

BENEDETTA CAPPA MARINETTI: "DONNA GENERATRICE"

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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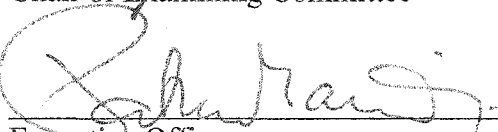
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## INTRODUCTION

Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, beginning in the 1920s, established an authoritative persona as both a writer and painter and, as such, she occupies a unique place within Futurism and among the ranks of its female participants. Benedetta and many of the women Futurists faced the difficulty of articulating an independent female identity and advocating equal rights for women. In her self and in her theories, Benedetta represents an amalgam of positions that are not only complex, but inseparable—Futurist artist, wife, mother, autonomous individual, and political subject. This complexity is reflected in Benedetta's works, which both embrace and deviate from Futurist and Fascist ideologies. Benedetta's philosophical and aesthetic conceptions of the world center on notions of resolution and harmony, the individuation of the self from the universe, and maternity as a font of creativity. They reflect varying concerns and influences, particularly the context of post-World War I Italy, deep divisions occurring within the Futurist movement, and her developing ideological construction of woman.

This study examines Benedetta, her work, and her varied roles in order to establish her personal, cultural, and political beliefs, and her development as an artist. This investigation will show how Benedetta was able to function successfully as a Fascist and an avant-garde artist and how she advanced her artistic ambitions despite the constraints on women inherent in both Futurism and Fascism. Though largely undiscussed in contemporary literature, Benedetta's contribution to Futurism was

significant. She wrote three well-received works of fiction, created a small but important body of paintings, and assisted her husband, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, founder of Futurism, in presiding over the movement. By contrast, under the Fascist regime, a woman's official role was that of mother. This study reveals how Benedetta not only adopted this view, but advocated it by developing a theory of creativity centered on motherhood that allowed her to meld her political, personal, and artistic beliefs. In addition, this investigation will explore the way in which Benedetta's spiritualism—a blend of Christianity and Theosophy—is revealed in her works. In retrospect, Benedetta's roles seem contradictory, but are less so when understood within the context in which she worked: namely that of Futurism and Fascism in Italy, in themselves inconsistent movements that embodied ideological stances that, like Benedetta's, shifted over time.

Benedetta met Marinetti as a young woman of about twenty (he was twice her age). Thus, as she was developing as an artist she was also establishing her identities as wife, mother, and political subject—roles that became interwoven. In large part, Benedetta's positions as wife of the leader of Futurism and of mother contributed to her success as an author and painter. Marinetti's inherited wealth and the issue of class figure importantly in her achievement, as the domestic help and ample house they afforded her allowed Benedetta to have both family and career. All of her work was made within the chronological confines of Futurism and her relationship to Marinetti, since she ceased all artistic production after his death.

During the span of their life together, between 1919 and 1944, she produced two small, but distinct, bodies of work, one literary and one pictorial. Her first novel *Le forze umane* was published in 1924 and follows the story of a young woman, Luciana, in a

thinly veiled autobiography. The text was accompanied by titled abstract images called *sintesi grafiche* (graphic syntheses). In 1931, *Viaggio di Garará. Romanzo cosmico per teatro* was published—a fantastic, “cosmic novel” that Benedetta intended to be staged. Her last work of fiction, *Astra e il sottomarino*, was published in 1935. An opaque and poetic work, it is a tragic love story that uses a thin plot line to employ dream sequences and letters in order to discuss abstract concepts. Benedetta participated in the first Futurist Congress in 1924 and soon after began exhibiting. *Luce + rumori di treno notturno* of 1924 (Light + sounds of a nocturnal train; Fig. 1) and *Velocità di motoscafo* of 1919-24 (Speed of a motorboat; Fig. 2) are her two central paintings of the 1920s, and indicate her reliance on previously established Futurist vocabularies, particularly those of Boccioni and Balla.

In the 1930s she executed a series of *aeropitture*, among them *Il Monte Tabor* (Mount Tabor; Fig. 3) and a group of panels for the Post Office in Palermo, Sicily (Fig. 4). Benedetta was an active exponent of *aeropittura* (aeropainting), the major Futurist stylistic genre of the 1930s, and signed the manifesto that officially established *aeropittura* in 1931. In addition, she authored numerous articles and lectures.

While not highly prolific as a painter, Benedetta showed her work regularly, particularly throughout the 1930s. In 1926 she exhibited *Velocità di un motoscafo* as well as *Luce + rumori di un treno notturno* at the XV Biennale di Venezia, in the exhibition of Italian Futurism organized by Marinetti.<sup>1</sup> She participated in the subsequent Biennale di Venezia exhibitions of 1930, 1932, 1934, and 1936, and in the Quadriennale di Roma exhibitions of 1931, 1935, and 1939. She was also included in numerous shows at private galleries. Benedetta participated in the Quadriennale di Torino and the exhibition

*Trentaquattro pittori futuristi* at Galleria Pesaro, Milan, in 1927 and, in 1929, her work was featured in the *III Mostra d'Arte Marinara* held in Rome. She was included in *Trentatre futuristi* at the Galleria Pesaro, Milan, and the *Prima Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Coloniale*, Rome, in 1931. In 1932, her work was exhibited in *Enrico Prampolini et les aéropeintres futurists italiens* at the Galerie de la Renaissance in Paris and, in 1934, at the *Prima Mostra Nazionale di Plastica Murale* in Genova. Benedetta's painting *Il Monte Tabor* was included in the *III Mostra del Sindacato Nazionale Fascista Belle Arti*, in Milan, in 1942.

That same year, Marinetti, at the age of 66 and in failing health, left as a volunteer for the Russian front. He returned to Rome in 1943 gravely ill. Still loyal to Mussolini, he and his family followed the move of the Fascist regime northward to Venice, then to Salò, Como, Cadenabbia, and finally to Bellagio, where Marinetti died in 1944.

Marinetti's death was compounded by Benedetta's grief over the loss of her mother Amalia (in 1942) and her beloved brother Alberto (at the Russian front c. 1942). Devastated by these tragedies (and presumably by the civil war in Italy), she ceased all artistic production. Finding it impossible to produce work outside the confines of Futurism and Fascism, she became determined, instead, to safeguard the legacy of Marinetti, actively promoting the movement in the decades following the Second World War. Ultimately, she moved to Venice to live with her daughter Luce. She died there in 1977.

Futurism was born publicly on February 20, 1909—while Benedetta was still a child—in the form of a manifesto by Marinetti that railed against museums, moralism, sentimentalism, and woman. Italy's own turbulent history greatly informed Futurism's

development. Italy was fully unified only in 1870, and lagged far behind other European nations because of its slow industrialization. The end of the 1880s was marked by bankruptcy, political corruption, and social crisis. By the 1890s, civil unrest broke out in the forms of riots and protests by workers. However, from 1896 through 1906, Northern Italy industrialized rapidly. It was within this setting of progress and disruption that Futurism arose, a movement that embraced the idea of widespread cultural and political revolution.

Futurism's lifespan was much longer than is generally acknowledged, its end occurring in 1944 with the death of Marinetti. Throughout its life, Futurism welcomed innumerable participants and developed many stylistic variations. Its history, however, can be divided into three major phases: the era of 1909-1916/17, sometimes referred to as the "heroic" period (given the degree of artistic innovation); the post-war era through the 1920s, during which works were characterized by an interest in mechanical art; and the decade of the 1930s, which was dominated by the development of *aeropittura*.

Driven by their desire to move beyond what they considered the *passé* culture of the nineteenth century, the Futurists championed the innovation and scientific discovery of the twentieth century. Marinetti, in his poetry known as *parole-in-libertà* (words-in-freedom), disrupted continuous narrative and employed typographic innovation and collage-like structure. The main Futurist artists of the early part of the movement were Giacomo Balla, Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo, and Gino Severini. Influenced by Italian Divisionism, Cubism, and the philosophy of Henri Bergson, these five depicted a world in constant flux, breaking down traditional pictorial subject-background relations through the constant interaction of objects and environment.

Interventionism (of Italy into World War I on the side of Britain and France) also was a frequent theme, and the Futurists used performance, in particular, as a means of expressing their pro-war stance. While the movement became reconfigured after the war (Boccioni and the Futurist architect Antonio Sant'Elia died and several others, including Carrà and Severini, left the group), it remained an important cultural force in Italy. Balla and Enrico Prampolini, in particular, would become central to the movement in the post-war years. Balla, an essential artist of the early period, provided an important link between pre- and post-World War I Futurism.

In the 1920s, the Futurist artists shifted the focus of their concerns toward *arte meccanica* (mechanical art). The adoption of a machine aesthetic in this phase of the movement is somewhat different from the Futurists' earlier infatuation with technology. Representations in this phase take on a much more hard-edged quality that reflects several quite varied influences, including synthetic cubism and Russian photomontage on the one hand, and the European post-war "return to order" current on the other.

By 1930, the Futurists turned to their last major stylistic development, *aeropittura* (aeropainting), which was paralleled by its literary counterpart (actually begun earlier), *aeropoesia* (aeropoetry). *Aeropittura* aimed at conveying the experience of flying through the use of shifting, distorted perspectives of the earth seen from above. This period also marks Futurism's ultimate compliance with the Fascist regime.

Futurism's association with Fascism has proven to be a strong obstacle to a true appreciation of the movement.<sup>2</sup> Marinetti was associated with Mussolini from as early as 1915 (Mussolini having been ousted from the Socialist Party by this point), when the two were arrested for making speeches advocating Italy's entry into World War I. Mussolini

and Marinetti shared the same pro-interventionist platform and, after the war, in April 1919, the Futurists were actively involved in the founding of the political party the *Fasci di Combattimento*. In April of that year both men were implicated in the ransacking of the offices of the publication *Avanti!* in Milan (which had begun as a counter-demonstration to protests arranged by the Socialists and unions). However, the Futurist-Fascist alliance failed to win support in the general election held in November of that year. The following May (1920), Marinetti attended the second Fascist Congress in Milan and made a speech outlining his differences with the Fascist group, which centered on his pro-labor and anti-clerical positions. Marinetti withdrew from the *Fasci di Combattimento* a few days after the Congress, but reconciled with Mussolini in 1924.

Realizing that he could not ignore the new Fascist state and determined to secure a central role for Futurism, Marinetti acquiesced increasingly to the regime, becoming a member of the *Accademia d'Italia* (Academy of Italy) in 1929. However, throughout the 1920s and 1930s, contrary to Marinetti's hopes, Futurism was not recognized as the state art. Increasing recognition was given instead to the *Novecento* artists active at this time, a group who adopted a more representational and classicizing style and that was championed by Margherita Sarfatti (the cultural arbiter and mistress of Mussolini). In the catalogue of the first Quadriennale, its organizers qualified their shift away from Futurism in the exhibition; while acknowledging that Futurism had opened new horizons, they indicated a new direction toward which cultural officials were looking: “[Il futurismo] ebbe un utile riflesso nella vita artistica del paese. Esso servì a muovere le acque ed a indicare nuovi orizzonti. Oggi è sopravvissuto.”<sup>3</sup> Ultimately, it was Futurist *aeropittura*, of which Benedetta was a key practitioner, that the regime recognized as a

significant contribution to Fascism, particularly during the 1935 war in Ethiopia, due to the military content and glorification that characterized the genre. However, by 1937 increasing pressure by Nazi Germany, which identified Futurism as decadent, led to a polemic in Italy over Futurism. Conservative forces in Italy gained increasing power, engaging in an anti-semitic and anti-modernist campaign (including the enactment of the racial laws in 1938). Marinetti was outspoken against the charges against modern art, despite his continued loyalty to Fascism, even through Mussolini's final failed Republic of Salò.

Futurism's connection to Fascism has been a chief impediment to its reassessment in Anglo-American scholarship. The English language bibliography on Futurism remains small, with few art historical surveys on the topic. Examinations of late Futurism, as well as Futurism's relationship to Fascism, have remained virtually absent from the general literature, save a few exceptions.<sup>4</sup> American art history has traditionally viewed Futurism as a movement secondary to Cubism that lost its viability around 1916. The widely used text by H.H. Arnason, *History of Modern Art* (1986), makes this bias most apparent. Futurism, which is characterized as an offshoot of Cubism, is discussed in the chapter entitled "The Spread of Cubism."<sup>5</sup> Arnason, in a backhanded acknowledgment of Futurism, contends that the movement was "really a sort of academy of the avant-garde, and it is remarkable that so substantial a number of effective and, at times, original works should have been produced by it."<sup>6</sup> Arnason ends his discussion writing, "World War I wrote *finis* to the first and only significant stage of Italian Futurism, although many of the more propagandist ideas and slogans were integrated into the rising tide of Fascism and used for political and social ends."<sup>7</sup>

Shortly after the Second World War, a small circle with an interest in Futurism, including the collector Lydia Winston Malbin, emerged in the United States and would have a powerful impact on the American definition of the movement. The Museum of Modern Art, and in particular Alfred H. Barr, Jr., were crucial to this developing interest. In 1949, the museum organized an exhibition and catalogue, *Italian Art of the Twentieth Century*, written by Barr and James Thrall Soby.<sup>8</sup> This was followed in 1961 by a pivotal exhibition of Futurist works curated by Peter Selz, with an exhibition catalogue by Joshua Taylor.<sup>9</sup> The catalogue makes explicit that it is concerned only with the painting and sculpture of the first phase of the movement:

After the first World War many countries claimed movements under the Futurist banner; in fact, the terms “Futurism” and “Futuristic” became almost standard in popular references to avant-garde art. Yet the vital nucleus of the movement had spent itself, and the “First Futurism,” as it is called in Italy to separate it from the politically associated “Second Futurism” of the 1920s and ’30s, can be said actually to close with the first War.<sup>10</sup>

MoMA’s lead, established by Barr (and influenced, probably, by his wife Margaret Scolari Barr), helped place Futurism securely in the American twentieth-century canon.<sup>11</sup> However, since the interpretive tools and definitions of modernism employed by Barr and MoMA privileged formal analysis, favored French modernism, and disregarded historical context, they also severely limited our understanding of Futurism.

Following Taylor’s catalogue, Mary Ann Martin’s study, *Futurist Art and Theory, 1909-1915* was published in 1968. Long considered the central study on Futurism, it largely shaped American ideas on the topic. Martin’s text is narrow in its view, discussing only painting and sculpture of the “heroic” years of the movement. Additionally, she disassociates Futurist politics from art, and disregards the relationship of the movement to women.<sup>12</sup> In her introduction Martin states, “Futurism had been much

tainted by this association with the Fascist leader, and the fact that its most original phase had virtually ended by 1915 has not prevented numerous Italian and non-Italian writers from giving biased accounts of the movement in terms of later events and regarding it primarily as a political manifestation.”<sup>13</sup> Her assessments of the artistic quality of the later work further served to limit her discussion. For example, she explains that Fortunato Depero and Prampolini are not included “for they contributed nothing essentially new to the first Futurism.”<sup>14</sup> While Martin’s detailed study provided an essential examination of the movement, it only told a partial story of Futurism.

Similarly limited in scope, Jane Rye’s *Futurism* (1972) adopts the idea (like Arnason) that Futurism was not new and was reiterating nineteenth-century interests.<sup>15</sup> Christiana Taylor in her 1974 study *Futurism: Politics, Painting and Performance* does emphasize the political aspect of the movement and its innovations in performance and theater through the 1920s.<sup>16</sup> However, she also holds that by 1920 the movement was spent with regard to painting and architecture. In addition, she contends that Marinetti was manipulated by Fascism, and thus avoids a discussion of his role as a willing participant. Caroline Tisdall and Angelo Bozzolla published *Futurism* in 1977, which attempts to give a sense of the interdisciplinary nature of the movement.<sup>17</sup> The text includes chapters (although problematic) on Futurism and its relationship to women and to Fascism. But, Tisdall and Bozzolla devote only two pages to what they call “Second Futurism,” which they describe as “Marinetti’s attempt to keep his movement alive after the death and desertion of his most talented followers.”<sup>18</sup> In 1980, the Philadelphia Museum of Art presented an exhibition entitled *Futurism and the avant-garde* and published an accompanying catalogue. While the catalogue situates Futurism within an

international context and importantly notes its influence on late twentieth century art, it, too, limits its focus to works from 1909 through 1915.<sup>19</sup>

There are some exceptions to this narrow definition of Futurism, but only a few texts in English address late Futurism. The only major English-language study that addresses Futurism of the 1920s and 1930s (and, surprisingly, reproduces a work by Benedetta) is Rosa Trillo Clough's *Futurism: The Story of a Modern Art Movement, A New Appraisal* (based on her 1942 doctoral dissertation of the same title, then published as *Looking Back at Futurism*, and finally revised and republished in 1961).<sup>20</sup> However, Martin's book and the more narrow definition of Futurism quickly superceded Clough's view and became the standard art historical reference on the subject.

The few other works in English to discuss late Futurism are translations of publications written originally in Italian or French. The exhibition catalogue accompanying the extensive exhibition of the same title, *Futurismo & Futurismi*, was translated in 1986 as *Futurism & Futurisms*.<sup>21</sup> Both the exhibition and catalogue were meant to expose the interdisciplinary character of Futurism and its relationship to the international avant-garde through a presentation of its many manifestations in Italy and abroad. The 600-page book provides numerous illustrations of Futurism from the 1920s (though not from the 1930s) and an informative "Dictionary" that discusses artists of the later period (including Benedetta). However, information is often buried in the idiosyncratically organized entries and as a result is difficult to locate. Moreover, later Futurism is placed within the context of the various international "Futurisms," implying it was an offshoot rather than an essential part of the Italian movement.

Giovanni Lista's *Futurism* (1986), although a very slim volume, gives condensed definitions of *arte meccanica* and *aeropittura* and provides a handful of color illustrations of later Futurist works, among them Benedetta's *Il grande X* (The Big X).<sup>22</sup> Lista recently published the much lengthier *Futurism*, which more fully addresses the later period. However, neither of Lista's texts (as is the case with much of the Italian literature) provides historical contextual information.<sup>23</sup> According to Lista, the term *secondo futurismo* or "second generation Futurism" was coined in the late 1950s in an effort to bolster the market for Futurist artworks of the later period, and has been often shortened or understood as the more derogatory "second Futurism."<sup>24</sup> While qualitative aesthetic judgments have been made by both Italian and American scholars and have limited the field of inquiry, serious study of the so-called *secondo futurismo* is evident in Italian art historical literature beginning in the 1960s, particularly in the work of Enrico Crispolti.<sup>25</sup>

Art historical studies in the United States have been slow to both discover and embrace women Futurists, and explore the relationship between Futurism and women. Primarily it has been in the field of comparative literature and Italian studies that texts examining women in Futurism have emerged; among the most important are those by Cinzia Blum, Barbara Spackman, and Lucia Re.<sup>26</sup> All three have noted that although Futurism has been generally considered a misogynist movement, many women actively participated in it. As Blum characterizes it, "Futurist rhetoric's abjection of the 'feminine other' does not conform to the actual standing of women in the movement."<sup>27</sup>

Recent studies by art historians such as Emily Braun and Christine Poggi have begun to re-evaluate Futurism within an art historical context.<sup>28</sup> Günter Berghaus has

made significant contributions in the areas of Futurist theater and politics.<sup>29</sup> Contextual studies of Italian Fascism and culture, such as those by Mark Antliff and Jeffrey Schnapp, have also furthered study in the area of Futurism and Fascism.<sup>30</sup>

Recent texts on Fascism and women have also revealed little examined aspects of woman's construction under Mussolini's government. Victoria de Grazia's seminal text *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922-1945* is an essential history that illuminates women's standing within the regime.<sup>31</sup> In addition, her work on commercial culture under Fascism has exposed the gaps between Fascist policy and women's actual daily life.<sup>32</sup> Robin Pickering-Iazzi has also made important in-roads into the field of women as cultural agents under the regime.<sup>33</sup>

On the topic of women and Futurism, Claudia Salaris has written extensively in Italian, investigating women's role in the movement in her 1982 study *Le Futuriste: Donne e letteratura d'avanguardia in Italia*. This study, as well as Lea Vergine's 1980 exhibition and catalogue *L'altra metà dell'avanguardia, 1910-1940*, are the first texts devoted to women of the Italian movement and are central to any discussion of women and Futurism (although neither has been translated into English).<sup>34</sup> Apart from the chapter on women and Futurism in *Futurism* by Tisdall and Bozzolla, M. Barry Katz's 1986 article, "The Women of Futurism" is the first study on women Futurist artists in English.<sup>35</sup> A short study, Katz's recuperation of these female figures is limited and lacking in any contextual information. More recently, Mirella Bentivoglio and Franca Zoccoli have written *The Women Artists of Italian Futurism—Almost Lost to History*.<sup>36</sup> While it does not provide any historical grounding, it outlines essential biographical information on each of the individual female figures affiliated with the movement.

Only one monographic text specifically on Benedetta exists in English—an exhibition catalogue from the Paley Gallery at Moore College of Art and Design—which this author organized and which is based upon my initial body of research into her life and work.<sup>37</sup> Interest in Benedetta also was resuscitated recently in Italy. Two studies devoted exclusively to her have been published: the exhibition catalogue *Fughe e Ritorni, Presenze futuriste in Sicilia: Benedetta* and Franca Zoccoli's *Benedetta Cappa Marinetti: l'incantesimo della luce*.<sup>38</sup> A number of critics addressed her work while she was active (see Chapter 3 for an overview); however, interest in her work after the war was not rekindled until the late 1960s.<sup>39</sup> Of particular importance was her inclusion in Crispolti's seminal text, *Il mito della macchina e altri temi del futurismo*.<sup>40</sup>

This study, in focusing on Benedetta and her work, will address some of these less discussed aspects of late Futurism. Much of the task of this study has been one of recuperation and clarification of primary source material—particularly Benedetta's letters and manuscripts at the Getty Research Institute, the Beinecke Rare Book Room and Manuscript Library at Yale University, as well as materials held by her heirs. Secondary source material is often conflicting and resolving these inconsistencies has also been one of the aims of this project.

Chapter 1 provides a biography and an account of Benedetta's entry into the Futurist movement; it establishes the nature of the relationship between Benedetta and Marinetti and its importance to his work, as well as hers. In addition, it places her in the context of other women Futurist writers of the period. Chapter 2 discusses Benedetta's development as an artist, illustrating how she integrated the important precedents of Divisionism, early Futurism, Theosophy, and Surrealism into her works of the 1920s.

Chapter 3 outlines Benedetta's theory of creativity and its relationship to gender, specifically through a discussion of her works of fiction. This section also provides a brief analysis of the gendered criticism of Benedetta's works during the 1920s and 1930s, and considers the ways in which critics designated her work as "female." Through an examination of her *aeropittura* works, Chapter 4 shows how Benedetta synthesized her interests, particularly nationalism and spiritualism, into a group of tightly composed paintings. In Chapter 5 we see how the role of woman and the image of mother became highly determined under the Fascist regime, contributing significantly to Benedetta's own construction of self. This chapter examines Benedetta's development as a Fascist subject through her lectures and writings on the nature of women and creativity. It also includes socio-historic information on the role of woman under Fascism and offers a means of reconciling Benedetta's ideological and aesthetic identities. The final section, Chapter 6, provides an epilogue and conclusion, examining Benedetta's post-Futurist activities as a promoter of the movement by tracing her distribution of Futurist artworks from her collection to private individuals and public collections. Finally, in order to provide additional information for the reader, appendices are attached that include the manifestos of *arte meccanica*, *aeropittura*, and *arte sacra* in the original Italian and in translation.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Giovanna Bonasegale, ed., *Catalogo Generale della Galleria Comunale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea* (Rome: Edizioni De Luca, 1995), 479.

<sup>2</sup> See Günter Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics* (Providence and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1996) for a full discussion of Futurism's relationship to Fascism. This section is fully informed by that study.

<sup>3</sup> "Futurism was a useful reflection of the artistic life of the country. It served to part the waters and indicate a new horizon. Today it has been surpassed." Quoted in Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*, 269, note 69.

<sup>4</sup> See Emily Braun, "Renaissance and Renascences: The Rebirth of Italy, 1911-1921," in *Masterpieces from the Gianni Mattioli Collection*. Venice and Milan: Peggy Guggenheim Collection and Electa, 1997.

<sup>5</sup> H. H. Arnason, *History of Modern Art*, third edition (New York: Abrams, 1986).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 181.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 185.

<sup>8</sup> James Thrall Soby and Alfred H. Barr, *Italian Art of the Twentieth Century* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1949).

<sup>9</sup> Joshua C. Taylor, *Futurism* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1961). With a foreword by Peter Selz.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Selz, "Foreword," in Taylor, *Futurism*, 7.

<sup>11</sup> Margaret Scolari Barr seems to have had a close relationship to Futurism. In a letter from to Giacomo Balla, Alfred H. Barr writes the following postscript: "P.S. Perhaps I forgot to tell you that long ago you used to give my wife chocolates on the Pincco [sic] when she was a little child. Her father, named Scolari, was a friend of yours at the time." Alfred H. Barr to Giacomo Balla, TLS (carbon copy), March 15, 1949, James Thrall Soby Papers, Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

<sup>12</sup> Mary Ann Martin, *Futurist Art and Theory, 1909-1915* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, xxvii.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, xxix.

<sup>15</sup> Jane Rye, *Futurism* (New York: Dutton, 1972).

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- <sup>16</sup> Christiana Taylor, *Futurism: Politics, Painting and Performance* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Press, 1974; 1979).
- <sup>17</sup> Caroline Tisdall and Angelo Bozzola, *Futurism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977).
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 198.
- <sup>19</sup> Anne d'Harnoncourt, ed., *Futurism and the International Avant-garde* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1980).
- <sup>20</sup> Rosa Trillo Clough, *Futurism: The Story of a Modern Art Movement: A New Appraisal* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1961).
- <sup>21</sup> Pontus Hulten, ed., *Futurism & Futurisms* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986).
- <sup>22</sup> Giovanni Lista, *Futurism* (New York: Universe Books, 1986).
- <sup>23</sup> Giovanni Lista, *Futurism* (Paris: Terrail, 2000).
- <sup>24</sup> Lista, *Futurism* (1986), 58.
- <sup>25</sup> See Enrico Crispolti, *Il mito della macchina e altri temi del futurismo* (Trapani: Editore Celebes, 1969); and Maurizio Calvesi, *Il Futurismo*, 3 vols. (Milan: Fabbri, 1967).
- <sup>26</sup> See Cinzia Blum, *The Other Modernism: F. T. Marinetti's Futurist Fiction of Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Barbara Spackman, *Fascist Virilities: Rhetoric, Ideology, and Social Fantasy in Italy* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1996); and Lucia Re "Futurism and Feminism," *Annali d'Italianistica* 7 (1989): 253-273.
- <sup>27</sup> Blum, *The Other Modernism*, xi.
- <sup>28</sup> See Emily Braun, "Renaissance and Renascences" and *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Christine Poggi, *In Defiance of Painting* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); and Poggi, "Folla/Follia: Futurism and the Crowd," *Critical Inquiry* 28 (Spring 2002): 709-748.
- <sup>29</sup> See Günter Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics and Italian Futurist Theater, 1909-1944* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).
- <sup>30</sup> See Mark Antliff and Mathew Affron, eds., *Fascist Visions: Art and Ideology in France and Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Jeffrey Schnapp, "Forwarding Address," *Stanford Italian Review* 8, no. 1-2 (1988): 52-80; Jeffrey Schnapp, *Staging Fascism, 18BL and the Theater of Masses for Masses* (Stanford:

Stanford University Press, 1996); and, Jeffrey Schnapp and João Cezar de Castro Rocha, "Brazilian Velocities: On Marinetti's 1926 Trip to South America," *South Central Review* 13, no. 2-3 (Summer-Fall 1996): 105-156. For more on Italian culture and Fascism (though these texts deal only marginally with Futurism) see also Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Richard J. Golsan, ed., *Fascism, Aesthetics, and Culture* (Hanover: University of New England, 1992); Marla Susan Stone, *The Patron State: Culture and Politics in Fascist Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); and Mabel Berenzin, *Making the Fascist Self: The Political Culture of Interwar Italy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

<sup>31</sup> Victoria de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

<sup>32</sup> See Victoria de Grazia, "Nationalizing Women: The Competition between Fascist and Commercial Cultural Models in Mussolini's Italy," in *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, ed. Victoria DeGrazia (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

<sup>33</sup> See Robin Pickering-Iazzi, ed., *Mothers of Invention: Women, Italian Fascism, and Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995). This volume includes essays by Emily Braun, Marolina Graziosi, and Barbara Spackman. See also Robin Pickering-Iazzi, *Politics of the Visible: Writing Women, Culture, and Fascism* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis, 1997) and "Unseduced Mothers: Configurations of a Different Female Subject Transgressing Fascistized Femininity," in *Feminine Feminists: Cultural Practices in Italy*, ed. Giovanna Miceli Jeffries (Minneapolis, University of Minneapolis Press, 1994).

<sup>34</sup> See Claudia Salaris, *Le Futuriste: Donne e letteratura d'avanguardia in Italia, 1909-1944* (Milan: Edizioni delle donne, 1982); and Lea Vergine, *L'altra metà dell'avanguardia, 1910-1940* (Milan: Mazzotta Editore, 1980).

<sup>35</sup> See "Women and Futurism," in Tisdall and Bozzolla, *Futurism*; and, M. Barry Katz, "The Women of Futurism," *Woman's Art Journal* 7, no. 2 (Fall-Winter 1986-1987): 3-13.

<sup>36</sup> Mirella Bentivoglio and Franca Zoccoli, *The Women Artists of Italian Futurism—Almost Lost to History* (New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 1997).

<sup>37</sup> See Lisa Panzera, ed., *La Futurista: Benedetta Cappa Marinetti* (Philadelphia: The Galleries at Moore, 1998). The publication includes essays by Cinzia Blum, Lisa Panzera, Christine Poggi, and Lucia Re.

<sup>38</sup> See Annamaria Ruta, ed., *Fughe e Ritorni, Presenze futuriste in Sicilia: Benedetta* (Naples: Electa, 1998); and Franca Zoccoli, *Benedetta Cappa Marinetti: l'incantesimo della luce* (Milano: Selene, 2000).

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<sup>39</sup> See Maria Goretti, *La donna e il futurismo* (Verona: La Casa Editrice La Scagliera, 1941); and Bruno G. Sanzin, *Benedetta, aeropoetessa, aeropittrice, futurista* (Roma: Rassegna Nazionale, 1939).

<sup>40</sup> See Enrico Crispolti, *Il mito della macchina*.

## CHAPTER 1

### BENEDETTA AND FILIPPO TOMMASO MARINETTI

Benedetta's relationship to her husband, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, is of central importance to her life and work, particularly in light of his attitudes toward woman. A close study of their marriage reveals Benedetta's independent nature and her struggle against being overshadowed personally and artistically by her famous husband. In addition, Benedetta's personal life is analyzed by the artist herself in her semi-autobiographical works of fiction. To understand fully the scope of their relationship, one must also consider Marinetti's relationship to individual women (there were several in the Futurist movement) and to the category of "woman." While Benedetta was a pivotal figure in the movement, she, by her very nature, was the "other" projected by Futurism's most misogynist and official rhetoric. As will be demonstrated, Benedetta was just as important a force for Marinetti in the second post-war phase of Futurism as he was for her.

Benedetta was born on August 15, 1897, the only daughter of five children (her brothers were Arturo, Aurelio, Alberto, and Arnaldo). She was raised by her strict, Catholic, upper-middle-class parents, Innocenzo Cappa and Amalia Cipollina, who were of Piedmontese origin. It has also been maintained that Benedetta's mother was "valdese," a member of a Christian evangelical religious sect.<sup>1</sup> Educated in literature, the arts and philosophy, as well as pedagogy, Benedetta lived with her family in Rome on the

same street as the Futurist Giacomo Balla, with whom she began studying painting in 1917.<sup>2</sup> It was at Balla's studio that she met Marinetti in 1918.<sup>3</sup> Her immediate family certainly knew of Marinetti, since in 1911 Benedetta's uncle, the attorney Innocenzo Cappa (not to be confused with her father who had the same name),<sup>4</sup> defended Marinetti against pornography charges for his 1909 novel *Mafarka il futurista*.<sup>5</sup> It was probably through her brother Arturo and his lover, the Czech painter Rougena Zatkova (who became involved with the Futurist movement in 1914 and with whom Benedetta became close), that Benedetta began to frequent Futurist circles. Interestingly, Arturo, as well as Benedetta's brother, Alberto, had leftist leanings. Arturo, a communist, was invited by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union<sup>6</sup> to travel there in 1920, while Alberto (to whom Benedetta was quite attached) maintained very liberal political ideas and was kept under police surveillance by the Fascist regime.<sup>7</sup>

Marinetti's diary entries and Benedetta's letters indicate that the two were clearly captivated by one another from the beginning. In Marinetti's diary entry from January 3, 1920 he notes first her intelligence and then expresses his desire and longing for her: "È intelligentissima. Ho dispiacere fisico e spirituale a separarmi da lei."<sup>8</sup> They lived together (at least part of the time) in northern Italy from about 1920, and in 1925 they moved back to Rome (apparently at Benedetta's urging). Their cohabitation without the sanction of marriage, despite Benedetta's Catholic upbringing, indicates a certain independence and social rebelliousness, although it was actually not that uncommon for the time.

According to Marinetti's biographer Gino Agnese, by early 1920 the two were living together, but not necessarily under the same roof. He maintains that because

Marinetti's house was more a headquarters than a home and to lessen the scandal their relationship caused her family, Marinetti persuaded her to live in Oneglia, nearby to him in Milan, and to pursue her studies at the University of Genoa.<sup>9</sup>

The two ultimately did marry in 1926 at Villasanta di Monza, outside Milan, at the home of their friends Umberto Notari and his wife Delia Pavoni. Notari and Benedetta's brother Alberto acted as witnesses. (All printed texts on Benedetta and Marinetti date the marriage to 1923; but a letter of 1926 from Benedetta to her brother Alberto clearly indicates that the two were actually married in that year.)<sup>10</sup> Notari was an author and newspaper publisher who made his name in 1904 as author of a best-selling novel set in a bordello entitled *Quelle signore* (for which he, like Marinetti, was brought up on obscenity charges).<sup>11</sup> Despite Marinetti's 1919 essay, "Contro il matrimonio" (Against marriage), their official union, according to Benedetta, took place at his insistence. In a letter to Alberto, dated March 19, 1926, Benedetta writes, "Per non avere noie durante il nostro viaggio in America...abbiamo deciso di legalizzare la nostra unione."<sup>12</sup> She goes on to inform him that she and Marinetti will be going to Monza (where the Notari family lived) for the civil ceremony and she asks her brother to be one of the witnesses. The remainder of the letter reads:

Marinetti parte domani per Livorno dove si daranno I prigionieri. Avevo desiderio di accompagnarlo e poi proseguire per Monza (dove la Signora Notari ci aiuterà a sbrigare la cosa). Con il contrattempo di oggi forse rinuncio a Livorno, ma spero esser ugualmente a Monza per il 23 o 24. Dopo 15 giorni di pubblicazioni l'atto civile. Naturalmente avrei molto piacere che tu fossi uno dei testimoni e perciò ti pregherei di rimandare al 15 aprile la tua gita a Milano e visita al Cova per accontentarmi.

Sei contento?

Io ho un'ombra di tristezza. Eravamo lieti e liberi, al di sopra di questa umanità tuffata nel relativo e nel grigio, eravamo spensierati e felici, dopo chi sa?

Marinetti lo ha voluto e il lo accontento, ora, come lo accontentai nel 7 luglio 1920. Il suo pensiero, oggi, di non procurarmi delle noie in un domani vicino e lontano, mi ha commosso, come mi persuase nel 1920 da sua volontà di portare il nostro amore nel cielo libero e puro della poesia.<sup>13</sup>

She expresses some apprehension, but explains “Marinetti wanted it,” so she is acquiescing in order to make him happy, just as she made him happy on July 7, 1920 (a reference, perhaps, to having agreed to live with him). After telling Alberto that she would be very happy if he would be one of the witnesses, she pointedly asks, “Are you happy?” The implication is not just that he should be pleased about being a witness but also because they are finally getting married, suggesting that Benedetta had been under pressure by her family to marry Marinetti.

From the beginning, Benedetta’s decision to be with Marinetti appears to have been a difficult one. Marinetti, much older and the leader of the Futurist movement, was a tremendously dominant personality and Benedetta fought against capitulating to both him and Futurism. In an early letter to Marinetti and in an accompanying poem, she describes her first meeting with him, expressing her resistance to being labeled a Futurist or *parolibera futurista*. The letter (dated November 23, 1918) reads,

Grazie per la promesssa mantenuta per quei libri che mi ha spedito— Ho trovato fastidio (=legami alle membra) nel veder il mio nome unito a ‘parolibera futurista.’ Sono troppo libera e ribelle—non voglio freni—voglio essere io solamente. Forze mi ci abitueró—questo per essere sincera—Auguri e saluti.<sup>14</sup>

While resisting the title, Benedetta accompanied the letter with a poem that was based on the *parole in libertà* (Fig. 5). A draft of the final poem is inscribed at the bottom “Domenica 3 febbraio—da Balla” (Sunday, February 3—at Balla’s), while an even earlier version reads “Il giorno 3—Incontro con Marinetti” (Day 3—Encounter with Marinetti), making explicit that this was a description, even a commemoration, of their

first encounter in Balla's studio. In her poem Benedetta thus pinpoints that first meeting to February 3 of that year. While she commemorates their meeting, she also asserts her independence in a flirtatious resistance of his persona and the absorption of her work under the banner of Futurism.

Marinetti responded to Benedetta's letter:

Parolibera futurista significa precisamente: esser IO. È un distintivo che ci separa nettamente dai moltissimi che sono tutti ieri e niente. È una parola d'ordine che ci lega nella lotta. Ho sentito tutta la nostra bella Domenica 3 Febbraio nella vostra piccola pagina di parole in libertà che mi piace molto.

Vi consiglio di riprendere quel groviglio di sensazioni e di darne tutte le forze—come forze—in una altra pagina di parola in libertà. Mandatemi i vostri scritti. Sono un amico non un maestro. Come amico futurista sono lieto di favorire il vostro ingegno nel suo slancio originalissimo.<sup>15</sup>

Marinetti insisted that *parolibera futurista* meant precisely being oneself. He also pointedly stated that he was her friend and not her teacher, though interestingly he still employs the formal form of address (*voi*)—indicating that the couple had not yet reached that stage of intimacy in their friendship.

Adding to their personal power negotiations in the beginning of the relationship was the difficulty of Benedetta's position within Marinetti's circle. Some of those closest to him clearly did not welcome her. In a letter to her brother (probably from 1925), Benedetta described the process of moving Marinetti from Milan to Rome and the feelings of depression and antagonism she experienced:

Sono ancora a Milano. Il trasloco è piú complesso di ciò che credevo.

La vita di Marinetti é stata densa e molteplice: di avvenimenti e di pensiero. In 15 giorni abbiamo solo riordinato gli echi della stampa, la corrispondenza, parte dei libri.

Sono giorni pesanti per me. Ho sulle spalle il passato tumultuoso di M. Passato che mi é ostile e che mi aggredisce ad ogni istante. Memorie sentimenti lotte.

Devo reagire contro le ombre, i fantasmi, le sensibilità, le realtà che la mia ipersensibilità crea e scopre. Devo aiutare M. a distaccarsi dalle pareti che hanno contenuto a racchiuso il suo dinamismo.

Devo sopportare l'odio e il rancore degli amici Milanesi e delle 2 cameriere.

Sono forte, quasi sempre serena, sempre cosciente. La consapevolezza di essere nella verità, di non muovere alla vita di M, di preparargli anzi una migliore atmosfera é la mia forza.

É di nuovo l'ideologia ultima del mio libro che vuole essere provata da me nella realtà.<sup>16</sup>

This somewhat odd last sentence suggests the strong degree to which Benedetta associated her work (specifically her novels) with her life.<sup>17</sup> Benedetta's reference to Marinetti's former "dense and complicated" life and to his hostile friends (particularly the two sisters who were the Marinetti family "cameriere" or maids since they were children) makes obvious her unwelcome status in these early years.

In yet another letter to her brother Alberto, Benedetta again expresses her exasperation at the banality of the people in Marinetti's circle and the nastiness of the men, especially the poet and artist Francesco Cangiullo. She writes, "...Marinetti sta meglio. Lavora. Io sono un po' depressa dalla mia sensibilità esasperata a Milano e urtata qui dalle solite persone banali e dalla cattiveria degli uomini (vedi Cangiullo, ecc.)."<sup>18</sup>

Cangiullo apparently was particularly antipathetic towards Benedetta. In two gouaches done in Capri in 1922, Cangiullo portrays Benedetta as weak and self-absorbed. He depicts her standing on the shore afraid to jump in the water in one scene and too busy braiding her hair in another to notice Marinetti swimming in the ocean and gazing intently at the buttocks of a nearby woman (Fig. 6).

The hostility of Marinetti's "cameriere" towards Benedetta that she relates in her letters was perhaps less surprising than Cangiullo's disdain. Nina and Marietta Angelini were, in fact, as much Marinetti's personal assistants, as maids, helping him to "run" Futurism while he was at the front during the First World War.<sup>19</sup> In removing Marinetti from them and his former sphere of influences, Benedetta believed she was assisting Marinetti and releasing his "enclosed dynamism." In this way, the move with Marinetti back to Rome, Benedetta's birthplace (and the seat of Fascism), was critical to their work and their relationship, allowing her greater influence over him. In addition, it moved the center of Futurism to Rome and their home there, a salon over which Benedetta would preside with her husband.

Despite Rome's symbolic status for Marinetti as the locus of *passatismo* (the seat of clericalism, archaeology, and conservatism), Rome was a center of vibrant cultural activity in the 1920s.<sup>20</sup> As Lucia Re notes, Rome throughout the twenties was "an extraordinarily cosmopolitan city, where a rejuvenated (especially after 1922) futurism coexisted, dialogued, and intersected with experimental tendencies throughout Europe, all of which were engaged in various forms of research on abstraction."<sup>21</sup> Spiritualism (including Symbolism and Theosophy) played an important role in the culture of the city as well.<sup>22</sup> It was in this environment in which Benedetta came into her own as an artist.

While Benedetta began to develop her artistic identity apart from Marinetti by establishing herself as a writer and painter, the two did collaborate on a number of occasions. Early in their relationship she worked with him to develop *tattilismo* (tactilism), first conceived by Marinetti during the war. The idea came from the experience of being in the dark trenches at night, unable to see with anything but one's

fingertips. The idea however, was not elaborated upon and written into a manifesto until 1921. When Marinetti published the manifesto he presented himself as the sole author; however, as Lia Giachero has convincingly demonstrated through an examination of primary documents, evidence indicates that Benedetta was a full collaborator.<sup>23</sup>

In 1927, Benedetta and Marinetti's first daughter Vittoria (Victory) was born. The following year Benedetta gave birth to another daughter, Ala (Wing), and, in 1932, to her third girl, Luce (Light; Fig. 7). While Marinetti traveled, and he did so extensively, Benedetta generally remained at home with their daughters and continued her writing and painting. She did, however, go with him to South America in 1926 and to Egypt in 1931. It was on the return trip from South America that Marinetti wrote his play *L'Oceano del cuore*, which takes place on a steamer crossing the Atlantic. Benedetta designed the stage sets, which were executed by fellow Futurist Enrico Prampolini for the premiere in 1927, combining her interests in both the literary and the visual arts. Benedetta also designed stage sets for Marinetti's *I prigionieri e l'amore* (that premiered in 1926 in Milan), as well as for *Simultanina* (Padua, 1930).

### Marinetti and Women

Benedetta's marriage to Marinetti coincided with and, no doubt, encouraged a shift in his public attitude toward women. Through Benedetta, Marinetti overcame many of his personal and cultural prejudices and preconceptions about family. He embraced Benedetta as both sexual partner and intellectual equal, ultimately transcending the stereotypes that he himself reinforced (if not created). However, Marinetti's attitudes were contradictory well before he met Benedetta. In addition, he was getting older (he

was born in 1876), and by this point his conceptions of Futurism and virility had entered a new stage.

Marinetti's infamous "scorn for women" has provided cause for claims of Futurism's misogyny, as well as discussions of the role and standing of women in the movement. As proclaimed in the founding manifesto of Futurism of 1909, "Noi vogliamo glorificare la Guerra—sola igiene del mondo—il militarismo, il patriottismo, il gesto distruttore dei libertari, le belle idee per cui si muore e il *disprezzo della donna*."<sup>24</sup> The manifesto also declares that Futurism will fight against moralism and feminism. In "Contro l'amore e il parlamentarismo" (Against love and parliamentarism) of 1915 Marinetti again makes clear his sentiment, contending that his hatred of the tyranny of love can be expressed by the phrase "scorn for woman."<sup>25</sup> He writes, "Noi disprezziamo la donna, concepita come unico ideale, divino serbatoio d'amore, la donna veleno, la donna ninno tragico, la donna fragile, ossessionante e fatale...."<sup>26</sup> Marinetti frequently expressed such disdain for romantic love and for women, going so far in "Contro il lusso femminile" (Against female extravagance; 1920) as to label women's desire for extravagant toilettes into a disease (*toilettite*).

Lucia Re has pointedly asked, "...what did Marinetti and company really mean by 'feminism' and 'contempt of woman,' and is it really as bad as it seems?"<sup>27</sup> She rightly answers yes and no—that every aspect of Futurism's relationship to women is characterized by contradiction. That contradiction lies in the gaps between practice and theory, hyperbole and pragmatism. In fact, (as has been contended by numerous scholars, as well as Marinetti himself), the "woman" towards whom he was so antipathetic was, in large part, a rhetorical and symbolic one. In his preface to *Mafarka il futurista*, Marinetti

provides his own clarification of declaration of contempt, maintaining that it was aimed at “woman” as symbol of fin-de-siècle decadence (i.e. the femme fatale) and also at the woman as muse (i.e. Dante’s Beatrice).<sup>28</sup> Walter Adamson contends that,

Marinetti intended the phrase not literally as a sexist denigration of women (though he undoubtedly would not have minded had some men been drawn to Futurism because they misunderstood it in that way) but, more subtly, as a denigration of the quietist and sentimental virtues traditionally associated with women. Or, to put it differently, Marinetti’s ‘scorn for women’ was a rejection not of women as a biological category, but of the discursive position that the feminine has come to assume in fin-de-siècle life.<sup>29</sup>

However, one of Marinetti’s chief fantasies (as expressed in works like *Mafarka il futurista*) is, in fact, to free male Futurists from the biological need for woman. As Re points out,

Although she is still essential to the reproduction of the species and therefore very much an agent in the construction of the future, for Marinetti and the Futurists woman embodies the antithesis of everything they value. Woman is passive, parasitical, peaceful, pacifist and therefore past-oriented rather than future-oriented. Conditioned by her endless desire to love and to be loved, woman is a slave to sentiments and sentimentalism, a prisoner of those very same static and suffocating social institutions which the Futurists abhor most, namely marriage and the family. Woman represents, in other words, the negative “other” of Futurist man, an “other” that must be repressed and exorcised if Futurist man is to develop his revolutionary potential.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, although Marinetti is ostensibly rejecting sentimental love, he is effectively rejecting woman altogether, developing a Futurist utopia completely free of female sexuality even for biological reproduction.<sup>31</sup> However, as Spackman suggests, Marinetti’s fantasy of male autonomy could only be constructed through female mediation.<sup>32</sup> Thus, while he argues against the category of (and need for) woman in his fiction, his opinions were much more complex and often contradictory. In his life he did marry Benedetta (seemingly at his own insistence), have three daughters, and value family life.

Hand in hand with Marinetti's scorn for woman and celebration of mechanized man was his position against social constructions of love and patriarchy. He was pro-divorce, writing in "Contro il matrimonio" of 1919:

La famiglia che nasce quasi sempre, per la donna, da una legale compra-vendita d'anima e di corpo, diventa una mascherata di ipocrisie oppure la facciata saggia dietro la quale si svolge una prostituzione legale incipriata di moralismo.

Tutto questo in nome di una divinità spaventosa da rovesciare: il Sentimento.<sup>33</sup>

Cinzia Blum notes that Marinetti's manifestos refute both erotic and sentimental love.

She writes:

Entirely consistent with this crusade is his political program for devaluating marriage and the family, first elaborated in the 1918 'Manifesto del partito Futurista italiano' (Manifesto of the Italian Futurist party). Its agenda included abolition of the marital license, easily obtainable divorce, and the advent of free love.<sup>34</sup>

At the same time that Marinetti was anti-woman, anti-marriage, and anti-infatuation, he supported women's right to vote—although this support was entirely equivocal. In "Contro l'amore e parlamentarismo," which was largely meant as an attack on the corruption and hypocrisy of Italian government and society, Marinetti vilifies woman at the same time that he defends suffragism. As Re aptly suggests, Italian democracy was a travesty for Marinetti, and he welcomed its demise through universal suffrage.<sup>35</sup> Most objections to extending women the vote were due to the fear that her assumption of political roles would undermine the foundations of marriage, family, and motherhood and Marinetti's ostensible support of the feminist movement was based on the same assumptions. He hoped that female participation would lead to the ultimate destruction of these institutions.<sup>36</sup> He did suggest, however, that an eventual equality of the sexes (and therefore the ability to vote intelligently) might be possible if women were to receive educations identical to men.<sup>37</sup>

Marinetti often occupies such multi-faceted, sometimes opposing, positions, resulting in the paradoxical voice that characterizes Futurism at its base. His actual relationship to the female sex—in particular to Benedetta—does not correspond to its ideological construction in his work. Marinetti allowed women a voice within the movement and many actively participated—often at his encouragement. In fact, Walter Adamson quantified Marinetti's inclusion of women in his projects, observing that at a time when the majority of journals excluded them, Marinetti's pre-Futurist review, *Poesia*, featured some fifteen percent female authors.<sup>38</sup> Marinetti also had very close ties to the journal *L'Italia Futurista* (1916-1918), which featured a number of female contributors.<sup>39</sup> The final issue in February 18, 1918 printed Marinetti's "Manifesto del partito futurista italiano," in which he calls for universal suffrage.<sup>40</sup> While Marinetti encouraged a female voice within the movement, he did not hesitate to appropriate it (or that of male participants for that matter) in order to further his own, frequently propagandistic, aims.

For example, *Un ventre di donna*, written by Enif Robert in collaboration with Marinetti, is a collage novel combining passages from a diary with actual and imaginary letters.<sup>41</sup> It is the story of a woman with abdominal cancer and the development of her courage via Futurism to deal with the pain of the operations she must undergo. It is structured as a split epistolary narration that presents two distinct dialogues: an imaginary exchange of letters with Eleonora Duse, and actual correspondence with Marinetti (then fighting in World War I).<sup>42</sup> Though co-signed by Marinetti, *Un ventre di donna* is really Robert's work; despite this, Marinetti's signature is privileged, appearing first.<sup>43</sup>

Marinetti thus usurps authorship and reinforces the stereotypical categorization of man/culture versus woman/nature.

Much later, in his preface to Benedetta's 1931 work *Viaggio di Gararà*, he pointedly refers to her as his equal not his follower ("mia eguale, non discepolà"). He writes,

L'elogio pubblico della propria consorte scrittrice è senza precedenti nella storia delle letterature.

Lo faccio con tanto più ardore che rompo così una assurda consuetudine di falso pudore e falsa modestia familiari.

Ammiro il genio di Benedetta, mia eguale non discepolà....

*Viaggio di Gararà* è infatti una potente e radiosa architettura di idee immagini personaggi simboli forme e colori canti e danze assolutamente inventati, la cui tipica intensa vita non rassomiglia in nulla alla vita vissuta dell'Autrice.

Si sale con lei nelle atmosfere inebriate della più alta poesia astratta. Le donne vi salgono raramente. Quasi tutte, perchè donne, quando scrivono, narrano minuziosamente le vicende grandi o piccine, spirituali o materiali della loro esistenza quotidiana (amore rettilineo, eccentricità sessuali, marito amante figli lusso feste rivalità carriera)...<sup>44</sup>

Marinetti exaggeratedly and somewhat patronizingly claims that writing a preface for one's wife is without precedent in the history of literature. He describes *Viaggio di Gararà* as a powerful structure of invented ideas, images, characters, symbols, forms, colors, songs, and dances. This notion of invention is essential to Marinetti, as it is his proof of Benedetta's importance as a writer and what separates her from other woman writers, whose works, he contends, are generally mundane. While Marinetti doesn't name names, he lauds Benedetta to the detriment of other female authors, describing how the reader flies into the atmosphere with Benedetta's poetry to heights that others rarely reach. Almost all women, Marinetti contends, minutely narrate the things of their daily existence; however Benedetta creates a fantastic, abstract persona in *Gararà*.<sup>45</sup>

In his support and acceptance of Benedetta as fellow artist, object of desire, and mother of his children, Marinetti casts off what Re describes as the “cultural schizophrenia that still afflicts Italian men in their veneration of their mothers and their difficulty in mediating between images of woman as mother and images of woman as erotic object.”<sup>46</sup> His devotion to Benedetta and his children was deep, and the sheaves of letters Marinetti sent to Benedetta are filled with declarations of his love for her. Over and over he writes affectionately to his “Beny” (who calls him “mio Marinettino”), to say how much he misses her, loves her, and to kiss the children for him. At the same time, he insisted on Benedetta’s independence from him as an artist. Benedetta, in turn, acted as a great support for Marinetti and his activities. She often read his material in draft form (corrections can be found in original manuscripts with Benedetta’s handwriting), wrote copious letters, took care of the children, and ran the Marinetti household, the “headquarters” of Futurism.

### **Benedetta in the Context of Women and Futurism**

Just as Marinetti’s relationship to Benedetta offers insight into her life and work, the relationship between women and Futurism more generally offers an important context within which to place Benedetta. Many women were affiliated with Futurism from early in its inception through the movement’s end. However, the works and ideological positions of female adherents were by no means consistent and (as with those of women modernists more generally) have sometimes been perceived as derivative of that of their male counterparts and bound up in patriarchal discourse. However, as Blum suggests, “Far from being entirely reducible to a mere imitation, the writing of Futurist women articulates a different and conflict-laden representation of the feminine...”<sup>47</sup> Most

importantly, Futurism offered them a significant opportunity to participate in avant-garde activities. At times these efforts were appropriated by Marinetti, who often corralled participants into his ideological program. An examination of writings by some of these Futurist women illuminates some of the problems they faced as artists and establishes a better understanding of Benedetta's position within that larger framework.

Comparisons between Benedetta's work and that of other Futurist women reveal distinct differences, particularly between earlier and later generations. Curiously, most of the women connected with Futurism early on—Valentine de Saint-Point, Frances Simpson Stevens, and Mina Loy—were foreigners, and an interesting relationship exists between Futurism, the rhetoric adopted by these women, and the suffragettes, particularly in the militant tone they employ.<sup>48</sup> In fact, Marinetti took careful note of the British suffragettes and felt compelled to re-appropriate their activities by reciting in his own voice the infamous 1912 window-smashing campaign at which he was present. He wrote,

Capitaniano con alcuni fratelli la donnesca turba per la strada dei Ministeri ma il rigurgito e il tumulto di alter legioni che sboccano annunciando nuove forze femminili della periferia decide la polizia a cavallo a dare il segnale della carica e questo avviene in un inferno di galoppi bastonate capitomboli urli rivoltellate e nuovi crolli di cristallerie in tutti i negozi invasi da forsennate.<sup>49</sup>

Not to be outdone by the British feminists, Marinetti, by retelling the story as if “captaining” the enterprise, co-opted their action, recasting himself as the hero and the women as lunatics. While a strong similarity can be seen between Saint-Point, Stevens, and the suffragettes, there is a great difference between these women and the Futurists of the later generation that included Benedetta. The Italian women's movement was far weaker than its French and British counterparts, and Italian women only received the right to vote after the Second World War. Interestingly, by the late 1930s and early

1940s, Benedetta, too, would adopt a more militant role; however, hers was not as an antagonist to government policy or misogynist social practice, but on the contrary, as a staunch supporter of the Fascist regime.

Militant or not, women sought independence and Futurism held a strong attraction for women eager to break out of traditional, confining roles. That interest increased during the First World War due to the resultant dramatic social changes that offered women new opportunities.<sup>50</sup> A comparison of the early female Futurists and Benedetta makes clear their generational and ideological differences, but also reveals their difficulty in adopting a cohesive position on the role and rights of women.

In her novels Benedetta advocates an independent female agency, while, at the same time, heterosexual love functions as an essential force. Benedetta clearly understands woman as the intellectual, emotional, and artistic equal of man. In the theory of creativity that she develops, and with her own position as mother, she uses motherhood as evidence of woman's creativity. In some ways, this theory may have helped her to reconcile the fiercely independent artist in her with the wife and mother she had become. With a theory of creativity centered on maternity, Benedetta could not only be comfortable in both roles, but actually use the one to reinforce the other.

Distinctions between the early years of Futurism and what the movement became by the 1930s are evident in the virility of Saint-Point and in the motherhood of Benedetta. After disassociating herself from Futurism in 1914 and then moving to Cairo in 1924, Saint-Point met once more with Marinetti in the 1930s, who was on a trip to Egypt with Benedetta. The meeting between Saint-Point and Benedetta is said to have been an antipathetic one from which Benedetta left infuriated. In that meeting, Salaris observes,

there were not just two different generations confronting one another, but two epochs; one libertine, the other more moralistic, representing two different moments of Futurism.<sup>51</sup> These differences represent shifts in sensibility that correspond to larger cultural and political shifts in Italy, as well as in Europe in general, and to correlative changes in the imagery and writing of the Futurists. Saint-Point's fascination with militancy and war, and her desire to shock her audience is characteristic of early Futurism; whereas, by the 1920s, when Benedetta entered the movement, the nature of Futurist concerns had changed considerably. In addition, she entered the movement under the tutelage of Balla, who was by no means a misogynist.<sup>52</sup>

Much has been written (compared to the rest of the women Futurists) about Saint-Point. Certainly one of the first women to become involved in the movement, and especially as the author of the 1912 "Manifesto della donna futurista" (Manifesto of the Futurist woman), she has sparked much interest in scholars. Yet, the amount written about her is perhaps disproportionate to her contribution in comparison to other women in the group—many more of whom exist than has generally been acknowledged.<sup>53</sup> However, her manifesto represents one of the first instances of a female voice within the movement.<sup>54</sup> Saint-Point first read the manifesto publicly in that same year at the Galerie Giroux in Brussels on the occasion of the Futurist exhibition on view. The reading was billed as an *azione femminile* (female action) and was clearly meant to be provocative. Even more controversial was her "Manifesto futurista della lussuria" (Futurist Manifesto of Lust) of 1913, in which Saint-Point forcefully and shockingly speaks out against traditional ideas of romantic love and calls for pure lust, instead.

In her attack on conventional bourgeois ideology, Saint-Point aimed to carve out a new subject position for woman. Her intention was to create turmoil with her manifestos, and here her strategy can be seen to sharply differ from that of Benedetta. In stripping woman of sentiment and morality, Saint-Point dislodges her image and role in conventional society; whereas, Benedetta adopts an identity firmly rooted in conventional notions of woman. Unlike Saint-Point, Benedetta never acted as provocateur—any attempt she made to create change was from within the system. Benedetta did not engage in outlandish Futurist activities (such as those of the *serate*), for example, and in her essays of the 1930s she fully adopts the role of Fascist subject. So much so, that her works are never understood within the regime as insistent, even subversive, documents of female creative agency. Both Benedetta's and Saint-Point's positions can indeed be understood as paradoxical.<sup>55</sup> Blum, as well as others, contends that in Saint-Point's notion of woman, although "woman's agency is celebrated, it is cast in a conventionally limited, dualistic, subordinate, and passive mold."<sup>56</sup> Such arguments, like the criticisms leveled at Benedetta and other women Futurists, seem to problematically read current understandings of feminism back onto women of the early half of the twentieth century.<sup>57</sup> In contrast, Re convincingly argues instead that Saint-Point's position was progressive, in that her manifestos put forth arguments against biological essentialism and for men and women partaking of both masculine and feminine categories, which, most notably, are categories that in themselves Saint-Point saw as relative and variable.<sup>58</sup>

#### **Rosa Rosà and the Women Contributors to *L'Italia Futurista***

Active several years later than Saint-Point, in the late 1910s, the writer Rosa Rosà also attempted to depict a new kind of woman and has been described as one of the few

women writers to take a clear feminist position in opposition to Marinetti's misogynist views.<sup>59</sup> Rosà published her first Futurist novel *Una donna con tre anime* in 1918, which Re has described as a text of "almost visionary originality" that attempts "to imagine how 'another woman' could come into being."<sup>60</sup> The protagonist Giorgina Rossi undergoes a transformation from a banal female character into a sexually and intellectually liberated figure, experiencing three metamorphoses: the first into a kind of a female flaneur, a new state in which she wanders the city and loses all traditional bourgeois values and scruples.<sup>61</sup> She secondly attains a new consciousness that involves the acquisition of "male" traits. Acquiring new perceptions and thought processes, even her actual physical appearance and speech become more masculine. Re notes, "Implicit here once again is—as in Valentine de Saint-Point's writings—the ideal of the androgyne, a superior being who will transcend gender differences as western culture has codified them."<sup>62</sup> Giorgina's third metamorphosis gives her a poetic gift—she becomes, in effect, a Futurist poet.<sup>63</sup>

Interestingly, certain parallels exist between *Una donna con tre anime* and Benedetta's *Le forze umane*. Both center on a woman who breaks out of a rote existence and moves into an enlightened, liberated state. Rosà's feminism is most explicit in her essays that appeared in *L'Italia Futurista*, in which she proposed to erase gender differentiations based on biological essentialism, contending that traits often associated with women are historically, not naturally, determined,<sup>64</sup> whereas in her essays on creativity and maternal intuition, Benedetta seems, to some degree, to embrace a certain biologism.

Futurism appealed to many creative women, as is demonstrated by the number of women contributors to *L'Italia Futurista*, the Florentine journal inspired by Marinetti, which ran from June 1916 to February 1918.<sup>65</sup> *L'Italia Futurista* was published in a newspaper format and was controlled by a group of seven editors, one of them a woman: Maria Ginanni, who, as the war continued on into 1917, became the lead editor. From mid-1917 to early-1918 the journal was marked by a debate on the "woman question."<sup>66</sup> As noted, the entrance of women into the work force radically changed their social position and, in particular, changed their conception of themselves in a fundamental way. The controversy itself was provoked largely by Marinetti's publication of *Come si seducono le donne*. A number of women contributed to the debate in *L'Italia Futurista*, including the featured writers Ginanni, Rosa Rosà, and Enif Robert, as well as Magamal, Fanny Dini, Irma Valeria, Fulvia Giuliani, Marj Carbonaro, Emma Marpillero, and Shara Marini.<sup>67</sup>

In "Come si seducono le donne (Lettera aperta a F.T. Marinetti)," an article from December 21, 1917, Robert argues that the idea that men have shrewdly won women over is a fable invented to create a sense of superiority. In a position somewhat akin to that expressed by Benedetta in *Le forze umane*, Robert counters the notion of woman as weak and passive insisting on her strength of character and will. Women, she argues, have let men believe in their fantasy of conquest because it has suited them. But love should be defined as an intelligent cooperation between two equal beings.

Of all the contributors to the debate, however, Rosà is arguably the most important. In one article, "Risposta a Jean-Jacques" (June 1, 1917), Rosà attempts to change the terms of the argument, and proposes to stop dividing humanity into men and

women but instead to divide them into intelligent versus mentally deficient people. This new categorization, she contends, will allow for a re-evaluation of human nature previously impossible due to the division between the sexes.

Later that month, Rosà wrote the first of two articles entitled “Le donne del posdomani.” The first, published on June 17, 1917, argues that women have assumed a new and important role, due to their entrance into the workforce during the war, allowing them a sense of self-importance. Rosà argues that even if women have to relinquish their positions to men returning from the war, their new sense of self will remain significantly enlarged, implicitly suggesting that things have changed, whether men like it or not.

In the second essay also titled “Le donne del posdomani” (October 7, 1917), Rosà argues that the stereotypical maternal temperament—the mother that exists more for her family than for herself—is essentially at odds with a self that is autonomous and strong.<sup>68</sup> This was not meant as an obliteration of the role of mother, but a modification of it. Rosà did not intend a total rejection of motherhood, but instead was attempting to describe a new mode of being a mother.<sup>69</sup>

Benedetta in her life became a mother that existed very much for her family, yet she also remained an autonomous and active artist. The reconciling of these two roles was often difficult for women. As will be seen, the issue of reconciliation was crucial to Benedetta’s thinking and helped her to integrate the wide, and at times disparate, range of influences at play in her work.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Lia Giachero, "... 'Grands étalges de mers et de nuages...' Due inediti bozzetti per vetrate di Benedetta Marinetti," in *Ricerche de Storia dell'arte*, no. 40 (Roma: La Nuova Italia Scientifica, 1990), 84. The Valdese were a religious sect that originated in the 12<sup>th</sup> century by Pierre Valdes. The movement was predicated on evangelical concepts, specifically preaching from the Bible, which caused its break with (and persecution by) the official Catholic Church. Adherents took a vow of poverty and promoted a concept of equality of the faithful. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Valdese adhered to the Reform, associating themselves with the Swiss Calvinist Church, but maintaining an autonomous character. In Italy, the movement had a following in Piemonte, in particular, the origin of Benedetta's family. See *Dizionario Esoterico*, ed. Riccardo Chissolli, [esonet.org/dizionario](http://esonet.org/dizionario).

<sup>2</sup> Giovanna Bonasegale ed., *Catalogo Generale della Galleria Comunale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea* (Rome: Edizioni De Luca, 1995), 478.

<sup>3</sup> In his biography of Marinetti, Gino Agnese contends the two met when she was 19 and four months, which would have been December of 1916. However, correspondence makes it clear that they met in 1918. Gino Agnese, *Marinetti, una vita esplosiva* (Milan: Camunia, 1990), 208.

<sup>4</sup> My thanks Lucia Re for first pointing out this confusing distinction.

<sup>5</sup> Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *Mafarka il futurista* (Milan: Edizioni futuriste di "Poesia," 1910). The book was originally published in French in 1909 as *Mafarka le futuriste* and translated and into Italian in 1910. Innocenzo Cappa along with Cesare Sarfatti (Margherita's husband) defended Marinetti.

<sup>6</sup> Although the revolution in Russia occurred in 1917, the USSR or Soviet Union wasn't officially formed until 1922.

<sup>7</sup> Claudia Salaris, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1988), 180.

<sup>8</sup> "She is very intelligent. I have a physical and spiritual displeasure at separating myself from her." Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *Taccuini, 1915-1921*, ed. Alberto Bertoni (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1987), 468.

<sup>9</sup> Gino Agnese, *Marinetti: una vita esplosiva* (Milan: Camunia, 1990), 208. In fact, Benedetta seems to live at a number of addresses in these years. A series of letters from Marinetti to Benedetta in 1920 are addressed to her at her family home in Castellamonte, Torino. From 1921 to 1922 he wrote to her at Villa Giaccone, Oneglia. After February 1922, however, his letters to Benedetta are addressed to her mother's home in Via Donizetti, Rome. In October 1924 Marinetti began addressing his letters to her at Piazza Adriana, 30, Rome—which would become their home together.

<sup>10</sup> Benedetta to Alberto Cappa, ALS, March 19, 1926, Benedetta Papers, Special Collections, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles. The dating of the marriage to 1923 seems to be because the two began living together at about that time.

<sup>11</sup> Walter Adamson in "Futurism, Mass Culture, and Women: The Reshaping of the Artistic Vocation, 1909-1920," *Modernism/Modernity* 4, no.1, (1997): 97-98. Like Marinetti, Notari was highly adept at self-promotion.

<sup>12</sup> "In order to avoid difficulties during our trip to America...we have decided to legalize our union." Benedetta to Alberto Cappa, ALS, March 19, 1926, Papers of F. T. Marinetti and Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, 920092, Special Collections, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

<sup>13</sup> "Marinetti is leaving tomorrow for Livorno where *I prigionieri* will be presented. I had wanted to accompany him and then go on to Monza (where Signora Notari will help us speed things up). With today's setback I may give up Livorno, but I hope to be in Monza by the 23rd or 24th just the same. After 15 days of bans the civil act. Naturally I would be very happy if you could be one of the witnesses and for this reason I will ask you to postpone your trip to Milan and visit to Cova until April 15 to please me.

Are you happy?

I am a bit sad. We were joyous and free, above this humanity that is plunged into relativity and grayness, we were light-hearted and happy, afterwards who knows?

Marinetti wanted it and I contented him, now, as I contented him on July 7, 1920. Today his thought of not causing me annoyances in a near and far tomorrow, moved me, just as he persuaded me in 1920 with his will to bring our love into the free and pure sky of poetry." Benedetta to Alberto Cappa, ALS, March 19, 1926, Papers of F. T. Marinetti and Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, 920092, Special Collections, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

<sup>14</sup> "Thank you for the promise kept for those books you sent me—I found it annoying (=ties to the member) to find my name united with Futurist free-worshiper [parolibera futurista]. I am too free and rebellious—I don't want restraints—I want to be myself alone. Maybe I will become used to it—this to be sincere—best wishes and salutations." Benedetta to Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, ALS, November 23, 1918, Marinetti Collection, Milan. Many thanks to Filippo Piazzoni who graciously shared this letter and poem, as well as the early drafts, which are in the collection of his family.

<sup>15</sup> "Parolibera futurista signifies precisely: being I. It is a distinction that neatly separates us from the many that are all yesterday and nothing. It is a password that joins us in the fight. I felt all of our beautiful Sunday, February 3 in your little page of parole in libertà that I very much liked.

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I suggest that you take up that tangle of sensations and that you give all of its forces—as forces—in another page of *parole in libertà*. Send me your writings. I am a friend not a teacher. As a futurist friend I am happy to foster your genius in its original impulse.”  
 Filippo Tommaso Marinetti to Benedetta, ALS, 1918, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti Papers Gen Mss 130, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven.

<sup>16</sup> “I am still in Milan. The move is more complicated than I thought.

Marinetti’s life has been dense and manifold: of events and of thought. In 15 days we have only reorganized the press clippings, the correspondence, part of the books.

These days are heavy for me. I have on my shoulders Marinetti’s tumultuous past. A past that is hostile to me and that assaults me at every instant. Memories feelings fights.

I have to fight against the shadows the ghosts the sensibilities the realities that my hypersensitivity creates and discovers. I have to help M. detach himself from the walls that have contained and enclosed his dynamism.

I have to withstand the hatred and the rancor of his Milanese friends and the two maids.

I am strong, almost always serene, always aware. The knowledge of being in the right, of not moving against Marinetti’s life, on the contrary of preparing for him a better atmosphere is my strength.

Once again it is the latest ideology of my book that must be tested by me in reality.”  
 Benedetta to Alberto Cappa, ALS, undated (probably from 1925), Papers of F. T. Marinetti and Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, 920092, Special Collections, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

<sup>17</sup> Given the context, it seems clear that Benedetta is referring to her first novel, *Le forze umane*, which was published in 1924. Thus, her move with Marinetti from Milan to Rome, which she is describing, must have taken place sometime after that.

<sup>18</sup> “Marinetti is better. He is working. I am a bit depressed from my sensibility [which has been] exasperated in Milan and here hurt by the usual banal people and by the nastiness of the men (like Cangiullo, etc.)” Benedetta to Alberto Cappa, ALS, undated (probably from the early 1920s), Papers of F. T. Marinetti and Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, 920092, Special Collections, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

<sup>19</sup> The two women were from Godiasco, a small town from the “Oltrepò” (where Marinetti’s father kept a country house). Nina, the younger sister, was placed in service with the Marinetti family at age 11 and Marietta followed later. Probably at Cangiullo’s suggestion and with his assistance, Marietta published several *parole in libertà* poems in the journal *Vela Latina* in 1916. Cangiullo wrote the introduction, claiming Marietta as

the first woman *parolibera* Futurist. Bentivoglio suggests that Cangiullo used Marietta in order to provoke the women writers of the day, who for the most part were writing sentimental romances—the very stuff the Futurists abhorred. Most interesting is that the two published “official” poems contrast significantly to several earlier unpublished works by Marietta. The published works, such as “Portrait of Marinetti,” are typically Futurist in style and it is not surprising that Cangiullo may have had a hand in these. Instead, the unpublished 1913 poem “Wireless Love Room,” is quite different in form and content. Part of a group of private poems, Bentivoglio suggests that it addresses Marinetti’s nighttime “visits” to the two sisters’ bedroom. The poem seems infinitely more genuine and original (and even somewhat horrifying in its revelation). Marietta’s output was quite limited and does not seem to have continued beyond the teens, although, born in 1869, she lived until 1942. See Mirella Bentivoglio and Franca Zoccoli, *Women Artists of Futurism—Almost Lost to History* (New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 1997).

<sup>20</sup> Claudia Salaris, “Futurismo letterario a Roma,” in *Casa Balla e il Futurismo a Roma*, ed. Enrico Crispolti (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1989), 42.

<sup>21</sup> Lucia Re, “Impure Abstraction: Benedetta as Visual Artist and Novelist,” in *La Futurista: Benedetta Cappa Marinetti*, ed. Lisa Panzera (Philadelphia: Moore College of Art and Design, 1998), 37.

<sup>22</sup> Numerous exhibitions in Rome in the last decade of the nineteenth century displayed European spiritualist and symbolist tendencies. Gianna Piantoni, “Art in Rome, The Capital of Italy,” in *Ottocento: Romanticism and Revolution in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Painting*, ed. Roberta J. M. Olson, (New York and Florence: The American Federation of Arts and Centro Di, 1992), 92-93.

<sup>23</sup> See Lia Giachero, “Mani ‘palpatrici d’orizzonti.’ Il contributo di Benedetta Marinetti al manifesto per il tattilismo,” in *Ricerche di Storia dell’Arte*, no. 45 (Rome: La Nuova Scientifica, 1991).

<sup>24</sup> Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “Fondazione e Manifesto del Futurismo,” in F. T. Marinetti, *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, ed. Luciano De Maria (Milan: Mondadori, 1968), 10. “We will glorify war—the world’s only hygiene—militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of freedom-bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and scorn for women.” Reprinted in translation in Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *Let’s Murder the Moonshine: Selected Writings*, ed. R. W. Flint (Los Angeles: Sun and Moon Classics, 1991), 84.

<sup>25</sup> Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “Contro l’amore e il parlamentarismo,” in Marinetti, *Teoria e Invenzione Futurista*, 250.

<sup>26</sup> “We scorn woman conceived as the sole ideal, the divine reservoir of love, the voluptuous lure, the tragic plaything, the fragile, obsessing and fatal woman....” *Ibid.*

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<sup>27</sup> Lucia Re, "Futurism and Feminism," *Annali d'Italianistica* 7 (1989): 253.

<sup>28</sup> Re, "Futurism and Feminism," 253. See Marinetti, *Mafarka il futurista*. Salaris, Adamson, and others have posited the same explanation of the meaning behind Marinetti's use of the term scorn.

<sup>29</sup> Adamson, "Futurism, Mass Culture and Women," 103.

<sup>30</sup> Re, "Futurism and Feminism," 254.

<sup>31</sup> "Ibid, 255.

<sup>32</sup> Barbara Spackman, *Fascist Virilities: Rhetoric, Ideology, and Social Fantasy in Italy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 76.

<sup>33</sup> "The family that almost always, for the woman, is born out of a legal sale of spirit and body, becomes a hypocritical masquerade or else the wise façade behind which one carries on a legal prostitution powdered over with moralism. All this in the name of a fearful divinity that must be overthrown: Sentiment." Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "Contro il matrimonio," in Marinetti, *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, 369. Reprinted in translation as "Marriage and the Family," in Marinetti, *Let's Murder the Moonshine*, 84.

<sup>34</sup> Blum, *The Other Modernism*, 79.

<sup>35</sup> Re, "Futurism and Feminism," 258.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> "Quanto alla pretesa inferiorità della donna, noi pensiamo che se il corpo e il spirito di questa avessero subito, attraverso una lunga serie di generazioni, una educazione identica a quella ricevuta dallo spirito e dal corpo dell'uomo, sarebbe forse possibile parlare di uguaglianza fra i due sessi." Filippo Tommaso Marinetti "Contro l'amore e il parlamentarismo," in Marinetti, *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, 293.

<sup>38</sup> Adamson, "Futurism, Mass Culture and Women," 103.

<sup>39</sup> See Walter Adamson, *Avant-garde Florence: From Modernism to Fascism* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1993).

<sup>40</sup> Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "Manifesto del partito futurista italiano" in Marinetti, *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, 154.

<sup>41</sup> Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and Enif Robert, *Un ventre di donna. Romanzo chirurgico* (Milan: Facchi, 1919). Robert was born in Prato in 1886 and was active in the movement beginning in the later teens. She published poems and essays in the journal *L'Italia Futurista*.

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<sup>42</sup> Kriss Ravetto, "SigarO + FIGARO = SFIGARO," *Carte Italiane: A Journal of Italian Studies* 13 (1993-94): 36.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>44</sup> "The public praise of one's own wife-writer is without precedent in the history of literature.

I do it with so much more ardor as I am breaking with such an absurd custom of false humility and false familial modesty.

I admire the genius of Benedetta, my equal not my disciple...

*Viaggio di Gararà* is in fact a potent and radiant structure of absolutely invented ideas images characters symbols colors and forms poems songs and dance whose typical intense life isn't in the slightest way like the life lived by the author.

One ascends with her into the intoxicated atmosphere of the most exalted abstract poetry. Women rarely ascend there. Almost all, because they are women, when they write, minutely narrate the events large or small, spiritual or material, of their everyday existence (rectilinear love, sexual eccentricities, husband lover children luxury parties rivalries careers)... F.T. Marinetti, "Preface" [to *Viaggio di Gararà*] in Benedetta, *I tre romanzi: Le forze umane, Viaggio di Gararà, Astra e il sottomarino*, ed. Simona Cigliana (Rome: Edizioni dell'Atlanta, 1988), 124.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Lucia Re, "Fascist Theories of 'Woman' and the Construction of Gender," in *Mothers of Invention: Women, Italian Fascism, and Culture*, ed. Robin Pickering-Iazzi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 85.

<sup>47</sup> Cinzia Blum, *The Other Modernism: F. T. Marinetti's Futurist Fiction of Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 110-111.

<sup>48</sup> The 1912 suffragette window smashing campaign (a demonstration consisting of approximately 150 women breaking thousands of dollars in plate glass shop windows at an appointed date and hour) and the slashing of the Rokeby Venus in protest by Mary Richardson both went a step further and assumed not just a Futurist tone but adapted terrorist activities. In a sense, these women did the Futurists' one better by acting on militant rhetoric. Janet Lyon notes that feminist Cristabel Pankhurst's description of suffragette activities as a "surgical operation" and a "great blasting away of ugly things" echoes Marinetti's call for the destruction of museums and the glorification of war. From 1912 to 1914, Pankhurst was in exile in Paris and traveled in avant-garde circles where she no doubt would have known Saint-Point. Saint-Point employs rhetoric similar to Pankhurst's in her manifesto of the Futurist Woman. See Janet Lyon, "Militant Discourse, Strange Bedfellows: Suffragettes and Vorticists Before the War," *differences* 4, no. 2 (summer 1992).

<sup>49</sup> Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "Suffragette e Indian Docks," in F. T. Marinetti *La grande Milano tradizionale e futurista; Una sensibilità Italiana nata in Egitto*, ed. Luciano De Maria (Milan: Mondadori, 1969), 291. "Several of us captain the tide of women along the street where the Ministries are located by the increasing flow and tumult of other legions coming in from the outlying districts compel the mounted police to give the signal for a charge all hell breaks loose as the horses come galloping down on them clubs flying screams pistol shots people knocked down and the crashing of more windows in the stores invaded by the madwoman." Reprinted in translation in Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *Selected Writings*, ed. R. W. Flint (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972), 341.

<sup>50</sup> Adamson suggests, "That attraction...may have much to do with Futurism's involvement with mass culture, a conjunction (that despite increasing recognition that mass culture was gendered as feminine from its inception) has been little explored and that seriously complicates our current understanding of Futurism's gender politics." Adamson, "Futurism, Mass Culture, and Women: The Reshaping of Artistic Vocation, 1909-1920," *Modernism/Modernity* 4, no. 1 (1997): 89-90. Adamson points out that modernism and mass culture ("high" and "low") can no longer be seen as oppositional. While the two canonical theories of modernism—those of Adorno and Greenberg—describe modernism and mass culture as in hostile opposition, Adamson points to the problems inherent in this position, arguing that Italian Futurism pursued a modernist aesthetic while embracing mass culture.

<sup>51</sup> Claudia Salaris, *Storia del Futurismo* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1992), 52-53. According to Salaris the account came from Nelson Morpurgo, a Futurist author and friend of Marinetti, as well as a lawyer born in Cairo in 1899 (who also became legal advisor to the Italian Consulate in Egypt after the Second World War).

<sup>52</sup> Emily Braun, "Balla and Benedetta: Problems in Futurist Gender Theories," unpublished paper presented at the symposium "Benedetta Cappa Marinetti," Moore College of Art and Design, Philadelphia, September 12, 1998.

<sup>53</sup> Saint-Point was an "international" figure, prominent in the early part of the movement. She participated in many of the *serate* and performed her Futurist and Futurist-inspired dances in the United States as well as in Europe. Saint-Point studied painting and exhibited in France beginning in 1904 but eventually established herself first as a writer and then as a dancer. Born as Anna-Jeanne-Valentine-Marianne Desglans de Cessiat-Vercell, she pursued a literary career and published numerous works of drama and poetry between 1906 and 1911. Through numerous literary gatherings Saint-Point came to know Marinetti. In 1913, she developed a form of interdisciplinary dance. Saint-Point first performed *La Métachorie* (a multilayered presentation of dance, music, and narration) in April 1913 at a Futurist soirée and, in 1917, performed it at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York. In 1914 Saint-Point distanced herself from the movement, and in 1924 she moved to Cairo, where she became a Sufi and lived until her death in 1953. See Gunther Berghaus, "Dance and the Futurist Woman: The Work of Valentine de Saint-Point," *Dance Research* 11, no. 2 (Autumn 1993); Leslie Satin, "Valentine de Saint-

Point,” *Dance Research Journal* 22, no. 1 (1990); Nancy Locke, “Valentine de Saint-Point and the Fascist Construction of Woman,” in Matthew Affron and Mark Antliff, *Fascist Visions: Art and Ideology in France and Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

In her 1997 doctoral dissertation, Nancy Gaye Moore has minimized Saint-Point’s role as a Futurist and maintains that *La Métachorie* was conceptualized independently from Futurism. Moore convincingly argues that the Futurist label has been an impediment to a full understanding of Saint-Point’s work. See Nancy Gaye Moore, “Valentine de Saint-Point: ‘La Femme Integrale’ and her Quest for a Modern Tragic Theater in *L’Agonie de Messaline* (1907) and *La Metachorie* (1913)” (Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1997).

<sup>54</sup> Marietta Angelini, Marinetti’s maid, is arguably the earliest woman writer of *parole in libertà*. See note 18.

<sup>55</sup> Locke, “Valentine de Saint-Point,” 83.

<sup>56</sup> Blum, *The Other Modernism*, 106.

<sup>57</sup> Locke, Spackman, and to some degree Blum, insist, for example, that even though Saint-Point asserted a position for woman in an art movement that oppressed women, she never changed the terms of the oppression.

<sup>58</sup> “Not only do men and women alike partake of the masculine and the feminine in varying degrees across a spectrum of sexual roles and attitudes but, according to Valentine, the feminine and the masculine themselves are relative categories, culturally and historically variable and subject to change, rather than a fixed binary opposition. For Valentine (as for, much later, Julia Kristeva), it is not the biological sex of a person, but the subject position he or she takes within a given cultural and social context that defines his or her identity and transgressive potential (Kristeva, *Womens’ time*” 33-34).” Re, “Futurism and Feminism,” 259-260.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, 263. Rosà was born in Vienna to a noble family as Edith Von Haynau in 1884. She attended the Vienna Art School, married in 1908 and had four children. She became connected with Futurism during World War I, while her husband was at the front, and became active as an illustrator and as a writer for *L’Italia Futurista*. It is unclear when Rosà separated from the Futurists, but she seems to have ceased her activities altogether from the 1930s through the 1950s, returning to writing in the 1960s as Edyth Arnaldi. She died in Rome in 1978. See Bentivoglio and Zoccoli, *Women Artists of Italian Futurism*; and Rinaldina Russell, ed., *Italian Women Writers* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994).

<sup>60</sup> Re, “Futurism and Feminism,” 265.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 267. See also Russell, ed., *Italian Women Writers*, 357.

<sup>63</sup> Re, "Futurism and Feminism," 267.

<sup>64</sup> Russell, ed., *Italian Women Writers*, 355-56.

<sup>65</sup> The journal began publication on the heels of the closure of *Lacerba* (the Florence-based review run by Papini and Soffici who publicly broke with Marinetti in its pages in February 1915). Walter Adamson, *Avant-Garde Florence: From Modernism to Fascism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 104.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 105.

<sup>67</sup> In 1917, following the publication of "Contro l'amore e parlamentarismo," Marinetti wrote *Come si seducono le donne*, an ironic treatise on romantic love that fueled the series of letters and articles in *L'Italia Futurista*. Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> "I temperamenti materni, epicentricamente incatenati all'utilità della famiglia, altruisticamente esistenti più per gli altri che per se stessi, non arrivano a quelle forme libere di *Io* cosiente e autonomo, e indipendentemente intelligibile, che unicamente sanno penetrare il mondo, capendolo perfettamente." Rosa Rosà, "Le donne del posdomani," *L'Italia Futurista* (October 7, 1917).

<sup>69</sup> Re, "Futurism and Feminism," 264.

## CHAPTER 2

### BENEDETTA AND HER FORMATION AS AN ARTIST

Benedetta's formation as an artist can be traced through an exploration of a number of divergent influences with varying degrees of importance, all of which may be found in her early works. Italian Divisionism greatly influenced Benedetta and was central in the development of Futurism in general, particularly in relation to the use of brilliant color and to the concept of *stati d'animo*, or the conveyance of emotional states through art. This chapter will illustrate the significance of early Futurism for Benedetta through her review of the Futurist exhibition at the *III Biennale di Roma*. While early Futurism, specifically the work of Umberto Boccioni, greatly affected Benedetta, Giacomo Balla had the most pronounced effect on her work. Boccioni's and Balla's influence on Benedetta's development as a Futurist artist will be further explored through an examination of her works from the 1920s, which also reveal the fundamental impact of Theosophy. Finally, a brief survey of the relationship between Futurism and Surrealism will demonstrate the relevance of the French movement for Benedetta, and the way in which she worked around the problem of its influence due to the Fascist regime's increasing insistence on Italian cultural autonomy.

Benedetta's integration of these varying influences in her work is paralleled by her reconciliation of divergent elements in her self-construction. Benedetta came out publicly as a painter in 1924, participating in the *Primo Congresso Futurista* at which she

presented a paper entitled “Futuro ruolo del pittore futurista” ([The] Future role of the Futurist painter). In her address, Benedetta spoke of a new Futurist sensibility, contending that the Futurist painter is immersed in nature and can be located in the contradictions between it and the individual.<sup>1</sup> Tellingly, Benedetta, at the outset of her career, describes the essence of the Futurist painter as contradictory—the very characteristic that is at the heart of her own formation as an artist and the complex relationships among her roles as artist, mother, wife, and Fascist.

### **Divisionism and Futurism**

Like Benedetta, Futurism’s development is multi-faceted. The late nineteenth-century movement Italian Divisionism (the major practitioners of which were Gaetano Previati, Giovanni Segantini, and Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo) was a fundamental precursor to Futurism and provided a new means of interpreting the real. Divisionism is characterized by the use of atmospheric light, a complex color theory marked by the use of contrasting color, a divided brushstroke, and often socially conscious and sometimes allegorical themes. The Futurists adopted aspects of Divisionism, which they recognized as a means of liberating themselves from the Academy.<sup>2</sup>

Balla, who had traveled to Paris where he studied neo-Impressionism, was also steeped in Divisionist ideas, which he imported from Turin to Rome (after his move there in 1895) and communicated to his students (including Boccioni, Gino Severini, Carlo Carrà, and, later, Benedetta). Between 1900 and 1910, Rome, in fact, became a center of Divisionist tendencies.<sup>3</sup> The Divisionists believed deeply in the ability of art to convey moral concepts and psychological states, ideas that were attractive to Boccioni, in

particular.<sup>4</sup> Previati was especially important to Boccioni, who read his treatise *La tecnica della pittura*, and Boccioni's use of line as an evocation of interior emotion is a notion taken directly from him.<sup>5</sup> Anna Maria Damigella has shown that the early Futurists' belief in modernity and progress as well as the ability of art to express psychological states, can be also traced directly to Previati.<sup>6</sup> As Damigella describes it:

The idea of the psychic realm as an intermediary state between matter and spirit, as the domain of energy and movement, lay at the core of early Futurism and was initially expressed through means derived from Divisionism and Symbolism. From these movements the Futurists inherited strident chromatic dissonances, synaesthetic correspondences between music, line and colour that reverberate in the soul of the viewer and the concept of the picture as an intermediary in the recreation of an emotive sensation or state of mind.<sup>7</sup>

The Futurist concept of simultaneity, central to Boccioni's *Stati d'animo*, also stems from Symbolist and Romantic concerns.

Benedetta's interest in such emotive sensations comes from Boccioni and Balla, as well as Previati (whose works, if not treatises, she knew). Benedetta did not adopt the technique of a Divisionist divided brushstroke, but she did create works meant to convey psychological states, most obviously in her *sintesi grafiche* of 1924. Her later works that depict related spiritual concerns, such as *Il Monte Tabor* (Fig. 3) and *Aeropittura di un incontro con l'isola* (Aeropainting of an encounter with the island; Fig. 8), convey emotion in a more diffuse manner, and relate to the kind of luminosity apparent in the works of Previati—who frequently created moody scenes that are heightened by a glowing, internal light. In his series for the Milan Chamber of Commerce, Previati transformed large panoramas of modern technological advances into allegorical decorations for a public building, which provided a central influence for Benedetta's series in the Palermo Post Office (Fig. 4).<sup>8</sup>

Benedetta's investigation of emotional and spiritual states reflects deeply personal concerns, illustrated by her compositions in which "collective harmony" or reconciliation is a dominant theme.<sup>9</sup> An important precedent to these emotional states was provided by the spiritualist concerns of a number of Futurists, such as Balla, Arnolda Ginna, and Boccioni, as made evident in his tripartite work, the *Stati d'animo* (States of mind).<sup>10</sup> In the three panels, entitled *Quelli che vanno* (Those who go; Fig. 9), *Gli Addii* (The farewells), and *Quelli che rimangono* (Those who remain), Boccioni combines Divisionist brushwork with a Cubist fracturing of object and space. The works depict the dynamism and simultaneity of modern train travel, the emotions surrounding separation and departure, and the Futurists' own metaphorical journey into the future. The desire to directly convey emotion was recurring in Futurism and took a variety of forms.<sup>11</sup> In 1931 (in a much later version of the theme that was heavily inflected by Theosophy and Catholicism) the artist Fillia directly referred to the depiction of pure emotion:

Al paesaggio degl'impressionisti e alla natura morta dei cubisti, la pittura futurista ha opposto la necessità di un soggetto vivente, in diretto rapporto con lo stato d'animo dell'artista moderno. È questa la più grande Gloria ideale del futurismo plastico, perché s'inizia d'allora la formazione della nuova spiritualità che sta dominando l'Europa. Infatti il pittore veniva strappato dai problemi puramente materialistici per essere tuffato nell'atmosfera passionale e religiosa dello stato d'animo. Nulla di letterario o di decorativo, ma emozione pura.<sup>12</sup>

Benedetta's *Le forze umane* was accompanied by nineteen graphic syntheses that were meant to express such pureness of feeling through their synthetic, immediate quality. At times, these represent forces in conflict, a theme no doubt derived from Balla and evident in works such as *Pessimismo e ottimismo* (Fig. 10).<sup>13</sup> Balla's interest in Divisionism was also intermingled with the influence of Positivism (particularly the theories of Cesare

Lombroso), reflecting the seemingly strange mix of art, science, and spiritualism that was prevalent at the time.<sup>14</sup>

### Benedetta and Balla versus Boccioni

The centrality of Balla and Boccioni, and Benedetta's attempt to reconcile both influences, are apparent in her painting (as discussed below). Benedetta (who did not regularly publish art criticism) also acknowledged these two as the seminal figures of Futurism in her 1931 review "Sui Futuristi alla III Biennale Romana, Conclusioni" published in *L'Impero*.<sup>15</sup> She writes that the Futurist sensibility is characterized by a passion for profundity, life, liberty, and complexity (the same idea she expressed almost verbatim in her article "Sensibilità futuriste" published in *Vetrina futurista* in 1927).<sup>16</sup> For Benedetta, Boccioni exemplifies this Futurist sensibility. She describes his series, the *Stati d'animo*, as the embodiment of this complex, profound, simultaneous dynamism, which she further describes as a compenetration of time-space, distance-closeness, internal-external, presence-memory.<sup>17</sup> To illustrate her contention, she points to his

*Quelli che vanno:*

Ad esempio *Quelli che vanno*. In un ritmo obliquo per la velocità e verde azzuro di lontananze notturne egli ha imprigionato le facce oblique dei dormienti, le luci sfaccettate e i pali telegrafici stemperati dalla velocità. La velocità in questo quadro è come un fiume che annega e trasporta immersi nel suo elemento delle realtà, facce angosciate tristi beate.<sup>18</sup>

She goes on to describe Boccioni's depiction of speed as a force that melts objects and figures, and like a river, drowns and carries them away. She continues with a description of *Gli Addi*, which she characterizes as a harmonious arabesque of the vast fluctuations of the essential rhythms of a train station.<sup>19</sup>

But while Benedetta praises the spirit and dynamism of Boccioni, she points to the originality of temperament and color in Balla as far surpassing that of Boccioni:

In questa grande via maestra Balla è col suo originale temperamento misteriosamente intuitivo. Balla vi ha portato la distruzione di oïo che nel colore Boccioni conteneva ancora di tono museo, di groviglio, sfumatura atelier.<sup>20</sup>

For Benedetta, Boccioni is still wed coloristically to the museum or atelier, while Balla was able to destroy the color of the academy.<sup>21</sup> Benedetta lauds Balla for his originality, in particular his mysterious, intuitive temperament. As she describes:

Egli è il giovanissimo mago del colore e della linea. Egli sintetizza nuovissimi stati di animo e forze ignorate con una pittura assolutamente vergine, nuda come una infanzia purissima, fresca di bucato come dice lui. Il suo quadro *Pessimismo e ottimismo* è melodioso come una musica, sensibile come una epidermide, sicuro come la gioventù.”

Altri quadri come *L'idea che nasce e Stantuffo di primavera* sono meravigliose sintesi pittoriche di intuizioni delle forze che ci circondano.<sup>22</sup>

Benedetta continues, characterizing Enrico Prampolini's presence in the exhibition as powerful, but only briefly examines his work; and Fortunato Depero, Gerardo Dottori, and Tato are given quick mentions. Although she acknowledges the accomplishments of others, Benedetta makes clear that the two central protagonists of Futurism are Boccioni and Balla, and that it is the latter who is the true Futurist “magician of color and line.”

### **The Influence of Theosophy on Benedetta and the Women of *L'Italia Futurista***

Benedetta was deeply influenced by Balla on many levels and his interest in Theosophy had a strong impact on her. A fascination with Theosophy was also prevalent in the circle of women contributors to *L'Italia Futurista*. Many of the group involved in *L'Italia Futurista*, like Benedetta, developed a visionary literature marked by spiritualist interests. The Theosophical Society was founded in the United States in 1875 by the medium Helena Blavatsky. Theosophy, which drew from Indian philosophy and

Christian thought, was characterized by an interest in direct spiritual experience and supernatural phenomenon. It was believed that evil, which existed due to man's desire for material things, could be overcome by complete absorption into the infinite. Sacred writings and revelations were essential to the movement. In 1907, Annie Besant, an Englishwoman, took over as head of the Society and moved its seat to India, having co-authored (with Charles Leadbeater) two years earlier the influential *Thought-forms*.

Most of the women Futurists of *L'Italia Futurista* embraced some form of Theosophy or spiritualism, and in this respect there are strong correspondences between their interests and Benedetta's. Rudolf Steiner, who in 1913 founded Anthroposophy (his own offshoot movement of Theosophy), was an influential figure in Italy and was read by the groups surrounding the journals *Leonardo* and *La Voce*, as well as the Futurists.<sup>23</sup> The editors of *L'Italia Futurista*, particularly Arnaldo Ginna and Bruno Corra, were also very interested in Theosophy and Eastern religions and were close friends with Benedetta's mentor, Balla.<sup>24</sup> The paranormal and the occult figured significantly in the writings published in *L'Italia Futurista*. These occultist and spiritualist interests were not unique to Futurism and influenced many of the important figures of European art and intellectual thought at the time.<sup>25</sup> This preoccupation was widespread after the First World War (in part due to the desire to communicate with the dead through mediums and séances).<sup>26</sup>

Theosophy's influence on Benedetta is evident in her literary works, as well as in the cosmic imagery that dominates her painted work of the 1930s. While Benedetta wasn't directly involved with the *L'Italia Futurista* group, her interests in spiritualist beliefs coincided with many of theirs, as illustrated by her use of fantastic descriptive sequences in *Astra e il sottomarino*, by her intense desire to feel the presence of her dead

father in *Le forze umane*,<sup>27</sup> and by her use of the *sintesi grafiche*. In much the same manner, Maria Ginanni's novel *Montagne trasparenti* is laced with visionary language and her mediumistic tone also has a symbolic color component that coincides strongly with that of Benedetta.<sup>28</sup> Similar coloristic fantasies and correspondences between feelings and sensations were explored by Corra and Ginna and have a direct relationship to *Thought-forms*, to which Ginna explicitly refers.<sup>29</sup> Strains of this fascination can also be traced in the works by the writer Irma Valeria who authored the article "Occultismo e arte nuovo" in *L'Italia Futurista*.<sup>30</sup> Occultist-theosophist ideas are visible in Rosà's writing, as well, particularly in the multiple and simultaneous consciousnesses of the central protagonist of *Una donna con tre anime*.<sup>31</sup>

Bound up in occultism itself is a position for woman to subvert male authority while conforming to accepted passive roles. Female mediums, while ostensibly conforming to "normative ideals of feminine passivity and receptivity," in many ways subverted male authority in their reach into another realm.<sup>32</sup> Benedetta does not seem to have been interested in mediumship per se, though her spiritual and meditative interests were at odds with the aggressive, machine-oriented concerns that generally dominated Futurism.

Much of the alternative artistic work that was created by women more generally at the early part of the twentieth century focused on spiritual themes and imagery. Often these women adopted iconographies derived from Theosophy and Catholicism.<sup>33</sup> As Rosemary Betterton has noted, the use of this imagery has been considered an embarrassment to some feminist critics, as it has been assumed that the use of such iconography was too complicit with traditional roles for women and regressive ideas

about woman's "nature."<sup>34</sup> But this is a position that needs to be re-addressed. Figures such as Benedetta, and the group revolving around *L'Italia Futurista*, used overtly spiritual and cosmic imagery to create progressive and expressive works of literature and fine art (as did many of the male European avant-garde artists of the period).<sup>35</sup>

### Theosophy, Balla, and Benedetta's Works on Paper

During the 1920s, Benedetta produced a body of work on paper that is clearly influenced by Theosophy. These images are part of a series derived from the *sintesi grafiche* of *Le forze umane*, and relate to the illustrations in Besant and Leadbeater's *Thought-forms*.<sup>36</sup> Benedetta's interest in Theosophy, no doubt, came via Balla, who frequented meetings of the Theosophical Society.<sup>37</sup> As noted, Benedetta also took the subject of forces in conflict from Balla, reconciling them in her work in some way. Balla's *Pessimismo e ottimismo* (Fig. 10) from the larger series of the same name depicts large, colored, competing geometric forms. In comparison, Benedetta's *L'Io ottimista fra le rotaie del pessimismo* (The I optimist in the tracks of pessimism; Fig. 11), a work in ink on paper, is an abstracted self-portrait in which Benedetta represents herself as centered between the tracks of pessimism in a stance of mediation rather than conflict or competition. Another work from this series, aptly entitled *Armonia di forze dissimili* (Harmony of dissimilar forms; Fig. 12) more explicitly refers to this desire to create harmony between disparate forces.

Balla exhibited the first of his *Pessimismo e ottimismo* series, as well as works from his *Trasformazione forme-spiriti* (Transformation forms-spirits) series at his solo show at the Galleria Bragaglia in 1918,<sup>38</sup> the same year that Benedetta studied with him. Notably, the zigzag form in the upper right of Benedetta's later composition *Sintesi delle*

*comunicazioni terrestri* (Synthesis of land communications one of a group of murals she executed in 1934 for the Post Office in Palermo; Fig. 13) directly recalls one of Balla's *Trasformazione forme-spiriti* compositions from 1917-18 (Fig. 14). A small work, Balla's painting, which bears an inscription in the upper right reading "Per Benedetta," refers to the spiritual and Theosophical concerns that he and Benedetta shared.<sup>39</sup>

Benedetta's watercolor on paper from 1924, *Ironia* (Irony; Fig. 15) is a strange, ambiguous image that again relates to Theosophy.<sup>40</sup> The form resembles a bent figure, one arm raised, scattering inverted V marks across the upper left of the page. The "head," a blue ovoid shape, resembles a brain, perhaps symbolizing intellect. The V marks resemble a series of brush strokes spouting from the arm of the figure. The spray of marks bears a strong resemblance to "Sudden Fright" (Illustration 27 from *Thought-forms*; Fig. 16), which uses lines and crescent shapes (as opposed to V marks) meant to convey annoyance. In this work, Benedetta is not assuming a literal translation of Besant and Leadbeater's meaning, but is using the broken forms and lines to convey the "explosive appearance" of creativity. With the title *Ironia*, Benedetta suggests her reconciliation of an assumed incompatibility between intellect and creativity (in her, as a woman and as the creator of the work).

This chevron or V shape, employed by Balla much earlier in his canonical *Street Light* of 1909, frequently makes an appearance in this series of works by Benedetta. In *Affinità di forze* (Affinity of forces; Fig. 17), an ink drawing from the *sintesi grafiche*, Benedetta employs the same shape, but here the triangular forms stand starkly on their own. Benedetta uses the repeated V shape to express forces in and of themselves, which are positively connected, rather than to denote the aggressive dynamism of modern

technology, as in the works of Balla and Boccioni. In *Un totale raggiunto* (An achieved totality; Fig. 18), a 1924 watercolor, the triangle is again central. Here it has become a solid mass, made up of shifting patches of color, closely related in tone, which create a sense of rugged terrain—a kind of craggy, rock-faced cliff.<sup>41</sup> The radiating triangular form relates strongly to “The Response to Devotion” (Illustration 17 in *Thought-forms*; Fig. 19) the extended explanation of which reads:

Yet there are conditions under which the grace and strength peculiar to a higher plane may in measure be brought down to a lower one, and may spread abroad there with wonderful effect. This seems to be possible only when a special channel is for the moment opened; and that work must be done from below and by the effort of man.<sup>42</sup>

In *Un totale raggiunto* Benedetta not only uses the external appearance of Besant and Leadbeater’s form, but also appropriates its meaning in her own expression of “totality” or spiritual completion.

*Lo spirito e l’arte* (Fig. 20) again employs the V shape, animating the red, spiraling nautilus form.<sup>43</sup> The series of staccato Vs that move upward from the tail of the form, function as radiating force-lines. Benedetta’s title and her use of these devices again express her belief that the way to harmony and spirituality is through art. Benedetta thus combines Theosophy and Futurism to create her own idiosyncratic visual language.

### Benedetta’s Paintings and Collage Works of the 1920s

In addition to Benedetta’s interest in Theosophy and Balla, her works of the 1920s reveal the influence of other aspects of Futurism. Some of Benedetta’s first artworks of the 1920s were collages, entitled *tavole tattile* (tactile tables), made in collaboration with Marinetti. *Sudan-Parigi* (1921; Fig. 21), a tactile table attributed to Marinetti, has been reattributed by Lia Giachero to include Benedetta as co-producer. Giachero convincingly

argues that *Sudan-Parigi*, as well as the development of *tattilismo* (tactilism), intimately involved Benedetta's participation.<sup>44</sup>

Marinetti first conceived of *tattilismo* during World War I, noting that the idea came from the experience of being in the dark trenches at night, unable to see with anything but one's fingertips.<sup>45</sup> However, the idea was not elaborated upon and written into a manifesto until 1921. The concept was to create a series of works intended not to be seen, but to be felt. A "viewer" was meant to run one's fingers down the front of a *tavola tattile* thereby developing senses other than sight and sound through the sensation of different textures. Marinetti published the manifesto indicating only himself as author. But, the manifesto indicates an awareness of experimental learning devices—particularly those conceived by Maria Montessori of the school for young children founded in Rome in 1907. Benedetta, a trained teacher, would have had occasion to be exposed to these techniques, while it is unlikely that Marinetti would have known them. Furthermore, in an unpublished manuscript, Marinetti described Benedetta's contribution, saying it was she who formed *Sudan-Parigi*:

Benedetta creò...una tavola tattile formata di un cartone piatto sul quale uni ed agganciò pezzi di sughero legni e metallico...Benedetta costruì poi la tavola Sudan-Parigi che faceva passare i polpastrelli attenti dalla granulosità dentata ruvide delle sabbie africane e vetrosità solari alle delizie lisce marine e poi cotonose e seriche e dettagli di una toelette o piumino incipriato di una bella parigina.<sup>46</sup>

This tactile board was designed to function on a purely sensory, textural level, yet this is a visually compelling work as well. The use of primary colors dispersed across the board (the red towel in the upper section, the blue material in the lower section and the yellow in the lower left) serve to carry the eye down through the composition, bumping into objects along the way, in a visual counterpoint to the sensation of dragging one's

fingertips down the board. Marinetti described how the upper section made of rough, coarse textures (the bristle brush and cheese grater) represents Sudan; the lower section—made up of soft, delicate, sensual textures (including silk, velvet, and feathers)—represents Paris; and the sea that separates them both is represented by reflective silver paper.<sup>47</sup> The title is highly suggestive of Marinetti's deeply felt roots: his upbringing in North Africa and his intellectual development in Paris. This collaboration indicates Marinetti's confidence in (and eventual reliance on) Benedetta.

In the mid-1920s Benedetta was developing her own expressive language within Futurism and absorbing the central Futurist aesthetic of the period, *arte meccanica*. *Velocità di un motoscafo* (Fig. 2) of 1919-24 falls squarely within the mature *arte meccanica* style and is comparable to works being produced by other Futurists of the period.<sup>48</sup> While pre-World War I Futurism extolled progress, which it associated with the speed and innovation of modern mechanical devices (especially the automobile and the airplane), it did not idolize the machine per se. Whereas, *arte meccanica* reveals a thematic and an aesthetic derived directly from the machine. The manifesto *L'Arte meccanica* of 1923, written by Enrico Prampolini, Ivo Panaggi, and Vinicio Paladini, called for the machine to be stripped of its practical function and used as a rich inspiration—essentially a kind of new-found spiritual muse. Giovanni Lista describes this new aesthetic tendency (especially in relation to Paladini) in somewhat more Marxist terms: “The machine, which Marinetti had celebrated as a metaphor for vital energy and power, was replaced by the factory machine, i.e., the machine as a tool of production.”<sup>49</sup> Paladini, in his essay “Estetica meccanica,” emphasized that the machine as subject and

the use of formal mechanical elements were not necessarily new, but, through Futurism, were transformed:

Non si tratta [la funzione della macchina] di un nuovo soggetto...ma del suo valore interferenziale nella trasposizione della costruzione figurativa dell'artista alla tela, del suo valore quasi di mito (comparabile al valore del corpo umano nell'arte classica), del suo valore *attraverso* la nostra sensibilità. In altri termini, il soggetto attraverso noi prende un nostro significato, ed a sua volta questo significato è frutto di forze formalistiche meccaniche dovute alla realtà macchinistica della nostra epoca.<sup>50</sup>

The elements of precision and clarity in Benedetta's *Velocità di un motoscafo* are consistent with the *arte meccanica* concerns of Futurism, and also reveal the influence of Balla's use of abstract geometric form and color. Balla, who wrote the 1914 "Manifesto del colore," was considered by many to be the most refined colorist of the period.<sup>51</sup>

The influence of Balla (particularly his work of the early 1910s) is explicit in this depiction, a highly simplified motorboat racing through abstracted, stylized water. The water, which is sliced through by the boat, is made up of repeated bands, occasionally broken into triangular or diamond-shaped forms that bear a distinct relationship to Balla's series of works entitled *Compenetrazione iridescente* (Iridescent interpenetration), a beautiful sequence of color studies executed from 1912 to 1914 (Fig. 22).

Benedetta revisited the composition of *Velocità di un motoscafo* in several later works. Like many Futurists, she translated compositions from one medium to another and *Velocità di un motoscafo* was recreated as a watercolor on paper (1924) and a plate in majolica terracotta (1929). Benedetta made clear her desire to embrace all aspects of cultural production and this refusal to limit herself to one creative medium should be understood not as capriciousness, but rather as a Futurist aesthetic imperative.<sup>52</sup>

In 1929 Benedetta exhibited *Velocità di motoscafo* at the *III Mostra d'Arte Marinara*. It was purchased on that occasion by the Governatorato of Rome for the Galleria Mussolini (now the Galleria Comunale), which was quite significant given that the regime bought few Futurist works during this period and fewer still by women artists.

In addition to the *arte meccanica* style, Benedetta also experimented to some degree with pre-war Futurist styles. *Luce + rumori di treno notturno* of 1924 (Fig. 1) incorporates elements of collage into a composition of loosely handled paint and parallel abstract gestures moving diagonally across the canvas. Benedetta conveys the sense of a speeding blurred object as it rushes by, barely discernable in dim light. Triangular elements, here made of copper pieces formed into a series of six pyramid shapes, are affixed to the canvas, and recall not only the geometric metal components of a train, but also buildings and houses rushing by in the night. One can see a resemblance, particularly in the house-like forms that dissolve in the background, to Boccioni's *Quelli che vanno* (Fig. 9) although Benedetta's is a less literal description than Boccioni's. *Luce + rumori di treno notturno* also closely relates to the work of Balla, specifically his series of abstractions in the 1910s depicting the dynamism of automobiles using repeated diagonal lines and semi-circular motifs (Fig. 23).

By the end of the 1920s and into the 1930s, Benedetta developed an innovative body of work that combined her Theosophical-spiritualist symbolism and lyric use of color with the aerial landscape views characteristic of Futurist *aeropittura*. Her sense of self and her creative work, in turn, was increasingly and intimately intertwined with her experience as a Fascist subject.

### Futurism and the influence of Surrealism

Surrealism also formed an important influence for Benedetta, who, as a Fascist subject, was ultimately forced to mediate or mask that interest. The Futurists' relationship to the Surrealists seems to have been a checkered one. *L'Italia Futurista* demonstrated an early and ongoing interest within the Futurist ranks in psychic themes, the occult, and paranormal phenomena, which overlapped similar Surrealist concerns. Carlo Settimelli, one of the journal's editors, subsequently co-founded *L'Impero* with Mario Carli in 1923. Despite its Fascist leanings, *L'Impero* revealed an interest in themes associated with Surrealism, such as oneiricism and dreams, and in 1928 it published an article on Surrealism and Futurism.<sup>53</sup> Benedetta would have been familiar with *L'Impero*'s publications pertaining to Surrealism, as she occasionally wrote for the paper.

The Futurists, particularly Marinetti and Enrico Prampolini, fostered international relationships with a variety of avant-garde movements, in part through Prampolini's journal *Noi*. In the early part of the 1920s, Marinetti attempted to maintain ties to the Surrealists while asserting the leadership of Futurism, in part by publishing *Le Futurisme Mondial* in 1924 (which mentions André Breton and Louis Aragon among others).<sup>54</sup> However, that same year the relationship between the strongly nationalistic Marinetti and the anti-patriotic Breton deteriorated, and the Futurists seem to have ignored the Surrealists for the rest of the decade. An attempt at reconciliation occurred at the conference entitled *Contre Camille Mauclair—Futurisme, Cubism, Surrealisme*, held in Paris in 1929 on the occasion of the Futurist exhibition at Galerie 23.<sup>55</sup> Perhaps this reflected a need on Marinetti's part to endorse Futurism's increasing move away from

*arte meccanica* towards the “cosmic” representations that would come to dominate the developing genre of *aeropittura*.<sup>56</sup>

The uneasy relationship between Futurism and Surrealism was played out in much stronger terms in the antagonism between the Cercle et Carré group (which developed into Abstraction-Création) and Surrealism. In 1927, Prampolini became the co-director (with Michel Seuphor and Paul Dermée) of *Les Documents Internationaux de l'Esprit Nouveau*. The journal (which followed Jeanneret's and Ozenfant's *L'Esprit Nouveau*, published from 1920-1925) brought together various strains of abstraction, including Dada, Futurism, Constructivism, Neo-Plasticism, Bauhaus, and Purism, and generally pitted abstraction against Surrealist figuration.<sup>57</sup>

Despite Prampolini's dedication to international abstraction, on some level he (and the Futurists) reconciled himself to Surrealistic language. Figuration, distorted landscape, and other themes associated with Surrealism became dominant in Futurist *aeropittura* works of the 1930s, and are particularly evident in the work of Benedetta. Prampolini, along with Benedetta, was a signatory of the manifesto and exhibited with the *aeropittori*. In a short essay in the catalogue accompanying the *Mostra Futurista di Aeropittura e Scenografia*, Prampolini states that he sees in the new genre a complete overcoming of the confines of earthly reality and that surging forth from *aeropittura* painters is the desire to internalize the occult forces of cosmic idealism: “Io vedo nell'aeropittura il totale superamento dei confini della realtà terrestre, mentre si sprigiona in noi, piloti inestinguibili di nuove realtà plastiche, il desiderio latente di vivere le forze occulte dell'idealismo cosmico.”<sup>58</sup> Even for Prampolini, an author of the manifesto of *arte meccanica*, the other-worldly and the irrational became predominant in his thinking

of the 1930s. Concern with the mysteries of the extra-terrestrial is also reflected in Futurist *arte sacra* (sacred art), promoted most intensely by the artist Fillia (to be discussed in Chapter 4).

At the same time, a number of Futurists kept the Surrealists at a distance. Interestingly, Fillia, perhaps because of the overlap of their interests, seems to have kept himself removed from Surrealism, and particularly from the French embrace of “Freudism.”<sup>59</sup> Others, such as Vittorio Orazi (brother of Prampolini, who in 1926 wrote “Arte e psicoanalisi” which acknowledged the unconscious and dream as sources of inspiration), became quite negative about Surrealism in the 1930s.<sup>60</sup> This, no doubt, was due to mounting pressure by the Fascist regime to keep Italian culture autonomous and pure, in order to demonstrate its power and significance. While conservative critics began demonizing foreign influences, many Futurists continued to draw upon international culture and speak out in its favor. By the late 1930s, however, Surrealism came to be associated with Judaism and communism by ultra conservative Fascist critics, making any sort of connection with the group a liability.

Benedetta seems to quietly defy Fascist dogma by employing aspects of Surrealism in her works of the mid- to late-1930s, such as the dream sequences in *Astra e il sottmarino*. Her *aeropittura* paintings reveal enigmatic narratives and a strangely nostalgic sensibility indicative of the French movement, but even more-so of its precursor, Giorgio de Chirico. In using de Chirico as an Italian influence in these later years of the regime, Benedetta cleverly manages to employ aspects of Surrealism while complying with Fascist cultural dictates.

As discussed, the stylistic and spiritual concerns of the Divisionists (Previati, in particular), the pre-war Futurists (primarily Boccioni and Balla), Theosophy, and Surrealism all had a fundamental impact on Benedetta and are evident in her work of the 1920s. Benedetta was able to interweave these wide-ranging influences both formally and conceptually. In her paintings of the 1930s, Benedetta would fully integrate her varied interests, making them her own in a series of synthetic and original *aeropittura* compositions that also reveal her rising sense of nationalism as a Fascist subject. Many of these concerns and particularly a link to Surrealism can also be traced in her literary work.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Lia Giachero. "...Grandes étalages de mers et du nuages...". Due inediti bozzetti per vetrate di Benedetta Marinetti," in *Ricerca di Storia dell'arte*, no. 40 (Rome: La Nuova Scientifica, 1990), 82. Giachero notes that there exists no written copy of Benedetta's address; however, Giachero contends that Benedetta's "Sensibilità futuriste" published in *Vetrina futurista* in 1927 is essentially the same text.

<sup>2</sup> Ester Coen, "Balla, Boccioni, Severini, Sironi," in *Divisionismo Italiano*, Gabriella Belli, ed. (Milan: Electa, 1990), 354.

<sup>3</sup> Anna Maria Damigella, "Divisionism and Symbolism in Italy at the Turn of the Century," in *Italian Art in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Painting and Sculpture, 1900-1988*, ed. Emily Braun (London: Royal Academy of the Arts, 1989), 40.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> See Luciano Caramel, "Dal Divisionismo al Futurismo a Milano: Boccioni, Carrà, Russolo," in *Divisionismo Italiano*, 396.

<sup>6</sup> Anna Maria Damigella, "Divisionism and Symbolism in Italy," 33.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>8</sup> Aurora Scotti Tosini, "Divisionist Painters in Italy: Between Modern Chromatics and New Symbols," in *Lost Paradise: Symbolist Europe* (Montreal: The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1995), 70.

<sup>9</sup> The term is Emilio Gentile's. See Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 80.

<sup>10</sup> Lia Giachero, "Il grande multiplo sforzo futurista di sintetizzare l'anima," in *Futurismo: I grandi temi, 1909-1944*, ed. Enrico Crispolti and Franco Sborgi (Milano: Fondazione Antonio Mazzotta, 1998), 56.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> "Against the impressionist landscape and the cubist still life, Futurist painting has opposed the necessity of a live subject, in direct relationship with the state of mind of the modern artist. And this is the greatest Glory of plastic Futurism, because here originates the formation of the new spirituality that is dominating Europe. In fact the painter was torn from purely materialistic problems to be launched into the passionate and religious atmosphere of the state of mind. Nothing literary or decorative, but pure emotion." Fillia, "La Sentinella d'Italia," *Cuneo* 13-14 (May 1931). Quoted in Giachero, "Il grande multiplo sforzo futurista," 56.

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<sup>13</sup> Giachero, "Il grande multiplo sforzo futurista," 55.

<sup>14</sup> See Damigella, "Divisionism and Symbolism in Italy."

<sup>15</sup> Benedetta, "Sui Futuristi alla III Biennale Romana, Conclusioni," *L'Impero* (July 30, 1931).

<sup>16</sup> See Giachero, "... 'Grands étalges de mers et de nuages....'"

<sup>17</sup> Benedetta, "Sui Futuristi."

<sup>18</sup> "For example *Quelli che vanno*. In a slanting rhythm of velocity and blue-green nocturnal distances he has imprisoned the oblique faces of the sleepers, the multi-faceted lights and the telegraph poles softened by speed. Speed in this picture is like a river that drowns and transports realities immersed in its element, distressed sad blissful faces." Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> "In this great, masterful way Balla, with his original temperament, is mysteriously intuitive. Balla brought there the destruction of 'oïo' that Boccioni still contained in his color, the tone of museum, tangle, the atelier tone." Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> "Oïo" or "langue d'oïl" refers to the language of northern France—clearly a reference to the French academy.

<sup>22</sup> "He is the very young magician of color and of line. He synthesizes completely new states of mind and ignored forces with an absolutely virginal painting, naked as very pure infancy, fresh as laundry, as he says. His painting *Pessimismo e ottimismo* is melodious as music, sensitive as skin, confident like youth."

Other paintings such as *L'idea che nasce* and *Stantuffo di primavera* are marvelous pictorial synthesis of intuitions of the forces that surround us." Benedetta, "Sui Futuristi."

<sup>23</sup> Cigliana, "Il seme e la rosa," 26.

<sup>24</sup> Simona Cigliana, "Note ai testi," in Benedetta, *I tre romanzi*, 224.

<sup>25</sup> See Maurice Tuchman, ed., *The Spiritual in Art; Abstract Painting, 1890-1985* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986).

<sup>26</sup> Re, "Impure Abstraction," 42.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

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- <sup>28</sup> Cigliana, "Note ai testi," 229-231.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.
- <sup>30</sup> Irma Valeria, "Occultismo e arte nuovo," *L'Italia Futurista* (June 10, 1917).
- <sup>31</sup> Cigliana, "Note ai testi," 236.
- <sup>32</sup> Gauri Viswanathan, "The Ordinary Business of Occultism," *Critical Inquiry* 27, no. 1 (Autumn 2000): 15.
- <sup>33</sup> Rosemary Betterton, "Women artists, modernity and suffrage cultures in Britain and Germany, 1890-1920," in *Women Artists and Modernism*, ed. Katy Deepwell (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 25.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>35</sup> Many women artists of the period turned not only to cosmic imagery, but also to the female body as subject matter. See Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990). The related (and stereotypical) notion of intuition as a female realm (versus the male domain of science and culture) is also discussed by Chadwick. See Whitney Chadwick, "Living Simultaneously: Sonia and Robert Delaunay" in *Significant Others: Creativity and Intimate Partnership*, Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds., (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993).
- <sup>36</sup> Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater, *Thought-forms* (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1905).
- <sup>37</sup> Balla, *Con Balla*, 387.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 431.
- <sup>39</sup> Elica Balla discusses the spiritual and Theosophical underpinnings to Balla's series *Trasformazione forme-spiriti*. Elica Balla, *Con Balla*, vol. 1 (Milan: Multhipla, 1984), 387.
- <sup>40</sup> Several versions of this work exist, one in ink and two in watercolor on paper.
- <sup>41</sup> There is also a very similar variation in the Marinetti Collection, Milan.
- <sup>42</sup> Besant and Leadbeater, *Thought-forms*, 47.
- <sup>43</sup> There is also a very similar variation in the Marinetti Collection, Milan.

<sup>44</sup> Lia Giachero "Mani 'palpatrici d'orizzonti.' Il contributo di Benedetta Marinetti al manifesto per il tattilismo," in *Ricerche di Storia dell'Arte*, no.45 (Rome: La Nuova Scientifica, 1991).

<sup>45</sup> Interestingly, Louis Braille's method of writing for the blind using raised dots was derived from "night writing," developed in 1819 by Captain Charles Barbier. Barbier's system was devised for nighttime military communications in the battlefield. It is possible that Marinetti was introduced to such a system while in the military. However, I have not been able to determine whether night writing was in use in the Italian military (or at all) in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. I would like to thank Gerard Brown for bringing night writing to my attention.

<sup>46</sup> "Benedetta created a tactile table formed from cardboard to which she attached pieces of cork, wood and metal....Benedetta then constructed the table Sudan-Parigi that required fingers to run over it attentive to the granular toothy coarseness of the African sand and the solar glassiness of the smooth coastline delights and then the cottony and silky and details of a toilette or a powder puff of a beautiful Parisian." Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "Il buio eliminando ogni plastica e colore vivono pensano solo i polpastrelli," reprinted in F. T. Marinetti, *La grande Milano tradizionale e futurista*, ed. Luciano De Maria (Milan, Mondadori, 1969), 263-267. Quoted in Giachero "Mani 'palpatrici d'orizzonti,'" 65.

<sup>47</sup> Salaris, *Le Futuriste: Donne e letteratura d'avanguardia in Italian, 1909-1944* (Milan: Edizioni delle donne, 1982), 178.

<sup>48</sup> Enrico Crispolti, "Una riflessione sulla sua pittura," in *Fughe e Ritorni: Presenze futuriste in Sicilia. Benedetta*, ed. Anna Maria Ruta (Naples: Electa, 1998), 25.

<sup>49</sup> Giovanni Lista, *Futurism* (New York: Universe Books, 1986), 67.

<sup>50</sup> "[The function of the machine] is not about a new subject...but of its inter-referential value in the transposition of the artist's physical construction of the canvas, in its nearly mythical value (comparable to the value of the human body in classical art), of its value *through* our sensitivity. In other words, the subject acquires meaning through us, and at the same time this meaning is the result of formalistic mechanical forces due to the machine-centered reality of our time." Vinicio Paladini, "Estetica Meccanica," *Noi* 1, no. 2 (May 1923), 2. Reprinted in Enrico Crispolti, ed., *Panaggi e l'arte meccanica futurista* (Milan: Mazzotta, 1995), 175-176.

<sup>51</sup> Benedetta's brother Alberto Cappa wrote an article on the work of Balla that was published in the March 25, 1922 issue of *Rassegna dell'arte e del lavoro*. In it he refers to Balla's magnificent color, claiming that Balla stripped from nature the secret of color and light. The article is reprinted in Elica Balla, *Con Balla*, vol. 1 (Milan: Multhipla, 1986), p.125-127.

<sup>52</sup> Giachero, "... 'Grands étalges de mers et de nuages...,'" 82.

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<sup>53</sup> Matteo Fochessati, "Going beyond Reality. Contacts and Echoes Between Futurism and Surrealism," in *Parole e Immagini Futuriste dalla Collezione Wolfson*, eds., Silvia Barisione, Matteo Fochessati, Gianni Franzone (Milano: Mazzota, 2001), 177.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 179-180.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> See *Paris 1930, arte abstracto, arte concreto, Cercle et carré* (Valencia: IVAM Centre Julio Gonzalez, 1990).

<sup>58</sup> "I see in *aeropittura* the total overcoming of the limits of terrestrial reality, whilst it releases itself within us, inextinguishable pilots of new plastic realities, the latent desire to live the occult forces of cosmic idealism." Enrico Prampolini, "L' *Aeropittura futurista*," in *Mostra Futurista di Aeropittura e Scenografia* (Milan: Galleria Pesaro, 1931), 13.

<sup>59</sup> Fochessati, "Going beyond Reality," 182. Fillia also showed with the Cercle et Carré group.

<sup>60</sup> Orazi wrote "Arte e psicoanalisi," *L'Impero* (October 7, 1926), which acknowledged the unconscious and dreams as sources of inspiration, but his response to Surrealism became quite negative in "Posizione del Surrealismo," *Stile Futurista* (September 3, 1934). Fochessati, "Going beyond Reality," 183.

### CHAPTER 3

#### BENEDETTA AS AUTHOR

More than her early paintings, Benedetta's writings serve to exemplify her theories in relation to gender. The protagonists of Benedetta's three novels reflect not only the diverse influences on her formation as an artist, but also her own experiences as a woman and as an intellectual. Her fiction reveals an experimental nature, and, at the same time, a reliance on Futurist precedents. By examining published reviews of Benedetta's works from the 1920s and 1930s we can situate her in a specific critical context that insisted on her position as a *woman* writer.

Benedetta incorporated elements of Futurist theory and practice, as well as independent notions of creativity and autonomy, which, while always a part of Futurism's flexibility, were newly configured in Benedetta's work. She became a Futurist adherent after the movement underwent significant post-war changes, including the defection of several figures (including Carlo Carrà and Gino Severini) and the death of key participants, notably the major theorist of the group, Umberto Boccioni. Benedetta developed as a writer and painter in the aftermath of World War I, during which time, in contrast to the return to order prevalent in Europe, there arose an increasingly strong interest in the irrational, expressly articulated in the works of the Dadaists and Surrealists (which built on the pre-war Metaphysical art of Giorgio de Chirico). Benedetta's novels indicate an interest in Surrealism (while her painting reveals the influence of de Chirico).

Benedetta would have been increasingly familiar with a wide variety of European art, particularly through journals such as Enrico Prampolini's *Noi* and *Valori Plastici* (although the latter would have been considered anathema to Futurism, it was well-known).<sup>1</sup>

Along with Prampolini, Giacomo Balla and Fortunato Depero were the major figures of later Futurism. They published their manifesto *La ricostruzione del universo* in 1915, which also greatly informed Benedetta's work—particularly with regard to the themes of play and spiritualism. Their creation of toys and whimsical furniture found resonance in Benedetta's interest in the childlike, which Lucia Re has linked to self-individuation, specifically in how “the unconscious and the self become formed and mobilized through the body.”<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the spiritual components of Balla and Depero's program supported Benedetta's interest in occultism.<sup>3</sup> In their manifesto, Balla and Depero express a desire to create bones and flesh from the invisible, the impalpable, the imponderable, the imperceptible. Their desire was to find abstract equivalents of all of the forms and elements of the universe:

Noi futuristi, Balla e Depero, vogliamo realizzare questa fusione totale per ricostruire l'universo rallegrandolo integralmente. Daremo scheletro e carne all'invisibile, all'impalpabile, all'imponderabile, all'impercettibile. Troveremo degli equivalenti astratti di tutte le forme e di tutti gli elementi dell'universo, poi li combineremo insieme, secondo i capricci della nostra ispirazione, per formare dei complessi plastici che metteremo in moto.<sup>4</sup>

This search for abstract equivalents of the elements of the universe is very similar to Benedetta's later attempt to use graphic notation to express states of mind in the *sintesi grafiche* of *Le forze umane*.<sup>5</sup> Anton Giulio Bragaglia also provided an important precedent: his photodynamic images and theories (published in his book *Fotodinamismo futurista* [Futurist Photodynamism] of 1913) were meant to communicate the

‘transcendental dimension’ and the ‘psychic impression’ of a gesture by representing a synthesis of its trajectory.<sup>6</sup>

As Benedetta’s teacher, Balla played a central role in her personal as well as artistic development from the very beginning. It was, as noted previously, at his studio where Benedetta and Marinetti first met. Benedetta’s first exercise in Futurist writing was her letter to Marinetti of 1918 (described in Chapter 1) in which she writes, “Sono troppo libera e ribelle. Non voglio freni—voglio essere io solamente.”<sup>7</sup> In the letter, a box is drawn around the word “io” (meaning “I” or myself) to physically separate it from the rest of the sentence, underscoring her insistence on self. The accompanying poem is handwritten in a *parole in libertà* format, even though she rejected the *parolibera* label.<sup>8</sup> The poem provides an abstract account of her meeting with Marinetti: with “sensibilità femminile” (feminine sensibility) representing Benedetta on one side and “cerca di fare inchinare gli altri” (he who tries to make others kneel) representing Marinetti as an opposing force on the other. Despite Marinetti’s misogynist writings, his dominant position as the (male) leader of the Futurist movement, and their age difference, Benedetta, in writing, boldly assumed a position as his equal from the beginning of their relationship.

#### “Spicologia di un uomo,” 1919

Benedetta’s first published visual work—a first manifestation of her *sintesi grafiche*—appeared in the Roman monthly *Dinamo*, which followed a mostly literary poetic program. “Spicologia di un uomo” (Fig. 24), published in 1919, was based on Marinetti’s *parole in libertà*.<sup>9</sup> Handwritten as opposed to typeset, “Spicologia di un uomo” employs the same playful word placement and visual relationships characteristic

of Marinetti's format. "Benedetta" translates literally in Italian as "blessed;" thus in signing herself in this work "Benedetta fra le donne" (Benedetta/blessed among women), she plays on the line from the prayer "Hail Mary," "tu sei la benedetta fra le donne" (blessed art thou among women). While this signature can be seen as a declaration of feminist solidarity (Benedetta among women), the statement can also be understood as a reference to Mary (the quintessential mother), establishing Benedetta's initial association (shortly to be developed into an aesthetic theory) between creation (of poetry and art) and motherhood (creation of life).

### *Le forze umane*

The self-referential aspect of "Spicologia di un uomo" is also apparent in Benedetta's works of fiction. *Le forze umane* of 1924 (Fig.25) is essentially an autobiographical novel that is accompanied by *sintesi grafiche* (graphic syntheses) or titled abstract images that are meant to communicate directly to the viewer, such as *Ribellione dell'Io* (Rebellion of the I; Fig. 26) and *Irradiazione di un nucleo in sviluppo* (Irradiation of a nucleus in development; Fig. 27). Benedetta's *sintesi grafiche* form a visual poetry that Lucia Re has described as, "a kind of abstract visual writing, an attempt to express meaning directly through the graphic mark on the page."<sup>10</sup> However, there is an inextricable relationship of the images to the text evidenced by Benedetta's frequent use of the same titles for her chapters as for her *sintesi grafiche*, such as, *Un totale raggiunto*, (A joined totality; Fig. 28), and *Sforzo Differenziatore* (Differentiating effort; Fig. 29). This overlap between chapter names and image titles reveals Benedetta's aim in *Le forze umane* to develop an innovative genre that, in true Futurist spirit, erased the traditional boundaries between media.

The form of the *sintesi grafiche* was not unprecedented, however. *Stati d'animo disegnati* (Drawings of the states of mind) by Giuseppe Steiner was printed in *Roma futurista* in 1920 and then published by Edizioni futuriste di "Poesia," Milan, in 1923. These *stati d'animo*, which Benedetta knew, bear a strong relationship in theme and style to her own *sintesi grafiche*. Defined by Steiner as *precipitati psichici* (psychic precipitates), these "pictographs" are meant as abstract, conceptual signs that represent psychological states.<sup>11</sup> Steiner employed pure abstract notation in an attempt to communicate with the viewer through feeling and intuition.<sup>12</sup> Benedetta describes her *sintesi grafiche* in relationship to what she herself calls "similar attempts" in the last page of *Le forze umane*:

Manifestano questo sforzo di creazione immediata le sintesi-grafiche di questo volume. Sono l'espressione diretta delle forze dell'universo senza nessuna preoccupazione plastica. Pubblicai una prima sintesi grafica ne la rivista *Dinamo* (1919). Tentativi simili furono chiamati precipitati lirici da Giuseppe Steiner, o stati d'animo o pitture medianiche dai paroliberi come Buzzi, Rognoni, Soggetti; o dai pittori come Rougena Zatkova, e sono state considerate come sviluppi del parolibero e straripamenti nella loro formidabile portata di creazione immediata.<sup>13</sup>

Benedetta, who insists on the importance of the immediacy of these creations, notes that her first graphic synthesis was published in *Dinamo*—a reference to "Spicologia di un uomo." However, in *Le forze umane* Benedetta's graphic works accompany her novel, thereby becoming bound to and mediated by the text; thus, not allowing for quite so direct a communication as she desired.

In *Le forze umane* Benedetta held that art and sentimental love lead to spiritual transcendence. Her emphasis on accord works very much in contrast to the artistic aggressivity of Marinetti. In her work, Benedetta clearly changes the terms of the Futurist desire for transcendence, mapping out a route through the use of harmony rather than

power.<sup>14</sup> For Benedetta, it is through art that the individual can be joined with the universal. Thus, it is not coincidental that the *sintesi grafiche* that form a central accompaniment to *Le forze umane* bear a distinct relationship to aspects of Theosophy, a form of mysticism meant to mediate between the earthly and the spiritual. The graphic syntheses, in fact, come directly out of Theosophy, and can be specifically traced to Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater's influential 1905 text *Thought-forms*.

The central narrative of *Le forze umane* traces Benedetta's upbringing and family dynamics, describing her father's illness and death following his experience in the First World War. Ultimately, the novel is about her search for spirituality and "wholeness," her attempt to reconcile her interior life with the exterior world. The protagonist, Luciana, yearns for spiritual harmony: "Sogno di creare il mio spirito in armonia perfetta, uno in sé è completo."<sup>15</sup> The novel describes her discovery of internal "completeness" and its subsequent disruption by (and resolution with) her encounter with love. In the end, it is the artistic force of Futurism that allows her to go beyond human limits to realize her aspirations.<sup>16</sup> *Le forze umane* makes clear Benedetta's belief in the strength of her own power (and that of woman's in general) to find harmony and unity of spirit independently—a balance, however, that is then interrupted by the figure of a man (Marinetti) and the power of love. As Luciana describes it: "Nell'intimo mio è gioia tormentosa, vibrante poiché la forza maschile molteplicità da potenzialità grandi mi attira nel suo raggio. L'equilibrio del mio essere è rotto."<sup>17</sup> Thus, sentimental love between a man and woman is understood as a heady and potentially disruptive force. *Le forze umane* also reveals Benedetta's strong and complex personality and her own internal

conflict between her passions, sense of duty, desire for self-affirmation, and fear of an over-encapsulating bond with another of the opposite sex.

For Benedetta, what leads to harmony, individuation, and balance is art. She begins the chapter entitled “L’Essenza e la Sua Attuazione Immediata=Arte” (Essence and its immediate actualization=art) by stating the equation, “Differenziandone molteplicità armonia=Arte” (Differentiating multiplicity harmony=art).<sup>18</sup> Underscoring this belief is Benedetta’s last line of the novel linking creativity to creation itself, a notion that would become central to Benedetta: “Sono IO-UMANITÀ che scopro e CREO la REALTÀ” (It is I-HUMANITY that discovers and CREATES reality).<sup>19</sup>

Luciana engages in a struggle to separate the “I” from the unconscious, which is underlined by the title of the first chapter, “Sforzo differenziatore” (Differentiating effort).<sup>20</sup> Thus, Benedetta conceives of life as a battle, not for supremacy or victory, but for the survival and individuation of the self in a universe that threatens constantly to swallow it up. The contrasting forces at work on Luciana are resolved by the novel’s end, as she comes to embody a harmonious fusion of possibilities.<sup>21</sup> This formulation of an individuated female self and her conception of love as a relationship between equals, run contrary to developing Fascist theories. Benedetta was clearly in favor of woman’s freedom to work and to be independent. As Re suggests, Benedetta’s description of her search for a unified self and her belief in her self-formation as a paradigm for the development of both male and female consciousness implicitly rejects the prevalent European theories of woman’s inferiority to man, which were connected to pre-World War I patriarchal theories of sexuality.<sup>22</sup>

Although Benedetta was deeply influenced by the work of other Futurists, particularly that of Marinetti and Balla, she often reshaped or departed entirely from Futurist conceptions to suit her own philosophical, spiritual, and aesthetic beliefs (just as she engaged in and resisted aspects of Fascist ideology). Re notes, for example, in *Le forze umane*, war and sexual difference are assessed as:

essential elements that contributed to Benedetta's approach to art, and to her own path to futurist abstraction. They are, apparently, the same elements that futurism had consistently privileged. But Benedetta turns them entirely inside out, giving a portrayal of war as tragic and filled with horror, and recasting the question of gender in terms that undermines the futurist notion of virility as the dominant paradigm.<sup>23</sup>

The devastating effect of war is illustrated through the dramatic changes in Luciana's father. After 8 months at the front he returns home a changed man. Once very strict and reserved in his manner, he becomes highly agitated and increasingly emotional. He rapidly deteriorates (paralleling Benedetta's own father's breakdown). Luciana describes him (and thus the ravages of war):

Supino nel letto. Viso terreo con profondi solchi neri, bocca aperta labbra violacee contratte in dentro, occhi chiusi affondati nelle orbite. Respirava lentamente con un rantolo profondo. Le mani tiravano stiravano il lenzuolo, lo ammicchiavano lo allontanavano da sé. Rapidi sussulti serpeggiavano per il suo corpo, lo squassavano, ma non arrivavano al viso che rimaneva nella terribile espressione cieca di un grido tragico pietrificato.<sup>24</sup>

Luciana's brothers could barely bring themselves to look at their father in this state and their mother was reduced to sobs. Luciana, however, continued to gaze at her martyred father: "Continuavo a guardare la forma martirizzata di mio padre, i segni di tanti anni di volontà."<sup>25</sup>

Though Benedetta's poetic, descriptive style reflects a deep Futurist influence, her refusal to adopt a pro-war stance marks her personal and artistic independence from

Marinetti, given his penchant for war and virile rhetoric. This novel was written after the First World War, the horrors of which made a deep impression on Benedetta (and many others), though did not necessarily temper Marinetti's position. Benedetta consistently modified notions central to Futurist, as well as Fascist ideologies, subverting them to her own personal philosophy of harmony and unity, using the creative act itself as a means of uniting opposites.

### *Viaggio di Gararà*

*Viaggio di Gararà*, published by Benedetta in 1931 is subtitled "romanzo cosmico per teatro" (cosmic novel for the theater). Like *Le forze umane*, *Viaggio di Gararà* engages in Futurist notions of interdisciplinarity by interweaving several different genres. This novel-play is not easily categorized, mixing dialogue and description with *parole in libertà* and *aeropoesia*, and choreographic sketches of three dances (Fig. 30).<sup>26</sup> A kind of fable, the play describes the travels of an old female dwarf named Gararà, who is trying to understand the mysteries of the universe. The fantastic settings and non-human characters have an absurd quality to them that suggest a Dadaist-Surrealist, as well as a Metaphysical, sensibility. Gararà's two legs are crutch-compasses that are forever measuring everything, allegorically illustrating, as the novel-play does as a whole, the futility of logic and reason. As with all of Benedetta's novels, *Viaggio di Gararà* is a form of autobiography, describing the journey of a woman artist who searches for her unique path. Günther Berghaus also describes the novel as "a journey through the stages of development of the human species: from primal, material existence through rational, hierarchical civilization, to a non-intellectual, creative free society."<sup>27</sup> Berghaus interestingly suggests that *Gararà* represents the Italian woman and the three stages of

her emancipation: her confrontation with the prior female generation, her discontent with the intellectual sterility of male society, and the discovery of her own creative forces.<sup>28</sup>

Re has pointed to the relationship between *Viaggio di Gararà* and Marinetti's 1922 novel *Gli indomabili*, noting that the latter, which is dedicated to Benedetta, functioned as a model for her "cosmic novel."<sup>29</sup> In *Gli indomabili* Marinetti actually reverses his previous privileging of technology. In this narrative, the machine age is described as full of suffering and pain and woman, the feminine, becomes associated with salvation.<sup>30</sup> Benedetta clearly, in turn, served as an influence on Marinetti. Moreover, *Viaggio di Gararà* is a more inventive work. Marinetti relies, as he does so many times previously, on a heavily Orientalized backdrop to establish an exotic setting. *Viaggio di Gararà*, instead, is a surrealistic fairy tale in which Benedetta makes extensive use of fantasy and color symbolism.

The color symbolism of *Viaggio di Gararà* is highly original and is most explicit in the act that takes place in the "regno delle Libertà creatrici" (Reign of creative Liberties). The "Allegrì" (The Happy ones), who inhabit this fictional country, have colored spheres in place of heads and their slender bodies are sheathed in white light:

Hanno ciascuno al posto della testa una sfera del colore e della grandezza di uno dei globi del cono. Il loro corpo esile è inguainato di luce bianca. Rappresentano ognuno un tono. Subitamente si sbandano felici come una fresca risata in un'alba d'amore."<sup>31</sup>

Each of the Allegrì represents a color and are named accordingly—Blue Allegro, Violet Allegro, Green Allegro, etc. Benedetta's playful geometric entities highlight her attention to the psychology of color,<sup>32</sup> which was no doubt influenced by the color theory of Theosophists Besant and Leadbeater. In *Thought-forms*, Besant and Leadbeater ascribe specific meanings to colors and forms that appear to them as visions or auras (for

example, red means anger, dark red is animal passion, yellow denotes intellect, blue represents religious feeling, etc.).<sup>33</sup> The co-authors pointedly note that the thought-forms they illustrate are drawn from life: “They are not imaginary forms, prepared as some dreamer thinks they ought to appear; they are representations of forms actually observed as thrown off by ordinary men and women, and either reproduced with all possible care and fidelity by those who have seen them, or with the help of artists to whom the seers have described them.”<sup>34</sup> Benedetta sometimes adopts their specific meanings, but often uses their ideas and images more generally (relying also on the Symbolist tradition of correspondences) to develop a more idiosyncratic iconography.

In addition, Benedetta’s conception of colors as anthropomorphic entities may also have been influenced by Balla’s 1917 design for Sergei Diaghilev’s production of Igor Stravinsky’s ballet *Fuochi d’artificio* (Fireworks). Balla created an abstract stage set of painted wooden forms for the production. Dancers were replaced by colored lights that, in coordination with the music, moved in different combinations and sequences across the geometric forms of the stage set, creating a spectacle of pure color, light, and music. In fact, Benedetta intended, though never succeeded, to produce *Viaggio di Gararà* for the stage (Franco Casavola wrote musical accompaniment and she outlined costume designs). Her watercolor and collage *Fuoco-luce* (Fire-light; Fig. 31) of 1931, is an illustration of the novel-play’s characters Fire and Light, dancing.

#### *Astra e il sottomarino*

Benedetta’s interest in color symbolism and visionary themes is again evident in her third novel, *Astra e il sottomarino*, written in 1935. The novel makes explicit her continued concern with the ideas of instinct and intuition versus reason, the unconscious

and dreams, female creativity, and spiritualism. It is a description of an extended reverie more than a conventional narrative. Subtitled “vita trasognata” (daydreaming life), the thinly veiled love story begins with a young woman who, traveling at night on a train, encounters a stranger with whom she engages in a dialogue. In the darkness of the compartment, the two immediately enter into a profound discussion—the only actual conversation in the novel—which Benedetta uses to establish the relationship between the characters of the novel, Astra and Emilio. Notably, Emilio was actually Marinetti’s legal first name.<sup>35</sup> The two fall immediately in love, but are forced to separate as quickly as they met, as Emilio must return to his work as captain of a submarine. Astra moves to a villa that overlooks the sea to be in visual reach of her lover. One night before submerging on a mission, Emilio searches for a glimpse of Astra through the windows of the villa in the distance and becomes devastated when he finds the windows closed. Emilio and his vessel then mysteriously disappear in calm waters, suggesting Astra’s betrayal of her lover. The novel functions as a modern romantic tragedy. Astra (perhaps inadvertently) abandons Emilio, not for another lover, but for herself, by asserting her own desires rather than pining by the windows in wait. Laura Serra observes that the destiny of this love (and of life itself) is inextricably linked to optimism and to fidelity.<sup>36</sup> But, in fact, at the heart of the novel is its deliberate opacity. Is it optimistic or pessimistic? Is it infidelity or self-realization?

The initial conversation between Astra and Emilio allows Benedetta a means to put forward her philosophical and spiritual platform at the outset of the novel, which ultimately functions as a prose-poem on the individual, spiritual love, dreams, and the irrational. After the opening dialogue *Astra e il sottomarino* shifts to an epistolary novel,

made up of a series of letters that primarily describe the two characters' dreams. Slowly the oneiric life of Astra becomes threatening as her dreams shift to premonitions and nightmares, which are realized in the death of Emilio. The reader is left with an account of Astra's final strange and enigmatic dream of a solitary white house without windows or an entrance. The inhabitant cannot be seen but can be felt. This non-materialized force produced four daughters that lived within him, but also outside of him, each on her own floor. To each daughter he gave a soul and a window. Benedetta recounts Astra's dream:

Una casa bianca. Isolata. Altissima. Prismatica. Le facciate levigate non hanno finestre né portone. Un coltello smisurato sembra avere tagliato dall'alto in basso uno degli spigoli creando così una nuova stretta facciata.

Il proprietario della casa non si vede. Se ne sente l'esistenza. Per quanto non sia materializzato in nessun punto, occupa ogni vuoto e ogni pieno dell'edificio che è carico della sua potenzialità luminosa.

Da sé espresse quattro figlie. Ciascuna viveva in lui, ma separatamente autonoma, in un diverso piano della casa. A ognuna dette un'anima e succesivamente aperse un vano tondo senza imposte nello spigolo smusato.<sup>37</sup>

Each of the daughters successively became preyed upon by external forces, such as brutal midday sun and doubt, causing the father to wall up the openings. Describing the first instance, Benedetta writes:

In un attimo senza meta ella si affacciò alla tonda finestra. Il meriggio brutale a ondate le sommerse nel suo oro giallo, così che cadde all'interno.

Immediatamente il padre murò il tondo occhio dell'ultimo piano. Al suo posto trasnudò una lieve candida evanescenza spiraleica che giorno e notte vapora come i sogni non espressi.<sup>38</sup>

In the end the house is left "blinded": "La casa altissima, prismatica isolata senza finestre né portone, offre ora sulla facciata dello spigolo tagliato quattro tondi occhi accecati e murati, irremediabilmente."<sup>39</sup> This ending suggests a dark interpretation, centered on the impossibility of overcoming human limitations.<sup>40</sup> Critics of the time, such as Bruno Sanzin and Francesco Orestano, point to the inherent pessimism of *Astra e il*

*sottomarino*.<sup>41</sup> Yet at the same time, Maria Goretti interpreted the work as optimistic (“...io, donna, non esito a riconoscere in quest’opera opera di ottimismo...”), making clear that *Astra e il sottomarino* is deliberately obscure.<sup>42</sup> As Cinzia Blum suggests, while this final dream may represent the destruction of Astra’s spirit by its failure to strive toward faith and love, such a bleak interpretation and dystopian message is at odds with Benedetta’s preface to Marinetti.<sup>43</sup> In fact, it is this preface, rather than Astra’s inscrutable last dream, that seems to hold the key to Benedetta’s story. Benedetta offers Marinetti the novel, writing:

Sono certa che questa è opera futurista e ne sono fiera. È nata carica d’anime. Tutte le ansie le vibrazioni le gioie I presentimenti le certezze vi sono disegnate.

La trama è semplice eterna.

L’Amore fra un uomo e una donna, ma ho cercato di dare il mistero del destino condizionato dalla Realtà e precisato e preveduto dal Sogno.

Da tre anni quest’opera è compiuta.

Vi è stata, tu lo sai, una parentesi più pesante nei miei giorni ed è nata la nostra Luce: Luce oggi è vittoriosa nel sorriso blu, nei suoi canti, nei biondi giochi al sole con Vittoria ardenta e Ala veloce ed oggi Astra può andare nella vita portandovi una irradiazione di poesia. Poesia: tu non credi che in essa per illuminare il mondo, io credo che senza ansia spirituale e senza amore, pur se a volte e forse troppo spesso è dolore, il mondo si disgrega e si sparpaglia nel nulla.<sup>44</sup>

For Benedetta, mother to three girls, Astra is a fourth child (perhaps the fourth daughter living in the house of Astra’s dream), one who will go forth in the world emanating poetry. It is poetry that illuminates the world, but it is spiritual anxiety and love that prevent the work from shattering. Thus, Astra’s doubt is essential. Astra survives because she chooses to embrace life rather than isolate herself.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, her decision to act rather than remain passive suggests a strong individuality, if not a feminist stance. In addition, Astra, who is clairvoyant, again evidences Benedetta’s interest in the occult as well as her desire to render emotion and psychic states, particularly through the use of psychology and Surrealist imagery.

### Benedetta and Italian Criticism from the Late 1920s to the Early 1940s

While she was active, Benedetta's novels received more attention than her painting. As noted, Marinetti highly praised her work and, in an interview from 1927, he contended that Benedetta, being younger, was, in fact, more Futurist than he.<sup>46</sup> In his slim 1936 volume *Opera letteraria di Benedetta*, Francesco Orestano refers to Marinetti's statement that Benedetta was his equal (see Chapter 1), maintaining it was more than a mere gesture of gallantry.<sup>47</sup> Yet, Orestano extols Benedetta's achievements, describing her as a pivotal influence on Marinetti and Futurism, and an innovative artist in her own right:

Anche questa verità può esser dimostrata con due serie di considerazioni:

1) Chi farà una volta la storia del Futurismo, dovrà registrare quali profonde mutazioni sono intervenute nella personalità poetica del suo capo Marinetti in seguito all'ingresso di Benedetta nella vita e nella fantasia di lui: scorie inessenziali al movimento abbandonate per via; assolutezze che si temperano, certe crudezze che scompaiono, un velo di pudore inconsueto che o affiora nel dettato poetico o è calato, più probabilmente, prima su certe zone della fantasia, esercitandovi un'intima censura preventiva.

2) E in più lo storico del Futurismo dovrà registrare quali apporti personali Benedetta vi ha immessi.<sup>48</sup>

Orestano ascribes no small role to Benedetta, crediting her with profound changes in the Futurist movement (with which Marinetti must have agreed given that the commentary was published by his Edizioni Futuriste di 'Poesia'). Further on in the text, however, Orestano rhetorically asks what Futurism represents for Benedetta. His answer indicates the way in which he associates Benedetta's work with the feminine and the maternal:

Tuttavia senza tema di sbagliare può dirsi, che essi sono più di ordine *costruttivo* che *distuttivo*, com'è nella natura essenziale economico-materna della donna.

Più dell'uomo vicina all'*istinto* e all'*intuizione*, Benedetta sente ed esalta nell'*istinto* 'ciò che nel profondo di noi è legato alle forze della natura, ciò che in noi è essenziale', e nell'*intuizione* il superamento delle '*cerebralità raffinate*' e raziocinanti; ama nella volontà l'impeto della vita-creazione, veramente viva,

profonda, agonale, che si colloca sempre alla più breve distanza dalle forze avversarie, spavalda, piena d'immediatezze, avida di velocità stesse nella simultaneità.<sup>49</sup>

On the one hand Orestano characterizes Benedetta as a central force within the movement, but on the other, relegates her work to the realm of the maternal and instinctual—the essential nature of woman. Benedetta might well have agreed with such associations of her work with intuition and maternity, but surely would have taken issue with the implication that woman's writing, as well as her nature, are secondary to that of man.

Also simultaneously complementary and disparaging are the comments of Ezra Pound. The journal *Il Mare* featured a special issue in 1933 dedicated to women, much of which was devoted to Benedetta. In it appeared an article entitled "Ecrevisse?" by Pound discussing Benedetta's work. He was much impressed by *Viaggio di Gararà*, though his praise is somewhat backhanded:

Nessuno persona più di me detesta un soggetto cosmico, una discussione a proposito della creazione del mondo, ecc. Lessi il "Viaggio di Gararà" svegliato. Qui si trova una prosa italiana NON scritta sulla melodia stanca dell' "articolo in due" del "Corriere della Sera"; non sulla melodia stanca dei romanzieri da dozzina contemporanei.<sup>50</sup>

Despite his hatred of cosmic subjects and romance writers, Pound insists he was "awakened" after reading Benedetta's work. A vocal pro-Fascist, Pound actually helped launch the careers of a number of women writers, yet at the same time held misogynist conceptions regarding the nature of modernism and culture.<sup>51</sup>

In another critical review of 1935 entitled "La Pittrice Futurista Benedetta," published in *Stile Futurista*, Nenè Centonze discusses Benedetta's painting.<sup>52</sup> He describes *Velocità di motoscafo* as a dynamic depiction of the sinuous trail of a "metallic

shark” racing through the Gulf of Naples. Centonze goes on to discuss what he sees as the nature of Benedetta’s work:

In esso [*Velocità di motoscafo*] è rappresentata con dinamismo efficace, la scia sinuosa dello squalo di acciaio in corsa nel Golfo di Napoli, metallico anch’esso e luminoso sotto il sole.

In questo quadro appare già quella che è una delle maggiori qualità della pittrice. Voglio dire come, nonostante le continue ricerche ed eliminazioni che portano alla assoluta semplicità geometrica, Benedetta sappia infondere alla sua arte un senso di femminilità, di sensibilità lieve, se pure importante ed intelligente. E questo senso, è quello che in lei più che in qualunque altro pittore futurista combatte l’imputazione di aridità o freddezza....

Per cui nel barbaglio di un’elica in moto, nella proiezione di un’ala di aeroplano sulle nuvole, nel nero grasso e lucente di una locomotiva s’intuisce la sensibilità di una donna la quale ha saputo rimaner tale anche attraverso l’audacia tutta virile dell’arte futurista.<sup>53</sup>

For Centonze, *Velocità di motoscafo* indicates early on what he sees as a major aspect of Benedetta’s work overall: a feminine sensibility that displays a “lightness” and intelligence that counter charges of aridity and/or coldness being leveled at some Futurist painting. Centonze insists that Benedetta’s work reveals the sensibility of a woman who has understood how to remain one, even through (what he sees as) her adoption of the virile audaciousness of Futurist art. Centonze identifies what, in fact, is a central aspect of Benedetta’s working strategy (conscious or not): her retention of a “femininity” that allows her to participate in the virile (masculine) domain of Futurism. Although he interprets Benedetta’s work as being aggressive and focused on machinery, Benedetta’s work was hardly aggressive in approach or content. Rather, simply by her association with the movement, Benedetta’s “masculine leanings” seem to have been suggested to him. Thus, her “femininity” became all-important in allowing her not just a viable position, but a major role in Futurism.

Although most reviews of Benedetta were written in Futurist or Futurist-affiliated journals such as *Stile Futurista*, a few critical texts were published independently. In 1939, Bruno Sanzin wrote a small book on Benedetta entitled *Benedetta, aeropoetessa, aeropittrice, futurista*, the suffixes all underscoring Benedetta's position as female poet, painter and Futurist. Sanzin's text praises Benedetta for her contribution to the movement as a woman, noting that it is difficult for a woman to rise to such a level of cerebralism, as the feminine spirit is generally guided by sentiment rather than reason.<sup>54</sup> Noting there are exceptions to this rule, in commenting on *Astra e il sottomarino* he explicitly states:

Difficilmente una donna surge a sì alto grado di cerebralismo. Normalmente l'animo femminile si lascia avviluppare e guidare più volentieri dal sentimento che dalla ragione, e tale preferenza è subordinata a richiami insiti nella sua stessa natura che ben di rado possono essere imbrigliati in modo da farsi sentire soltanto in sordina. Ci vuole una tempra d'eccezione, ad ogni modo, perchè il consueto possa essere superato vittoriosamente.<sup>55</sup>

Sanzin also contends that Benedetta's written work is far superior to her painting:

Benedetta scrive e dipinge. Metto in primo piano la sua attività letteraria poichè la ritengo superiore a quella pittorica. Con questo non intendo esprimere un giudizio assoluto. E probabilmente una certa quale affinità spirituale che mi amalgama meglio alla sua opera letteraria. Riuscendo a compenetrarla facilmente godo di tutto il suo fascino seduttore.<sup>56</sup>

Here he revealingly suggests that his preference may be due to a personal affinity to the work describing the seductive fascination he finds at trying to penetrate it. Sanzin thus establishes clearly gendered positions for Benedetta, the artist/feminine seductress, and himself, the critic/penetrator.

In 1942, Laura Serra wrote a lengthy discussion of Benedetta's novels that appeared in *Autori e Scrittori*, the monthly journal of the Italian writers' national union, a Fascist organization.<sup>57</sup> Benedetta, she maintains, grapples with philosophical and cosmic issues, which are at the heart of her Futurist position:

Certo non possiamo negare in lei un'atteggiamento teorico; i suoi lavori non sono la comune pratica o l'effetto d'una sbrigliata fantasia; c'è uno sfondo dottrinale in cui s'accentuano problemi filosofici, che solo la sua conoscenza profonda di diverse arti (poesia, pittura, plastica, musica) poteva portare con leggerezza e soavità in primo piano: esplora, coordina, disgiunge in modo che alla gamma delle sensazioni viene man mano sostituendosi un'insieme di esperienza che dalle forme primitive si sviluppa e proietta tutto quello che la vita cosmica presenta; il risultato di tali indagini e di tale proiezione costituisce la posizione della filosofia futurista.<sup>58</sup>

For Serra, Futurism cast off all that was exhausted and decadent and offered in its place a revolutionary form of expression, and it is this kind of creativity that is to be found at the heart of Benedetta's research.<sup>59</sup> Staying very close to the original text of *Le forze umane*, Serra goes on to summarize Benedetta's abstract theories of human nature, noting that it is the "original nucleus" that tends to ultimately disperse into indeterminacy, suggesting that the self is easily sublimated by pessimism and human tragedy:

Il nucleo originario forma per Benedetta il fattore materiale o caos tragico umano che tende a differenziarsi fino alla dispersione e si risolve in una sublimazione. Il problema delle origini passa dalla indeterminazione ad una formazione sintetica dell'infinito in un nucleo capace d'una forza dilatatoria; ma il nucleo è chiuso da limiti che formano la tragedia quotidiana dell'umanità: sono i dati di sensi, il mondo fenomenico e le formule logiche a cui a cui esso obbedisce, *le rotaie del pessimismo*. Bisogna superare il peso densità e fissare gli occhi nel fondo più profondo oltre tutto infrangere le forze di gravità. Senza isolarsi però o trascendere e fissare l'armonia fuori del nostro io; poichè il tendere all'atomo in movimento, all'offerta dell'amore, alle esperienze d'ogni genere gioiosa, amara misera, il partecipare alla vita e conoscerne gli slanci l'umiltà il dolore è quello che ci dà il mezzo per superare.<sup>60</sup>

It is the full experience of love, both joyous and miserable, that gives the self the means of transcendence. Serra's analysis is based primarily on Benedetta's first novel *Le forze umane*, which she discusses in detail. She praises the vastness of Benedetta's mind and yet characterizes *Le forze umane* as the greatest effort that could come from the mind of a woman:

Penso che questo romanzo sia quanto di più grande abbia potuto venir fuori in forma artistica dalla mente d'una donna. La vastità della concezione basterebbe a

dare al lettore la misura del cervello di Benedetta, specialmente se si pensa che nell'età in cui ha scritto il cervello è sempre in formazione.<sup>61</sup>

Even as a female critic, Serra adopts an accepted notion of the inferiority of women by qualifying Benedetta's work as exceptional for the female sex.

In addition to her lengthy discussion of *Le forze umane*, Serra examines *Viaggio di Gararà* (which, as she describes, reveals the alogicity of creation) and *Astra e il sottomarino* (which enters into the psychic world, illustrating the indispensability of love). She concludes her article with the assertion that Marinetti's revolution becomes evolutionary with Benedetta: "Con lei la rivoluzione di Marinetti cambia carattere e da reazione diviene evoluzione dell'arte e della vita."<sup>62</sup>

The critic Vittorio Orazi also commented on *Astra e il sottomarino*, claiming it a singular book that has the merits of few others.<sup>63</sup> However, in the same context he insisted that one recognize in Benedetta's work a singular spiritual and artistic quality that sets her apart within women's literature:

Il tema dell'amore e della morte, la lotta del razionale con l'irrazionale, la ansiosa ricerca di quei valori imponderabili, ma inflessibilmente determinanti che agiscono oltre i limiti della piatta coscienza, l'esaltazione trascendentale dell'eroismo in quello che ha di divinamente disinteressato, la preminenza del pensiero sul puro gioco della sensibilità; questi elementi base che noi già abbiamo notato nei precedenti volumi, e che ci hanno fatto riconoscere in Benedetta e nella sua opera una singolarità di atteggiamento spirituale ed artistico che le conferisce un posto a parte nella letteratura femminile, questi elementi noi li troviamo qui approfonditi arditamente, più ricchi d'anima e di pathos ed espressi artisticamente con maggiore sagacia, organicità e dovizia lirica.<sup>64</sup>

In an article from a few months earlier in *Stile Futurista* Orazi writes:

Opera di spiritualità e di sentimento che si distanzia assai dai vari aspetti che assume il romanzo nella letteratura femminile e che rivela nella Scrittrice qualità creative ed acume di analisi tutt'altro che comuni. Non manca poi al lavoro una efficacia rappresentativa ed una agilità stilistica tanto più difficile a conseguirsi quanto più arduo era il soggetto, spesso tenuto su di un piano di astrazione e di incorporeità.<sup>65</sup>

Although Orazi lauds *Le forze umane*, he again finds it distinguished within “feminine literature.”

Giuseppe Lipparini in “Futurismo femminile” also discusses Benedetta’s work in the context of women’s writing. He finds Benedetta’s Futurism timid but elegant: “Il futurismo di Benedetta è un po’ timido, e sembra aborre dalle audacie puramente esteriori...; no [sic] ignora la sintassi, e no [sic] disdegna certe eleganze da cui pure si esprime la poesia.”<sup>66</sup> At the same time he maintains that, while women have a tendency to exaggerate, Benedetta does not. “Quando le donne seguono le novità, sogliono nella maggior parte esagerare. Benedetta no. Dobbiamo anzi esserle grati così del suo sottinteso amore come del suo pudico riserbo.”<sup>67</sup> Again, Lipparini’s criticism is backhanded, disdaining women’s writing—the context within which he situates Benedetta’s work—but praising her work for its subtlety and reserve.

In 1941, the writer Maria Goretti published a study entitled *La donna e il futurismo*, which also qualifies Benedetta’s work according to the issue of gender, but here it is seen in a positive light.<sup>68</sup> The text includes a short preface by Marinetti commending Goretti and briefly noting the important but differing contributions of Valentine de Saint-Point and Benedetta. Goretti provides an overview of Marinetti’s work, discussions of Saint-Point and Benedetta, and a final section devoted to Goretti’s own *aeropoesia* (aeropoetry). Goretti compares Benedetta to Saint-Point, pointing to the spirituality of the former as compared to the sensuality of the latter, a distinction that Marinetti also notes in his preface.<sup>69</sup>

The section on Benedetta is fairly long (18 pages, as opposed to the 8 pages devoted to Saint-Point) and quite complimentary. For Goretti, Benedetta sails into the

heights of abstract and conceptual poetics: “Anche l’arte di Benedetta con la sua forma scabra ed essenziale, sdegnosa di ogni indulgenza alle fioriture o al ricamo, è in certo modo arsa di solitudine, poichè, incurante di chi la potrà seguire o come la potrà seguire, sale alle quote più alte dell’astrattismo verbale e del simbolismo concettuale.”<sup>70</sup> The metaphors and descriptive language in Goretto’s text (as well as in many of the other critiques of Benedetta’s work), repeatedly refer to ascension and aerial flight. Goretto maintains that Benedetta applies Futurism to the “problem of women” which she interprets (based on Benedetta’s *Le forze umane*) as the conflict between instinct and reason. Luciana (the central protagonist) resolves her conflict initially in love, but, finally, it is in art and in creative will that she finds resolution.<sup>71</sup> In this regard, and in Benedetta’s subsequent novels, Goretto finds Benedetta’s message one of optimism (“l’opera di Benedetta canta così l’ottimismo.”)<sup>72</sup>

It is due to Benedetta’s optimism, according to Goretto, that Benedetta is able to express the sentiments she offers in her article “Spiritualità della donna italiana” (discussed in Chapter 5), which Goretto reprints. Here, Goretto maintains, Benedetta’s solution to the “woman problem” is once again woman as creator: “Soluzione questa futurista del problema della donna, soluzione che avevamo già vista balzar fuori dalla poesia di Benedetta: Donna Generatrice.”<sup>73</sup> A quote by Benedetta on woman as mother/creator (taken from “Spiritualità della donna italiana”) is in fact reprinted on the title page of the book: “la [sic] donna italiana è madre. Quando si dice madre bisogna dare alla parola il suo grande significato di generatrice; generatrice di uomini, di sentimenti, di passioni, di idee.”<sup>74</sup> Though Goretto does not make the distinction, Benedetta’s thinking and writing shifted importantly from the notion of woman as

mother/creator to a much more explicitly Fascist conception of motherhood by the time of Goretti's publication (1941), and it is telling that Benedetta's quote followed that from Mussolini: "la [sic] guerra sta all'uomo come la maternità sta alla donna."<sup>75</sup>

With the benefit of historical hindsight, Anna Nozzoli, in her 1978 study *Tabù e coscienza*, locates the roots of Fascist reactionary roles for women in Futurism. Moreover it is in Benedetta's writing, particularly in her notion of the "Donna Creatrice" (woman-creator)—which has at its roots motherhood—that Nozzoli sees the overlap of Futurist and Fascist ideology.<sup>76</sup> This point of intersection in Benedetta, Nozzoli problematically argues, was initiated in the works of Rosà, Ginanni, and Robert, despite the fact that most were written in the pre-Fascist period.<sup>77</sup> Additionally, Nozzoli contends that ultimately Benedetta's work ends in the direct association of creation with maternity, in which woman finds her most profound reason for existence.<sup>78</sup> Nozzoli's argument, however, is one-sided. As fundamental as the concept of maternity was to Benedetta's philosophy of creativity, she never viewed motherhood as the sole or ultimate role for woman. This crucial distinction opens up a larger issue: namely, the discussion of Benedetta's complicated and multi-faceted relationship to Fascism in actual practice (to be discussed in detail in Chapter 5). While Benedetta embraced aspects of Fascism, as well as Futurism, in her works, she integrated them with ideas and innovations of her own. In so doing, she created a distinctive voice within the movement, developing concepts of creativity and female agency that reflected her own construction of self under a totalitarian regime.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> During this period, Prampolini published the movement's manifesto on *arte meccanica* of 1922 (see Appendix 1). Authored in 1922, "Arte meccanica. Manifesto futurista" was written by Prampolini, Ivo Pannaggi, and Vinicio Paladini and published in *Noi* 1, no. 2 (May 1923). The manifesto is reprinted in Enrico Crispolti, ed., *Pannaggi e l'arte meccanica futurista* (Milan: Mazzotta, 1995). See Appendix A.

<sup>2</sup> Lucia Re, "Impure Abstraction: Benedetta as Visual Artist and Novelist," in *La Futurista: Benedetta Cappa Marinetti*, Lisa Panzera, ed. (Philadelphia: Moore College of Art and Design, 1998), 42.

<sup>3</sup> Simona Cigliana, "Il seme e la rosa: Benedetta o la poesia delle Forze cosmiche," in Benedetta, *I tre romanzi: Le forze umane, Viaggio di Gararà, Astra e il sottomarino*, Simona Cigliana, ed. (Roma: Edizioni dell'Atlanta, 1998), 18.

<sup>4</sup> "We Futurists, Balla and Depero, want to realize this total fusion to reconstruct the universe wholly enlivening it. We will give bones and flesh to the invisible, the impalpable, the imponderable, the imperceptible. We will find abstract equivalents of all of the forms and all the elements of the universe, then we will combine them together, according to the capriciousness of our inspiration, to form plastic complexes that we will put in motion." Giacomo Balla and Fortunato Depero, "La ricostruzione futurista del universo," in Enrico Crispolti, ed., *Ricostruzione futurista dell'universo* (Torino: Mole Antonelliana, Assessorato per la Cultura, Musei Civici, 1980), 27.

<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that the Italian term "sintesi" does not simply translate into the English "synthesis," as used in its simplest definition, but should be understood in its broadest definition as a combination into one complex of diverse ideas, forces, or factors. The term should also be understood in relation to the scientific use, as in a "complex compound."

<sup>6</sup> Giovanni Lista, *Futurism and Photography* (London: Merrell and the Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, 2001), 26.

<sup>7</sup> "I am too free and rebellious. I don't want breaks—I want to be myself alone." Benedetta to Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, ALS, November 23, 1918, Marinetti Piazzoni Collection.

<sup>8</sup> "Ho trovato fastidio...nel vedere il mio nome unito a 'parolibera futurista.'" Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> The month is not indicated in references to this issue of *Dinamo*.

<sup>10</sup> Lucia Re, "Fascist Theories of 'Woman' and the Construction of Gender," in *Mothers of Invention: Women, Italian Fascism, and Culture*, ed. Robin Pickering-Iazzi (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 90.

<sup>11</sup> As discussed by Emily Braun in "Balla and Benedetta: Problems in Futurist Gender Theories," unpublished paper presented at the symposium "Benedetta Cappa Marinetti," Moore College of Art and Design, Philadelphia, September 12, 1998. See also Claudia Salaris, "Futurismo letterario a Roma," in *Casa Balla e il Futurismo a Roma*, ed. Enrico Crispolti (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1989), 61.

<sup>12</sup> Crispolti, *Ricostruzione futurista dell'universo*, 378.

<sup>13</sup> "The graphic-syntheses of this volume demonstrate this effort of immediate creation. They are the direct expression of the forces of the universe without plastic concerns. I published a first graphic synthesis in the magazine *Dinamo* (1919). Similar attempts were called lyrical precipitates by Giuseppe Steiner, or states of mind ["moods"] or medium painting by freeworders [*paroliberi*] like Buzzi, Rognoni, Soggetti, or painters like Rougena Zatkova, and have been considered developments of *paroliberismo* and overflowing in their formidable capacity of immediate creation." Benedetta, *I tre romanzi*, 118.

<sup>14</sup> Cinzia Blum, "Benedetta's Empathetic Journey to Transcendence," in *La Futurista: Benedetta Cappa Marinetti* (Philadelphia: Moore College of Art and Design, 1998), 25.

<sup>15</sup> "I dream of creating my spirit in perfect harmony, one is complete in oneself." Benedetta, *Le forze umane* in, *I tre romanzi*, 70.

<sup>16</sup> Lia Giachero, "Benedetta nel clima del futurismo romano," in *Casa Balla e il futurismo a Roma*, ed. Enrico Crispolti (Roma: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1989), 412.

<sup>17</sup> "My innermost [self] is tormented joy, vibrant because the masculine force multiplied by great potential attracts me in its rays. The equilibrium of my being is broken." Benedetta, *Le forze umane*, 108.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 116.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 120.

<sup>20</sup> Cigliana, "Il seme e la rosa," 19.

<sup>21</sup> Giachero, "Benedetta nel clima del futurismo romano," 412.

<sup>22</sup> Re, "Fascist Theories of 'Woman,'" 90-91. See also Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991) and *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997).

<sup>23</sup> Re, "Impure Abstraction," 33.

<sup>24</sup> “Supine on the bed. Ashen face with deep black furrows, open mouth purplish blue lips contracted inwards, closed eyes sunk into the sockets. He breathed slowly with a deep wheeze. The hands pulled, pressed the sheet, [which they] they heaped up, pushed away. Rapid starts twisted through his body, shaking him, but they did not reach his face which remained in the terrible blind expression of a petrified tragic cry.” Benedetta, *Le forze umane*, in *I tre romanzi*, 92.

<sup>25</sup> “I continued to look at the martyred form of my father, the signs of many years of willfulness.” Benedetta, *Le forze umane*, 92.

<sup>26</sup> Günter Berghaus, *Italian Futurist Theater, 1909-1944*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 542.

<sup>27</sup> Berghaus, *Italian Futurist Theater*, 542.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Re, “Impure Abstraction,” 35.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 36. Filippo Tommso Marinetti, *Gli Indomabili* (Piacenza: Edizioni Futuriste di Poesia della Società Tip Editoriale Porta, 1922).

<sup>31</sup> “Instead of a head each one has a sphere the color and size of one of the globes of the cone. Their slender bodies are sheathed in white light. Each one represents a tone. Suddenly they happily disperse like a fresh laugh in a dawn of love.” Benedetta, *Il Viaggio di Gararà*, in Benedetta, *I tre romanzi*, 151.

<sup>32</sup> Claudia Salaris, “I romanzi di Benedetta,” *Cavallo di Troia* (Milano), no. 1 (Winter 1981), 62.

<sup>33</sup> Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater, *Thought-forms* (London: The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1905).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>35</sup> Blum, “Benedetta’s Empathetic Journey,” 29.

<sup>36</sup> “E il destino di quest’amore è legato come il destino della vita all’ottimismo e alla fiducia.” Laura Serra, “L’opera letteraria di Benedetta e la Sua Conversazione in Roma Milano Torino Genova Firenze Bologna Venezia Palermo Napoli Bari ‘Donne della patria in Guerra’ giudicata dalla poetessa Laura Serra,” *Autori e Scrittori, mensile del Sindacato Nazionale* 2 (February 1942): 6.

<sup>37</sup> “A white house. Isolated. Towering. Prismatic. The smooth facades have neither windows nor a portal. An enormous knife seems to have split one of the corners from the top to the bottom, creating a new narrow façade.

The owner of the house is nowhere to be seen. His existence can be felt. Even though he is not physically present anywhere, he occupies every empty and full space in the building, which is full of his luminous potential.

From himself he expressed four daughters. Each one lived within him, but also outside of him autonomously, each on a different floor of the house. To each he gave a soul and then opened a round aperture without shutters in the beveled corner.” Benedetta, *Astra e il sottmarino*, in Benedetta, *I tre romanzi*, 214. “Astra’s final dream” printed in translation in *La Futurista: Benedetta Cappa Marinetti*, ed. Lisa Panzera, trans. Antonio Melchor, 50.

<sup>38</sup> “In an undirected instant she went toward the round window. The brutal midday flooded her in the waves of its yellow gold, so that she fell inside. Immediately the father walled off the round eye of the top floor. In its place, transuded a light candid spiral evanescence that steams night and day like unexpressed dreams.” Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> “The house—owering, prismatic, isolated, without windows or a portal—displays on the façade of the sliced corner, four eyes, hopelessly blinded and walled. Ibid, 215.

<sup>40</sup> Blum, “Benedetta’s Empathetic Journey,” 29.

<sup>41</sup> See Bruno G. Sanzin, *Benedetta, aeropoetessa, aeropittrice, futurista* (Roma: Rassegna Nazionale, 1939); and Francesco Orestano, *Opera letteraria di Benedetta* (Rome: Edizioni Futuriste di ‘Poesia,’ 1936).

<sup>42</sup> Maria Goretti, *La donna e il futurismo* (Verona: Casa Editrice La Scagliera , 1941), 99.

<sup>43</sup> Blum, “Benedetta’s Empathetic Journey,” 29.

<sup>44</sup> “I am certain that this is a Futurist work and I am proud of it. It was born full of souls. All the anxieties, the vibrations, the joys, the presentiments, the certainties are depicted in it.

The plot is simple, eternal.

Love between a man and a woman, but I tried to evoke the mystery of destiny conditioned by Reality and clarified and predicted by Dream.

This work has been complete for three years.

There has been, you know, a heavier digression in my life and our Luce was born: Luce today is victorious in the blue smile, in her songs, in the blond games under the sun with burning Victoria and fast Ala and today Astra can go into life radiating poetry. Poetry: you believe that only it can illuminate the world, I believe that without spiritual anxiety and without love, even if at times and maybe too often it is painful, the world disintegrates and scatters into thin air.” Benedetta, “Preface,” *Astra e il sottmarino*, in Benedetta, *I tre romanzi*, 172.

<sup>45</sup> Blum, "Benedetta's Empathetic Journey," 29.

<sup>46</sup> "'L'Oceano del cuore:' Intervista con Marinetti," *Lo spettacolo d'Italia* (Rome), November 11, 1927.

<sup>47</sup> "'Mia uguale, non discepola'—l'ha proclamata Marinetti presentando con accese parole il volume di GARARA'. E in questo saluto c'è più che un gesto cavalleresco. C'è—a parte la equazione di uguaglianza, di qui lasciamo arbitro Marinetti—il riconoscimento di una verità di fatto: Benedetta non discepola." Francesco Orestano, *Opera letteraria di Benedetta* (Rome: Edizioni Futuriste di 'Poesia,' 1936), 3.

<sup>48</sup> "Even this truth can be demonstrated with two series of considerations:

1) Whoever someday does a history of Futurism, will have to note what deep changes have taken place in the poetic personality of its leader Marinetti following the entrance of Benedetta into his life and fantasy: debris inessential for the movement abandoned by way; absolutes that are tempered, certain crudeness that disappear, a veil of unusual decency that either arises in poetic dictation or falls, more likely, first on certain zones of the imagination, exercising on it an intimate preventative censorship.

2) And in addition the historian of Futurism will have to note what personal contributions Benedetta introduced into it [Futurism]." *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>49</sup> "None the less without fear of being in the wrong it can be said, that they themselves are more of a *constructive* order rather than *destructive*, as it is in the essential maternal-economic nature of women.

Closer than man to *instinct* and *intuition*, Benedetta feels and exalts in the *instinct* 'that which in the depth of us is tied to the forces of nature, that which is essential in us,' and in *intuition* the overcoming of the '*refined cerebralisms*' and rationalization; in willfulness she loves the force of the life-creation, really alive, deep, agonic, that is always placed at the shortest distance from the opposing forces, arrogant, full of immediateness, greedy for actual speed in simultaneity." *Ibid*, 17.

<sup>50</sup> "No one more than me detests a cosmic subject, a discussion regarding the creation of the world, etc. I read *Viaggio di Gararà* [and I] awakened. Here one finds Italian prose NOT written on the tired melody of an 'articolo in due' of the *Corriere della Sera*, not on the tired melody of the dozens of contemporary romance novelists." Ezra Pound, "Ecrevisse?" *Il Mare* (March 18, 1933; special issue dedicated to woman).

<sup>51</sup> See Ronald Bush, "Ezra Pound (1885-1972)" in *The Gender of Modernism*, ed. Bonnie Kime Scott (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990).

<sup>52</sup> Nenè Centonze, "La Pittrice Futurista Benedetta," *Stile Futurista* 2, no. 10 (June 1935): 10-11.

<sup>53</sup> "In it [*Velocità di motoscafo*], the sinuous trail of the iron shark racing in the Gulf of Naples, metallic and luminous under the sun, is represented with effective dynamism.

In in this painting there already appears one of the major qualities of the artist. I mean to say that, notwithstanding the continuous research and eliminations that bring one to an absolute geometric simplicity, Benedetta knows how to infuse her work with a sense of femininity, of light sensibility, even if important and intelligent. And this sense is what in her more than in any other Futurist painter combats the charges of aridness or coldness....

Hence in the dazzle of a propeller in motion, in the projection of a wing of an airplane onto the clouds, in the fat and shiny black of a train one intuits the sensibility of a woman that has understood how to remain one, even through the virile audacity of Futurist art." Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Bruno G. Sanzin, *Benedetta, aeropoetessa, aeropittrice, futurista* (Roma: Rassegna Nazionale, 1939), 22.

<sup>55</sup> "It is with difficulty that a woman soars to such a level of cerebralism. Normally the female spirit allows herself to be wrapped up in and voluntarily guided by sentiment rather than reason, and this preference is subordinated to calls inherent in her very nature that rarely can be curbed in such a way as to make them mute. One needs the tempering of an exception, at all costs, so that the usual can be victoriously overcome." Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> "Benedetta writes and paints. I foreground her literary activities because I find them superior to her painterly ones. With this I do not intend to express an absolute judgement. Probably a certain spiritual affinity better binds me to her literary work. Succeeding in easily penetrating it, I enjoy all of its seductive charm." Ibid, 2.

<sup>57</sup> Laura Serra, "L'opera letteraria di Benedetta e la Sua Conversazione in Roma Milano Torino Genova Firenze Bologna Venezia Palermo Napoli Bari 'Donne della patria in Guerra' giudicata dalla poetessa Laura Serra," *Autori e Scrittori, mensile del Sindacato Nazionale*, vol. 2 (February 1942). Although the title of her article suggests that Serra discusses Benedetta's recent lecture "Donne della patria in Guerra," she in fact makes no mention of it in the article.

<sup>58</sup> "Of course, we cannot deny in her a theoretical attitude; her works are not common practice or the effect of an unfurled fantasy; there is a didactic base in which philosophical problems are stressed that only her profuse knowledge of diverse arts (poetry, painting, plastic arts, music) could bring to the fore with such lightness and delicacy: she explores, coordinates, separates in such a way that a range of sensations slowly come to substitute themselves with an accumulation of experiences that develop from the primitive forms and it projects all that which the cosmic life presents; the result of such research and of such projection constitutes the position of the Futurist philosophy." Ibid, 1.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>60</sup> "The originating nucleus forms for Benedetta the material factor or human tragic chaos that tends to differentiate itself towards dispersion and resolves itself in sublimation. The

problem of origins passes from indeterminacy to a synthetic formation of the infinite in a nucleus capable of a dilatory force; but the nucleus is closed by limits that form the everyday tragedy of humanity: they are the facts of the senses, the phenomenological world and the logical formulas that they obey, *the tracks of pessimism*. One must overcome the heavy density and focus on the deepest depths beyond all that breaks the forces of gravity. Without isolating oneself though or transcending and fixing the harmony outside of our I; the tendency towards the atom in movement, towards the offer of love, towards the joyful experiences of every sort, bitter miserable, to participate in life and know the surges of humility, the pain is that which gives us the means to go forward." Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> "I think that this novel is the greatest artistic form that could have come from the mind of a woman. The vastness of the concept is enough to give the reader the measure of the mind of Benedetta, especially if one thinks about [the fact] that at the age at which she wrote it, the mind is still in formation." Ibid, 3.

<sup>62</sup> "With her Marinetti's revolution changes character and from reaction it becomes evolution of art and life." Ibid, 8.

<sup>63</sup> Vittorio Orazi, "'Astra e il Sottomarino' di Benedetta," *Stile Futurista* 2, no. 11-12 (September 1935), 41.

<sup>64</sup> "The themes of love and death, the fight between reason and the irrational, the anxious search for those imponderable values, but inflexibly determined that operate beyond the limits of the dull conscience, the transcendental exaltation of heroism in that which has divinely disinterested, the preeminence of thought on the pure play of sensibility; these basic elements that we have already noted in the preceding volumes, and that have made us recognize in Benedetta and in her work a singular spiritual and artistic manner which sets her apart in women's literature, we find these elements here fearlessly deepened, richer in spirit and pathos and artistically expressed with much sagacity, organicism, and lyric richness." Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> "[*Le forze umane*] is a work of spirituality and sentiment that distances itself greatly from the various forms that the novel in women's literature takes and that reveals in the author all but common creative qualities and analytical acumen quite other than ordinary. The work also contains a representative efficiency and a stylistic agility much harder to achieve the more audacious the subject, often kept up on a level of abstraction and incorporeality." Vittorio Orazi, "Benedetta Scrittrice Futurista," *Stile Futurista* 2, no. 8-9 (May 1935): 34.

<sup>66</sup> "The Futurism of Benedetta is a bit timid, and seems to abhor purely superficial impudences...; it doesn't ignore syntax, and it doesn't disdain certain elegances with which she also expresses poetry." Giuseppe Lipparini, "Futurismo femminile," *Stile Futurista* 2, no. 11-12 (September 1935): 42.

<sup>67</sup> “When women try new things, they tend to exaggerate. Not Benedetta. We must indeed be thankful to her for her implicit love and for her modest restraint.” Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Maria Goretti, *La donna e il futurismo* (Verona: La Casa Editrice La Scagliera, 1941).

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 102.

<sup>70</sup> “Also the art of Benedetta with its austere and essential form, scornful of every indulgence towards the florid or embroidered, is in a certain way scorched by solitude, because, unconcerned with who might follow her or how he might follow her, she sails into the highest altitude of verbal abstraction and conceptual symbolism.” Ibid, 88.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 90.

<sup>72</sup> “the work of Benedetta thus sings with optimism....” Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> “This Futurist solution to the woman problem, a solution that we have already seen spring forward from Benedetta’s poetry: Woman Creator.” Ibid, 102.

<sup>74</sup> “The Italian woman is mother. When one says mother one must give the word its larger meaning of creator; creator of men, of sentiment, of passions, of ideas.”

<sup>75</sup> “War is to man, as motherhood is to woman.”

<sup>76</sup> “Se questo percorso è in astratto ipotizzabile per tutte le narratrici, date le premesse fortemente indicative del loro discorso, l’esempio concreto è tuttavia rintracciabile nell’*iter* letterario-culturale di Benedetta, nella evoluzione ideologica che doveva condurla tra il ’20 e il ’40 dalla equivocal sottolineatura della creatività femminile al recupero in chiave mistico-spiritualista della funzione riproduttrice. A differenza di quando accade nella Robert o nella Rosà, perigliosamente bilanciate tra la apologia dell a maternità e l’esaltazione del sesso, tra ruolo materno e ruolo demoniaco, la poetica di Benedetta si concentra infatti sin dagli esordi intorno al motivo centrale della Donna Creatrice, della femminilità come polo vitale da cui traggono origine uomini, *idées*, passioni.” Anna Nozzoli, *Tabù e coscienza: La condizione femminile nella letteratura italiana del novecento* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1978), 60.

<sup>77</sup> “Qui, nel legame istituito da Benedetta tra futurismo e fascismo, è da cercarsi, a mio parere, il punto d’arrivo di un viaggio iniziato molti anni prima nei romanzi della Rosà, della Ginanni, della Robert. Ed è in virtù di queste pagine che, al di là della maggiore brutalità o goffaggine del regime, l’ideologia futurista consegna il reale significato del suo messaggio intorno alla donna, svelando alla base della sua extravagante misoginia radici politico-sociali non dissimili da quelle della propaganda fascista.” Ibid, 63.

<sup>78</sup> “Ma se è evidente che il dualismo Fuoco-Luce esemplifica fuor di metafora la dicomtomia esistente tra principio generatore e Generazione, tra atto materiale e

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Assoluto, è altrettanto chiaro che all'interno del sistema ideologico di Benedetta l'Arte come principio della Generazione finisce poi per coincidere direttamente con la maternità, nella quale la donna trova la sua più profonda ragione d'essere." Ibid, 61.

## CHAPTER 4

## BENEDETTA AEROPITTRICE

Benedetta's *aeropittura* or aeropaintings of the 1930s illustrate her increasing sense of nationalism and her identity as a Fascist, while at the same time, reflect her ongoing spiritual search. These works reveal Benedetta's engagement with the larger cultural arena traditionally marked as male, particularly through her appropriation of history painting and her receipt of public and private commissions. Throughout the 1930s, Divisionism (particularly the works of Previati) and Metaphysical painting (especially the painting of Giorgio De Chirico) continued to provide an important influence for Benedetta. The deliberate use of Italian predecessors allowed Benedetta to maintain Mussolini's policy of cultural autarky, which went hand in hand with his economic policy (particularly after Italy's 1935 invasion of Ethiopia that resulted in sanctions imposed by the League of Nations). Benedetta's compliance with Fascist policy camouflaged any foreign influences (which included Surrealism), at the same time that it illustrated her pro-Fascist stance.

In her writings, Benedetta constructed an autonomous identity, but it is in her paintings of the 1930s that she cast herself as a political subject, by creating works that celebrated the Fascist empire. Women under Fascism were not assigned simply the role of mother but were encouraged to adopt a civic responsibility: that of educating the "new man" of Fascism and restoring the family.<sup>1</sup> Individualism, however—a concept that was

essential to Benedetta—was not particularly encouraged by the state (though it was in consumer culture<sup>2</sup>). Concurrently, “women” and “modernism” were emerging and developing categories and the arts offered women a means to “articulate a changing sense of themselves as new political subjects.”<sup>3</sup> As artists, women could explore individual expression and, as political subjects (perhaps most clearly exemplified by activist suffragettes), women could expand a sense of personal agency.

The separation of the public and private spheres that dominated woman’s experience in the nineteenth century changed markedly in the beginning of the twentieth. Rosemary Betterton notes that as women became more educated and assumed positions as professionals, the boundaries between male and female experiences of modernity became less clear, allowing a “fragile space” to open up in which women could act as producers (as well as patrons) of modern art.<sup>4</sup> Although the primarily male preserve of progressive painting was notoriously misogynistic,<sup>5</sup> many avant-garde circles and left-wing political movements also increasingly allowed for women’s actual participation. While Betterton’s argument centers on Britain and Germany, many of her observations hold true for Italy as well. As Cinzia Blum, in fact, states,

The status of women beyond Italy’s borders confirms that the antifeminist obsession traversed chronological, ideological, and national boundaries in the prefascist and fascist periods...In other words, the repressive encoding of gender roles was a widespread reaction to modern attempts to reshape gender roles—a reaction that was exacerbated during wartime and during periods of crisis, such as the economic crises coinciding with the first affirmation and successive consolidation of fascist power in 1922 and in the late 1920s.<sup>6</sup>

At the same time, inconsistencies within Fascist doctrine created such a space, allowing figures such as Benedetta room in which to act as cultural producers.

Benedetta's *aeropitture* of this period provide a synthesis of her varied roles, as well as her many pictorial interests. At the same time, they reflect her desire and search for spiritual transcendence, through her development of a style of reconciliation that embraced abstraction and figuration. Thus, landscape elements from diverse locations, "cosmic" imagery that draws on religious and occult iconography, orientalist elements, and political symbolism are all absorbed into a series of works that center on a triangulation of identity: female, Futurist, and Fascist.

Rooted in a thorough understanding of painting genres, Fascist imperialism, and Futurist dogma, Benedetta's *aeropittura* works are at one in the same time expressions of national identity, history, and Orientalism. As used in this discussion, the meaning of "Orientalism" comprises both Edward Said's definition of a means by which European culture managed and produced the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, and ideologically, as well as the specific artistic genre prevalent in the mid-nineteenth century (as epitomized by the works of painters such as Jean-Leon Gerome, Eugene Delacroix, and Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres).<sup>7</sup> The landscape itself is often associated with woman and maternity, and in an undated manuscript on feminine art, Benedetta explicitly correlates female artist, maternity, and the earth: "E allora la donna artista si manterrà nei confini della terra, volutamente o istintivamente ci si mantiene, circoscritta dalla curva precisa del globo che è anche la curva pesante della maternità."<sup>8</sup> In Benedetta's *Il Monte Tabor* (Fig. 3) the earth functions as an odalisque, the rounded forms paralleling that of the reclining female body in a merger of Orientalist and landscape themes. Unlike most Orientalist works of the nineteenth century, the element of desire as represented by the

naked female body is absent, and Benedetta's dream-like scene remains devoid of all human forms.

Benedetta embraced the newly forming Futurist genre of *aeropittura* and was the only woman that signed the manifesto, which called for incorporating the sensations of flying, such as shifting perspectives and flattened, momentary views of the landscape from above. The *aeropittura* painters changed the pictorial terms of pre-World War I Futurism in an attempt to express their genuinely felt spiritual investigations, the dynamism of flight, and the grandeur of Italy (thus allowing for the approval of the State). Aviation in itself can also be understood as a means of freedom and, consequently, *aeropittura* as a means of escape from earthly constraints.<sup>9</sup> In this way, the "poetics of flight" allowed Benedetta access into, as well as a way out of, the behavioral codes of Fascism.<sup>10</sup> The manifesto is dated 1931 (coinciding with Italo Balbo's famed first Atlantic crossing from Italy to Brazil), although a very similar article by Marinetti published in 1929 laid out all of the essential points; and, certainly, the Futurist fascination with flight existed much earlier.<sup>11</sup> In the catalogue *Mostra di Aeropittura Futuriste* of 1937, Marinetti identified four major tendencies within *aeropittura* in order to differentiate and account for the divergent stylistics within the genre: 1) the synthetic, documentary *aeropittura* of Tato and Ambrosi; 2) the transfigured, lyrical, spatial *aeropittura* practiced by Gerardo Dottori and Benedetta; 3) the essential, mystical, ascendant, symbolic *aeropittura* of Fillia; and, 4) the stratospheric, cosmic, biochemical *aeropittura* of Enrico Prampolini.<sup>12</sup> He elaborates slightly on these characterizations, noting that Benedetta coloristically evokes the space that separates the airplane from the earth:

Benedetta assolve questi due compiti dell'aeropittura a) trovare la trasparente soavità di tono di un azzurro o d'un verdolino che garantiscano l'autenticità dell'altezza con le caratteristiche plastiche della cosa sospesa e volante b) esprimere coloristicamente tutto lo spazio che separa l'apparecchio dalla terra.<sup>13</sup>

It was through this new genre that Benedetta created her most synthetic and personal paintings.

Benedetta's softened palette and organic forms in her aeropittura works are quite different in nature from earlier works such as *Luce + rumori do treno notturno* (Fig. 1). The frenetic, charged compositions of the 1920s are replaced by contemplative, sensitive, and often mystically charged creations. The "Manifesto dell'arte sacra futurista" of 1931, written by Marinetti and Fillia, provided an important influence, but Theosophy held the strongest fascination for Benedetta. Theosophy emphasized direct mystical experience, suggesting a pantheistic alternative to Christianity, while also offering adherents a means to maintain aspects of the mysteries of the Christian faith.<sup>14</sup> These are most evident in facets of Catholicism such as the notion of transubstantiation, wherein it is believed that the communion bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Christ. Thus, Theosophy offered Benedetta the perfect combination of familiar and unorthodox spiritual investigation.

Benedetta's spiritualism of the 1930s also mirrors an increasingly religious quality of Futurism, which is indicated by the "Manifesto di arte sacra futurista." This concern did not necessarily result in a turning away from political themes. Rather, the Futurist interest in mysticism went hand in hand with the "sacralization of politics" under Mussolini.<sup>15</sup> Artists were called upon to glorify the State, which sought to create communal myths in support of the regime, using a series of rituals and symbols that

established a kind of “political liturgy” that manipulated the masses, as well as voiced the tenets of Fascist culture.<sup>16</sup>

*Aeropittura* had many adherents and, at times, these artists were very literal in their depictions of the landscape, as if spiralling down towards the earth below. One of the notable exceptions is the work of the central practitioner of the group, Gerardo Dottori.<sup>17</sup> Dottori shared many of Benedetta’s concerns and sought a “spiritualization of nature” through aerial views of the Umbrian landscape.<sup>18</sup> A number of women joined the movement in this period, but often the work of these artists is unremarkable, with the exception of a few, including Leandra Angelucci Cominazzini, whose paintings take on a swirling, visionary quality.<sup>19</sup>

Around 1931, Benedetta underwent an imaginative and creative leap forward from the *arte meccanica* period of Futurism, during which time she was still working out a pictorial vocabulary, toward a new complexity in her *aeropittura* compositions.<sup>20</sup> The strength of these *aeropittura* works stems from their engagement with the issues of synthesis and transcendence. Emily Braun has shown that Benedetta’s development of a feminized abstraction (as put forward by Lucia Re) reconciles differences rather than transcends them and this strategy comes, at least in part, from the influence of Balla.<sup>21</sup> However, at the same time, spiritual transcendence (as opposed to dominance) is central to these images. Re maintains that Benedetta “...expresses the need for a unity of the abstract and the concrete, a kind of abstraction that, in its yearning for purity and absolute harmony, may still engage the forms of the real, of perception, of the body, and of temporality, however transformed and transfigured.”<sup>22</sup> These concepts are essential to coming to an understanding of the paintings of Benedetta. It has been argued that her

works continue in the Futurist desire for transcendence via the machine evident in the earlier years of the movement, but do so in a different way.<sup>23</sup> While the machine is the model for a new society in early Futurism (particularly in that it is empty of sexual desire and nostalgia), the man/machine hybrid that Marinetti created and glorified in *Mafarka il futurista* is replaced in *aeropittura* by a different vision in which the airplane gives form to spiritual ideas. But while *aeropittura* offered spiritual transcendence through aviation, Benedetta sought to express harmony and compatibility not only between abstraction and figuration, but also metaphorically between Fascism and Futurism, and motherhood and creativity.

Benedetta's composition *Cirri + elica, 3500 metri*, 1928 (Cirrus clouds + propeller, 3500 meters; Fig. 32) can be seen as a kind of bridge between her work of the 1920s and the 1930s. This oil on canvas was created before the official advent of *aeropittura*, although it was displayed in the first exhibition of *aeropittura* in 1931. A pair of crossed, flat metal strips are attached to the surface, relating to the collaged metal elements in *Luce + rumori di treno notturno*. *Cirri + elica, 3500 metri* presents a very literal interpretation of the ideas of *aeropittura*, with the cross of the metal bars mimicking the view through the airplane windshield. In early biplanes, looking left or right the pilot would see the propellers often depicted in the form of a whirling X. In *Cirri + elica, 3500 metri*, the X form dominates the composition, offering a view through the window to the spinning white clouds and propellers of other planes.<sup>24</sup> In the catalogue accompanying the *Prima Mostra di Aeropittura*, Benedetta wrote: "I quadri rappresentati da me sono il risultato plastico dei miei voli su Roma (800 metri), Appennini (3500 metri), Milano (2500 metri), Mediterraneo Palermo-Tunisi (800 metri)."<sup>25</sup> Thus

Benedetta was still drawing a very literal relationship between her experiences of flying and her paintings.

In 1931, Benedetta was invited to participate in the *I Quadriennale Nazionale d'Arte* in Rome where she exhibited *Il grande X* (Fig. 33), 1930. Like *Cirri + elica, 3500 metri* the X form is at the heart of the composition, which corresponds quite closely to the description of flying in the manifesto "L'aeropittura futurista." It reads: "Nella virata si chiudono le pieghe della visione-ventaglio (toni verdi + marroni + toni celesti diafani dell'atmosfera) per lanciarsi verticali contro la verticale formata dall'apparecchio e dalla terra. Questa visione-ventaglio si riapre in forma di X nella picchiata mantenendo come unica base l'incrocio dei due angoli."<sup>26</sup> That *Cirri + elica, 3500 metri* also corresponds closely to the manifesto's description of flight suggests that either it was painted slightly later than Marinetti's 1929 article, or that, more likely, Benedetta was aware of, or even had a hand in drafting, the article before its publication. The manifesto also notes that, "Il decollare crea un inseguirsi di V allargantisi."<sup>27</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, Benedetta's fascination with the V as an expressive form was apparent in her series of gouaches and watercolors from the 1920s and further suggests Benedetta's participation in drafting the 1931 manifesto.

In *Il grande X*, Benedetta attempts a complex synthesis of many elements. The composition is divided into four quadrants that Marinetti, in his 1931 review of Benedetta in *Oggi e Domani*, described as the plastic syntheses of the four realities: world, atmosphere, sentiment, and everyday life.<sup>28</sup> The bottom section is clearly meant to indicate the terrestrial realm, represented by the city seen from on high, looking down at a skyscraper. The building with its pointed spire may represent the Empire State

Building, which was begun in 1930 and completed in 1931, perhaps suggesting a later date of 1931 for this work.<sup>29</sup> The cityscape with its electric lights and skyscrapers, reveals Benedetta's name lettered across a store window, recalling in more conventional terms Charles Demuth's employment of text in *I Saw the Figure Five in Gold* of 1929.<sup>30</sup> On the right side of the composition are depicted elongated cloud-like forms that are rising upward, perhaps the spiritual auras described by Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater in *Thought-forms*. The left side of the painting is made up of circular forms indicating the cosmos, while the topmost area represents the heavens, with bands of pink and white radiating from a pyramid form, which is intersected by the spire of the skyscraper. The pyramid could be a literal reference to Egypt, Marinetti's birthplace, which they visited together in 1931, further suggesting the revised date. It also seems to conjoin the skyscraper with the pyramid, perhaps suggesting the two pinnacles of architectural achievement. The banding indicating the heavenly realm in the top section of the painting would be repeated later by Benedetta in works such as *Il Monte Tabor*.

The composition of *Il grande X* can be seen as a mini-history of Futurism itself: the city, the center of early Futurist concerns, is at its base, whereas the soaring, lyrical imagery of Benedetta's *aeropittura* is at top, with cosmic sources at either side. Lia Giachero has also discussed the way in which the division created by the X, sets up a series of "oppositions-correspondences" such as night/day, north/south, modern civilization/ancient civilization.<sup>31</sup> According to Enrico Crispolti, in *Il grande X* Benedetta presented a new proposition—that of bringing together *aeropittura* with "simultaneity of memory" using a new kind of "chromatic fluidity."<sup>32</sup> By this Crispolti aptly suggests that

Benedetta merged her aerial imagery with the Boccionian concept of simultaneity via Balla's lyric use of color.

### *Aeropittura and Arte Sacra*

In their 1931 "Manifesto dell'arte sacra futurista," Marinetti and Fillia refer specifically to Benedetta as one of the Futurist artists ("electrified" with color and fantasy) that is able to express the heavenly. They maintain that it is only the Futurist *aeropittori* that can adequately portray the mysteries of Catholicism and the "beatic transparencies of the infinite":

Soltanto gli aeropittori futuristi, maestri delle prospettive aeree e abituati a dipingere in volo dall'alto, possono esprimere plasticamente il fascino abissale e le trasparenze beate dell'infinito... Soltanto gli artisti futuristi, che da vent'anni impongono nell'arte l'arduo problema della simultaneità, possono esprimere chiaramente, con adeguate compenetrazioni di tempo-spazio, i dogmi simultanei del culto cattolico, come la Santa Trinità, l'Immacolata Concezione e il Calvario di Dio.<sup>33</sup>

This quote evidences how Marinetti and Fillia's language deliberately overlaps traditional Catholic dogma with more general mystical imagery, despite Marinetti's previously avowed anti-clericalism.

*Prendendo quota* (Gaining altitude; Fig. 34) of 1931, provides an example of the intersection between the *aeropittura/arte sacra* relationship iterated by Fillia and Marinetti. The work, an oil on canvas that is now lost, is available only through another version in ceramic tile (Fig. 35). *Prendendo quota a spirale*, apparently another version, was exhibited at the *XVIII Biennale di Venezia*.<sup>34</sup> The work is an image of an abstracted landscape seen from above. A triangular sail-like form at the center dominates the composition, intersecting with what appears to be a biplane flying through the air. Benedetta also exhibited *Prendendo quota* in the 1932 show *Aeropittura Arte Sacra*

*Futuriste* held at Casa d'Arte La Spezia. The name of the exhibition underscores the connection between *aeropittura* and *arte sacra*, as does the title *Prendendo quota*, which can be interpreted as both a technical reference to gaining altitude, as well as to the spiritual notion of ascension.

Benedetta's spiritual iconography continues in *Cime arse di solitudine* (Scorched peaks of solitude; Fig. 36). An oil on canvas from 1936, the composition is made up of a central dominant sphere from which juts a large, mountainous formation. The pointed tip of the rocky shaft is crowned by a halo, which relates directly to the form used frequently by Fillia in his compositions of these years. *Cime arse di solitudine*, which Benedetta first exhibited at the *XX Biennale di Venezia*, creates a somewhat clichéd representation of the "sacred." What Marinetti calls "beatic transparencies" are evoked by a layering of compositional elements. The sphere of the earth is a solid form that floats in the universe, but is also a clear "bubble" through which one sees cubed structures in proximity to a large body of water. These layerings represent Futurist simultaneity, to which Marinetti and Fillia refer in their manifesto. They maintain that it is only this mode of Futurist time-space interpenetration that can clearly express the simultaneous mysteries of Catholicism, such as the Holy Trinity and the Immaculate Conception. In this way, they insert the avant-garde concepts of early Futurism into their increasingly conservative statements of the 1930s. Ultimately, Benedetta veered away from more literal *arte sacra* compositions (leaving behind overt references to simultaneity and the halo) and developed, instead, her own symbolic imagery.

### Orientalism, Colonialism, and the Occult

Within this personal symbolism and Fascist spirituality, Benedetta, like Marinetti, appropriated exotic cultures, such as Brazil and North Africa. Orientalism, and the concomitant issue of colonialism, are pervasive themes in Benedetta's *aeropitture* and figure obviously in many of her compositions of the 1930s—the period of Mussolini's empire building. *Laghi Salati Algerini* (Algerian salt lakes; Fig. 37) is a small oil on canvas from 1931. The work was one of three by Benedetta to be included in the *Prima Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Coloniale* in Rome (promoted by Ente Autonoma della Fiera di Tripoli). As discussed by Giachero, Marinetti, in his preface to the Futurist section of the exhibition, wrote that the work should not be considered mannered, but a representation of a harsh continent, evoking the human force of survival.<sup>35</sup> Embedded in Benedetta's view of Algeria is a central ambiguity. Given the theme of colonialism, what remains odd and goes unremarked is why anyone would want to occupy such a desolate landscape. The key to *Laghi Salati Algerini*'s barrenness probably lies in Algeria's status as a rival French colony.<sup>36</sup>

Italy's own efforts at the colonization of North Africa began soon after the country's unification, but it wasn't until 1911 that Giovanni Giolitti declared war on Turkey to gain control of Libya. Then, after launching Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, Mussolini declared victory the following year, claiming Ethiopia as the foundation of the new Italian empire. Marinetti (who was born in Alexandria) also appropriated North Africa for himself (though metaphorically rather than physically), stating "Mine is an Italian sensibility born in Alexandria, Egypt." Similarly Napoleon (a central model for

Mussolini), insisted on his rightful ownership of Alexandria during his campaign in Egypt, attempting to convince the Alexandrians that he and his soldiers were the “true Muslims.”<sup>37</sup>

While Italy’s colonial conquest of Ethiopia fulfilled its long held desire for an Italian empire (ostensibly for immigration and development), it also made clear its rivalry with France, as well as Britain. Mussolini gambled that, while Britain and France would oppose Italy’s act of aggression, they would not go to war with Italy over Ethiopia. In fact, the two nations secretly negotiated with Italy and proposed to carve up the territory. The revelation of these secret meetings proved devastating. French Foreign Minister Pierre Laval (as well as the British) disavowed the proposals when they became public, earning the hatred of Mussolini and undermining the League of Nations with regard to sanctions and European security.<sup>38</sup>

In *Interpretazione mistica di un paesaggio* (Mystical interpretation of a landscape; Fig. 38), a 1934 painting that is now lost, Benedetta’s interests in mysticism, Fascism, and colonization (both Mussolini’s imperialist aims and her own appropriation of Rio de Janeiro) coincide, making apparent her own form of Orientalism. The central aisle of trees in the work have been likened to a procession of Fasci (the stylized bundled rods that were the symbol of Mussolini’s Fascist regime).<sup>39</sup> However, they also bear a very strong resemblance to a specific scenic view in Rio de Janeiro (Fig. 39), which Marinetti and Benedetta visited in 1926. Brazil, and particularly Rio de Janeiro, was a major tourist destination promoted in all manner of materials from the turn of the century on, including stereoscope cards, postcards, and *National Geographic Magazine*.<sup>40</sup> Palms, a major feature of the city, lined a number of major avenues including the Rua Visconte, a

majestic palm-lined double thoroughfare that flanked the Mangue Canal. Benedetta's composition in *Interpretazione mistica di un paesaggio* relates very closely to the rows of tall trees receding back into space along the canal. The predominance of the trees parallels the central place the prized palms occupied in Rio's mythology, as well as its cityscape.<sup>41</sup> Benedetta and Marinetti were both evidently impressed by the city's palms (noting in his journal his impressions of Rio, Marinetti devoted three pages to the varied types they saw in the city's famed Botanical Garden).<sup>42</sup>

The thematics at the heart of *Interpretazione mistica di un paesaggio* are made evident by the strong formal relationship between the palms of the Mangue Canal and the Fasci. In visually linking the landscape of Rio to Mussolini's government, Benedetta symbolically colonized Brazil in the name of the Italian regime. Edward Said has noted, "To colonize meant at first the identification—indeed, the creation—of interests; these could be commercial, communicational, religious, military, cultural."<sup>43</sup> Benedetta's is a kind of artistic colonization used to present a new type of history painting in which narratives are conjoined and retold.

Benedetta's "imaginary colonization" of Brazil (that allowed her to create a territory over which she, a woman, dominated) originated in the 1926 trip she undertook with Marinetti, who gave a lecture tour in South America.<sup>44</sup> Marinetti's goals for the tour were both practical (monetary gain) and proselytizing (to spread Futurism). By the mid-1920s Marinetti, who had run through the inheritance left him by his father, was under financial strain and struggling to maintain Futurism's status in the newly established Fascist regime. Marinetti was approached at this time by Niccolino Viggiani, a Brazilian impresario, to give a series of lectures in Argentina and Brazil. A number of factors made

the notion of a trip to Brazil, in particular, seem enticing from both an artistic and financial standpoint. Futurism had played an important (if problematic) role in the development of Brazilian literary Modernism, particularly in the work of Mário de Andrade, Graça Aranha, and Oswald de Andrade. This, coupled with Viggiani's many connections, assured Marinetti a large and responsive audience. In addition, the large number of Italian expatriates in Brazil ensured a host of welcoming committees, side lectures, and dinners honoring Marinetti and his wife. In fact, in some ways the country, home to over 1 million Italian immigrants at this time, functioned as an unofficial Italian colony.<sup>45</sup>

While the trip was a popular success in terms of audience response and box-office returns, it seems to have contributed to Futurism's downfall in South America as a serious literary movement, due in large part to infighting within the Brazilian avant-garde and strong anti-Fascist sentiment that provoked suspicion of Marinetti. It was feared that his trip was politically motivated—he was suspected of trying to smuggle in Fascism under the guise of a dubious art theory, which he categorically denied. While Marinetti was the main attraction of the trip, Benedetta garnered some attention as well. She was perceived as sympathetic, but with conservative, regressive ideas. Mirroring the perceived concerns of women at the time, the majority of the papers and journalists, however, asked her simply about fashion and love.<sup>46</sup>

Before their trip to South America, Brazil was not a source for the works of Benedetta or Marinetti, but clearly both saw affinities between Italy and Brazil.<sup>47</sup> As Jeffrey Schnapp and João Cezar de Castro Rocha describe, Marinetti's desire to fuse the "...African with the European, so as to forge a tropical modernist paradise rendered

Brazil [with its exotic indigenous peoples and landscape, as well as European settlers] an ideal site for imaginary colonization.”<sup>48</sup>

Marinetti’s most obvious colonial use of Brazil was in his unpublished *Velocità brasiliane* (Brazilian velocities), which comes out of a draft of a larger travelogue tellingly entitled *Varie velocità dal mio amoroso possesso di Rio de Janeiro* (Various velocities from my amorous possession of Rio de Janeiro). It is precisely this “amorous possession” of Rio de Janeiro that allows both Marinetti and Benedetta to lift the city out of context and place it in the service of both Futurism and Fascism. Marinetti’s title, suggestive of rape, is paralleled by Benedetta’s representation of the earth as a form of female proxy. This allegorization of the earth as a female is used repeatedly throughout Futurism (and indeed throughout the history of art and literature). As Blum notes of Marinetti’s “La Guerra elettrica” of 1915: “This technological utopia inspires sexually charged imagery, thus invoking a science fiction version of an age-old topos: the equation of earth with the female body, a ‘territory’ that man is entitled to exploit.”<sup>49</sup> But, while Marinetti’s co-option of the earth becomes a form of gender exploitation and violent aggression, in Benedetta’s work it becomes something very different. Through her appropriation, Benedetta creates a fantastic landscape, a kind of synthesized terrain over which she maintains control, not by force but (in keeping with Braun’s and Re’s notions of a “feminized” abstraction of harmony) by conciliation. Benedetta celebrates Brazil’s femininity in both a sexual and a spiritual sense.

The culture of Rio de Janeiro is an even more explicit influence in Benedetta’s collage, *Il ponte di commando scoperto* (The command bridge discovered; Fig. 40), 1928. The origins of the work provide another example of Benedetta’s collaboration with

Marinetti. As a scenographic study for Marinetti's play *L'oceano del cuore* it offers a more overt visual narrative than *Interpretazione mistica di un paesaggio*. The depiction of geometric masks and figurines and black native faces are in keeping with Marinetti's almost caricatural descriptions.<sup>50</sup> Described in an article and interview with Marinetti on the play (which premiered in Milan in 1927), the sequences that take place in Rio de Janeiro were compared with the more stark images of the first class "salone:"

Un'altra scena del tutto diversa, vivacissima, ricca di colori e di forme strane, più analitica e quasi affastellata è la scena del carnevale di Rio de Janeiro, carnevale, che, m'informa Marinetti e lunghissimo, caratteristico, clamoroso e divertentissimo. C'è poi una grande prua a triangolo rivolta verso lo spettatore che taglia un mare, di cui è tipica della Benedetta la risoluzione tecnica che mi ricorda il "Motoscafo in corsa" [Velocità di motoscafo].<sup>51</sup>

The author notes Benedetta's use of the triangle, which for him recalls *Velocità di motoscafo*. The mise-en-scene was well-received and considered a brilliant confirmation of the color and harmony already evident in Benedetta's work.<sup>52</sup>

### Mural Painting and the Palermo Post Office Commission

In 1934, Benedetta turned to another art form, the mural, which was a key genre of the Fascist period. Her first exercise for a large-scale format was her design entitled *Tre polimaterici per il vestibolo Case della Piccola Italiana* (Three polymaterials for the vestibule of the House of the Little Italian; Fig. 41) for the *Prima Mostra Nazionale di Plastica Murale* held at the Palazzo Ducale, Genoa (an exhibition organized by Marinetti that same year).<sup>53</sup> The design, which was reproduced in *Stile Futurista*, was intended to be realized in a mix of materials, including a variety of marbles, metals, wood, and glass. The exhibition itself mandated a move for the Futurist group away from easel painting and traditional fresco painting and toward mixed media works. This kept them

competitive with rival groups, such as the Novecento, aiming to be recognized as the official Fascist art.

But Benedetta's major, and first public, mural commission was the series she produced in 1934 for the Post Office in Palermo, Sicily, which demonstrate her fairly conventional notion of wall painting and decoration. The five panels were entitled *Sintesi delle comunicazioni terrestri* (Synthesis of land communications; Fig. 13), *Sintesi delle comunicazioni marittime* (Synthesis of sea maritime communications; Fig. 42), *Sintesi delle comunicazioni aeree* (Synthesis of air communications; Fig. 43), *Sintesi delle comunicazioni telegrafiche e telefoniche* (Synthesis of telegraph and telephonic communications; Fig. 44), and *Sintesi delle comunicazioni radiofoniche* (Syntheses radio communications; Fig. 45). These, executed specifically for the Palermo Post Office, were created in tempera and encaustic on canvas (and inserted into the space), resulting in a flat, matte surface, not unlike that of traditional fresco.<sup>54</sup>

The mural movement began in theory at the end of the First World War when Italian artists began conceptualizing a return to traditional (i.e. Renaissance) forms of mural, mosaic, etc.<sup>55</sup> Mussolini, in his building program beginning in the 1930s, regularly commissioned artists to decorate new government buildings. However, women were not awarded large public commissions and generally did not participate in the mural movement. Notably, the Palermo Post Office commission was awarded to not only a Futurist, but a woman, making Benedetta an exception to the rule.

The Post Office was designed by Angiolino Mazzoni and reveals a fusion of elements and influences, particularly Rationalist architecture and Futurism. Very few major commissions were given to Futurists even in the 1930s, with the exception of three

buildings, all post offices, designed by Mazzoni for La Spezia, Palermo, and Trento. These commissions were granted by the Ministry of Communications, and Mazzoni, as it happens, was in charge of building works for the Ministry, which controlled Post Offices and Railways.<sup>56</sup> Mazzoni had met Marinetti in 1932 and that year officially joined Futurism, writing articles for *Futurismo-Sant-Elia* (the journal edited by Mino Somenzi).<sup>57</sup> In January 1934 he signed the *Manifesto dell'Architettura Aerea*. No doubt his friendship with Marinetti, combined with Mazzoni's own interest in Futurism, accounts for the number of Futurists asked to provide works for the interior, including Marinetti's wife. In addition to Benedetta, Piero Bevilacqua, Tato, and Brunas (Bruna Somenzi) created works for the structure's interior. However, Mazzoni was ordered by his superiors to resign from the review (it was considered incompatible with his position as a civil servant) in March 1934, the same month in which Marinetti was attacked in Germany for the subversive nature of Futurism.<sup>58</sup> Following both events, the Futurists had only rare commissions for public decorations.

One positive aspect of Mussolini's regime was the development of numerous public services and the construction of buildings to house them, including schools, hospitals, and post offices. In keeping with the regime's increasingly imperialistic mission, Mazzoni's colonnade and long portico of the Post Office in Palermo recall Roman architecture.<sup>59</sup> No doubt the 1932 exhibition of the Fascist Revolution also exerted a strong influence on Mazzoni,<sup>60</sup> who included overt symbols of the regime, such as a huge, free-standing stylized fasci (situated to the left of the structure as if a sort of belltower) and, framed by the doorway leading to the administrative wing, a bust of Mussolini flanked by three fasci (both now lost). At times, Mazzoni's Rationalist design

was dominated by the use of expressive, Futurist elements. The interior is characterized by a range of richly colored marbles—black, tan, yellow, red, and pink from locations as varied as Belgium, Elba, and Trapani. Occasionally mosaics comprised of enameled ceramic tiles also were incorporated.<sup>61</sup> The Sala del Consiglio e delle Conferenze, a conference room located on an upper floor with the administrative offices, houses the works by Benedetta. It also contained furnishings by Mazzoni, two paintings by the Futurist Tato (entitled *Il Lavoro* [Work] and *Giovinezza* or *Gioventù fascista* [Youthfulness or Fascist youth]), and a canvas by Piero Bevilacqua. In addition, lace curtains embroidered with a motif representing modern communications (now lost) were designed by Brunas (another female Futurist and the wife of Mino Somenzi).<sup>62</sup>

Despite Benedetta's use of abstract elements such as Futurist force-lines, her large-scale paintings for the Palermo Post Office offer a fascinating mix of almost classicizing forms on the one hand and lyrical abstraction on the other. As with her earlier easel painting, Benedetta engages in an ongoing dialectic between abstraction and realism and the self and the collective (Futurist) experience. As Re observes, however "transformed or transfigured," Benedetta's works engage with a specific time and place, involving an investigation of perception and desire.<sup>63</sup>

In *Sintesi delle comunicazioni aeree*, an abstract circular form to the left repeats the form at the lower right, clearly meant to indicate the earth. A land mass, specifically an outline of the geographical shape of Sicily, is superimposed on the earth, pointing to the specific location of the mural in the vast abstraction of the universe. In *Sintesi delle comunicazioni marittime*, the hull of a large ship cuts through the water, which is indicated by repeated blue striations or bands that are periodically broken into stylized,

triangular motifs. The decorative, abstract quality directly recalls that of *Velocità di un motoscafo*.

In *Sintesi di comunicazioni radiofoniche*,<sup>64</sup> a large open structure seems to be a radio transmitter tower, and the semi-circular, repeating arches suggest radio waves emanating through the skies. The open work of the tower and the celestial forms indicate an awareness of the works of Robert Delaunay, specifically his Eiffel Tower series (1909) and his abstract Orphist works (1912-13) employing brilliantly-colored, circular forms.<sup>65</sup> The surreal landscape and ladder-like tower ascending into the sky also evoke the painting of Joan Mirò, particularly in his *Dog Barking at the Moon* (1926). In addition to the importance of Surrealism's dream-like imagery, its biomorphic abstraction, evident in the work of artists such as Mirò, formed an important influence for Benedetta.

*Sintesi delle comunicazioni telegrafiche e telefoniche* is the most abstracted composition of the group. The houses at the lower right of the composition are schematically indicated by a flat plane of modulated ochre and gray which is subdivided at some points by a heavy outline (to suggest rows of houses). The outline is periodically interrupted in a nod to both Cezannian *passage* and the analytic Cubism of Picasso and Braque. The numbers at the lower left, no doubt a reference to the telephone, also recall the Cubists' use of stenciled numbers. In addition, the works may be influenced by the work of De Stijl, which surely Benedetta would have known through Prampolini, if not directly. The flattened overlapping planes in the left of the composition do not seem to suggest the houses or landscapes that populate Benedetta's works. Rather they remain purely abstract elements. The group of black parallel zigzagging lines that move across

the canvas (no doubt the telephone lines themselves) emphasize the graphic quality of the work, as do the wavy copper lines (presumably indicating the telegraph).

In *Sintesi delle comunicazioni terrestri* (Synthesis of land communications), the composition is dominated by large square columns that reach up to the top of the picture where they intersect with a succession of arches, resembling a viaduct. The arches, the receding tunnel-like cave at right, and the “wall” in the distance at the lower left, evoke the porticos, walls, and train tunnels that populate the early Metaphysical works of Giorgio de Chirico. The “mediterranean flavor” of Benedetta’s murals also relates importantly to de Chirico’s sensibility and iconography, which often made reference to the past empires of Greece and Rome. Benedetta’s viaduct also refers to the notion of progress and the glorious achievements of the Roman Empire, now being repeated and built upon by Mussolini.

In *Sintesi delle comunicazioni terrestri* Benedetta adopts Balla’s zigzag line from *Trasformazione forme-spiriti* (Transformation forms-spirits; Fig. 14) in homage to the artist and also as a means of transforming “land communications” into waves of spiritualized form. Benedetta’s employment of these graphic notations helps synthesize her portrayal of Futurist modernity, Fascist power, and a mode of spiritualized communication.

Gaetano Previati’s cycle of panels, *Le vie del commercio* (The paths of commerce), decorating the Camera del Commercio in Milan also provides an important precedent for Benedetta’s *Sintesi delle comunicazioni*, in particular, and for the series in general.<sup>66</sup> *Le vie del commercio* is comprised of five panels, *Carovaniera del deserto* (Desert caravan), *Ferrovia del Pacifico* (Pacific Railway; Fig. 46), *Il canale Suez* (The

Suez Canal), *Trafofo delle Alpi* (Alpine tunnel; Fig. 47), and *Carovana nel deserto* (Caravan in the desert). While all were executed between 1914-16, the works do not seem to have been installed at the Camera di Commercio until after 1927, though the series was exhibited before then.<sup>67</sup> Benedetta clearly looked at *Ferrovia del Pacifico* and appropriated the elevated train tracks. Thus the “viaduct” in *Sintesi delle comunicazioni terrestri* is also a train trestle, implying the absent train and its importance to communication. The presence of the train is underscored by the “tracks” at the lower right of Benedetta’s composition, which correspond to those depicted in *Trafofo delle Alpi*. In *Trafofo delle Alpi* the train is entering a tunnel at the lower right and it is the tunnel (rather than the train) that is explicitly depicted at the center of Benedetta’s work.

Marinetti considered Benedetta’s series a new departure within *aeropittura*. For him, these works were site-specific in that the space itself dictated the series, which would have been unthinkable as a group of easel paintings. In *Stile Futurista* he describes:

Benedetta realizza un tipo aeropittura assolutamente nuova, che chiamo GEOGRAFICA. Dato uno spazio ampio, l’aeropittrice riesce a fissare in modo probante una serie di antitesi di proporzioni e distanze e una serie di dinamismi tra le distanze con compenetrazioni e simultaneità espressive di uno stato d’animo sferico terrestre.

Il valore maggiore delle cinque pitture murali è costituito dalla genialità complessa della composizione ideata per una grande parete e che non sarebbe stata concepibile per un quadro da cavaletto, lo spazio da dipingere costituendo in certo modo la ragione essenziale dell’opera d’arte.<sup>68</sup>

The large space of the room allowed these works to interact across a distance, echoing the syntheses of communications that they portray.

Benedetta’s ideation of public art and large-scale decoration continued in several other designs for both public and private commissions. Benedetta experimented with

different media, in particular stained glass, in her other commissions. Giachero has identified two works by Benedetta as studies for stained-glass works. Both *Paesaggio marino* (Marine landscape; Fig. 48) and *Paesaggio cosmico* (Cosmic landscape; Fig. 49) of 1936 were executed in tempera on paper. That year Benedetta traveled to Livorno to work at the glass company Balzaretti & Modigliani to create the stained-glass works based on these two designs. The company had recently developed and patented Thermolux, an innovation that allowed for the use of glass wool instead of lead between sheets of glass.<sup>69</sup> This new technique allowed artists to create colorful, fantastic designs without the constraints of traditional lead profiles, which clearly appealed to Benedetta.<sup>70</sup> The terms of her agreement with the company are unknown and the final stained glass has been lost. According to Benedetta's daughter, Vittoria Marinetti, the work was commissioned by the publisher and friend to Marinetti, Umberto Notari.<sup>71</sup>

*Paesaggio marino*, in contrast, bears a very strong resemblance to the *Sintesi delle comunicazioni marittime*, while the stylized trees relate to those in the distance in *Interpretazione mistica di un paesaggio*. Giachero suggests that *Paesaggio marino* may represent Capri, which is possible given that both Benedetta and Marinetti spent much time there. She also finds the image comparable to *Aeropittura di un incontro con l'Isola*, due to the similar "mediterranean" quality of the landscape.<sup>72</sup> More convincingly, Giachero draws a parallel between the composition of *Paesaggio cosmico* and that of *Cime arse di solitudine*, which points to Benedetta's frequent re-use of motifs.<sup>73</sup>

Benedetta's interest in stained glass, Giachero suggests, is tied to her activities with Ambrosi and Tato in the design of a stained glass work entitled *Comunicazioni ferroviarie* (Fig. 50), presented in 1936 in Rome at the *II Mostra di Plastica Murale per*

*l'Edilizia Fascista in Italia e in Africa* (a venue for a particularly Futurist version of mixed media mural art that was meant to distinguish it from the classicizing, figurative murals of the Novecento group). The destination of the work was supposed to have been a public building—presumably the Ministry of Communications—but the work was never executed. The black and white photo that exists seems to represent a full-scale mock-up of the proposed stained-glass work on view. Only a gouache study remains (Fig. 51).

### *Il Monte Tabor*

Toward the end of her working career, on the occasion of the *III Quadriennale* of 1939, Benedetta exhibited two paintings, *Aeropittura di un incontro con l'isola* and *Il Monte Tabor*. They form the last, most “mature” phase of her pictorial research.<sup>74</sup>

Benedetta, who quickly abandoned her more literal references to sacred art as in *Cime arse di solitudine*, creates in *Il Monte Tabor* a lyrical and harmonious composite of narratives, which reconfigure the genres of history and religious painting.

The composition is dominated by a large, spherical form, clearly meant to indicate the earth as seen from above, but which also suggests the cosmos or heavenly realm. The concept of earth as female and subject to male domination is again subverted (as in *Interpretazione mistica di un paesaggio*) by Benedetta in *Il Monte Tabor*. While in *Il Monte Tabor* Benedetta looks down over the land from her position above, this is not intended as a position of aggression. The curves of the earth and Benedetta's soft palette function as signs of femininity that are divorced from the actual body. The right side of the larger sphere at the center of the composition is marked by bands of blue and pink and a jagged band that resembles the contour of a mountainous terrain. On the left yellow

and blue “hills” resemble the yellow and blue diamond “waves” that predominated in *Velocità di un motoscafo*, which again provides an important source. At the top and slightly to the left perched at the edge of the largest sphere is a small white structure with a blue roof and a doorway. Leading from the doorway is a white pathway that becomes progressively wider as it ascends upward into the atmosphere. At the center of the smaller sphere is the profile of a mountain—perhaps Mount Tabor itself.

Mount Tabor is traditionally accepted as the site of the transfiguration of Christ, an event depicted frequently in the history of Western art. According to the Christian tradition, Christ brought three of his apostles onto a mountain-top with him to pray and during his prayer they witnessed his divine nature through a physical change that substantially altered his whole being. As described in the gospel by Luke: “...as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening” (Luke 9:20). The hazy, atmospheric “rays” or bands of white streaming down from the sky in the upper right of Benedetta’s composition may well refer to that divine light of the transfiguration.

Some theologians hold that Mount Tabor was the site of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, although, traditionally the mountain Karn Hattin in Galilee has been considered the location. St. Jerome conjectured that Jesus’ delivery of the Beatitudes could have occurred on Mount Tabor, which is located just to the southwest of Karn Hattin. This reading of Mount Tabor as the site of Christ’s Sermon on the Mount can perhaps account for the enigmatic small structure located at the top of the outer sphere in Benedetta’s canvas. According to St. Matthew, the sermon referred to a city that was “seated on the hill and could not be hid” (Matthew 14). It may well be that this luminous structure that

leads heavenward is a reference to that city of Christ's sermon. However, at the same time, in keeping with Benedetta's melding of Christianity and spiritualism, this structure also recalls that of the solitary house of Astra's mysterious dream in *Astra e il sottomarino*.

Rather than a specifically Catholic religiosity, the spiritualism of *Astra e il sottomarino* is a much more oneiric one. The graduated, canonical "mountain" moving from the earth heavenward at the center of *Il Monte Tabor* seems in keeping with Theosophical themes. Each of the flattened "tops" or terraces is depicted in a different color, bringing Benedetta's emphasis on color into play. The form also bears a certain resemblance to a very small postcard work created by Balla in 1919 for Rougena Zatkova, with whom, as previously noted, Benedetta was very close. The image is a terraced mountain that reaches, at its summit, a point, above which Balla has written "Cima Spirituale." Certainly just such a heavenly peak is what Benedetta is alluding to in *Il Monte Tabor*, in which she conflates Catholic and occult symbolism.

Additionally, Mount Tabor was the actual sight of an important battle led by Napoleon in 1799. Numerous paintings and engravings depicting the battle, a spectacular French victory against the Army of Damascus in Napoleon's expedition to Egypt, exist, including Antoine Jean Gros' *Battle of Nazareth* and Louis-Francois Lejeune's *La Bataille de Mont Thabor*. Benedetta's *Il Monte Tabor* can thus be seen as a history painting in which she recalls Napoleon's battle to underscore Mussolini's recent victory in Africa. Benedetta may well also be referring to Napoleon's larger imperialistic project, drawing a parallel with Mussolini's desire to reclaim the Roman Empire. With her concentric, repeated spheres she optimistically implies il Duce's eventual global

conquest. Benedetta subscribed both to Marinetti's "Egyptian-ness" as well as the regime's expansionism, underscoring the Futurist-Fascist intersection at the center of *Il Monte Tabor*. Benedetta may also be simultaneously celebrating (albeit wishfully at this stage of the movement) the dominance of Futurism itself, by collapsing history and religious painting, and replacing it with the transcendent genre of *aeropittura*.

Through her participation in exhibitions and her execution of a major commission for a public building, Benedetta successfully competed with her male Futurist counterparts. By integrating formal concerns (derived from a range of influences) with political ideology and spiritual investigation, she created an innovative form of *aeropittura*. Her "feminized" aesthetic of reconciliation allowed her a means of reconceptualizing the Boccianian notions of simultaneity and *stati d'animo* of early Futurism, which she reconfigured in her own terms.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Centro Studi Futura, *Gli Angeli e La Rivoluzione: Squadriste, intellettuali, madri, contadine: imagine inediti del fascismo femminile* (Rome: Edizioni Settimo Sigillo, 1991), 7.
- <sup>2</sup> See Victoria de Grazia, "Nationalizing Women: The Competition between Fascist and Commercial Cultural Models in Mussolini's Italy," in *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, ed. Vitoria de Grazia (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996).
- <sup>3</sup> Rosemary Betterton, "Women artists, modernity and suffrage cultures in Britain and Germany, 1890-1920," in *Women Artists and Modernism*, ed. Katy Deepwell (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 18-19.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 19. Betterton further contends that while individual women were allowed to participate in modern art practices, femininity remained the condition of difference against which masculine creativity defined itself.
- <sup>5</sup> See Carol Duncan, "Virility and Domination in Early Twentieth-Century Vanguard Painting," in *The Aesthetics of Power*, ed. Carol Duncan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
- <sup>6</sup> Cinzia Blum, *The Other Modernism: F. T. Marinetti's Futurist Fiction of Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 80-81.
- <sup>7</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 3.
- <sup>8</sup> "Thus the female artist will stay within the confines of the earth, voluntarily or instinctively she keeps herself there, circumscribed by the precise curve of the globe that is also the heavy curve of maternity." Benedetta, "Riassumere quindi l'arte femminile," AMs, (probably a lecture), Papers of F. T. Marinetti and Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, 920092, Special Collections, Getty Research Insititute, Los Angeles.
- <sup>9</sup> Robin Pickering-Iazzi, *Politics of the Visible: Writing Women, Culture, and Fascism* (London and Minneapolis: Universtity of Minnesota Press, 1997), 117.
- <sup>10</sup> The term is Pickering-Iazzi's. *Ibid.*
- <sup>11</sup> Recent studies have shifted the date of the official manifesto of *aeropittura* from 1929 to 1931, although the article written by Marinetti in 1929 (published in the *Gazzetta del Popolo*, September 22, 1929) has all of the essential points of the manifesto and was then expanded in 1931. In that year the manifesto was published in *Giornale della Domenica*, February 1-2, 1931 and later that year in the exhibition catalogue *Mostra Futurista di Aeropittura* (Milan: Galleria Pesaro, 1931). See Massimo Duranti, ed., *Dottori e l'Aeropittura: Aeropittori e aeroscultori futuristi*, Massimo Duranti (Florence:

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Maschietto e Musolino, 1996), 17-18. For more on Balbo see Claudio Segre, *Italo Balbo: A Fascist Life*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

<sup>12</sup> Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *Mostra di Aeropittura Futurista* (Rome: Ministero dell'aeronautica, 1937), 2.

<sup>13</sup> "Benedetta carried out these two tasks of *aeropittura* a) to find the transparent softness of tone of a blue or a green that assures the authenticity of height with the plastic characteristics of the suspended and flying thing b) to express through color all the space that separates the aircraft from the earth." Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Gauri Viswanathan, "The Ordinary Business of Occultism," *Critical Inquiry* 27, no. 1 (Autumn 2000): 5.

<sup>15</sup> See Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1996).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 81; 105.

<sup>17</sup> Dottori began creating Futurist work circa 1912, after meeting Balla, but didn't become a direct participant in the movement until the 1920s, when he moved from his home in Perugia to Rome. Dottori was the major proponent of *aeropittura* and worked intensively in this genre in the 1930s. See Massimo Duranti, ed., *Gerardo Dottori, pittore totale* (Bologna: Edizioni Galleria Marescalchi, 1993) and Massimo Duranti, ed., *Dottori e l'aeropittura, aeropittori e aeroscultori futuristi* (Florence: Maschietto & Musolino, 1996).

<sup>18</sup> Giovanni Lista, *Futurism* (Paris: Terrail, 2001), 188. Lista notes that Dottori came from Umbria, a region known for its mystics (Saint Rita, Saint Benedict, Saint Clare, and Saint Francis of Assisi were all born there).

<sup>19</sup> Many of Benedetta's fellow female aeropainters joined the movement in the 1930s. For example, the painter known as Barbara only officially became affiliated with the movement in 1938. Born Olga Biglieri in 1915, Barbara made her Futurist debut at the Venice Biennial of 1938. Unlike Benedetta, Barbara continued painting after the war, moving beyond her Futurist work. See Laura Monachesi, Franco Passuello, Marta Savini, eds., *Barbara dal futurismo al 2001* (Rome: Tempio di Adriano, Piazza di Pietra, 2001). Other adherents included Marisa Mori and Adele Gloria. See Mirella Bentivoglio and Franca Zoccoli, *Women Artists of Italian Futurism—Almost Lost to History* (New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 1997). One of the more interesting figures, Leandra Angelucci Cominazzini became part of the Futurist movement in 1928 and began showing with the group as an aeropainter in 1930. Cominazzini was born in 1890 to upper middle class family in Foligno and moved to Rome, where she frequented artistic circles. Her fantastic landscape images, in which she sometimes employed encaustic and repeated bands of color, have a visionary quality that is quite different from the work of Benedetta, but

which stands out. See Bentivoglio and Zoccoli, *Women Artists of Italian Futurism*; Duranti, ed., *Dottori e l'aeropittura*; and, Massimo Duranti, ed., *Leandra Angelucci Cominazzini* (Milan: Galleria Dan Carlo, 1992).

<sup>20</sup> Crispolti, "Una riflessione sulla sua pittura," 25.

<sup>21</sup> Emily Braun, "Balla and Benedetta: Problems in Futurist Gender Theories," unpublished paper presented at the symposium "Benedetta Cappa Marinetti," Moore College of Art and Design, Philadelphia, September 12, 1998.

<sup>22</sup> Lucia Re, "Impure Abstraction: Benedetta as Visual Artist and Novelist," in *La Futurista: Benedetta Cappa Marinetti*, ed. Lisa Panzera (Philadelphia: Moore College of Art and Design, 1998), 37.

<sup>23</sup> Christine Poggi, "The Return of the Repressed: Tradition as Myth in Futurist Fascism," unpublished paper presented at the College Art Association Conference, February 25, 2000. Poggi also examined Benedetta's work in her unpublished lecture "Benedetta Futurista," November 15, 1998, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.

<sup>24</sup> According to Filippo Piazzoni, Benedetta's grandson, this painting was badly damaged and the restoration is problematic. The surface does not correspond exactly to other work by Benedetta and is slightly less refined due to this treatment.

<sup>25</sup> "The paintings presented by me are the plastic results of my flights over Rome (800 meters), the Appenines (3500 meters), Milan (2500 meters), the Mediterranean Palermo-Tunisia (800 meters)." Benedetta, statement in the exhibition catalogue, *Mostra Futurista di Aeropittura* (Milan: Galleria Pesaro, 1931), 18.

<sup>26</sup> "When the airplane turns, the folds of the fan of vision (green hues and brown hues and the celestial diaphanous hues of the atmosphere) close to fling themselves vertically against the vertical formed by the craft and the earth. This vision-fan reopens in the form of an X in the nose-dive, maintaining, as its only base, the intersection of the two angles." F. T. Marinetti, et al., "L'aeropittura futurista," in *Mostra Futurista di aeropittura e di scenografia* (Milan: Galleria Pesaro, 1931); reprinted in F. T. Marinetti *Invenzione e teoria futurista*, ed. Luciano De Maria (Milan: Mondadori, 1968; reprint, 1998), 197-201. Printed in English in *La Futurista: Benedetta Cappa Marinetti*, ed., Lisa Panzera, trans. Antonio Melchor, 48-49. Thanks to Emily Braun for first pointing out the connection between the manifesto and Benedetta's work. Giovanni Lista also makes reference to this relationship in *Il Futurismo*, (Milano: Jaca Book, 1986), 102; as does Lia Giachero in "Benedetta nel clima del futurismo romano," in *Casa Balla e il Futurismo a Roma*, ed. Enrico Crispolti (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1989), 414.

<sup>27</sup> "Takeoff creates a succession of widening Vs." Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "Benedetta giudicata da Marinetti," *Oggi e Domani*, February 23, 1931. Quoted in Giachero, "Benedetta nel clima del futurismo romano," 414.

<sup>29</sup> The Futurist Depero lived in New York from November 1928 to October 1930 and news of events in New York may have come through him or through any number of sources.

<sup>30</sup> Demuth himself seems to have been directly interested in Futurism. He made use of lines or rays quite similar to Futurist force-lines in his works of the late teens.

<sup>31</sup> Giachero, "Benedetta nel clima del futurismo romano," 414.

<sup>32</sup> Crispolti, "Una riflessione sulla sua pittura," 26.

<sup>33</sup> "Only Futurist aeropainters, masters of aerial perspectives and accustomed to painting in flight from on high, can plastically express the abyssal fascination and the beatific transparencies of infinity....

Only Futurist artists, that for twenty years have been rendering the arduous problem of simultaneity, can clearly express, with adequate time-space interpenetrations, the simultaneous dogmas of the Catholic cult, such as the Holy Trinity, the Immaculate Conception, and the Calvary of God." Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (with Fillia), "Manifesto dell'arte sacra futurista," *Gazzetta del Popolo*, June 23, 1931; reprinted in F. T. Marinetti *Invenzione e teoria futurista*, ed. Luciano De Maria (Milan: Mondadori, 1968; reprint, 1998), 201-205.

<sup>34</sup> According to Crispolti this was another version in oil on canvas of *Predendo quota*. Crispolti, "Una riflessione sulla sua pittura," 25.

<sup>35</sup> Giachero, "Benedetta nel clima del futurismo romano," 414.

<sup>36</sup> Thanks to Emily Braun for pointing out this probable explanation.

<sup>37</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 82.

<sup>38</sup> See Philip Cannistraro, ed., *Historical Dictionary of Fascist Italy* (Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 1982).

<sup>39</sup> Poggi, unpublished paper, "The Return of the Repressed."

<sup>40</sup> The September 1920 issue of *The National Geographic Magazine* included a feature article on Rio de Janeiro with 40 illustrations of the city. Benedetta often melded imagery taken from postcards into fantastic landscapes of her own making. Comparisons between her sketches and painted works indicate that she would superimpose characteristics from a specific place onto an image of a fictitious locale. For example, in *Sintesi delle comunicazioni marittime* there is a small group of houses on the shore in the lower left. A

sketch of Benedetta's done on the back of a postcard from Capri (among Benedetta's papers at the Getty Research Institute) is clearly the source for this group of buildings. Another postcard from Benedetta to her brother Alberto (also among her papers) offers a tourist aerial view of Rio de Janeiro and the bay. A pointy formation of rock in the distance in the postcard view corresponds directly to the rocky mass in *Aeropittura di un incontro con l'isola* of 1939. Vittoria Marinetti Piazzoni has identified the central island as Elba, thus pointing to the conflation of varied elements. Comparison with the gouache study for *Aeropittura di un incontro con l'isola* indicates the ways in which Benedetta modified the land mass in the final composition, oddly angling the island and shifting from the somewhat mimetic study to a more surrealistic composite of real and unreal elements.

<sup>41</sup> The "mother" palm tree from which all the city's royal palms ostensibly originated is located in the Botanical Garden. The tree was planted in 1808 by the Regent of Portugal, who, after creating an avenue of these trees in the Botanical Garden insisted that all of their seeds should be burned. The story told is that slaves working in the garden smuggled seeds out and sold them, thus disseminating the many trees located throughout Rio and Brazil.

<sup>42</sup> Filippo Tommaso Marinetti: *Taccuini, 1915-1921*, ed. Alberto Bertoni (Bologna: Società editrice il mulino, 1987), 516.

<sup>43</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 100.

<sup>44</sup> For a full discussion of this trip and its repercussions see Jeffrey Schnapp and João Cezar de Castro Rocha, "Brazilian Velocities: On Marinetti's 1926 Trip to South America," *South Central Review* 13, no. 2-3 (Summer-Fall 1996): 105-156. The term "imaginary colonization" is taken from this article, which largely informs this section. See also João Cezar de Castro Rocha, "'Futures Past': On the Reception and Impact of Futurism in Brazil," in *International Futurism in Arts and Literature*, ed. Günter Berghaus (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000).

<sup>45</sup> In some ways Brazil functioned as an unofficial Italian colony. Between 1887 and 1902 approximately 1 million Italians emigrated to Brazil, making up the largest number of immigrants in the country during this period. The agriculture business, particular coffee, offered work for many. But some developed highly successful import businesses and small industries based on construction, the operation of mills, and even the production of lard. See D. Bartolotti, *Alcune verità sulla emigrazione Italiana* (Milano: Gastaldi Editore, 1953); and Emilio Franzina, *Gli Italiani al nuovo mondo. L'emigrazione italiana in America, 1492-1942* (Milano: Mondadori, 1995).

<sup>46</sup> See the clippings in the Librone (Benedetta's scrapbook), Papers of F. T. Marinetti and Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, 920092, Special Collections, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

<sup>47</sup> Marinetti's lectures in Rio were based on the declamations he developed in the pre-war Futurist *serate*. Among the varied topics covered, Marinetti presented his impressions of Brazil and the "sensuous affinities between Italian and Brazilians." He also engaged in a diatribe against short hair on women claiming that long hair was "Mediterranean and tropical," which "...is to say as no less Italian than Brazilian." Schnapp and Castro Rocha, "Brazilian Velocities," 113-114.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 106.

<sup>49</sup> Blum, *The Other Modernism*, 43.

<sup>50</sup> "La coffa di ferro che pende sospesa alla catena del braccio metallico di una gru automobile gira lentamente sulla testa del comandante. Contiene negri e negre camuffati da pezzi di carbone, balla di cotone e pappagalli giganteschi." Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *L'Oceano del cuore*, quoted in Ruta, ed., *Fughe e Ritorni*, 93.

<sup>51</sup> "Another completely different scene, very vivacious, rich with colors and unusual forms, more analytical and nearly bundled up is the scene of the Carnival of Rio de Janeiro, a carnival that Marinetti informs me is very long, characteristic, clamorous and very amusing. There is also a great triangular deck turned towards the spectator that slices the sea, which is a characteristic technical resolution of Benedetta [and] which reminds me of 'Motoscafo in corsa' [Velocità di Motoscafo]." "L'Oceano del cuore: Intervista con Marinetti," *Lo Spettacolo d'Italia* (Rome), November 11, 1927.

<sup>52</sup> Giuseppe Mazzesi, "L'Oceano del cuore," *L'Impero* (Rome), November 17, 1927. Benedetta's activity as stage set designer was not limited to *L'Oceano del cuore*. She also created set designs for Marinetti's plays *I prigionieri e l'amore* (Prisoners and love—premiering in 1926, Milan) and *Simultanina* (Simultaneous—premiering in 1930, Padua), in addition to designs for the mise-en-scene of her own *Viaggio di Gararà*.

<sup>53</sup> The catalogue caption in Ruta, ed., *Fughe e ritorni*, 46, mistakenly attributes this work to Benedetta with Ambrosi and Tato.

<sup>54</sup> Thanks to Anthony Panzera for his explanation of this technique.

<sup>55</sup> In December 1933 the "Manifesto della pittura murale" was published in *La Colonna* and signed by Mario Sironi, Carlo Carrà, Massimo Campigli, and Achille Funi. This was distinct from Futurist interests, although the Futurists followed with their manifesto *L'arte della plastica murale*. See Emily Braun, "Antonietta Raphaël: Artist, Woman, Foreigner, Jew, Wife, Mother, Muse, and Anti-Fascist," in *Mothers of Invention: Women, Italian Fascism, and Culture*, ed. Robin Pickering-Iazzi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995); and, Emily Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>56</sup>Patrizia Rosazza-Ferraris, "The aeropainters and the state: commissions and acquisitions," *Futurism in Flight* (Rome: DeLuca Edizioni d'Arte, 1990), 35.

<sup>57</sup> Rosazza-Ferraris, "The aeropainters and the state," 36. In the 1930s many Futurist journals gave a lot of space to discussions of architecture, especially Rationalism, which was considered a derivation of concepts first developed by Sant'Elia. Claudia Salaris, "Futurismo letterario a Roma," in *Casa Balla e il Futurismo a Roma*, ed. Enrico Crispolti (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1989), 64.

<sup>58</sup> Rosazza-Ferraris, "The aeropainters and the state," 36.

<sup>59</sup> Anna Maria Ruta and D. Cappellani, *Il Palazzo delle Poste* (Palermo: Edizioni Guida, 1993), 10.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>62</sup> Bentivoglio and Zoccoli, *The Women Artists of Italian Futurism*, 142. "Brunas" was the adopted name of Bruna Somenzi, another woman Futurist active in the 1930s. She took part in the first *aeropittura* exhibition in 1931 and she edited the letters column in *Futurismo*, the newspaper created by her husband Mino Somenzi. She wrote prose poems, in addition to creating paintings, tapestries and pottery (although her artworks do not seem to have survived).

<sup>63</sup> Re, "Impure Abstraction," 37.

<sup>64</sup> Zoccoli describes this work as *Sintesi delle comunicazioni telegrafiche e telefoniche*, which seems to be correct. Thus, the captions for *Sintesi delle comunicazioni telegrafiche e telefoniche* and *Sintesi delle comunicazioni radiofoniche* have been flipped in Ruta, ed., *Fughe e Ritorni*.

<sup>65</sup> Zoccoli and others make reference to an Orphist influence, but, as yet, no direct link between them has been established. Franca Zoccoli, *Benedetta Cappa Marinetti; L'incantesimo della luce* (Milano: Selene Edizioni, 2000), 86.

<sup>66</sup> Thanks to Vivien Greene for first pointing out this relationship and for her assistance on questions pertaining to the topic of Divisionism.

<sup>67</sup> See Giovanna Ginex, "L'epica del progresso: Il ciclo per la Camera di Commercio di Milano," in *Gaetano Previati, 1852-1920*, ed. Fernando Mazzoca (Milano: Electa, 1999), 212-213.

<sup>68</sup> "Benedetta creates a completely new kind of *aeropittura*, which I call GEOGRAPHIC. Given a large space, the *aeropittrice* succeeds in establishing in a probing way a series of

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antitheses of proportion and distance and a series of dynamisms between distances through interpenetrations and simultaneity expressive of a spherical terrestrial state of mind.

The main value of the five murals relies in the complex brilliance of the composition conceived for a large surface and which would not have been conceivable as an easel painting, the site to be painted being in a certain way the essential reason for the work of art." Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "Benedetta e l'aeropittura geografica," *Stile Futurista* 1, no. 4 (October 1934), 26. This issue presented a six-page spread on Benedetta's murals in the Post Office of Palermo.

<sup>69</sup> Lia Giachero, "... 'Grands étages de mers et de nuages...' Due inediti bozzetti per vetrate di Benedetta Marinetti," *Ricerche de Storia dell'arte*, no. 40 (Roma: La Nuova Italia Scientifica, 1990), 81.

<sup>70</sup> Voltolino Fontani worked for Balzaretti & Modigliani at the time and assisted Benedetta (after which she gave him the two studies). Giachero, "... 'Grands étages de mers et de nuages...,'" 82.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 83.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 84.

<sup>74</sup> Crispolti, "Una riflessione sulla sua pittura," 25.

## CHAPTER 5

### BENEDETTA FASCISTA

This chapter will demonstrate that Benedetta paradoxically, and as was typical in Fascist Italy, could be identified as both an avant-garde artist and an advocate of the regime.<sup>1</sup> As Benedetta was coming into her own artistically in the 1920s, Fascism gained political ascendance in Italy (in 1922) and, subsequently dictated a role for women. Her positions as artist, wife, mother, and political subject reflect the shifting and often paradoxical definition of woman under Fascism. Benedetta assumed aspects of the Fascist construction of woman, particularly the centrality of her role as mother, while, at the same time, she undermined other tenets of the regime, including its repressive strictures that kept woman out of the public arena. Fascist rhetoric was often countered by its own internal contradictions as well as by actual cultural practice, particularly its inability to control media and consumerism. Thus, models of women at odds with the state's dictates emerged, especially in the realms of media, film, and advertising.<sup>2</sup> Though Benedetta was certainly not the only woman to play a visible role, she became an increasingly public figure as she became a more outspoken proponent of Fascism. Arguably, she used the regime to further her career and the profile of Futurism, as the regime used her as a cultural propagandist.

By the late 1930s, Benedetta had internalized the role of mother as glorified under Mussolini. Her essays and lectures of the late 1930s/early 1940s betray a shift toward a

more dogmatic embrace of the regime. Increasingly, Fascist rhetoric enters into her discussions of woman's role in art and society. Benedetta's acquiescence to Fascism's directives must be understood within the context of Mussolini's increasingly authoritarian strictures, as well as within Futurism's increasing accommodation of the regime. An overview of the theories of the Positivist criminologist Cesare Lombroso and their influence on Fascist thought explain much of Benedetta's position and the regime's construction of woman. Fascist theory, specifically that of Giovanni Gentile (an academic, member of the Fascist Parliament, and one of the central theoreticians of the regime), also offers important insight into Benedetta's thinking.

### **Benedetta, Feminism, and Fascism**

The environment in which Benedetta came of age was deeply formative, not only for her own theories of self and creativity, but for the changing social definition and role of woman. Aspects of Fascism's repression of women were continuous with nineteenth century thinking and went hand in hand with the subjugation of women by the Catholic Church. Unlike other European countries, Italy had little tradition of a women's rights movement.<sup>3</sup> What it did have developed late and was generally linked to labor organizations.<sup>4</sup> As Victoria de Grazia notes, "It was characteristic of the Italian movement that, being weak and isolated at home, it cultivated its ties with women's associations abroad."<sup>5</sup> These relationships to movements such as British suffragism made the woman's rights movement in Italy vulnerable to attack on the grounds that feminism was foreign to Italian soil.<sup>6</sup> The Church was also hostile to modern woman's emancipation and insisted on her role as mother through formal modes (such as a papal encyclical) as early as the 1880s.<sup>7</sup> Catholicism became the official religion of the Fascist

state with the Concordat of 1929 and, in 1930, the Church officially relegated woman to the role of wife and mother (subjugated to her husband) with the legislation of the *Casti Connubii*.<sup>8</sup> The regime even began a program of rewarding its most prolific women. Ultimately, Italian women did not receive the right to vote until after the Second World War.

Benedetta was clearly influenced by “the woman question”—the post-war debate on the role of woman in Italian society after women entered, and then were required to exit, the workplace after the First World War. Stereotypes about women’s abilities had been proven false when women took on a range of demanding jobs. When forced to leave them, an ideological battle over the role of women waged, sparking debates within Futurism itself, made explicit in the pages of the journal *L’Italia Futurista* (as discussed in Chapter 1). As Mariolina Graziosi has suggested, the redefinition of gender is essential when society undergoes deep social changes.<sup>9</sup> It became necessary in Italy in the years following World War I to control unemployment, which required a redistribution of economic resources. “Gender struggle was the expression of this need, and the formation of a new gender identity was the ideological mask that covered the concrete process of violence exercised against women through the social practices of expulsion, segregation, and moralization.”<sup>10</sup> Transforming the wish of women to be full citizens into the wish to be moral subjects became a strategic goal of the administration. Benedetta came of age precisely in the midst of this shift. Her Catholic upbringing (reflected even in her name which translates as blessed), combined with mounting social pressure to adopt “femininity,” affected Benedetta’s assumption of an identity and creative philosophy that centered around motherhood as the emblem of both womanhood and creativity.

From the 1920s on, Mussolini strove to create an image of Fascism as modern, which he strongly associated with its procreative ability. As Ruth Ben-Ghiat describes, “Natalist programs would not only combat internal decadence by curtailing female emancipation but would close the demographic gap with dominant European nations and allow Italy to emerge as a leader in the continent.”<sup>11</sup> The regime simultaneously attempted to develop a distinctly Fascist culture that could be used for foreign export and improve its status in the European arena.<sup>12</sup>

While the figure of mother became the idealized version of woman under Fascism, there was also much contradiction of role playing. Women’s identities as mothers, welfare claimants, workers, and consumers, were often at odds, creating conflicting notions of women’s rights and duties.<sup>13</sup> Tensions between public and private loyalties were aggravated by family welfare reforms. While the Labor Charter of 1927 affirmed that citizenship was due only to those who worked, government codes, contracts, and regulations restricted women’s access to the labor market. Political organizations mobilized women in public locations, yet Fascist propaganda urged them to remain at home. The National Fascist Party (PNF) incited women to revere il Duce at the same time that the Catholic Church required that they worship only God. As Robin Pickering-Iazzi describes it, while sexual politics under Fascism limited women’s ability to achieve and even aspire to certain goals, “it also created possibilities, deriving from the internal contradictions of Fascism and the politics it developed for incorporating women in national life.”<sup>14</sup> Due to their contradictory natures, both Futurism and Fascism opened gaps in the social fabric that allowed women to express their own voice, thus allowing a

figure like Benedetta to position herself both as an active Futurist artist and an ideal Fascist mother.

The Fascist Party made clear that the education of young girls was to prepare them “to serve the Fatherland as the greatest Mother, the Mother of all good Italians.”<sup>15</sup> With so emphatic a directive, it became increasingly difficult for women such as Benedetta to embrace ideological positions openly antagonistic to the regime. Fascism enforced motherhood as well as heterosexuality through a series of compulsory measures that largely excluded women from the workplace, prohibited birth control, and levied taxes on unmarried males, making opposition to Fascist dogma not only difficult, but often illegal. By embracing Fascism’s idealization of motherhood, Benedetta was able to remain untainted by masculinity or the sterility associated with women who worked, which allowed her to continue as a creator of innovative fiction and painting. This embrace was made explicit in her essays and lectures (which remained distinct from her fiction and painting).

In contrast to Benedetta is the life and work of the artist Antonietta Raphaël Mafai, a painter and sculptor (as well as an anti-Fascist and a Jew), who was a central figure in the Scuola Romana (a group that produced an anti-classicizing, expressionist style of painting). While Raphaël had three children, she lived on the margins of bourgeois society with her husband, the painter Mario Mafai, thus evading the norms of male/female stereotypes and family life so central to Fascism.<sup>16</sup> Raphaël periodically abandoned her role as mother, sending her first newborn off to the country with a wet nurse so that she could continue to work and going abroad in 1930 after the birth of her third child, leaving the children in Mafai’s care for nearly four years.<sup>17</sup> Yet, motherhood

remained a dominant theme in her work. As Emily Braun notes, “Ironically, only by placing her work above her children could Raphaël so devote herself to the art of maternity.”<sup>18</sup> Benedetta, conversely, was an attentive mother, while none of the protagonists of her novels had children.

If we understand motherhood as the embodiment of womanliness under Fascism, Joan Riviere’s theories, developed precisely at the time that Benedetta was active, may provide some interesting insights into Benedetta’s theoretical conception and actual role of mother. In her seminal 1929 paper on masquerade Joan Riviere posited:

Womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it—much as a thief will turn out his pockets and ask to be searched to prove that he has not the stolen goods. The reader may now ask how I define womanliness or where I draw the line between genuine womanliness and the ‘masquerade.’ My suggestion is not, however, that there is any such difference; whether radical or superficial, they are the same thing.<sup>19</sup>

Stephen Heath maintains that in “collapsing genuine womanliness and the masquerade together, Riviere undermines the integrity of the former with the artifice of the latter.”<sup>20</sup>

This womanliness is both real and a mask. For Heath, Riviere’s formulation contains a central contradiction, belying her belief in a purely constructed identity and thus creating a kind of “slippage” between terms. And if, Heath persists, womanliness is pure construction, then “what is left behind the mask of womanliness?”<sup>21</sup> Is it an unconscious masculinity? Or is it pure loss (as in Luce Irigaray’s contention that women adopt the masquerade “in order to participate in man’s desire, but at the cost of giving up theirs”)?<sup>22</sup> Either formulation would refute any notion of a “genuine womanliness.”<sup>23</sup>

But the concept of masquerade must be understood not just as a construction of sexual identity, but, as Riviere suggests, as a strategy in which “the woman uses her own

body as a disguise.”<sup>24</sup> In such a strategy, as with Riviere’s patient, the woman “uses” her sex to act in the public (masculine) realm, while averting any unacceptable effects such actions might create. (Although, of course, femininity and masculinity both are constructions that are established and perpetuated via cultural stereotypes, in particular through behavior and dress.)<sup>25</sup> Thus, Benedetta’s role of mother (the embodiment of womanliness under Fascism) and her concomitant theory of creativity based on maternity can be seen as a fascinating, though probably unconscious, use of “masquerade” by providing an ideal foil to her intellectual and public artistic activities. As much as Benedetta may have wanted a family with Marinetti (and letters indicate that they loved each other and their children deeply), they also served her. While the role of woman was being reshaped in terms of biological categorization by the Fascist regime, and while, for Riviere the masquerade *is* femininity, for Benedetta, womanliness functioned as both biological essence *and* social construct. Thus, Benedetta’s construction of woman involves a kind of amalgam or mediation between categories.

In this way “womanliness” worked strategically for Benedetta, helping “soften” any masculine or virile tone with which her visible cultural activities might have been associated. Véronique Machelidon discusses the difficulty of measuring such a definition and use of masquerade:

Whatever its ironic possibilities for depicting gender hyperbolically, the subversiveness of masquerade can probably never be calculated, for its actors as well as its spectators (not to mention its readers) are themselves located within the power they are hoping to expose.<sup>26</sup>

Such is the case with Benedetta. It is because she was bound up in patriarchal discourse that she was allowed a voice in the public realm, making its location within that discourse permissible. As Barbara Spackman contends:

...Foucault argues for a conception of discourse as 'a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable.' This instability means that the beginnings of an opposing strategy are located not 'outside' a discourse of control, repression, or prohibition but rather are produced by that same discourse.<sup>27</sup>

In this way, Benedetta's accommodation of the Regime paradoxically allowed her to create work that contradicted the dominant ideology.

While many of Benedetta's ideas (particularly those expressed in her novels centering on the female independent subject) worked against Fascist ideology, Benedetta was ultimately interested in reconciliation rather than rebellion—a notion that in itself was anathema to the rhetoric of dominance and virility of the regime.

In developing a female voice within the Futurist movement, it was difficult, if not impossible, for women not to become implicated in aspects of the same discourse they were working against. Spackman, for instance, finds that as a reversal of Futurist attitudes towards women, Valentine de Saint-Point's characterization of women Futurists as "virile" remains governed by the very oppositions it attempts to overturn.<sup>28</sup> Thus, Saint-Point simultaneously refutes and participates in Futurist strategies. Similarly, Benedetta both adopted an overtly Fascist rhetoric and simultaneously created works resistant to Fascist ideology. Spackman has additionally shown that Fascist discourse works precisely by binding together the progressive and the reactionary, revealing "the glimmerings of opposing strategies even within fascism as discursive regime and is...particularly useful in understanding the contradictory position of women within fascism both as discursive and as juridico-political regime."<sup>29</sup> Benedetta located herself within the discourses of both Fascism and Futurism, whose paradoxical natures themselves are reflected in the seeming inconsistency of her varying positions.

In writing on suffragism, scholar Lisa Tickner notes that in pre-war Britain it was widely asserted that:

...enfranchising women could compromise the virility of the state and promote unrest in the colonies. Woman, or rather “womanliness,” was the linchpin in bourgeois ideology and a structuring category in the principal discourses of civil society...If woman was out of place everything was out of place.<sup>30</sup>

This same assertion could be made with regard to the Fascist regime in Italy. If woman stepped outside of her capacity as mother and wife, it was feared that all would be reduced to chaos. As Mary Gibson suggests, “Women, unlike men, were not feared for their physical violence, yet they symbolized the sexual disorder associated with female autonomy.”<sup>31</sup> Benedetta, by embracing “womanliness” as part of her artistic persona, frustrated Fascism’s intention to use motherhood as a means of keeping woman out of the public realm.

As previously discussed, Saint-Point’s notion of woman is expressed in her two manifestos (“Manifesto della donna futurista” and “Manifesto futurista della lussuria”). In the “Manifesto della donna futurista,” Saint-Point claims that it is humanity itself that is mediocre and that both men and women are equally deserving of contempt. But despite her assertion of the importance of both femininity and masculinity, she privileges masculinity, writing, “In order to bring a certain virility back to our race corrupted by its femininity, one needs to force the race to become virile, even to the point of brutality.”<sup>32</sup> She goes on to claim that both the roles of mother and lover are essential, but insists that one cannot be both. Saint-Point shifts back and forth between male and female positions, between a call for a more egalitarian society and a justification of male domination, thus illustrating her difficulty in adopting a purely “feminist” position.<sup>33</sup> Spackman has discussed the problems inherent in Saint-Point’s position, pointing out that “by turning

Marinetti's argument against him, Saint Point succeeds in turning it back against women as well; while Marinetti argues that men had become too feminine and women too masculine, de Saint Point finds women not virile enough....<sup>34</sup> This insistence on the notion of virility, however, was a common topos among early women Futurists.

As Spackman contends, Enif Robert "seems to offer a variation, rather than simply a repetition, of the notion that the woman who enters the public sphere is masculinized, for here virilization appears to be the effect of contiguity...rather than a question of similarity and substitution... But in either case, going out means going virile."<sup>35</sup> Spackman further describes the way in which working women were considered wholly threatening to Italian society:

The representation of the 'virile woman' for the most part skirted the historical association of the virilization of women and lesbianism...and concentrated on more overtly political connotations, for every woman's entry into the public, economic sphere threatened the very means of production. This threat was recoded as a threat to women's own reproductive equipment, and its political force retained in the repeated association of the 'masculine woman' and feminism. This is not, of course, an innovation on the part of the fascist regime or even of the fascist movement but has roots in the reaction of late nineteenth-century medico-legal anthropology and sociology to women's suffrage and emancipation movements.<sup>36</sup>

Benedetta avoided this weighty and overdetermined charge of virility by associating her work praxis with motherhood. Sexual creativity was linked to biological imperative. She thus could work openly in the public realm and avoid any accusations of usurping a male position that might have made her suspect. Her most visible public persona, in fact, was as an advocate of Fascism.

### Cesare Lombroso and Positivist Criminology

Cesare Lombroso and his colleagues in the field of Positivist criminology, provided “scientific” grounding for the Fascist regime’s view of women. Positivism gained wide currency in Italy by the 1860s particularly within the fields of science, philosophy, history, sociology, and psychology, each of which embraced empirical methods. Positivism provided “the new Italian state with a modern and progressive philosophical foundation as a replacement for a religion that resisted change and opposed the risorgimento.”<sup>37</sup> Positivist criminology, as developed by Cesare Lombroso (and his colleagues Enrico Ferri and Raffaele Garofalo), encompassed aspects of the medical, psychiatric, and legal disciplines and was considered an essential and much-needed plan for a modernization of crime analysis and the penal system. In 1876, Lombroso was appointed the Chair of Legal Medicine and Public Hygiene at the University of Turin and in the 1880s his home became a center of cultural exchange.<sup>38</sup> Also in 1876 he published his seminal work *L'uomo delinquente (Criminal Man)*; which went through five editions between 1876 and 1897).<sup>39</sup> In this book Lombroso contended that most lawbreakers were identifiable by atavistic physical traits (linked to “primitive” man), such as abnormal facial characteristics (i.e., small heads, protruding cheekbones, and flat noses). Moreover, according to Lombroso, these were born criminals, unable to escape their destiny. Lombroso recommended harsh penalties for these biologically determined lawbreakers, as reform was considered impossible. Despite his belief in immutable biological categories, Lombroso, a member of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), did recognize environmental factors as well, and was very sympathetic to the plight of the poor. He acknowledged that the conditions of late nineteenth century Italy, specifically the dire

poverty, could create “occasional criminals” for which he prescribed more lenient measures.<sup>40</sup>

Recognizing Lombroso’s theory within the context of the tenuousness of the recently united Kingdom of Italy is essential to a thorough understanding of his theory and its popularity, and especially its later adoption by the Fascist government. As Gibson contends, “... by identifying a minority of the population as born criminals, Lombroso could use them as a foil for defining the boundaries of nationhood and the shared characteristics of ‘normal’ citizens.”<sup>41</sup> Thus, Lombroso provided the regime with a justification for surveillance based on biological characteristics.

In 1893, Lombroso (a prolific writer) published *La donna delinquente* (The Female Offender), a second edition of which was published ten years later. In order to define the female delinquent, criminology first had to identify and characterize the “normal” woman. Moreover, Gibson maintains that it was not coincidental that extensive research on female crime developed at the same time that the first strong feminist groups were organizing.<sup>42</sup> Through examinations of brain weight and size, facial hair, pain sensitivity, and sexual desire, women were deemed inferior to men. Gibson notes:

To the disappointment of feminists, the revolutionary methodology of criminal anthropology did not result in an analysis that sharply challenged nineteenth-century conventions but instead confirmed them. Science proved that normal women were decidedly inferior in biology, intelligence, and morality to their male counterparts.<sup>43</sup>

The few recognized women intellectuals were considered degenerate, which was generally evidenced by a virile appearance; thus, it was concluded: “To avoid degeneracy and retain femininity, normal women should not attempt to develop their powers of thought beyond a moderate and modest level.”<sup>44</sup> Maternity, they determined, was

woman's primary role and woman should withdraw from the public realm to the home to nurture her family. "Expending most of their 'vital force' in pregnancy, childbirth, and nursing, women were biologically incapable of summoning up the energies necessary to rival men intellectually or assume political roles in the public arena."<sup>45</sup> The analyses of female criminals focused on sexuality, so much so that it ended in collapsing the distinct categories deemed essential to understanding male offenders. Positivism did much to stunt thinking regarding women's rights. As Gibson describes:

Reduced to biological machines in positivist writings, women were said to pursue their role of motherhood through instinct rather than moral and intellectual choice. Destined never to reach the male peak of evolutionary success, they would remain eternally in need of male guidance, even about family affairs. Such a view, enunciated by a group of well-respected scientists, not only crippled the Italian feminist movement, but created an atmosphere conducive to the further restriction of women's rights under fascism.<sup>46</sup>

Lombroso's criminal anthropology and his theory of female inferiority developed a wide following, and his legacy extended to a third-generation of followers, many connected to the Fascist regime. While Benedetta in no way accepted the notion of women as inferior, she did internalize the centrality of maternity to woman as put forth by Lombroso and his colleagues. Benedetta implicitly rejected the notion of motherhood as the *sole* role of woman (as put forth by Lombroso and later by Giovanni Gentile) by her devotion to her work as a writer and painter.

### Giovanni Gentile

Gentile provided much of the philosophical foundation for Italian Fascism. Arguably the foremost Fascist intellectual, Gentile founded the School of Philosophy at the University of Rome in 1925 and from 1922-24 served as Mussolini's Minister of Public Instruction. In 1923 he was appointed to the Upper House of Parliament and from

1925-44 he supervised the publication of the prestigious *Enciclopedia Italiana*. Most significantly, Gentile was charged by Mussolini to “ghostwrite” the *Dottrina del Fascismo*, which functioned as the official manifesto of Fascism and, in publication was signed by Mussolini. As A. James Gregor summarizes, Gentile held that:

The real individual was not the abstract, empirical individual, but the concrete spiritual being whose transcendental essence was communal. For Gentile, the community, and its form as the state, was the universal aspect of the individual—they could only be opposed when each was considered in abstraction.<sup>47</sup>

In essence, then, the individual was a communal and social being and without the community, there could be no reason, no language, and no knowledge. Gentile also believed that the state is the will of the community, “the universal aspect of the individual.”<sup>48</sup>

For Gentile, as for many Italians, Fascism came to be seen as the final resolution of the (failed) Risorgimento (which had left in many a bitter sense of disillusionment and inferiority). A new Italy needed to be created that could stand as an equal to the other major European powers. Gentile’s philosophy, particularly his notion of totalitarianism based on order, discipline, sacrifice, faith, and labor, envisioned an Italy strong enough to regain its former imperial glory. Nothing existed outside the state. Gentile’s *Dottrina del Fascismo* was largely a synopsis of his personal philosophy of Actualism and provided an essential and coherent rationale for totalitarian Fascism. As Gregor states:

The claim that the individual had a self-affirming moral imperative to identify with the State—a sovereign State that was the moral embodiment of all the individuals and associations of a nation—a State that had a unique personality, a will and an ethical substance—a State that was intrinsically and exquisitely religious in disposition—all that really had only one plausible philosophical rationale—the reformed Hegelianism of Giovanni Gentile.<sup>49</sup>

Gregor continues,

In sum, Fascism was understood not only as the giver of laws and the founder of institutions, but as educator and supporter of spiritual life. The Fascist state ‘charged itself with refashioning not only the form, but the content, of life as well—the refashioning of man, his character and faith. To achieve those ends, Fascism requires discipline and authority that reaches deep, unopposed in the spirit.’<sup>50</sup>

Gentile’s opponents held, as he himself could not (because for Gentile Roman Catholicism was immanent in Actualism), that an individual could have a divine essence independent of the State (which required the recognition of a transcendent God).<sup>51</sup>

With regard to gender roles, Gentile’s philosophy was no less explicit. Victoria de Grazia has discussed Gentile’s repressive position with regard to women. She writes,

True to a system based on essentialist principles, Gentile viewed woman as ‘infinite nature,’ the ‘primordial principle,” hence outside of history and with a subaltern relationship to the State and the Spirit. For woman to be ‘valued, respected, exalted,’ she had to ‘accept and not attempt to deny the nature of her difference.’<sup>52</sup>

His sweeping educational reforms of the 1920s were decidedly class biased and anti-female, restricting avenues of study open to girls and, ultimately, denying women’s ability to be educators.<sup>53</sup>

Re has closely examined Gentile’s theorization of gender, specifically as revealed in “La donna nella coscienza moderna.” She notes that for Gentile “modern” and “consciousness” are always synonymous with “Fascist” and “male” respectively.<sup>54</sup>

Moreover, gender difference was essential to his thought:

The maintenance of difference—sexual and gender difference first and foremost—as a strong, sharply defined, either/or binary logic is fundamental to the Fascist philosopher. The blurring of this difference threatens to weaken, if not abolish, modern, or in other words, Fascist, consciousness, and the Fascist state.<sup>55</sup>

Although Gentile does not seem to conceive of woman as inferior to man, he understands her as “the other” of man, the object of his desire. She has no individuality outside of her

role as wife and mother, motherhood being particularly venerated. Gentile's maternalist ideology leads him to conclude, as summarized by Re, "Motherhood is the holiness that makes of woman the self-sacrificing link between man and God...."<sup>56</sup>

While the notion of humans as moral identities that ultimately find a higher spiritual community outside of time and space is certainly an idea that would have resonated in Benedetta (and is part of her own explorations in *Le forze umane* and *Astra e il sottomarino*), Benedetta diverged importantly from Gentile's thinking. As Re contends, in *Le forze umane*, Benedetta implicitly rejects Gentile's contention that the "female self is but a completion of the male, and that woman exists only as the other of man....Benedetta takes her experience of self-formation as a paradigm of the development of human consciousness, male *and* female...."<sup>57</sup> Certainly she would have fundamentally disagreed with his educational reform that slighted both women and the poorer classes. Benedetta expresses deep discomfort and concern with the depth of the poverty and lack of education of the children the protagonist describes teaching in *Le forze umane*. In addition, the differentiation between the material being and the spiritual being was an important one to Benedetta, and she clearly describes the difficulty of the struggle in forming the self as distinct from (but in harmony with) the universal in *Le forze umane*.

Finally, in Gentile's *Philosophy of Art*, the ideas in which, to a large degree, are already present in his major theoretical texts,<sup>58</sup> an emphasis on creativity is conspicuously absent, whereas the notion of creativity is at the center of Benedetta's concept of artistic identity. In fact, she uses motherhood, woman's central role in Gentile's discourse, to illustrate woman's equality and even superiority, positing woman as more than man,

because as mother she contains in her the future and forms the basis of society: “Madre—crea ed educa i figli è più che essere uomo perchè lo si contiene nel futuro—è necessario formare la donna perchè la donna è base della società.”<sup>59</sup> Benedetta therefore insists on all that Gentile denies: woman’s creativity, spirituality, and individual identity.

### Fascism and Culture

The constructions of gender and culture under Fascism are complex. Generally speaking, there was little political resistance to Mussolini on the part of cultural figures, due largely to his policy of “tolerance,” illustrated by his refusal to adopt a single artistic style of the State. As Braun states:

Instead the regime instigated a cultural policy based on a series of administrative controls, which aimed to discourage opposition within an insidious combination of coercion and tolerance. As a result, the Fascist period was marked by pluralism in the visual arts, which permitted the avant-garde and the retrograde, abstraction and neoclassicism, to be deftly absorbed by the state’s eclectic patronage.... Intentionally or not, Mussolini’s hands-off policy had the effect of dividing and conquering the intellectual community. This made organizing a cultural opposition a remote possibility: the strategy of allowing a margin of creative freedom while rewarding capitulation led the majority of artists to coexist with, if not openly support, the regime.<sup>60</sup>

Thus, Fascist aesthetics were frequently linked to progressive styles, and the regime shrewdly used creative freedom as a form of Fascist propaganda.

Three general phases of recognition existed under the Fascist regime. The first period (1925-30), represents the restructuring and bureaucratization of state patronage that occurred during the regime’s political consolidation; the second period (1931-36), one of overt aesthetic pluralism, was shaped by the regime’s policies of patronage and incentive; and, the final stage (1937-43), was characterized by a much more coercive and autarchic form of patronage.<sup>61</sup> This strong relationship between Futurism and Fascism, as

well as the regime's patronage of modernism, makes evident, as Andrew Hewitt has discussed, not only the possibility, but the existence of a Fascist modernity.<sup>62</sup>

Paradoxically, while both Benedetta and Marinetti retained close ties with Mussolini, the movement suffered, particularly in the 1920s, from less government patronage and competition from other quarters. Although he broke with Mussolini in 1920, ostensibly due to their differing views on the monarchy and clericalism, Marinetti sought a rapprochement with the leader in 1924. However, at base Futurism and Fascism had more fundamental differences than just these. Braun notes this underlying incompatibility and points to a commentary by Giuseppe Prezzolini, the former editor of *La Voce*, who underscored that Futurism's program of destruction was at odds with Fascism's values of discipline and hierarchy.<sup>63</sup> Prezzolini astutely concluded, "Fascism, if it really wants to win its battle, must realize that it has already absorbed all of the stimulating qualities of Futurism and must repress whatever is still revolutionary, anti-classical, and undisciplined in its art."<sup>64</sup> In fact, although Marinetti was officially appointed to the Italian Academy in 1929, and while Futurism was used as a tool in the 1920s to further the government's modernist image, the movement did not play a major role in the cultural hierarchy,<sup>65</sup> or at least it did not have the high visibility that Marinetti desired. To some degree, then, Benedetta, as Marinetti's wife, would have been forced to adopt the role of dutiful Fascist subject not only to attain her own good standing in the eyes of the regime, but also in order to court favor for Marinetti and the movement.

Despite the policy of cultural tolerance, Mussolini, as noted, instituted certain restrictions on artists. The relationship between intellectuals and the regime was in many ways forced through a series of subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) measures of

coercion. For example, the Accademia d'Italia (established in 1926) offered intellectuals a privileged position and a generous stipend; in return, they had to relinquish independence by swearing allegiance to Fascism.<sup>66</sup> As Philip Cannistraro has discussed, most effective at coercion were the *sindacati* or cultural unions that were established, particularly during the period of 1929-1932 under the supervision of Giuseppe Bottai. “[The Confederazione] set specific policies aimed at destroying the perceived anachronism of ‘free’ professions by making intellectuals and artists dependent on the state for work and inspiration.”<sup>67</sup> Artists had to be enrolled in the union to exhibit, forcing many to compromise their political views. On the other hand, the government and the unions offered many opportunities for purchases, commissions and exhibitions. For example the *Quadriennale d'Arte Nazionale* was established in 1928 and explicitly made open by Mussolini to all stylistic tendencies.<sup>68</sup> As early as 1924 (the same year that Marinetti rejoined the Fascist fold) Mussolini initiated a policy of censorship and began recruiting intellectuals for the regime.<sup>69</sup> As Ben-Ghiat describes, from its inception the regime used the promise of creative freedom and state patronage to “domesticate and normalize” intellectuals.<sup>70</sup>

After the Fascists' murder of the Socialist Giacomo Matteotti in 1924 (which provoked hostility and a crisis in the regime) Mussolini responded with a political crackdown that included an initiative to gain the allegiance of Italian intellectuals. Many were forced to court favor (and funding) from the regime, and often did so by employing Fascist rhetoric.<sup>71</sup> Marinetti's own ideological and political shifts were already considered suspect by the government and Marinetti was kept under secret surveillance.<sup>72</sup> Yet, Marinetti was admitted into the Accademia, after which exhibitions of Futurist work

picked up; despite that, much of the reaction by state officials to Futurist work remained negative.<sup>73</sup> In addition to Futurism's increased visibility through exhibitions, Marinetti would have received a stipend of 3,000 Italian lire per month paid to members of the Academy.<sup>74</sup> This may have provided yet another motivation for acquiescence to the regime given his less stable financial position from the 1920s on. Most interesting is that it was seemingly Mussolini himself who secured a certain position for the Futurists, particularly Marinetti, despite opposition from figures such as Margherita Sarfatti and others.<sup>75</sup> (An intellectual, art critic, and the mistress of Mussolini, Sarfatti wielded significant power and influence throughout the 1920s, attracting many intellectuals and artists to Fascism.)<sup>76</sup> Marinetti's concessions ultimately required his political abdication when he reentered the Fascist fold in 1924. His compromises were, in effect, endorsed by the state at the 1925 *Onoranze a Marinetti* in Rome, an official banquet ceremony held in his honor.<sup>77</sup> Mussolini's congratulatory telegram to Marinetti was reprinted in *L'Impero*, which also contained an article by Settimelli minimizing the differences between Futurism and Fascism.<sup>78</sup>

As Günter Berghaus has discussed, professional artists were required to pay at least lip-service to the regime if they wanted to earn a living from their work. The contradictory alliance of Futurism and Fascism was one shaped primarily by this need.

Also, there were personal ties and friendships that had been forged during the interventionist years and the immediate power period, which despite much friction had never been completely severed. Many Futurists used these connections with friends and acquaintances in positions of influence to secure commissions or subsidies for their artistic activities.<sup>79</sup>

Yet, many, as Marinetti and Benedetta did, idealistically believed in the regime's vision for the future and their own role in that program.

During the 1920s the group of artists known as the *Novecentisti* received a fair amount of recognition from the regime. The *Novecento* movement, formed in 1922 (which included a number of former Futurists), advocated a form of “modern classicism.”<sup>80</sup> The movement as it was first formed, *Sette Pittori del Novecento*, was a group of seven artists, founded by Mario Sironi and Margherita Sarfatti, among others.<sup>81</sup> Though never proclaimed as the official art of the state, the *Novecento* group was very closely allied with the regime throughout the decade, due in large part to Sarfatti’s connection to Mussolini. Like the Futurists, the *Novecento* artists aspired to a role in shaping the new order.<sup>82</sup> While the *Novecento* is invariably discussed in terms of the post-war “return to order,” Braun also argues for the dominance of Magic Realism—characterized by a realistic painting style coupled with fragmentary narrative, derived from the deliberately enigmatic works of Giorgio de Chirico—within the group.<sup>83</sup> Due to a variety of factors, the *Novecento* group began to fail by the end of the 1920s, and a new kind of naturalist style came to dominate the state exhibitions.<sup>84</sup>

It was not until the 1930s, with the decline of the *Novecentisti* and the advent of *aeropittura*, that Futurism was embraced to some degree by the state. *Aeropittura*’s glorification of imperialism and war was rewarded by the regime with an exhibition in 1937 in the building of the Ministry of Aeronautics, and an agreement to found the Galleria Nazionale di Arte Fascista e Aeropittura di Guerra.<sup>85</sup> Yet, as early as 1934, Marinetti was put in the position of having to publicly defend Futurism, which had come under fire both in Berlin and in Italy.<sup>86</sup> In 1937 (the year of the “Degenerate Art” exhibition in Berlin), Marinetti and Futurism again were heavily criticized by Italian cultural critics attempting to assert Nazi cultural politics.<sup>87</sup> Marinetti, from 1937 to 1939,

not only defended himself and Futurism in writing, but also fought against anti-modernism, anti-Semitism, and government censorship, despite his continued allegiance to the regime.<sup>88</sup>

### Women's Roles Under Fascism

Artists and cultural producers tended to support the Fascist regime, and women, surprisingly, were also often dedicated subjects. Fascism never extended women the vote and increasingly excluded them from the workplace. The regime sought to engage woman solely on her ability to reproduce and to confine her to that role through social, as well as legal, measures, including the banning of abortion and contraceptive devices. As discussed, as early as 1926 Mussolini enacted a punitive tax on male celibacy. In 1931, homosexual acts were outlawed and, by 1937, marriage and children became obligatory to such a degree that government careers or positions of "civic leadership" (such as mayors and professors) were unthinkable for men without families.<sup>89</sup> Fascism, Spackman notes, perhaps more emphatically than any other regime, made heterosexuality and reproduction compulsory: "Production and reproduction are strictly, and asymmetrically, linked for men and women: only men involved in economic production are figured as capable of sexual reproduction, whereas involvement in economic production is presumed to destroy the woman's ability to reproduce."<sup>90</sup>

Fears of woman's sterility and virility were associated not only with woman's involvement in the workplace, but also with the very survival of the race. In spite of this, women remained loyal supporters and continued to work in certain realms such as in consumer stores and in film. De Grazia accounts for women's willing participation in the regime, in part, by pointing to the seeming innocuousness of Fascist dictates:

Mussolini's regime stood for returning women to home and hearth, restoring patriarchal authority, and confining female destiny to bearing babies. To be sure, these constraints were not as overtly violent as other state actions in peacetime, including stifling political freedoms and smashing the free trade unions, not to mention the persecution of Italian Jews in the wake of the racial laws of November 1938. It was indeed the apparent normalness of the constraints on women that made them all the more mystifying, insidious, and demeaning.<sup>91</sup>

These insidious, but highly effective policies functioned much like those imposed on Italy's cultural producers, resulting in willing participants.

The notion of the self, and particularly female individuality, also became problematized under the regime. In general, an individual's relationship to the Fascist nation was understood in terms of duties, not rights, and this seemed particularly to describe the case for women.<sup>92</sup> Fascism attempted to deeply affect identity formation, aspiring to fuse the public and private self.<sup>93</sup>

The regime's policies on women's issues were formulated and implemented over time, and it wasn't until after 1935 that its harshest measures, including those against women, were enacted.<sup>94</sup> From the first, Fascism restricted women in the workplace, in response to high male unemployment in Italy in the years after the First World War. Thus, while these restrictions were based on economic necessity, they were also in response to loud male protestations to female competition, which reflected regressive notions even about woman's capacity to work.<sup>95</sup> Mussolini himself made the regime's position on woman's employment emphatic in 1934:

The demographic question intersects with the question of unemployment in the working woman. When work is not a direct impediment to production, it is a distraction, foments an independence and resultant physical and moral habits contrary to childbirth. Man, disoriented and above all 'unemployed' in all senses, ends up renouncing the family. Today, the machine and woman are the two major causes of unemployment. In particular, woman often saves a family in trouble or even herself, but her work is, in the general framework, a source of political and moral bitterness. The salvation of a few individuals is paid for with the blood of a

multitude. There is no victory without some deaths. The exit of women from the workforce would undoubtedly have an economic repercussion on many families, but a legion of men would raise their heads, now hung in shame, and a hundredfold new families would suddenly enter into the life of the nation. We must convince ourselves that the same work that causes the loss of reproductive attributes in woman brings to man a robust physical and moral virility. A virility that the machine should help along.<sup>96</sup>

The regime repeatedly called for woman's self-sacrifice, made perhaps most symbolic by the wedding band ceremony of 1935, which asked women to donate their gold wedding bands to the Ethiopian war effort. Women rallied to the cause, donating rings, earrings, war medals, sacrificing their most treasured possessions to pledge their allegiance to Mussolini.<sup>97</sup> The ring ceremony, however, again suggests inconsistencies and conflicting messages within the Fascist state, creating some uncertainty as to whether a woman's allegiance was first to Fascism or to her family.<sup>98</sup>

At the same time that de Grazia has illustrated the insidiousness of Fascist strategies to manipulate its female citizenry, she has also shown that not all of its attempts were entirely successful. The regime endeavored to further dominate its citizens by controlling the production and meaning of commercial products, and through the manipulation of pastimes.<sup>99</sup> In response to the increasing "Americanization" of its women subjects (largely through the proliferation of American movies, tabloids, and advertising), Mussolini countered again with the image of mother. In addition to her role as producer of Fascist citizens, the mother was glorified by the regime as both an ideal of female beauty and an authentic Italian type.<sup>100</sup> In order to define and restrict these labels the government had to deal with powerful cultural constraints, particularly the issue of class distinctions. However, the regime greatly resisted disrupting these class markers, at least until the late 1930s.<sup>101</sup> It wasn't until then that the bourgeois female came under fire.

Achille Starace's 'reform of custom' was an attempt to militarize Italian society and break down class distinctions—particularly the extravagances of the bourgeois female who ignored the austerity of the Fascist program of autarky (economic self-sufficiency).<sup>102</sup> As part of his reform, Starace called for women to adopt uniforms, though his attempts were not generally successful. The very well dressed wife of a member of the Italian Academy, who was often interviewed by ladies' magazines, Benedetta might well have been identified as an unwholesome and unpatriotic "creature of luxury." However, her adoption of Fascist dogma, and, eventually, of Fascist dress, kept her beyond reproach.

### Benedetta as Fascist Mother and Subject

Benedetta's embrace of the role of mother is made explicit in her writing and lectures. These shift from the early 1930s to the early 1940s, becoming increasingly dogmatic in their support of the regime (and of Mussolini in particular). In manuscripts such as "Riassumere quindi l'arte femminile" (undated, but probably from the mid- to late-1930s), Benedetta, using Futurist language, exhorts her fellow (female) Italians to place themselves (and implicitly their children) in service of the regime. She writes:

Benito Mussolini ci additava un nuovo grande compito: Noi donne lo accogliamo rispondendo: Noi non solo diremo ai nostri figli...ma saremo noi donne che porteremo alti motivi ispiratori del tempo fascista, intrecceremo un ardito di fili luminosi sui quali si recameranno sogni e realtà.<sup>103</sup>

She ends her manuscript by stating:

Noi che abbiamo il potere di dare la carne a un essere umano, vorremmo dare per miracolo d'arte all'opera d'arte nostra anche la materiale: Era il sogno della mia giovinezza profondamente materno e assolutamente artista.

Oggi il mio volere è più vasto e concreto insieme: sogno la donna italiana vertice e propultrice della espansione spirituale artistica della grande Italia fascista.<sup>104</sup>

According to Benedetta, Mussolini has given women a great assignment and they (who have the power to bring life into being) must respond by becoming the keepers of Fascist ideals. Benedetta expresses not only woman's power to create life, but also her own desire to do so, as well as to give life to art. She professes, however, that this desire has been supplanted by her greater dream to see woman as the driving force of the spiritual artistic expansion of Fascist Italy. Again linking creativity and motherhood, Benedetta stresses the importance of putting one's self to work for the glory of the regime. In addition, this passage reflects the spiritualism and language of the earlier manifesto *La Ricostruzione Futurista dell'universo* in which Giacomo Balla and Fortunato Depero express their desire to give "flesh and bones" to the invisible.

But while Benedetta took on essential aspects of the regime's imperatives, including the education of her fellow Italians through her lectures and essays, she did not renounce her intellectual and creative autonomy. As Graziosi describes:

The redefinition of the female role in the Fascist regime made women victims and at the same time protagonists of the state's key activity: social moralization that asked women to fulfill their maternal role at home or in state-sanctioned welfare associations, renouncing any form of economic, political, or intellectual autonomy.<sup>105</sup>

In addition, Benedetta worked against the Fascist model of woman that associated intellectualism with sterility and masculinity.

In contrast to Benedetta's novels, which present independent and questioning female protagonists (who are childless and thereby run counter to Fascist imperatives), her essays and lectures engage in Fascist propaganda. It is likely that this overt allegiance to Fascism in her public speeches and essays allowed Benedetta to express her own voice in her fiction without fear of censorship. Although the regime adopted a position of

cultural plurality, it also exerted control over cultural production. For example, as Ben-Ghiat points out, “Although many authors managed to publish without joining the PNF [the National Fascist Party], the state made full use of its powers to silence unacceptable voices and control the content and circulation of literary texts.”<sup>106</sup> The government used a combination of patronage and strictures to regulate writers and critics. At the same time, writers were encouraged to create works that provided a model of Fascist moral and spiritual values.<sup>107</sup>

Benedetta often countered Fascist theories even in her essays. In one such essay on woman and music, she rhetorically asks and answers, “Sono le donne capaci di creare della musica? Certamente sì, la femminilità in fatti è creazione e musica.”<sup>108</sup> This runs against sentiments like that expressed by Nicola Pende (a follower of Lombroso and a director of special pathology at the University of Rome), who wrote:

We are not among the people who believe in woman’s intellectual inferiority. But it is indisputable that the female brain is qualitatively different from the male brain. Woman is capable of doing everything that male intelligence can, but only up to a certain average level which, however, is more than sufficient for the tasks for which woman was created. The best and most objective psychologists admit that woman is rarely able to rise to celebrity in those fields of thought which require the power of abstract thinking and a sense of proportion or original invention. These fields include creative and abstract arts, like musical composition and architecture, the sciences, philosophy, history and law.<sup>109</sup>

While this is not solely a Fascist belief, it demonstrates the misogynist thread that is prevalent in and continuous with the opinions of women developed by Positivist criminology.

A photograph of Benedetta with her daughters, Vittoria and Ala, appeared in 1930 in the newspaper *Oggi e Domani* with the caption “Futurismo e maternità” (Fig. 52). The accompanying text reads:

Questo sorriso di gioia vi dice in qual modo una vera donna italiana dell'Era Fascista possa conciliare genialmente le cure dell'arte con quelle della maternità. L'esempio è dato dalla scrittrice e pittrice Benedetta, moglie del nostro illustre e caro Marinetti, autrice del libro *Le forze umane* e di questi due capolavori che si chiamano Vittoria ed Ala.<sup>110</sup>

The text is implicitly condescending in its description of Benedetta (whose smile is evidence of her successful mediation of art and motherhood). She is described as an author, wife of the illustrious Marinetti, and the artist of the two masterpieces Vittoria and Ala (her daughters). Benedetta, rather than being trapped by such portrayals, used them to her advantage. Moreover, the presence of this text lauding the reconciliation of an art career and motherhood illustrates the paradoxes inherent in the regime. Art, it seems, remained an acceptable career for women despite theoretical claims of culture solely for men. Surprisingly, with the rise of free exhibitions and the widening avant-garde the number of exhibiting women artists began to grow. Yet, women remained a marginal group particularly with regard to the number of awards and purchases of works by women, which did not increase proportionally.<sup>111</sup>

Benedetta's assumption of motherhood and artistic creativity usurps the long-time (male) association of the phallus and the pen. As Braun has concisely outlined:

The pairing of procreativity and creativity has a long and venerable literary history, traditionally among men, who, as the dominant force in cultural production, have used the birthing metaphor to express both the anxieties and the fulfillment of their work. Unable to reproduce in fact, men reproduce in fiction, begetting immortality through art and usurping the procreative role for the furthering of humanity in an intellectual sense. Conversely, the metaphor underlines the traditional divisions of labor in society—men create, women procreate.<sup>112</sup>

Benedetta, in effect, reclaimed the metaphor of birth as a means of legitimizing women's artistic creation.

In “Spiritualità della donna italiana” (a lecture that Benedetta gave throughout Italy in 1935 and which was printed in a number of newspapers), Benedetta wrote that the Italian woman would never be a rival of man because she is too much and too essentially mother—a clearly Fascist sentiment (“La donna italiana non è, non sarà mai una concorrente dell’uomo. Ella è troppo ed essenzialmente madre.”).<sup>113</sup> However, for Benedetta “mother” also meant creator of art, emotions, passions, and ideas: “Quando si dice madre bisogna dare alla parola il suo grande significato di generatrice; generatrice di uomini, di sentimenti, di passioni, di idée.”<sup>114</sup> Her theoretical framework closely related woman’s ability to create art with her biological capacity to create children, though (as noted) in her novels the female protagonists are not mothers. Deprived of her “nature” (according to Fascism), woman is ascribed a new role by Benedetta that is characterized by significantly more agency than Fascist theory allowed. Yet, in the same breath, Benedetta espoused Fascist propaganda. She writes that Fascism wants sons, Fascism protects and takes care of its mothers, constructs the family and has organized professional woman and female artists. It is up to the Italian woman to create the new poetry of life at precisely the moment that Italy is affirming its imperial will:

Il Fascismo ha voluto e vuole il figlio, il Fascismo cura e protegge la madre, il Fascismo costruisce la famiglia, tutela e favorisce il lavoro della donna, il Fascismo ha organizzato le donne professioniste e artiste....È alla donna italiana additava così questo destino e questo compito: creare la nuova poesia della vita.

Non senza un chiaro pensiero l’appello alle donne è stato rivolto nel momento in cui l’Italia afferma la propria volontà imperiale e la deve affermare con la Guerra.<sup>115</sup>

Benedetta mixes poetic allusion with Italy’s military operation in Ethiopia, conflating creation with war and self-sacrifice. At the heart of her message is the need for woman’s sacrifice for the regime—a sentiment that will be repeated in her many lectures and

essays of the later 1930s and early 1940s. Giachero has suggested that Benedetta, “through exalting motherhood, but specifying, at the same time, that one could be mother both of men and of ideas, deluded herself that she could reconcile the two extremes.”<sup>116</sup> I would argue, however, that Benedetta (at least until 1939), sustains, if not reconciles, both roles as avant-garde artist and regime propagandist.

Underpinning Benedetta’s theories is the notion of a female essence. Positing a theory of feminine art in her untitled, undated (probably from the mid- to late-1930s) manuscript (“*Riassumere quindi l’arte femminile*”), Benedetta describes such a “female art” as intuitive, mysterious, and rhythmic: “*Riassumere quindi l’arte femminile: intuito, sensibilità, ritmo. Il misterioso il fantastico il sognato le appartengono.*”<sup>117</sup> Contending that when woman rebels she separates from her nature, resulting in a deviant or sadly pessimistic artist, Benedetta seems to embrace explicitly Fascist (and Lombrosian) notions regarding the limited role of woman.<sup>118</sup> Yet, she also works precisely against such prescribed limitations when, in her essay she also rhetorically asks, “*È orgoglioso troppo se noi donne ci riservassimo la più alta lotta—quella di conquistare col nostro intuito materno il segreto della creazione obbligando i materiali e il verbo a racchiuderlo?*”<sup>119</sup> Thus, woman’s maternal instinct was to be put in service of both the regime and artistic creation. While Benedetta truly believed in the intimate relationship between maternity and creativity, her advocacy of motherhood complied entirely with the regime’s insistence on it as woman’s central role. By embracing Fascist dictates regarding the role of woman as mother, Benedetta constituted herself as a citizen in good standing, while, at the same time, this very role veiled any perceived dissidence in her

activities. In this sense, Benedetta's theories subverted the regime even as she complied with its policies.

Fascist dogma required not just dutiful biological reproduction, but also conformance to Fascist political ideology.<sup>120</sup> In many ways Benedetta by the late 1930s/early 1940s became emblematic of such Fascist motherhood, demonstrating in her lectures and articles an overt allegiance to the regime and encouraged all women to join her in her patriotism. She gave lectures throughout Italy on the role of woman, which were often printed in newspapers, carried on the radio, and, on occasion, even disseminated abroad. Some were directed specifically to audiences outside Europe, such as her essay "Alle donne d'Europa e d'Italia" and the English language radio broadcast of "The Modern Woman's Contribution to Literature and Art."<sup>121</sup> In that essay she writes, "Modern woman is the result of many factors, but above all of the economic crisis, of velocity, of sport. We cannot circumscribe modern woman in an only type."<sup>122</sup> Benedetta characterizes woman as "an immediate being, little tied to the past, more to the future, since she carries life in her very self."<sup>123</sup> She continues:

Other characteristics: the racial instinct today is expressed more freely by her. I mean by instinct that which in our character, in the depths of our beings, is tied to nature. That which is essential to us, which represents the continuity of the species, which does not lie, which does not permit any pause, but pushes towards life, like the force of a grain of wheat which slits open the dark earth to rise and become a golden ear of corn....Intuition, a profound comprehension, this is what femininity brings to art.<sup>124</sup>

Benedetta here describes woman's nature in highly sexualized terms, reclaiming not only the metaphor of birth for women, but the phallus, as well. Woman's intuition, consequently, can be seen as the embodiment of both female and male characteristics, in

a cancellation of traditional divisions (both sexual and intellectual/cultural). This same concept of intuition (and femininity) dominates Benedetta's works of fiction.

Increasingly, Benedetta's lectures reflected less of her theories of art and creativity and more of the regime's rhetoric. In 1936, *Il Progresso*, the Italian community newspaper of New York, reprinted "Building Moral Resistance; Source of Pride for Mothers: Message to the Women of America and Europe Asks for Understanding in the Resistance of Sanctions" by Benedetta. The introduction describes Benedetta as an "ideal Fascist wife and mother who paints, lectures, and travels, and is the active leader of Fascist women throughout Italy."<sup>125</sup> Benedetta's message is clearly an appeal against the sanctions imposed on Italy by the League of Nations, due to Italy's invasion of Ethiopia:

Therefore, Women beyond the Alps and across the seas: we ask you to look upon us. Certainly your hearts will be with us—who humbly embrace renunciation and are ready to offer all we have in order to achieve the highest degree of pure and ardent patriotism.

For we Italian women are guided by an ideal Decalogue:

—Religious devotion to Italy, to Fascism as created by Benito Mussolini. Proud absolute devotion which enables us to offer spontaneously any sacrifice, including that of our private affections and of our lives.

—Every day of our lives shall sweep the earth with a bright and lyric wave of optimism.

—Consider life sacred: of beings, ideas, sentiments. Be faithful. Never deny it, giving yourself generously up to it.

—Look beyond the brutality and pain of childbirth. Motherhood is a spiritual force which it is your duty to complete to perfection.

—Do not consider yourself isolated, but live in the full splendor of the social architecture; humbly associate yourself with its profound law.

—Systematically destroy in yourself any petty sterile vanity without hiding behind resignation or hypocrisy.

—Proudly and gratefully bear your womanly fate—a sensitive, intuitive being, called upon to contain and prepare the future.<sup>126</sup>

In describing the determination and self-sacrifice of Italian women, Benedetta goes so far as to invoke Catherine Sforza, who infamously flouted her enemies who had kidnapped her sons, taunting them by saying that even if they killed her sons, she had the mold to

make more. In a highly rhetorical form, Benedetta adopts the regime's insistence on self-sacrifice, demonstrating a strong embrace of Fascist ideology. Benedetta's style becomes increasingly militant in these speeches, in an ironic reversal of the earliest women Futurists' use of militant rhetoric as a revolutionary means of breaking out of traditional, conservative roles.

Although it was "ordained" by the regime, Benedetta's function as a public orator simultaneously ran counter to Fascist ideology with regard to the role of woman. Therefore, oddly, Benedetta's overtly Fascistic public speeches conflict with the regime's own rhetoric. At the 1941 speech Benedetta gave entitled "Donne della Patria in Guerra," she discussed the role of woman in relation to war, insisting on the need for Italian women's patriotism, pride and sacrifice.<sup>127</sup> While delivering the speech Benedetta wore a Fascist uniform. A woman public orator in military dress is antithetical to the regime's insistence on "femininity" versus "virility" (though in keeping with its increasingly severe dictums, including the unsuccessful campaign to have citizens wear uniforms). In a perverse reversal (perhaps a form of self-preservation as much as patriotism) Benedetta exchanged her mask of femininity for one of virility, underscoring the strange complexity of her position.

While an outspoken advocate of the regime, Benedetta often seemed to break with its policies. In 1934, Mussolini, upon reading an advertisement urging women to join a local flying club, immediately wired the city's prefect to halt the director from accepting female members. He declared: "In Fascist Italy, the most Fascist thing Italian women can do is pilot many children."<sup>128</sup> Yet during that time period, Benedetta, as an active adherent of *aeropittura*, advocated the power and excitement of flying, exalting her own

flights in the 1931 catalogue accompanying the *Mostra Futurista de Aeropittura* at Galleria Pesaro, Milan. By way of comparison, Giannina Censi offers another somewhat paradoxical example of a woman Futurist put in service of the regime. A dancer, Censi took part in Futurist performances of the early 1930s, traveling with the troupe of Marinetti's play *Simultanina*.<sup>129</sup> In 1933, she was featured in photographs illustrating Dr. Poggi-Longostrevi's text *Cultura fisica della donna ed estetica femminile*. The book reflects the directive of the Gran Consiglio del Fascismo and is directed at young female subjects of the regime to help them correct and prevent imbalances of the female body by cultivating agility, grace, and strength in women (whose ultimate vocation, it was made clear, remained always that of motherhood).<sup>130</sup> Yet, in the photographs, Censi looks decidedly un-Fascist, striking Futurist aerodance poses in a one-shouldered swimsuit-like costume and aviator's cap. It is such examples that point to the ways in which mass culture and media countered the rigidity of Fascist sexual difference and gender identity. Such reflections of the internal contradictions of the regime shed light on how Benedetta could occupy seemingly conflicting positions.

This ambiguity seems imbedded in Benedetta's late paintings, as well. As discussed previously, *Il Monte Tabor*, of 1939, reflects the imperialistic desires of the regime, glorifying its conquest of Ethiopia. However, contrary to good State art, it also is strangely escapist with its "cosmic" overtones. In its relationship to the enigmatic final dream of *Astra e il sottomarino*, it conjures up references to the unconscious and the dream state, both Surrealist elements. Given that Surrealism was then under attack by conservative critics, Benedetta's espousal of Fascism in its last years was not as dogmatic as might seem. The Fascist official Giuseppe Bottai denounced some forms of "foreign"

modernism, claiming that works that were “psychoanalytic” and “fragmentary” were “rebellious against the Italian tradition.”<sup>131</sup>

In addition to land reclamation programs, in 1938 (at the same time as the Fascist racial laws and the “reform of custom”) there began a “cultural reclamation” designed to ban foreign influences.<sup>132</sup> The conquest of Ethiopia had met with internal support in Italy by many intellectuals. However, increasing strictures made politically unfettered cultural production increasingly difficult.<sup>133</sup> Ben-Ghiat states, “The new conditions required intellectuals to become vigilant self-censors if they wished to remain productive members of the fascist cultural community.”<sup>134</sup> Cultural producers were forced to minimize their connections with European modernism. To that end, architects began to look toward native constructions. Giuseppe Pagano proposed vernacular constructions as emblems of an uninterrupted functionalist tradition in Italy and organized an exhibition of rural architecture for the 1936 Triennial to demonstrate the inherent Italian-ness of flat-roofed, simple white boxes, that were also seen as emblems of architectural modernism.<sup>135</sup> It is precisely such types of structures that Benedetta employs in works such as *Il Monte Tabor* as signifiers of both the Italian and the modernist.

It has been noted that cosmic imagery is suggestive of the mystical notion that the universe is a “single, living substance.”<sup>136</sup> Perhaps the allusion in *Il Monte Tabor* to a cosmic dream world represents a utopian desire for a conflict-free world. Benedetta’s composition offers a deeply nostalgic yearning for the spiritual that, like *Astra e il sottomarino*, suggests a deepening pessimism about human limitations.

In Benedetta’s *Aeropittura di un incontro con l’isola*, also from 1939, there is a significant detachment from the highly stylized land mass represented. In depicting the

island of Elba, Benedetta is inevitably contributing to the construction of the notion of *mediterraneità*. During the First World War, France, which saw herself as the defender of Western civilization against the barbarian forces, invoked the cultural signifiers *latinità* and *mediterraneità*; thus, when Italy, the seat of the Roman empire, entered into the war on the side of the allies, the cultural and moral significance was enormous.<sup>137</sup> The concepts of *latinità* and also *romanità* were invoked again on the occasion of Mussolini's conquest of Ethiopia and his declaration of the new Roman Empire.<sup>138</sup> The viaducts in Benedetta's *Sintesi delle comunicazioni terrestri* refer to such advances and evoke Italian imperial pride. Napoleon, considered by Mussolini to be the initiator of the unification and expansion of Italy, was also noted for the important improvements he made. Even during his short time as ruler of Elba, where he was banished, he is noted for having constructed its network of roads. In picturing Elba, Benedetta may well be referring, as she does in *Il Monte Tabor*, to the rule of Napoleon. However, unlike her reference in *Il Monte Tabor* to Napoleon's heroic conquests and imperialistic expansionism, Elba could only symbolize his defeat, abdication, and subsequent exile to the island.<sup>139</sup>

Given the harsh measures being implemented by the regime in the late 1930s, coupled with the attacks on Marinetti and Futurism (including the suppression of the review *Artecrazia*, edited by Mino Somenzi) Benedetta may have been disillusioned. Yet, she continued her propagandistic activities in favor of the regime, while the ailing Marinetti left in 1942 for the Russian front. After Marinetti's death in 1944 Benedetta halted all artistic production. As if no longer able to sustain her program of reconciliation and aesthetic harmony, Benedetta seems to give up, unable to create work outside of her identities as Fascist and Futurist. After relinquishing her role as artist, Benedetta assumed

that of advocate and caretaker of Futurism in a post-war period in which both Futurism and Fascism were discredited.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> On the paradoxical relationship of the avant-garde and Fascist Italy see Emily Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> See Victoria de Grazia, "Nationalizing Women: The Competition between Fascist and Commercial Cultural Models in Mussolini's Italy," in *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, ed. Victoria de Grazia (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> Lucia Re, "Futurism and Feminism," *Annali d'Italianistica*, 7 (1989): 256.

<sup>4</sup> Victoria de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 20.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 21.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 20.

<sup>8</sup> Emily Braun, "Antonietta Raphaël: Artist, Woman, Foreigner, Jew, Wife, Mother, Muse, and Anti-Fascist," in *Mothers of Invention: Women, Italian Fascism, and Culture*, ed. Robin Pickering-Iazzi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 177. On February 11, 1929 the Lateran Accords were signed whereby the Pope recognized Italy as an independent country. In turn, Catholicism became the official religion of the Italian state and Vatican City was established as an independent state. The *Casti Connubii* was an encyclical on Christian Marriage circulated by Pope Pius XI on December 31, 1930.

<sup>9</sup> Mariolina Graziosi, "Gender Struggle and the Social Manipulation and Ideological Use of Gender Identity in the Interwar Years," in *Mothers of Invention: Women, Italian Fascism, and Culture*, ed. Robin Pickering-Iazzi (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 26

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 31-32.

<sup>11</sup> Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 19.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 22.

<sup>13</sup> de Grazia, "Nationalizing Women," 340. This paragraph relies heavily on De Grazia's article.

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<sup>14</sup> Robin Pickering-Iazzi, "Introduction: Inventions of Women's Making in History and in Critical Thought," in *Mothers of Invention: Women, Italian Fascism, and Culture*, ed. Robin Pickering-Iazzi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), xi.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* Benedetta and Marinetti brought up their own daughters to be educated and cultured, sending them, ironically, to Catholic school.

<sup>16</sup> Braun, "Antonietta Raphaël," 170.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>19</sup> Joan Riviere, "Womanliness as a Masquerade," reprinted in *Formations of Fantasy*, ed. Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan (London and New York: Methuen, 1986).

<sup>20</sup> Stephen Heath, "Joan Riviere and the Masquerade," in *Formations of Fantasy*, ed. Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan (London and New York: Methuen, 1986), 49.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>23</sup> This would also be in keeping with the later Lacanian notion that subjectivity is determined by the subject's entry into language, and therefore identity is defined as "a matrix of subject-positions, which may be inconsistent or even in contradiction with one another." Catherine Belsey, "Constructing the Subject; Deconstructing the Text," in *Feminisms; An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Robyn Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 596.

<sup>24</sup> Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator," in *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*, ed. Patricia Erens (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 49.

<sup>25</sup> Jennifer Blessing, "Introduction," *Rose is a Rose is a Rose: Gender Performance in Photography*, (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1997), 12.

<sup>26</sup> Véronique Machelidon, "Masquerade: A Feminine or Feminist Strategy?" in *Psychoanalyses/Feminisms*, ed. Peter L. Rudnytsky and Andre M. Gordon (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), 116.

<sup>27</sup> Barabara Spackman, *Fascist Virilities: Rhetoric, Ideology, and Social Fantasy in Italy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 37.

<sup>28</sup> Barbara Spackman, "Fascist Women and the Rhetoric of Virility," in *Mothers of Invention: Women, Italian Fascism, and Culture*, ed. Robin Pickering-Iazzi (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1995), 106.

<sup>29</sup> Spackman, *Fascist Virilities*, 40.

<sup>30</sup> Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women; Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign, 1907-1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 170.

<sup>31</sup> Mary Gibson, *Born to Crime; Cesare Lombroso and the Origins of Biological Criminology* (Westport, CT and London: Praeger, 2002), 58.

<sup>32</sup> Valentine de Saint-Point, "Manifesto futurista della lussuria," reprinted in translation as "Futurist Manifesto of Lust," in Mirella Bentivoglio and Franca Zoccoli, *Women Artists of Italian Futurism—Almost Lost to History* (New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 1997), 163.

<sup>33</sup> Nancy Locke contends, "The case of Saint-Point provides a fascinating opportunity to explore constructions of woman in fascism, and an examination of the representations of woman in her work would complement analyses already done on nations and individuals." Nancy Locke, "Valentine de Saint-Point and the Fascist Construction of Woman," in *Fascist Visions: Art and Ideology in France and Italy*, Matthew Affron and Mark Antliff, eds. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 74. Locke's leap from Futurism to Fascism in the work of Saint-Point is misleading. While Saint-Point's manifestos help shed light on the role of woman, her manifestos are written well before the Fascist period and to use them to exemplify Fascist impositions of gender roles is highly problematic.

<sup>34</sup> Spackman, *Fascist Virilities*, 38.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 39.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

<sup>37</sup> Gibson, *Born to Crime*, 18. Gibson's thorough contextual examination of Lombroso's theories largely informs this section.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 21.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 2

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 61.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 65.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 89.

<sup>47</sup> A. James Gregor, *Giovanni Gentile: Philosopher of Fascism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2001), 51.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 79.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 64.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 73.

<sup>52</sup> de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women*, 152.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 153-54.

<sup>54</sup> Re, "Fascist Theoreis of 'Woman,'" 82.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 85.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 90.

<sup>58</sup> Giovanna Gullace, "Introduction," in Giovanni Gentile, *The Philosophy of Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), xxxviii.

<sup>59</sup> "Mother—creates and educates children, is more than being a man because she contains him in the future—it is necessary to form woman because woman is the foundation of society." Benedetta, untitled ("È certamente l'uomo..."), AMs, undated (probably from the late-1930s), Papers of F. T. Marinetti and Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, 920092, Special Collections, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, 3.

<sup>60</sup> Braun, *Sironi*, 2.

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- <sup>61</sup> Marla Stone, *The Patron State: Culture and Politics in Fascist Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).
- <sup>62</sup> Andrew Hewitt, *Fascist Modernism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 41.
- <sup>63</sup> Braun, *Sironi*, 66-67.
- <sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>65</sup> Günter Berghaus, *Italian Futurist Theater, 1909-1944* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 334. The Futurists exhibited as a group at the Biennale di Venezia of 1926, but were allowed to include only 60 works. In 1928, they were allowed a mere 18. In 1930, after Marinetti became a member of the Accademia and the control of the Biennale was shifted from the Venice city council to the State, the Futurists were allowed a much larger number of works, totaling 127. However, official purchases remained minimal. In 1930 only one work was purchased—interestingly, Prampolini's portrait of Benedetta. 1932 marked the best reception the Futurists would receive, with numerous purchases. After this, however, their recognition fell off once again. See Patrizia Rosazza-Ferraris, "The aeropainters and the state: commissions and acquisitions," in *Futurism in Flight* (Rome: De Luca Edizioni d'Arte, 1990).
- <sup>66</sup> Philip Cannistraro, "Fascism and Culture in Italy, 1919-1945," in *Italian Art of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, ed. Emily Braun (London: Royal Academy, 1989), 148.
- <sup>67</sup> As early as 1922 a corporation of intellectuals was established under the Confederazione Nazionale delle Corporazione Sindicali. In 1924 this was incorporated into the Corporazione delle Professioni Intelletuali (Corporation of Intellectual Professors). In 1926 Mussolini replaced the Corporazione Sindicali with the Confederazione Nazionale dei Sindacati Fascisti (National Confederation of Fascist Unions). Finally during 1928-31 Mussolini did away with the Federation and established the Confederazione dei Professionisti e degli Artisti (Confederation of Professionals and Artists). Cannistraro, "Fascism and Culture in Italy, 1919-1945," 149.
- <sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.
- <sup>69</sup> Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*, 21.
- <sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.
- <sup>71</sup> Mabel Berenzin, *Making the Fascist Self: The Political Culture of Interwar Italy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 110.
- <sup>72</sup> Berghaus, *Italian Futurist Theater*, 337. The police opened a file on Marinetti because of alleged anti-Fascist activities.

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 338.

<sup>74</sup> Berezin, *Making the Fascist Self*, 111.

<sup>75</sup> Stone quotes the notes from the 1931 Biennale administrative council deliberations in which Sarfatti asks if there must always be a room dedicated to the Futurists. Oppo responds that they tried to reduce the number of rooms for the Futurists at the Quadriennale. "But, Marinetti wrote [Mussolini], who called me and told me to add an additional eight...It is blackmail." Stone, *The Patron State*, 51-52.

<sup>76</sup> See the seminal study by Philip Cannistraro and Brian Sullivan, *Il Duce's Other Woman* (NY: William Morrow and Company, 1993).

<sup>77</sup> Günter Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1996), 224.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 263, note 23.

<sup>79</sup> Berghaus, *Italian Futurist Theater*, 334.

<sup>80</sup> Braun, *Mario Sironi*, 90-91.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. The original seven included Anselmo Bucci, Leonardo Dudreville, Achille Funi, Pietro Marussig, Gian Emilio Malerba, Ubaldo Oppi, and Sironi.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 91-92.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 95.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 112.

<sup>85</sup> Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*, 248.

<sup>86</sup> Rosazza-Ferraris, "The Aeropainters and the State," 34.

<sup>87</sup> Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*, 251-252. Berghaus outlines a series of attacks in the form of articles by Stefano Tuscano printed in *Il perseo*.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 254.

<sup>89</sup> de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women*, 43. This section is heavily indebted to de Grazia's study.

<sup>90</sup> Spackman, *Fascist Virilities*, 35.

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<sup>91</sup> de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women*, 1. Others have proposed that women were seduced by Mussolini's persona and/or coerced into submission. See for example, Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, *La donna "nera": "Consenso" femminile e fascismo* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1976). See also Robin Pickering-Iazzi's critique of such approaches in "Unseduced Mothers: Configurations of a Different Female Subject Transgressing Fascistized Femininity," in *Feminine Feminists: Cultural Practices in Italy*, ed. Giovanna Miceli Jeffries (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

<sup>92</sup> Berenzin, *Making the Fascist Self*, 59.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 195

<sup>94</sup> de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women*, 8.

<sup>95</sup> "Men with or without employment felt justified in complaining about female competition, for public discourse held that female employment was unnecessary, that it caused neurasthenia and sterility, and that it obstructed fulfilling family obligations." Ibid, 75-76.

<sup>96</sup> Benito Mussolini, "Macchina e donna" quoted in translation in Spackman, *Fascist Virilities*, 163, note 7. Originally published in *Il popolo d'Italia*, 206 (August 31, 1934), 21.

<sup>97</sup> de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women*, 78.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> de Grazia, "Nationalizing Women," 345.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 345-46.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 342.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 342-43.

<sup>103</sup> "Benito Mussolini appointed us with a new, great task: We women accept it responding: We will not only tell our children...but we women will be the ones to carry the high inspirational motives of the Fascist era, we interweave a squadron of luminous threads on which we embroider dreams and reality." Benedetta, untitled ("Riassumere quindi l'arte femminile"), AMs (probably a lecture), undated (probably from the mid- to late-1930s), Papers of F. T. Marinetti and Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, 920092, Special Collections, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, 11.

<sup>104</sup> “We who have the power to give flesh to a human being, would like to also give materiality to our work of art through the miracle of art: This was the dream of my profoundly maternal and absolutely artistic youth.

Today, my desire is simultaneously more vast and concrete: I dream of the Italian woman, apex and driving force of the spiritual artistic expansion of the great Fascist Italy.” Ibid, 25.

<sup>105</sup> Graziosi, “Gender Struggle,” 40-41.

<sup>106</sup> Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*, 47.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 46.

<sup>108</sup> “Are women capable of creating music? Certainly, yes; femininity in fact is creation and music.” Benedetta, untitled, AMs, undated (probably from the mid-1930s), Papers of F. T. Marinetti and Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, 920092, Special Collections, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

<sup>109</sup> Nicola Pende, “Femminilità e la cultura femminile,” quoted in Robin Pickering-Iazzi, “Introduction,” xi. Originally published in *Gerarchia* in 1941.

<sup>110</sup> “This smile of joy illustrates the way in which a real Italian woman of the Fascist era is able to brilliantly reconcile the responsibilities of art and motherhood. The example here is given by the writer and painter Benedetta, wife of our illustrious and dear Marinetti, author of the book *Le forze umane* and of these two masterpieces named Vittoria and Ala.” “Futurismo e maternità,” *Oggi e Domani*, November 27, 1930.

<sup>111</sup> Emily Braun, “Antonietta Raphaël,” 178.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 189.

<sup>113</sup> “The Italian woman isn’t and will never be a rival of man. She is too essentially mother.” Benedetta, “Spiritualità della donna italiana,” *Scolte d’Africa*, November 6, 1935.

<sup>114</sup> “When one says ‘mother’ one must attribute to the word its great meaning of generator; generator of men, of feelings, of passions, of ideas.” Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> “Fascism has wanted and wants the child, Fascism takes care of and protects the mother, Fascism builds the family, it safeguards and favors the work of women, Fascism has organized professional women and female artists.... And to the Italian woman it pointed out this destiny and this duty: to create the new poetry of life. Not without a clear thought the appeal to women was addressed at the time in which Italy stated its imperial ambition and had to assert it with war.” Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Lia Giachero, "Seduced by Fascism: Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, the Woman Who Did Not Write Three Guineas," *Virginia Woolf and Fascism*, ed. Merry M. Pawlowski (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave, 2001), 163.

<sup>117</sup> "Therefore to summarize a female art: intuition, sensibility, rhythm. The mysterious, the fantastic, the dreamed belong to it." Benedetta, untitled ("Riassumere quindi l'arte femminile"), 1.

<sup>118</sup> Benedetta, untitled ("Riassumere quindi l'arte femminile"), 4.

<sup>119</sup> "Would it be too prideful if we women reserved [for] ourselves the highest fight—that of conquering with our maternal intuition the secret of creativity compelling materials and speech to contain it?" *Ibid*, 24.

<sup>120</sup> Graziosi, "Gender Struggle," 45.

<sup>121</sup> See Benedetta, "Alle donne d'Europa e d'Italia," *Il Giornale d'Italia*, February 23, 1936; and Benedetta "The Modern Woman's Contribution to Literature and Art," TD (Woman's Broadcast from Rome, Associazione Nazionale Fascista Donne Artiste e Laureate, Special Programs organized by The Italian Federation of P&P women), December 28, 1936, Librone, Papers of F. T. Marinetti and Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, 920092, Special Collections, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

<sup>122</sup> Benedetta, "The Modern Woman's Contribution."

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>125</sup> Benedetta, "Building Moral Resistance; Source of Pride for Mothers: Message to the Women of America and Europe Asks for Understanding in the Resistance of Sanctions," *Il Progresso* (New York), March 15, 1936.

<sup>126</sup> Benedetta's "message" is also preserved as an undated manuscript. See Benedetta, "A Message to the Women of America and Europe," AMs, undated, Papers of F. T. Marinetti and Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, 920092, Special Collections, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles. It reads in full as follows:

Rome.....Women of America and Europe: We ask for profound understanding.

We want you to feel with us the pure joy of our days burning with the ardor of faith, the fullness of our lives as mothers, wives, workers, the pride of being considered the high spirituality of our nation, the gladness with which we have accepted and are performing the duty of building up our moral resistance.

Women of America and Europe: those among you who must stifle their femininity from the necessity of earning their livelihood or from lack of love; you intellectuals who strive to achieve equality with man that your work may be the more

justly appreciated; you mothers who jealously [guard] their motherly instincts within their hearts lest they be hurt by indifference—you all human and sensitive women, too often perhaps wounded by man's incomprehension and whose days, though you do not confess it, are loaded with dull pain and boredom; women whose life is but a frivolous and vain awaiting, or a duty without love, or a labor without joy, or a motherhood that is heavy: Be grateful to Fascism and look with sisterly love upon the Italian Woman.

Thankful to Fascism because it has given us our rightful place, serene, full of soul and future. Rich with work. Luminous.

Fascism baptizes our flowering with the instinct of race: Mothers, Creators.

MOTHERS: Our glory consists in the child and is our most holy right.

CREATORS: All the atmospheres of thought, goodness, heroism are immensified because we give them life.

Historical human task.

Whatever be the distance between us, here we shall find and appreciate each other.

Therefore, Women beyond the alps and across the seas: we ask you to look upon us. Certainly your hearts will be with us—who humbly embrace renunciation and are ready to offer all we have in order to achieve the highest degree of pure and ardent patriotism.

For we Italian women are guided by an ideal Decalogue:

—Religious devotion to Italy, to Fascism as created by Benito Mussolini. Proud absolute devotion which enables us to offer spontaneously any sacrifice, including that of our private affections and of our lives.

—Every day of our lives shall sweep the earth with a bright and lyric wave of optimism.

—Consider life sacred: of beings, ideas, sentiments. Be faithful. Never deny it, giving yourself generously up to it.

—Look beyond the brutality and pain of childbirth. Motherhood is a spiritual force which it is your duty to complete to perfection.

—Do not consider yourself isolated, but live in the full splendor of the social architecture; humbly associate yourself with its profound laws.

—Systematically destroy in yourself any petty sterile vanity without hiding behind resignation or hypocrisy.

—Proudly and gratefully bear your womanly fate—a sensitive, intuitive being, called upon to contain and prepare the future.

—Develop your intelligence, carefully observing Life and Science, audaciously striking new paths, especially if they be difficult.

—Take care of your body with the precise goal of achieving Beauty, Health, Strength.

—Work without hesitation or pause in active solidarity with mankind.

Today might be spoken the famous words which Catherine Sforza, besieged by the enemy and enemy and threatened with the death of her imprisoned sons, brutally flung down from the battlements of her castle: 'With this die I shall make others.'

Today's are the proud letters to il Duce from wives and mothers who overcome their sorrow for the death of their loved ones in Africa, with the conviction that their sacrifice makes holy the conquered soil.

Today's and certainly also tomorrow's is the proud smile which appears on the lips of the fine Italian women the frontiers are closed, signifying:

'We have the blue of the sea, the roses of our gardens, the perfumed orange groves with which to clothe our bodies.

And on our hair the sunshine.'

<sup>127</sup> See photograph and article entitled "Donne e della Patria in Guerra: Conferenza di Benedetta Marinetti," *Il Secolo*, November 27, 1941. The talk was presented by the Istituto nazionale di cultura fascista in collaboration with the Fasci femminili. The Istituto was established in 1925 to disseminate propaganda in Italy, often through lectures delivered by intellectuals. Cannistraro, "Fascism and Culture in Italy," 148.

<sup>128</sup> de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women*, 76.

<sup>129</sup> See Giannina Censi, "Storia della Mia Vita," *Memorie di Giannina Censi*, AMs, Archivio Giannina Censi, Cen.9.1, Archivio del '900, Rovereto. Censi was born in Voghera in 1913. She traveled to Paris in 1930 and studied dance, encountering dancers of the ballets Russe as well as Josephine Baker. At about the same time she began frequenting Futurist circles. Escodamè (the pseudonym of Michele Leskovitch) directed the production of Marinetti's play *Simultanina* (subtitled as "divertimento in 19 sintesi"), the sets for which were designed by Benedetta. Based on the Futurist concept of simultaneity, the play was an interpenetration of several different scenes, performed on stage together, with the actors continuously changing their characters. A kind of interplay between mime and gesture, Censi danced without music interpreting the works of the actors and the stage setting, alternating expressions of joy and pain depending on the scenographic context. See Bentivoglio and Zoccoli, *Women Artists of Futurism*, 45. The play (and the serate) was met with boos, whistles, and a pelting of vegetables. Censi describes: "In teatro avveniva il finimondo, tanto che nessun attore riusciva a recitare, le urla e i fischi e il lancio di legumi accompagnavano le parole e la regia del lavoro. Solo alla mia uscita il pubblico si rimetteva in silenzio perchè ero l'unica donna giovane (dopo la prima attrice) che si esibiva con della musica più comprensibile. Ma alla fine della mia danza, la pioggia di pomodori riempiva il proscenio." Censi, "Storia della Mia Vita."

In 1931 at the Galleria Pesaro, Milan, Censi participated in a serata in which she interpreted the paintings of Enrico Prampolini, dancing in a costume of metal tubes, an aviator's hat, and bare feet, which caused a great scandal.

<sup>130</sup> Elisa Vaccarino, ed., *Giannina Censi: Danzare il Futurismo*, (Milan: Electa, 1998), 20-22.

<sup>131</sup> Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*, 25.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid*, 124.

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 127.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 131.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, 136.

<sup>136</sup> Maurice Tuchman, "Meanings in Abstract Art," in *The Spiritual in Art; Abstract Painting, 1890-1985*, ed. Maurice Tuchman (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986), 23.

<sup>137</sup> Kenneth Silver, *Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914-1925* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 93.

<sup>138</sup> Berezin, *Making the Fascist Self*, 173.

<sup>139</sup> In 1804 Napoleon proclaimed himself emperor and transformed the Italian Republic into the Kingdom of Italy. Napoleon was badly defeated by the Russians in 1812 and was subsequently exiled to Elba. In 1815 (9 months later) he escaped from exile and made a last, unsuccessful attempt to regain his position as sovereign of France. See Spencer Di Scala, *Italy from Revolution to Republic, 1700 to the Present*, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1995), 36-37.

## CHAPTER 6

### EPILOGUE AND CONCLUSION

#### **Benedetta Promoter of Futurism**

With the death of Marinetti in 1944, the Futurist movement ended and Benedetta ceased her artistic activities. However, she did not abandon Futurism. Instead, in the years following the Second World War, her role shifted from producer to promoter and historical guardian. Beginning in the late 1940s, Benedetta sold off much of the collection of Futurist works that she and Marinetti had amassed. This was, according to her daughter Luce, in part to raise funds in the hope of creating a center for Futurist studies, but was largely due to financial exigencies.<sup>1</sup> The center did not come into being, and Benedetta ultimately sold many of what are now considered the most canonical works of Futurism to important international collections, particularly in America.

In the years immediately following the Second World War, the director of the Museum of Modern Art, Alfred H. Barr, actively acquired Futurist works for the museum, as well as for influential friends such as Nelson Rockefeller. What emerges from the correspondence surrounding these dealings is that Benedetta, at times a hard-nosed negotiator, insisted on the importance and worth of Futurism, despite the low post-war market.

In 1949, Rockefeller (with Barr's assistance) purchased Umberto Boccioni's triptych *Stati d'animo* from Benedetta. In a letter to Benedetta regarding this sale Barr wrote:

Futurist painting has very little commercial value in the United States so that it would take great persuasion to convince our Committee that we should pay anything like so much as \$10,000 for 3 Boccioni's. I wonder indeed whether you really wish to sell the paintings to which, obviously, you must be very attached. . . . We very much enjoyed our two visits to your house. . . . It was very agreeable to us to find the widow of Marinetti so interesting a writer and personality.<sup>2</sup>

In a separate letter to Rockefeller regarding the same transaction, Barr wrote:

Signora Marinetti held out stubbornly for 10 days but finally accepted your offer of \$6,000. . . . Both Jim Soby and I thought that the Museum ought to go up to \$7,500 if necessary to get these really important pictures, but our committee did not agree with us. So I am delighted that you have them.<sup>3</sup>

Benedetta's negotiations over Futurist artworks indicate her conviction of their worth, and her realization that Barr recognized their value as well. Moreover, her position as Marinetti's widow (rather than as artist in her own right) is made clear by Barr's surprise at and only mild interest in her artistic activities. Barr's reference to Benedetta as the "agreeable" widow Marinetti in no way begins to note Benedetta's own achievements, which are not again discussed in their correspondence.

In July 1948, and after some wrangling over price, Barr wrote to Benedetta agreeing to her price of \$1,500 for Boccioni's bronze *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* and offering \$800 for Boccioni's *Development of a Bottle in Space*.<sup>4</sup> A somewhat unpleasant letter from Benedetta to Barr regarding the purchase indicates the difficulty for her of selling Futurist works at what she considered inferior prices:

I accepted your conditions, which were far from being satisfactory to me, taking for granted that the whole sum would be in my hands at the moment the two casts were to leave my house.

I am sorry not to be able to face another procrastination. I did not at first realize your standpoint, as we are in the habit here to perform the payment at the moment of the deliverance of the goods.

I therefore must consider myself free from any obligation to the Museum of Modern Art. Should you still be interested in these two sculptures by Boccioni, and ready to make the proposed payment of 2,300 dollars at once, please let me know, and I shall immediately advise you if I am still in a condition to let you have two sculptures referred to.<sup>5</sup>

The situation was resolved and the museum acquired the works. A few weeks later

Benedetta wrote again to Barr, making explicit her acute financial difficulties:

Just as your kind letter reached me I received word from the Banca Commerciale that the payment of \$2,300 on the behalf of the Museum of Modern Art had been made to me.

It has perhaps been a mistake not to put things more plainly in my first letters so to avoid subsequent explanations—Believe me anyhow that only the need of facing some heavy obligations compelled me to write you as I did.<sup>6</sup>

While Benedetta's financial burdens compelled her to sell off much of her collection, it remains clear that she also intended to safeguard the legacy and reputation of Futurism.

Benedetta's first introduction to Barr and his colleague James Thrall Soby came via Romeo Toninelli (an art dealer and cultural agent) regarding the exhibition of Italian art they were organizing for MoMA. Toninelli (President of the Circolo delle Arti, Milano) wrote to Benedetta in April 1948 introducing Barr and Soby. Toninelli assured her that the project was strictly "private, cultural and apolitical" and was being organized by the Museum with the collaboration of the Circolo delle Arti and the American Academy in Rome.<sup>7</sup> Barr immediately began negotiations with Benedetta to purchase several works. Only in the following year did Barr continue with his original motive for meeting with her, to borrow works for the exhibition. Benedetta agreed to lend several to the 1949 exhibition.

Throughout the 1950s Benedetta also sold work to Harry Winston and his wife Lydia Winston Malbin, who would become the foremost collector of Futurism in America. Among their many acquisitions from Benedetta, the Winstons purchased *Mercurio passa davanti al sole* (Mercury Passes Before the Sun) and *Iniezione di Futurismo* (Futurist Injection) by Balla in 1954, and Luigi Russolo's *Il Profumo* (Perfume) and Boccioni's bronze *Antigrizioso* (Antigraceful) in 1956. In addition, Benedetta dispersed Futurist works throughout Europe to prominent institutions and collectors. However, it was through her sales to the Winstons, to MoMA, and others (in part, through the Sidney Janis Gallery), that Benedetta helped shape the definition of and disseminated information about Futurism in the United States. As the widow of Marinetti, Benedetta undoubtedly felt that she was now singularly responsible for maintaining the visibility and integrity of the movement.

Benedetta perhaps best encapsulated her history of Futurism in an account published in a 1950 edition of *Cahiers d'Art* entitled "Uu demi-siècle d'art italien."<sup>8</sup> Entitled "Le Futurisme," the article was presented by the editors as a rich, impartial, and objective source of information on the movement. Detailed and idiosyncratic, Benedetta's chronology begins with a poetic biographical account of Marinetti and his activities up to the birth of Futurism. The rest of her article is a more factual overview of the movement through 1944, comprised of short chronological entries, with the exception of several paragraphs on Balla in which she vividly describes not only his importance to the movement (and his role as a teacher to many, including Boccioni), but also his vivid blue eyes, serene demeanor and youthful explosiveness. While Benedetta highlights the contributions of each of the central members of the movement, by presenting lengthier

and more personal pictures of Marinetti and Balla, she suggests that these are the two core figures of Futurism (diverging from Boccioni-centric descriptions of the group). Benedetta outlines the whole of Futurist activities through the 1930s (including *aeropittura* and *arte sacra*), noting her own participation. The editors, in keeping with Benedetta's portrayal, chose a work by Balla as the cover illustration. They also reproduced a number of late Futurist works by artists including Gerardo Dottori, Tato, and Benedetta, as well as a 1924 poem by Marinetti entitled "à Beny." Thus, not only did Benedetta describe her role in Futurism's history, but she also underlined her privileged personal relationship to its key members.

### Conclusion

As demonstrated, Benedetta, despite her virtual historical obscurity in America, occupied a unique position within Futurism, playing a central role in the movement's development in the 1920s and 1930s. Her work was well received and she was awarded public and private commissions rarely given to women. Her position as the wealthy and renowned Marinetti's wife allowed her to paint and publish, as well as raise a family. At the same time, Benedetta refused to be subsumed by or passive to Marinetti and developed an original voice, despite the difficulty of doing so within the male-dominated systems of Futurism and Fascism. Benedetta's relationship to Marinetti also allows us to reframe his attitudes toward woman, revealing her influence on him and his work. Benedetta's work, particularly her novels, was generally praised by critics during the 1920s and 1930s, though these reviews qualified her work as "good for a woman." Marinetti, who expressed in writing his admiration for her work on a number of occasions, was the only male to call her in print an equal.

Benedetta brought her various identities as a woman, a Fascist subject, a painter and writer, a wife, and a mother together, in keeping with her program of artistic reconciliation. Moreover, she made her belief in the power of art and the strength and creativity of woman apparent in her writing. These themes are brought together in her first novel *Le forze umane*. Benedetta's conception of an individuated female self and of love as a relationship between equals that are explored in *Le forze umane* and expanded in *Astra e il sottomarino*, run contrary to Fascist prescriptions regarding the role of woman. Both novels, as well as *Viaggio di Gararà*, depict strong female protagonists and incorporate varied influences, including Theosophy and Surrealism. In all, Benedetta's three novels were innovative and experimental, melding graphic syntheses, poetry, dialogue, dream sequences, letters, and color symbolism that was linked to oneiric interests prevalent at the time.

Mysticism and a concern with the other-worldly is an important component of Benedetta's literary and artistic works. She also displayed an interest in the Catholic-based *arte sacra* that surfaced within Futurism in the 1930s. Aspects of the work of Boccioni and Balla, such as the expression of psychological states and the exploration of color, provided central influences on Benedetta's work. In her *aeropittura* paintings, Benedetta combines these and other influences (such as Divisionism and Metaphysical painting) into synthetic and original compositions that transcend the style and collapse traditional genre definitions.

As Fascism in Italy developed in the 1930s, Benedetta assumed Fascism's construction of woman as the ideal mother. Ultimately, Benedetta became a vocal supporter of the Fascist regime, a position she did not disavow after the collapse of the

regime. However, as evidenced by her activities after the Second World War, she dedicated herself to a reclamation of Futurism, which was generally perceived as tainted by Fascism. Thus, in her final role, Benedetta took on the mission of her late husband by perpetuating the legacy of Futurism in Italy and abroad.

Benedetta's status as a woman, an Italian, a second-generation Futurist, and a Fascist have worked against her and marginalized her position in art history. Yet, the difficulty in classifying Benedetta also prevents her from being pigeonholed. Her aesthetic of reconciliation and her philosophy of creativity placed harmony and motherhood at the center of her thinking. Not only did she manage to incorporate such differing ideas into the Futurist framework, she found a means of individual expression within the confines of the Fascist totalitarian state. Her career exemplifies both a woman's history that has, until recently, been ignored, and the internal contradictions of Futurism and Fascism.

## NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> Luce Marinetti Barbi, Rome, interview by the author, November 20, 1997, Lugano.
- <sup>2</sup> Alfred H. Barr to Benedetta, TLS, May 28, 1948, Papers of F. T. Marinetti and Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, 920092, Special Collections, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.
- <sup>3</sup> Alfred H. Barr to Nelson Rockefeller, TL (carbon copy), October 13, 1949, James Thrall Soby Papers, Archives of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- <sup>4</sup> Alfred H. Barr to Benedetta, TLS, July 13, 1948, Papers of F. T. Marinetti and Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, 920092, Special Collections, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.
- <sup>5</sup> Benedetta to Alfred H. Barr, AL (copy), 12 August 1948, Papers of F. T. Marinetti and Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, 920092, Special Collections, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.
- <sup>6</sup> Benedetta to Alfred H. Barr, AL (copy), September 7, 1948, Papers of F. T. Marinetti and Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, 920092, Special Collections, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.
- <sup>7</sup> Romeo Toninelli to Benedetta, TLS, April 26, 1948, Papers of F. T. Marinetti and Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, 920092, Special Collections, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.
- <sup>8</sup> Benedetta, "Le Futurisme," *Cahiers d'Art* 1 (1950).

## APPENDIX A

## ARTE MECCANICA. MANIFESTO FUTURISTA

Ciò che noi chiamiamo l'Arte meccanica, cioè la Macchina adorata e considerata come simbolo, fonte e maestra della nuova sensibilità artistica, è nata col primo Manifesto Futurista, nel 1909, nella più meccanica città d'Italia: Milano. Questo primo Manifesto, pubblicato dal *Figaro*, tradotto in tutte le lingue e lanciato a molte centinaia di migliaia di esemplari, conteneva idee che sconvolsero e mutarono le anime degli artisti di tutto il mondo:

“Noi affermiamo che la magnificenza del mondo si è arricchita di una bellezza nuova: la bellezza della velocità. Un automobile da corsa col suo cofano adorno di grossi tubi simili a serpenti dall'alito esplosivo... un automobile ruggente che sembra correre sulla mitraglia, è più bella della Vittoria di Samotracia.

Noi canteremo le grandi folle... il vibrante fervore notturno degli arsenali... le officine, i ponti... i piroscafi avventurosi, le locomotive, e il volo scivolante degli aeroplani..”

Subito dopo Marinetti sviluppa il suo pensiero nel manifesto *Uccidiamo il Chiaro di Luna* e nel volume *Le Futurisme* (Paris 1911), che glorifica l'Uomo moltiplicato e il Regno della Macchina. Nel 1911-1912, appare il volume di versi liberi *Aeroplani* di Paolo Buzzi. Nel 1911-1912 corrono per il mondo le Esposizioni futuriste, che impongono la nuova sensibilità di compenetrazione, simultaneità, dinamismo plastico, formata nella passione ardente per la Macchina. Ai primi iniziatori, Boccioni, Balla, Russolo, Carrà, Severini, si uniscono: Depero, Prampolini, Funi, Dudreville, Sant'Elia, Soffici, Sironi, Galli, Baldessari, Marasco. Nell'ottobre 1911 Marinetti crea le Parole in libertà *Battaglia Peso + odore*, libera esaltazione delle forze meccaniche della guerra. Seguono *Zang tumb tumb*, *Assedio di Adrianopoli* e il *Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista* (1912), con queste dichiarazioni di Marinetti:

“È la solidità di una lastra d'acciaio, che c'interessa per sé stessa cioè l'alleanza incomprensibile e inumana delle sue molecole e dei suoi elettroni, che si oppongono, per esempio, alla penetrazione di un obice. Il calore di un pezzo di ferro o di legno è ormai più appassionante per noi, del sorriso o delle lagrime di una donna.

“Noi vogliamo dare, in letteratura, la vita del motore, nuovo animale istintivo del quale conosceremo l'istinto generale allorché avremo conosciuti gl'istinti delle diverse forze che lo compongono.

“Nulla è più interessante, per un poeta futurista, che l'agitarsi della tastiera di un pianoforte meccanico. Il cinematografo ci offre la danza di un oggetto che si divide e si ricompone senza intervento umano”.

Nel 1912, il musicista futurista Balilla Pratella compone la sua prima opera futurista, *L'Aviatore Dro*, glorificazione dell'aeroplano e dell'eroismo aereo.

Nel 1913, nel suo manifesto: *L'Arte dei Rumori*, Luigi Russolo dopo aver descritto il meccanismo dei suoi intonarumori elettrici, scrive:

“Godiamo molto più nel combinare idealmente dei rumori di tram, di motori a scoppio, di carrozze e di folle vocianti, che nel riudire *l'Eroica o la Pastorale*. Attraversiamo una grande capitale moderna con le orecchie più attente che gli occhi, e godiamo nel distinguere i risucchi d'acqua, d'aria o di gas nei tubi metallici, e il borbottio dei motori che fiantano e pulsano con una indiscutibile animalità, il palpitare delle valvole, l'andirivieni degli stantuffi, gli stridori delle seghe meccaniche, i balzi dei *trams* sulle rotaie...”.

Nel 1914, Boccioni lancia la magica parola “Modernolatria”, sviluppandone il concetto nel suo volume *Pittura e scultura futuriste*. Nello stesso anno, scoppia col fragore d'una officina ispirata il volume di Luciano Folgore *Canto dei motori*.

Il 18 marzo 1914, Marinetti completa e definisce la nuova estetica futurista, col manifesto: *Lo splendore geometrico e meccanico e la nuova sensibilità numerica*, seguita dal manifesto *Nuova religione e morale della Velocità*.

Il 29 marzo 1914, nella Galleria Permanente futurista di Roma, Marinetti realizza il suo manifesto *La declamazione dinamica e sinottica*. Nel declamare le parole in libertà, bisogna imitare i motori e i loro ritmi mediante una gesticolazione meccanica. Il poema parolibero *Piedigrotta* di Cangiullo fu presentato con una declamazione dinamico-sinottica.

Nel 1915, il pittore futurista Prampolini completa e definisce la plastica futurista nel suo manifesto *Costruzione assoluta di moto-rumore*. Nel 1916, il pittore Severini spiega il *Macchinismo nell'arte*, in un suo articolo del *Mercure de France*.

Nel 1917, il pittore futurista Depero crea i suoi Balli Plastici con ritmi meccanici.

La rivista olandese *Mecano* constatava recentemente tutto ciò, pubblicando la fotografia di una macchina con questo titolo: *Plastica moderna dello spirito italiano*.

Ora, dopo innumerevoli battaglie, tentativi, ricerche, opere realizzate, vittorie indiscutibili, sentiamo il bisogno di liberarci degli ultimi avanzi della vecchia sensibilità, per creare definitivamente la nuova plastica ispirata dalla Macchina.

La Modernolatria predicata da Boccioni ci esalta sempre più. L'epoca in cui viviamo – tipicamente futurista – si distinguerà fra tutte nella storia per la divinità che vi impera: la Macchina.

Pulegge, volani, bulloni, ciminiere, acciaio lucido, grasso odorante, profumo di ozono delle centrali elettriche, ansare delle locomotive, urlare delle sirene, ruote dentate, pignoni!

**SENSO MECCANICO, NETTO, DECISO, che ci attrae irresistibilmente!**

Gli ingranaggi purificano i nostri occhi dalla nebbia dell'indeterminato. Tutto è tagliente, aristocratico, distinto.

**SENTIAMO MECCANICAMENTE. CI SENTIAMO COSTRUITI IN ACCIAIO. ANCHE NOI MACCHINE, ANCHE NOI MECCANIZZATI!**

Bellezza nuovissima degli autocarri veloci che corrono con un vasto tremolare sconquassato, ma sicuro e travolgente. Infinite gioie che danno agli occhi le architetture fantastiche delle gru, gli acciai freddi, lucenti e i palpitanti caratteri solidi, voluminosi e fugaci degli avvisi luminosi. Ecco le nostre nuove necessità spirituali e i principii della nostra nuova estetica.

La vecchia estetica si nutriva di leggende miti e storie, prodotti mediocri di collettività cieche e schiave.

L'estetica futurista si nutre dei più potenti e complessi prodotti del genio umano. La Macchina non è forse oggi il simbolo più esuberante della misteriosa forza creatrice umana? DALLA MACCHINA E NELLA MACCHINA SI SVOLGE OGGI TUTTO IL DRAMMA UMANO.

Noi futuristi imponiamo alla Macchina di strapparsi alla sua funzione pratica, assurgere nella vita spirituale e disinteressata dell'arte, e diventare un'altissima e feconda ispiratrice. L'artista che non vuol perire nell'impreciso o nel plagio, deve prestar fede soltanto alla propria vita e all'atmosfera in cui respira.

La belle macchine ci hanno circondati, si sono chinate su di noi amorevolmente, e noi selvaggi e istintivi scopritori d'ogni mistero, ci siamo lasciati prendere nel loro bizzarro e frenetico girotondo.

Invaghiti, le possedemmo virilmente, voluttuosamente.

Oggi sappiamo rivelare al mondo le loro anime profondissime e i loro smisurati cuori in cui spiraleggiano le dinamiche architetture; le nuove architetture, che Sant'Elia e Virgilio Marchi hanno già stabilite.

Bisogna però distinguere fra esteriorità e spirito della Macchina. Quando parlammo di bulloni, acciai, pignoni, ruote dentate, fummo frantesi. Precisiamo dunque il nostro pensiero: i manifesti e le opere del Futurismo, pubblicati esposti e commentati in tutto il mondo, hanno spinto molti artisti geniali, italiani, francesi, olandesi, belgi, tedeschi e russi verso l'Arte meccanica. Ma essi quasi sempre si fermarono all'esteriorità della macchina; perciò essi realizzarono soltanto: pitture puramente geometriche, aride ed esteriori (paragonabili a certi progetti d'ingegneria), le quali pur essendo ritmiche e costruttivamente equilibrate, mancano di interiorità ed hanno più sapore scientifico che contenuto lirico; costruzioni plastiche eseguite con autentici elementi meccanici (viti, ingranaggi, cremagliere, acciai, ecc.) che non entrano nella creazione come materiale espressivo, ma che sono fine esclusivamente a se stessi.

Perciò questi artisti caddero spesso nel falso e nel superficiale e realizzarono delle opere interessanti ma inferiori alle macchine, poiché non ne avevano né la solidità, né l'organicità.

#### NOI FUTURISTI VOGLIAMO:

1° che della Macchina si renda lo spirito e non la forma esteriore, creando composizioni che si valgano di qualsiasi mezzo espressivo ed anche di veri elementi meccanici;

2° che questi mezzi espressivi ed elementi meccanici siano coordinati da una legge lirica originale, e non da una legge scientifica appresa;

3° che per essenza della macchina s'intendono le sue forze, i suoi ritmi e le infinite analogie che la Macchina suggerisce;

4° che la Macchina così concepita diventi la sorgente ispiratrice per l'evoluzione e lo sviluppo delle arti plastiche.

I diversi stili di questa nuova arte meccanica scaturirono dalla Macchina come un elemento interferenziale tra la concezione spirituale dell'oggetto e l'ideale plastico che il pittore si propone.

La Macchina imprime oggi il ritmo del grande animo collettivo e dei vari individui creatori.

La Macchina scande il Canto del Genio. La Macchina è la nuova divinità che illumina, domina, distribuisce i suoi doni e punisce in questo nostro tempo futurista, cioè devoto alla grande Religione del Nuovo.

Enrico Prampolini  
Ivo Pannaggi  
Vinicio Paladini

Roma, ottobre 1922

[Published in *Noi* 1, no. 2 (May 1923); reprinted in Enrico Crispolti, ed., *Pannaggi e l'arte meccanica futurista* (Milan: Mazzotta, 1995), 174-175.]

### Mechanical Art, Futurist Manifesto

That which we call mechanic art, that is, the machine adored and considered as a symbol, source and teacher of the new artistic sensibility, was born with the first Futurist Manifesto, in 1909, in the most mechanic city of Italy: Milan. This first manifesto, which was published in *Le Figaro*, was translated in all languages and released in many hundreds of thousands of copies, contained ideas that disrupted and changed the spirit of artists all around the world:

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

We will sing of great crowds...the nightly fervor of arsenals... factories, bridges... adventurous steamers, the locomotives and the sleek flight of airplanes...”

Immediately afterwards, Marinetti develops his thought in the manifesto *Let's Murder the Moonshine* and in the volume *Futurism* (Paris 1911), that glorifies the Multiplied Man and the Reign of the Machine. In 1911-12, the volume of free verse *Aereoplani* of Paolo Buzzi is published. In 1911-12 Futurist exhibitions go around the world, imposing the new sensibility of interpenetration, simultaneity, plastic dynamism, formed in the ardent passion for the Machine. The first initiators, Boccioni, Balla, Russolo, Carrà, Severini are (later) joined by: Depero, Prampolini, Funi, Dudreville, Sant'Elia, Soffici, Sironi, Galli, Baldessarri, Marasco. In October 1911 Marinetti creates the *parole in libertà Battaglia Peso+ odore*, free exaltation of the mechanical forces of the war. *Zang tumb tumb*, *Assedio di Adrianopoli* and the *Technical Manifesto of Futurist literature* (1912) follow with these declarations by Marinetti:

“It is the solidity of an iron sheet that interests us in itself, that is, the incomprehensible and inhuman alliance of its molecules and electrodes, that oppose, for example, the penetration of a howitzer, the heat of a piece of iron or wood is by this time more enthralling to us, than the smile of or the tears of a woman.

“Through literature we want to portray the life of the engine, new instinctive animal whose general instinct we will comprehend only once we have understood the instincts of the different forces that compose? It.

“Nothing is more interesting for a Futurist poet than the undulation of the keyboard of an mechanical piano. Cinema offers us the dance of an object that divide and recomposes itself without human intervention.

In 1912, the Futurist musician Balilla Pratella, composes his first Futuristic work, *L'Aviatore Dro*, a glorification of the airplane and of aerial heroism.

“In 1913 in his manifesto: *L'Arte dei Rumori*, Luigi Russolo aveter having described the mechanism of his electrical intonarumori, he writes:

“We far more enjoy the ideal combination of the sounds of streetcars, internal combustion engines, carriages, and of howling crowds, than in hearing once again *Eroica* or *Pastorale*. We run through a great modern capital with ears more attentive than eyes, and we take pleasure in distinguishing the suction of water, of air, or gas in metallic tubes, and the grumbling of engines that breathe and pulse in an animal-like way, the palpitation of valves, the coming and going of pistons, the rasps of mechanical saws, the leaps of the streetcars on the tracks...”

In 1914, Boccioni launches the magic word ‘Modernolatria’, developing its concept in his volume *Pittura e scultura Futuriste*. In the same year, the volume by Luciano Folgore *Canto dei motori* explodes with the roar of a breathing factory.

The 18<sup>th</sup> of March 1914, Marinetti completes and defines the new Futuristic aesthetics with the manifesto: *Geometric and mechanical splendor and the new numeric sensibility*, followed by the manifesto *New religion and morality of Speed*.

On March 1914, in the Galleria Permanente Futurista of Rome, Marinetti realizes his manifesto *Dynamic and synthetic declamation*. In declaiming the *parole in libertà*, one must imitate the engines and their rhythms by way of mechanic gesticulation. The parolibera poem? a *Piedigrotta* by Cangiullo was presented with a dynamic-synoptic declamation.

In 1915, the Futurist painter Prampolini completes and defines the Futurist plasticity in his manifesto *Absolute construction of motor-noise*. In 1916, in an article in the *Mercure de France* the painter Severini explains *Machinism in art*.

In 1917 the Futurist painter Depero invents his Plastic dances with mechanical rhythms.

The Dutch magazine *Mecano* recently noticed all this, by publishing a photo of a car with this title: *Modern plasticity of the Italian spirit*.

Now, after innumerable battles, attempts, researches, realized works, indisputable victories, we feel the need to free ourselves from the last leftovers of the old sensibility to create definitively the new Plasticity inspired by the machine.

The *Modernolatria* predicated by Boccioni exalts us always more. The time in which we live—typically Futurist—will be distinguished by all others in history for the divinity that rules over it: the Machine.

Pulleys, flywheels, bolts, chimneys, shiny steel, smelly grease, ozone perfume of the power stations, gasping of locomotives, the cries of the sirens, dented tiers, pinions!

MECHANIC SENSE, SHARP, FORCEFUL, that irresistibly attracts us!

The gears purify our eyes from the fog of the unknown. Everything is sharp, aristocratic, distinctive.

WE FEEL MECHANICALLY. WE FEEL BUILT OF STEEL. EVEN US MACHINES. EVEN US WHO ARE MECHANIZED!

The newest beauty of the fast trucks that run with a vast, but confident and devastating, shattered trembling. The infinite joys that the fantastic architecture of cranes gives the eyes, the cold steel, shiny and palpitating solid, voluminous and fleeting of the luminous signs. These are our new spiritual needs and the principals of our new aesthetics.

The old aesthetic fed itself on legends, myths, and stories, mediocre products of blind and slavish collectives.

The Futurist aesthetic feeds itself of the most powerful and complex products of human genius. Isn't the machine today the most exuberant symbol of the mysterious human creative power? FROM THE MACHINE AND IN THE MACHINE ALL HUMAN DRAMA TAKES PLACE.

We Futurists force the Machine to free itself from its practical function, to arise in the spiritual and unselfish life of art, and become a mighty and fertile inspiration. The artist who doesn't want to perish in the indefinite or in subjugation, has to be faithful only to his life and to the atmosphere in which he breaths.

Beautiful machines have surrounded us, they have bent lovingly over us, and we savages and instinctive discoverers of all mysteries, have let ourselves be taken into their bizarre and hectic spin.

Infatuated, we manfully possessed them, voluptuously.

Today we are able to reveal to the world their deep soul and their boundless hearts in which dynamic architecture swirls; the new architecture that Sant'Elia and Virgilio Marchi have already established.

However, it is necessary to distinguish between the exterior and the spirit of the Machine. When we refer to bolts, steel, pinions, dented wheels, we were misunderstood. We therefore clarify our thought: the Futurist manifestos and works, published, exhibited, and reviewed around the world, have encouraged many brilliant Italian, French, Dutch, Belgian, German, and Russian artists towards Mechanical Art. But nearly always they remain focused on the outward appearance of the machine; for this reason they produce only: purely geometric, arid, and superficial paintings (comparable to certain engineering projects), which even though rhythmically and constructively balanced, lack substance and have more scientific flavor than lyric content; plastic constructions executed with authentic mechanical elements (screws, gears, racks, steels, etc) that don't become part of the creation as expressive materials, but that are exclusively an end in itself?

Therefore, these artists often slipped into the false and superficial and created some works that are interesting, but inferior to the machine, because they had neither its solidity or its organic quality.

WE FUTURISTS WANT:

1. that the spirit, and not the exterior form of the machine is rendered, creating compositions that make use of any expressive means and also of real mechanical elements;
2. that these expressive means and mechanical elements are organized by an original and lyric rule, and not by a learned scientific rule;

3. that by the essence of a machine we intend its forces, its rhythms, and the infinite analogies the Machine suggests;
4. that the machine intended as such, becomes the inspirational source for the evolution and development of the plastic arts.

The different styles of this new mechanical art arose from the Machine, seen as an inter-referential element between the spiritual conception of the object and the plastic ideal that the artist himself proposes.

Today the Machine represents the rhythm of the great collective spirit and of the many creative individuals.

The Machine articulates the Song of the Genius. The Machine is the new divinity that illuminates, dominates, distributes its gifts, as well as punishes, in this Futurist era, which is devoted to the great Religion of the New.

Enrico Prampolini  
Ivo Pannaggi  
Vinicio Paladini

Rome, October 1922

## APPENDIX B

## L'AEROPITTURA FUTURISTA

Nel 1908, F.T. Marinetti pubblicò *L'aeroplano del Papa*, prima esaltazione lirica in versi liberi del volo e delle prospettive aeree della nostra penisola dall'Etna a Roma, Milano, Trieste.

L'aeropoiesia si sviluppò con *Aeroplani* di Paolo Buzzi *Ponti sull'Oceano* di Luciano Folgore e *Caproni* di Mario Carli.

Nel 1919 il musicista futurista Balilla Pratella realizza la prima aeromusica con l'opera *L'aviatore di Dro*.

Nel 1926, il pittore e aviatore futurista Azari crea la prima opera di aeropittura *Prospettive di volo*, esposta nella Grande Sala futurista alla Biennale Veneziana.

Nel 1929, il pittore Gerardo Dottori orna l'Aeroporto di Ostia con una mirabile decorazione aviatoria futurista, impetuoso slancio di aeroplani nel cielo di Roma con eliche fusoliere ali trasfigurate sintetizzate e ridotte a tipici elementi plastici.

Questa opera di Gerardo Dottori, già notissimo per il suo grande *Trittico della velocità*, segna una data importante nella storia della nuova aeropittura.

Contemplando le pareti e il soffitto dell'Aeroporto di Ostia il pubblico e la critica si convincono che le tradizionali aquile dipinte, ben lungi dal glorificare l'aviazione, appaiono oggi come miserabili polli accanto al torrido splendore meccanico di un motore volante che certo sdegna di arrostirli.

La convivenza in carlinga col pittore Dottori, intento a prendere appunti dall'alto, ha suscitato in un altro artista, Mino Somenzi, la concezione precisa dell'Aeropittura. Fra le molte idee esposte da me nella "Gazzetta del Popolo" del 22 settembre 1929, noto quella del superamento artistico del mare, ultimo grande ispiratore d'avanguardisti e novatori ormai tutti in cielo.

Col quadro *Prospettive di volo* di Azari, le decorazioni dell'Aeroporto di Ostia di Dottori, le aeropitture di Tato, Marasco, Prampolini, Fillia, Oriani, entriamo nella bella sintesi astratta di una nuova grande arte.

Noi futuristi dichiariamo che

1. le prospettive mutevoli del volo costituiscono una realtà assolutamente nuova e che nulla ha di comune con la realtà tradizionalmente costituita dalle prospettive terrestri;
2. gli elementi di questa nuova realtà non hanno nessun punto fermo e sono costruiti dalla stessa mobilità perenne;
3. il pittore non può osservare e dipingere che partecipando alla loro stessa velocità;
4. dipingere dall'alto questa nuova realtà impone un disprezzo profondo per il dettaglio e una necessità di sintetizzare e trasfigurare tutto;

5. tutte le parti del paesaggio appaiono al pittore in volo:
- a) schiacciate
  - b) artificiali
  - c) provvisorie
  - d) appena cadute dal cielo;
6. tutte le parti del paesaggio accentuano agli occhi del pittore in volo i loro caratteri di:
- a) folto
  - b) sparso
  - c) elegante
  - d) grandioso;
7. ogni aeropittura contiene simultaneamente il doppio movimento dell'aeroplano e della mano del pittore che muove matita, pennello o diffusore;
8. il quadro o complesso plastico di aeropittura deve essere policentrico;
9. si giungerà presto a una nuova spiritualità plastica extraterrestre.

Nelle velocità terrestri (cavallo, automobile, treno) le piante, le case ecc., avventandosi contro di noi, girando rapidissime le vicine, meno rapide le lontane, formano una ruota dinamica nella cornice dell'orizzonte di montagne mare colline laghi, che si sposta anch'essa, ma così lentamente da sembrare ferma. Oltre questa cornice immobile esiste per l'occhio nostro anche la continuità orizzontale del piano su cui si corre.

Nelle velocità aeree invece mancano questa continuità e quella cornice panoramica. L'aeroplano, che plana si tuffa s'impenna ecc., crea un ideale osservatorio ipersensibile appeso dovunque nell'infinito, dinamizzato inoltre dalla coscienza stessa del moto che muta il valore e il ritmo dei minuti e dei secondi di visione-sensazione. Il tempo e lo spazio vengono polverizzati dalla fulminea constatazione che la terra corre velocissima sotto l'aeroplano immobile.

Nella virata si chiudono le pieghe della visione-ventaglio (toni verdi + toni marroni + toni celesti diafani dell'atmosfera) per lanciarsi verticali contro la verticale formata dall'apparecchio e dalla terra. Questa visione-ventaglio si riapre in forma di X nella picchiata mantenendo come unica base l'incrocio dei due angoli.

Il decollare crea un inseguirsi di V allargantisi.

Il Colosseo visto a 3000 metri da un aviatore, che plana a spirale, muta, di forma e di dimensione ad ogni istante e ingrossa successivamente tutte le facce del suo volume nel mostrarle.

In linea di volo, ad una quota qualsiasi, ma costante, se trascuriamo ciò che si vede sotto di noi vediamo apparire davanti un panorama A che si allarga man mano proporzionalmente alla nostra velocità, più oltre un piccolo panorama B che ingrandisce mentre sorvoliamo il panorama A, finché scorgiamo un panorama C allargantesi man mano che scompaiono A lontanissimo e B ora sorvolato.

Nelle virate il punto di vista è sempre sulla traiettoria dell'apparecchio, ma coincide successivamente con tutti i punti della curva compiuta, seguendo tutte le posizioni dell'apparecchio stesso. In una virata a destra i frammenti panoramici diventano circolari e corrono verso sinistra moltiplicandosi e stringendosi, mentre diminuiscono di numero nello spaziarsi a destra, secondo la maggiore o minore inclinazione dell'apparecchio.

Dopo aver studiato le prospettive aeree che si offrono di fronte all'aviatore, studiamo gl'innumerevoli effetti laterali. Questi hanno tutti un movimento di rotazione. Così l'apparecchio si avvanza come un'asta di ferro doppiamente dentate ingranandosi da una parte e dall'altra coi denti di due ruote che girano in senso opposto a quello dell'apparecchio, e i cui centri sono in tutti i punti dell'orizzonte.

Queste visioni rotanti si susseguono, si amalgamano, compenetrando la somma degli spettacoli frontali. Noi futuristi dichiariamo che il principio delle prospettive aeree e conseguentemente il principio dell'Aeropittura è un'incessante e graduata moltiplicazione di forme e colori con dei crescendo e diminuendo elasticissimi, che si intensificano o si spaziano partorendo nuove gradazioni di forme e colori.

Con qualsiasi traiettoria metodo o condizione di volo, i frammenti panoramici sono ognuno la continuazione dell'altro, legati tutti da un misterioso e fatale bisogno di sovrapporre le loro forme e i loro colori, pur conservando fra loro una perfetta e prodigiosa armonia.

Quest'armonia è determinata dalla stessa continuità del volo.

Si delineano così i caratteri dominanti dell'Aeropittura che, mediante una libertà assoluta di fantasia e un ossessionante desiderio di abbracciare la molteplicità dinamica con la più indispensabile delle sintesi, fisserà l'immenso drama visionario e sensibile del volo. Si avvicina il giorno in cui gli aeropittori futuristi realizzeranno l'Aeroscultura sognata dal grande Boccioni, armoniosa e significativa composizione di fumi colorati offerti ai pennelli del tramonto e dell'aurora e di variopinti lunghi fasci di luce elettrica.

I Futuristi: Balla  
Benedetta  
Depero  
Dottori  
Fillia  
Marinetti  
Prampolini  
Mino Somenzi  
Tato

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### Futurist Aeropainting

In 1908, F.T. Marinetti published *The Pope's Airplane*, the first lyric exaltation in free verse of flight and of the aerial perspectives of our peninsula from Etna to Rome, Milan, Trieste. Aeropoetry then developed with *Airplanes*, by Paolo Buzzi, *Bridges over the Ocean*, by Luciano Folgore, and *Caprioni*, by Mario Carli. In 1926, the futurist

painter and aviator Azari creates the first work of aeropainting, *Flight Perspectives*, exhibited in the Great Futurist Hall at the Venice Biennale.

In 1929, the painter Gerardo Dottori adorns the Ostia airport with an admirable futurist aviatory decoration, an impetuous rush of airplanes in the sky of Rome, with propellers, fuselages, wings, transfigured synthesized and reduced to typical plastic elements. This work of Dottori, already known for his great *Triptych on Speed*, marks an important date in the history of the new aeropainting.

Contemplating the walls and the ceiling of the Ostia airport, the public and the critics become convinced that the traditional painted eagles, far from glorifying flight, appear today as miserable chickens next to the torrid mechanical splendor of a flying motor that would certainly disdain even to roast them.

Spending time in a plane with the painter Dottori, intent on taking notes from on high, elicited in another artist, Mino Somenzi, the exact conception of aeropainting. Among the many ideas I proposed in the *Gazzetta del Popolo*, of 22 September 1929, I point out the artistic overcoming of the sea, last great inspirer of the avant-garde and of innovators, who are now all to be found in the skies.

With Azari's painting *Flight Perspectives*, Dottori's decorations of the Ostia airport, the aeropainting of Tato, Marasco, Corona, Fillia, and Oriani, we encounter the great abstract synthesis of a new great art.

We futurists declare that:

1. The mutable perspectives of flight constitute an absolutely new reality that has nothing in common with reality as traditionally constituted from terrestrial perspectives.
2. The elements of this new reality have no stable point and are made up of perpetual mobility itself.
3. The painter cannot observe and paint without participating in the experience of speed.
4. Painting the new reality from the perspective of such elevation imposes a great contempt for detail and imposes the need to synthesize and transfigure everything.
5. All parts of the landscape appear to the painter in flight
  - a) flattened
  - b) artificial
  - c) temporary
  - d) newly fallen from the sky;
6. All parts of the landscape show themselves, to the eyes of a painter in flight, in their characteristic:
  - thickness
  - scatteredness
  - elegance
  - grandiosity
7. Every aeropainting simultaneously contains the double movement of the airplane and the hand of the painter that moves the pencil, brush, or diffuser.
8. The painting or plastic complex of aeropainting must be polycentric.
9. We will soon arrive at a new extraterrestrial plastic spirituality.

In terrestrial speeds (horse, automobile, train), plants, houses, etc., hurling themselves against us, the closest ones moving quickly, the distant ones less quickly, form a dynamic wheel in the frame of the horizon of mountains sea hills lakes, which

itself moves, but so slowly that it seems to stand still. Beyond this immobile frame, there also exists for the eye the horizontal continuity of the plane on which one travels.

In aerial speeds, on the other hand, these continuities and this panoramic frame are lacking. The airplane, which glides, dives, climbs, etc., creates an ideal hypersensitive observatory suspended everywhere in the infinite and made dynamic by the consciousness of movement itself, which alters the value of the minutes and seconds of vision-sensation. Time and space are pulverized by the flashing verification that the earth quickly moves under the immobile airplane.

When the airplane turns, the folds of the fan of vision (green hues + brown hues + the celestial diaphanous hues of the atmosphere) close to fling themselves vertically against the vertical formed by the craft and the earth. This vision-fan reopens in the form of an X in the nosedive, maintaining, as its only base, the intersection of the two angles.

Takeoff creates a succession of widening Vs.

The Coliseum, seen from three thousand meters in the air by a pilot in a spiraling glide, changes form and dimension at every instant and successively expands all the faces of its volume in showing them.

If we ignore everything that can be seen underneath, we will see appear, in the line of flight, at any constant rate, a view A, which expands proportionately to our speed; beyond that, a small view B, which grows as we coast over panorama A, until we discern a panorama C expanding as the very distant A and now overflowed B disappear.

When the airplane turns, the point of view is always with the trajectory of the plane, but it successively coincides with all of the points of the completed curve, following all of the positions of the plane itself. In a turn to the right, the panoramic fragments become circular and run to the left, multiplying and drawing near, while their number decreases in moving to the right, according to the smaller or greater inclination of the aircraft.

After having studied the aerial perspectives that offer themselves to the pilot, we study the innumerable lateral effects. These all have a rotary movement. Thus, the airplane advances like a double-toothed iron rod, catching on one side and the other with the teeth of two wheels that move in directions opposite to that of the airplane, and whose centers are in all the points of the horizon.

These rotating visions follow one another, fuse, permeating the sum of frontal spectacles. We futurists declare that the principle of aerial perspectives and, consequently, the principle of aeropainting, is an unceasing and graded multiplication of forms and colors with supremely elastic crescendos and diminuendos that intensify or spread out, creating new gradations of form and color.

With any trajectory or method or condition of flight, each panoramic fragment is a continuation of another, linked by a mysterious and fatal need to impose on each other their forms and colors, while conserving between themselves a perfect and prodigious harmony.

This harmony is determined by the very continuity of flight. Thus, the outlines of the dominant characteristics of aeropainting reveal themselves. Aeropainting, through the absolute freedom of the imagination and an obsessive desire to embrace the dynamic multiplicity of things with the most indispensable of syntheses, will capture the immense visionary and sensible drama of flight. The day approaches in which futurist aeropainters will accomplish the aerosculpture dreamed by the great Boccioni—a harmonious and

significant composition of the colored smoke offered to the painter's brushes by the sunset and the aurora and long multicolored bands of electric light.

I Futuristi: Balla  
Benedetta  
Depero  
Dottori  
Fillia  
Marinetti  
Prampolini  
Mino Somenzi  
Tato

[Translation by Antonio Melchor]

## APPENDIX C

## MANIFESTO DELL'ARTE SACRA FUTURISTA

Premesso che non fu indispensabile praticare la religione cattolica per creare capolavori d'Arte Sacra, premesso d'altra parte che un'arte senza evoluzione è destinata a morire, il Futurismo, distributore di energie, pone all'Arte Sacra il seguente dilemma: o rinunciare a qualsiasi azione esaltatrice sui fedeli o rinnovarsi completamente mediante sintesi, trasfigurazione, dinamismo di tempo-spazio compenetrati, simultaneità di stati d'animo, splendore geometrico dell'estetica della macchina.

L'uso della luce elettrica per decorare le chiese col suo fulgore bianco-azzurro superiore in purezza celestiale a quello rosso-giallo carnale lussurioso delle candele, le meravigliose pitture sacre di Gerardo Dottori, primo futurista che rinnovò con originale intensità l'Arte Sacra, gli affreschi futuristi di Gino Severini nelle chiese svizzere, le molte cattedrali futuriste con un dinamismo di forme in cemento armato, cristallo e acciaio realizzate in Germania e in Svizzera, sono i segni di questo indispensabile rinnovamento dell'Arte Sacra.

Infatti:

1. Soltanto gli artisti futuristi, perché ricchi di una immaginazione illimitata, possono dipingere o costruire un Inferno tale da terrorizzare le generazioni che hanno subito eroicamente gl'infornali bombardamenti del Carso e sono allenati ad una vita meccanizzata più pericolosa delle fiammelle da gas povero dell'Inferno tradizionale.
2. Soltanto gli aeropittori futuristi, maestri delle prospettive aeree e abituati a dipingere in volo dall'alto, possono esprimere plasticamente il fascino abissale e le trasparenze beate dell'infinito. Ciò invece non è consentito ai pittori tradizionali, tutti più o meno legati dall'ossessionante realismo, tutti ineluttabilmente terrestri e quindi incapaci d'innalzarsi fino ad un'astrazione mistica.
3. Soltanto gli aeropittori futuristi possono far cantare sulla tela la multiforme e veloce vita aerea degli Angeli e l'apparizione dei Santi.
4. Soltanto gli artisti futuristi ansiosi di originalità ad ogni costo e sistematici odiatori del già visto, possono dare al quadro, all'affresco e al complesso plastico la potenza di sorpresa magica necessaria per esprimere miracoli.
5. Soltanto gli artisti futuristi, che da vent'anni impongono nell'arte l'arduo problema della simultaneità, possono esprimere chiaramente, con adeguate compenetrazioni di

tempo-spazio, i dogmi simultanei del culto cattolico, come la Santa Trinità, l'Immacolata Concezione e il Calvario di Dio.

6. Soltanto artisti futuristi elettrizzati di ottimismo colore e fantasia come Andreoni, Ambrosi, Balla, Belli, Benedetta, Caviglioni, Cocchia, Depero, Diulgheroff, Dottori, Duse, Fillia, Alf Gaudenzi, Lepore, Marasco, Munari, Oriani, Pozzo, Prampolini, Rosso, Tato, Thayaht, Tullio d'Albissola, Zucco ecc., possono oggi precisare in un'opera d'Arte Sacra la beatitudine del Paradiso, superando nei nervi dei combattenti cattolici la infinita gioia paradisiaca della nostra immensa Vittoria di Vittorio Veneto.

Il Futurismo, incalzante e veloce Al-di-là dell'Arte, può solo figurare e plasmare qualsiasi al-di-là della vita.

Esempi di Arte Sacra futurista:

Il quadro di Gerardo Dottori *La Crocifissione* è caratterizzato dall'affascinante fluidità dei corpi delle donne piangenti ai piedi della croce. Queste sembrano i dolorosi prolungamenti del corpo stesso di Cristo tutti imbevuti da una luce extra-terrestre che costituisce il personaggio dominante del quadro.

Il quadro di Fillia *Natività-morte-eternità* offre intorno alla Madonna seduta in primo piano un paesaggio reso irrealista dall'apparizione di una grande croce smaterializzata, cioè *formata di puro cielo*. Questa croce affiora nel liquido corpo della Madonna, come una soave fosforescenza sottomarina. L'insieme è chiuso nella sfera del mondo sulla cui superficie appaiono tutte le chiese della storia da quelle incavate nelle catacombe alle romane, bizantine, romaniche, gotiche, rinascimento, ecc., fino a quelle futuriste. La figurazione della Madonna è animata dalla linea luminosa del Bambino Gesù. Questa continua nel ritmo del corpo della madre cogli stessi elementi architettonici delle chiese. Il quadro contiene una prodigiosa simultaneità di elementi diversissimi. Fusione impressionante di concreto e di astratto. Sintesi del Cattolicesimo nel suo lungo sviluppo secolare.

Il quadro di Fillia *L'Adorazione* figura una Madonna pregante, il cui corpo è smaterializzato al punto da non avere più nulla di umano, forma astratta della preghiera ai piedi di una croce fatta di atmosfera.

Il quadro di Oriani *Salita al Calvario* è caratterizzato dalla drammatizzazione di tutto l'ambiente il cui dolore, plasmato in cento modi diversi, domina il dolore espresso dalla figura di Cristo.

Il complesso plastico di Mino Rosso *Natività* mostra l'obbedienza plastica assoluta di tutti i personaggi e di tutti gli oggetti circostanti che sembrano calamitati irrealmente dal Gesù Bambino.

Sono ugualmente significative le altre opere di Arte Sacra futurista esposte a La Spezia dai futuristi Fillia, Oriani, Pozzo, Pogolotti, Rosso, Saladin, Gaudenzi Alf, Vignazia, ecc.

Il Futurismo, movimento d'orgoglio italiano novatore, nettamente antimassonico e anticlericale, ha divinato venti anni fa l'avvento del fascismo, creato e capitanato le avanguardie artistiche del mondo intero, agilizato la letteratura colle parole in libertà e lo stile simultaneo, svuotato del tempo e della psicologia il teatro mediante sintesi simultanee alogiche a sorpresa o drammi d'oggetti, immensificato le arti plastiche colla trasfigurazione antirealistica e il dinamismo plastico, inventato l'Arte dei Rumori, il

Rumorarmonio e il Tattilismo, introdotto nella musica l'estetica della macchina, iniziato una alimentazione dinamizzante, dato una ampiezza creativa alla fotografia, suscitato la stupenda Aeropittura di domani, e lanciato la Nuova Architettura di ferro cemento agilità colore monda di decorativismo ricca di nudo splendore geometrico che Antonio Sant'Elia insegnò ai razionalisti italiani ormai costretti a riconoscere la sua paternità italiana se non vogliono passare per imitatori dei nordici imitatori di Sant'Elia.

Ora venti fra i cento pittori migliori del movimento futurista italiano, presentano una sala d'Arte Sacra futurista nella grande esposizione di La Spezia alla Casa d'Arte.

Questo manifesto è perfettamente in armonia coll'attività creatrice di Enrico Prampolini che brilla oggi in prima linea estremista all'Esposizione del Gruppo 1940 di Parigi, e coll'attività creatrice di Fortunato Depero che prepara la sua grande Mostra di Dinamismi newyorkeesi.

F.T. Marinetti [with Fillia]

[Published in *Gazzetta del Popolo*, June 23, 1931 (signed only by Marinetti, but conceived and written in collaboration with Fillia); reprint in reprinted in F. T. Marinetti *Invenzione e teoria futurista*, ed. Luciano De Maria (Milan: Mondadori, 1968; reprint, 1998), 201-205]

### Manifesto of Futurist Sacred Art

Assuming that practicing the Catholic religion was not indispensable to create works of Sacred Art, and preliminarily stating, on the other hand, that an art without evolution is destined to perish, Futurism, distributor of energy, poses the following dilemma to Sacred Art: either it must give up any thrilling effects on the faithful or it must renew itself by means of synthesis, transfiguration, dynamism of time-space interpenetrations, simultaneity of states of mind, and the geometric splendor of machine aesthetics.

The use of electric light to decorate churches with its white-blue brilliance is superior in celestial pureness to the lustful carnal yellow-red of the candles, the marvelous sacred paintings of Gerardo Dottori, the first Futurist to renew Sacred Art with original intensity, the Futurist frescos of Gino Severini in Swiss churches, the many Futurist cathedrals built in Germany and Switzerland, with a dynamism of shapes in reinforced concrete, crystal and steel, are the signs of this indispensable renewal of Sacred Art.

In fact:

1. Only Futurist artists, because rich in boundless imagination, can paint or construct such a Hell that would terrorize the generations which were heroically subjected to the bombardments of the Carso and are accustomed to a mechanized life, more dangerous than the flames of weak gas of the traditional Hell.
2. Only Futurist aeropainters, masters of aerial perspectives and accustomed to painting in flight from on high, can plastically express the abyssal fascination and the beatific transparencies of infinity. This is not allowed to traditional painters,

all more or less bound by obsessive realism, all inevitably earthly and therefore unable to arise up to a mystical abstraction.

3. Only Futurist aeropainters are able to make sing on canvas the multiform and speeding aerial life of the Angels and the apparition of Saints.
4. Only Futurist artists, anxious with originality at any cost and systematic haters of the already seen, can give a painting, a fresco, and a plastic complex, the power of magical surprise necessary to express miracles.
5. Only Futurist artists, that for twenty years have been rendering the arduous problem of simultaneity, can clearly express, with adequate time-space interpenetrations, the simultaneous dogmas of the Catholic cult, such as the Holy Trinity, the Immaculate Conception, and the Calvary of God.
6. Only Futurist artists, electrified with optimism, color, and fantasy, like Andreoni, Ambrosi, Balla, Belli, Benedetta, Caviglioni, Cocchia, Depero, Diulgheroff, Dottori, Duse, Fillia, Alf Gaudenzi, Lapore, Marasco, Munari, Oriani, Pozzo, Prampolini, Rosso, Tato, Thayaht, Tullio d'Albissola, Zucco, etc., today can precisely define the beatitude of Paradise in a work of Sacred Art, surpassing through the courage of the Catholic combatants, the infinite heavenly joy of our immense Victory of Vittorio Veneto.

Futurism, chasing and fast Afterlife of Art, can only represent and shape anything beyond life.

Examples of Futurist Sacred Art:

The painting by Gerardo Dottori *La Crocifissione* is characterized by the enchanting fluidity of the bodies of the women crying at the base of the cross. They seem like painful extensions of the body of Christ soaked in an extraterrestrial light, which forms the central character of the painting.

The painting by Fillia *Natività-morte-eternità*, offers the Madonna seated in the forefront a landscape that is unrealistically conveyed by the apparition of a large dematerialized cross, which is *formed by pure sky*. This cross arises from the liquid body of the Madonna, like a gentle underwater effervescence. The ensemble is enclosed in the sphere of the world on the surface of which all the churches of history appear, from the underground ones in the catacombs, to the Roman, Byzantine, Romanic, Gothic, Renaissance, etc., to the Futurist ones. The representation of the Madonna is animated by the luminous line of the Baby Jesus. This continues in the rhythm of the body of the mother with the same architectural elements of churches. The painting contains a marvelous simultaneity of very different elements. Impressive fusion of the concrete and the abstract. Synthesis of Catholicism in its long secular development.

The painting of Fillia *l'Adorazione* represents a pregnant Madonna, whose body is dematerialized to the point of not having anything left of the human, abstract form of a prayer at the base of a cross made out of atmosphere.

Oriani's painting *Salita al Calvario* is characterized by the dramatization of the whole environment, which, modeled in a hundred different ways, dominates the pain expressed by the figure of Christ.

The plastic complex of Mino Rosso *Natività* shows the absolute plastic obedience of all the surrounding characters and objects that seem unrealistically attracted by the Baby Jesus.

The other works of Futurist Sacred Art exhibited in La Spezia by the Futurists Fillia, Oriani, Pozzo, Pogolotti, Rosso, Saladin, Gaudenzi Alf, Vignazia, etc., are equally significant.

Futurism, innovative movement of Italian pride, clearly anti-Masonic and anti-clerical, twenty years ago foresaw the advent of Fascism, it created and led the artistic avant-gardes of the whole world, it rendered literature more agile with *parole in libertà* and with the simultaneous style, it emptied the theatre of time and psychology through simultaneous unexpected illogical syntheses or dramas of objects, it widened the plastic arts with its unrealistic transfiguration and plastic dynamism, it invented the Art of Sound, *Rumorarmonio*, and Tactilism, it introduced the aesthetic of the machine to music, it initiated a dynamizing diet, it has given a creative breadth to photography, it generated the beautiful Aeropittura of tomorrow, and it launched the New Architecture of re-enforced cement, agility, color, free of ornamental motifs, rich in naked geometric splendor, which Sant'Elia taught the Italian rationalists, who at this point are forced to recognize its Italian paternity if they don't want to appear as imitators of the northern imitators of Sant'Elia.

Now twenty out of a hundred of the best painters of the Italian Futurist movement present a room of Sacred Futurist Art in the exhibit at the Casa d'Arte in La Spezia.

This manifesto is in perfect harmony with the creative activity of Enrico Prampolini who shines in the extremist forefront at the Esposizione del Gruppo 1940 in Paris and with the creative activity of Fortunato Depero who is preparing his great exhibition of New York Dynamism.

F.T. Marinetti [with Fillia]

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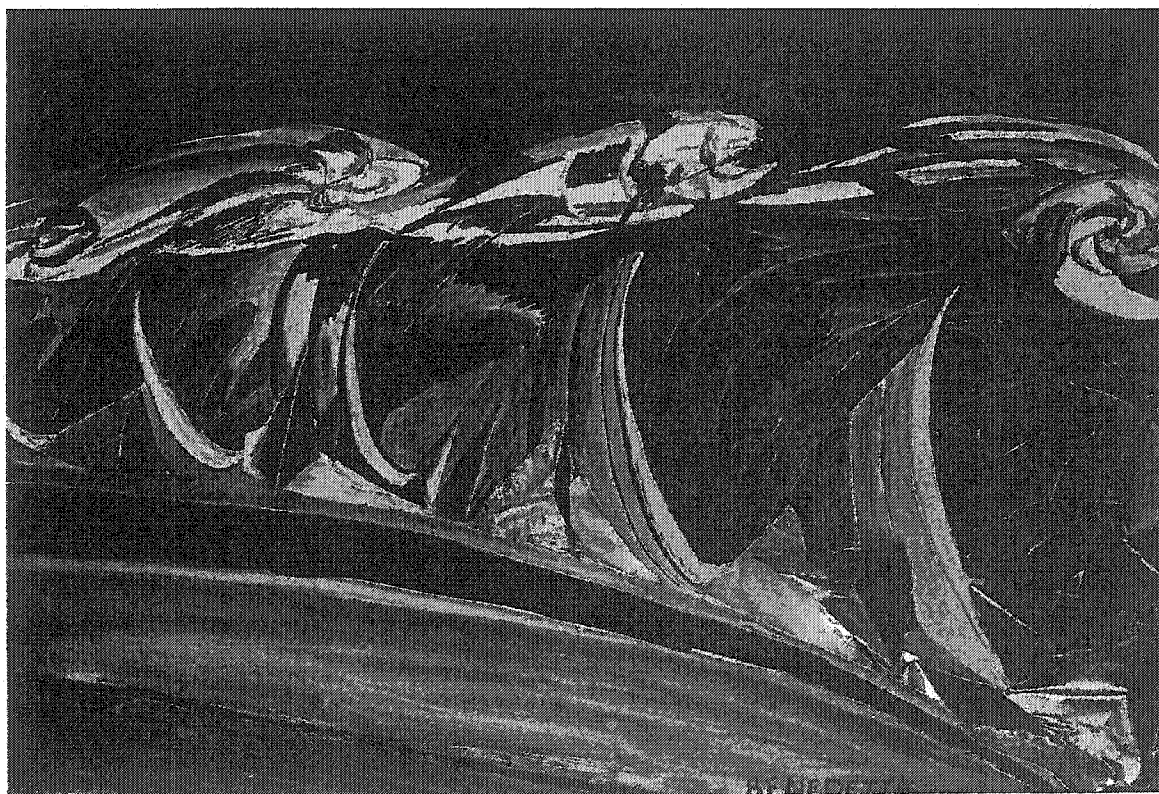


Fig. 1. Benedetta  
*Luce + rumori di treno notturno*, 1924  
oil on collage on canvas  
Private Collection

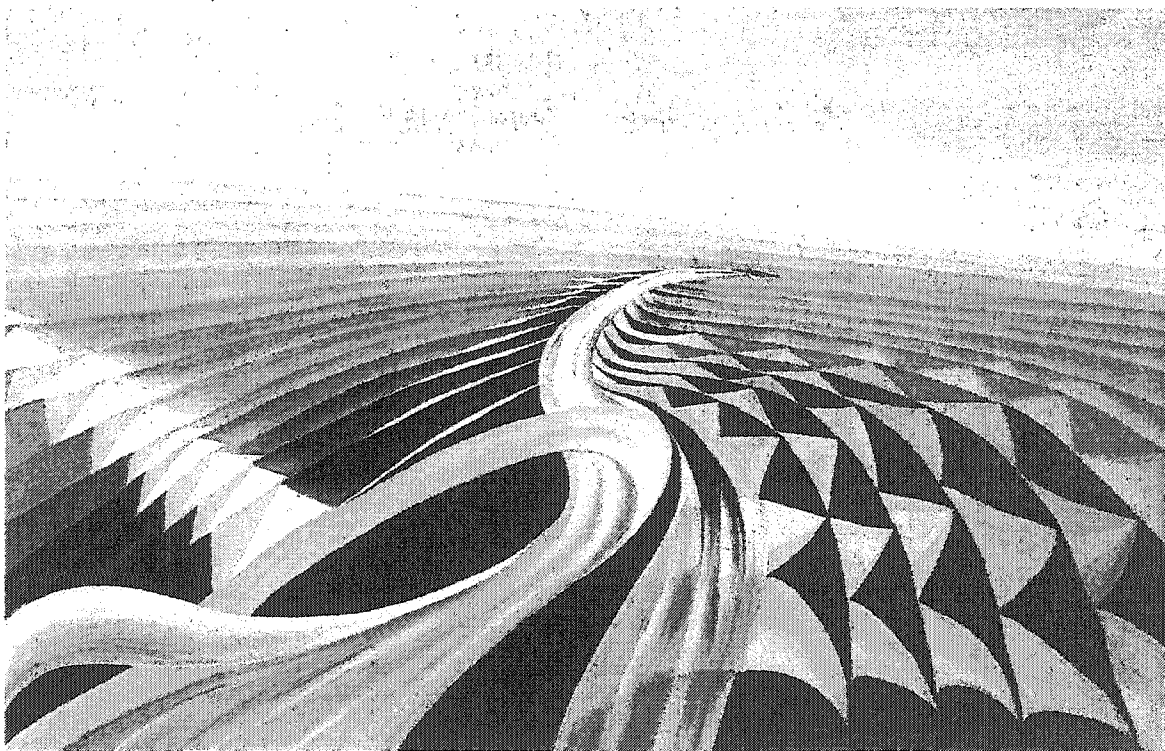


Fig. 2. Benedetta  
*Velocità di motoscafo*, 1919-24  
oil on canvas  
Galleria Comunale d'Arte Moderna, Rome

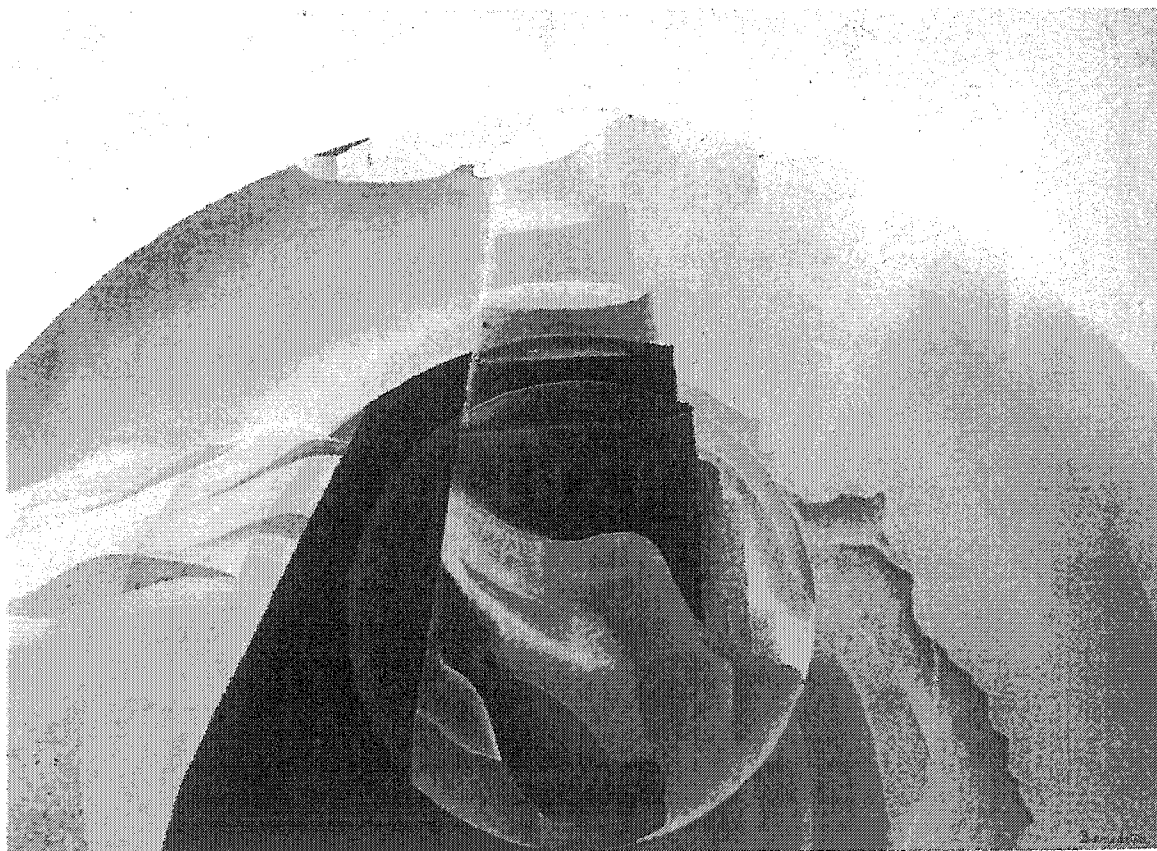


Fig. 3. Benedetta  
*Il Monte Tabor*, 1939  
oil on canvas  
Marinetti Collection, Milan

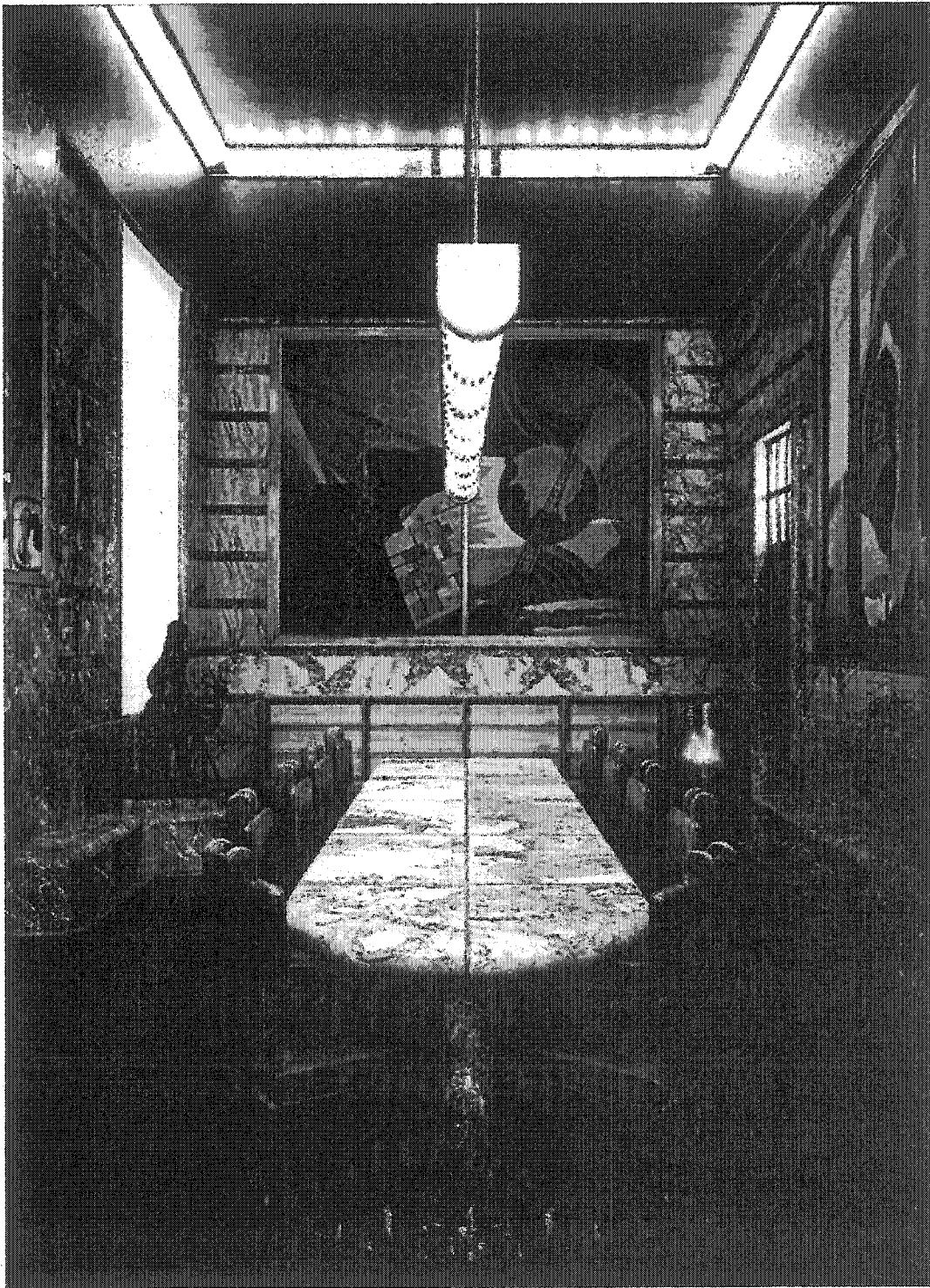


Fig. 4. Sala del Consiglio e delle Conferenze, Post Office, Palermo



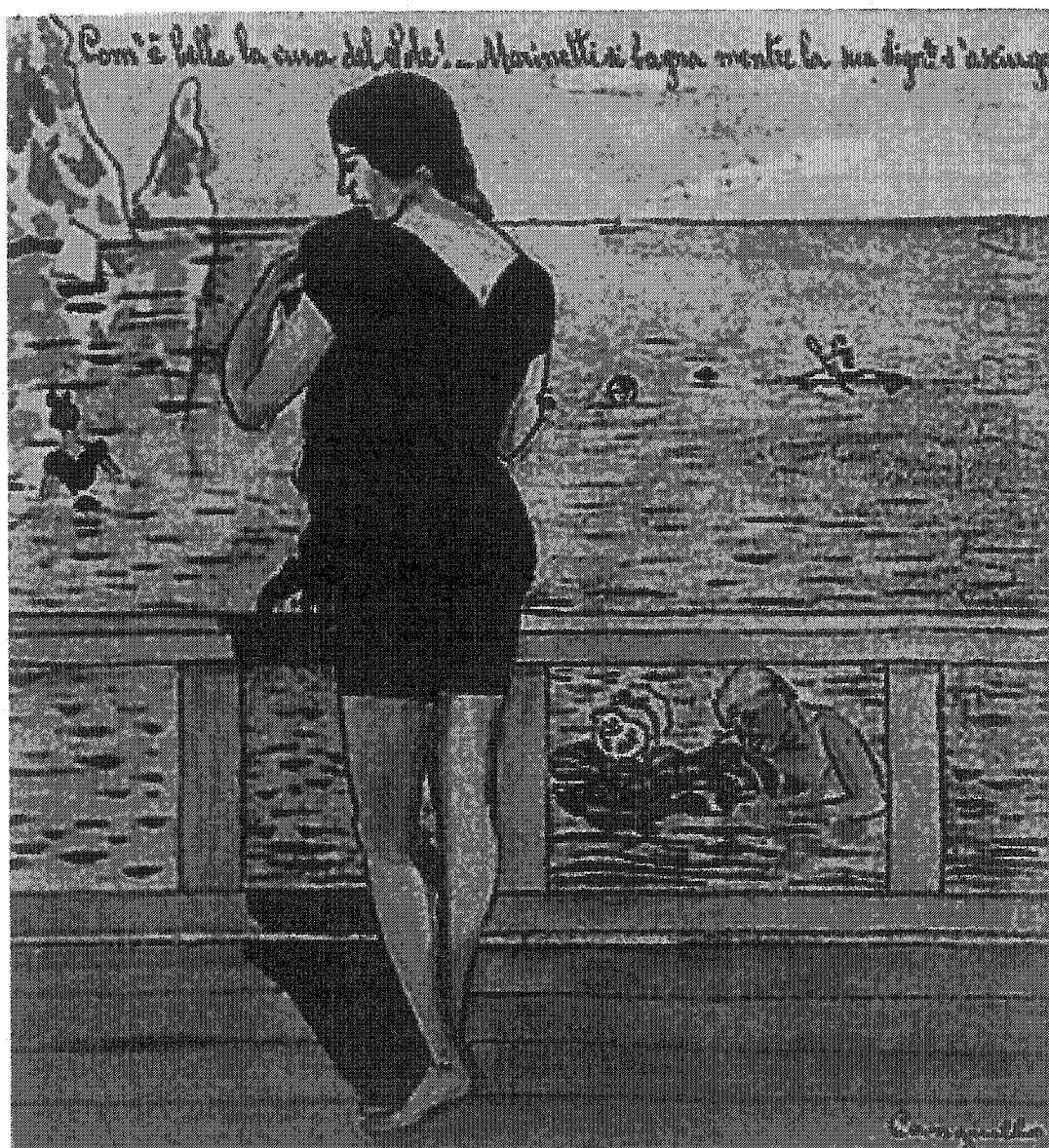


Fig. 6. Francesco Cangiullo  
*Com'è bella la cura del sole*, 1922  
watercolor on paper  
Private Collection



Fig. 7. Portrait of Marinetti, Benedetta, and their three daughters

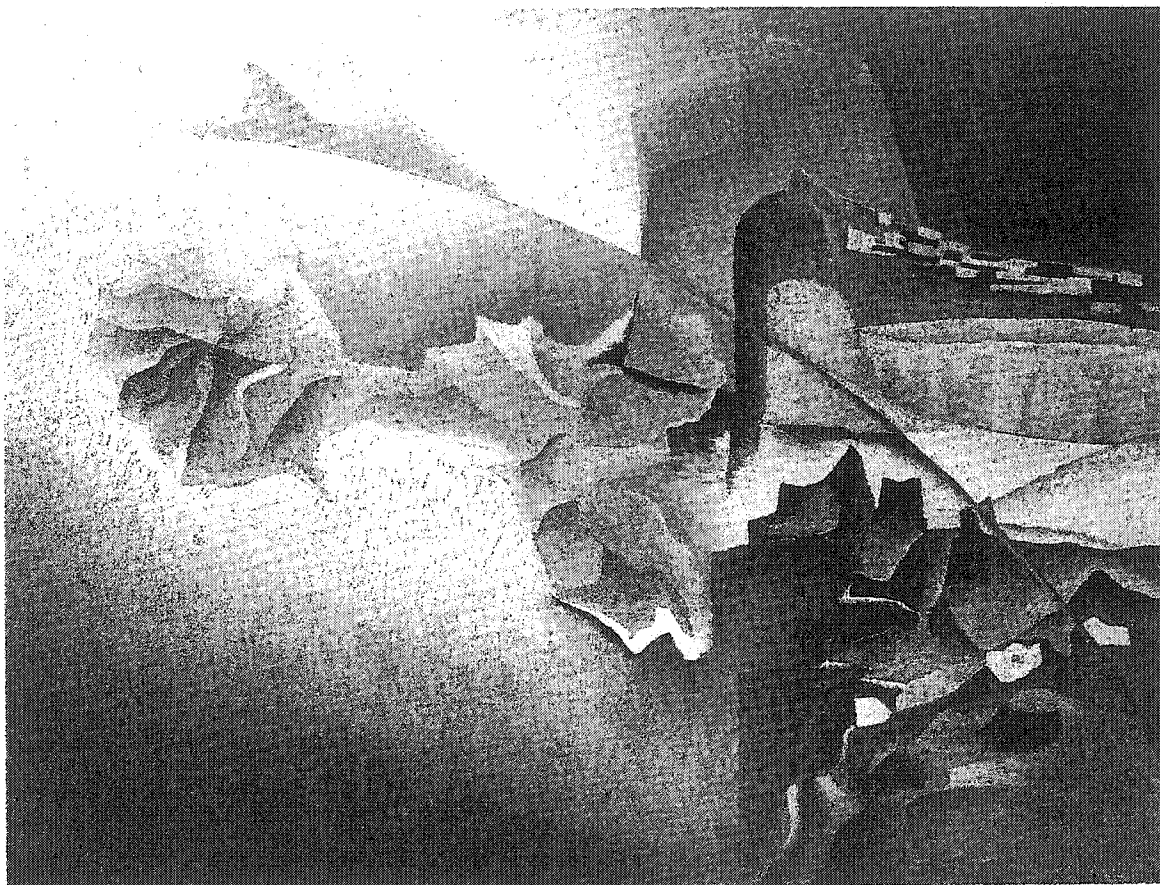


Fig. 8. Benedetta  
*Aeropittura di un incontro con l'isola*, 1939  
oil on canvas  
Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome

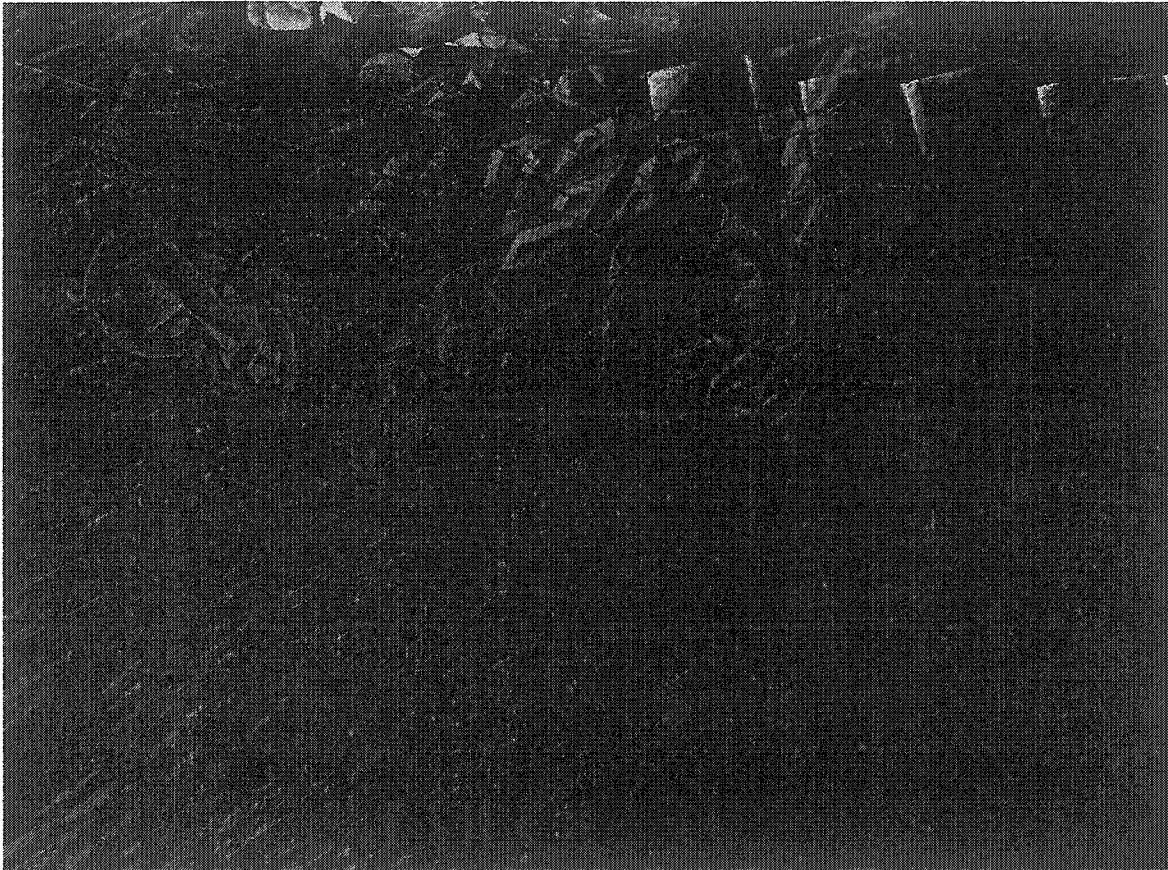


Fig. 9. Umberto Boccioni  
*Stati d'animo: Quelli che vanno*, 1911  
oil on canvas  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York

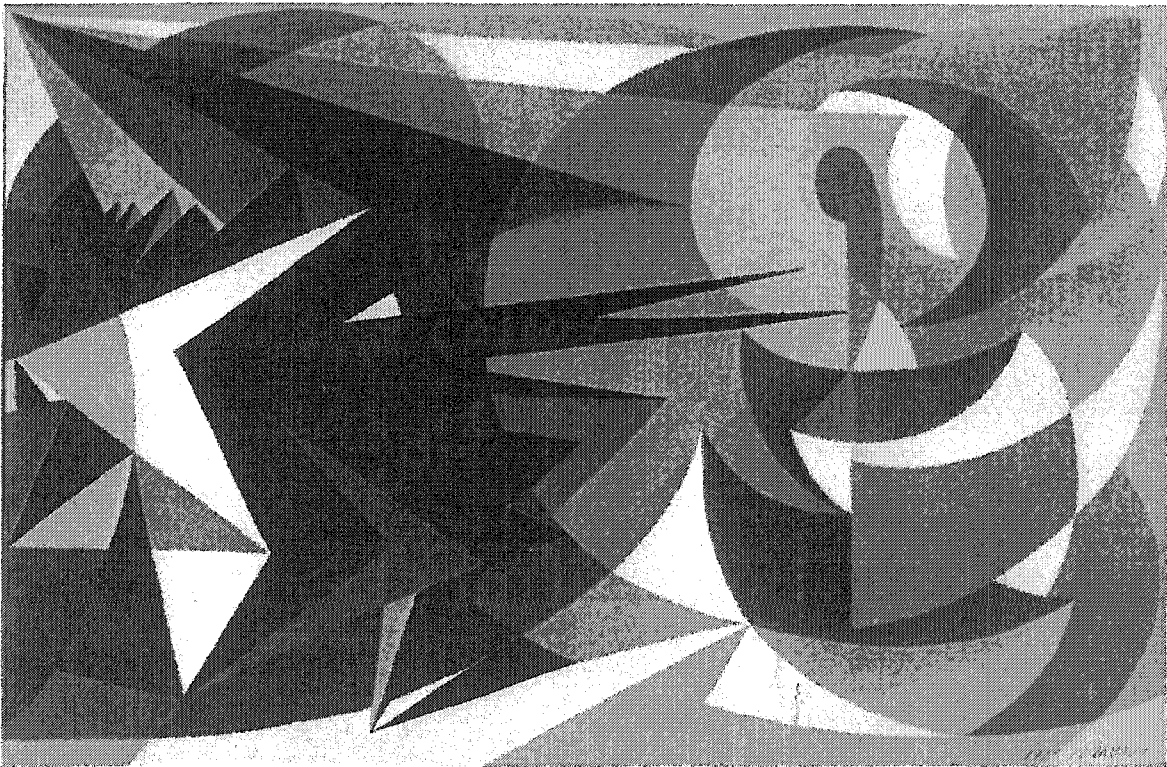
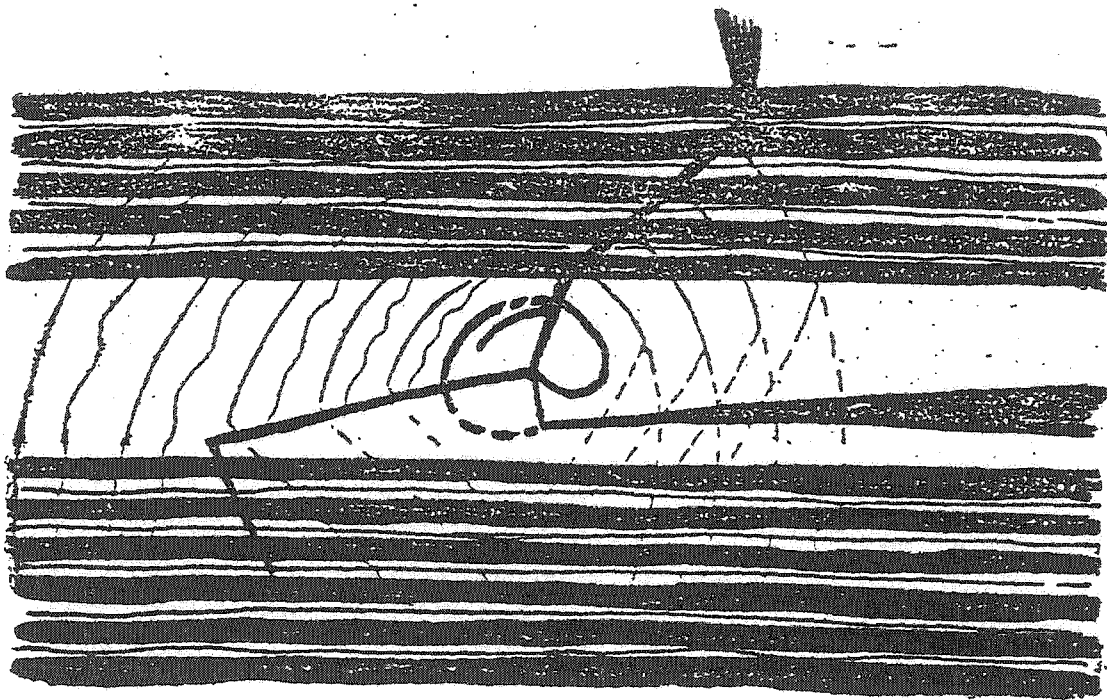


Fig. 10. Giacomo Balla  
*Pessimismo e ottimismo*, 1923  
oil on canvas  
Private Collection, Rome



*L'io ottimista fra le rotaie del pessimismo*

Fig. 11. Benedetta

*L'io ottimista fra le rotaie del pessimismo*, drawing for *Le forze umane*, 1924

ink on paper

Marinetti Collection, Milan

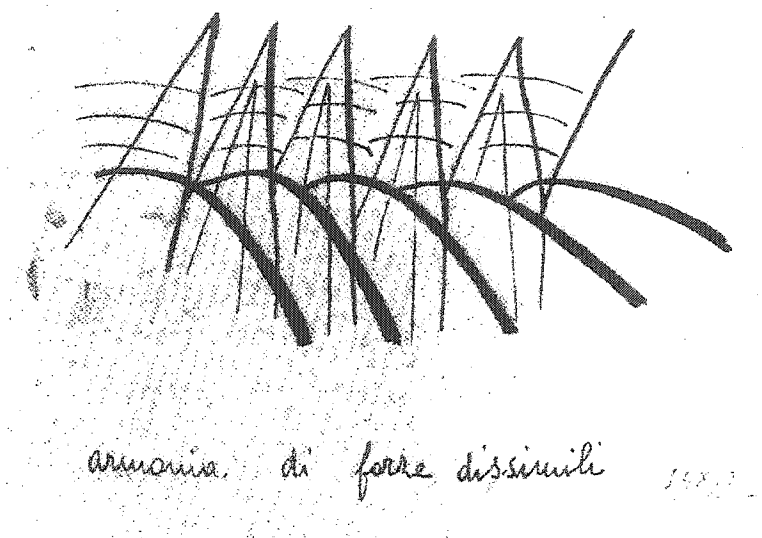


Fig. 12. Benedetta  
*Armonia di forze dissimili*, drawing for *Le forze umane*, 1924  
ink on paper  
Marinetti Collection, Milan



Fig. 13. Benedetta  
*Sintesi delle comunicazioni terrestri*, 1934  
tempera and encaustic  
Sala del Consiglio e delle Conferenze, Post Office, Palermo

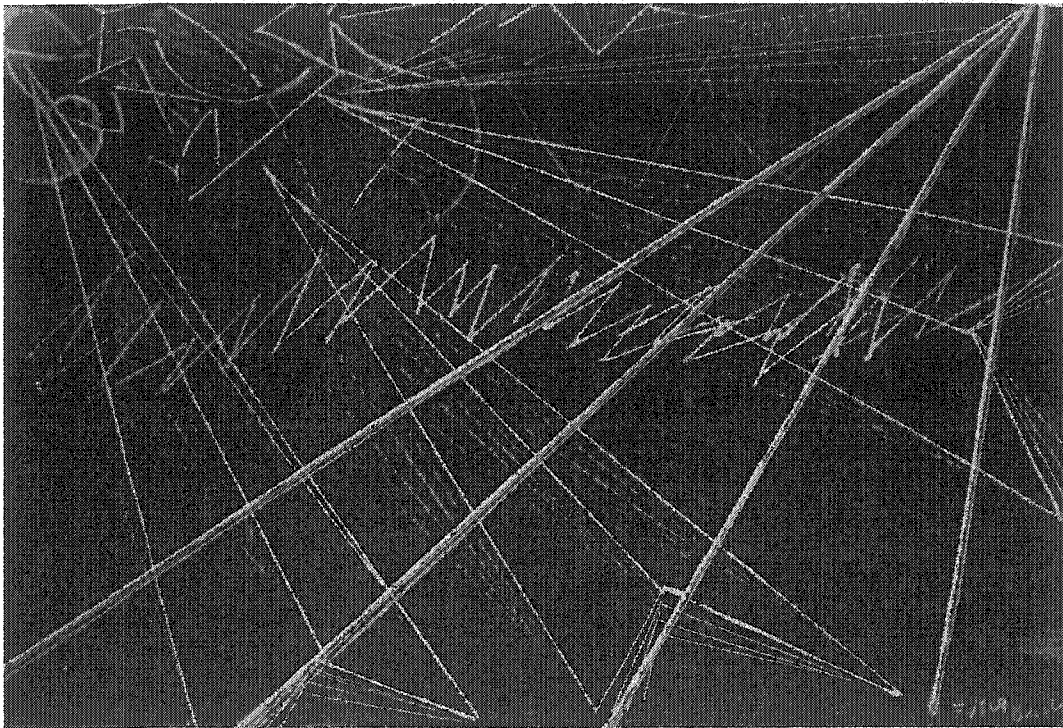


Fig. 14. Giacomo Balla  
*Trasformazione forme-spiriti*, 1917-18  
oil and tempera on cardboard  
Private Collection

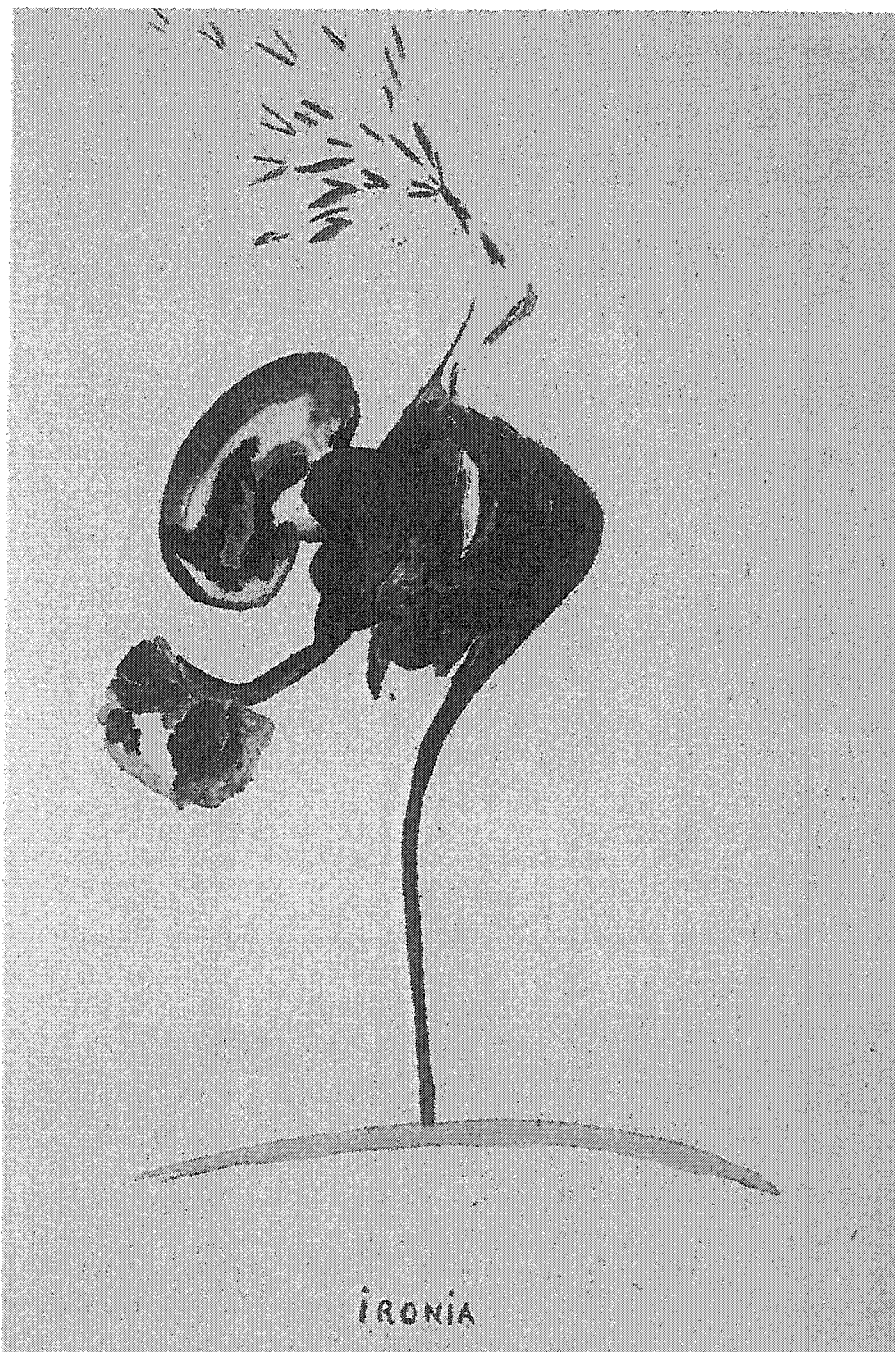


Fig. 15. Benedetta  
*Ironia*, c.1924  
gouache on paper  
Private Collection

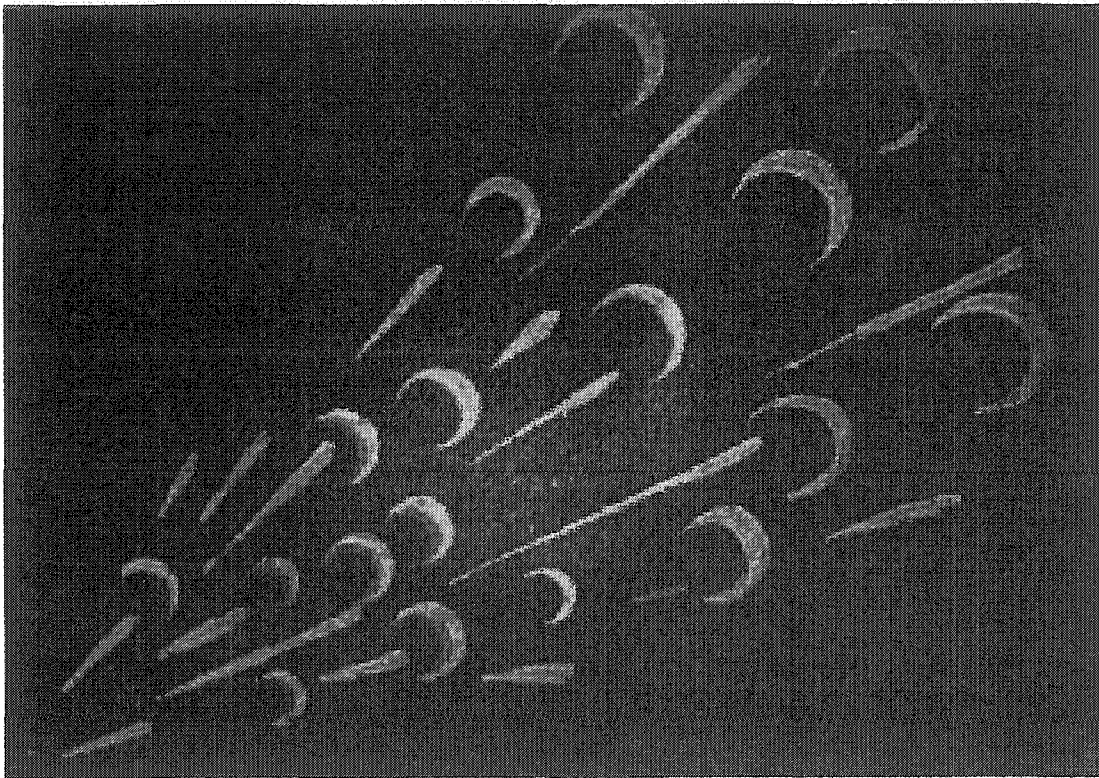


Fig. 16. "Sudden Fright" (Illustration 27 from Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater, *Thought-forms*, 1905)

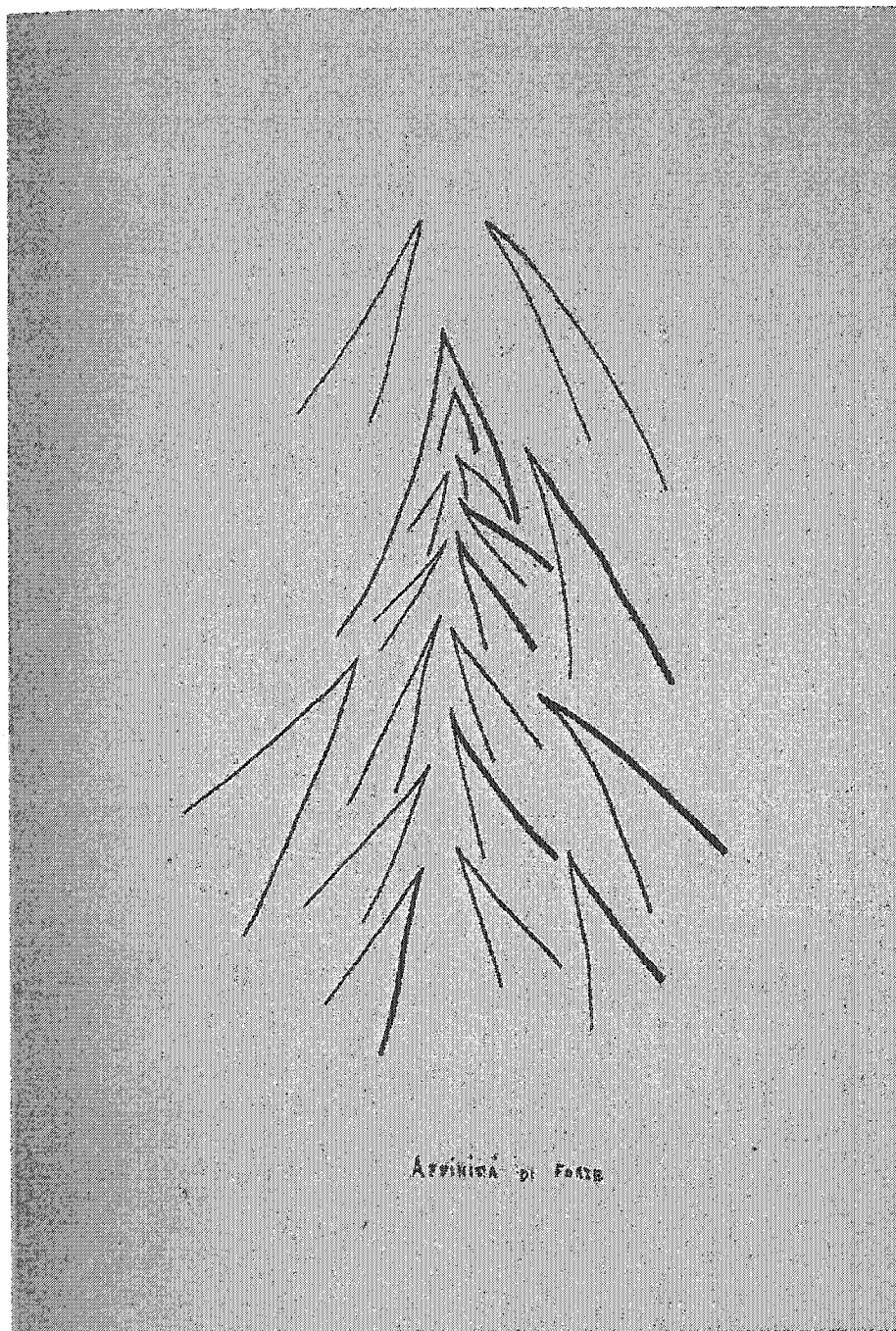


Fig. 17. Benedetta  
*Affinità di forze*, drawing for *Le forze umane*, 1924  
ink on paper  
Marinetti Collection, Milan

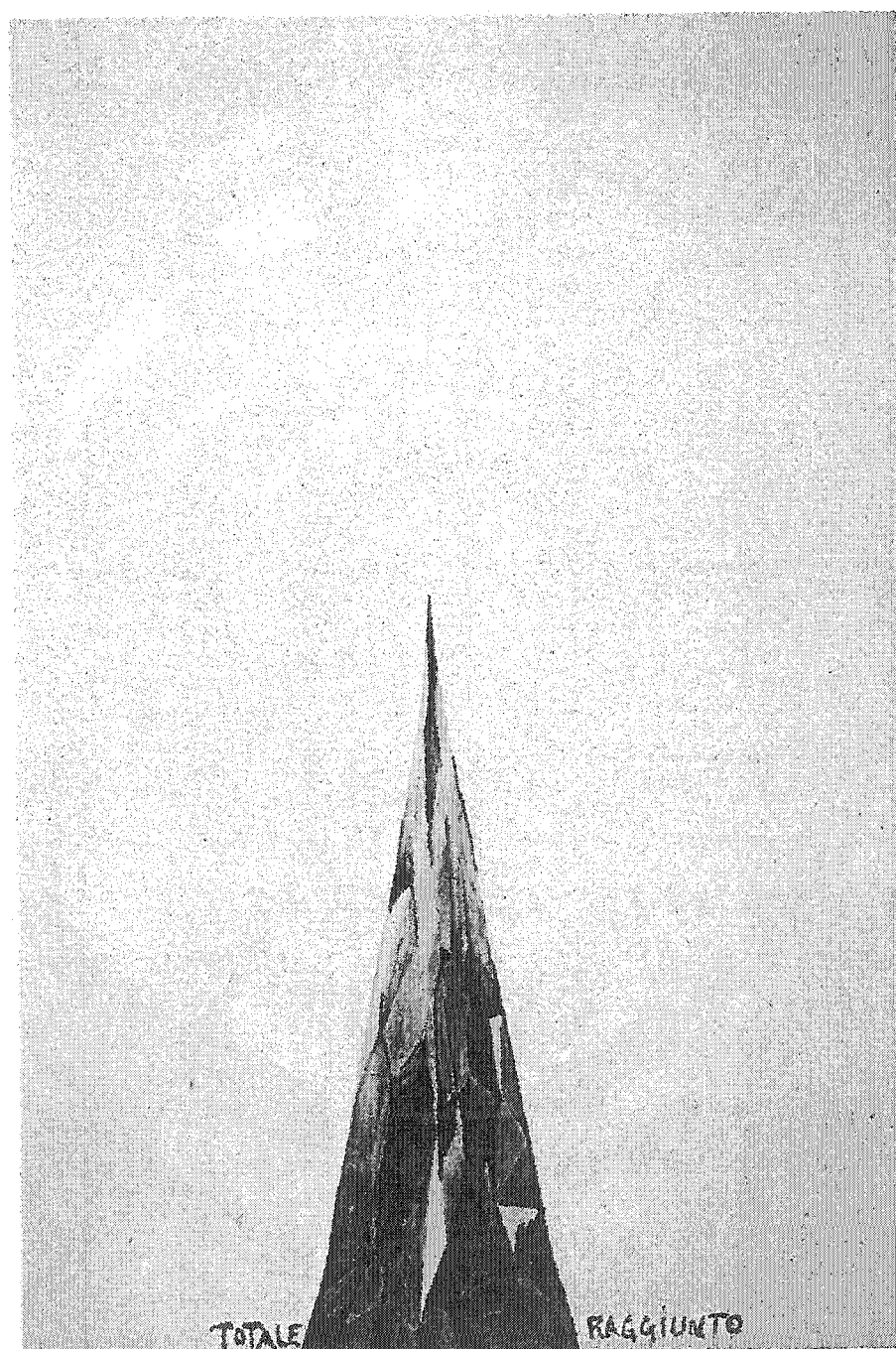


Fig. 18. Benedetta  
*Un totale raggiunto*, c.1924  
gouache on paper  
Private Collection

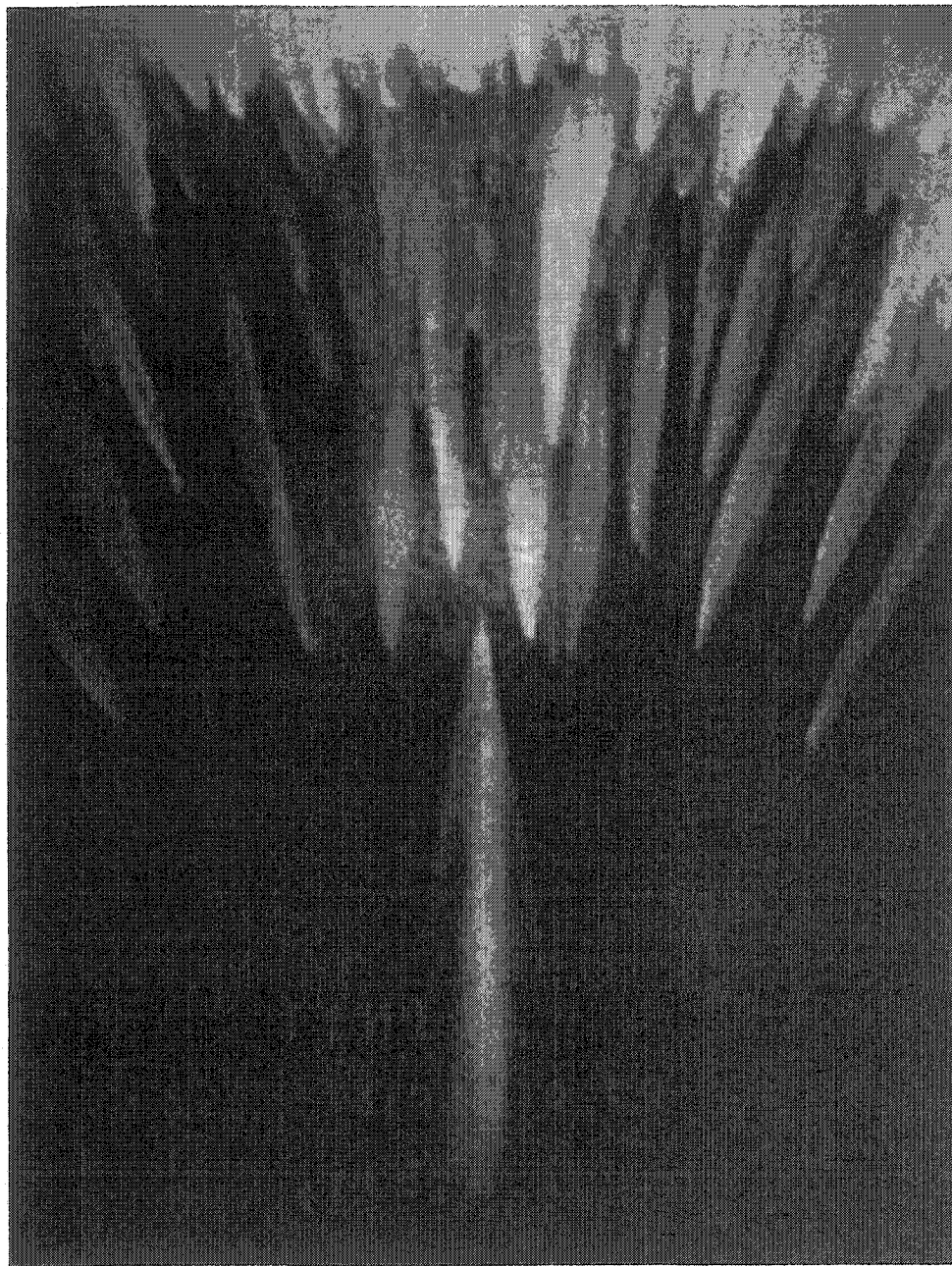


Fig. 19. "The Response to Devotion" (Illustration 17 from Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater, *Thought-forms*, 1905)

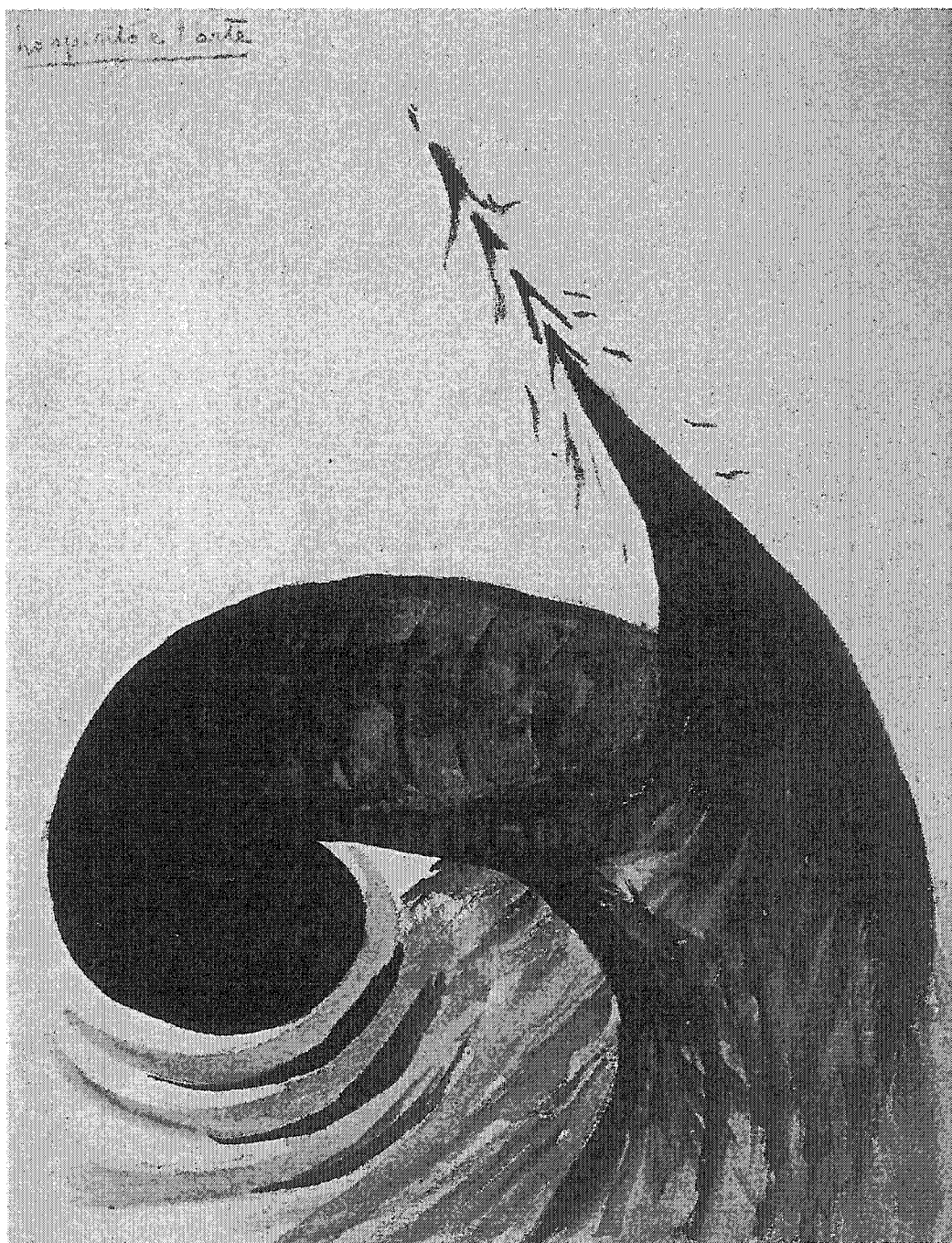


Fig. 20. Benedetta  
*Lo spirito e l'arte*, c. 1924  
gouache on paper  
Private Collection

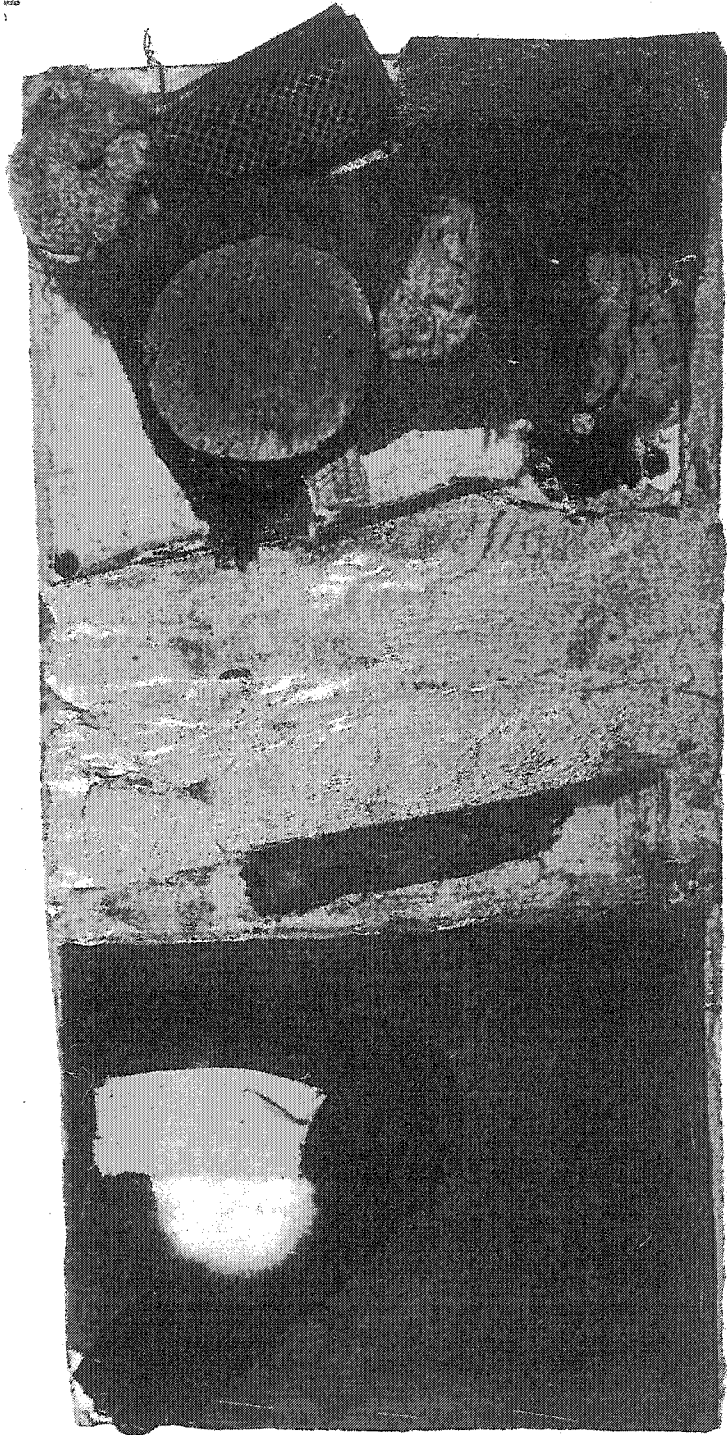


Fig. 21. F.T. Marinetti and Bendetta  
*Sudan-Parigi*, 1921  
mixed media  
Private Collection

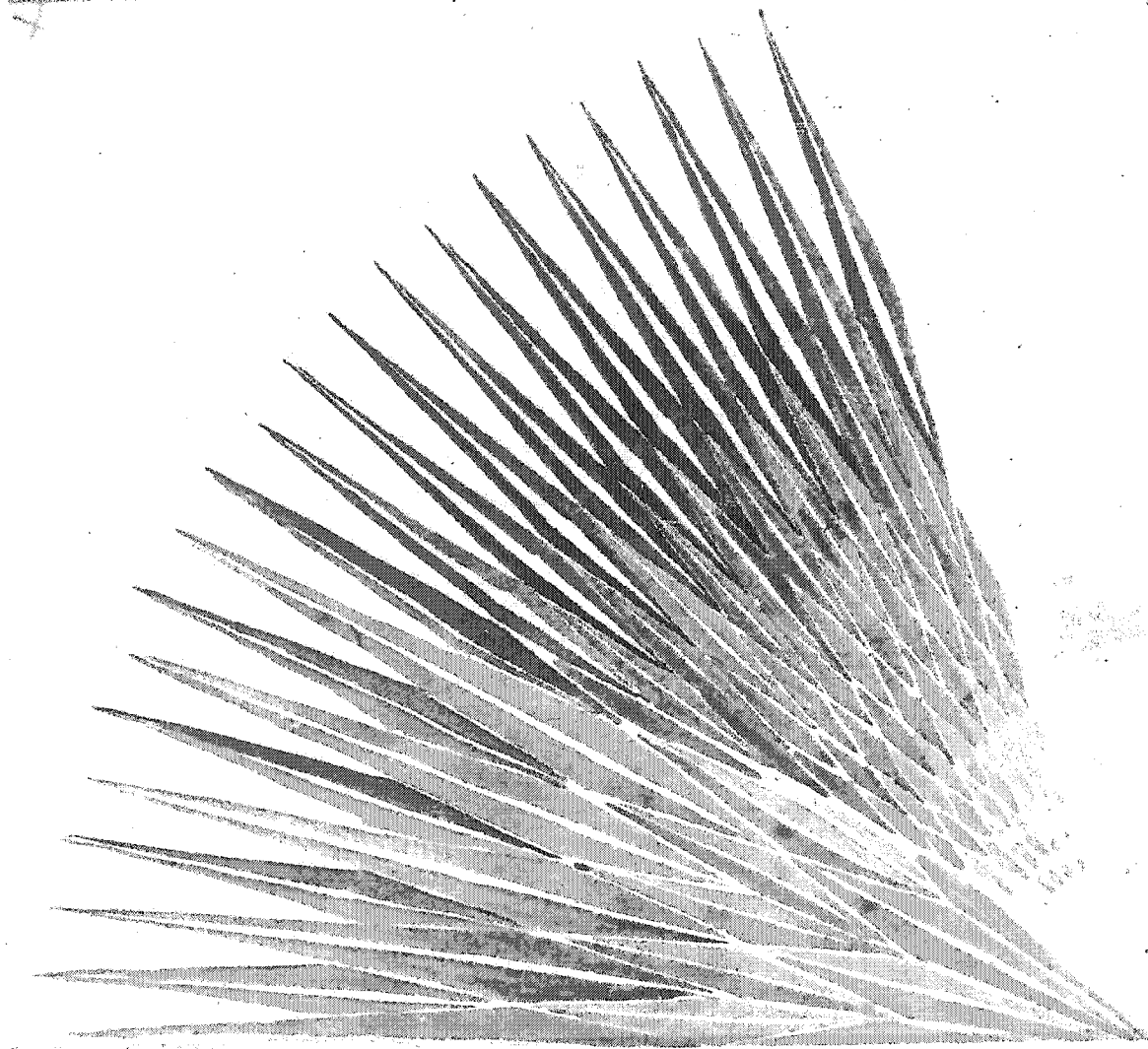


Fig. 22. Giacomo Balla  
*Studio per compenetrazione iridescente*, 1912  
watercolor on paper  
Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna, Turin

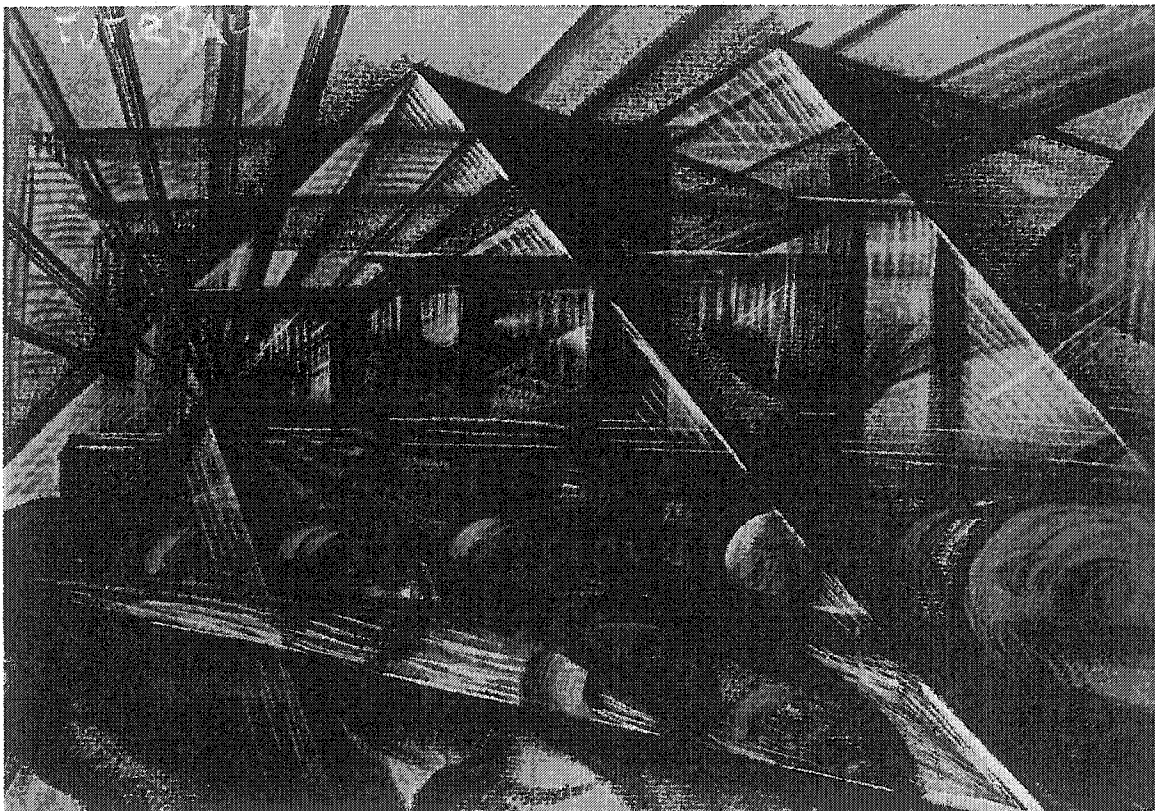
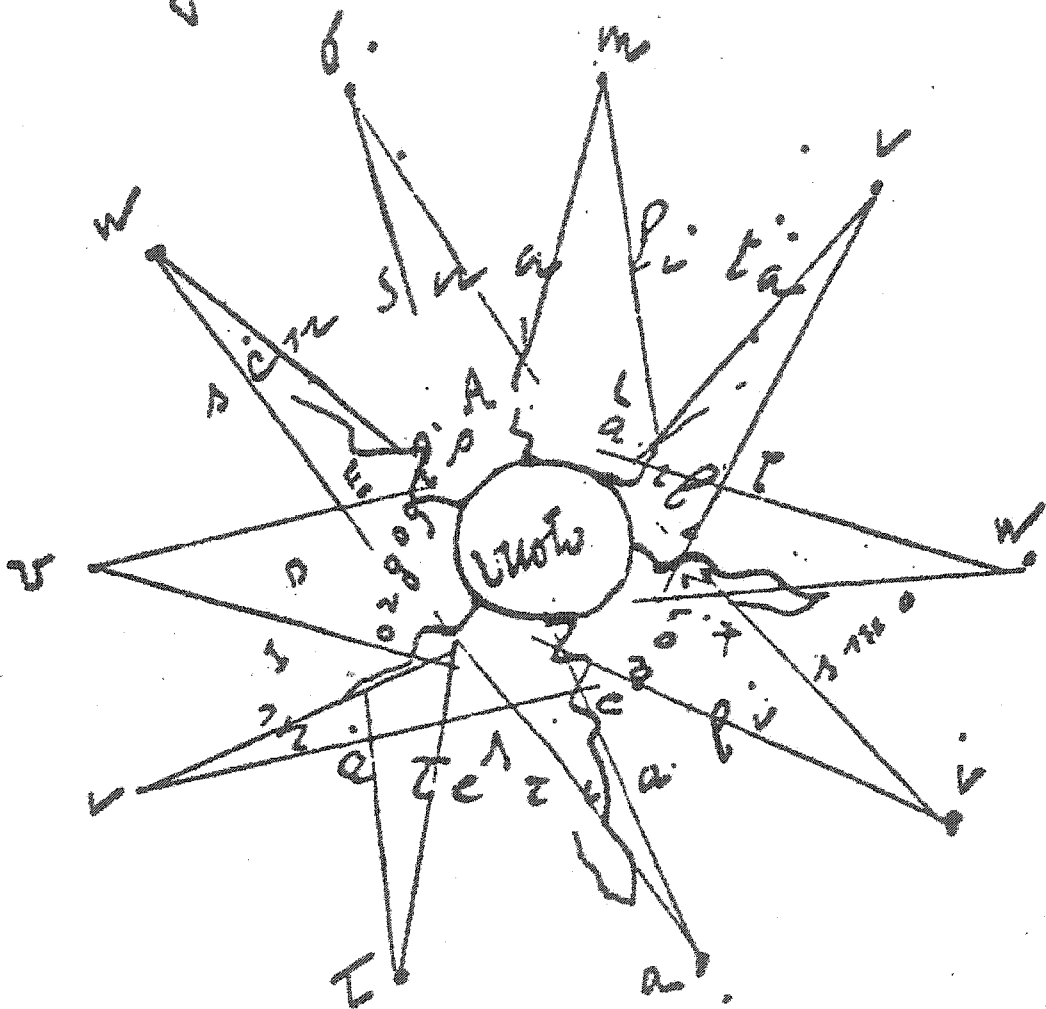


Fig. 23. Giacomo Balla  
*Profondità dinamiche*, 1913  
tempera on paper  
Private Collection, Milan

Spicologia di un uomo <sup>15</sup>



Benedetta fra le dome  
parolibera futurista

Fig. 24. Benedetta  
"Spicologia di un uomo," *Dinamo*, 1919  
ink on paper  
Private Collection

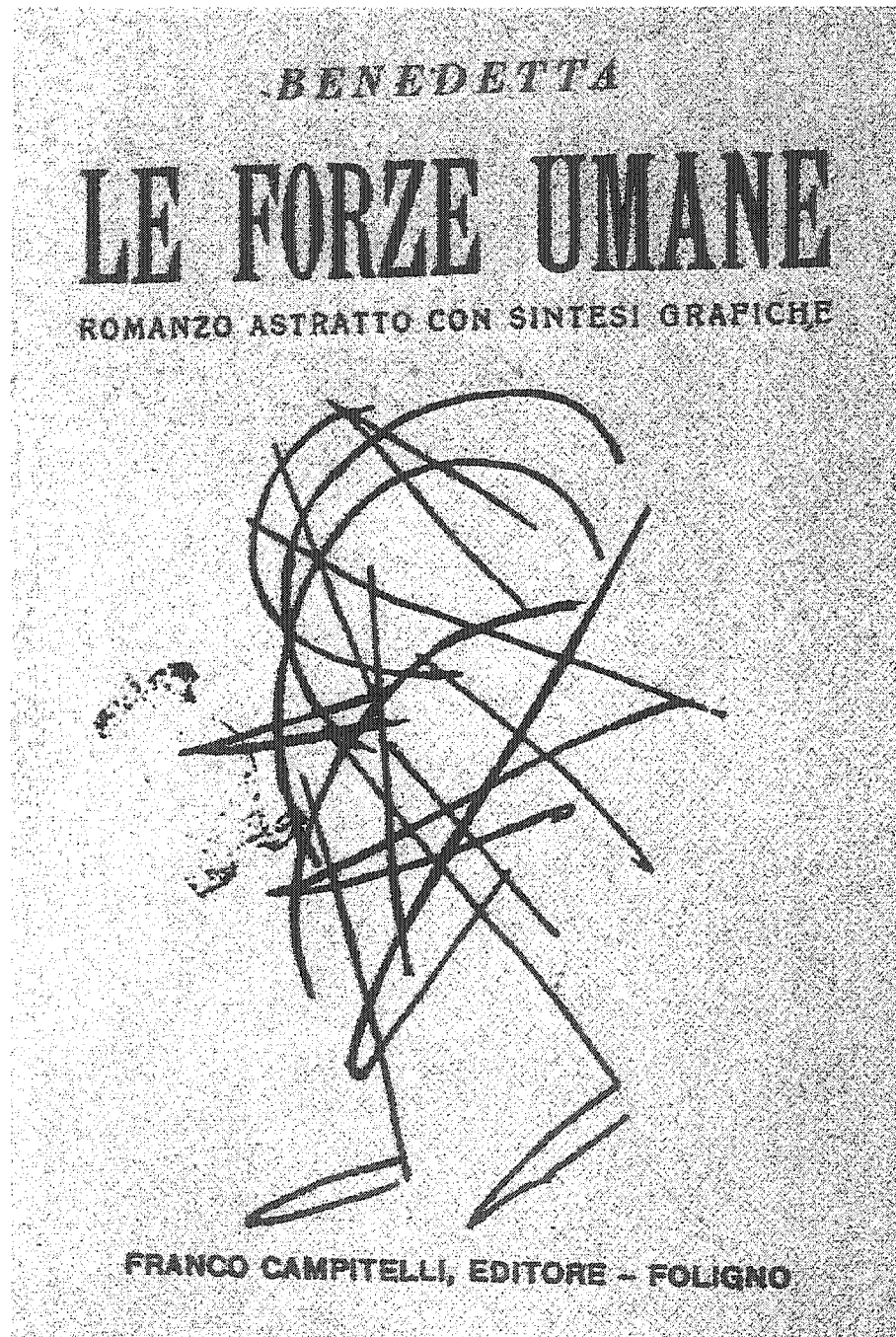
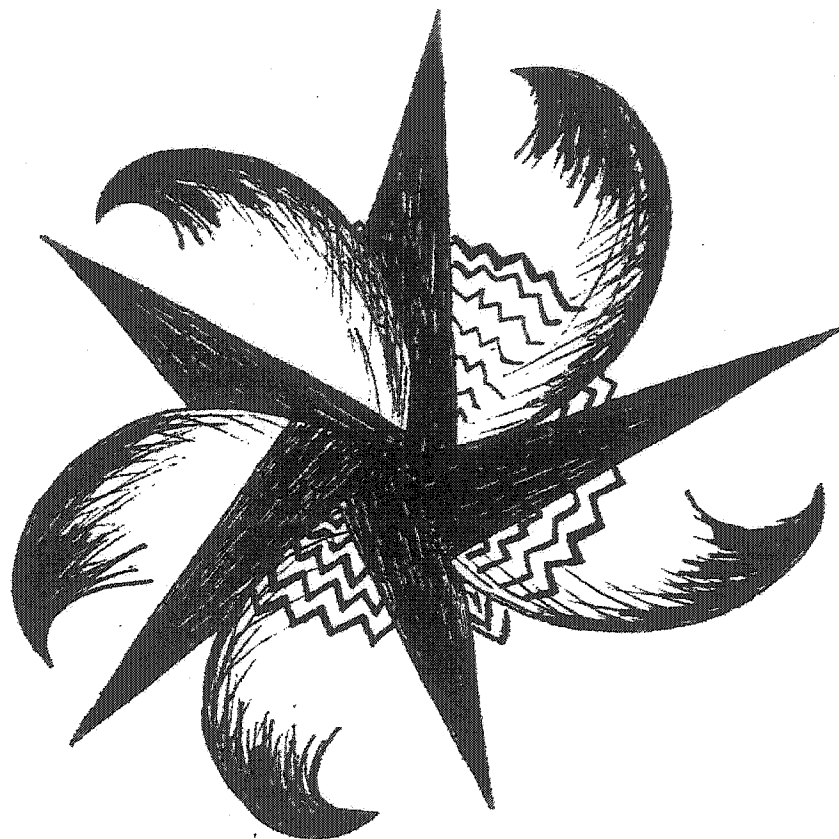
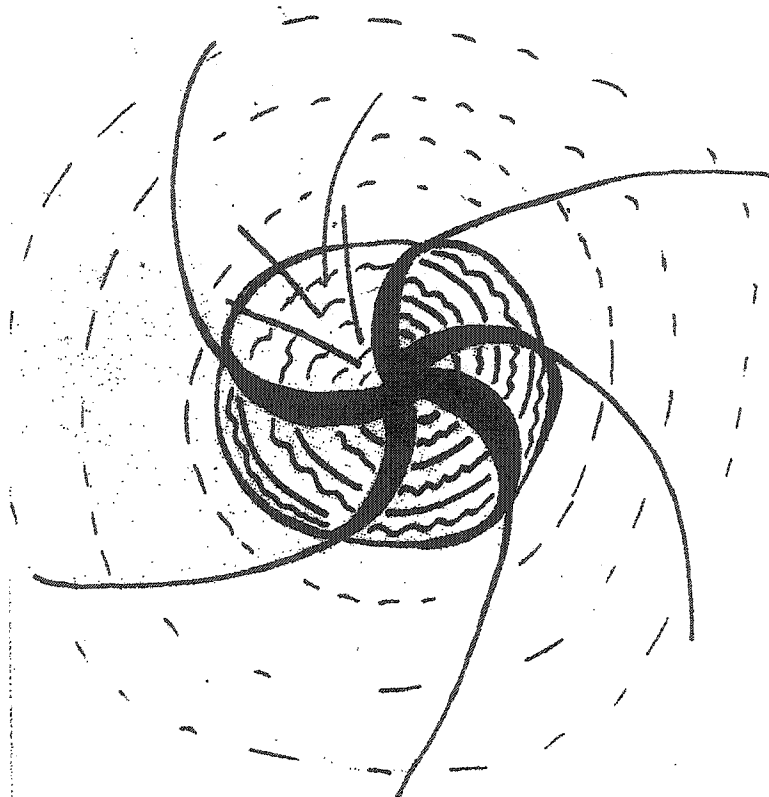


Fig. 25. Cover of *Le forze umane*, 1924, novel by Benedetta



Ribellione dell' '50

Fig. 26. Benedetta  
*Ribellione dell' '50*, drawing for *Le forze umane*, 1924  
ink on paper  
Marinetti Collection, Milan



irradiazione di un nucleo in sviluppo  
(Primavera) 1924

Fig. 27. Benedetta  
*Irradiazione di un nucleo in sviluppo*, drawing for *Le forze umane*,  
1924  
ink on paper  
Marinetti Collection, Milan

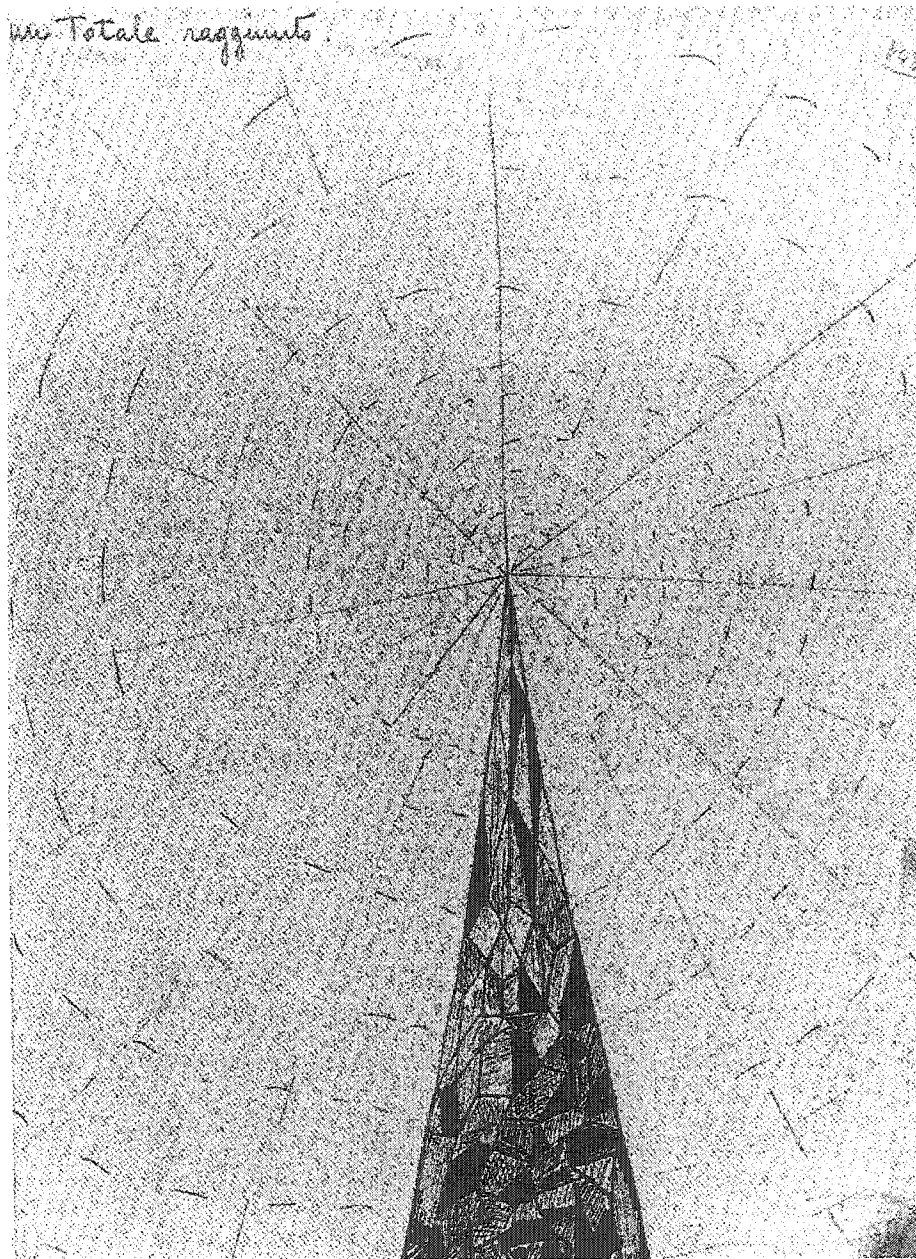


Fig. 28. Benedetta  
*Un totale raggiunto*, drawing for *Le forze umane*, 1924  
ink on paper  
Marinetti Collection, Milan

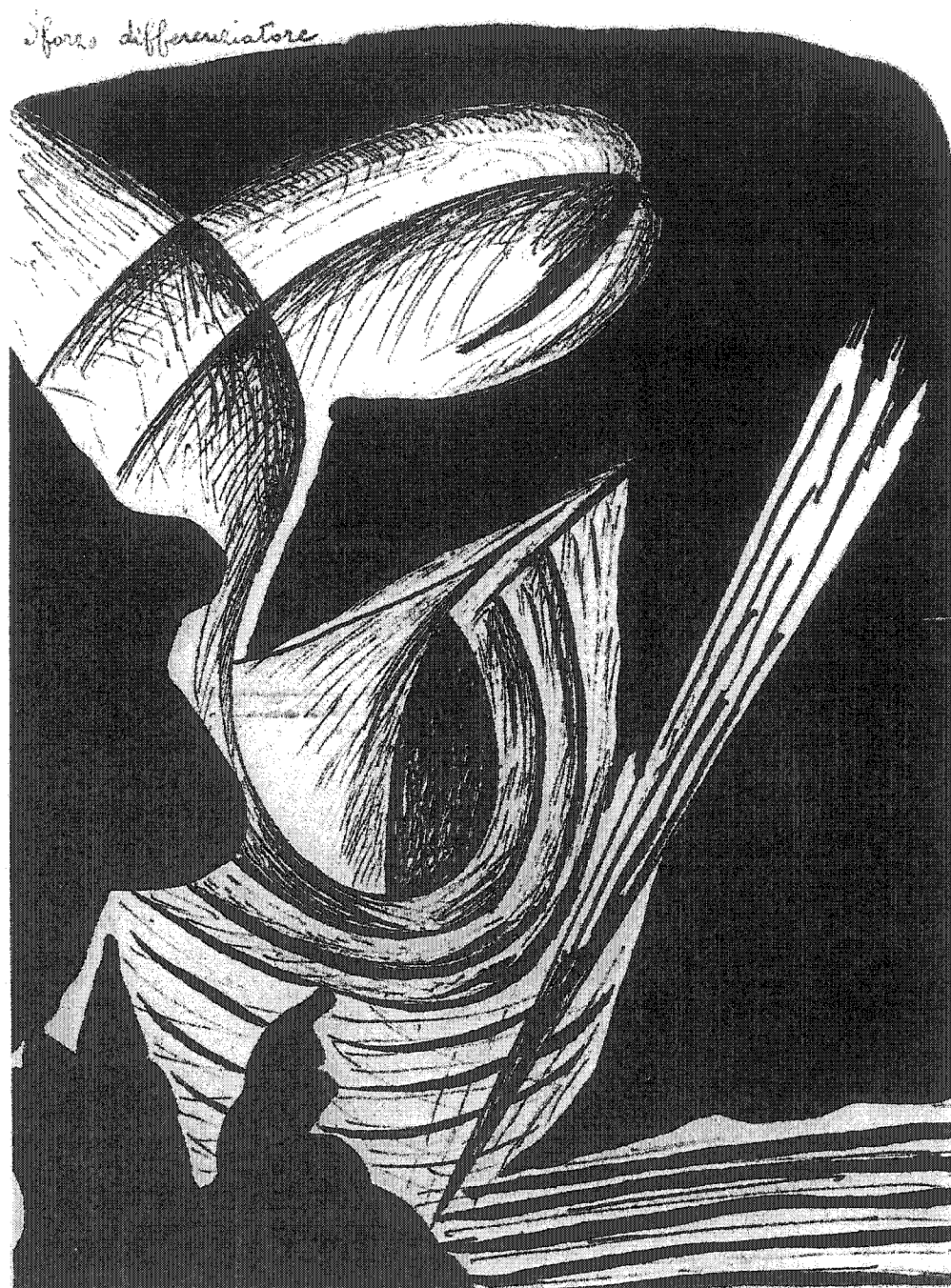


Fig. 29. Benedetta  
*Sforzo differenziatore*, drawing for *Le forze umane*, 1924  
ink on paper  
Private Collection

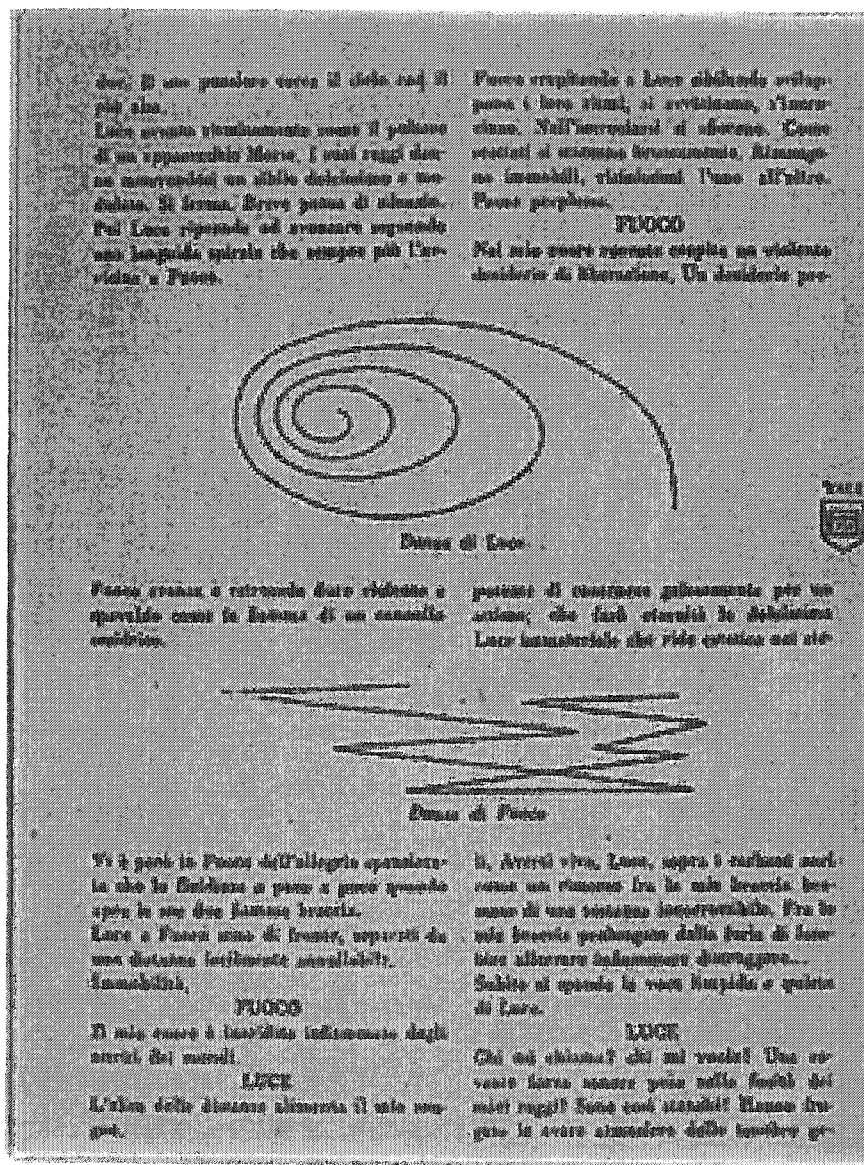


Fig. 30. Page from *Viaggio di Gararà*, 1931, novel-play by Benedetta

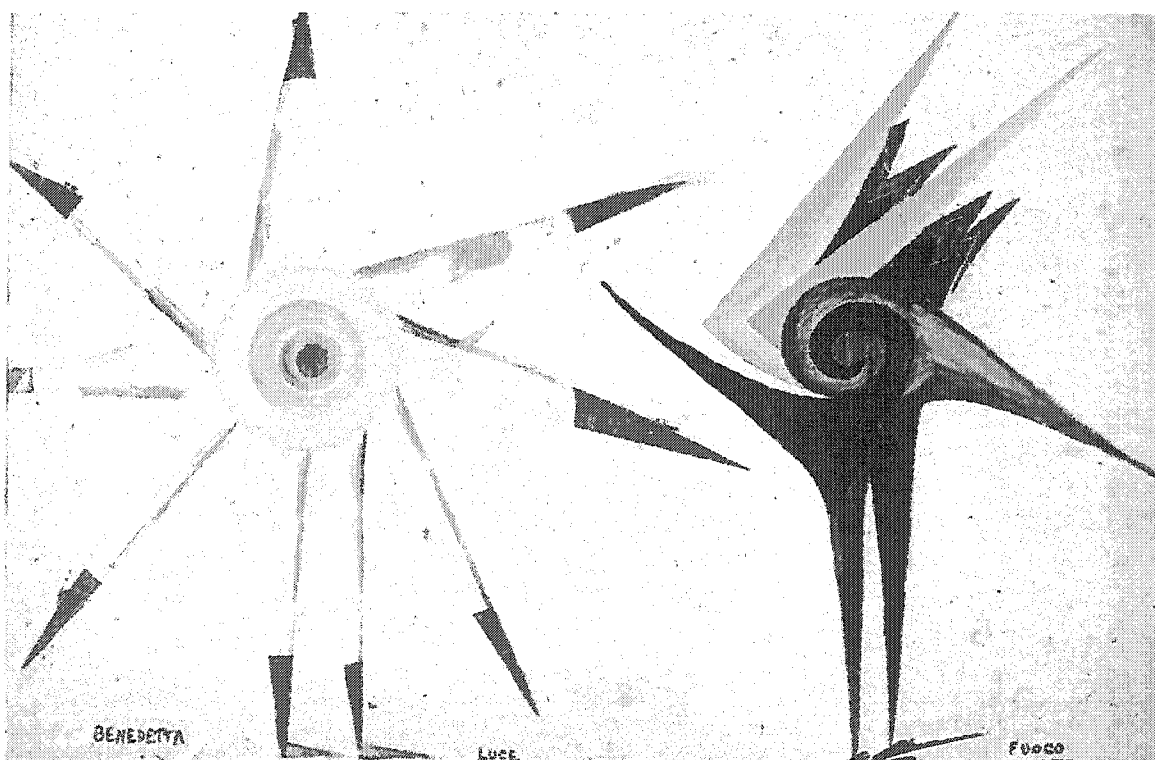


Fig. 31. Benedetta  
*Fuoco-luce*, 1931  
watercolor and collage on paper  
Marinetti Collection, Milan



Fig. 32. Benedetta  
*Cirri + elica, 3500 metri*, 1928  
oil and collage on panel  
Marinetti Collection, Milan

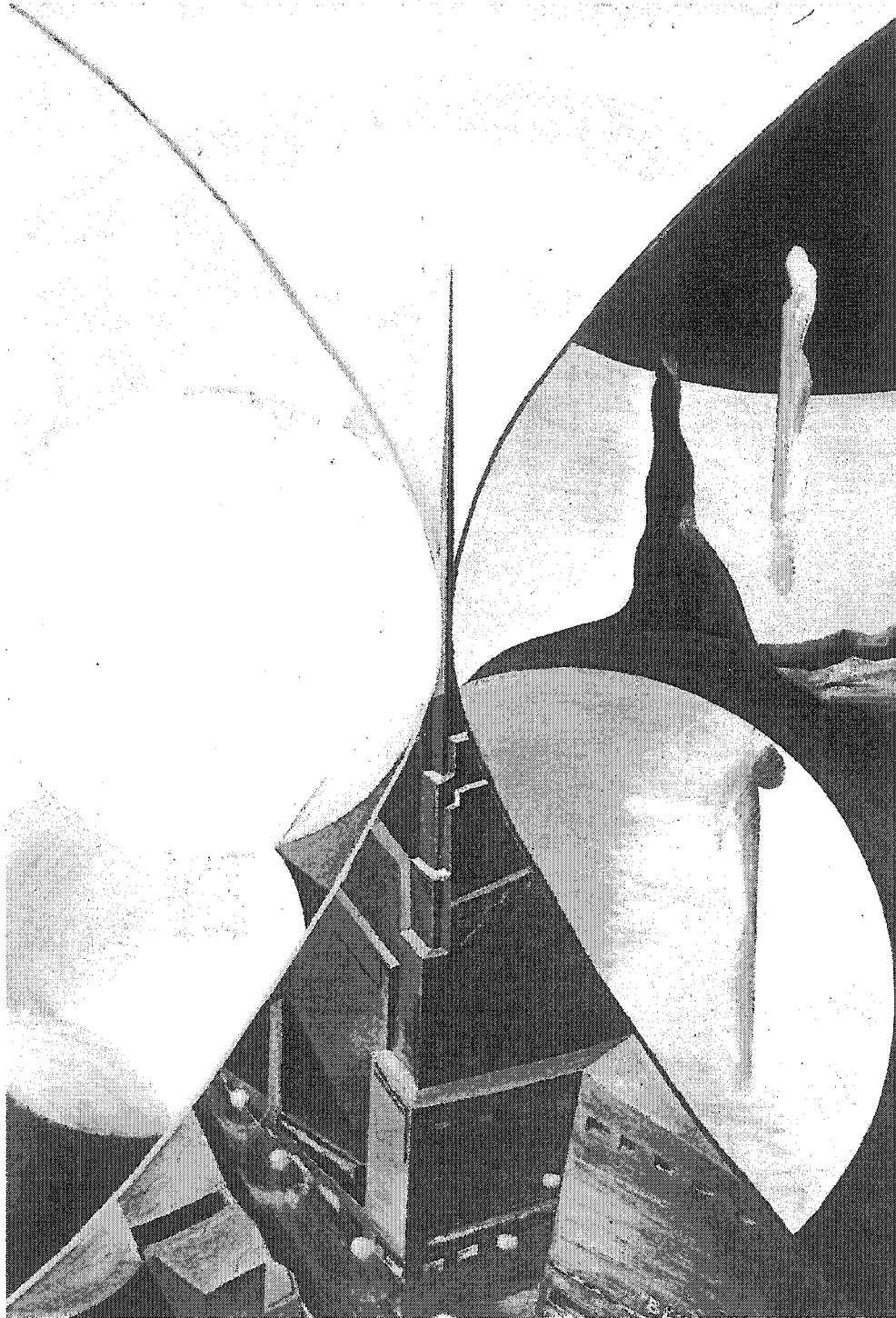


Fig.33. Benedetta  
*Il grande X*, 1931  
oil on canvas  
Musée de l'Art de la Ville de Paris

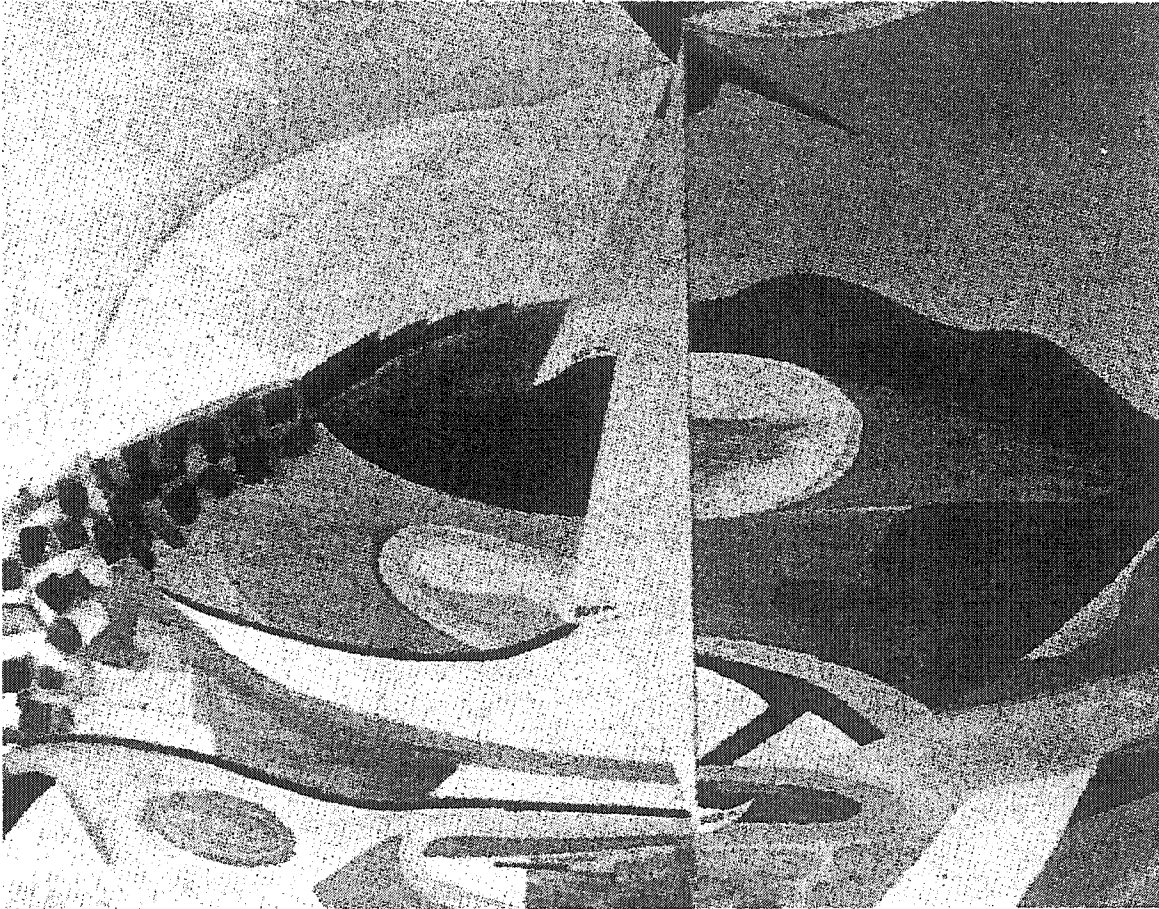


Fig. 34. Benedetta,  
*Prendendo quota*, 1931  
oil on canvas  
whereabouts unknown



Fig. 35. Benedetta  
*Prendendo quota*, 1931  
ceramic tile  
Marinetti Collection, Milan

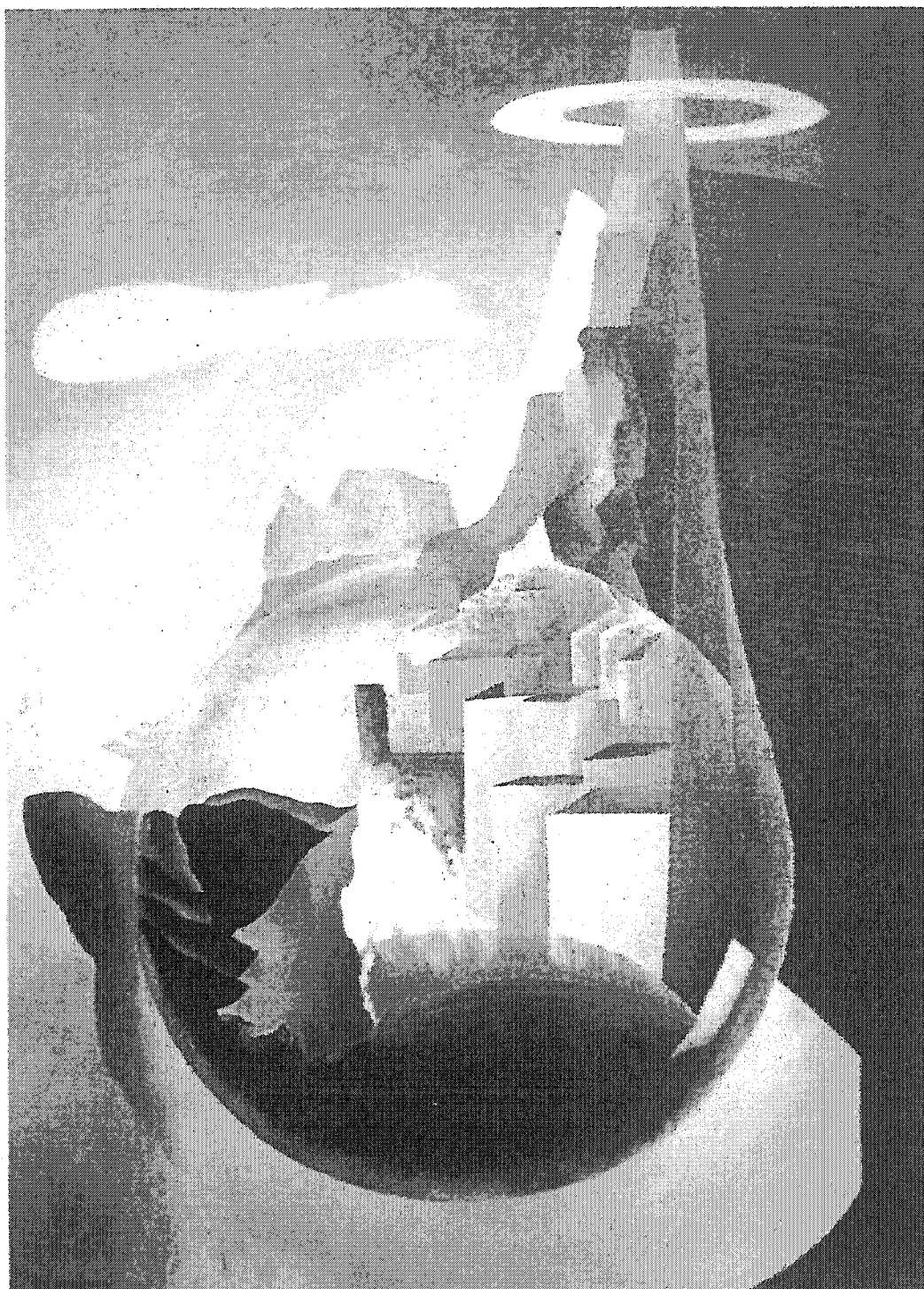


Fig. 36. Benedetta  
*Cime arse di solitudine*, 1936  
oil on canvas

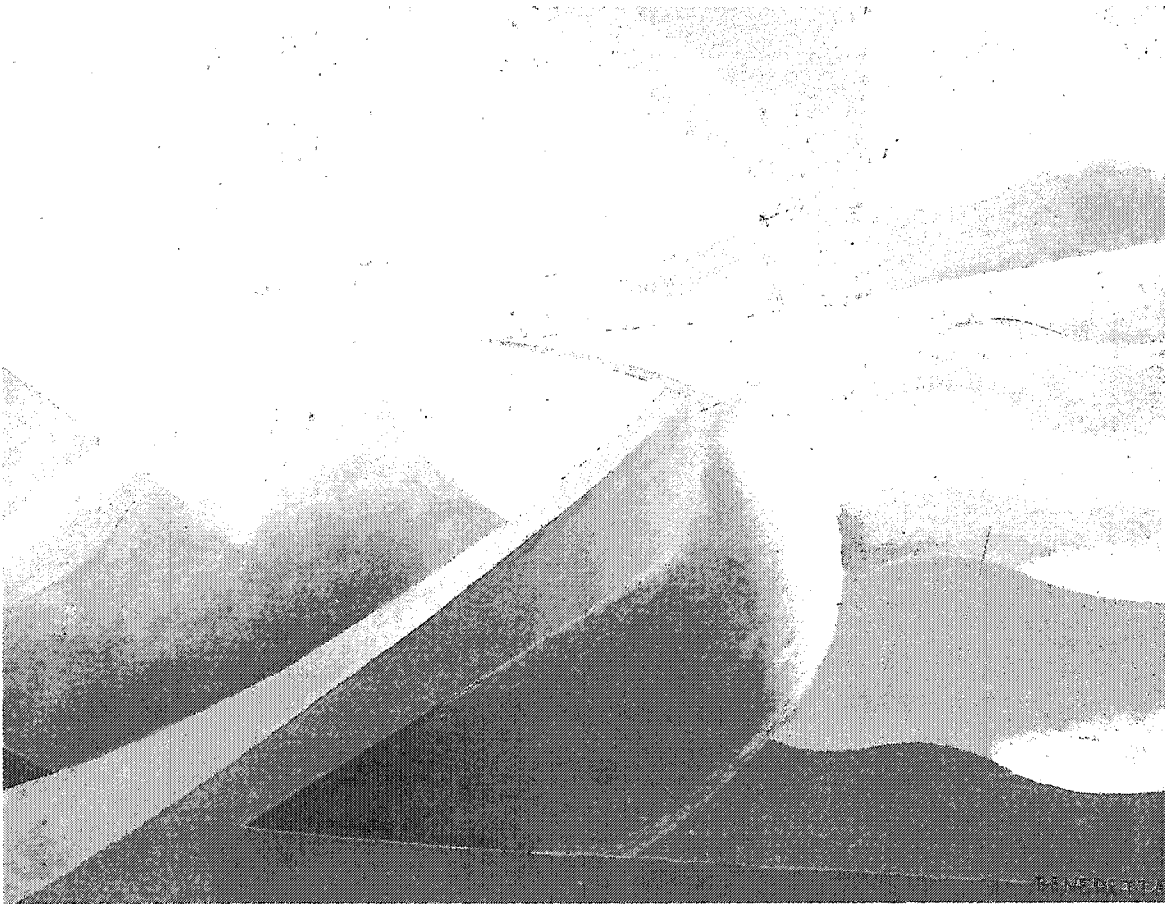


Fig. 37. Benedetta  
*Laghi Salati Algerini*, 1931  
oil on canvas  
Marinetti Collection, Milan

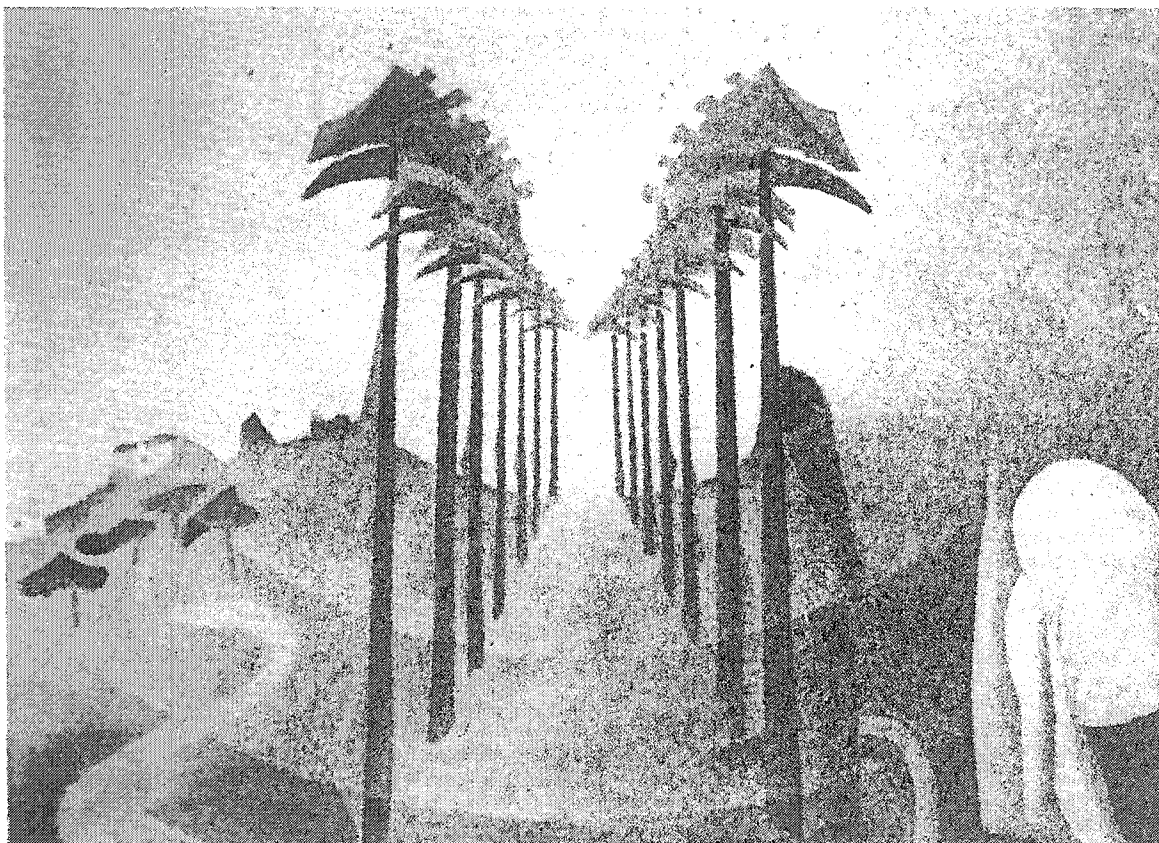


Fig. 38. Benedetta  
*Interpretazione mistica di un paesaggio*, 1934  
oil on canvas  
wherabouts unknown



Fig. 39. Stereoscope view of the Mangue Canal, Rio de Janeiro

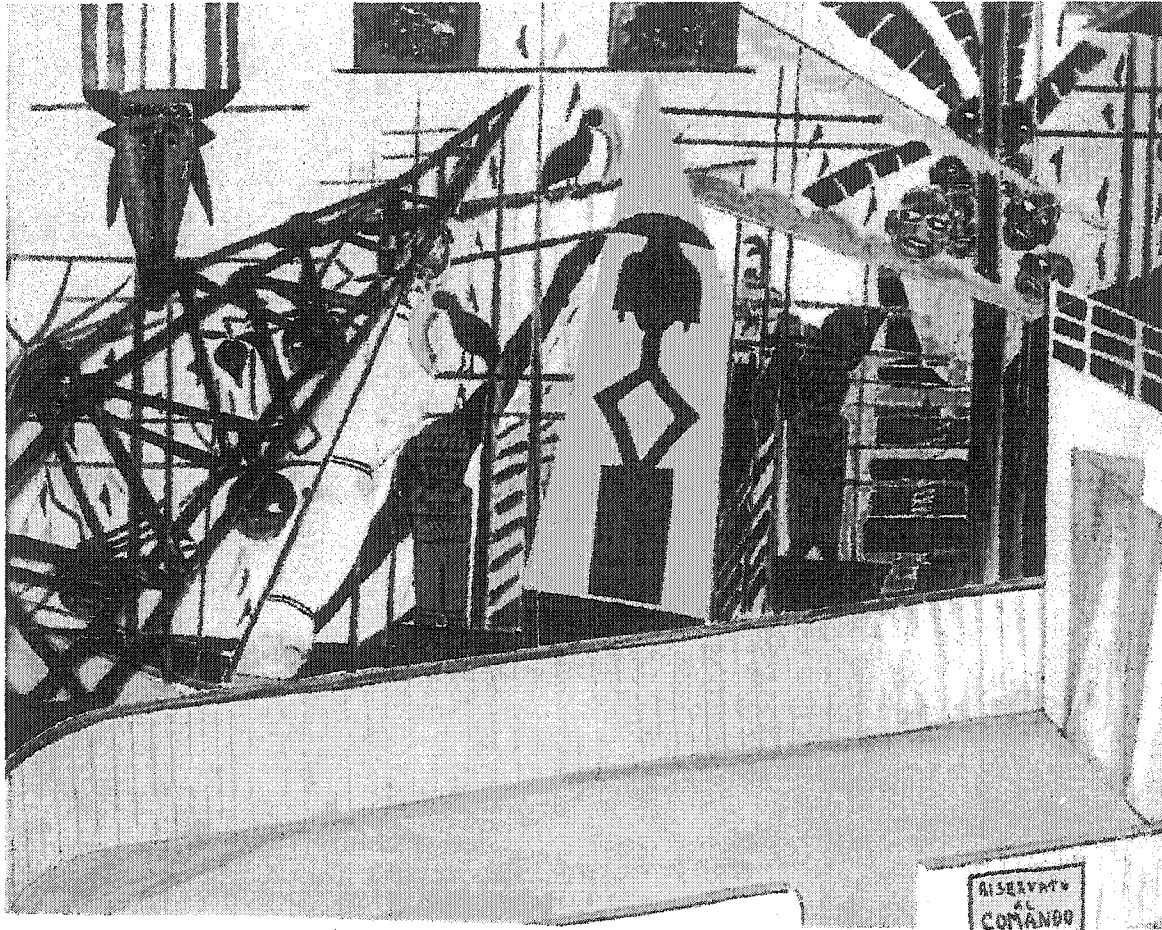


Fig. 40. Benedetta  
*Il ponte di comando scoperto*, 1928  
collage  
Private Collection, Milan

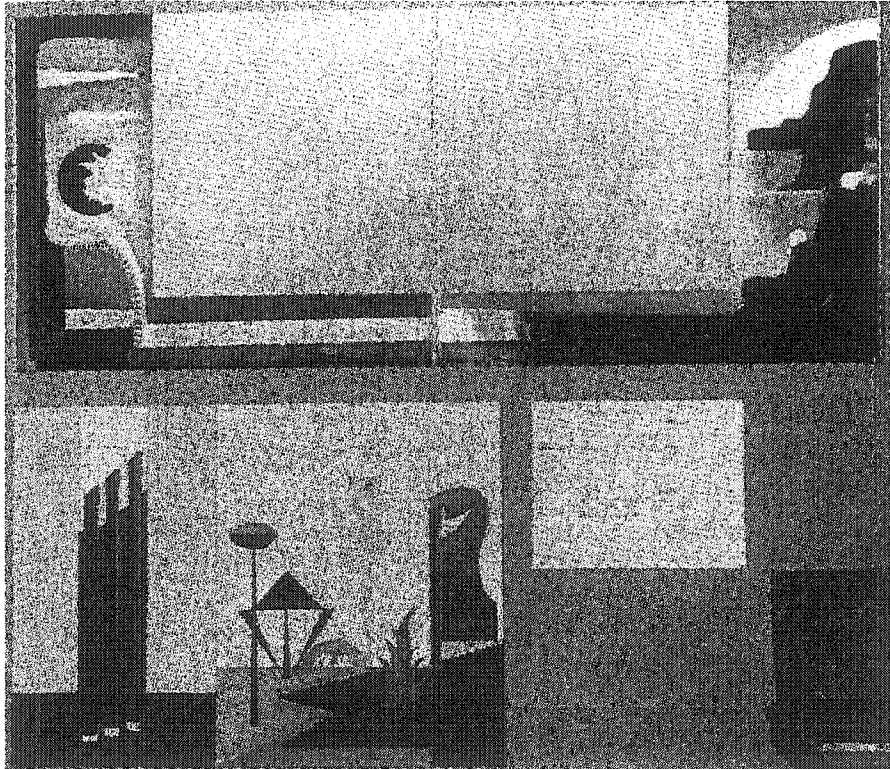


Fig. 41. Benedetta  
*Study for Tre polimaterici per il vestibolo Case della Piccola italiana, 1934*

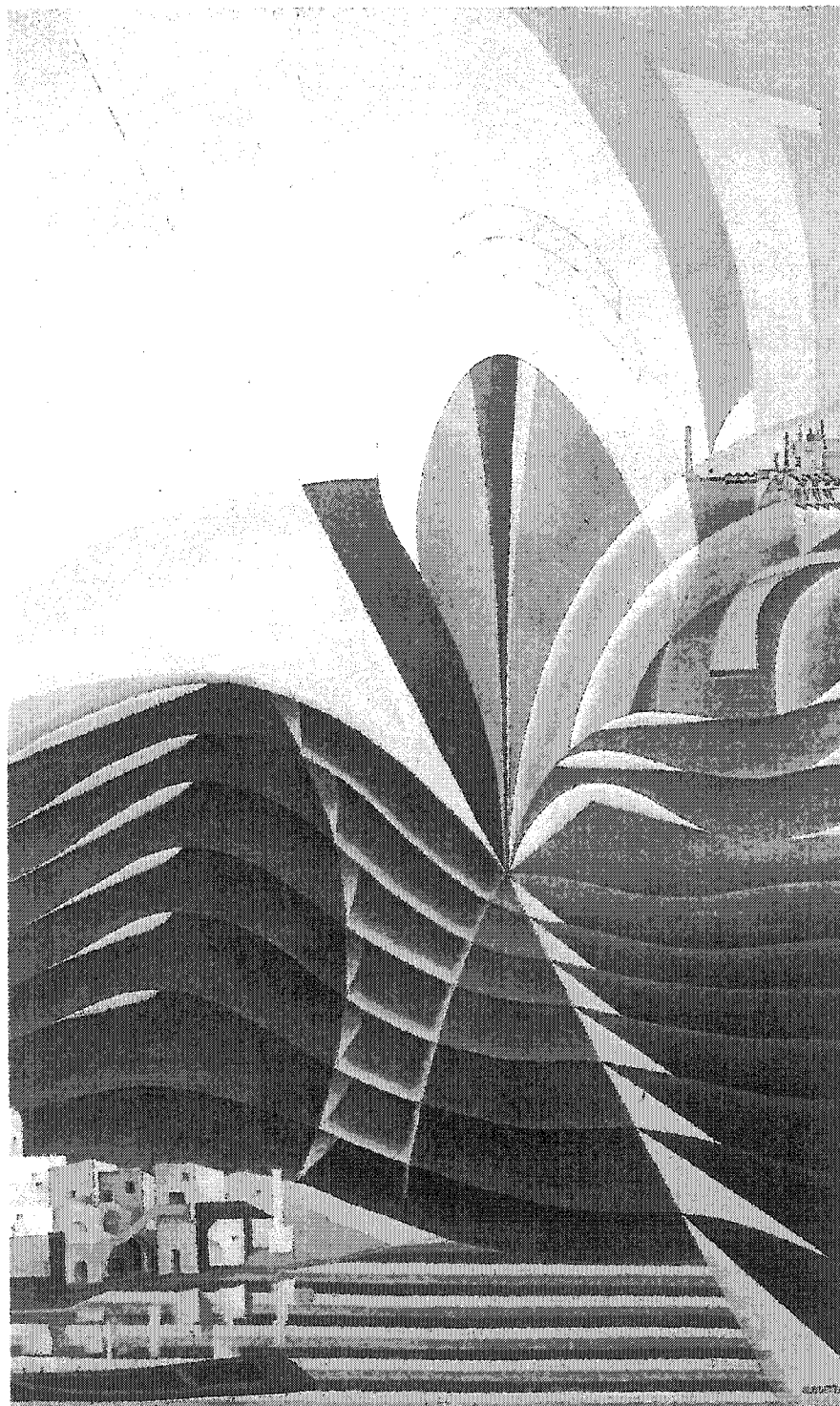


Fig. 42. Benedetta  
*Sintesi delle comunicazioni marittime*, 1934  
tempera and encaustic  
Sala del Consiglio e delle Conferenze, Post Office, Palermo



Fig. 43. Benedetta  
*Sintesi delle comunicazioni aeree*, 1934  
tempera and encaustic  
Sala del Consiglio e delle Conferenze, Post Office, Palermo

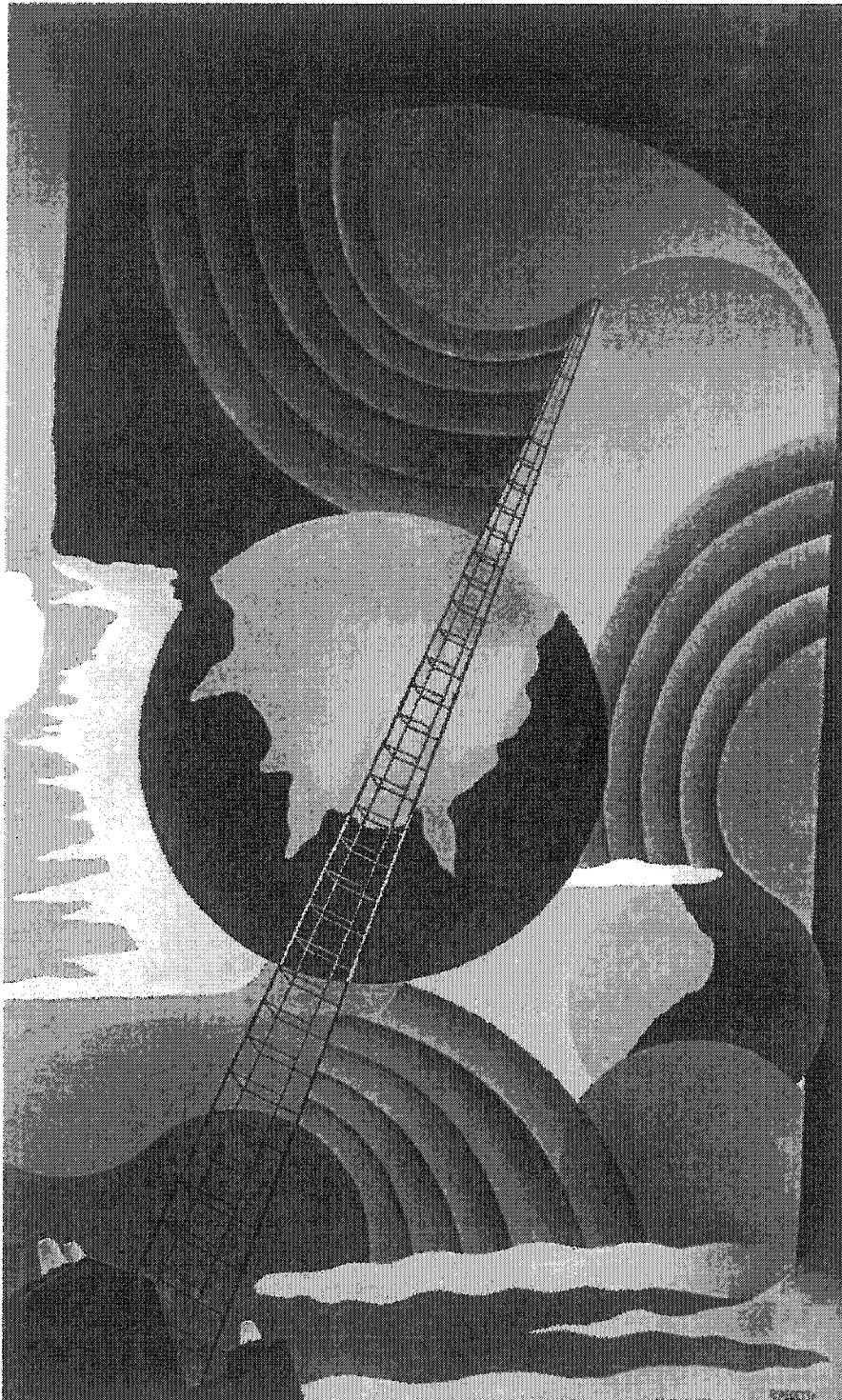


Fig. 44. Benedetta  
*Sintesi delle comunicazioni telegrafiche e telefoniche*, 1934  
tempera and encaustic  
Sala del Consiglio e delle Conferenze, Post Office, Palermo

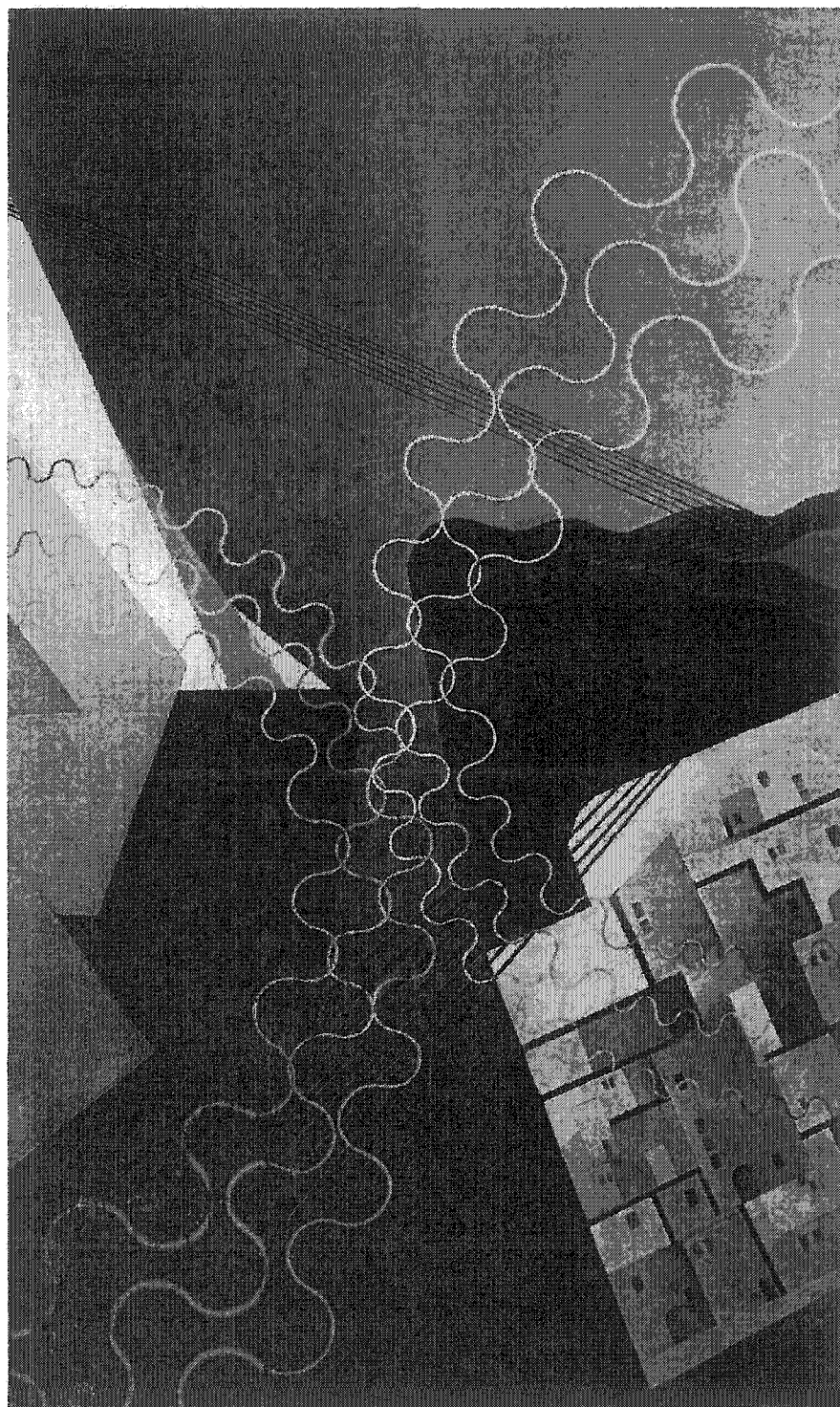


Fig. 45. Benedetta  
*Sintesi delle comunicazioni radiofoniche*, 1934  
tempera and encaustic  
Sala del Consiglio e delle Conferenze, Post Office, Palermo

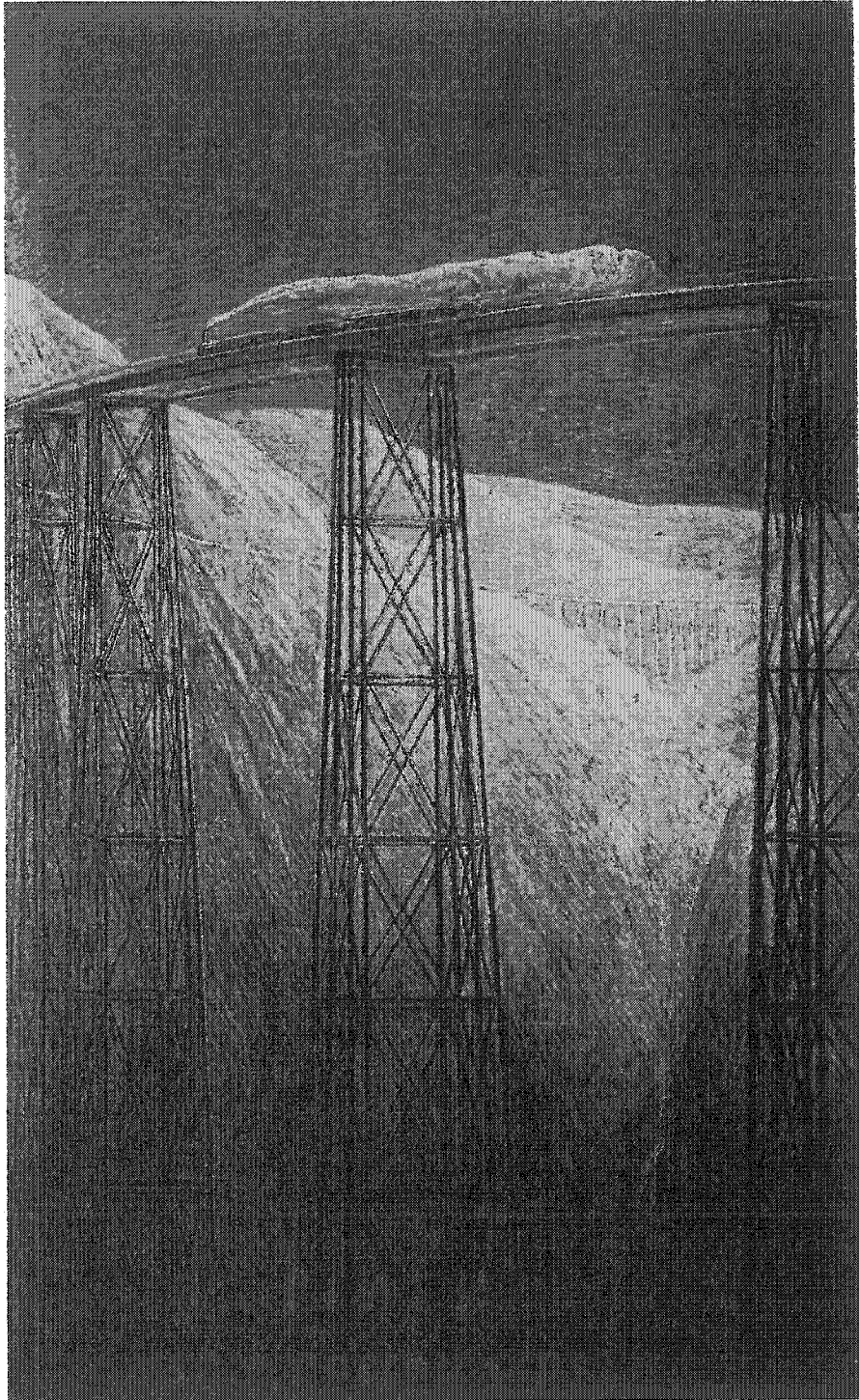


Fig. 46. Gaetano Previati  
*Ferrovia del Pacifico*, 1914  
oil on canvas  
Camera di Commercio, Milan



Fig. 47. Gaetano Previati  
*Traforo delle Alpi*, 1914  
oil on canvas  
Camera di Commercio, Milan

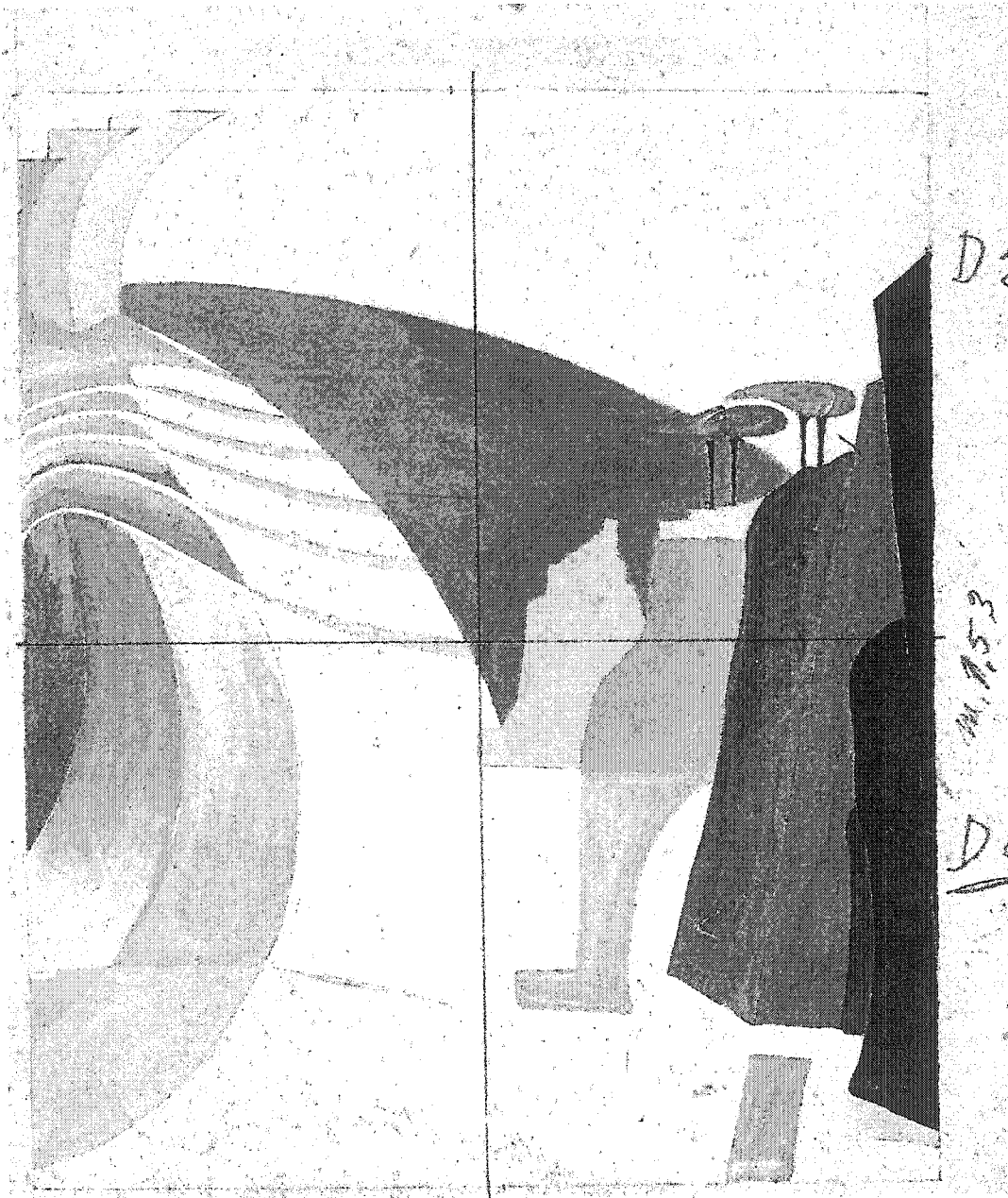


Fig. 48. Benedetta  
*Paesaggio marino*, 1936  
tempera on paper  
Private Collection



Fig. 49. Benedetta  
*Paesaggio cosmico*, 1936  
tempera on paper  
Marinetti Collection, Milan

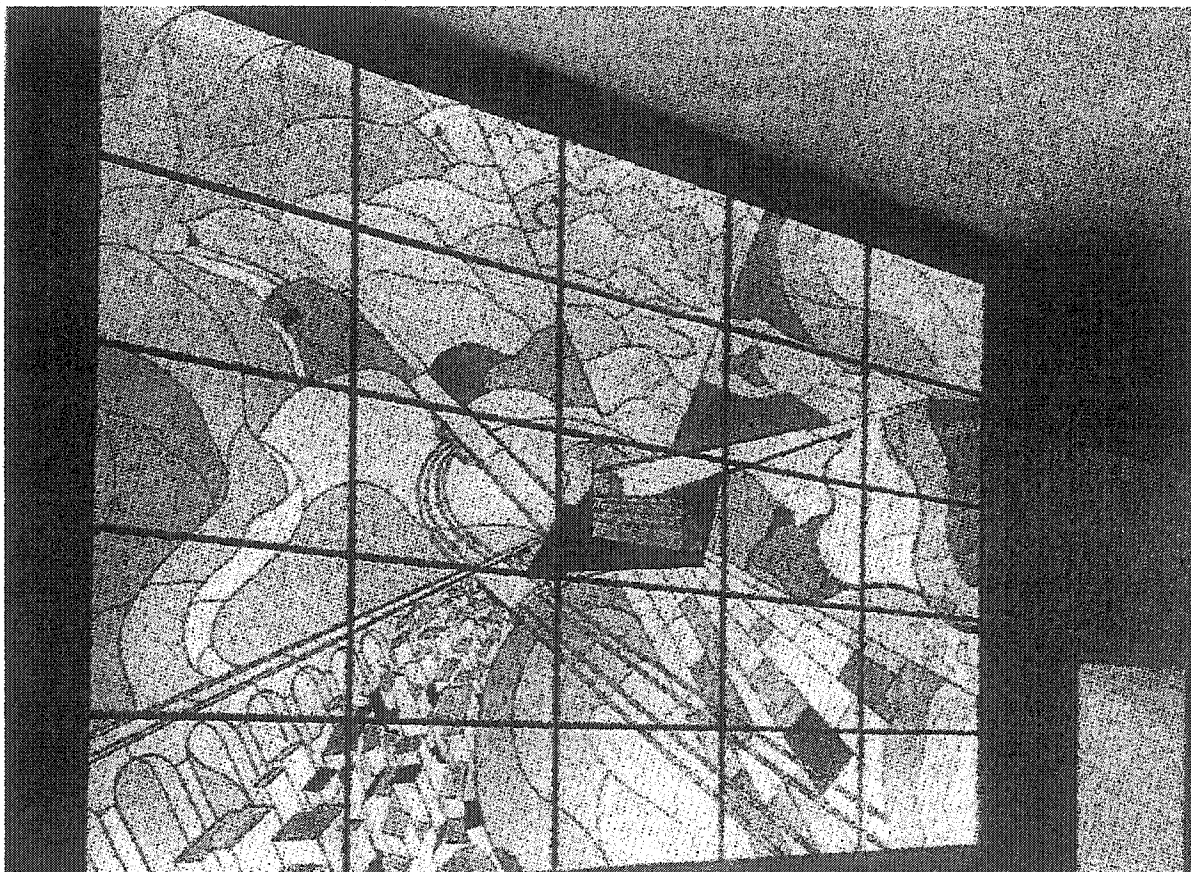


Fig. 50. Benedetta, Ambrosi, Tato  
*Comunicazioni ferroviarie*, 1936  
installation photograph at II Mostra di Plastica per l'Edilizia Fascista in Italia e  
in Africa

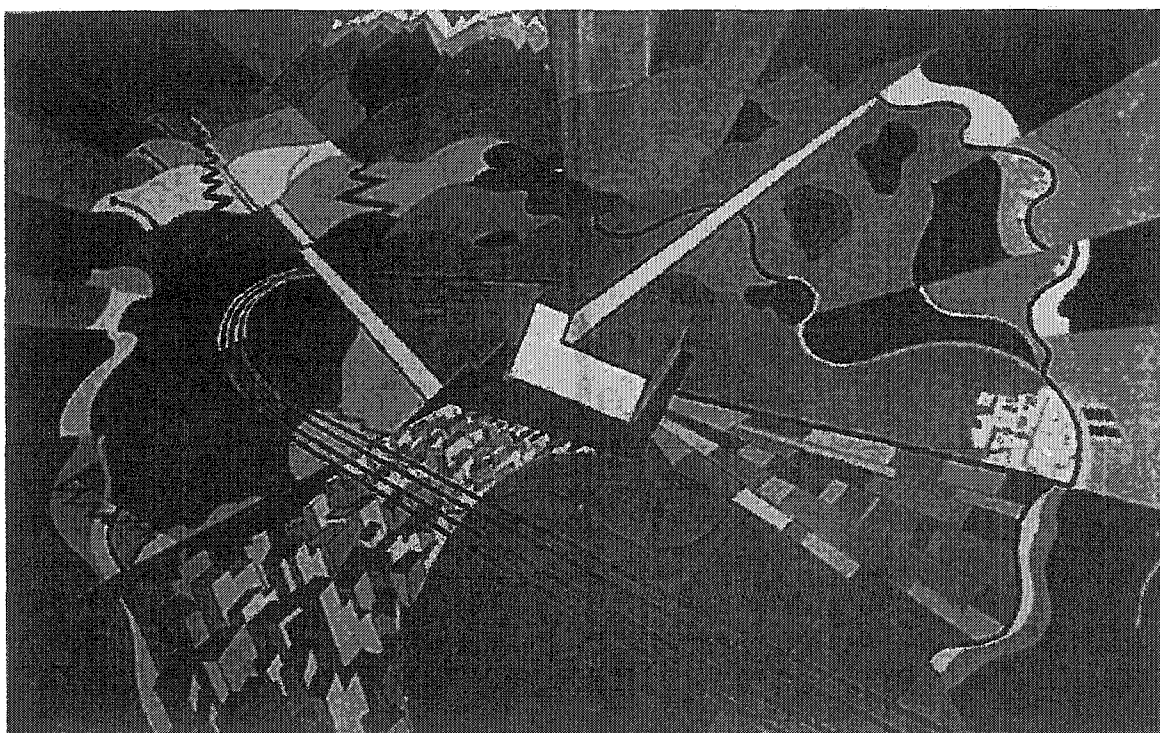


Fig. 51. Benedetta (Ambrosi and Tato)  
*Untitled* (Study for *Comunicazioni ferroviarie*), c.1936  
gouache and oil on paper  
Private Collection



Fig. 52. "Futurismo e maternità," *Oggi e domani*, November 27, 1930