UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Fillia's Futurism

Writing, Politics, Gender and Art after the First World War

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Italian

By

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2014

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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By

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Doctor of Philosophy in Italian

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

Professor Lucia Re, Co-Chair

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Fillia (Luigi Colombo, 1904-1936) is one of the most significant and intriguing protagonists of the Italian futurist avant-garde in the period between the two World Wars, though his body of work has yet to be considered in any depth. My dissertation uses a variety of critical methods (socio-political, historical, philological, narratological and feminist), along with the stylistic analysis and close reading of individual works, to study and assess the importance of Fillia's literature, theater, art, political activism, and beyond. Far from being derivative and reactionary in form and content, as interwar futurism has often been characterized, Fillia's works deploy subtler, but no less innovative forms of experimentation. For most of his brief but highly productive life, Fillia lived and worked in Turin, where in the early 1920s he came into contact with Antonio Gramsci and his factory councils. This led to a period of extreme left-wing communist-futurism. In the mid-1920s, following Marinetti's lead, Fillia moved toward accommodation with the fascist regime. This shift to the right eventually even led to a phase

dominated by Catholic mysticism, from which emerged his idiosyncratic and highly original futurist sacred art.

The purposes of my study are the following: to analyze and contextualize Fillia's oeuvre; to highlight his importance for a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the futurist movement and the European avant-garde; to demonstrate his crucial aesthetic contributions to late futurism; and to bring critical attention to his radical political ideology. I also draw out the influence that his early communist activities continued to have even in his later fascist years, as well as his unprecedented interest in questions of gender and feminism.

Based on the evidence that emerges from my reading of Fillia's oeuvre, in my conclusions I show how my work contributes to a more thorough and nuanced understanding of futurism's complexity, and I discuss Fillia's importance to Italian intellectual life immediately before and under the fascist regime. Studying Fillia's ideological swing from left-wing radical to right-leaning conservative provides crucial clues about the intellectual and cultural climate in interwar Italy, and forwards scholarly understanding of the pressures and constraints that led so many Italian intellectuals to active participation in Mussolini's regime. Finally, using the evidence presented in the dissertation, I suggest some possible new perspectives for the comparative study of modernism and the avant-garde in Europe.

The dissertation of Adriana Marie Baranello is approved.

Massimo Ciavolella

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2014

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Acknowledgements:

I would like to express my deepest thanks first to my advisor, Lucia Re, for the guidance, the support, the immeasurable amount of help and feedback she has given me, and her seemingly endless patience. I likewise thank Claudio Fogu for taking on the role of co-chair of my committee, for his guidance and for his insightful feedback as I wrote my dissertation. Professor Re and Professor Fogu have been endlessly generous to me of their time and energy, and for that I am very grateful. Both have helped me develop as a scholar and an educator, and I hope to show respect for them by continuing to pursue both roles, and to continue to improve, as they have pushed me to do.

My thanks to Professor Thomas Harrison, and the UCLA Department of Italian for the resources, opportunities, funding, and support that made my project possible. Without the generous financial support of the department, and the foundations that awarded me grants through the graduate division, this project would not have been possible.

I would also like to thank Professor Günter Berghaus for his generous responses to my inquiries. Professor Berghaus provided me very valuable assistance at multiple stages of my work, and with information that greatly facilitated my research.

Thanks are due, of course, to my parents, James and Catherine, to Dr. Sarah Parkinson, to Kathleen O'Leary, and to the group of dear friends who have become a vital support network for me, without all of whom this process would have been a much longer and more difficult a road.

Per ultimo, ai parenti italiani: questo itinerario pazzesco è stato iniziato con voi. Vi ringrazio con tutto il cuore.

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Introduction

0. Scope, Methodology, and Organizational Logic

The goal of this introduction is to provide a synthetic portrait of Fillia (Luigi Colombo 1904-1936) through a brief discussion of his personal identity politics and his futurist theories of expression. This will serve as a preface to my subsequent study of his literary and visual works produced between 1922 and 1935. In section 1, I outline Fillia's biography and his major life events to orient the reader. This task continues in section 2, in which I explore general characteristics of Fillia and his works that will form an important base for my later analyses. Sections 3 and 4 analyze Fillia's exploration of his self-perception and his identity as a futurist, first through poetry and prose, then through painting. Finally, in section 5, I provide a brief outline of each of my chapters.

Beginning in 1909, with the "Fondazione e Manifesto del Futurismo," and lasting until 1944, futurism championed the awakening of a new, modern consciousness bound to the infinite possibilities of technology and its manifestations in the automobile, the airplane, and other mechanical marvels.[1] Early futurist art was primarily concerned with the depiction of the physical sensations of speed, movement and "mechanical splendor" and, in literature, the "destruction of the self" as F. T. Marinetti declares in the 1912 "Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista." The focus was on demolishing everything that came before, which futurism viewed as passé sentimentality and bourgeois banality. Futurism sought to replace sentimentality and historicity with ruthless progress and an unrelenting drive toward an impersonal (yet anti-individualistic), machine-driven modernity using new and shocking forms of (both metaphorical

[1] An earlier version of this introduction was published as an article titled "Poetry Made Image and Images Made Poetry: Fillia's Verbal and Visual Self-Portraiture." in *La Fusta*, Volume 21 (Fall 2013).

and actual) violence and desecration. The emphasis was on a visceral, tumultuous kind of collective provocation, exemplified by the first manifestos and the early *serate futuriste*.

Fillia, though, was part of the second generation of futurist poets, artists, and rabble-rousers who took up F. T. Marinetti's flag and carried the futurist agenda forward in the aftermath of World War I, and into the movement's "reconstructive phase." Fillia was the author of poetry, novels and plays, a self-taught painter, journalist, political activist, and editor who devoted his life to the pursuit of his art and the advancement of the futurist cause. He published volumes on modern architecture, experimental cooking, and on design, collaborating extensively with Marinetti and Enrico Prampolini, as well as with a number of the most important European intellectuals of his time.

Due to the immense range of Fillia's work, the methodological framework I utilize is interdisciplinary and varies with the particulars of the topic and media addressed. Given Fillia's lifelong involvement in the political and ideological discourses that were current in his lifetime, and the active role that politics played in cultural and artistic discourse, throughout my work on Fillia, I construct a cultural, political and ideological "history" of Fillia's life. My historical contextualization and my close readings provide the foundation for the thematic, theoretical and ideological aspects of this study and tie the project together. Fillia's works, across a wide variety media and genres, dialogue with each other, addressing many of the same themes and concerns.

The organizational logic of my dissertation is two-fold. The type of work under consideration dictates the basic organizational structure. The chapters are then further organized in a loosely chronologically manner. While Fillia certainly worked more intensively with certain art forms in certain phases of his life, he constantly switched between various media. Throughout the course of my dissertation and throughout these ordered divisions, I frequently return to works

I have considered in other chapters to develop my analysis of the continuities and discontinuities in Fillia's works. In many cases I also take on comparative studies of Fillia's work with that of his contemporaries, especially those of Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, Enrico Prampolini, Fortunato Depero and Giacomo Balla. This sheds new light on the Futurists' diversity, collaborative methods, and the influence they exerted on one another. This comparative study will also help to build bridges between the different genres in Fillia's work by exposing the outside influences that shaped Fillia's works, and the reach of Fillia's influence on others.

1. Who was Fillia?

Fillia was born Luigi Colombo in Revello, in the province of Cuneo on 3 October 1904, the firstborn of Domenico Colombo and Maria Sellina Fillia. His mother, whose maiden name would later provide the Futurist's penname, was born in Argentina to an Italian immigrant father and Argentine born mother who was likely of partial indigenous descent. Her baptismal name, Atahuallpa, the name of the Incan emperor who ruled at the time of the Spanish conquest of the Americas, connotes this heritage. His mother's family, led by his Italian-born maternal grandfather, transferred back to Turin in 1895, but the influence of this Argentine heritage remained important for Fillia and his works. Latin and South American themes and settings appear throughout Fillia's writings, and are especially prominent in the mid-1920s.

Fillia's paternal grandfather owned and operated a silk factory in Revello (CN), employing nearly two hundred women and several male supervisors. The silk factory, later inherited by his father, was central to Fillia's childhood. As Pierpaolo Bindolo and Anna Campanella write in their biographical sketch based on local documents from their town of Revello:

> Il piccolo Luigi visse dunque l'infanzia in contatto con un mondo industriale e quasi esclusivamente femminile, frequentamente protagonista delle sue opere. In esse si fa continuamente riferimento ad una realtà in perenne divenire, identificata da alcuni nella città simbolo del progresso tecnologico, Torino, in cui Filla visse a partire dalla fine del 1918…[2]

Surrounded by female workers and semi-mechanized industry during his childhood, it is unsurprising that these elements remain central to Fillia's writings, artwork, and politics. In fact, Fillia's intimate knowledge of factory work and the conditions of the proletariat seems to have led to his initial interest in allying himself with the Antonio Gramsci and the Italian Communist Party (PCI). Due to general economic conditions and to specific issues in the textiles industry, the firm that his father inherited was forced to close in 1915.[3] The closure of the firm sent the small community of Revello into further economic disorder, forcing Domenico Colombo to transfer his family to Turin in late 1918, when Fillia was just fourteen. In Turin, Fillia involved himself in theater, political activism, and made his first attempts at publishing. Over the next few years, Fillia began to experiment with poetry and painting; in the latter he appears to have been entirely self-taught.[4] Between 1918 and 1923 Fillia also began to involve himself in worker politics in Turin. This became the motivation for his first published works: five un-credited poems in the 1922 collection *1+1+1=1 – Dinamite – Poesie Proletarie – Rosso + Nero.*[5]

Through the 1920s, Fillia continued to publish his poetry and prose works, producing in all: a stand-alone volume of poetry, a sizeable contribution of poems to *I nuovi poeti futuristi*, a number of novellas and three novels. Through the course of the twenties, Fillia continued to push a gender and sexual politics agenda that can only be described as radical for its time, but his

[2] Pierpaolo Bindolo and Anna Campanella, *Fillia Artista Revellese: Il Figlio Di Atahuallpa* (Revello: Editrice Nuova Stampa, 2003). 20.
[3] Ibid. 20-22.
[4] Ibid, 36.
[5] Fillia's specific contributions to the volume are known only from a single signed copy belonging to Marzio Pinottini, in which Fillia signed his name next to his contributions. Claudia Salaris, "L'attività letteraria di Fillia." In Enrico Crispolti, *Fillia: fra immaginario meccanico e primordio cosmico : [Cuneo, mostra in San Francesco, 14 maggio - 30 giugno 1988]* (Milano: Mazzotta, 1988). They will be analyzed in chapter 1.

politics would later appear to veer rightwards along with futurist leadership, though as I will show, this is not the case. During the twenties, Fillia also dramatically increased his output as a painter, and his pictorial style began to shift. In the 1920s, he was also associated with several projects to open futurist pubs, dancehalls, cafés, and theaters in Turin, the purpose of which were to give futurists guaranteed venues for their works and to revive the spirit of the early *serate.* From 1929 until his death at the beginning of 1936, Fillia traveled extensively for the benefit of the futurist movement. He was often in Paris, particularly to assist with the organization of various international artistic endeavors. He was also often in the company of Marinetti and Enrico Prampolini, collaborating on projects and fulfilling his responsibilities as the movement's Vice-Secretary General.

These would be the most intensive years of Fillia's painting and his editorial work. He helped to develop *aeropittura* [aeropainting], and, in 1931, participated in the first exhibition of *aeropittura* in Rome. He also published several painting manifestos and journal articles related to the Futurist aesthetic and ideology under fascism. Fillia's major publications in this period are two books on architecture, *La nuova architettura* and *Gli ambienti della nuova architettura*. He was also busy with projects for the futurist cookbook, *La cucina futurista*, which he would publish, together with Marinetti in 1932. After the cookbook's publication Fillia was kept busy organizing Futurist *serate*, as well as working on his multiple journal and magazine publishing ventures.

Fillia's artwork in this period was dominated by mystical landscapes and especially by the religious paintings that are his most well known works. In 1933, following the competitions for painting and poetry to celebrate the Gulf of La Spezia, a crucial shipping and naval port, that he used *Terra dei vivi* (one of his journals) to publicize, he and Enrico Prampolini executed

mosaics in the new Palazzo delle Poste e dei Telegrafi in La Spezia.[6] Throughout 1934 and 1935 Fillia continued to be an active publisher, critic and journalist. Fillia, whose health was fragile his whole life, contracted tuberculosis in the later part of 1935. He immediately entered a clinic in Rovereto for care, but succumbed to the disease on 10 February 1936.

2. General Characteristics of Fillia and His Works

Fillia was unique among futurists for the strength and pervasiveness of meditative, mystical, and spiritual qualities that shaped his worldview. The personal and spiritual nature of Fillia's works are one of his oeuvre's main unifying themes and are what give cohesiveness to my study. Fillia's work exerted tremendous influence on futurism in the twenties, and helped to bring about the explicitly religious images of the "arte sacra futurista," a new trend that developed in the 1920s in a movement previously characterized by aggressive materialism and anti-religiosity. The "Manifesto dell'arte sacra futurista" (1931) as well as several other important texts co-authored with Marinetti resulted from this trend, including *La cucina futurista*, and all of them bear the stamp of Fillia's ascetic spirituality.[7]

By Fillia's time, many of the already canonical futurist "conventions" had long run their course. In 1915, Fortunato Depero and Giacomo Balla published the manifesto "Ricostruzione futurista dell'universo" proposing a new path for futurism, which took the shattered pieces of the arts, culture, and society left by early futurism's iconoclasm and offered a way to reconstruct them from the ground up. Fillia, deeply influenced by both the destructive and reconstructive

[6] This is one of several public works projects that the futurists were able to secure between 1933 and 1935. However, these works did not succeed at garnering much attention, because they are mostly contained in private rooms. These mosaics, for example, are in the clock tower of the post office, and Benedetta's frescos at the Palazzo delle Poste in Palermo are in a private meeting room.

[7] Sources for Fillia's influence include: Massimo Duranti, *Aeropittura e aeroscultura futuriste* (San Sisto (Perugia): Effe, 2002); Christine Poggi, *Inventing Futurism: The Art and Politics of Artificial Optimism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).Claudia Salaris, *Artecrazia: l'avanguardia futurista negli anni del fascismo* (Scandicci [Italy]: Nuova Italia, 1992).

impulses, took futurism's tools and imposed his own personal philosophy onto the movement. Throughout his career, Fillia placed significant emphasis on increasing the spiritual and psychological character of futurism in an attempt, I argue, to complete the process of elevating it to a level of spirituality suited to the *Vita Meccanica* and the *Religione della Velocità*. One of his most original contributions springs from his efforts to recover and redefine the futurist poetic "I" and lyric voice, by reasserting the importance of personal identity and the individual spiritual experience through new forms of verbo-visual representation.

In the initial stages of his career, Fillia struggled to work with the futurist notion of a collective avant-garde identity and sought ways to redefine it politically and esthetically. This resulted in the only attempt ever made to publish a literary work that explicitly tied together Gramscian communism with futurism's anarchic and radical modernism. The results were Fillia's first published works, five of the eleven unsigned, free verse poems in the 1922 collection *1+1+1=1 – Dinamite – Poesie Proletarie – Rosso + Nero* published by the Istituto di Cultura Proletaria in Turin. Determined to use art and literature to forward political and social agendas, Fillia co-authored the volume with two other poets, Galeazzi and Pasquali in order to forge an unprecedented kind of collective futurist self inspired by the new left-wing ideas that circulated in Turin at the time. Soon after the publication of *Dinamite*, Fillia veered away from his experiments with collective identity, shifting towards a more personal approach, while also moving to the right politically. At the same time, he increasingly championed a spiritual rather than merely political or aesthetic function for futurism in society.

As Fillia continued to explore futurist poetics in the mid 1920s, his interest and investment in the movement grew, and he began to explore the art of manifesto writing. In multiple manifestos, some co-written with fellow futurists Tullio Alpinolo Bracci and Maino, he

elucidated many of the ideological, philosophical and aesthetic positions and practices that would guide his work, and which would prove so influential on late futurism's overall ideological and aesthetic practices. In 1925, Fillia and Bracci published two manifestos on futurist art. "Alfabeto spirituale" was published in January, in the catalog of an exhibition held at the Palazzo Madama in Turin and "La pittura spirituale" was published in March in *L'Impero*, a fascist-futurist Roman journal. A third manifesto, "L'idolo meccanico," of which Fillia was the sole author, was published in July, also in *L'Impero*. In "L'idolo meccanico," Fillia writes:

> L'arte, per avere ragione di esistere, deve essere non solo utile ma parallela ai movimenti sociali e spirituali; altrimenti si cade nella ricerca del bello e del puro, colossale errore di secoli, dove l'individualità dell'artista è superiore alla volontà ambientale e significa appunto decadenza provocata dalla stessa degenerazione filosofica di un grande mondo antico esaurito dal tempo e superato da nuove necessità. […] L'arte torna ad essere indispensabile: interpretazione e psicologia della Macchina per la Vita Moderna.
> […]
> Possiamo così, paradossalmente, fissare la necessità di un'"Arte Sacra Meccanica." Le conquiste tecniche del Futurismo hanno prodotto i mezzi esatti di rappresentazione: le unioni e i rapporti degli oggetti tra di loro creano un tutto indivisibile di valori, un complesso plastico, un'altra estetica. […] Oggi la "religione della Velocità" (superiore all'Uomo) forma una credenza spirituale che corrisponde alla vita sociale moderna, e ha bisogno di una propria mistica.[8]

What Fillia is saying, echoing Marinetti's 1916 manifesto "La nuova religione-morale della velocità" and Umberto Boccioni's futurist writings on art, is that art is inextricably tied to socio-political ideology and to spirituality, and is not merely only an aesthetic act (in the classical sense of the word where aesthetics alludes to questions of beauty and perfection). Art is also indispensable to the psychology of the Machine and its role in Modern Life because it opens up avenues of interpretation and comprehension that are appropriate to the new realities of technological society. Differing from early futurism, there is an increased emphasis on the spiritual and psychological nature of the relationship between art and technological society in the

[8] Fillia, "L'idolo meccanico," in Crispolti, *Fillia*. 72.

post-World War I expressions of the movement. In the aftermath of the war, the need for the renewal of the spiritual self began to make itself felt, and is part of what drove the reconstructive impulse and the *rappel à l'ordre*.

In "La pittura spirituale," Fillia and Bracci claim that futurism has been successful in preparing Italian society to receive futurism's new 'sacred' mechanical art. More ambitious and "more complete" works whose technical aspects would better integrate multiple artistic media into one work become desirable and available to futurism. Fillia then echoes the same sentiment as above in "L'idolo meccanico." He writes:

> La possibilità di una realizzazione materialista completa, con tutta la sua importanza e la sua concezione tecnica, permette uno sviluppo spirituale molto più grande, verso gli orizzonti luminosi della sensibilità futura.
>
> Questa ricerca di creazione spirituale già da qualche tempo domina nebulosamente le produzioni futuristiche e soltanto oggi appaiono i primi tentativi di applicazione (si badi che il valore della pittura futuristica accresciuta della sua vitalità spirituale sarebbe definito in tutta l'arte moderna). Già Balla ed altri sentirono la necessità di questa applicazione.
>
> Noi, fin dal 1922 (all'esposizione del Garden di Torino) tentavamo di ottenere una rappresentazione psicologica e soggettiva delle sensazioni, specialmente attraverso una nuova concezione cromatica…[9]

This emphasis on the spiritual and psychological over the material, physical, visceral and spontaneous is a major ideological shift for futurism, and signals one of the principal differences between Fillia's ideology and that of futurism's first phase. Fillia's position on the spiritual and psychological is critical to understanding his works, and the fact that it received the futurist leader's approval is telling of Fillia's growing influence. In "La nuova religione-morale della velocità" Marinetti had claimed "s'è svuotato il Divino"—the Divine has been emptied out—reinforcing futurism as a philosophical system whose directives where primarily physical, mechanical, external and objective. Marinetti's "moral religion of speed" was concerned with physical ecstasy derived from the technological, and not yet concerned with the spiritual or

[9] Ibid. 72.

transubstantive. Fillia's "religion of speed," on the other hand, reintroduced elements of mysticism and spirituality into futurism, rebuilding and reconstructing the possibilities for art to serve as a transcendent experience.

Fillia was also responding to the push towards "the spiritual" that was a growing force in international abstraction. Showing an interest in international intellectual trends early in his career, Fillia's spiritualistic color theories have correspondences with those of Wassily Kandinskij's Theosophy-influenced theoretical writings, among other influences. Like Kandinskij, Fillia set up oppositional relationships to older systems, and believed that color and form constituted a language of spiritual effects.[10] In "Alfabeto spirituale," Fillia declares the need for a painting made up entirely of colors that became the core subject of the painting. He insisted that colors were capable of containing all human spiritual and psychological traits and "rendering them mathematically comprehensible."[11] Though these musings lean in the direction of abstraction, the movement never made the stylistic and ideological leap to full abstraction. [12]

The "alphabet" in the "Alfabeto spirituale" is Fillia's new color code. He claims that colors, abstracted from material bodies and figures are the "vital force" of painting, and that because they were historically "nailed" to reality by figurative aesthetics, they had not been utilized to their fullest potential. The use of *inchiodato* in the passage is likely a deliberate reference to Christianity, implicitly replacing the traditional color symbolism used in Christian images, especially Renaissance altarpieces, with Futurist art, and especially with Fillia's art. He

[10] John Gage, *Color and Meaning: Art, Science, and Symbolism* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999). 241-242.
[11] Fillia and T. A. Bracci, "Alfabeto spirituale." in Crispolti, *Fillia*.70.
[12] While none of Fillia's theories are entirely new to futurism— Enrico Prampolini had already written a manifesto heavily influenced by Theosophy in 1921, and Giacomo Balla had also been using colors with Theosophical thought-forms in mind for several years—many of Fillia's principal beliefs differ significantly from his predecessors. Balla, for example, maintained that the psychological aspects of a work remained entirely secondary, and the specific values he assigned to various colors were different. Giovanni Lista, *Futurismo 1909-2009: velocità + arte + azione* (Milano: Skira, 2009). 199-222.

assigns both aesthetic and moral values, as well as abstract concepts to the colors of the rainbow, and to grey, black, and white. After listing each color's most significant traits, he outlines the differences between his Futurist color symbolism and traditional color symbolism. He explains why the latter failed, justifying it with comparisons between the two:

> nego che il rosso sia l'amore—perché l'amore è costituito da diversi colori secondo il suo stato sensuale-degenerativo e di svolgimento, quasi sempre in sintesi diversa, mentre il rosso è creativo-leale-aperto; nego che il pensiero sia blu, perché il pensiero è continuamente velocità ed azione—mentre il blu è statico-contemplativo e tradizionale. (Fillia and. Bracci, "Alfabeto spirituale," 70)

So, for example, red is creation because it is loyal and open; blue is sentimentalism because it is static and traditional. Colors and the symbolic meanings they convey, continues Fillia, are the first interpretive factor of the painting. They are a crucial clue to the meaning of the work, and the first aspect that the viewer or reader (because, according to the manifesto, these theories were also applicable to literary works) must confront to understand the work and the personality or spiritual identity of its creator. In the second part of the manifesto Fillia argues for an even greater synthesis of verbal and visual expression than the synthesis Marinetti had already designed for free-word poetry, as outlined in the "Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista."

Though Fillia did not specifically write a manifesto on futurist literature, his manifestos on art are full of commentary on literary expression and of comparisons between painting and writing. In "Alfabeto spirituale" (1925) under the heading "Scenografia interpretativa" Fillia and Bracci write:

> allo stesso modo un pittore dovrà allargare la sua opera per raggiungere una completazione estetica: questo cambiamento darà il giusto valore ad ogni rappresentazione, cioè il lavoro letterario sarà coerente anche nelle altre parti ambientali, come il lavoro pittorico accrescerà la sua stessa atmosfera espressiva
>
> abbiamo appunto cercato di ottenere infinite reazioni psicologiche, che formino armonie sconosciute, più estese di quelle fino ad oggi costruite[13]

[13] Fillia and T.A. Bracci, "Alfabeto spirituale." in Crispolti, *Fillia*.70

The central argument of this passage is that artists in all media need to incorporate stylistic and technical elements from a variety of media in order to achieve their fullest expressive potential as individuals. For example, the author must expand his expressive atmosphere, that is, heighten the visuality and concreteness of his text in order to form more expansive and previously unarticulated spiritual harmonies. Though the value of the synthesis of all art forms into a totalized experience may ultimately be traced back to Richard Wagner, and was adopted and altered early on by futurism, Fillia gives it a distinct spin.

The desire for synthesis and efforts to clarify and apply these theories in a concrete way is manifest in all of Fillia's creative works from this period. It is certain that Fillia was concurrently working on a large number of written and visual works between 1922 and 1926. He published very little in 1923 or 1924, but then published a flood of works in 1925 and into 1926. The list includes his manifestos, the forty poems he published in the anthology *I nuovi poeti futuristi*, another thirty poems for the volume *Lussuria radioelettrica*, the text of a play written in 1923 titled *Sensualità – Teatro d'eccezione* and his first novel *La morte della donna: Romanzo a novelle collegate*. The significant development of these works, away from the style and thematics of *Dinamite*, demonstrate how deeply transformative these years were for Fillia. It is further indicative of how important the ideological and theoretical developments of this period were that 1924 was the year that Fillia dropped Luigi Colombo from his public identity, and began signing his works only "Fillia." It is only after completing this process of metaphorical self-transformation that Fillia published these works and signed them as a futurist.

Naming or, more accurately, *renaming* was a frequent and important aspect of futurist self-creation and identity. Many futurists shortened, altered, or entirely changed their names to

make them more synthetic, more technological sounding, or just odder.[14] Not only is naming a fundamental act of birth, in some religious ceremonies it becomes an act of *rebirth* as well, such as in Catholic Confirmation ceremonies and in oaths taken to monastic orders. If futurism was intentionally positioning itself as a new religion, then Fillia's process of self-renaming must also be understood within the framework of a futurist spiritual rebirth. The frequency with which Fillia uses his name and identity in his works, especially combining them into verbo-visual units, and to which I now turn, emphasizes the importance of the moment of the author's renaming.

Using the evidence I have so far presented on Fillia's theoretical, philosophical, and ideological profile, I will now go on to demonstrate how Fillia applies them to his works. The framework provided by Fillia's futurist spirituality and artistic theories come together in Fillia's works that metaphorically address identity, the awakening of a futurist consciousness, and the power of words combined with images to symbolically convey fundamental spiritual information about the subject depicted. Fillia narrates this process in his written works, in a universally relatable way, and then, in his visual works, demonstrates the same process occurring within his own consciousness. While Günter Berghaus has asserted that many of Fillia's works were semi-autobiographical,[15] I assert that the process of awakening is a more symbolic and abstract one in Fillia's works.

3. Forming a Futurist Identity: Literary Basis

The verbal and the visual narration of a new futurist identity and the complexities of gendering this identity come together in Fillia's 1925 *La morte della donna: Romanzo a novelle collegate*. Each of the stories and the framing narrative feature an illustration by a different

[14] John J White, *Literary Futurism: Aspects of the First Avant Garde* (Oxford [England]; New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1990). 216.
[15] Günter Berghaus, *Italian Futurist Theatre, 1909-1944* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998). 431-432.

futurist artist. The seventh story, "Quarta dimensione di me stesso," is the only one, even including the cover illustration, that features an illustration by Fillia himself (Figure 1). The choice is significant, and it indicates that this is a narrative the author considers particularly important. The image, like most of Fillia's other works from the mid-twenties, is a geometric, fractured one, in this case, of a mechanized nude figure. It is not clear whether the figure is male or female. It likely that the ambiguity is intentional, and that it represents the degendered identity of a modern Man living a Mechanical Life, where "Man" is not a quantifier based on biological sex.[16]

In the case of "Quarta dimensione di me stesso," the male narrator is suffering from a deep malaise, barely finding sexual satisfaction and certainly no emotional fulfillment from his lover, even though he knows that she loves him "fervently." At the beginning of the novella, the narrator is struggling to understand and harness the passions he feels. Despite intense periods of reading and research, he is unable to channel his restlessness into productivity. He is unable to resolve his confusion and distress until one day when on a chance motorcycle ride, he discovers the erotic thrill of speed—and with it the futurist joy of the *Religione della Velocità*. The motorcycle ride opens up the narrator's perceptive faculties and, he declares, liberates his consciousness from the mental bindings of atavism and sentimentality. The story's central theme of spiritual awakening, facilitated by the overtly sexualized thrill of the motorcycle ride, is an obvious reference to the "Fondazione e Manifesto del Futurismo." But instead of being a public act of propaganda, as the chain of events recounted in the "Fondazione e Manifesto" was, there is

[16] In the last of the short stories in the novel *La morte della donna*, titled *La vita di domani*, Fillia's vision of a possible future world uses characters whose names are composed of *"Uomo M."* or *"Uomo F."* plus a number. The letters M and F indicate the biological sex of the person (male or female), but there is otherwise total equality and no differentiation between any members of society. All three of Fillia's novels are, in fact, populated with female protagonists who are liberated from emotional and intellectual sentimentalism and the weaknesses and degeneration that Futurists believed inherent to traditional femininity [Fillia, *Bolidi e tango* (Torino: N. Aragno, 2002). 117-126]. This argument is explored in greater depth in chapter three of this work.

no audience to the proceedings, and the experience is an intensely personal one. The motorcycle ride in Fillia's story is as eroticized as Marinetti's 1909 car ride and accident, but the narratives have important differences. Whereas Marinetti's sexual bombast was loud, prolific and often misogynistic, trumpeted from texts like *Mafarka le futuriste* to *Come si seducono le donne*, Fillia's conception of futurist sexual practice is, here, thoroughly autoerotic and mechanized. Indeed, in "Quarta dimensione di me stesso" it is not until the narrator explicitly abandons his attempts at passion with a woman and turns to motorized stimulus—he calls his experience a "coito spirituale improvviso che vibra di spasimi sulla strada diritta"—that he achieves cathartic release.

The plot of the story unfolds in three parts. The first section reveals the narrator's growing discomfort and internal conflict. The beginning reads:

> —non riesco a trovare me stesso: è una strana situazione interiore che mi fa quasi paura—intuisco di avere elementi spirituali diversi dagli altri uomini e non posso definirli—vivo perciò in uno stato di continua morbosità, come attendessi da un giorno all'altro una soluzione sconosciuta[17]

The narrator is lost, adrift, and stagnating. He can feel the creeping rot that Marinetti had set out to eliminate 15 years before, and he (the narrator) knows that his ability to sense this disease makes him different from other men. As the narrative continues, he attempts to understand and expunge his restless discontent by developing his artistic and literary pursuits, by trying and failing to form an emotional bond with a woman, and through the study of philosophy and the search for beauty, which Fillia would later call "the colossal error of centuries."[18]

Finding all of these lacking, salvation is achieved via the erotic and psychological exhilaration and liberation of a motorcycle ride on a summer afternoon. In the midst of the motorcycle ride, the narrator's consciousness expands and accelerates, and the narrative structure

[17] Ibid. 103.
[18] Fillia. "L'idolo meccanica." In Crispolti, *Fillia*. 72.

changes. The sentences become shorter and more disjointed, and lose connectivity with one another. Instead of the long sentences and paragraphs used in the first two sections of the story, each sentence (or, increasingly, sentence fragments) becomes a unit of its own, a vivid flash of a thought or feeling. There is immediacy to the onslaught of impressions that is reflected in both the content and structure, which mimic the narrator's experience. The story concludes:

> sono tornato in sera, nel pieno sfibramento muscolare, estenuato
>
> ò compreso chiaramente la conformazione emotiva dei miei sensi, lontano dal forzato apparamento delle abitudini ataviche, ricchi di nuove possibilità
>
> vasto giardino sensibile del mondo moderno, pieno di fiori dalle forme dai colori e dai profumi sconosciuti—desiderati avidamente dal mio bisogno sessuale
>
> giardino tumultuoso e incontrollabile, dove vivono tutte le seduzioni, tutte le necessità
>
> vertigine dell'imprevisto e dell'originale—bellezza delle materie in movimento…
>
> —atmosfera reale della mia nuova individualità[19]

The narrator's experience was thus revelatory. He perceives himself as a new person, and the implication is that this new person is a futurist.

Stylistically, the entire text of this short story reads like a stream of consciousness: there is no capitalization, and there are no periods, so no sharp breaks are created. The phrases are separated by dashes; commas and colons are occasionally used to facilitate flow. The narrator's main points are separated as blocks of text; the longest paragraphs of text are at the beginning of the narrative, in the first section, and as the story progresses the narrator's thoughts become more fragmented. The acceleration of the narrator's thoughts and impressions mimics the acceleration of the motorcycle. The correlation between the content and form of the narrative reinforces the narrator's perceptions of his experience and of his new psychological and spiritual state.

[19] Fillia, *Bolidi e tango*. 108.

The way in which the narrator perceives himself is a critical aspect not only of "Quarta dimensione di me stesso," but also of many of Fillia's other literary and visual works. Evidence of this is found throughout the poems and short stories he wrote in the mid twenties.[20] Following his affirmations in the manifestos discussed above, the author-artist places critical emphasis on the act of weaving together verbal and visual building blocks to create a more complex and expressive whole. Fillia's poetics rely heavily on color imagery as well as vividly descriptive nouns and adjectives to create strong visuals. After *Dinamite* and a contribution of 41 poems to the 1925 anthology *I nuovi poeti futuristi*, Fillia published a collection of his poetry, titled *Lussuria radioelettrica*, dedicated to funding the study and promotion of radio technology. The latter volume also includes a lengthy introduction on the radio and its spiritual potential by one Dottor Ernesto Falchetti, as well as two excerpts, titled "le parole in libertà" and "l'estetica della macchina," from Marinetti's introduction to *I nuovi poeti futuristi*.

These later poetic works demonstrate the increase in Fillia's use of futurist poetics, and a pronounced increase in his rejection of the conventions of traditional folk and lyric poetry, with respect to the poems he contributed to the *Dinamite* anthology.[21] At the same time, an increased emphasis is placed on the personal and psychological throughout the poems in *Lussuria radioelettrica*. The poems vary greatly in length, format, and style, ranging from just a few lines to several pages. Some approach prose form, some contain graphic effects and some are examples of shaped poetry. The short free-word poem *Matematica*, which I reproduce in its

[20] A very similar narrative to that of *Quarta dimensione di me stesso* also occurs in another short work of synthetic theater that is included in *Lussuria radioelettrica*. It is a "poem" titled *Adulterio futurista*. In it the motorcycle ride is replaced by an early morning bicycle ride (*Lussuria radioelettrica* 17-19). Fillia's poetry from the mid 1920s is the subject of chapter of this work.

[21] For a discussion of the stylistic developments of late futurist poetry, see White. For my analysis of Fillia's futurist-communist works, including the *Dinamite* poems, see chapter 1.

entirety here, is typical of the volume and usefully illustrates both Fillia's mixed technique, the application of his theories to poetry and his use of futurist poetic conventions.

3 colori	3 elementi	3 scopi
rosso	notte	ricerca
bianco	freddo	creazione
azzurro	sensibilità	emozione

SONO LE TRE DI NOTTE

stanchezza sonnolente che m'impedisce di risolvere il problema cerebrale sulla lavagna pulita del cuore[22]

The first part of the poem, made up of three columns of three terms each, structurally adheres to the dictates of futurism's most radical innovations in free word poetry form. The intrusion of the clock and the precise indication of the time—3 o'clock in the morning—shatter the poet's concentration. This also grounds the abstraction of the earlier text, bringing it into a precise moment in time and makes the experience a personal, defined one. This also denies the universality of the experience, and forces the reader into the minds eye of the author, instead of placing the reader at the center of the poem, it places the author there. It does not invite the reader to identify with the narrative voice. The free-word format of the first section of the poem is tempered by the last three lines.[23] It is an expression of the intensity of the speaker's psychological state: he is exhausted, tense and so troubled by his inability to solve the abstract thought rubric that he cannot sleep, despite his exhaustion and the chiming of the late hour, intruding on the mental fog of exhaustion and confusion. The narrator of the poem is awake long into the night and is exhausted trying to solve, as he says in the last line of the poem, the

[22] Fillia, *Lussuria radioelettrica.* (Torino: Edizioni Sindacati artistici, 1926). 25.
[23] White, *Literary Futurism*.

"problem [written] on the clean chalkboard of [his] heart." The poem's "equation" is intensely personal; it is a puzzle rubric composed of nouns, both concrete and abstract, and the narrator must find the relationships between the symbolic qualities of the colors in the first column and the elements in the second column in order to achieve the goals in the third column.

The poem is organized as a mathematical equation whose factors are colors, elements and goals. While the poem does not utilize mathematical operators, a trope common to futurism and invented by Marinetti, their presence is implied and would, once their proper order was determined, take the place of standard punctuation. As Marinetti says in the "Manifesto tecnico," having abolished adjectives, adverbs and conjunctions, punctuation, the "absurd" stops they create are also eliminated. Replacing punctuation with mathematical symbols creates movement and forward action, emphasizing the importance of the outcome, which is arrived at via the relationships the poet will establish between the elements. The result of completing the equation should then be that deeper understanding of the terms is achieved.[24] This technique emphasizes movement through universal time, which implies psychological expansion and evolution, but in this case, forward progress is halted because of the constraints of personal time. Yet, it is implied, the columns of abstract and concrete nouns will, with a fresh mind, be resolved into the mathematical formulas of futurist direct analogy. The implied outcome is that direct analogies between seemingly unrelated nouns will be formed, which is another primary feature of futurist poetry. The "problem" is not only a mental and creative one; it is also an algebra problem. Forward movement through time, foundational to futurist thinking, will provide the solution to the problem. But time—specifically, the time of night at which the author is attempting to write—is also impeding the narrator's work.

[24] Ibid. 21-22.

Both in this poem and in many others of the poems in *Lussuria radioelettrica* there is a distinct emphasis on the use of the first person narrative voice, which is contrary to futurist poetic conventions, but consonant with the spiritual and psychological nature of so much of Fillia's work. The *io narrativo*, proscribed in earlier futurist poetry[25] reappears gradually in Fillia's work, as he also increases the spiritual and psychological dimensions of his works. In his earlier poetry, Fillia mostly maintained the aggressive futurist avoidance of self-narration but ceases to do so in his later works. The *io narrativo* appears in only two of Fillia's poems in *I nuovi poeti futuristi* and in none of his poems in *Dinamite*, but is used in half of the poems in *Lussuria radioelettrica*.

Color and strong visuals, which had been constant in Fillia's poetry, reached their apex of use in *Lussuria radioelettrica*. The use of color in *Matematica* is representative of how Fillia's artistic theories carry over into the literary sphere. Color, which he has claimed as a work of art's most important feature, and for which he has provided an interpretive key, is the first constructive element of the poem. The first step in solving the puzzle would be decoding the significance of the colors in the leftmost column, using Fillia's spiritual "alphabet." Red stands for creation—thought—originality—intelligence; blue is for sentimentalism—dreams—illusions—abstraction—hope. White is "morally neutral," representing virginity—mysticism—religion as well as lying and ignorance. The symbolic attributes that Fillia assigns to the colors in his alphabet are those necessary to solve the puzzle. It is not hard to link white to research, red to creation and blue to emotion, but the middle terms of the equation are a mystery of significances that the narrator must uncover and then shift the terms into their proper places.

The solution to the poem's equation is going to be a private one. In the poem, the narrator has turned to the idea of a creative process that is inscribed onto the mind and heart—the

[25] F. T Marinetti, *Teoria e invenzione futurista* (Milano: A. Mondadori, 1983). 61-69. (Hereafter TIF.)

intellectual and emotional centers. The root of the problem is inside the narrator's self. This is not the external stimulus even of a motorcycle ride, and certainly not of war or a car race; it is an entirely internalized problem. Furthermore, the focus is on emotion, the creative intellect and the sets of outside forces that must be arranged according to abstract mathematical formulae, not driven by violent external forces.

The poem is a meditation on its narrator's attempts to write futurist poetry, restricted but also liberated by the need to impose certain spiritual and environmental conditions onto the artistic process, in order to foster total expression. It is a portrait of the poet's mental processes, particularly of his struggles with the process of creation itself, and it is emotionally immediate and intense. Just as in "Quarta dimensione di me stesso," the focus of this poem is turned inward, directed at the unquiet state of the narrator's mind and spirit. As the short story explicitly declared, and the poem implies, it is with the new futurist tools afforded to the narrator that resolution is possible. In both works, the emphasis is on the personal revelation instead of on an explosively outward and public revelation.

4. Forming a Futurist Identity: Pictorial Basis

A series of three self-portraits executed in 1925-1926 (Figures 3, 4 and 5) based on a photograph of the artist, dated to 1924-25 (Figure 2) demonstrate Fillia also explicitly applied the existential and experiential logic found in his written works to his own psyche and self-perceptions. Fillia returned to this photograph frequently throughout his career, either as a model for new works, or reproduced it collages and advertisements, which emphasizes the importance of this image to the artist's self-perception and identity. The first of these three works, *Autoritratto parolibero* (Figure 3), is an ink drawing, which is functionally a pictorial manifesto

of Fillia's theories. Beginning from the title—"free-word self-portrait"—it becomes clear the language of the image is to be read on both visual and linguistic registers. In this self-portrait, Fillia has combined his name with the fragmented image of his face, declaring his profound and fundamental identification with his futurist literary and artistic persona. One cannot exist without the other because neither is capable of complete expression, nor of structurally supporting itself. The words and images that emerge from his conscious mind are a composite structure, just as the words and image in this "free-word self-portrait" are combined into a new kind of whole. The image affirms the totality of Fillia's existence as a futurist, and that he has so fully embraced the movement that is has become a fundamental part of his identity and self-image.

Two further portraits—or more precisely a painting and its preparatory drawing (Figures 4 and 5)—also confirm the relationship between identity, image, word and name, and further develop the relationship between Fillia's self-conception, futurism, and the importance of images that combine the verbal and visual. Again, the images are based on the 1924-25 photo, only this time both the drawing and the painting contain only a large "F" bisecting the artist's forehead instead of his full name. The painting also contains a number of added elements that significantly increased its complexity and significance. The use of the first letter of the artist's pen name is, again, a mark of his identity as both a poet and an artist, and so carries the same spiritual and psychological connotations as in *Autoritratto parolibero*. But shortening "Fillia" to just the initial "F" adds complexity to the interpretation by adding ambiguity. Here, the "F" can stand for Fillia, futurismo, *and* futurista. He has woven futurist thought, aesthetics, and identity into his self-image, completely merging it with that of the movement.

In his painting, the artist presents himself as the dominant human force in a polivisionary scene built on color, semi-abstract geometrical forms, and the atmosphere that surrounds and

intersects them; it is a work that is literary, visual, and theatrical. The composition is entirely composed of intersecting colored shapes; no other type of line or shading is used. Though the painting tends toward abstract, geometric stylization, like most futurists, Fillia was never invested in fully non-figurative abstraction. Yet, like Kandinskij, Fillia did attempt to give the objects and the fields of color equal compositional weight by using color to convey psychological and spiritual qualities.[26] And like Kandinskij, Fillia builds a language from color, which is critical to reading the painting because of the spiritual and psychological information it was capable of carrying. If color is the first interpretive factor of a painting, as Fillia claims in "Alfabeto spirituale," and colors represent the artist's subjectivity and psychology, then Fillia's self-portrait is not only an image of his physical appearance executed in a futurist style, it also a portrait of his psychological and spiritual self. With this work, Fillia has provided a portrait of what his own psycho-spiritual profile has become following his futurist awakening. Fillia's self-portrait is coded with the same kind of performative and psycho-spiritual information that is present in his written works.

As in *Matematica*, Fillia uses blue (sentimentalism, dreams, illusions, the infinite, abstraction and hope), and red (creation, originality, intelligence), but replaces the white from his poetic equation with yellow (civilization, aristocracy and depravity, and also, importantly for futurism, electricity). The replacement of white with yellow symbolizes the development of Fillia's futurist thought. As his theories and literary works developed, the white of ignorance still present at the time the poem was composed, and which demanded research, is replaced with yellow—with electric civilization and its ability to stimulate the mind. So the artist sees himself as part of the red—part of the intellectual and creative elite—yet still a hopeful blue dreamer,

[26] Gage, *Color and Meaning*. 242.

who may still, to some extent be battling sentimentalism and naïve illusions, but as a futurist he is energized by electrical energy, which radiates into his surroundings.

The other most heavily used color in the painting is purple, to which Fillia attributes violence, dynamism, speed, and insanity. Though it is not entirely clear what the purple pinwheel represents, it may be just that—a pinwheel or a windmill, or a turbine of some kind. Whatever the spinning object is, it is seen through a window and meant to be perceived as a machine in motion, which explains the color choice. Purple is also the combination of blue and red, and the mauve-purple used to bisect the forehead of Fillia's face, forming the vertical stroke of the "F" is the intersection of the blue of the atmospheric planes and the red of the artist's face. This represents the intersection of the dreams and hope of infinite space and abstraction with the intelligence and creativity of the artist's mind. In fact, the lateral strokes of the "F' are in blue, which physically ties them to the atmosphere behind Fillia's floating head.

Architectural and environmental elements, necessary for the complete development of the atmosphere of the painting (according to the dictates of the Fillia's interpretive scenography), are represented by the buildings in the lower right corner and the staged grouping of geometric masses on a platform at the lower left; the colors are the vivid, anti-naturalistic ones typical of Fillia's work, and of many other futurist's work. The scenic framework of this painting is a visual representation of the guidelines established in Fillia's theoretical manifestos. In the same passage of "Alfabeto spirituale" in which Fillia dictates that the artist mindfully construct an expanding and developing atmosphere, he also declares that a painter is actually unable to fully interpret the scenic plan of a writer, because the painter will always lack the "sincere, creative instinct" that is directly expressed by an author. Therefore, the painter must attempt to feel the weight of the atmosphere, seeing and intuiting the placement of planes and colors. Fillia

continues on to describe stage settings (which are descriptions of actual sets from his 1923 play *Sensualità—Teatro d'eccezione*) that combine lighting effects, color-coded geometric objects, a multiplicity of planes, and the colors required for each as ideal examples of successful environmental expansion.[27] In his manifesti, the theater is the literary form that Fillia most emphasizes for its capacity to meld the written and the visual more effectively than any other art form. Theater and café culture were an influential force on Fillia's works throughout his career.

The platform of geometric figures and buildings, then, is an allusion to these theoretical writings on scenography and the expansion of a painting's environment to include the atmosphere, both mental and physical, that deepens the painting's significance and completes the aesthetic expression. Working these scenic elements into his self-portrait, which in the photo and the preparatory sketch feature only empty space, is an effort by Fillia to completely render his spiritual self and his existence within an environment. This is also an interesting extension of Umberto Boccioni's declaration; "Per dipingere una figura, non bisogna farla: bisogna farne l'atmosfera."[28] To create the image of a figure it was not necessary to draw the figure itself, but to render the atmosphere that surrounded it. Fillia has added spiritual and literary dimensions to the technical dimensions of Boccioni's scintillating pictorial planes. The yellow building in the lower right hand corner also features the mathematical symbol for equality as its windows, again echoing futurist literary practice. As Fillia reminds the reader in *Matematica*, mathematical symbols were of supreme importance to futurist poetry. Of all the mathematical symbols the futurists used, the sign for equality was probably the most important, because it is the icon of their "direct analogies."[29] The equal sign declares that two things are in some way the same or in

[27] Fillia, T. A. Bracci and Maino. "Alfabeto spirituale." in Crispolti, *Fillia*.70-71.
[28] Umberto Boccioni. "La pittura futurista." in Luciano De Maria, *Per conoscere Marinetti e il futurismo* (Milano: A. Mondadori, 1981). 23.
[29] TIF

direct relation to one another, though they may not seem it on the surface. The pictorial image declares itself equal to the whole of Fillia's futurist self. It reaffirms the importance of the combination of words and images in fulfilling Fillia's requirements for spiritually and psychologically complete artistic expression,

To examine Fillia's works from 1925 and 1926 is to trace the evidence of the emotional and spiritual journey of one of the second generation of futurism's foremost authors and artists. His exploration of such a wide range of artistic media—literature, poetry, painting, and theater—signifies his vision of artistic expression that is unified by its dedication to synthetic and synaesthetic modes of expression and to the evolution of futurism along the lines of his personal social, political, and aesthetic values. Throughout his career, Fillia continually translated his works across genres and media, referencing their most important theoretical and aesthetic developments while creating a complex net of citations and layers of meaning. Fillia used these different and interwoven authorial and artistic modes to construct and narrate his rapidly changing and increasingly spiritual identity, his newly awakened "futurist sensibility." The tightly woven relationship between expression and ideology in Fillia's works, then, constitutes the underlying structure of the arguments I present in the rest of this work.

5. Chapter Breakdown

Chapter One: Futurist-Communist Poetry and Theater

Chapter one focuses on Fillia's earliest works, dating from 1922-1925. Collaborating, for a time, with Antonio Gramsci, and the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI), Fillia and his cohort of communist-futurists (*futurbolscevisti* in Vinicio Paladini's words) made a concerted effort to align the Movimento Futurista and the PCI. This short-lived alliance produced the only known creative work that explicitly attempted to wed communist ideology with futurist literary practice: the poetry anthology *1+1+1=1 – Dinamite – Poesie Proletarie – Rosso + Nero*, co-authored by Fillia and two others. Fillia's second major communist work, and only multi-act theatrical work, *Sensualità—Teatro d'eccezione*, written in 1923 and published in 1925, is the other main work I analyze in this chapter. *Sensualità* reveals the early stages of Fillia's ideological development, his early explorations of color theory, his interest in the synaesthetic potential of art and literature, and the additive potential of combining genres and media in a futurist style. The groundwork I lay in this chapter constitutes the foundation onto which I build in order to demonstrate in the chapters that follow how Fillia's early communist and feminist experience continued to manifest itself throughout his fifteen-year career, and throughout his years under fascism.

Chapter Two: New Lyric and New Lust Under a New Regime: I nuovi poeti futuristi *and* Lussuria radioelettrica*—Fillia's Poetry Projects*

The subject of chapter two is Fillia's later poetry, also published in 1925. I examine Fillia's contributions to the 1925 anthology *I nuovi poeti futuristi* and his stand-alone volume *Lussuria radioelettrica*. I argue that Fillia's influence on futurist poetry in the 1920s was much

greater than has been previously recognized. Based on letters he wrote in 1925 and other information I have obtained through archival research in Turin and Rome, I demonstrate that Fillia, and not F. T. Marinetti, was the driving force behind *I nuovi poeti futuristi*, and that the selection of authors and works was dictated by Fillia's poetic and political agenda, not that of the historic futurist leader. My analysis shows how Fillia worked to revolutionize futurist poetry from within, using many of the very same stylistic and thematic conventions common to the movement since 1910. During this period, Fillia reintroduces elements long anathema to futurist poetics, such as the subjective voice of the poet, psychological introspection, and shunned subject matter such as the landscape and eroticism, but gives these themes a new, provocative spin. In addition to philological research, the pioneering work of John White and other scholars of experimental poetics guides my analysis and close readings in this chapter.

Chapter Three: The Experimental Novels

In chapter three I analyze Fillia's novel-length works, *La morte della donna: romanzo a novelle collegate* (1925); *L'uomo senza sesso* (1927); and *L'ultimo sentimentale* (1927). These three works turn Fillia's eye onto the emergence and evolution of human civilization, and its march toward his ideal futurist society. I demonstrate that these little-studied works are of great literary and ideological import. Fillia's novels aim to refute Lombrosian positivism, instead claiming evolutionary biology and a version of social Darwinism for futurism. To contextualize Fillia's feminist view of gender relations in this period, which is at its most progressive and assertive in these works, I also discuss crucial feminist figures active or influential in northern Italy such as Anna Kuliscioff, Camilla Ravera and Clara Zetkin. Their writings and activism

helped spur major progress in women's rights from 1880 to 1922, before fascism ruthlessly undid most of feminism's accomplishments in Italy.

I also compare Fillia's novels to several other significant figures in the futurist movement. In order to contrast Fillia with the female voice within futurism, I introduce Valentine de Saint-Point, Enif Robert, and Benedetta Cappa Marinetti. Meanwhile, F. T. Marinetti, Aldo Palazzeschi and Ruggero Vasari stand as important male authors whose work Fillia either builds on or refutes. The critical framework I employ in this chapter is narratological and feminist, based on the scholarship of feminist theorists such as Adriana Cavarero and the pioneering scholarship on women writers in Italy by Lucia Re, Gabriella Parati, Silvia Contarini and Cecilia Bello Minciacchi.

Chapter Four: Sacred Art

Fillia's most noted contribution to futurism, his paintings, are the subject of chapter four. Looking in particular at Fillia's semi-abstract and highly stylized religious paintings (including nativity scenes and altarpieces which were never actually allowed by the Vatican to be used in churches) and his mystical aeropaintings, I discuss their place in the artistic currents of the late 1920s and early 1930s. My analysis offers a clearer understanding of Fillia's version of *arte sacra futurista* and *aeropittura*, the two dominant stylistic trends of futurist art during that period. In this chapter, adapting some of the work on fascism of scholars such as Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, Claudio Fogu, Emilio Gentile, Ruth Ben-Ghiat, and Matei Calinescu, I examine the emergence of sacred and religious themes and imagery in futurism as a kind of "return of the repressed" within the Italian avant-garde. I also situate Fillia's sacred art in the greater context of fascism, and its ritualization and sacralization of politics as well as its alliance

with the Catholic Church. I analyze and locate Fillia's role in the aestheticization of politics, and the impact this particular turn had on the reception of futurism and futurist scholarship to date.

Figure 1: Fillia, *Nudo meccanico*, 1925, accompanying "Quarta dimensione di me stesso" in *La morte della donna*. Turin: Sindacati Artistici Torino, 1925.

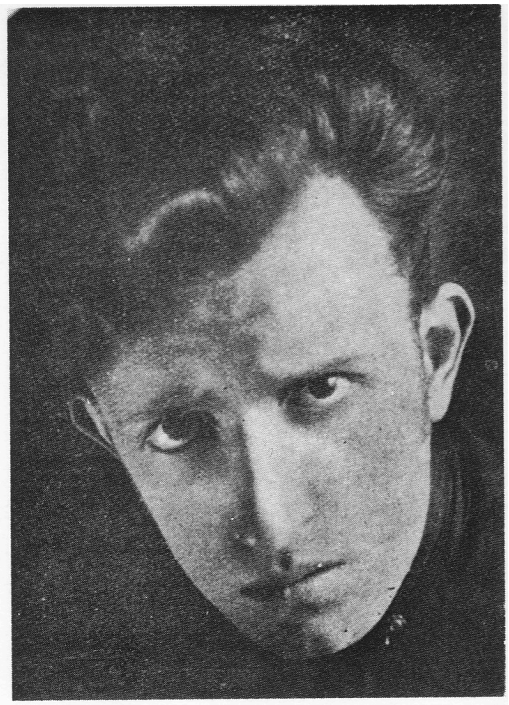

Figure 2: Photo of Fillia, 1924-25

Figure 3: Fillia, *Autoritratto parolibero*, 1926 (?), published with *L'avventura irrazionale* in *L'Impero*, date of publication unknown.

Figure 4: Fillia, *Autoritratto*, 1926, Private collection

Figure 5: Fillia, *Studio per autoritratto*, 1925-6, *L'Impero* Rome, 24 March 1926

Chapter 1
Proletarian Dynamite:
Politics, Poetry and Theater in Fillia's Early Works

0. Introduction

Fillia's futurist story begins with his contentious surge onto the scene in Turin at the beginning of the 1920s. Fillia's entry into the public arena of literary and political action came during an unsettled moment on both the local and international stages. Though no detailed record of Fillia's activities prior to 1922 is available, it is known that he and his family had transferred to Turin in 1918, in time to witness the political upheavals of the *biennio rosso* (1918-1919), the emergence of Italy's Communist Party, the *fasces di combattimento*, and the shifting allegiances amongst the leading members of the artistic avant-gardes. Because of their intersecting agendas, and the node created between them by Fillia and his cohort of friends and collaborators, the stories of futurism and Gramscian communism are variously and critically intertwined for a time. This often fluid mix of aesthetic and ideological forces, as this chapter aims to show, is crucial to Fillia's earliest works; and Fillia's works from this period will be shown, in the course of later chapters, to have had a lasting effect on futurism throughout the later 1920s and even the 1930s. Although well documented, the connection between Italian communism and futurism has received scant attention, and the critical view that futurism was in fact always essentially only a right-wing, or basically a fascist-leaning movement, has prevailed without much space for a more nuanced analysis.[1]

[1] Two exceptions are the pioneering works of Umberto Carpi, *Bolscevico immaginista: comunismo e avanguardie artistiche nell'Italia degli anni venti* (Napoli: Liguori, 1981) and Günter Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics: Between Anarchist Rebellion and Fascist Reaction, 1909-1944* (Providence, R.I.: Berghahn Books, 1996).. For an overview of recent trends in the interpretation of Futurism's politics, see Walter L. Adamson, "Contexts and Debates Fascinating futurism: The historiographical politics of an historical avant-garde," *Modern Italy* 13:1(2008): 69-85. Adamson, however, ignores Carpi's fundamental study, as does Lawrence Rainey in his introduction to futurist politics in *Futurism: an Anthology*. Rainey comments in a non-committal way that shuns a more rigorous and documented analysis: "identifying the elusive interplay between Futurism and Fascism will remain a subject of perennial debate" (p. 34).

The second goal of this chapter is to demonstrate that this is far from accurate. As I chart Fillia's path from communism to a sort of illicit left-wing kind of passive resistance under fascism, I will introduce his unusual positions on gender in the early 1920s, which I will trace in depth in chapter 3, I hope it will become clear that the ideological make-up of futurism was more diversified and intriguing than usually assumed.[2] After setting the scene of the political and ideological context of Fillia's early works (Section 1), this chapter provides a close reading and analysis of some of his most significant early poems, manifestos, artwork (Section 2), and plays, focusing in particular on the play *Sensualità—Teatro d'eccezione* (Section 3) whose abstract, symbolic and politicized use of color (theorized in the manifesto "La pittura spirituale") and costumes, and themes of communist revolt, gender conflict, *macchinolatria*, and the new politicized *donna,* make it one of the most intriguing and important works from this period. The last section (Section 4) traces, through an analysis of Fillia's efforts to build the *Teatro Novatore* in Turin and a series of related paintings and drawings of female figures, Fillia's progressive and implicit adjustments and subtle negotiations with the politics and ideology of the regime, which culminated in the publication of several of his articles in the ultra right-wing newspaper *L'Impero* in 1925-27. Nonetheless, as subsequent chapters will show, themes related to Fillia's early "communism" remain central to his entire production.

Beginning with the wartime deaths of Umberto Boccioni and Antonio Sant'Elia in 1916 and the departure or ideological realignments of many of the most important pre-war futurists (Carlo Carrà and Gino Severini most prominently), as well as changes in the movement's

[2] Ibid. One of the most recent studies that have started providing a more comprehensive view of the subject is Günter Berghaus's excellent *Futurism and Politics*, on which I rely heavily, However, even in its laudable efforts to correct widespread erroneous common places on the subject, it occasionally overestimates the persistence of a left-wing *diaciannovista* spirit among futurists under the regime. For a pointed critique, see the review by Claudio Fogu in *Modernism/Modernity* 4.1 (1997) 178-181. The recently opened exhibition at the Guggenheim and the essays in its catalog also make a concerted effort to address the multiplicity of futurism. Vivien Greene and Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, *Italian Futurism 1909-1944: Reconstructing the Universe*, 2014.

structure—Marinetti encouraged the development of small independent cells—futurism was inundated by a new generation of members with different aesthetic and political priorities than their predecessors. Overall, the futurist movement went through a period of significant political and ideological splintering and realignment. The new generation of futurists often had different priorities and different interests; in response to these influences, futurism began to develop a number of contradictory political and aesthetic positions.[3]

Though this period of turmoil would only last a few years, it produced the ultimately unsuccessful but critically important attempt to join the radical, revolutionary aesthetics and ideology of futurism with the revolutionary ideals of the Italian Communist Party. This fusion was partly based on the model of Russian futurism and on the role that certain Soviet intellectuals hoped that constructivism would assume following the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. That movement was defined and solidified in the two years immediately before and immediately after the 1921 founding of the Soviet state.

1. Setting the Scene

When Marinetti officially severed ties with Mussolini and the Fascist Party in 1920, it opened an avenue for an alliance with the Communist Party, which was formed in 1921, though this, too, was a fraught relationship, and ultimately short-lived. Marinetti's rift with Mussolini and the Fascist Party would in fact be closed in 1924. There were four main centers of communist activity within the futurist movement: Parma, La Spezia, Bologna, and Turin, the last of these also serving as the seat of Communist Party leadership. Turin is where the Partito Comunista Italiano (the PCI) was founded on 21 January 1921 by Amadeo Bordiga and Antonio Gramsci. Though there was initially immense enthusiasm from some members of both camps,

[3] Günter Berghaus, *Italian Futurist Theatre, 1909-1944* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998). 346-347.

the alliance between the futurists and communists remained a contentious issue for many. Personal sentiment of either group aside, the alliance was contradictory and beset with conflict, driven by both idealism and practicality.

For a time, leftist sentiment—and especially communist sentiment—was a fast-growing and influential minority tendency within the futurist movement. Following World War I many who defected from other political groups, including futurists, anarchists, socialist, ex-combatants and the *Arditi di guerra* found a new home within the PCI.[4] The majority of defections were rooted in disillusionment with Mussolini's leadership and developing party politics, most particularly the turn toward the reactionary. The increasing strength of the PCI even led to the founding of a section of Proletkult in Turin, guided by Gramsci.[5] Gramsci believed that without adequate preparation, which he defined as education and cultural development, the revolt was bound to fail.[6] For a while, this seemed to segue perfectly with the futurist desire to completely democratize literature and art and to dismantle bourgeois culture.[7]

On the part of communist leadership it was Gramsci in particular who hoped that the revolutionary, anti-bourgeois character of futurism would provide a conduit for the founding of a revolutionary, proletarian art in Italy, in the service of the revolution. Unfortunately, Gramsci's support did not last. At first, he spoke positively of futurism, in a general way, when he wrote "Marinetti rivoluzionario?" an article published in *L'ordine nuovo* on 5 January 1921. Gramsci's support for the movement lay with its cultural iconoclasm, and especially with its rejection of

[4] Gianfranco Arcangeli, *La cattura della ragione: aspetti della propaganda fascista* ([Roma]: Nuova Spada, 1979).; Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*. 172-174, 180-181.
[5] Protletkult, short for *Proletarskaya kultura* thrived from 1918 to 1920 and had upwards of 400,000 members in Europe. It was based on ideas developed a decade earlier by Lunacharsky, Bogdanov and Gorky. It covered art, literature, theater and music, with the scope of encouraging artistic expression amongst the working class. Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*. 172-174, 180-181.
[6] Ibid.181-182.
[7] F. T Marinetti, *Teoria e invenzione futurista* (Milano: A. Mondadori, 1983).7-26.

bourgeois society and morals. Gramsci rhetorically asks what must be done to produce the proletarian social order, and his thesis is:

> Niente altro che distruggere la presente forma di civilità, In questo campo "distruggere" non ha lo stesso significato che nel campo economico: distruggere non significa privare l'umanità di prodotti materiali necessari alla sua sussistenza e al suo sviluppo; significa distruggere gerarchie spirituali, pregiudizi, idoli, tradizioni irrigidite, significa non aver paura dei mostri, non credere che il mondo caschi se un operaio fa errori di grammatica, se una poesia zoppica, se un quadro assomiglia a un cartellone, se la gioventù fa tanto di naso alla senilità accademica e rimbambita. I futuristi hanno svolto questo compito nel campo della cultura borghese: hanno distrutto, distrutto, distrutto, senza preoccuparsi se le nuove creazioni, prodotte dalla loro attività, fossero nel complesso un'opera superiore a quella distrutta […] I futuristi nel loro campo, nel campo della cultura sono rivoluzionari; in questo campo, come opera creativa, è probabile che la classe operaia non riuscirà per molto tempo a fare di più di quanto hanno fatto i futuristi: quando sostenevano i futuristi, i gruppi di operai dimostravano di non spaventarsi della *distruzione*, sicuri di potere, essi operai, fare poesia, pittura, dramma, come i futuristi, questi operai sostenevano la storicità, la possibilità di una cultura proletaria, creata dagli operai stessi.[8]

Gramsci limits the revolutionary traits of futurism to the cultural sector; he does not grant that they have created a new art that will serve the proletariat. He does appreciate that they have completed the first stage of the process, the "destructive phase" wherein the cultural hegemony of the bourgeoisie was broken. He also asserts that this is why the proletarian classes supported futurism: because is opened up the possibility of a proletarian culture built by the workers themselves. A journal such as the wartime *L'Italia futurista,* for example, was both profoundly iconoclastic and open to contributions from members of lower social strata and to women.

Less than eighteen months later, in a letter to Leon Trotsky, dated 8 September 1922, in the course of responding to a series of questions that Trotsky posed to him regarding the topic of Marinetti and futurism, Gramsci's change of heart is evident. After all, the argument made in "Marinetti rivoluzionario?" is more accurately that Marinetti and the futurists were

[8] Antonio Gramsci, *Marxismo e letteratura* (Roma: Editori riuniti, 1975). 334-335.

revolutionaries and that they had contributed to one aspect of the Marxist agenda, *not* that futurism was in itself Marxist or communist. As Gramsci explains to Trotsky:

> Si può dire che dopo la conclusione della pace il movimento futurista ha perduto interamente il suo carattere e si è dissolto in correnti diverse, che si sono formate in conseguenza alla guerra. I giovani intellettuali erano in genere assai reazionari. I lavoratori che vedevano nel futurismo gli elementi di una lotta contro la vecchia cultura accademica italiana ossificata, estranea al popolo, devono oggi lottare le armi alla mano per la loro libertà e hanno scarso interesse per le vecchie dispute. Nelle grandi città industriali il programma del *Proletkult*, che tende al risveglio dello spirito creativo dei lavoratori nella letteratura e nell'arte assorbe l'energia di color che hanno ancora tempo e voglia di occuparsi di simili questioni.[9]

With that, Gramsci joined the rest of the PCI leadership in rejecting the possibility of futurism as an art movement suitable for the needs of the proletariat. Despite this rejection, a small cadre of futurists would continue to attempt to build a bridge between the two movements for the next few years.

Two of the most influential and important of these futurist-communists were Vinicio Paladini and Ivo Pannaggi, artists whose work was essentially transnational and (like, as we shall see, the later Fillia) uncompromised by the politics of the Italian fascist regime. Like Fillia after them, both men worked in theater, designing sets and costumes, and they were also painters. They collaborated extensively, joining forces in their shared political and cultural mission. Vinicio Paladini was the son of an Italian father and Russian mother. Though he was born in Moscow in 1902, his family transferred to Rome the year after his birth. Even though Paladini was one of the few futurists welcomed with more enthusiasm by Gramsci into the *ordinovisti* circle, and embraced by the Casa del Popolo in Rome, his relationship with the communists was not an easy one. Paladini, aware of the apparently irreconcilable differences between communism and futurism, nonetheless sought to create a bridge between them. It was not that others were not both communist and futurist, but rather that the two spheres of activity were

[9] Ibid. 337.

maintained at a distance from each other by them.[10] Attempting to combine futurism and communism as the Bolsheviks had done in Russia, Paladini sought to outline a futurist political aesthetic that did not simply substitute leftist thought for right-wing conservatism, to combat the politically reactionary tendencies within the futurist movement.[11] As Umberto Carpi explains:

> [Paladini] esprimeva almeno il tentativo di tradurre in coscienza soggettiva, in consapevole programma politico-culturale, l'oggettivo e generazionale bisogno di ricomporre la propria anima diversa, di ritrovare indentità storica.[12]

Carpi's observation points to an aspect of Paladini's work that lends significant support to the observations I will elaborate later in this chapter. Fillia and his early communist politics, I will show, would continue to influence futurism in the 1920s, despite fascism and the fascist *apologismo* that came to dominate the movement in Italy as the 1920s wore on. Furthermore, communist and fascist ideologies understood artworks to be more than just instruments of propaganda. Works of art were understood to serve as messengers from the future, "relays from the imaginary to the real, activating within the collective's mind and body the entire complex of the revolution's values *yet to be fully realized in history*."[13] In light of this observation made by Jeffrey Schnapp, Paladini may be understood to have pursued a reconstructive and re-historicizing agenda deriving both from the desire to build a new Marxist social order, and from his position as a post-World War I, post-"Ricostruzione futurista dell'universo" member of the movement.

Paladini published numerous articles on the theme of art's theoretical potential, within the framework of communism, in *Avanguardia*, the publishing organ of the Federation of Young

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[10] Umberto Carpi, *Bolscevico immaginista: comunismo e avanguardie artistiche nell'Italia degli anni venti* (Napoli: Liguori, 1981). 36.
[11] Gramsci, *Marxismo e letteratura*. 335-337.
[12] Carpi, *Bolscevico immaginista*. 37.
[13] Jeffrey T Schnapp, *Staging Fascism: 18 BL and the Theater of Masses for Masses* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996). 2.

Socialists. Paladini believed that early futurism, and even impressionism (considered by most futurists as only a paltry first step toward dismantling passèist ideals) had made important contributions to wiping out the old order, but had not gone far enough. He also proposed the further development of the movement's aesthetics into two separate channels, one of pure art and one of applied art as a crucial goal.[14] These developments, he believed, could then elevate the worker's spiritual condition. Paladini, though, became quickly disillusioned with the PCI. Because of their censorship of his futurist activities, he felt he was being backed into a corner.[15]

Paladini and Pannaggi's activism, though, was from a distance. Both were active in Rome, whereas most of the significant political activity at the time was in the north of Italy, principally in Piedmont and Lombardy. During the *biennio rosso* and most especially in Turin, worker organization was on the rise. Beginning with the Fiat sit-in strike in April 1920, there were a number of large strikes over the next year and a half. The government responded with mass arrests, and the fascist squads' assaults on worker's unions, socialist papers (like the 1919 attack and destruction of the offices of *Avanti!*) and other leftist groups grew steadily more frequent and more violent.

Ivo Pannaggi (also born in 1901, in Macerata in Le Marche) was a disciple of Giacomo Balla's. Like Paladini, and later Fillia, Pannaggi was an active member of Anton Giulio Bragaglia's Circolo delle Cronache d'Attualità at the Casa d'Arte Bragaglia, where both Paladini and Pannaggi had the opportunity to show their works extensively at exhibits of futurist paintings in the early to mid twenties. However, Paladini found little audience for his works from the mid twenties onward. Overall, Pannaggi was far less politically outspoken than Paladini, more

[14] This issue will come back in Fillia's later work, as well. See chapter 4, and Fillia, *Lettere di Fillia a Tullio d'Albisola: 1929-1935* (Savona: Ed. Liguria, 1981).
[15] Umberto Carpi, "Gramsci e le avanguardie intellettuali," *Studi Storici* 21, no. 1 (1980): 19–29.; Berghaus, *Italian Futurist Theatre, 1909-1944*. 201-204.

interested in the aesthetic implications of constructivism, and the social aim of his aesthetic politics was more in line with that of Walter Gropius and the Bauhaus.[16] Fillia was also a close collaborator of Gropius in the late twenties and early thirties. But unlike Fillia, who remained in Italy until his death and in his own way eventually came to terms with the regime, Pannaggi immigrated to Germany in 1927 and joined the Bauhaus, officially, in 1932 (less than a month before it was shut down). When, in 1933, several Bauhaus artists were arrested or killed by the Nazis, others fled to exile. Pannaggi fled to Norway, where he worked as an architect, returning to Italy only in 1960. Following a number of moves, between Italy, the United States, and Stalin's Moscow between 1935 and 1938, Paladini instead settled in New York and worked in stage, film and interior design. He returned to Italy in 1958 due to the anti-communist persecution during the McCarthy era.[17]

Starting in 1922, Paladini and Pannaggi collaborated on several important projects. The *Ballo meccanico futurista* was their first work together, performed with Russian dancers on 2 June 1922 in Rome, at the Casa d'Arte Bragaglia.[18] Their next work together was the critically important and highly influential "Manifesto dell'arte meccanica futurista," which was published on 20 June 1922 in *La nuova Lacerba*. It outlined how the mechanical age had changed our bodies, our minds and our environments. The machine, the manifesto also claimed, must be understood as a symbol of the proletarian revolution. Unfortunately, when the manifesto was reprinted a few months later in *Noi* (by now into 1923), it was heavily rewritten by Enrico Prampolini, who was pushing a reactionary, proto-fascist political agenda and to gain Marinetti's

[16] The revolutionary principles of the Bauhaus, however, especially with regard to the notion of integrating art into life and changing the lives of the workers and even the lowest social classes and "the masses" through design and the objects of everyday life, in some ways paralleled those of the Futurist "Reconstruction of the Universe" to which Fillia, Pannaggi and Paladini all adhered.
[17] Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*. 206-7.
[18] Berghaus, *Italian Futurist Theatre, 1909-1944*. 419-422.

stamp of approval.[19] Paladini, clearly dissatisfied with the changes published an explanatory follow-up article on the *estetica della macchina* to accompany the *Noi* version of the manifesto as a justification for his aesthetic, where he claims:

> La macchina ha segnato un periodo di rivoluzione nella struttura della società e, di conseguenza, ha influito sul pensiero moderno creando nuove forme di lotta, nuove aspirazioni ed, in totale un rinnovamento dell'atmosfera.[20]

While the original version of the manifesto implied the centrality of the relationship between or identification of the proletariat with the machine, on which communist art must therefore hinge, Prampolini's version was a banal reiteration of formalist mechanistic idol making. The first was a 'dramatic historical subject' the second 'consolatory diseased decorativeness.'[21]

The conflict surrounding the manifesto and the fallout from it led both Paladini and Pannaggi to a partial rejection of the movement, and neither embraced aeropainting and poetry, despite the fact that the aero aesthetic was the logical and inevitable outgrowth of the two men's writings. A decorative and celebratory aeropainting was in their eyes no longer credible or able to present the *mito della macchina* as independent of capitalistic use. Despite rejecting the artistic progeny of their communist intellectual project and despite their wide-ranging later activities, the two artists remain principally associated with the "Manifesto dell'arte meccanica futurista" and with the development of a new futurist machine aesthetic, which shaped much of the futurist art of the 1920s.[22]

Gramsci's support of Marinetti and the Turin futurists had begun to erode by 1922, when he traveled to Russia, despite intensive concurrent efforts by Paladini and Pannaggi and by Fillia and the Turin circle (to which I will turn my attention shortly). Notwithstanding his earlier

[19] Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*. 206-7.
[20] Cited in Carpi, *Bolscevico immaginista*. 91.
[21] Ibid. 89.
[22] Ibid. 89-93.

defense of Marinetti, Gramsci had clearly concluded that Marinetti's futurism and communism were incompatible. The push for a futurist-communist cultural alliance did not come only through the small groups of leftist futurists and Gramsci's short-lived support. Within the communist organization several members of Gramsci's party such as Duilio Remondino and Arturo Cappa were staunchly pro-futurist. Remondino wrote extensively in support of Paladini, and of Fillia and entered into a heated debate with Guido Arcuno on Fillia's crucial contribution to this debate (*1+1+1=1 – Dinamite – Poesie Proletarie – Rosso + Nero*, discussed in the next section of this chapter). In an unexpected plot twist, the involvement of Arturo Cappa in this matter leads to what Gramsci ultimately considers one of Marinetti's biggest downfalls. While Arturo insisted that the art of the proletarian, communist society must be futurist and that this must be held separate from the tendency toward political conservatism and reactionism within the movement, his sister Benedetta became, in 1923, Marinetti's wife.[23] Ironically, according to Gramsci in his letter to Trotsky, it was the marriage with Benedetta (despite her being the sister to an important member of the PCI) that caused Marinetti's regrettable and growing complacency, and his lack of interest in sustaining the revolutionary aspects of futurism.[24]

These left-wing futurists, now driven away from the communist movement, either left futurism entirely or were pushed closer to Marinetti, who did provide institutional affiliations and protections to them. And like Paladini, many, including Fillia, chose to throw in their lot with the futurist leader in part because he had access to international contacts and important patrons within Italy that they might otherwise not have been able to reach. As the twenties wore

[23] Lawrence Rainey questions this date in *Futurism: an Anthology*, p. 31 and 523, claiming that according to Jeffrey Schnapp a wedding certificate has recently emerged that shows the couple officially married only in 1926 prior to traveling abroad. As far as I have been able to discover this is based on two documents held in the Getty Research Institute archive that declare Marinetti and Benedetta "never to have been married *in Rome,*" which is not equivalent to unmarried in the Italian legal system. In any event, as indicated by Gramsci's letter, the couple, who had lived together since about 1919, was commonly thought to be married by 1923.

[24] Gramsci, *Marxismo e letteratura*. 335. The letter was published in appendice a Lev Trotskij, *Literatura i revoljutsija*, Izdatel'stvo "Krasnaja nov'" Glavpolitprosvet, Moskva 1923, pp. 116-18

on, however, futurist artists were often rejected from shows, a source of significant conflict with the government. Fillia and several others were even arrested in 1925 while protesting their exclusion from a large exposition at the Società Promotrice in Turin.[25]

The definitive break between Marinetti, his followers and the PCI occurred only in 1924. The deathblow to their alliance may have been dealt at the 1924 futurist Congress, where there was a major confrontation between left and right leaning political factions within the movement. Unfortunately, none of the speeches from the debate were ever published and no record of the proceedings, beyond the titles of the speeches given, survives, although it is known that Fillia aligned himself with Marinetti and not with those who still clung to anti-fascist and pro-communist positions.[26] Later that year, Marinetti made his formal move to reconcile with the fascist government, clearly spurred in part by concerns over survival of the movement he had devoted nearly 15 years to building. Mussolini himself had been an anarchist and a socialist in his youth, and professed to be a revolutionary; the dictatorial, repressive and eventually totalitarian and right-wing nature of the regime emerged only in stages, and many left-wing intellectuals (such as Elio Vittorini) were at first greatly attracted by the fascist rhetoric of revolutionary change and redemption for Italy and Italians.

Marinetti's nostalgic *diciannovismo* and ardent *italianismo* served as the road back to Mussolini, and he, Emilio Settimelli, and Mario Carli published a number of pro-fascist manifestos, starting in 1923. Intending to reconcile and align with the fascist government or not, the process was a stilted and conflict-filled one, and the relationship between futurism and fascism was always tense and distrustful. The fear of marginalization was constant, even as Marinetti dreamed of futurism as the official state art. By the end of 1924, after ordering the

[25] Berghaus, *Italian Futurist Theatre*. 436.
[26] Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*. 222-227.; Claudia Salaris, *Storia del futurismo: libri, giornali, manifesti* (Roma: Editori riuniti, 1985). 136-139.

assassination of socialist leader Giacomo Matteotti, the fascist government had embarked on a full-fledged attack against the opposition, arresting many of the socialist and PCI leaders. Gramsci himself was arrested in November 1926. Marinetti, who had already published the treatise *Al di là del comunismo* in 1920, published the book *Futurismo e Fascismo* in 1924. The earlier work was published just before Marinetti broke with Mussolini, the later one just after their reconciliation.

2. Fillia's Earliest Works: Communism, Futurism and the Poems of 1+*1+1=1 – Dinamite – Poesie Proletarie – Rosso + Nero*,

Fillia's career as a published author began in earnest in 1922, when he was just 18 years old, although he had been experimenting with poetry for at least a few years.[27] First among Fillia's published works are five poems in the anthology *1+1+1=1 – Dinamite – Poesie Proletarie – Rosso + Nero*, published by the Istituto di Cultura Proletaria, *pro vittime politiche*, as the cover declares. This work is unique in the history of futurism and its experiment with communism. It is the only example of a literary work that explicitly attempts to explore a union between the two groups and to join them under the banner of a common cause.[28] Only a few copies of the work remain, for unknown reasons. Claudia Salaris speculates that the scarcity of copies is due to the Istituto pulling them from circulation upon protest by communist leadership in Turin. Umberto Carpi goes so far as to attribute the recall and destruction of the pamphlet to the authority of Ugo Arcuno, acting with greater authority than he might otherwise while

[27] One of the documents contained in the collection of Piera Gaudenzi, widow of Fillia's friend and fellow Futurist Alf Gaudenzi, is a handwritten poetry "magazine" titled *Poesia*, that Fillia created in 1919.
[28] Carpi, *Bolscevico immaginista*. 60-61.; Alessandra Ottieri, *Fillia, un percorso futurista: da Dinamite al jazz-band* ([Napoles, Italy]: Libreria Dante & Descartes, 1999). Salaris. "L'Attività letteraria di Fillia." In Enrico Crispolti, *Fillia: fra immaginario meccanico e primordio cosmico : [Cuneo, mostra in San Francesco, 14 maggio - 30 giugno 1988]* (Milano: Mazzotta, 1988). 62-63.

Gramsci was absent on his visit to the Soviet Union.[29] Arcuno, who belonged to the Bordiga-inspired majority of the PCI, did not support the hypothesis of a potential coming together of the workers, the communist leaders, and the futurist avant-garde. Carpi further notes that the work must have been conceived and executed during the wave of enthusiasm following the April show of futurist art at The Winter Club in Turin, during which Marinetti had appeared in person to escort a group of factory workers through a guided tour of the exhibit.[30]

The activities of the *futurbolscevisti*, as Paladini called them, and the publication of the anthology sparked a heated debate between different factions in Turin, even spurring the publication of a several responses long series of back and forth articles between Duilio Remondino and Rezio Buscaroli on the subject of whether or not futurism could be a proletarian movement. Ugo Arcuno also used the publication of the poetry volume as an opportunity to attack futurism as inaccessible to the proletarian. Arcuno's attack was particularly venomous; he saw the work, along with Paladini's "Appello agli intelletuali" published in *Avanguardia* on 16 July 1922, as part of a perverse tendency that needed to be expunged. Besides the fact, Arcuno claimed, that futurism and communism were anything but agreeable to each other, the poetry anthology was a grave error in judgment because of its format. Not only does Arcuno remark that reading the poems was "davvero rattristante," he also asserts that if the author truly meant to produce a useful work of propaganda that it must necessarily have been in the form of spontaneous, efficacious simple and sincere prose.[31] Arcuno excluded the possibility of futurist membership within the proletarian classes and communist party on the grounds of their 'clumsiness' and 'petite bourgeois incomprehension.[32]

[29] Carpi, *Bolscevico immaginista*. 62-63
[30] Umberto Carpi, *L'estrema avanguardia del Novecento* (Roma: Editori riuniti, 1985). 103-104.
[31] Cited in Carpi, *Bolscevico immaginista*, 60-63 and in Ottieri, *Fillia, un percorso futurista*. 34.
[32] Carpi, *Bolscevico immaginista*. 60-63

The volume consists of eleven poems written by three authors: Fillia, Galeazzi and Pasquali. Nothing is known about the other two authors, and Alessandra Ottieri notes that their names never reappear on any list of futurist party membership.[33] None of the authors' names appear anywhere in the volume, for symbolic reasons. The five poems written by Fillia are attributable to Fillia with certainly only because one copy exists wherein the author signed his name next to the poems he authored.[34]

The front cover of the book is critical to understanding the text, and serves, itself, very much as a twelfth poem.[35] In fact, the cover design is perhaps the most futurist aspect of the text, incorporating mathematical symbols, direct analogies between nouns, and the use of varied typefaces. The title and cover design immediately impart significant amounts of information about the text, and introduces motifs that will recur throughout. The first line, "1+1+1=1," explains the ideological reasons for not including the authors' names with their work. Left intentionally anonymous, the work becomes the property of the collective, and the private, intellectual property of no individual person. The next line, "DINAMITE" is a metonym for the violent revolution that would bring about the downfall of society built on the exploitation of the working class, and bring the proletariat freedom from its oppression and exploitation. The third line, "Poesie Proletarie," affirms the audience for whom the text was intended. The final line, "Rosso + Nero" and the colors used for the cover design—red and black—can be understood to represent many things: the alliance of the "red" communists and "black" anarchists; the red of fire (or perhaps blood) and black of dynamite powder. The symbolic use of *rosso* and *nero* is

[33] Ottieri, *Fillia, un percorso futurista*. 11-12.
[34] The volume with the attribution, as noted by Silvia Evangelisti, is in the collection of Marzio Pinottini. The five poems attributed to Fillia are: *Visione simbolica*, *Noi*, *Rivolta*, *Ghigno* and *Prima luce.* Fillia, *Fillia e l'avanguardia futurista negli anni del fascismo* (Milano: A. Mondadori : P. Daverio, 1986).
[35] There is no indication of who designed the cover, though I suspect, given Fillia's many other examples of graphic design for book covers that he at least contributed to it.

also a constantly recurring motif throughout the poems in the volume. It should be noted that Balla's famous drawings for *Il pugno di Boccioni* (c. 1916), adopted as a futurist logo by Marinetti himself, and the sculpture by the same title, were not only bright red, but evoked the shapes of the hammer and sickle, symbols of the peasant and urban working classes even before they became part of the communist emblem. Furthermore, Balla's sketches for the statue were used by Fillia and Bracci on the posters for the Movimento Futurista Torinese—Sindacati Artistici Futuristi, which they founded in 1923, and on some of the group's membership cards.

All five of Fillia's poems are long, free verse poems, though they assiduously maintain the stated themes and tone of the anthology. The use of punctuation is playful, and he switches back and forth between full sentences and fragments. Unlike the title and cover design, Fillia's poems are not examples of futurist *paroliberismo*, though they do evoke the spirit of Carlo Carrà's celebrated 1910 painting *Il funerale dell'anarchico Galli*, which is a chaotic scene, half funeral, half riot, rendered entirely in red and black. The word *rosso* appears in every one of Fillia's poems at least once, and *nero*, if it does not specifically appear is evoked through a constant use of words that are semantically linked to it, like *notte, tenebra*, *carbonizzate*, *scure*. The contrast between night and day are also constant motifs with day, sunrise, light, and the *colori di fuoco*, all equated with red. Fillia's first entry and the third poem in the anthology, *Visione simbolica* begins:

> Nero e rosso.
> Tenebra e luce.
> Notte di sangue.
> […][36]

Red blood alludes to both violence and passion. Though the poems are not written in a typical futurist style, it is clear that Fillia had already integrated many Futurist ideals into his writing,

[36] Fillia. *Visione simbolica.* In Fillia, Galleazzi, and Pasquali, *1+1+1=1 – Dinamite – Poesie Proletarie – Rosso + Nero.* (Turin: Istituto di Cultura Proletaria, 1922). 6.

such as the celebration of anarchic violence and an utterly iconoclastic attitude toward any form of established culture or social structure. The poems fluctuate between Symbolist ornament—at times they are nearly Dannunzian—futurist anarchy, and communist chant. Again quoting from *Visione simbolica*:

> Noi siamo l'Esercito della Miseria,
> Noi lottiamo per l'apoteosi della più umana Vittoria.
> Noi siamo divinizzati dalla Giustizia.
> […][37]

This passage is indicative of many aspects of these poems, and offers insights into what Fillia's later concerns would be. Throughout his poems, Fillia maintains this habit of capitalizing terms like misery, victory, truth, justice, and love, among others. By doing so, he elevates them to the level of the ideal, to the divine and the allegorical. The idea of the vision, of the cleansing flame, "poesie sacramentali"[38] and songs or hymns to battle and glory already have clear religious and mystical overtones foreshadowing in this text the interest Fillia will later take in the mystical and spiritual. These preoccupations will later lead to the "Manifesto dell'arte spirituale" (1930), the notable number of religious paintings Fillia produced between 1928 and 1935 and the mystical tone that pervades the majority of his written works.

Thematically, the early poems adhere much more closely to the anarcho-futurist ideals of the movement's first wave than to its stylistic conventions, and Fillia intently weaves these earlier futurist ideals together with communist sentiment, metaphorically attempting to create a harmonious entity not only of futurism and communism, but also futurist communism and futurist anarchism. The poems echo songs such as "Bandiera Rossa" and other anarchist and communist chants, many of which (like "Bandiera Rossa" itself) were originally based on traditional peasant folk songs.

[37] Ibid. 6.
[38] Fillia. *Rivolta.* In Fillia et al. *Dinamite*. 14

Fillia's second poem in the anthology, *Noi* explicitly reinforces the alliance between anarchism and communism. The poem's title announces an agenda of consensus building and of the creation of a collective; the use of verbs with first person plural subjects (the *noi* form of the verb), and frequent reference to the collective ownership of the movement reinforce both the metaphorical human collective and the Marxist abolition of private property. The second and last stanzas of *Noi* in fact read (emphasis mine):

> Perché **la nostra lotta** ha due principii:
> un ideale e un desiderio:
> libertà senza legge, di lavoro e di vita,
> piacere senza freno, di godimento e di estenuazione:
> **dateci** il pieno frutto delle nostre forze
> abolendo il denaro,
> **dateci** l'amore
> perché **vogliamo** eternare la carne.
> […]
> E **canteremo** su tutte le più alte montagne,
> che sono i tetti del mondo,
> su tutti i mari e su tutte le terre
> **canteremo** la Vittoria.
> E **solleveremo** le bandiere rosse
> e le bandiere nere.
> Vita e Morte.
> Distruzione e Anarchia.
> Libertà e Rivoluzione. [39]

In these two stanzas, Fillia creates balance between the two ideologies, attempting to locate and emphasize their convergences. The ideals of communism are united with the desire of anarchism, and the flags are flown together. Fillia seems to imply, here, a message similar to that of Gramsci in "Marinetti rivoluzionario?": futurist anarchism had brought about lawless destruction of the entrenched bourgeois hegemony, and now communist futurism was furthering the revolution. Earlier in the poem, in the same vein he says:

> Bisogna minare il mondo dalle fondamenta
> e distruggere la società egoista

[39] Fillia. *Noi*. In Fillia et al. *Dinamite.* 8-10.

coi pugnali e con le combe
che ci ereditarono i padri della guerra.[40]

So, Fillia, claims, communism and anarchism are natural allies. This is potentially even more inflammatory than the historic tensions between the groups given that the roots of the Partito Nazionale Fascista (PNF), which Benito Mussolini officially founded just a year earlier, were anarchist and socialist in nature. The poem's title likely also references the futurist periodical of the same title, which would link it to Enrico Prampolini (founding editor of the journal) and to Marinetti.

Fillia further attempts to integrate into the revolutionary futurist "Noi" not only the political outcasts of society but also the moral outcasts, for example claiming, as other futurists and even *Scapigliati* had before him, that prostitutes were the only rebellious (and therefore admirable) women. He says:

Passeremo nelle solitudini verdi
a raccogliere gli isolati
e i sognatori,
passeremo nei lupanari
a raccogliere le meretrici
che sono le sole donne ribelli.[41]

These sentiments are echoed in the poem "Ghigno," where the central trope is that of a fuse waiting to be lit. Once lit, the fuse will set off an infernal conflagration, that will demolish everything in its path, destroying religion, law, money, country, and family.

Ultimately, none of the imagery or symbolism in these five poems is particularly surprising or particularly inventive from a literary point of view. The poems are, overall, fairly novice and naïve, yet in trying to bridge the themes and diction of futurism with that of the anarchist and communist politics and folk songs, they constitute an interesting experiment. The

[40] Ibid. 8.
[41] Fillia. *Noi*. In Fillia et al. *Dinamite.* 9. This is not entirely unrelated to sentiments such as those expressed by Italo Tavolato in "L'Elogio della Prostituzione." *Lacerba*. 1,9 (1 May 1913). 5-8.

vocabulary and structure of the poems are quite dramatic and overwrought, and they were harshly reviewed by the communist and socialist press. In his review, Arcuno had also deemed them necessarily the literary product of a member of the working class, in fact, he stated, if they were written by a futurist intellectual, he should be immediately sent back to primary school, because they were, in his eyes, of such poor quality.[42] Arcuno's reading, however, is politically biased and reflects on the one hand the persistent cultural elitism of many communist intellectuals at the time and, on the other hand, his skepticism towards a possible alliance of the futurist intellectuals with the working class and the communist leadership.

While Fillia's later poems (the 41 poems he contributed to *I nuovi poeti futuristi* in 1925, and in his 1925 collection *Lussuria radioelettrica* analyzed in the next chapter) would incorporate many more of futurism's free-word poetic conventions, his poetry would always retain strong traces of lyric and folk poetry. In fact, part of the poetic agenda of later futurist poets was to develop a "new lyricism" in line with futurist theory and praxis, post-1915, when one of the most influential of all futurist manifestos, Fortunato Depero and Giacomo Balla's 1915 "Ricostruzione futurista dell'universo" initiated the reorientation the futurist movement as a whole. The repercussions of this manifesto and the rebuilding process would significantly influence Fillia's works, in all of the genre and media in which he would work. The manifesto declared that it was time to take the shattered pieces of artistic expression, the results of the movement's core belief in destruction, and use them as the building blocks for the rebirth and regeneration of new artistic ideals and forms, then theorized a path for reassembly, for a framework on which to reconstruct artistic and literary expression from the ground up.[43]

[42] Cited in Ottieri, *Fillia, un percorso futurista*. 34.
[43] Günter Berghaus, "A Theatre of Image, Sound and Motion: On Synaesthesia and the Idea of a Total Work of Art," *MuK Maske Und Kothurn: Internationale Beitrage Zur Theaterwissenschaft* 32, no. 1–2 (1986): 7–28.Enrico

Despite the negative response to *Dinamite* by the communist leadership in Turin, Fillia, along with the poet and novelist Tullio Alpinolo Bracci (who also later used the pseudonym Kiribiri), went on to found the Movimento Futurista Torinese—Sindacati Artistici Futuristi, an organization of left wing futurists and artists' union in April of 1923. The Sindacati Artistici was also a publishing house, which Fillia would use to publish many of his and other futurists' works over the course of the next several years, continuing even after the Turin futurists abandoned left-wing politics and moved into closer accord with Mussolini's regime. The group's founding manifesto, also titled "Movimento Futurista Torinese—Sindacati Artistici Futuristi" was a call to the futurist worker, a manifesto of workers' rights and a call to the futurist artist to support and vitalize the workers' cause. Though the manifesto claims to be apolitical, it is clearly concerned with the rights of the proletariat above all other concerns, demanding non-exploitation, supporting the artistic endeavors of the masses, and improvement of the lives, education and resources such as gyms and public baths available to the masses. The text reads:

> **Lavoratori,**
> noi sorgiamo con un programma d'azione!
>
> *Il Futurismo* (che ha capovolto ieri i valori artistici d'Italia imponendo alla luce e nella lotta soltanto le Creazinoi giovani-originali-violente e portando l'Italia all'*Impero* della nuovissima arte), vede oggi nella massa popolare la sensibilità moderna pienamente evolutiva per la valorizzazione di ciò che contiene la formidabile forza del domani: il *Lavoro*, e crede nella possibilità meravigliosa di portare il lavoro stesso a dominare tutte le correnti della vita, meccanizzando materialmente e moralmente la Nazione.
>
> *Il Movimento Futurista Torinese* (accanto a tutte le caratteristiche e le forze economiche di ogni altra organizzazione) sorge con un programma che segna le nuove vie sociali del domani:
>
> 1) *Azione apolitica* permettendo ai suoi aderenti di appartenere a qualsiasi partito o Associazione perché ha nella *Produzione* le sole basi reali.
>
> 2) *Non-sfruttamento* degli aderenti *abolendo* ogni tassa d'iscrizione-quote mensili-sottoscrizioni ecc., perché la massa operaia non deve pagare la propria organizzazione, ma essere al contrario ricompensata.
>
> 3) *Portare l'arte a favore dell'organizzazione* con il doppio fine di favorire l'istruzione della massa concedendo pubblicazioni gratuite, ingressi liberi, sconti e

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Crispolti, *Il mito della macchina e altri temi del futurismo.* ([Trapani: Celebes, 1971).; Enrica Mezzetta, *Il teatro futurista in teoria* (Pisa: Giardini, 2006). 11.

facilitazioni in ogni manifestazione-rappresentazione-esposizione ecc. e di creare intanto quel fondo di cassa necessario al movimento senza aggravare di alcuna tassa i propri iscritti.

4) *Valorizzare la vita* riuscendo a portare i lavoratori dalla fatica quotidiana alle più allegre elasticità serali, che ritemprano il corpo e lo spirito.

5) *Azione nazionale* per ottenere l'apertura di palestre ginnastiche e sportive, bagni pubblici ecc. in ogni borgo, liberi a tutti e senza distinzione.

6) *Abolizione delle scuole* serali e festive di cultura classica per sostituirle con scuole pratiche *gratuite* d'industria e commercio, o anche di semplice spiegazione dei valori moderni-inventivi-dinamici. […][44]

The first of several manifestos the two would write together, this is the only one in which Fillia and Bracci explicitly address politics. While the manifesto claims a position of *azione apolitica* for the Movimento Futurista Torinese, it explicitly addresses the needs of the worker and of the masses, insisting that the movement existed to serve their needs, calling for national action to support the betterment of workers' lives by providing for more free time, public gyms and baths, and free schools. The claims to an apolitical nature are likely protective, given that the fascist assaults on labor unions, socialist newspapers and other groups maintaining leftist political stances were already becoming even more frequent and violent.[45] Furthermore, this allowed Fillia and Bracci to offer an appeal and a direction for the antifascist futurists who were left without support after Gramsci's rejection. I argue that this is evidence of Fillia's persistent and continual drive to resolve the conflict between futurism's established dogma, and the political and aesthetic flux of the 1920s and 1930s.

Directed at both workers and artists, the manifesto ties together the needs and activities of the two groups. Art and industrial production are given equal value in the manifesto, because both *create*. Addressing futurist artists, after just having addressed the futurist worker, the two authors insist:

[44] Fillia and T. A. Bracci "Movimento Futurista Torinese Sindacati Artistici Futuristi" reprinted in Crispolti, *Fillia*. 69.

[45] Seven months later, in November 1923, the Legge Acerbo, which regulated electoral procedures and the formation of political parties was also passed.

> **Artisti futuristi,** noi non vogliamo chiudere l'attività personale nel cerchio di un'organizzazione, ma creare la possibilità di un rapido e violentissimo lavoro: I *"Sindacati Artistici di Mestieri"* rappresentano la valorizzazione nuovissima e agile della vita moderna, futurista e dinamica perché portano la grande massa productrice (che sarà domani il solo cosciente imperialismo dell'Italia) al centro della civiltà industriale e metallica, meccanizzando ogni forza e ogni pensiero.
>
> Avremo il mezzo più sicuro e più meraviglioso di un'azione formidabile, perché *Arte* and *Lavoro* rappresentano creazione e applicazione continua, Giovinezza eternamente unita, Conquista e velocità compenetrante; rappresentano in una parola il grande impulso italiano costruttore del mondo: *Futurismo*.
>
> E il nostro programma è sempre dinamite violentissima ed esplosiva di cervello nell'assalto ai castelli chiusi della vecchia Arte, per la provocazione futura della *Luce*.[46]

So, they claim in the manifesto's closing paragraphs, the ideology of futurism is the great constructive impulse driving the development of the new world order. Perhaps intentionally recalling the poetry collection of a year earlier, and definitely evoking futurism's anarchist origins, Fillia and Bracci call their program the "violent and explosive dynamite of the mind," capable of breaking down the walls around high art and lighting the way toward the future.

Meanwhile, Fillia's pictorial interests were already manifesting themselves in 1922, in his poetry and theater, alluded to by the vivid, coloristic imagery and in the call to artists in his manifestos. Confirmation of this early interest in the visual arts can also be found in the pamphlet and *tessera d'iscrizione* (Figure 6) that he and Bracci designed and issued to the members of the Movimento Futurista Torinese.[47] The tessera features two figures that appear to be faces and the caption: "Creazioni – Futuriste – Antilogiche Bracci – Fillia." The two figures represent either the painter and the poet or the worker and the artist. The figure on the left has a Mondrian-esque pattern over its entire face, while the figure on the right is red faced, and has color wheels for eyes. I surmise one references manual (outwardly visible) work and productivity

[46] Filla and T.A. Bracci "Movimento Futurista Torinese Sindacati Artistici Futuristi" reprinted in Crispolti, *Fillia*. 69.

[47] The *tessera* also bears a striking rememblance to a portrait of Vinicio Paladini that Ivo Pannaggi exectuted in 1922 (see Carpi, *Bolscevico immaginista* for a reproduction of this work). It is impossible to know whether the works bear any relationship to each other, beyond chance similarity, but Fillia and Bracci may have seen the work from a year earlier before designing their *tessera*.

and the other intellectual (mental, non-visible) productivity, signifying the movement's attempts to combine disparate spheres of activity. The pamphlet cover, for the publication of the manifesto, also featured an illustration of Balla's preparatory drawing for *Linee forza del pugno di Boccioni* (1914-1915). The drawing is red, and also representative of the anarchic, violent and rowdy nature of early futurism, but co-opts Balla's color choice (the statue itself is, in fact, bright red) to also symbolically represent communism.

In 1924, Fillia and Bracci published their futurist program in the single issue of *Futurismo* (a publication of theirs, not to be confused with the periodical edited by Marinetti), intended as an introductory publication. This was the first in a series of journal projects of Fillia's that would either never be published or would only manage to reach one or two issues before folding. The manifesto demonstrates that Fillia and Bracci had already either bowed to pressure to conform to futurism's alliance with fascism, or had substantially changed their views. They claim in the opening sentences:

> La politica è *superata*.
> interverremo nella lotta soltanto in momenti di estreme necessità Il Governo nazionale, nato nel *Futurismo*, è già applicazione del nostro programma minimo.[48]

The rest of the program is almost too carefully pro-fascist and only concerned with artistic activities. The program mimics the form of the 1923 manifesto, listing several bullet points, but now, instead of addressing the worker's needs, they are pointedly aesthetic in nature. It is not clear, whether this change derived from rapidly evolving political sentiment on the parts of Fillia and Bracci, from growing fascist political pressure, pressure from Marinetti, newly reconciled with Mussolini, or all of the above.[49] Yet, the fact that Fillia published a version of *Sensualità* in

[48] Reproduced in Fillia, *Fillia e l'avanguardia futurista negli anni del fascismo*. 66.
[49] Notably, Umberto Carpi expresses doubts about whether Fillia and his circle ever had a legitimately *Ordinovista* phase, but were instead, as mentioned previously, that they were merely swept up in the short-lived enthusiasm for a Futurist-Communist alliance. Carpi, *L'estrema avanguardia del Novecento*. 103-105.

1925, a text whose communist and feminist themes will be the topic of the next section of this chapter, demonstrates that even after futurism's official reconciliation with fascism, he was not entirely willing to abandon the revolutionary sentiments that had driven its composition. Though the play was likely altered between its first performance and its eventual publication, there was no attempt to entirely strip the play of its communist themes. In contrast to *Sensualità's* obvious political ideology, 1925 was also the year that Giovanni Gentile published the "Manifesto degli intellettuali fascisti" following the convegno in Bologna, on 21 April of that year. Amongst the signatories of Gentile's manifesto were several futurist leaders: Marinetti of course, and Ardengo Soffici among them, but not Fillia.

3. *Sensualità—Teatro d'eccezione*

The theatrical work *Sensualità—Teatro d'eccezione* is Fillia's second major work from this period, following on the heels of *Dinamite* and continuing his leftist and politically minded activities. *Sensualità* is his first fully futurist work and first (and only) full-length play. At the time, he and Bracci were still in a position to forward a leftist agenda, though they were rushing headlong into direct opposition to the futurist leadership, a conflict of which they must have been conscious. Even though Marinetti's official reconciliation with Mussolini did not occur until 1924, Marinetti did publish his "I diritti artistici propugnati dai futuristi italiani: Manifesto al Governo Fascista" in early 1923.[50] Involvement in the theater, which was one of the most popular futurist art forms with the public, was natural for Fillia. Not only was it one of the most popular and frequented forms of public entertainment at the time, and thus an ideal vehicle for his purposes, Fillia had likely being surrounded by theater work and involved in theatrical

[50] Marinetti's manifesto was first published on 1 March 1923, in the journal *Futurismo*, then reprinted in *L'Impero* on 11 March 1923 and *Noi* on 1 April 1923.

productions for much of his life, thanks to his mother's career as a stage actress, which began in Revello, and continued in Turin.[51]

Theater was a perfect medium for Fillia to disseminate an ideological message. Not only was theater widely popular in Italy, it was also a means to reach an audience that was still largely under-educated or illiterate. Theater was also a particularly well-adapted choice for the movement, because of its inherently propagandistic and spectacle-making character. In fact, theater had been the revolutionary's art of choice since at least the French Revolution. The leaders of the French Revolution considered it a total art form, and as such, capable of the work of integration once performed by religion. Furthermore, it was low cost, took advantage of audience involvement and the mixing of social classes. Theater, it was believed, had to power to shape model citizens and a model society.[52] Theater, spectacle and ritual, of course, were integral also to the fascist government's *modus operandi.*

Fillia's activities centered on the theater are part of a larger international push for theater that had a social consciousness and/or propagandistic function. Theater based on social and moral critique, and not just on propping up middle class propriety and strict moral codes, had been developing since the mid-19th century, prominently among dramaturges such as Henrik Ibsen and Anton Chekhov and those they influenced, such as Eugene O'Neill, who was responsible for introducing theatrical realism to the United States. Into the 1920s, playwrights like Bertolt Brecht in Germany, and Louis Aragon and Roger Vitrac in France experimented with "epic" and surrealist theater. Meanwhile, in an experimental trajectory similar to futurist theater, Erwin Piscator was utilizing mechanized sets and mechanical devices in the service of his leftist agenda, as did Brecht and August Strindberg, and even Ibsen before them. Though not

[51] Pierpaolo Bindolo and Anna Campanella, *Fillia Artista Revellese: Il Figlio Di Atahuallpa* (Revello: Editrice Nuova Stampa, 2003).
[52] Schnapp, *Staging Fascism*. 4.

strictly theatrical, Kurt Schwitters's *Herzbau* series of environments are in the same vein of the surrealist and mechanized environment, as are films such as Robert Weine's 1920 *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*. Vsevolod Meyerhold's symbolic theater in Russia also dealt, like Fillia's, with the nature of the physical being. It is likely that Fillia was exposed to Meyerhold's works in 1922-23, and that this was also a source of inspiration for Fillia's unconventional and anti-realist scenery. In addition to the notable influence of Prampolini, Fillia's theater shows some parallels with the experiments in theatrical abstraction of the Bauhaus and, for example, works such as Laszlo Moholy-Nagy's *Score Sketch for Mechanized Eccentrics* and Oskar Schlemmer's *Triadic Ballet* (1922), though unlike the latter, Fillia always retains a clear story line.

The most important theatrical precedents at home, in Italy, were Giovanni Verga, whose *Verismo* was motivated by a desire to starkly represent the real in all its animalistic rawness, and Pirandello, whose modernist meta-theater revolutionized the stage. Pirandello, as a contemporary of the futurists, and like D'Annunzio was a constant target of their vitriol, was nonetheless a major force. Pirandello, however, maintained a position of an Ivory Tower intellectual, insisting (even though a member of the fascist party and the recipient of fascist funding) that his art was apolitical and existed for its own sake. Nevertheless, his works such as *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*, published just two years before Fillia debuted *Sensualità—Teatro d'eccezione*, were fundamental to exploring the relationship between an author, his text, and the characters Pirandello creates within it. Indeed, Fillia will also take up the question of masks, masking and identity in several different works.[53]

On the fascist end of the political spectrum and in the years of the regime's growing popularity (so, until 1936), theater was increasingly utilized as a means of effectively spreading

[53] For a detailed look at the history and fluence of prior futurist theatrical trends on Fillia, especially the *teatro della sorpresa*, see Berghaus, *Italian Futurist Theatre, 1909-1944*.

propaganda. Fascism, which as a political philosophy presents itself as radically populist and ultra-nationalist, is fundamentally dependent on spectacle. Just as leftist and futurists exploited the populist nature of theater, fascist Italy and other fascist leaning governments across Europe and South America exploited the theater, too. The locus of fascist theatrical culture was civic life, and reinforcing the civic order.[54] Although it also fostered a new form of nationalism on the stage, fascism returned to the kinds theater that reinforced the morals of the conservative bourgeois and petty bourgeois mentality that it was forcing Italy to reassume, thus wiping out decades of progress toward laicism, workers' rights and women's rights. Fascist aestheticizing ritualization of both politics and daily life also drew on theatrical spectacle and the theatrics of the Church.[55]

During this period of attempted collaboration with the Proletkult, the PCI and communist leadership, Fillia followed the Soviet model of art in service of the revolution. From 1919 through 1923 Vladimir Malevich, El Lissitsky, Vladimir Mayakovsky (who was a crucial reference for late futurism and for post-war Italian neo-avant-garde art and literature) and Vladimir Tatlin, among many other prominent Bolshevik intellectuals and artists, emphasized art that permeated the public space. One of the most important of these works, *The Monument to the Third International*, which Tatlin designed in 1919-1920 was almost certainly a point of reference for Fillia's set designs in *Sensualità*, knowledge of which would likely have reached him via the collaboration of the Turin futurists and the Russian constructivists with their respective Proletkult offices and the communication between branches.

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[54] Roger Griffin. "Staging the Nation's Rebirth: The politics and Aesthetics of Performance in the Context of Fascist Studies." In Günter Berghaus, *Fascism and Theatre: Comparative Studies on the Aesthetics and Politics of Performance in Europe, 1925-1945* (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1996). 11-38; Schnapp, *Staging Fascism*. 2-11.
[55] Günter Berghaus. "Ritual Core of Fascist Theater." In Berghaus *Fascism and Theater*. 39-71. Claudio Fogu, *The Historic Imaginary: Politics of History in Fascist Italy* (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2003).; Fogu. *The Historic Imaginary*; Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

Futurist playwrights and performance artists made extensive use of the theater to disseminate explicit political messages from the very beginning of the movement, and especially for the purpose of interventionist propaganda before World War I, which Italy entered only in 1915. By the twenties, however, futurist theater was beginning to focus more and more on purely aesthetic expression while political ideology became less explicit and more to be read between the lines than shouted.[56]

Sensualità, however, which dates originally, as we have seen, from 1923*,* might as well have been written expressly to reflect the declaration in the 1915 futurist manifesto for the theater which read, "Noi crediamo dunque che non si possa oggi influenzare guerrescamente l'anima italiana, se non mediante il teatro."[57] The whole play, despites its tragic conclusion, is effectively a call to action, to revolution. The play, itself, is the story of a violent revolt that Fillia may have hoped would cause an actual revolt to arise on the streets of Turin. This is Fillia's only stand-alone theatrical work, and it was first performed in part in 1923 at the offices of the Sindacati Artistici futuristi, then published in 1925. The first act was presented several times, and the last act performed once, in 1924, again in the offices of the Sindacati Artistici, but the whole work was never presented.[58] That the work was not produced in regular theaters is not surprising, given the conservative nature of the repertoire on most Italian stages at the time.[59]

Fillia's theater was generally anti-mimetic and anti-ritualistic, rejecting realism in favor of the symbolic and metaphorical semi-abstract theater. Not only is Fillia's an avant-garde play,

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[56] Mezzetta, *Il teatro futurista in teoria*.10. Berghaus, *Italian Futurist Theatre, 1909-1944*.
[57] F. T Marinetti and Settimelli, *Il teatro futurista sintetico: atecnico, dinamico, autonomo, alogico, irreale.* (Milan: Direzione del movimento futurista, 1915).
[58] Berghaus, *Italian Futurist Theatre, 1909-1944*. 433.
[59] With the exception of Bragaglia and a few other small venues for modernist and avant-garde work, most Italian theaters continued to present a very traditional and largely 19th century repertoire, and innovators like Pirandello (whose *Six Chatracters in Search of an Author* caused a riot when it first opened) were extremely rare and met with great difficulties in trying to find producers for their plays. See Franca Angelini, *Teatro e spettacolo nel primo Novecento* (Roma: Laterza, 1988).

with its use of abstract set designs, color and light, as well as entirely non-naturalistic and non conventional characters, as well as revolutionary in terms of dramatic form; it is also exceedingly iconoclastic in terms of politics and gender issues. The work carries forward the themes of the communist revolt from *Dinamite*, and at the same time introduces many of the prominent themes of futurism that dominate Fillia's later poetic and prose works. The action follows the organization and implementation of a populist revolt to overthrow the government. Entwined within this plotline, there is a second plotline that involves the love affairs of the male protagonist: *Lui.* This plotline also introduces and begins to explore themes related to Fillia's futurist *Uomo senza sesso*, and the end of sentimentality, that Fillia will delve into in his later prose works, though this will prove to be a problematic notion.

Structurally the play attempts to incorporate many of the standards of futurist theater that had been developed in the previous decade and a half, including—beyond the precedents discussed above—synthetic theater, *il teatro della sorpresa*, tactile theater, and Pino Masnata's *teatro visionico*.[60] It is clear that in the year between the publication of *Dinamite* and the composition of this work, Fillia had made an active effort to familiarize himself with the stylistic and ideological traits of the movement, as he aligned himself with it. Perhaps even more than *Dinamite*, *Sensualità* represents Fillia's attempts to combine communism and futurism, because of the more profound integration of ideology with content and form. Unlike the five poems he contributed to *Dinamite*, Fillia's play demonstrates a clear consciousness of the futurist aesthetic. The poems, instead, do touch on futurist themes, but, partly for political reasons, do not attempt the formal innovations more typical of the best futurist poetry.

[60] Michael Kirby, *Futurist Performance.* (New York: Dutton, 1971); Berghaus, *Italian Futurist Theatre, 1909-1944*; Mario Verdone, *Teatro del tempo futurista.* (Roma: Lerici, 1969).

Sensualità is a carefully researched attempt to incorporate various aspects of futurist theatrical theory into a single work, and Fillia's first major effort to produce a fully futurist work. The play is structured to carefully adhere to a number of different technical and thematic developments within the movement, starting with the 1915 manifesto "Il teatro futurista sintetico" written by Marinetti, Bruno Corra and Emilio Settimelli. First, the play is brief, even though it encompasses no less than seven acts. Only the fourth and seventh acts are more than a few minutes in length, and most of the acts have little to no speech, and few actions, but communicate many ideas and symbolic motifs quickly. By the immediate post-war period, futurist synthetic theater had already run the gamut of its innovative potential, but several new trends were emerging, and were attentively incorporated into *Sensualità*.

The newest innovations were made in revolutionizing set design and staging in the theater. One of the principal areas under attack was the realism of the stage settings—which even synthetic theater and the *serate futuriste* had not really challenged. Prampolini's 1915 manifesto "Scenografia e coreografia futurista" appears to have been particularly influential on Fillia's thought. As Prampolini wrote, the true revolution "deve passare attraverso l'abolizione della tradizionale scena dipinta."[61] The manifesto proposed scenic construction that incorporated noise and movement, generated by the set pieces and proposed that the actors take on chromatic and spatial qualities. This is interesting in Fillia's case not only for the technical application he made of these directives for the clearly anti-realistic sets and the costuming integrated into the scenery that is constant in *Sensualità*, but because it also illuminates a source of inspiration for the theories on painting that Fillia would articulate in the mid twenties. Following Prampolini, Fillia makes a very pointed use of electrically powered elements, including moving set pieces and

[61] Enrico Prampolini. "Scenografia e coreografia futurista." Reprinted in Enrico Prampolini et al., *Enrico Prampolini* (Roma: DeLuca, 1961). 41-44.

lighting effects. As Prampolini declared, the traditional painted scene and even the realistic sets with real-life objects were to be abolished and substituted with "un'architettura eletromeccanica incolore, vivificata potentemente da emanazioni cromatiche di fonte luminosa."[62] Fillia's mixed media use of a color projector and a screen as a large backdrop is also a notable inclusion. The stage directions call for projecting moving, colored images, which were rare before the 1930s.

Fillia's theoretical advances also came in the wake of Giacomo Balla's innovations in painting and the ballet *Feu d'artifice*, which explored the spiritual and symbolic possibilities of color and the spiritual environment of a work using set and lighting effects that were choreographed to Stravinsky's score. *Sensualità* aggressively attempted to incorporate scenic elements and effects that took advantage of all of the newest stage technology, though this limited the possibility of it being performed properly, as Italy still lacked any truly technologically advanced theaters.[63] Fillia also makes prominent use of the color yellow, the symbolic color of light and of the sun. He would also choose yellow to symbolize the all-important electricity, in the manifestos he later published on the use and importance of color. Symbolic and metaphoric use of color is a fundamental element of this work.

Inspiration for the bold colors and geometric, semi-abstract sets can also be traced to Depero's *teatro plastico* from the 1910s. *Sensualità*, like Fillia's poetry, is an attempt to reconstruct rather than destroy theater in the wake of Balla and Depero's "Ricostruzione futurista dell'universo." The *ballo plastico* and the *insiemi plastici* that Depero worked on from 1914-1916 were directly tied into the composition of the manifesto. Here, unlike the initial futurist *teatro sintetico* and *teatro del varietà*, where chaos, disorder and the illogical reigned, the technical, abstract elements of futurist theater are newly recombined with a coherent story, the

[62] Ibid. 41-44.
[63] Berghaus, *Italian Futurist Theatre, 1909-1944*. 329-396.

two aspects woven together to mutually advance the political and ideological content of the play. Fillia was determined to integrate the spiritual possibilities of these developments with a concrete political agenda supporting the proletariat, and to use futurist theatrical innovation to do so.

The first act gives voice to symbolic, abstract representations of spirit (a red spiral), matter (a white cube) and action (geometric shapes arranged to resemble a car). The stage is a mass of brightly colored objects and colored light. In Fillia's play, movement, airflow, temperature and background noise are all manipulated in turn, in order to create "the impression of a atmospheric development."[64] Each of the objects at the center of the stage speaks in turn, per its essential trait: the spirit speaks about the *annullamento dell'IO* and the beauty of speed; the material speaks of the thirst for and love of the unformed, and the need to cede control to the spirit; the *macchina* inevitably gives voice to the futurist desire to "live in action" in a world that "drinks the oxygen of the machine, into its insatiable lungs." The act ends with a bodiless voice calling out, "presto, più presto – bisogna liberarsi dal TEMPO – salire, salire – SALIRE!" Nearly serving the function of a Greek chorus, the first act introduces the themes that will be explored in the play, and already hints at Fillia's coming spiritual, genderless—but not asexual—futurism, mixed in with the more characteristic futurist themes of the *macchina*, the beauty of speed and the negation of the poetic self.

The second act, with entirely different, geometric set pieces (as each act will have), introduces the first three human actors: *Lui*, *Lei* and an *Amico*. The stage is set in black, white and grey, with a sliver of sky visible, illuminating the stage in red light. *Lui* is at center stage, wearing all white, save the small red circle above his heart; *Lei,* at the left, is dressed in a

[64] This act was also published as a stand-alone piece of synthetic theater in 1927 in the monthly magazine *Teatro*. Fillia. "Sensualità." *Teatro: rivista mensile*, anno V, no 3, marzo-aprile 1927. 22-23..

costume of heavy white cloth, which both accentuates the shape of her body, but also joins her, immobile, with the set; the *Amico*, motionless to the right side of the stage is clothed in the same manner as *Lei*, but in grey. In this act *Lui* is the only speaker, while the other two remain voiceless, posed against the background. The only action within the act is *Lui's* monologue, wherein he explores what will become a central theme of Fillia's later prose works—the renunciation of emotional, sentimental love in order to save the spirit and to render the spirit more potent and capable of producing radical changes in the real world. *Lui* is poised in a moment of deep self-reflection, and of rendering himself conscious of the limitations that sentimental love has placed on his ability to create and to completely exploit his cerebral potential.

Act three is, again, abstract, and clearly symbolizes the eradication of sentimentality, represented by the heart. There is no speaking, and the action is nearly entirely carried out by the moving set pieces. Several anonymous men dressed in white are positioned in a line, and as a red light shines on each, in turn, a red disc above the heart, like the one *Lui* wore, appears above their hearts. The large red, rectangular prism at the center of the stage starts to tip, threatening to crush the men on the stage. Its fall is halted by a cone of bright blue light, which expands to illuminate the whole scene as the men exit.

The fourth act, at the middle of the play is also the longest, and uses the most actors. Only *Lui* and the *Donna*, a new character separate from *Lei*, speak, but *Lei* is motionless, at one side of the stage and several of the *Uomini* from the last act, now dressed entirely in red, receive instruction from *Lui*, then exit. In this act *Lui*, the *Donna* and the *Uomini* are revealed as conspirators in a revolt against the ruling classes and government. They are organizing a public revolt for the next night, and the *Uomini* exit to receive specific instructions from the secret

council. Afterwards *Lui* and the *Donna* converse at length. They discuss *Lui*'s spontaneous seizure of control over the counsel, and the need to take advantage of the exact moment when the public is the most energized by its discontent. In this act Fillia also introduces the theme of the woman as the morally and spiritually stronger, and more capable of abandoning sentimentality and emotional love ahead of a man. It should be noted that while the anti-sentimental polemic is surely a futurist theme from the very beginning, and a Dannunzian one as well, Gramsci himself is well known to have eschewed feminine softness and sentimentality in times of political turmoil. Thus the source of this ideological position, which would remain important throughout Fillia's works, likely originated both from the futurist and Marxist components of his political education.[65]

Act five is a mass of colored, geometric forms, with a purple loudspeaker mounted on a white block. The act uses light, sound and heat effects, and the loudspeaker trumpets news of the revolution in progress, reporting that government troops are firing machine guns at the crowd and narrates the seizure of the Palazzo del Governo by the revolutionaries. It continues to declare that the army has been pushed back and the mob is assailing the governmental palace and public offices. With the rest of the colored lights extinguished, the room on the stage becomes suffocatingly hot and illuminated only in red. The loudspeaker announces the overthrow of the government and the curtain falls.

The sixth act, like the third, contains no dialogue, but this time *Lui*, who is accompanied by six dancers in different colored outfits are the human presence on the stage. The ballerinas dance in front of a large screen onto which are projected six, differently colored, spinning dice. The red dancer begins first, and they dance until each, save the blue dancer, collapses in

[65] Antonio Gramsci and Istituto Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere* (Torino: G. Einaudi, 1975). Mezzetta, *Il teatro futurista in teoria*. 9-12.

exhaustion. *Lui* watches them, mesmerized. At last, unable to control himself and his sexual desires, he launches himself at the blue dancer, as the curtain falls.

The seventh and final act is a confrontation between *Lui* and *Lei*, wherein the theme of communist revolt becomes secondary and the conflict between the revolution, modernity and romantic love takes center stage. The climax of the play comes when *Lui* definitively rejects *Lei*, after overcoming his personal turmoil; unwilling to accept this, *Lei* pulls a gun from her dress and shoots *Lui* through the heart, ending the play.

Sensualità is a starting point for the complex color theories that Fillia would later develop and flesh out in two manifestos, "Alfabeto spirituale" and "La pittura spirituale," both co-written with T. A. Bracci and published in 1925. Fillia's research built on Wassily Kandinsky's Theosophy-based color theories and Achille Ricciardi's *Teatro del Colore*, which dates from 1919.[66] While Fillia may have had direct knowledge of these sources, it is more likely that he derived these theories in great part from Enrico Prampolini's use of them. Fillia, however, adapted and further developed these ideas along different lines than the others. Ricciardi's fervent desire was to be the leader of a great renewal of *mise-en-scène* in Italy, and his work was based on both Romantic and modernist ideas on fusing the arts and on Symbolist experimentation with synaesthetic correspondences between color and sound. Ricciardi, though never a futurist, found active support in the movement, especially from Balla, Bragaglia and Prampolini.[67] Kandinsky and Ricciardi both believed that every artistic or existential event had a specific tonality, which developed within its particular atmosphere and through which the nature of its structure was externalized. Ricciardi proposed, for the theater, a more complete and organic typology of spectacle, where expressive function was tied to color itself. Like Ricciardi,

[66] Mario Verdone, *Avventure teatrali del Novecento* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 1999).
[67]Berghaus, *Italian Futurist Theatre, 1909-1944*.. 283, 347-357.

Fillia believed that color created a 'psychic space' on the stage and that the scenic elements were capable of transfiguring the drama.

These theories and their practical application would have a notable effect on Fillia's works throughout his career, a fact which becomes readily apparent, already, in 1925, with the publication of the two artistic manifestos, "Alfabeto spirituale" and "La pittura spirituale" signed by Fillia, Bracci and Angelo Maino. In fact, a version of "Alfabeto spirituale" had already been published, under the title "Creazioni futuriste" in Fillia and Bracci's 1924 *Futurismo*.[68] The central argument of "Alfabeto spirituale" was that before Fillia's work there had not existed a clear conception of color as the vital core of a painting, and superior in importance to every other part of the work. Color, he argued, was the very first and most important interpretive element of a work and that by defining an "alphabet" of color, whose definitions were feelings as well as spiritual and moral values and sensibilities, it would be possible to build a primitive lyric sensibility, divorced from the complicated, useless, natural and exterior. This alphabet was, of course, entirely anti-natural and contrary to traditional color symbolism, and lacking in realistic forms. The manifesto claims that its color theories are:

> applicazione nuova perché fino ad oggi i colori non avevano mai avuto dominio proprio ma erano sempre stati asserviti al fine fotografico e naturale del soggetto (anche la pittura dei suoni e rumori parte da un principio realistico) […] le sole sensazioni già vissute di colore erano errate ed incomplete [...]
>
> nego che il rosso sia amore—perché l'amore è costituito da diversi colori secondo il suo stato sensuale-degenerativo e di svolgimento, quasi sempre in sintesi diversa, mentre rosso è creativo-leale –aperto; nego che il pensiero sia blu, perché il pensiero è continuamente velocità ed azione—mentre il blu è statico-contemplativo e tradizionale.[69]

The first half of the manifesto is really focused on painting, but the second half, titled "Scenographia interpretativa" is given over to the question of set design. Here Fillia gives pride

[68] Carpi, *L'estrema avanguardia del Novecento*. 108.
[69] Fillia and T.A. Bracci "Alfabeto spirituale" in Crispolti, *Fillia*. 69-71.

of place to the author, saying that the painter can never completely understand the scenographic concept of the writer. He says:

> bisogna che ogni artista raggiunga la totalità di un lavoro: è stupid parlare di impossibilità techniche […]qualsiasi disegnatore intelligente avrà campo di svolgerlo, sotto la direzione critica dell'ideatore
>
> allo stesso modo un pittore dovrà allargare la sua opera per raggiungere una completazione estetica: questo cambiamento darà il giusto valore ad ogni rappresentazione, cioè il lavoro letterario sarà coerente anche nelle altre parti ambientali, come il lavoro pittorico, accrescerà la sua stessa atmosfera espressiva
>
> noi abbiamo appunto cercato di ottenere infinite reazioni psicologiche, che formino armonie sconosciute, più estese di quelle fino ad oggi costruite[70]

The last few paragraphs of the manifesto are a series of examples of stage designs that Fillia believes succeed in this task, and Fillia is very clearly describing multiple scenes from *Sensualità* to illustrate his points. That he uses scenes from *Sensualità* to illustrate his point about *ambienti spirituali* means that Fillia not only considered his theatrical work a good example of his argument, but that even though the manifesto was not published until 1925, two years earlier, while writing *Sensualità*, Fillia was already developing this theoretical framework and working within it while ideating the *Sensualità's* symbolically charged sets.

Even though in "La pittura spirituale" the focus of the manifesto is almost entirely on painting, it is important to note that Fillia reemphasizes that colors are the first interpretive factor of any work. He also reiterates his stance on the psychological use of color, emphasizing the centrality of the impressions and feelings that each one provokes in the viewer. The manifesto contains a list of five works, some realized, some not, the last of which is a series of six "spiritual portraits"— *Uomo*, *Guerra*, *Amare*, *Creazione*, *Conquista* and *Luce*. In a parenthetical note at the end of this manifesto Fillia claims that these spiritual portraits were a concept that he had laid out for Marinetti, and for which he had received approval from the futurist leader in 1923, which,

[70] Ibid. 70.

of course, was also when he first wrote *Sensualità*.[71] Indeed, the set descriptions in *Sensualità*, and above all the description of the three entities—Spirit, Matter and Action—from the first act in *Sensualità*, though less complex than in the manifesto, are very similar to these "spiritual portraits."

The sets and costumes described for *Sensualità* are representative of futurist theatrical aesthetics from this period. In each act, Fillia gives detailed descriptions for both, including materials and colors. Not only does he adhere to the vividly colored anti-naturalist conventions typical of some prominent futurist artists, the specificity of his instructions indicates that the importance of these elements went far beyond the aesthetic surface for Fillia. The stage directions also emphasize the importance of the total and totally controlled experience: lighting effects, air movement from electric fans, the temperature in the room and background noises are all given exact indication as well, in order to completely control the viewer's experience.

The greatest emphasis in the set design for *Sensualità* lies with the importance it places on the use of specific colors and simple, geometric shapes. Almost every set piece and character's costume is carefully detailed, as are the colors for the lighting. The most prevalent colors in the play are red, black, white and azure blue. Grey, yellow, green and purple are also used, though minimally. Though it would be a temporal non sequitur to use Fillia's "spiritual alphabet" to fully analyze the symbolic use of color in the play, it is clear that the color use was systematic and completely intentional. Nonetheless, Fillia was, to some degree, already thinking about color use within this framework when *Sensualità* was first written; therefore the later articulated color theory may be used as a general guide to Fillia's present symbolic system.

[71] Fillia and T. A. Bracci, "La pittura spirituale". in Ibid. 71-72. Variations on these works are also presented as poems in *Lussuria radioelettrica* (1926). For a discussion of these poems, see chapter 2 of this work.

The emphatic use of red and black carries over from *Dinamite* into this work, though with shifting significance, and the theme of violent, chaotic revolution is also recurrent. The play's narrative centers around the planning and successful implementation of a revolt against the government, which the male protagonist, called simply *Lui*, plans and leads, having seized control and leadership from the older, established leaders of the secret committee. We are informed of this by the character named simple *Donna*, a revolutionary and one of *Lui's* co-conspirators, in act four. During this conversation Fillia even echoes lines from his own poems from *Dinamite* in the play's dialogue. Echoing *Visione simbolica*, *Lui* explains to the *Donna* that the moment to seize upon, in order to most successfully incite a revolution, would come when "il popolo esasperato dai tormenti, è ubriaco di sè stesso," and the lines in *Visione simbolica* similarly declare that:

> L'umanità stanca di catene ed ebbra di vita,
> accende la fiaccola della redenzione.

Both evoke the beaten down and exploited proletariat on the edge of an explosive uprising. The use of red in *Sensualità* primarily symbolizes communism. Without the preponderance of red, the political position of the revolutionaries, based on their speeches alone, would be much more vague. Their dialogue tends toward the generic; secret councils planning a revolt could belong to any subversive political group. However, the word "council" clearly echoes Gramsci's *Consigli di fabbrica* and the revolutionaries wearing red could not have indicated anything other than that they were communists to the play's audience in the early to mid 1920s. *Sensualità* is also non-specific regarding its political agenda in the same way that the "Manifesto dei Futuristi Torinesi" is, i.e. both works clearly promote leftist, pro-worker politics, without using explicitly pro-communist language to do so. Entwined within the revolutionary politics of *Sensualità* is also an early exploration of issues related to Fillia's futurist *Uomo senza sesso*, the end of sentimentality

and the transcendence of sexual difference that he will delve into in his later prose works, an ideological construct, as I will explore, that is both aggressively progressive and at the same time highly problematic notion.

Red is the most prevalent color in the play, used for several of the largest set pieces in the most ideologically charged scenes, including the large, three-dimensional letters spelling VITA in act six, and for many of the costumes. Until the end of the play, when the thematic focus shifts from political revolution to sentimental and sensual love, *Lui* is always wearing some amount of red. This takes the form of a red circle in the center of his chest, which gets larger throughout the play, until it switches to white in act six, a major turning point and reversal in the play. It marks the shift in thematic focus from revolution to sentimental and sensual love, following the newsreel gramophone announcements about the revolution's success in act five. With each act, the amount of red in the costumes increases, indicating the growing strength of the characters' revolutionary convictions. From act four onward, the revolutionaries—*Donna* and several extras—are entirely dressed in red. The transition began in act three when a group of the revolutionaries had red circles exposed on their chests by a beam of red light. The circles mimic the one *Lui* already carried in act two on his otherwise totally white costume. In act four *Lui* added a red hood, and in act seven (when and why, as I will show, *Lui*'s costume changes), the revolutionary *Donna* is also wearing all red. The only time no costume information is given is for the *Donna*, in act four, but this appears to be a simple oversight or intentional omission in the 1925 version.

Blue is the other most significant color used throughout the play. Blue and red are often placed in opposition to one another, and sometimes literally, physically push back and forth against each other in the form of moving set pieces. The color choice is specific; *azzurro* is not

just any blue; the color carries particular and important connotations. First, azzurro traditionally connotes spirituality. It was a color that was privileged by Balla in his abstract painting, especially in his spiritualist period of 1918-1920, and later (along the same lines) by Benedetta and by Fillia himself. In Catholic culture, azzurro had been associated since the Renaissance with the cult of and iconic representation of the Virgin Mary.[72] In specifically political terms, however, the choice of azure blue at the time would have almost surely evoked the House of Savoy when the play was presented, in the city that birthed the Italian monarchy. The fascist government was by then, with the collusion of the monarchy, consolidating its power. (One of the principal reasons behind the schism between Marinetti and Mussolini in 1920 had been precisely the refusal by the futurism to accept the monarchy).

By the time the play was published, Giacomo Matteotti had been assassinated and the massive political fallout from that event helped to lead to Mussolini's proudly taking responsibility for the assassination and thus to the authoritarian turn of 1925, the year usually seen as the beginning of the dictatorial phase. Because this was a period of such turmoil, publishing a work without somewhat obscuring political leanings that by then ran directly counter to those of the government, as it was becoming ever more totalitarian and right-wing, would have been a risky venture. Though the pre-publication censorship that had been instituted during WWI was abolished in the interwar years, censors did exist in the prefectures and had returned to monitoring the moral and political respectability of published works. Moreover, as soon as Mussolini attained a position of power in 1922, he began to exert further pressure on publications, including enacting a law in July 1924 (the king had signed the measure a year earlier) that allowed local prefects to suppress newspapers after two warnings. While the *Testo*

[72] Fillia very specifically does not use blue for the Virgin's robes in any his religious paintings, a choice I explore in chapter 4.

Unico di Pubblica Sicurezza of November 1926 had not yet been enacted by the time *Sensualità* was published, the turmoil surrounding the Matteotti affair and the November 1925 assassination attempt against Mussolini had given the regime ample excuse to actively menace anyone publishing works that they considered anti-regime propaganda.[73]

The symbolism assigned to red is apparently muddled in act three when the red prism threatens to crush the motionless men, whose red hearts have just been exposed, and by the fact that *Lei* (who, it will be shown in act seven, represents atavism and reactionism) wears a red circle on her chest in act four; however, this may also comment on the deceptiveness and malleability of symbols. The revolutionaries are saved by a cone of blue light, which prevents the prism from crushing them. This seeming contradictory use of color symbolism is where turning to Fillia's color alphabet and the context of concurrent political events may shed some light on the issue. It is also possible that the colors of the set design changed from the first, performed version to the final, published version. Following the guidelines in the manifesto, the opposition here could be between red standing for thought or force-dominance and blue denoting dreams, hopes and contemplation resisting the crushing weight of red.

Blue was designated in Fillia's spiritual alphabet as representative of hope, sentiments, feelings and dreams, and it clearly also serves this metaphorical function in the play. Two figures are costumed in blue, and without a doubt both represent sentimentality, old-fashioned sensuality and tradition. The first is *Lei*, who is *Lui's* spurned lover, in act four, when she hovers in the scene as *Lui* and the *Donna* converse. The other is one of the six ballerinas that perform in act six. The costuming indications are for each to wear a different color and that the first wears red and sixth blue. Both blue-clad female figures are targets of *Lui*'s sexual and emotional desire, which he is unable to withstand. In act six he is entranced by the blue dancer, and attempts to

[73] Guido Bonsaver, *Censorship and Literature in Fascist Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007). 17-20,

seize her. In act seven *Lui* cannot resist *Lei'*s summons to meet in secret, ultimately leading to his downfall. Connotations of sentimentality and tradition do not exclude blue from concurrently symbolizing the Savoy kings and their decline. In fact, these two possibilities function together well. Attachment to the idea of a monarchy, and to the class and privilege structures in place is reactionary and old fashioned for Fillia. Attachment to a royal figurehead is a sentimental act. It represents for Fillia just as much a restrictive submission to tradition as sentimental love. And as the ballerinas collapse in act six, in turn, the one who represents sentimentality and dreams is the last left standing. Even the red ballerina falls first. Entwined with the revolutionary themes of the play are therefore musings on the themes of love, sensuality and sentimentality, which for Fillia have critical political implications. These themes are also briefly referenced in, but not central to the poems in *Dinamite*. By setting up a relationship between the emotional and psychic strength of the individual and the state, Fillia is also implying that futurism and communism were the only means of survival.

The other important symbolic color structure in the play is the use of black and white. In *Sensualità*, black, white and grey are used as foundational colors, literally for platforms, on top of which a riot of bold color is added and metaphorically for the base onto which symbolic meaning is built. Unlike *Dinamite*, where black is associated with night, with violence and with anarchic destruction, here black is "il non creato su cui si svolge la pittura and white is mysticism, religion and ignorance. White is also used to represent the fundamental nature of matter represented by the cube in the first act. Then in the final act, as the plot climaxes, the only colors utilized are black and white. No one wears black clothing at all, until *Lui* does in the very last scene.

Indicative of its importance, the description of act seven's stark, black and white sets is cited by Fillia in "Alfabeto spirituale" as well, serving as an example of a successfully executed *ambiente spirituale in sviluppo*. In the spiritual alphabet, black has a "valore primitivo"; it is the uncreated space onto which a painting develops, or in this case an environment on the stage. White has a "valore nullo" a negative representing virginity and concepts that include mysticism, religion, ignorance and cowardice. In the last act black and white represent material existence and the void. By giving in to *Lei*, (now wearing white with a black circle on her chest while *Lui* is now wearing black, with a white circle), *Lui* has nearly abandoned his revolutionary life; his destruction is imminent, meanwhile *Lei* is now clearly made of pure negativity and pure matter. She is flesh only: ignorant cowardly and soulless, and totally unlike the red-clad *Donna* and *Uomini* who briefly enter the scene, a shock of color against the stark scene standing in contrast to the riot of color that preceded it. It is a reminder of the revolution's accomplishments. The meaning assigned to red in Fillia's color alphabet, like that of blue, even without its political inflections stood for force, dominance, creation and intelligence.

Whether the play was altered for publication or not—though I consider it likely that it was—the ending implies that Fillia had already begun to doubt the possibility of a truly successful communist revolution.[74] It is clear that the death of the charismatic leader of the revolt signals Fillia's doubt that even a charismatic and revolutionary communist leader could both overcome the oppression of both sentimental love *and* the political order. With the increasing violence and severity of repression being meted out by Mussolini's regime, it must have seemed far safer to embrace the protection offered by membership in the core group of futurists, under Marinetti's leadership, whether Fillia and his group were ready to embrace fascist politics or not.

[74] Supported by Salaris and Ottieri. For example, in act two we have another "named" character, the *Amico*, but he never reappears to any purpose in the play. The only three speaking actors are *Lui*, *Lei* and *Donna*.

The death of the protagonist symbolically represents the death of both the communist ideal, which recurs later in Fillia's works. Communism is slain by its sentimental, atavistic elements, and the failure of the charismatic leader to overcome the doubters.

Also intwined with the revolutionary themes of the play, as I have discussed, are Fillia's early musings on the themes of love and sentimentality. These themes were also briefly referenced in, but not central to, the poems in *Dinamite*. Even though, as I will show, Fillia's position on the woman question was still embryonic, he is already tying together the idea that political revolt, rebirth and rejuvenation are linked to the rejection of sentimental love, and that women were active and equal players in the discourse. Though the elimination of these emotions was a futurist theme from the beginning, Fillia's take on the issue is unique. What is already clear is that the polarities exist in the female psyche, and the male is caught, out of weakness, in a state of indecision between the two. It is also clear that Fillia is only beginning to work out the shape that his radical theories will take on in his novels, most explicitly in *La morte della donna*.

At this stage of development, Fillia's positions on sentimental and sensual, heterosexual love, gender dynamics and gender roles are not yet wildly divergent from Marinetti's. Futurism is largely viewed by critics to be misogynistic, despite the number of female members among its ranks, its support of universal suffrage, divorce and the dismantling of restrictive bourgeois morality. In reality, Marinetti and many of his followers were early supporters of the idea that gender is a social construct and that the more extreme its expression and integration into one's psyche, the greater the damage to the individual and to society. Nevertheless, their position did remain androcentric, in that they universally condemned "femininity" in both men and women.[75] The movement's violently misogynistic rhetoric, however, softened considerably after World

[75] Lucia Re, "Futurism and the Feminine: New Perspectives," *EuL European Legacy: Toward New Paradigms* 14, no. 7 (2009): 877–880.

War I, as more women joined the movement, and Marinetti married Benedetta Cappa; they had three daughters on whom he doted. Thus Fillia's continued adherence to the anti-sentimental, anti-love platform does not really follow in line with the futurist leader's position, appearing rather as an implicit critique of Marinetti's new "sentimentality," along the lines of Gramsci's own critique.

In act two, when *Lui* is introduced, the first information he provides, in a short monologue that constitutes the entirety of the act, is not about his revolutionary aspirations at all, but that he is still struggling with his decision to abandon his lover (*Lei*), and still attempting to justify it even to himself. *Lei* and the *Amico* (a named character who never reappears, like a kind of absent specter or ghost) are positioned, motionless and menacing, behind him. *Lei* is a kind of archetypal material female—she wears white, which "aumenta plasticamente le parti anatomiche femminili, esagerandole," and the *Amico* wears grey, both melding with the set, nearly turning them into symbolic props on the stage. The monologue is a clear first attempt, by Fillia, to explore futurist conventions on the dangers of femininity, sentimentality and sensual love, and to tie them to physical and mental weakness, or more specifically his belief that their renunciation will lead to renewed creative drive, physical power, bravery and daring. *Lui* says "ed oggi, che potrei raccogliere il frutto del piacere, l'anima mi à spalancate le porte del domani e mi à data la sensazione della lotta…" Nonetheless, it is a painful renunciation, and he regrets its necessity; it is a "rinuncia fisica dolorosa, ma necessaria per salvare lo spirito." If he did not succeed, he would not have the strength of body, mind, and conviction to lead the revolt. Here, Fillia is taking an ideological position that runs starkly counter to the standard Marinettian dogma. Marinetti's *Come si seducono le donne* and Valentine de Saint-Point's "Manifesto futurista della

Lussuria" both celebrate lust, physical pleasure and sexual conquest as vital, energizing and innervating.[76]

The next time *Lui* is on stage, in act four, he is accompanied by the *Donna*, with whom he is conversing at center stage. Representing the weight of *Lui*'s responsibilities and his inner turmoil, three of the revolutionaries and *Lei* are positioned motionless on the stage, hovering. *Lui* and the *Donna* are discussing the planned revolt and *Lui*'s impetuous seizure of control in the council. They also discuss the difficulty and pain of renouncing sentimentality and atavism. *Lui* says:

> —ma le crisi allontanate brutalmente ritornano. Siamo malati nell'anima. La nostra sensibilità si dibatte tra il passato e il futuro, perchè il presente non può accoglierla essendo chiuso in questa lotta di trapasso. L'uomo più solido à qualche istante di vertigine e si risente bambino. Un primitivismo decadente, non nuovo. Prepariamo il domani con rinuncie, contraddizionie, false volontà: è questa lotta in me stesso ch'esaurisce e mi fa male. Non sempre l'attività riesce a soffocarla…

They continue for several more exchanges, each momentarily losing their determination. Unexpectedly (in a futurist context), it is the *Donna* who is able to overcome the momentary temptations and force *Lui* to reaffirm his commitment.

In the play's somewhat unforeseeable and tragic final turn, when the focus shifts almost entirely to romantic and sensual love, the political themes become secondary. The *Donna* and three male revolutionaries briefly enter the scene, which otherwise only concerns the final confrontation between *Lui* and *Lei*. The *Donna* and one of the men speak, demanding that *Lui* hurry and liberate himself from *Lei*, because he is needed to lead the next phase of the revolt. They exit, but *Lui* continues to argue with *Lei*. His final heroic refusal of the sexual pleasure *Lei*

[76] F. T Marinetti, *Come si seducono le donne* (Firenze: Vallecchi, 2003).; Valentine de Saint-Point. "Manifesto della Donna futurista"Manifesto futurista della Lussuria." in Valentine de Saint-Point, *Manifesto della donna futurista ; seguito da, Manifesto futurista della lussuria ; Amore e lussuria ; Il teatro della donna ; Il mio esordio coreografico ; La metacorìa* (Genova: Il melangolo, 2006).

offers sends her into state of distraught disbelief, culminating in his death at her hand, when she draws a pistol from her breast and shoots him through the heart.

Here, as in his later novels, Fillia has presented a woman, the *Donna*, who already runs counter to nearly all of the conventionally held beliefs about women and femininity, and in the *Donna*, the beginnings of characters like Nina Sereni (protagonist of *L'uomo senza sesso*) are detectable. The *Donna* even says:

> —anch'io ò subito il fàscino della tua lotta, il tuo istinto artistico di dominatore. La tradizione mi à creata un'anima maschile. Ciò che gli uomini limitano alla necessità del sesso, io l'ò superato di un balzo. Voglio lavorare al tuo fianco per iniziare l'impalcatura rossa del domani dove saranno annullate o mantenute nel loro semplice valore tutte le leggi morali e sociali della nostra vita passata[77]

Lui responds:

> —tu hai una forza morale più potente della mia. Il tuo vecchio mondo di donna era più difficile da distruggere che il mio, ma il tuo successo ti ha definitivamente temprata[78]

She is politically engaged, and an integral part of the discussion on the destiny of humanity, framed in *Sensualità* as the inevitable overthrow of the old system. Fillia has already allowed women into the public, political sphere, which even early futurism did not.[79]

Lei, unlike *Donna*, conforms to and is representative of many of the common attitudes held about conventional women and traditional female types, even by futurists. By the time Fillia publishes his second and third novels in 1927, this kind of figure will have disappeared, and even the sentimental, feminine women are not dangerous and lustful in the way that *Lei* is. *Lei* is debilitating for *Lui*, and ultimately fatal, like Lombroso's *donna delinquente*.[80] She lacks the intelligence and political sensibility that would allow her to see the vital necessity of his choice.

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[77] Fillia, *Sensualità--Teatro d'eccezione* (Torino: Edizione Sindacati artistici, 1925). 10.
[78] Ibid. 10.
[79] Silvia Contarini, *La femme futuriste: mythes, modèles, et représentations de la femme dans la théorie et la littrature futuristes (1909-1919)* (Paris: Presses universitaires de Paris 10, 2006). 66-69.
[80] Ibid. 66-69.

That *Lei's* costume is specified as enhancing her female anatomy and the *Donna's* is not, only serves to reinforce the dichotomy between the two female figures. Using *Lui*, *Lei* and the *Donna*, Fillia has begun to construct character types that would be critical to his later works. The revolutionary red-clothed *Donna* is politically engaged, and an integral part of the discussion on the destiny of humanity, framed in *Sensualità* as the inevitable overthrow of the capitalist and monarchical status quo. In contrast, *Lei*, who is representative of retrograde femininity, sentimentality and atavistic eros is a debilitating force acting on *Lui*, and ultimately fatal to him. As an anti-modern woman, she utterly lacks the intelligence and political sensibility that would allow her to see the vital necessity of his choice.

The salient details here are two: first that Fillia specifically notes how the costumes that *Lei* wears highlight her female body, while he very specifically does not do so in the case of *Donna*; second, *Lui's* costume responds to *Lei's* and, I argue, is dictated by the struggle between the two polarities the female characters represent. Costumes for Fillia are symbolic representations on stage of sexual *mores* and gender roles, "costumi" in a more metaphorical sense. Fillia is also exploiting a theory similar to one voiced by the feminist socialist Anna Kuliscioff wherein a metaphorical costume becomes the performance of gender and character, especially as assumed by a man. Kuliscioff, while arguing for the crucial importance of treating women's liberation as separate from and just as important as the Marxist revolution, says:

> E ciò sarebbe anche nell'interesse dell'uomo e della specie umana, perché, se la donna è quale l'ha tenuta l'uomo fin ad ora, l'uomo, viceversa, è la creazione della donna – è lei che forma la sua intelligenza; ond'è che giustamente fu detto che, se gli uomini fanno le leggi, sono invece le donne che fanno i costumi e sapete pure che, quando è conflitto fra le leggi ed i costumi, il costume, in definitiva, è sempre il vincitore.[81]

[81] Anna Kuliscioff, *Il monopolio dell'uomo: conferenza tenuta il 27 Aprile 1890 nelle sale del circolo filologico milanese* (Milano: Libreria Editrice Galli, 1890).

Much like a child, *Lui* is stuck between two women who want to literally and metaphorically dictate his costume. They stand in place of the mother, one offering an Oedipal return to the feminine, the other denying that possibility.

The question of costuming opens the door onto issues of major importance to Fillia's oeuvre. In *Sensualità* Fillia has begun to articulate a complex ideological system in which he will reinsert a spiritual order that owes a significant debt to Cartesian dualism. In this ideological system, yet to be fully articulated, Fillia asserts a dualistic conception of the mind-body complex, which renders the two distinct in their needs, and semi-independent from one another, once the mind is brought into complete (futurist) harmony, free of the influence exerted by the sexual needs of the body and the emotional irrationality that comes along with both the material body and socially dictated gender performance. Yet Fillia will continue to reject traditional Christian patriarchal structures, as well as the Lombrosian School's interpretation of Darwinism, which used Darwin's theories to articulate a theory of social evolution and to prop up traditional patriarchal and capitalist power structures, even when he returns to embracing Catholic imagery in his religious paintings. While not fully articulated here, the evidence is present. The particularity of the costuming in this work, which will be echoed in "Il sesso di metallo" and "Il mondo di domani" in *La morte della donna*, carries a tremendous amount of metaphoric and symbolic weight. The futurist rejection of positivism is no great revelation, but Fillia's avenue of attack *is*.

What remains still undeveloped in this work is the explicitness on the subject of women's equality and even superiority to men found in several of Fillia's later works, and the idea of the woman is the originator of the anti-sentimental revolution. The *Donna* has not yet assumed the nearly messianic role that her counterpart Laba will in "Il sesso di metallo" a later theatrical

work which is broadly similar to *Sensualità* and is part of Fillia's 1925 novel *La morte della donna*. The *Donna* and *Lei* are not yet the starkly dichotomous pair that Laba and Lebe (*Lei's* counterpart) will be, but they are tending in that direction.

It is also evident that Fillia's "feminism," nascent in this work, derives more significantly from a male Marxist or Gramscian perspective than it does directly from the most outspoken feminist activists at the time such as Camilla Ravera or Anna Kuliscioff. Both of these women, and many others, were prominent figures in Gramsci's Turin and in Milan, and published extensively in newspapers and magazines. Ravera who was, with Gramsci, a co-founder of the Communist Party, edited the column "Tribuna femminile" for Gramsci's journal *L'ordine nuovo*, and then the journal *La compagna* (1922-1926). *L'ordine nuovo* published interventions by Marxist feminists such as Clara Zetkin, Alexandra Kollontaj, and Rosa Luxemburg who pointedly highlighted the double standards and patriarchal bias even among the leaders of the workers' movement. However, there remained a distinct ideological disconnect between many feminists, including socialist feminists, and the socialist or communist leadership on the issue of women's rights. The (male) leadership on the left generally held that there was no need to make a specific issue of women's rights, as clearly, women's rights would naturally come along with the overthrow of the capitalist hegemonic structure and the rise of the proletariat. In the same speech cited above, Kuliscioff lays out her reasons for making women's liberation a central priority, namely that without the liberation of women, who bear the responsibility of bearing and raising children and forming the characters of men, that the revolution was impossible.[82]

Fillia clearly falls much more into the camp of the Marxist orthodoxy on this issue. While, like Gramsci did, Fillia does grant women a political space, and an important one, the fact that women's rights are a non-issue in *Sensualità* implies that he did not see it as anything more

[82] Ibid.

than the obvious consequence of the coming order. As Gramsci wrote in "Marinetti rivoluzionario?" (cited above, pages 3-4), to destroy the current civilization meant, on the cultural front, destroying spiritual hierarchies, prejudices, idols and rigid traditions. Obviously (to the male leadership), patriarchal gender norms fell under this rubric and would, perforce collapse along with the rest.[83] Furthermore, this more easily concords with the futurist stance on women—that virile, unsentimental, masculine women were acceptable, but the feminine and effeminate were weak and destructive. A woman, like *Donna*, in the public sphere and in a position of power would certainly be a masculine (the futurists would say "virile") woman. This is further problematic in the context of Italian feminism because, as noted above, futurism remains essentially androcentric. Instead Italian feminism has tended to consider women fundamentally different, but equal to men, not, as is more common to feminist thought in some other countries, that women and men were equal because they were inherently and essentially the same.[84] This is not to imply that a feminist position that supports the fundamental sameness of the sexes is also androcentric. In the feminist assertion of gender equality, there is no valuation of "masculine" and "feminine," but rather a belief that a person, male or female and otherwise a blank slate, performs gender in a socially constructed way, but that this performance is not tied essentially to biology.

The futurists, to a great extent, also understood this concept, though of course their conclusions were different. Many futurists from Marinetti and Valentine de Saint-Point, to Enif Robert and Fillia, amongst a lengthy list, voiced the conviction that conventional gender expression was a socially constructed entity. Within the range of positions taken by members of

[83] On Gramsci, women and feminism, see Jane Slaughter (2011) "Gramsci's place in women's history", *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 16:2, 256-272.
[84] Paola Donadi and Loredano Matteo Lorenzetti, *Generi: differenze nelle identità* (Milano: F. Angeli, 2000). 59-62.; Graziella Parati and Rebecca J West, *Italian Feminist Theory and Practice: Equality and Sexual Difference* (Madison; Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002).

the futurist movement, Fillia's may perhaps be most aptly compared to that of Enif Robert, who felt as though her body had been physically masculinized and mechanized by the removal of her cancerous uterus. Following her surgery, her "liberation" from the chains of reproduction, she was stronger, more virile, and thus more futurist.[85] Fillia, like Robert, actively masculinizes his women, in manner and character, if not in body, at this stage.

Fillia's position is, however, in some conflict with that of Valentine de Saint-Point on this topic. While Saint-Point does agree with a great deal of Marinetti's rhetoric on the subject, certain positions expressed in her manifestos place her closer to later Italian feminism. Certain aspects of the "Manifesto della Donna futurista" point towards a belief in an inherent difference between men and women, such as her belief that women need not be granted the vote because the parliamentary system is only a patriarchal sham.[86] While she and Fillia agree on the theater's ability to reflect life and that it should say something profound, Saint-Point envisioned a *teatro della donna* that would be defined by its difference from male theater, again indicating a belief in inherent difference.[87]

The connection between the embryonic versions of so many of Fillia's later theories is more convincing than it might otherwise be, in light of some significant links between *Sensualità* and *La morte della donna*. In the first place, Fillia had been working on parts of *La morte della donna* since at least 1921, based on the date appended to *Maternità*, one of the nine short stories told by the *Scrittore*, meaning that he was working on the two projects concurrently. Furthermore, *La morte della donna* was published only months after *Sensualità*, in the fall of 1925. Even though *Sensualità* was first written and partially performed in 1923, given that there

[85] F. T Marinetti and Robert, *Un ventre di donna, romanzo chirurgico* (Milano: Facchi, 1919).
[86] Saint-Point, *Manifesto della donna futurista ; seguito da, Manifesto futurista della lussuria ; Amore e lussuria ; Il teatro della donna ; Il mio esordio coreografico ; La metacorìa*.. 7-15. This has been superficially read as Saint-Point being against women in politics, or against women's rights, but that is reductivist.
[87] Valentine de Saint-Point, "Il teatro della donna." in *Manifesto della donna futurista* 31-45.

is no known record of the first version, it is possible that the texts were both manipulated to create greater uniformity between Fillia's works. Most indicative of all, though, is the fact that parts of the text of act two of *Sensualità* and the text of *Tormento a Pino Curtoni*, another of the short stories in *La morte della donna*, are nearly identical. Most of the text from the shorter version, given in *Lui*'s monologue in act two of *Sensualità* is repeated with only slight alterations in *Tormento a Pino Curtoni*, meaning even if they were not written nearly concurrently, then at the least the author intentionally created an ideological connection between the works. This overt systemization remains a habit of Fillia's throughout his life and oeuvre.

The early development of Fillia's particular machine aesthetic is also apparent in many aspects of the play. On the literary front these will come to fruition in *La morte della donna*, and visually in the religious paintings of the late twenties and early thirties. The descriptions of the geometric, color blocked sets and some elements of the costuming indicate a mechanistic and strongly visual turn in his work. Importantly, this is also the beginning of Fillia's ruminations on the machine, and his *presa di posizione*. Since its founding, futurism had been an individualistic, fundamentally heterogeneous movement, and this only became more true in the interwar period.[88] Not only had the political positions of the movement fractured, for a time, the aesthetic—always highly individual in any case—fractured further, and finally, and importantly, the futurist attitude toward the machine became heterogeneous, more complicated and its nature understood as much more sinister than previously perceived.[89]

The gendering implied in the first act is also caught between reinforcing traditional formulations and the development of Fillia's particular theories. This gendering is performed via

[88] See Crispolti. *Futurism and Futurisms*; Contarini, *La femme futuriste*.
[89] On heterogeneity see Berghaus, *Italian Futurist Theatre, 1909-1944*. 406. On the menace of the machine-man hybrid see: Kai Mikkonen, *The Plot Machine: The French Novel and the Bachelor Machines in the Electric Years (1880-1914)* (Amsterdam; New York, NY: Rodopi, 2001).

the voice of each speaking object in act one. The spiral, cube and *macchina* are each assigned a specific tone and gender—or lack of a gender. The spiral (Spirit) is sharp and masculine; the cube (Matter) is intensely sweet and feminine; but the *macchina* (Action), is steady, mechanical, and toneless. In comparison to the other two, the implication is that the *macchina* is genderless. That the spirit is masculine and that matter is feminine is an example of the traditional view that men are thinkers and women mere animals due to their role in reproduction persisting on a subconscious level. Fillia begins to break down this idea in *Sensualità*, further deconstructing and rejecting it in his novels. The fact that the car, representing action, is genderless is of great interest within the context of Fillia's works, because it points toward the ideological position he will take on gender in his later works. This also runs subtly counter to Marinetti's car as a female lover, and points towards Fillia's ideal, genderless, technology-steeped future.

Fillia has already begun to reject the Lombrosian formulation of women as inferior and inherently criminal, and goes so far as to actively counter certain aspects of Lombroso's and his school's theories, which were the dominant matrix for Italian definitions of gender difference until at least the 1930s and were largely subsumed into the fascist ideology of sexual difference (even as fascist ideologues like Giovanni Gentile idealized the putatively non-corporeal, spiritual aspects of maternal womanhood).[90] For example, as we have seen, *Lei*, who is soft, feminine, and dressed to accentuate these qualities, like Lombroso's ideal maternal and family-oriented woman.[91] fragment? *Donna* instead, whose body is never commented on, and in fact, whose specific costuming in the ideologically charged act of the play is omitted, is the proletarian,

[90] Elisabetta Mondello, *Roma futurista: i periodici e i luoghi dell'avanguardia nella Roma degli anni Venti* (Milano: Angeli, 1990).; Piero Meldini, *Sposa e madre esemplare: ideologia e politica della donna e della famiglia durante il fascismo* (Rinini; Firenze: Guaraldi, 1975).; Lucia Re, "Fascist Theories of Woman." In Robin Pickering-Iazzi, *Mothers of Invention: Women, Italian Fascism, and Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).
[91] Mary Gibson, "Labelling Women Deviant: Heterosexual Women, Prostitutes and Lesbians in Early Criminological Discourse." Perry R Willson, Association for the Study of Modern Italy, and Annual conference, "Gender, Family and Sexuality: The Private Sphere in Italy, 1860-1945" (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). 89-104.

"masculinized" woman that both Lombroso and fascism feared. *Donna* is an integral part of the machinery, brain and spirit of the revolution. futurist costuming and set design primarily focused in fact on two concepts: integration of the performer with the set and the mechanization of the performer, to which Fillia added metaphorical and spiritual dimensions.[92]

In the 1920s, futurist machine-worship expanded beyond Marinetti's more materialist *macchinolatria*, to incorporate more nuanced responses to technology, now that it had much more deeply penetrated Italian life, and war technology had had such a tremendous impact. A year after the publication of *Sensualità*, in a review of Fillia's work, Bruno Sanzin, another futurist wrote:

> Fillia oltre che dare alla macchina un valore estetico, le dà un valore etico. Anzi è intorno a questo punto che preponderano le sue ricerche e gli scritti che ne seguono valgono a definire la sua brutale sensibilità meccanica. Egli adora, idolatra la macchina. Vorebbe farla sua amante. Si strugge agognando l'amplesso, il contatto con le carni metalliche avide di piacere. Confessa di ricevere "più emozione toccando il campanello elettrico che una mammella bianchissima, perchè sente la lunghezza maggiore della corrente e del brivido sensibile"… Attività coloratissima, che rivela in lui l'uomo d'azione destinato a salire.[93]

Sanzin's remarks highlight more than one of the important aspects of Fillia's work, already evident in *Sensualità*. First, there is the renunciation of sexual relationships between humans in favor of the stimulus derived from technology; second there is the matter of sexual and physical pleasure derived from the machine. This pleasure, according to Fillia would need to be sublimated into a spiritual experience, or a mental and intellectual one—in a Cartesian fashion. Although the eroticism of the machine is highlighted for example by Marinetti il *L'alcova d'acciaio,* Marinetti effectively anthropormophizes or rather feminizes and militarizes the machine in order to parody the decadent Dannunzian "alcova," but he never renounces or denounces the materiality and corporeality of erotic and sexual relations. Fillia on the other hand

[92] Kirby, *Futurist Performance.* 97.

[93] Bruno Sanzin. "Fillia: Amante della macchina." *Il popolo di Trieste*, 15 gennaio 1926, anno 7, n. 13

rejects the link between corporeality, eroticism and sexual need and the stimulation of the intellect and spirit. He argues instead, here and in later works, that the needs of the body should not interfere with or exert influence over the needs and functioning of the spirit and mind. This ideological position is saved, for now, from crossing over into the ascetic monastic tradition and the writings of Saint Augustine and other Catholic theologians, by Fillia's provisions for the physical and sexual needs of the body, which he still acknowledges and admits into his future-world constructs.[94]

Fillia's play also contains early indications of the spiritual turn that futurism would take in the 1920s, which I argue had a great deal to do with Fillia's influence as well as Benedetta's.[95] From the beginning of the play, the spiritual is clearly given primacy in Fillia's construct. The Spirit is the first "actor" to speak, over and above Matter and Action, the two idols of futurism. In the 1910s futurism (with exceptions such as Balla and several women artists and writers such as Maria Ginanni and Irma Valeria) was, in general, aggressively materialist, marking this new spiritualism as a major turn, perhaps brought about by the horrors of war, and the reality of what the machine age had brought on.[96] The spiral, with a "voce tagliente – maschia – molto chiara" [97] declares:

> —gli uomini sono stati assorbiti dall'espansione meccanica. Necessità costruttiva dello spirito sensuale fecondatore dell'ambiente. Calore delle compensazioni umane, brutali come maschi, che annullano l'«IO» sulla strada cementata del futuro. Tutto è geometrico – lucido – indispensabile: splendore del sesso artificiale che à per bellezza la velocità—[98]

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[94] For a more detailed discussion of this topic and further textual evidence, please see chapter 3 of this work.
[95] Claudia Salaris notes that Benedetta's *Viaggio di Garará* shares tone and aesthetic elements with Fillia's theatrical works. Claudia Salaris. "L'attività letteraria di Fillia." In Crispolti, *Fillia*. 61-68. Spiritual and Theosophic elements emerged early on in the work of Balla (who was Benedetta's teacher) as well as among the writers of *L'Italia futurista* during World War I.
[96] However, interest in the esoteric was not new, and had carried over from futurism's Symbolist origins. See: Simona Cigliana, *Futurismo esoterico: contributi per una storia dell'irrazionalismo italiano tra Otto e Novecento* (Napoli: Liguori, 2002).
[97] Fillia, *Sensualità--Teatro d'eccezione*. 4.
[98] Ibid. 4.

At the same time, the dialogue is overlaid with tonal noises. Matter, the next to speak, reaffirms the importance of the spirit, claiming to bend to the will of the Spirit, which then granted it "forza – movimento – agilità."[99] Spirit animates matter, and matter is subservient to it. The *macchina*, the third speaker, is an outside influence, a fundamental force and fuel for the world, which breathed "l'ossigeno delle macchine per i suoi polmoni insaziabili e canta più forte.[100] Action, then echoing the "Fondazione e Manifesto" is a vital, energizing force; though, the fact that the Spirit is considered at all, and then that it is given dominion is certainly a shift from first wave futurism.[101] This focus on the spirit and on the spiritual aspects of the futurist machine aesthetic would reverberate throughout Fillia's work, culminating in the series of otherworldly, mechanical-religious paintings he would produce in the late twenties and early thirties.

Fillia's two other plays are brief, one act works, one published in *Lussuria radioelettrica*, and one in *La morte della donna*. (The former is not even really a play.) Because the latter work, "Il sesso di metallo" is integral to the structure of the *romanzo di novelle collegate*, it will be discussed in that context, and *Adulterio futurista*, presented on 1 November 1925, at a futurist *serata*, fits neatly into the thematics of *Lussuria radioelettrica*, and thus will be analyzed in the next chapter, in the context of that volume.

4. Related Projects: The Teatro Novatore, Early Paintings and Journalism

Fillia's interest in the theater and his related works extend far beyond script and play writing. Fillia's vision was decidedly global in nature, much in the vein of Marinetti's own

[99] Ibid. 4.
[100] Ibid. 4.
[101] It must be noted, however, that Marinetti did conceive of the *religione della velocità* as a spiritual experience. For further discussion of the spiritual in Futurism, particularly in the works of Maria Ginanni, see Lucia Re, "Maria Ginanni vs F. T. Marinetti: Women, Speed, and War in Futurist Italy," *AdI Annali d'Italianistica* 27 (2009): 103–124.

approach to the totalizing futurist experience. In later years, this would lead to projects like the Santopalato restaurant, collaboration with Marinetti on *La cucina futurista*, and many projects related to design and architecture. In the early in the twenties, Fillia was already experimenting with controlling the environment and the viewer's or patron's total experience in applied form, beyond the page. Not only would the total control of and development of the environment repeatedly appear in his artwork and theatrical interests, but many of his poems and significant portions of his prose works also explore the intoxicating experience of the lights, sound and crowds in these environments. Among these projects were the Teatro Novatore in Turin and a series of paintings on stage themes and real-life portraits of people involved in the theater, as well as numerous reviews of performances and written works. The nightclub, the tabarin and the dancehall, always of interest to futurism, resonated with particular intensity for Fillia.

The Teatro Novatore, realized in 1927, was in the Piazza Castello, in a space that had held a restaurant. Though the theater never assumed more than local importance, it testifies to another attempt on the part of Fillia and his collaborator, the architect Ludovico De Amicis, to turn the ideological substratum of futurist theater into an actual scenic apparatus, in a stable, permanent environment.[102] Fillia and De Amicis's intentions were also to establish a *Teatro Stabile Futurista* at the Novatore, and to this end the space was entirely remodeled by Fillia and De Amicis in a futurist style. It occupied a huge space—three rooms on the ground floor, five on the first, and the restaurant and café were located in the basement. The ground floor rooms were a central dance hall, an orchestral chamber, and a lounge; the first floor rooms where reserved for displaying futurist art. In an article published in October 1927, published in *L'Impero*, announcing the upcoming opening of the Novatore, Fillia explained that the goal of the space

[102] Berghaus, *Italian Futurist Theatre, 1909-1944*. 437-439.; Enrico Crispolti, *Ricostruzione futurista dell'universo* (Torino: Assessorato per la Cultura, Musei Civici, 1980). 288-290.; Mezzetta, *Il teatro futurista in teoria*. 99-100.

was to configure the "architettura del ballo" in a fantastical, unreal atmosphere. The interior was decorated in 'grand futurist style,' with murals painted onto the walls, hanging decorations and light effects. Colored glass was used, and even the ceiling was decorated. Fillia, in his article announcing the Novatore, also notes that the space was intended to be reminiscent of the Casa d'Arte Bragaglia in Rome.[103]

The Novatore also bore resemblances to Balla's Bal Tic Tac, and Depero's Cabaret Diavolo, both also in Rome.[104] Based on photographic evidence, the aesthetic of Fillia's theater shared a great deal with these other futurist cabaret and theater establishments. Fillia's efforts at the Teatro Novatore were part of a larger trend within futurism at the time to open dedicated public spaces for experimenting with theatrical arts and for attracting the public. It is clear from the detailed description of the Novatore and the extensive stage directions and notations about set design in *Sensualità* that Fillia was thinking visually as well as ideologically and thematically about his work for the stage, and this translated into the beginning of Fillia's work as a visual artist, which is the only pursuit that he would carry forward throughout the rest of his life.

Some time around 1924 or 1925 Fillia took up painting and drawing (discussed at greater length in chapter 4 of this dissertation), but several of his works, especially those executed early on, were directly related to the theater, and thus more appropriately discussed here. Like the set designs in *Sensualità*, Fillia's theatrical paintings are geometric and brilliantly colored, and both the paintings and drawings owe much to the work of Giacomo Balla, and to Gino Severini both of whose bright colors and fractured, geometric and intersecting planes are notably recalled in Fillia's early works. Reminiscent of the works of Gino Severini, who was immersed in the Paris

[103] Fillia. "Il Novatore è l'ambiente più futurista del mondo" in *L'impero*. No 242, 12 October 1927. Reprinted in Crispolti, *Ricostruzione futurista dell'universo*. 290. Crispolti includes one of the few remaining photos documenting the Teatro Novatore, an image of the central dance hall. It is very grainy and of poor quality, so I have not attempted to reproduce it here.
[104] Berghaus, *Italian Futurist Theatre, 1909-1944*. 384-391.

world of the tabarin, there are several ballerinas. The ballerina was also a motif that would carry through the various painting styles that Fillia experimented with, demonstrating a continued interest in performance throughout his career. Perhaps the best example of Fillia's early artistic experiments is the 1926 *Ballerina – Paesaggio scenografico*. The painting (Figure 7) is nearly a manifesto of Fillia's early (post-communist) futurist program. The central figure is a nightclub dancer, illuminated by a presumably electric spotlight. Her dress is multicolored, and decorated with geometric, differently and brightly colored panels, and with two designs that appear to be a coffee cup and candle on the bodice, and coffee cup and napkin on the skirt. Besides referencing the café and restaurant setting, this may be a sly reference to Marinetti's status as the "caffeina d'Europa."

The setting of the painting is clearly a large, multi-room nightclub, with different, vividly colored rooms. Each room's color palette would necessarily follow its function, in order to heighten the experience and spiritual environment, according to the theories laid down in "Alfabeto spirituale." Moreover, the ballerina, whose mechanical aspect is emphasized by the hard geometric style of the painting, evokes the use of marionettes and puppetry, and the mechanization and integration into the scenery of the performer common in futurist theater. Fillia executed a large number of stylized paintings of performers and of dancers, and also of male and female nudes. All of Fillia's human figures (those that are not portraits) tend toward the mechanical, the faceless and the anonymous, neither more sexual nor libidinous than the other. Indeed, the few figures he paints reading are women. All of this goes toward reinforcing the idea that the male and female individual are functionally the same and that the body is an entity to some degree separate from the mind and the spirit for both women and men. Though not explicitly anti-fascist, this choice of themes and visual motifs, even as Fillia professes to be in

line with the regime, has little in common with the new policies on fertility and the demographic campaign launched by Mussolini in the Discorso dell'Ascensione of May 1927 and the new fleshy image of woman as a being whose mind is essentially rooted in the body and the maternal function, in contrast to the intellectual woman, deemed to be sterile and androgynous.

Fillia did all he could to make his work penetrate public consciousness. Like the reused text between *Sensualità* and *Tormento a Pino Curtoni*, and the 1927 reprint of the first act of *Sensualità*, the painting *Quarta dimensione del cuore* (Figure 8) is a useful case for illustrating Fillia's adeptness in following Marinetti's lead in tireless self-promotion, endlessly recycling works and the careful application of publicity. The painting bears the same title as a never completed short story, though a not too differently titled story, "Quarta dimensione di me stesso" is yet another of the short stories in *La morte della donna*. Fillia also contributed a poem titled *Quarta dimensione di me stesso* to *I nuovi poeti futuristi*. The publication of *Quarta dimensione del cuore* was twice announced, once in *La Fiamma* on 25 April 1926, and once, in 1927, on the frontispiece of *L'ultimo sentimentale*. This painting and several others, including Fillia's 1926 *Autoritratto*, numerous still-life paintings and cityscapes all feature radically simplified, graphic and brightly colored settings reminiscent of the set descriptions in *Sensualità* and the description of the Teatro Novatore. The cumulative volume of works that carry the theme forward again indicate Fillia's intense focus on the possibilities of developing a spiritual environment. Though the character and tone of his works would later shift to the ever more spiritual and mystic, this interest in the total environment would carry through into nearly all of Fillia's later pursuits.

In February 1926, Fillia published two articles in *L'Impero*, reviewing the works of two intellectual women: Vera Lautard (a concert pianist) and Ludmilla Pitoëff (an actress). Notably, he again chooses accomplished female artists as his subjects. As was his habit when reviewing

works, he included his own portrait of each woman. These portraits, like many of his self-portraits and portraits of his mother, friends and collaborators are geometric. They visually resemble his stylized paintings of nudes and performers; nonetheless, they capture something notable of the character of the portrait's subject. Focused only on the head of the subject, these paintings and drawings communicate and emphasize the essence of the person, and on their intellectual traits. The two reviews both focus on the extreme modernity and unparalleled talent of the women. These reviews are two amongst a significant number that Fillia wrote for *L'Impero* reviewing all manner of artistic, theatrical and literary works and figures.

Fillia's extensive list of articles, reviews and short fiction published in *L'Impero*, which was an intentionally reactionary publication directed by Mario Carli and Emilio Settimelli, does indicate at least resignation to the inevitability of a fascistized avant-garde, if not a willing embrace of the regime and its ideology. The journal maintained, overall, a unified politico-ideological position as the "primary Roman journal of the [fascist] revolution" and served as the voice of *futurfascismo*. Nevertheless it is worth noting that in a 1926 centerfold spread which marked and commemorated the founding of the Fascist Third Rome, Fillia was not listed among the role call of *futurfascisti*, which otherwise featured every major other futurist and many minor ones.[105] Furthermore, the journal certainly evidenced tension between serving reactionism and as a voice for the regime on the one hand, and avant-garde contestation and dissent with Mussolini on the other. This lasted until 1929, when Settimelli was expelled from the party and Carli was served a severe warning.[106]

[105] The list was published on 11 March 1926, and commemorated the third anniversary of the founding of *L'Impero*. Fillia was also absent from the list of 100 works of Futurists artists at the *Terza biennale* in 1925, published in *L'impero* on 24 March 1925.
[106] Mondello, *Roma futurista*. 89-91. See also Rainey, 30-1.

In this period, Fillia also began his editorial work as director of *Vetrina Futurista* a magazine of literature, theater, and art. He described the magazine as a "publicazione riassuntiva delle creazioni e del notiziario internazionale di tutti i movimenti futuristi." Ultimately only two issues were published, both in 1927, by the Edizioni Sindacati Artistici. Like *Futurismo*, this was yet another in the series of journals and magazines that Fillia would work on, with varying success. (He would have much greater success at maintaining these ventures in the early thirties, when he focused on architecture, garden and design, publishing numerous issues of *Terra dei vivi* and *La città nuova*.) The first issue of the magazine focused on "creazioni ed azioni del futurismo mondiale" and was a curated selection of works. It contains theatrical works, poetry and manifestos, among them "Il teatro futurista" written by Fillia and also Prampolini's "L'atmosfera scenica," as well as several more items on the theme of the theater and performance.

The second issue was a collection of "le migliori opere degli scrittori futuristi italiani e stranieri," and the third, never published issue was planned to have been reproductions of the most important painted works by futurist artists. The second issue opens with a lengthy homage to Marinetti, reprinting, among other works, such as poems lauding the futurist leader, the chapter of Marinetti's autobiographical *Una sensibilità futurista nata in Egitto* titled "Caffeina d'Europa." This issue also announced the upcoming opening of the Teatro Novatore, published manifesto style, in seven bullet points, with an illustration and signed by Fillia and De Amicis. The theater, they declared, was intended to be "il centro più rappresentativo dell'arte moderna."[107]

In all of Fillia's early projects, especially for the theater, it is possible both to observe the foundations of Fillia's later works, and the variety of forces that influenced Fillia and his peers

[107] Fillia and Ludovico De Amicis. "Annuncio del Teatro Novatore." *Vetrina futurista*, no 2; 1927. 47.

during this unique and unsettled period. Fillia's work is part of a greater current of theatrical developments and formal innovation, but as I hope to have shown, his unique perspective from communist Turin and his interest in futurism along with the beginnings of his unusual aesthetic and ideological positions produced unique results. His exploration of futurist technique and convention will be most visible in his further experiments with poetry in 1925 and 1926, while his ideological and theoretical development is the most important aspect of his coming prose works. Themes and technical aspects of these works remain relevant throughout Fillia's career, even through his shifting interests. "Communism" and many of the particulars of Fillia's belief system will carry through and shape even the works that appear to incorporate fascistic ideology.

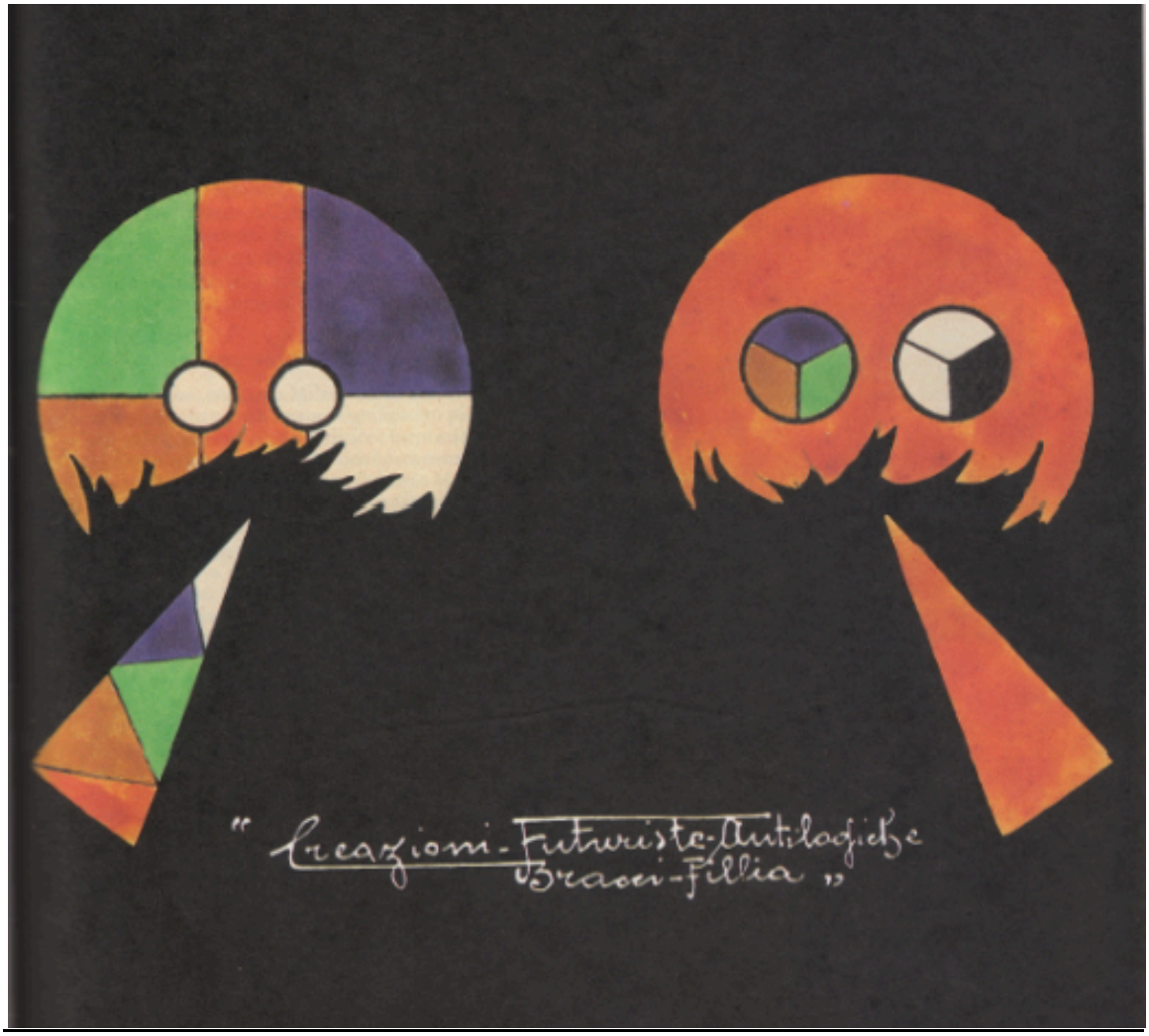

Figure 6: Fillia and T. A. Bracci, *Tessera d'iscrizione ai Sindacati Artistici Futuristi*, 1923.

Figure 7: Fillia, *Ballerina -- Paesaggio scenografico*, 1926, Private Collection

Figure 8: Fillia, *Set and Costumes for Quarta dimensione del cuore*, 1926, Private Collection

Chapter 2:
New Lyric and New Lust Under a New Regime:
I nuovi poeti futuristi and *Lussuria radioelettrica*—Fillia's Poetry Projects

0. Introduction

In this chapter, I examine Fillia's poetry in order to demonstrate, through the analysis of his poetic form and content, letters and manifestos, the evolution of his futurist literary style, and his integration into the movement's leadership. Despite the discouraging reception of *Dinamite*, Fillia's poetic output in 1925 was significant in volume. Technically and thematically these poems signal Fillia's rapid and total immersion in futurism, and the beginning of his career as one of the movement's most vociferous advocates. Despite failing to secure a futurist-communist alliance, in the space of just a year Fillia maneuvered himself from fringe leftist into the movement's leadership. After a lull in Fillia's writing output the next two years see a drastic increase in Fillia's literary and artistic output and a rapid evolution in style and content. (He published almost nothing in 1924—the year of the Matteotti crisis and a turning point for the establishment of the fascist dictatorship, nor showed any paintings, though he did participate in various *serate* and the futurist congress.)[1] The years 1925-26 coincided with a rapid acceleration in the efforts by the regime to fascistize culture (the National Institute for Fascist Culture was created in 1925) and Marinetti himself received official *onoranze nazionali* in Rome in 1925. Despite the reconciliation of futurism with fascism, and Marinetti's accommodations with the regime, Fillia's work refrains from any type of propaganda for the new regime and focuses on aesthetic experimentation, laced with subtle ideological implications.

After 1924, Fillia began publishing journal articles, short stories and poetry at an astounding rate. This is also when Fillia's growing interest in the visual arts begins to dominate

[1] Fillia, *Fillia e l'avanguardia futurista negli anni del fascismo*. Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*. 220. His only documented important activities were the manifesto "Futurismo" which I have discussed in Chapter 1, and the speech he gave at the 1924 futurist congress, entitled "Artistic and Political Organization of the Futurist Syndicates."

his works, penetrating also into his poetry. Taking to heart the idea of fusing the arts together, Fillia poetry is intensely visual and coloristic, and, as if to emphasize the power of images, from 1925 onward he paired many written works with drawings. In fact, the inspiration for his ideas on the integration of consciousness into the environment, which is a prominent theme in his poetry, stems, in great part, from this visual and painterly approach. It mimics and extends the fragmentation and simultaneity of futurist painting, and the attempts of Boccioni, Carrà, Severini and Balla to place the viewer at the center of the painting. In the "Ricostruzione futurista dell'universo" Balla and Depero describe this as the "superamento e solidificazione dell'impressionismo, dinamismo plastico e plasmazione dell'atmosfera, compenetrazione di piani e stati d'animo." Fillia takes this "objective" physical and perceptual experience and extends it into the subjective and spiritual.

All of the poetry that Fillia published is grouped into two collections; first, there are the 41 poems he contributed to the anthology *I nuovi poeti futuristi* in 1925 (Section 1), and then there is *Lussuria radioelettrica* (Section 2), the volume of 30 poems also published in 1925. This small corpus of poetry, as I will show in Section 3, is characterized by Fillia's enthusiastic adherence to futurism; his poetics demonstrate a single-minded process of familiarizing himself with and internalizing the themes, techniques and conventions of the movement. Furthermore, these poems expose more of the foundational explorations and the ideological *prise-de-position* that would come to full fruition in Fillia's prose works, before mutating again in the context of his visual works. Though the exact reason that Fillia abandoned poetry as a means of literary expression after *Lussuria radioelettrica* and instead focused his literary production on prose works (see chapter 3) is not known, I conjecture that this had, in part, to do with the pressures of

two political ideologies—communist and fascist—that rejected poetry in favor of prose, on the insistence that the latter was more easily digestible by the masses.

The years 1925-1926 also saw a concurrent and significant uptick in Fillia's organizational activities as a futurist, including his participation in various futurist *serate* and his first painting exhibitions. Fillia even managed to get himself and several others arrested in 1925 for protesting their exclusion from a painting exhibition at The Winter Club in Turin. 1925 was a particularly significant year for Fillia's literary output, overall. *Sensualità—Teatro d'eccezione* was finally published (see chapter 1), and Fillia published his first manifestos on art with Tullio Alpinolo Bracci (Kiribiri in his later works), and Maino as co-signers, as well as his first novel, *La morte della donna: romanzo a novelle collegate* (see chapter 3). Fillia was clearly working feverishly to secure his position and influence within the movement as quickly and as concretely as possible.

1. General Characteristics and Issues in *I nuovi poeti futuristi*

The 1925 anthology *I nuovi poeti futuristi* was intended as a follow-up to the first anthology of futurist poetry, *I poeti futuristi*, which Marinetti edited in 1912, though the differences between the two volumes are notable. While the new volume also claimed Marinetti as editor, and features an introduction written by him, the poetry contained within the new volume is vastly different in style and content. In his introductory essay, Marinetti lays out the motivations that drove the publication of the new anthology. Marinetti's main claim is that the new anthology serves as an introduction to the public for these new futurist poets. His introduction, as usual, also provides a venue to attack *passatismo*. In the case of *I nuovi poeti*

futuristi, Marinetti unleashes his venom on the prefaces and introductions for new books written by famous critics and literary figures.

As I will demonstrate, this volume actually indicates Fillia's already significant and growing influence on futurism and the position of authority he had attained after only brief involvement with the movement. Fillia, who in 1925 was given the post of Vice-Secretario del Movimento by Marinetti, was clearly a major player already, and Fillia's growing influence would have major implications for the aesthetics and ideology of the movement in the course of the following decade. Fillia assumed responsibility for organizing numerous trips to Paris and various *serate*, exhibitions of futurist art, contests for poetry and art, and oversight of the publication of written works by other futurists (often under the auspices of the Sindacati Artistici Torino). Indeed, as I will prove, the driving force behind *I nuovi poeti futuristi* was Fillia, and not Marinetti at all. This will shed light not only on Fillia's works, but also on the inconsistencies and oddities of the anthology as a whole. My analysis begins with two of Fillia's letters, written around the time of the anthology's publication, and then on a number of observations about Marinetti's introduction and about the composition of the volume as a whole and Fillia's poems within it.

In an undated letter reproduced in Silvia Evangelisti's 1986 catalogue, Fillia wrote to Enzo Mainardi, his friend and futurist collaborator (Mainardi was, in fact, also one of the most ardent of the *futurfascisti*), that he, Fillia, had been the one to assemble the volume and have it published. Fillia tells Mainardi, "Tra poco uscirà il volume dei nuovi poeti futuristi che ho curato io."[2] Fillia's claim that he was the de facto editor of *I nuovi poeti futuristi* is further supported by a second surviving letter that Fillia sent to Mainardi earlier in 1925. In this letter, Fillia boasts that he is expecting to publish a volume of Futurist works with Mondadori, which would have

[2] Fillia, *Fillia e l'avanguardia futurista negli anni del fascismo*. p?

likely guaranteed wider distribution and publicity than he would otherwise be able to achieve either using the Sindacati Artistici or the Edizioni Futuriste di *Poesia*. Though he does not name the volume explicitly, the dating of the letter to early 1925 indicates that he must be referring to *I nuovi poeti futuristi*, as this is the only major group work to come out in that year.

In another brief 1925 letter to Mainardi, accompanied by a watercolor sketch, Fillia characterized his forthcoming anthology of futurist poetry as luxuriously bound, and of particular preciousness of manufacture. This is evident in the volume itself by the several free-word, designed poems that fold out from the binding, and the variety of graphic elements included by several of the authors, making the printing and binding arduous and expensive. When publication by Mondadori fell through, the volume was printed by L'Alpina in Cuneo, capital of the province where Revello, Fillia's birthplace and childhood home, is also located. Two of these fold-out poems are works by Fillia. One of the other two is by Marinetti and one is by Cesare Simonetti. The only challenge to Fillia's claims about the anthology comes from Farfa (pseudonym of Vittorio Osvaldo Tommasini) who, ten years later, also claimed responsibility for the gestation of *I nuovi poeti futuristi*.[3] It is most likely, since Fillia and Farfa are the two most prominently and extensively published of the poets featured in the volume, that they worked together, though Fillia's position as vice-secretary suggests that he was the overall organizer.

Furthermore, Marinetti's own words and the full title of the volume subtly indicate that the anthology was not a project he helmed himself, but one that he put his name on for publicity's sake.[4] The title of the anthology reads, in full, *F.T. Marinetti* presenta *I nuovi poeti futuristi* (emphasis mine), and Marinetti, if nothing else, was very particular and precise about

[3] Ottieri, *Fillia, un percorso futurista*. Salaris, *Storia del futurismo*. 181.
[4] Another example of this happening is Enif Robert's autobiographical *Un ventre di donna*, which actually lists Marinetti as the first author. Robert did include a number of Marinetti's letters in the novel, but Marinetti was definitely not a primary author of that work.

word choice, and especially about verb usage. Even more significantly, though, the opening line of the introduction reads:

> Le prefazioni che i letterati passatisti illustri scrivono per i libri dei giovani *debuttanti* [emphasis original] sono dettate *dal desiderio di liberarsi da una richiesta fastidiosa* [emphasis mine], quasi mai ispirate dalla volontà di rivelare al pubblico un nuovo ingegno.[5]

Marinetti, contrasting himself to these other 'illustrious literati,' implies that he, unlike these passèists, is enthusiastic about being asked to write an introduction to the works of new authors, not that he is taking credit for the gestation of the project. In typical fashion, Marinetti uses the next several paragraphs of the introduction to inveigh against *passatismo* in introductions by authors such as Giosuè Carducci, Giovanni Pascoli and Gabriele D'Annunzio, but what is of greater interest here is, again, word choice. The implication is that Marinetti's preface to the volume is fulfilling a request by the new futurist poets, but that Marinetti—never one to miss an opportunity for aggrandizement—was delighted to take on this task. Therefore, it is further implied, Marinetti was not responsible for the initiation and organization of the anthology at all, but that he was brought into the project because he would provide much needed publicity.

Later in the introduction there is another subtle contrast in the way that Marinetti talks about this anthology in comparison to the 1912 anthology *I poeti futuristi*. He says that it was he who "ha *pubblicato* e *lanciato*" (emphasis mine) the earlier volume using an active verb construction for his participation, but of *I nuovi poeti futuristi* he says instead that "Questo volume… *rivelerà* al mondo i nuovi poeti futuristi…"[6] (emphasis mine). Marinetti gives agency to the anthology, and places himself in a passive role. Marinetti was never shy about taking credit for his works nor about touting his genius, which makes the fact that he does not do so here a notable aberration. Finally, in the closing sentences of the introduction Marinetti says,

[5] TIF 184.
[6] TIF 187.

"Ad altri *giunti come me* sulle vette della celebrità di questi giovani poeti…"[7] (emphasis mine). So, Marinetti joined the group of new poets; he did not bring them together himself.

This is early evidence of one of my central claims—that Fillia exerted much greater influence on the futurist movement and was much more important to it from the mid-1920s until his death in 1936 than has previously been acknowledged. This is, in part, due to the longstanding, and only sparsely reconsidered, critical position that late futurism bears little artistic or literary merit, and in part due to the difficulty of accessing the majority of Fillia's works.[8] Though many of the ideological and aesthetic changes the movement underwent were already apparent in the works of some of Fillia's peers, such as Enrico Prampolini, Giacomo Balla and Fortunato Depero, the anthology is a significant indicator of the growing difference between the first generation of futurist poets and the second. Moreover, the selection of works and authors is indicative more of Fillia's interests than of Marinetti's. At the time Marinetti was struggling with maintaining relevance and with negotiating the movement's relationship with the fascist regime, leaving him less directly concerned with aesthetic or theoretical developments of the movement, especially on its peripheries.[9] In the meantime Fillia was working to shape the movement's direction with a plethora of manifestos, journal reviews of other authors, artists and performers, and with a flood of creative works. This might also explain the lesser effort on

[7] TIF. 195.
[8] Berghaus cites Fillia as the most important later Futurist other than Marinetti and Prampolini, Berghaus, *Italian Futurist Theatre, 1909-1944*. 426. Scholars like Lucia Re and Cecilia Bello Minciacchi have made significant strides in bringing the works of women Futurists to the forefront of scholarly attention. See for example: Re, "Futurism and the Feminine"; Lucia Re, "Futurism, Seduction, and the Strange Sublimity of War," *Italian Studies Italian Studies* 59, no. 1 (2004): 83–111; Lucia Re, "Mina Loy and the Quest for a Futurist Feminist Woman," *The European Legacy* 14, no. 7 (2009): 799–819; Cecilia Bello Minciacchi, *Scrittrici della prima avanguardia: concezione, caratteri e testimonianze del femminile nel futurismo* (Firenze: Le lettere, 2012); Cecilia Bello Minciacchi, "La concezione della donna tra futurismo e fascismo: La proposta della futurista Maria Goretti," *Qd900 Quaderni del '900* 5 (2005): 25–38.
[9] Lawrence S Rainey, *Futurism: An Anthology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

Marinetti's part that went into publicizing and distributing the anthology after its release, in comparison to the first volume from 1912.[10]

The general character of the volume—its multiplicity of themes and styles—bespeaks Fillia's influence and the implicit influence of communism and Russian futurism. Italian futurism was inherently protean and multifaceted, and this became even more true in the movement's later years, so a more marked degree of diversity is to be expected. Though early Italian futurism was more homogenous—early legislators of the avant-garde tend to be prescriptive rather than permissive—and Russian futurism was from its beginnings much more heterogeneous,[11] the influence of Marinetti's 1922 trip to Russia and the Turin Proletkult plus the influx of new members, whom the volume was intended to highlight, helped to open up futurist styles and conventions in the 1920s. Nonetheless, the argument I will make about Fillia's contribution is somewhat different. Though I will touch on the continuing influence of communism on Fillia's works, I will argue that the overall apolitical nature of the poems in *I nuovi futuristi* makes a statement by omission. The poems that Fillia included in the 1925 anthology are vastly different from the communist *Dinamite* poems, and denote both Fillia's constant search for innovation and his shrewd political intuitions. Some of the poems that show this notable difference were actually written not long after *Dinamite's* publication.

One last detail, which does, however, both hark back to *Dinamite* and attest to Fillia's leading role in the realization of the anthology, involves the original cover to the first edition of *I nuovi poeti futuristi*. In a review of the work, published in *L'Impero* in the 10-11 February 1926 issue, Vittorio Orazi comments, rather off-handedly, that the original cover of the volume had to

[10] Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*. 218-276.
[11] John J White, *Literary Futurism: Aspects of the First Avant Garde* (Oxford [England]; New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1990). 2-8.

be redone because the paper was dyed so intensely red that it stained the hands of its readers.[12] Indeed one of the Getty Research Institute's two copies of the volume shows evidence of this "fix." A second layer of grey (or perhaps originally white) paper with blue printing has been glued over the original red cover, visible where part of the top layer has broken off from some of the corners. However, there is no sign of dye transfer from the cover to the interior title page. It is therefore very likely that the red binding was covered for political reasons. Orazi's offhand comment about the defect in the cover color was a very obvious reference to communism implications for the use of red.

The 1925 poems demonstrate Fillia's exploration of different futurist forms and motifs, both for his own benefit, and to lay down a course for the reconstruction of a new futurist lyricism, evident in his works and the work of the other authors he chose for inclusion in the volume. Fillia's own poems chosen to be included in *I nuovi poeti futuristi* were, in fact, a sort of exercise in and a series of models for the direction in which Fillia wanted to take futurist poetry. It is also of note that Marinetti is the only author included in the anthology who had any importance to the movement prior to the early 1920s. And while many early futurist authors had left the movement by the mid-20s, even those who had not (such as Prampolini) were not included in the anthology. The anthology, then, is characterized as much by what it contains as by what it lacks, both in style and content.

Importantly one of the things the volume lacks is any reference to or concession to fascism, even in Marinetti's introduction. Claudia Salaris, following Ruggero Jacobbi, characterizes the volume as being, stylistically and ideologically "belated" with respect to Marinetti's concurrent maneuvers aimed and concordance with the regime.[13] This is an odd

[12] Vittorio Orazi, "I nuovi poeti futuristi." *L'Impero*, Anno 4, no, 85, 10-11 febbraio 1926.;
[13] Ruggero Jacobbi, *Poesia futurista italiana.* (Parma: Guanda, 1968). 59.

observation, given that her wording seems to imply that this resistance to fascist influence and collusion were some sort of retardation, instead of the possibility that this was an act of resistance. Both Salaris and Jacobbi also observe, with some derision, that, as Salaris says, "da queste pagine spira un ribellismo tutto provinciale" noting that the poets in the anthology exhibit "atteggiamenti anarchici, con punte di antimilitarismo, antiborghesismo violento ed erotismo come dissacrazione dei valori."[14] That Salaris characterizes the work as "breathing an entirely provincial kind of rebelliousness" indicates that even though she also claims the anthology "inaugurates the Roman season [of the movement]"[15] that the organizing principles of the work were aimed not at the established futurist leadership, and not at the main centers, but that the interests of the compiler were to explore and attempt to establish ideals independent of core influences and interests. In any case, claiming that an anthology that has just been insulted as "provincial" inaugurates the movement's Roman period—the least provincial location possible, at the time—is odd.

Contrary to these negative and dismissive responses to the anthology, I take this very characteristic of the anthology to be a sign of Fillia's continued unwillingness to entirely abandon leftist, anti-regime politics. It may also have been a ploy to vitalize writers on the margins who could more easily circumvent the fascist censors and the imposition of their reactionary ideology. The exclusion of the likes of Prampolini, Settimelli and Mario Carli may simply be because the anthology was intended to highlight new poets, but it also may have been an attempt to avoid being forced to publish fascist leaning poetry, written by pro-regime futurists. Furthermore, the fact that very few of the authors featured in *I nuovi poeti futuristi*, like Galeazzi and Pasquali (Fillia's co-authors in *Dinamite*), ever reappear in the Futurist roll call

[14] Salaris, *Storia del futurismo*.180.
[15] Ibid. 179.

(unlike the poets chosen for *I poeti futuristi* in 1912, most of whom remained important figures) suggests two things: first that Fillia was using some of them to bulk up the new anthology, and second that the anthology was really meant to publicize his own works, and perhaps those of Farfa, just as *Dinamite* both supported Fillia's communist agenda and served to increase his own notoriety as a futurist and as an influential and important figure.

The works included in the anthology range widely in content, format and sophistication. The number of poems provided by each of the authors ranges from just one (Alceo Folicaldi's[16] *L'autunno futurista*) to Fillia's 41 entries; Farfa provided 40 poems, and Marinetti 20. The other 11 authors provided between 3 and 13 poems each. Though many of the many poems are not groundbreaking and many of the authors never published again, taken as a group the poems avoidance of political themes in favor of subjects like nature, so atypical of futurism, becomes interesting and significant. The most interesting and innovative works belong to Escodamè, Farfa, Fillia, and Bruno Sanzin. These authors' works manifest the most novel uses of typography, graphic elements, and overall explorations of linguistic effects and layout. However, Escodamè, Farfa and Sanzin, like Fillia, all abandoned poetry after the anthology. Farfa and Escodamè later dedicated themselves to art, and Sanzin turned to journalism. These three all become dedicated fascists. For the most part, stylistically and technically, the works present in the volume conform little or not at all to conventional futurist *paroliberismo* and syntactic experimentation. They tend, overall, to be essentially prose poems or traditional lyric verse, which is true even of some of Fillia's own works.

Thematically the volume ranges, as Salaris observed, from typically futurist themes such as anarchism and anti-bourgeois invective to eroticism as a tool for desacralizing and destabilizing the moral values of the bourgeoisie and other conservative groups. Without

[16] Alceo Folicaldi was the pseudonym of Roberto Cassinis.

commenting on its unusualness, Salaris a strongly anti-militaristic tone to the volume. Other themes include hooliganism (Fillia refers to himself as a *teppista* more than once), industrial civilization and everyday technology, the nocturnal metropolis and many musings (very atypical for futurism) on the natural world. It is characterized by irony and irreverence, and as Alessandra Ottieri claims a "sometimes a cynical accession to the demands of the market,"[17] though again, I would argue that this was intended to broaden the anthology's reach without drawing the ire of the censors. And really, the "provincialism" of the works is perhaps one of the anthology's more interesting qualities, because it demonstrates the degree to which futurism had infiltrated the public consciousness, and it also demonstrates the wider applicability of some futurist techniques. Out of the context of "Marinetti's futurism" some of these poems stand up as quite interesting.

Fillia's own poems are characterized by both innovation and conformity to futurist themes, styles and the interplay between content and form. He tended, much more than any of the others save Marinetti, to innovate within futurist free-word convention. Like Fillia and Bracci's 1924 manifesto program, *Futurismo*, the apolitical nature of most of the poems is telling. The quality that most stands out about the anthology as a whole is the frequency of references to the passing of time, most particularly the seasons and of the day, with the transition from night to day as an especially powerful image. The diversification of artistic expression and poetics is evident in the stylistic and thematically varied selection of works and authors. These characteristics of the volume go to supporting the extensive evidence that the mid-20s were a time of major flux within the futurist movement, and that even with the (official) abandonment of communism by Fillia and his cohort, there was still reluctance and avoidance of fully aligning with fascism and with Marinetti's aesthetics. Furthermore, both fascism and communism

[17] Ottieri, *Fillia, un percorso futurista*. 53.

discouraged poetry as a literary form, because it was a high art form not accessible to the masses, which both political movements courted.[18] The pressures of both of the major political ideologies that were in play in the early 1920s, and the negative reception of all three poetry collections that Fillia had a hand in would certainly have been discouraging enough to push the author away from pursuing poetry further.

2. Fillia's New Lyricism

Despite the negative critical reception of later futurist poetry that continues to characterize even the work of many scholars in the last few decades[19]—the scholarly evaluation of later futurist art has been much more extensively revised—I will show, now, that Fillia's poetry does bear reconsideration. Fillia's poems range widely in style, partly in an attempt, I argue, to prove his adeptness with futurist poetics, and to demonstrate the ways in which he intended to use futurist poetics to his own ends. The goal of futurist activities in the wake of World War I, and into the 1920s was a "reconstructive" one after the movement's initial "destructive" phase. Fillia builds onto Giacomo Balla and Fortunato Depero's 1915 manifesto "Ricostruzione futurista dell'universo" which reversed the Futurist destructive impulse and its obsession with an ever faster moving universe. For example, Fillia's first painting manifestos, published nearly concurrently with *I nuovi poeti futuristi* also reintroduce symbolism and metaphor (especially using color) and psychology, as well as previously unacceptable or objectionable subjects, such as the natural landscape. (The cityscape on the other hand was, of

[18] Umberto Carpi, *Bolscevico immaginista: comunismo e avanguardie artistiche nell'Italia degli anni venti* (Napoli: Liguori, 1981); Umberto Carpi, "Gramsci e le avanguardie intellettuali," *Studi Storici* 21, no. 1 (1980): 19–29.
[19] Salaris, *Storia del futurismo*; Ottieri, *Fillia, un percorso futurista*; Glauco Viazzi, *I Poeti del futurismo, 1909-1944* (Milano: Longanesi, 1978).

course, laudable.)[20] Though not discussed in the manifestos, a year or two later Fillia would reintroduce another previously taboo subject into his paintings: the nude. In doing so, he directly disobeys the edicts of Umberto Boccioni's famous painting manifestos from 1911 and 1912, and much of Boccioni's *Pittura e scultura futuriste*, published in 1914.[21]

One of Fillia's explicit interests,[22] evident throughout his poetry and manifestos, is the concept of lyricism, and the reintroduction of the lyric form and of the self and his experiences into futurist poetry. The presence of the lyric form and lyric voice have been held as signs of the poor quality of late futurist poetry, and of *I nuovi poeti futuristi* in particular, but as I will show, the motivations are specific and the results worth much greater consideration. Following Northrop Frye, I understand the lyric poem as a manifestation of displaced activity and as a turn away from the mimetic experience of continuous time represented in narrative. Frye follows by arguing that the association with music is particularly apt, because the lyric turns away not only from ordinary space and time but also from the kind of language used to describe and cope with it.[23] Jonathan Culler argues that a fundamental aspect of the lyric is the production of an apparently phenomenal world via the lyric voice. Culler, citing Walter Benjamin and other recent criticism, also argues in support of the idea that allegory is the primary mode of expression for the modernist consciousness even in the lyric, and that the role of the symbol is no longer as prominent.[24]

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[20] Umberto Boccioni. "Contro il paesaggio e la vecchia estetica." In Umberto Boccioni, "Pittura e scultura futuriste dinamismo plastico," 1997. 19-25.
[21] Umberto Boccioni, et al. "La pittura futurista: Manifesto tecnico." in Luciano De Maria, *Per conoscere Marinetti e il futurismo* (Milano: A. Mondadori, 1981). 23-26. "Noi combattiamo […] contro il nudo in pittura, altrettanto stucchevole ed opprimente quanto l'adulterio nella letteratura."
[22] Crispolti, *Fillia*.
[23] Northrup Frye "Approaching the Lyric." in Chaviva Hosek, *Lyric Poetry: Beyond New Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985). 31-34.
[24] Jonathan Culler " Changes in the Study of the Lyric." in Ibid. 52-54.

In the case of Fillia's lyric, yet futurist poetry, these are crucial observations. Futurist writing in general, in both prose and poetry, rejected the traditional tenets of both realism and lyricism, starting from the self and psychological introspection. Futurist time was non-linear and non-continuous and devoid of a centralized self. Futurist poems are distillations of simultaneity; they do not the trace a linear progression of distinct moments or actions. The signatories of "La pittura futurista: Manifesto tecnico" describe human gestures in terms that are applicable to both futurist poetry and painting (emphasis original):

> Il gesto per noi, non sarà più un *momento fermato* del dinamismo universale: sarà, decisamente, la *sensazione dinamica* eternata come tale.[25]

The futurist gesture, the authors claim, is as I understand it, best conceived of as a vortex, spinning towards a central axis, captured in a poem or painting, but never a distinct, still moment; it is always moving through time. Fillia's lyric poems on the other hand often spring from the displaced activity that Frye observes: some moment of extreme duress or some experience becomes the impetus for poetic expression, outside of linear time. Lyric poems are driven by the individual psychology of the author, and what they communicate expands outward from the personal *to* the universal. A moment of rupture or trauma and transient states of being become the impetus for poetic expression.

According to Glauco Viazzi, Fillia's poetry is characterized by the frequent use of the term *sensazioni*, but that in reality Fillia uses this to refer to states of consciousness that manifest in the whole body. He continues to assert that Fillia's theories of total integration with the environment spring from this conception of "sensation," and that total immersion in it uncoupled

[25] Umberto Boccioni, et al. "La pittura futurista: Manifesto tecnico." In De Maria, *Per conoscere Marinetti e il futurismo*. 23-26.

and reordered the perceived by undoing the mechanisms of thought and ideology.[26] While I largely agree with Viazzi on the importance of the concept "sensation" and even his interpretation of what that term means, I would argue that the he errs in claiming that the mechanisms of thought and ideology are unmoored. In fact, Fillia's process is nearly completely the opposite of Viazzi's claim. There is no dissolution of the self in Fillia's works; rather the self is extended and integrated into the environment.

This, though, I maintain, is not equivalent to a return to either a romantic or a symbolist poetic voice and the types of impressions of the world that these movements privileged in defiance of Marinetti's *distruzione dell'io*. Aspects of romanticism and symbolism were fundamental to many early 20th century avant-garde poets, and though Marinetti and many other futurist poets did have symbolist phases, early futurist poetry attempted to force the complete disintegration of the poet's voice and poet's subjectivity from poetry.[27]

Fillia, taking part in futurism's later, "reconstructive" phase, was one of the futurist poets who took on the task of reconstructing a coherent poetic self, as did many of his peers. Though this is definitely a move "backwards," the return of the repressed, it was not conceived as such. An attempt was made to reincorporate a coherent poetic self that accounted for the futurist style, especially the destruction of syntax and *paroliberismo*. Where early futurist poets dissolved or annihilated the self in order to depict the total experience of the material environment, Fillia re-solidified the voice of the poet, and wove this re-solidified consciousness into its environment, but in a way that maintained, instead of annihilated as Viazzi claims, its unitary integrity. Even

[26] Viazzi, *I Poeti del futurismo, 1909-1944*. 509. Il Fillìa [sic] usa sovente il termine /sensazione/, in realtà si tratta di stati coscienziali estesi all'intera corporietà. Di qui la sua fusione, il calarsi nell'ambiente fino al coinvolgimento totale, all'identificazione ma anche e sopratutto la diffusione dell'Io nei gesti e nella globalità degli atteggiamenti, condizione nella quale i meccanismi di pensiero e/o ideologismi si vanificano nel vivere interamente a contatto con le cose, disgiungendo e riordinando il percepito…

[27] On the return to Symbolism in Marinetti see: Andrew Hewitt, *Fascist Modernism: Aesthetics, Politics, and the Avant-Garde* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993); Cigliana, *Futurismo esoterico*.

Fillia's most fragmented poems and paintings maintain an underlying integrity of psychic form. Indeed, where Marinetti's *distruzione dell'io* sought to annihilate the subjectivity of the lyric voice in favor of the attempting to bring the objective and materialist into poetry, Fillia, like many of the women of *L'Italia futurista*, especially Maria Ginanni, and then Benedetta in *Le forze umane* privileged it and worked to configure a new type of lyrical subjectivity and a new type of spiritual quest.

Fillia's poetry also reaffirms that futurist poetry need not conform to any strict conventions, even that of earlier futurism. After all, Marinetti did claim that the founders' forty-year-old selves would be cast off, destined for replacement by their twenty-year-old peers.[28] The relevant point here, is that any short work, Fillia insists, written with the intent to express a subject lyrically was thus poetry, not matter its style or form. For example, Fillia repeatedly refers to *Adulterio futurista*, one of the works included in *Lussuria radioelettrica*, as a *poesia lirica* (not as a theatrical work, as it has previously been perceived to be). While some aspects of the poem do go to support the analysis of it as a theatrical work, it is much more meaningful in the context of Fillia's other poetry. It is much more relevant to comparative analysis with the short story "Quarta dimensione di me stesso" published in *La morte della donna*. Though Fillia was very active in the theater, designing sets and costumes, which unfortunately do not survive, he wrote only two known works explicitly intended for the theater, *Sensualità—Teatro d'eccezione* and *Il sesso di metallo*, published as one of the "short stories" in *La morte della donna: Romanzo a novelle collegate*. Indeed, the latter may never have been intended for performance at all, and instead demonstrates Fillia exploiting a useful format for a particular ideological and aesthetic agenda that he uses repeatedly. Rather than be read as a theatrical work, *Adulterio futurista* must be read as a poetic work characteristic of Fillia's new lyricism.

[28] TIF. 7.

Adulterio futurista is a prose poem that mixes dialogue and descriptive narrative with several interjections in the form of all capitalized snippets of sensation, reminiscent of free-word poetry. The subject of the poem is an unnamed man who rejects his lover in favor of a bicycle. The bicycle is a source of mechanistic eroticism, and the work as a whole is focused on attempting to offer a "lyric" treatment of Futurist machine eroticism. The poem is an extended exploration of the protagonist's expanding consciousness, and the subsequent penetration of his conscious and subconscious mind by the world around him, and with the mechanical lover he has taken in place of a human one.

> —piacere fresco e mattutino dei sensi che si liberano elasticamente dal peso grigio-responsabile della fedeltà quotidiana, tuffandosi nei colori urlanti dell'emozione corpo magro, femminile, seducentissimo di una bicicletta metallica.[29]

In this particular work, Fillia's treatment of the eroticism of the machine is not apparently different from Marinetti's machine eroticism in *L'alcova d'acciaio* and his erotic attachment to the car; Fillia's sublimation of machine eroticism into spiritual exultation is reserved for the more internally focused short story. Meanwhile, *Adulterio futurista* is much more heavily invested in the coloristic, outward expanding penetration of the consciousness, and its submersion into the environment. The process of outward expansion demonstrated by *Adulterio futurista* defines Fillia's lyricism.

3. Nuovo Lirismo, Nuovo Poeta: Close Readings from *I nuovi poeti futuristi*

Further illustrative of Fillia's new lyricism, and some of his most significant poems from *I nuovi poeti futuristi* are the several poems that took on the modernist experience of the café and nightclub; it is a theme that would also carry through into his prose works and his entertainment ventures such as *the Teatro Novatore* and the *Ristorante del Santopalato*, as well as other similar

[29] Fillia, *Lussuria radioelettrica.* (Torino: Edizioni Sindacati artistici, 1926). 19.

projects such as gallery exhibitions and Futurist *serate*. These poems are some of the most technically complex and "futurist" that Fillia includes in the anthology.

Both of the poems published in *I nuovi poeti futuristi*, titled *Sensualità meccanica* (separate from the section heading given to the first group of Fillia's poems in the anthology) and *Notte di Estate: caffè – chantant affollatissmo* are riots of impressions: the sounds, light and colors of a crowded nightclub. The nightclub was an iconic, symbolic space exploited by futurists for breaking down both moral and aesthetic codes. (Mussolini condemned them in 1927 for just that character.) Umberto Boccioni and Gino Severini repeatedly explored the subject in their paintings, and it was common to many of the futurist poets throughout the movement's literary history. Fillia's innovation within this common motif lies in his synaesthetic treatment of sound, color and space, even more fully immersive for the reader than Severini's fractured planes or even the verbal and visual assault of Marinetti's poetry. Futurism, as John White observes, was making strides toward language intensification in an attempt to convey the full sensory experience of the real just at the moment Ferdinand de Saussure was defining language as arbitrary and non-referential. Futurist poetry sought to concretize language.[30] And Fillia's lyric poetry does just that: it concretizes the lyric experience of the poet.

Notte di Estate: caffè – chantant affollatissimo, the longer of Fillia's two fold-out poems is also the most technically and graphically ambitious of the poems Fillia includes in the anthology (Figure 1). The poem stretches over the length of what would have otherwise covered three pages of the volume, and it folds out horizontally from the binding. It is a verbal and visual metaphor for the night sounds of a mountain forest as an open-air concert. The graphic framing of the poem is an abstract rendering of the passage of time and the expansion and contraction of

[30] White, *Literary Futurism*. 25.

the consciousness of the "attendees," the intensity of the "performance on the stage," and the vigor of the "dance floor."[31]

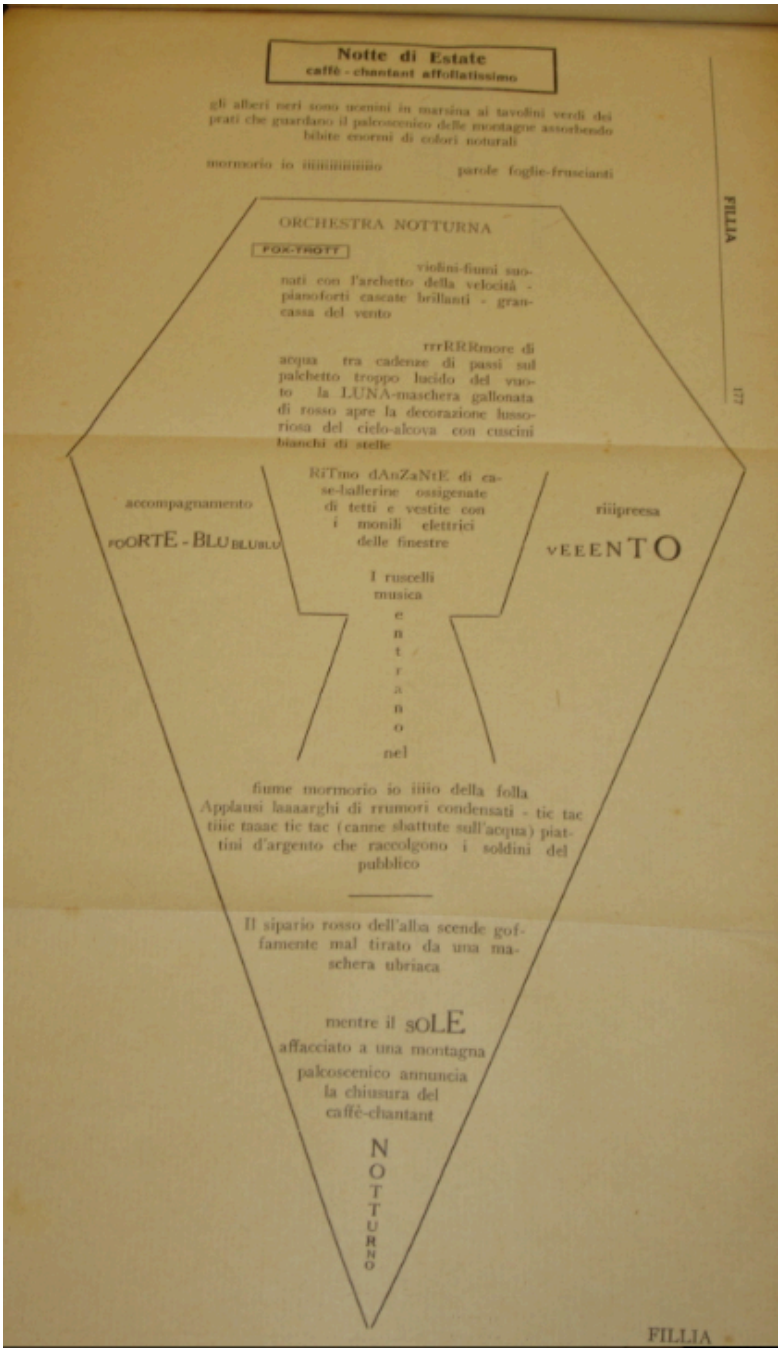


Figure 9: Fillia, *Notte di Estate: caffè - chantant affollatissimo*

[31] The poem is comparable to Cangiullo's festive visual poem, "Piedigrotta" (1916) in *Piedigrotta : parole in liberta*; col *Manifesto sulla declamazione dinamica sinottica* di Marinetti (Milano, Edizioni futuriste di Poesia, 1916).

The first verse, above the arrowhead shaped frame, sets the scene—the black trees are like men in tailcoats drinking cocktails in the forest glades, and the sounds of the wind are like the murmur of conversation in an open-air amphitheater. As the action of the poem passes into the imaginary "space" of the performance, as the crowd is drawn into the music, the orchestra begins to perform. The expanding sound pushes the boundaries of the poem outward; the experience is thus simultaneously auditory and tactile. The "violini-fiumi suonati con l'archetto della velocità – pianoforti cascate brillanti – grancassa del vento" and the "cadenze di passi sul palchetto troppo lucido del vuoto" and ""cuscini bianchi di stelle" are intensely visual, but also luxuriously tactile imagery, suggesting a certain exclusiveness and opulence.

The interior graphic elements, the two crooked lines, both serve to suggest the outstretched arms and torso of the "dancers"—which are the little houses, lit up, dressed up by the electric light shining through their windows—described within it, and also to create visual flow and direction for the verbal elements. The widest point of the diamond is also the height of the performance's intensity, after which the poem's boundaries begin to narrow, as the performance winds down. In the final moments of the poem the patrons pay their bills; the sun begins to creep above the hills, and the poem closes literally and figuratively, as the nocturnal café closes with the rising of the sun, which is allegorized as the red curtain, falling to the mountain stage.

Notte di Estate displays Fillia's adeptness at combining words and images to maximum effect, demonstrating his understanding of the visual and iconic power of the printed word. It also highlights the intensely visual, painterly and theatrical approach he took in much of his poetry. Not only does the drawn aspect of the poem evoke the progression of events, within the poem Fillia manipulates typographical elements to heighten their effect. The words *vento* and

sole expand into larger letters, as the wind and light of the sun physically increase. This technique is, of course, a futurist convention, stemming from the earliest futurist poems, such as Marinetti's "poesia nascere" or Cangiullo's "fumare," both of which use increasingly scaled typeface. This technique did not, in fact, as Papini accused, serve as a kind of pictorial mimesis, but instead created a concrete, schematized icon.[32] Similarly, the movement of the trees is a RiTmo dAnZaNtE, which is suggested graphically through the irregularly alternating use of capitalization, the waving of their branches in the wind liked to the gyrations of dancers on a stage.

One of the most interesting and significant details of the poem is the phrase *mormorio io iiiio* which is emphasized just as the "orchestra performance" begins and just before it ends. Firstly, *mormorio* carries at least two meanings in this context. It is both the semi-onomatopoeic phoneme for the noise of the wind among the trees, and it is also a metaphorical comparison to the noise made by a crowd of revelers. However, *mormorio* also has a secondary, literary meaning, indicating verbalized recrimination or complaint. By inverting and shifting parts of speech the phrase *io mormoro* (I murmur or I recriminate) becomes hidden, coded into a superficially onomatopoeic phrase. Not only does this utilize the first person voice of the poet, it weaves the poetic self seamlessly into the composition. The poet's lyric voice is so deeply immersed in the scene that the reader nearly loses awareness of it, while being dragged as deeply into the fabric of the experience as the lyric self constructed by the poem. This indication of protest and discontent may be a coded allusion to Fillia's forced turn away from his leftist politics and the activist poetry and theater of the previous few years.

Fillia's first eighteen poems in *I nuovi poeti futuristi* are grouped under the heading "Sensualità meccanica." The subjects of all but a few of them are at least partly mechanical and

[32] White, *Literary Futurism*. 23.

technological, and all of them are sense-impressions of the subject given in the title: mechanical sensuality. Some of the poems are about the use of machines—telegraphs, telephones, automobiles (of course), airplanes and electric lights. Others are evocations of modern spaces—commercial streets, the interior of a factory, a skyscraper. These poems, like *Interno di fabbrica*, which I turn to now as a representative sampling, all function to describe an intimate psychological and physiological experience brought on by the conditions of modern life.

> bianco grigio nerolucido
> le macchine in movimento mi compenetrano
> occhi-cervello soffocati da una forza maggiore
> orrore di troppa simmetria cadenza meccanica
> allungamento infinito della volontà dei sensi della forza
> negazione dell' IO
> schiavitù di tutte le puleggie cinghie ruote trasmissioni
> avidità feroce dell'odore dei lubrificanti[33]

The poem is a snapshot of an experience, of the effects of a visit to a factory on the psyche of the poet. The colors, sounds and smells suffocate the eyes and brain, and cause horror and desire at the same time. Will and desire are amplified, but the self is negated and absorbed into the moving machinery, which penetrates the body and mind. *Interno di fabbrica*, with its "orrore di troppa simmetria" points to the futurist fascination with technology and the intentionally anti-aesthetic (what Boccioni called the *antigrazioso*). These poems are laced with an underlying sense of anxiety and anguish even as they celebrate technology. The environment of the factory, while exhilarating, is also a source of fear. The factory worker is no longer the heroic member of a collective, but is instead the slave to the methods of production that also destroy the workers' self, because of its horrific nature. This poem also suggests Fillia's continuing discontentment with the PCI and with worker politics, following Gramsci's rejection of the futurist movement and Marinetti's rapprochement with Mussolini. Given that these qualities permeate Fillia's

[33] F. T Marinetti, *F.T. Marinetti presenta I nouvi poeti futuristi* (Roma: Edizioni futuriste di "Poesia," 1925).

poems, this points to the fact that the anthology as a whole, while certainly no longer communist, is certainly not pro-fascist, and I argue, instead constitutes an act of symbolic resistance by Fillia.

While the factory is a source of uncanny horror (however pleasurable), the smaller technological objects that had penetrated everyday life at the beginning of the 20th century are less threatening and have a more positive role in Fillia's work. Technology as a catalyst for sensory and psychological stimulation is a concurrent theme in Fillia's works presented in *I nuovi poeti futuristi;* however, the focus of these poems is, for the most part, the somewhat more banal, household or common technological advancements such as the telephone, the adding machine and the bicycle, as opposed to Marinetti's bombs, automobiles and armored tanks. This infiltration of small, mechanized conveniences into daily life would have seemed like the futurist dream of mechanized life coming true. Fillia's focus on small, banal and accessible objects is notable precisely because it differs from Marinetti's war machines and from the fascist emphasis on modernizing Italy in preparation for war. On the one hand, it is as purely futurist as the Italian love affair with the automobile, as it is tangible and accessible technology that was revolutionizing the average person's way of life. On the other hand, it may imply a rejection by some futurists of futurist bellicosity and of the violent and terrifying aspects of armored tanks, machine guns and the mass death caused by the First World War.

Each of these poems dedicated to small technology is only a few lines long, and captures the essence of the sensory effect of the object on the human psyche. *Telefono*, for example, reads:

> l'orecchio si diluisce nell'apparecchio uditore di-
> venta il centro sensibile dei rumori
>
> non può non sentire perché l'esterno s'infrange
> contro la piccola placca circolare di metallo

The telephone in this poem has become a conduit for external data, directly channeling it into the brain. But, at the same time, the listener cannot ignore what is being said to him, because the outside is pressing in on him, which is a menacing prospect.

These poems also repeatedly highlight what is, in John White's excellent analysis of Fillia's poem *Telegrafo* also from *I nuovi poeti futuristi*, another essential point about futurist poetry in the 1920s. White observes that "telegraphic" writing—that is the tendency toward lean and spare poetics—is important for the movement as a whole, and specifically critical to Fillia's poetry. (Wireless telegraphy quickly developed into a fetish object during this period, and became a central preoccupation not just in Italy, but also throughout Europe and the United States). *Telegrafo* is characterized by a "relentlessly self-undermining momentum,"[34] which White ties to his earlier analysis of the importance of the telegraph:

> [Telegraphic writing] provided a medium particularly attractive to writers whose modernity often lay in trying to bridge the gap between man and machine, rather than simply depicting the new technological furniture of the world around them.[35]

Like *Telegrafo*, the entire group of technology poems works to bridge the gap between man and machine and to assuage the horror of the uncanny stimulated by technology. Each poem does so through short, compelling bursts of words. The poems imply that each object chose has made a fundamental difference in the lives and work of its user, and had quickly became indispensible. Though this dependence is a threat. Despite using essentially grammatically coherent phrases, the poems also maintain the essence of the sharp, staccato rhythm of free-word poetry.

The telegraphic quality of poetry was widely observed at the time by the Italians (Prampolini in 1924), Germans (Iwan Goll in 1921) and Russians (Kornei Chukovsky in 1922). However, the topic had been a developing preoccupation in poetry for at least a decade, and even

[34] White, *Literary Futurism*. 194.
[35] Ibid. 204.

before the publication of Marinetti's manifestos on futurist poetry and words-in-freedom in 1910 and 1912. Chukovsky, whom White cites, relates this tendency toward the telegraphic[36] to what can be understood as a response to what Ronald Schleifer has called "the crisis of abundance."[37] At a time characterized by the vast and overwhelming multiplication and acceleration of outside stimulants, poetry responded by compressing itself, by developing a poetics that mimicked the stripping down and mechanization of communication. This drew attention both to the aesthetics and utility of the new media and technology, while also attempting to resist drowning in the vast proliferation of words.[38] Fillia's telegraphic poems are both numerous and verbally compressed, reflecting both aspects of the poetic reaction to abundance.

Many of the machine odes about the smaller, seemingly less threatening technological devices also express the anxiety they provoke. One, *Macchina dattilografica*, invokes a feeling of ecstasy combined with dread:

> La mano diventa un ritmo pulsante di movimento
> un ingranaggio girato dal cervello con le puleggie e le cinghie della velocità e dell'abitudine
>
> sarebbe impossibile seguire una armonia personale tutto è chiuso nello scatto secco-esauriente dei piccoli tasti di metallo[39]

In *Macchina dattilografica*, the first verse melds the user and the typewriter, giving the user agency and ascribing the positive quality of speed. Then, the situation is reversed. The second verse insists that a "personal harmony"—a personal rhythm of work—is impossible and that "everything is closed within the dry-exhausting click of the small metal keys." The machine,

[36] Ibid. 143-149.
[37] Ronald Schleifer, *Modernism and Time: The Logic of Abundance in Literature, Science, and Culture, 1880-1930* (Cambridge, UK; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
[38] For a discussion of Marinetti's similar response, see White, *Literary Futurism*. 165.
[39] Fillia. in F. T Marinetti. et al., *F.T. Marinetti presenta I nuovi poeti futuristi* (Roma: Edizioni futuriste di "Poesia," 1925). 150.

then, is in control, not its user. Human autonomy has been ceded to the machine, a phenomenon about which there is growing preoccupation in the 1920s, even among the futurists.

The majority of these short poems dedicated to the subject of everyday technology were for use in transmitting information and communications quickly, and the rest are modes of transport. This interest in communication leads to one of the more unusual intersections of meaning in Fillia's works, and one that will become much more explicit in *Lussuria radioelettrica*. In another example of Fillia's efforts to repurpose futurist tropes, he rearranges the intersection of communications technology, modes of transportation and the erotic.

One of the principal symbolic objects in the fetishization of technology in the early 20th century was the Eiffel tower. This was due both to its appearance and technical traits and to its role in broadcasting global time (which began in 1912) and for radio signal broadcast.[40] It is the Eiffel Tower's use as radio tower that are relevant to this study, because of Fillia's interest in radio. (This interest was atypical of a futurist. They largely ignored the radio until into the 1930s.) The Eiffel Tower was a powerful image of modernity, which was "felt to communicate with the entire universe."[41] What it did do was literally transmit data to the entire planet. And it also deeply affected the cultural consciousness. In futurist art, the Eiffel Tower had already appeared, including in at least one of Severini's paintings from the early 1910s.

That the Eiffel Tower in its multiple representations was also seen as a phallic construct need barely be restated. Nor does the relevance of that aspect to the futurists' interest in it. One of the poems contributed to *I nuovi poeti futuristi* by another author, Cesare Simonetti, cleverly plays with both the conceit of the speeding train and of the Eiffel tower whose use in poetry was

[40] Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983).
[41] White, *Literary Futurism*.155.; See also, Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Virginia Spate, *Orphism: The Evolution of Non-Figurative Painting in Paris, 1910-1914* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press : Oxford University Press, 1979). 9.

made famous by works such as Blaise Cendrars and Sonia Delaunay's artist's book *La prose du Transsibérien et de la Petite Jehanne de France.* The poem is Simonetti's fold-out poem, entitled *Treno in corsa*. What seems clear is that, as touched on above, the choice of the poems featured in these fold-outs was not trivial. This is the only fold-out that it not a poem of Fillia's or of Marinetti's. The one dedicated to Marinetti's poem, I would argue, is merely to appease him, as it does not actually exploit the potential of the format. I have already discussed Fillia's first fold-out poem, and will now look at Simonetti's Analyzing this poem, briefly, before returning to Fillia's second fold-out poem, will provide clues to the connections between several of Fillia's works, and from Fillia's poetry in *I nuovi poeti futuristi* to *Lussuria radioelettrica*.

Stretching over the width of five pages, it is physically the longest of the four fold-out poems. The work is decidedly phallic (Figure 10). Besides mimicking the shape of a train, it also looks rather noticeably like a retractable telescope.

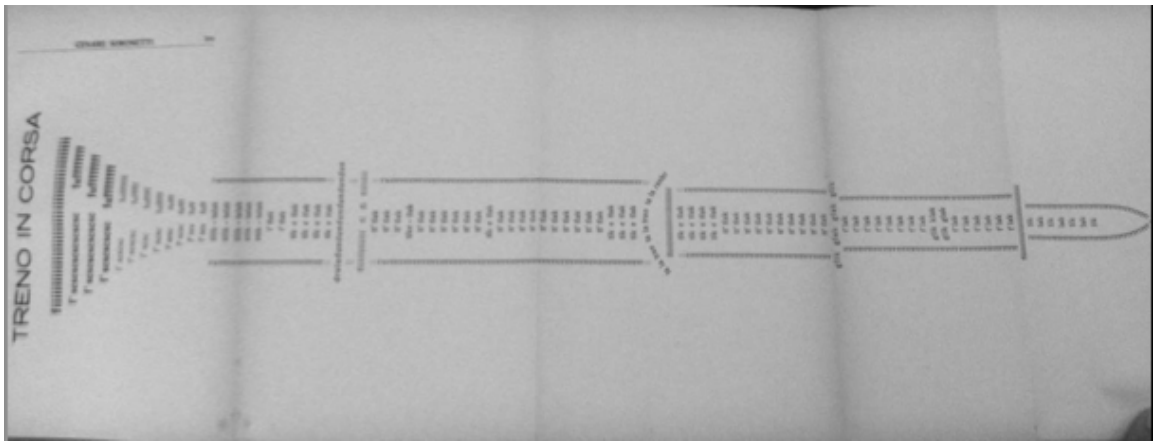


Figure 10: Cesare Simonetti, *Treno in corsa*

The work also mimics the (equally phallic) shape of a bayonet blade, or when flipped on end, so that the title is at the base, it mimics the form of a radio tower—a s the Eiffel Tower was.[42] This fully free-word poem is made up of onomatopoeic, composite glyphs that iconize and schematize

[42] For examples of Eiffel Tower shaped poetry, and this work's similarity in shape to them, see White, *Literary Futurism*. 156-157.

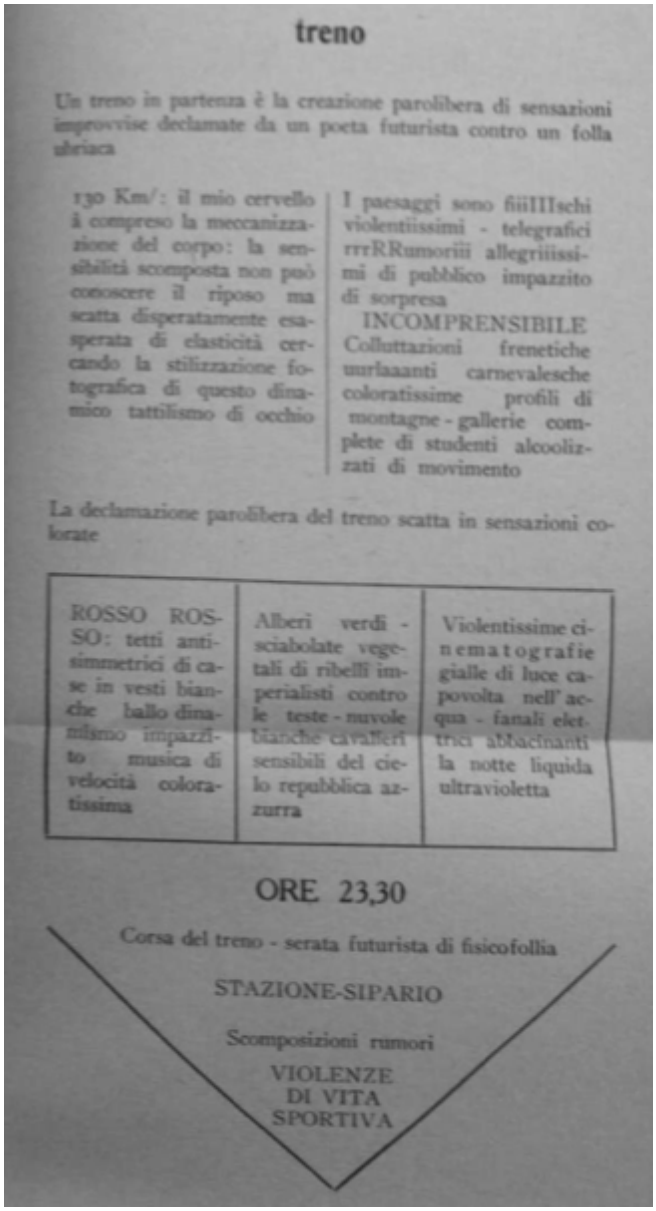
a rushing train. Many of the verbal elements that make up this work—the central column repeats variations on "t'lak" interspersed with "glik klak/glik glak" the length of the poem—also evoke the clicking of a telegraph machine or typewriter, already unifying a number of the different technological themes discussed so far.

The theme of the train, and the phallic imagery also carries into Fillia's second fold-out poem. The implications of communications and the erotic aspects of the radio tower will return in *Lussuria radioelettrica*. Titled simply *Treno* (Figure 3), it folds out vertically instead of horizontally as do *Notte di Estate*, Marinetti's *Con BOCCIONI a Dosso Cassina* and Simonetti's *Treno in corsa*, and it covers two page-lengths. What *Treno* does share with *Notte di Estate* and Simonetti's *Treno in corsa*, though, is the mix of technology and sexuality that are inescapable connotations of the pointed rod shape featured in three of the four fold-out poems. Like *Notte di Estate*, the poem begins with an introductory verse that sets the scene and the key in which the rest of the poem is to be read. Here, a speeding train is the "creazione parolibera di sensazioni improvvise declamate da un poeta futurista contro un[a] folla ubriaca."[43] Two columns of tightly packed verse follow.

The left-hand column declares the poem a free-word description of train travel at 130 km/h, the response to which is the detectable mechanization of the body, and the breaking apart of the poet's senses, though the senses do not rest. The right-hand column is a blur of phrases describing the scenery as the train races along. The downward flow is interrupted by another horizontal sentence, wherein form and function follow content. It reads "La declamazione parolibera del treno scatta in sensazioni colorate." And fracture the poem's flow is exactly what the placement of this sentence does. Below it, the three closed boxes of text are the "stylized photograph of this dynamic tactilism of the eye" from the top left column. The final section in

[43] F. T Marinetti. et al., *F.T. Marinetti presenta I nuovi poeti futuristi*. 175

the arrow-shaped space both completes the loose graphic resemblance that the poem's shape has to a train engine and becomes a symbolic representation of the train's rushing forward movement; the arrow shape created by the linear elements underlines the aggressiveness and violence of the experience. Finally, the last few phrases confirm this impression; the train is rushing to the station, to a violent futurist *serata*, characterized by broken noise and the violent sporting life.



treno

Un treno in partenza è la creazione parolibera di sensazioni improvvise declamate da un poeta futurista contro un folla ubriaca

130 Km/: il mio cervello à compreso la meccanizzazione del corpo: la sensibilità scomposta non può conoscere il riposo ma scatta disperatamente esasperata di elasticità cercando la stilizzazione fotografica di questo dinamico tattilismo di occhio

I paesaggi sono fiiiIIIschi violentiissimi - telegrafici rrrRRumoriii allegriiissimi di pubblico impazzito di sorpresa

INCOMPRENSIBILE

Colluttazioni frenetiche uurlaaanti carnevalesche coloratissime profili di montagne - gallerie complete di studenti alcoolizzati di movimento

La declamazione parolibera del treno scatta in sensazioni colorate

ROSSO ROSSO: tetti antisimmetrici di case in vesti bianche ballo dinamismo impazzito musica di velocità coloratissima	Alberi verdi - sciabolate vegetali di ribelli imperialisti contro le teste - nuvole bianche cavalieri sensibili del cielo repubblica azzurra	Violentissime cinematografie gialle di luce capovolta nell' acqua - fanali elettrici abbacinanti la notte liquida ultravioletta

ORE 23,30

Corsa del treno - serata futurista di fisicofollia

STAZIONE-SIPARIO

Scomposizioni rumori

VIOLENZE
DI VITA
SPORTIVA

Figure 11: Fillia, *Treno*

The poem is a self-referential and circular construction; it ends where it begins, with the drunken crowd egged on by the poet, and it self-reflexively acknowledges its constructedness. As Culler observes, one of self-referentiality's important functions is to make masterable a situation of potential excess. [44] In the case of *Treno*, the excess contained is both structural and thematic. The structure of the poem, and its organization on the page, tightly contain and bring into tight focus the potential excess and abundance of words and impressions, and the poet's lyric voice literally contains and controls the excesses of the drunken crowd. Moreover, *Treno*, like Simonetti's *Treno in corsa* relies on unambiguously phallic penetration metaphors. Technology was penetrating daily life, and the metaphor of the sexual thrill it provided was not new to Futurism nor to Fillia's work;[45] however, the metaphorical penetration is, in this case, quite clever. The poet's words create the train, which penetrates the crowd's drunken haze. Each of the three fold-out, graphic poems which I have analyzed, two by Fillia, and one by Simonetti, telegraphs—that is shortens, essentializes and communicates with a mix of word clusters and empty space—a modernist experience that is at once technological, erotic and psychological.

Fillia's poetry illuminates the ideological transition he is making from a more typical conception of male futurist eroticism (found, for example in Marinetti), toward the asceticism that will dominate his religious paintings. Fillia has already transitioned to the auto-erotic, eliminating the dynamics of seduction between two people. Fillia's conception of the erotic has certain affinities with the Freudian concept of Eros, as Freud defined it in *Beyond the Pleasure*

[44] Culler. "Changes in the Study of the Lyric." in Hosek, *Lyric Poetry*. 51.
[45] On futurism, technology and eroticism, see also Contarini, *La femme futuriste*. See also Mario Perniola, *The sex appeal of the inorganic* (New York; London: Continuum, 2004).Christine Poggi, *Inventing Futurism: The Art and Politics of Artificial Optimism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). Barbara Spackman, *Fascist Virilities: Rhetoric, Ideology, and Social Fantasy in Italy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

Principle (1920).[46] In Platonic philosophy, eros was a spiritual energy, that when divorced from carnality, led to Platonic love.[47] For Freud eros is the sublimation of physical energy into will (from Eros, the creative, reproductive drive which is in opposition to Thanatos, the death drive).[48] I argue that Fillia comes to understands eroticism more in this manner, and less in the sense of the erotic equated with the sexually arousing.

The issue of Eros is, however, still muddied in Fillia's works in the mid 1920s, with some works embracing the sublimation of erotic desire, and others fixated on sexually charged experiences, and the eroticism of the machine. Fillia, in the face of encroaching technology, and the crisis of abundance, responded by attempting to circumvent the anxiety of the machine and of machine reproduction by not granting erotic appeal to the machinery of war, and in doing so avoided the clash of Eros and Thanatos, the clash between the erotic drive to create and the drive to destroy. Instead, Fillia runs head on into the crisis of abundance, and of infinite multiplication and accumulation, especially of the written word. The sublimation of the phallic train into a mechanism of control in *Treno* is metaphorically representative of the will of the poet to overcome the sexual and destructive drives, especially at their point of intersection.

Closing out Fillia's contribution to *I nuovi poeti futuristi*, his second to last poem, is, appropriately, an ode to one of the foundational spheres of futurist research into the potential of the written word—typography. *Tipografia* celebrates the very technology that makes the new anthology possible. New printing techniques and technology made futurist page layouts and typographical innovation possible. It is similar to *Telegrafo* and to *Macchina dattilografica*, and

[46] It is, however, impossible to estimate the extent of Fillia's knowledge of Freud. The text was not translated into Italian until 1946, but Fillia may have read it in French. By 1925, almost the only one of Freud's texts available in Italian was an *Introduzione alla psicoanlisi*, translated in 1922.
[47] Plato and Benjamin Jowett, *The republic and other works* (New York: Anchor Books, 1973).
[48] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1962); Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (New York: Norton, 1989).

as such I will not analyze it here. Then, in Fillia's last entry, the he neatly sums up all of his works from 1922 until around the end of 1925. The poem is titled simply *Finale*, and it is made up of three long sentences-verses. Each verse addresses a fundamental aspect of Fillia's literary ideology—musicality, electrical civilization and the feverish effects of new emotions.

> la mia poesia è la musica sensibile che canta la pesantezza di grotte nere dove bianche forme di vergini danzano nude attorno a un enorme teschio rosso
>
> la mia poesia è la sensazione scattante di tutte le civiltà elettricamente elastiche fino a coprire con pazzi assalti violetti i chiarori in penombra del passato.
>
> La mia poesia è la febbre dell'uomo che sente nel desiderio enorme della violenza e della conquista una sensibilità colorata di emozioni nuove.[49]

This is an odd poem, with a number of unusual images and allegories. By choosing to use it to conclude his contributions to the anthology, Fillia is pointing his work in some very specific and provocative directions. Fillia's poetry, as described in this poem is the music of primitive eroticism, the dynamic sensation of elastic, electrified civilization, and it is the fever of a man who detects the "colorized sensibility" of new emotions in his desire for the violent conquest of new emotions. The tone and dramatic imagery—especially the first verse—recall his early works in *Dinamite*. The use of red, black, and white, and the evocation of a "pagan" or "primitive" fetish ritual combined with the themes of music and death (the black grottos, and the red skull) evoke the dramatic, anarchic, destructive imagery of Fillia's anarcho-communist poems. The black skull was a symbol of fascist *arditismo*; here Fillia provocatively evokes a red skull in its place.

Overall, the poem is profoundly ambiguous. At the same time that it offers up a lurid, violent, erotic, and classically futurist collection of images, it renders them unstable and

[49] Fillia. *Finale*. in F. T Marinetti. et al., *F.T. Marinetti presenta I nuovi poeti futuristi*. 189?

disquieting. In the first verse, the erotic ritual leads to death—a cynical take on the failure of communism in Italy. In the second verse, electric civilization, for all its pops and flares, is still shrouded by the past. The final verse uses *febbre*, which is simultaneously desire and illness or infection to describe the drive for violence and conquest. The cult of modernity, Fillia seems to say, is feverish desire for violence and conquest, but that very fever will break, bringing with it a new sensibility, colored by new emotions. The poem is rife with the same conflict between the desire to create and the desire to destroy, the same Eros and Thanatos that troubles Fillia in many of the poems in the anthology. In fact, *Finale*, heightens this aspect of Fillia's contribution to the anthology. It renders explicit the fearful aspects of eroticized modernity.

The poem also evokes a tone of protest, another indication of Fillia's resistance to fascism, and the nostalgia for leftist ideals to which he still clung in 1924-25. The poem offers up clues about the internal emotional and ideological chaos that Fillia must have suffered as he transitioned away from communism and toward his later ascetic and mystic take on futurism. The tumult of late 1923 to early1925 will lead to both *La morte della donna*, also published in 1925, and to Fillia's next volume of poetry, *Lussuria radiolettrica*.

2. *Lussuria radioelettrica: Poetry + Science*

Fillia's second volume of poetry, *Lussuria radioelettrica*, was published in 1925. There is a distinct, though not extreme, difference in the works that Fillia presents in *Lussuria radioelettrica* compared to *I nuovi poeti futuristi*. Most particularly, he varies his thematics and the format of his works more extensively. Some of the themes he introduces into his poetry is this volume are ones that will be crucial also to his later novels and visual works. Overall the poems in *Lussuria radioelettrica* are also much more personal, more contemplative and more

philosophical than those in *I nuovi poeti futuristi*. They range in style from free-word snippets to longer almost prose-form poems. They are grouped to some extent by theme, and by form, though some groupings are more distinct and unified than others. Overall, the volume progresses from longer, more detailed and less experimental forms to sketchier, more fragmented, free-word verse. The longest works, and the most prose-like, *Autoradio* and *Adulterio futurista*, are at the beginning of the volume. The "Giocattoli" section placed at the end of the volume, which features a dedication to Giacomo Balla, Fortunato Depero and Enrico Prampolini, is made up of descriptive, semi-abstract fragments.

This time, Fillia's works are accompanied by an introduction titled "Quel che sarà il mondo col dominio del radio," written by Dottor Ernesto Falchetti, a member of the Istituto Radiologico Nazionale,[50] and by two excerpts from Marinetti's introduction to *I nuovi poeti futuristi*. The thirty poems in this volume represent the culmination and termination of Fillia's exploration of futurist poetry; after the publication of *Lussuria radioelettrica*, he entirely abandons poetry in favor of prose, journalism and painting. The ostensible purpose of the volume, according to the title page, was to publicize and support the development and expansion of radio technology in Italy. The proceeds *of Lussuria radioelettrica*'s sales were to be sent directly to the Istituto Radiologico Nazionale and to Elena of Savoy, wife of Umberto III.[51] During the 1920s, as I have discussed above, "wireless telegraphy," as radio telegraph communication was called at the time, had become an erotic fetish object, a fact that is explicitly alluded to in the title of the work, "radio-electric lust." Marinetti was very interested in telegraphy, but not in radio until the mid-1930s. This work, though, is aimed at all kinds of radio broadcast. The title also characterizes Fillia's own works, whether poetry or prose, in that they

[50] Alessandra Ottieri, "Appunti su futurismo e mass-media." in Associazione culturale internazionale "Sinestesie.," "Sinestesie.," *Sinestesie.*, 2001. 2004. 68.
[51] Ernesto Falchetti "Cosa sarà il mondo di domani" in Fillia, *Lussuria radioelettrica.* 6.

eroticize and fetishize mechanization and technology—especially smaller scale instruments, objects and devices that are or may become a part of everyone's every-day life--in a generally positive manner. Though, as I discussed above, desire is sublimated into will throughout Fillia's works. This was already evident, as shown in chapter 1, in *Sensualità—teatro d'eccezione*.

So, the first major theme of this work is lust, and the second is the radio. In the more scientifically connotative aspect of the title's phrasing, the metaphor of poetry as a "campo di ricerca" that Fillia uses in this volume, and which I will discuss in greater detail below, reinforces the third major implication of the title's "radio electric lust." This third meaning only becomes clear and persuasive in the light of Falchetti's introduction "Quel che sarà il mondo di domain col dominio del radio." Falchetti's introduction introduces a number of unusual themes including interstellar communication and the idea that the rate of technological change and development was non-linear. Falchetti even predicted the invention of cellular telephones!

In the context of *Lussuria radioelettrica*, Fillia's *campo di ricerca* refers not only to poetry but also to the scientific research being conducted at the time (the volume is "per lo studio sperimetale di Radio e radiazioni"), into electromagnetic waves and the search for methods of communication capable of transmission over immense distances, even including interstellar transmissions. Indeed, "radio electric" is defined as "of or pertaining to the transmission of power via electromagnetic waves."[52] As Margaret Fisher has argued, radio communication vastly expands the experience of space, but also simultaneously collapses perceptions of distance and time onto themselves.[53] Falchetti's introduction explicitly references this paradoxical expansion and contraction. He claims:

[52] "Radioelettricità" Nicola Zingarelli, *Lo Zingarelli: vocabolario della lingua italiana* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 2004). 1465.
[53] Fisher in Günter Berghaus, *Futurism and the Technological Imagination* (Amsterdam; New York, N.Y.: Rodopi, 2009). 230.

> Le distanze sparirebbero; ciascuno possederebbe la sua macchina piccola e sicura con cui dominerebbe lo spazio e soggiogherebbe il tempo, centuplicando la vita…[54]

So distance would diminish and disappear with the aid of radio-electric technology; man would come to dominate space and time by compressing it, but at the same time one's life and experiences would expand and multiply. Paradoxically, just as distance and time are diminished, they are also infinitely expanded. Falchetti also muses about the possibilities of space travel and that in the infinite expanse of space there must necessarily exist other planets supporting intelligent life. The fact that radio waves could travel just below the speed of light must have seemed miraculous to a world that was barely becoming accustomed to car and train transport.

The fact that the premise for the work refers not only to the transmission of voice and data over the airwaves (like from the Eiffel Tower), but also the science of the electromagnetic spectrum, also reinforces the relevance of pictorial and coloristic effects to the complete interpretation of these poems. In other higher and lower frequencies than the band useful for radio, waves on the electromagnetic spectrum also transmit light and heat. All waves transport *energy*. X-ray technology and photography were also already known to be dependent on different kinds of waves.

On a theoretical and metaphorical level, "lussuria radio-elettrica" echoes and refashions in its own way the work of earlier futurist artists, especially Balla and Boccioni. Balla's *Velocità* and *Interpretazione* series of paintings, in which he sought to depict the cerebral and sensory experiences of moving through space and time at high speed are particularly relevant to the theme of acceleration expanding and compressing space. Similarly, Boccioni's *La strada entra nella casa* (1911) and *La città che sale* (1910), just to name two examples, stretch and compress

[54] Falchetti. in Fillia, *Lussuria radioelettrica.* 4

space into the vortex, tumbling time and space together into a single snapshot of enhanced perception.

Falchetti's preface is followed by two excerpts from Marinetti's introduction to *I nuovi poeti futuristi*; the first part describes and defines what the *parole in libertà* do and how this poetic effect is accomplished from a technical standpoint, while the second excerpt is on *l'estetica della macchina*. These excerpts serve, in part, to signpost Fillia's formal and thematic intentions for the volume. But these excerpts also serve to lend authority and legitimacy to Fillia's project by providing a basis for the further development of his poetics. Following the standard futurist practice of perpetual self-validation, these two pages of text serve to "prove" to the reader that despite his continued deviation from "standard" futurist poetry, Fillia had the blessing of the futurist leader to do as he wished with his poetry, and with the anthology. At the beginning of his official futurist career and newly come onto center stage, Fillia still uses Marinetti's words to lend validity to his project.

One of the most striking aspects of these excerpts is the emphasis that is placed on the spiritual aspect of Futurist poetry. This would have been, like so many of Fillia's other aesthetic and ideological positions, totally out of place in the movement prior to the War. The mid-1920s are the period in which it became very clear that the orientation toward the spiritual that had started its proliferation on the pages of the journal *L'Italia futurista* was now infiltrating futurism more deeply and subverting the movement's formerly more materialist nature. A significant part of this turn, as I will demonstrate, sprang from Fillia's works, both creative and theoretical. Besides Fillia, Enrico Prampolini had also begun to produce paintings that were seemingly more Metaphysical than Futurist, as had Fortunato Depero. But it was Fillia, and before him the women of *L'Italia futurista* who expanded the spiritual possibilities of futurism. Key example

are Benedetta's three novels: *Le forze umane*, *Il viaggio di Garará* and *Astra e il sottomarino*, as well as Rosa Rosà's *Una donna con tre anime*. As I will explore in chapter 3 of this work, Fillia's mysticism and spirituality were nonetheless unique in many respects from the works of these female authors.

The content of the first excerpt of Marinetti's writing on free-word poetry mostly reiterates the main points of the "Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista" declaring:

> Le parole in libertà orchestrano i colori, i rumori, e i suoni, combinano i materiali della lingua e dei dialetti, le formole aritmetiche e geometriche, i segni musicali, le parole vecchie, deformate o nuove, i gridi degli animali, delle belve e dei motori.[55]

The rest of this section continues in much the same vein, reiterating the rupture between futurism and its literary predecessors. Nonetheless, there are oddities in this iteration of Marinetti's formula. First of all, the mention of the dialects is new with respect to the preface to *I nuovi poeti futuristi*.[56] It would be perhaps insignificant, were it not for the "provincial" nature of *I nuovi poeti futuristi*, and Fillia's own provincial origins, which I consider so important to the 1925 anthology. The second reason this is a point of interest is the fact that starting around 1930, Mussolini began to personally interfere in censorship questions, accelerating and intensifying the campaign against the use of dialects that had already started in the mid-1920s, after an official royal decree in 1925 dictated the exclusive use of Italian in all official and legal documents.[57] Furthermore, Marinetti includes "old words" in his list, another decidedly odd inclusion. The end of this excerpt, though, is even more unusual than that. Marinetti calls the *parole in libertà* "[t]entivi eroici dello spirito." Any reference to the spirit or spirituality had been foreign to

[55] Ibid.p?
[56] Francesco Cangiullo, though, did use Neapolitan dialect in his 1916 work, *Piedigrotta*, so that is not an entirely new phenomenon in Futurism.
[57] Bonsaver, *Censorship and Literature in Fascist Italy*. 63-65; *Gabriella Klein, La politica linguistica del fascismo, Bologna, il Mulino.*1986 165-175.

Marinetti's futurist writing, but in the sea change of the 1920s, the spiritual reestablished itself forcefully within the formerly materialist movement.[58]

Furthermore, this first excerpt of Marinetti's introduction to *I nuovi poeti futuristi* alludes to another fundamental characteristic of Fillia's poetics—his painterly, visual approach, which becomes at times so vivid, as, for example, in *Notte di Estate*, that it becomes eidetic. By 1925 Fillia was well into the development of his pictorial interests, and the coloristic and highly visual style of his poetry is even more evident in the poems in *Lussuria radioelettrica* that it already was in *I nuovi poeti futuristi*. It will also become evident that Fillia was working to develop a poetic counterpart to his particular approach to futurist painting, which would encompass the paradoxical conception of time and space that fascinated European intellectuals so fundamentally in this period, that Fillia's entire volume of poetry is colored by it.

The connections between radio technology, the electromagnetic spectrum and Fillia's works also brings another new and significant layer of meaning to this excerpt of Marinetti's preface to *I nuovi poeti futuristi.* These lines come just after the above-discussed citation. Marinetti continues:

> Le parole in libertà sono un nuovo modo di vedere l'universo come somma di forze in moto che s'intersecano al traguardo cosciente del nostro *io* creatore, e vengono simultaneamente notate con tutti i mezzi espressivi che sono a nostra disposizione.
>
> Campo di ricerca difficilissimo, piene d'incertezze, lontane dal successo e dall'approvazione del pubblico. Tentativi eroici dello spirito che si proietta al difuori [sic] di tutte le sue norme di logica e di comodità.[59]

The experiences of color, sound and light all result from how the ears and eyes process energy waves on different parts of the electromagnetic spectrum. Electromagnetic waves are literally

[58] Spiritualism and the belief in the occult were common, however, among the historical avant-gardes, though they did not necessarily carry a spiritual connotation, being rather the expression of a belief in the existence of invisible yet material substances (such as ether), powers and magnetic energies. See Simona Cigliana for a discussion of spiritualism in futurism other Italian intellectual movements.

[59] Fillia, *Lussuria radioelettrica.*11

force (energy) in motion that can penetrate even solid masses. In the same way that technology was encroaching on daily life, it also penetrated literary metaphors, reframing and technologizing language. In Fillia's works, this penetration (pun intended) also takes on psychological and erotic characteristics.

So the introduction to *Lussuria radioelettrica* insinuates that there is a kind of lust that is radio-electric, that is, electrified, invisible, scientific and mechanical, yet perceptible, on both psychological and corporeal levels. For Fillia, radio-electric technology promised the ability to transmit not only physical desire, but also spiritual and symbolic eroticism. In the same way that waves transmit voice, data, sound, light and heat, waves could carry lust over distance, as Falchetti says in his preface:

> E che diremo ancora se consideriamo il trasporto dell'energia a grande distanza mediante la stessa conduttura elettrica e la scoperta eccelsa e gloriosa del nostro Galileo Ferraris? il campo elettrico-magnetico rotante? per cui rese finalmente possibile nell'applicazione dell'elettricità tutto quanto non si osava neppure sognare?[60]

This short paragraph contains a multitude of allusions indicating that radio-wave technology, even in its most mundane applications of broadcasting news bulletins and music, was previously undreamed of, and thus a glorious demonstration of the infinite possibilities of technology.

Though radio should have been a technology beloved of the futurists, the medium failed to capture and retain their attention. It is important to distinguish the fact that "wireless writing" (Marinetti's *communicazioni senza fili*) was not quite the same thing as "radio" in the early decades of the 20th century—wireless writing inhabits a place somewhere in between telegraphy and early radio broadcast.[61] Radio waves, which were independently discovery by an Italian, Galileo Ferraris, that could transport electrical energy through space, should almost have been

[60] Falchetti. in Ibid. 6.
[61] Timothy C Campbell, *Wireless Writing in the Age of Marconi* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006). x-xi.

the ideal symbol of futurism and Marinetti's *italianismo*, but it did not prove to be. Given the number of Italian scientists who were critical to the discovery and development of radio, the lack of a wholesale embrace of radio technology is even more puzzling. Moreover, the manifesto on the topic, "La Radia," written by Marinetti and Pino Masnata, was not published until 1933.[62]

For Fillia, one theoretical use of the radio was a tantalizing dream. This was the projection of futurist lust without requiring the physical proximity of bodies. However, that though Fillia acknowledged the existence of physical lust, and the sexual and erotic needs of the body, he maintained a strict separation of bodily needs from intellectual and emotional ones. This subject is developed in great detail in Fillia's three novels, but above all in *La morte della donna: romanzo collegate*, which was also published in 1925 (see chapter 3). Elsewhere in Fillia's writings the idea of bodiless desire is further elaborated. The end goal was to sever the link between the emotional and intellectual, from the sexual drives of the body. The end result would be the complete separation of human lust and the reproductive drive from exerting any effect on human intellect. This would lead to a collapse of the social constructs that dictated gendered behavior, thus eliminating gender difference and marking the birth of the *uomo senza sesso*. The manner, then, in which this seeming contradiction is resolved, is also found in *La morte della donna*, and in the manifesto "La pittura spirituale" in the elaboration on Fillia's theory of *ambiente*, and its importance to the human psyche. It again lies in the sublimation of desire into will. Notably, part of the plot of "Il mondo di domain" revolves around a broken machine that is supposed to dispense temperature related environment. And heat is precisely another type of perceptible, wave-transmitted energy.

The second excerpt, "L'estetica della Macchina" is also illuminating for the thematic content this work. In a similar way to the previous excerpt that focuses on technical aspects of

[62] TIF. 205-210.

futurist poetry, it reiterates many standard components of the futurist canon, mixed with intriguing indications about the movement's new direction. Typical of futurism, it lauds the inspirational and vitality augmenting qualities of the *estetica della macchina*, but atypical of Marinetti's earlier writings, and indicative of the fundamental shift that Fillia and his contemporaries were causing, Marinetti says (emphasis mine):

> Non c'è *salvezza* dunque fuori dell'estetica della macchina e del suo *splendore* geometrico meccanico che noi futuristi *predichiamo* e *glorifichiamo* da 16 anni. Questa estetica ha per elementi la forza imbrigliata, la velocità, la luce, la volontà, l'ordine, la disciplina, il metodo, la concisione essenziale e la sintesi, la felice precisione degli ingranaggi, la concorrenza d'energie convergenti in una sola traiettoria.[63]

The allusion to spiritual or religious tropes is undeniable in Marinetti's vocabulary. The use of splendor to describe geometry dates back to earlier manifestos,[64] but in the context of Marinetti's other wording (the use of *predicare* in particular), it also takes on religious connotations in this phrase. In the preceding paragraph, the 'heroic efforts of the spirit" were the "traguardo cosciente del nostro *io* creatore."[65] The classic metaphor that exists between writing and giving birth also contains an implied relationship to divine creation, going back, in part to the conception of Christ via the Word of God. Marinetti had already exploited the will to asexually reproduce through the will and the word in *Mafarka le futuriste* in 1909.

The spiritual tenor of the volume is prominent from the very first poem, *Autoradio*. Like many of Fillia's works from this period, is the first-person lyric expression of psychological rupture. In this case, the poem consists of an internal dialogue between the *io* and his *anima* in a moment of discord and transition. This poem, and *Adulterio futurista*, which comes two pages later, after *Supersensi* (which, like the poem *Sensualità mecchanica* contained in the volume, is republished from *I nuovi poeti futuristi* with only minimal differences in capitalization) are under

[63] Fillia, *Lussuria radioelettrica.*12.
[64] TIF. 188.
[65] Fillia, *Lussuria radioelettrica.*11.

the section heading "Amore futurista ai seni degli altoparlanti" (Futurist Love for the Breasts of Loudspeakers). *Autoradio* and *Adulterio futurista* represent the two possibilities that exist in Fillia's developing paradigms of the futurist "awakening." In *Autoradio*, the transition is entirely internal and meditative, whereas the transition in *Adulterio futurista* is catalyzed an external force, in this case a bicycle. Both paradigms reappear in many of Fillia's works, most notably in "Quarta dimensione di me stesso," which is of the latter, externally motivated type, and *L'ultimo sentimentale* which is of the former internally motivated type. The heading for the section is also a sly word game. It is more than just machine eroticism, with its association between a loudspeaker and a lactating woman's breasts, because the "milk" that the *altoparlante* produces is words! That is to say, technology *and also poetry* are sources of nourishment and maternal sustenance for someone newly "born" into modernity and the *Religione della Velocità*. It is a Freudian and Oedipal construction transferred onto a societal level, and which returns the grown man to the state of an infant, nourished at its "mother's" breasts.

The main conflict in *Autoradio*, which Fillia will resolve into a new kind of futurist spirituality, is between the "stanco atteggiamento di preghiera" that accompanies extreme lassitude and the threat of dissolution into the vacuum on one side, and on the other side the *io* who screams in response:

> — «non è vero!
> noi siamo fatti di materia pura
> abbiamo la potenza e la forza del radio
> — bisogna uscire ferocemente
> dall'involucro del Tempo:
> bisogna essere liberi per vivere!
>
> — vieni, anima rinnovata,
> ti condurrò in una grande casa
> grattacielo construito dai miei sensi
> — avrai fontane luminose di elettricità
> giardini artificiali di velluto e di feltro

concerti allegrissimi di Macchine
— ameremo la lussuria bruciate del Nuovo
proveremo la febbre sensuale della Velocità
daremo orizzonti più vasti all'Impossibile

e nelle notti colorate, chiare, ottimiste,
bacieremo in un'orgia rosso di vita
il corpo giovane della Modernità» —[66]

Stylistically, *Autoradio* remains essentially a free verse poem, in the vein of symbolist poetics and sentiment given its references to gardens, fountains, and concerts. On the other hand, the language also recalls the epic-heroic language of the "Fondazione e Manifesto del Futurismo." *Autoradio* is similar to Fillia's poems in *Dinamite* in form and style, but is more aggressively futurist in its thematic preoccupations and more technically sophisticated. The final stanzas of the poem repeat the standard futurist motif of rebirth and revitalization, brought about by the machine age and modernity. Where the poem succeeds with more force and sophistication than those in *Dinamite* is where it incorporates discordant elements that jar the senses, such as the "giardini artificiali di velluto e di feltro" and the "grattacielo costruito dai miei sensi." In a sort of reverse fashion from his poetics in *I nuovi poeti futuristi*, where more traditional content was successfully worked into a futurist poetic style, here Fillia has shown here how futurist content can be successfully worked into a more traditional style of verse.

Adulterio futurista is, in contrast to *Autoradio*, a mix of poetic forms, made up of mostly dialogue and prose-form verses. It is occasionally accented by typographic and free-word elements. Overall the form of this poem is far less important than the content, which parallels many of the issues that Fillia was working through concurrently in his prose. Like "Quarta dimensione di me stesso" from *La morte della donna*, *Adulterio futurista* concerns a man who has ceased to find satisfaction in his lover, and is looking for a new passion—a new mistress,

[66] Ibid.15.

really. He abandons his lover for a bicycle, after two days of conflict between them, and many days of internal torment for him. (In the short story, discussed in chapter 3, it is a motorcycle, and the female figure is not present within the narrative space. The number of similar iterations of the theme of this poem, shows Fillia exploring the issue in as many permutations as possible.)

There is a detectable shift in works whose themes were similar between *I nuovi poeti futuristi* and *Lussuria radioelettrica* especially regarding the issue of machine angst, and *Adulterio futurista* is indicative. The change in tone from the selection of erotically charged poems in *I nuovi poeti futuristi* to that of *Adulterio futurista* and several of the other *Lussuria radioelettrica* poems demonstrates that Fillia has, to a degree, worked through the anxiety caused by encroaching technology. There is not a shred of fear left in the conclusion, only unadulterated joy and sexual catharsis. The final verse reads:

> l'uomo urla: — «ti amo pazzamente,
> furiosamente, sul grande letto bianco, convulso, nau-
> fragante della strada provinciale — carezza sensuale
> del mio corpo sui tuoi nervi d'acciaio — spasimo fred-
> do della tua nudità geometrica che sussulta di lussu-
> ria meccanica: coito brutale del mio fisico con la bi-
> cicletta — fecondazione della VELOCITÀ! — »[67]

It is implied that the man no longer needs a female lover, and that his bicycle will fulfill his sexual needs. He will inseminate speed itself, reproducing more and more speed and mechanical splendor.

Superficially similar to Alfred Jarry's work, there are actually several important differences. The works of Alfred Jarry—featuring his *machines célèbitaires*, and especially the bicycle in *Le Surmale* with which the protagonist Marceuil fuses—demonstrate an attitude of fear in the face of the fusion of man with a machine and clear distrust of the body-machine complex. In contrast, there is no such fear in the *Lussuria radioelettrica* poems. Fillia has taken

[67] Ibid.19.

the idea of the bachelor machine and culled the elements of this motif that he found undesirable, kept those he found useful, then slightly altered many of the anxiety inducing negative aspects and made them into positive ones. The man-machine complex, like Falchetti's radio waves, made the possibility of incessant presence, the annulment of distance and the possibility of recording and repeating all sensory experiences very real. Instead of voicing the author's fear of being consumed and absorbed by the machine, Fillia's protagonist in *Adulterio futurista* remains the master of his new lover. (The same end result will reappear in "Quarta dimensione di me stesso.") The threat of merging with the machine does not exist as it does for other authors because man maintains his power to command the machine.[68]

Typical of the bachelor machine genre, though, Fillia's bicycle is gendered feminine, and the protagonist falls in love (or merely in lust, as the case may be) with the bicycle, while the relationship between the man and a real, human woman becomes disharmonious and the traditional structure of their relationship is upended. This was a source of intense anguish for bourgeois society at the time. Though these traits are similar to those of the bachelor machines in Jarry's works and in the works of many other writers in the decades right before and right after the turn of the 20th century, for Fillia the futurist the potential for the man-machine hybrid to disrupt or destroy the traditional bourgeois and conservative family structure is not a fearful possibility. Instead the breakdown of these moral codes and restrictive social stuctures was enthusiastically sought.

In contrast to Fillia, within the futurist movement, later in the 1920, the sense of fear and anxiety does become prevalent in the works of futurists such as Ruggero Vasari. Technology was becoming an intimate part of people's lives, literally and figuratively. In fact, the 1920s was also when the vibrator first made it into pornography, escaping the context of a "medical treatment"

[68] Mikkonen, *The Plot Machine*.20-27

for "female hysteria," though the use in pornography also caused the vibrator's general disappearance from the market until the 1960s.[69] This adds a dimension of possibility to the anxiety surrounding Alfred Jarry's *machines célèbitaires* or Vasari's similar constructs in *L'angoscia delle macchine*.[70]And there is nonetheless, some discomfort in Fillia's works, too. According to Michael Carrouges, cited by Kai Mikkonen, the machine affirms the power of passion and negates death by rejecting physical women and procreation. Carrouges also argues that the bachelor machine mechanizes and ridicules love.[71] Throughout his machine poems Fillia does communicate a certain discomfort with the infiltration of technology into everyday life that has thus far occurred, but the qualities Carrouges claims for the bachelor machine are exactly the ones Fillia was pursuing.

By equating futurist adultery with the betrayal of a human woman in favor of a machine, Fillia furthers the ridicule of love and sentimentality that futurism had enthusiastically perpetuated for a decade and a half. Not only are these great strides toward modernity, in the futurist worldview, and thus already mostly unproblematic, the possibility of machine reproduction or auto-regeneration rendered the need for the maternal and the feminine even more obsolete. This then reinforces the idea that the maternal and feminine were no longer positive forces in a mechanized society. Fillia further refines and to some degree de-problematizes the futurist war on the feminine and the threat of weakness, by continuing to shift this war towards dismantling gender norms when he assigns both the role of the savior of Man (Yole in "Maternità) in *La morte della donna* and that of the first *uomo senza sesso* (Nina Sereni) in *L'uomo senza sesso* to women (see chapter 3). These examples illustrate a fundamental point of

[69] Rachel P Maines, *The Technology of Orgasm: "Hysteria, " the Vibrator, and Women's Sexual Satisfaction* (Baltimore, Md.; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999). Though various "medical" versions had been invented since the first one in 1734, the first home, commercial model was made available in 1902. ETC.
[70] Contarini and whatever article? Book? That talked about Vasari… Need to track down.
[71] Mikkonen, *The Plot Machine*. 32.

divergence between Fillia's take on the elimination of the weak, corrupting feminine and the general position of his fellow futurists that is embedded in this issue. While Fillia does maintain an ultimately androcentric worldview, as I have previously noted, the violent elimination of the female of the species is conspicuously lacking in contrast to Marinetti's *Mafarka le futuriste* or Vasari's *L'angoscia delle macchine*, to cite only two examples. And, as will become clear in Fillia's novels, women are crucial to his revolution.

Another notable feature of *Lussuria radioelettrica* is how many of the entries are allusions to, citations of or occasionally complete reproductions of other works by the author. Fillia, in this practice, was very obviously modeling his methodology and futurist practice on Marinetti's futurist convention. The attempt, by Fillia, to model himself after the futurist leader, is clearly demonstrated by a series of intentional parallels. Fillia demonstrates repeatedly that he understood the utility of Marinetti's publicity machine and how to use Marinetti's methods for garnering as much attention as possible. One such method was the reprinting, repurposing and/or reworking of texts in order to perpetuate production and the proliferation of items. Not only does this cause the propagation of the work itself, it increases the abundance of both the printed word and of the author's percentage of presence within the growing mass of cultural product, augmenting the crisis of abundance.[72]

Fillia reprinted more than one poem from *I nuovi poeti futuristi* in *Lussuria radioelettrica*, and he also reused titles several times, for different poems. In this way, Fillia ties these poems together into clusters, facilitating his continued exploration into the respective themes and metaphors. For example, Fillia includes a work titled *Notturno* in both *I nuovi poeti futuristi*, and in that case they are different poems. The poem *Notturno* in *I nuovi poeti futuristi* is a more typical futurist poem about a prostitute, and the speaker, the "elegant hooligan" who

[72] Schleifer, *Modernism and Time*.

patronized her once.[73] In comparison the poem *Notturno* in *Lussuria radioelettrica*, is the semi-abstract, almost hallucinatory experience of the conscious mind as it is integrated into the environment, highlighting a moment of fear of what is to come. The last verse reads:

> paura di allungare queste linee soggettive per non incontrare l'ambiente = situazione anormale che beve l'assoluto e si ubriaca dimenticando la realtà oggettiva[74]

Conversely, the poems *Primitivismo* and *Sensualità meccanica* are each one the same poem in both volumes.

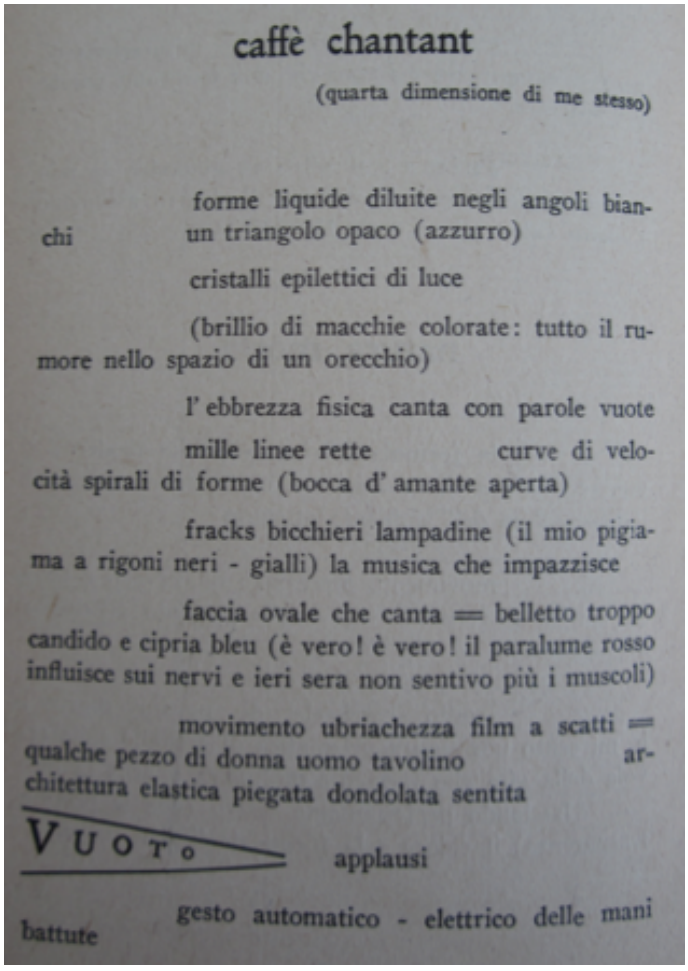
This self-reflexive and discursive artistic process highlights a poem in *Lussuria radioelettrica* that is very significant for the way in which it ties together themes. It is the poem titled *Caffè chantant (Quarta dimensione di me stesso*). This poem loops back to give further insight into Fillia's thought on the experience of time; it also reinforces the importance of caffè culture, and the importance of the psychological and subjective experience of and in Fillia's poetry. It is an interesting poem in and of itself, but it becomes especially striking when placed in parallel with Fillia's painting of almost the same title: *Set and Costumes for Quarta dimensione del cuore* (Figure 8), then with the short story "Quarta dimensione di me stesso" and with the poem *Notte di Estate: Caffè – chantant affollatissimo* from *I nuovi poeti futuristi*.

Moreover, the poem *Caffè chantant (Quarta dimensione di me stesso)*, and all three other works that were given similar titles, must also be versions of the never published theatrical work *Quarta dimensione del cuore*, which the painting illustrates, and that Fillia announced many times in the back matter of other publications, but which he never followed through to publication. Though it is impossible to know if even a draft of the play was ever written and subsequently lost or destroyed, it is also possible that Fillia merely chose to abandon the project, having decided that the two poems and the short story adequately addressed the intersection of

[73] Fillia. *Notturno. in* F. T Marinetti. et al., *F.T. Marinetti presenta I nuovi poeti futuristi*. 178.
[74] Fillia, *Lussuria radioelettrica.*

time, emotion and intellect. Viewing these works as a group lends itself to an understanding of Fillia's working method, and underlines a number of important themes. Each of these works—the short story, two very different poems and the painting—approaches the same themes from a different viewpoint.

Caffè chantant (Quarta dimensione di me stesso) is a quintessentially futurist poem. It is a fragmented series of impressions and experiences set, like *Notte di Estate*, in a nightclub (though in this case an actual nightclub and not a metaphorical forest scene) during a performance. The poem (Figure 12) uses descriptive language so intense that it is almost surreal or hallucinatory.



caffè chantant

(quarta dimensione di me stesso)

forme liquide diluite negli angoli bianchi un triangolo opaco (azzurro)

cristalli epilettici di luce

(brillio di macchie colorate: tutto il rumore nello spazio di un orecchio)

l'ebbrezza fisica canta con parole vuote

mille linee rette curve di velocità spirali di forme (bocca d'amante aperta)

fracks bicchieri lampadine (il mio pigiama a rigoni neri - gialli) la musica che impazzisce

faccia ovale che canta = belletto troppo candido e cipria bleu (è vero! è vero! il paralume rosso influisce sui nervi e ieri sera non sentivo più i muscoli)

movimento ubriachezza film a scatti = qualche pezzo di donna uomo tavolino architettura elastica piegata dondolata sentita

VUOTO applausi

battute gesto automatico - elettrico delle mani

Figure 12: Fillia, *Caffè chantant (quarta dimensione di me stesso)*

The evocative imagery compares the sparkle cast by the lights to crystal fragments. They are so intense that they cause an epileptic seizure. The shadows on the white walls are compared to liquid splashed into the corners. The kaleidoscope of colors, dancers and movement also evokes Umberto Boccioni's painting *La risata* (1911); the experience is a rush of fractured, intersecting stimuli and drunken clientele. The poem spins, and wobbles through a series of images that echo the empty words of the song sung by physical drunkenness. Inebriation of the body, not of the intellect rules here, and Fillia has rendered the effects of consuming too much alcohol with incredible vividness. In this iteration of the fourth dimension of the self (the self moving through space *and* time), the inebriation of the physical body is examined and it forms a triad with the ecstatic expression of the natural world (*Notte di Estate*) and the ecstasy of the mind (both *Adulterio futurista* and "Quarta dimensione di me stesso").

Furthermore, the title of this poem is paradoxically both typical of futurism and also very atypical. The allegory of the poem is, as the title tells us, the subjective experience of time and space as they are altered and heightened by alcohol and by the chaotic stimulation of the nightclub. Time is as fractured and unstable as the rainbow of glittering lights. All five senses overlap and meld, fueled by drunkenness. Likewise, the short story "Quarta dimensione di me stesso" is focused on the narrator's experience in time and passing through time while experiencing a futurist awakening. Time is fluid and non-linear for Fillia, and it is utterly subjective. This is a radical position, in the face of positivism, and reflects the growing body of scientific evidence that rejected the presumed objectivity and concreteness of time and space.[75]

[75] The early decades of the 20th century saw such fundamental discoveries as radiation, Einstein's proof of the mass-energy equivalency, the discovery of atomic particles, and significant research into the nature of genetics. All of these discoveries and many more had profound effects on society and on the group psyche. See Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918*.

Questions of subjectivity and shifting perceptions of space and time (and the relationship between the two) are also related to radio as a ontological problem.[76] As Timothy Campbell explains, the tendency is to associate radio broadcast with intimacy and a private world of listening. It presupposes a relationship between the creation of interiority and the obligatory reception of the transmission. Radio amplifies the individuality of the speaking voice, and creates an immaterial, but very real, construct, and it causes time and space to collapse, toward instantaneity.[77] Radio, therefore, would permit the limitless, instantaneous and intimate transmission of Fillia's lyric subjectivity to a far distant listener, whom would be stimulated in all ways other the sexual. Time was a persistent preoccupation in this period in general and for futurism in particular. Throughout the movement's ideological development, time was a topic of discussion and of theorization, especially as it related to the understanding of past, present and future on practical, epistemological and ontological levels.[78] This was a historical moment in which time's status as an absolute or relative quantity was in flux, and when the fascist regime was beginning to manipulate concepts of historical time to its own propagandistic ends.[79] So Fillia pushed back, manipulating the same to his ends.

The mix of whimsy and menace that characterized several of Fillia's technology poems in *I nuovi poeti futuristi* reappears at the end of *Lussuria radioelettrica*, though this time the focus is on an apparently benign topic. The last few poems are grouped under the heading "Giocattoli ("games" or "toys") and are dedicated to Fillia's compatriots Fortunato Depero, Giacomo Balla, and Enrico Prampolini. These six short poems: *Uomo, Guerra, Scienza, Amore,*

[76] As I previously metioned, there was not a futurist manifesto on the radio until October, 1933 in the *Gazzetta del Popolo*. The manifesto, "La Radia," signed by Marinetti and Pino Masnata, and is intensely propagandistic. It also focuses much more on the aesthetic—including in the ideological sense—potential of the radio, and not the scientific and spiritual aspects that are the focus of *Lussuria radioelettrica.* TIF 205-210.
[77] Campbell, *Wireless Writing in the Age of Marconi*. xiv.
[78] On the preoccupation with the nature of time, see: Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918*.
[79] Fogu, *The Historic Imaginary*; Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918*; Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle*.

Creazione, and *Luce*, are dated 1923. They are very similar to the six *ritratti spirituali* that conclude the 1925 manifesto. They follow Fillia's argument that, "lo svolgimento cerebrale s'innalza nella più assoluta comprensione spaziale-cromatica,"[80] meaning that for Fillia, vision and the elevation of the intellect are inextricably bound. The implications of this statement are profound. The comprehension of spatial and chromatic values spurs the development of the mind, and that is a process that occurs in time. The process of sublimating experiences will continue to be critical to Fillia's work throughout his life.

The description of the staging (the first line) of each *ritratto* in the manifesto and each *giocattolo* poem is identical, but afterwards the poems and *ritratti spirituali* diverge. Whereas the second phrase of each of the *ritratti spirituali* describes a body that performs a symbolic representation of each subject, the second verse in each of the *giocattoli* describes the costume and actions of a *burattino,* who seems, like Pinocchio, to move on his own. The descriptions of the costumes and actions vary from minimal differences to complete changes between the texts of the two groups of poems. For example in the manifesto version *Uomo* reads:

> *Uomo*: un cubo rosso che sostiene 4 piramidi colorate (sintesi della vita) costruite con un corpo che balla vestito di 7 colori: la testa nera nel vuoto di un occhio enorme ha il movimento meccanica di spazi colorati secondo la decadenza dei passi[81]

And the *Lussuria radioelettrica* version is very similar:

> sfondo: un cubo rosso che sostiene 4 piramidi color
> ate: sintesi della vita
> il burattino che balla è vestito di 7 colori
> la testa nera nel vuoto di un occhio enor-
> me à il movimento meccanica di spazi colorati secondo
> la cadenza dei passi[82]

[80] Crispolti, *Fillia*. 71.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Fillia, *Lussuria radioelettrica.* 30.

In each case, as in this example, the abstract and metaphorical descriptions from the manifesto are rearranged into verses, and they are placed on a stage and they are made more tangible. The shifts are an effort to show both dexterity, and to provide another concrete example of how his works would transfer from the abstract, to the stage, to the literary.

In an interesting shift, the title of the fourth poem, *Amore,* differs from the *Amare* in the manifesto, and the description varies. *Conquista* in the manifesto is entirely re-titled as *Scienza* in the poetry, but otherwise remains almost identical. The differences may be explained by the fact that the two groups of works served different purposes; the *ritratti* served the theoretical purposes of the manifesto, hence the more abstract "bodies," whereas the poems are concrete applications of theories and are also meant to seem as descriptions of real toys. The *giocattoli* are also meant to tie Fillia's poetry to the "Ricostruzione futurista dell'universo" and to have a mechanical character that fit the unifying theme of *Lussuria radioelettrica*.

Furthermore, these poems confirm that Fillia was intentionally working within the boundaries set by his predecessors while still trying to put his stamp on futurist poetics. The dedication to Balla, Depero and Prampolini makes at least one aspect of these poems' meaning immediately clear. Fillia is establishing his ideological debt to the two authors of "Ricostruzione futurista dell'universo" (Balla and Depero) and to the artist who would be one of Fillia's primary collaborators and influences from 1925 onward (Prampolini). In "Ricostruzione futurista dell'universo" Balla and Depero declare:

> Noi futuristi, Balla e Depero, vogliamo realizzare questa fusione totale per ricostruire l'universo rallegrandolo, cioè ricreandolo integralmente. Daremo scheletro e carne all'invisibile, all'impalpabile, all'imponderabile, all'impercettibile. Troveremo degli equivalenti astratti di tutte le forme e tutti gli elementi dell'universo, poi li combineremo insieme, secondo i capricci della nostra ispirazione, per formare dei complessi plastici che metteremo in moto. […]
> Ogni azione che si sviluppa nello spazio, ogni emozione vissuta, sarà per noi intuizione di una scoperta. […]

IL GIOCATTOLO FUTURISTA

> Nei giochi e nei giocattoli, come in tutte le manifestazioni passatiste, no c'è che grottesca imitazione, timidezza, (trenini, carrozzini, pupazzi immobili, caricature cretine d'oggetti domestici), *antiginnastici o monotoni, solamente atti a istupidire e avvilire il bambino.* […]
>
> Il giocattolo futurista sarà utilissimo anche all'adulto, perché lo manterrà *giovane, agile, festante, disinvolto, pronto a tutto, instancabile, istintivo e intuitivo*. [emphasis original][83]

Futurist toys were, therefore, meant to stimulate children to develop the strength of character and intellect that futurism considered crucial to a modern, vital society, such as an easy laugh, an active imagination and the physical courage to fight.[84] Furthermore, the use of toys and games, Balla and Depero asserted, was useful to adults, because toys and games keep them young, agile and tireless. So, in this group of six poems, Fillia has created puppets out of six motifs, all of which, except for *Amore*, are common futurist themes.

There is, however, a definite tension between Fillia's *giocattoli* and Balla and Depero's. Balla and Depero were writing at the beginning of World War I, and there is a distinctly positive attitude towards the stalwart futurist themes of war, violence and technological progress at all costs. By the time Fillia is writing in the early to mid-1920s, the situation was very different. Europe had lost an entire generation of young men to the war, leaving only the elderly and the very young. Fillia's puppets, responding to this trauma, are at best ambivalent (*Uomo*) and at their most conflicted exude both anxiety and a sort of forced utopianism or avoidance (*Guerra* and *Amore*).

The very last poem in the volume, *Luce*, is also symptomatic of the conflicted state of Fillia's thought. It differs only slightly from the manifesto version, but the change is not trivial. The poem reads:

[83] De Maria, *Per conoscere Marinetti e il futurismo*.172-175.
[84] Ibid.174-175.

sfondo: triangolo giallo in campo nero:
sintesi della luce
il burattino rosso in uno specchio alzato
raccoglie con mimica pesante gli arcobaleni dei riflet-
tori[85]

The important change is the addition of the description of the puppet's movements as "heavy." This will add a layer of meaning to the poem that is not present in the earlier text.

Artificial light is represented by the yellow triangle on a black backdrop, mimicking the light a street lamp would project onto a dark street. The puppet, dressed in red, with "heavy" gestures—caused by physical and psychic exhaustion—collects the rainbows cast by the spotlights in a mirror. The rainbows, physically caused by the splitting of the visible light spectrum through a prism, reflect a childlike wonder and innocence, but the mirror forces simultaneous self-examination and self-reflection. The other five poems variously refer either to luminous or coloristic effects; it is only in *Luce* that the two elements are brought together. White light and colored light are, in the mirror, revealed to be one and the same. Subtly bringing back the themes and purpose of the volume, the poem is at once visual and coloristic, theatrical, and metaphorical. It is reliant on numerous futurist motifs, making it in a fitting conclusion to the collection. This poem also inevitably calls to mind Balla's iconic 1913 painting *Lampada ad arco* (which was, itself, inspired by Marinetti's 1910 manifesto "Uccidiamo il chiaro di luna") as well as theatrical robots and the puppets of Depero's *balli plastici*.

Fillia had also already included three poems in *I nuovi poeti futuristi* that were very similar to his *giocattoli*, all titled *Complesso plastico*. The *Complesso plastico* poems are structurally similar to the *giocattoli* in that the first verse describes the staging, and the second

[85] Fillia, *Lussuria radioelettrica.* 31.

the action, but where the *giocattoli* have a concrete figure with agency in the second verse, the *Complessi plastici* describe abstract, conceptual scenes. They are manifestations of Balla and Depero's *capricci di ispirazione messi in moto* as described in the "Ricostruzione futurista dell'universo," and they also likely allude to the *complessi plastici* that Depero built in 1914-15. However, Fillia's poems are descriptions much more akin to theater sets, than to the moving sculptures in the manifesto.

3. Conclusions

Wireless telegraphy was a salient facet of the burgeoning technological innovations infiltrating daily life in the 1920s. As such, it is unsurprising that it would become such an influence on futurist poetry. Although technology and the machine were sometimes a source of anxiety even for Fillia, especially in connection with the environment of the factory and the alienation of the worker, the poems are for the most part a celebration of technology, especially its more manageable manifestations and uses in its mundane applications. Nonetheless it is here, in the first several poems that Fillia provides for *I nuovi poeti futuristi*, that the technology derived anxiety that he felt is manifest. Other critics (see chapters 1 and 3) have located this anxiety in Fillia's theatrical and prose works, which is a position that I refute. Machine anxiety was certainly present in some phases of Fillia's futurist works, and it is present here, but its influence is, overall, limited. It was too early in Fillia's thought for this anxiety to manifest in *Dinamite* and in *Sensualità*; the ideological goals of those two works were very specific to the communist revolution, and the works remained targeted on that purpose. By the time Fillia wrote *La morte della donna*, he had mostly worked through the kind of machine anxiety typical of

Alfred Jarry's bachelor machine and Ruggero Vasari's *L'angoscia delle macchine* or if not, felt it to be irrelevant to the structure of that work.

Whereas *I nuovi poeti futuristi* was to some extent an exercise, by Fillia, in using futurist poetics to establish the legitimacy of his work, *Lussuria radioelettrica* positions him firmly into the post-*ricostruzione* camp.[86] The latter poems demonstrate Fillia's (re)constructive impulses, and the beginnings of his ambitious, though under the radar, campaign in the 1920s to guide futurism. *Autoradio* sets the tone for the whole volume of *Lussuria radioelettrica*, and the thematic and poetic arc of the volume is closed by *Luce* in the same way that *Poesia* opened Fillia's section of *I nuovi poeti futuristi* and *Finale* closed it.

Where Fillia's poetics and thematic preoccupations in *I nuovi poeti futuristi* demonstrate the state of flux that characterized the early 1920s, *Lussuria radioelettrica* demonstrates the inherent, yet intentional paradoxes in Fillia's futurism. The paradox of the futurist conception of time develops into the paradox of Fillia's spiritual interests emerging within the materialist framework of futurism.[87]

[86] This traditional "division" derives significantly from the work of Enrico Crispolti, and may need to be reconsidered.
[87] See Jeffrey T Schnapp, *Modernitalia* (Oxford [England]; New York: Peter Lang, 2012). 1-22 for a discussion of the paradox of Futurist time.

Chapter 3: The Experimental Novels

0. Introduction

In the mid-1920s, Fillia began to shift his literary experimentation into prose, publishing three novels and a substantial number of short stories between 1925 and 1929. The focus of this chapter will be on his three novel-length works, *La morte della donna* (1925), *L'uomo senza sesso* and *L'ultimo sentimentale* (both 1927). As I will show, Fillia uses his prose works to explore a variety of themes typical of futurism, but often with an atypical interpretation. Principal among the themes and problems he explores in his novels are issues of gender and sexuality, which he uses to suggest his theoretical evolutionary path toward a futurist society. As I have previously alluded to, the embryonic explorations of these issues were present in Fillia's theatrical and poetic works from as early as 1923, though Fillia's thought reaches its most detailed articulation here. I will also address Fillia's vivid and painterly descriptions in order to demonstrate how his interest in visuality, evident in his poetry and budding visual artistry, carries into his prose.

My intentions for this chapter are to analyze and contextualize Fillia's development and application of what, for its time, was a radically feminist agenda, and to demonstrate that he continued to show evidence of communist sympathies and far-left politics, despite an official political shift to the right. I demonstrate that Fillia's "feminism," despite remaining problematically androcentric, predicts and predates aspects of both the Italian tradition of understanding women and the feminine as fundamentally different from the masculine, as well as aspects of the Anglo-French tradition, which posits gender difference as a social construct and recognizes no inherent difference in the sexes. In an effort to draw out the source of Fillia's unusual ideology, I will also explore the most important of the women's rights activists, both socialist and communist, active during and immediately prior to Fillia's lifetime. These women

include Anna Kuliscioff, Camilla Ravera, Clara Zetkin, Aleksandra Kollontaj and Anna Balabanoff. I will also compare Fillia's works and thought to that of notable futurist women, such as Valentine de Saint-Point and Benedetta Cappa Marinetti, in order to provide a better understanding of the intellectual exchange within the movement and the place the female voice occupied in it.

In the three novels I analyze, Fillia has shifted his main preoccupation from the radical politics of the proletariat, the central theme of his earliest poetry and theater, and from questions of formalism, to the *questione sessuale*. Despite the increasing totalitarianism of the fascist regime, Fillia continues to push an agenda that runs directly counter to the regime's reactionary policies.[1] His novels and short stories place female protagonists at the center of very public dramas and political activities, which ran counter to the fascist regime's work to undo the progress made toward women's rights from the 1880s to 1920s and its attempts to restrict women's roles to that of wife and mother. In direct contrast to this and to the virgin-whore dichotomy that held up the patriarchal moral order, the network of the *case chiuse* and the police monitoring of prostitutes, Fillia's female protagonists were unmarried, childless, and sexually liberated.

Fillia's novels also tap into a theme that has otherwise been most often reserved to religion—an intensive investigation of purity, purification, and the distillation or sublimation of the bodily. In Fillia's works, the physical needs of the body and especially its sexual desires are forcibly disconnected from their influence over the psychic and emotional self, and the energy this liberates in the mind is channeled into the spiritual and abstract. This was already evident to a degree in Fillia's poetry, and it reaches its apex in his later religious paintings. Fillia was a

[1] Nadia Spano and Fiamma Camarlinghi, *La Questione Femminile Nella Politica Del PCI, 1921-1963* (Roma: Donne e Politica, 1972).

leader in the tendency toward reintroducing the psychological and subjective into futurism, though these qualities had begun to infiltrate the works of other futurists from about 1915 onward.[2] Fillia's increasingly complex, inward-focused psychological profiles are in direct conflict with the earlier materialist and objectivity-oriented movement,[3] which tended toward populating its novelistic works with characters who were intentionally reduced to pure actants.[4]

Past critics have relegated Fillia's prose works, dismissively, to the category of the *genere brillante*, part of the 1920s *futurismo di consumo*: works of little critical value published purely to raise funds and to generate publicity, that generally lack in literary merit.[5] I will contest this claim, and demonstrate, based on textual evidence, that Fillia was aware of this and intentionally exploiting it. Moreover, this distinction entirely misses the point of futurism and avant-gardism, the goals of which were not only to create new links between high art and the masses, but to abolish the distinction entirely.[6] I will further demonstrate that the accusatory dismissal of these works lies partly in the fact that previous critics have failed to note the continuing influence of Fillia's radical Communist activities on his ideology. Previous scholarship has held that by the mid-1920s Fillia had already entirely abandoned his leftist agenda, and while I agree that Fillia had begun to move to the right, and to accommodate the regime, his politics in this period remained at odds with the regime.[7]

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[2] Giacomo Balla and Fortunato Depero "Ricostruzione futurista dell'universo." in De Maria, *Per conoscere Marinetti e il futurismo*.
[3] For discussions of the materialism of the futurist movement see: Roberto Tessari, *Il mito della macchina. Letteratura e industria nel primo Novecento italiano.* (Milano: U. Mursia, 1973).; Berghaus, *Futurism and the Technological Imagination*.
[4] See the "Fondazione e Manifesto del Futurismo." in. *TIF* 7-12.
[5] Ottieri, *Fillia, un percorso futurista*; Salaris, *Storia del futurismo*.
[6] Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).
[7] Ottieri, *Fillia, un percorso futurista*.; Claudia Salaris. "Attività letteraria di Fillia" in Crispolti, *Fillia*. 61-69. Marzio Pinottini. "Fillia futurista fra Guido da Verona e Pitigrilli." in Fillia, *Bolidi e tango* (Torino: N. Aragno, 2002). 311-325.

1. Women in Italy 1880-1920: Feminism, Socialism, and Communism

Futurism's relationship to feminism and the movement's well-documented misogyny have been contentious issues in past scholarship, often contributing to the movement's overall dismissal from the canonical studies of 20th century avant-gardes; however, in recent years, the scholarship has become much more nuanced in its understanding of women's place in futurism. Italian feminism, though a vibrant voice in the forty years leading up to fascism, is not well-known outside of the limited scholarly circles that study its authors and activists.

In the period that lasted roughly from unification to the fascist Ventennio, Italian feminists had made significant strides toward universal suffrage, workers' rights and the right to property. The two primary affiliations for feminists in Italy, in this period, were Catholic and socialist; it is the activities of the socialists that are of greater interest to this study. The former tended to concern itself with women's role within the family, and the rights relevant to that sphere, the latter took greater interest in women's legal rights and rights to education and emancipation. One of the most important and influential texts for these socialist-feminists was Friedrich Engels's *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, published in 1884. In it, Engels argues that women's liberation will only be possible when they are given the opportunity to participate in production and their domestic work is reduced to an irrelevant amount, and when both are shared equally between all members of society, male or female. Engels further argues that this is only possible with the advent of modern industry. The book begins with Engels' interpretation of ancient society, and moves through the major stages of development of civilization, as they were understood at the time.[8] (This is a temporal structure that Fillia's novel *La morte della donna* will mimic.)

[8] Friedrich Engels and Ernest Untermann, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State,* (Chicago: C.H. Kerr & Co., 1902).

One of the seminal early texts of European feminism is the socialist Anna Kuliscioff's *Il monopolio dell'uomo*, which she delivered as a speech in advance of elections in 1887. Kuliscioff was the principal female leader of the new socialist movement in Italy. Her speech called for the end of patriarchal domination over, oppression of and exploitation of women, within the family and in the workforce. Anna Maria Mozzoni was a contemporary of Kuliscioff's who took on the issue of bourgeois hypocrisy, though she—and the socialist party in general—never linked feminism and the revolution, and thus their propaganda never transformed into a political action program.

The Italian suffragist movement began to gain traction in the early twentieth century, supported by socialist, Catholic and liberal women, and the first national women's congress was held in 1908, in Rome.[9] The congress, however, did not address the issue of suffrage, and took the position of class unity over class conflict. The women's movement began to suffer, already in 1910-12; its hard won unity began to dissolve because of factional disagreement over the war in Libya.[10] Many feminists, at the time, like Zetkin and Ravera, linked the process of ending female oppression to the fight against capitalism and the exploitation of women. Zetkin's work had begun to circulate in Italy even before World War I.

A major issue that feminists in Italy faced was an inability to convince and communist leadership to make their interests a priority. The war and the October Revolution caused a major schism of socialists into groups that remained under the moniker socialist, and those who shifted over to the Third International, and to the founding of the Partito Communista Italiano in 1921. The founding of the PCI, and its journal *L'ordine nuovo* provided the opportunity to solidify a

[9] Lucia Re, "Italians and the Invention of Race: The Poetics and Politics of Difference in the Struggle over Libya, 1890-1913," *California Italian Studies Journal* 1, no. 1 (February 17, 2010), http://escholarship.org/uc/item/96k3w5kn?query=lucia%20re. 38.
[10] Ibid. 38-39.

program, and it gave publishing space to Ravera, Zetkin, Alexandra Kollontai and many other women. Despite fundamental disagreements on how the topic was to be handled, Clara Zetkin and Camilla Ravera worked closely with Antonio Gramsci and the PCI, and both published extensively in Gramsci's journal *L'ordine nuovo*. Clara Zetkin also translated a number of important political texts between German and Italian, greatly expanding access to the writings of feminists outside of Italy.

Ravera, principal among the women of *L'ordine nuovo*, denounced the condition of housewives and the bourgeois oppression of the working classes and took a clear, radical stance on the issue of maternity for the first time, supporting even the right to abortion.[11] Starting in 1920, however, as fascism began its rise to power, women's rights began to slide backwards. Their salaries were cut; the positions outside the home they were able to hold reduced, and any possibility of domestic rights eliminated.[12] Nevertheless, Fillia had at least a few years of direct contact with these feminist activists, while in Turin attempting to forge the futurist-communist alliance.

The second direct way that feminism in Italy affected Fillia is through exposure to futurist feminism. Though the movement, particularly in its early phases, has been rightly criticized for its violent misogyny, the movement's anti-establishment politics (including its condemnation of marriage, bourgeois sexual mores, and the invective against restrictive femininity) and the movement's openness to a multiplicity of literary and artistic modalities drew many educated literary and artistic women to its ranks. This was particularly true after World

[11] Marlene LeGates, *In Their Time: A History of Feminism in Western Society* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Jane Slaughter and Robert Kern, *European Women on the Left: Socialism, Feminism, and the Problems Faced by Political Women, 1880 to the Present* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981); Joan Wallach Scott, *Feminism and History* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Pickering-Iazzi, *Mothers of Invention*.
[12] Pickering-Iazzi, *Mothers of Invention*; Minciacchi, "La concezione della donna tra futurismo e fascismo"; Spackman, *Fascist Virilities*.

War I, and in the ranks of the magazine *L'Italia futurista*. In the late 1910s and early 1920s Maria Goretti, Rosa Rosà, Benedetta, Enif Robert and Maria Ginanni, among others, joined the movement and produced works of incredible originality and richness, and helped to shape the movement's later years.[13] Through the influence of these women, futurist rhetoric softened, and it shifted towards the condemnation of gender constructs, and away from outright and extreme misogyny

2. Novel Summaries

Given the difficulty involved in obtaining copies of Fillia's novels, even after the 2002 reprint by the casa editrice Nino Aragno, I have deemed it helpful to include a detailed summary of each work in order to render my arguments clearer. This section is not intended as any kind of analysis. That will follow in the next sections.

La morte della donna: romanzo a novelle collegate

Fillia's first novel is composed of ten short stories, linked together by an eleventh story, which makes up a narrative frame, situated at the beginning and the end of the novel (the sections labeled "La morte della donna" and "Conclusione"). The framing story, narrated in the present, centers on a famous author, called only 'lo Scrittore,' and his fellow passengers on a transatlantic ocean liner sailing through the Caribbean Sea. The Scrittore is challenged to defend his works by a female passenger, 'la Signora,' who accuses him of writing absurd tales. She believes that his characters, especially the female ones, are not credible or realistic. The Scrittore

[13] For analyses of women and futurism, see for example: Re, "Futurism and the Feminine."; Bello Minciacchi, *Scrittrici della prima avanguardia*.; Minciacchi, "La concezione della donna tra futurismo e fascismo."; Contarini, *La femme futuriste*.Pickering-Iazzi, *Mothers of Invention*.; Angelica Balabanoff, *My Life as a Rebel.* (New York; London: Harper & Brothers, 1938).; A Kollontaĭ, *The Autobiography of a Sexually Emancipated Communist Woman* ([New York: Herder and Herder, 1971); Klara Zetkin and Klara Zetkin, *La questione femminile e la lotta al riformismo.* (Milano: G. Mazzotta, 1972).; Camilla Ravera, *Breve storia del movimento femminile in Italia* (Roma: Editori riuniti, 1978).

responds to each of her challenges, defending and explaining his theories, which he further explains and defends in the conclusion.

The Scrittore believes that society is evolving and that humanity is moving toward a stronger future in which the damaging and artificial social constructs that create differences and inequality between the genders, most especially creating weakness in women, will be eliminated. His stories, he claims, are meant to reflect this evolution. The Scrittore briefly outlines the "scientific" basis for his works in language that is heavily coded in social Darwinist terms. This sets up a narrative arc in the novel that begins with development of early civilizations, skips the "decadent period" (everything from antiquity to the present), then finishes with the present day and the possible future. The Scrittore maintains that history is an inevitable and necessary march toward an end state characterized by complete gender equality.

The first four narratives following the introduction are set in antiquity, focusing on four ancient civilizations. A lot of emphasis is placed on religion in these four stories, emphasizing that this was an earlier, barbaric, wild, unscientific and superstitious stage of human development and civilization. The second group of four stories is set in the present day, and they narrate two common modernist motifs: the cabaret dancer-prostitute, and the young woman pregnant out of wedlock, then the novel features two common literary formulas: a diary entry exploring existential angst, and an impassioned epistolary monologue. The influence that religion holds on humanity disappears over the course of the novel, steadily diminishing as the stories move temporally forward, but sexuality and desire remain an obsessive focus throughout. The ninth story is a one-act work of futurist synthetic theater, set in an abstract mechanistic future at the breaking point between the old world order and the new. The tenth and last story is set in the far

future, and it depicts a society that is further evolved toward the Scrittore's vision, but which cannot be described as fully utopian.

The first story, "La conquista," is set in Africa. It focuses on a tribe whose warriors are agitating to go war, to take revenge on another tribe that invaded their territory. The chief, simply called 'il Capo,' has so far prohibited his men from marching, while he waited for a time that augured greater fortune. He determines this to be ten days after the birth of his son, when the baby is presented to the Sun, the tribe's god. After this momentous ceremony the men who have fathered sons are allowed to depart for war; childless men, the women and children are to remain behind to rebuild the tribe, should the warriors not return. The warriors spend two days fighting through the jungle, a vast and fecund, but dangerous world. The story ends as they arrive at one of the extreme confines of their territory, a river that the narrator tells us they have never crossed before, and they surge across to war. No final resolution is offered.

The second story, "Il figlio," is set in Ancient Egypt; its protagonist is the High Princess Amesi. The narrative begins the night before her fifteenth birthday, when she will be wed to her brother, Asychis, the pharaoh. Asychis is weak and feeble, the audience is told, in part from the drain of ruling his kingdom, but also from the energy leeched away by his concubines, with whom he spends an inordinate amount of time. The people of the kingdom, especially the priests, are worried that Asychis will not survive long enough, and that he lacks the virility to produce a male heir. That night Amesi is taken by the High Priest to pray in the tomb of Cheops, and she is overcome by a thought-message sent to her by Cheops's spirit. Back in her chambers, alone, she is driven by the message's insistent prompting out into the palace and eventually to the guard barracks, full of drunken guards. Knocking on the door she attracts the soldiers' attention. Dressed only in a chemise, and lacking any sign of her station, she seems a courtesan or perhaps

a low house servant. Driven by their drunkenness and by animalistic sexual desire, they charge after her; she runs in fear through the dark corridors, where she falls and is overtaken by one of the soldiers and is raped. Afterwards, she returns to her chambers, dazed. Meanwhile sacrifices are being offered to Isis, asking that a warlord prince be born of the union between Amesi and Asychis. In the morning, she is wed to Asychis, but remembering her rape, feels the strength of certitude that her duty is done. She knows that the pharaoh's blood is too weak, and that the blood of the soldier mixed with the blood of the royal line will produce the heir the empire needs to rule it.

The third story, "La rivolta delle femmine," takes place in Peru during the Incan Empire. The women in one of the provinces are in revolt because the men are not fulfilling their sexual and maternal desires because they are instead having homosexual relationships with each other. This is the only time in his works that Fillia addresses (and condemns) homosexuality; however, all forms of sexual intercourse are presented as animalistic in this story, and as socially disruptive. The women had revolted before for the same reason and won concessions from the emperor. There are laws against sodomy in the kingdom, but their enforcement had lapsed. Under pressure from his brother Hiso Chanca, the Emperor Sinchi Rukka reinstates brutal enforcement of the anti-sodomy laws, and also begins to construct a fleet of barges to go to war (because, Hiso Chanca declares, conquest 'makes civilizations strong and healthy').

At the last minute, when the populace has been calmed, the emperor orders Hiso Chanca to cease construction of the fleet, as the emperor no longer sees any reason to waste resources on war. Hiso Chanca, unable to accept this, departs in the dead of night in search of conquest. Like

"La conquista," the male ruling figures are fixated on the nexus between war and sex, and their ability to strengthen or weaken the race through them.[14]

The fourth story, "La regina dei crisantemi," is set in ancient China; its protagonist is the queen Hai-Fu. Hai-Fu is traveling downriver to bring an offering to the temple of Buddha, accompanied by an escort. She lusts after one of the young men who accompanies her on the barge, Ju-Pong, but he cannot fully satisfy her desire, despite his strength and virility. Their sexual relationship continues at the temple site, but the queen's desire continues to grow and to drive her mad. Driven by desperation, she enters the temple. The statue of the Buddha, which has an eternally burning fire inside it, enflames her desire. Hai-Fu strips off her clothes, and climbs the statue. Embracing the burning metal, she copulates with the statue and burns to death.

The fifth story, "La regina del Jazz-Band," moves from ancient empires to the Scrittore's own time. The main protagonist is Alba Cherie, a beautiful blond dancer and prostitute, the star of a South American club. Race serves as a marker of exoticism, as it also did on the cruise ship at the beginning of the novel, and as it did in the first four stories. Alba Cherie's race is not specified, but that of the jazz band that accompanies her is, and like the one that performs on the cruise ship, the band members are Black. The speaker whose voice narrates most of this story from a second person perspective is also a writer, but it is unclear whether it is meant to be the same voice as that of the narrator of the story. The first, and longest part of this story is an ode to Alba Cherie, which tells her story, what she looks like, and describes her personality. In the second short section, she interacts with the story's Scrittore, briefly. The third section returns to the ode format.

[14] It is unclear how much Fillia knew about South American history, though it must have been a fair amount, given the historical allusions in this story. Fillia's mother was a descendent of Atahualpa, the last Sapa Incan sovreign in the 16th century CE; Atahualpa was her given middle name. Sinchi Roca (also Cinchi Roca) was the second Sapa Incan ruler who lived in the 13th century CE. Meanwhile the Chanka were an actual Incan sub-group that dates from the end of the 14th or beginning of the 15th century CE. Their territory bordered on present day Bolivia.

The sixth story, "Tormento a Pino Curtoni," is narrated in the first person. It is an epistolary monologue. Pino Curtoni was a real person and a friend of Fillia's, as well as a fellow futurist artist. (Curtoni supplied the cover illustration for the original edition of *La morte della donna* as well as the one for the last story, "La vita di domani"). The narrator of the story is trying to justify his choice of a life of abstaining from emotional or sexual love, for the benefit of his art, which he does not think is something Curtoni will be able to nor even want to try to understand. The narrator tells the story of the young woman with whom he fell in love, at the beach, during a dry period in his artistic endeavors. Despite the care he had put into wooing this woman, in time the letter writer realized that he had to choose between marriage and family and his career as an artist, because while he was investing emotional energy in this woman, he was unable to produce any art. The narrator decides that it must be his work and his duty to which he remains faithful and that he must renounce love and family for the sake of his art.[15]

The seventh story, "Maternità," resumes the third person narrative, and is dated 1921, (meaning it significantly predates the rest of the volume and even predates Fillia's contributions to *Dinamite*, which is from 1922). The protagonist is named Miranda, but called Yole. She was terrified of sexual intimacy as a young woman, because every night she listened to her mother being brutally assaulted by her husband. Yole also has no desire for emotional love, because she fears men's egoism. Throughout the story, music is tied to desire and to love, and given a mystical power of suggestion and control.

Yole is sent away to a convent to be educated, and when she returns, all of the men desire her, but she rebukes every one, despite her own growing sensuality and desire, because she feels that she is waiting for something. Late one night, a man appears at the gate of her house, and she

[15] This is the story, as discussed in chapter 1 that uses, with slight alterations some of the text from *Lui's* monologue in act four of *Sensualità—Teatro d'eccezione.* The present narrative expands significantly on some of the themes in *Lui's* monologue.

lets him in because she desires him and because "the song she could never hear burst into her mind." She sees something of herself in this stranger: her same dark eyes and the same "tenebra dei suoi desideri."[16] Following their sexual encounter the man tells Yole that they are on the precipice of a new world order for which they have "tanta capacità spirituale da comprenderne una nuova."[17] When Yole returns to the convent, she feels separate, different from the other young women. One evening, as she watches her companions from her window, she begins to reflect, and is struck by a revelatory desire for motherhood. Realizing in that moment that she is already pregnant, she is joyful because her son will be the bearer of a new world order, a symbol of the fight against the "suffocating bourgeois order."

The focus of the story is on sexuality and desire tied to maternity, and to the emotions fear and hope. Superficially incongruous with the rest of the volume, this story is actually the thematic the bridge between the stories set in the ancient world and the modern. It emphasizes that violent sexuality is to be feared, and it ties sex and love to religion, poetics, and mysticism. This is the first story in which the idea that men and women are positioned as spiritually and morally equal appears, and where the idea of fighting to overcome the old order is introduced as an explicit theme.

The eighth story, "Quarta dimensione di me stesso," uses the first person narrative voice, in the form of a diary entry or stream of consciousness. The story is divided into three parts and narrates the futurist awakening of the protagonist. In the first section, the narrator is conflicted, tormented by his search for knowledge and enlightenment. He is trying to fill a spiritual need, but cannot, no matter the books he reads nor the art he studies. He also cannot find love or satisfaction (emotional or sexual) from the woman with whom he has a relationship, despite her

[16] Fillia, *Bolidi e tango*. 94.
[17] Ibid. 98.

love for him. The second part of the story is the experience—a motorcycle ride—that finally allows the narrator to break through his malaise. He describes the physical and emotional experience of the ride using language that uses both spiritual and blatantly sexual imagery. The third and shortest section is a series of brief impressions of the narrator's newly awakened consciousness and new perceptions. This experience, in sweeping terms, parallels and reformulates the seminal trope of futurism's founding, as narrated in "La Fondazione e Manifesto del Futurismo."

The ninth story, "Il sesso di metallo," is set in an abstract mechanized future. It is a one act theatrical work, with three protagonists: Sada (a man), Laba and Lebe (two women). The scenery and costumes, which are described in detail, are geometric and heavily stylized. The description of Sada, the *uomo nuovo* emphasizes that his anatomy-accenting clothing, made up of exaggerated, angular sculpted iron and pieces of wood with a silk disc covering his heart, is spiritually expressive of the materials that compose him. Lebe is the *donna della carne* and her costume emphasizes her carnality. She is naked, except for white paint that covers her entire body, and she wears a silver wig. The third character, Laba is the *donna dello spirito*. Her costume explicitly downplays her femininity in contrast to Lebe's sensual body; Laba's costume, which strips her of any outward femininity, other than her obvious anatomical features, is made of wood, iron, glass, rubber and leather. Lebe fears Laba's sexuality, which is divorced from sensual femininity, and is pure physicality. Laba, unlike Lebe, is freed from sentimentality and the damaging social constructs of femininity, and her costume is made of "masculine" materials. The dramatic action is an allegorical fight between old, gendered emotional and sexual relationships and new ones. It represents in an abstracted allegory, the moment of transition in

which society rejects its artificial gender constructs and its atavistic attachment to fatal sentimentalism.

The tenth story, "Il mondo di domani," is set far into the future and is the Scrittore's vision of how society and technology will evolve once sentimentality and femininity are overcome. Men and women will be complete equals, and are called only Uomo M(aschio) and Uomo F(emmina) with a number. Individuality is subsumed into the mechanized collective, and man is thoroughly integrated into a machine-made environment. There are three protagonists: Uomo M. 6436, Uomo M. 17698 and Uomo F. 10045. In the first scene, M. 6436 is at work, and as the workday ends, he boards the train home, with his usual companions in the car, M. 17698 and F. 10045. F. 10045 tells the others about a revolt in one of the districts against the Macchina della Temperatura. Another passenger interjects and insists that this justified because the Macchina della Temperatura, the passenger claims, had not been dispensing the proper intensity of colors and atmosphere. Each person is dressed in a color "psychologically appropriate" to them. At dinner M. 17698 tells M. 6436 that now that he is 20, he must marry, because M. 17698 was being punished for the delay. M. 6436 proposes marriage (a simple contract, without emotion) to F. 10045. After dinner all three go to a café, but there is a fight, related to the revolt, and they leave for home. The next day, M. 6436 and F. 10045 go to the Direzione Centrale, register their marriage and for their new apartment, then depart for their month of matrimonial leave in an underwater colony, which will afford them new, perception-altering bodily experiences.

The "Conclusione" returns to the Scrittore and his audience aboard the ocean liner. The stories have had a notable effect on the Scrittore's audience, and he uses the opportunity to outline his philosophy and ideology more clearly and thoroughly than he did at the beginning of

the novel. At this point, the Scrittore places the greatest emphasis on the equality of the sexes and the importance of technology.

L'uomo senza sesso

Fillia's second novel is set in the author's present and introduces the theme of sports as a public spectacle, a burgeoning world obsession.[18] The novel opens with a note that the author has "cinematographically" reduced the content of 400 pages of musing on modern life into this final version, which is just 95 pages. The novel's protagonist is Nina Sereni, and the most important secondary characters are Mac Rebour and Sedora. The story follows Nina as she first abandons her home, courted and encouraged by a cousin who wishes to marry her. In the Capital she begins to fulfill her *destino di libertà* where she and her fiancé cousin immerse themselves in the modernity and intoxication of cabaret life. In the tabarins, infected by 'epileptic fever' of the jazz bands Nina begins to construct her new identity.

Three months after they fled together, Nina begins to believe that her cousin would turn out to be just another man who loved her and who would be filled with all the same ancient prejudices, a tyranny that would hold her down. She packs her bags and money and flees in the middle of the night. This first experience with love leaves Nina believing that "l'amore fosse una povera cosa, troppo fisica e leggermente sporca."[19] The narrator declares that Nina, free from the moral and intellectual movements typical of all women, represents the strong, wakeful vanguard of the woman of tomorrow. In a new city, Nina continues to develop spiritually, immersed in the beauty of perpetual movement. The city's rhythms and atmosphere contribute to her evolving,

[18] Berghaus, *Futurism and the Technological Imagination*. 87.
[19] Fillia, *Bolidi e tango*. 217.

modern sensibility. She changes lovers twenty times, until she tires of sexual relationships. Switching to gambling, she wins enough to support herself and live in a luxurious grand hotel.

Later, in a hotel in Rome, Nina has been frequenting cabarets and refusing personal relationships. There she meets Mac Rebour, a Frenchman who shares her vision of the Mechanical Age to come, and belief in the useless nature of romantic intimacy. He also declares his belief that women should have equal rights with men, and that granting them will bring about a change in sexual mores. It will negate sentimentality, and love will be reduced to its physical aspects omly. Mac declares that he believes in the end of money, and that in the future business will be extraneous to all artistic reason, but in the meantime, until an art form is invented to fill this need, Sport (emphasized as an abstract value by the capital letter) is the only method capable of drawing passion and sensuality from mechanical life. He claims that Sport fills the place for the public that Art once filled, interpreting the spirit of modern existence.

In Mac Rebour, Nina finds a platonic companion to end her self-imposed solitude. He convinces her to accompany him to Venezuela to retrieve Sedora, who is a famous and skilled racecar driver, and then on to New York, where the Società Sportiva that Mac Rebour founded, together with the Fabbrica Italiana d'Automobili (a barely disguised simulacrum for FIAT), is holding an international car race on the North American Circuit. They depart on an ocean liner, from Naples, and on board meet Pedro Alcazar, a Spaniard, with whom they discuss the strength of the Latin race and the importance of sports. Nina and Mac also begin a sexual relationship, but one that is 'free of love and sentimentality and thoroughly modern.'

When they arrive in Venezuela, they take the train to Caracas. In Caracas, they must convince the president and the Venezuelan Sport Society to release Sedora from the final three months of his obligations in Venezuela, so Sedora can accompany them to New York.

Unfortunately, Nina fascinates the president, and they fail to secure the president's support, because he is trying to use his power to bribe Nina into sexual favors. She refuses, and in retribution the president refuses to release Sedora. While they continue their attempts to liberate Sedora from his contract, the president continues to aggressively pursue Nina. Eventually Nina, Mac and Sedora concoct a plan to sneak Sedora out of Venezuela using an elaborate political game. While both the president and minister are occupied, Nina, Mac, and Sedora sneak off to the airfield to leave Venezuela. Nina and Mac depart separately from Sedora, and the three meet in Santiago, Cuba. While they are traveling from Venezuela to Cuba, the narrator supplies short psychological profiles of the three protagonists, and the sensations inspired in them by flight.

In Cuba, the protagonists' convoluted plans begin to fall apart. They stay in Havana for three days waiting for the departure of their ocean liner to New York. Mac is seduced by a woman named Reyna Dolada—whom Nina understands as a Woman, that is, as a relic of the past. Overcome by the power of Reyna's 'ancient sensibility' Mac abandons Nina, Sedora and the Società Sportiva, to leave for South America with Reyna. Before boarding a cruise ship, Mac hands full responsibility and directorial powers to Nina. Nina continues on to New York with Sedora, to make sure that the one Italian car, which Sedora is intended to drive, makes it into the race. As they arrive in New York, there is a narrative shift, into the first person. The narrator directly addresses the reader, using the opportunity to make several direct statements about literature in general and about the story he is narrating specifically. These narrative shifts will occur periodically throughout the rest of the novel.

Once in New York, the focus is on preparations for the race—advertising, practice along the course, meetings with mechanics, and on descriptions of the city environment and the people. Nina spends time contemplating religion and the strange sort of faith she sometimes felt during

her childhood that has now mutated into the new mechanical religion of modern life. At the Taverna Blu, which features yet another Black jazz band, Nina argues that Black fashion is a symbol of physical rebirth, and is an anti-sentimental act that destroys romanticism and exults the physiological property of pure coitus. This, rebirth she says, must precede the destruction of nostalgia, sexual sentimentalism, and the ills of the heart. Black fashion, Nina says, kills the Woman, primitively uniting male and female, morally preparing the *uomo senza sesso*. Brutality, she continues, is the basis of modern life. In the Taverna Blu, Nina meets Mulay Bey, a representative of the Turkish Government. The narrator tells us it is useless to go into the reasons that Nina and Mulay Bey enter into confidence and mutual business interests, but they do. Nina convinces Mulay Bey to support the Italian interests in the race, but tells him that she will not use sex to smooth over matters and convince men of her case, even though it would be easier.

Rejoining Sedora, Nina is introduced to a young journalist named Miss Gonej, from Chicago. She is a 'real American' according to Nina (by which, the narrator tells us, she means that Miss Gonej is in possession of the three dimensions of modernity—her aesthetic form, lifestyle, and education correspond 'magically' to mechanical life). The narrator then opens a parenthesis to tell the reader that Sedora madly desired Nina, but realizing that she would never consent to him, turns his attentions to the American. Miss Gonej is spying on the Italians, and her real lover is the American driver. (Mulay Bey discovers this duplicity for Nina by following Miss Gonej.) Miss Gonej's successful ensnarement of Sedora, following on Mac's abandonment, causes Nina to reflect with disgust that men are indeed weak and sentimental.

The next chapter is about the visit that Nina and Mulay Bey make to the Ford Motors plant. It focuses on the technological aspects of mechanical modernity, and on the plight of the worker. The faceless worker has also become the sexless worker. The vast anonymity of the

factory and its assembly line diminishes and then totally erases the differences between the sexes.

In the second-to-last chapter, the narrator speaks directly to the reader again, explaining that events became so chaotic and intense that it would be impossible to explain or even narrate them. What follows is a series of 17 "cinematographic" summaries—they resemble news dispatches—of the events that occur over the next four days. During a practice race, Sedora veers off the track and drives wildly away. He is arrested for theft, but the public was totally enamored of his daring and of his marvelous adventure. Miss Gonej's betrayal also comes to light, and with Mulay Bey's help, Sedora is released from prison, and allowed to reenter the race.

The last chapter is divided into three sections. In the first, hours before the race, Mac Rebour returns, and recounts what has happened to him since their parting. He talks at length about overcoming sentimentality and regaining the force of his modern spirit. The second section describes the passion and madness of the crowd, as the race is about to begin; the colorful description is reminiscent of a futurist painting. The final section describes the excitement of the race, and ends with the Italian car's victory

L'ultimo sentimentale

Fillia's final novel is a story divided into two parts, and follows similar themes to those in *La morte della donna*, emphasizing the turn away from sentimentality and away from the enslavement to emotions, especially romantic love, during the journey toward an unsentimental futurist consciousness. The two protagonists are Sona Vinki, a Polish actress, and Farro Marchi, an Italian author and artist. The story takes place in a series of cosmopolitan centers: Milan, Lima, Paris, Turin, and Rome. The focus of the narrative is on the relationship between Sona and

Farro, both of whom the narrator characterizes as "liberated" and "modern." The first part of the story takes place over the fourteen months of their relationship, narrating key moments in it, and the second part picks up just as Sona is about to break off their relationship. The final resolution takes place an indeterminate, though clearly not lengthy, time after the end of Sona and Farro's relationship.

Sona is the object of intense desire by all of the men in Milan's intellectual circles, but she takes Farro as her lover. After a short trip during which Sona had to go back to Poland, she and Farro flee Milan, because they feel threatened by other her jealous suitors. As in Fillia's two previous novels, Farro and Sona board a transatlantic ocean liner for the Americas, arriving, this time in Uruguay. They first encounter a man named Pablo Halosa, an Argentine who attempts to woo Sona. The conversation with Pablo Halosa becomes an excuse for Sona and Farro to talk about what they believe is the character of modern Man. Pablo, in contrast to Farro, is a conventional man, who is consumed by his sexual needs and belief in his sexual prowess and superiority over women. The conversation highlights many of the same points that the Scrittore from *La morte della donna* covers in the "Conclusione." At this point Sona and Farro have been in their "utterly modern" relationship for about three months and continue to Peru.

In Lima, Sona is pursued by another man, Pedro Juanil, a wealthy young man who grew up in Paris and who wields tremendous political power in Peru. When she refuses him, his pride drives him to attempt to take revenge, using his connections with the government. The explanation for his behavior is that, like most men, he is convinced of his moral superiority over women. Because of Pedro's machinations, Farro is arrested for 'subversive activities.' Sona is arrested as an accomplice. Pedro visits her in prison, and following their conversation realizes his grievous error. In this conversation Sona reiterates the theories that she and Farro share about art

and literature, and tells Pedro that the changing nature of modern relationships will lead to a truly modern Man. She emphasizes freedom from sentimentality and from the chains of emotional love. And she convinces him that she cannot love a man like Pedro who still believes in the moral superiority of a man over a woman, on the sole basis of his biological sex. Sona and Farro are freed shortly thereafter, and flee back to Europe. Three months later, they are in Paris, and Farro has been publishing his work, but not receiving payment. The chapter focuses on Farro's internal conflict, especially on his relationship with Sona. The remaining sentimentalism in his character is in conflict with his belief in a new modern spirituality and psychology.

Finally, Sona and Farro return to Milan. Sona and Farro meet in a café, and are joined by the futurist painter Arenda. They discuss Farro's upcoming show in Rome of twenty paintings of scenes from his and Sona's time in the Americas, and Arenda declares Farro to be at the vanguard of modernity. The next day Farro and Sona must also defend their theories on literature and art to another futurist writer, Mario Vaderi, placing particular emphasis on the importance of the harmonic equilibrium between concept, form, and expression in a work of art. They also discuss spiritual abstraction in art and poetry at length.

The last chapter of Part I takes place in Rome, where Farro and Sona are directing the publication of a literary journal. This chapter is narrated from Sona's point of view, as she reads a letter written to her by Farro. (He is Paris opening an exhibit of his paintings, and she has remained in Rome.) The letter is both a description of Farro's impressions of Paris, especially of the cabarets and the intellectual life of the city, and it also betrays Farro's slip into sentimentalism and his romantic love for Sona.

As Part II of the novel opens, Sona and Farro have finished with their obligations to the Roman journal, and have moved on to Turin, where Farro has an upcoming exhibition. Fourteen

months have passed since the beginning of Farro and Sona's relationship, and Farro has become consumed by his love for her. He cannot separate his love for her from the sensations created by the atmosphere, and the emotional turmoil is severely limiting his (artistic) intuition. But just as Farro is becoming totally overcome by his love for her, Sona ends their relationship and moves out of the hotel room they shared. She swears that she does not love anyone else, and that she will likely never love anyone again; it is simply that she does not love him anymore, and that his artistic sensibility and spiritual force no longer have indisputable value for her.

Farro suffers a period of two days of intense reflection and despair, during which he feels separated and abstracted from reality. He passes periods of intense mania, in which he loses his grasp on reason. Coming out of his delirium, he begins to analyze and work through his emotional and intellectual responses to his relationship with Sona and its end. He concludes, as before, that intellect and emotion must be kept entirely separate from physical relationships (like the letter writer in "Tormento a Pino Curtoni"). Only this time he is wholly convinced. He also concludes that the residual atavistic intuition that every intelligent individual possesses is the reason for his previous failure and that sentimental love, for him, has finally been surpassed because it is used up and worn out. Crisis overcome, Farro moves forward, into a future stripped of excessive passion, guided by the interpretive capacities of his spirit.

Farro has a short affair with a dancer, Katja, and during this period he further reflects on the idea that he must be free of romantic love for the benefit of his art. An entire chapter is devoted to Farro's self-analysis and psychological state, extolling on his reinvigorated moral force and energy. He re-immerses himself in modern and technological life, declaring that machines are the expansion of human bodies, and that the new spirituality of modern life emerges from them. Love will return to its natural, purely physical state, stripped of emotion, he

believes. The splendor of the technological age full of new sensations and passions is the death knoll and funeral for sentimental and sensual love.

In the last chapter, Farro returns to Rome permanently, to be near the most important artistic activity. He encounters Sona one last time, in a restaurant, and is overcome by a flood of emotions, none of which succeeds in dominating him. In this moment Farro "Concepì finalmente il potere definitivo della propria individualità"[20] and is freed of any lingering emotion for her. He sees her abstractly, disconnected from his memories of her, as if they are both entirely different people. In that moment, as they exchange a few words, Farro claims to have only then truly begun to live.

3. Publication History, Technical Aspects of the Texts and Stylistic Analysis

All three of Fillia's novels were published by the Sindacati Artistici Torino, which despite its original mission to support the working class's artistic development, had quickly become a conduit for Fillia's personal agenda and organ of the futurist movement's leadership. His numerous short stories were published in a variety of literary journals between 1925 and 1929, including Amalia Guglielminetti's *Le seduzioni: raccolta quindicinale di novelle seducenti*, and the journals *Teatro, Novelle Italiane*, *La novella d'Autore,* and *La novella d'oro*.

Fillia's first novel-length work, *La morte della donna: romanzo a novelle collegate*, stands out from both *L'uomo senza sesso* and *L'ultimo sentimentale* in two very notable ways. It is, first of all, made up of ten short stories and a two-part framing narrative (the introduction and conclusion), whereas *L'uomo senza sesso* and *L'ultimo sentimentale* are more typically structured short novels with semi-linear plot lines. *La morte della donna* is also the only one of the three works, and indeed the only of Fillia's novels, to feature illustrations. The original

[20] Ibid. 211.

edition features a cover illustration and twelve title page illustrations, one for each story. Each illustration is by a different futurist artist, and only one is by Fillia, himself. In fact, most of Fillia's short stories, poems, and articles published in newspapers and journals were accompanied by illustrations. It is, therefore, odder that *L'uomo senza sesso* and *L'ultimo sentimentale* do not contain any illustrations, even a cover illustration, than it is odd that *La morte della donna* does feature them.

Fillia's other two novels, which to a great extent function as a pair, were both published in 1927. *L'uomo senza sesso* was published first, in March, and *L'ultimo sentimentale* shortly thereafter.[21] Based on the announcements of forthcoming works published in F.T. Marinetti's journal *Futurismo*, in the back of *I nuovi poeti futuristi* and of *Lussuria radioelettrica*, it is clear that Fillia was working on *L'uomo senza sesso* first, and as early as 1925. At one point, Fillia seems to have believed that this work would also be published by Mondadori (as he had believed about *I nuovi poeti futuristi*), but this never happened.[22] The first time that evidence of *L'ultimo sentimentale* appears comes from a 1926 flyer promoting Fillia's works. The flyer, reproduced in Silvia Evangelisti's catalogue, gives a cover price—6 *lire*—for *L'uomo senza sesso*, which I take to indicate that Fillia again intended to publish it sooner than 1927, but was delayed; it then lists *L'ultimo sentimentale* as forthcoming.[23] *L'ultimo sentimentale* is the last and shortest of Fillia's novels, though he would continue publishing short stories until 1929.

In 2002, Fillia's three novels were reprinted by Nino Aragno Editore in a single volume entitled *Bolidi e tango*. The texts are accompanied by an introductory critical essay by Sergio

[21] I have, to date, been unable to locate more precise information on its publication date than that provided by Silvia Evangelisti in her catalog, *Fillia e l'avanguardia futurista negli anni del fascismo*. 1986.
[22] Fillia, *Fillia e l'avanguardia futurista negli anni del fascismo*. 86.
[23] In a publicity move, many futurist publications contain a back page containing lists of available titles and forthcoming works. Throughout Fillia's works, there are records of works were never published, or possibly even begun at all. The destruction of the author's personal archives prohibits discovery of what stage of completion any of these projects ever reached.

Anelli and another critical essay by Marzio Pinottini that serves as an afterword. Marzio Pinottini has written extensively on Fillia, though mostly on painting. Both essays are problematic, and tend to conform to very standard analysis and fail to take into consideration Fillia's other, contemporary works to advance their arguments.

Moreover, there are several issues with the volume, even beyond an intrusive number of typos. In the first place, the illustrations from *La morte della donna* and the note from the inside cover (see below) have been unfortunately eliminated, and even the cover illustration is a painting that post-dates at least two of the novels. Secondly, and more importantly, the novels are ordered non-sequentially with respect to their original publication dates. The anthology inexplicably places *L'ultimo sentimentale* in the second position and *L'uomo senza sesso* last. I contend that this has multiple motivations, some attributable to thoughtlessness, others to inappropriate editorial or critical agendas. These editorial and critical agendas vary in motivation from a misreading of the texts, to attempts at forcing Fillia into closer alignment with futurist convention. I contend, instead, that he was actually intentionally acting to counter the canon. I believe that this reordering makes a complete and nuanced reading of Fillia's works and of his particular ideological and stylistic interests difficult. In my analysis, then, I will address them in their proper chronological order, to give a more accurate picture of how Fillia's thoughts evolved on a number of topics. This will lead me to challenge the readings of Alessandra Ottieri, who, to date, has published the only critical volume on Fillia's written works.

Stylistically, the three novels are quite diverse; as I mentioned above, the greatest difference is between *La morte della donna* and the two later novels. *La morte della donna* is a hybrid text, with style, tone and structure varying from story to story. It is also the longest of the three works. The narration occurs on two levels, and the narrative focus shifts frequently. There

is both an absent narrator for the framing story (the initial and final chapters, "La morte della donna" and "Conclusione") and a character, the Scrittore, who is the omniscient narrator for the ten short stories that are "his works." The stories vary from pseudo-historical narratives of the exotic past, to psychological studies of characters contemporaneous to Fillia, to a semi-abstracted and futuristic (in the science-fiction sense of the term) one-act theatrical work, and the last story is a mechanistic, science fiction-tinged imaginary future. The wide variety of styles indicates that Fillia was experimenting with how to coordinate style with content, while also experimenting with ways to include a variety of artistic media into his prose works, a central issue in the manifestos he published alone and with co-authors throughout the 1920s.[24] This also mimics the process he used in his poetry, as I have analyzed in chapter 2.

Fillia's second novel, *L'uomo senza sesso*, abandons the hybrid format of *La morte della donna* in favor of a more unified narrative. The text, though, continues to be experimental, especially demonstrating Fillia's interest in the expressive potential of film and of the impact of the sound-bite driven nature of a news reportage and advertising. The narrator is largely an absent one, though he emerges several times to directly address the reader or to make some stylistic or ideological point. The shift can be particularly jarring, as it was likely intended to be. This novel has the most in common with the *genere brillante* and *futurismo di consumo*, as it has the most dramatic storyline and the most commercially-popular elements—intrigue, an international car race competition, and romantic entanglements for all of the lead protagonists. At the same time, this is also the most stylistically daring of the three works. Narrative time expands and contracts, sometimes flashing forward significantly and sometimes condensing lengthy periods of time and large amounts of information into brief snatches, mimicking a filmic

[24] See especially "La spirituale nell'arte" and "L'idolo meccanico" Crispolti, *Fillia*.

montage. Like in *La morte della donna*, there is some psychological profiling of the protagonists, but it is not as in-depth as what will appear in *L'ultimo sentimentale*.

Fillia's last novel, *L'ultimo sentimentale* is the shortest of the three works, and it is also the slowest paced. Most of the narrative takes place over a period of 14 months, and the protagonists have been reduced to only two. The narrator is not as overt as in *L'uomo senza sesso*, but is more frequently omniscient. The novel is also much more focused on character study than either of the author's previous prose works. Much of the narrative action is concentrated into only a few sentences sprinkled throughout the text, while the bulk of the prose focuses on the psychology, emotional states, and the theoretical literary and philosophical musings of the protagonists. Both of the main characters in *L'ultimo sentimentale* is given a psychological profile at the midpoint of the narrative, while in *La morte della donna*, some of the protagonists' psychological states are narrated, while other stories feature no overt narration of psychic states.

Linguistically all three works employ a mixed register, oscillating between high and middle registers for the most part. The narratives are easily accessible and clearly narrated, but at the same time, Fillia does not hesitate to work significant passages devoted to theory and ideology into the narrative. All three works contain lengthy passages that discuss literary theory, futurist ideology, and Fillia's still communist-leaning politics. This effort to intentionally make futurist texts accessible to the wider public was a specific early goal of the Sindacati Artistici Torino, whose early mission was to publish works that offered simple explanations of the union's policies to the masses, in accordance with its founding as part of Turin's communist branch of futurism. Unfortunately, as my discussion of *I nuovi poeti futuristi* demonstrated, by 1925 the Sindacati Artistici had for the most part become an organ of the futurist movement's

leadership, and abandoned all pretense of promoting worker politics.[25] Nevertheless, traces of the spirit of the publishing house's mission remain in Fillia's works.

The idea that the Sindacati Artistici had sold out to the regime, and the critique that Fillia's novels were "merely" meant to generate revenue must have been part of the conversation in 1925. Throughout both *L'ultimo sentimentale* and *L'uomo senza sesso* Fillia makes pointed references to the idea that his works were objects for sale, consumer products with an economic value. With a wink and nod Fillia is telling the attentive reader that he knows that his works may be dismissed, but that if read attentively, his ideological agenda and interest in serious artistic issues emerge from his works. In his latter two works, I argue, Fillia has intentionally chosen to integrate his ideas into his texts more fully, as opposed to using the Scrittore as an explicit voice explaining how the other stories in the novel are to be read. Furthermore, the accusation that Fillia's works were *letteratura di consumo* likely also has to do with the sense of betrayal felt by the few Marxists who still supported the Turin *futurbolscevisti* after their rejection by communist party leadership and Marinetti's reconciliation with Mussolini.

When reading Fillia's works it is critical to consider his theoretical writings and to account for his other contemporaneous artistic pursuits. Failure to do so has led to a fundamental misreading of Fillia's written works. The first of these erroneous readings springs from the attempt to force Fillia and his ideology into accordance with that of futurist convention, and more particularly into agreement with Marinetti's writings and ideological stance. Second, in a mistaken effort to prove or force such conformity, past critics have either chosen to ignore (as in the Aragno edition) or have been unaware of the order in which Fillia composed these works. This has been the most damaging to analyses of *L'uomo senza sesso* and *L'ultimo sentimentale*. Alessandra Ottieri (whose book *Fillia: Un percorso futurista da Dinamite al Jazz-band* predates

[25] See also: Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*. 193.

the Aragno edition by three years) has argued at length that *L'uomo senza sesso* is the "most developed" and most characteristically futurist (and thus "best") of Fillia's three novels, given that it shows the greatest interest in typical futurist themes and the greatest reduction in psychological and spiritual interests, and she bases this analysis, in part, on the theory that it is Fillia's third, not his second, novel. The fact that these two sources, which are almost the only two sources for analysis Fillia's novels prior to my own work, have taken this stance has surely led to further amplification of these misinterpretations. And thirdly, the importance of the Wagnerian synthesis of the arts that formed one of the backbones of Fillia's aesthetics has gone overlooked in most analyses of Fillia's written works, save for the occasional remark on the eidetic nature of his poems. Moreover, this last issue has led to a general dismissal of Fillia's poetry on the grounds that his interest was actually in painting, and that since Fillia was trying to make all of this works into "paintings" one might as well go directly to analyzing the paintings and discard Fillia's writings.

Ottieri's argument that *L'uomo senza sesso* is Fillia's most advanced work completely ignores Fillia's theories in favor of a very canonical and conventional reading of Fillia's novels and poetry. Fillia's numerous manifestos, written alongside his novels, explicitly argue for the need to *increase* not decrease the psychological atmosphere of all types of artistic works: "noi abbiamo appunto cercato di ottenere infinite reazioni psicologiche, che formino armonie sconosciute, più estese di quelle fino ad oggi costruite," he says in the catalog for an exhibit at the Palazzo Madama in Turin.[26] Thus, psychological elements were specifically and intentionally incorporated in Fillia's works, and never intended to be stripped away, as Ottieri maintains.[27]

[26] Fillia and T.A. Bracci. "Alfabeto Spirituale" Crispolti, *Fillia*. 70.
[27] This argument is made further untenable based on the content of Fillia's theatrical works written and published first (see chapter 1), and by Fillia's role in the development of *arte sacra futurista* (see chapter 4), neither of which Ottieri takes into consideration at all.

Though the above passage is part of a manifesto on painting, in this same manifesto (and elsewhere) Fillia specifically states that all arts, written, visual, or performative, must augment their psychological and spiritual characteristics in order to reach complete realization. The only time that Fillia makes a claim against the psychological in his works is at the beginning of *La morte della donna*, when the Scrittore claims to have worked to "limitare analisi psicologica, descrittiva e cerebrale, al puro volume della semplice comprensione logica."[28] Despite this claim, four of the stories are focalized on the emotional, spiritual, and psychological experiences of their protagonists. Moreover, the specific purpose of this work, which I will explore in detail later, was to look at issues of gender, the relationship between the sexes and the evolution of a society that negated the social constructs surrounding gender, not to develop detailed psychological profiles of its protagonists.

In another manifesto, also published in 1925, Fillia continued to analyze and elaborate on the role of psychology in futurist works. In the following passage, Fillia argues that the first generation of futurists and the works they produced had served as preparation for the work that was now being done by their successors:

> Il Futurismo è stato il precursore di quest'opera moderna, senza averne ancora esaurita la portata psicologica: movimento essenzialmente intuitivo ha compreso la spiritualità della Macchina, somma e sintesi di tutta la natura conosciuta. Specialmente nel campo artistico l'affermazione futurista ha dato elementi tali da impostare un'architettura conclusiva; soltanto esasperando la portata di queste ricerche si può raggiungere una sicura solidità. Ma la Macchina intesa come un simbolo, ritraendone il senso di azione, la composizione materialistica e il movimento, non è interpretata secondo la sua importanza storica e risente ancora le vecchie concezioni superficiali del passato. Cioè, da Boccioni e Prampolini, accanto ai tentativi alla realizzazione tecnica, il problema è stato chiarito pochissimo. L'arte, per avere ragione di esistere, deve essere non solo utile ma parallela ai movimenti sociali e spirituali; altrimenti si cade nella ricerca del bello e del puro, colossale errore di secoli… L'arte ritorna ad essere indispensabile: interpretazione psicologica della Macchina per la Vita Meccanica.[29]

[28] Fillia, *Bolidi e tango*. 127.
[29] Fillia "L'Idolo Meccanico" in *L'Impero*, Rome, July 1925.Crispolti, *Fillia*. 72.

So Fillia and his companions imagine themselves as nothing other than the logical and necessary continuation of everyone that preceded them. The idea of evolution and of the search for the climactic state of perfection pervades Fillia's works, both on the aesthetic level, and on the level of the human condition, which is a preoccupation that is made its most explicit in *La morte della donna*. Fillia continues, later in the passage as above, to declare that the work of his predecessors had served to wipe away the decadence and error of the old ways, in the long arc between antiquity and modernity, but that now artists and society had been sufficiently prepared for the new *Religione della Velocità* and that new artistic works must incorporate the principles that Fillia outlined.

It seems, to some extent, that scholars have failed to account for the fact that Fillia took very seriously Giacomo Balla and Fortunato Depero's manifesto "La ricostruzione futurista dell'universo" and the trend toward rebuilding and reorganizing that became integral to the futurist experience. It is difficult to see how it has been possible for critics to argue away the importance of the spiritual and psychological aspects of Fillia's written works, though Ottieri also believes that Fillia kept his various genres of work strictly segregated, which is assuredly specious. Fillia uses all three of his novels to expand on and further develop his literary and artistic theories, both by building off his manifestos and by expanding his theories in new directions. Most importantly, Fillia uses these works to broaden his art-based theories into literary ones, and then to apply them to the works themselves.

Though Fillia, like Umberto Boccioni and F. T. Marinetti before him, envisioned the total fusion of the arts by mixing techniques and content in order to achieve more complete modes of expression, he differed from them in this challenge to the strict materialist aesthetic and animus

of first generation futurists.[30] The complete reversal of position from early to late futurism is among the issues most directly addressed by Fillia. And he does so at length in all three novels, as he attempts to weave his aesthetic and ideological theories into his prose works. One of the most detailed explanations and justifications for this development occurs in *L'ultimo sentimentale*. Fillia uses protagonists to voice his theories and to acknowledge that they are in direct conflict with those of his predecessors. Contradicting Mario Vaderi (who has been assumed to represent Marinetti, though again, I disagree[31]), Farro, the male protagonist of *L'ultimo sentimentale* declares:

> Io ò del NUOVO un concetto diverso dal tuo. Le ricerche cerebrali e polemiche ànno servito a incanalare il pensiero sulla giusta strada della modernità, ma per dissolversi immediatamente nella realizzazione organica dei principi compresi o intuiti. Il lavoro letterario à perciò riacquistato l'equilibrio armonico tra concetto, forma ed espressione, equilibrio indispensabile perché la sintesi e la chiarezza possedessero uno scheletro vitale. Le più assurde differenze di stile, di svolgimento analitico e di valutazione psicologica, sono legate al temperamento dell'autore e non possono essere modificate: ciò che importa è la capacità di comunicare col pubblico, fornendo completamente la interpretazione stessa.[32]

Farro claims that having reacquired the harmony between concept, form and expression, literature would then guide human thought and artistic expression onto the correct path toward the full realization of modernity. Fillia has clearly grasped the power of aesthetic Modernism on some level, and already begun to exploit it. Farro's statement also anticipates on some level the way in which Modernism would be exploited by the fascist and Nazi regimes to construct their fictions of power. Furthermore, subjectivity and differences in modes of expression were due to the character of the author and impossible to avoid, according to Farro, but this was no longer a weakness or fault in the author or his work. Characterizing subjective impressions as desirable

[30] This was not, of course only (or even originally) a Futurist concept. The main source for the theory of complete fusion of the arts actually originates in a revolt against the theory of the hierarchy of the arts, and comes from Wagner's writings on music.
[31] Ottieri, *Fillia, un percorso futurista*. 45.
[32] Fillia, *Bolidi e tango*. 171.

ran directly counter to the search for absolute objectivity in the depiction of the machine age and modernity that had characterized what Günter Berghaus calls the Materialästhetik of futurism as it existed prior to 1915.[33]

Furthermore, the rehabilitation of futurism has not entirely freed itself, yet, from the values imposed by the Marxist progressives school of criticism, which set "uncorrupted" Modernisms, such as Dadaism, whose politics were leftist and anarchist, on a pedestal. This kind of criticism, and the suppression of anything that was associated with fascism in Italy was the reason that futurism went largely ignored for several decades, and until recently, even contemporary scholarship has tended to value only the works of futurism's "heroic" years. And as such, it is not, ultimately, a surprise that Fillia's works have often been found lacking when they are evaluated on these terms. In any case, over the course of the twenties, Fillia's position on the spiritual and psychological won out, and questions of psychology, spirituality, and subjectivity gained preeminence amongst futurist aesthetic concerns.

4. Fillia's Novels in Context

Many of the characteristics of Fillia's novels, both formal and ideological, derive from his futurist predecessors and from the dominant intellectual trends of the period. I would like to explore the similarities and differences briefly, in order to highlight both Fillia's debt to earlier futurist authors and his deviation from their work. This interplay of debt and difference will highlight the particularities of Fillia's ideological profile and will pave the way for further demonstrating Fillia's contribution to futurism in the 1920s and 1930s. Fillia's novels in the greater context of the 1920s will be discussed as it is relevant throughout the rest of this chapter.

[33] Berghaus, *Futurism and the Technological Imagination*. 24.

Fillia's first novel, *La morte della donna*, derives considerably from Marinetti's 1909 novel *Mafarka le futuriste* and explores many of the same motifs, though Fillia ultimately arrives at very different conclusions. Like Marinetti's narrative, set in Mafarka's barbaric North African empire, the four stories in *La morte della donna* that take place in the ancient world exploit stereotypes of the primitive and exotic savage, and confront themes related to the nexus between war, violence, sex, and religion. Fillia, like Marinetti, links war to sexual fecundity, social health and regeneration, and hygiene. Significantly, though, where Marinetti's Mafarka is a way for the potent male figure to appropriate regenerative and reproductive powers by eliminating the threat of the feminine,[34] Fillia never attempts to divorce reproduction from the female body. The feminine is dangerous for Fillia, but not the female, which is an idea that pervades the writings of some other futurists, especially Valentine de Saint-Point, as I will discuss below.

As Marinetti does in *Mafarka le futuriste*, in *La morte della donna* Fillia ties together sex and religion. In three of the four stories set in the ancient world ("La conquista," "Il figlio." "La rivolta delle femmine" and "La regina dei crisantemi"), religious practices are directly tied to sexual desire, ritual, and violence. In contrast to Marinetti, though, the rest of *La morte della donna*, *L'uomo senza sesso* and *L'ultimo sentimentale* all focus on the elimination of both emotional love and sexual desire to loosen their control over the *uomo senza sesso's* behavior. In the transitional shift from ancient religions to the *Religione della Velocità*, Fillia explores the possibilities of the purification of the body, beginning with the separation of the sexual act from the intellect and from emotion. Fillia's asceticism, in contrast to Marinetti's hedonism, focuses on severing the intellectual and emotional centers of the mind from the control of excessive physical and emotional passion. There is an implied link between primitive societies, aggressive sexuality, and violence in the ordering of Fillia's stories. This seems to follow on what

[34] For more on Mafarka and the threat of the feminine see Contarini, *La femme futuriste*.

anthropologists define as the difference between purposive violence as part of nature and the post-industrial perpetual alteration of nature. As technology progresses, Adorno observed, the technical subjugation of nature is a condition for social domination providing an epistemological ground for a positive science of society.[35] Therefore, the technological (or lack thereof) is also tied, in Fillia, to repurposing social Darwinism and Lombrosian positivism into affirming futurism's *machinolatria* and his own asceticism as it relates to the complete sublimation of the sexual drive (Eros) and instinctual drives to violence (part of Thanatos) into the Religion of Speed, and into the will.

Another important point of comparison is to Marinetti's manifestos "Uccidiamo il chiaro di luna" and "Abbasso il tango e *Parsifal*." Though superficially similar because of the mythic tone and primal drive for conquest, Fillia's novels and "Uccidiamo il chiaro di luna" have little else in common. Whereas the manifesto is meant as an allegorical and metaphorical battle that transposes ancient and classical motifs into a futurist battle of conquest, Fillia's stories are meant as pseudo-historical narratives. Where Marinetti uses references to real places and civilizations—Persia, the Ganges River, the Gulf of Oman: all seats of ancient civilizations—Fillia's civilizations are pastiches, or vague and fictionalized references, giving a superficial wash of believability that did not concern Marinetti in his manifesto. Meanwhile, Fillia's novels and short stories may be understood as following on the sentiments of "Abbasso il tango e *Parsifal*" because they celebrate modernist entertainment such as jazz music, the fox-trot, and sports such as car racing and boxing.

Typical of Marinetti's tendency for grand theatricality and pompous showmanship, *Come si seducono le donne*, a manual for the art of seducing women, in a similar way to some of

[35] Daniel Woodley, *Fascism and Political Theory: Critical Perspectives on Fascist Ideology* (London; New York: Routledge, 2010). 106-107.

Valentine de Saint-Point's manifesti, is a celebration of exuberant sexuality and lust. Marinetti's work is framed in the same kind of conquest-hungry masculinity as *Mafarka le futuriste*. While *Come si seduzione delle donne* is a celebration of sexual conquest and Latin masculinity, Fillia's prose works are entirely opposed to seduction and frame lust as a debilitating force, not an innervating one.

The same motifs return in Marinetti's *Gli amori futuristi*, which was a collection of short stories printed in 1930. It is, however, that work is mostly a reprint of the *Novelle con le labbra tinte* from ten years earlier. Like *Come si seducono le donne*, it is erotic, grotesque, and exuberantly sexual. Yet in Fillia, when sexual relationships are portrayed, and especially when a female protagonist is central, the sexual act is absolutely consensual and verges on the coldly rational. Indeed, "antiseptic" is generally a much more apt descriptor for the sexuality of Fillia's contemporary protagonists. When Fillia does attempt to write more aggressively or exuberantly sexual scenes, he mostly relegates them to the "barbarism" of the ancient world, reinforcing their irrelevance to his vision of the futurist *uomo senza sesso*. What Marinetti's works and Fillia's works do share is a desire to educate the public on the subject of non-conformist sexuality.[36] In a way, Fillia's prose works become an encyclopedia of futurist sexualities; he has heterosexual, homosexual, asexual, and autoerotic characters, prostitutes, and characters who copulate with machines and inanimate objects, the gods of the ancient world and the modern.

Fillia also demonstrates a notable deviation from his futurist predecessor Valentine de Saint-Point. Though Saint-Point did attack Marinetti for his misogyny, her earlier attempts to elaborate new female models differ notably from Fillia's. Saint-Point believed that lust was powerful and vital and an integral part of Art and War. Thus, lust was a essential drive for

[36] Salaris. *Dizionario*. 175.

futurism and for society in general.[37] Fillia takes the exact opposite position: throughout his novels (as well as in his theatrical works: see Chapter 1 of this dissertation), Fillia advocates for the complete nullification of lust, of sexual passion, and even, in his vision for the future, the complete nullification of physical desire's influence over behavior. This, I argue, was part of an agenda of purification and of abstraction away from the body, and is directly in opposition to Saint-Point's celebration of the carnality of the body.

Fillia's gender and sexuality politics in all three works are, in many ways, contrary to Saint-Point's. Where Valentine de Saint-Point, in her "Manifesto della Donna futurista" and "Manifesto futurista della lussuria," argues specifically against women gaining the right to vote, and against women gaining political equality with men,[38] Fillia aggressively advocates complete, gender-blind equality, and not only allows women into the political sphere, but into positions of leadership based on their merit. Saint-Point's models, more responsive to the belief that there remained an inherent difference between men and women, created new models for women that turned those differences into strengths. Fillia's belief that absolute equality of ability and intellect between men and women, which anticipates Simone de Beauvoir's seminal writings in *The Second Sex* by three decades, foreshadows the Anglo-American schools of feminism, instead of the Italian, which maintains a belief in equality based on fundamental difference.[39]

In the "Manifesto della lussuria futurista," Saint-Point also argues for feminism and against the vilification of feminine traits and virtues by her male counterparts within the futurist movement. For Saint-Point, femininity was a strength, providing balance to masculinity. Against

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[37] Saint-Point, *Manifesto della donna futurista ; seguito da, Manifesto futurista della lussuria ; Amore e lussuria ; Il teatro della donna ; Il mio esordio coreografico ; La metacorìa*.
[38] Ibid. It should be noted, though, that Saint-Point took this stance in part because of her belief that the entire system was broken.
[39] Sharon Wood, *Italian Women Writing* (Manchester; New York; New York: Manchester University Press; Distributed exclusively in the USA and Canada by St. Martin's Press, 1993).

Saint-Point, Fillia, like Marinetti before him, believed in the total abolition of the "feminine," though Fillia's position differs somewhat from Marinetti's. Fillia, like Marinetti, believed that the feminine and the Woman were a degeneration of Man. Both viewed femininity as an artificial social construct that fatally weakened the female gender, and both believed that the destruction of femininity would make all Men, both male and female, stronger. But, unlike Marinetti, Fillia did not lay the blame on women themselves and did not viciously deride them for it. Fillia placed full blame for this state of affairs on patriarchal society as a whole, and on the debilitating effects of tradition, religion, and sentimental and sensual love. Marinetti, on the other hand has (fairly) been accused of violent misogyny in both his fictional works and his theoretical writings, though the picture is somewhat more complicated than its common reduction to base misogyny and hatred for women.[40]

Fillia's position on women falls into much greater accord with that of Enif Robert, whose 1919 autobiographical novel, *Un ventre di donna: un romanzo chirurgico*, like Fillia's novels, is a product of the post-World War I era. Where Robert explores degenderization via a literal removal of her sexual organs via a surgical intervention, Fillia explores the themes of degenderization via the futurist intellect and the radical alteration of consciousness that will result, and its obsession with merging man with the Machine. Both authors explore the theme of women who "become Men," and who abandon the traditional markers of womanhood and femininity to become more masculine. The difference, though, is that Robert hews closer to the Marinettian desire to eliminate the need for the female body; Robert's exultant liberation comes from the physical removal of her uterus. The physical elimination of her ability to bear children is, for Robert, a physical transformation which in some sense is similar to the transitional process

[40] For a detailed discussion of the complicated nature and nuances of Marinetti's position on women, see Contarini, *La femme futuriste*.

of a transgendered male. It also transforms her mentally and emotionally. Meanwhile, Fillia's concern is for the elimination of femininity as a mental and emotional state, from both men and women, and a process of spiritualization that divorces both sexes from the libidinousness of their physical bodies.

Another important precursor to Fillia's novels is Aldo Palazzeschi's 1913 novel, *Il codice di Perelà*, because it provides both a model for the asexual, purified, and semi-religious ascetic figure that appears repeatedly in Fillia's works. The novel also serves as an earlier example of a futurist study of psychological states in literature. Though serving less obviously as religious allegories than Perelà, many of Fillia's protagonists (among them Farro Marchi in *L'ultimo sentimentale*, and the narrators in "Tormento a Pino Curtoni" and "Quarta dimensione di me stesso" from *La morte della donna*), are progressing toward dispassionate sexuality or total asexuality, abandoning the "waste" of vital creative energy and artistic passion that accompanies lustful, passionate sexuality and romantic entanglements. This leads Fillia's protagonists closer to a new futurist consciousness and receptive openness to the *Religione della Velocità*. In a sense, Fillia's protagonists are the acolytes of Perelà's new religion, though a version of it taken out of the fantastical irreality of Perelà's world and into a contemporary, realistic setting.

Like *Il codice di Perelà*, Rosa Rosà's *Una donna con tre anime* is a study of psychological states and an important precursor to Fillia. Like Fillia, Rosa Rosà (Edyth von Haynau) was both an accomplished author and illustrator. Following in Rosà's footsteps, Fillia demonstrated an interest in proto-feminist protagonists; in the case of *Una donna con tre anime*, the novel focuses on a woman whose psychological states and evolving futurist consciousness change under the influence of modernity and the mechanical age, an experience which is paralleled most closely by Nina Sereni in *La morte della donna*. Rosà's and Fillia's protagonists

share the experience of blossoming artistic and intellectual capacities, grounded in the new possibilities of the semi-abstract, semi-religious mechanical splendor of the *Religione della Velocità* and the *ricostruzione futurista dell'universo*.

Ruggero Vasari's play, *Angoscia delle macchine* has been cited by both Alessandra Ottieri and Günter Berghaus[41] as a likely inspiration for many aspects of Fillia's prose works, though this is an ultimately superficial comparison. Whereas Vasari's work focuses on the anxiety-inducing bodily mating and integration with the machine, Fillia's machine universe is environmental and experiential, not threateningly, anxiety-inducingly biomechanical. Vasari's theatrical work is rife with fear about the machine's conquest of man, whereas Fillia never envisions the machine out of human control. As in Marinetti's *Le Roi bombance* and *Mafarka le futuriste*, Vasari's machine future is womanless. The male, as through Alfred Jarry's bachelor machine, has become auto-regenerative, not asexual, but asexually reproductive.[42] The machine has appropriated the responsibility and biological necessities of reproduction from the female body, and thus negated the threat of the feminine and the need even for the continued existence of biological women.

The physical union with the machine and the unmaking of the body, sources of tremendous anxiety for early twentieth century writers, are also reframed, reworked, and to a great extent rejected by Fillia. Unlike Jarry's "machines célibataires" and unlike in Ruggero Vasari's "Angoscia delle macchine," Fillia does not pursue the fearful implications of physical mating with and complete integration of the human body with the machine. Instead, he focuses on the experience of using the machine and of deriving benefit from the machine's function, leaving it subordinate to human control.

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[41] Ottieri, *Fillia, un percorso futurista*. Berghaus, *Italian Futurist Theatre, 1909-1944*. 518.
[42] Mikkonen, *The Plot Machine*.

Despite the differences between Fillia's works and Vasari's, the tension with the erotic potential of the inorganic is at issue in Fillia's works. Whereas Jarry's and Vasari's narratives fear the *un*making and loss of the self in the machine, Fillia's exalts the *re*making of the self, using the machine as a tool. At no time does the machine in Fillia's world cross the terrifying boundary of consciousness and seize dominion over man. The machine can heighten and change the human experience and consciousness and it can provide the tools for new experiences, but it does not supersede the human, nor does it threaten mankind's place at the top of the evolutionary pyramid. However, there is clearly some anxiety related to a perceived dependence on the machine-driven experience, when, in "Il mondo di domani" the malfunctioning weather machine in one district causes riots, because it is not supplying sufficient *ambiente* to the residents. Neither does the machine supplant the need for the female for reproduction, as Marinetti's Mafarka's magic and mechanical construct does, nor as the machine-human hybrid does in Jarry and Vasari. Both the male and female bodies do undergo some degree of mechanization, but it is a process of de-eroticization in Fillia's idealized metaphors and idealized future. The mechanization is much more metaphorical than it is literal in Fillia's works. The epiphanic is not in the act of physical or emotional love, but the liberation from the necessity of them.

Another comparison that I believe to be generally unfounded is to the *romanzi erotico-sociali* written by, most notably, Bruno Corra and Luigi Settimelli. The novels written by Corra, Settimelli, and others such as Mario Carli share characteristics with Fillia's, and are perhaps the closest kin to his works, though again, the similarities remain to some degree superficial. Corra and Settimelli's works, like Fillia's, attack traditional, binding social structures, though Corra and Settimelli's works are not invested in the communist and feminist frameworks that we find in Fillia's writing. Instead, following Marinetti's lead, they take a stance more typical of

futurism, which attacks and deconstructs bourgeois morality, but do not offer any path toward changing the station of women in society, beyond removing the stigma of prostitution. The basis on which these works are lumped together with little examination is that all of these authors' works fit into the categories of the *genere brillante, pitigrilismo* and *futurismo di consumo*. While these are legitimate categories, and useful for understanding the consumer literature market, and many of the romanzi erotico-sociali are reasonably catalogued into these categories, categorizing futurist works as "merely" consumer-driven is entirely missing the point of modernism's drive to break down the barriers between high culture and mass culture.

5. Fillia's "Social Darwinism"

I will now highlight what I am calling Fillia's "social Darwinism" so that it will be clearer, as this analysis continues, what Fillia's societal agenda was during the mid-1920s. I use the term "social Darwinism" here to mean that Fillia has developed a theory on the survival of those he considers fittest wherein *La morte della donna* serves as Fillia's road map of human progress. He uses this novel to highlight the historical and evolutionary issues he considers most important. Fillia uses *La morte della donna* to particular effect when situating the state of affairs as they stood during his lifetime. *La morte della donna* then provides the context necessary for interpreting his later two novels.

At the beginning of *La morte della donna* the Scrittore outlines his interpretation of human history. His intent, he says, is to analyze his world as he sees it, and then to chart a course for the future of mankind.[43] In the introduction, also titled "La morte della donna," the Scrittore gives a speech on the history of human civilization, heavily coded in language that evokes Lombrosian theories and the wider context of social Darwinism as it was understood in the early

[43] Fillia also published an annotated historiography of the entire Futurist movement, entitled *Futurismo*, in 1927.

20th century.[44] The Scrittore, who is careful to emphasize that this is all science—and therefore implied to be objectively true and inevitable—says:

> sarò brevissimo perché le teorie scientifiche annoiano: si dimostra che allo stato quaternario, sul principio, quando aveva l'uomo già i caratteri odierni la Terra si raffreddò in tutta la parte Nord. Questo spiega il movimento delle civiltà […] ciò che interessa è l'emigrazione bianca in America—l'eterno bisogno umano di terre nuove: questa grande emigrazione che si sostituì ai primitivi abitanti e che rivela una realtà importantissima: infatti queste nuove popolazioni non ànno assimilato nessun costume o valore morale esistente in precedenza—la loro superiorità fu assoluta—dimostra che la potenzialità spirituale europea deve ancora raggiungere il massimo sviluppo […][45]

The Scrittore claims that the European spirit and the white race have not reached their full potential, but that progress is being made. Further social and spiritual evolution is imminent; however, it will only be possible to continue forward after the total nullification of the values systems currently in place. (The manifesto cited previously, "L'Idolo meccanico," wherein Fillia claims that the blank slate has been prepared, and that the time has come to implement his vision, was published the same year as *La morte della donna*.)

By positing his theory on geological history and evolutionary biology, Fillia attempts to gloss his theories with the validity of science. Later in the introduction, after he has outlined the changing roles of women, the Scrittore stresses, again, that he has organized his stories around the concept of evolution and of the progress of human civilization, using these terms explicitly. Though the title of the novel would seem to indicate its principal theme—the "death" of woman, it is far less straightforward than it seems. The introduction indicates *how* and what *kind* of death it will be, and it is not a literal death or biological irrelevancy. It is the death of the concept of *Donna* [Woman]. Fillia views the feminine as a useless and damaging social construct, but, in

[44] I here cite Lombroso because it remained the most common frame of reference in this period. 1925 is too early to consider the Fascist frameworks as the ones to which Fillia responds. While it is certainly true that Fascism was swiftly gaining ever greater power in all arenas, the social developments, as for example highlighted by Barbara Spackman, are not yet in place. Spackman, *Fascist Virilities*.
[45] Fillia, *Bolidi e tango*. 32-33.

contrast to most other futurists, his solution does not lead toward an implied future where the male seizes the reproductive role of the biological female as a way to eliminate the threat of the feminine.[46] Instead he uses social evolution and the survival of his fittest (the emotionally and intellectually liberated of both sexes) in place of the physically fittest, which were implied to be only male. One of the unusual features of Fillia's thought also begins to emerge in the opening to *La morte della donna*. In stark contrast to all of his Futurist contemporaries, Fillia also advocates for the suppression of over-expressed masculinity. This denies the very foundations of the patriarchal order, which, though it is starkly out of line with futurist thought, is consistent with Engels's work and with the position of Italian feminists.[47] This ideologically shocking response by the Scrittore to the Signora's challenge develops and emerges as the stories he tells progress, creating a world whose gender and sexuality systems are far different from both traditional and futurist norms.

Beginning with four primitive yet 'noble and virile' ancient societies, Fillia explores violent sexuality and its ties to war; the ties between sexual potency and the health of the race (a common motif of both futurism and late 19th–early 20th century thought); and questions of masculinity and virility. Violent and overly sexualized behaviors are presented, by Fillia, as characteristic of early civilizations. The lust for conquest and for sexual gratification are primitive drives in Fillia's worldview, the heredity of an earlier stage of evolution. Continuing with his theories on evolution and using a perspective spanning millennia, the stories also hint at the biological directives of the life cycle, of genetics and breeding.

Ostensibly about war and conquest, "La Conquista" actually focuses on the importance of maintaining a healthy and sustainable breeding population for the survival of civilization, and on

[46] Contarini, *La femme futuriste*.
[47] Engels and Untermann, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State,*.; Kuliscioff, *Il monopolio dell'uomo*.

the ties between sexual prowess and prowess in battle. For the future health of the tribe, the young and those who have not fathered a child are not permitted to leave for war because they will be needed to sustain the tribe, should the war party not return. The preparations that the African tribe makes for war also emphasize the ties that the futurists made between war, societal hygiene, and reproduction. Like in *Mafarka le futuriste*, "La conquista" combines an orgy with the ceremonious preparation for battle. The passion of the orgy inflames the passion for battle. Beginning to untether sex and violence even here, Fillia's orgy is willingly participated in by the women; he does not to recreate the mass rape of prisoners in Marinetti's text. Throughout Fillia's works there is indeed an underlying distaste for and rejection of violent sexuality and its use against women. Each time there is an act of sexual violence, the narrative voice is given to the female protagonist, and her fear and unwillingness are made explicit. Examples may be seen in the figures of Amesi, Yole, and even Nina and Sona, who both reject the psychosexual violence implied in the act of submitting to the sexual demands of the passèist, traditional men who attempt to coerce them and whom they refuse.

The themes of reproductive health and the health of the empire are also a central thematic preoccupation in "Il figlio." In this story, Fillia elaborates both on the idea that uncontrolled desire is dangerous, and that (genetically) strong blood is critical to the health of the empire. In this story the aging pharaoh Asychis is too weak to produce an heir and his strength has been sapped by the excessive time spent with his concubines. Excessive sexual passion—not blamed on the concubines, nor on the dangerous feminine, as it would have been by Marinetti—has weakened the pharaoh. His moral weakness is a danger to the stability of his bloodline, because he has selfishly spent himself on his own pleasure. Yet, this is not the only critical issue; there is weakness in the blood of the royal line caused by inbreeding. The solution in "Il figlio," and the

result of divine intervention, is to force a rape, in order to secretly impregnate Amesi, the pharaoh's sister and bride, so that her child will be healthy and strong. This divine intervention is born of desperation; it is the only way to impregnate Amesi before Asychis either dies or passes on his weak seed. Despite the divine intervention that leads Amesi to be raped, and its ultimate benefit to the empire, Fillia does not hesitate to make it clear that Amesi's rape is a revolting act of violence against her, and that she feared the soldier who was her rapist. The story graphically exposes Amesi's internal psychological state, and Fillia does not shy away from revealing her fear and trauma. This is a radical rejection of rape culture, even for the present day. Amesi is not held responsible for her violation, is not turned into an outcast, and she is not portrayed as enjoying the experience. Her joy derives only from the child she has conceived, and the duty she fulfills to the empire and to the greater good.

Blood purity and the strength of the Italian 'race' was a topic of serious preoccupation and considerable rhetoric at the beginning of the 20th century. It figured significantly into Marinetti's rhetoric, and Mussolini's. One of the more famous examples is Giovanni Pascoli's 1912 oration "La grande proletaria s'è mossa." In it, Pascoli transfers the anxieties of race and nation building onto the war in Libya, and to recalling the emigrant Italian to the motherland. In Fillia's novel the purity of blood, so sacred to the pharaohs and to the lines of European royalty, is dangerous; it causes weakness and deformity. The fascist rhetoric, the theories of Lombroso and his followers, and of many of the ardently nationalist writers (most futurists included) were fixated on the purity of the Italian race, of its strength and its might. Fillia again breaks rank with his peers, condemning the fear of mixed blood.[48]

[48] Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero, *La donna delinquente la prostituta e la donna normale.* (Torino: Roux, 1893).

As Giulio Bollati has observed, Italianness is an imaginary formation.[49] And as Lucia Re has explained, Italians during the 19th and early 20th century had ambiguous racial and economic statuses, often as poor, emigrant and even non-white, and this may have contributed to the recurrent tendency towards racism.[50] While Italian identity *qua* identity dates back to Dante, Pascoli makes clear that *italianità* was (and is) also tied to the Roman Empire and its dominion over the *Mare Nostrum*. Fillia's novel operates on two levels to counter these biases. First, Fillia is, himself, of mixed blood. His mother Maria Attahualpa Sellina was part indigenous and part Italo-Argentinian, though the idea that mixed blood is strengthening is ironic, giving Fillia's lifelong poor health. Second, Fillia conspicuously avoids the Roman Empire in his schema of the ancient world, focusing instead on Africa twice, South America, and China. This also counters the works of Paola Mantegazza and Paolo Orano, whose works on "sexual hygiene" (Mantegazza) and pervasive anti-Semitism (from both authors) gave a scientific cast to characterize the "Oriental" other as effeminate, passive, melancholy, and deranged.[51]

In Fillia's ancient world, untamed sexual desire is also destructive. In "La rivolta delle femmine" unfulfilled sexual and maternal desires threaten to destroy the Incan Empire. Though the story might be read as expressing a deep fear of homosexuality and its "dangerous" consequences for the stability of the empire, it is not necessarily only homosexual desire that is destructive, it is *all* sexual desire. While Hiso Chanca obviously fears and loathes sodomy, and the male homosexual act threatens the stability and control of the government, it is not homosexuality in and of itself that is dangerous. The danger lies in the fact that the women in revolt will bring down the current government, because their unfulfilled sexual desire and desire

[49] Giulio Bollati, *L'Italiano: il carattere nazionale come storia e come invenzione* (Torino: G. Einaudi, 1983).
[50] Re, "Italians and the Invention of Race." For more, see also: Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno, *Are Italians White? How Race Is Made in America* (New York: Routledge, 2003).
[51] Re, "Italians and the Invention of Race." 25. Paolo Mantegazza, *Igiene dell'amore.* (Milano: Treves, 1889); Paolo Orano, *Il problema del Christianesimo* (Roma, 1900).

to procreate has whipped them in a dangerous frenzy. Uncontrolled sexual passion is also the topic of "La regina dei crisantemi." Hai-Fu is ultimately destroyed by the sexual hunger she cannot fulfill. The desire that burns inside her ultimately drives her to burn herself to death on the superheated bronze statue of the Buddha. Both "La regina dei crisantemi" and "Il figlio" also link ancient religious devotion to violence and irrationality. (Fillia's explicit dismissal of the Christian era in "La morte della donna" negates the possibility that he privileges it as civilized. In fact, he characterizes the entire Christian period as decadent.)

Controlling sexuality is fundamentally about power and about keeping autocratic and patriarchal structures in place. Rejection of these social structures both reaffirms the continuing influence of Marxist thought. It is a reaction to the fascist solidification of power, and rejection of the rhetoric of the normative and reactionary heterosexual marriage and family structures dictated by conservative bourgeois values and morality. Fillia's response implies a very liberal and progressive belief that governing bodies have no place regulating the sexual behaviors and morals of its citizens and that doing so is a sign of corruption and of a flawed governmental structure. While, overall, Fillia's positions on sexuality and sexual desire do diverge from his futurist compatriots', and while he does advocate an ascetic, quasi-asexuality, he does not, ultimately, condemn sexuality and desire *a priori*. In some sense, he does conform to the futurist free love canon (see below), and he does not impose different standards for male and female.

Furthermore, the content of all three novels argues a position very different from the standard understanding that female sexuality was inherently dangerous. It was generally held at the time that female sexuality needed to be tamed and contained, especially through pregnancy and childbearing.[52] In contrast, Fillia's works offer a future in which there is complete equality in

[52] Cesare Lombroso and Rodolfo Laschi, *Delitto Politico E Le Rivoluzioni in Rapporto Al Diritto, All'antropologia Criminale Ed Alla Scienza Di Governo, Etc.* (Torino, 1890); Mantegazza, *Igiene dell'amore.*

sexual relations, both within the power dynamics of the relationship and in the possibility to rationally enter into and exit from these relationships on the part of either partner. This further reinforces his contention that the male and female are equally intellectually and emotionally intelligent, and that the difference in physical bodies is merely a non-issue of basic biology.

As the narrative shifts from the ancient world to the modern, entirely skipping the Christian Middle Ages, the socio-economic functions of sex and reproduction change, and the function of desire changes, too. In the introduction to *La morte della donna*, the Scrittore claimed that the heating and cooling of the earth "ridusse la vita al solo fisico, senza compensazioni cerebrali." He argues that in the past ages of humanity there was an accord between mankind and its environment, which allowed it to develop and grow, though ultimately this also led to the decadence of the middle period between antiquity and modernity. In order to justify his argument, the Scrittore says:

> la nostra vita ci rende inquieti, in un periodo di trapasso e di superamento: scopriremo il germe di questa nuova sensibilità—ma oggi bisogna definire la sintesi del Passato in relazione a tutta la sua storia, per liberarsi dal cubo nero delle tradizioni che ci opprime
>
> andrò per ordine—matematicamente—un'analisi fredda del corpo per raggiungere il calore conclusivo dello spirito:
>
> nel futuro, giudicando il valore storico del mondo, avremo due sole, grandissime divisioni: la civiltà antica e la civiltà meccanica—tutto il periodo che va dall'epoca greca compresa fino ai nostri giorni, avrà una mediocre interpretazione di decadenza umana
>
> le civiltà antiche che conosciamo aumentano così la loro importanza organizzata: sappiamo infatti che, allora, queste grandi civiltà secolari (l'egiziana—la babilonese—la cinese—l'indiana ecc. oltre quelle americane degli Aztechi e degli Incas) avevano un'identica forma morale di vita…[53]

Though Fillia calls ancient civilizations secular, in this context he can only intend non-Christian civilizations. The moral codes that these societies share, in Fillia's view, are passionate and violent ones, but these moral systems were also the source of these societies' strength. He calls them "grandi periodi fecondi dell'umanità" and says they were characterized by "sanità morale."

[53] Fillia, *Bolidi e tango*. 34-35.

However, it is because they were in the process of building empires in a pre-industrial world, not necessarily because of any inherent genetic superiority that passion and violence were constructive. As the energy of this world ran out, humanity fell into spiritual and moral decadence.

Following the decadent age between antiquity and the present day (the Christian era that he functionally intends to erase from historical record), the Scrittore believes that a new natural equilibrium will be established:

> «questa grande realtà storica modifica fatalmente la nostra sensibilità: cadranno le tradizioni e le concezioni morali della vita presente, limitate ad un passato nazionale o di razza, troppo deboli per resistere ad una forza collettiva—ogni senso di vita agirà secondo i rapporti e le necessità ambientali. Il futuro richiede una sanità sessuale normalissima che noi ci stiamo lentamente formando»[54]

The Scrittore and his audience are on the cusp of the second great age of humanity. They are at the beginning of Modernity, of the *Vita Meccanica.* The moment of *traverso* has come, but it is not without conflict. This is where the second group of stories in *La morte della donna* takes up its ideological position and where both *L'uomo senza sesso* and *L'ultimo sentimentale* are situated.

The second group of four stories in *La morte della donna* is set in modern times, and the narrative shifts its focus onto the individual experience, deconstructing bourgeois individualism and exposing its weaknesses in order to overcome it. In this second group of stories Fillia explores his protagonists' psychological and spiritual responses to love and the influence that passion exerts on modern man. This second group of short stories and the two later novels thematize the changing nature of sexual and emotional relationships in the modern era, before the moment of total rupture and revolution. These narrative arcs carry their protagonists through the first steps in abandoning sentimentality and reducing love solely to its physical aspects

[54] Ibid. 36.

without sensual and sentimental love tingeing any aspect of the sexual act, to the point where it serves only to fulfill a basic physiological drive to seek the physical pleasure of sexual climax. The protagonists in "La regina del Jazz-Band," "Tormento a Pino Curtoni," "Quarta dimensione di me stesso" and "Maternità" continue to suffer from atavistic sentimentality, but each demonstrates some awareness of this state, and takes some action to overcome it. This is also the state in which we find Farro Marchi in *L'ultimo sentimentale* and Mac Rebour in *L'uomo senza sesso*. Even awareness of atavistic sentimentality, implies Fillia, will diminish the importance of sexual relationships and allow for spiritual ones to flourish.

Both "La regina del Jazz-band" and "Maternità" are stories of passion, the former passion *for* a woman, the latter the passion *of* a woman. Alba Cherie, the beautiful, blond prostitute in the first story is the object of a great writer's passion; she is a spellbinding muse, loved and desired by many men, She is, in the words of the "Grande Scrittore" within the tale: "la santa dell'amore/la santa della disperazione/la santa della poesia" but her only wealth has been that of "la libertà umana del Piacere." Unable to understand her, the Grande Scrittore angrily declares that "tutte quelle donne venute dal basso ànno un'anima di prostituta." It is not Alba Cherie, however, who is trapped by her atavism; it is the Scrittore who lauds and desires her, ceding voice to her only for a few lines. Alba Cherie--dancer, performer, and prostitute—foreshadows Nina Sereni, and Fillia's position on prostitution.

In the story "Maternità," sexual violence is exposed as the fault of men and their egoism, not the fault of the women they victimize. To some extent, Yole's tale parallels Amesi's from the first quartet of stories.[55] Each girl is impregnated during her first sexual encounter, and each is

[55] Miranda may refer either to Shakespeare's heroin in *The Tempest*, or the subject of Antonio Fogazzaro's 1873 poem of the same title. She seems to have elements of both characters, and the story, dated 1921, would have been written when Fillia was still in school, or only just finished. Iole comes from Greek mythology, and there are several versions of her story. The most common, the version by Apollodorus, claims that Iole was the cause of Heracles

destined to bear the savior of her race. But Yole's narrative also demonstrates the progress of civilization between the ancient Egyptian empire and Italy in the modern era. The sexual act is no longer a forced act of violence; it is a consensual act, free of moral stigma and personal shame, freely chosen by the woman. Yole's choice to take the stranger into her bed, even though she was called by a secret song in her heart, is still her own free choice. Though her destiny, Yole believes, lay in the dark eyes of a stranger at the gate with the "stessa tenebra dei suoi desideri" she is not coerced as Amesi was.[56]

Violence, sexual or societal, has no place in Yole's world. It is the violence of her mother's husband that drove Yole's rejection of men and of the sexual. The violence of war is made entirely extraneous to this second quartet of stories, and it is because society has evolved significantly from a time when war *was* the answer and a means of salvation. War is no longer a solution in Fillia's universe. Inspired by the trauma of the First World War, he looks for a solution that includes a kind of futurism freed from its obsession with war and violence, a futurism that is founded instead on spiritual regeneration. The stranger says:

> Noi siamo di una generazione che è nata troppo tardi per temperarsi le forze nella guerra e siamo cresciuti nella più pazza libertà del pensiero, ma coi corpi legati.[57]

Though, the stranger continues, they do not yet know the way ahead, Yole's role is a linchpin in the fight to find the right path. The child she conceives that night will be a savior of mankind, a guide. It is a child who she will shield from "le soffocazioni del morale borghese, per allevarlo nudo, senza le catene grigie delle tradizioni, e farlo guardare diritto nella sensibilità del nuovo."[58] Yole's child will be a new kind of person, a futurist Man.

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death, due to his wife, Deianeira's jealousy. Other versions of the story appear in Ovid, Sophocles and Seneca, Ovid's purporting that Iole enslaved Heracles.

[56] Fillia, *Bolidi e tango*. 94.

[57] Ibid. 95.

[58] Ibid.102.

Both "Tormento a Pino Curtoni" and "Quarta dimensione di me stesso," on the other hand, focus on male figures who are artists and writers, and in both cases, the stories are told from the first person point of view. "Tormento a Pino Curtoni" is an epistle of sorts, a long letter addressed to a living person, and "Quarta dimensione di me stesso" is in the style of a diary entry or monologue. Both present themselves as 'real' narratives, and as pseudo-autobiographical ones. It is clear that the narrator in these cases is not meant to be interpreted as the Scrittore, but instead meant to be understood as representing a version or a part of Fillia himself. It does not follow, of course, that these are truly autobiographical narratives in whole or even in part.[59] Instead, the verisimilitude and first person narration of these episodes serve to heighten their affectivity, and to highlight the fictiveness and artifice of the narrative frame. These two fictive 'Fillias' are the means to narrate the difficult process of overcoming the psychological and social constraints that tradition places on the psyche, in order to reinforce how important the coming social revolution will be.

The choice to make both of the protagonists in "Tormento a Pino Curtoni" and "Quarta dimensione di me stesso" as well as the Grande Scrittore in "La regina del jazz-band" male and to make both of the actual protagonists of "La regina del jazz-band" and "Maternità" female betrays Fillia's lingering misogyny. (Though the latter case is, to some degree, excusable due to biological reproductive constraints.) All of Fillia's fictional writers and painters are male; all of his actresses, prostitutes, and "nurturing" figures are female. While Fillia does succeed at giving women the authoritative voice on matters of the emotional, corporeal, and symbolic, he retains the literary and philosophical spheres for his male figures. It was unlikely this was even a conscious choice. Though Fillia makes significant strides past most of his contemporaries, this

[59] Similarly, several of Fillia's poems and a piece of *teatro sintetico* (see Chapters 1 and 2) are also framed as exploring Fillia's self-realization as a Futurist and as an artist, each slightly different in plot and details, but unified by theme.

goes to reinforcing the fact that Fillia's position remains subject to the subconscious effects of patriarchal values systems.

6. The Futurist War on Love

The final two stories from *La morte della donna* ("Il sesso di metallo" and "Il mondo di domani") shifts the reader's attention from the preparatory phases of human evolution to the moments of rupture in these last two tales, and opens the door to the ideological preoccupations in Fillia's second and third novels. Following in Marinetti's footsteps, as discussed above, Fillia waged a persistent campaign against romantic love, sensuality, and sentimentality, though again with notable differences in their concepts and goals. The modern war, in Fillia's works, was waged on the emotional and intellectual fronts. War and conquest on the battlefield no longer figure into his contemporary or future visions, though civil unrest does. Taking futurist ideology in his own direction, Fillia builds on the idea that love and sentimentality must be destroyed, and points to an end result very different from Marinetti's. Fillia does this by implying that eroticism and the dominion of physical desire and passion over mankind must be overcome through spirituality, the intellect, and artistic passion.

His attack on this topic is direct. Each of Fillia's three novels features at least one character who is paralyzed by his sentimental love for a woman. The characters who are weakened or paralyzed by their atavistic emotion are almost always male, and unable to resist or overcome their love of a woman without being forced to do so by someone else—always a woman it is critical to note—who has an intuitive grasp on modern sensibility and the capacity to have already rejected sentimentality on her own. This quality of Fillia's works that will return in my analysis when I demonstrate the radical nature of the author's gender politics. Fillia also uses

his female characters to set up the dichotomous before and after structure of his universe. The female characters that are "quelle femmine che vivevano ancora per la loro esistenza di Donna, anche se le ispiravano un senso estetico"[60] are the consistently ancillary ones, clearly destined for irrelevancy. So even though femininity and womanliness may be artistically inspirational, this kind of woman is bound for extinction. Furthermore, that is a kind of inspiration that Fillia rejects as decadent, and ultimately paralyzing. In the ninth story from *La morte della donna*, "Il sesso di metallo," the battle over sentimentality and love is waged over and within the male figure, Sada, who is being pulled in separate directions by his atavistic emotions on one side and his spirituality and intellect on the other, allegorically represented by the two women Lebe and Laba. This work is very similar in plot, to the last act of *Sensualità*.

Sada's sentimentality and love for Lebe, the *donna della carne*, prevents him from embracing progress and modernity. Laba, the *donna dello spirito* is the voice of reason, the voice of modernity who wins the battle for Sada, and allegorical also wins out in determining the fate of mankind. Flesh gives way to spirit; the bodily to the bodiless. This story is the allegorical tipping point in the narrative of human evolution and progress, as Fillia has framed it in *La morte della donna*. Though clearly set in the mechanized future, it lies in a temporally and spatially semi-abstract universe. Moreover, as they were in *Sensualità—Teatro d'eccezione,* both the staging and costumes are symbolically charged. Lebe, *donna della carne*, wears nothing but white body paint and a silver wig, visually emphasizing carnality via the total exposure of her body and emphasizing old age, decay and irrelevancy by her silver wig, which mimics greyed hair. Laba, *donna dello spirito*, is, instead, as desexualized as possible; the description of her costuming emphasizes the use of "masculine" materials (leather wood and metal) and the fact that only her most overt secondary sexual characteristics (her breasts and long hair) indicate the

[60] Fillia, *Bolidi e tango*. 261.

gender of her physical body. Sada's costume is caught between the two extreme ends of the spectrum, between past and future, carnality and spirituality, mechanical splendor and sentimental emotionalism. It is made of hard materials, cut into geometric, armor-like forms, but the chink in his armor is the circle of white cloth that is placed over his heart.

At the climactic moment, the battle seems lost; Sada is teetering on the edge about to fall back into Lebe's arms. In this moment, emotional weakness almost triumphs over spiritual strength. But, for the sake of humanity, Sada cannot choose but to finally reject the past, to reject his weak, pathetic lover, and to embrace the intellectual union that Laba offers. Laba, it is critical to note, is not a new lover for Sada. Their relationship is platonic; the armor-like nature of their costumes both protects them and prevents contamination. Laba's final embrace is one of compassion and comfort, not of love and not at all sexual. The path forward is not an easy one, but its course is inevitable. Women, social constructs of femininity and carnality, are the source of men's sentimentalism and weakness, but *uomini senza sesso*, Men, are the source and salvation of the futurist society that Fillia envisions. This one-act play distills the communist and revolutionary themes in *Sensualità*, and it abstracts the story into the realm of the allegorical. What of Fillia's revolutionary politics that remain overtly present, as far as *La morte della donna* is concerned will appear only in the tenth and last, of the Scrittore's stories.

If "Il sesso di metallo" is the climax of *La morte della donna*, the height of the battle, and the moment of rupture with humanity's past, then "Il mondo di domani" is the denouement. It narrates the eventual outcomes of the revolution, of societal renewal and a return to order. After the climactic spiritual fight, a new political and social order is given form. Sentimentality and romantic love have been completely abolished, and physical love has been divorced from emotional entanglement. In this story, Fillia constructs his vision of a semi-utopic future, and the

characteristics of what he views as human relationships that have been perfected (as far as that is possible).

Uomo M. 6436 and Uomo F. 10045 are well known to each other; they share a train car and meals, daily, with Uomo M. 17689, and the decision by M. 6436 and F. 10045 to enter into contractual marriage is a rational one, based partly on mutual physical attraction, perhaps, but mostly based on a rationally made agreement between equals. Furthermore the aspect of their honeymoon that Uomo M 6436 and Uomo F. 10045 are most anticipating is the "sensations" that the change in pressure that their trip to an underwater city will provide, not the consummation of the marriage, or even the reprieve from work. Their sexual relationship is incidental to their civic duty to marry and to their other experiential opportunities.[61] *Ambiente*, as Fillia calls both what he considers the most crucial quality of a work of art (that it expand outward and that the person experiencing the work, written or visual, have his consciousness expanded) and the environmental controls in this future world nourish the mind and the soul, removing the need for the body to stimulate the creative and spiritual drives. Any children they conceived would be turned over to the state for upbringing, also liberating them from the duties of the home. In line with Fillia's complete dedication to the idea of equality between male and female bodies, none of the characters in this story are given any physical description beyond the letter denoting their biological sex.

The other half of the equation demonstrates what happens when an atavistic man is forced to break free of his lust and sentimentality. Representing this archetype is Farro Marchi and the story his awakening to a new consciousness. This, then, is the principal theme of Fillia's last novel, *L'ultimo sentimentale*. Farro is the male counterpart to *L'uomo senza sesso's* Nina Sereni. Farro, spurred by his lover Sona's abandonment, is forced to free himself from

[61] For the importance of "sensazioni" in Fillia, see Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

sentimentality in order to regain his artistic intuition and his mental stability. Despite his conviction throughout the novel that he and Sona are liberated from their sentimentality, and freed from the bindings of traditional gender roles, it is not until the trauma of their separation that Farro is forced to truly confront his atavistic nature and his emotional weakness. Some time before Sona ends their relationship, Farro betrays his atavism in a letter to her in Rome while he is in Paris to inaugurate a show of his paintings. He writes:

> E vorrei urlare il miracolo della nostra felicità, della nostra fusione sessuale il punto di partenza per un'interpretazione più umana della sessualità, verso il traguardo insuperabile dello spirito. Soltanto così le potenze dell'ambiente anno una seduzione sana ed appagante—il tormento interiore diventa bisogno di espressione artistica—la sensualità è un centro di forze creative.
>
> In questa esistenza complicata, dove il giuoco degli interessi, delle passioni e delle intelligenze non à limiti, in questa concorrenza spietata di valori, io non posso uscire neppure per un attimo dall'unione con la tua individualità. Ti ò nel sangue, nei nervi, nel cervello. La nostra unione è la quarta dimensione di noi stessi. Sanità meravigliosa della natura che, sommando le qualità del maschio e della femmina à creato il unico dell'uomo.[62]

Farro is partly correct. There is a new man, who is a sum of the qualities of both male and female, and who is in harmony with the fourth dimension, but he is wrong about what defines the "sensuality" behind this new man's creative force and about the sexual union being the point of departure and the foundation on which this radical new kind of relationship was to be built. Farro sees the path that the Yole's lover could not, but he must still make the final break. The transformation is not complete.

Lust, which featured so prominently as a futurist theme, is reduced to near nonexistence in Fillia's works, and the energy expended on it is redirected into artistic expression and intellectual and psychological experiences. Fillia's novels all progress toward a devaluation of sexual passion and of the physiological needs of the body. He abstracts away from them, and toward an almost ascetic religious spirituality that favors intellectual passion and artistic

[62] Fillia, *Bolidi e tango*.178.

production over physical passion and reproduction. In all three novels, the ideological progression favors the decreasing physicality of the body, and the lived experience, in favor of increasingly spiritual and psychological experiences.

Even the stories set in the ancient world in *La morte della donna* lack any real sense of the physicality of experience, as does Yole's sexual union with the stranger and revelation of her pregnancy. Eroticism in Yole's tale is tied to the spoken and written word, and the spell of the song she hears. The only time that the novels approach the graphic sexuality and physicality that typifies many other futurist writings is in "Quarta dimensione di me stesso" as the narrator's experience of his motorcycle ride is framed in explicitly sexual terms. This is one significant way I maintain that Fillia's work differs from that of his predecessors and his peers, in particular from Marinetti's libidinousness and from the *romanzi erotico-sociali* written by Corra, Settimelli and Carli in the mid-to-late 1920s.

The ultimate resolution lies in Farro Marchi's case is the crucial realization that he could not properly express his artistic intuition and create while involved in sexually and emotionally-charged relationship and that he could not rely it as a stable or succoring source of inspiration. (This is similar to the revelation that the narrator has in both "Quarta dimensione di me stesso" and "Tormento a Pino Curtoni.") The intensive psychological self-evaluation and self-reconstruction he goes through alter his perceptions of his art. As his perceptions shift, aided by the mechanical splendor and exhilaration of car racing and driving in the car that Farro buys himself, he finally perceives love's dangerous, damaging nature. Farro's last sighting of Sona, after she had left him, after his mania, his depression, and after his affair with the dancer Katja, is the moment of revelation. Farro is so completely changed that seeing Sona in the final pages of the novel does not, as he feared it would, rip open the emotional wounds he 'so carefully stitched

closed.' The change within Farro is so extreme that he cannot even conceive of her as the same woman. As they exchange a few words, Farro's last remark to Sona ends the novel. He tells her, "…comincio appena oggi a vivere."[63] Farro, abandoned by Sona, revives his dedication to his art; he is invigorated by casting off the weight of sentimentality and atavism, and inspired to more deeply meaningful, spiritually weighty expression.

7. Gender, Sexuality and Breaking Down Social Constructs

Fillia's spiritualistic and mystical futurism took part in, but also transformed the expression of, futurist ideology. His literary works and the socio-cultural and psychosexual dynamics within them were unique in many respects. As Fillia elaborated his positions on sexuality, on the body, and on issues of gender expression in his prose works these positions become increasingly forward looking, radical, and divergent from their futurist origins. He began incorporating ideas and theories that were emerging from the radically progressive voices in the debate on female sexuality, the female intellect, and female emotional intelligence, rejecting the work of figures such as Rodolfo Laschi, Cesare Lombroso and Paolo Mantegazza.[64] These issues were at the center of the debate over how to respond to shifting societal order and the fight over the hegemony of bourgeois morality in the early 20th century.[65] Dismantling Christianity, which I will discuss below, and in chapter 4, was an integral part of dismantling the power structures that maintained patriarchal and capitalist hegemony, and thus Fillia's agendas are both congruent and global in conception.

[63] Ibid. 212.
[64] Lombroso and Laschi, *Delitto Politico E Le Rivoluzioni in Rapporto Al Diritto, All'antropologia Criminale Ed Alla Scienza Di Governo, Etc.*
[65] Contarini, *La femme futuriste*. 43.

Closely tied to the rejection of love and sentimentality is Fillia's war on the gender binary and on the social constructs that prop it up. In *L'uomo senza sesso*, Fillia repeats the battle from *Sensualità* and "Il sesso di metallo" in a "real world" context. Nina Sereni is, effectively, the "real" Laba, a woman who does not need marriage, family, or even sex to feel fulfilled her in life. It is *Nina* who is the most important character in the novel, and the *uomo senza sesso*. It is *not* Sedora or Mac who fill these roles, though this has been claimed in the past.[66] Nina's renunciation of traditional morals and gender roles is, for her, swift and painless, and the opposite of both Sada and (later) Farro Marchi. It even seems, according to the narrator, that Nina had been born different. The novel opens with the following gendered stereotypes, a description of Nina, and a scathing assessment of the commodification of female beauty, which have overtones of the writings of Italian communists and feminists:

> Le donne si dividono in una sola categoria: donne belle.
> Gli uomini in tre categorie: uomini ricchi, uomini poveri e donne brutte.
>
> Nina Sereni, magra e vellutata, discretamente sensibile, non era classificabile: la famiglia borghese di commercianti arricchiti non le aveva concesso di conoscere il mondo che attraverso il proprio grigiore spirituale e pochi libri. Una donna è bella soltanto quando capisce il valore sociale della sua bellezza. Nina Sereni, in collegio non aveva imparato che le oscenità superficiali ed epidermiche delle signorine per bene.
>
> Il desiderio di vita, la pesante atmosfera famigliare e il tormento di carnalità insoddisfatta, costruirono in lei un bisogno feroce di libertà: il problema morale della sua anima fu rapidamente liquidato—per una donna l'affetto e il sentimento della propria casa non esistono: presto o tardi è necessario abbandonarla, sposandosi. E il matrimonio la impauriva, con le sue leggi definite di normalità.
> […]
> Nina Sereni, diciotto anni e intelligenza ottimista, non aveva il difetto decadente di discutere ciò che le suggeriva il proprio subcosciente"[67]

Nina, in *L'uomo senza sesso*, is smart, practical, and utterly unsentimental. She acts as she needs and wishes, with no regrets, and she uses her beauty to get what she wants. She is suffocated by her family's bourgeois banality and convention.

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[66] Mario Verdone, *Prosa e critica futurista* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1973).
[67] Fillia. Bolidi e tango, 215-218.

Nina, unlike her defective, decadent family, is capable of action. Because, we are told, she does not endlessly discuss and analyze her actions, as they do, she is able to act on her desires. In no time at all Nina, abandoning first her family and then her fiancé, became:

> …liberata dalle catene che opprimono i movimenti morali e intellettuali di tutte le donne, forte avanguardia cosciente della donna di domani.[68]

Nina throws off the weight of traditional morality, sentimentality, and femininity, the chains that restrict the moral and intellectual actions of all women. Fillia was repeatedly willing to declare, in the plainest terms, that traditional social morals and gender roles were 'chains that oppress all women.' The way in which he consistently provides his female protagonists with the means to seize control of their own lives' narratives makes it clear that Fillia believes the liberation of women to be a necessary pre-condition to futurist society, and to his *Religione della Velocità*.

Fillia is much more vocal on the *questione della donna* than most of the (predominantly male) leadership of the socialist and communist groups, who, at the time, did not prioritize the issue of women's rights. Many male socialist and communist leaders, including Gramsci, if they bothered at all with the question of women's rights, believed that gender equality was the inevitable result of the proletarian revolution, and that freedom for the one would necessarily follow from freedom won by the other; therefore, it was not necessary for them to take any special interest in the issue. Of course, as the last several decades have shown, women's rights and the rights of persons of color come only with the active effort of the oppressed groups to force concessions from the ruling majority. Because of this unwillingness to prioritize the issue of women's rights, female leaders and the voices of female protest were almost entirely pushed

[68] Ibid,.218.

to the side.[69] Fillia, a male quasi-feminist, took the exceptional position, alongside feminist activists, that women's rights had to be actively fought for, and actively pursued.

After seizing her independence, Nina profits from her beauty, and it is implied that she prostitutes herself in order to support herself until she tires of it; she then turns to gambling. Her winnings are enough to support her until Mac Rebour asks her to join his *Associazione Sportiva*. Mac recognized in Nina her extreme modernity, though he did not initially grasp the entirety of its implications. Nina's behavior functions on several levels to critique society, and she is, in a sense, an active rejection, by Fillia, of fascist and bourgeois morals and ideals. First, she twice defies and abandons family and financial security, then successively turns to prostitution and gambling, without remorse. As early as *Dinamite*, in the poem *Noi*, Fillia called prostitutes 'the only rebellious women.' He groups the prostitutes in with the dreamers and the outcasts, as groups to be collected into the revolutionary hordes.[70] By 1927, a character like Nina actively defied the models of traditional female virtue such as the *angelo della casa* that were reasserting themselves.

Futurism, in general, broke with bourgeois and traditional morals, and did not condemn prostitution. It is treated as a profession like any other in *L'uomo senza sesso*. Fillia treats Nina's behavior as resourceful and clever, but also banal to the point that it was barely worth noting. In fact, Nina is treated with respect for exerting her independence and for finding ways to support herself outside of the bonds of marriage and home. The precedent for this kind of treatment is found as far back as in pre-war futurist writing. In 1913, Italo Tavolato published the manifesto "Elogio della prostituzione" in *Lacerba* and he also published the pamphlet "Contro la morale sessuale" the same year. In the "Elogio" Tavolato declares:

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[69] Camilla Ravera. *Breve storia del movimento femminile in Italia*. Roma: Ed. Riuniti, 1979.
[70] Fillia, Galleazzi, and Pasquali, *1+1+1=1 – Dinamite – Poesie Proletarie – Rosso + Nero.* 9.

> Tutte le morali variano, mutano, decadono, spariscono; la prostituzione resta. Perciò, se durata è indice di valore, la prostituzione è superiore all'etica.[71]

And while, to a great extent, Fillia does agree with Tavolato on the subject of "the world's oldest profession," ultimately there are the same differences between Fillia and Tavolato's sexual ethics and ethos as there are between Fillia and Valentine de Saint-Point's, when it comes to the subject of lust (meaning that Tavolato, like Saint-Point, celebrates the innervating power of lust). Moreover, Fillia's embrace of prostitution actively rejects Lombroso's *donna delinquente*.

There is another level of difference between Fillia and Tavolato, having to do with the issue of the entrenched system of commodities exchange. This difference also ties into and affects another common trait of Fillia's and Tavolato's prostitutes. It is the idea that the prostitute is one who embodies truth, and refuses to compromise her character, because she does not care about the opinion or approval of the public. Nina lives for herself; her actions are dictated by her own ethical and moral codes.[72] The disagreement in Fillia and Tavolato's works emerges from the issue of prostitutes as profane commodities. According to Hirschman and Stern:

> Feminist critiques point out that at the present time as well as in most past eras, prostitutes have been viewed as profane commodities (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989). They serve no familial function, and fulfill neither the domestic nurturance nor reproductive roles usually assigned to women. Instead, prostitutes' social and economic value lies in their provision of a sexual service to men. They are, in modern terms "sex workers" (Lewin 1992, B16), women those humanity is derogated by reduction to their sexual parts (Bullough 1974; Perkins and Bennett 1985). In essence, a prostitute is a sexual commodity, a bundle of product attributes whose primary role is to serve as an object or product consumed by men. […] The images of prostitutes in film derive from a long history of earlier texts-poems, plays, and novels that commodify prostitutes as a subordinate group even within the larger group of women, itself subordinate to men. Virtually all of these images are reductive, defining a prostitute not as a complete human being, but as merely a collection of sexual parts. [73]

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[71] Italo Tavolato, "Elogio della prostituzione." *Lacerba*. Vol 1, 9. 1 May 1913. 5-8.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Elizabeth C. Hirschman and Barbara B. Stern (1994) ,"Women As Commodities: Prostitution As Depicted in the Blue Angel, Pretty Baby, and Pretty Woman", *in NA - Advances in Consumer Research*. Volume 21, eds. Chris T. Allen and Deborah Roedder John, Provo, UT : Association for Consumer Research, Pages: 576-581.

In Tavolato's work, this framework is at issue. And in the text "Elogio della prostituzione," the figures of Tavolato's prostitutes, Lulù and Zazà, are ultimately reductive. In no significant way does Tavolato grant the prostitute the fullness of her existence as a human person; she remains merely a collection of sexual parts. When contrasted with "Il mondo di domani" and *L'uomo senza sesso*, it appears that Fillia has turned this lack of familial function into a positive trait of the prostitute. Because it is no longer the role of the biological parents, and especially no longer necessary to commodify women into the subordinate role (per Engels), this lack of familial function becomes positive, even laudable.

The problem with Fillia's work, though, is that his asceticism and anti-sexual-desire stance is ultimately to some degree misogynistic. Because he strips away sexual desire from the woman *first*, he is denying the possibility of a woman as a sexual being. Moreover, Nina in great part remains a stereotype. Hirschman and Stern, reworking the Horn-Pringle methodology[74] into four "quadrants" instead of nine definitions, describe the type of prostitute that Nina is in this way:

> There are three subtypes represented in [the Good-Unpunished quadrant], each representing variations on the oppositional theme of Good-Unpunished characters. The first is termed the Whore-with-a-heart-of-gold and is derived from the Romantic tradition that emphasized the innate goodness of humanity. [,..]
>
> The third subtype is labeled the Material Girl and is traceable to the Marxist/Socialist view of capitalist society. Here the text emphasizes the prostitute's economic motivation—the necessity for her to earn a living. The text also serves a larger metaphorical function of indicting capitalist society as one in which most persons are prostituted in various ways. At the narrative's conclusion, the prostitute is saved by means of her own efforts.[75]

This is the innate problem with Fillia's prostitute figure. He combines these Romantic and Marxist stereotypes into one, though with a futurist slant. Although this does highlight the

[74] Pierre L Horn and Mary Beth Pringle, *The Image of the Prostitute in Modern Literature* (New York: F. Ungar, 1984).
[75] Elizabeth C. Hirschman and Barbara B. Stern (1994),"Women As Commodities: Prostitution As Depicted in the Blue Angel, Pretty Baby, and Pretty Woman."

continuing influence of Marxist thought on Fillia, it also reinforces the fact that his Marxist thought derives more from Gramsci and the communist party than it does from the work of Italian feminists in this period. It is a construct that is inextricably tied to the male perspective.

The contrast between Nina and Farro Marchi, protagonist of *L'ultimo sentimentale* (who is the last sentimental man and the novel's titular character) is stark. The contrast is heightened through their existences in the same spatial and temporal universe. Where Nina was the "real world" Laba, Farro is the "real world" Sada; however, Sona is not entirely like the atavistic and emotional Lebe. Sona is much more like Nina; she is independent and is an actress and a writer (though we are never given evidence of her practicing this career bringing home, again the persistence of societally determined gender roles). Indeed Sona is the one who abandons Farro when she no longer loves him. She is capable of acting without emotion, and of recognizing the fact that the relationship she has with Farro is no longer viable for either of them. She sees what Farro does not, that their relationship has begun to strangle both of them. Sona forces the Farro to see, by forcing an emotional and artistic crisis in him. At their last meeting, seeing Sona releases Farro from the last chains binding him to the past and shows Farro what it is 'to begin to live.' In essence, Sona is Farro's foil, and little more. Fillia, then, has set up a dichotomy between his two titular protagonists (Nina and Farro), that contrasts the emotional intellect of male and female, ultimately privileging his version of what it means to be genderless.

Not only were love and sentimentality retrograde and weak emotions in Fillia's schema, he also held them responsible for delaying the emergence of the *uomo senza sesso*, his prototype in the evolution of the genderless future of mankind. The *uomo senza sesso* would be, Fillia asserted, the true mover of the revolution and was mankind's inevitable evolutionary end-state. But this genderless man is not a hermaphroditic or physiologically-degendered individual;

instead the *uomo senza sesso* is both male and female, but of a genderless *psychology* and *spirituality*. Fillia, speaking through the Scrittore in *La morte della donna* says:

> la civiltà meccanica, riducendo al bisogno fisiologico i rapporti tra maschio e femmina, forma l'uomo senza sesso perché la donna non è più necessaria […]
>
> l'amore è perciò assurdo come sentimento, nemico all'esistenza moderno dove non esistono differenze tra maschio e femmina e l'ambiente è ricchissimo di sensazioni sensuali
>
> noi possiamo cioè affermare che la civiltà meccanica assorbe ogni attività dell'uomo, e il prolungarsi dei sentimenti morali tra uomo e donna è una limitazione delle possibilità umane[76]

And later, in *L'uomo senza sesso*, Fillia says of Nina:

> La sua sensibilità era sincera e primitiva, di femmina sana, spiritualmente livellata alle capacità intellettuali dell'uomo moderno. Aveva una sensualità formidabile, caldissima che non si riassumeva nel sesso ma si distribuiva nelle diverse manifestazioni sensibili, come una benzina umana che azionasse la velocità, la luce, il calore, i sentimenti del corpo.
>
> Senza complicazioni teoriche e artificiali, per la sua natura intuitiva libera dalle oppressioni dell'atavismo, aderiva all'ambiente come un ingranaggio. Il maschio per lei non esisteva che tra le coltri del letto—nella vita collettiva e pubblica si stimava ugualmente uomo e la fisica non era che la materia indispensabile per l'esistenza dello spirito.[77]

Above all, Fillia privileged the intellectual and spiritual over the physical, and he straightforwardly asserted the intellectual and spiritual equality of the sexes. Through Nina, Fillia suggests that the physical body is nothing more than a vehicle for the human spirit: a necessary but somewhat limiting vessel. Furthermore, Nina's, and therefore also the *uomo senza sesso's*, sensuality is a new futurist sensuality that Fillia was attempting to define, and it did non reside in her sexual organs, but instead was the condition that animated her whole self.

The *uomo senza sesso* is both the male and female person, but neither one is excessively masculine, nor excessively feminine. In the encounter with Pablo Halosa on board the ocean liner, Nina's disgust at overly exaggerated masculinity shows how Fillia also disapproved of the

[76] Fillia, *Bolidi e tango*.128-129.
[77] Ibid. 256-257.

rabid masculinity that was common to both literary and political discourse in the interwar years.[78] Even after outward appearance of rapprochement with fascism in the late twenties, Fillia seems to have chosen to cease writing fiction at all (his last work of fiction, a short story was published in 1929), rather than to reinforce the aggressive gender-normatization policies of the regime.[79]

Linguistically, the "*uomo senza sesso"* can signify not only the "genderless" man, but also the "sexless" man, in the sense of someone who does not participate in the sexual act. Those who have earned the status of *uomo senza sesso* are also those who, while rebranding sensuality as "fuel" for the spirit (this is again the sublimation of Eros), have limited and strictly controlled their interest in physical love; they are those who have reduced it to its barest physiological necessity. Laba, the allegorical figure that represents the future of woman, is the *donna dello spirito*; she replaces Lebe the *donna della carne*. Spirit replaces flesh. The body is transcended, and its physical needs become secondary. In each of the three novels, the evolution is away from both emotional and physical amorous passion, toward an almost monastic asceticism. The revelatory futurist experience followed by the sustained spiritual experience of the *nuovo ambiente* transforms the *uomo senza sesso* who is the acolyte of the *Religione della Velocità*.

The fact that Fillia's most trenchant treatments of the subject were ultimately a theatrical work, buttresses his explorations of gender as a performed act in his novels. Fillia, I argue, also demonstrates some awareness of gender as a performed spectacle, in line with the definition of this theory defined in Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*. Fillia's works, especially *Sensualità* and

[78] Spackman, *Fascist Virilities*.
[79] Conversely, one might argue that Fillia's numerous paintings of the Madonna and the Adoration of Christ point toward a gender-normative stance, and reinforce the Fascist elevation of the ideal mother. I contend, however, that this choice of subject remains in line with Fillia's belief in asexual, mystical asceticism than it does with the Virgin as ideal mother. I also affirm that these images confirm Fillia's continuing leftist political beliefs. See Chapter 4 of this work.

"Il sesso di metallo" are specifically performative—they are, after all, theatrical works. The climax of each work results in the denial of fundamental gender difference, and on driving home the point that social constructs of gender are assumed under the pressure of social constructs. Both works are balanced on the edge of stripping away these costumes and masks.[80]

The questions of gender normativity were pressing ones at the time. Otto Weininger published *Sex and Character* in 1903, which outlined his theory that all people were composed of a mix of male and female characteristics, and like Lombroso or Mantegazza, attempted to give his theories the patina of scientific proof. One of Weininger's main arguments, similar to the positions taken on the masculine/feminine dichotomy shared by many futurists, is that the masculine is active, productive, conscious, and moral while the feminine is inactive, unproductive, and amoral.[81] Even in Fillia's works, as progressive as they often are, this remains the general tenor of his arguments.

As Maurizio Boscagli has argued, modernization created a situation wherein masculinity needed to be "performed," which rendered gender into a spectacle.[82] This, then, relates to the homosocial and homoerotic tendencies in fascist imagery. Following on Boscagli's work, John Champagne has taken this argument and problematized the conflictual relationship between fascism, capitalism, and commodity culture.[83] What emerges is the fact that the relationship between fascism and the reestablishment of stable definitions of masculinity was a complicated one, and that the 1920s brought to a head the crisis of definition that had begun in the mid-nineteenth century. This also included the figure of the dandy, the most high profile of whom in

[80] Ibid. 45-47.
[81] George L. Mosse, "The Political Culture of Italian Futurism: A General Perspective," *Journal of Contemporary History* 25, no. 2/3 (May 1, 1990): 253–268.
[82] Maurizia Boscagli, *Eye on the Flesh: Fashions of Masculinity in the Early Twentieth Century* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1996). 4.
[83] John Champagne, *Aesthetic Modernism and Masculinity in Fascist Italy*, 2013. 10.

the same period were probably Oscar Wilde and Gabriele D'Annunzio. Indeed, there is a concurrent wave of interest in the hermaphrodite in the works of Carlo Carrà, Giorgio de Chirico, and Alberto Savinio, among others. This is, of course, related to the earlier works of Wilde and D'Annunzio, as much as it is their public images. Fillia was *not*, however, using the hermaphrodite. His *uomo senza sesso* is neither *not both*, closer to the androgyne, especially given the conspicuous avoidance of "abnormal" bodies. This, then is a different paradigm, that operates on the character and mental profile of the individual, not the physical. It is ambiguous, not combinatory.

Nina's beauty is also that of the androgynous, asexual, and mechanical. At the beginning of the novel Fillia describes her as having the "magrezza di una macchina, costruita con i soli elementi indispensabili per essere perfetta."[84] And she knows that the worth of her beauty lies in her ability to use it to gain social standing and economic advantage, which she does coldly and with calculation. Perhaps the most interesting moments of the novel occur when Mac and Nina go to meet the president of Venezuela. Nina is wearing *uno smoking*, a tuxedo jacket, an article of men's clothing. Despite the trouble Nina's physical desirability causes to her and Mac in their encounter with the President of Venezuela (the president tries to coerce or bribe her into his bed, and she refuses), Fillia uses it as an opportunity to reinforce his point about the power that clothing provides its wearer:

> Non è possibile definire tutta l'importanza di uno smoking femminile: la donna perde ogni senso di morbidezza e di sessualità, acquista il medesimo livello sociale dell'uomo, dimentica le limitazioni procurate dalla sua bellezza individuale dipendente dal gusto del maschio.[85]

In a tuxedo jacket, a woman achieves the same social status and has the same social currency as a man because she is desexualized, and because she is not restricted in her choices by the tastes

[84] Fillia, *Bolidi e tango*. 221.
[85] Ibid. 241.

of men nor hindered in her pursuits by their sexual pursuit of her. Though not as abstracted as Laba's costume is in "Il sesso di metallo," the description of Nina, and the desexualization of her body through her clothes, functions in the same way. This is also true of the description of Farro Marchi's briefly maintained lover, Katja, a dancer in *L'ultimo sentimentale*. Katja is even literally costumed, for the purposes of her stage performances.

In Fillia's literary works, the differences that mark male and female bodies are erased as fully as possible, but, I repeat, they do not meld. Fillia's future visions "normalize" the physical body to as great a state of androgyny as possible. Nina's *smoking* erases her 'female softness;' Laba's costume is made of 'masculine' materials, which conceal all but her most overt female characteristics, and in "Il mondo di domani" everyone is clothed in the same manner, but with a color determined by their psychological character. The physical body and physical difference are inconsequential to the spiritual and intellectual profiles of the characters than populate Fillia's fiction, and his ideal future civilization.

8. Spirituality and Religion

As I have stressed in Chapters 1 and 2, the growing spirituality of Fillia's works is very different from the objectivist, materialist drives of early futurism; nevertheless, Marinetti's manifesto "La nuova religione-morale della velocità" is a text that must be dealt with. Clearly, Fillia's *Religione della Velocità* to some degree relates to Marinetti's 1916 manifesto.[86] The major difference is that Marinetti posits his religion of speed as a new system of ethics and morals that replace Christian morality, in the face of the emptied out figure of the godhead. As

[86] The manifesto was republished in 1919 and 1921, guaranteeing that Fillia would have been aware of it. The 1921 republication was in a volume entitled *Lurrusia – Velocità*, which I take as supporting my argument over the differences between precedent and antecedent. F. T Marinetti, *Critical Writings* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2006). 259.

Marinetti says: "s'è svuotato il Divino." Moreover, it is closer to a kind of inebriation or obsession than it is to any kind of spiritual devotion.

Fillia's novels illustrate his very different desire to make a fully spiritual religion out of futurism. In them, he replaces bodily stimulation with psychological stimulation, and physical pleasure is substituted by spiritual pleasure, creating a semi-ascetic and monastic environment. Indeed, even as his manifestos construct a new religion around the spirituality of the machine, Fillia calls the machine itself a 'mechanical idol.' It is not a true god at all, but a figurehead on which to focus one's passions in order to focalize them onto the spiritual. What Fillia's novels do, then, as his poetry did, is take Marinetti's work one step farther: the Divine is emptied out (or, "utterly finished" as Berghaus translates it[87]) and replaced by a futurist ethical system, and finally, Fillia takes the initiative to introduce a new sense of spirituality and divinity. Fillia's 'mechanical idol' leads back to religion, eventually resulting in the unity of futurist *machinolatria* and Christian iconography in his later religious paintings.

The relationship between Marinetti's manifesto and Fillia's efforts in his novels to continue down the path toward a true religion of speed becomes explicit when the subject of sport, most particularly motorsports, are exmined. Marinetti writes:

> L'Ebbrezza delle grandi velocità in automobile non è che la gioia di sentirsi fusi con l'unica *divinità*. Gli sportsmen sono i primi catecumeni di questa religione. Prossima distruzione delle città, per formare dei grandi ritrovi di automobili e di aeroplani.[88]

Fillia goes on to make a sportsman—a racecar driver in a major international race, in a major international metropolis—one of the three main protagonists, and the plotline around which he builds *L'uomo senza sesso*. Boxers, also mentioned by Marinetti in his manifesto, figure into a number of Fillia's short stories. What is more, the two most explicit moments of transition

[87] Ibid. 253.
[88] *TIF*. 133.

between the old order and the new—the bicycle ride in *Adulterio futurista* and the motorcycle ride in "Quarta dimensione di me stesso"—are erotic climaxes that open the door (indeed each story features the protagonist *going outside* and *crossing a threshold*) toward Fillia's ascetic, asexual, and spiritual future. Even Farro Marchi in *L'ultimo sentimentale* buys a car and races it during his transitional process of abandoning sentimentality.

With the sole exception of "Maternità," the seventh story in *La morte della donna*, whose protagonist Yole is educated at a convent, Christian religion is entirely absent from Fillia's 'historiography' of religion. Yole's story is Fillia's version of the conception story of a new savior for mankind. Fillia will continue to play with the Annunciation myth in his religious paintings. Yole's child, who she will raise free of the weaknesses of atavism and men's egoism, is Fillia's Christ figure. Yole's story is also dependent on the power of words, by writing and by speaking, alluding to divine conception through the word of god. Her destiny is controlled by the song that only she can hear, and her virginity is given to a man whose words seduce her and who fathers her child. "Maternità" is also the most explicitly erotic of the stories in *La morte della donna*, but the eroticism is tied to poetry, to the stranger's philosophy, and to the erotic power of the word. Not only to the body and carnal desire. Yole and the stranger's sexual encounter is "poesia nuova, ostia sacramentale del mondo, bevuto con labbra avide su tutti gli altari della voluttà…"[89]

The absence of nearly all traces of Christianity, beyond "Maternità," in Fillia's works is a condemnation by exclusion of the values, social structures, and especially patriarchal structures of Christianity that represent so many of the traditional values that Fillia and futurism condemned. Nearly the only other reference to Christianity in any of the three novels occurs at the beginning of *La morte della donna* where Fillia offers a kind of explicit condemnation. Fillia

[89] Fillia, *Bolidi e tango*. 97.

condemns Christianity again by exclusion, referring to the Christian era only as the period between (pagan) antiquity and the *machinolatria* of the modern era. The Scrittore claims:

> nel futuro, giudicando il valore storico del mondo, avremo due sole, grandissime divisioni: la civiltà antica e la civiltà meccanica—tutto il periodo che va dall'epoca greca compresa fino ai nostri giorni, avrà una mediocre interpretazione di decadenza umana[90]

Fillia implies that the decadence of the Christian age must be entirely wiped away, almost cancelled from human memory. If the Word is the source of Christianity, Fillia refutes it by refusing to name it. Further reinforcing this reading, Fillia's ancient civilizations are all external to Europe. Their exoticism is founded in their difference from Fillia's European norm, and their physical and temporal distance. Furthermore, this exoticism reinforces the idea that the primitive or atavistic is tied to vitality and strength. Yet, just as the topic of Christianity is conspicuously ignored, it becomes crucially utilized and appropriated.

Fillia's overall focus is on the psychological and spiritual experiences of *la Vita Meccanica* and the *Religione della Velocità*. Taking his cues from futurist dogma, the mechanical idol of *L'uomo senza sesso* and *L'ultimo sentimentale* was the racecar, and the breathtaking acceleration of life. For Nina, Sedora's victory is the first time she cries, and for Farro it is the exhilaration of riding a bicycle through the city, or driving his Fiat-Lingotto through the "geometrie miracolose della città" and his casual encounters with prostitutes in hotels that complete his rejection of the slavish, religious devotion to love.

In "Il mondo di domani," the last story the Scrittore tells his audience in *La morte della donna*, even Marinetti's infamous racecar has been cast aside as an unnecessary idol. Society in Fillia's tomorrow-land has surpassed the need even of a figurehead, because the *Vita Meccanica* has fully remade society according to the dictates of the *Religione della Velocità*. Machines and art have infiltrated life fully, and living has become a totalized, aestheticized experience;

[90] Ibid. 34.

clothing, food, and work are all meted out equally, but in accord with the individual's psychological profile. Fillia also shows that overcoming traditional family structures was a necessary component in overcoming religion and the established socio-economic order. In Fillia's quasi-Marxist state, he has revolutionized family structure, negating the status of the woman as an exploited commodity in an economic exchange, and has relinquished child-rearing responsibilities to the state. According to Nina, the protagonist of Fillia's second novel, *L'uomo senza sesso*, the worker was the "parte più sana e più vergine della società presente."[91] She continues to say:

> Essi stanno tranquillamente superando l'atavismo che tormenta le altri classi, perché la loro passione si manifesta nello sport—in un prossimo domani riusciranno ad aumentare le proprie facoltà intellettuali, assorbire altri strati dell'umanità, bastare a sé stessi.[92]

Marx and Engels argued that man created god in his own image as a result of his alienation, and that the image of the holy family also sprang from these origins. Fillia has explicitly tied the factory worker to the religion of sport and to the eventual surpassing of even that.

Though Fillia agreed, in principle, with the futurist ideological condemnation of sentimentalism, traditionalism, and bourgeois morality, he also sometimes subtly and at other times blatantly molded the futurist canon to accommodate his desire to found a futurist spiritual religion. He aimed, in fact, to surpass the materialist idol-worship of his predecessors and inspire new beliefs and devotional practices tied to artistic expression and to technological and social progress. Fillia believed that the age of the *Vita Meccanica* and the *Religione della Velocità* had come. When love and sentimentality had been overcome, Fillia believed that the conditions would finally be right for his futurist vision for the future to come to fruition. In "L'idolo meccanico" he writes:

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[91] Ibid. 296.
[92] Ibid. 296-297.

> Da pochi anni soltanto cominciamo a comprendere la potenzialità di un'epoca nuova, liberata dalla vecchia atmosfera di valutazioni, con altro equilibrio ed altro modo di sentire. Questa forza inesorabile sorpassa la semplice volontà individuale, limitata tra tendenze diverse, e rappresenta una legge espansiva, più assoluta delle tradizioni viventi, in quanto il nostro progresso meccanico e progressivo non è un monopolio di uno Stato ma possiede la medesima capacità d'azione in ogni parte del mondo. Noi possiamo perciò credere a tutto un complesso materiale e morale che risolverà finalmente l'evoluzione umana, con un perfezionamento definitivo.[93]

Now that the time had come Fillia believed the responsibility lay with him and the others belonging to his generation of futurists to build onto the blank slate created by their first generation predecessors. Onto this blank slate, they would build a new world order, though one that differed, sometimes significantly, from that envisioned in the dogma of early futurism. Though there was still work to be done, and though the future was both exhilarating and anxiety inducing, Fillia believed it was the proper and inevitable fate of modern life to progress according to his vision. Modern man, Fillia believed, had the skills and intuitive capacity to respond and to progress, to build a new futurist civilization and new futurist religion.

9. (Communist) Conclusions

While sentimentality, sexuality, and religion are the dominant nexus of themes in Fillia's novel-length prose works, one of the most striking and important secondary aspects of all three novels is Fillia's continued interest in communism. Though previous scholars have claimed Fillia abandoned communist interests by 1925, it is only true that he abandoned the overtly activist poetry and theater that he was producing in 1922-23.[94] In his later works, Fillia shifts his focus away from the workers' revolution and the plight of the proletariat to focus his prose works on the *questione sessuale* and the possibilities of a Marxist family structure, social structure, and

[93] Fillia. "L'idolo meccanico" in Crispolti, *Fillia*. 72.
[94] Ottieri, *Fillia, un percorso futurista*. Salaris. "L'attività letteraria di Fillia." Pinottini. "Fillia futurista fra Gruido da Verona e Pitigrilli. Sergio Anelli. "Parole in Technicolor nei romanzi di Fillia." in Fillia, *Bolidi e tango*.7-23.

gender dynamic. It is truer to say that the aspects of the communist agenda he chose to address had shifted, either because his personal political agenda had changed, or because it was unsafe to continue espousing such radical politics under the fascist regime.

As the twenties progressed, the tensions between the reactionary regime and the groups pushing for social reform, the rights of the worker, and the rights of women heightened significantly. Ultimately, of course, the regime succeeded at nullifying the gains made over the previous several decades, especially in the area of women's rights.[95] Contrary to the dominant trends of political reactionism, Fillia published works whose gender politics, for their time, may only be described as radically progressive. As I have shown, throughout Fillia's novels, his male and female characters give voice to the need for complete equality of the sexes, and for the need to abolish the artificial social constructs that hold the female in a position of weakness and inferiority to the male.

La morte della donna is the most explicit in its demands for gender equality, and indeed, the whole novel must be read and analyzed with this in mind; otherwise, many of the narratives fail to take on any significant ideological position. Viewed as a whole, the stories are structured to reflect the nature of early civilizations and their treatment of women, the progress made in the present, and the moment of rupture in the fight to achieve equality and the possibilities for the future. The evidence of a continuing communist agenda decreases in both *L'uomo senza sesso* and *L'ultimo sentimentale*, though the issue remains topical.

Part and parcel of the social and intellectual equality that Fillia grants to women is equality of economic power, and the right to work and property. Women in the *età moderna* and in Fillia's vision for the future are granted the same rights and powers as their male peers. The issue of a woman's right to work, in fact, is the jumping off point for the entire argument posited

[95] Duggan, Christopher. *The force of destiny: a history of Italy since 1796*. London: Allen Lane, 2007.

by the Scrittore in *La morte della donna*. When the Scrittore is challenged by the Signora, it is precisely because he has eliminated the alienation of the woman by restoring to her the right to work and by relieving her of the status as property in the capitalist system. He has eliminated her reduction to an object of exchange value in marriage.

Another important aspect of the Scrittore's statement is the way in which Fillia again avoids the anxiety caused by the encroachment of mechanization into life. Masculinity and emasculation were pressing issues for the fascist regime, tied to changing moral and social codes and the modernization of society.[96] The Signora claims that a woman will never have the same capabilities as a man. Fillia, however, speaking through the Scrittore, boldly claims that not only is the threat of emasculation a non-issue, he argues that:

> …cerebralmente la funzione è identica, e questa è l'unica forma veramente umana, anche perché nella vita odierna la resistenza fisica non ha più un'importanza di superiorità.[97]

The fact that men are no longer in a position of power because of physical strength is actually beneficial to society because it allows women to pursue the same work as men. Instead of viewing the mechanization of the workforce—via the Industrial Revolution, the assembly line and a host of other technological advancements, such as flight and the steam engine—as a threat to the patriarchal and capitalist power structures, Fillia embraces these advancements, because it improves the lives of the worker by lightening the physical burden of their work, and precisely because it does destabilize entrenched power structures.

The strongest evidence of a communist agenda returns in "Il mondo di domani." This tale incorporates several significant aspects of the Marxist agenda. In the first place, the state controls the division of labor and resources; it supplies food, clothing, work, and transportation in

[96] Champagne, *Aesthetic Modernism and Masculinity in Fascist Italy*.; Derek Duncan, *Reading and Writing Italian Homosexuality: A Case of Possible Difference* (Aldershot, Hampshire, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006).
[97] Fillia, *Bolidi e tango*. 30.

accordance with each person's spiritual and psychological needs. Work is divided; art and music are constantly present, and Fillia makes sure to note in his description of Uomo M. 6436's apartment that there is a room set aside for making art. Each person is provided equal access to work and to pleasure.

Social unrest has also been reduced, though clearly not expunged. During their evening train ride home, the discussion between the three protagonists of the story and another unnamed companion centers a violent protest and the continuing social unrest that were directly the results of a mechanical failure in the state run *Macchina della Temperatura*. This response, their unnamed companion argues, is justified, on the basis that the people are not being provided with the necessary *ambiente* to which they are entitled. At the same time that the protest is framed as justifiable because this kind of protest was within the rights of the populace, this betrays some of Fillia's deeper anxieties about the encroachment of technology, and the control of totalitarian state, even one that approaches the utopic.

The influence of communist politics on the social and familial relationships between individuals in Fillia's works is also undeniable. In the *mondo di domani*, marriage has been reduced to a simple contract between two people, entered into only through the free agreement of both parties, instead of being structured on the economic commodification and exploitation of women and children. Furthermore, each couple is equally provided with a matrimonial residence and a month of leave that they may choose to spend as they like. As an almost incidental side note during a conversation between M. 6436 and F. 10049, concerning their upcoming nuptials, Fillia also specifies, following Engels, that should children result from a union, they would be

given over to the state to be raised, eliminating the bourgeois family structure and practice of inheritances.[98]

In both *L'uomo senza sesso* and *L'ultimo sentimentale* Fillia also models his protagonist's sexual relationships on Engels's ideal. Engels believed, following Fourier, that permanent monogamous pairings were anti-natural, and argued that the future of interpersonal relationships would involve short-term, intense partnerships that would end when their course was run and the persons involved would move on without remorse. Nina, the *uomo senza sesso*, is intuitively able to understand her modernity, and thus able to move in and out of relationships with complete freedom. Farro, the *ultimo sentimentale*, must instead learn how to move within relationships of this type. When he finally sees Sona for the last time, he understands:

> …era impossibile che quella femmina, bella di una bellezza strana, quasi nordica, aumentata dall'espressione mobilissima, fosse la stessa che aveva trascorso quattordici mesi con lui. […] Comprese facilmente che il passato era isolato, ridotto al periodo della gioia trascorsa, senza possibilità di rinascita. Quella femmina non era Sona, non aveva nulla in comune con lei. Anche lui era un altro, completamente diverso.[99]

During the tenure of their relationship, they right for each other, but at the end of the novel they have both become very different and are no longer anything like the people they were before or during their relationship.

Throughout Fillia's novels and his theatrical works, the female characters are the teachers, the first to break with tradition and the most successful, and it is the male characters who are least able to change and become modern on their own. Throughout these novels Fillia continually returned to the same arguments and the same themes, framing them in different ways, and elaborating on them as appropriate to the specifics of each work. The novels would have been readily accessible to the public and were it not for Gramsci's rejection of futurism and

[98] Engels and Untermann, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State,*.
[99] Fillia, *Bolidi e tango*. 211.

Marinetti's resultant (complex and problematic) realignment with the fascist regime, it is likely that Fillia's works would have had a much more significant distribution and been much more influential. It is unclear why Fillia gave up writing poetry and fiction in the late 1920s, though under rising political pressure it was becoming increasingly difficult to publish works of such a revolutionary kind. In order to break free of sentimentality, to liberate the artistic conscience and to embrace the *Religione della Velocità* both emotion and sexually and socially normative behaviors and structures are abandoned.

Chapter 4
Fillia's Distant, Disintegrating Bodies and the Loss of a Dream

0. Introduction

In the later 1920s, the idiom of Fillia's artistic and political interests shifted away from the contentious, revolutionary rhetoric of his early futurist experience. His work had shifted almost entirely away from literary expressions to pictorial ones in 1927, and by 1929 he had entirely abandoned it. In 1927 Fillia released his second and third novels (see chapter 3), and a few short stories. But after 1927 he only published three more short stories over the next two years, though he did republish parts of other works, such as the first act of *Sensualità—Teatro d'eccezione* (see chapter 1). Even though Fillia is primarily remembered as a painter, it is his pictorial works, I contend, that are actually the least well understood, because they have only been analyzed outside the context of his writings and political alignment. It is Fillia's leftist politics that I believe help to explain the sudden abandonment of writing for painting and the sudden silence on issues he had previously championed.

Fillia's abandonment of ideologically charged literary writing occurred not coincidentally, I argue, at exactly the moment when both Antonio Gramsci and Amadeo Bordiga were arrested and imprisoned by Mussolini. Both were arrested in 1926, and sentenced to imprisonment in 1927. 1926 was also the year that Mussolini had the PCI outlawed, which drove the party underground. As I have previously argued (see chapter 1), Fillia and Bracci's 1924 and 1925 publications, especially the program laid out in the single edition of their magazine *Futurismo*, are conspicuously careful in their acknowledgments of Mussolini and of fascism. This coincides also with the fallout from the Matteotti Affair, and its direct result, which was the declaration of the dictatorship in 1925.

By 1927, Fillia was traveling extensively and, in his role as vice-secretary of the movement, had taken on the responsibility of organizing futurist exhibits all over Italy, France and Germany. In particular, Fillia made three lengthy trips to Paris between 1928 and 1930, even staying in Paris for several months in 1930. Enrico Prampolini, with whom Fillia collaborated extensively, was well connected to the Paris and Munich art communities and he made a concerted effort to introduce any futurist who made the trip to Paris to his Parisian circle. It was through Prampolini that Fillia, along with Prampolini himself, became acquainted with the group of artists that would form Cercle et Carré.[1] During his several months long stay in 1930, Fillia participated in the founding of Cercle et Carré along with Alberto Sartoris, the Italian architect who would later settle in Switzerland and who was a close collaborator of Fillia's, as did Luigi Russolo and Enrico Prampolini's.[2] All four Italians were included in the official membership rolls and featured in the group's first publications. Cercle et Carré was primarily dedicated to abstract art and rationalist architecture. This experience, which included interactions with Ferdinand Legér, Wassilj Kandinskij, Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier, and others, would exert a significant influence on Fillia's pictorial style, as I will show in this chapter.[3]

In the late 1920s, Fillia began producing what would become a large number of paintings of (mostly female) nudes. It was around this same time that Fillia also began to explore religious painting. The earliest of the nudes (Figures 13 and 14), painted between 1927 and 1928, maintain Fillia's early geometric style, and will not be the focus of this analysis, though their existence

[1] Enrico Crispolti, *Fillia: fra immaginario meccanico e primordio cosmico : [Cuneo, mostra in San Francesco, 14 maggio - 30 giugno 1988]* (Milano: Mazzotta, 1988); Günter Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics: Between Anarchist Rebellion and Fascist Reaction, 1909-1944* (Providence, R.I.: Berghahn Books, 1996).
[2] Enrico Crispolti, *Il Secondo Futurismo, Torino 1923-1938.* (Torino, 1962). 37.
[3] Fillia took this opportunity to connect with the Rationalist school of architecture, which would become the main focus of his activities only two years later.[3] This later shift into architecture and landscape architecture is a logical conclusion, given Fillia's earlier works. Throughout his writings, years before he involved himself in the international conversation on architecture, Fillia had already consistently framed his theories in terms of constructing a "new architecture." Fillia's architectural interests will be the focus of a later stage in my work on this project.

and the divergence from them are significant. Fillia painted these early nudes in tandem with his most aggressive writings on the machine aesthetic, the union of man and machine, and the last of his literary works. These early paintings of nudes are geometric, mechanical and even a bit cubist or orphic looking, whereas Fillia's later nudes move toward biomorphic abstraction, which share some characteristics with the roughly applied wax appearance of August Rodin's and Alberto Giacometti's sculptures and the bulbousness of some of Henri Matisse's nudes.[4] Taking cues from Marinetti's *tattilismo*, and Prampolini's textured paintings that used sand, cloth and other materials to alter the surface of the painting, Fillia experimented with techniques for applying paint to the canvas, and deformed the human body's boundaries to look as though they were sculpted from mud. Meanwhile, Fillia religious paintings developed a style that was entirely unique to him. Though his painting style does share some features with Prampolini's biomorphic works that are almost complete abstractions, Fillia uses a mix of these biomorphic shapes combined with an almost Minimalist kind of geometry. His forms are radically simplified and flat in a way that anticipates the post-war explorations into the nature of the picture plane by Lucio Fontana.

At this time, all of Fillia's human figures, and the landscapes he set them into, veered sharply in the direction of the spiritual and mystical. These tendencies were amplified by the move from earth-bound, geometric space bound by the laws of Newtonian physics into a kind of cosmic dreamscape, in which the laws of physics and geometry cease to be absolute. This is almost certainly due to the influence of Enrico Prampolini, and due to Fillia's direct exposure to the Paris-based avant-garde (most particularly to the artists and poets of surrealist and dada movements) during and following his stays in the French capital between 1928 and 1930. The Metaphysical quality of estrangement and disquiet that pervades Fillia's later paintings is likely

[4] I am here thinking of paintings such as Matisse's *Large Reclining Nude* from 1935, and the 1907 *Blue Nude*.

due to the influence of Fortunato Depero, whose paintings from the 1920s demonstrate a distinct debt to Giorgio De Chirico and Alberto Savinio, if not to De Chirico and Savinio themselves. Fillia's exposure to the Paris scene was undeniably influential, though as is the case with futurism and cubism in the early 1910s, Fillia's evolving style was clearly not a mere imitation of French surrealism, or misunderstood abstraction.[5] Though it is likely that Fillia's ideas on the spiritual in art were influenced early on by Wassily Kandinsky's treatise *On the Spiritual in Art*, from the early 1920s and certainly between 1928 and 1930 Fillia interacted directly with Kandinsky not only with his theories as filtered through Prampolini.[6]

In this chapter I will first analyze a series of Fillia's nudes and then a number of his religious paintings, painted in the years between 1928 and his death in 1936 in order to untangle this web of influence and to demonstrate where Fillia's paintings starkly diverge from his peers. In doing so, I will challenge previous readings of Fillia's paintings that fail to take into account his personal ideology, early political activism, and his extensive literary output. These earlier readings do not allow for the possibility of a non-conformist response to the political pressures exerted by the fascist regime that I argue is at the heart of understanding these works. The parallel emergence of two motifs that had been taboo to futurism in Fillia's work—the nude and the religious icon—point, as I will show, to an ever more pressing search for the empathetic and the spiritual in Fillia's post-Marxist years.

Section 1 briefly presents the contextual foundations for this chapter, and discusses the topics of fascism and religion. I will look at the aestheticized politics of fascism that presented

[5] There is a persistent bias in art historical scholarship that considers futurist aesthetics as a mere offshoot of cubism, and one that failed to really exploit cubism's potential. Fortunately, there is a growing body of scholarship that is breaking down this bias, looking at how futurism was also influential on cubism, and also evaluating futurism on its own (Italian) terms. See Enrico Crispolti, "The Dynamics of Futurism's Historiography" in Vivien Greene and Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, *Italian Futurism 1909-1944: Reconstructing the Universe*, 2014. 50.57.

[6] Günter Berghaus, "A Theatre of Image, Sound and Motion: On Synaesthesia and the Idea of a Total Work of Art," *MuK Maske Und Kothurn: Internationale Beitrage Zur Theaterwissenschaft* 32, no. 1–2 (1986): 7–28.

the rituals of the political state as those of a secular religion, and then touch on the relationship between the Vatican and the regime following the 1929 Lateran Accords. Section 2 looks generally at futurist *aeropittura,* the *arte sacra futurista*, and emergent religious trends in the futurist movement. Meanwhile Section 3 looks at some of the formal pictorial elements that Fillia used in his later paintings. I will then analyze two of the three main motifs of Fillia's later paintings: the nude in section 4 and religious paintings in section 5.[7] I will then use these two motifs to draw conclusions about the significance of religion and spirituality in Fillia's works.

1. Futurism, Fascism and the Aesthetic

Futurism's position in the later 1920s and early 1930s was precarious. Despite widespread efforts to secure official recognition as the state art of Italy, futurism was increasingly marginalized, and the movement almost entirely withdrew from its political activities. To prevent complete marginalization, Marinetti and many leading futurists made a number of ideological concessions that cut into the ideological heart of the movement and others that profoundly altered the movement's aesthetic.[8] It was only into the mid 1930s that futurism gained any margin of success in entering the officially sanctioned art market, receiving a few important state commissions and commercial contracts like Depero's advertising campaign for Campari. While aeropainting would never be recognized as the official artistic style of the regime, it did become more widely utilized by it than earlier futurist styles. This was due to the usefulness of aeropainting in fascist propaganda.[9] The association of aeropainting, the major late

[7] The third main motif was the aerial landscape, which I will touch upon, as it is ultimately inseparable from Fillia's religious paintings, though it will not be a focus. The landscape was more common across the genre of aeropainting, with many futurist artists, including Gerardo Dottori and Benedetta, producing stellar works.
[8] Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*. 219-235.
[9] Ibid. 232. Robert Wohl, *A Passion for Wings: Aviation and the Western Imagination, 1908-1918* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

futurist pictorial style, with fascism and the number of futurists who were committed fascists, has led to broad assumptions about the movement's participants save for a few notable outsiders like Vinicio Paladini and Ivo Panaggi, whose communist politics are well known.[10]

In the *serate futuriste* and in futurist performance in general, Futurism closed the aesthetic distance between the artwork and the public, stripped away its auratic and aristocratic halo, and increased the active relationship of the public to the work of art. But after 1922, the auratic remnants of art's ritual functions (which futurism had earlier gathered and deployed towards the aestheticization of war) were seized by fascism along with other aspects of religious ritual and belief, and utilized them to pacify the masses rather than to excite them to revolt.[11] As the regime's reliance on spectacle grew, so did its emphasis on ritual and the sacralization of the state. In the move to aestheticize politics, the regime used stylized collective performances and rituals and a type of quasi-religious spectacle that was previously the domain of the theater or the Church.[12] Political spectacle in Italy took on performative aspects from the theater and from both Marinettian and Dannunzian models of public rhetoric and showmanship, at the same time staking a claim on the ritual and religious dimensions that had—despite the resilience of

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[10] Umberto Carpi, *Bolscevico immaginista: comunismo e avanguardie artistiche nell'Italia degli anni venti* (Napoli: Liguori, 1981); Umberto Carpi, *L'estrema avanguardia del Novecento* (Roma: Editori riuniti, 1985); Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*.

[11] Emilio Gentile notes, "The search for civil religion had been present in Italian political culture from the *Risorgimento* onwards. As with all romantic nationalism, Italian nationalism constructed its own symbolic world, giving the idea of the nation a sacred aura." Emilio Gentile, *The sacralization of politics in fascist Italy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996). Walter Benjamin, *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction* (London: Penguin, 2008).

In this vein, the Scuola di mistica fascista was founded in 1930 by Niccolò Giani in order to train the future leaders of the fascist party. This was to be accomplished through the study of the Mistica fascista. This was a school of political thought based on Fideism, which is the belief that faith exists without reason. The goal of the school was to develop a spiritual understanding of fascism to accompany the political movement. Tomas Carini, *Niccolò Giani e la scuola di mistica fascista: 1930-1945* (Milano: Mursia, 2009).

[12] On this topic, see Claudio Fogu, *The Historic Imaginary: Politics of History in Fascist Italy* (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2003); Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Gentile, *The sacralization of politics in fascist Italy*; Emilio Gentile, *La grande Italia: il mito della nazione nel XX secolo* (Roma: GLF editori Laterza, 2006).

Catholicism in Italy—been lost to the high arts in the age of technology and the commodification of culture.[13]

Almost from its inception, and increasingly with World War I, futurism had had the explicit goal of bringing art to the masses, through the exploitation of technology, the technological imagination, and the velocity of modern life. Fillia, as I have previously shown, both rejected this capitalist commodification and at the same time attempted to exploit it. But in this period, futurism abdicated any and all overtly political function or action to fascism, and allowed its technological themes, its myths of violence and speed, and even some of its avant-garde techniques to be rolled into fascist propaganda. Although futurism cannot be characterized as wholly fascist, as scholars have repeatedly demonstrated in the last two decades, it handed fascism some of the tools it needed, in part through direct contact between Marinetti and Mussolini.[14]

I believe that the futurist situation in the 1920s and 1930s is, in a condensed version, akin to that of the Soviet Union in the latter half of the 20th century, as defined by Mikhail Epstein.[15]. According to Epstein, a form of repressed religious unconscious re-emerges in societies that aggressively push atheism. Epstein defines the "religious unconscious" as the sphere of primal drives and vital instincts, which the non-religious or officially atheist consciousness seeks to

[13] Benjamin, *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction*. Walter Adamson demonstrates that while futurism was a concrete source for fascism, and that futurism was a necessary building block of fascism, that equating the whole movement with "proto-fascism" is inappropriate. Walter L. Adamson, "Futurism, Mass Culture, and Women: The Reshaping of the Artistic Vocation, 1909- 1920," *Modernism/modernity* 4, no. 1 (1997): 89–114.
[14] Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi "The Aesthetics of Politics". Though, as Falasca-Zamponi points out, Gentile argues for the sacralization of politics, he, himself, discusses the issue in terms of a "lay religiousness," which to some extent undercuts his point in favor of that made by Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi *Fascist Spectacle*, Fogu *Historic Imaginary*. For another source on sacralization and politics see: Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).Karen Pinkus, *Bodily Regimes: Italian Advertising under Fascism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).
[15] Mikhail Epstein and Maria Barabtarlo, *Russian Spirituality and the Secularization of Culture* ([USA]: Franc-Tireur, 2011). I am utilizing the vocabulary and framework of Mikhail Epstein's chapter 'Post-Atheism: From Apophatic Theology to "Minimal Religion"'[15] (an examination of the situation in post-Soviet Russia) to elaborate the theoretical framework I use to justify my claims.

repress and eliminate. He uses 'the unconscious' not as a purely psychoanalytic term, but instead as a broad cultural paradigm.[16] Thus, Epstein argues, as atheism suppresses conscious religion, it takes the place of the primal drives that previously resided there, and pushes them into the conscious mind. So, just as in Soviet Russia, where the religious consciousness was largely repressed in favor of atheism, so it also was in futurism and in Italy. Mussolini was notoriously a declaredly an atheist, at least in the early phase of his political career.[17] In place of the drive toward extreme state atheism as in Russia, in Italy the drive was toward the religion of the state. The evolutionary arc of fascism also fulfills Epstein's paradigm. Totalitarian regimes, Epstein argues, seethe "with religious allusions, symbols, references, substitutions and transformations."[18] He explains that this pervasive religious unconscious leads to the attempt by regimes to replace religiosity through "crude" political action—the creation of idols, leader worship, worship of the state and its images, and a regression to ritual.[19] Epstein builds the second half of his argument on apophatic theology, which is an issue that is of oblique, but vital importance to Fillia's religious paintings.

According to Epstein, the locus of repressed faith is transferred to the cultural unconscious, and it can only be defined by what it is not. And what it is *not* in the case of futurism and fascism, is a genuine return to Catholic devotion and morality. Even Marinetti's "La nuova-religione-morale della velocità" is not actually advocating a kind religion akin to Christianity. This religious unconscious, I argue, returned to haunt the futurist avant-garde in the same period as fascism's efforts to tap into the political potential of religious sentiment in the

[16] Ibid. 345-352.
[17] http://www.libertaepersona.org/wordpress/2012/07/mussolini-la-sua-formazione-culturale-e-la-fede/
[18] Ibid. 352.
[19] Ibid. 352. George L. Mosse, "The Political Culture of Italian Futurism: A General Perspective," *Journal of Contemporary History* 25, no. 2/3 (May 1, 1990): 253–268. Roger Griffin similarly argues that the de-transcendentalization of the sacred shifted the locus of faith to the state. See: Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*.

Italian population. The religious unconscious had, in fact, been lurking within futurism since its inception.[20] A profound interest in the spiritual had always been present in Balla's work, for example. However, the efflorescence of futurist spirituality ultimately paralleled that of fascism.

The combination of the upsurge of "religious" feeling during the war, the PCI's rejection of futurism, the rise of the fascist aestheticized state, and Marinetti's 1924 reconciliation with Mussolini accelerated the return of this repressed religious dimension within futurism. Soon futurism started to make a more explicit and expedient use of religious imagery. It is worth noting that Marinetti's father was an amateur historian of religions, and that his mother was very religious. Benedetta Cappa was religious (a devout Waldensian), and Marinetti, himself, eventually returned to the Catholic Church, then in 1942 authored the "Aeropoema di Gesù," meaning that the religious was actually never far off from Marinetti's consciousness. Fillia himself was educated at the school run by the Franciscans in Rovereto, and the earliest poem of his that I have found, dated to 1919, is very religious.20 However Fillia abandons all pretense of Catholicism by the time he emerges on the futurist scene. Fillia's religiosity was to reemerge only later. Whenever it is discussed, those who knew him, and critics alike, have instead insisted on his thorough laity and the laity of his works.[21] However, in Fillia's case, he abandons all pretext of Catholicism by the time he emerges on the futurist scene. Whenever it is discussed, those who knew him, and critics alike, have instead insisted on his laity and the laity of his works.[22]

The peculiarity of fascism, futurism and the Italian state, differentiating them from what occurred over the next decades in Russia, is the very short timeframe and that both the fascist

[20] Simona Cigliana, *Futurismo esoterico: contributi per una storia dell'irrazionalismo italiano tra Otto e Novecento* (Napoli: Liguori, 2002).
[21] This work is handwritten on paper in Fillia's "literary magazine." It is in the collection of Piera Gaudenzi.
[22] Crispolti, *Il Secondo Futurismo, Torino 1923-1938.*; Crispolti, *Fillia*.

government and futurist movement essentially took the expedient route for exploiting not only the religious unconscious, but religious structures of belief. Both returned quickly and directly to exploiting the cultural weight of the Catholic Church (and in the case of fascism, but not futurism, the rituals and symbols of the Roman Empire). This was especially evident following the 1929 Lateran Accords, which returned many of the privileges lost to the Church during unification, and forced the Church back into the daily functioning of the state. The pact sealed the loss of the widespread *Risorgimento* ideal of the secular state. Through the mobilization of the masses by myth, ritual and symbol, fascism was able to establish itself as a lay religion, further burying the republican ideals of the unification.[23] At the same time as fascism did, many futurist artists took an interest in the Catholic visual vocabulary, and proceeded to directly adopt it, instead of articulating another new vocabulary of their own as they had done in the 1910s.[24]

Fillia, I believe, turns to sacred subjects in his paintings in part because they offer an established allegorical tradition and include dogmatic codes, which hold that spiritual elevation and enlightenment can be achieved through meditation on the image of Christ and the Madonna. The idea that the image is as truly the divine body it portrays (through transubstantiation, like the sacramental bread and wine) is one of the bases on which the altarpiece tradition was established.[25] The comparison of the altar to a stage, and the derisive comparison of priests to puppets, which is a common motif in the minstrel tradition and in medieval morality plays, and which continued at least through the *commedia dell'arte* and the Baroque period, should not go

[23] Gentile, *The sacralization of politics in fascist Italy*. 230.
[24] Walter L Adamson, "How Avant-Gardes End--and Begin: Italian Futurism in Historical Perspective," *New Literary History* 41, no. 4 (2010): 855–874. Massimo Duranti and Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, *Piety and Pragmatism: Spiritualism in Futurist Art = Arte Sacra Futurista* (Roma: Gangemi Editore, 2007).. 35
[25] The condemnation of this belief was one of the "heresies" that would drive 8th century Byzantine iconoclasm, and drive the Eastern and Western Churches toward their 11th century schism, leaving the icon tradition to take firm hold in Italy. On this issue see: Hans Belting, *Likeness and presence: a history of the image before the era of art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

unnoticed.[26] Furthermore, the systematic use of color on Renaissance altarpieces was not only symbolic, but also an ostentatious demonstration of both wealth and faith.[27] In the context of Fillia's poetry and theater, the visual style of his religious paintings communicate very different meanings than the iconography traditionally does. Fillia uses many easily identifiable Christological structures to give form and comprehensibility to his new system. This is a powerful choice because these tropes, rituals, and allusions carry the layers of allegorical meanings already associated with them. Fillia reconfigures these structures, motifs, and symbolic tropes and breaks them down. He then weaves them into futurist ideology, in order to better articulate his vision of futurist spirituality in a way that would have been more easily digested by the viewers.

Fillia's paintings also responded to, and, as it were, offered an *ante litteram* comment on what Walter Benjamin, in 1936, would call the loss of the aura in the work of art through mechanical reproduction and commodification. The majority of Fillia's late paintings are executed in oil, on canvas, and very carefully executed, demonstrating a conscious will to reintroduce the existential paradigm of the artist as an interpreter of intuition and spirituality.[28]

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[26] See: Peter Gillgren, *Performativity and Performance in Baroque Rome* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012). Kenneth Richards, *The Commedia Dell'arte: A Documentary History* (Oxford, UK; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Published by B. Blackwell for Shakespeare Head Press, 1990).

[27] Contracts in the 14th and 15th centuries usually specified the quality and quantity of lapis lazuli to be used when mixing the blue tempera for the Virgin's robe. On this topic see: Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford [Oxfordshire]; New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

[28] Christine Poggi reads this as simply a return to Renaissance altarpiece and portrait tradition by late futurists, and was therefore a kind of concession or regression; however, even many early futurist works by Umberto Boccioni, Gino Severini and Giacomo Balla were on canvas. Most famously, Boccioni's *Dinamismo di un foot-baller* (1913), is painted on a canvas that was initially too small, and which Boccioni added onto on all four sides of the original canvas in order to complete the painting. Christine Poggi, *Inventing Futurism: The Art and Politics of Artificial Optimism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

Moreover In 1931, Fillia wrote an urgent, almost panicked letter to Tullio d'Albisola (Tullio Mazzotti), first exclaiming in outrage that many critics were conflating futurist high art with its decorative arts, and that while both had their value, they were not interchangeable. Fillia continues in his tirade to inform Mazzotti that he (Fillia) would be organizing two separate exhibitions in Germany to clear the confusion from the air, one that will be only "high art" and one that will be explicitly decorative arts, and exhorts Mazzotti to hurry and prepare works specifically geared to both. This remains one of the central paradoxes of futurist art, and was one from the very

But at the same time, he produced his religious paintings in series, making multiple copies of most images, with only slight changes. So, he produced the images in series, in an ironic echo of mechanical techniques of reproduction, while at the same time merging the mechanical with the sacred and the auratic in the painted images. They are at once cult-worthy and reproducible. Their mechanical gods, and machine aesthetic allow for copying, but their worked aspect and subject matter attempted to stave off the loss of their auratic power. Fillia, attempted to resolve the competing claims on the auratic placed by politics and art, and to show that high art and the mechanical could co-exist and co-mingle on the canvas and not partake of fascist political spectacle. This also creates a tension within the works when it comes to their stake in Modernism. While the potential appeal of these works to mass culture lies in these paintings' themes, which could be consumed with ease, Fillia's insistence on the High Art status of these works explicitly resists commodification.[29]

On the other hand, Fillia's paradigm reverts to one of the core tenets of futurism: the aestheticization of every aspect of life. Moreover, the confusion between the cases of fascism and of Fillia and the inevitable conflation of them is grounded in the theatrical. In Fillia's works, the theatrical is literal. There is no carryover of ritual or performance into reality. Indeed, he repeatedly denies performativity, through his rejection of gender difference and of aestheticized behavior. For Fillia the aesthetic is instead entirely about the environment and the experience of it, and not creating spectacle or ritual in everyday life. In fact, Fillia's only two theatrical works, *Sensualità—teatro d'eccezione* and *Il sesso di metallo*, are so highly stylized and allegorical, that

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beginning. Even in the earliest years of the movement, Umberto Boccioni was using 19th century sculptural techniques for his works, and Marinetti's political theories called for rule by the "intellectual proletariat"—meaning the futurist intellectual.[28]

[29] Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

they approach abstraction. Much of the rest of Fillia's prose, in contrast, aspires to realism and to remaining within the realm of the possible.[30]

Further muddying the difference between Fillia's position and that of the Italian fascist state, is their shared palingenetic tendencies, and the tendency for it to manifest in the theatrical in both cases. The vision of rebirth or of regeneration was shared by Fillia and by fascism, but whereas fascist palingenesis was ultranationalist, Fillia's was grounded in Marxist eschatology. Fascist theatricality arises, as Roger Griffin has argued, from some permutation of the myth that the nation needs to be saved from decadence, via revolutionary means. This is also one of the foundational notions of futurism, and a point of mutual origins between the two movements. (Though, it cannot be said enough times, futurism, especially in its earliest stages cannot accurately be given a blanket label of fascist or proto-fascist, as that requires an untenable degree of back-reading.)[31] Fillia's theatricality, though, is literal. His paintings, especially of religious themes, are all very staged looking. Part of the sterility of Fillia's religious images lies in their quality of being staged and artificially arranged in contrast to images made to seem as though they were divinely inspired.

2. Aeropittura, the Arte Sacra Futurista and the Spiritual Currents in Futurism

Aeropittura [aeropainting] was the major stylistic innovation to emerge in futurism after 1925 and the most clearly unified trend in a movement that had become ideologically,

[30] For analyses of fascist theater and theatricality see: Günter Berghaus, *Fascism and Theatre: Comparative Studies on the Aesthetics and Politics of Performance in Europe, 1925-1945* (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1996); Fogu, *The Historic Imaginary*; Jeffrey T Schnapp, *Staging Fascism: 18 BL and the Theater of Masses for Masses* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996).

[31] See Roger Griffin. "The Nature of Fascism Staging The Nation's Rebirth: The Politics and Aesthetics of Performance in the Context of Fascist Studies" in Berghaus, *Fascism and Theatre*. 11-29.

aesthetically, and politically fragmented.[32] The style was meant, its manifesto claims, to construct a new reality that was perpetually in motion and that reached "una nuova spiritualità plastica extraterrestre."[33] Like many other futurist manifestos (especially the "Pittura futurista: Manifesto tecnico" of 1911), the "Manifesto dell'aeropittura" first published by Marinetti and Mino Somenzi in 1929, postdates the development of the style. The manifesto mainly served to give official recognition and some semblance of cohesiveness to this new pictorial style. Enrico Crispolti has called aeropainting the most significant development in Italian painting during the Ventennio, and it does stand out against the other major pictorial trends both in Italy and in the wider European milieu. Still intent on fusing technology and the arts, the goal of the *aeropittori* was to capture the experience of flight on the canvas, much like they had tried to capture the racing car and speeding train in the 1910s.[34] Flight offered futurism a new mythology, a new constellation of symbols to explore. Most importantly for Fillia, given his demonstrated interest in the spiritual and psychological possibilities of futurism, in this period the experience of flight generated profound new questions about technology and its effects on the psyche.[35]

Aeropainting was as close as most futurists came to abstraction; the two artists whose work consistently went farthest toward abstraction were Fillia, and Enrico Prampolini, both of whom incorporated many elements of biomorphic abstraction into their works. Fillia's and Prampolini's interpretations of aeropainting were far less literal than those of most of their

[32] Berghaus notes that "aero" began to replace "futurista" in the language of the movement, which he posits as an attempt to make them appeal more to the public. Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*. See also: Claudia Salaris, *Storia del futurismo: libri, giornali, manifesti* (Roma: Editori riuniti, 1985).
[33] TIF 195-201.
[34] For more general analyses of aeropainting, see: Andreoli, Annamaria and Caprara, Giovanni, eds., *Volare!: futurismo, aviomania, tecnica e cultura italiana del volo, 1903-1940.* (Roma: De Luca, 2003).
[35] Giovanna Bonasegale in Ibid.172-173. While the experience of flight had been of interest to futurism since at least 1912 (see Jeffrey T. (Jeffrey Thompson) Schnapp, "Propeller Talk," *Modernism/Modernity* 1, no. 3 (1994): 153.), it was not until the late 1920s that flight came to dominate futurist discourse. This was, not coincidentally, the period in which aviation was capturing the public's imagination. See also Andreoli, Annamaria and Caprara, Giovanni, *Volare!*.

companions. Of the other futurist artists active at the time, Giacomo Balla also continued to use degrees of abstraction even as he returned to the figurative more regularly until the end of his career. Balla's paintings from the 1920s and 1930s are often semi-abstract or wholly abstract color studies, but they approach geometric abstraction from the direction of still life studies of flowers and gardens.[36]

Despite the fact that abstraction, and the historical avant-gardes that most directly led to it, "won out" on the international stage and in the canonical readings of 20th century art, the shift toward abstraction was not uncontested even at the time. By the late 1920s, abstraction was an established avant-garde art form, but its meanings and values were being hotly contested. Carl Einstein, writing for George Bataille's *Documents*, even went so far as to call mathematical abstraction a puerile fantasy.[37] Nonetheless, the tendency towards abstraction was the dominant pictorial destructive idiom, and most futurist artists took steps to deconstruct and fragment the painted image, and to maintain and extend its abstraction away from realism.

Futurist art from this period is often still dismissed as technically reactionary, an ideological judgment explicitly falling in favor of the move toward abstraction that was occurring in France and the United States from the 1910s onward.[38] Importantly, however, even futurism's "unproblematic" co-modernism, cubism, did not intend to abolish the figurative subject. Quite the opposite. The goal of both pictorial styles was to explore (albeit in different

[36]For more general information on aeropittura see: Giacomo Balla et al., *Balla: la modernità futurista* (Milano: Skira, 2008); Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco and Paolo Sprovieri, *Arte astratta italiana: Roma, 1986* (Roma: De Luca, 1986); Enrico Crispolti, *Dal futurismo all'astrattismo: un percorso d'avanguardia nell'arte italiana del primo Novecento* (Roma: Edieuropa : De Luca, 2002); Enrico Crispolti, *Aeropittura futurista aeropittori* (Modena: Galleria fonte d'abisso, 1985); Massimo Duranti, *Aeropittura e aeroscultura futuriste* (San Sisto (Perugia): Effe, 2002); Massimo Duranti, Antonella Pesola, and Italy), Seravezza (Italy) Palazzo mediceo (Seravezza, *Dottori e l'aeropittura: aeropittori e aeroscultori futuristi* (Firenze: Maschietto & Musolino, 1996); Bruno Mantura et al., *Futurism in Flight: "Aeropittura" Paintings and Sculptures of Man's Conquest of Space (1913-1945)* (Rome: De Luca Edizioni d'Arte, 1990).
[37] Briony Fer, *On Abstract Art* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1997). 1-2.
[38] Poggi, *Inventing Futurism*. 257. Fer, *On Abstract Art*. 17.

ways and for different reasons) the experience of the pictorial subject within its environment and in its temporality. Where cubism remained a purely aesthetic and apolitical development, futurism added political activism and direct interaction with the viewing public. They also added the elimination of traditional artistic subjects in favor of a single subject—the experience of modernity. Fillia reacts against this, though, and in the spirit of the futurist defiance of order and of rules, was determined to rehabilitate traditional artistic subjects and to make them part of the experience of modernity.

Once it is clear that the model of a logical progression from the developments of the early avant-garde on to abstraction is a problematic one,[39] the question of figurative works after 1910 becomes very different. This then, leads to the necessary reconsideration of Fillia's works, and more generally of figurative art in Italy during the Ventennio.[40] The symbolic procedures elaborated by futurist art in the 1920s and 1930s do express a deep need for the transcendent, but the realities of the political climate and lingering aftermath of World War I provoked deep changes in the futurist visual vocabulary, compared to the period of 1909-1916.[41] In context, Fillia's mystical and religious figurative works are broadly unsurprising given the spiritual shift that took place in many members of the futurist movement, and in the political climate in the late 1920s and 1930s.

It is documented fact in Fillia's case, though attested to post-mortem by Enrico Prampolini, that the choice to remain within the figurative was an intentional one, and one that he made in the service of his personal agenda. Prampolini noted in a posthumous article on Fillia, from a 1950 retrospective, that Fillia was "mathematically certain" that Mondrian, Kandinsky,

[39] Fer, *On Abstract Art*. 17.
[40] For an excellent example of this work, see Emily Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism: Art and Politics under Fascism* (New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
[41] Duranti and Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, *Piety and Pragmatism*. 21.

Picasso and Léger were to be the "unchallenged masters of the new future generations."[42] This prediction is both prescient and self-serving. In it there is both the truism that these four are among those accorded highest importance in the Modernist canon, and there is the fact that parts of these four artists' styles are comparable to many of the stylistic elements exploited by Fillia himself. Furthermore, Mondrian and Léger would become crucial in the development of Rationalism,[43] a movement with which Fillia was heavily involved in 1933-1935. The implications of this statement are profound. It demonstrates that Fillia, even recognizing the importance of cubism and abstraction (both biomorphic and mathematical), still chose to continue with his use of the figurative. Based on the preciseness and intention of Fillia's past authorial and artistic choices, this can only mean two things: first, that he wished to continue to work within a mostly canonical futurist visual vocabulary, and second that figurative art better served his needs than did a complete transition into non-figurative abstraction.[44]

That being said, the late 1920s saw a contemporaneous shift in both Fillia and Prampolini's artwork, away from the geometric, intersecting planes typical of both artists' early paintings and earlier futurist painting in general. This is also the point of divergence in both the style and spirit of Fillia's and Prampolini's aeropainting from that of most other futurist artists, whose works tend more toward literalizing the idea of painting from above, at speed, in order to capture the experience of flight and of aerial perspective on the canvas. Fillia and Prampolini took a less literal approach, casting their paintings into abstracted, fantastical spaces where forms and figures float and disaggregate. They evoke a more mystical "airiness," than they do the literal experience of airplane flight. Fillia's later painting style relies on both loose, biomorphic forms, and simple, hard-edged geometric shapes. The issue of abstraction was not one on which

[42] Crispolti, *Fillia*. 16.
[43] Anna Vallye et al., *Léger: Modern Art and the Metropolis*, 2013.
[44] Bonasegale. in Andreoli, Annamaria and Caprara, Giovanni, *Volare!*. 107-122

there was complete agreement among the futurists either, as there was not, on the international state. Of Fillia's paintings, Gerardo Dottori, who distinctly favored a more representational approach, said:

> Fillia non esce dalla "realtà" visibile per cercare ritmi pittorici astratti, ma trasporta questa realtà, con tutto il suo peso, calore, colore in un'atmosfera che appare astratta a chi non è allenato al volo lirico della fantasia; ma rimane realtà visibile e palpabile per Fillia e per i futuristi che nella creazione dell'opera d'arte sanno inalzarsi al di sopra della vita e delle cose di tutti i giorni.[45]

In essence, Dottori is claiming an experiential kind of abstraction for Fillia's works, instead of a purely visual one. Dottori further claims that Fillia moved recognizable realities into an atmosphere that *seems* abstract to those not accustomed to "the lyric flight of fantasy." Dottori makes the (unsurprisingly) bold claim that futurist artists did not need abstraction to "lift themselves above the lives of everyday things."[46]

Following quickly on the development of aeropainting as a style, religious and Christological themes began appearing in futurist painting. The resurgence of these themes was not only evidence of cynical pragmatism; it was also the result of a confluence of interest in the spiritual, which was pushed to the forefront as a manifestation of the suppressed religious unconscious.[47] The emergence of aeropainting into the national spotlight put further pressure on futurist artists to feature themes that would be accepted both by the regime and the general population.

The "Manifesto dell'arte sacra futurista," published in 1931, also followed after the actual stylistic developments of futurist sacred art and served to give it official, Marinettian sanction,

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[45] Gerardo Dottori, cited in Crispolti, *Il Secondo Futurismo, Torino 1923-1938*.152.
[46] Ibid 152.
[47] For examples of both interpretations see: Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*; Crispolti, *Il Secondo Futurismo, Torino 1923-1938*. Claudia Salaris, *Artecrazia: l'avanguardia futurista negli anni del fascismo* (Scandicci [Italy]: Nuova Italia, 1992). Duranti and Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, *Piety and Pragmatism*.

just as the manifesto of aeropainting had done two years earlier.[48] Fillia's leading role in the development of futurist sacred art, and in the gestation of the manifesto has largely been under-acknowledged by the scholarship in the subject, which has tended to focus on Marinetti, Dottori and Prampolini.[49] As the facts bear out, Fillia was one of the principal forces driving the manifesto's writing and publication, as well as in developing the pictorial conventions of the style.[50] The manifesto bears the signatures of Marinetti and Fillia, and although Fillia's influence on it is demonstrable, as with most things with which the futurist leader was associated, Marinetti is generally accorded full responsibility for the manifesto. While it is more than likely that Marinetti played a leading role in the actual writing of the manifesto, according to a letter written to Tullio d'Albisola (Tullio Mazzotti) in 1931, the impetus for its composition and publication was at Fillia's repeated insistence. In his letter to Mazzotti, Fillia reproduces another that he had recently sent to Marinetti, urgently pleading with the futurist leader to get started on a manifesto of sacred art. Fillia tells Mazzotti, he had been urging this for quite some time.[51]

The manifesto on sacred art is an odd, slapdash text, clearly thrown together hurriedly despite its long inception. There are indications of this in the text of the manifesto, and in the conditions of its publication. The manifesto was originally published with only Marinetti's signature, but then hastily republished after only two weeks, adding Fillia's signature to it.[52] is the text is characterized by several passages that have the flavor of being petulant justifications for the claim to futurist artists' unique ability to revolutionize sacred art, but the manifesto gives no real indication of how this had already been or was to be henceforth accomplished. Though

[48] Enrico Crispolti, *Ricostruzione futurista dell'universo* (Torino: Assessorato per la Cultura, Musei Civici, 1980).
[49] This is evident in the numerous catalogs dedicated to both artists, and even in as recent scholarship as the Guggenheim's catalog, in which Fillia is mentioned only a handful of times, despite being one of the most prolific futurists of the 1920s and early 1930s.
[50] See for example Poggi, *Inventing Futurism*. who claims that Fillia was merely a later signatory of the manifesto, which is not contradicted by Fillia's letters and by the circumstances of the manifesto's publication.
[51] Fillia, *Lettere di Fillia a Tullio d'Albisola: 1929-1935* (Savona: Ed. Liguria, 1981).
[52] Duranti and Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, *Piety and Pragmatism*. 29.

several passages in the manifesto are clearly written in Marinetti's style, the text shows evidence of Fillia's influence in several other passages. Many of the turns of phrase and the vocabulary usage are typical of Marinetti, such as the framing of metaphors in terms of a battle, and the references to the activities of the movement's founding twenty years earlier. These are activities that Fillia never otherwise directly discussed in his manifestos; he only ever broadly referred back to the movement's founding period. (He was, after all, only five years old in 1909.) Fillia also did not employ battle metaphors in his other manifestos. However, many of the artists that the manifesto lists were both less important figures *and* from Fillia's circle in Turin.

Fillia was also the one responsible for organizing the futurist room at the exhibition of sacred art in La Spezia to which the manifesto makes reference at the end.[53] Furthermore, the topic or futurist spirituality was one on which Fillia had already published multiple times. There was his manifesto in 1925, titled "L'idolo meccanico," which tied modern life to a new kind of spirituality expressed in the fourth dimension, time, and which specifically conceived of this spirituality as quasi-religious, even recognizing, as the title references, the idea that the machine was the new god of the post-industrial era. Then he published another manifesto, "L'idolo meccanico; Arte sacra meccanica; Manifesto futurista" in 1926, undersigned by Pino Curtoni and A. C. Caligaris, that also tied the spiritual and the sacred to the *religione della velocità* and placed the mechanical idol on its pedestal. This is just to cite the two principal manifestos on the theme. Fillia's numerous newspaper articles, his reviews and his prose and poetry from throughout the mid to late 1920s are almost all also peppered with references to the spiritual.

The *arte sacra futurista* was dependent on aeropainting's prior development, because aeropainting shifted the futurist artistic and ideological mindset both literally and figuratively toward the cosmic and the metaphysical. The manifesto "La nuova religione-morale della

[53] Fillia, *Fillia e l'avanguardia futurista negli anni del fascismo* (Milano: A. Mondadori : P. Daverio, 1986).

velocità" established futurist interest in appropriating the divine in 1916, although it does not yet access the spiritual.[54] Interest in establishing futurism as a "religion" continued to percolate in the turbulent years between that manifesto's publication and 1922, when Fillia first emerged on the futurist scene. From the very beginning, Fillia's work demonstrated his interest in the idea of futurism as a kind of religious experience.

Among the futurists themselves, Gerardo Dottori was considered the first "spiritual futurist," a role for which he is given credit in the manifesto of sacred art, though he was never a signatory of it.[55] The development of sacred art, which I view to be as much about a confluence of interest in the sacred as a subject as it was a pragmatic decision made for the sake of the movement's survival, brought together a number of different styles sometimes very successfully, and sometimes not at all successfully.[56] In the end, though it was Fillia's thought, his painting and his insistence on the publication of a manifesto and contributions to it that led to the codification of futurist sacred art.[57] It was, in part, also Fillia's obsessive drive—adopted from Marinetti's style of propagandistic publicity—to keep futurist art in the national conversation that contributed significantly to what success the movement had by being included in national exhibitions.[58]

3. An Art That Was "Both Traditional and Modern": The Return of Perspective and Symbolic Form

[54] TIF 130-138.
[55] Duranti and Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, *Piety and Pragmatism*. 27-30.
[56] Massimo Duranti argues that this is due to a confluence of interest, whereas Günter Berghaus argues for it being a pragmatic decision. I hold that both factors are in play. See Ibid.; Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*.
[57] Duranti and Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, *Piety and Pragmatism*. 27.
[58] Fillia, *Fillia e l'avanguardia futurista negli anni del fascismo*; Salaris, *Storia del futurismo*. Both sources highlight the frequency with which Fillia was involved in publicity and propaganda and how much work he put into promoting the movement.

Futurist art in the 1920s was subject to a slew of ideological shifts. With futurist authors and artists attempting to work more and more within the confines of what the regime would support, and within the stylistic parameters that would have commercial success, the embrace of the cultic (be it of the Duce, or the return of the cult of the Madonna) emerged as one of the main ways they could do so, regardless of personal political or religious beliefs. The shifting attitudes and praxes of futurist artists were due both to the general zeitgeist of the period and the reassertion of the repressed religious unconscious, and also directly responsive to Mussolini and his ministers of culture. In a speech in 1926, Mussolini called for an art that was "both traditional and modern."[59] As for the ministers of culture, the movement's relationship with them, was contentious. Futurist artists (usually through the advocacy or Marinetti or of Fillia) were constantly fighting for inclusion in official exhibitions, including the Venice Biennial, and rarely successful.[60]

The formal pictorial problems with which futurist artists were confronted were increasingly those same problems that had challenged traditional artistic discourse. In this "reconstructive" phase, futurist artists more and more frequently used a futurist pictorial language not to abolish their artistic heritage, but to attack old problems in new, futurist ways. One of these traditional formal problems, which carried deep ideological implications in the Italian context, was the problem of perspective. The "Manifesto dell'aeropittura" (written first in 1929, then published in 1931) claims:

> 1. le prospettive mutevoli del volo costituisono una realtà assolutamente nuova e che nulla ha di commune con la realtà tradizionalmente costituita dalle prospettive terrestri;
> […]
> 7. ogni aeropittura contiene simultaneamente il doppio movimento dell'aeroplano e della mano del pittore che muove la matita, pennello o diffusore;

[59] Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*. 232.
[60] See Fillia, *Lettere di Fillìa a Tullio d'Albisola*; Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*; Salaris, *Storia del futurismo*.

8. il quadro o complesso plastico di aeropittura deve essere policentrico…[61]

The viewer is no longer just at the center of the painting, experiencing the speed of life around him, he is now moving with it, and, as the manifesto claims, this type of perspective has no relationship to standard ideas of perspective formulated from ground level. This is partly due the fact that the perspectival construct in aeropainting was conceived in a way that allowed it to have many vanishing points that were unstable and continuously shifting. Fillia himself also phrases the issue in terms of perspective, saying:

> Le sensazioni di velocità dovevano logicamente essere le prime a interessare la fantasia dell'artista che vedeva nell'aeroplano la possibilità di afferrare una serie di paesaggi e di orizzonti ignoti, con altre prospettive ed altri fonti liriche.[62]

In the context of the manifesto and of Fillia's other writings, it is clear that he means to use "prospettiva" and and "orizzonte" in both their literal and metaphorical senses.

"Perspective" is a loaded term in the context of the visual arts, and especially in the context of painting in Italy, and it was not one used with any frequency by Umberto Boccioni in his manifestos on art. Rational, mathematical perspective is, in some way, embedded into the Italian artistic consciousness, and like the religious, was pushed out of the conscious mind by the founders of futurism and replaced by willful and fanciful distortions, as in much of Boccioni's work, which were intended to represent unconscious or dream-like states of mind.[63] Leon Battista Alberti's 1435 treatise *De pictura* is both a technical and philosophical touchstone in Italian art. Considered one of the crowning achievements of Italian Renaissance thought on what was a vexing problem in the visual arts, the treatise's discoveries are what allowed for the development of mathematical perspective. Italian mathematical perspective and Northern

[61] TIF 198-199.
[62] Fillia. "Spiritualità aerea" in Crispolti, *Fillia*. 77.
[63] Particularly salient examples are *La strada entra nella casa* (1911), and the multiple versions of his *Stati d'animo* series (1911). On the general condition in Italy on this topic, see David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

European atmospheric perspective, though both with their strengths, and ideological bases, remained imperfect in their ability to transpose reality onto the canvas. Neoclassicism was the apex of artistic research into monumental perspective and naturalism, and futurism was its complete, intentional antithesis in both form and intent.

Mathematical perspective sometimes has a tendency to distort the edges of a painting, and atmospheric perspective cannot handle the middle ground of a painting. It relies on the strength of the artist's observational skills and ability to recreate the visual field freehand. Aeropainting uniquely combines these two solutions, forming a modernist hybrid that attempts to be at once objective and subjective, but in an entirely different way than anything in the period from the High Renaissance to the Neoclassical grounded it its central preoccupation with the modernist experience. Aeropainting confronts the futurist artistic directive to "place the viewer at the center of the painting",[64] shifts it up, into the cockpit of the airplane (or in Fillia and Prampolini's case, out of "real" space). For the most part, futurist aeropainters attempted to maintain the "objectivity" of the visual construct and the transfer of bodily experience into a still image.

The importance of this pictorial development in the visual language in Fillia's work, in particular, springs from his insistence on the necessity of reclaiming the spiritual for futurism and reintroducing it into art, his insistence on the psychological aspect of a work, and on the experiential possibilities that art discloses in its world-making. As Erwin Panofsky concludes in "Perspective as Symbolic Form," his seminal essay on the topic:

> [T]he perspectival view, whether it is evaluated and interpreted more in the sense of rationality and the objective, or more in the sense of contingency and the subjective, rests on the will to construct pictorial space, in principle, out of the elements of, and according to the plan of, empirical visual space (although still abstracted considerably from the

[64] Umberto Boccioni, et al. "La pittura futurista: manifesto tecnico." in Luciano De Maria, *Per conoscere Marinetti e il futurismo* (Milano: A. Mondadori, 1981). 23-26.

> psychophysiological "givens"). Perspective mathematizes the visual space, and yet it is very much *visual* space that it mathematizes; it is an ordering, but an ordering of the visual phenomenon. Whether one reproaches perspective for evaporating "true being" into a mere manifestation of seen things, or rather for anchoring the free and, as it were, spirit idea of form to a manifestation of mere seen things, is in the end little more than a question of emphasis.
>
> Through this peculiar carrying over of artistic objectivity into the domain of the phenomenal, perspective seals off religious art from the realm of the magical […] then it opens it to something entirely new: the realm of the visionary, where the miraculous becomes the direct experience of the beholder, in that the supernatural events in a sense erupt into his own, apparently natural, visual space and so permit him really to "internalize" their supernaturalness. Perspective, finally, opens art to the realm of the psychological, in the highest sense, where the miraculous finds its last refuge in the soul of the human being represented in the work of art […] it expands human consciousness into a vessel for the divine.[65]

Though it is atypical to view futurism through the lens of Renaissance and Baroque art historical scholarship, Panofsky's argument is illuminating for Fillia's works and more broadly for the "problem" of the *arte sacra futurista*.

Perspective in Italy, is therefore not only *like* the repressed religious, it is also an inherent part of it because of its historical relationship to use in fresco and altar painting traditions. As such, the repression or displacement of symbolic perspective was concomitant with the repressed sacred. Panofsky's argument speaks directly to what was occurring in futurist art, and thus, I contend, directly to the idea that repressed urges had begun to reassert themselves in the cultural sphere, though in a different form.[66] The return of perspective along with the late 1910 and 1920s generalized *rappel à l'ordre* and return to realism in Italy undeniably coincides with a generalized return religious imagery across artistic styles and movements. Carlo Carrà, in his post-futurist phase, produced metaphysical paintings, such as *Le figlie di Loth* (1919) which were not only religious in subject, but which reassumed the burden of the history of Italian religious

[65] Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (New York; Cambridge, Mass.: Zone Books ; Distributed by the MIT Press, 1991). 71-72.
[66] Panofsky also discusses the implications of the active rejection of perspective, also present in Italian art in the 1930s in the works of artists such as Mario Sironi and Mario Mafai. Ibid. 71..
See also: Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism*.

art, by reopening the dialogue with Giotto. Felice Casorati produced his portrait of Silvana Cenni in 1922, echoing Piero della Francesca's enthroned Madonnas and his 1923 *Meriggio* which visually cites Andrea Mantegna's *Cristo morto* (c. 1480).

This reinforces the relevance of Mikhail Epstein's framework for understanding the psychosocial drives at work in arte sacra futurista. That the symbolic and spiritual are at work, and are tied to the unconscious desire for order goes a long way toward illuminating the development of aeropainting and the return of the sacred and spiritual, now newly wedded to technology through more or less explicit images of flight and airplanes and aerial views. The association of perspective with religious art ties this technical aspect of Fillia's art to the expression of the repressed spiritual and religious unconscious. For Fillia, the *arte sacra futurista* also meant the extension of his theories on using color to construct a pictorial environment that was experienced both physically and psychologically.[67] Fillia emphasizes that:

> La possibilità di una realizzazione materialistica completa, con tutta sua importanza e la sua concezione tecnica, permette uno sviluppo spirituale molto più grande, verso gli orizzonti luminosi della sensibilità futurista.
> […]
> [I]l nuovo mezzo rappresentativo deve essere formato di alte capacità creative e non di semplici gradiosità costruttive ed estetiche.
>
> L'unione del soggetto e dell'ambiente, come realtà dinamica, genera un'architettura di piani plastici che si sviluppa al di fuori dei limiti di una cornice per un proprio organismo definitivo, tipicamente simile ad una macchina, perché formato di elementi diversi ma indipensabili al suo funzionamento espressivo. Annullamento perciò delle parti inutili: come, ad esempio, in una macchina da cucire, nessuno ravvisa la forma dell'albero nella tavola di legno ma vede un elemento indispensabile, così lo spettatore in un quadro futurista deve cercare la realtà visiva già conosciuta ma il contenuto nuovo del complesso costruito.[68]

So, for Fillia, there is both a fundamental spiritual aspect of a work and the conditions its physical existence, which are inextricable from one another. He argues that the complete material realization creates the conditions under which the spiritual aspect of the work develops

[67] Fillia. "Alfabeto spirituale" in Crispolti, *Fillia*. 69-71.
[68] Ibid. 71.

and "approaches the luminous horizons of the futurist sensibility." Similarly, Fillia's insistence on the union of the subject and environment in this passage carries through into painting from his earliest works for the stage (see chapter one) where he uses stage settings and costumes to unify the actors with their environment and the audience with the spectacle. Just as the lighting and sets pushed through the fourth wall, aestheticizing and affecting the space occupied by the audience, the painting that Fillia theorizes develops beyond the limits of the frame. Fillia then continues on to argue that the final product is usually similar to a machine because it is stripped of any non-essential parts, and composed only of elements that while distinct are fundamental to the work's expressive function and harmoniously integrated into it. The constructive complex is an image of something known, but elevated to art because of the artist's will to create.[69]

It is in the moment when aeropainting assumes a metaprospective vision, when it comes closest to letting go of the "nostalgia terrestre" and abstracts away from reality to express the conditions of what the futurists say as a new, transformative, and universal human experience that it is most successful. Prampolini argued that fully letting go of terrestrial nostalgia was the only way to overcome the known horizons, approach the unknown, and give expression to the experience of it.[70] This echoes the article of Fillia's cited above, as well as other of Fillia's articles from the mid-1920s. Taken both literally and metaphorically, this give insight into both the stylistic and thematic choices made by both Prampolini and Fillia. Prampolini also insisted that aeropainting creates "lontananza spirituale" and a "nuova dimensione emotiva."[71] He discounts the need for contact with objective reality in aeropainting, and argues that the intuition

[69] This is not far from the theories of Martin Heidegger, and especially of Heideggar's analysis of Vincent Van Gogh's *A Pair of Shoes* (1886). Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).
[70] Bonasegale. In Andreoli, Annamaria and Caprara, Giovanni, *Volare!*. 173. Crispolti, *Ricostruzione futurista dell'universo*. 499.
[71] Crispolti, *Fillia*. 15-16.

of the artist moves toward the extremes of introspection in a process of spiritual transfiguration and formal transposition.[72] There is, in Fillia's aeropaintings and sacred art a "cupa condizione di maliconia [che] assumeva effettivamente significato metafisico"[73] that is inwardly focused, and which transposes and transfigures the human subjects in Fillia's paintings during the ascent from the earthly plane to the cosmic. Though Prampolini opened the door to futurist transcendentalism, he never tackled religious subject matter, and instead responded more to the cult of the nation.[74]

4. Fillia's Nudes

The early futurist invective against the nude in portraiture is founded at least in part on the *disprezzo per la donna*, and the rejection of the feminine that characterized futurism's earliest manifestos.[75] Yet again, Fillia will counter these ideological positions in his work, and reclaim the nude. Given Fillia's proven penchant for reworking futurism from the inside to suit his own needs and to confront new problems, it would have been nearly impossible for him to ignore the nude in his works, even without any kind of subconscious influence. In fact, the exploration of themes and motifs previously shunned by the movement can be viewed as attempts at the fulfillment of the postulates set out in the 1915 manifesto by Fortunato Depero and Giacomo Balla the "Ricostruzione futurista del mondo."[76]

Like his written works from earlier in the 1920s, Fillia's early paintings of nudes crossed man with the machine (Figures 13 and 14). The later nudes (Figures 15, 16 and 17) morphed the

[72] Enrico Prampolini in "L'Impero d'Italia" Roma 18 maggio 1930 cited in Crispolti, *Ricostruzione futurista dell'universo*. 499-500. Prampolini looks back in writing in 1941 *Mostra del pittore Enrico Prampolini*, Galleria di Roma, febbraio-marzo 1941.
[73] Crispolti, *Il Secondo Futurismo, Torino 1923-1938*.155.
[74] Duranti and Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, *Piety and Pragmatism*.30.
[75] F.T Marinetti "Fondazione e manifesto del futurismo" and U. Boccioni et al. "La pittura futurista, manifesto tecnico." In De Maria, *Per conoscere Marinetti e il futurismo*.
[76] Duranti and Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, *Piety and Pragmatism*. 21.

human body through the filter of metaphysical mysticism and semi-abstraction. The semi-abstracted, and often disfigured nudes produced by Fillia and his contemporaries, including Mario Sironi, Felice Casorati, and Amedeo Modigliani, demonstrate how they were all searching for a way to make the nude relevant to the turbulence of the 1920s and 1930s. Each artist uniquely deformed the naked human body, infusing it with his own existential anxieties.

The nude has been considered one of the enduring subjects of art, even into the present day, and even more sweepingly, the (female) nude has been interpreted not as the *subject* of art, but rather a *form* of art in its own right.[77] If the premise that the nude is a form of art, and not a subject is true (which is what Kenneth Clark argues in his still influential book on the subject), is an argument that is founded on the Platonic theory of forms, then early futurism, with its indictments against the nude female figure, was an aberration, and maybe one that was doomed to fail at rewriting the book on what art was, what it should become and what it should depict in the service of the modernist experience. On the one hand, Clark's interpretation neatly fits into theories of the return of the repressed; on the other, Fillia's nude figures continue to subvert traditional ideas of gender and its strict association with the physical character of the body defying most of Clark's argument. And yet, there is something of the repressed cultural unconscious at work.

In feminist art historical scholarship the question of the female nude as an elevated subject of art is revealed as a means of containment, control, and possession, not one of Platonic forms nor one of higher intellectual ideals. In short, the nude represents the patriarchal need to exert control over the body, and more specifically control of and over the female body. This is

[77] Kenneth Clark, *The Nude* (New York: MJF Books, 1956). 3-5.

especially true after the male nude fell out of favor in the 19th century.[78] Contrary to any generalizing, and to some degree defying both traditional and feminist critiques of the nude, in the case of Fillia's works, the gendered body will matter as little as it does in his prose and theater, and will be just as ideologically charged. As I have shown previously, Fillia had a mostly divergent take on issues of sex and gender, and his position on these topics is just as much at stake in his paintings as it was in his other media.

When Fillia reinstates the nude in futurist art, he reduces it and deforms it into a neo-primordial icon. Marinetti described Fillia's method and style this way:

> Fillia, dopo aver superato la vecchia "natura morta" coi suoi "oggetti atmosferizzati" ha voluto uccidere il vecchio nudo, creando dei nuovi corpi umani. Non sono mostri […] Fillia è entrato nella turbinosa e straripante matassa della simultaneità di tempo-spazio, lontano-vicino, concreto-sognato, ricordato-sperato. Si è nella grande intuizione delle forze misteriose da esprimere plasticamente. […] sono dei nuovi corpi vivi formati di pezzi d'universo concreto o sognato, vaste reti di nervi, raggi o correnti elettriche, grandi sistemi sanguigni arteriosi e venosi strappati all'infinito di cui comincia a intuire la corposità, gli spessori e la perfetta organicità.[79]

Like Marinetti remarks, Fillia's nude forms translate both their insubstantiality and instability, and their contradictory elemental physicality onto the canvas creating a tension between that insubstantiality and the monumentality and weight of their bodies.

In paintings like *Gli innamorati* (Fig. 5) and *Riposo* (Fig. 4) the male and female bodies appear almost as one body, caught in the process either of merging or separation. They are depicted in earth tones, evoking Adam's creation from the mud, and Eve's creation from Adam's rib. One made from earth, the second made from the first.[80] They are at once all spirit and shadow, ghosts of the future yet to come, and, at the same time, they are made of plasmatic, primordial sludge that was the origin the cosmos, in defiance of a literal interpretation of the

[78] Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude Art, Obscenity, and Sexuality* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992); Clark, *The Nude*.
[79] F.T. Marinetti cited in Crispolti, *Il Secondo Futurismo, Torino 1923-1938.* 144.
[80] Genesis 2:7-23.

Genesis myth. Their duality mimics the mind/body duality of Fillia's *uomo senza sesso*, responsive to the physical needs of the body, but mentally and spiritually unchained from them. Fillia's nudes, and the male and female pairs in particular, seeming made of mud or earth, can also be discursively tied to Fillia's religious paintings of this period. Following on his use of new scientific discoveries about radio waves, light and sound to shape *Lussuria radioelettrica*, Fillia's later nudes respond to the growing evidence on the origins and nature of the universe.[81] The figures in Fillia's paintings exist as both pure spirit and pure matter.

In his idealized and very traditional interpretation of the nude, Kenneth Clark argues that the nude requires some degree of abstraction away from reality in order to truly capture the naked human form and elevate it to the status of a work of art. This, he argues, is not the case for the rest of the natural world, given that its lack of innate rationality allows for unmediated copying. In this aspect, too, Clark's argument rests on containment and order, on controlling the female subject (pure matter) with the male gaze (pure intellect).[82] His contention, though, framed in architectural terms, falls apart where Fillia's nudes are concerned. In the first place, Fillia's bodies—male and female—are barely contained by their boundaries, as if they could succumb to entropy and dissolve back into the earth, allowing the psyche to rejoin the electric currents of the universe from which they had been congealed. In the second place, Fillia's abstraction of the body, away from reality, deforms instead of idealizes the body, actively breaking with Kenneth Clark's theories on the artistic nude. But at the same time, Fillia's nudes do not assume the

[81] In the 1920s, Cecilia H. Payne discoved that the universe is made mostly of hydrogen; Edwin Hubble and Georges Lemaitre made important discoveries about the age of universe. In the late 19th century Charles Darwin and Louis Pasteur made important contributions to the understanding of the origins of life. Then in 1924 Alexander Oparin published *The Origin of Life on Earth*, which dealt with his hypothesis on how life developed out of inorganic matter.

[82] Clark, *The Nude*.6, 11-12.; Nead, *The Female Nude Art, Obscenity, and Sexuality*. 20-26.

qualities of pornography.[83] They instead mimic Fillia's literary and theatrical desexualization and degendering of the body and mind. Once Fillia abandons the geometric style he used in the mid 1920s, the human body loses any kind of mechanical harmony, and control of the body's "architecture" is ceded to the environment. Fillia's nudes resist the effort to contain the female body and female sexuality that is a precondition of the transformation of base matter into the elevated form of culture and the spirit in Western art and aesthetics.[84]

The transitional state of the material body and its non-containment of primordial matter is a threat, as is the existence of these bodies on the margins of categorization, which is critical in the construction of symbolic meaning.[85] Symbolic meaning, and the defiance of categorization are manifest in the blurred gendering of bodies in these paintings. Like the concealing costumes worn by the characters in his earlier theatrical works, the gender of Fillia's nudes is defined by incidental reference to sexual characteristics, a round circle for a breast, or perhaps long hair to indicate the female form, the outline of a pectoral muscle or the barest indication of external genitals for the male form as in *Riposo* and *Gli innamorati* (Figures 16 and 17). Frequently the only differentiation between the figures is in the size and colors of their bodies. Moreover, Fillia's nudes become progressively more sexually androgynous from one painting to the next—in direct opposition to the fascist regime's continuing efforts to retrench traditional understandings of gender and sexuality, to restrict women to the role of housewife and mother, and to remove what little social, political and economic capital she had gained in the forty years between unification and the Ventennio.[86]

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[83] Lynda Nead spends several chapters analyzing the pornographic and its relationship to the nude in art, and particularly how the former replaces the latter. Nead, *The Female Nude Art, Obscenity, and Sexuality*.
[84] For more on the idea of base matter and containment as it pertains to the female nude, see Ibid.
[85] Mary Douglas, *Mary Douglas: Collected Works.* (London: Routledge, 2003).
[86] Victoria De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

It is notable that Fillia also utilized the male nude, the depiction of which had fallen out of favor during the 19th century and ceded pride of place to the female nude as the ideal painterly subject;[87] nevertheless, the male nude remained secondary in Fillia's works. Only fascism's cult of masculinity and the cult of the Duce extensively reinvigorated the use of the monumental, heroic male nude in the first half of the 20th century (most notably by Mario Sironi). Resisting the image of the hyper-masculinized ideal fascist male, Fillia's male nudes are as ambiguous as his female nudes.

5. The Holy Family and Religious Icon(ographie)s

Religious imagery was the next motif to take hold of Fillia's painterly consciousness, and it dominated the works he produced in 1931-1932, while explorations of the human body had instead dominated 1928 and 1929. (Fillia produced more than thirty paintings of nudes, then almost entirely abandoned the subject, just as he had done in the succession from theater to poetry to prose.) The first documentation of any of Fillia's religious paintings is from March of 1931, though it is probable that work began some time in late 1930.[88] The emergence of religious themes follows closely on Fillia's 1930 sojourn in Paris, where Gino Severini was almost certainly a major influence on Fillia's interest in religious art. Severini had, at the time, just completed fresco cycles in the cathedral of Semsales (1926) and of La Roche (1928) in Switzerland.[89] In the early 1930s Severini also completed mosaics in the cathedral of Cortona, and a series of mosaics in the Palazzo delle Poste e Telegrafi in Alessandria, Italy. The Alessandria project was one of only a few such projects granted to the futurists. The group had

[87] Clark, *The Nude*.
[88] Crispolti, *Fillia*. 44-45.
[89] Fillia, *Fillia e l'avanguardia futurista negli anni del fascismo*. 144.

little success overall at winning these state commissions.[90] In total, futurist artists won commissions for the decoration of only three of the new Palazzi delle Poste constructed between 1933 and 1935. Fillia and Prampolini were responsible for the mosaics in the tower at La Spezia, and Benedetta for a series of frescos in Palermo. Prampolini also later designed murals for EUR, in Rome, but not until 1942 and for the Mostra delle terre d'oltremare in Naples, in 1943.

Though there were some futurist artists who decorated churches (like the aforementioned Severini), Fillia's altarpiece-style paintings were never used in any cultic capacity.[91] The development of the *arte sacra futurista* had followed quickly on the heels of the Lateran Accords, and the push for a style of painting that was "both traditional and modern." [92] But, just prior to the Lateran Accords, on 28 October 1928, Pope Pius XI released a statement declaring that futurist paintings "il sacro non sembrano richiamare e far presente se non perché lo sfigurano fino alla caricatura, e bene spesso fino a vera e propria profanazione."[93] Despite (and perhaps because of) strong the official Church objections that futurist sacred art was extravagant and irreconcilable with Christian iconography, the futurists pursued religious themes with great interest in the early 1930s. Fillia did, though, have one success. He was commissioned to decorate the interior of the cathedral in Lortrier, Switzerland, designed by Alberto Sartoris.[94] This was likely due to his friendship with Sartoris.

The Vatican's stance against the *arte sacra futurista* did not stop the ambitious Fillia and his fellow futurists from attempting to "renew" sacred art, and to exhibit their works to the public. In the 1931 exhibition of sacred art, in Padua, marking the 700th anniversary of the death

[90] Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*. 238.
[91] Salaris, *Artecrazia*. 157.
[92] Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*. 232.
[93] Cited in Salaris, *Artecrazia*. 157.
[94] Duranti and Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, *Piety and Pragmatism*. 29. I have been unable to locate any illustrations of these works, nor information on whether or not they even still exist.

of St. Anthony of Padua, the futurists did succeed in having a number of works exhibited.[95] Fillia's two nearly identical portraits of the saint (Figure 20 illustrates one of them) were very likely produced in order to increase the chances that he would have works accepted into the exhibition, which he ultimately did.

As Berghaus points out, the idea that a "drastic change in attitude" regarding religious themes in a "mature" futurist movement was inevitable or natural is suspect.[96] On the level of an ideological return or resurgence of genuine felt Catholic sentiment within the movement, I agree. It is in no way contentious to state that Marinetti was a pragmatist, and I argue that Fillia was, too. This pragmatism is certain to have been part of the choice to exploit sacred art, after 1929. And yet, I contend that as a formal subject, the return of this repressed iconography did approach the inevitable, in the same way that the return of the nude did: because it was an integral part of the Italian cultural unconscious, just as the nude is a part of the cultural unconscious of painting itself. The combination of two driven, and ultimately practical leaders like Marinetti and Fillia, plus the devout Waldensian faith Benedetta (who, it is also well established, had a significant influence on her spouse), combined with the anxieties of the machine age created a situation wherein the return of religious imagery to futurism, and to the greater Italian cultural and artistic contexts makes sense.

During this period, in which the movement was being submitted to many stressors, maintaining a modernist style and recombining it with a corpus of religious imagery that is the very definition of traditional for Western culture was, in reality, a way for Fillia to passively and perhaps somewhat cynically, express his resistance to fascist politics. Under the guise of conformity, Fillia's religious imagery is in fact subtly and dangerously subversive toward the

[95] Ibid. 29.
[96] Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*. 246.

regime, because its subtext is both anti-fascist and non-religious. As I have already argued, Fillia chose to retain a degree of connection with the figurative, not because he rejected the value or potential of abstract art, but because a semi-abstracted figurative style better suited his needs.

The paintings *L'eternità* (Figure 19) and *Natività – Morte – Eternità* (Figure 24), which have been much written about, in so far as any painting of Fillia's has been much written about, are large format paintings (each more than 2'x3'), as were most of Fillia's religious paintings, mimicking the format of an altarpiece's central panel. The aspect of both paintings that has attracted most comments is the series of architectural schematics representing the architectural styles of houses of worship that culminate in a futurist style church. Little else has been remarked upon. The building schematics in both paintings have been widely assumed only to represent Christian architecture and the evolution of church architecture through history to its endpoint, the futurist style church.[97] Yet in each case there are places of worship that can also be interpreted as non-Christian. In the *Natività*, just to the right of the cross's top arm, there appears a building that closely resembles the mosque at the Dome of the Rock, or perhaps the Jewish temple in Florence, with its domed roof. There is a second similar schematic to the right of the cross. It is possible, though, that these images represent Greek Orthodox churches. Another image is featured in *L'eternità*, and there is, second from the bottom, what appears more like a Roman or Greek temple than it does a Catholic church of any kind. I would argue, then, that this ambiguity points to these being non-specific models, meant to evoke a variety of types of holy buildings.

Likewise, In *L'eternità*, the eight human figures that stand in the shadow of a dematerialized, abstract rendering of Christ as a swaddled infant are distinctly dressed in a variety of religious or pseudo-religious robes. It is clear that they are meant to evoke either

[97] See Fillia and Marzio Pinottini, *Sensibilità futurista, Fillia: l'avanguardia inquieta* (Torino: Piazza, 2004).

church fathers or other important religious figures. The figure fourth from the left is almost certainly identifiable as St. Francis of Assisi or St. Anthony of Padua, given the dark-colored robe with the large dark colored cowl and light colored (so rope) belt of the Franciscan order. The rest are harder to identify. Like the church buildings in this painting and *Natività – Morte – Eternità*, the rest are or partly completely schematic, and non-specific, unidentifiable figures, but the type of figure to which they allude is clear. These figures, like the rendering of churches in the lower right corner of the painting, represent the material foundations of transcendent, dematerialized futurist spirituality.

Fillia's religious paintings are, however, steeped in various expressions of dualism, likely part of why they were viewed as inadmissible by the Catholic Church. Philosophical and spiritual dualisms are persistent motifs in Fillia's works, beginning, as I noted previously, with the mind/body duality on which the ideological underpinnings of his earliest written works is built, to hints of Catholic heresies based on theological dualism in his religious paintings. Significantly one of the most important dualistic heresies is that of Manichaeism, the heresy overcome most famously by St. Augustine of Hippo, the process of which is recounted in his *Confessions*.

There are numerous structural motifs in Fillia's religious paintings that are built on Augustinian theology, including two paintings that share the title of one of St. Augustine's chief works, *The City of God*. In *The City of God*, Augustine conceives of history as a battle between the City of Man and the City of God, with the latter destined to be victorious. This conflict is grounded in the battle between good and evil, which in Augustine's faith arises from his former devotion to Manichaeism.[98] Earthly physical reality, absolute matter, in this system, is separate and subordinate to the cosmic, spiritual order of the heavens. This is visually transposed in the

[98] Augustine, Marcus Dods, and Thomas Merton, *The City of God* (New York: Modern Library, 1950).

majority of Fillia's religious paintings, and in his landscape paintings, even when they are not specifically of St. Augustine. This translation of theory into image is accomplished using spatial logic. The foreground is the astral plane "fatto di puro cielo," as Fillia also described it[99] and there is a far off city. Fillia's sacred figures are faceless, and often even bodiless, with only their robes taking on any solidity. The completely solid and earthly is far distant, though it still protrudes into the cosmic space, appearing both in front of and behind the figures in the foreground, in a surreal warping of space.

In *Divintà della vita aerea* (Figure 22) and the two versions of *La città di Dio* (Figure 21) where again the two paintings are nearly identical, and I have illustrated only one), the two-dimensional rendering of both the third and fourth-dimensions[100] foregrounds dematerialized and sacred cosmic space. The distant cities are solid, blocky and opaque. They protrude into the sphere of the sacred, out of the realm of the "real" and out of historical time, into eternal time and space but cannot fully either. In the two versions of *La città di Dio*, the disembodied figure is likely the saint himself, and the kneeling figure his mother, Saint Monica, whose influence on her son was significant. It is she who was a Christian and guided Augustine to conversion.[101] This mirrors Fillia's relationship with his own mother, with whom he was very close his whole life.

Divinità della vita aerea is the key that unlocks Fillia's system of symbols, and ties together his nudes, religious paintings, and even his later landscapes. It is a densely coded image, hiding Fillia's resistance to fascist politics in plain sight, and it is the linchpin in Fillia's efforts to use Christian symbolism and allegory to facilitate his explorations into the psychology and

[99] TIF 201-205.
[100] For more on futurism and the fourth dimension see Mark Antliff, "The Fourth Dimension and Futurism: A Politicized Space," *The Art Bulletin* 82, no. 4 (2000): 720–733.
[101] Augustine and Henry Chadwick, *Confessions* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

metaphysics of flight. In light of the repetition of Augustine's dichotomous world structure in this image, along with the formal aspects of this work that carry forward from Fillia's theater and poetry, the subtext can be decoded. First, the three main colors are red, blue and yellow, which are defined in Fillia's personal symbolic system for color, as I discussed in the introduction and in chapter 1, with different meanings than the ones they are traditionally accorded. Blue is *sogno—illusione—speranza—ecc.*; red is *creazione—forza-dominio—intelligenza*—ecc.; yellow stands for *elettricità—civiltà—ecc*. Black is also used, and is defined as "il non creato su cui si svolge la pittura."[102]

The red ground on which the scene is built represents the Marxist foundation of Fillia's ideal society, which is one characterized by creativity and intelligence. The blue god figure, representing hope and dreams is clearly robotic, and seemingly male; however, this assumption is undercut by the circle painted on the figure's left breast. This was Fillia's usual signifier of a female figure, thus indicating his continued belief in a kind of genderless and androgynous ambiguity as the ideal state of the human spirit. The black or brown sheet (the color changes depending on the photographic reproduction), and the form inscribed on it, which expands upward into the cross made of air above it, foregrounds the Turin context of Fillia's visual metaphor. It is a futurist version of the Shroud of Turin, a divine touch relic. But instead of Christ, the savior in Fillia's image appears female, and merged with the machine, an airplane.

The yellow cross, with its red orb, and the spiritual echo in front of it, that emerges from the image of the divine on the shroud, contain layers of meaning. On the most obvious levels they are at once the airplane, futurist mechanical divinity *par excellence*, and the crucifix, making the orb a stand in for Christ. The yellow connotes electricity and civilization. But, this Tau cross (the cross lacking the top arm used by the Franciscan order) is also reminiscent of the

[102] Crispolti, *Fillia*. 70.

shape of the *martello*, one half of the communist emblem. In keeping with the political climate, the communist emblem is intentionally obscured. In several other paintings, the similarities to the typical shape and diagonal orientation of the hammer are much clearer. Moreover, the image juxtaposes red and yellow, the two colors of the communist flag.

The crucified red orb, then, represents the death of communism under the fascist regime. In numerous examples of Fillia's landscapes and aeropaintings on non-religious subjects, this form of the cross reappears, very often in red. Like in *Divinità della vita aerea*, they are often placed vertically, superimposing the hammer on top of the cross. Fillia painted this image heavily coded image, I argue, in silent protest of the continuing fascist persecution of socialists and communists, and Gramsci's continued imprisonment. Fillia's use of red is also conspicuous. He uses the color much more than any other later futurist, except perhaps Balla; however, Balla's use of red was entirely within the context of the *tricolore*, The only other painting that makes such an overt use of red is Carlo Carrà's *Funerale dell'anarchico Galli* (1913), and in that painting the red and black are associated with anarchism and violence.

Lastly, the four (again nearly identical) versions of *L'Adorazione* (Figure 23 illustrates one example) that were painted in 1931-32 confirm Fillia's state of mourning for the loss of his spiritual, communist future. Christ is again replaced with a red orb. Given the number of times this red orb appears, both in obviously religious contexts and in non-religious aeropaintings around this period, and given the number of times in previous works that Fillia used red to denote communist politics, I argue that this motif symbolically represents the nascent communist state, destined for death. The Virgin wears black, the color of mourning, and also the symbolic color of anarchy. Following Catholic tradition, placing the cross and Golgotha in an adoration scene foreshadows Christ's death. In this case, it is the death of an ideal that reaches all the way

back to the poems from *1+1+1=1 – Dinamite – Poesie Proletarie – Rosso + Nero*. The image mourns the death of Fillia's ideal vision for the future that he elaborated in *La morte della donna*, in 1925. What is more, the overt fascist rhetoric about returning Italy to the glory of the Roman Empire adds a sardonic twist. It was the Roman Empire, through Pontius Pilate, that was responsible for the crucifixion.

The consistency of imagery and color, and repeating motifs gives the sense that these religious paintings were conceived of as a massive group, and serve to reinforce one another, through the repetition of symbolic pictorial elements. Their consistency is in line with Fillia's literary practice, wherein he often repeated motifs with slight variations, in order to subtly emphasize their important, though often non-obvious meaning. Pictorial continuity from Fillia's theatrical works to his religious paintings is established in two ways: in the sense of staging and ceremony present in these paintings and in the use of the machine aesthetic (albeit stylistically different from his earlier works). The environments into which he sets his figures are isolated in the center of the canvas, and their extremely blocky forms recall the descriptions of the staging and set pieces in *Sensualità—Teatro d'eccezione* and in the manifesto "Alfabeto spirituale." The use of brightly colored, geometric shapes that intersect in ways that seem to defy the laws of physics are characteristic of both, and mechanical movement is implicit in their status as aeropaintings, a style prefaced on depicting motion. These simple shapes also recall his earlier description of puppets in *Lussuria radioelettrica* and "Alfabeto spirituale" as well as radically simplified and geometric style of Fortunato Depero's puppet theater. In Fillia's works, it is not literal motion, but spiritual vibrations.

In further continuation from these earlier precedents, Fillia's religious (Figures 19 through 24) and non-religious aeropaintings (Figures 25, 26 and 27) all exhibit the same interest

in the abstraction of the spirit away from the body. The sacred bodies are literally empty in many cases. The image of St Augustine and St Anthony are either solid only where their garments are or are merely outlines. Christ in his swaddling is also only ever an outline. The orb and mount Golgotha are self-consciously mimetic. The *trompe l'oeil* effect is obtrusive, and brings attention to the a priori impossibility of constructing three- or four-dimensional space on a flat canvas.

Enrico Crispolti has argued that Fillia's religious paintings are fundamentally lay in character, and that this was part of the Church's motives for rejecting his futurist art.[103] However, based on the nature of the Vatican's interdiction, and as Crispolti has also surmised, in the case of Fillia, it was also likely that the interdiction against his art was directly related to the way in which he portrayed religious figures. Fillia's paintings act to dematerialize religious bodies and to merge them with the atmosphere, thereby distancing them from their corporeality. This is a problematic act in a dogmatic system that is based on the incarnate existence of its Messiah and on the real physical existence and suffering of saints and martyrs. Moreover, associating God with the machine and with technology carries associations that evoke the man-made origins of the godhead and places human innovation on par with the divine.

Fillia's dematerialization of the human body, and disembodiment of Catholic holy figures (especially of Christ and the Virgin Mary), are, on one level, a symptom of the Modernist condition, of the emptying out of meaning or of aura. Their immateriality symbolically represents the emptiness of their meaning. Marinetti, himself, declared "Si è svuotato il divino."[104] God (and indeed the whole conception of god), as Epstein says, has been de-reified—in other words, the concept of god has been shorn of its concreteness and has reverted to an abstraction. Once de-reified, god is replaced within a mere mechanism (contrived system) of

[103] Crispolti, *Il Secondo Futurismo, Torino 1923-1938.*
[104] TIF 131.

worship. In futurism the mechanism is both literal and metaphoric. Their metaphorical mechanism is *macchinolatria*, worship of a secular mechanized "god," and their concrete mechanism in this period is the airplane. The implicit inadequacy or lack of divinity detectable in the figure of the machine made god, whose objectness, laity and emblematic status as the pinnacle of human achievement is inherent in this secular divinity's very existence, accounts for the feeling of emptiness or melancholy that has been observed in these paintings. This feeling clearly contrasts greatly with the machinist euphoria of early futurism, especially Marinetti's, and even with the wartime divinization of speed. Fillia's religious paintings reveal further traces of the repressed religious unconscious in their interpretation of the futurist "machine divinity." But, they resist it as well. A man made, mechanical idol, with its implicit lack of omnipotence and omnipresence that is also physically disembodied reinforces the continuing irrelevance of Catholicism to Fillia.

The primal urges and the atavism of ancient cultures, which in Fillia's world-building metamorphosed into the *uomo senza sesso* (visually portrayed in a number of paintings from circa 1925) with his preternatural spiritual balance, has morphed into an almost "postmodern spiritually alienated angelesque form"[105] in the astral figures of Fillia's later paintings. Fillia's pseudo-angelic figures demonstrate an unconscious backlash against the "soulless civilization" of the modern age, and against Nietzsche's dead god, but also Fillia's own state of alienation.[106] Further augmenting the heterodoxy of these images, is the fact that Fillia's paintings and writings place no hierarchical order or qualitative difference in truth-value between his mechanical idols and the Christian God. In the late futurist hierarchy of meaning, God and the machine are given

[105] Epstein and Barabtarlo, *Russian Spirituality and the Secularization of Culture*; Göran Therborn, "After Dialectics," *New Left Review*, no. 43, II (February 2007): 63–114.
[106] Epstein and Barabtarlo, *Russian Spirituality and the Secularization of Culture*. I am again paralleling Mikhail Epstein's arguments on apophatic theology, in this case, on angelism as a postmodern religion.

equal power to order and reveal. The auratic and cultic aspects of the technological are reclaimed for the realm of art, in Fillia's refutation of the aesthetic state. From the beginning, futurist thought granted literature and art, because it communed with Modernity and the technological, the power to channel something beyond itself, something of the Modernist condition. Fillia's sacred art embodies the influence of the religious unconscious on the unconcealment of the spiritual within the technological. It betrays the subconscious need to deify, and the need to reify concepts that provide spiritual surety.

6. Conclusions

In an era when international tensions were again building, Fillia's paintings are characterized by desire (for a utopic planar existence) and defense (of his vision), the two Modernist articulations of fantasy.[107] Though he failed to integrate futurism and Gramscian communism, Fillia, like some postmodern philosophers, still looked at Christianity from a safe distance, even if this safe distance was only his own personal separation from it. Fillia's Christian allegories are a frame of representation, used to convey his dismay and to do so in a way that subtly exploited the regime's own political agenda. Enrico Crispolti has viewed Fillia's religious paintings as lacking an essential spirituality or religiousness that comes from Fillia's utter laicism; however, this "emptiness" is instead a manifestation of Fillia's post-Marxist experience and ultimately, of his despair. The far distant "real" cities in his paintings indicate ideological and psychological distancing by Fillia from the realpolitik of interwar Europe.

Both of the motifs that I have discussed in Fillia's painting—the research into the human form and the re-appropriation of the divine—hark back to the aesthetics and ideology of his earliest written works. While it is tempting to associate the aesthetics of his theater only to his

[107] Fer, *On Abstract Art*. 19.

earlier, geometric paintings, it is instead the case that these later nudes and religious paintings bring Fillia's aesthetic and ideological vision into their full realization. The increasing androgyny of the nudes carries Fillia's theories of costuming, elaborated in *Sensualità—Teatro d'eccezione* and *Il sesso di metallo*, beyond the realm of the garment and imposes his theories onto the human body itself. Fillia no longer requires clothing to equalize the male and female, he operates directly on the body. As the body is attenuated and disaggregated, it also loses its distinction. It metaphorically implies that the foundational, spiritual side of human nature is identical in the male and female, and that it is the physical body that deceives. The paintings of saints and gods are even more dramatic. They rely on no clear markers of gender, at all, and instead on the established codes of body language and relative position to mark the figures' identities. And then they dissolve the body entirely, privileging the mind and spirit, just as Fillia did in his attempts to separate the intellectual and emotional centers from the influence of physiological needs, especially sexual needs. Fillia's paintings are works of extreme indifference to the human form, in contrast, for example, to what Kenneth Clark called the "triumph of hate" for the human body in Picasso's *Les demoiselles d'Avignon*.[108] This indifference resonates both with his gender theories and with Fillia's implied retreat from society.

Like the more obvious richness of allegorical and cultural associations embedded in religious imagery, the naked human body is also rich in associations. The question of the nature of mankind's physical existence is a shared preoccupation in both kinds of images—on the one hand it is the question of the nature of human form and of the mind-body complex, and on the other hand it is the questions of the divine made human. Fillia has moved both the human and the divine into a universe of otherworldly abstraction, but he has anchored the slippage into the non-figurative by the use of schematized forms representing real objects.

[108] Clark, *The Nude*. 7.

The often-commented upon tension between weightiness and dematerialization is the visual manifestation of Fillia's complex vision of human nature. The separation between the drives of the body and the degendered, asexual functioning of the human mind are metaphorically present in the nude pairs whose bodies are nearly identical, and have begun to merge back into one. The rejection of the physical body, of rigidly gendered difference, and of aestheticized mass rituals are also implicitly a discursive rejection of the cult of the Duce and of the fascist state; they reject the cultification of the leader's body and of the body politic. If the recognition of power is rhetorically and symbolically tied to visibility, to ritual and to the symbols of the state,[109] Fillia's works implicitly reject the cult of fascist Italy and of Mussolini as leader by sacred right. As the regime increasingly firmed its rituals and imagery into a pseudo-religion, taking on symbols, rituals and imagery from both Ancient Rome and the Catholic Church, Fillia used the same symbols to reject the fascist state.

The divine is radically separate from the human, distant, and beyond human reach. The cities of man, enclosed within their far distant tower walls, can no longer access the futurist spiritual realm, and the technological gods that should have substituted both the Christian divine and the religion of the fascist state. Fillia, as Panofsky says, aggressively brings religious symbolism into the realm of the real, closing off the realm of the magical and opening the realm of the psychological. What Fillia has done in these religious images is use the realm of the magical—the heavenly sphere—to elaborate a metaphor for the political realities that he faced. Fillia's unstable bodies in cosmic, aeropictorial space evaporate the materiality of the body into a seen manifestation only, and they do so with purpose. Developments in aerial perspective finally allowed Fillia to open his visual art to the realm of the psychological, where the spiritual resided.

[109] Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle*.

The distance from the miraculous, from the ideal, haunts these paintings, imbuing them with the weight of doubt and disappointment in the divine right to progress that was slipping away.

In Fillia's paintings, the distance and dematerialization of "the divine" and of the body in his nudes partake in the artist's so particular vision of ideal human form, betraying his increasing frustration at the impossibility of seeing his early vision for the future realized, as fascism increasingly exploited many of the same psychosocial and cultural structures that Fillia and his brand of futurism did, but to drive Italy further down the road toward the totalitarian state, and eventually, as Fillia would not live to see, into the Second World War. Fillia's paintings continued to elaborate the palingenetic tendencies of his literary works, but adapted them in the face of fascism. They are a weary response to the palingenetic ultranationalism of the aesthetic state.[110] Hiding in plain sight under the umbrella of fascism's palingenetic myth, Fillia's paintings subtly subvert it to reflect on the loss of his vision for the future.

[110] Griffin. "The Nature of Fascism Staging The Nation's Rebirth." In Berghaus, *Fascism and Theatre*. 13.

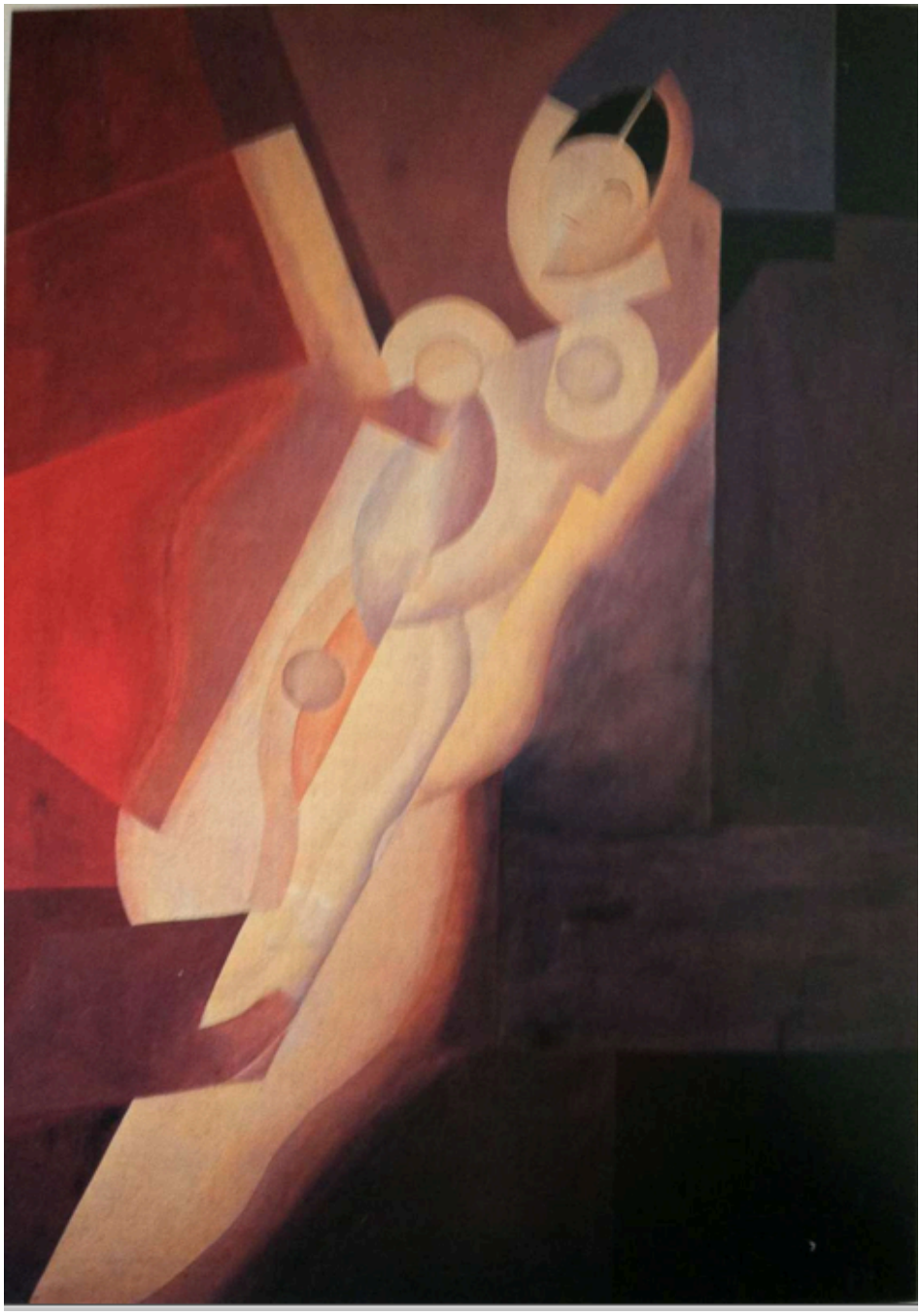

Figure 13: *Femminilità*, 1928

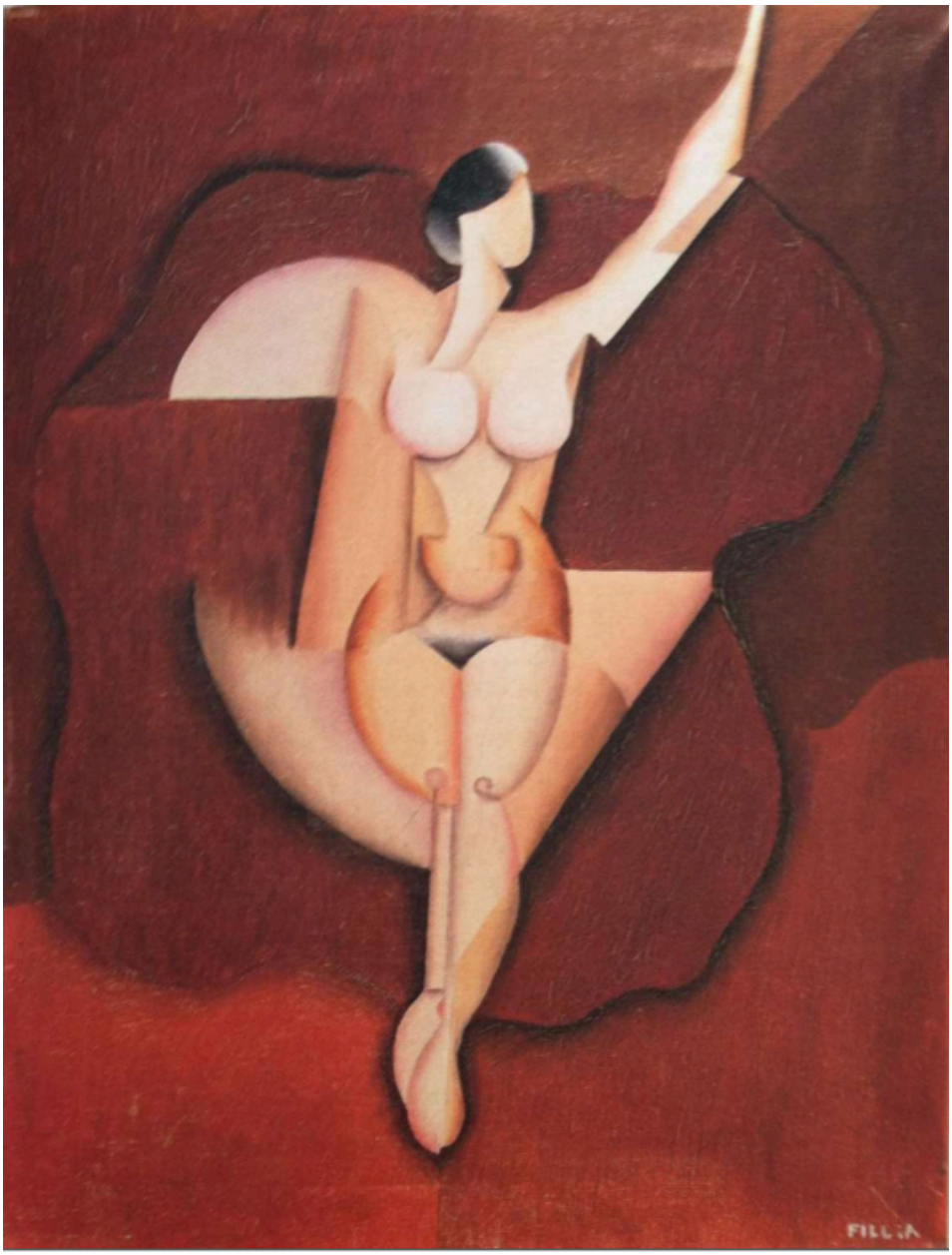

Figure 14: *Valori Plastici di un nudo*, 1928

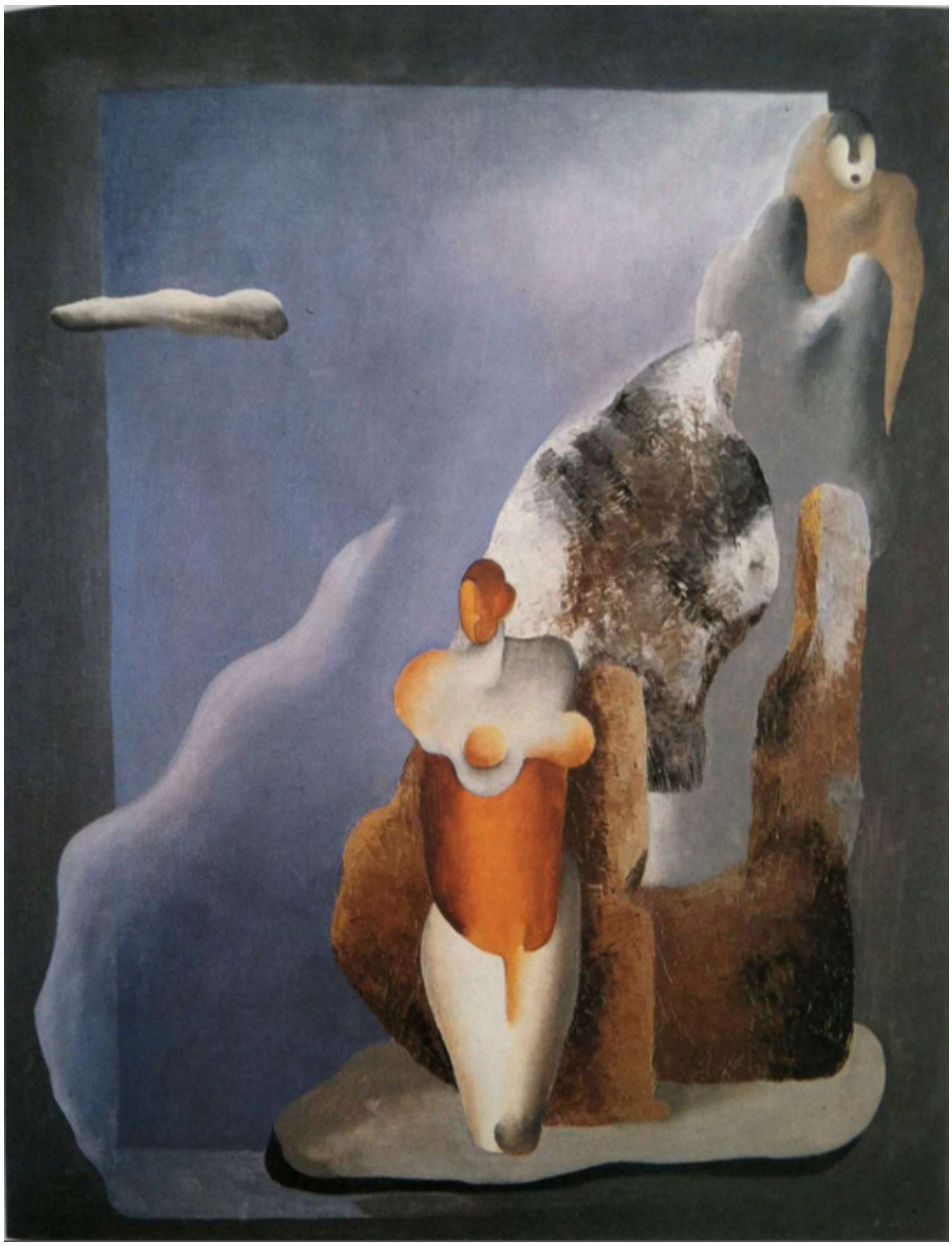

Figure 15: *Figure nello spazio (Senza titolo)*, 1930

Figure 16: *Riposo*, 1930

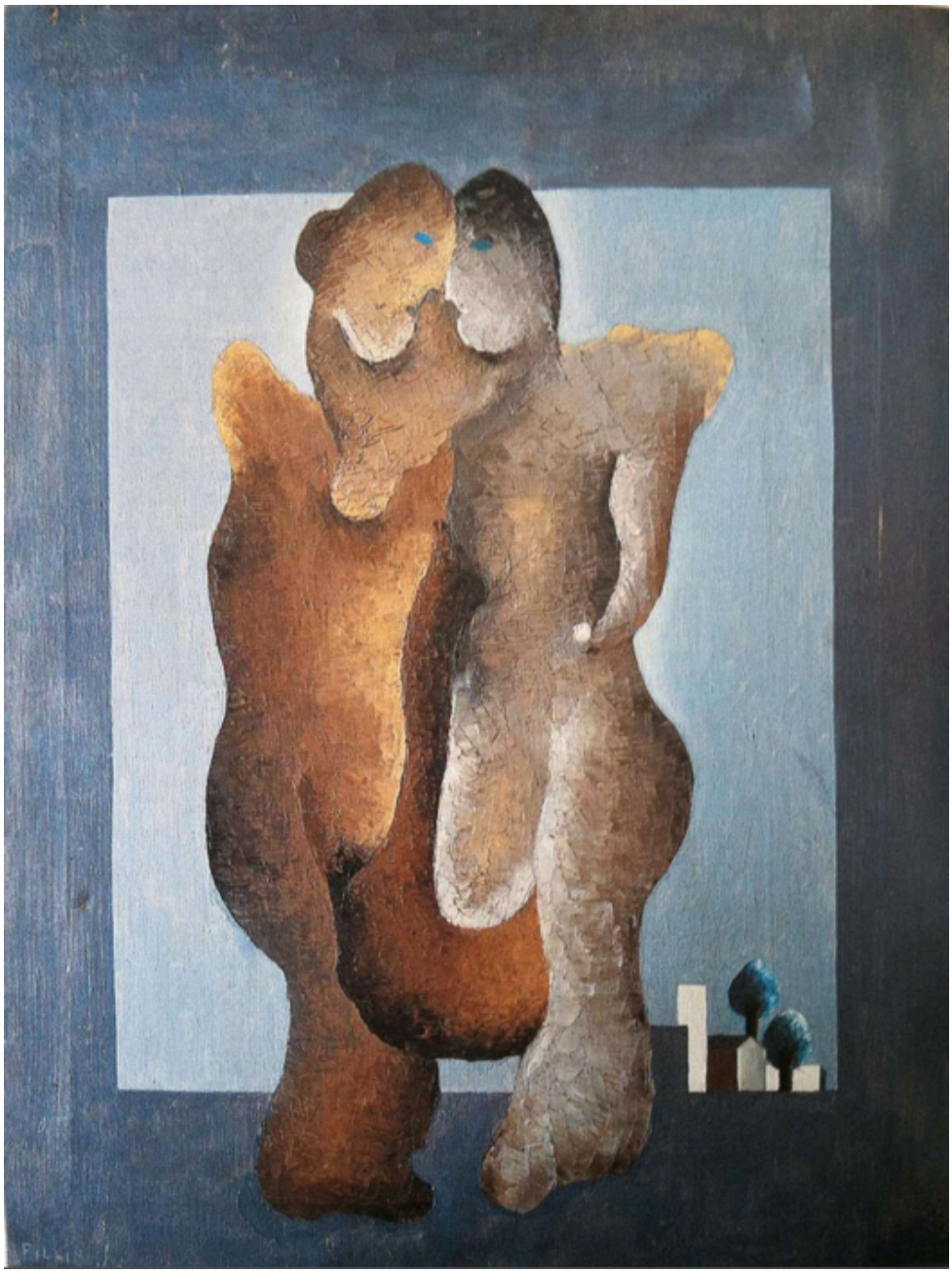

Figure 17: *Gli innamorati*, 1930

Figure 18: *Misteri d'ambiente*, 1929

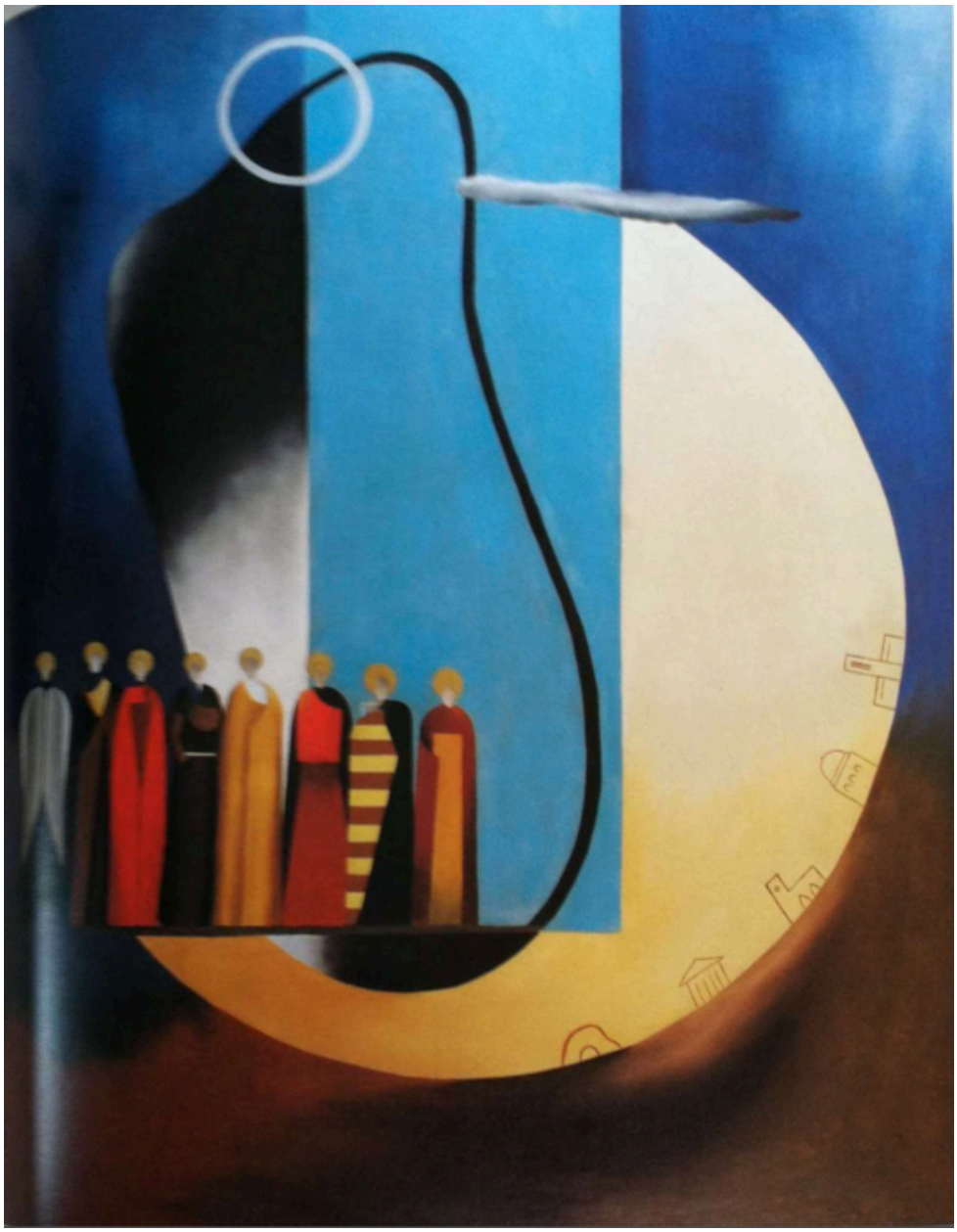

Figure 19: *L'Eternità*, 1934

Figure 20: *S. Antonio da Padova*, Probably 1931

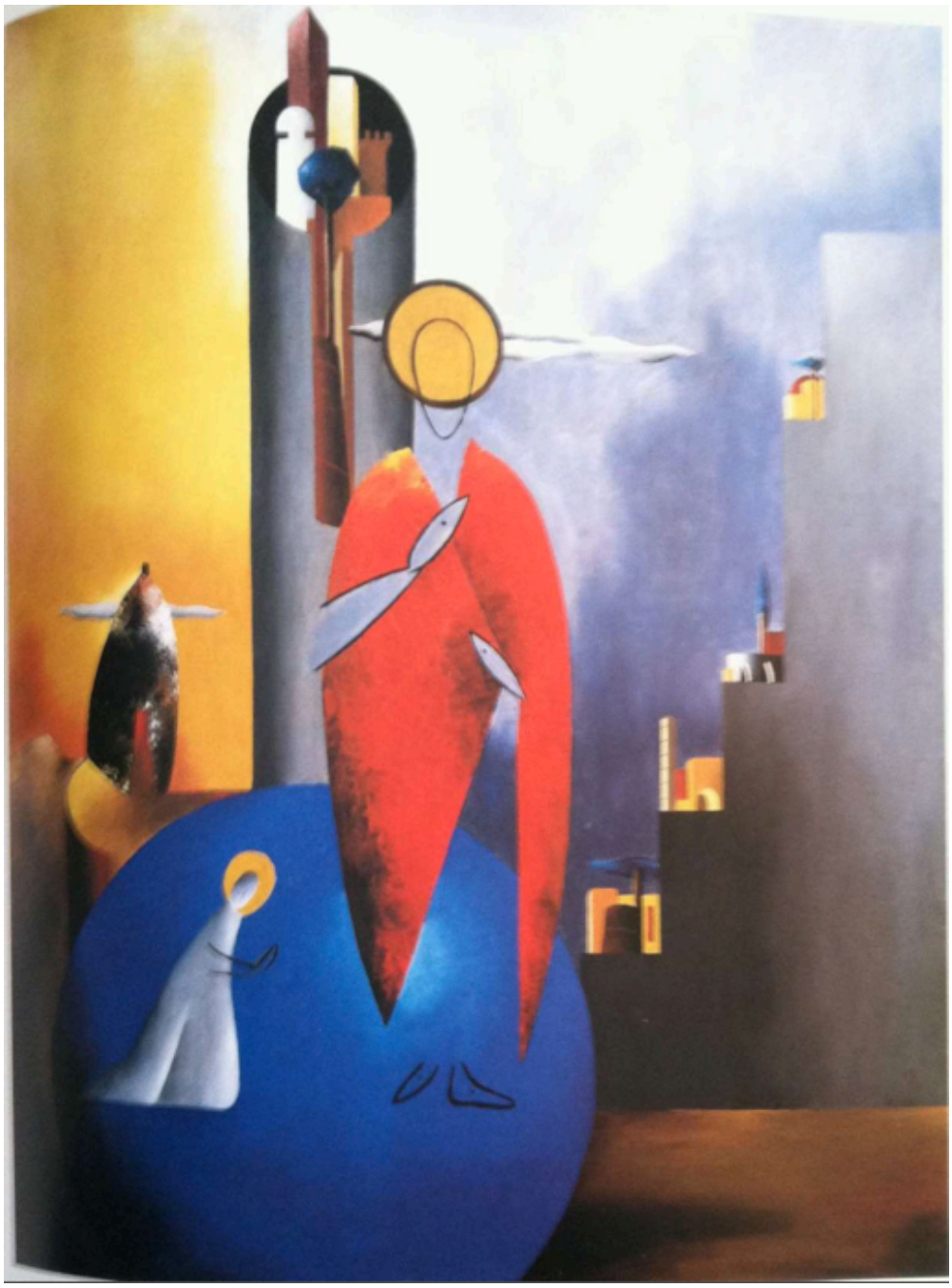

Figure 21: *La città di Dio*, 1931

Figure 22: *Divinità della vita aerea*, 1933-34

Figure 23: *L'Adorazione*, 1931

Figure 24: *Natività – Morte – Eternità*, 1931

Figure 25: *Aeropittura*, 1931

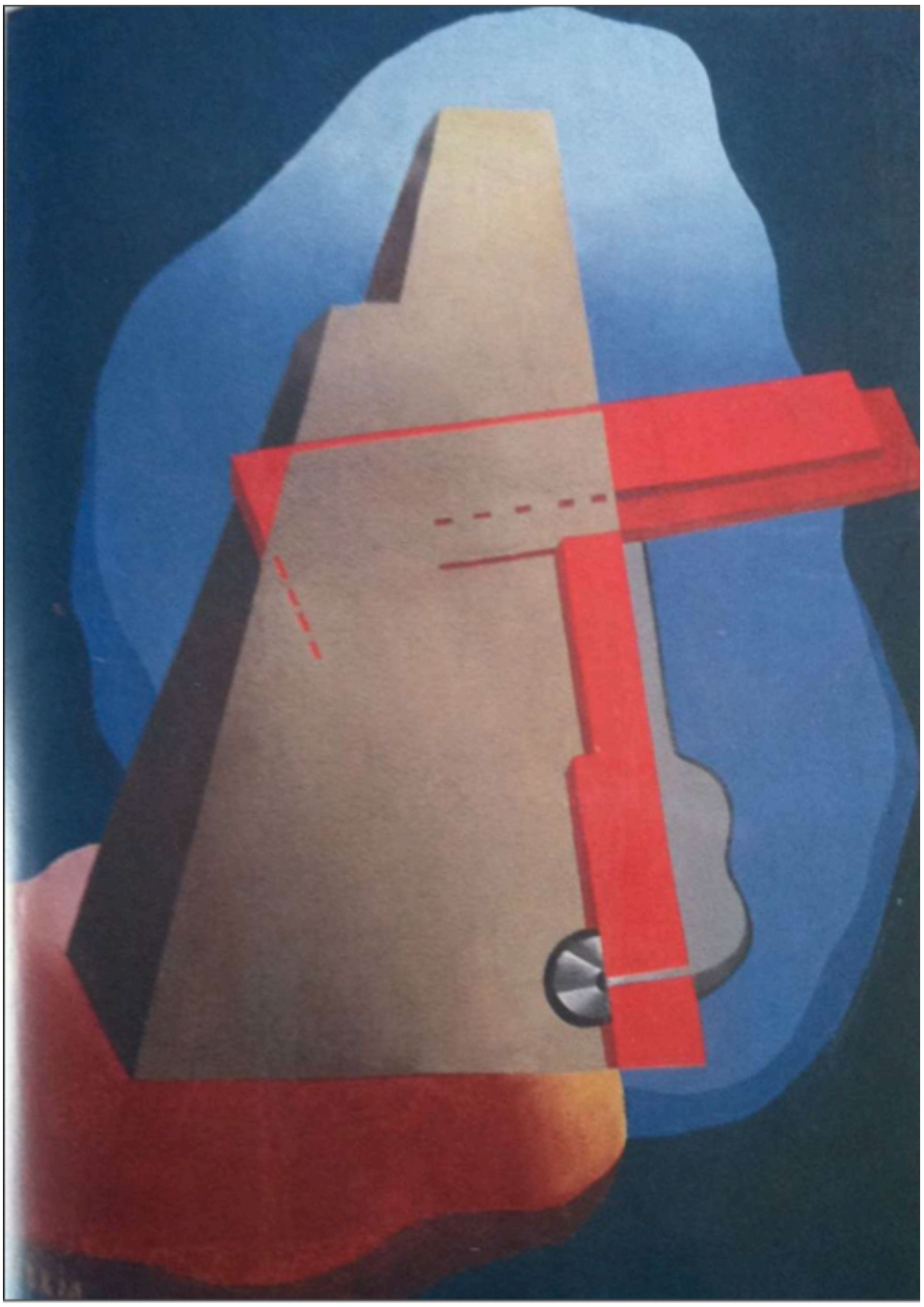

Figure 26: *Paesaggio (Senza titolo)*, 1931

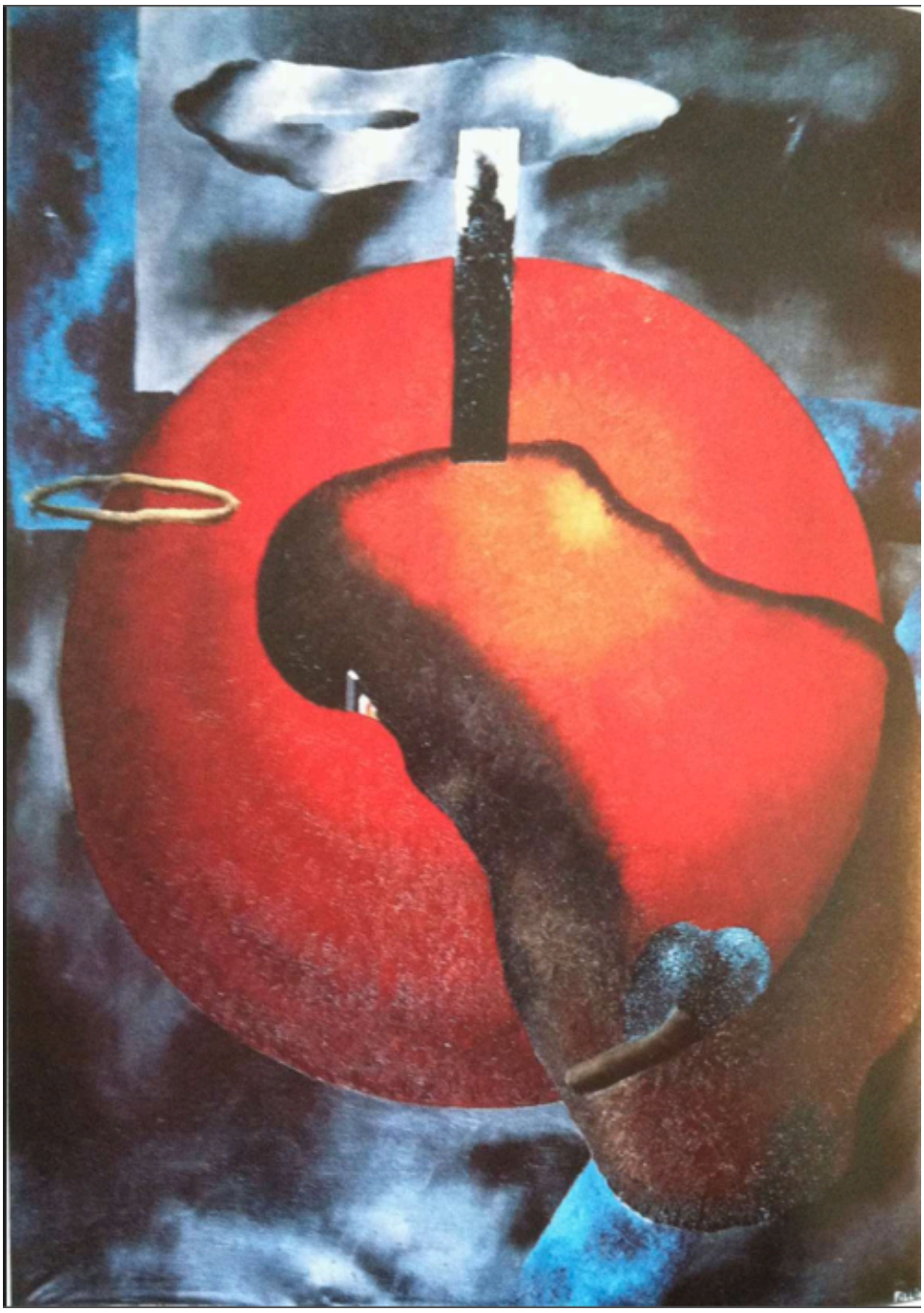

Figure 27: *Superamento terrestre*, 1931

Conclusion

That Fillia's health had been fragile his whole life was well known and frequently commented on by Fillia himself and by his peers. The frenetic activities of 1928-1934—months in Germany and France, near constant travel around Italy, his drive surpassed only by Marinetti's own frenetic nature and incessant travel—took their toll, and his health rapidly declined. By late 1935 Fillia's health had become so poor that he was confined to his bed, and only allowed an hour or so of activity a day. Fillia died at a clinic in Rovereto in February 1936, following a lengthy battle with tuberculosis.

If there is one single word that may be used to summarize Fillia's oeuvre, it is negotiation. From his earliest activities the author and artist worked to negotiate fundamentally oppositional ideologies, styles, and forms and then to bring them into harmony. The pillars of his ideology were futurism and communism, despite the two ideologies' discord. His fundamental dedication to social and technological progress sprang from the values of these parallel ideologies. His early politics, and his dedication to erasing class and gender divides were deeply idealistic and idiosyncratic. Throughout Fillia's works, beginning with the strident politics of his earliest works, to the quietly subversive nature of his paintings, his ideals shaped his works and expressed themselves in a multiplicity of ways, many of them surprising.

From the poems in *1+1+1=1 – Dinamite – Poesie Proletarie – Rosso + Nero* to his attempts at commercial success with his novels and on to his religious paintings, Fillia tried to negotiate accords between oppositional belief systems and oppositional aesthetic positions. As the political climate changed, so did Fillia's methods and priorities. His first efforts to harmonize futurism and communism bled into the expression of his progressive gender politics, and even

into his attempts to reconcile his theories on the spiritual and universal with a belief system that was rooted in the atheistic worship of man-made technology and human achievement.

What little remains of Fillia's personal communications evidences only his complete absorption in the futurist movement. Nevertheless, Fillia's works demonstrate some capitulation to fascism, though whether that indicates a pragmatic choice made for the sake of survival, or whether it indicates shifting political beliefs remains to be proved. Over the course of the mid to late 1920s, his idealistic hope faded and was replaced by despair and mourning, as he watched the development of Mussolini's government. As the regime's totalitarianism increased, Fillia's involvement in politics decreased proportionally, as he immersed himself more fully in the development of his aesthetics.

The degree to which Fillia ever threw his lot in with the fascist regime remains still obscure. Based on the work I have done and which for now finishes in 1932, I conclude that until at least the early 1930s Fillia's involvement with the politics of the regime are more accurately understood under the rubric of what Günter Berghaus has termed "passive resistance." Fillia's works demonstrate his quiet non-compliance with the regime's policies in a way that avoided drawing attention to his political stance, while allowing him to stay quietly true to his beliefs. Though it is true that Fillia received a small government stipend in 1932, this was likely an economic hardship subsidy, as Fillia was rarely successful at profiting from his works.[1] Though he published in and served as editor-in-chief for several newspapers and journals with fascist ties, his own articles remained apolitical, centering on art, architecture, and aesthetics. He also continued to write reviews, and to document the work of his fellow futurists. Fillia's

[1] Pierpaolo Bindolo and Anna Campanella, *Fillia Artista Revellese: Il Figlio Di Atahuallpa* (Revello: Editrice Nuova Stampa, 2003). 98.

commitment to the shrewd use of publicity went a long way toward keeping futurism in the public consciousness. [2]

While it remains true that many futurists were committed fascists, and that it is stretching credibility to say any futurist who was not a dedicated fascist was therefore an underground communist or dedicated leftist is not possible, the evidence does, thus far, point to this being true in the case of Fillia. Fillia's works, even after he outwardly abandons his early radicalism, continue to deny the pull of fascist ideology, or subvert fascist culture to serve Fillia's own purposes. As Enrico Crispolti has argued, 'the thematics and iconographies of the fascist regime never touched Fillia's imagination.'[3] While I do not agree with this in its literal reading—I have, after all argued something very different—I agree with the spirit of this statement. What Crispolti has read as a sort of innocence or purity of intent in Fillia's works, I have read as a deliberate act of subversion, and as a deliberate expression of very different ideals, disguised as conformity. I believe that the evidence will continue to show that Fillia's position was one of silent protest underneath superficial conformity until his death.

Looking forward, there remains much work to be done on both Fillia and on futurism in the 1920s and 1930s. Where Fillia is concerned, and where I will take this project in its next phase, this will mean a great deal of further research into his activities as journalist and editor, especially where it concerns architecture and the decorative arts. These activities, along with *La cucina futurista* and his other numerous forays into experimental cuisine, dominated Fillia's last years, reaching far beyond Italy's borders, as much of Italian modernism from the period did not. Moreover, Fillia's interests crossed into each other so frequently, it is impossible to offer a

[2] Fillia also published a short history of the movement titled *Futurismo* in 1932, and in my future research for the book version of this dissertation that may give useful indications on the direction in which Fillia's politics were evolving. This will provide a guide for reading Fillia's final works on architecture and his intent to revolutionize the lived environment, and to complete the process Marinetti began in 1909.

[3] Crispolti, *Il Secondo Futurismo, Torino 1923-1938*.59.

complete picture of his activities, ideology and contributions to both futurism and modernism without further archival work to locate a number of texts, personal correspondences and the print runs of Fillia's newspapers and magazines.

Fillia's energy, advocacy, organizational skills and official role as vice-secretary of the movement made him a highly effective and influential figure. His dedication to the *Movimento futurista* was total, and is the defining characteristic of his life's work. As I hope to have now shown, Fillia's dedication, and his authorial and artistic accomplishments were more integral to the survival of the movement than was previously apparent in the scholarship, and far more complex and original.

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