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Benedetta's Futurist Novels

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
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by

Jan DeLozier

2020

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Benedetta's Futurist Novels

by

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Master of Arts in Italian

University of California, Los Angeles, 2020

Professor Lucia Re, Chair

Benedetta Cappa Marinetti does not simply write novels, she constructs them. In her first novel, *Le forze umane* (1926), Benedetta parallels handwritten words to hand-drawn images, or what she terms as “graphic syntheses.” From this autobiographical beginning, Benedetta immerses her audience into the timeline of her own life events. Surpassing a simple documentary or chronological account, Benedetta embeds her own states of mind. In her next novel, *Viaggio di Gararà* (1931), Benedetta continues to incorporate visuals into her narrative, however, not to convey states of mind, but to immerse the reader into another realm: the theater. *Viaggio di Gararà* is a “cosmic novel for the theater,” allowing the work to be flexibly read as both a script and a novel. Her final novel, *Astra e il sottomarino* (1936) evokes an epistolary model. This form exchanges dialogue for letters, continuing her interest in the participatory elements of script and narrative. Benedetta's much overlooked literary career reconstructs the narrative relationship to time, context and participation. Benedetta's narratives reveal a new branch of knowledge, one that interrogates not only the structure, but the behavior of narrative. Each of Benedetta's novels “uncover” narrative from the its bound-state, testing the applications of her thoughtful curiosity of the world and how it behaves.

The thesis of Jan DeLozier is approved.

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2020

Benedetta Cappa Marinetti does not simply write novels, she constructs them. Over the span of ten years, Benedetta pairs narrative first with images, then with performative elements, and lastly, letters. The Futurist applies her abstract and conceptual style to observable and palpable works. In her first novel, *Le forze umane* (1926), Benedetta parallels handwritten words to hand-drawn images, or what she terms as “graphic syntheses.” From this autobiographical beginning, Benedetta immerses her audience into the timeline of her own life events. Surpassing a simple documentary or chronological account, Benedetta embeds her own states of mind, a practice also explored by Futurist Giuseppe Steiner. In her next novel, *Viaggio di Gararà* (1931), Benedetta continues to incorporate visuals into her narrative, however, not to convey states of mind, but to immerse the reader into another realm: the theater. *Viaggio di Gararà* is a “cosmic novel for the theater,” allowing the work to be flexibly read as both a script and a novel. Her final novel, *Astra e il sottomarino* (1936) evokes an epistolary model. This form exchanges dialogue for letters, continuing her interest in the participatory elements of script and narrative. Benedetta’s much overlooked literary career reconstructs the narrative relationship to time, context and participation. These three specific elements include a female narrative missing from many of her fellow Futurist’s novels. Benedetta interconnects narrative with visual images, theatrical settings, and modes of contact itself. Conveying how narrative can both precede and exceed material script, Benedetta’s works surpass the boundaries of a novel. Benedetta composes three “studies” of how narrative can express the natural world, without subscribing to scientific terminology. Benedetta’s narratives reveal a new branch of knowledge, one that interrogates not only the structure, but the behavior of narrative. Each of Benedetta’s novels “uncover” narrative from the bound-state, testing the applications of her thoughtful curiosity of the world and how it behaves.

Narrative Images: *Le forze umane con sintesi grafiche*

Benedetta is not alone in her desire to liberate an aesthetic experience from traditional contexts and forms. Instead, her inquiry reflects the previous achievements of the Futurist movement. Texts such as Marinetti's "Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista" (1912) and "Lo splendore geometrico e meccanico e la sensibilità numerica" (1914) predate and inform Benedetta's novels, particularly in her use of non-verbal images or graphic syntheses. Futurist Umberto Boccioni's triptych of *Stati d'animo* paintings (1911) also influence her use of graphic syntheses. Boccioni's later publication *Pittura scultura futuriste* devotes an entire chapter towards the study of "Transcendentalismo fisico e stati d'animo plastiche."¹ For Boccioni, the "stato d'animo" allows a Futurist to "osservare un oggetto anche nello specchio del ricordo interno e dipingerlo."² This two-part process is both the observation of a "stato," mood or memory, and the creative manifestation of that state: "inscopriolo non vuole ancora dire creazione."³ The interior retrieval of the sentiment is not enough, exterior visibility must also ensue. Just as Boccioni's paintings are "l'interno e l'esterno appaiono in simultanea compenetrazione," his depiction of a 'stato d'animo' brings objects from the past and the present together.⁴

¹ Within his glossary of terms, John White argues Boccioni's *Pittura scultura futuriste* follows his triptych *Stati d'animo: Gli addi, Quelli che vanno, and Quelli che restano* not only in the date of publication, but also in theory. White claims the theorization of *stato d'animo* is a "retrospective account of [Boccioni's] earlier practice, not part of some manifesto program (it only becomes this for the Futurist poets who followed in his wake)." (White, "Stato d'animo," 365).

² Boccioni, *Pittura scultura futuriste*, 1914.

³ Ibid.

⁴ White, "Stato d'animo," 365.

From this foundation, various artists create works of their own ‘stato d’animo’ that span different media and genres. Giacomo Balla configures his state of mind through semi-abstract painting and manifesto-like synthetic works, such as at his famous 1914 *Sintesi futurista della guerra*. Benedetta’s *Le forze umane* resists the bombastic tendencies of Balla’s wartime futurism in both word and image. Benedetta’s intimate autobiography is of the same topic— her experience of World War I and its aftermath—however, it is not nearly as terse as Balla’s typographic work. Benedetta’s graphic syntheses of her ‘stato d’animo’ as also different from those of Futurist Giuseppe Steiner, who published a manifesto with graphic syntheses entitled *Stati d’animo disegnati* in 1921. Unlike Benedetta, Steiner does not offer narrative with his graphic syntheses. Instead, he only offers titles, which act as one-word analogies. Instead of narrative, his graphic syntheses are informed by his manifesto-system of methods, offering no clues of context nor revealing much about the author himself. Benedetta adapts this practice of capturing her ‘stato d’anima’ to her autobiography, interweaving her own narrative within *Le forze umane*. The differences in these literary genres—Balla’s *parole in libertà*, Steiner’s manifesto, and Benedetta’s autobiography— are many, yet each contributes to form a Futurist aesthetic known as ‘sintesi grafica,’ or ‘graphic synthesis’

Futurists are not alone in the interest for the immediate expression of mental states and perceptions. Translator Guy Bennett suggests Surrealism’s “automatic writing” relate to the production of graphic syntheses. Bennett correlates the year of Andre Breton and Philippe Soupault’s publication of *Les Champs magnétiques* to Giuseppe Steiner’s *Stati d’animo disegnati*, suggesting a dialogue between Futurist and Surrealist experimental literature. Though further work is necessary to understand Bennett’s connections, scholar Lucia Re establishes

intertextual associations between Benedetta's abstraction and graphic syntheses with the work of Piet Mondrian.⁵ Following Re's initial research, scholar Janaya Lasker-Ferretti suggests that Benedetta appropriates Mondrian's writings on neoplasticism both thematically and structurally.⁶ Other scholars, such as Franca Zoccoli and Eva di Stefano, consider the theosophical influences within Benedetta's novels.⁷ Such studies demonstrate how self-expression is not dependent on words alone. Instead, new methods of multimedia legibility, such as Benedetta's pairing of narrative and graphic syntheses, collaborate to connote an artist's states of mind. This experimental presentation of an artist's state of mind is not only a Futurist act, but should be understood as part of a larger project involving methods of artistic representation.

Benedetta's first novel intertwines these efforts with the title itself: *Le forze umane, Romanzo astratto con sintesi grafiche*. As both a "romanzo" and a visual form, "sintesi grafiche," Benedetta's title establishes her relationship between visual syntheses and written narrative. Relying on graphic images to help capture, not only verbalize, her point of view, *Le forze umane* fluidly shortens the distance between narrative and image. Benedetta abridges written and visual forms to surpass the limits of a realist novel; for her, an autobiography is a work of all creative arts rather than a recording or rewriting of her life. Benedetta recognizes the artificiality of constructing her own autobiography, even renaming her (own) protagonist "Luciana."

⁵ Re, Lucia. "Impure Abstraction: Benedetta as Visual Artist and Novelist," 31-34.

⁶ Lasker-Ferretti, "Appropriating the Abstract: Benedetta's 'Le Forze Umane' and Neoplasticism," 2009.

⁷ Zoccoli, *Benedetta Cappa Marinetti: L'incantesimo Della Luce*, 2001. For further criticism of Benedetta, see Panzera, Lisa. *Benedetta Cappa Marinetti: Donna Generatrice*. Diss. CUNY, 2003. Ann Arbor: UMI, 2003.

Benedetta's preference for the novel is in her "apposizione con attributo ("parolibera futurista") aggiunta al nome."⁸ Benedetta herself did not endorse Marinetti's practice of parole in libertà.⁹ She is not alone in her contestation as Giuseppe Steiner, too claims his disinterest in parole in libertà in his 1921 manifesto *Stati d'animo disegnati*. As both Steiner and Benedetta create graphic syntheses, the artists indicate an internal insistence of originality and identity within the Futurist movement. In the same letter that Benedetta opposes the title "parolibera," Benedetta emphasizes her independence from any categorical identification, "Sono troppo libera e ribelle—non voglio freni. Voglio essere io solamente."¹⁰ Just as she retains the importance of being "only her," Benedetta believes her distinctiveness is not communicable within the terse limits of parole in libertà. Instead, Benedetta's graphic syntheses intersect her creative originality as both a visual artist and novelist. She later develops topics of her graphic syntheses into multicolored paintings, such as *Ironia* (1930) and *Totale Raggiunto* (1930). Her later return to the topics of her graphic syntheses stress the profundity of her original autobiographical syntheses. As *Le forze umane* is first published in 1924, Benedetta's graphic syntheses begin her path of further abstracting Futurist art and vernacular.

Benedetta's initial inclusion of syntheses in her novel suggests that her hand-drawn, spontaneous images "posit a new relationship between word and image that makes the word as important as the image."¹¹ Janaya Lasker-Ferretti argues this relationship of handwriting

⁸ Baldissone, "Autobiografia di una futurista: il filo dei nomi nei romanzi di Benedetta," 198.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Lasker-Ferretti, "Between Word and Image: Women Futurists and *Parole in Libertà* 1914- 1924," 88.

connects Benedetta's "human psychology and the body."¹² As author and artist, her hand-drawn images allow Benedetta to "reinsert a tie to the literary 'I' that Marinetti bans from futurist literature."¹³ Benedetta's handmade drawings insert her own female corporeality into the narrative of *Le Forze Umane*. Benedetta allows her gender to both intrude and abstract her narrative, demonstrating her creation of her "own terms" within Futurism, disregarding of the movement's "glorification of war and disapproval of love and family."¹⁴ Despite her deviation from the "rules" of Futurist self-expression, Benedetta's autobiographic work advanced not only to publication, but also to presentation, such as at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1924.

Benedetta's *Le forze umane* is a signal of her authorial power within the Futurist movement, deriving her own story as content. Finding inspiration from other than Marinetti himself, Benedetta's juxtaposition of storytelling and concrete visuals, signals her allegiance to nonconventional forms of personal expression that are "unica e completa" to herself.¹⁵ Despite her enactment of Steiner's opening remarks: "per trasmettere ad altri dobbiamo innanzi tutto essere onesti e rendere tale e quale noi l'abbiamo veramente e sinceramente provata," Benedetta's contemporary critical response to *Le forze umane* reveals the gendered hierarchy and misinterpretations of women's involvement in Futurism.¹⁶ Critics questioned her work, even debasing the inclusion of it in the Futurist movement:

¹² Benedetta herself studied psychology (Ibid., 87).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Steiner, *Stati d'animo disegnati*, 8.

¹⁶ Steiner, *Stati d'animo disegnati*, 8.

Romanzo futurista? Non direi. Troppo vasto e profondo palpito d'umanità è nelle parole della donna, troppa tenerezza trema nel suo cuore forte, e di troppa pena e di troppa gioia sono tormentati i suoi sogni.¹⁷

The reviewer's insistence of effeminacy, emotion and tenderness demonstrates the sexism towards female authors at the time. In comparison, Giuseppe Steiner creates graphic syntheses under the guide of his (senti)mental experience and his contributions receive glorious praise. As Benedetta also replicates her own sensations in her narrative and graphic syntheses, her work is understood as a diversion and outside of the oeuvre of Futurist literature.

Benedetta's emotive incorporation of both image and text open the boundaries of relying on a singular medium for representation. She allows words and visuals to flow from one to the other through the conduit of her hand.¹⁸ This self-reflexivity ties her autobiographical narrative to her graphic syntheses and the titles she gives them. In other words, Benedetta's narrative precedes her image. The narrative, then, informs the "content" of the syntheses as well as the titling of the syntheses, usually found below. The materials of ink and paper unite Benedetta's graphic syntheses to both her titles and her narrative. The graphic syntheses are linear representations, but are abstract in both form and title, such as the intersecting spiral and star entitled "contatto di due nuclei potenti (femminile e maschile)." Benedetta scales her syntheses by the confines of her own writing rather than aggrandizing them to her later work on canvas or

¹⁷ Cited from Lasker-Ferretti, 89. Quote originates from Benedetta's *libroni*, scrapbooks in which she conserves articles about herself and her work, located at the Getty Research Library, Los Angeles. Full citation: "Librone di Benedetta." Papers of F. T. Marinetti and Benedetta Cappa Marinetti 1902-1965 (920092). Series Vili Libroni, Box 27. The Getty Research Library, Los Angeles.

¹⁸ Re, "Impure Abstraction: Benedetta as Visual Artist and Novelist." 43.

mural. Just as the length of paragraphs and stanzas fluctuate, the size of her syntheses varies in *Le forze umane*. The syntheses either fill an entire page on their own or are about the size of a paragraph. This correlating scale allows her graphic syntheses to be summaries and/or substitutes of a full page of narrative or a paragraph of writing. Without hierarchy of word or image, Benedetta creates a spectrum of writing and visuals that is fluid and interchangeable. The graphic syntheses do not interrupt the narrative, but rather, display a parallel between word and image.

Benedetta oscillates between her narrative storytelling and graphic syntheses within *Le forze umane*, opening her novel with text and closing with a graphic image. In her first synthesis, *Sforzo differenziatore*, the image covers an entire page. Her final graphic synthesis, entitled *Armonia*, crosses the binding of the novel itself, filling not one, but two pages. This representation overtly plays with the structure of the novel as bound pages, a continuous experiment for the artist and author. Benedetta's concluding *Armonia* graphic synthesis breaks both the binding and the boundaries of *Le forze umane* as a novel, suggesting a "harmony" itself between written narrative and graphic visuals.

Scale is also of interest in Benedetta's use of an index in her novel. As a guide of the chapter titles and graphic syntheses, the index communicates a discernible separation between Benedetta's writing and her syntheses, despite their relative content. The index separates her written narrative into three chapters entitled "Caos Tragico Umano," "Armonie Potenziali" and "Armonia." Her designation of "parts" of narrative is of interest as "Armonia" contains no written narrative, but rather, is solely a graphic synthesis. Benedetta's parceling of her autobiography gives the impression of a timeline or chronology, separating the stages of her

experiences into parts of a whole. The arrangement of her narrative chapters are sequential and analogous to her own passage of time.

The index, as a directive skeleton, separates the graphic syntheses from the chapters in which they are found. Benedetta lists the graphic syntheses below her narrative components. This layout recognizes the graphic syntheses as “whole” works of narrative their own rather than “parts” of a narrative chapter. The presentation of the index exposes how Benedetta’s narrative and visuals are simulacra: the titles of her narrative chapters often correspond to the titles of her graphic syntheses. As both are necessary constituents of the novel, the index “outlines” and directs readership, as if an order of operations. Benedetta’s index further suggests a similarity between reading narrative and reading graphic visuals. A reference tool, the index cleverly demonstrates the flexibility of the novel to be read, reread and referred to rather than an undeviated reading. The index suggests the act of reading is not only visualizing words, but also observing images.

Le forze umane, as a novel, links Benedetta’s interests as both an author and artist. Scholar Simona Cigliana refers to the nineteen graphic syntheses as “il corrispettivo grafico “oggettivo” degli stati psichici.”¹⁹ Cigliana’s commentary considers Benedetta’s narrative and graphic syntheses as oscillations between subjectivity and objectivity. This understanding would explain why Benedetta separates her graphic syntheses from narrative in the index, however, the syntheses themselves are not the product of an “objective” machine, but remind the viewer of the subjectivity of Benedetta’s hand. Ironically, the typed print of Benedetta’s novel evokes a greater

¹⁹ Cigliana, “Note ai testi,” 228.

objectivity through the standardized font. Nonetheless, both typing and drawing rely on Benedetta's hand and rely on reading the narrative to understand Benedetta's imaginative voice. The use of an index offers a brief moment to reference to the visual symbolism that words and graphic syntheses share. The synchronous pages found in Benedetta's index reveal the intertwining nature of her images and text. Benedetta allows her titles to be simultaneous, rather than unique, readdressing the singularity often associated with titling itself.

As directed in the index, Benedetta begins with the narrative chapter entitled *Sforzo differenziatore*—the simultaneous title of her first graphic synthesis, found a few pages later. In her writing, Benedetta locates Luciana, her own protagonist-persona, in her youth. The chapter presents the moment in which Luciana is alone after laying in the lap of her mother. On her own, Luciana begins to recognize the differences “nella densità uguale del buio” where “le cose note si differenziano.”²⁰ The narrative is an interrogation of communicating density and is further investigated in the visual representation of *Sforzo differenziatore*. Beyond the referential title, the content of the graphic synthesis reveals an intense black cavity spilling from the upper right curved corner as if an artful translation of Benedetta's narrative “avendo le tenebre inghiottito lo spazio.”²¹ The vast use of blackness is particular to the opening synthesis and is not found in later graphic syntheses. Luciana's unmediated experience of black visibly differentiates "forze statiche, spezzate, rudi, intrecciate, dinamiche, lontane-indecise. Rimangono staccate nella notte,

²⁰ I quote from the version included in the volume of Benedetta's novels edited by Simona Cigliana, *Le forze umane. Viaggio di Gararà. Astra e il sottomarino. By Benedetta Cappa Marinetti*. Roma: Dell'Altana, 1998 (Benedetta, *Le forze umane*, 47).

²¹ Benedetta, *Le forze umane*, 47.

separate l'una dall'altra da infiniti,” as if replacing the scientific variables to calculate density.²² Benedetta's linear brushstrokes work to divide the mass and the volume of the room. The pairing of her narrative with her visual exposes how the density of darkness is also an auditory experience: “crea i rumori isolati e li scolpisce.”²³ To visualize these forces and noises, Benedetta employs cross-hatching and diagonals, both techniques of discordant direction. Benedetta merges her text with her synthesis to find shades, shapes, and forms within the blackness, as if to grant the color black “just as much reality for our consciousness as white.”²⁴ This duplication of forms as sounds reflects Benedetta's activity with Theosophy. As Theosophy was apart of the World War I Roman scene, Benedetta attempts to create visual equivalents of her mental processes similar to the practices of Annie Besant's *Thought-Forms*.²⁵ Benedetta, raised by a mother who practiced numerology, does not shy from including the influence of Theosophical mysticism in both her narrative and graphic syntheses. Further work is necessary to uncover the depths of Benedetta's encounters with Theosophy.

Following the graphic synthesis *Sforzo differenziatore*, a work which Giuseppina Baldissone describes as one that “riassume l'atteggiamento di Luciana,” the next chapter begins.²⁶ Luciana continues to maintain an “evanescente ondeggiare dell'essere fra il sonno e la

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, 54.

25 The Italian Theosophical Society has published several magazines such as *Ultra* (1907-1934) in Rome. For more on Theosophical ideology, see Besant, *Thought-Forms*.

26 Baldissone, “Autobiografia di una futurista il filo dei nomi nei romanzi di Benedetta,” 200.

veglia.”²⁷ Luciana’s, or Benedetta’s, experience of being awake and asleep—conscious or unconscious—will be of later interest to Benedetta and discussed in regards to her final work *Astra e il sottomarino*. Within the context of *Le forze umane*, Luciana’s many states parallel Benedetta’s own oscillation between words and images. The emotive ranges of Luciana also echo the many sensitivities that develop when forming self-identity. Furthermore, as noted by Simona Cigliana, “Benedetta sembra invece poco incline alla pedissequa aderenza alle regole del formalismo di stampo marinettiano.”²⁸ Giuseppe Baldissone echoes this interpretation, signifying that “*Le forze umane* è una lezione di futurismo al maestro del futurismo.”²⁹ Going against the Futurist forms of *parole in libertà* and the abolition of the “I,” Benedetta’s *Le forze umane* brings a new dimension to Futurist aesthetics by oscillating between narrative and visual syntheses.

Benedetta’s syntheses, entwined with her narrative autobiography, bridge the gap between events she depicts. Benedetta seeks to capture the invisible forces that animate the universe, as well as her mind, through drawing and writing. Benedetta describes her own syntheses as “l’espressione diretta delle forze dell’universo senza nessuna preoccupazione plastica.”³⁰ Her work, in other words, is not in accordance to a specific aesthetic project of her own, or the will to create an original form, but rather, aims instead to render visible what is ordinarily hiding from sight and hence inaccessible to more traditional means of representation

²⁷ Benedetta, *Le forze umane*, 47.

²⁸ Cigliana, “Il seme e la rosa,” 17.

²⁹ Baldissone, “Autobiografia di una futurista il filo dei nomi nei romanzi di Benedetta,” 199.

³⁰ Benedetta, *Le forze umane*, 118.

or narration. As Benedetta threads both written and visual renderings of her experience, she creates a fiction of her own history and regulates her story to a specific series of events.

Benedetta's narrative empowers her own vision to take form, looking to her own subjectivity as it evolves over time and space. Her complex oscillation between narrative and image reveals a powerful strategy in self-representation. Recent institutional efforts, such as the curated presentation of Futurist papers and books by the Biblioteca Arcari di Tirano, affirm Benedetta's impact on not only *il romanzo*, but also her reconsideration of what is meant as "graphic."³¹ As both graphic syntheses and text rely on visibility and sight, Benedetta conveys her own fluid understanding of herself, different than her Futurist predecessors and collaborators. Her narrative is an emphasis of memory and place, all of which accumulate and correspond to her individual 'state d'animo.' Benedetta's correspondence of narrative-to-image reveals her state of mind is not a fixed, synthesized entity, but rather, a constant state of becoming.

Narrative Bodies: *Viaggio di Gararà, romanzo cosmico per teatro*

Benedetta continues to bridge the gaps between artistic genres in her 1931 three part—or rather, three act—"romanzo cosmico per teatro." As her second novel, Benedetta constructs *Viaggio di Gararà* for both publication and performance.³² Benedetta's work reinvents the epic journey as her protagonist, Gararà, travels across three imaginary realms. Gararà seeks to transform each "regno" through the principles of logic and reason—her guiding belief systems.

³¹ Sacchini, Paolo. *Segno + Ritmo + Scrittura: da Marinetti a Boccioni + da Palazzeschi a Depero*, 5 maggio- 24 giugno 2012. Biblioteca Arcari di Tirano, Tirano.

³² As previously mentioned, I quote from the version included in the volume of Benedetta's novels edited by Simona Cigliana, *Le forze umane. Viaggio di Gararà. Astra e il sottomarino. By Benedetta Cappa Marinetti*. Roma: Dell'Altana, 1998.

Benedetta applies the methods from her first novel, where she entrusts abstract visuals to communicate her own ‘stato d’animo,’ her second novel. Instead of exploring her own process of becoming, Benedetta allows color, sound, and even graphic syntheses become characters and “bodies.” This is not new to Futurism, as previously demonstrated in Marinetti’s “i cartacei” characters in his novel *Gli indomabili* (1922). Other Futurist works also explore an abstraction of characters such as Achilles Ricciardi *Teatro del colore* (1919), Fortunato Depero’s *Balli Plastici* (1917), and Giacomo Balla’s *Feu d’Artifice* (1917). With awareness of these works, Benedetta situates both human and nonhuman characters in *Viaggio di Gararà*. The multimedia work investigates alternatives “bodies” of characters while also eliding the “bodies” that separate genres; Benedetta’s fictive narrative is not held within the singular form of the novel, but rather, multiplies into an iterative, simultaneous and circuitous work, flexible to theatrical performance. Benedetta’s novel demonstrates how narrative is a tool, pliable and applicable in venues beyond a singular, “bound” form.

Viaggio di Gararà: un romanzo cosmico per il teatro is Benedetta’s second attempt to remodel the genre of the novel into a new form entirely.³³ The work exceeds the limitations of Benedetta’s previous autobiographical work *Le forze umane* that solely reflects on her youth and family.³⁴ Instead of Benedetta’s alter-ego Luciana as the protagonist, who draws from her interiority to create and convey personal images of her life-experience, an aged, crippled dwarf

³³ Simona Cigliana describes this facet in regard to Benedetta’s first, autobiographic novel *Le forze umane* where Benedetta “Spinta dalle proprie esigenze espressive e dall’urgenza dei propri contenuti, avverte la necessità di rimodellare il genere romanzo in una nuova forma, di plasmare il periodo secondo i propri ritmi immaginativi e di piegare il lessico ad una personale semantica” (Cigliana, “Il seme e la rosa,” 17).

³⁴ “*Forze umane* poteva avere limiti autobiografici, nel riflettere il quadro della giovinezza propria e dei familiari, *Viaggio di Garara* li scavaica salendo, dice Marinetti, nelle atmosfere inebriate della poesia astratta” (Verdone, “La poliespressività di Benedetta,” 110).

named Gararà leads the reader on a journey through fantastical realms. In even greater contrast to Luciana, Gararà lives her life according to the rules of logic and reason. Despite these differences, scholar Lucia Re emphasizes how Benedetta continues to create female narratives unlike Futurist precedents such as F.T. Marinetti and Umberto Boccioni, who both focused their works on “the multiplied, all-powerful metallized male body.”³⁵ Also previously discussed by Lucia Re, Benedetta’s *Viaggio di Gararà* is in relationship to the previous Futurist novel *Gli indomabili* (1922). Authored by Benedetta’s husband, F.T. Marinetti, *Gli indomabili* was dedicated to Benedetta herself. Re finds Marinetti’s work a “model” for *Viaggio di Gararà*, citing Benedetta’s own review of the novel for *L’Impero* (13 May 1923), in which Benedetta judges the work “superior to [F.T. Marinetti’s] other novels.”³⁶ The two texts have “a similar use” of a “(grotesquely deformed) Dantesque allegorical journey structure.”³⁷ Benedetta’s novel, however, is “more concise and visual, partly because it was destined also to be performed on stage.”³⁸ Re highlights how *Viaggio di Gararà* is a cautionary stance against the logic and the “machine age,” similar to Marinetti’s *Gli indomabili*.³⁹ Just as Gararà’s calculated attempt to categorize and find logic within the three fantastical realms fails, Marinetti’s use of “capitalist industrial technology” in *Gli indomabili* do not offer solutions, but instead, create a kind of

³⁵ Re, “Impure Abstractions: Benedetta as Visual Artist and Novelist,” 32.

³⁶ Ibid., 35.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Re’s includes other concise and visual aspects outside of the novel, such as the “experimental hybrid of ballet and modernist opera, with music and futurist ‘noise’ effects,” that were also elements of Benedetta’s production (Re, “Impure Abstractions: Benedetta as Visual Artist and Novelist,” 35-36).

³⁹ *Gli indomabili* does not “blindly celebrate the machine age, as sometimes is assumed” (Re, “Impure Abstractions: Benedetta as Visual Artist and Novelist, 36).

“purgatory of suffering and pain.”⁴⁰ Re illuminates that both novels share an attempt to free human desires from the growing impulses of science and capitalism.⁴¹

Benedetta uses names and narrative, rather than numbers and data, to reveal the suffering that exists under capitalist, technocratic systems. Gararà’s name itself is illusive and suggestive of Benedetta’s anti-capitalist tactics. As a “gara” connotes a “contest” or “race,” Benedetta plays with the competitive motivation to “outcompete” previous uses of the epic narrative form, not only within Futurism, but also with historical characters such as Dante himself. The protagonist Gararà is also a participant in the “contest” of logic, reason and rationality to supersede all other forms of making sense of things, such as spiritual, mystical, aesthetic understandings. Gararà’s character demonstrates the hubris of asserting “logic” as a superior form to knowledge. Scholar Lucia Re discusses Gararà as the representation of the “frenzy to see, to lay bare and open, tearing and breaking, to measure and calculate everything.”⁴² This “frenzy” to complete her journey is not for religious salvation, but instead, under the “merciless logic of vivisection, ‘to palpate, analyze, dissect.’”⁴³ As the embodiment of a “gara” who is on a “viaggio,” or journey, Gararà herself represents how the ideals of competition, capitalism and logic can all intersect into one path.

Gararà’s embodiment is of further interest as her journey relies on her movement through three realms. As if a side effect of the ableism that logical thought can assert, Gararà’s body is

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Re, *A partire da un saggio di Mario Verdone: Benedetta, il viaggio, lo sconfinamento*, 18.

43 Ibid.

full of flaws and limitations. Gararà is a female dwarf: “Piccolissima, mezzo metro. Zoppica.”⁴⁴ However, her resilient belief and application of traditional scientific reason/rationality allows her to embrace technology. With the impression of prostheses to her limbs, two steel compasses hang beneath Gararà’s armpits and act as her “crutches.” These “grucce-compassi,” or “crutch-compasses,” allow for Gararà to mobilize herself through three fantastical realms.⁴⁵ The compasses are experienced in both age and prolonged use, reflecting Gararà’s own enfleshment.⁴⁶ Beyond increasing her mobility, these crutches are also important devices for Gararà to puncture and extract meaning from each abstract character she encounters, such as the forms of light she probes in the second scene or Regno delle Volontà-Tensioni. Gararà limps on these compasses, “her sole means of support both physically and philosophically,” to unbind the “binary limits” of Il Regno della Materia Dinamica, Il Regno delle Volontà-Tensioni and Il Regno Delle Libertà Creatrici. Though the compasses-crutches empower Gararà’s ability to attempt and complete her journey through these realms, her corporeal assumption of technology has impacts on her disposition. Gararà is self-assured, violent and aggressive—even destructive. Gararà’s wrinkled forehead exhibits “three deep horizontal lines” which is not only a sign of her age, but also underlines her sarcastic and angry temperament.⁴⁷

Disregarding these embodied affects, Gararà uses her instruments of reason, her crutches, to classify order as she travels. Her probing crutches are covered by rags, morphing and hiding

⁴⁴ Benedetta, *Viaggio di Gararà*, 129.

⁴⁵ “Si sostiene con le ascelle su due grucce-compassi di acciaio lucente” (Benedetta, *Viaggio di Gararà*, 129).

⁴⁶ “Scabrosità del suolo” (Benedetta, *Viaggio di Gararà*, 129).

⁴⁷ “Tre profonde rughe orrizzontali” (Benedetta, *Viaggio di Gararà*, 129).

her body as if it were nonexistent.⁴⁸ F.T. Marinetti's preface, an element of the novel that does not reproduce itself in the theater, reveals that Gararà's tattered idle rags are the remnants of wasted riches.⁴⁹ Interviewing and evaluating Benedetta's novels as early as 1969, critic Mario Verdone describes Gararà as the "heir of logical intelligence" whose tattered clothes are the remains of old-fashioned clothes, once magnificent, now "metaphorically fallen to shreds."⁵⁰

The material rags and technological crutches that extend Gararà's corporeal form demonstrate the fungible state of Gararà's embodiment. In an exchanged and extended form, Gararà's enfleshes technological reason.⁵¹ The completion of her form is *through* technology, not *with* technology, highlights her fungibility demonstrating how she is a representative product of the systematic embrace of logic. Gararà's use of logic and reason inform both her mental orientation, as well as her ability to mobilize through "grucce-compassi." Her crutches are no longer mere possessions or tools, but rather, stride over their object-status to unite her mind's perception and bodily movement. Gararà's mathematic prostheses demonstrate her transhumanist

⁴⁸ "Gli stracci che la coprono sembra allora smascherarsi l'inganno di un corpo inesistente" (Benedetta, *Viaggio di Gararà*, 129).

⁴⁹ "Vecchia deforme, vestita dei brandelli di una ricchezza sciupata, essa zoppica su gambe imprestate che sembrano stampelle e sono in realtà compassi misuratori" (Marinetti, *Viaggio di Gararà*, 124-125). Marinetti suggests that the rags seem to cover both Gararà's body and her crutches. On stage, Gararà's appearance would be overtly visible, but do not contain the explicit connotations that Marinetti's writes. Instead, the audience would have the chance to interpret for themselves what Gararà's aged appearance inferred, opening the possibilities of her representation beyond Marinetti's prescribed definition.

⁵⁰ "...protagonista astratta la vecchia nana Gararà - erede della intelligenza logica - coperta di stracci, che sono i resti di sontuosi vestiti di un tempo, vistosi e magnifici, e poi caduti metaforicamente a brandelli" (Verdone, "La poliespressività di Benedetta, 110).

⁵¹ My theoretical discussion of fungibility, embodiment, and enfleshment, even impotency and ineffectiveness of forms, derives from Hortense Spillers's groundbreaking essay *Black, white and in Color: Essays on American Culture and Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

identity as she evolves and conditions her physical, and mental, state with the aid of science and technology.

As the only “human” representative, Gararà’s body is a constant “other” and is in opposition with the characters of each realm. The “othering” of her form suggests that her representative body is both impotent and ineffective through each realm she travels. As “la vecchia sciancata,” each fantastic realm rejects her age, gender, and crippling weakness. Her corporeality has been suggested to indicate an “involution and degeneration of the human, an inversion of [the human] in the inhuman.”⁵² Gararà’s embodiment also indicates a merge between the human and the device. This integration aids her physical capacity to explore each realm, but fails to advance her comprehension of the mystical nuances each realm possesses. As the chief protagonist, with whom the audience is to sympathize and by whom we visualize the journey, Gararà’s incompetencies endure through each realm. Despite her failures, scholar Franca Zoccoli retains Gararà as a heroine, albeit “a negative heroine.”⁵³ Gararà’s failures are not her own, but rather, side effects of an erroneous desire to “catalogue” the universe through reason and logic. The compass on the cover of Benedetta’s *Viaggio di Gararà* functions as a “metaphor” for the impossibility of using meticulous methods of logic, geometry, and scientific inquiry to delineate reason within each realm.⁵⁴

Gararà’s old, dwarfish and crippled body is only one of Benedetta’s many variations of enfleshment. The characters Gararà encounters within each realm of *Viaggio di Gararà* also

⁵² Re, “A partire da un saggio di Mario Verdone: Benedetta, il viaggio, lo sconfinamento,” 18.

⁵³ “Una eroina negativa” (Zoccoli, *Benedetta Cappa Marinetti: L’incantesimo della luce*, 60).

⁵⁴ “E proprio un compasso campeggia in copertina, quale metafora di una misurazione meticolosa, maniacale, impossibile del cosmo” (Zoccoli, *Benedetta Cappa Marinetti: L’incantesimo della luce*, 61).

provide alternative simulations of embodiment. In the first realm, Il Regno della Materia Dinamica, or “the realm of dynamic material,” Gararà meets the dominating character named Mata, whose name cleverly demonstrates an embodiment of “Materia.” Mata consists of all definitions of “materia” such as “matter,” “material,” even “stuff.” These associations encumber Mata, affixing the character to the “materia” of earth itself: “rimane immobile con la sua asta sollevata”⁵⁵ Mata's inability to move is also due to his umbilical cord which vitally binds the earth-monster to the nearby Lake.⁵⁶ Mata’s posture is “accovacciata,” or squatting down, further lowering and uniting his form to the Earth-defined landscape.⁵⁷ The character’s stance suggests that Mata cannot stand up and, more crudely, that he is constantly “squatting” and defecating all he consumes. Benedetta further correlates his form to his actions as Mata’s body of “crude folds” and “sloping planes” establish the “fold of the buttocks” and his “vented (air-filled) belly.”⁵⁸ Benedetta’s angular description of Mata’s shape mimics the compasses that Gararà herself utilizes. Benedetta’s inclusion of right-angles and sloping planes as means to describe Mata’s form also add to the “science-fiction” quality that critic Mario Verdone finds in Benedetta’s work.⁵⁹

Mata’s stance contributes to his repetitive behaviors; first, Mata overindulges, next, Mata expels waste and gas. More simply, Mata is what he eats. Gararà hopes to liberate Mata from this

⁵⁵ Benedetta, *Viaggio di Gararà*, 135.

⁵⁶ “Col suo ombelico” (Benedetta, *Viaggio di Gararà*, 128).

⁵⁷ Benedetta, *Viaggio di Gararà*, 127.

⁵⁸ “Piani digradanti dei quali il primo corre sulla piega delle natiche e del ventre spiaccicato il secondo ondula sulle spalle montagnose la testa cubica ne costituisce il terzo gambe divaricate ad angolo retto come partorienti un pallone semigonfio” (Benedetta, *Viaggio di Gararà*, 127).

⁵⁹ Verdone, “La poliespressività di Benedetta,” 110.

thick conditions, however, she fails. She attempts to “change” and “improve” Mata’s materially-bound predicament by offering the powers of reason and logical thought. Gararà sees no logic behind Mata’s consumption and offers reason as an immaterial way to liberate Mata, and his obedient Dinici, from their mechanical, repetitive labors.⁶⁰ Mata and the Dinici continue their mechanized routines despite Gararà’s attempt to “liberate” their minds to the powers of thought before action. Gararà endorses logic as the freedom from mundane automaticity and obedient activity, hoping to empower Mata to control his appetites, as well as give confidence to the independence of the Dinici. One of the Dinici attempts Gararà’s advice, freeing himself from Mata’s control, but becomes fearful and provokes Mata’s rage. The opening realm concludes with both Gararà and Mata left unfulfilled. Mata’s final words reiterate his ignorance of logic and his the perpetual, unfulfillable condition within the realm, stating, “...di più di più,” or “...more, more.”⁶¹

Despite this failure, Gararà continues in her attempt to convince the second realm, also the second scene, of the superiority of reason and logical methods. She enters the Regno delle Volontà-tensioni, or “realm of desire-tensions,” to meet characters that further investigate the possibilities of form. The shapes and colors of the “Volontà-tensioni” correspond to their intention and function.⁶² These characters identify themselves through speech, vocalizing their ability to evade Time’s reign. Time, in this realm, is both a measurement and a character that

⁶⁰ The “Dinici” are an iteration of the word “dinamico” or “dynamic” and “energetic” and “cinici” or “cynics.” These characters, or phenomena, aid Mata in his massive consumption.

⁶¹ Benedetta, *Viaggio di Gararà*, 139.

⁶² “Le Volontà-tensioni hanno per forma e colore la materializzazione della loro ragione di vita” (Benedetta, *Viaggio di Gararà*, 140).

cannot be added to nor ignored; “Il Tempo” is unfalteringly present, even if only as a sound. The characters of this realm acknowledge that they are subjects of Time, instilling them with both torment and nostalgia.

The terrain of this realm is “ricco d’ogni possibilità, è la base di tutti le origini,” allowing a diversity in the shapes and forms of each Volontà-tensioni.⁶³ The Voluit appear first and are dark green, smooth, and compact. Three pyramidal shapes form and connect the Voluit to the ground, which is further described as architectural and solid. Following, the Saôa appear. They circulate within the grey atmosphere and are serene and happy. The Aciri are next, shaking and fleeing about. The Aciri are the color orange and are almost solar-like. Then, the Convol enter. Benedetta describes the Convol as “offerte,” or “offerings,” who are as endless and complex as if representations of a “convoluzione,” or “convolution,” from which their name derives.⁶⁴ The final Volontà-tensioni, the Illiri, represent and evoke nostalgia. The Illiri are “cheerful” characters who return attention to the past, a reminder of how Time reigns this realm.

Personifying each Volontà-tensioni, Benedetta further exhibits alternative modes of being and perceiving, beyond the calculable devices of reason. In order to translate these experimental characters—and their experimental realms—on the stage, Benedetta includes the gender she envisions for certain characters, such as a male actor to play the Voluit and a female actress to play the Saôa. Benedetta even specifies the tone of voice that she imagines for characters such as

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Convolutions can be represented by coils or twists. Beyond their visual representation, convolutions are always complex and difficult to follow things. In mathematics, a convolutional integral can be a function derived from two given functions by integration which expresses how the shape of one is modified by the other. For further, see definitions of “convolutions” in *New Oxford American Dictionary*.

the Acri, Illiri, and Previdenti. Benedetta further indicates methods of movement, writing the Previdenti are to move in a mechanic manner. The inclusion of these details— casting, vocal presentation, and gesture— give Benedetta the status of not only author of *Viaggio di Gararà*, but suggests her interest in direction as well.

Similar to her disapproval of the first realm, Gararà reproaches the inventive characters in the second realm. Gararà urges for the Volontà-tensioni to free themselves from their submission to Time. Gararà, still aggravated by her previous failure to convert Mata and the Dinici to logical thinking, encourages the Volontà-tensioni not only rebel against, but also, kill Time. Gararà even recommends the Volontà-tensioni run away with her, as if replacing the superiority and organization of Time with her own “superior” logic. Gararà’s aggressive demands assert her hubris. Knowing this, the Volontà-tensioni disregard Gararà’s advice and they each continue to exist amid Time’s rhythmic and abstract sound, which echoes “Trru.”⁶⁵ Again, Gararà must exit this realm as a failure. She cannot convince the mystical beings of the greatness of reason and logic.

Gararà continues into the third realm where embodiment and enfleshment are most abstract. Il Regno delle Libertà Creatrici, or the “realm of creative liberty,” is where individually colored Piccoli Allegri, or “little cheerfuls,” live. Appearing slender in form, each Allegro, or “cheerful,” has a spherical head that holds a patch, or spectrum, of color. The outer color of their sphere-shaped head corresponds to each Allegro’s name. The affective qualities of each Allegro

⁶⁵ Benedetta, *Viaggio di Gararà*, 150.

are also the effective qualities of their colorful names, such as “passionate red,” “tortured purple,” and “superficial green.”⁶⁶

Similar to Time’s “Truu” in the second realm, sound personifies the Allegri. The Allegri vocalize both coherent and incoherent noises, singing “Alla’ òh” or “ruà ruà” along with speaking in brief, prophetic phrases. Philosopher Francesco Orestano writes on Benedetta’s interchangeable use of sound and language which helps to solve

La crisi della parola umana: della parola detronizzata dalla scienza—divenuta tutta una matematica— dal suo millenario soglio teoretico, svuotata del contenuto degli ontologismi tradizionali— lessicografici, grammaticali, e sintattici.”⁶⁷

Benedetta’s literature actively constructs and deconstructs language, questioning any form of “logical” speech. Gararà articulates with “pious exactitude,” or “scientific syntax” which sounds “absurd in the mysterious irrational realms.”⁶⁸ Benedetta’s use of noise is apart of a greater project to develop and engage sensitivities beyond the visual. In the theater, the suggested tones of the Allegri could also be audibly differentiated by musical pitch or direction, helping define them further than relying on their differentiated visual colors.

The embodied relationship of color and sound within each Allegro is scalable and quantifiable. The “smallest” or “shortest” Allegro is green and they speak with in a “voce squillante.” In contrast, the purple Allegro articulates in a “voce di basso.” As ranges of both color and pitch, or light and sound, the Allegri represent “un tono,” “a tone,” which is not

⁶⁶ “Passioni rosse,” “tormenti viola,” and “superfici verdi” (Benedetta, *Viaggio di Gararà*, 158).

⁶⁷ Orestano, *Opera letteraria di Benedetta*, 16.

⁶⁸ Kelly, “The revolution in futuristic language— A study of Benedetta Cappa Marinetti's *Viaggio di Gararà*,” 72.

homogenous, but instead, heterogenous.⁶⁹ By placing the Allegri on a scale of color and sound, they mimic light and sound waves. For example, in sound waves, the shorter the wavelength, the higher the pitch, hence the green Allegro's short stature and squealing voice. The purple Allegro, with the lowest voice, would also correlate to a longer communicative wave. Benedetta artfully insinuates that the Allegri live in a realm of visible light, where white-light dominates rather than black-light. From her creative interpretation, Benedetta frees this realm from Earth-bound "laws," or scientific reason, that define the spectrum of visible light. Instead, the realm of white-light embraces all colors. Each Allegro's embodiment is a "creative liberty" informed by an alternative—perhaps more spiritual, mystical— understanding of light, color, sound and other energetic wavelengths.⁷⁰ This abstract use of light and sound could extend and apply to the theatrical production of *Viaggio di Gararà*, complementing previous Futurist theater such as Enrico Prampolini's 1925 *Teatro Magnetico* (*Magnetic Theatre*) and his 1927-1928 collaboration with Maria Ricotti *Teatro della Pantomima Futurista* (*Futurist Pantomime Theatre*). Prampolini's theatrical experiments involved lights, gases, puppetry, and pantomimes to generate alternative forms of embodied acting. Benedetta continues these efforts in her novel, even if they were never realized on stage.

Finding "failure" or incompleteness of Gararà's tactics of reason in each realm, Benedetta allows the novel for the theater to end with unfulfilled objectives. This failure suggests a purposelessness of trying to logically categorize immaterial concepts such as creative liberty. Her work also mocks any scientific "explanation" of the cosmic. This does not infer Benedetta is

⁶⁹ Benedetta, *Viaggio di Gararà*, 151.

completely weary of technology, however, as she employs elements of technology both fictionally and factually. In her fictive narrative, Gararà's compass-crutches move and calculate her every step, indicating the correlation between perception, embodiment and technology. Benedetta considers technological elements outside of her narrative as well, incorporating sounds and lighting to communicate her story. Mario Verdone understands Benedetta's novel-for-the-theater holding yet another technological potential: film. As a "proto-screenplay" Verdone finds *Viaggio di Gararà* representational of the multimedia and sequential action required by film.⁷¹ However, instructed as "un romanzo cosmico per il teatro" Benedetta's work exists within the greater Futurist project of abstracting theater.⁷² Though *Viaggio di Gararà* was never realized on stage, Benedetta's abstract and concrete forms of "technology" demonstrate how technology is a mere "tool" of representation rather than a stand-in for narrative. It is Benedetta's narrative that also aids in the interpretation of her graphic syntheses and directs and envisions the theatrical performance of *Viaggio di Gararà*, not the technology itself.

Scholar Piers Kelly uncovers Benedetta's skepticism of positivist science, which claims to explain "everything" through logical and mathematical proof.⁷³ He exemplifies such skepticism through Gararà's assertive and repetitive chant, found in each realm: "Ga-ra-rà/ Toc-che-rà/ Ga-ra-rà/ A-pri-rà/ Ga- ra- rà/ Sa-ne-rà" ("Ga-ra-rà/ She-will touch/ Ga-ra-rà/ She-will-open/ Ga-ra-rà/ She-will-heal").⁷⁴ Gararà's language appears as a mere mathematical equation, a list of steps

⁷¹ Verdone, "La poliespressività di Benedetta," 111.

⁷² Verdone illuminates practices of "teatro colorato" and "teatro luce" as cherished forms of Futurist "teatro poliespressivo" (Ibid.).

⁷³ Kelly, "The revolution in futuristic language— A study of Benedetta Cappa Marinetti's *Viaggio di Gararà*," 78.

⁷⁴ Benedetta, *Viaggio di Gararà* 145.

to complete her method. Her separated syllables add together, accumulating and corresponding with her rational desires. The chant takes place the future tense, locating her “gara,” “contest,” on a continuing quest or progressive track towards reason. Gararà’s deliberate chant communicates her process, evoking the steps of the scientific method.⁷⁵ As discussed by Piers Kelly, Gararà’s inability to complete her incantation through her journey parallels the “impossibility of a totalizing positivist discourse.”⁷⁶

As Kelly argues, Benedetta’s *Viaggio di Gararà* denies and defies coherent language throughout her narrative. Beyond dialogue, Benedetta also includes graphic syntheses to demonstrate movement and the breakdown of narrative.⁷⁷ Benedetta’s previous use of graphic syntheses in *Le forze umane* appear “quickly drawn” which suggested

the work of the hand and handwriting, and, therefore, allude implicitly not only to the body, but the natural continuity between the act of writing and the act of drawing, the word and the image, language, and vision.⁷⁸

Instead, Benedetta diverges from her first experimentation with graphic syntheses and allows the graphic syntheses in *Viaggio di Gararà* to appear less as a product of the hand and more as the result of a mechanical device, such as a stenograph or Gararà’s compass itself. As a

⁷⁵ Gararà’s chant is introduced twice in the novel as “una voce grave lent e ritmata” (Benedetta, *Viaggio di Gararà*, 127 and 129).

⁷⁶ Kelly, “The revolution in futuristic language— A study of Benedetta Cappa Marinetti’s *Viaggio di Gararà*,” 78.

⁷⁷ Benedetta’s use of graphic syntheses exist within a greater Futurist context, including artists such as Giuseppe Steiner (*Gli stati d’animo disegnati*), Pietro Illari (*Diagrammi di stati d’animo*), and Osvaldo Bot (*Autoritratto futurista*) as previously discussed here as well as in Simona Cigliana’s “Il seme e la rosa.”

⁷⁸ Re, “Impure Abstractions: Benedetta as Visual Artist and Novelist.,” 43.

stylization of her creativity, Simona Cigliana understands Benedetta's second use of syntheses as "il prodotto di una mente portata all'analisi filosofica, di una mano educata al disegno e alla resa spaziale delle forme e dei concetti."⁷⁹ The graphic syntheses in *Viaggio di Gararà* are not completely unlike her previous ones, however, as both demonstrate Benedetta's interest in the expressive power of images and create a relationship between narrative and image.

In Benedetta's personal syntheses from *Le forze umane*, abstract visuals embellish her personal narrative. Similarly, the graphic syntheses in *Viaggio di Gararà* dramatize the passages they precede and follow. In the third in final realm, the graphic syntheses follow the excitement of the Allegri for the passionate encounter between the characters of Fuoco, or "fire," and Luce, or "light." The synthesis entitled *La danza di Luce*, "the dance of light," depicts a curving spiral and follows with *La danza di fuoco*, "the dance of fire," graphically synthesized as an open-ended zig-zag. The spiraling visual of Benedetta's *Danza di luce* echoes the graphic synthesis *Contatto di due nuclei potenti (femminile e maschile)* from Benedetta's previous *Le forze umane*. Lucia Re understands Benedetta's sustained design as a kind of self-reflective "palimpsest"; Benedetta's intertextual writing presents traces of her painting and of other texts, to "link the word to the image and vice versa."⁸⁰ As a leitmotif, *Contatto di due nuclei potenti (femminile e maschile)* and the two *Danza* syntheses from *Viaggio di Gararà* depict male and female elements, discussed in detail by Franca Zoccoli.⁸¹ In the case of *Viaggio di Gararà* the "frenzied

⁷⁹ Not as "espressioni naïves" (Cigliana, "Il seme e la rosa," 27).

⁸⁰ Re, "A partire da un saggio di Mario Verdone: Benedetta, il viaggio, lo sconfinamento," 10.

⁸¹ "In *Viaggio di Gararà* l'avvenimento centrale è l'appassionato incontro di Fuoco e Luce, personaggi che rappresentano l'elemento maschile e l'elemento femminile: alla voluttà di struggere si contrappone la gita di purificare" (Zoccoli, *Benedetta Cappa Marinetti: L'incantesimo della luce*, 96).

dance” interweaves Fire’s masculine, brutal selfishness with Light’s feminine, spiritual ascension.⁸² *Viaggio di Gararà* innovates the form of the graphic synthesis to allow the two dances of Fire and Light go beyond their graphic state and venture into the choreographic. Each of the syntheses titles’ in *Viaggio di Gararà* suggest dances, including the *Danza dei piccoli allegri* not discussed in this assessment, but found in the second realm. These “dancing” graphic syntheses allow linear design to infiltrate into performative movement and dance, as if instructional. The visual syntheses work with Benedetta’s narrative to symbolically choreograph and describe dance and performance.

Lucia Re and Franca Zoccoli also trace Benedetta’s graphic syntheses of *La danza di fuoco* and *La Danza di luce* to a watercolor-collage *Fuoco-Luce* (1931).⁸³ The mixed-media sketch points to the multiple possibilities for staging the graphic syntheses in *Viaggio di Gararà*. Zoccoli interprets the graphic syntheses as directions. Not for choreography, Zoccoli read the syntheses as representations of the scenography itself. Zoccoli’s interpretation of the graphic syntheses further implicates Benedetta’s previous work in creating scenographic sets for many Futurist plays, such as Marinetti’s *L’oceano del cuore* (1927).

Benedetta’s artistic experiences as writer, scenographer, and now, director, merge in her use of graphic syntheses. Beyond suggestions of movement and dance, I interpret *La Danza di fuoco* and *La Danza di luce* as representative characters themselves. Benedetta’s narrative prepares the reader or actor for a visual experience of Luce and Fuoco as they will meet in a

⁸² “Nella rovente danza frenetica che intrecciano, stanno per prevalere brutalità sensuale ed egoismo, di cui Fuoco è portatore (si ricordi *Spicologia di l’uomo*), ma alla fine trionfano spiritualità e ascesa: "luce s'innalza e svanisce" Fuoco cade a terra incenerito” (Ibid.).

⁸³ Re, “A partire da un saggio di Mario Verdone: Benedetta, il viaggio, lo sconfinamento,” 10.

dance. The singular and separate representation of the two graphic syntheses implies they are separate and specific characters, though they will eventually unite. As each synthesis inflects a new way of seeing the characters, the graphic images demand a reading that is simultaneous to the textual narrative. This reading also returns attention to the relevance of the supplementary bozzetto *Fuoco-Luce* from 1931. As I read Luce and Fuoco as singular characters, the bozzetto also infers they are costumed and embodied, situated for performance. The collage personifies the “dance” between Luce and Fuoco as both appear to rectilinearly stand “afoot” two “legs.” The bozzetto depicts Luce and Fuoco with verisimilar “feet” that also suggest they are in movement, with shadows of their dancing movement. From this reading of the bozzetto, the narrative, and the graphic syntheses I demonstrate the many tools Benedetta utilizes in creating and aiding her narrative, in this case, in representing the characters—and actors—Fuoco and Luce. Reading the graphic syntheses as characters, rather than choreographic movements or scenographic sets, complements the costuming visualized in the bozzetto *Fuoco-Luce*. As both *Fuoco-Luce* and *Viaggio di Gararà* date to the same year, 1931, the simultaneity of Benedetta’s media encourages the many arts are necessary to adapt a novel for the theater, especially a work that is designated as “cosmic.” Other artists also contributed to Benedetta’s novel, including Franco Casavola’s musical score and lighting effects. *Viaggio di Gararà* frees narrative from relying solely on visual text and images, transversing ontologies, in this case, into the sounds and immersive experience of the theater.

Benedetta begins to blur the boundaries of drawing and literature in *Le forze umane*. Her second novel is bound for the theater, yet it maintains a fluidity between the image, the narrative, the auditory, and the performance itself. Rather than an attempt to preserve and petrify narrative

within the genres they are delineated by, Benedetta's graphic syntheses transgress a singular interpretation as well as a singular form. In the theater, in a collage, or on the page of the novel, the graphic syntheses reveal Benedetta's "impulse toward abstraction...radical simplification of form, and attempt to evade the constraints of traditional mimesis, visuality, and perspective."⁸⁴ The graphic syntheses exist in between the materialism of their page drawn-construction and the immaterialism of their abstraction that provokes movement or embodiment. Benedetta multitudinous interest in how to "form and mobilize through the body" is inherent to *Viaggio di Gararà*.⁸⁵ The graphic syntheses *Danza di fuoco* and *Danza di luce* are remarkable in their countless potentials; from are subtitled collages, to visuals that correspond to narrative; from directions of "dance" to an abstract representation of embodiment; from set backgrounds to even direction of light or sound effects. The simultaneity and "polyexpressive" movement between media is what Lucia Re helps to understand and define as the "cosmic" element of *Viaggio di Gararà*. As the text hovers between the "novel" and the "theater," *Viaggio di Gararà* is flexible to

reading or rereading, wandering and rambling on the page or between the pages of the reader's gaze, free to come and go in the space of the text as it wants without constraints of any kind, to depict the sound and visual effects according to his imaginary perspectives and paths that can be zigzag, rectilinear or arabesque, forward or backward.⁸⁶

These elements create an atmosphere that correspond with the intense abstraction of

⁸⁴ Re, "Impure Abstractions: Benedetta as Visual Artist and Novelist.," 40.

⁸⁵ As discussed by both Lucia Re ("Impure Abstractions: Benedetta as Visual Artist and Novelist." 42) and Simona Cigliana ("Il seme e la rosa," 17).

⁸⁶ Re, "A partire da un saggio di Mario Verdone: Benedetta, il viaggio, lo sconfinamento," 14.

Benedetta's writing, what Zoccoli "l'atmosfera scenica futurista."⁸⁷ Benedetta's inclusion of drawing adds visual cues, just as her writing adds narrative content. Her provocative graphic syntheses calculate, fascinate, attempt to determine the essential nature of representing Fire and Light. Rather than keep these characters static in representation, she entitles them with movement or in a "dance." The titles below each synthesis name the visuals, but their abstraction mandates a continued reliance on Benedetta's authorial, and directorial, status to decide how to transcribe the syntheses two-dimensional state of the pen and paper into being or "dances." The graphic syntheses are not greater or lesser descriptors than her writing, but rather, combine many ways of representing form, a technique that echoes previous epic-journey novels such as Dante's "visibile parlare."⁸⁸ Whether presented as choreography, in fashioning of costume design, as backdrops and sets, or lighting direction, Benedetta's graphic syntheses demonstrate the visual capacities of narrative beyond a novelistic state.

Benedetta's *Viaggio di Gararà* renews and reforms artistic expression, refusing existing traditions of individual genres and allowing new forms and concepts to arise.⁸⁹ Her work forces the audience to more closely recognize and associate the experiences of reading and spectating. The recognition of textual, visual, and lingual consonance between Benedetta's work and

⁸⁷ Zoccoli adds to what she understands as the atmosphere stating, "Benedetta ha inoltre fornito indicazioni per al scenografi, tra l'altro con diagrammi per la parte coreografica, bozzetti per i costumi, che sottolineavano—come è stato osservato—il carattere anti-naturalistico dei personaggio, e con suggerimenti per le luci, importantissime dato il loro compito di suscitare" (Zoccoli, *Benedetta Cappa Marinetti: L'incantesimo della luce*, 62).

⁸⁸ Re finds Benedetta "reinventing" Dante's comedy through *Viaggio di Gararà* (Re, "A partire da un saggio di Mario Verdone: Benedetta, il viaggio, lo sconfinamento," 1). Benedetta's use of the epic structure of "the journey" unbinds her from both "autobiography and the mimetic fiction of Dante's Inferno" (Ibid., 16).

⁸⁹ "Le arti si potevano rinnovare, nel secolo che si era avviato a rinnegare tutto il passato, con nuove forme e concezioni" (Verdone, "La poliespressività di Benedetta," 111).

Futurist activity points to the coalescence Benedetta sought to achieve through her own, in this case theatrical, visual, and literary, productions.

Though Futurism admired the speed and mobility that Gararà exhibits, Benedetta challenges traditional methods of reason, demonstrating Futurists anti-Enlightenment stance. Re discusses how Gararà's drive to direct and rationalize "the will and desires of the inhabitants" of each realm is a symbolic of discriminatory acts to control and regulate. In each realm, Gararà is met with rage and repression for attempting to reorganize and streamline behavior. Re brilliantly uncovers Benedetta's critique of modernist hegemony as Gararà represents the links between Western rationality, exploration and the false logic used by power.⁹⁰ *Viaggio di Gararà* also iterates narrative into a new arena: the theater.⁹¹

Narrative Participation: *Astra e il sottomarino*

Benedetta configures her final novel *Astra e il sottomarino: Vita trasognata* as an exchange of letters and diary entries. The title introduces Astra, the protagonist, and substitutes her lover, Emilio, with "il sottomarino." This replacement positions Astra in a relationship with the militaristic marine vehicle Emilio inhabits rather than Emilio himself. The titular submarine is an introduction to Astra's deep dive below the surface of her reality; the metaphoric depth of her mind is verisimilitudinous to the brooding manner of the submarine. The second part of Benedetta's title further introduces this imaginative mood as the novel is "vita trasognata," a sustained place of inquiry following *Le forze umane*. Just as a submarine materializes in places

⁹⁰ Re, "A partire da un saggio di Mario Verdone: Benedetta, il viaggio, lo sconfinamento," 17.

⁹¹ Re, "Impure Abstractions: Benedetta as Visual Artist and Novelist.," 32.

previously intangible, Astra and Emilio's letters cross the threshold of literature and give structure to their subconscious thoughts.

Before the novel begins, Benedetta introduces her work. Dedicated to Marinetti, she communicates how "la trama" is "semplice eterna. L'Amore fra un uomo e una donna, ma ho cercato di dare il mistero del destino condizionato dalla Realtà e precisato e preveduto dal Sogno."⁹² Her introduction creates a relationship between reality and dreaming, both as visually "seen" and specific phenomena. Benedetta also bonds her personal reality to the novel, writing that the novel "è nata carica d'anima," just as the recent birth of her daughter, Luce. She claims the simultaneity of her life and artistry, as both author and mother, demonstrates how *Astra e il sottomarino* is truly an "opera futurista."⁹³ Benedetta includes Astra alongside her daughters Vittoria, Ala, and newborn Luce, each able to live as irradiations of poetry.⁹⁴ Each of their poetic names can be found amid the manifestos of Futurism, indicating Benedetta's intense cultivation and conviction of the movement. Her introduction publicly distinguishes her own beliefs and establishes new credos to Futurist poetry, even as they diverge from Marinetti's ideas. She states, "Poesia: tu non credi che in essa per illuminare il mondo, io credo che senza ansia spirituale e senza amore, pur se a volte e forse troppo spesso è dolore, il mondo si disgrega e si sparpaglia nel nulla."⁹⁵ Benedetta's inclusion of her own spiritual beliefs, even as they differ from

⁹² As previously mentioned, I quote from the version included in the volume of Benedetta's novels edited by Simona Cigliana, *Le forze umane. Viaggio di Gararà. Astra e il sottomarino. By Benedetta Cappa Marinetti*. Roma: Dell'Altana, 1998. (Benedetta, *Astra e il sottomarino*, 172).

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ "Luce oggi è vittoriosa nel sorriso blu, nei suoi canti, nei biondi giochi al sole con Vittoria ardente e Ala veloce ed oggi Astra può andare nella vita portandovi una irradiazione di poesia" (Ibid.).

⁹⁵ Benedetta, *Astra e il sottomarino*, 172.

Marinetti's, repeats her demonstration of her shifting within—or rather, an opening of—Futurism, as previously discussed. Her emphasis on poetic love also prepares the reader for the abstract lyricism found within *Astra e il sottomarino*.

Benedetta's introduction indicates not only the plot of her novel, but also her inclusive style of both poetry and prose. She begins *Astra e il sottomarino* on a "sera di novembre" within the "stazione di Milano"; the air is both urban and rural with "il profumo di erbe terra umida della notte autunale entra, si mescola sensualmente all'odore di carbone fumo velluto sigarette dello scompartimento."⁹⁶ The smell of mixed scents is Benedetta's subtle introduction to the residual effect of sensation; by way of the olfactory air and the setting, Benedetta demonstrates her interest in imparting an atmosphere full of lingering, beyond what is visible. She develops this interest in the unseen by including the darkness of the night within the train itself. Astra does not avoid or fear the darkness, but rather, takes a comfort in it and selects one of the train's unlit compartments for her journey. Astra reasons that the dark compartment will deter any other traveler from entering to join her. Not only does Astra's rationale point to her preference for solitude and self-interest, it also eliminates notions of female solitude as distressing. Astra's employment of "reason" or logic is her attempt to predict the behavior of the other train passengers and to retain her privacy and seclusion. Such rationale fails, however, as Emilio enters the compartment. This failure of logic is Benedetta's subtle demonstration of the Futurist abhorrence of reason, as mentioned in analysis of *Viaggio di Gararà*, and points to the Futurist preference for the irrational, the unexpected, and the convergence of the public. Benedetta inverts the trope of darkness as a place of fear and solitude to suggest that darkness is a

⁹⁶ Ibid., 173.

simultaneously shared space between Astra, Emilio and the train itself. Rather than a place of incognizance, darkness becomes a uniting place for both the human and the mechanic.

Emilio differentiates himself from the darkness with his polite request to share the space of the unlit compartment. Astra and Emilio's inclination for dark environments energizes and sparks their conversation. From their destinations (Emilio is heading to Florence, Astra to Rome), to their occupations (Emilio is leaving school for work on a submarine, Astra helps take care of children), to their shared interest in matters of the subconscious, it is as if the rush of the steam engine has entered their own compartment, fueling their dialogue. The time constraint of travel or Benedetta's clever inclusion of intuition could also be forces that compel Emilio and Astra to flow into conversation with one another. If not an exhibition of two strangers' instincts, their words menace the relationship between silence and darkness, mimicking the train's intrusion into the dark night.

The immediate space of the train is part and parcel of Emilio and Astra's intimate conversation, acting as an alternative reality for them to share and speak within. The compartments, too are both "buio" and reflective due to their windows. These simultaneities underline how Emilio and Astra meet in an "in-between" space; not yet working nor sleeping they are along their way to their own destinations. Emilio and Astra's converging journey demonstrates the essence of their conversation which points "al dualismo eterno dell'anima altalenata fra i confini sicuri della fede e i baratri della fatica umana."⁹⁷ Their enclosed compartment provides an opportunity for depth which is antagonistic to both the surface velocity of the train and passé manners of humility in the presence of strangers.

⁹⁷ Benedetta, *Astra e il sottomarino*, 174.

Astra demonstrates such “dualism” as she remains closed and guarded on matters of her identity and privacy. Though their conversation sources from her innermost beliefs, she does not forget that Emilio is a stranger and she refrains from sharing certain details. Astra is willing to reveal her most profound feelings and convictions, however, she keeps her full name private. Her concealment demonstrates the enigmatic barriers of sharing information: “Potrebbe nascondere il nome ma a che gioverebbe poiché le forze più intime si sono viste ritrovate e le anime tremano di precipitare nei limiti voluti dal realtà.”⁹⁸ Astra’s hesitancy calls the substance of an individual identity into question. She wishes to be recognized by the vivid transmission of her thoughts rather than defined by her given name. Astra’s guarded disposition—certainly influenced by her status as young woman traveling alone—is unlike Emilio’s, who divulges his name and place of work aboard a submarine. This should not be read, however, as Benedetta maintaining gendered stereotypes of men, as proud, and women, as timorous. Instead, Astra demonstrates how self-consciousness is not the same as being shy, but rather, is an intentional choice, a demonstration of self-recognition rather than relying on Emilio’s recognition. Her reluctance to share her name suggests an ambivalence towards any singular definition of herself. Astra, as a conscious being, is deliberate in her communication, demonstrating her occupation with her own interior space. Just as the vehicle she rides pierces into undefined space, she too seeks a relationship with the unknown places in her mind.

Astra eventually introduces herself, however, she shares only her first name. Increasing the abstraction of their conversation, Emilio is shocked by the relevance of her name and asks

⁹⁸ Ibid.

her to affirm her name as the truth, “mi giuri che è veramente il suo nome.”⁹⁹ His statement is not one of doubt nor questioning, but rather, an affirmation of the potent symbolism of her name, especially as he claims Astra “pronuncia le parole della mia coscienza.”¹⁰⁰ Astra’s name is a reminder of the “astratto” conversation they share and her preference to discuss abstract matters. Astra’s name compliments, even reflects, her astral knowledge. She states, “i vertici delle infinite metà immateriali sono le stelle” as if the name of a star is less important than the infinite vertices it contains.¹⁰¹ When Emilio begins to exit and requests her full details to sustain contact, Astra keeps her information from him. As she does not share her address, Astra further demonstrates the nuances of self-consciousness. Astra’s intentions are to develop ideas of consciousness and give her thoughts a voice through sharing conversation. Astra does not participate in their deep interaction with the sole aim to solidify a relationship with Emilio, but rather, utilizes the train’s compartment as a place to springboard and share her own ideas. Astra’s decision to withhold her information does not perturb Emilio and he professes his happiness and reinvigorated feelings following their interaction as he leaves. Alone again, Astra follows Emilio’s countenance through the dark window. She, too feels a sense of “reawakening” and enlightenment despite the continual darkness of the train.

The conclusion of their intense and obscure meeting concludes the first chapter, yet lingers into the next as Astra returns home and Emilio enters her dreams. Her dream occurs in a recognizable place with characters of tedious familiarity. The dream-state, where Astra’s reality

⁹⁹ Benedetta, *Astra e il sottomarino*, 176.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 175.

is suspended, affirms the impact Emilio left on her. Astra's dream suggests that her meeting with Emilio imparts feelings that she either hid or was unaware of during their shared time. It is only after Astra's dream that she decides to reconnect with Emilio. She begins writing the details of her dream in a letter to Emilio as a way of recognizing and giving consciousness to her dream. Though she writes as soon as she awakens, time continues to lag, first in her deferred acknowledgement of her feelings and next, in the inherent delay of epistolary correspondence, especially as Emilio embarks the submarine. This deference is insignificant, however, as Astra shares her feelings of immortal love and the timeless quality of their connection. Astra ends her letter noting that the constraints of reality and the distance between them does not impede their relationship, stating, "perché noi siamo al di sopra nel cielo del nostro amore."¹⁰² Astra's placement of their relationship "above" reality, or in the sky, provokes the simultaneity of the sky, where their love is found, the land, where Astra lives, and the sea, where Emilio works and lives. Both the sky and the sea share a sense of limitless depth, challenging terrestrial definitions of direction. As Astra shares she is flying in her dream, her subconscious experience impacts her placement of their love in a familiar and lingering space.

Astra's use of the "above" and the influence of flight also indicate Benedetta's own authorship as she, too finds spiritual and artistic inspiration in the azure. As a signing author of the "Manifesto Futurista di Aeropittura" (1929), flight offers Benedetta a dynamic abstraction of her perspective. The novelty of aerial vision is one "che nulla ha di comune con la realtà

¹⁰² Benedetta, *Astra e il sottomarino*, 180.

tradizionalmente costituita dalle prospettive terrestri.”¹⁰³ For Futurists, flight is not simply a method to connecting destinations, but rather, is itself a destination that offers a new way of seeing. Akin to the affect that follows Astra and Emilio’s experience of the train, the vision of Astra’s dream and her sensation of flight sustains long after the dream has expired.

Astra’s lofty writing style also returns attention to her dream of flying. Her writing is both different and distinct from Emilio’s, perhaps a side effect of his enclosed and contained workspace. Emilio’s life aboard the submarine may plunge him into the depths of the sea, but he remains confined inside the vehicle. Their locations give both Emilio and Astra no option other than to share a spiritual, rather than a physical, love. They are not “terrestrially” available to live together or see each other and thus their relationship is not subject to the expectations or physicality of a “normal” relationship. Through their chain of letters, Emilio and Astra demonstrate an unconventional love, one that is not truly concerned with unifying their locations. Instead, the two hope to share a mental state, one that explores unknown and subconscious matters, just as the submarine.

The only way for the two to materialize their thoughts is through the act of writing. Scholar Laura Anne Salsini highlights the many nuances of the epistolary genre, which she considers “an ideal forum for matters private, intimate, and subjective.”¹⁰⁴ Astra’s first letter is a conduit of her excitement and enchantment of her dreams; she writes as if she is transmitting an

¹⁰³ “Noi futuristi dichiariamo che 1) le prospettive mutevoli del volo costituiscono una realtà assolutamente nuova e che nulla ha di comune con la realtà tradizionalmente costituita dalle prospettive terrestri” (Balla, Benedetta, et. al. “Manifesto of Aeropainting,” 1929). As many Futurists texts, this work is often attributed to F.T. Marinetti’s sole authorship as in the February 1, 1931 publication in *Il Giornale Della Domenica Sera* which entitled the Manifesto as “La prima affermazione nel mondo di una nuova arte italiana: L’Aeropittura. Un manifesto di Marinetti.”

¹⁰⁴ Salsini, *Addressing the Letter: Italian Women Writers’ Epistolary Fiction*, 45.

embodied and direct experience. From her beginning, Emilio and Astra freely share the stories of their dreams no matter how unlikely or impractical the content seems. Their dreams are not judged under the auspices of “reason” or “rationality,” but instead, interrogate the possibility of another reality, where the content of their dreams could be realized. As they revisit their dreams when they write their letters, the letters themselves can also be revisited. The letters are physical daydreams; their fantasies and desires would remain intangible if they were not found on the pages of their letters or the pages of Benedetta’s novel.

The act of submerging themselves into their dreams, and then into their writing, mirrors Emilio’s submarine which submerges into the depths of the water. Ironically, the letter and the submarine are representations of technocratic vehicles. Both technologies stem from and operate under government systems of social organization. Benedetta interpolates these systems with two characters who find their subconscious more worthy of sharing and discussing rather than their conscious surroundings. This artful subversion of military-operated technology points to Benedetta’s interest in non-utilitarian uses of technology. Instead, Benedetta uses the submarine and the letter as apparatuses of illogical dreams and relationships.

The epistolary form allows the separated lovers to share, commemorate, and readdress their daily lives. Astra and Emilio’s letters integrate their subconscious dreams into their conscious reality. They take the time to share their dreams and feelings for one another by sitting and writing a letter, where their “relationship” becomes “real” and experienced. The epistolary form places their writing in movement, covering distance and taking time to arrive. This physicality is a stand in for their relationship; the delay implied in sending and receiving letters mirrors the delay of their ability to physically reunite. From hand-written to hand-delivered to

hand-held, the couple is neared by each other's implied, almost omnipresent touch. This material exchange allows their immaterial thoughts and dreams to endure even if they are not themselves present.

At the same time, however, the visual of each other's touch on the page reminds both Astra and Emilio of the vacancy that remains, what Salsini terms as the "metonymic bond between writer and recipient."¹⁰⁵ This metonymy exacerbates when an opportunity arises for Emilio's submarine to surface above sea level. The boat ascends only enough for Emilio to view the shoreline from his ship. Emilio wishfully peeks out of his portal view, hoping to see Astra awaiting outside of her coastal home. To his dismay, Astra's shutters are tightly closed and she is nowhere in sight. The visibility of Astra's home reminds Emilio of just how far and out of touch their worlds truly are. When the vessel returns underwater, each letter delivers a tangible reminder of their distant locations.

This irreconcilable nature of their relationship has positive attributes, too, as it allows them to integrate the stories and ideas that exist during the evening's sleep into their day. The terrestrial light that differentiates "day" and "night" are already of no use in Emilio's underwater location which enshrouds him only in darkness. Scholar Cecilia Bello Minciocchi finds the sea itself as "materno e insieme ostile."¹⁰⁶ She claims the sea represents the subconscious in dreams and provides a metaphor from which the narrative generates depth. Believing and participating in their letter-bound world, Minciocchi calls their relationship

¹⁰⁵ Salsini, *Addressing the Letter: Italian Women Writers' Epistolary Fiction*, 53.

¹⁰⁶ Minciocchi, "*Astra e il sottomarino di Benedetta*," 457.

La relazione dualistica—sotterranea, viscerale— tra realtà e sogno, tra coscienza e “subcoscienza”, nell’ipotesi che le elaborazioni oniriche *precisino e prevedano* quanto tende fatalmente a compiersi nel “reale” stato di veglia.¹⁰⁷

Emilio and Astra engage in their writing to the point that they begin to question the reality in which they work and live. They write mixing both past and future tenses, allowing memories and hypothetical futures to merge into the present. Even when Astra writes journal entries to herself and not to Emilio, she explores the dualism of reality and dreaming.

The gendered realities of Emilio and Astra’s professions dictate where and how they spend their time. Emilio’s profession subjects him to confinement aboard the submarine. It is Astra who is able to ambulate freely, rather than Emilio. The letter allows Astra to involve Emilio in her life in a suspended state; Astra’s concern is not to revolve her world around Emilio, as Salsini notes many epistolary traditions suggest women do, but instead, involve each other in their own independent realities. As Astra even ventures to Paris, she sustains her interest in her own interiority. She communicates a disinterest with those around her, demonstrating the insignificance she places on her location. No matter where she is, her interest is in the looming quality of her dreams. Her focus on the subconscious imparts a freedom from her found environment, one that Emilio also benefits from as he writes “l’acqua mi imprigiona, la terra che è densa come il desiderio dei nostri corpi, il cielo che vuol sconfiggerci con l’eternità”¹⁰⁸ As they share their dreams, their subconscious serves as an analogy for a more sincere, liberated, and alternative reality.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 449.

¹⁰⁸ Benedetta, *Astra e il sottomarino*, 192.

Emilio's aforementioned analogy fulfills F.T. Marinetti's requirements for new, "dense" analogies in his 1913 leaflet entitled *L'Immaginazione senza fili e le parole in libertà. Manifesto futurista*.¹⁰⁹ Emilio's analogies of water, which imprisons him, and land, which is dense as the desires of their bodies, create "una gradazione di analogie sempre più vaste, vi sono dei rapporti sempre più profondi e solidi, quantunque lontanissimi."¹¹⁰ These analogies are representations of "l'amore profondo che collega le cose distanti, apparentemente diverse ed ostili."¹¹¹ Even if Astra and Emilio do not relocate and alter their realities to be together, they can create analogies of reality through their letters. As writing is analogous to their spoken dialogue, their dreams become an analog to their shared space, the submarine an analog to the depth in which they detail their subconscious states. These analogies allow an embrace of "la vita della materia" and replace the need for logic in a relationship.¹¹² Astra's "immaginazione senza fili," or "imagination without wires," empowers a "nuovo senso meccanico, fusione dell'istinto col rendimento del motor e colle forze addomesticate."¹¹³ As their relationship intensifies, Astra's mental state(s) merge with the submarine she writes to; Astra fulfills the Futurist desire to merge human thought with the depth-defiant mechanized technology of the submarine.

Astra's interest in matters subconscious and dream-based suggest the letter as the most suitable form for sharing the intimacy of Astra's thoughts. The intimate diction of Astra's writing, "amore," is intended only for Emilio. Emilio's isolated quarters aboard the submarine

¹⁰⁹ Marinetti, *L'immaginazione senza fili e le parole in libertà. Manifesto futurista*, 1913.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

highlight the intense privacy of the letter. The train's private, dark space where they first meet is mimicked by their writing, relying on words rather than images to spark and sustain connection.

In the end, Emilio is finally out of contact aboard the submarine. Astra must turn to writing in her diary, addressing herself rather than Emilio. The short stanzas of Astra's final journal entry reveal a fragmentation in her communication. Astra previously shared her thoughts and dreams with Emilio through their letters. Benedetta demonstrates the subtle, yet supple differences of a letter and a diary entry; though both appear as ink on a page, Astra's writing is not the same when addressing herself rather than Emilio. Her writing continues to be allegorical, however, it is abrupt and segmented, using short phrases and a vertical structure to differentiate her thoughts, a stark change from the flowing prose of her letters. She writes,

Questa notte.

Alta sugli scogli caotici del promontorio

la mia ringhiera

formata forse colle aste dei bambini

mi schizza fuori dalla buccia della casa là,

sulla via lattea letto amaca o rete del circo

nero per le mie acrobazie.¹¹⁴

Astra's diary demonstrates how narrative format and syntax depends on readership.

Astra's vivid dreams are more comprehensible when she shares them through her letters. For Emilio to participate and respond to her writing, he must be able to understand the content of her letters. In the fractured format within her own diary, she does not concern herself with feedback

¹¹⁴ Benedetta, *Astra e il sottomarino*, 211.

nor critical response. Instead, her diary allows her to continue to commemorate her dreams in her own notation. Astra's interest in interrogating the meaning of her subconscious remains and her diary entries demonstrate her self-conscious activity does not rely solely on her relationship with Emilio or legibility.

In the conclusion of her final journal entry, Astra communicates a dream where she is within a towering "casa altissima...senza finestre nè portone."¹¹⁵ This vertically-defined house encloses Astra and offers no window for her to peer out of nor any fresh air to remind her of the world around her, similar to Emilio's submarine environment with "l'aria chiusa."¹¹⁶ The closed space also parallels Emilio's previous attempt to gaze into Astra's home from his submarine, only to find her windows tightly shut and inaccessible.

Astra's final dream reveals her immersion and enclosure within her dreams. The white color of the house is the opposite of the mysterious darkness that deceives her vision in the opening train scene of the novel. Instead, the white house is a starkly illuminated space, where her subconscious is clearly visible, yet mysterious. Alone and isolated, the house reflects Astra's own state of mind.

The house within Astra's dream is also "prismatica," a figural definition of the exactness of her final vision.¹¹⁷ The prismatic element of the house insinuates a similarity, a parallel, or a reflection of Astra's own condition; though the house appears alone, she is able to clarify her own (subconscious) viewpoint through the prism of the house. As an optical illusion, the

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 215.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 192.

¹¹⁷ Benedetta, *Astra e il sottomarino*, 215.

prismatic house refracts her vision to change the direction of the narrative away from reality and solely concern itself with her subconscious dream-space. Astra's final enclosure within her dream returns attention to her first experience of confinement on the train. The interpolation of Astra's subconscious dream-space into her conscious reality allows Benedetta to intertwine what is intuitive, mystic and nonscientific into narrative. As the novel concludes with the dream, the reader, too must return to reality, as their own oscillation between life and reading finds an end.

Narrative: Benedetta's Futurist Approach

Benedetta's narratives both precede and exceed her novels. She verbalizes and visualizes her own story in *Le forze umane*, retelling her life through an allegorical character and visual descriptions. From this beginning, Benedetta eclipses the "rules" of a novel made of words to instead couple her unique story with a unique form. She continues the extensive potential of narrative in her second novel, *Viaggio di Gararà*, detailing a shift in where her narrative is found; beyond the bookshelf, the theater becomes yet another venue for Benedetta's stories. Though the work was never realized on stage, *Viaggio di Gararà* returns attention to the intermediary nature of storytelling, allowing the printed text to simply be a suggestion of alternative forms of reproduction. Benedetta continues her search for immersive narrative techniques in her final *Astra e il sottomarino*. Her novel works to situate narrative, that is, embed the characters in a dynamic environment, built upon the reliance of each other through letter-writing and reading, or dreaming and sharing. Scholar Laura Salsini argues the literal accumulation of letters inspires "papers worthy of being called a manuscript."¹¹⁸ The act of

¹¹⁸ Salsini, *Addressing the Letter: Italian Women Writers' Epistolary Fiction*, 53.

transcription becomes “the physical, spiritual, and sensual representation of the narrator.”¹¹⁹

Bound together as a novel, Benedetta reconstructs the epistolary trope with Astra at the helm.

Astra e il sottomarino is Benedetta’s only novel without graphic syntheses, however, the letter-form continues to imply the work of the hand and experiments with narrative inquiry and expression.

Benedetta’s multimedia novels are not stable upon the shelf, but instead, evoke a kind of fermentation, agitating and breaking down the novel as a written composition. From her experimentation, Benedetta constructs three effervescent narratives that translate through the venues of graphic syntheses, theatrical performance, or communicative writing. As a writer, she first explores her own embodied state in *Le forze umane*. From there, Benedetta follows how embodied behaviors can exist in the states of lights and sound, challenging what is considered “embodiment” itself along the way. Her final situated narrative is through the embodied acts of writing letters, an act that considers each perspective individually rather than prescriptively. Benedetta’s final situated narrative emphasizes the interactivity of characters as well as the reader itself. Her other literary works, such as her aeropoetry *Volontà Golfo di Spezia*, also communicates her experience of non-normative embodiment such as the experience of floating. Benedetta’s sensorial and perceptual narratives must also be situated alongside her contemporaneous work as a painter, though is not discussed here, but communicated her works such as *Sintesi delle comunicazione*.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 54.

¹²⁰ The companionship of these works is a product of the scholarship of Lucia Re. For more, watch: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=38jn_uLk02M

Benedetta's novels are difficult to read in their insistence on abstraction and mysticism, however, this unfamiliarity is inextricably tied to the limited circulation of Benedetta's texts, especially in comparison to those written by her Futurist male counterparts. The republication of Benedetta's three texts by Simona Cigliana (1998) answers many silences present in the contemporary discussion of the Futurist movement. Firstly, the edition locates Benedetta's Futurist's works that previously existed in evasive spaces, if at all.¹²¹ Next, Cigliana's successive presentation of Benedetta's novels illuminates how the artist used graphic syntheses in different ways, as seen first in her autobiography *Le forze umane* and next in the novel for the theater *Viaggio di Gararà*. After reading these two texts, it clarifies how Benedetta's final novel, *Astra e il sottomarino*, continues her experimentation not with visuality or mobility, but rather, modes of communication, mimicking dialogue in through her letter-formed narrative. Each of Benedetta's literary works uncover a new potential for literature, one that is "uncovered." In other words, Benedetta constructed "a new universe of the imagination" in which narrative does not need a binding and can traverse media.¹²²

Benedetta's work can be found within republished Futurist works such as in the English translated anthology entitled *Futurism* (2009). Though Benedetta's works exist within this text, they are truncated. The influence of her work, however, is clearly visible in other translated texts, such as in Bruno Sanzin's 1933 "Genesi cosmica."¹²³ First published in *Infinito*, he writes

¹²¹ Also noted by Lucia Re, Benedetta's works are often circulated in their original, precarious state. Other Futurists texts of the same original edition, but with male authors, are privileged within the museum and archive. Cigliana's reproduction attempts to equalize the privileged recirculation of male-authored texts.

¹²² Re, "Impure Abstractions: Benedetta as Visual Artist and Novelist.," 31.

¹²³ This English translation is from page 501 of *Futurism: An Anthology*. Yale University Press (2008). The translation derives from Sanzin's original publication in 1933.

A light flashing genius-speed

sharp shining darts

to see

cut apart

measure analyze

discover

penetrate the Unknown

—safe inured

to the silent drills of the brain—

expose truth

absolute truth.

Echoing Gararà's repetitive mission to dissect and discover in order to expose a logical truth, scholarship within the anthology suggests the "increasingly abstract spirituality of Futurism's later years...expressed in the 'immaterial and antiritual essences' that Sanzin seeks, 'by not inquiring too deeply.'"¹²⁴ Benedetta's literary oeuvre should be understood not only as a source, but even a guide, for such abstraction and spiritualism.

¹²⁴ Notes, *Futurism: An Anthology*, 575.

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