

Fillia's Verbal and Visual Self-Portraiture: Narrating a Futurist Awakening¹

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Beginning in 1909, with the “Fondazione e Manifesto del Futurismo,” and lasting until 1944, Futurism championed the awakening of a new, modern consciousness bound to the infinite possibilities of technology and its manifestations in the automobile, the airplane and other mechanical marvels. Early Futurist art was primarily concerned with the depiction of physical sensations of speed, movement and “mechanical splendor” and, in literature, the “destruction of the self” as Marinetti declares in the 1912 “Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista.” The focus was on demolishing everything that came before, which Futurism viewed as passé sentimentality and bourgeois banality. Futurism sought to replace sentimentality and historicity with ruthless progress and an unrelenting drive toward an impersonal, machine-driven modernity using new and shocking forms of (both metaphorical and actual) violence and desecration. The emphasis was on a very visceral, tumultuous kind of collective provocation, exemplified by the 1909 “Fondazione e Manifesto del Futurismo” and the early *serate futuriste*.

Fillia (Luigi Colombo, 1904-1936), however, was part of the second generation of Futurist poets, artists, and rabble-rousers who took up F. T. Marinetti's flag and carried the Futurist agenda forward in the aftermath of World War I. Fillia was the author of poetry, novels and plays, a self-taught painter, journalist, political

activist, and editor who devoted his life to the pursuit of his art and the advancement of the Futurist cause. He published volumes on modern architecture, cooking, and design, collaborating extensively with Marinetti as well as with a number of the most important European intellectuals of his time.

Fillia was unique among Futurists for the intensely personal and spiritual qualities that permeated his particular worldview. In this article, I will trace the emergence of the individual and spiritual in Fillia's early works, and through the works I will examine—including literary works, theoretical writings and self-portraits—I will show how Fillia ties together verbal and visual expression to narrate the birth and evolution of his idiosyncratic Futurist self across a variety of media. The personal and spiritual nature of Fillia's works constitutes one of his oeuvre's main unifying themes. Fillia's work exerted tremendous influence on Futurism in the twenties. This led to, among other developments, the explicitly religious images of the "arte sacra futurista," a new trend that developed in the 1920s in a movement previously characterized by aggressive materialism and anti-religiosity and to the "Manifesto dell'arte sacra futurista" (1931) as well as several other important texts co-authored with Marinetti, including *La cucina futurista*, which all bear the stamp of Fillia's ascetic spirituality. (Duranti; Poggi; Salaris *Artecrazia*).

By Fillia's time, the already canonical Futurist "conventions" had run their course. By 1915 Fortunato Depero and Giacomo Balla had already published the manifesto "Ricostruzione futurista dell'universo" proposing a new path for Futurism, which took the shattered pieces of the arts, culture and society left by early

Futurism's iconoclasm and offered a way to reconstruct them from the ground up. Fillia, deeply influenced by both the destructive and reconstructive impulses, took Futurism's tools and imposed his own personal philosophy onto the movement, becoming hugely influential over the course of the twenties and early thirties. Throughout his career, Fillia placed significant emphasis on increasing the spiritual character of Futurism in an attempt to complete the process of elevating its ideology to a religion suited to individuals living in the 'machine age.' One of his most original contributions was the attempt to recover and redefine the Futurist "I," by reasserting the importance of personal identity and spiritual experience through new forms of visual-verbal representation.

In the initial stages of his career, Fillia struggled to work with the Futurist notion of a collective avant-garde identity and sought ways to redefine it politically and esthetically. This resulted in the only attempt ever made to publish a literary work that explicitly tied together the collectivity of Gramscian communism with Futurism's anarchic and radical modernity. The results were Fillia's first published works, five of the eleven unsigned, free verse poems in the 1922 collection *1+1+1=1. Dinamite. Poesie Proletarie. Rosso + Nero* (Figure 1) published by the Istituto di Cultura Proletaria in Turin. Determined to use art and literature to forward political and social agendas, Fillia co-authored the volume with two other poets, Galeazzi and Pasquali (of whom nothing else is known) in order to forge an unprecedented kind of collective Futurist self inspired by the new left-wing ideas that circulated in Turin at the time.²

The cover of *Dinamite* (Figure 1) is, in fact, the most Futurist “poem” in the whole volume, and the aspect that most concerns my argument is the first line, which reads: “1+1+1=1.” Stylistically, the line represents an attempt to incorporate Futurist conventions. Ideologically, the formula represents the three authors who contributed their works as a collective and who did not take individual credit. This marks the authors’ interest in overcoming the intellectual individualism of the bourgeois artist in order to conform to an avant-garde philosophy of group action (Carpi; Ottieri 11-13; Salaris “L’attività letteraria di Fillia”). The fact that Fillia and his co-authors published the work this way demonstrates an early interest in exploring questions of identity, and that Fillia was looking for ways in which participation in a group could and did both shape identity and spur creative output. Nevertheless, soon after the publication of *Dinamite*, Fillia veered away from his experiments with collective identity, shifting towards a more personal, individualized approach, while also moving to the right politically, which was in consonance with Marinetti and the Futurist movement as a whole. At the same time, he was increasingly championing a spiritual rather than merely political or esthetic function for Futurism in society.

As Fillia continued to explore Futurist poetics, his interest and investment in the movement grew, and he began to explore the art of manifesto writing. In multiple manifestos, some co-written with Tullio Alpinolo Bracci (who also worked under the Futurist pseudonym Kiribiri), he elucidated many of the ideological, philosophical and aesthetic positions and practices that would guide his work, and which would prove so influential on late Futurism’s overall ideological and esthetic practices. In

1925 Fillia and Bracci published two manifestos on Futurist art. “Alfabeto spirituale” was published in January, in the catalog of an exhibition held at the Palazzo Madama in Turin and “La pittura spirituale” was published in March in *L’Impero*, a Fascist-Futurist Roman journal. A third manifesto, “L’idolo meccanico,” which Fillia authored on his own, was published in July, also in *L’Impero*. In “L’idolo meccanico,” Fillia writes:

L’arte, per avere ragione di esistere, deve essere non solo utile ma parallela ai movimenti sociali e spirituali; altrimenti si cade nella ricerca del bello e del puro, colossale errore di secoli, dove l’individualità dell’artista è superiore alla volontà ambientale e significa appunto decadenza provocata dalla stessa degenerazione filosofica di un grande mondo antico esaurito dal tempo e superato da nuove necessità. [...] L’arte torna ad essere indispensabile: interpretazione e psicologia della Macchina per la Vita Moderna.

[...]

Possiamo così, paradossalmente, fissare la necessità di un’“Arte Sacra Meccanica.” Le conquiste tecniche del Futurismo hanno prodotto i mezzi esatti di rappresentazione: le unioni e i rapporti degli oggetti tra di loro creano un tutto indivisibile di valori, un complesso plastico, un’altra estetica. [...] Oggi la “religione della Velocità” (superiore all’Uomo) forma una credenza spirituale che corrisponde alla vita sociale moderna, e ha bisogno di una propria mistica. (Fillia, “L’idolo meccanico,” 72)

What Fillia is saying, echoing Marinetti’s 1916 manifesto “La nuova religione-morale della velocità” and Umberto Boccioni’s Futurist writings on art, is that art is inextricably tied to socio-political ideology and to spirituality, and is not merely an aesthetic act. Art is also indispensable to the Mechanical psychology of Modern Life (emphasis original), opening up avenues of interpretation and comprehension adapted to the new realities of technological society. Differing from early Futurism, there is an increased emphasis on the spiritual and psychological nature of the relationship between art and technological society, and in the aftermath of the war, the need for

the renewal of the spiritual self began to make itself felt, which drove a reconstructive the reconstructive impulse and the return to order.

In “La pittura spirituale” Fillia and Bracci claim that Futurism has been successful in preparing Italian society to receive Futurism’s new ‘sacred’ mechanical art. More ambitious and “more complete” works whose technical aspects would better integrate multiple artistic media into one work had become desirable and possible. Fillia then echoes this sentiment again in “L’idolo meccanico.” He writes:

La possibilità di una realizzazione materialista completa, con tutta la sua importanza e la sua concezione tecnica, permette uno sviluppo spirituale molto più grande, verso gli orizzonti luminosi della sensibilità futura.

Questa ricerca di creazione spirituale già da qualche tempo domina nebulosamente le produzioni futuristiche e soltanto oggi appaiono i primi tentativi di applicazione (si badi che il valore della pittura futuristica accresciuta della sua vitalità spirituale sarebbe definito in tutta l’arte moderna). Già Balla ed altri sentirono la necessità di questa applicazione.

Noi, fin dal 1922 (all’esposizione del Garden di Torino) tentavamo di ottenere una rappresentazione psicologica e soggettiva delle sensazioni, specialmente attraverso una nuova concezione cromatica... (72)

This emphasis on the spiritual and psychological over the material, physical, visceral and spontaneous is a major ideological shift for Futurism, and signals one of the principal differences between Fillia’s ideology and that of Futurism’s first phase.

Fillia’s position is both critical to understanding his own works and that it received the Futurist leader’s approval is telling of Fillia’s growing influence. In “La nuova religione-morale della velocità” Marinetti had claimed “s’è svuotato il Divino”—the Divine has been emptied out—reinforcing Futurism as a philosophical system whose directives were primarily physical, mechanical, external and objective. Marinetti’s “moral religion of speed” was concerned with physical ecstasy, derived from the

technological, and not at all concerned with the spiritual or transubstantive. Fillia's "religion of speed," on the other hand, reintroduced elements of mysticism and spirituality into Futurism, rebuilding and reconstructing the possibilities for art to serve as a transcendent experience.

In the mid 1920s, Futurism skewed sharply to the political right eventually officially aligning with the Fascist state. This move was driven by a number of factors, including Marinetti's ardent *italianismo*, the Italian Communist Party's official rejection of the movement and sheer expediency. Marinetti dreamed of Futurism as the state art of Italy, and was also driven by a fear of marginalization. Many of the developing tendencies in Futurism can be traced to the effects of the Fascist regime's policies and ever tightening totalitarian grasp. Though Fillia's Futurist spirituality and emphasis on religion parallel the increasingly religious tendencies of the Fascist regime and the "sacralization of politics" under Mussolini (Gentile), his spiritual turn cannot be solely attributed to Fascist tendencies. Fillia's spiritual yearnings were largely focused on the renovation of the individual rather than the collective and thus differed from the regime.

Fillia was also responding to the push towards "the spiritual" that was a growing force in international abstraction. Showing an interest in international intellectual trends from early in his career, Fillia's spiritualistic color theories have correspondences with those of Wassily Kandinskij's Theosophy influenced theoretical writings, among others. Like Kandinskij, Fillia set up oppositional relationships to older systems, and believed that color and form constituted a

language of spiritual effects (Gage 241-242). In “Alfabeto spirituale,” Fillia declares the need for a painting made up entirely of colors that were the entire subject of the painting. He insisted that colors were capable of containing all human spiritual and psychological traits and “rendering them mathematically comprehensible” (Fillia and Bracci, “Alfabeto spirituale,” 70). Though these musings head in the direction of abstraction, Futurism’s interests never lay in that direction, and the movement never made the stylistic and ideological leap to full abstraction.³

The “alphabet” in the “Alfabeto spirituale” is Fillia’s new color code. He says that colors, abstracted from material bodies and figures are the “vital force” of painting, and that because they were historically “nailed” to reality by figurative aesthetics, they had not been utilized to their fullest potential. The use of *inchiodato* in the passage must have been a deliberate reference to Christianity, implicitly placing Futurist art, and especially Fillia’s art, above the traditional color symbolism used in Christian images, especially Renaissance altarpieces. He assigns values, both aesthetic and moral, as well as abstract concepts to the colors of the rainbow, and to grey, black and white. After listing each color's principal characteristics, he outlines the differences between his Futurist system and traditional color symbolism, and explains why the latter failed, justifying it with comparisons between traditional qualities of color and his own:

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

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

Though Fillia did not specifically write a manifesto on Futurist literature, his manifestos on art are full of commentary on literary expression and of comparisons between painting and writing, and his artistic theories may be easily extended to literature. They write in “Alfabeto spirituale” (1925) under the heading “Scenografia interpretativa:”

allo stesso modo un pittore dovrà allargare la sua opera per raggiungere una completazione estetica: questo cambiamento darà il giusto valore ad ogni rappresentazione, cioè il lavoro letterario sarà coerente anche nelle altre parti ambientali, come il lavoro pittorico accrescerà la sua stessa atmosfera espressiva

abbiamo appunto cercato di ottenere infinite reazioni psicologiche, che formino armonie sconosciute, più estese di quelle fino ad oggi costruite (Fillia and T.A. Bracci, “Alfabeto spirituale,” 70)

The central argument of this passage is that artists in all media need to incorporate stylistic and technical elements from a variety of media in order to achieve their fullest expressive potential as individuals. For example, the author must expand his

expressive atmosphere, that is, heighten the visuality and concreteness of his text in order to form more expansive and previously unarticulated spiritual harmonies.

Though the value of the synthesis of all art forms into one may ultimately be traced back to Wagner, Fillia gives it a distinctly Futurist spin.

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

Naming, or more accurately *renaming* was a frequent and important aspect of Futurist self-creation and identity. Many Futurists shortened, altered or entirely changed their names to make them more synthetic, more technological sounding, or

just odder (White). Not only is naming a fundamental act of birth, in some religious ceremonies it becomes an act of *rebirth* as well, such as Catholic Confirmation ceremonies, and oaths to monastic orders. If Futurism was intentionally positioning itself as a new religion, then Fillia's process of self-renaming must also be understood within the framework of a Futurist spiritual rebirth. The frequency with which Fillia uses his name and identity in his works, especially combining them into verbo-visual units emphasizes, as I will show, the importance of the moment of the author's renaming.

Using the evidence I have so far presented on Fillia's theoretical, philosophical and ideological profile, I will now go on to demonstrate how Fillia applies them to his works. I have attempted to build a framework based on Fillia's Futurist spirituality and artistic theory that will go to support my assertions that Fillia's works address identity, the awakening of a Futurist consciousness, and the power of words combined with images to symbolically convey fundamental spiritual information about the subject depicted. I will show how Fillia narrates this process in his written works, in a universally relatable way, and then, in his visual works, demonstrates the same process occurring within his own consciousness. While Günther Berghaus (431-432) has asserted that many of Fillia's works were semi-autobiographical, I assert that the process is a more symbolic and abstract one. This is also consonant with the Marinettian tendency to widely reprint works and to publish many works that were very similar.

In the first work I will consider, the verbal and the visual narration of a new futurist identity and the connotations of the gendering this identity come together explicitly in Fillia's 1925 *La morte della donna: Romanzo a novelle collegate*. This text is about the death of a woman (or all women), but it is, instead, about the radical reconstruction identity and of sexual and gender roles. The novel is a series of ten short stories, tied together by a variety of themes and bookended by a framing story. It is, as the title calls it, "a novel of linked short stories." The framing story features a *Scrittore* speaking to a *Signora*, who challenges the *Scrittore* to defend the realism of his stories to her and to his audience aboard a transatlantic ocean liner. (She believes they are unrealistic because his female characters are all excessively "masculine" and "too strong.") Each of the stories and the framing narrative feature an illustration by a different Futurist artist. The seventh story, *Quarta dimensione di me stesso*, is the only one, even including the cover illustration, that features an illustration by Fillia himself (Figure 2). The choice cannot be insignificant, and it indicates that this is a narrative the author considers particularly significant. The image, like most of Fillia's other works from the mid-twenties, is a geometric, fractured one, in this case, of a "mechanical" nude. It is not clear whether the mechanized figure is male or female, though I surmise that it is intentionally ambiguous, and that it represents the degendered identity of a modern Man living a Mechanical Life, where "Man" is not a quantifier based on biological sex.⁴

In the case of *Quarta dimensione di me stesso*, the male narrator is suffering from a deep malaise, finding only sexual satisfaction but no emotional fulfillment

from his lover, even though he knows that she loves him “fervently.” At the beginning of the novella, the narrator is struggling to understand and harness the passions he feels, but despite intense periods of reading and research, he is unable to channel his restlessness. He is unable to resolve his confusion and distress, until one day when, riding a motorcycle, he discovers the thrill of speed—and with it, the Futurist joy in the religion of Speed. The motorcycle ride opens up the narrator’s perceptive faculties and liberates his consciousness from the mental bindings of atavism and sentimentality. The story’s central theme of spiritual awakening, facilitated by the overtly sexualized thrill of the motorcycle ride, is an obvious reference to the “Fondazione e Manifesto del Futurismo.” But instead of being a public act of propaganda, as the chain of events recounted in the “Fondazione e Manifesto” was, there is no audience to the proceedings, and the experience is an intensely personal one. The motorcycle ride in Fillia’s story is as eroticized as Marinetti’s 1909 car ride and accident, and Fillia’s psychosexual experience of mechanical splendor was clearly inspired by Marinetti’s manifesto, but the narratives have important differences. Whereas Marinetti’s sexual bombast was loud, prolific and macho, trumpeted from texts like *Mafarka le futuriste* to *Come si seducono le donne*, Fillia’s conception of Futurist sexual practice is thoroughly autoerotic. Indeed, in *Quarta dimensione di me stesso* it is not until the narrator explicitly abandons his attempts at sparking passion with a woman and turns to the motorized stimulus—he calls his experience a *coito spirituale improvviso che vibra di spasimi sulla strada diritta*—that he achieves cathartic release.

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

—non riesco a trovare me stesso: è una strana situazione interiore che mi fa quasi paura—intuisco di avere elementi spirituali diversi dagli altri uomini e non posso definirli—vivo perciò in uno stato di continua morbosità, come attendessi da un giorno all'altro una soluzione sconosciuta (Fillia, *Bolidi e tango*, 103)

The narrator is lost, adrift and stagnating. He can feel the creeping rot that Marinetti had set out to eliminate 15 years before, and he knows that his ability to sense this disease makes him different from other men. As the narrative continues, it explores the narrator's attempts at understanding and expunging his restless discontent by developing his artistic and literary pursuits; by trying and failing to form an emotional bond with a woman; and through the study of philosophy and the search for beauty, which Fillia would later call "the colossal error of centuries" (Fillia "L'idolo meccanico" 72).

Finding all of these lacking, the narrator's eventual salvation is achieved via the sexual and spiritual exhilaration and liberation of a motorcycle ride on a summer afternoon. In the midst of the motorcycle ride the narrator's consciousness expands and accelerates, and the narrative structure changes. The sentences become shorter and more disjointed, and lose connectivity with one another. Instead of the long sentences and paragraphs used in the first two sections of the story, each sentence (or increasingly sentence fragments) becomes a unit of its own, a vivid flash of a thought or feeling. There is an immediacy to the onslaught of impressions that is reflected in

both the content and structure of the narrative, which mimic the narrator's experience. The narrative concludes:

sono tornato in sera, nel pieno sfibramento muscolare, estenuato

ò compreso chiaramente la conformazione emotiva dei miei sensi, lontano dal forzato apparamento delle abitudini ataviche, ricchi di nuove possibilità

vasto giardino sensibile del mondo moderno, pieno di fiori dalle forme dai colori e dai profumi sconosciuti—desiderati avidamente dal mio bisogno sessuale

giardino tumultuoso e incontrollabile, dove vivono tutte le seduzioni, tutte le necessità

vertigine dell'imprevisto e dell'originale—bellezza delle materie in movimento...

—atmosfera reale della mia nuova individualità
(Fillia, *Bolidi e tango*, 108)

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

Stylistically speaking, the entire text of this short story reads like a stream of consciousness: there is no capitalization, and there are no periods. The phrases are separated by dashes; commas and colons are occasionally used to facilitate flow. The narrator's main points are separated as blocks of text; the longest paragraphs of text are at the beginning of the narrative, in the first section, and as the story progresses the narrator's thoughts become shorter and more fragmented. Fillia's shift away not only from traditional prose, mirrors the narrator's departure from traditional sexual and gender identity. The acceleration of the narrator's thoughts and impressions mimics the acceleration of the motorcycle. The correlation between the content and

form of the narrative reinforces the narrator's perceptions of his experience and of his new psychological and spiritual state.

How the narrator perceives himself is a critical aspect not only of *Quarta dimensione di me stesso*, but also of many of Fillia's other literary and visual works, evidence of which is found throughout the poems and short stories he wrote in the mid twenties.⁵ Fillia's poetics are intensely visual. Following the affirmations in his manifestos, discussed above, the author-artist places significant crucial emphasis on the act of weaving together verbal and visual building blocks to create a more complex and expressive whole. Fillia's poetics rely heavily on color imagery as well as vividly descriptive nouns and adjectives to create strong visuals. After *Dinamite* and a contribution of forty poems to Marinetti's 1925 anthology *I nuovi poeti futuristi*, Fillia published a collection of his poetry in 1926, titled *Lussuria radioelettrica*, which was dedicated to the study and promotion of radio technology. The volume also includes a lengthy introduction on the radio and its spiritual potential by one Dottor Ernesto Falchetti, as well as two excerpts, titled "le parole in libertà" and "l'estetica della macchina," from Marinetti's introduction to *I nuovi poeti futuristi*.

The volume as a whole demonstrates the increase in Fillia's use of Futurist poetics, a pronounced increase in his rejection of the conventions of traditional folk and lyric poetry, with respect to the poems he contributed to the *Dinamite* anthology.⁶ At the same time, an increased emphasis is placed on the personal and psychological throughout the poems in this collection. The poems vary greatly in length, format and

style, ranging from a few lines, to multiple pages. Some approach prose form, and some contain graphic effects and or are examples of shaped poetry. The poem *matematica*, which I will now discuss is typical of the volume, and usefully illustrates both Fillia's mixed technique and the application of his theories to poetry and his use of Futurist poetic conventions.

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

SONO LE TRE DI NOTTE

stanchezza sonnolente che m'impedisce di
 risolvere il problema cerebrale sulla lavagna puli-
 ta del cuore
 (Fillia, *Lussuria radioelettrica*, 25).

The first part of the poem, which structurally adheres to the dictates of Futurism's most radical innovations in free word poetry, is tempered by the last two lines (White). Though not an entire sentence, it is in a prose-like format, and is a long enough thought fragment to be easily comprehensible. It is an expression of the intensity of the speaker's psychological state: he is exhausted, tense and so troubled by his inability to solve the rubric that he cannot sleep, despite his exhaustion and the late hour, the implied chiming of the hour, shouting into the mental fog of exhaustion and confusion. As Marinetti says in the "Manifesto tecnico," having abolished adjectives, adverbs and conjunctions, punctuation the "absurd" stops it creates are also eliminated. Replacing punctuation with (in this case implied) mathematical

symbols creates movement and forward action, emphasizing the importance of the outcome, which is arrived at via the relationships established between the elements. The result is that deeper understanding is achieved (White 21-22). This technique emphasizes movement *through time*, which implies psychological expansion and evolution. Fillia's columns of abstract and concrete nouns will, with a fresh mind, be resolved into the *mathematical formulas* of Futurist direct analogy.

The poem is organized as a mathematical equation, whose factors are colors, elements and goals, and while, the poem does not utilize mathematical operators, which was a trope common to, and invented by Futurism, their presence is implied and would take the place of standard punctuation. The narrator of the poem is awake long into the night, and is exhausted trying to solve, as he says, the "problem [written] on the clean chalkboard of [his] heart." The poem's "equation" is intensely personal; it is a puzzle rubric composed of nouns, both concrete and abstract, and the narrator must find the relationships between the symbolic qualities of the colors in the first column and the elements in the second column in order to achieve the goals in the third column. The solution implies that direct analogies between seemingly unrelated nouns will be formed, another primary feature of Futurist poetry. The "problem" is not only a mental and creative one; it is also an algebra problem. Forward movement through time, foundational to Futurist thinking, will provide the solution to the problem. But time—specifically, the time of night at which the author is attempting to write—is also impeding the narrator's work. Written prior to 1915, the poem would likely stop after the first three lines, but the reconstructive impulse

and new spirituality of twenties Futurism has reintroduced the psychological into poetry.

Both in this poem and in many others of the poems in the collection there is a distinct emphasis on the use of the first person narrative voice, which is contrary to Futurist poetic conventions, but consonant with the spiritual and psychological nature of so much of Fillia's work. The *io narrativo*, proscribed in earlier Futurist poetry (Marinetti, "Distruzione," 61-69), reappears gradually in Fillia's work, as he also increases the spiritual and psychological dimensions of his works. In his earlier poetry, Fillia mostly maintained the aggressive Futurist avoidance of self-narration, which was more typical of Futurist convention, but ceases to do so in his later works. The *io narrativo* appears in only two of Fillia's poems in *I nuovi poeti futuristi* and in none of his poems in *Dinamite*, but is used in half of the poems in *Lussuria radioelettrica*.

Color and strong visuals, on the other hand, which had been constant in Fillia's poetry, and reached their apex of literary use in *Lussuria radioelettrica*. The use of color in *matematica* is a clear example of how Fillia's artistic theories carry over into the literary sphere. Color, which he has claimed as a work of art's most important feature, and for which he has provided an interpretive key, is the first constructive element of the poem. The first step in solving the puzzle would be decoding the significance of the colors in the leftmost column, using Fillia's spiritual "alphabet." Red stands for creation—thought—originality—intelligence; blue is for sentimentalism—dreams—illusions—abstraction—hope. White is "morally neutral,"

representing virginity—mysticism—religion as well as lying and ignorance. The symbolic attributes that Fillia assigns to the colors in his alphabet are those necessary to solve the puzzle. It is not hard to link white to research, red to creation and blue to emotion, but the middle terms of the equation are a mystery of significances that the narrator must solve and shift into their proper places.

The solution to the poem's equation is going to be a private one. In the poem, the narrator has turned to the idea of a creative process that is inscribed onto the mind and heart—the intellectual and emotional centers. The root of the problem is inside the narrator's self. This is not the external stimulus even of a motorcycle ride, and certainly not of war or a car race; it is an entirely internalized problem. Furthermore, the focus is on emotion, the creative intellect and the sets of outside forces that must be arranged according to abstract mathematical formulae, not driven by violent external forces.

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

resolution is possible. In both works the emphasis is on the personal revelation instead of on an explosively outward and public revelation.

Based on the cumulative evidence in Fillia's manifestos, *Quarta dimensione di me stesso*, and *matematica*, and the images I will now address, it is clear that Fillia conceived of his own identity in the same terms as the narrative selves in his poetry and fiction. A series of three self-portraits executed in 1925-1926 and based on a photograph of the artist, dated to 1924-25 (Figure 3) prove that Fillia also applied the existential and experiential logic found in these works to his own psyche and self-perceptions. Fillia returned to this photograph frequently throughout his career, either as a model for new works, or reproduced it in collages and advertisements, which emphasizes the importance of that image to the artist's self-perception.

The first of the three works, *Autoritratto parolibero* (Figure 4), is an ink drawing, which is in itself functionally a pictorial manifesto of Fillia's theories. Beginning from the title—"free word self-portrait"—it is obvious that the semiotics of the image are to be read on both visual and linguistic registers. In this self-portrait Fillia has combined his name with the fragmented image of his face, and declared his profound identification with his literary and artistic persona. One cannot exist without the other, because neither is capable of complete expression. The words and images that emerge from his conscious mind are a composite structure, just as the words and image in this "free-word self-portrait" are combined into a new kind of whole image. The image affirms the totality of Fillia's existence as a Futurist, and that he has so

fully embraced the ideology of the movement that is has become a fundamental part of his identity and self-image.

Two further portraits—or more precisely a painting and its preparatory drawing (Figures 5 and 6)—also confirm the relationship between identity, image, word and name, and further develop the relationship between Fillia’s self-conception, Futurism, and images that combine the verbal and visual. Again, the images are based on the 1924 photo, only this time the both drawing and the painting contain only a large “F” bisecting the artist’s forehead instead of his full name, and the painting has a number of added elements that significantly increased its complexity. The use of the first letter of the artist’s pen name is, again, a mark of his identity as both a poet and an artist, and so carries the same spiritual and psychological connotations as in *Autoritratto parolibero*. In this case, shortening Fillia to just “F” adds complexity to the interpretation by adding ambiguity. Here, F can stand for *Fillia*, *futurismo* and *futurista*. So he has woven Futurist thought, aesthetics, and identity into his self-image and merged it with that of the movement.

In his painting, the artist presents himself as the dominant human force in a polivisionary scene built on color, semi-abstract geometrical forms, and the atmosphere that surrounds and intersects them; it is a work that is literary, visual and theatrical. The composition is made purely out of intersecting colored shapes; no other type of line or shading is used. Though the painting tends toward abstract stylization, like most Futurists, Fillia was never invested in fully non-figurative abstraction. Yet, like Kandinskij, Fillia *did* attempt to give the objects and the fields

of color equal compositional weight by using color (Gage 242). And like Kandinskij, as I previously discussed, Fillia builds a language from color, critical to reading the painting because of the spiritual and psychological information it was capable of carrying.

If color is the first interpretive factor of a painting, as Fillia claims in “Alfabeto spirituale,” and colors represent the artist’s subjectivity and psychology, then Fillia’s self-portrait is not only an image of his physical appearance, executed in a Futurist style, but also a portrait of his psychological and spiritual self. Fillia has provided a portrait of what his own psycho-spiritual profile has become after his own Futurist awakening. And, as I will now demonstrate, Fillia’s self-portrait is coded with the same kind of performative and psycho-spiritual information that is present in his written works.

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

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

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

Architectural and environmental elements, necessary for the complete development of the atmosphere of the painting according to the dictates of the Fillia's interpretive scenography, are represented by the buildings in the lower right corner and the staged grouping of geometric masses on a platform at the lower left; the colors are the vivid, anti-naturalistic ones typical of Fillia's work. The scenic framework of this painting is a visual representation of the blueprints and guidelines established in Fillia's theoretical manifestos. In the same passage of "Alfabeto spirituale" in which Fillia dictates that the artist mindfully construct an expanding

and developing atmosphere, he also declares that a painter is actually unable to fully interpret the scenic plan of a writer, because the painter will always lack the “sincere, creative instinct” that is directly expressed by an author. Therefore, the painter must attempt to feel the weight of the atmosphere, seeing and intuiting the placement of planes and colors. Fillia continues on to describe stage settings (which are descriptions of actual sets from his 1923 play *Sensualità – Teatro d’eccezione*) that combine lighting effects, color-coded geometric objects, a multiplicity of planes, and the colors required for each as ideal examples of successful environmental expansion (Fillia, “Alfabeto spirituale,” 70-71). In his manifestos the literary form that Fillia most emphasizes for its capacity to meld the written and the visual more effectively than any other art form is the theater. Theater and café culture remained important and influential upon Fillia’s works throughout his career, and he remained active in Futurist performance art until his death; included amongst these ventures are works such as *La cucina futurista*, co-authored with Marinetti.

The platform of geometric figures and buildings, then, is an allusion to these theoretical writings on scenography and the expansion of a painting’s environment to include the atmosphere, both mental and physical, that deepens its significance and completes the aesthetic expression. Working these scenic elements into his self-portrait, where in the photo and the preparatory sketch there is only empty space, is an effort by the artist to completely render his spiritual self and his existence within an environment. This is also an interesting extension of Umberto Boccioni’s declaration; “Per dipingere una figura, non bisogna *farla*: bisogna farne l’atmosfera.”

(Boccioni, “La pittura futurista”, 23). To create the image of a figure it was not necessary to draw the figure itself, but to render the atmosphere that surrounded it. Fillia has added spiritual and literary dimensions to the technical dimensions of Boccioni’s scintillating pictorial planes. The yellow building in the lower right hand corner also features the mathematical symbol for equality as its windows, again echoing Futurist literature. As Fillia denotes in *matematica*, mathematical symbols were of supreme importance to Futurist poetry. Of all the mathematical symbols the Futurists used, the equal sign was the most important, because it is perfectly adapted to creating their direct analogies. The equal sign declares that two things are in some way the same or in direct relation to one another, despite any seeming lack of connection. Reaffirming the importance of the combination of words and images as a necessary condition for fulfilling Fillia's requirements for a spiritually and psychologically complete artistic expression, the pictorial image declares itself equal to the whole of Fillia’s Futurist self.

Fillia has thus used his personal narrative to both visually illustrate and verbally reinforce the Futurist religion of Speed while asserting his own personal spiritual philosophy. To examine Fillia’s works from 1925 and 1926 is to trace the emotional and spiritual journey of one of Second Futurism’s foremost artists. His exploration of such a wide range of artistic media—literature, poetry, painting, theater—signifies his vision for a future where art is unified by its dedication to synthetic modes of expression and to the evolution of Futurism in line with his personal social, political and aesthetic values. Throughout his career Fillia

continually translated his works across genres and media, referencing their most important theoretical and aesthetic developments while creating a complex net of citations and layers of meaning. It is clear from the examples I have discussed that Fillia's works must be read together; the verbal, visual and theoretical all tightly interwoven, many of an intensely personal nature. Fillia used these different and interwoven authorial and artistic modes to construct and narrate his rapidly changing and increasingly spiritual identity, his newly awakened “Futurist sensibility.”

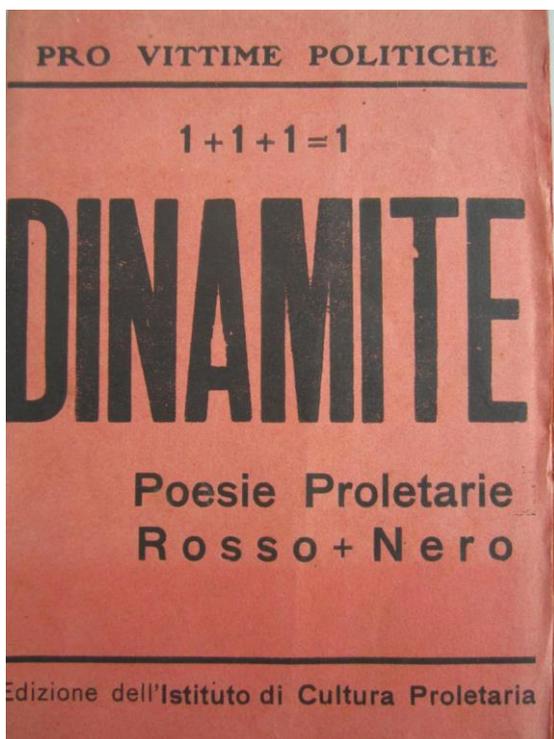


Figure 1: *1+1+1=1. Dinamite. Poesie Proletarie. Rosso + Nero*. Turin: Istituto di Cultura Proletaria, 1922.



Figure 2: Fillia, *Nudo meccanico*, 1925, accompanying “Quarta dimensione di me stesso” in *La morte della donna*. Turin: Sindacati Artistici Torino, 1925.



Figure 3: Photo of Fillia, 1924-25



Figure 4: Fillia, *Autoritratto parolibero*, 1926 (?), published with *L'avventura irrazionale* in *L'Impero*, date of publication unknown.

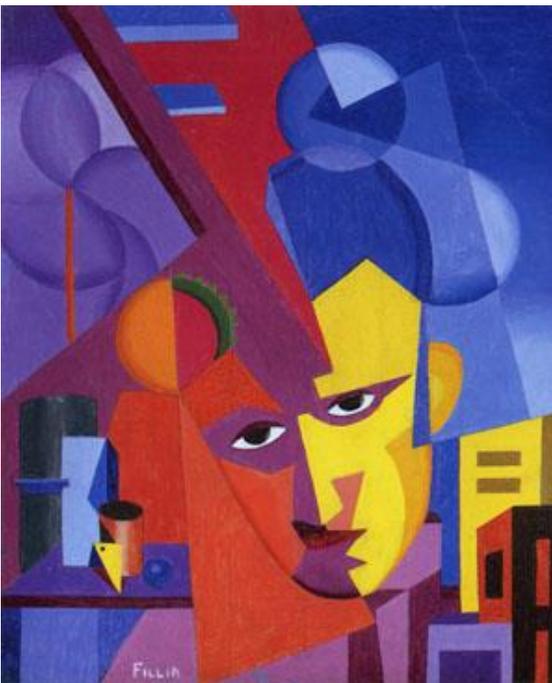


Figure 5: Fillia, *Autoritratto*, 1926, Private collection



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

Notes

¹ This essay has been adapted from a paper given at the conference *Words and Images: East Meets West* at the University of Sydney, in Sydney, Australia, 29 October 2011. Some of this work derives from my dissertation, titled *Fillia: Futurist Polymath and Polymaterialist*, which will be filed in summer 2013.

² Fillia's specific contributions to the volume are known only from a single signed copy belonging to Marzio Pinottini, in which Fillia signed his name next to his contributions. Salaris, "L'attività letteraria di Fillia". For further information on the relationship between Futurism and communism, see Carpi.

³ While none of Fillia's theories are entirely new to Futurism— Enrico Prampolini had already written a manifesto heavily influenced by Theosophy in 1921, and Giacomo Balla had also been using colors with Theosophical thought-forms in mind for several years—many of Fillia's principal beliefs differ significantly from his predecessors. Balla, for example, maintained that the psychological aspects of a work remained entirely secondary, and the specific values he assigned to various colors were different. (Lista 199-222.)

⁴ In the last of the short stories in the novel *La morte della donna*, titled *La vita di domani*, Fillia's vision of a possible future world uses characters whose names are composed of "Uomo M." or "Uomo F." plus a number. The letters M and F indicate the biological sex of the person (male or female), but there is otherwise total equality and no differentiation between any member of society. All three of Fillia's novels are,

in fact, populated with female protagonists who are liberated from emotional and intellectual sentimentalism and the weaknesses and degeneration that Futurists believed inherent to traditional femininity (Fillia. *Bolidi e tango*, 117-126).

⁵ A very similar narrative to that of *Quarta dimensione di me stesso* also occurs in another short work of synthetic theater that is included in *Lussuria radioelettrica*. It is a “poem” titled *Adulterio futurista*. In it the motorcycle ride is replaced by an early morning bicycle ride (*Lussuria radioelettrica* 17-19).

⁶ For a discussion of the stylistic developments of late Futurist poetry see White.

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