

**MASZYNA DO
KOMUNIKACJI**
**A MACHINE FOR
COMMUNICATING**

**WOKÓŁ
AWANGARDOWEJ
IDEI
NOWEJ
TYPOGRAFII**

**AROUND
THE AVANT-GARDE
IDEA OF
NEW TYPOGRAPHY**

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THE AVANT-GARDE IDEA

OF NEW TYPOGRAPHY

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ROXANE JUBERT

REVOLUTIONIZING AND EXTENDING THE VIEWPOINT.

**NEW VISUAL AND SPATIAL EXPERIENCES
TRANSFORM THE FIELD OF GRAPHICS**

Everything changes – in proportion, angle, aspect. Everything recedes. Everything comes close.

Blaise Cendrars

Looking at objects from a new vantage point, no longer head on or from behind but straight down, foreshortened [...].

Filippo Tommaso Marinetti

Graphic works that form the heart of our historical avant-gardes still impart to us today an exceptional vitality and energy. Although they date back about a hundred years, a considerable number of the visual works produced at the time remain a major source of influence. They still capture our imagination. Many of the creative talents at the leading edge of this movement – artists, writers, designers, poets, etc. – were profoundly impressed by the new sensory and motor experiences of the time. The mutations in urban life, the technical breakthroughs, the new means of transportation as well as the First World War drastically altered visual perception and spatial notions. Movement, acceleration, and intensity transformed and redefined modern life, giving it a kaleidoscopic dimension. There are abundant written accounts of this phenomenon by writers and artists alike, some going as far as hypotyposis. At the same time, photographs, collages, graphic and

typographic works continued to assimilate and reflect these new sources of inspiration.

In a very expressive and sometimes striking way, the actors at the forefront deployed all their imagination in their poetry, brilliant writings, low-angle photographs, or through abrupt changes in scale, foreshortenings, and telescoping effects. Amongst many others, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Fernand Léger, El Lissitzky, and László Moholy-Nagy expressed this new vision extremely powerfully, contributing to the major revival that opened the door to spatial impact in graphic works. Difficult as it may now seem to imagine exactly what the eye perceived at the time, nevertheless their visual and written works give us a clear insight into the whole transformative process they were involved in. Their fascination can be seen in Léger's vitality, Cendrars' exaltation, Moholy-Nagy's unbridled enthusiasm, and Marinetti's provocative ebullience.

"For example, you discover a tree with a chair perched on top of it," writes Léger in his war correspondence to Louis Poughon: "In this Verdun, there is subject matter that is totally unexpected for me, just right to delight my cubist's soul."¹ While the sight of battle scenes and general experience of the war acted as a catalyst for the graphic output to come, the radical shifting of viewpoint constituted another fundamental source of renewal. Elevation in the air had already been well represented in the 19th century, as can be seen in Albert Robida's illustration "Sur les toits" (On the Roofs), featured in his futuristic book, *The Twentieth Century*; an image that had already celebrated the fusion of spatial ascension and urban visual communication, typefaces, signs, and advertising. Beyond the new staggering views seen from the nacelle of air balloons, the actual sensation of flying inspired Marinetti to give vibrant accounts of what was no doubt a decisive adventure. In his *Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature* in 1912, the spearhead of the Futurist movement recounts with a certain vehemence his experience of flying:

Sitting astride the fuel tank of an airplane, [...] I felt the ridiculous inanity of the old syntax inherited from Homer. A raging need to liberate words, dragging them out from the prison of the Latin period. [...] This is what the swirling propeller told me as I sped along at two hundred metres above the powerful smokestacks of Milan:

1. – It is imperative to destroy syntax and scatter one's nouns at random, just as they are born.

1 F. Léger, in "Fernand Léger, une correspondance de guerre. À Louis Poughon, 1914–1918," *Les Cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne*, Hors-série Archives, Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris, 1990), p. 72 (our translation).

2. – It is imperative to use verbs in the infinitive [...].

3. – Adjectives must be abolished, so that the noun retains its essential colour. [...]

6. – Abolish all punctuation. [...]

Profound intuitions of life linked together one by one, word by word, according to their illogical surge – these will give us the general outlines for an intuitive psychology of matter. That is what was revealed to me from the heights of the airplane. Looking at objects from a new vantage point, no longer head on or from behind but straight down, foreshortened, I was able to break apart the old shackles of logic and the plumb lines of the old form of comprehension.²

Marinetti describes in this first manifesto devoted to "écriture motlibriste" (writing with words in freedom) the upheaval that the experience of flying triggered in him and its impact on his conception of writing and language. At the same time, other artists also became increasingly interested in aviation: Léger, Duchamp, and Brancusi all went together to visit the "International Exhibition of Aerial Locomotion" held in Paris, already before World War I.

Speed, motion, instantaneity, and simultaneity all impacted considerably works produced at the time. Two works testify to this: *La Prose du Transsibérien et de la petite Jehanne de France* (Prose of the Trans-Siberian and of Little Jehanne of France) – "the first simultaneous book," produced jointly by Blaise Cendrars and Sonia Delaunay in 1913 – and Gino Severini's painting *North-South*, dating from 1912, depicting the Paris métro in a kinetic environment, where the signage plays a prominent role. Underground experiences that alter our normal points of reference, dizzying low-angle shots, aerial views defying gravity – both our shifting gaze and bodies had an impact on graphic art in a fundamental, even spectacular way, right from the beginning of the 20th century, paving the way for the reconfiguration of visual languages.

The impact of flying on Marinetti and his experience of the Balkan wars in 1912 (he was confronted with battle scenes and bombings in Edirne/Adriano-ple) played a pivotal role in the elaboration of his "typographic revolution" and "free expressive typography" (1913 and 1914).³ The First World War, in

2 F. T. Marinetti, "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature" (1912); in in Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi, and Laura Wittman, eds., *Futurism. An Anthology* (New Haven, 2009), pp. 119–120 and 123 (author's emphasis).

3 F. T. Marinetti, "Destruction of Syntax – Radio Imagination – Words-in-Freedom" (1913) and "Geometrical and Mechanical Splendor and the Numerical Sensibility" (1914); in *Futurism. An Anthology*, *ibid.*, pp. 150 and 178.

turn, had a lasting impact on the perception of visual communication and its representation. A case in point: the Verdun that Léger captures while the war is raging could well be at the root of his interest in novel, fragmented letters and inscriptions, recurrent motifs in his work thereafter. As he explains in a conversation:

The destruction, the walls in ruins, what was left of the signs in the streets, on the façades of buildings – all feature in my compositions where I try to render as best I can my sense of shock with lines and surfaces of extreme simplicity. Lettering used in signs and printed typefaces appear in these drawings where they take on a plastic quality, and act as elements in their own right.⁴

These new dimensions of perception together with actual physical experiences greatly impacted graphic art, which, in turn, served to prolong and sustain them. Two major thematic strains involving space stood out of the huge output of visuals produced: on the one hand, either the human body or the letter in space, and on the other hand, compositions resorting to circles, spirals, concentric figures, or radiating patterns, etc. Novel representations of the body recurred, which can be seen as a direct transposition of these new sensations. Moreover, visual communication designed for means of transportation was remarkable in its efficacy, in particular in the posters. In the juxtaposition of the human body with space, we see figures depicted in the air or in a state of levitation and bodies where the vertical, the oblique, or movements contained in a curved line help to structure the compositions: Gustav Klutssis' postcards bursting with energy for the Spartakiads in Moscow (1928), Charles Loupot's aerial posters for the Saint-Raphaël apéritif (1937), Karel Teige's illustrations for the book *Abeceda* (Alphabet) by Vítězslav Nezval (with the highly original imbrication of photographs of a female dancer and letters – 1926, Prague), the stunning double-page spread in the magazine *Harper's Bazaar* (where, in a photograph by Man Ray, under the artistic direction of Alexey Brodovitch, the contours of a female figure bending over mirror the silhouette of a paragraph of text on the opposite page; March 1936) \triangleleft . There are innumerable notable examples of this.

The same applies to the graphics designed for means of locomotion and themes centring around travel \triangleleft . We only have to look at the famous series

4 F. Léger, in André Verdet, *Entretiens, notes et écrits sur la peinture. Braque, Léger, Matisse, Picasso, Chagall* (Nantes, 2000), p. 74 (our translation).

of posters by Herbert Matter for the Swiss Office of Tourism (in the 1930s, playing extrovertly with the montage and contrasts in scale), of Moholy-Nagy's project *Pneumatik* (1924; \triangleright), of Man Ray's double poster presented as a diptych for the London subway \triangleright , or still yet Cassandre's posters the *Nord-Express* (North express) and the *Étoile du Nord* (North star) with their receding perspectives (1927). Aeroplanes, trains, subway trains, boats, and motor cars – motifs right at the heart of the subject matter – inspired the most innovative compositions, whether for advertising, pictorial or experimental purposes. They served to convey movement, sensations of speed and depth in fixed images created on flat surfaces, thus enhancing the dynamic and kinetic dimensions of expression. The means of human and mechanical locomotion open up two essential avenues for subject matter – closely tied to the representation of the eye and of vision.

The search for innovative graphic spheres gives rise to a considerable number of works where the writing itself figures as the protagonist: in typefaces, words, typography, drawings, manuscript writing, signs, imaginary fragments, etc. The fusion of the arts was in the air – the illustrations for the book *Abeceda* were emblematic of this trend as were the works by Léger and Moholy-Nagy for the review *Broom*, the stunning poster for the film *Enthusiasm: Symphony of the Donbass* over-run with highly coloured letters \triangleright , or the German enamel plaque for the daily newspaper *Echo*⁵ – a dynamic composition featuring the four letters of the title in perspective, three dimensions, and vivid colours \triangleright . Also, there are projects in three dimensions where the letter is given a prominent place, as in Fortunato Depero's famous "typographic architecture"⁶ built for the Book Pavilion of the International Biennial of Decorative Arts in Monza (1927), and numerous projects designed at the Bauhaus,⁷ or by the Constructivists. Within this group we also find numerous graphic works where letters are combined with individual signs, with an economy of means – an extremely small common denominator of language serving as raw material – and celebrating with enormous freedom

5 The word "echo", being the same in German, English, and French, gives this work a particular resonance.

6 According to Giovanni Lista, "Diulgheroff, Prampolini, Nizzoli, and Depero were the protagonists of Futurist lettering in the thirties, which materialized in dynamic, highly pliable blocks of letters – square, round, asymmetric – used in the temporary constructions of the major exhibitions organized by the Futurist artists or in collaboration with them. [...] the most original by far being the *Book Pavilion* built by Depero in Monza in 1927 to present the publications of three associated publishing houses. He had used as early as 1916 the expression 'typographic architecture' for his words-in-freedom compositions exhibited in Rome" (G. Lista, *Le Livre futuriste. De la libération du mot au poème tactile* (Modena, 1984), p. 120) (our translation).

7 See for example the project for the luminous advertising by Heinz Loew and Franz Ehrlich, Bauhaus students (*Plastische Werkstatt*), reproduced in the review *Bauhaus* no. 4, 1928.

FIG. 4, P. 75

FIG. 7, P. 80

FIG. 8, P. 81

FIG. 9, P. 82

FIG. 10, P. 83

the convergence of letter and space, as in the works of Herbert Bayer (*The World of Letters*, 1928–1929), of Jean Pougny (Ivan Puni, *Flight of Forms*, 1919) and of Władysław Strzemiński for the covers of books by Julian Przyboś and Tadeusz Peiper, and other compositions <.⁸ As Paulina Kurc-Maj points out in her introduction to the catalogue, *Changing the Field of View*,

FIG. 11, P. 85

Modern design, based on transforming and modifying the language of visual communication, as proposed by the avant-garde movement, found its expression in modernising not only the general concept of design or in making use of technical possibilities, but also in the radical transformation of the basic graphic sign, which is a letter. [...] the most radical experiment [of typefaces] being probably that done by Władysław Strzemiński. In fact, the avant-garde movement strived not merely to modernise but to create a whole new language of visual communication within the culture of writing.⁹

Apart from these major trends that stand out in the works produced in the interwar years, and sometimes associated with them, there was the frequent use of circles and circular forms. Thus, we see a plethora of circles, discs, wheels, spirals, helices, concentric patterns, whirlwinds,¹⁰ forms that grow or expand – added to which come the iris or the pupil of the eye, and the diaphragm of the camera. This vibrant repertoire, bearing its own intrinsic dynamic, is often inflected with sensations of rotation, rolling, or of depth. There are numerous examples around the turn of the 1920s, as in the works of Fernand Léger, the Constructivists, or in the New Typography. It must be pointed out however that this visual theme had been well exploited earlier, as in Apollinaire's first calligramme to be published, in 1914,¹¹ *Lettre-océan* or various works by Carlo Carrà dating from the same year, highlighting the importance of the fusion between writing (and typography) and the circular form – radiating and solar – bearing heat, light, and energy.

8 As regards Strzemiński's work in this domain, see: *Afterimages of Life, Władysław Strzemiński and Rights for Art*, J. Lubiak, ed., exhibition catalogue, Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź (Łódź, 2012), pp. 551–567.

9 P. Kurc-Maj, ed., "Changing the Field of View. Modern Printing and the Avant-garde," in *Zmiana pola widzenia. Druk nowoczesny i awangarda / Changing the Field of View. Modern Printing and the Avant-garde*, exhibition catalogue, Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź (Łódź, 2014), p. 25.

10 Cf. British Vorticism, following in the wake of Futurism.

11 At the time, Apollinaire used the expression "*idéogramme lyrique*" (lyrical ideogram). He later coined the word "*calligrammes*".

This world of renewed forms was expressed as much through visual communication as through writings or the visual arts. In 1909, Marinetti, one of the most prominent precursors in this domain, advocated "free poetry, liberated from all its traditional bonds, functioning rhythmically in the symphony of meetings, automobiles, flying airplanes."¹² With his words in freedom, this élan finds its true expression in typography and in writing. His texts reflect in a remarkable way the spirit of the times impacted by visual and sound stimuli, against a backdrop of constant ambient movement:

Thus the poetry of cosmic forces supplants the poetry of the human,¹³ Words in freedom are an absolutely free expression of the universe, cut off from prosodies and syntaxes, a new way of seeing and feeling things, a measuring of the universe as the sum of forces in movement. [...] Words in freedom convey an integral, dynamic, and simultaneous expression of the universe.¹⁴

In his 1913 manifesto, *Imagination without Strings and Words in Freedom*, Marinetti declares:

I have initiated a typographical revolution [...]. My revolution is directed against the so-called typographical harmony of the page, which is contrary to the flux and reflux, the leaps and bursts of style that run through the page itself. For that reason we will use, in the very same page, three or four different colours of ink, and as many as twenty different typographical typefaces if necessary. For example: *italics* for a series of swift or similar sensations, *boldface* for violent onomatopoeias, etc. The typographical revolution and the multicoloured variety in the letters will mean that I can double the expressive force of words.¹⁵

His novel *Zang Tumb Tumb*, published in 1914 and inspired by his experiences during the Balkan wars at the end of 1912, is considered to be his first words-in-freedom book: ▷ the typographic composition on the three sides of the cover can be seen as a lively transposition of a forceful experience, both

FIG. 12, P. 86

12 F. T. Marinetti, preface to *Revolverate* by G. P. Lucini (Milan, 1909); quoted by G. Lista in his preface to *Les Mots en liberté futuristes* by F. T. Marinetti (Lausanne, 1987), p. V – orig. publ. dated 1919, Edizioni Futuriste di "Poesia", Milan (our translation).

13 F. T. Marinetti, "Geometrical and Mechanical Splendor and the Numerical Sensibility" (1914); in *Futurism. An Anthology*, op. cit., p. 176.

14 F. T. Marinetti (1914), "Les Mots en liberté futuristes," op. cit., pp. 11–12 (our translation).

15 F. T. Marinetti, "Destruction of Syntax – Radio Imagination – Words-in-Freedom," (1913); in *Futurism. An Anthology*, op. cit., pp. 149–150.

spatially and sound-wise. These works are inextricably bound up with his experience of flying, of the bombings and other aspects of war. Besides, in his book *Futurist Words in Freedom*, words pertaining to war appear regularly. Amongst the words-in-freedom plates reproduced at the end of the book, two bear the word “battle” in their title, and two others the word “front”.

In a very different way, Fernand Léger also expresses his great awareness of the changing times, resulting from the confluence of various phenomena: the impact of the war, an accrued interest in daily life, a great fascination for visual communication, a more acute observation of everything in the streets (shop windows, signs, typefaces, advertisements, poster advertisements, colours, walls, etc.) – in short, an enthusiasm, shared by many, for the powerful sensory kaleidoscope emanating from the cityscape and environment. “We live in a magnificently dangerous era where man’s senses are aroused from every quarter,” writes Léger in the 1930s, in a text where he recalls the end of the war: “It’s after the war that all of a sudden, the walls, the roads, everyday objects became violently coloured. The houses bedecked in blue, yellow, red. Huge letters inscribed on them. This is modern life – explosive and brutal.”¹⁶ He had already noted in 1914, “Modern man registers a hundred times more impressions than the artists of the 18th century.”¹⁷ Léger develops a close and lasting friendship with Cendrars and relates their shared exaltation: “I got deeply immersed in modern life with him; we really went for it!”¹⁸ Cendrars, in his typically expressive vein, gives a graphic description of their elation and what induced it – including the graphic design in the posters, the oversized lettering, and colour:

the multicoloured posters and the huge letters which prop up the hybrid architectures of the towns and which straddle the streets, the new electric constellations that reach up to the sky every night, the alphabet of the swirling smoke in the morning breeze. / Today. / Profound today. / Everything changes – in proportion, angle, aspect. Everything recedes. Everything comes close [...]. The wheel that turns. The wing that flies. [...]. Orientation. Rhythm. Life.¹⁹

16 F. Léger, “Couleur dans le monde” (1937); in: Fernand Léger, *Fonctions de la peinture*, (Paris, 2004), pp. 221 and 206 (our translation).

17 F. Léger, *Fonctions de la peinture*, *ibid.*, p. 40 (our translation).

18 D. Vallier, *L’Intérieur de l’art. Entretien avec Braque, Léger, Villon, Miro, Brancusi (1954–1960)* (Paris, 1982), p. 66 (our translation).

19 B. Cendrars, *Moravagine*, (Paris, 2002) (1st ed. 1926), p. 165 (our translation, author’s emphasis). Certain parts of this quotation had already appeared in his 1917 text “Profond aujourd’hui” (Profound today).

From then on, having found a secure niche in public spaces, words, lettering, inscriptions, and typography could make the imagination fly. As Cendrars showed in this extract from a letter dated 1920: “And then, the war: a void. After that, the present time: construction, simultanism [sic], affirmation. [...] Posters. The façades of houses consumed by letters. The streets taken over by words.”²⁰ Both Cendrars and Léger accredited the coloured surfaces and the huge typefaces with being the two major sources of inspiration towards the end of the decade 1910–1920: “For me, all this is raw material,”²¹ enthused Léger. A similar passion had been triggered by the impact of the poster in the 19th century – which saw posters being reproduced on a massive scale, covering vast expanses of town walls.

Such a convergence of novel experiences gave rise to a modern perception, spearheading the development of new visual languages. Shifting viewpoints became exploited in different ways by the proponents of Futurism, Suprematism, and Constructivism. These movements became the milestones of the phenomenon – in the same way that collage, photomontage, and typophoto²² had. Across Europe, numerous creative talents had contributed to the elaboration of an innovative typography – the Czechs, the Poles, the Germans, the Hungarians, the Soviets, the Dutch, etc. Each resorted to the efficacy of communication, precision, optical construction, spatial articulation, visual effects, rhythm, elasticity, flow, etc. Numerous formulas and explanations were found to express this revival. “Optical gymnastics”²³ was the succinct and meaningful way Moholy-Nagy put it. Jan Tschichold had another take on the subject, insisting on the fact that the eye had to be literally led by the typographic structuring. The impact of novel experiences in space – “the trajectories or their speed” – made a lasting impression on their writings. Marinetti, again in his manifesto *Imagination without Strings*

20 B. Cendrars, letter dated 1920; extract quoted by Claude Leroy in “Les Trois rencontres de Léger avec Cendrars,” *Europe. Revue littéraire mensuelle*, Nos. 818–819, “Fernand Léger” (Paris, June–July 1997), p. 107 (our translation).

21 F. Léger, “Notes sur la vie plastique actuelle” (manuscripts from the early 1920s), in *Fonctions de la peinture*, *op. cit.*, p. 65 (our translation).

22 L. Moholy-Nagy is credited with having coined the word “typophoto” in 1925. On the subject of typophoto, see: R. Jubert, “Typophoto. A Major Shift in Visual Communication,” conference proceedings, “Photo / Graphisme” (Photo / graphics) (2007), (Paris, 2008), English translation by John Tittensor, [pdf online], <http://www.jeudepaume.org/?page=article&sousmenu=112&idArt=511&lieu=7> [Accessed 24 September 2015].

23 L. Moholy-Nagy, “Photographie, mise en forme de la lumière” (1928), in: *Peinture, photographie, film [Bauhausbücher 8, 1925], et autres écrits sur la photographie* (Nîmes, 1997), p. 155 (our translation). The term “optical gymnastics” here refers to “photoplastique”.

and *Words in Freedom*, explains “and between parentheses we place indications such as (fast) (faster) (slower) (two-beat time) to control the speed of the style. These parentheses can even cut into a word or an onomatopoeic harmony.”²⁴ A little further on, after giving a broad-brush definition of his “typographic revolution,” he continues, using words as a malleable component: “our lyrical intoxication must be free to deform and reshape words, cutting them, lengthening them, reinforcing their centres or their extremities, increasing or diminishing the number of vowels and consonants.”²⁵

In a completely different register, Theo van Doesburg also shows his preoccupation with the notion of speed, going as far as to establish a correspondence with visual creation. In 1928, in the triple issue of the review *De Stijl* devoted to l’Aubette, he defines his own conception in an eloquent way: “The straight line responds to the speed of modern traffic.”²⁶ This throws light on the direct rapport between formal choices in art and design on the one hand, and the joint sensations of trajectories and speed on the other hand. In an explicit extract from a letter to the architect Oud, Van

FIG. 13, P. 88 Doesburg comments on the graphics that he is designing for a sign <

I have designed [...] a cash-register sign inspired by two fast trains meeting head-on. It has turned into a complete painting. The letters form part of the movement. They are based on a square and widen out in a regular tempo. I had never realised that you could achieve a rhythm of such expressive quality with letters.²⁷

As for Moholy-Nagy, he analyses the mutations under way with a more general perspective in his 1925 text entitled “Typophoto”:

Every period of time has its own optical focus. Our times: that of film, of advertising using light, of the simultaneity of events perceivable through the senses. [...] Gutenberg’s typography, which has continued almost to our own day, moves exclusively in a linear dimension. [...] Only in very recent times has a kind of typographic work emerged that attempts to create a link to contemporary life by using typographic material [...] these

24 F. T. Marinetti, “Destruction of Syntax – Radio Imagination – Words-in-Freedom” (1913); in *Futurism. An Anthology*, op. cit., p. 149.

25 F. T. Marinetti, *ibid.*, p. 151.

26 T. Van Doesburg, “L’Elémentarisme et son origine” (Elementarism and its origin), *De Stijl*, Nos. 87–89, special issue on Aubette, series xv (Leiden, 1928), p. 23 (our translation).

27 Letter from Van Doesburg to J. J. P. Oud, dated 24 June 1919; passage reproduced in E. Hoek (ed.), *Theo Doesburg. Oeuvre catalogue* (Utrecht / Otterlo, 2000), p. 253.

new typographic works will be very different in form – typographically – optically – synoptically from the linear typography of today.”²⁸

The connection between sensory stimuli and typographic revival is thus defined explicitly, sometimes going as far as to reveal graphic art directly inspired by the modern means of locomotion.

•

All these new perceptions, sensations, and experiences have repercussions on graphics, which, in turn, provide them with a creative outlet. As a result, a huge range of devices and creative means, often innovative, is developed: changing viewpoints, of course, but also related elements such as depth, scale, tridimensionality, cartography, direction, trajectory, light, movement, speed, acceleration, and, equally, the balance of forces or elements in play. Numerous examples reveal novel possibilities, leading to a variety of new constructions, abstractions, combinations of viewpoints, imaginary spaces, distortions, etc. Signs and letters, impacted by all this, often acquired an exceptionally powerful quality of image ▷ – shifting the question of the process of reading towards other considerations of perception, such that impact and perception often take precedence over legibility and recognition.²⁹

The extreme importance attached by artists at the time to all these characteristics resulted in certain cases in visuals of a cosmic or astral nature. Man Ray’s double poster *London Transport – Keeps London Going*, dating from the 1930s, demonstrates this particularly well: the logo for the London subway is represented as a star high up in the sky, conveying an impression of movement by its incline towards another three-dimensional star in the foreground ▷.³⁰ Where celestial metaphors are concerned, we have an emotive account by Paul Valéry of Mallarmé, himself, reading *the Throw of the Dice*:

I honestly believe that I am the first person to have seen this extraordinary work. [...] it seemed to me I was seeing the figuration of a thought, set within the confines of our space for the first time... Here, truly, it was

28 L. Moholy-Nagy, “Typophoto” (1925), in P. Kurc-Maj, *Zmiana pola widzenia...*, op. cit., p. 147 (author’s emphasis).

29 This phenomenon was already well represented in the lettering of certain Viennese Secession posters, particularly in those by Alfred Roller and Koloman Moser at the beginning of the century.

30 In a different register, the graphics for Odol, the mouthwash brand – found on the bottles of the product at the end of the 19th century and also on the enamel plaques in the following decades – shows how a logo can conjure up an aerial presence. See the exhibition catalogue *Enamel Icons, 1895–1935*, Macao Museum of Art (Macao, 2002) (text in English, Chinese, and Portuguese).

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FIG. 8, P. 81

vastness speaking, dreaming, giving rise to temporal forms. [...] It was all murmurings, insinuations, thunder for the eyes, a whole spiritual storm leading from page to page right to the extreme limits of thought. [...] He tried [...] *finally to elevate a page to the height of a starry sky!* He had studied very carefully (even on the posters, in the papers) the judicious distribution of white spaces and black print, the comparative intensity of the typefaces.³¹

Discussing his poem in a letter to André Gide, Mallarmé refers to a “viewpoint” and to “a constellation”.³²

From Futurism to Constructivism and on through to the Nouvelle Vision, graphic works produced by the historical avant-gardes reveal a rich and varied interest in everything pertaining to shifting viewpoints as a source of inspiration, formal objective, and expressive potential, all at the same time. Certain elements recur regularly, such as oblique lines – highly common and representing the contemporary dynamic – or circles, symbolizing the wheel and movement ◁. These elements are anchored in the New Typography. Their impact is such that certain works gain a spectacular, vertiginous aspect (for example, certain Constructivist posters), particularly when they trump our normal points of reference as regards gravity or generate a forceful impact. Thus, in a looping effect, visual communication becomes greatly influenced by perceptive experiences of the time, which it helps to transform by revealing renewed graphic languages. We can consider the flights of Art Nouveau, just like the flying figures of Jules Chéret or Leonetto Cappiello, representing the early signs of a new rapport between the eye and the body to space (far from a whole tradition rooted in plane surfaces, classical frameworks, statism, or black and white).

Since then, the question of renewing our perception and sense of space has been a driving force of graphic art, through the effects of depth or suspension, of new abstractions, various distortions ◁, a surrealist register, macrophotography, or, still yet, of views under the microscope. The question of the metamorphoses thus wrought and established by the avant-gardes

needs to be explored further, and in depth – through their own voices,³³ their writings and the creative output of their era, in order to ascertain the full measure of a unique and spectacular visual phenomenon, which has remained inexhaustible to this day and is all the more significant since it is expressed in a variety of disciplines – graphics, photography, photomontage, posters, books, painting, poetry, artists' writings, manifestos, reviews, etc. Certain *données* of the era still resonate with us in a special way today – to begin with, maybe, due to the speed and rhythm imposed on our perception of images, and also, to the necessity, built up over time, of impact through their sheer numbers.

This text was written for a lecture entitled *Changing the Viewpoint. A Visual Turning Point* given at the conference “Machine for Communication. Around the Idea of New Typography.” The title and the subject matter of this lecture were directly inspired by the title of the exhibition, *Changing the Field of View* – taken in its literal sense – which provided the framework for the conference.

The text has drawn on personal research undertaken for numerous articles, chapters of books and lectures – in particular on Léger, Cendrars, Marinetti, Van Doesburg, Cassandre, Tschichold, and also on typophoto, the Bauhaus, and enamel plaques.

I would particularly like to thank Paulina Kurc-Maj for her invitation and her warm welcome, and Parry Jubert for her helpful comments on the original text in French.

(translation: Parry Jubert)

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FIG. 15, P. 90

31 P. Valéry, “*Le coup de dés, lettre au directeur des Marges*” (*The Throw of the Dice*, letter to the director of *les Marges*). The text appeared in the review *Les Marges* in February 1920; in: P. Valéry, *Œuvres* (Works), Jean Hytier (ed.), vol. 1, (Paris, 1992), pp. 623 – 627 (our translation, underlined in the text). (Partially quoted by Anne-Marie Christin, “De l’espace typographique [...]”, in *L’Aventure des écritures. La Page* [The adventure of writing. The page], A. Zali, ed., [Paris, 1999], p. 195.)

32 S. Mallarmé, quoted by Valéry in: P. Valéry, *Œuvres*, *ibid.* The term “point de vue” (vantage point) is also employed by Marinetti in his *Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature* (1912) – see quotation above: “*Looking at objects from a new vantage point [...].*”

33 For the sound recordings, cf. Marinetti’s *La Battaglia di Adrianopoli*.

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