The characters of power. The power of the characters

Typefaces have the power to enhance the traditional communication process activated by graphic signs. Indeed, in addition to transmitting meaning starting from the decoding of the signer, they are able to communicate further information through the peculiarities and the recognizability of their sign. The different typographic characters suggest imagery, encourage mental connections with ideas and ideologies, and place communication within a more specific cultural, social, historical, and geographical context evoked by the graphic features of alphabetic signs. The different forms of power have always leveraged on this peculiarity of the alphabets by assuming the typographic characters design to effective form of self-representation. Power is therefore an interpretative category useful for reading the evolution of the form of the lettering, and for understanding their affirmation or oblivion. From the Roman Capitalis, called to represent the grandeur of the empire, to the fonts of the contemporary technological and economic empires, such as San Francisco designed by Apple, passing through the classic Roman of the Roi wanted by Louis XIV, there are numerous episodes of mutual representation between powers and characters. If on the one hand the capacity of representation of power in the graphic signs can make the fortune of the alphabetic characters, it can also decrees their decline, as in the case of the Fraktur adopted as image of Germanness, or the litteri characters that have characterized the communication of political power in the Fascist Italy. Starting from the graphic and paleographic studies of Giovanni Lussu, Stanley Morrison, and Armando Petrucci, this article aims to retrace some of the most significant episodes of the relations between lettering and power in the western culture, updating this approach to the new forms of power of contemporary society, analyzing the graphic features of the different old and new characters of power.

Keywords: alphabetic characters, paleography, public lettering.

The evolution of the shape of alphabetic characters is influenced by several factors closely interconnected like those aesthetic, technological and political. Indeed, character design is strongly influenced by the aesthetic sensibility of the time in which they were conceived. The Bodoni, for example, is consistent with the neoclassical inspiration of the artistic works of the early decades of the nineteenth century (Lussu 1990, pp. 57–58), while the Universal–Alphabet that incorporates the principles of rationalism. Also, the influence on characters design of the transformation of technologies used for writing and printing is undeniable. The passage from the nib pen to the steel pen, for example, involves a change in the calligraphic taste linked to the possibility of thinner and more delicate marks, stroke thickenings independent from the inclination of the pen and the direction of writing, characteristic absorbed immediately by the Cadon and the Baskerville after the redesign of Giovanni Francesco Cresci (Lussu 1990, pp. 52–54).

Finally, referring to the influence of politics it includes all those factors that lead the characters to assume not only a linguistic and graphic meaning, but also an ideological one. This is the case of all those alphabets designed to represent power, such as those derived from the Roman Capitalis, as well as the Capitalis itself which is the archetype that has conditioned the entire history of the Latin characters up to the present day.

Powers and Characters

Adopting this particular gaze, this article proposes a synthesis, without aiming to be complete and exhaustive, of the wide literature that has investigated the relations between character design and representation of power. What are discussed below are the so-called public (or monumental) writings, that is “all the writings that have a particularly solemn character and functions mainly indicative and descriptive; they are generally laid, of great form, made with obvious intentions of ele-

I caratteri del potere. Il potere dei caratteri

La scelta dei caratteri tipografici può potenziare il processo di comunicazione dei testi. Questi, infatti, oltre a trasmettere un significato a partire dal significante sono in grado di comunicare un’ulteriore informazione attraverso le peculiarità del disegno del loro segno. Le diverse grafie suggeriscono immaginari, favoriscono connessioni mentali con idee e ideologie; collocano la comunicazione all’interno di un contesto culturale, sociale, storico e geografico più specifico evocato dalle caratteristiche grafiche dei segni alfabetici. Le diverse forme di potere hanno da sempre fatto leva su questa peculiarità degli alfabeti assumendo il disegno dei caratteri come efficace forma di auto-rappresentazione. Il potere costituisce per questa una categoria interpretativa utile all’interpretazione dell’evoluzione della forma grafica, alla comprensione della loro affermazione o del loro oblio. Dalla Capitalis Romana chiamata a rappresentare la forza dell’impero fino ai caratteri dei contemporanei imperi tecnologici ed economici, come il San Francisco disegnato dalla Apple, passando per il classico Roman del Roi voluto da Luigi XIV, sono numerosi gli episodi di reciproca rappresentazione tra poteri e caratteri. Se da un lato la capacità di rappresentazione del potere nelle grafie può fare la fortuna dei caratteri, essa può anche decretare il tramonto, come nel caso dei Fraktur adottati ad immagine della germanicità o dei caratteri litteri che hanno caratterizzato la comunicazione del potere politico nell’Italia fascista. A partire dagli studi grafici e paleografici di Giovanni Lussu, Stanley Morrison e Armando Petrucci, in questo articolo si intende ripercorrere alcuni degli archetipi e degli episodi più significativi delle relazioni tra scrittura e potere nella cultura occidentale, attualizzando questo approccio alle nuove forme di potere della società contemporanea; analizzando i caratteri grafici delle diverse vecchie e nuove grafie del potere.

Parole chiave: caratteri alfabetici, paleografia, scrittura apparato.

L’evoluzione della forma dei caratteri alfabetici è stata influenzata da diversi fattori storico-monumentali, ideologici e politici. Il disegno dei caratteri è infatti fortemente influenzato dalla sensibilità estetica dell’epoca in cui vengono concepiti. Il Bodoni, ad esempio, è un esempio speciale dell’archetipo che ha condizionato l’intera storia dei caratteri latinì sino ai nostri giorni.

Poteri e caratteri

Adottando questo particolare sguardo nel presente articolo viene proposta una sintesi, senza pretese di completezza e esaustività, dell’amplia letteratura che ha indagato le relazioni tra disegno dei caratteri e rappresentazione del potere. Quelle che si vanno di seguito a discutere sono le cosiddette scritture apparato (o monumental), ovvero «tutte le scritture che hanno carattere di particolare solemnità e funzioni precipuatamente indicative e designative; esse in genere sono posate, di modo grande, realizzate con evidenti intenzioni di eleganza.
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gance and artificiality and usable, and used, in any situation writings, books, documents” (PETRUCCI 1986, XXI). These are ‘political’ practices aimed at celebrating, solemnizing and remembering the power and social presence of individuals, groups, corporations and families, and at confirming their strength, wealth and prestige, making all of this lasting as an archetype.

The civil function of the public lettering, and their location both in the open spaces of the cities and in those inside the monumental buildings, has determined the graphic style of the solemn epigraphy from the Greek and Latin worlds, to which this type of writing has always referred in Western culture. The graphic style of the public writings is characterized by an apparent rigid geometrization of the forms, by a careful relationship between solids and voids, by a general harmony in the composition of the characters, by a careful calculation of the dimensions according to their height and location, by the chiaroscuro of the lines obtained through the technique of triangular engraving; all aspects that contribute coherently to the achievement of that grandeur, harmony and full visual legibility in different lighting conditions (PETRUCCI 1986, p. 5) which could symbolize and represent the supremacy of the commissioner.

Considered as an example of beauty, harmony and perfection of forms, the alphabet of Trajan’s column in Rome (fig. 1), has over time been assumed as an archetype of the characters drawing schools of the sixteenth century and in the England of the twentieth century (HARRIS 1998, p. 26). Therefore, the archetypes to which the characters of power refer are traditions that appear and claim to be ancient, but which in reality have more recent origins and which are even sometimes invented to a large extent. These are examples of those ‘invented traditions’ that Hobbsaw (HOBSBAWN 2002, p. 3) defines as “a set of practices, generally regulated by openly or tacitly accepted norms, and endowed with a ritual or symbolic nature, which aim to inculcate certain repetitive values and norms of behavior in which continuity is automatically implicit [...] with a suitably selected historical past”.

The Latin Archetype

The search for the rule with which to replicate the models coming from a suitably selected historical past has sanctioned the construction of the graphic archetypes of which would later become the writings representing power. During the whole Renaissance there were numerous attempts to define the rules to realize, with rigorous methods and instruments of measurement, the forms of the Roman Capitales such as, among others, those of Felice Feliciano in his Alphabetum Romanum of the 1463.


L’archetipo latino

La ricerca della regola con la quale replicare i modelli provenienti dal passato storico opportunamente selezionati, ha sanzionato la costruzione degli archetipi grafici di quelle che sarebbero poi diventate le scritture rappresentative del potere.

Durante tutto il Rinascimento furono numerosi i tentativi di definire delle regole per realizzare con metodi rigorosi e strumenti di misurazione le forme delle Capitalis Romanae che si sono propagati in tutta l’estensione delle tradizioni e delle prassi ‘politiche’ in occasione di festività, cerimonie, affermazione di potere.”
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During his papacy, Rome saw the beginning of impressive building works that led to the opening of some of the major roads and the establishment of focal points of connection marked by obelisks and columns on which stand inscriptions of high ideological and expressive value (PETRUCCI 1986, pp. 46–47). The drawing of Orfei’s letters derives from that of Giovan Francesco Cresci, scribe of the Vatican Library and of the Sistine Chapel, of which he was an apprentice. The new capital letters, which will take the name of ‘Sistine’, are a Christian revision of the capital letters that were part of the insignia of Augustus, Trajan and the successive pre-Christian emperors. Such a distancing of the Sistine letters from the then so much admired proportions of the Trajan column was deliberate (MORISON 1962, pp. 24–25) and encouraged by Pope Sixtus V as part of his desired conversion of pagan materials and buildings for Christian use (HARRIS 1998, p. 48). On the model of the characters of Cresci and Orfei, the Christian militant inscriptions of Papal Rome until the 17th century were drawn up, starting from the inscription at the base of the lantern of the dome of Saint Peter’s of the 1589, up to the inscription in black mosaic on gold that runs on the continuous fascia of the cupola of San Pietro del 1589 circa, sino all’iscrizione mosaica nero su oro che corre sulla fascia continua della trabeazione sempre all’interno della Basilica di San Pietro. A tale tipo di carattere solenne d’apparato si ispireranno poi i diversi papi che successero a Sisto V per esaltare attraverso queste forme di scrittura spettacolare le proprie imprese urbanistiche e monumentali (PETRUCCI 1986, pp. 30–32). A differenza di tutti gli studi elaborati in quegli anni, i disegni dei caratteri iscritti delle Capitale Romane in realtà venivano prima disegnati su pietra con il pennello a mano libera e poi successivamente incisi sulla pietra (LUSSU 1999, p. 67) per cui tutte le traduzioni secondo canoni geometrici ideali rimanevano comunque distanti dai modelli di origine. Il contrasto tra gli spessori dei tratti ha infatti una ragione calligrafica, cioè è legato all’uso del pennello piatto (HARRIS 1998, p. 83) la cui traccia modificava il suo spessore a seconda della direzione del gesto. L’unico riferimento geometrico che sembra emergere dalle testimonianze a noi pervenute sono le linee guida parallele che governavano la dimensione dei caratteri (MORISON 1972, p. 39). La stessa origine si ritrova nell’etimologia della parola “grazie” usata per indicare il disegno dei tratti terminali dei caratteri, la cui co-
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Figura 5 
Geoffroy Tory, Champ Fleury, 1529. Studi geometrici dei caratteri latini. 
Bibliothèque nationale de France. (Visita il 23 luglio 2018). Disponibile da: https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b86998308/f68.image

...r=Tory+Champ+Fleury.langFR.

Figura 6 
Giovanbattista Palatino, Libro Nuovo, 1540. Studi geometrici dei caratteri latini. 

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L’archetipo greco

L’aggiunta delle grazie, elementi grafici termi- nali dei tratti dei caratteri, che nel corso del tempo hanno assunto un ruolo fondamentale nella leggibilità dei testi, nasce come abbelli- mento celebrativo apportato dai Romani all’al- fabeto greco, a sua volta derivante da quello fenicio, che in questo modo impreziosisce i testi associando così al disegno dei caratteri un’aura di solennità e importanza (MORISON 1972, p. 11). Infatti l’arricchimento dei caratteri con elementi non necessari implica un maggiore tempo di realizzazione, una mag- giore abilità da parte degli scribi e dunque un maggior dispendio economico. I caratteri con le grazie diventano in questo modo i caratteri identificativi delle classi più agiate e il simbolo del potere (MORISON 1972, p. 14).

La storia dell’affermazione dei caratteri senza grazia che richiama l’archetipo greco appare in realtà meno chiara rispetto a quella dei car-atteri latini. Tuttavia in letteratura essa viene ricondotta alle trasformazioni culturali, sociali ed economiche dei primi dell’Ottocento. Con la nascita della pubblicità, così come la inten- diamo oggi, nel corso di questi anni si assiste ad un’esplosione incontrollata di nuovi carat-teri che cercano di imporsi sullo sfondo della caotica diffusione di materiali stampati (LUSSU 1990, p. 60). Il processo di lento, lineare e progressivo adattamento dei rapporti dimen-sionali tra le parti delle lettere degli alfabeti per assorbire e rispecchiare le trasformazioni della sensibilità estetica e delle tecnologie connesse con la scrittura e la stampa che aveva caratteriz- zato la storia dei caratteri con le grazie derivati...
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received. In fact, it dates back to 1760 and is by George Dance, who, together with the drawing and survey of Vespasian's Temple in Rome, also drew its inscriptions (HARRIS 1998, p. 90).

The calligraphic roots of the font will then be lost in what will be another significant moment for the relations between character design and power. The same role of representation of power was assigned to Romain du Roi in relation to the monarchy of Louis XIV, who in 1692 commissioned the study of a new character designed according to scientific principles. Once again the study is conducted by a mathematician, Nicolas Jaureg, who sets the character drawing on a square grid of 48 modules (fig. 10). The real character is protected by a strict prohibition on reproduction, even if in reality it starts to be copied and modified immediately by printers (LUSSO 1990, p. 56). The relationship between printers and rulers became particularly intense in these centuries, as is also testified by the numerous honours and gifts they received, a sign of an awareness of the power that the characters can exercise in the representation and celebration of power (LUSSO 1990, p. 57).

After this first discovery of the Roman archetype in the Renaissance, the Trajan archetype re-emerged once again between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries within the schools of the Art and Crafts movement (HARRIS 1998, p. 26), where it was taken as a model in classes of character drawing, such as that held by Edward Johnston at the Central School of Art and Crafts, among whose ranks sat Eric Gill whose figure will then bind to the affirmation of sans-serif characters.

The Greek archetype

The addition of serifs, terminal graphic elements of the strokes of characters that over time have assumed a fundamental role in the legibility of texts, was born as a celebratory embroidery brought by the Romans to the Greek alphabet, in turn derived from the Phoenician. Thus, in this way they embellish the texts associating to the drawing of characters an aura of solemnity and importance (MORISON 1972, p. 11). In fact, the enrichment of characters with unnecessary elements...
implies a longer realization time, a greater ability on the part of the scribes and therefore a greater economic expenditure. Consequently, characters with serifs become the identifying sign of the wealthier classes and the symbol of the greater economic expenditure. Consequently, the process of slow, linear and progressive adaptation of the dimensional relationships between the parts of the letters of the alphabets, to ab-sorb and reflect the transformations of aesthetic sensitivity and technologies associated with writing and printing that had characterized the history of the affirmation of the characters with serifs derived from the Latin alphabet, gives way to an acceler-ation in different and contrasting directions. On the one hand, the process of exasperation of the contrast between the weight of the strokes and the serifs is concluded, which will lead to the history of the characters with serifs become the identifying sign of the wealthier classes and the symbol of the greater economic expenditure. Consequently, the process of slow, linear and progressive adaptation of the dimensional relationships between the parts of the letters of the alphabets, to absorb and reflect the transformations of aesthetic sensitivity and technologies associated with writing and printing that had characterized the history of the affirmation of the characters with serifs derived from the Latin alphabet, gives way to an acceleration in different and contrasting directions. On the one hand, the process of exasperation of the contrast between the weight of the strokes and the serifs is concluded, which will lead to

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the drawing of the ‘stick’ characters, closing that circle of strengthening and weakening of the serifs of the Latin characters starting from the Greek characters. On the other hand, the serifs gain importance, acquiring the same thickness of the strokes and originating the so-called ‘Egyptian’ fonts, or even becoming prevalent in the design of French Clarendon. Despite the fact that sans-serif characters became established between the 19th and 20th centuries as a result of a process of simplification, lightening and search for formal simplicity, in reality they cannot be read only as the result of a process of evolution of the type design. In fact, the Latin archetype was born from another archetype, the Greek alphabet (fig. 11), already at the beginning without serifs, which many characters referred to, starting with those of Republican Rome, whose simple and clear design aspired to reflect the moral qualities of these political systems (MOsLEY 2001, p. 12), to also become a symbol of something pure, simple, non-corrupt, such as what is natural and primordial (HARRIS 1998, p. 99), as opposed to what is enriched and decorated as were the Latin characters. Essentiality and simplicity will then be the canons of the new aesthetic and the new rational ideology that opposed, at the beginning of the 19th century, the Gothic and Deco styles and that adopted the Soviet and Weimerian models in the new graphic-architectural language of the new fascist political regime (PETRuCCI 1986, pp. 134–136). Indeed, in 1933 Paul Renner presented the Futura character at the Triennale di Milano, which was to become the basic model for the self-representation of the fascist regime. As in the past, first in Imperial Rome and then in Papal Rome, even with the advent of Fascism the city was the protagonist of ambitious celebrating monumental urban projects in which demotic and new architectures dressed broad perspectives and new surfaces on which to stand commemorative and solemn texts visible from distance that formed an integral part of architectural and urban planning as, for example, in the case of the University City of Rome (IPPOLITI, CALVANO, GUADAGNOLI 2016). The types used in the new public writings are always sans-serif, not only engraved on the stone, but also made with the technique of mosaic and of mural painting executed manually with a brush or with stencils, but always carefully studied and rigorously proportioned to preserve, therefore, their representativeness and official nature (PETRUCCI 1986, p. 137).

The Gothic archetype
Instead, in the same years, in Germany it were the Gothic characters to be initially assumed, by decree of Joseph Goebbels, Minister of Nazi propaganda, as official characters of the regime and symbol of the most authentic Germanness. However, in 1941, because of the difficulty of reading this kind of characters – according to some authors particularly felt in the occupied countries (BURKE 1998, pp. 148–150; LUSU 1999, p. 62), but according to others in military environments and in particular by pilots of aeronautics who could not easily read the texts written on the aircrafts (HELLER 2004, p. 151) – they will be officially abolished by law on the official motivations of being judeoletter, or Jewish characters. Paradoxically, the same fate had first been touched to the characters of the Die Neue Typographie adopted by the Weimar Republic and then abolished in 1933 with the same motivation, judeoletter, to leave room for the more Germanic Fraktur of Gothic origin to which those characters programmatically opposed (JOBLING, CROWLEY 1996, p.140). The Fraktur is in fact based on the design of the liturgical Gothic characters of Gutenberg’s prints of the mid-fifteenth century and then developed in the sixteenth century following various evolutionary paths, one of which will be that of the Fraktur, repeatedly used throughout history as an emblem of Germanity, well before Nazi adoption (HELLER 2004, p. 152). Also this archetype, resulting from an adaptation to the spirit of the time of Caro- lina’s calligraphic writing (GREGORIETTI, VAS SALE 2007, p. 90), was forcibly subjected to processes of geometrization in search of codes for their ideal design, such as those conducted by Sigismundo de’ Fant in 1514 and Albert Dürer in 1525 (fig. 12; MORISON 1972, p. 322) consistently with the Renaissance enjoyment and of the regole of the armonia. Dopo il 1945, con la fine del regime, il Fraktur, e più in generale i caratteri gotici, cadono pressoché in disuso in ambito politico e istituzionale proprio a causa della forte carica simbolica da essi assunta nei decenni precedenti, mantenendosi invece in uso, oltre che come rappresentazioni di quelle stesse ideologie, in altri settori, come quelli commerciali più recenti che possono invece beneficiare delle qualità gotiche o teutoiche a cui il loro disegno si ricollega.

Nuovi poteri, nuovi caratteri
Sebbene quelli precedentemente descritti non siano gli unici archetipi nella storia delle scritture d’apparato e più in generale nella storia della scrittura, meritano un’attenzione particolare le evoluzioni più recenti. Se il Novecento è stato il secolo in cui le modalità di comunicazione del potere attraverso le scritture d’apparato si sono consolidate, l’avvento del nuovo secolo e del nuovo millennio segnano alcuni profondi cambiamenti nelle modalità di comunicazione del potere. Nel suo La scrittura. Ideologia e Rappresentazione, Armando Petrucci (PETRUCCI 1986) analizza l’evoluzione storica della rappresentazione delle ideologie e del potere attraverso la scrittura partendo dagli archetipi e arrivando sino ai tempi più recenti, in relazione all’anno di pubblicazione del libro, comprendendo forme di comunicazione non solo permanenti come le iscrizioni epigrafiche, ma anche effimere e temporanee, a partire dalle pitture murali della propaganda stili di vita e, con questi, le modalità e i canali dei grafiti. Nel momento in cui le nuove iscrizioni urbane diventano meno frequenti e sempre più estese alla ricerca formale che ne ha caratterizzato l’evoluzione, l’attenzione per le trasformazioni delle scritture d’apparato si focalizza infatti verso altre forme di espressione. Cambia, inoltre, anche il ruolo dello spazio pubblico. Mutano gli usi e più in generale le modalità di comunicazione con il pubblico. Basti pensare agli spazi per le affissioni elettorali che nei decenni precedenti erano affollati di manifesti e di propaganda e che ormai si trovano inutilizzati in occasione delle consultazioni elettorali a causa di uno spostamento della comunicazione dagli spazi della città agli spazi digitali.
New powers, new characters

Although those described above are not the only archetypes in the history of public lettering and more generally in the history of writing, the most recent developments deserve particular attention. If the twentieth century and of the new millennium mark some profound changes in the modes of communication of power through the public writings were consolidated, the advent of the new century and of the new millennium mark some profound changes in the modes of communication of power. In his La scrittura. Ideologia e rappresentazione, Armando Petrucci (PETRUCCI 1986) analyzes the forms of communication of power through the publication of the work, including not only permanent inscriptions, but also those ephemeral and temporary, starting from the murals of fascist inscriptions, but also those ephemeral and temporary, starting from the murals of fascist and social networks. This paradigm shift invites us to search for new forms of communication of power in virtual spaces accessible through the Internet. Public communication is now entrusted to messages disseminated directly through social networks, skipping the transition to traditional media that has instead characterized public communication in the last decades of the last century. The era in which public opinion could be shaped or, in any case, influenced through the public, material and monumental lettering seems now distant, replaced by an age in which communication becomes increasingly private, dematerialized, minute, and enclosed within pocket mobile devices.

Propaganda today spread through the messages of social networks and transmitted through technological tools, both managed by large private companies that manage public communication, and for this reason become the new economic and political powers of our time. Power continues to be linked to communication, but the new powers are not represented by those who send messages but by those who transmit them, through the provision of their own technologies and applications. Companies like Google, Facebook and Apple that today, reach a value higher than that of the GDPs of many Western countries, confirming themselves as the new powers, not only economic but also political, of our time. The forms of power have changed but the role of the web and of the social network. This mutative form of communication invites us to see the shifts and changes in power that are not just technological but also cultural and social. The new economic and political powers of our time are not just technological, but also cultural and social, and the power that now remain unused during the elections because of a shift in communication from the new economic and political powers of our time. The power continues to be linked to communication, but the new powers are not represented by those who send messages but by those who transmit them, through the provision of their own technologies and applications. Companies like Google, Facebook and Apple that today, reach a value higher than that of the GDPs of many Western countries, confirming themselves as the new powers, not only economic but also political, of our time. The forms of power have changed but the role of the web and of the social network. This mutative form of communication invites us to see the shifts and changes in power that are not just technological but also cultural and social. The new economic and political powers of our time are not just technological, but also cultural and social, and the power that now remain unused during the elections because of a shift in communication from the

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principles inspiring the search for perfection and the rules of harmony. After 1945, with the end of the regime, the Fraktur, and more generally the Gothic characters, fell almost into disuse in the political and institutional sphere precisely because of the strong symbolic power they had absorbed in previous decades. They remain instead in use, as well as symbol of those same ideologies, in other sectors, such as more recent commercial ones which can instead benefit from the Gothic or Teutonic roots to which their design relates.

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of the characters have not changed. Studied and designed to adapt to new and different sizes and new ways of transmitting and reading messages, like their predecessors these new characters also continue to play the role of symbols of the new powers. Like the San Francisco font, which characterizes all the graphical interfaces of Apple devices communication. The first font designed in 2015 by Apple, the San Francisco (fig. 13), has been optimized to be used on very small size digital devices. It modifies through some optical adjustments the previous Helvetica Neue, which was designed for printing on paper and therefore it was not entirely suitable to the new needs related to the reading on digital screens. It is the first font to be considered 'digital native' as it is designed to adapt in responsive modality to all sizes of all possible screens on which it is displayed; a task hitherto entrusted to developers rather than just to the font. In particular, kerning, glyphs, eye, punctuation and the general design change their characteristics to ensure maximum readability 1. The same attention to the design of new generation parametric and responsive fonts also characterizes the other companies that dominate today the sphere of digital communication, in particular with the use of 'authorial' images now available to all, thanks to the applications that today the widespread mobile devices are provided with (SALERNO 2016, p. 65), the public also becomes the sender and at the meantime the means of the dissemination of public communication messages. In the era of the democratizing of the communication, favored by the greater diffusion and accessibility of professional tools for the construction of graphic contents, the making of visual communication theoretically becomes something accessible to all. Through the messages published on social networks, public and political communication takes the form of a communication from below, popular and populist, in which the messages elaborated and published by heads of state, political parties, economic powers have the same visibility as that of any citizen who, through the sharing of messages, becomes an amplifier of public communication. These new modes of communication give graphic languages a new centrality. Since speed is the characteristic element of the new communication media, the use of images to 1. Developer: Apple Inc. 2018. [visited June 22, 2018]. Available at: https://developer.apple.com/design/human-interface-guidelines/ios/visual-design/typography/ 2. Prototype: [visited June 22, 2018]. Available at: https://spectral.prototype.io. 

Se da un lato i caratteri della comunicazione vengono studiati e imposti dalle aziende che rendono disponibili gli applicativi con cui oggi si divulga la comunicazione, dall’altra saranno gli utenti a dare un loro personale contributo all’affermazione dei tipi di caratteri. Con l’irruzione della dimensione individuale nella comunicazione, in particolare nell’uso delle immagini “authorial” ornali alla portata di tutti, grazie alle applicazioni di cui oggi i dispositivi mobili-capillarmente diffusi sono provvisti (SALERNO 2016, p. 65), anche il pubblico si fa attorno e allo stesso tempo il mezzo di diffusione dei messaggi della comunicazione pubblica. Nell’epoca della democratizzazione della comunicazione, favorita dalla maggiore diffusione e accessibilità degli strumenti professionali per la costruzione di contenuti grafici, la comunicazione visiva diventa infatti teoricamente alla portata di tutti. Attraverso i messaggi pubblici sui social network la comunicazione pubblica, politica e d’apparato assume le sembianze di una comunicazione dal basso, popolare e populistì, con i messaggi elaborati e pubblicati da capi di stato, parti politiche, potenze economiche, hanno la stessa visibilità di quello di qualunque cittadino che attraverso la condivisione dei messaggi si fa amplificatore della comunicazione pubblica. Queste nuove modalità di comunicazione conferiscono ai linguaggi grafici una rinnovata centralità. Poiché la velocità si configura come elemento caratterizzante dei nuovi modi di comunicazione, ne deriva una crescita esponenziale dell’uso di immagini per veicolare messaggi e per catalizzare l’attenzione del pubblico. Si rafforza così l’idea di un’ecomonia dell’attenzione (DAVENPORT, BECK 2001, p. 20) intesa come studio dell’uso ottimale di risorse scarce come lo è l’attenzione del pubblico. Nell’economia dell’attenzione capire e prevedere dove e come si può soffermare lo sguardo dell’osservatore è la nuova frontiera della ricerca al centro degli interessi delle aziende sempre più disponibili a mettere a disposizione gratuitamente servizi e applicazioni in cambio dell’attenzione del pubblico che, una volta raccolta, diventa merce con un alto valore economico messa in vendita dai “mercanti dell’attenzione” (WU 2016, pp. 5–7). L’attenzione del pubblico è da considerarsi dunque oggi sempre più come merce preziosa e le immagini strumento efficace per guadagnarla (YACOB 2015, pp. 5–6). Per questo si vanno diffondendo nella comunicazione sul web messaggi virali che mettono insieme immagini e testi brevi di forte impatto con cui oggi vengono diffusi capillarmente i messaggi della propaganda politica. I nuovi caratteri delle scritture d’apparato sembrano essere quelli che maggiormente sono compatibili con queste nuove strategie di comunicazione. Assimilando, ad esempio, ad un revival dell’Impact che, essendo stato progettato negli anni ‘60 proprio per avere un’ottima leggibilità anche con lo sfondo di immagini (fig. 15), si configura come il carattere più efficace per questo tipo di comunicazione su social network, forum, chat e su tutti i canali di comunicazione partecipati che caratterizzano la nostra epoca (BRIDEAU, BERRET 2014).

Conclusioni
Il disegno dei caratteri è sempre stato nel corso della storia un fondamentale strumento per la propaganda e di comunicazione tra il potere e l’opinione pubblica. Le forme di tali caratteri si sono evolute in relazione non solo alla necessità di autorappresentazione dei poteri politici, religiosi, culturali ed economici così come si sono evolute le tecnologie e i mezzi tecnologici attraverso cui la comunicazione è stata trasformata nel corso dell’evoluzione della cultura occidentale si sono succeduti diversi modi di comunicazione e sono evolute in relazione alla trasformazione della società e ai meccanismi tecnologici attraverso cui la comunicazione è stata trasformata nel corso delle ultime decadi. Nel corso di questo processo culturale sono venute in auge le forme di comunicazione destinate a specifici pubblici e il potere è stato in grado di dominare la comunicazione in questo lato, ad esempio, ad un revival dell’Impact che, essendo stato progettato negli anni ‘60 proprio per avere un’ottima leggibilità anche con lo sfondo di immagini (fig. 15), si configura come il carattere più efficace per questo tipo di comunicazione su social network, forum, chat e su tutti i canali di comunicazione partecipati che caratterizzano la nostra epoca (BRIDEAU, BERRET 2014).


convey messages and to attract the public’s attention is growing exponentially. For this reason, it is becoming increasingly accepted the idea of an ‘economy of attention’ (DAVENDRAN, BECK 2001, p. 20), understood as the study of the optimal use of scarce resources as is the attention of the public. In the ‘economy of attention’ to understand and to predict where and how the observer looks at is the new frontier of research at the center of the interests of companies, increasingly willing to provide free services and applications in exchange for the attention of the public that, once collected, becomes a product with a high economic value offered for sale by the ‘merchants of attention’ (WU 2016, pp. 5–7). Therefore, the attention of the public is to be considered today more and more as a precious commodity and the images as an effective tool to earn it (YACOB 2015, pp. 5–6). Consequently, viral visual messages are spreading in web communication, bringing together images and short texts of strong impact with which the messages of political propaganda are now widespread. The new characters of the public lettering seem to be those which are more compatible with these new strategies of communication. We are witnessing, for example, a revival of the Impact font that, having been designed in the ’60s to have an excellent readability even with the background of images (fig. 15), is configured as the most effective character for this type of visual message on social networks, forums, chats and all participatory communication channels that characterize our era (BRIDEAU, BERRET 2014).

**Conclusions**

Characters design has always been a fundamental tool of propaganda and communication between power and public opinion throughout history. Their forms have evolved not only in relation to the need for self-representation of the potents, but also in relation to the transformation of aesthetic sensibility and of the technological means through which communication was transmitted. During the entire evolution of Western culture, different political, religious, cultural and economic powers have followed one another, as well as technologies have evolved and the supports through which writings were exposed to the public have modified. The design of the characters has always adapted and still continues to adapt, maintaining the power to represent, identify and exert the forms of power that commission their design and govern its diffusion.

The written communication, the letterings, maintain unchanged their effectiveness in spite of the passing of the millennia thanks to its being graphic entities, drawable, modifiable and adaptable, able to maintain unchanged their linguistic meaning in spite of the transformation of their graphic meaning. This duplicity of meaning that the alphabetic characters incorporate have allowed them to confirm their capacity for representation and to adapt to the changing nature of the supports, first stone, then paper and now digital, adapting to dematerialization, popularization, miniaturization and parametrization of public lettering that, perhaps, today can no longer be called ‘monumental’, as understood by Petrucci, but ephemeral.

**References / Bibliography**


