



segni 16.03 _ 18.05.2019 esemplari

Palazzo della Pilotta, Biblioteca Palatina

cogitations and digressions
on the shape of writing
to celebrate the bi-centenary
of the *Manuale tipografico*
by Giambattista Bodoni:
manuals, printers' catalogues and posters
in an exhibition organised
by the Museo Bodoniano of Parma



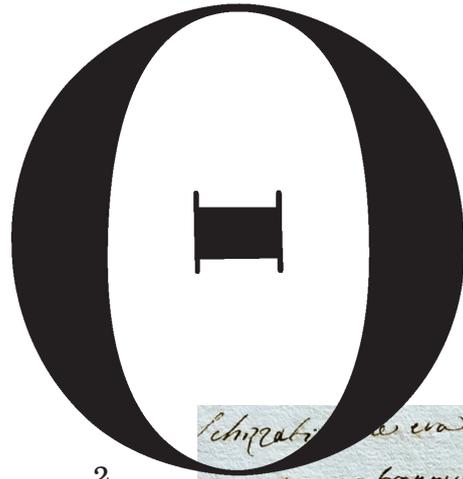
Only recently the year ended in which the bi-centenary of the publication of Giambattista Bodoni's *Manuale tipografico* occurred, and the occasion has prompted an exhibition and study day organised by the Fondazione Museo Bodoniano of Parma. ¶ The manual was published posthumously by Bodoni's widow in order to bring to completion a long-matured project taken on by her husband. It consists of a collection of 665 different alphabets and a series of around 1,300 friezes, as well as a foreword in which Bodoni lays out some of his working methods. ¶ There was a previous collection of typefaces printed by Bodoni in 1788, at the time also entitled *Manuale tipografico*, but the work lacks a preface or other explanatory text. It is probable that the letter founder from Parma had borrowed the title from a small technical manual by Fournier, the *Manuel typographique* of 1764, but in reality the two volumes, although sharing the same name, were objects with very different functions. Indeed, Fournier's was a manual in the real sense of the term, an explanatory publication describing the essential elements of the complex activity of the letter founder, from punch-cutting to producing matrices and ultimately moveable characters. Whereas that of Bodoni was a sample book displaying typefaces and ornaments that he had designed. ¶ The *Manuale tipografico* of 1818 is something else again, being more of a hybrid that, despite its name, belongs neither to the field of manuals, nor to the field of typeface catalogues. Here, what we find is a proud and monumental summary of his activity, which Bodoni wanted to conserve in time, setting it down in black and white. ¶ Taking these elements as a starting point, alongside the display of Bodoni's books, his punches and matrices, hand-written notes and archival documents we are showing a selection of manuals and typeface catalogues, or specimens as they were then called, designed by other typographers (before and after 1818), with the aim of bringing to a less-specialised public these two distinct and little known types of publications. What they have in common, however, is the object at the centre of the work, which is to say alphabet letters in their printed form: writing that as it spread has had such a weighty effect on western culture over the last five centuries. ¶ In parallel, part of the exhibition is dedicated to printing today. A select group of international graphic designers has contributed to the making of a typographical poster. The objective of this section is to set up a visual recognition of concepts around the potential of writing expressed by designers who are known for their outstanding and conversant approach to printing. If the poster can be defined as a programmatic document that lays out rules and inspirational principles, we find ourselves in the unusual situation in which the object in question and its shape coincide, as do the designer and contributor. ¶ Exemplary Signs, therefore, are visual testimonies that allow us to trace our changing history by means of the evolving shapes of lettering, and to take the opportunity to set in motion new critical discussions on the theme of writing as a tool of knowledge.

— Silvana Amato

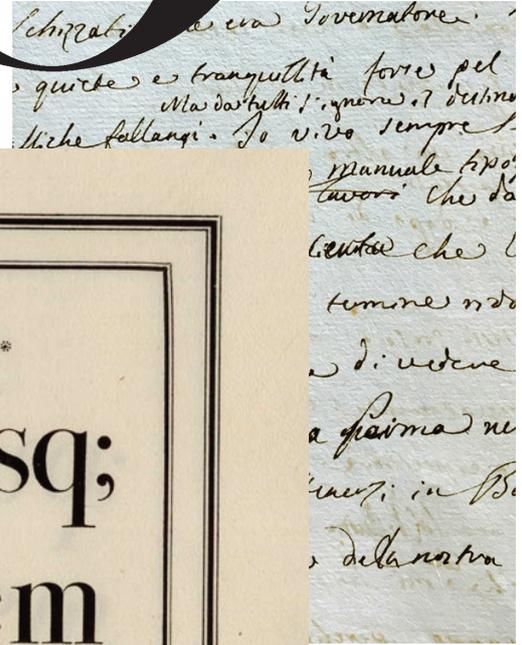




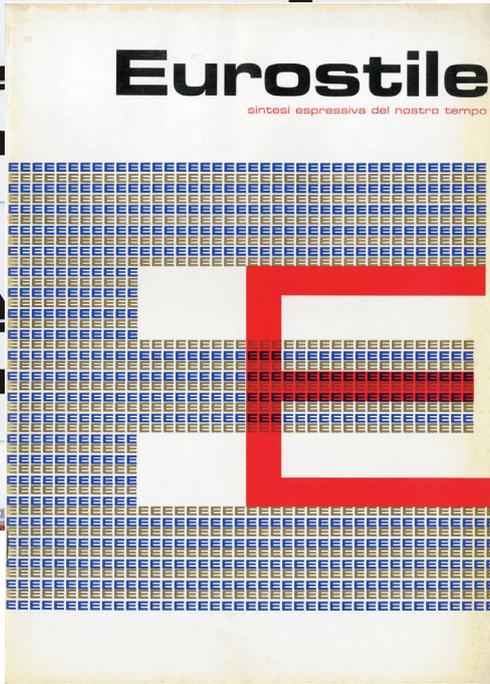
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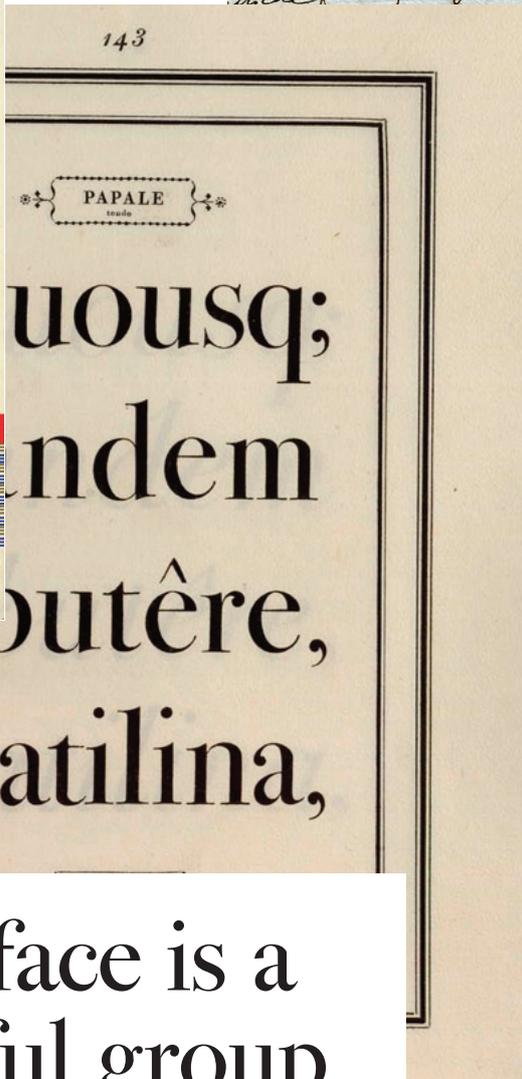
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3



4



143

6



5

7 A typeface is a beautiful group of letters, not a group of beautiful letters.



8

1 — manifesto poster designed for the exhibition by the British graphic designer Patrick Thomas illustrating on a wall one of the first principles he learnt as a student: kerning (or the empty space between letters) is easier to check when holding the text upside down

2 — the letter Theta from the Greek alphabet, one of the so-called “exotic” characters designed by Giambattista Bodoni, is taken from page 42 of the second volume of the *Manuale tipografico* of 1818

3 — minute signature from a letter dated 29 December 1800 to Andrés Franco Castellanos in which Bodoni writes: “I live cut off from the world, endeavouring to finish my *Manuale tipografico* which has kept me extremely busy for forty years, and be assured that you will receive a copy as long as it meets praiseworthy completion”

4 — catalogue from the Nebiolo type foundry in Turin that shows the *Eurostile* designed in 1962 by Aldo Novarese, a character that is unique for its geometricity and becomes, in Italy, one of the most famous and recognisable of the period

5 — one of the eight sides of the brochure from the Berthold foundry of Berlin that reproduces *Lo* in the italic version by Louis Oppenheim, a character designed in 1914 that adopts a typical style of the time, with an irregular outline that gives the impression that it is cut by hand

6 — character in Papale typeface that can be found on page 143 of the first volume of the *Manuale tipografico* of 1818 on every page of which, beneath the identically repeated text (the incipit of the first Catiline Oration by Cicero), is displayed the name of a different Italian city and this, the last, shows the largest character body, named Saluzzo after Bodoni’s birthplace

7 — manifesto poster designed for the exhibition by Matthew Carter, British by birth but American by adoption, in which the famous designer of typefaces clarifies an essential principle in the culture of printing

8 — one of the many decorations designed by Bodoni; at the end of the printers’ catalogues of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there was usually a final part dedicated to these decorative glyphs (this is the digital version designed in 1994 by the Californian Sumner Stone)

— the exhibition was curated by Silvana Amato

— with Grazia Maria De Rubeis and Caterina Silva

— it was made possible thanks to the valuable contributions of Majid Abbasi, Peter Bil’ak, Matthew Carter, Simon Esterson, Vince Frost, Mark Gowing, Joost Grootens, Jianping He, Henrik Kubel, Zuzana Ličko, Sascha Lobe, Ellen Lupton, Karel Martens, Ahn Sang-Soo, Gerwin Schmidt, António Silveira Gomes, Erik Spiekermann, Astrid Stavro, Sumner Stone, Lucille Tenazas, Patrick Thomas, Rudy VanderLans

— a particular thanks go to Chiara Mediolì

— the volumes on display come for the most part from the collection at the Palatina Library; further loans were kindly made by the Tipoteca Italiana Fondazione and the Aiap-CDPG Centro di Documentazione sul Progetto Grafico

— Rosanna Lama and Nicolò Mingolini collaborated with Silvana Amato on the exhibition’s graphic design

— the typeface used in the text is *Caponi* by Paul Barnes and Christian Schwartz, Commercial Type 2014, whose shapes are based on typefaces designed in early years of Bodoni’s activity; ornaments and other occasional signs are taken from *Bodoni ornaments* and *ITC Bodoni* by Sumner Stone

The exhibition is on show at Palazzo della Pilotta near Galleria Petitot in the Biblioteca Palatina

it will be open from Saturday 16 March to Saturday 18 May 2019

Monday to Thursday from 9am to 6pm – Friday and Saturday from 9am to 1pm

and exceptionally on Sunday 24 March from 1pm to 7pm

ticket 3 euro



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