

AESTHETIC FORMS AND SOCIAL COMMITMENT: THE DEBATE OF THE ITALIAN
NEOAVANT-GARDE

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The conception of art as social engagement has been a pivotal one in the entire second half of twentieth century, either by enlisting large numbers of supporters or by provoking sharp dissensions. Indeed, the contrasting positions incited by this aesthetic orientation seem to swing back and forth like the movement of a pendulum.

The post-WWII generation, guided by the legacy of the political and moral antagonism toward nazifascism and by the experience of the Resistance (interpreted as a struggle for the foundation of a new society), constructed a model of art based on social commitment that was to become dominant in literature, cinema, and the visual arts throughout the late 1940s and the 1950s. Undoubtedly, the most influential expressions of this model are embodied in France by Jean Paul Sartre's notion of the littérature engagée and in Italy by the movement of neorealism.

This aesthetic orientation is sustained by a view of literature and the arts as instruments of ideology or tools of socio-political praxis. Commitment is entrusted to canons of representation through which social realities find redemption in being opposed either by the ethical resentments or by ideological promises of collective salvation. Essentially art is legitimized by ethics and ideology. This general trend is detectable in the cinema of Rossellini, Visconti, De Sica; in novelists like

Pratolini, Moravia, Pavese, including younger authors such as Pasolini; and in visual artists like Guttuso and Sassu.

This model came under attack when a younger generation of artists and critics started to focus on the formal organization of the art work. The objective here is to survey the emergence of this new aesthetic framework within the domain of literature as experienced in Italy. A parallel situation can be traced also in France where the nouveau roman and the group of Tel Quel, in its initial stage, embody a radical abandonment of the socially-committed artistic discourse. Within the French context, it was perhaps Roland Barthes one of the first to identify in a neutral mode of writing, defined as the 'zero degree of writing,' a

definitive shift from the literature engagé. He writes:
 It is because there is no thought without language, that Form is the first and last arbiter of literary responsibility, and it is because there is no reconciliation within the present society, that language, necessary and necessarily orientated, creates for the writer a situation fraught with conflict [...] it is now writing which absorbs the whole identity of a literary work [...] Literature [...] invents its language only in order to be a project: Literature becomes the Utopia of language.¹

In Italy, it was the work centered around the review Il Verri (founded in 1956 by Luciano Anceschi) and the subsequent formation of the neoavant-garde that radically questioned the conceptual and aesthetic framework of art as social engagement. The first coordinated evidence came to life with the publication of the poetry anthology I Novissimi: Poesie per gli anni '60, edited by Alfredo Giuliani and including his texts and those by Elio Pagliarani, Nanni Balestrini, Antonio Porta, and Edoardo Sanguineti.² This represented the first step toward the creation of

the Italian neoavant-garde. In his introduction to the anthology, Giuliani perceives poetry exclusively as a provoking linguistic experience. Against any instrumental view of language, Giuliani insists that a poet must be preoccupied with words and not with ideologies or pre-given truths. He writes:
 [B]efore looking to abstract ideology, to cultural intention, we look to the concrete semantics of poetry, mindful that it is a after all an art, a vis milologica. (I Nov, 23)

Such a poetics generates various corollaries. The major one is the rejection of an ante poesim ideology. Subject and object of its operation, poetry is not seen in an ancillary, servile subordination to reality, and not even as its metaphor. Rather, poetry is conceived as an alternative dimension to our life-world and to everyday linguistic practices. This position recalls that of the American Black Mountain poet Charles Olson when he declared that 'art is the only twin life has--its only valid metaphysics. Art does not seek to describe but to enact.'³ Giuliani forcefully states:

If to live is already "to represent," i.e. to write, biologically to carve memorial signs, creating poetry means forcing life to rewrite itself, to scramble and reassemble memorial signs in unprecedented connections, to push it to free itself from the fetishes of representations into visions that "traverse," without stopping and "forming" in either one or the other, the language of life and the language of art.

In other words: the primacy of structure, its putting itself in place of representation, means that poetry, rather than offering itself whole as a metaphor of the real, is constituted as another pole of the linguistic world we all write in living. (I Nov, 56)

The Novissimi thus reject any conventional conception of realism based on principles of verisimilitude, factuality and fidelity in the documentation of social and individual life.

Indeed, they contest any practice of mimetic narration tied to criteria of plausibility, normality, and acceptability--the kind of literature that finds fulfilment by taking on issues of a social nature explored, or explorable, perhaps with better instruments, outside of its field. In this perspective, literature cannot be reduced to contents and themes; it does many other things in virtue of its language. Language becomes its content and its vision of the world.

Giuliani and the Novissimi favour a pragmatic, gestural attitude. By abandoning the constrictions of representational aesthetics, they shifts towards a deliberately arbitrary and deviant poetic structure. Poetry is, first of all, not so much a cognitive medium, but a form of contact. As Giuliani argues in an essay written in 1962, '[p]oetry is not a form of knowledge, but a mode of contact. Poetry is made to act [...], [it] is a cultivated capacity of contact with the linguistic reality (that is with the linguistic modality of reality.'⁴

Poetry's content is what it does--how it acts upon the reader, the action it exerts:
 Why are we so concerned with diction, syntax, meter, and so on? Because if we grant that, in its "contemporaneity," poetry acts directly on the reader's vitality, then what matters most is its linguistic efficacy. What poetry does is precisely its "content" [...] in periods of crisis the modus operandi coincides almost totally with meaning. (I Nov, 21)

Prompted by this emerging new aesthetic model, in 1962 Umberto Eco writes an essay entitled 'Del modo di formare come impegno sulla realtà' [Form as Social Commitment] in response to a discussion promoted by the review Il menabò on the relation

between literature, the arts, and industrial society.⁵

Eco adheres to the implications present in Hegel's dialectics that tension between subject and object is unsuppressible from any human activity. Indeed, he sets Marx aside and returns to Hegel by identifying alienation with objectification. In his view, the knowledge of the object and the ensuing construction of self-consciousness does not lead, as Marx had envisioned, to the overcoming of the condition of alienation to the object or to its negation.⁶ With this premise he sets the ground for an analysis of alienation within the realm of art forms. In all systems of forms, Eco contends, can be detected an analogous condition of alienation. In formal systems as well it is possible to uncover a tension between 'invention and manner,' between 'freedom and restrictions dictated by conventions' (O_W, 137). Conventions and manner generate obsolescence, exhausted and stale forms, stereotypes that are drained of any communicative force and become alienated constructs within the linguistic system. Dried out forms are expressions of alienation not only for the artist, but for the public as well inasmuch as they can only command standardized acts of reception. The investigation of both social and artistic alienation leads Eco to propose a lucid defence of avant-garde practices, as the only acceptable historical possibility. In his view, the avant-garde artist is engaged in rupturing conventional language inasmuch as refuses to express through it a false sense of order that no longer corresponds to the state of alienation, or, as he puts it, 'the order of words no longer corresponds to

the order of things' (O_W, 141). Eco argues that although avant-garde artists, with their attention to formal structures, seem to be only concerned with abstractions and not with the real human condition, they are the only ones 'capable of establishing a meaningful relationship with the world in which they live' (O_W, 142). Their forms represent their discourse on the world, their cultural project, and their commitment.⁷

The cultural and aesthetic climate engendered by the Verri's work and the publication of the Novissimi exploded in the formation of Gruppo 63, a group of writers and critics--whose life-span stretches from 1963 to 1969--soon defined as the Italian neoavanguardia. The issue of form, ideology, and social commitment became a central reference at various gatherings organized by the group and it represents a clear expression of a new literary generation that aims at radically subverting the model of literature as social engagement.

One of the most forceful and provoking positions is that represented by Angelo Guglielmi, a critic whose tendencies foreshadow some of the postmodern postures that were to become dominant a decade or so later. Guglielmi's main assumption is that the primary function of avant-garde literature is that of reproducing the contradictions and the ruins of the present time and thus 'refusing to express any idea at all on the world' (G_63, 376).⁸ He argues that in writers such as Musil, Kafka, or Joyce, human actions pertaining to the moral, sentimental, or social realm, had already been emptied of any ideal function, namely the

impossibility to ground them in absolute values. As a result, reality's disclosures must be totally severed from old hermeneutic schemes and presented in a 'neutral space' where things appear in their physical and material state, 'real and immobile, without any expectation' (G 63, 379). This position seems to eradicate the revolutionary ethos of the early twenty-century avantgardism in its ambition to bridge art and life or to create a culture of dissent and antagonism. Affirmative stands are fatally vanished. They are perceived as mystifications derived from mythologizing a system of thought. For this reason Guglielmi declares the groundlessness of all meanings, dialectics, and History. Indeed, all historical processes, in his view, have simply led to the exhaustion of History itself. It is futile to call upon History to uncover a new course of action or to reconstruct a sense of the real. There can be no exegesis of reality inasmuch as all interpretative tools have fatally collapsed. There no longer exists the separation between words and things. In this theoretical orientation, words are autotelic materials, discrete fragments for constructing a reality.

In Guglielmi's outlook, the 'death of ideologies' must be at the base of the new avant-garde's literary strategy inasmuch as ideologies are negated as epistemological grids. An 'a-ideological' and 'visceral' avant-garde assumes the world as a space of chaos and disorder. Chance and 'the interchangeability of meanings and viewpoints' (G 63, 377) become the last resources for resisting silence or fabrications of reality. Faced by the death

of ideology and the crisis of cognition, the neoavant-garde literature must undertake the function of demystifying the alienated representations of the world by adopting the technique of pastiche, a conflation, a hybridization of a multiplicity of styles and viewpoints reached through intertextual quotationism and the cannibalization of conflicting linguistic modes.⁹

A novelist, whose position can be aligned with that of Giuliani and Guglielmi, is Giorgio Manganelli. In a theoretical volume entitled Letteratura come menzogna¹⁰ [Literature as a Lie] he reduces literature to rhetoric, to a game that, either 'useless' or 'poisonous' (172), ends up being a fabrication, a lie. In a world where children die of hunger, literature is an 'immoral' and 'cynical' activity (L M,172). In reducing literature to a purely linguistic act, Manganelli demystifies its social and political impact. Basically, this reduction of language to an ontological status detaches it from its social origins and from specific historical conditions. Although, in his view, literature is driven by an anarchic and utopian spirit, this is a trait dissociated from any tangible project. Indeed, for Manganelli it is only an 'infantile' and 'irritating' posture (L M, 174). He constructs a neo-baroque literary theory by declaring that a writer 'ignores totally the meaning of language' (L M,175); he posits that language 'chooses' the writer who becomes a medium through whom it expresses its 'lies, illusionisms, games, and ceremonies' (L M, 175). The writer is caught in a web of infinite linguistic subtleties. An encounter with language is an encounter

with an oracle. Language, as an oracular god delivers an ambiguous constellation of meanings, 'it communicates everything and thus nothing' (L M, 176). Manganelli's notion of literature as a fictive activity revolves around the assumption that the production of its meaning cannot be grounded in any reality. It is a gratuitous and non-cognitive activity. Literary signs are enclosed within a rhetorical verbal space in which there is no possibility of encountering referents.¹¹ This depoliticized version of the new avant-garde and particularly its rejection to view Marxism as a method for reading the world and legitimizing literary work (as it had been the case of previous generations), encountered a strong opposition in the position advocated by Edoardo Sanguineti. At the base of Sanguineti's position lies the postulate that literature is in essence a metalinguistic production of ideologies. In other words, literary language and ideology are inseparable inasmuch as a writer's form inevitably corresponds to an ideology--language is always drenched with ideological paradigms, it is always a codified way of seeing things. He states:

[I]n a text there is no ideology, aesthetically speaking, if not in the form of language. In general terms, the avant-garde thus expresses the awareness of the relationship between the intellectual and the bourgeois society in its latest development. In general and contemporaneously, it expresses the awareness of the relationship between ideology and language, namely the realization of the fact that what is intrinsic to a literary

operation is the evidence of an ideology in the form of language. (G 63, 382)

Sanguineti reverses the position commonly associated with 'vulgar' Marxism that assigns priority to content over form (content seen as an equivalent of the modes of production that determines forms, the expressions of the superstructure). For Sanguineti, a writer must oppose bourgeois society by constructing a 'new rationality' (G 63, 385) in the form of language. He remains loyal to a Marxist revolutionary ethos. In his view, by espousing forms capable of exploding bourgeois paradigms of normality, the avant-garde can rediscover the road to revolution.

In his essay 'La letteratura della crudeltà' [Literature of Cruelty], Sanguineti declares that 'the experience of words conditions--precedes--that of things' (G 63, 133) and that the transformation of reality (things) can occur through the demolition of conventional language. Avant-garde literature must express the dialectical unity of poiesis and praxis inasmuch as by contesting the ordered system of traditional language it throws into question the accepted vision of reality and the dominant ideology. Indeed, avant-garde literature, in his words, 'is not at the service of revolution, but it is the revolution at the level of words' (G 63, 134-135).

Sanguineti seems to set for himself the difficult task of reconciling the Gramscian model of the 'organic intellectual' with principles of aesthetic autonomy suggested by the Frankfurt School--Adorno in particular. He keeps firm the Gramscian

conviction of the inseparability of theory and practice and assigns to a writer's work on language the function of communicating a counter-ideology capable of supplanting the bourgeois view of the world. Praxis is identified with the verbal revolution and thus literature maintains its own autonomy with respect to the actions of the political struggle. Literature delegates its negation of the capitalist system to language-- reality does not emerge into consciousness as an cluster of empirical data, as neutral facts, but through a system of signs and codes. This is why language is seen by Sanguineti as praxis. The ruptures of the avant-garde writing, as claimed by Adorno, denounce the false harmonies and reconciling modes of bourgeois literature whose function is that of concealing alienation and social contradictions. Sanguineti assimilates Adorno's conviction that the avant-garde produces formal dissonances as messages of dialectical antithesis, as a negation of the present system and the desire for a new one.

As a rebuttal to Sanguineti's proposal to ideologize the avant-garde, Renato Barilli underscores that it is still fettered by the postwar notion of a politically committed literature inasmuch as it privileges exclusively 'practical reason' by positing ideology in 'political and economic terms' (G 63, 389). Advocating the Kantian category of 'pure reason,' Barilli contends that ideology is also related to 'perception, cognition, space, and time' (G 63, 390), elements that are fundamental for constructing a view of the world. Indeed, for Barilli literature

shows many more affinities with questions related to the sphere of psychology, anthropology, or epistemology than with those pertaining to the political or economic order. Accordingly, literature requires the adoption of an ideological orientation, but not as an embodiment of issues concerning 'practical reason.' This would heavily impair the literary word to perform an effective function. He proposes to situate the avant-garde within a dynamic process that is governed by an incessant relation between the social refusal of the new and normalization. The formal innovations and the new consciousness advocated by works of the avant-garde will inevitably be legitimized by the future society and replaced, in most cases, by other projects that, at first, will appear to be shocking--and so on, in a never-ending process.¹²

For Sanguineti, the avant-garde, as a politically-engaged force that refuses to sever the political from the aesthetic domain, cannot espouse a museumized normality inasmuch as it would entail the acceptance of bourgeois logic. Both Guglielmi's end of ideology and of dialectic and Barilli's inclusivity of otherness in the normality of bourgeois existence cannot but cause, in his view, paralysing effects, the unconditional acceptance of the world as it is.¹³

The experience of the neoavant-garde reveals the core of a plurality of issues that continue to be at the base of the debate on literature and its social functions. After three decades from its demise, literature is still wrestling with analogous disputes.

Since then, there is no doubt, the formal and linguistic significance assigned to literary projects is no longer at stake-- at least for a literature searching for some degree of autonomy. What has changed is the political reference. If then for some members of the neoavant-garde the identification of poesis with praxis rested on Marxism as a social alternative to the dehumanizing conditions under capitalism, this has been shattered by the crisis that fell upon the traditional left. Dissent and antagonism toward current social realities are no longer supported by a strong ideological struggle aimed at putting in motion radical historical changes. The crisis of utopian thought, the devaluation of class struggle as a historical telos, the end of the cold war, the political correctness, the critique cast upon the Enlightenment project of emancipation, have caused a loss of immediate and concrete social referents. Many voices have been claiming that the condition of exhaustion of all poetics centred on shock and confrontation have created an embourgeoisement of any neoavangardist revolt, inasmuch as it is completely devoured by the mechanisms of the culture industry. Indeed, influential opinion makers like Jean Baudrillard have been repeating that we live in a 'hyperreality' dominated by empty signs. 'Illusion is no longer possible'--he writes--'because the real is no longer possible [...] the real has become our true utopia--but a utopia that is no longer in the realm of the possible.'¹⁴ However, it should be underscored that although globalization is an overpowering process depleting differences, the entire planet does

not live in cyberspace and within the simulated spectacles of digital capitalism. The homogenization of the world in the post-industrial condition of western societies, with their disappearance of the real, the end of history and dialectics, is not an all-encompassing actuality. Local realities command specific narratives and a distinctive production of mythologies. What is required is the awareness of the perils connected to a hegemonic model and its colonizing effects. Perhaps a possible ground of consensus can be identified in the postulate that literary and artistic language is always a production of consciousness and collective constructs. Whenever literature--or any other art--succeeds in conceiving new forms, the perception of our human realities is unavoidably affected. In this resides the engagement of the arts.

If it is undeniable that aesthetic projects can neither compensate for the realities of the world nor substitute a direct intervention in the political sphere of social conditions, it is equally manifest that literature and the arts represent a unique space for promoting cultural changes, social critique, and the exploration of unchartered territories of human imagination.

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NOTES

1. Barthes, Roland, Le degré zero de l'écriture (Paris: Seuil, 1953); trans. Annette Lavers, and Colin Smith, Writing Degree Zero (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967), p. 89, p. 91, p. 94. Within the context of French culture, this linguistic turn aided by the discipline of structuralism and post-structuralism, will gradually not only encompass the theory of literature, but also the philosophical orientation of deconstruction and the human sciences, from Lacanian psychology to the anthropology of Levi-Strauss.
2. (Milan: Rusconi and Paolazzi, 1961); rev. ed., (Turin: Einaudi, 1965); English trans. Luigi Ballerini, Bradley Dick, David Jacobson, Michael Moore, Stephen Sartelli, and Paul Vangelisti, I Novissimi: Poetry for the Sixties (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1995). All quotations from this translation, hereinafter cited in the text as I Nov.
3. 'Human Universe,' in Robert Creely, ed., Selected Writings of Charles Olson (New York: New Directions, 1966), p. 61.
4. Immagini e maniere (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1965) p. 146, p. 148. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Italian are mine.
5. The essay first appeared on Il menabò, 5, 1962; it later became the closing chapter of the second edition of his volume Opera aperta, (Milan: Bompiani, 1967); first edition (Milan: Bompiani, 1962); trans. Anna Cancogni, The Open Work, (Harvard: Harvard College, 1989), cited in the text as O.W. As a student at the University of Turin under the guidance of Luigi Pareyson, Eco was exposed to aesthetic principles that radically questioned the dominant positions embodying both the content-oriented political art and the idealist legacy of Benedetto Croce. To the Crocean tenets of art conceived as lyrical intuition, an interior process detached from any material reality and aimed at capturing transhistorical truths, Pareyson opposes the concept of 'formatività' [formativity] (Estetica: teoria della formatività, Bologna: Zanichelli, 1960). Art, as all other human activities, is understood as a production of forms, a forming action conducted under specific historical conditions. Style is seen as the result of a dialectics between the intrinsic potentiality of matter and human creativity (the latter is identified totally with forms). From the aesthetic investigation conducted by Pareyson, Eco derives pivotal concepts that revolve around the primacy of the formal structures and the openness of the art work.
6. In his reading of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit, Eco argues that if the refusal of the object would result in the impasse

of the contemplation of a feeling of emptiness (the 'beautiful soul', as the German philosopher defines it), the integration to the object would have as a consequence the annihilation of the self--the abdication of the subject.

7. Eco illustrates his position by making references also to the field of music. He writes: '[T]he avant-garde musician rejects the tonal system not only because it alienates him to a conventional system of musical laws, but also because it alienates him to a social ethics and to a given vision of the world [...] The artist who protests through form acts on two levels. On one, he rejects a formal system but does not obliterate it; he transforms it from within by alienating himself in it and by exploiting its self-destructive tendencies. On the other, he shows his acceptance of the world as is, in full crisis, by formulating a new grammar that rests not on a system of organization but on an assumption of disorder. And this is one way in which he implicates himself in the world in which he lives, for the new language he thinks he has invented has instead been suggested to him by his very existential situation. He has no choice, since his only alternative would be to ignore the existence of crisis, to deny it by continuing to rely on the very system of order that have caused it' (O W, pp. 140-141). References are made to the system of rhyme. Eco remarks: '[A]s soon as we accept a convention we find ourselves alienated in it [...] The more a certain practice asserts itself, and the more it pushes us to contemplate creative alternatives, the more it imprisons us. The use of rhyme will result in a dictionary of rhymes, which will start as a compendium of possible rhymes and end up as a catalogue of common rhymes (O W, pp. 137-138). In other words, the avant-garde solution develops as a result of a dialectic that still reflects the historical condition that engendered it. The avant-garde artist is compelled to opt for a total immersion in the alienated language because it is the only way of objectifying in a form the state of alienation and, thus, to some extent, arrive at some clarification--the awareness of alienation does not produce its elimination.

8. Guglielmi's statement at the first gathering of Gruppo 63 (Palermo, 1963). Reproduced with the title "Il dibattito" [The Debate] in Nanni Balestrini and Alfredo Giuliani (eds.), Gruppo 63: la nuova letteratura (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1964), pp. 371-406. Hereinafter cited in the text as G 63). The debate can also be read in Renato Barilli, and Angelo Guglielmi (eds.), Gruppo 63: critica e teoria (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1976), 264-288. The premise on which the neoavanguardia seems to find some general consensus is that the displacement of dominant literary sites and norms of social communication coincides with the displacement of established grammars of the world. A subversive use of language implies a subversion of the linguistic modalities

through which reality is constructed. The dislodging of atrophied and conventional forms of writing means to dislodge ossified and alienated forms of thought. The neoavant-garde's denunciation of conventional forms of representation and mimesis, together with its condemnation of the postwar trend of reducing the literary activity to social commitment, discloses a daring attempt at shifting literature toward other tasks and possibilities. Indeed, this is not a declaration of literature's impotence as a social medium of communication. It is a forceful attempt in freeing the language of literature from tautological, decorative, and subordinate roles. The shift toward the centrality of language aims at transforming literature into an activity capable of producing its own communication--a production of forms and meanings and not an uncomplicated and dubious mirror of externality. Poiesis is recaptured in the meaning of its etymological roots: to make, to produce.

9. Guglielmi's positions are further developed in the volume Avanguardia e sperimentalismo (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1964). In its general outlook, the volume reiterates the conviction that literature must stop to falsify reality by shrouding it with moral values, prejudices of all sorts, or ideological constructs. The responsibility of a contemporary writer is that of recovering, behind false appearances, a reality in its neutral, physical, material state. Essentially, Guglielmi seems to be searching for a new canon of realism for which 'there exists no truth prior to reality' (p. 30). In his view, this crisis of reality is combined with the futility to call upon History to uncover a new course of action or to reconstruct a sense of the real. For this reasons, he must favour the writer who 'makes an effort to capture [reality] in a primeval state, as a physical matter, prior to any qualifying form of intervention, be it ideological, moral, or sentimental in nature' (p. 41). In order to fend off misleading readings of the term realism, Guglielmi is keen in clarifying that art as representation or, which is basically the same, as an hermeneutic experience, is historically hopeless. Guglielmi refuses to acknowledge even Eco's notion of art as an 'epistemological metaphor' and the world as an 'open' space of possibilities. Guglielmi's theoretical stand does not admit cognition of any fixed laws governing reality. He writes: '[T]he modern poet, musician or painter, does not propose a portrait of reality, but its correspondences. The modern work of art is not a mirror that, as such, places itself in front of the object that it has to reflect, but is the factory of reality and, at the same time, its product' (48). In his essay 'Avanguardia e sperimentalismo' [Avant-garde and Experimentalism] that functions as a title for the volume, Guglielmi proposes a distinction between an experimental model of literature and one tied to an avant-garde movement, concluding that the cultural conditions of the times render it impossible for the latter to be put into

effect. In the statement that follows, Guglielmi clearly recognizes pivotal traits of contemporary culture (traits later associated with the condition of postmodernity) that cannot sustain the revolutionary objectives of the avant-garde: 'One of the characteristics of our times, we will agree, is the extreme confusion. However, we deal with a confusion that stems from the fact that in our cultural area everything is allowed. That is to say, it is in some ways tied to a positive situation, one of extreme freedom and extreme tolerance. Our times are as fertile and inventive as any other. The most extravagant products are accepted and boast the most commanding warranties. In this condition of absolute predisposition what sense can an avant-garde movement have? What doors does it want to open when all doors are open? [...] At this stage, the culture industry builds its prosperity on the most innovative products. It is a useless pretence to behave obstinately as if things were otherwise. To believe there are enemies to defeat, barriers to dislodge, or, in short, to believe in a situation that needs to be overturned, it is, in the best scenario, a form of unawareness, an insufficient understanding of things' (pp. 54-55). For Guglielmi, the experimental writer must practice the 'contamination' of conflicting linguistic modes through the 'repêchages' (the recycling of existing texts) of materials that cross the boundaries of the most heterogeneous cultures. Intertextuality, hybridization, pastiche are clearly in tune with the dominant tenets that will be identified with postmodern aesthetics. Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that if postmodernism cannot be located within the parameters of avant-garde aesthetics (as it has persuasively been argued by a myriad of theorists) primarily for abandoning the objectives of an antagonistic culture, Guglielmi's case seems, at least on the surface of things, to display some incongruities. On the one hand Guglielmi argues that 'art as intuitive cognition, a synthetic and comprehensive view of the totality of the real, is dead' (p. 82), on the other, he claims that reality can be recovered (the 'objective of the research is reality' (p. 82), he writes in his closing remarks. It seems that Guglielmi does not abandon the hope for literature (as it is the case with postmodernism in general) to reencounter a sense of authentic reality behind all the simulacra of consumer society and capitalist alienation. Furthermore, he does not seem to renounce completely the precepts of literature as a form of adversary culture. In fact, occasionally he speaks of literature as a field in which it is necessary to apply 'critical awareness' (p. 56) and 'critical acids' (p. 61) for generating unbalance and disorder.

10. (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1967). Hereinafter cited in the text as L M.
11. Here is the closing statement by Manganelli: 'With its

"meaningless" propositions and "unverifiable" affirmations, [literature] invents worlds and fabricates endless ceremonies. It possesses and governs nothing (L M, p. 177).

12. Referring to a writer such as Robbe-Grillet, Barilli states: '[I] think he is a writer that can last and consequently in twenty or thirty years he will be officially recognized. In other words, his style will enter, at a certain point, in the stage of normality and, perhaps, there will be new artistic forms that will revolt against him' (G 63, p. 391). The normalization of the new avant-garde is for Barilli a necessity. The new avant-garde writer must perform the role of contributing constructively to ignite revolutionary processes at the level of the superstructures--specifically at the psychological and cognitive levels. Such a writer can add value to the world-view elaborated by the historical avant-garde, integrating it with other alternative projects offered by contemporary culture.

13. Adopting Adorno's concept of museum as a bourgeois strategy for coopting otherness (which is the equivalent of the legitimation of avant-garde literature through the publishing industry and bourgeois social institutions), Sanguineti declares: 'The danger here is that there is an enormous excess of illusions: the new normality that I have conquered and established in an objective fashion, today cannot be conquered and established in any way than in the form of the bourgeois museum, thus becoming reified and neutralized' (G 63, p. 403). For Sanguineti, Barilli's position is dangerously neutral, as it is that fostered by Guglielmi. He seems to anticipate rather lucidly the acquiescing modes that will be associated with the postmodern postures. These conflicting positions that mark the debate of the Italian neoavant-garde in the early 1960s are experienced by the Telquelians in 1967 when Jean-Pierre Faye left the review and founded Change, advocating a literature capable of reestablishing links with issues of political praxis. Tel Quel was engaged in reassessing the role of Marxism within the theory of literature between 1968 and 1970, when the group participated to two colloquia organized at Cluny by La Nouvelle Critique, the first on 'Linguistics and Literature' and the second on 'Literature and Ideology.' If Marxist thought and ideology represent for the neoavanguardia, in its early stages, significant issues for debate and divergencies, the Telquelians seem to experience a rapprochement with left-wing political objectives during the students' revolts and the Maoist cultural revolution.

14. Simulacra and Simulations, trans. S. F. Glaser, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 19, p. 123). In Baudrillard's view, programmes of revolt are an inherent part of the strategies of the system itself. In For a Critique of the Political economy of the Sign [1972], trans. Charles

Levin (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1981), he writes: 'Modern art wishes to be negative, critical, innovative and a perpetual surpassing, as well as immediately (or almost) assimilated, accepted, integrated, consumed. One must surrender to the evidence: art no longer contests anything, if ever did. Revolt is isolated, the malediction 'consumed.' [...] Modern art, midway between critical terrorism (ideological) and de facto structural integration, is quite exactly an art of collusion vis-à-vis this contemporary world.' (p. 110)