

Deconstructing the Model in 20th and 21st-Century Italian Experimental Writings

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Edited by

Beppe Cavatorta and Federica Santini

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INTRODUCTION

BEPPE CAVATORTA AND FEDERICA SANTINI

*Curiously deep, the slumber of crimson
thoughts:*

*While breathless, in stodgy viridian
Colorless green ideas sleep furiously.*

—John Hollander, 1971

The main objective of this volume is to start an exchange, to begin a dialogue for which many authors and texts seem unable to find interlocutors. Thus, we present discussions and analyses of books and writers that are difficult to label because of their experimental *modi operandi*, which go against the grain and break the rules that firm, traditional literary genres impose. For this very reason, these texts, except for some rare occasions, have remained in perennial exile from actual or implicit Italian “literary salons,” those elusive spaces from within which the doors into the literary canon can be opened. In this sense, our choice of William Xerra’s *Absent Dialogue* for our front cover was not one of convenience, but rather refers to the editors’ and authors’ collective effort to point out these long-lasting exclusions and rebuild such a dialogue.

It is true that, since the 1980s, with the rehabilitation of Futurism—until then banned because of its relationship with the fascist regime—and with the publication of numerous studies on the Neo-Avant-Garde, many experimental authors have been reintegrated into the Italian critical discourse. Yet, there is still much to be done, especially concerning authors and works that position themselves in the undefined area between canonical genres and established experimental movements. Indeed, the very resumption of studies on the two great Italian experimental giants, Futurism and the Neo-Avant-Garde, has weighted negatively on other writers who, both for chronological reasons and by choice, did not fit within either. The idea of continuity is often denied to experimentalism, and therefore Futurism and the Neo-Avant-Garde tend to be perceived as two isolated entities, foreign bodies, or sudden storms, which in distinct but well-circumscribed moments have broken the banks of the otherwise peaceful

flow of Italian literature. On the contrary, the contributors to this volume acknowledge the existence of many paths to literary experimentation and aim to engage with those forms that are further from established manifestos, thus deconstructing the pre-established model of 20th- and 21st-century Italian literature.

To make things even more difficult, even such a goal of deconstruction or disruption may fall within canonic avant-garde theory. Often, literary experimentation has been conceived as a negative, destructive force aimed to eliminate mainstream literature while often unable to replace it with truly novel ways of writing. Far from being connected to the more traditional or conservative fringes of literary criticism, such a conception is widespread and the idea of experimentation as a completely negative, and ultimately sterile mode re-emerges from the most unexpected sources. Ironically, for instance, some of the harshest criticisms of the historic avant-gardes and Futurism have originated from the Neo-Avant-Garde area, as is apparent from the following statement by prominent and prolific neo-avant-gardist critic, Angelo Guglielmi:

Marinetti's avant-gardism was born out of contentious pretexts, outside of a clear ideological basis and serious expressive intentions. The Futurists' linguistic revolutions are ostentatious and superficial. They work on the external layers of the traditional linguistic framework in order to bring it to an irreversible point of crisis, to denounce its substantial unproductivity. The inner or ideological core of language remains intact; or rather it escapes their violence. After all, thinking about it, never has a sense of language been so lacking as it was in avant-garde writers. [...] The revolt of avant-garde writers generally starts from a content-emotional reason. Form-related interests occupy, despite appearances, a secondary place.¹

¹ "L'avanguardia marinettiana nasce su pretesti polemici, al di fuori di una chiara base ideologica e di serie intenzioni espressive. Le rivoluzioni linguistiche dei futuristi sono chiassose e superficiali. Esse operano sulla impalcatura esterna dell'istituto linguistico tradizionale con lo scopo di portarlo a un punto irreversibile di crisi, di denunciarne la sostanziale improduttività. Il nucleo interno o ideologico della lingua rimane intatto o meglio sfugge alla loro violenza. In fondo, a pensarci, mai senso della lingua fu ed è così mancante come negli scrittori d'avanguardia. [...] La rivolta degli scrittori di avanguardia ha in genere una partenza contenutistica-emozionale. Gli interessi formali occupano, nonostante le apparenze, un posto secondario." In Guglielmi, Angelo. "Avanguardia e sperimentalismo." In *Gruppo 63. Critica e teoria*. Edited by Renato Barilli and Angelo Guglielmi. Milano:

Such a sharp declaration, of course, must be taken cautiously, and we fully concur with John Picchione's assessment of the situation when he states that, "even though Guglielmi and others proclaim the impossibility of reigniting the dialectical spirit associated with the avant-garde, Gruppo 63 represents, in its general objectives, an offer to reconnect with the aesthetic legacy of the historic avant-garde."² At the same time, the fact that Guglielmi chose to specifically attack the formal and linguistic objectives of Futurism is indicative of how widespread the idea of a lack of productive force and positive energy coming from within experimentation has been and still is.

And, of course, the Italian Neo-Avant-Garde itself has been all but immune from nearly identical commentaries and claims. Andrea Barbato clearly summarizes the way in which the establishment reacted to the claim brought forth by the Neo-Avant-Garde about the necessity, in the mid-Sixties, to approach the novel in new and different ways:

Replies and counter-accusations were explicit as well and came from every possible outlet, newspapers, literary journals, conferences. First of all, the so-called establishment said in effect, the avant-garde today is arrogant and impractical. In addition, those who vouch for it have not yet provided valid examples for their often very violent critical claims.³

Through a series of original analyses of experimental works that exist well outside of the established territory inhabited by the Italian literary canon or purposely position themselves at its margins, this volume proposes a new way to understand the goals of literary experimentation as a means to break the canon and give literature the same freedom that is easily granted to other arts, hence allowing literature itself to intersect with those other art forms while enhancing the powerful and positive outcomes of literary experimentation.

Feltrinelli, 1976: 330-331. All translations in this introduction, unless noted otherwise, are by Beppe Cavatorta, Thomas E. Peterson, and Federica Santini.

² Picchione, John. *The New Avant-garde in Italy: Theoretical Debate and Poetic Practices*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004: 209.

³ "Le repliche e le controaccuse non erano meno esplicite e venivano da ogni parte, si potevano raccogliere sui giornali, nelle riviste, nelle conferenze. Innanzitutto, diceva in pratica il cosiddetto *establishment*, l'avanguardia oggi è superba e inattuabile. E poi chi la propone non ha ancora accompagnato le intenzioni critiche spesso così violente con opere esemplificatrici valide." Barbato, Andrea. "Appunti per una storia della nuova avanguardia italiana." In *Avanguardia e neo-avanguardia*. Edited by Giansiro Ferrata. Milan: Sugar, 1966: 180.

Specifically, the volume explores a series of 20th- and 21st-century Italian works that are characterized by a non-normative approach to language or the act of writing itself. In discussing the theory of language behind the 1961, experimental anthology *I Novissimi*, Luigi Ballerini highlights the importance, for all participating poets, of the material aspects of a text, and identifies their “[...] interest for the material configurations of texts, for their substance and accidents, which become invested of a discriminating power far superior to that of any preconceived label (be it futurism, hermeticism, or realism...), always sought for as a sort of taxonomic life vest.”⁴ The authors discussed in this volume all share that same desire to engage with the substance of language, and to overcome pre-made definitions and canonic barriers.

The contributors, while addressing diverse writers, and often even adopting different theoretical interpretations of experimentalism itself, all aim to analyze the intersection between experimental literatures and other art forms, as well as cross-disciplinary and/or non-traditional approaches to the theme of experimentation. While the chapters follow an overall chronological order, we thought it essential to also highlight thematic connections and linguistic choices among the many authors being analyzed. Thus, at times, we have opted to subvert the chronological order in favor of a more thematic, and we think more significant, approach.

The book opens with an essay on Luigi Malerba by Margherita Heyer-Cáput. The multigenerational span of Malerba’s production and its multifaceted aspects, from his Neo-Avant-Garde experience to postmodernism, perfectly exemplifies the way in which many of the writers included in the first half of the volume go beyond canonic categorizations. In Heyer-Cáput’s own words, Malerba’s work “articulates the crisis of both the subject and the object of modernity and their narratability while searching for ‘models of freedom’ beyond linguistic, literary, and epistemological norms.” The chapter explores Malerba’s non-normative journey, from its experimental beginnings in the Gruppo 63 to the posthumous aphorisms, through the lens of the simulacrum that, according to Baudrillard, is the substitution of “signs of the real for the real itself.” In Malerba’s literary invention, the simulacrum plays a liberating role that unties meaning from its reference and enables critical thinking through the distancing effect of irony. Heyer-Cáput’s analysis of three extremely heterogeneous works, such as the theatre pièce *Qualcosa di grave* (1963), the historical novel *Il*

⁴ Ballerini, Luigi. “For a New Edition of the *Novissimi*.” *Autografo*, 50, XXI (2013): 33.

fuoco greco (1990), and the collection of linguistic aphorisms *I neologissimi* (2013), demonstrates that Malerba's "literature of invention" (1990) consistently implements a strategy of "expansion of facts," which engages the reader in an open-ended quest for linguistic, logical, ethical, and political "models of freedom."

In chapter 2, Thomas E. Peterson focuses on "fourth generation" poet Giovanni Giudici. The inclusion of a well-established poet like Giudici in a volume dedicated to non-canonical, difficult-to-label writings may appear hazardous, but Peterson's analysis, based on poems taken largely from *Il male dei creditori* (1977), delineates new ways to look at Giudici's entire opus. By adopting "the concept of the self as something mutable and transformational," found in Paul Ricoeur's *Oneself as Another*, Peterson highlights how in Giudici's work "the relation with the Other attains to the status of a literary double, a specular version of the poetic self or psyche detected in those *personae* with whom the poet shares the most profound psychic affinities." Another reason that, in our view, makes the presence of Giudici particularly intriguing is the specific focus of Peterson's analysis, which centers on the treatment of the self in Giudici's poetry, a topic that is also fundamental in Neo-Avant-Garde theory. In this sense, Peterson highlights new, and until now uncharted, connections between the poet and experimental authors of the same period.

Peterson's discussion of a non-canonically experimental poet is followed by an extensive discussion of Italy's main experimental and avant-garde poetry anthologies and groups by Ernesto Livorni. Although Livorni refers to several other anthologies published in the second half of the Twentieth Century, there are a few at the core of his contribution: *I Novissimi*, *Il pubblico della poesia*, and *La parola innamorata*. These anthologies, along with the work of Gruppo 93, of which Livorni offers an in-depth discussion, were crucial in defining the landscape of avant-garde and experimentalism in Italian poetry since the Sixties and at least until the end of the Twentieth Century. Through his analysis of the volumes, Livorni discusses transversal poetic and theoretical experiences, which, rather than looking back at pre-1950 poetry and summarizing its achievements (as in Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo's anthology *Poeti italiani del Novecento*) or even defining a specific poetic line (this is the case of Luciano Anceschi's *Linea Lombarda*), look ahead and prepare the ground for 21st-century poetry.

Chapters 4 and 5 center on two poets who, despite their early experimental work chronologically coincides with the golden years of the Neo-Avant-Garde, always operated on the fringe of it when not in strong opposition to it: Amelia Rosselli and Andrea Zanzotto. Multilingual poet Amelia Rosselli's rapport with the members of the Neo-Avant-Garde was

complex and, in many cases, conflictual. In essence, while she did participate in the Gruppo 63 conventions at Palermo and La Spezia, she never felt that her work, which in many cases had deep international roots, fit within the framework proposed by the scholars of Gruppo 63.⁵ Andrea Zanzotto was even more explicit in his attack to neo-avant-gardist authors, labeling their experimentation as “disengaged” and entirely focused on formal aspects, where the only risks taken are “purely conventional, intra-literary.”⁶ Out of the entire movement, Zanzotto seems to save, in a classic love-hate relationship, only Sanguineti’s linguistic and syntactic experimentations (but not their socio-political innervations). In our view, it is clear that rather focusing on these personal clashes, it is more fruitful to concentrate on the ways these two poets and the poets of the Neo-Avant-Garde offer effective solutions toward experimentation.

In chapter 4, Elena Carletti delves into interdisciplinary territories by analyzing the relationship between Rosselli’s 1962 collection *Spazi metrici* and photography. Rosselli’s work has been the object of several studies covering a vast spectrum of approaches, ranging from language and history to psychoanalysis and gender, yet very little has been done regarding its interaction with visual culture. In her contribution, Carletti is able to uncover Rosselli’s relationship with visuality, with a focus on photographic modes, and to demonstrate how the latter constitute an underlying influence in the developing of her metrical system, put forward in *Spazi metrici*.

Zanzotto’s posthumous collection *Haiku for a Season—per una stagione* is the focus of Daria’s Catulini’s essay in chapter 5. The volume in

⁵ This sense of estrangement and disconnection from the critical aspects of Gruppo 63, which always remained paired with her appreciation of many of the authors’ poetical work, was clarified by the poet, for instance, in a conversation with Renato Minore, during which, discussing her role within the Neo-Avant-Garde and at the conventions, Rosselli stated, “Stavo a sentire. Tutto quel ciacchiericcio critico era un po’ pesante. Scoprivano Pound, Joyce e tanti altri che io avevo letto mille volte, che io avevo scoperto anni prima, per via della mia formazione non italiana. A me interessavano soprattutto i testi: per esempio quelli di Antonio Porta.” [“I just listened. All that chattering of criticism was a bit heavy. They were discovering Pound, Joyce, and many others I’d read thousands of times, I’d discovered years before, because of my non-Italian upbringing. I was mostly interested in the texts, for instance those by Antonio Porta”]. The interview now appears in Renato Minore, *La promessa della notte. Conversazioni con i poeti italiani*. Roma: Donzelli, 2011: 182.

⁶ “[...] quel disimpegno di cui oggi si fa interprete un certo settore della neo-avanguardia. Per quest’ultimo infatti nel lavoro di ricerca ogni rischio è puramente convenzionale, endoletterario [...]” In Zanzotto, Andrea. “Michaux: un impegno delle origini”. In *Fantasie di avvicinamento*. Milano: Mondadori, 2001, 108.

itself is a transgression within Zanzotto's opus poeticum: not only it is written in English and then translated by the author in Italian, but it collects poems that fit within a genre which has been rarely explored in Italian poetry, the haiku. A thorough description of the haiku's characteristics and its popularity and/or influence among poets writing in English (Pound, Williams Carlos Williams, Conrad Aiken, and Wallace Stevens), French (Apollinaire) and Italian (Ungaretti), is followed by Catulini's analysis of Zanzotto's collection. Catulini's main argument, supported by numerous references, is that *Haiku for a Season—per una stagione* is essential both for a better understanding of Zanzotto's poetic development, and for elucidating Zanzotto's take on two themes that have always been essential to poetry's realm: space and time.

Destruction of ordinary language, sabotage of the poetic "I," attacks against bourgeois society, emphasis on the corporeal, contamination of art and non-art, and meta-literary reflections are key elements of Italian avant-garde movements. As discussed earlier, critics of the avant-garde generally maintain that, while these strategies create an impactful, shocking art that successfully deconstructs tradition, they have very little use in the process of reconstruction. In chapter 6, Danila Cannamela directly discusses and refutes this view, showing how avant-garde movements have informed the experimental writing of Aldo Nove. Both in his fiction and poetry, Nove represented a psychotic, capitalist society, engaging a "visionary writing" that, as Cannamela contends, repurposes the avant-garde legacy while succeeding in reaching a wider audience. The chapter explores the many ways in which Nove has turned mainstream narratives—media, advertising, collective rituals—into nonsensical Dadaesque jingles, and trivial consumer practices into epiphanies of commodity fetishism. Overall, according to Cannamela's analysis, Nove's readers can retrace a path of constructive deconstruction and see that, although by definition avant-garde movements are unable to create a stable tradition, they are certainly able to generate profound innovation in the literary system.

The next three chapters focus on different examples of *scrittura collettiva*, with essays that range from an analysis of Wu Ming, the collective that brought popularity to this technique in Italy, to Gregorio Magini's and Vanni Santoni's SIC (*Scrittura Industriale Collettiva*), and to the innovative and very recent collaboration between Luciana Castellina and Milena Agus, in a book where fiction and journalism, literature and history intersect to bring to life a dreadful, forgotten historical event.

In chapter 7, Fabrizio di Maio analyzes the way in which Wu Ming aim at deconstructing the modern conception of the author as a figure often invented and exploited by the literary industry. In the elaboration of their

collective novels, Wu Ming usually refer to collective improvisation in jazz and 1970s Dutch “Total Football,” where any player could take over the role of any other player in a team, with no fixed roles. Similarly, in Wu Ming’s collective writing authors adapt their own skills to suit the needs of the collective, and every bit of text written is discussed and constantly reprocessed by the collective. Additionally, the main focus of Di Maio’s essay is on Wu Ming’s openness to external influences, from their interaction with readers on the web, to their use of blogs and online exchanges as part of the writing process, a process that thus encourages readers to interpret and construct meaning. In Di Maio’s view, the interconnection between Wu Ming’s literary work and their cultural project reflects one of the most essential features of the collective, confirming them as both writers and militant activists.

Iuri Moscardi’s analysis of *In territorio nemico* in chapter 8 continues the volume’s investigation of collective writing. Published in 2013, *In territorio nemico* is a collective novel written by 115 writers, under the acronym SIC (Scrittura Industriale Collettiva), a name that refers to a writing methodology developed by Gregorio Magini and Vanni Santoni. Moscardi’s essay offers a detailed account of the making of the book and the main ideas behind SIC’s methodology, as well as connections to other literary works and writers. In this sense, Moscardi analyzes the most innovative elements of the composition of the novel, as well as its style and content, and demonstrates how it deals with more traditional literary approaches in order to redefine them. For instance, Moscardi explains that the writing methodology employed by SIC is defined as *industrial* in reference to the way in which Elio Vittorini and Italo Calvino, in the 1960s, employed the term: according to Calvino and Vittorini, in order to adapt to the changing times, literature needed to employ industrial methodologies. For SIC, instead, it has to adopt the dynamics developed by the Internet (openness, collective participation, redefinition of the role of author and reader).

A third, very different instance of collective writing is highlighted in chapter 9 by Irene Zanini-Cordi, who focuses on the volume *Guardati dalla mia fame* by Milena Agus and Luciana Castellina. In it, the authors achieve a remarkable feat: they bring to life a forgotten, tragic episode of Italian history by suspending it between the genre of the novel and that of the socio-historical reportage. Zanini-Cordi also shows how the choice of the title, borrowed from Mahmud Darwish’s *Carta d’identità* (“Guardati... / Guardati / dalla mia fame / e dalla mia ira”), reveals the essence of the book, which reconstructs the lynching of the rich Porro sisters by an angry and hungry crowd of hired hands on March 7, 1946, and the trial that

followed with 130 people accused and tried for the murder, mostly day laborers and women. Although fiction and *History* are carefully kept separate in this work, according to Zanini-Cordi the book acquires a life of its own in the mind of the reader, where the newly-found intimacy with the re-imagined victims raises questions about who the victims really are, while the historical reconstruction points to class issues. This, then, is yet another example of the constructive power and relevance of literary and intra-textual experimentation.

The two final chapters of the book focus on emerging writers, who have yet to receive the attention due to them within English-language, Italian literary criticism. In chapter 10, Simona Lorenzini takes us back to poetry with an essay on Alessandro Broggi. In 2009, Paolo Giovannetti edited an anthology titled *Prosa in prosa*, showcasing the work of six Italian poets. As Giovannetti pointed out in his introduction, the anthology collects texts that share a “poetic” mode aiming at the highest degree of *littéralité*: “*Prosa in prosa* achieves this *littéralité* in two ways [...] First, the lexeme suggests what is given as non-symbol, non-figure, eventually as anti-connotation. [...] Second, the *littéralité* challenges the sonority of the word, its ability, as Gabriele Frasca states, to be chewed and re-chewed.” Lorenzini explores how the prose-in-prose category affects Alessandro Broggi’s works, mainly focusing on his book *Nuovo paesaggio italiano*. Close attention is given to Broggi’s language, which is rich in common stereotypes, advertising slogans, and clichés, that are now so pervasive in the language to deserve to be taken into consideration by poetry as well. According to Lorenzini, by denouncing the emptiness and superficiality of contemporary modes of communication through his linguistic experiments, Broggi is able to create a new narrative style that gives voice to the anonymity and solitude of everyday life.

The volume closes with Sandro-Angelo de Thomas’s analysis of Lorenzo Durante’s *Quarantore* (2016), a rewriting of Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898) *Tombeau pour Anatole* (1961). De Thomas starts his essay with a preliminary discussion focused on Mallarmé’s poetics and how the *Tombeau* dedicated to his son Anatole stands in contrast with those he wrote for Poe, Baudelaire, and Verlaine, bringing to the fore the text’s uncanny character and its positioning within what Lacan refers to as the area “between two deaths.” In De Thomas’s reading, these elements, alongside the notion of the “irruption of the real,” become hypertrophied in Durante’s rewriting, whereas the implicit Christian echoes of Mallarmé’s *Tombeau* are made explicit by being associated with the Forty Hours’ Devotion. This significant shift, from an introspective and intimate text to a public and communal act of prayer, masks another equally important turn in Durante’s

poetic production. The reduction of the poetic I, the anti-lyrical and theoretical stance, behind the pseudonym Lorenzo Durante, seems weakened by a particularly personal and intellectual dimension. However, this “irruption of the real” is, in turn, counterbalanced by the universalism implied in Christ’s death and resurrection.

Before we close, an additional note on the composition of the volume. While aiming to break the canonic barriers of Italian 20th- and 21st-century literature, we also wanted, as co-editors, to disrupt certain structures that seem inherent to academic writing and publishing, and present an inclusive and diverse (for academic rank, geographical location, and specific approach to the discipline) group of scholars. The core of the volume is based on a series of panels that we have been organizing for AAIS and AATI over the last several years (our *Experimental Writings* series, which we run with our colleague Gianluca Rizzo). Looking to expand the range of our volume, we also selected essays through an open call for contributions as well as via direct invitations to relevant scholars in our field of inquiry.

In selecting the contributors, then, we were careful to present a mix of well-established and internationally recognized critics and emerging scholars, to whom we wanted to grant the opportunity to have their voices develop in what can be, at times, a difficult-to-breach scholarly area. In the same way, we were deliberate in including a majority of women in our mix of scholars of Italian experimentalism. Finally, as scholars of experimentation, we acknowledge the importance of collective writing modes and collaborative endeavors: thus, we worked cooperatively with our more junior contributors in order to discuss goals and fine-tune materials. Because of these very choices, we are aware that the volume presents a mix of very different perspectives, with almost every contributor adopting a dissimilar definition of literary experimentation. But in that, we think, is the very richness of the volume.

This, then, aims to be a work of ethics, through which we hope to see the flow of literary works change from orderly to unruly; as Amelia Rosselli put it, “Having broken it off with the archipelago we were / swept away by the river, inorganic event, but earth and sea / were spitting blood.”⁷

⁷ “In rotta con l’arcipelago fummo / travolti dal fiume, inorganica vicenda, terra e mare sputavano / sangue invece.” Rosselli is using the dual sense of the Italian expression “in rotta” (*en route to* and *broken it off with*, accentuating the second meaning by her use of the preposition “con” rather than “per”). The poem belongs to the collection *Serie ospedaliera*. Amelia Rosselli, “Severe le condanne a tre...”

Rather than abandoning themselves to the lulling waters of an established canon, we wish for our readers to be able to engage directly with these ever-changing waters, the many forms of experimentation, which at times may resemble sudden storms, while in other cases take on more subdued, muted forms, but always request a direct and demanding confrontation with their public. Ultimately, we wish to be swept up by these works, and we wish for our readers to be swept up with us. Our wish, then, is to break off from pre-conceived notions, and delve into the earth and sea of the reading materials.

ATLANTA & TUCSON, JANUARY 18, 2019

CHAPTER ONE

IN THE NAME OF THE SIMULACRUM: LUIGI MALERBA'S EXPERIMENTAL JOURNEY

MARGHERITA HEYER-CÁPUT

Introduction

The multifaceted production of Luigi Malerba (1927-2008), from the *Neoavanguardia* experience to postmodernism, articulates the crisis of both the subject and the object of modernity and their narratability while searching for “models of freedom”¹ beyond linguistic, literary, and epistemological norms. This contribution explores Malerba's non-normative journey, from its experimental beginnings in the collective volume *Gruppo 63* to the posthumous aphorisms, through the lens of the simulacrum, that is the substitution of “signs of the real for the real itself.”² In Malerba's literary invention the integration of the simulacrum plays a liberating role that disentangles meaning from its reference and enables critical thinking through the distancing effect of irony.

The analysis of three extremely heterogeneous works, such as the theatre pièce *Qualcosa di grave* (1963), the historical novel *Il fuoco greco* (1990), and the collection of linguistic aphorisms *I neologissimi* (2013), demonstrates that Malerba's “literature of invention”³ consistently

¹ Luigi Malerba, *Parole al vento: Interviste*, ed. G. Bonardi (Lecce: Manni, 2008), 259. A modified Italian version of this contribution, entitled “La ricerca sperimentale di Luigi Malerba: “modelli di libertà da *Qualcosa di grave* (1963) a *I neologissimi* (2013) ed oltre” appeared in *Avanguardia. Rivista di letteratura contemporanea*. *Per Luigi Malerba*, 23, no. 67 (2018): 21-40.

² Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, trans. P. Foss, P. Patton and Ph. Beittchman (New York: Semiotext, 1983), 2.

³ Luigi Malerba, “Intervista,” *L'Espresso* (18 February, 1990): 144. Also in Luigi Malerba, *Che vergogna scrivere* (Milano: Mondadori, 1996): 73. Unless otherwise noted, all italics and bracketed ellipses in the quotations are mine.

implements a strategy of “expansion of facts,”⁴ which engages the reader in an open-ended quest for linguistic, logical, ethical, and political “models of freedom.”

In a 1990 interview Malerba defined his main aspiration as a writer as follows:

*Scrivere dei libri nei quali, quando le parole finiscono, il significato continua. È proprio nel mistero che rimane nell'animo del lettore a libro finito, e dalle riflessioni che questo mistero sollecita, che si distingue l'ingombrante, evolutiva letteratura dell'invenzione dalla deprimente produzione di consumo.*⁵

[Writing books in which, when words end, meaning continues. It is precisely the mystery that remains in a reader's soul at the end of the book, and the reflections that this mystery spurs, which differentiates the cumbersome, evolutive, literature of invention from the depressing literature of consumption.]

Malerba's “literature of invention” is characterized by its “attempt to expand facts” through the interpretive energy that the author identified with the *topos* of the journey. From his first theatre play, *Qualcosa di grave*, to his last novel, *Fantasma romani* (2006), until his posthumous *Profili* (2012), *I neologismi*, and *Consigli inutili* (2014), interpretation as an extension of the factual has defined the development of Malerba's narrative journey, since “oggi viaggiare significa soprattutto dare una interpretazione di ciò che si vede”⁶ (today travelling means above all giving an interpretation of what we see).

***Qualcosa di grave* (1963): When writing “makes you understand things”**

Qualcosa di grave marks the first milestone of Malerba's journey. Staged as the introductory pièce of the “Teatro Gruppo 63” performance at the founding conference of the Gruppo 63 in Palermo, the one-act play seals its author's partaking in the experimental identity of the Neovanguardia

⁴ Malerba, interview by Margherita Heyer-Cáput, May 3, 1992, in Heyer-Cáput, *Per una letteratura della riflessione: Elementi filosofico-scientifici nell'opera di Luigi Malerba* (Bern: Haupt, 1995), 89.

⁵ Malerba, “Intervista,” 144; *Che vergogna*, 73.

⁶ Malerba, *Parole*, 10.

movement. Without siding either with Angelo Guglielmi's "linea viscerale"⁷ or with Edoardo Sanguineti's "linea ideologica,"⁸ Malerba rather endorses the philosophical core of the Neoavanguardia.⁹ In fact, his point of departure bears witness to the methodological approach of phenomenology, as it aims at "putting in parentheses" the mimetic nature of post-war Italian literature dominated by Neorealism. This systematic "bracketing" or *epoché*, inspired by Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, signifies a suspension of judgment regarding both the subject and object of external experiences and, therefore, questions any assumptions about an objective reality and any artistic mimesis thereof. Through journals such as *Officina*, *Il Menabò* and, above all, *Il Verri* directed by Luciano Anceschi, the methodological character of phenomenology exerted a deep influence on the Italian cultural debate of the '50s-'60s. In particular, it mediated a radical opening towards the most disquieting forms of literary, philosophical, artistic and scientific modernity, which resonate throughout Malerba's narrative.

Reflecting with Paolo Mauri on the significance of the Neoavanguardia in his intellectual biography, Malerba declared in 1977:

La mia partecipazione alle iniziative del Gruppo 63 è stata quella di semplice gregario, non di protagonista. Non poteva essere altrimenti perché *l'impegno di quel momento era soprattutto critico e teorico, cioè preparatorio di una nuova letteratura*. Alle discussioni di quegli anni sono debitore di molte consapevolezze e sollecitazioni per il mio lavoro successivo.¹⁰

⁷ Angelo Guglielmi, "Dibattito in occasione del primo incontro del Gruppo a Palermo nel 1963," in *Gruppo 63. Critica e teoria*, ed. A. Guglielmi (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1976), 29.

⁸ Edoardo Sanguineti, "Dibattito," in *Gruppo 63*, 272. On the different identities of the Neoavanguardia, see Fabio Gambaro, *Invito a conoscere la Neoavanguardia* (Milano: Mursia, 1977), 77, and John Picchione, *The New Avant-Garde in Italy: Theoretical Debate and Poetic Practices* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004): 47-8.

⁹ For a detailed analysis of the different aspects of the Neoavanguardia's participation in the cultural debate in Italy from 1963 to 2003, see Francesco Muzzioli, "Subverting Literature: Literary Theory and Critical Discourse in the Italian Neoavanguardia," in *Neoavanguardia: Italian Experimental Literature and Arts in the 1960s*, eds. P. Chirumbolo, M. Moroni, and L. Somigli (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 21-37, and Monica Jansen, "Neoavanguardia and Postmodernism: Oscillation between Innovation and Tradition from 1963 to 2003," *Neoavanguardia*, 38-73.

¹⁰ As quoted in Paolo Mauri, *Luigi Malerba* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1977), 4.

[I participated in the initiatives of the Gruppo 63 merely as a follower, not as a protagonist. It could have not been different, because *the commitment then was above all critical and theoretical, that is preparatory of a new literature*. I owe to the discussions of those years an awareness and stimulation for my subsequent work.]

As this statement illustrates, Malerba identifies the Gruppo 63's relevance first of all at the theoretical level, which semiotician Maria Corti indicates as the predominant "rational" character of the Neoavanguardia,¹¹ along the lines of the historical avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century.¹² In the same years, author and militant critic Elio Vittorini, another protagonist of the intellectual debate stirred by experimental authors, proposes a form of politically engaged literature centered on a "tensione razionale," which is ingrained in scientific thought. While literature has been constantly swinging between two poles, the "tensione espressivo-affettiva" and the "tensione razionale," only the latter is capable of shaping the vision of the world and the language of its time.¹³ According to Vittorini, only an "iniziativa razionale della letteratura" can shape "il rapporto nuovo, qualitativo, con la realtà mutata," that is a new, qualitative (and not quantitative) relationship between literature and a deeply transformed reality.¹⁴ It is the shattering gravity of this transformation and the difficulty of this relationship that Malerba address in *Qualcosa di grave*.

Wanderers at the margins of a suspended modernity, a man and a woman, covered with the dust of the wild capitalistic dreams of the Italian "boom economico" of the '50s-'60s, are returning from a "long journey on foot" (lungo viaggio a piedi).¹⁵ The improbable stage they tread is disseminated with random remainders of failed attempts of mimetic representation of reality: a spare wall evokes a bourgeois interior, and only a cloudy sky has survived from an exterior that epitomizes the medieval *topos* of the world upside-down in a modern frame: an overturned garden well here, a horizontal skyscraper there. The stage has become a simulacrum, a container of signs that copy a no longer existing reality.

¹¹ Maria Corti, *Il viaggio testuale* (Torino: Einaudi, 1978), 111.

¹² Laura Mancinelli, *Il messaggio razionale dell'avanguardia* (Torino: Einaudi, 1978), 98.

¹³ Elio Vittorini, *Le due tensioni. Appunti per una ideologia della letteratura*, ed. D. Isella (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 1967), 5-15.

¹⁴ Vittorini, *Le due tensioni*, 5.

¹⁵ Luigi Malerba, "Qualcosa di grave," in *Gruppo 63. La nuova letteratura. 34 scrittori. Palermo, ottobre 1963*, eds. N. Balestrini and A. Giuliani (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1964), 254.

By displaying the “‘schizomorphic’ vision” that informs the experimental poetry of *I Novissimi*,¹⁶ the spatial dimension of *Qualcosa di grave* silently brings to the fore the existential precariousness engendered by “economic miracle.” Angelo Guglielmi, a leading figure and theoretician of the movement, captures this socio-cultural context with a simile that fittingly describes the backdrop of *Qualcosa di grave*: “una città dalla quale il nemico, dopo averla cosparsa di mine, è fuggito”¹⁷ (a city that the enemy abandoned in retreat after transforming it in a minefield). Confusion reigns over the stage, as attested by the hammering recurrence of utterances related to this semantic field: “confusi” (confused), “[g]ettati lì alla rinfusa” (randomly thrown all around), “in una gran confusione” (in complete and utter confusion), “disorientato” (disoriented), “ingombro” (cluttered).

The loss of spatial and temporal categories defines the anonymous protagonists: they come from and return to an indefinite nothing without even managing to find an agreement on the temporal collocation of their misfortune: “Da un mese non riusciamo più a metterla insieme [...]. Da una settimana [...]. Da un mese [...]. Da quando è successo non andiamo più d’accordo come prima”¹⁸ [It has been a month that we don’t manage any longer to put it together (...). A week (...). A month (...). Since this has happened, we don’t get along well as we did before].

The unspoken and unspeakable center of the pièce, the simulacrum of an upside-down world, is “[u]na battuta bellissima, piena di poesia e di umanità”¹⁹ (a most beautiful line, full with poetry and humanity). This special line, now irreparably forgotten, was “allusiva, simbolica, allegorica, piena di sottintesi...”²⁰ (allusive, symbolical, allegorical, full with implications...). Susceptible of any interpretations from the audience, this line also perfectly lends itself to multiple manipulations from the actors: “A seconda della lingua o del paese, noi diamo un’intonazione diversa alla nostra battuta. Teniamo conto anche del momento politico, dello stato meteorologico, dei fusi orari, dei meridiani e paralleli, della pressione atmosferica... [...]. ... E della radioattività”²¹ [Depending on the language or the country in which we recite, we give a different intonation to our line.

¹⁶ Alfredo Giuliani, “Introduction to the First Edition (1961),” in *I Novissimi. Poetry for the Sixties*, eds. L. Ballerini and F. Santini (New York: Agincourt Press, 2017). See also the introductory essay to this precious bilingual edition, Luigi Ballerini, “For a new edition of *I Novissimi*,” 7-28.

¹⁷ Guglielmi, “Avanguardia,” in *Gruppo 63. Critica e teoria*, 18.

¹⁸ Malerba, “Qualcosa,” 256.

¹⁹ Malerba, “Qualcosa,” 254.

²⁰ Malerba, “Qualcosa,” 257.

²¹ Malerba, “Qualcosa,” 255.

We also take into consideration the political moment, the meteorological condition, time zones, meridians and parallels, atmospheric pressure... (...). ... And radioactivity].

The substitution of that “battuta” with its simulacrum, that is the mere evocation thereof devoid of its content, marks the irrevocable separation from any expression of realism, which has characterized Malerba’s writing since its inception. Mimetic literature had thriven on the illusion to have “una missione da compiere”²² (a mission to accomplish), to have already provided “un piccolo contributo alle miserie dell’umanità”²³ (a modest contribution to humanity’s miseries).

The missing “battuta” used to play a cathartic role because it enabled spectators to emotionally identify with the actors, “e alla fine tutti uscivano dal teatro molto soddisfatti, con la sensazione di aver imparato qualcosa...”²⁴ (and eventually everyone left the theatre very satisfied, with the feeling of having learned something). Despite its apparent success, the perfect, ductile phrase provided its modern audience with a mere “*feeling* of having learned something...” This superficial impression derives from a usage of language that hermeneutic philosopher Martin Heidegger would have defined “*Geschwätz*,” the idle talk of and about inauthenticity, the chatter of “exasperating senselessness” against which experimental poetry opposed resistance.²⁵ The “feeling of having learned something” corresponds to the *doxa*, the form of volatile knowledge based on appearances. In other words, literary realism becomes a dangerous artistic fallacy when a unifying center of reality no longer exists, as Malerba has often pointed out: “Il realismo, vecchio o nuovo, è una delle più clamorose truffe della letteratura”²⁶ (Realism, old or new, is one of the most clamorous frauds perpetrated through literature).

The line evoked for its absence becomes the volatile epitome of a sign that pretends to be the faithful copy of an original that no longer exists. The disorientation of the two nostalgic wanderers perfectly captures the fragmented existential condition that characterizes the transition from the third to the fourth stage of the sign order proposed by Baudrillard in *Simulations*.²⁷ In the third stage, which corresponds to the modern age of capitalism, signs mask the absence of their reference, which causes the nostalgic attitude that nurtures the proliferation of myths and deceiving

²² Malerba, “Qualcosa,” 255.

²³ Malerba, “Qualcosa,” 257.

²⁴ Malerba, “Qualcosa,” 257.

²⁵ Giuliani, “Introduction,” 31-2.

²⁶ Malerba, *Parole*, 113.

²⁷ Baudrillard, *Simulations*, 11-12.

images. In the fourth stage, the post-modern epoch of late capitalism, signs merely reflect other signs. Thus, they morph into simulacra, devoid of any reference and imbued with an ironic *levitas* that stand opposite the nostalgic *gravitas* of *Qualcosa di grave*'s protagonists in their unfulfilled quest for the missing line. It is precisely this transition from signs to simulacra that characterizes Malerba's journey from the *gravitas* of the Neoavanguardia to the *levitas* of his later works and, in particular, of his posthumous texts.

The "battuta" buried in oblivion belongs to the "letteratura espressivo-affettiva" that Vittorini likened to the leafy crown of a rational trunk to the extent that "essa vive di quello che una fase razionale ha fondato, e vivendone lo consuma, è di *consumo* [...]"²⁸ ([the former] lives on what a rational stage has founded, and by living on it, it consumes it, and it becomes *consumeristic* [...]). This form of literature is "di consumo" in both the objective and subjective reference of the original Italian syntagm. It has ended up consuming itself in the vain attempt to enclosing in the "battuta molto bella e importante"²⁹ (very beautiful and important line) a fragmented macrocosm, which experimental writers render as "un invincibile centro di disordine"³⁰ (an unswerving center of disorder). It comes as no surprise that the two actors fail in their reiterated attempts to update their famous line through "aggiunte, tagli, interpolazioni"³¹ (additions, cuts, interpolations) mirroring historical developments and cultural trends. A literary word that persists in reflecting a fragmented world in the name of a realistic truth cannot escape silence. Therefore, literature eventually negates itself when it does not accept the demise of a stable reality, or, to refer once again to Baudrillard, when it does not acknowledge the unescapable "precession of simulacra" that defines the "hyperreal" artificiality of late capitalistic society:

Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin in reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory—PRECESSION OF SIMULACRA—it is the map that engenders the territory [...]. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges subsist here and there, in the deserts which are no longer those of the Empire, but our own. *The desert of the real itself*.³²

²⁸ Vittorini, *Le due tensioni*, 6.

²⁹ Malerba, "Qualcosa," 257.

³⁰ Guglielmi, "Dibattito" *Gruppo 63. Critica e teoria*, 268.

³¹ Malerba, "Qualcosa," 256.

³² Baudrillard, *Simulations*, 2, italics in the original.

The bursting of disorder from reality onto the theatre stage generates in *Qualcosa di grave*'s protagonists the traumatic awareness of the relationship between bourgeois society and the artist as producer of aesthetic goods, which has characterized historical avant-garde movements.³³ As both actors explain, “[q]uella battuta era tutto il nostro capitale, tutta la nostra vita [...]. Adesso, senza la nostra battuta, ci troviamo con il culo a terra” ([t]hat line was our entire capital, our entire life [...]. Now, without our line, we are sitting with our ass on the ground).³⁴ The acknowledged impossibility of meaningful realistic expression in a world devoid of meaning expands the range of literary language, both horizontally and vertically, in a whirling downfall. Silence follows the actress' final plea for the spectators' cooperation in the search for a “buona battuta”³⁵ (a good line). The pièce ends with ellipses reminiscent of the expressive power of numerous passages in Alessandro Manzoni's *Promessi sposi*, and the ensuing caption visualizes the grotesque gestures of the actors, compelled by silence to leave the stage toward nowhere.

The conclusion seals the programmatic significance of Malerba's early play, in which several principles of the Neoavanguardia come (silently) to the fore.³⁶ In particular, the categories of “normalizzazione” (normalization) and “abbassamento” (reduction), discussed by Renato Barilli during the third conference of the Gruppo 63 in 1965,³⁷ inform here both the linguistic and the thematic levels.³⁸

At the thematic level, the inherent chaos of a fragmented reality manifests itself through both the inanimate objects of the *mise en scène* described in the first caption and the human subjects of the pièce. Traumatically thrown in a Heideggerian “Dasein” (being-there, existence) marked by the inauthentic, the two protagonists are reduced to their disoriented gestures. And yet, according to the poetics of *I Novissimi* delineated by Giuliani through Leopardi's words, precisely that traumatic experience

³³ Edoardo Sanguineti, “Sopra l'avanguardia,” *Ideologia e linguaggio* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1965), 54.

³⁴ Malerba, “Qualcosa,” 257.

³⁵ Malerba, “Qualcosa,” 258.

³⁶ For a more detailed discussion, see Heyer-Cáput, *Per una letteratura della riflessione*, 27-44.

³⁷ Renato Barilli, “La normalità autrice di Sanguineti,” in *Gruppo 63. Critica e teoria*, 184-90, e Angelo Guglielmi, “Relazione,” in *Gruppo 63. Il romanzo sperimentale*, ed. N. Balestrini (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1966), 27.

³⁸ Corti, *Il viaggio*, 134. Corti defines these two levels “forma dell'espressione” and “forma del contenuto.”

of chaos represents the indispensable condition for (experimental) poetry to reach its most significant aim, that is “to increase vitality.”³⁹

At the linguistic level, the systematic adoption of a colloquial register interspersed with programmatic plunges into expletives does not express a realistic intent, but rather the rejection of a conventional literary code. For, as Corti notes, “si rifiuta la referenza che vi è sottesa, non più ideologicamente attendibile, cioè i significati che la lingua veicola”⁴⁰ (the refusal targets the underlying reference, ideologically no longer reliable, that is, the meanings that language conveys). In the same spirit of the poetics of *I Novissimi*, Malerba’s experimental *Qualcosa di grave* expresses an anti-communicative phase. The plot of the pièce disintegrates in the anti-economic repetition of absence and forms a spiral around the unspeakable.

Albeit heterogeneous “sino al pericolo dell’atipicità” (to a point of dangerous atypicalness),⁴¹ all of the texts of the thirty-four writers gathered in the first, programmatic volume *Gruppo 63* partake of a generalized opposition to the prevailing socio-cultural paradigm of late capitalism that characterized Italy during the “economic miracle.” From the literary point of view, they share a common denominator that phenomenology philosopher Luciano Anceschi had illustrated in his introduction to the volume: “un filo rosso e inquieto” (a disquieting red thread) made of a deep anger against “l’idolo stesso del linguaggio” (the very idol of language).⁴² In this respect, Malerba’s *Qualcosa di grave* represents an exemplary text of the theoretical and critical stance of the original Gruppo 63.

The coincidence of ideology and work, which, according to Anceschi, defined experimental writing in its entirety,⁴³ reaches its extreme in Malerba’s single-act play. *Qualcosa di grave*, indeed, embodies the paradox that “l’idea dell’opera possa sostituire l’opera stessa” (the idea of a work could replace the work itself) when the text is seen as “un meccanismo formale nel suo stesso farsi”⁴⁴ (a formal mechanism in its making). For the two protagonists, the simulacrum of the “battuta”—the memories thereof devoid of any reference—replaces the “battuta” itself, and Malerba’s

³⁹ Giuliani, *I Novissimi*, 29. Giuliani begins his introduction by quoting and commenting on a passage from Leopardi’s *Zibaldone* (February 1, 1829).

⁴⁰ Corti, *Il viaggio*, 35.

⁴¹ Corti, *Il viaggio*, 117. See also Luciano De Maria, “Ricognizione sui testi,” in *Avanguardia e Neoavanguardia*, ed. G. Ferrata (Milano: Sugar, 1966), 138.

⁴² Luciano Anceschi, “Metodologia del nuovo,” in Balestrini and Giuliani, *Gruppo 63. La nuova letteratura*, 12.

⁴³ Anceschi, “Metodologia,” 9.

⁴⁴ Marina Mizzau, “Logica della finzione,” in Guglielmi, *Gruppo 63. Critica e teoria*, 225.

cinematic eye captures their disintegrating identities in sequences focused on gestures interspersed with silence.⁴⁵ The only instance of anti-communicative writing in his multifaceted production, *Qualcosa di grave* represents Malerba's most extreme experimental statement because of the predominance of the idea over the work itself.⁴⁶

As Laura Mancinelli convincingly argues, when “la crisi non è più vissuta, o solo vissuta, ma è concettualizzata”⁴⁷ (the crisis is conceptualized and is no longer a lived experience, or no longer only a lived experience), the rejection of language as a system of signs that reproduce social, cultural, and existential conditions of disintegration, cannot but result in a rational silence. “E se il poeta si chiuderà nel silenzio, sarà ulteriore prova che l'avanguardia non ha vinto la sua battaglia”⁴⁸ (And, if the poet confines herself in silence, this silence further demonstrates that the avant-garde did not win its battle). During his Neo-Avant-Garde experience Malerba develops a perceptive awareness of the anti-communicative risk inherent to extreme experimental productions, which he deftly integrates into his later works.

In his 1977 interview with Mauri, Malerba also admitted to prefer “gli scrittori che *fanno capire* le cose a quelli che le descrivono, quelli che le *inventano* a quelli che le fanno capire” (writers who *make us understand things* over those who describe them, and those who *invent* things over those who make us understand them).⁴⁹ *Qualcosa di grave* belongs rather to the first category. It constitutes the programmatic work of a writer who, through the amplification of silence, intends to “make us understand” the profound crisis of contemporary Italian literature still trapped in the fallacies of

⁴⁵ A scriptwriter and director in his own right, upon moving from Parma to Rome in 1950 Malerba co-scripted various films with Alberto Lattuada, Mario Monicelli, Marco Ferreri, Pasquale Festa Campanile, Yves Allegret, Eriprando Visconti, Franco Indovina, Fabio Carpi, and others. One of Malerba's most interesting productions is *Donne e soldati* (1953), a film spoken in the dialect of the Parma region and co-directed by Malerba and Antonio Marchi. For a detailed analysis of Malerba's cultural formation and interactions, see Giovanni Ronchini, “Cronologia,” Luigi Malerba, *Romanzi e racconti*, ed. G. Ronchini, intr. W. Pedullà (Milano: Mondadori, 2016), lxix-xc.

⁴⁶ Malerba himself often underlined his preference for “communication” over “expression.” See, for example, Malerba, *Parole* 206. For the “forte carica comunicativa” of Malerba's narrative, see Giulio Ferroni, “Luigi Malerba: l'assurdo e il comico,” *Storia della letteratura italiana* (Milano: Einaudi Scuola, 1991), 4: 703.

⁴⁷ Mancinelli, *Il messaggio razionale*, 32.

⁴⁸ Mancinelli, *Il messaggio razionale*, 33.

⁴⁹ Mauri, *Luigi Malerba*, 2; see also Malerba, *Parole*, 259.

realism. This deceptive realism, to which Malerba does not hesitate to ascribe “minimalism,” coincides with the “deprimente letteratura di consumo”⁵⁰ (depressing literature of consumption). Yet, this disquieting, anti-communicative text represents for Malerba a fruitful instance of reflection upon the “necessità di operare con strumenti che [lo scrittore] deve inventare di volta in volta, creando *modelli linguistici e perciò di pensiero e di comportamento (modelli di libertà) che spezzino il processo di standardizzazione* imposto dalle classi dominanti”⁵¹ (necessity of acting with instruments that [a writer] has to invent from time to time while *creating linguistic models. Linguistic models, [in turn], correspond to theoretical and behavioral models (models of freedom) which would break the standardization process* imposed by the ruling classes). The radical thematization of the unspoken and unspeakable in *Qualcosa di grave* provides a reflective premise to the creation of “modelli di libertà.” As I have indicated elsewhere, starting from his short-stories collection *La scoperta dell’alfabeto*, Malerba has traced “modelli di libertà” throughout his narrative journey in conversation with philosophical and scientific theories, from Husserl’s phenomenological *epoché* to Werner Heisenberg’s indeterminacy principle, from Plato’s ideas to Jacques Monod’s chance concept.⁵²

Malerba’s work, therefore, provides a textual crossroads where sciences and humanities interact while offering a creative contribution to the cultural debate that inflamed the ‘60s following the publication of Charles P. Snow’s best-seller, *The Two Cultures*.⁵³ In his posthumous publication *Profili*, Malerba presents his possibly most creative expression of art as epistemological metaphor. Precisely during the Neo-Avant-Garde debate, semiotician Umberto Eco thematized this concept, which had deeply shaped Romanticism aesthetics:

⁵⁰ Malerba, “Intervista,” 144; *Che vergogna*, 73.

⁵¹ As quoted in Mauri, *Luigi Malerba*, 2.

⁵² Jacques Monod, *Chance and Necessity: An Essay on the Natural Philosophy of Modern Biology* (New York: Knopf, 1971), which appeared in Italian as *Il caso e la necessità* (Milano, Mondadori, 1974). For the role of philosophical and scientific intertextuality in Malerba’s corpus, see Heyer-Cáput, *Per una letteratura della riflessione*, 89-308; Marco Giorgerini, “Luigi Malerba tra caso e necessità” (Master’s Thesis, University of Pisa, 2011), and Giovanni Ronchini, *Dentro il labirinto: studi sulla narrativa di Luigi Malerba* (Milano: Unicopli, 2012).

⁵³ Charles P. Snow, *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), which appeared in Italian as *Le due culture*, intr. L. Geymonat (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1964).

Ogni forma artistica può benissimo essere vista, se non come sostituto della conoscenza scientifica, come *metafora epistemologica*: vale a dire che in ogni secolo il modo in cui le forme dell'arte si strutturano riflette, in senso lato, a guisa di similitudine, di metaforizzazione appunto, *risoluzione del concetto in figura*—il modo in cui la scienza o la cultura dell'epoca vedono la realtà.⁵⁴

[Any form of art can be seen, if not as a replacement for scientific knowledge, as an *epistemological metaphor*. In other words, in any given century the way in which art forms are structured reflects, broadly speaking, the way in which the science or the culture of the time envisions reality. (Artistic structures function) as a simile, or, precisely, as a metaphor, as a resolution of a concept into a form.]⁵⁵

In a post-modern context, the epistemological meaning of Malerba's *Profili* expresses the “*risoluzione del concetto in simulacro*” rather than “*in figura*.” As I have argued elsewhere,⁵⁶ in his *Profili* Malerba proposes “*modelli di libertà*” in which word and image complement each other in a visual short-circuit that frees creativity from the chain of referential meaning. The creative freedom that Malerba infuses in his profiles of ordinary objects integrates the absence of meaning in the void, thus questioning allegedly objective perceptions of reality. In this sense, Malerba goes beyond modernity through an ironic lightness that, in Mauri's words, is “*stramoderna*” because of its original experimental energy.⁵⁷

As Malerba notes in his introduction to *Profili*, “[i]n tutti i casi il profilo racchiude un vuoto, una memoria incerta, un *simulacro* senza senso”⁵⁸ ([i]n any event the profile encloses a void, an uncertain memory, a

⁵⁴ Umberto Eco, “La poetica dell’opera aperta,” *Opera aperta. Forma e indeterminazione nelle poetiche contemporanee* (Milano: Bompiani, 1962), 42 (first italics in the original); see also Eco, “L’opera in movimento e la coscienza dell’epoca,” *Gruppo 63. Critica e teoria*, 250.

⁵⁵ I included my translation of Eco’s quotation because Anna Cancogni’s English version abridges this passage as follows: “In every century, the way that artistic forms are structured reflects the way in which science or contemporary culture views reality,” in Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. A. Cancogni (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 13.

⁵⁶ Heyer-Cáput, “Tra *brevitas* e *levitas*. La profondità alla superficie dell’ultimo Malerba,” *Avanguardia* 20, no. 59 (2015): 33–52.

⁵⁷ Mauri, “Domande e risposte,” *L’immaginazione. Per Luigi Malerba*, no. 248 (2009): 15–16.

⁵⁸ Malerba, *Profili* (Milano: Archinto, 2012), 10.