

**‘SCHIZOMORPHIC VISIONS’:
VISUALITY AND DISSENTING SUBJECTIVITIES IN THE POETRY OF
THE ITALIAN *NEOAVANGUARDIA***

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of
Philosophy

University College London (UCL)

By

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September 2018

I, Barbara Pycinska-Taylor, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my primary supervisor, Dr. Florian Mussgnug, for his invaluable help and guidance as this thesis has progressed. I wish to extend my thanks also to my secondary supervisor Dr. Beatrice Sica for her helpful comments. I would also like to thank Conor Kissane, Caroline Cullen, Christopher Kissane, Tom Snow, Eoin Rafferty, Hannah Malone and Lisa Walsh for many stimulating conversations, and I wish to express a special thank-you to Krystyna, Paul, and Julia for their unwavering support. Finally I would like to thank the London Arts and Humanities Partnership (LAHP) for awarding me a doctoral scholarship and so making my research possible.

Abstract

This dissertation examines the role of literary visuality in the construction of cultural categories of madness, delirium, schizophrenia, and trauma in the poetry of the Italian *neoavanguardia*. In addition to exploring configurations of madness and delirium in theoretical and critical writings produced by members of various interrelated literary movements in the 1960s, this dissertation centres on close readings of a selection of lesser known ekphrastic, visual, concrete, and collage poetic works, produced between 1961-1977, by Giulia Niccolai, Edoardo Sanguineti, Adriano Spatola, and Patrizia Vicinelli. I look also to more recent thought outside of the immediate historical Italian-language context in order to illuminate and inform my readings of the strategies of these literary figures. As part of my analysis of the renegotiation of these fraught themes in the experimental poetry of the *neoavanguardia*, I investigate how the theoretical category of *schizomorfismo* as described by Alfredo Giuliani, a key figure in the literary group known as the *Novissimi*, provides an illuminating paradigm for reading the discontinuous, discordant and febrile literary forms found within this poetry. I draw attention to the underexamined *visual* dynamics at play in both theoretical and poetic writings of this period, expanding on the fluid relations between visuality and madness, and their invocation as dissenting, countercultural literary entities.

As examples of a *scrittura altra*, invocations of ‘other’ subjectivities are, I argue, embedded in these mostly non-representational texts, which draw on the rich capacities of visual, typographic and concrete experimental forms to raise questions of normativity, marginalisation, and subjugation, as well as interrogate epistemologies of logic and logocentrism. Accordingly, this dissertation interrogates what it means to invoke cultural-clinical categories in the context of poetic experimentation and as literary tools of social critique at a historical moment, in Italy and beyond, when the relationship between clinical and cultural understandings of non-normative mental states were being fundamentally renegotiated.

Impact Statement

This thesis explores a fascinating and largely understudied poetic corpus within the 1960s Italian neo avant-garde movement. The *neoavanguardia*'s important contributions to latter twentieth-century re-evaluations of literary form and political engagement have long been recognised, but the fundamentally intermedial nature of many of their poetic experiments, and the intersections with more recent developments in cultural and political theory outside of the immediate Italian context, have not heretofore been treated in any great detail. The verbal-visual experimentations of Giulia Niccolai, Edoardo Sanguineti, Adriano Spatola, and Patrizia Vicinelli that form the subject matter of this thesis are not only innovative examples of intermedial poetic practice; they also open up a window into a range of important and timely contemporary cultural discourses surrounding the nature of language, rationality, madness and trauma, each of which interrogates the construction and negotiation of meaning in the present era. Ultimately I propose that this corpus asks challenging questions about the nature of form and content, the verbal and the visual, and the limitations of logocentric rationalism. The fundamentally interdisciplinary nature of this project situates it in the context of thought-provoking current debates about linguistic, socio-political and clinical-cultural exchange in the arts and humanities.

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‘Schizomorphic Visions’:
Visuality and Dissenting Subjectivities in the Poetry of the Italian
Neoavanguardia

Introduction

Strozzata apparizione, rito demente e schernitore, discorso sapiente, pantomima incorporea, gioco temerario, la nuova poesia si misura con la degredazione dei significati e con l’instabilità fisiognomica del mondo verbale in cui siamo immersi, ma anche con se stessa, con la sua capacità d’invenzione.

- Alfredo Giuliani, 1965 introduction, *I Novissimi*¹

Visuality and madness in poetry have long been portrayed as unconventional and inexplicable ‘others,’ historically inspiring awe and suspicion in equal measure. These categories are contiguous and profoundly intertwined: both hover on the threshold between locatability and fluidity, intelligibility and incomprehensibility. Experiments in literary form and function in Italian-language poetry of the latter twentieth century were markers of a historical flashpoint; in a period of profound social and political change, an increased cultural preoccupation with the radical aspects of non-normative psychological states coincided with a renewal of interest in the possibilities of verbal-visual literary forms. Building upon this connection, this thesis examines poetry that draws on the subversive capacity of the visual to illuminate issues surrounding madness, delirium and trauma in the Italian *neoavanguardia* of the 1960s.

Specifically, this dissertation centres on close readings of a selection of lesser known ekphrastic, visual, concrete, and collage poetic works produced between 1961-1977 by Giulia Niccolai, Edoardo Sanguineti, Adriano Spatola, and Patrizia Vicinelli. These poets, I argue, represent different approaches to exploring configurations of cultural madness, delirium, and trauma. In a broader sense, I contend that these works foreground literary *figures* which, through their

¹ A. Giuliani, 1965 introduction, *I Novissimi: Poesie per gli anni '60*, Turin, Einaudi, 1965, (2nd edn.), 2003, p. 7.

non-mimetic performativity, visual-material presence and non-logocentrism, open up spaces for the discussion of fraught, 'autre' logics. I explore these *figures*, which I refer to as dissenting, unconventional and marginal subjectivities,² within the context of the wider political and artistic preoccupations of the Italian *neoavanguardia*, aiming to demonstrate how this kind of intermedial experimentation, this 'scrittura altra,' might effectively reflect contemporary preoccupations with 'cultural madness.'

Literature has been, and remains, host to a wide variety of 'cultural madnnesses,' all imbued with the social and cultural baggage of their historical moment - from the ancient Greek notion of Dionysian 'delirium' to the Early Modern category of melancholia, from 19th century hysteria to a proliferation of late 19th and 20th century psychiatric and psychoanalytical categories which are continually rewritten and renegotiated.³ Much literature of the mid-twentieth century sought to exploit the creative potential attendant to psychic maladies and trauma, and the modern novel might be regarded as one of the foremost sites in the representation of mental illness and extreme psychological states.⁴ My thesis expands this debate into the less-studied realm of poetry, exploring the profound ways in which the theorists and poets of the Italian *neoavanguardia* engaged both

² Acknowledging the huge philosophical field dedicated to theories of the subject, I use the term 'subjectivities' to refer to abstract 'senses of self' (rather than pertaining to individual fictional or non-fictional subjects) which are not naturally given, bounded, or fixed, but rather fluid, mutable and plural. I hold that avant-garde poets often have complex relationships to subjects and subjectivities, using them as *figures* or 'intensities' rather than as depictions of internal subjecthood.

³ 'Madness' in this context should not necessarily be equated to specific clinical categories but rather as a more all-encompassing humanistic term that attempts to approximate the vast field of mental illnesses and psychological disturbances. Throughout this thesis, the tension between clinical and colloquial terminologies detailing non—normative mental states will be a recurring concern. Baker et al., for example, propose that the term 'madness' 'represents the social, personal, and cultural context of the term as signifying a number of different meanings for different people'; it thereby avoids the problems associated with specifying a particular illness or using a clinical term, in wishing to keep an open multi-disciplinary standpoint rather than an explicitly medical one. They are concerned about the 'thingification' and 'objectification' that can accompany formal diagnostic terms: '*Madness* is a term that actively defies, as do many of the novels we look at, formal diagnostic classification. Definitional precision, or labelling, encourages objectification.' C. Baker et al., *Madness in Post-1945 British and American Fiction*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 3. Jim Geekie and John Reed suggest that by employing this broader term of 'madness' in cultural contexts and resisting clinical definitions, we can reach towards an understanding of the concept as 'an aspect of the human condition, about which we can all have our say.' See J. Geekie and J. Read, *Making Sense of Madness: Contesting the Meaning of Schizophrenia*, London/New York, Routledge, 2009, p. 16.

⁴ Noteworthy examples from a wide range of different Anglophone traditions include Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*, and Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five*. In the European tradition we may look to Robert Musil's *The Man without Qualities* and within short fiction Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*.

formally and discursively with this field, creating a highly original poetic language of subversive countercultural critique in the process.

Positioning negotiations of madness at the intersection between a range of disciplines including literary studies, philosophy, linguistics, history and psychology, the literary critic Shoshana Felman has described ‘madness’ as a ‘crucial question in the current cultural scene’ more generally, posing searching questions about the limits of knowledge itself.⁵ As Felman argues, this cultural preoccupation with defining and categorising the epistemological valence of non-normative mental landscapes inevitably puts pressure on the scrutinising discourses themselves, ultimately subverting the disciplinary boundaries that ostensibly divide them.⁶ Felman links the boundary-blurring potential of madness as a cultural category to a wider ‘upheaval in the status of knowledge’ and established modes of expression; I argue that this offers a striking parallel to the challenging epistemological critiques underpinning the intermedial verbal-visual poetic experimentations of the Italian *neoavanguardia*.

As a medium that relies on interpretive practices that are very different from those pertaining to textuality, I contend that the emergence of visual features into the textual world of the poem constitutes a key into revealing how logocentric epistemologies - both as they relate to supposedly ‘rational’ mental states and coherent verbal expression - might be challenged from within the structures of poetic language itself. Exploiting the unpredictable power of the visual field, the poets I discuss in the following chapters enact a diverse series of ‘schizomorphic’ and traumatic ruptures, breaking down what Rosi Braidotti calls, after Gilles Deleuze, ‘the imperialism of rational thought.’⁷ Ultimately, the visual textuality of these works emerges as reflecting a fragmentary and indeterminate worldview that is fundamentally inimical to logocentric literary paradigms. Before I begin to explore these remarkable intersections, however, I briefly define my terms within the field of verbal-visual poetry, and outline my terminological approach to the visual practices of Giulia Niccolai, Edoardo Sanguineti, Adriano Spatola, and Patrizia Vicinelli.

⁵ S. Felman, *Writing and Madness (Literature/Philosophy/Psychoanalysis)*, Palo Alto, CA, Stanford University Press, 2003, p. 12.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ R. Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, Columbia University Press, 2011, p. 126.

What Constitutes the Visual in Poetry?

I define literary and poetic visuality broadly, as a wide range of formal and thematic practices that bring a visual mode, centred around seeing, into dialogue with a verbal or textual mode which primarily involves reading. Historically speaking, the rhetorical device of ekphrasis, in which visual phenomena and artworks are in various ways translated into the literary mode, constitutes one of the most important and pervasive sites of verbal-visual interactions. Described by James Heffernan as the ‘verbal representation of graphic representation,’ ekphrasis represents literary sites where poetry or prose engages with, describes, or comments on an image, usually a work of visual art, sculpture or a photo.⁸

In his short collection *T.A.T.* (1966-1968), Edoardo Sanguineti adopts a modernist take on ekphrasis, invoking phantom images in a perplexing disjointed poetics. Whilst ekphrasis is often deployed in classical literature and Romantic poetry to describe the beauty of an artwork to its readers, Sanguineti instead ironically mobilises the rhetorical device to depict the perceptual chaos and linguistic derangement of visual projective testing. Adriano Spatola, while approaching poetic visuality from a different angle, similarly exploits elements of visual perception and textual materiality to enter discursively into wider thematic preoccupations. In an analogue to Sanguineti, Spatola also explores the interpretive world of psychological testing in his 1964 *Reattivo per la vedova nera*; rather than employing the device of ekphrasis, however, he utilises a concrete prose-poetic style that seeks to engage the visual and linguistic perceptions of the reader through a heightened attention to the material and graphic qualities of words on the page.

The category of ‘concrete and visual poetry’ can be broadly defined as encompassing works in which there are a combination of graphic representations (images, photos or drawings) with typed or handwritten text. These different

⁸ J.A.W. Heffernan, ‘Ekphrasis and Representation,’ *New Literary History*, Vol. 22, No. 2, Spring 1991, p. 299.

modes interact within the space of the poems themselves in order to generate a third way of perceiving the work that supersedes the interpretive possibilities of reading and seeing alone.⁹ Patrizia Vicinelli's mixed-media collages provide a good example: in her collection *Apotheosis of schizoid woman* (1969-70), she experiments with found images, photography, and advertising, combining them with typed and handwritten poetry and prose in order to create a concrete, ephemeral synthesis which is fundamentally visual.

Visual poetry can also encompass what I term 'typographic experimentation,' in which the text itself is used graphically and where typographical features are manipulated into non-linear shapes and forms, rupturing the rectilinear grid of the printed page for artistic and creative effect. Giulia Niccolai's *Humpty Dumpty* (1969) works within this genre, creating meta-fictional links between the titular nursery rhyme and Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* through a ludic schema of verbal-visual puns, portmanteaus and word games. Typographic visibility can also function as a powerful affective mode where plain textuality fails, as I will investigate in the final chapter of this thesis by bringing Vicinelli's striking experimental verbal-visual collection *à, a. A.* (1966) into dialogue with theoretical developments in the field of literary trauma studies.

Finally, I include within the parameters of visual poetry 'textual collage' or 'textual mosaic,' where found textual fragments are treated as material entities that undergo cutting, moving and splicing, resulting in new combinations. In Niccolai's playful cut-up collections *Sostituzione* (1972-1974), *Dai Novissimi* (1970-1972), *Webster poems* (1971-1977), and *Greenwich* (1971), visibility is

⁹ W.J.T. Mitchell provides a framework for the discussion of verbal-visual relations, in the form of the three terms 'imagetext,' 'image/text,' and 'image-text': 'I will employ the typographic convention of the slash to designate "image/text" as a problematic gap, cleavage, or rupture in representation. The term "imagetext" designates composite, synthetic works (or concepts) that combine image and text. "Image-text," with a hyphen, designates *relations* of the visual and verbal.' W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*, University of Chicago Press, 1995, p. 89, fn. 9. Mitchell's categories are helpful in their objective breakdown of the precise manner in which the visual and the verbal engage with each other, and there is a level of confluence between these and certain categories employed in the poetic works by Vicinelli and Niccolai that I will explore.

explored as a way of negotiating the concrete and craftsmanlike elements of text *qua* material form.

The Italian *Neoavanguardia*: Debates and Contexts

To explore how Sanguineti, Spatola, Niccolai and Vicinelli each turned, in their own distinctive ways, to the parameters of the visual in seeking to negotiate the position of ‘dissenting subjectivities’ in contemporary culture, it is necessary to examine the specific political and artistic climates in which their poetic experimentation took place. Central to the development of the Italian *neoavanguardia* in the 1960s was the intense literary and theoretical activity of a progressive movement that came to be known as the Gruppo 63. This was established when a group of intellectuals, writers, and academics met in October 1963 in Palermo to debate what they considered to be the most pressing literary and cultural concerns of the day. Linked by a frustration with the outdated linguistic models that they felt characterised contemporary novels and poetry, the group animatedly discussed problems of artistic stasis and cultural regression, and sought to define new critical pathways towards linguistic rejuvenation.

Many of these issues had been already raised in *I Novissimi*, a 1961 anthology edited and annotated by the critic Alfredo Giuliani which brought together recent poetry by five pioneering poets: Edoardo Sanguineti, Nanni Balestrini, Antonio Porta, Elio Pagliarani and Giuliani himself.¹⁰ The collection included critical essays dealing with a range of political, linguistic and aesthetic issues written by the poets themselves, some of which had been already published in leading avant-gardist literary journals such as *Il Verri*. Giuliani’s introductions to the 1961 and 1965 editions of the *Novissimi* anthology provide a fascinating viewpoint on some of the fundamental questions concerning the role of poetry in

¹⁰ A. Giuliani (ed.), *I Novissimi: Poesie per gli anni '60*, Turin, Einaudi, 1965 (2nd edn.), 2003. (I cite this edition throughout.); 1st edn: A. Giuliani, (ed.), *I Novissimi: Poesie per gli anni '60*, Milano, Rusconi and Paolazzi, 1961; see also A. Giuliani, (ed.), *I Novissimi: Poetry for the Sixties* (U.S. edn.), L. Ballerini and P. Vangelisti (eds.), trans. D. Jacobson et al., Los Angeles, Sun and Moon Press, 1995.

contemporary society; it was also in these texts that Giuliani introduced and elaborated his concept of ‘schizomorfismo,’ to which I will return throughout this dissertation. The Gruppo 63 later founded the journal *Quindici*, which ran from 1967-1969, and was headed first by Giuliani and then by Balestrini.¹¹ With the tumultuous societal break represented by the radical student protests of Paris ’68 and their counterparts in Italy, *Quindici* became a major publication of militant political, social, and cultural material.

The movements involved in this fertile period of experimental literature have collectively come to be known as the Italian *neoavanguardia*. Whilst the contributors to the debate in 1963 occupied a range of different literary and ideological positions, all parties were in agreement that stereotyped language norms, which they believed had trickled down from advertising and functional language and permeated the artistic sphere, needed to be repudiated. In 1971, looking back at the activities of the Gruppo 63, having declared the ‘death’ of the movement, Umberto Eco traces the extent to which, in his estimation, the group cleaved to the idea of a new avant-garde. By enacting a critique of the ‘*miniature system* of official culture,’ the ‘*grand system* of bourgeois society’ itself might be challenged. For Eco, the key guiding principle of this process was that of language disruption, which could have far-reaching consequences:

We became convinced [...] that to renew forms of communication and destroy established methods would be an effective and far-reaching platform for criticizing—that is, overturning—everything that those cultural forms expressed.’¹²

Along with the critical material in *I Novissimi*, the Gruppo 63 ‘dibattito’ in Palermo remains a central moment in the evolution of the *neoavanguardia*’s

¹¹ See N. Balestrini (ed.), *Quindici: Una rivista e il Sessantotto*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 2008, for a critical selection of the journal’s articles and activities.

¹² U. Eco, ‘Death of the Gruppo 63,’ in *The Open Work*, trans. A. Cancogni, Cambridge, MA., Harvard, 1989, p. 239. Originally published in *Twentieth Century Studies* 5, 1971.

theoretical and aesthetic programme; it offers a number of clues as to how its contributors sought to ‘overturn’ established cultural forms in various ways, many of which are of signal importance to this dissertation. John Picchione discerns two distinctive theoretical camps at work in the ‘dibattito’, roughly described as late-modernist-Marxist and proto-postmodernist.¹³ Broadly speaking, the first group held that asemantic and shattered linguistic forms were tokens of the ideological potency of language, and believed that radical language forms had the potential to be both revelatory and subversive. The second group was by contrast convinced of the *impossibility* of ideologically engaged literary representation, and their literary experimentation was thus driven by an avowedly apolitical impulse.

Giuliani opens the debate with an analysis of traditional literature which, he claims, takes the existence of a correct, current, and cultivated language as a natural fact. Avant-garde literature, by contrast, must seek to question and probe language itself, recognising it as an inherited communicative medium that remains open to ideological critique.¹⁴ For Giuliani, the openly self-reflexive structures of avant-garde literature conferred upon its arbitrary forms a level of transparency alien to the illusory opacity of standard literary forms focused on naturalism and mimesis, what he describes as ‘un tipo di letteratura mimetico, o esplicativo, o semplicemente razionale nel senso illuministico o naturalistico della parola.’¹⁵ Crystallising his critique of this kind of universalising verbal form, he quotes William Demby’s memorable claim that all nations now seem to speak the same language, the ‘Esperanto of television.’¹⁶ Giuliani would return to this theme in

¹³ J. Picchione, *The New Avant-Garde in Italy; Theoretical Debate and Poetic Practices*, University of Toronto Press, 2004, pp. 47-8. Renato Barilli, an active contributor to the debates, adds to these two factions a third stance of his own, based on a more fluid and comprehensive ‘visione del mondo.’ R. Barilli, *La neoavanguardia italiana: dalla nascita del Verri alla fine di Quindici*, San Cesario di Lecce, Manni, 2007, pp. 196-208.

¹⁴ A. Giuliani, ‘Il dibattito’ in N. Balestrini and A. Giuliani (eds.), *Gruppo 63: La nuova letteratura*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 1964, pp. 371-406 (p. 372). (I cite this edition throughout.) Also reprinted in N. Balestrini, and A. Giuliani (eds.), *Gruppo 63: L’antologia / critica e teoria*, Milan, Bompiani, 2013, pp. 779-810.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 374.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 374.

his 1965 introduction to *I Novissimi*, where he described banal linguistic forms as ‘homogenised food powder.’¹⁷

Another prominent speaker at the ‘dibattito’, Angelo Guglielmi, shared Giuliani’s conviction that language itself needed to be reset. Also displaying a disdain for the ‘anonymous stereotyped language typical of modern Italy,’ he argues that these denuded forms acutely mirrored a wider social alienation. Guglielmi proposes a radical solution to this situation that differed from Giuliani’s more explicitly political approach. For Guglielmi ideologies had become interchangeable, and modernist writing was doomed if it continued to cleave to them. In order to combat alienation, writers must move away from literature tied up with ideology, instead ‘working with signs and language rather than things and contents.’¹⁸ This leaves the author with the demystifying operation of pastiche and mixing of signifiers: ‘una letteratura che, essendo un intreccio di modi espressivi e conoscitivi differenti, ha forzosamente una apparenza torrentizia, ridondante, impura.’¹⁹ Guglielmi’s account in the debate, then, promotes ‘the death of ideologies,’ a disengaged, ahistorical view of the role of avant-garde literature.²⁰

It is at this point that Sanguineti enters the debate. In a counter to Guglielmi, Sanguineti argues that the mere possibility of stepping outside of ideology altogether is illusory.²¹ He maintains that language is not a neutral tool, but one steeped in the precise historic and class-based conditions in which it is used:

Non esiste dunque originalità di visione ideologica, e di prospettiva realistica, che possa essere garantita da altro che dal linguaggio, giacché la

¹⁷ Giuliani, 1965 introduction, *I Novissimi*, p. 1.

¹⁸ Eco, ‘The Death of the Gruppo 63,’ p. 241.

¹⁹ A. Guglielmi, ‘Il dibattito,’ p. 377.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 378.

²¹ E. Sanguineti, ‘Il dibattito,’ p. 380.

realtà di un'opera, evidentemente, e immediatamente, è una realtà linguistica.²²

He speaks about the notion of a linguistic and aesthetic 'normalità,' stemming from bourgeois ideology, and manifesting in certain linguistic operations and aesthetic paradigms.²³ The avant-garde, conversely, in order to create art that is 'autenticamente critica' and 'realistica,' must counter this system with 'anormalità.'²⁴ 'Normalità,' and its avant-gardist 'other,' 'anormalità,' form a binary of particular interest to the arguments advanced in this dissertation.

For Sanguineti, linguistic 'anormalità' is intrinsically linked to the emergence of a 'nuova razionalità' whose creation is the task of the avant-garde artist.²⁵ As I will explore in further detail in the opening chapter of this thesis, the framing of 'abnormality' as a 'rational' strategy is a theoretical tenet of signal importance to Sanguineti, and a concept that recurs in various strands of neo avant-gardist thought. For now it is sufficient to note that Sanguineti is at pains to reject any suggestion that his frequently allusive and apparently oneiric work were acts of literary escapism or evasion – those who equated 'l'elemento immaginativo' in his work with 'l'elemento irrazionale' were guilty of flawed bourgeois logic.²⁶ On the contrary, this kind of experimentation was to be the very foundation of the 'nuova razionalità.'

Within the general programme of structural dissonances pursued by the *neoavanguardia* as a whole, the journal *Malebolge* represents a sub-group of writers and thinkers working within a particularly *visual* literary practice. Encompassing four issues over the years 1964-1967, and overlapping briefly with the similarly short-lived *Quindici* (1967-1969), *Malebolge's* platform was

²² *ibid.*, p. 382.

²³ *ibid.*, p. 383.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 382-3.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 385.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 383-4.

explicitly experimental and heavily theoretical.²⁷ Founded in Reggio Emilia in the wake of the Palermo Gruppo 63 meeting by Adriano Spatola, Corrado Costa and Giorgio Celli, *Malebolge* is of specific interest to the study of verbal-visual poetics as a result of its sustained emphasis on typographical experiments, permutational-combinatorial works, and graphic insertions into textual poetry.²⁸ Spatola contributed new creative texts, such as *Reattivo per la vedova nera*²⁹ (to which I will turn in chapter two) and *Aviazione/Aviatore*,³⁰ along with important critical essays such as ‘Poesia a tutti i costi’ and ‘Surrealismo sì e no.’³¹ Patrizia Vicinelli’s extraordinary ‘coinVOLT,’ which I will consider in depth in chapter four, was originally published in *Malebolge* in 1966, positioning her work firmly within the journal’s radical counter-cultural literary climate.³² Besides a turn to visual poetics, the journal shows a sensitivity to subjects attending to madness, psychoanalysis and neurosis; in setting up ‘Parasurrealism’ as a direct foil to historical Surrealism as embodied by André Breton, Spatola and the other essayists consider the unconscious and the technique of automatic writing in relation to their own historical moment.³³ Despite their differences, the disruptive potential of experimental forms to undermine official artistic and social institutions as theorised by the earlier Surrealists continues to flow through this later iteration of avant-garde aesthetic practice.

Vicinelli’s position within the *Malebolge* group through her publication of ‘coinVOLT’ draws attention to the role and representation of women writers within the Italian *neoavanguardia* more generally. The contribution of women to the group has traditionally received scant treatment, although recently it has garnered some attention from scholars such as Lucia Re, who argues that ‘women

²⁷ See four issues of *Malebolge*: n. 1.1, 1964; n. 1.2, 1964; n. 3/4, Autumn 1966; n. 1 Spring-Summer 1967.

²⁸ M. Moroni, ‘Parasurrealism and Technological Utopia: The Project of *Malebolge*,’ in P. Chirumbolo et al. (eds.), *Neoavanguardia: Italian Experimental Arts and Literature in the 1960s*, University of Toronto Press, 2010, p. 92, n2.

²⁹ *Malebolge*, n.1.2, 1964, pp. 43-47.

³⁰ *Malebolge*, n.1, Spring-Summer 1967, pp. 18-21.

³¹ *Malebolge*, part 1, n.1.1, 1964, pp. 48-50 and part 2, 1.2, 1964, pp. 51-53; n. 1.1, pp. 56-57.

³² *Malebolge*, n. 3/4, Autumn 1966, pp. 24-25.

³³ Moroni, ‘Parasurrealism and Technological Utopia,’ pp. 80-81.

were a tiny and marginalized minority’ in both Gruppo 63 and *I Novissimi*.³⁴ Neither Niccolai nor Vicinelli spoke at the original Gruppo 63 meeting in Palermo, although Vicinelli did read from her work in La Spezia in 1966. Reflecting the shifting political climate of the latter decades of the century, Niccolai and Vicinelli both featured in the 2003 edition *Il Gruppo 63: Quarant’anni dopo*.³⁵ Re links the central importance of linguistic experimentation amongst Italian women authors of this period to wider feminist philosophical theory in contemporary Europe; she argues that whether or not they explicitly adapted Helène Cixous’ elaboration of bodily writing and *écriture féminine*, they certainly advocated ‘the need to enter into a *corpo a corpo* with the problems of *form* as a way to politicize their aesthetic practices.’³⁶

For Re, these women writers occupied a ‘doubly marginal and isolated position at the edge of Italian society and of the neo avant-garde’, and it was this twice-othered perspective that provided the foundation for their radical, creative potency.³⁷ In Re’s analysis, the male-dominated group as a whole failed to adequately find a place for the radical political and artistic possibilities that engaging with women writers could offer:

Rather than deploy the explosive potential that a discourse of the feminine as radically ‘other’ holds within an essentially patriarchal society, the Italian neo-avant-garde ended up relapsing into a discourse complicitous with the very same misogynistic deep structures that formed the bases of that society.³⁸

³⁴ L. Re, ‘Language, Gender, and Sexuality in the *Neoavanguardia*,’ in Chirumbolo et al. (eds.), *Neoavanguardia*, pp. 171-211 (I cite this version). Also published as ‘Language, Gender and Sexuality in the Italian Neo-avant-garde,’ *Modern Language Notes* 119, 2004, 135–73. Quote at p.171.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 172, p. 201fn.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 181.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 201.

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 201.

Rather than aiming to document the historical reality of such a ‘doubly marginal’ condition, in my own treatment of Niccolai and Vicinelli I look mostly to the works themselves and examine how their authors seek to instantiate diverse formal and thematic ‘others’ in their poetic practice.

My reading of trauma and biopolitical critique in Vicinelli’s oeuvre, for example, attempts to demonstrate how certain patterns of resistance to marginalisation are manifested in her work. Specifically, I argue that Vicinelli’s verbal-visual poetry adopts a visually-charged language that engages with and subsequently undermines some of the contradictions inherent in the mainstream *neoavanguardia* through an anti-logocentric poetic practice. Giulia Niccolai, meanwhile, works within the structures of language itself, tinkering and toying with linguistic systems in order to generate a poetics of play and the unexpected. Her practice is also fundamentally concerned with the multi-faceted nature of rationality and the limitations of linear logocentric discourse; in a different manner to Vicinelli, she subtly probes the assumptions and values underlying some of the more phallogocentric aspects of neo avant-gardist theory and literature.

Configurations of Countercultural Madness and Delirium:

Alfredo Giuliani and *Schizomorfismo*

The theoretical and meta-literary writings of the different movements that constituted the Italian *neoavanguardia* provide vital reference points for this project. Central to this are the critical essays of Giuliani and Sanguineti in the landmark anthology *I Novissimi* (1961 and 1965 editions), which offer a fascinating insight into the literary, political and philosophical potential of madness and delirium as cultural categories. In his 1965 introduction, Giuliani states that what he termed a ‘visione schizomorfa’ was a fundamental characteristic of the poetry of the *Novissimi*, which he had associated back in

1961 with ‘la riduzione dell’io’ and a novel, atonal, ‘asyntactic’ approach to metrics.³⁹ He states that he was drawn to the ‘implicazioni socio-culturali’ of an understanding of schizophrenia as a ‘modalità dell’esistenza in cui sono altrettanto impossibili la soggettività e l’oggettività del mondo.’⁴⁰ He then provides a long list of characteristics proper to the poetry of the *Novissimi*, intriguingly bound up in the contemporaneous question of literary madness and delirium:

L’affettività turbata dallo sconvolgimento dei termini di relazione, l’intelligenza che registra la dissociazione degli eventi mediante la distorsione semantica, le conseguenti stesure intrecciate del discorso, i giochi linguistici (neologismi, schizofasie), la similarità tra il linguaggio del sogno e l’espressione della psicosi, la giustapposizione degli elementi di logiche diverse, il linguaggio-sfida, il non-finito: tutto ciò coincide con l’attitudine antropologica che precise condizioni storiche hanno esaltato fino alla costituzione di un linguaggio letterario che *fa epoca* e da cui non

³⁹ Giuliani, 1961 introduction to *I Novissimi* in: N. Balestrini, and A. Giuliani (eds.), *Gruppo 63: L’antologia / critica e teoria*, p. 523. These central concepts are reaffirmed in: R. Barilli et al. (eds.), *Il Gruppo 63 quarant’anni dopo: Bologna, 8-11 maggio 2003: atti del convegno*, Volume 1, Edizioni Pendragon, 2005, p. 102, 223.

⁴⁰ Giuliani, 1965 introduction, *I Novissimi*, p. 7. It should be emphasised that Giuliani uses the term ‘schizophrenia’ in a broad sense that has more valence in cultural representations than clinical discourses. Nonetheless, it remains important to seek a working definition of schizophrenia at the outset of this thesis. In both clinical and non-clinical environments the term remains a contested one. The Oxford English Dictionary (3rd edn., 2010) describes ‘schizophrenia’ as ‘a long-term mental disorder of a type involving a breakdown in the relation between thought, emotion, and behaviour, leading to faulty perception, inappropriate actions and feelings, withdrawal from reality and personal relationships into fantasy and delusion, and a sense of mental fragmentation.’ In general use, it also states ‘a mentality or approach characterised by inconsistent or contradictory elements.’ In terms of what the term ‘schizophrenia’ can evoke in a humanistic discourse, Angela Woods states that ‘throughout the last century, it has been used to describe some of the most severe forms of human suffering and some of the most extraordinary thoughts, sensations, and feelings the human subject can experience.’ (A. Woods, *The Sublime Object of Psychiatry: Schizophrenia in Clinical and Cultural Theory*, Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 1) She provides an illuminating analysis of both the intersections and divergences in cultural and clinical applications of this terminology, from its inception as ‘dementia praecox’ in the late nineteenth-century, through a host of various interpretations ranging from the realm of the mystical to the political throughout the twentieth century, to the biomedical model largely used in psychiatry today. Louis Sass asserts the elusiveness of the schizophrenic and is reluctant to provide any single essential feature of schizophrenia as a condition, but ventures into relating the *experience* as ‘the most profound alterations in the very structures of human consciousness, in the forms of time, space, causality, and human identity that normally provide a kind of bedrock foundation for a stable human existence.’ (L. Sass, *Madness and Modernism: Insanity in the Light of Modern Art, Literature and Thought*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1992, p. 14).

si può tornare indietro. Strozzata apparizione, rito demente e schernitore, discorso sapiente, pantomima incorporea, gioco temerario, la nuova poesia si misura con la *degradazione dei significati* e con *l'instabilità fisiognomica* del mondo verbale in cui siamo immersi, ma anche con se stessa, con la sua capacità d'invenzione.⁴¹

Giuliani's incredibly evocative account of 'la visione schizomorfa' details the features of a new literary language, an idiom that is intrinsically bound up with its historical moment and the 'socio-cultural' conditions in which it exists. Dissociation, loss of reality, repetition, alternative logics, dream-expression, incongruous categorisations, and non-teleological temporal progressions are the prevailing themes in this excerpt. Giuliani posits the new poetry in terms of instability and mutability within signification, reiterating once more the contemporary state of language in which poetry must exist and act.

What Giuliani did not explicitly elucidate is the enriching factor of the visual sphere within this new poetics, but which is revealed more fully in the poetry of the four poets I consider in this thesis. Many of the literary characteristics that Giuliani cites do, however, appear to possess an embedded potential for literary visuality – I think in particular of '*l'instabilità fisiognomica del mondo verbale*,' the 'pantomima incorporea' and the 'strozzata apparizione,' for example. In the course of this dissertation, I will examine in more detail the imperfectly overlapping junctures between Giuliani's theoretical configurations of madness and the visual devices that often provide a cypher for perceptions of delirium in the poetry of the *neoavanguardia*.

It should be emphasised that Giuliani did not promulgate a literary 'visione schizomorfa' in order to create thematically otherworldly, whimsical or fantastical poetic landscapes. On the contrary, his investigations of extreme linguistic, formal and thematic disjuncture sought to foreground a kind of non-mimetic, non-naturalistic *realism*. In the convoluted discursive style of Gruppo

⁴¹ Giuliani, 1965 introduction, *I Novissimi*, p. 7.

63's 'Il dibattito,' Giuliani (and as I will argue in the first chapter, Sanguineti) explicates his vision of the new poetry through an analysis of the essentially *structural* differences between traditional and avant-gardist literature. His position hinges on the difference between 'normal' and 'real':

Se il normale, ciò che è direttamente comunicabile, è divenuto non realistico allora è chiaro che entra in gioco una nuova idea, per esempio, dei rapporti tra immaginazione e percezione: questo è un punto secondo me molto importante, e l'idea mi è stata confermata da un uomo come Gunther Anders quando nel suo diario di Hiroshima scopre che obbiettivamente il mondo della percezione non è piú realistico, quando scopre (con i mezzi dell'informazione scientifica e dell'intuizione discorsiva) che soltanto l'immaginazione riesce ormai a fungere da organo della verità.⁴²

For Giuliani, that 'objectively' *only* the imagination can function as an organ of truth, and that what was the 'world of perception' is 'no longer realistic,' is a crucial and revelatory insight that enables a reconceptualisation of poetry along the lines of 'schizomorphic vision' - a fractured poetic process that is analogous to the 'tecniche dell'alienato.'

Years later, in his preface to the 2003 edition, Giuliani reaffirmed that 'la "visione schizomorfa" della composizione' constituted 'l'intenzionalità alla forma scissa,' emphasising the movement's essential aesthetic of 'split form.'⁴³ The very essence of being split gathers together historic interpretations of schizophrenia as the sign of a 'split mind' (prompting Eugen Bleuler's 1911 coinage from the Greek etymological roots *schizein* and *phren*⁴⁴), with the neo avant-gardist emphasis on the splitting of conventional grammar, syntax and

⁴² Giuliani, 'Il dibattito,' p. 375.

⁴³ Giuliani, 2003 preface, *I Novissimi*, p. viii.

⁴⁴ R. B. Taylor, *The Amazing Language of Medicine: Understanding Medical Terms and Their Backstories*, Springer International, 2017, p. 160.

genre – in short, the breaking down of naturalism in the name of novel aesthetic models. The ‘visione schizomorfa’ and the tendency towards ‘split form’ in poetics signal a site where the invocation of literary delirium and the employment of visual-verbal tactics intersect.

The idea of a literary programme based around ‘split form’ as theorised by Giuliani anticipates a remarkable example of the confluence of radical psychiatry and the arts, the *Semiotext(e)* Colloquium of 1975 titled *Schizo-Culture: The Event*, published as a special issue in 1978.⁴⁵ This gathering brought together psychiatrists along with philosophers and cultural commentators including Jean-Francois Lyotard, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari.⁴⁶ It had been conceived as an introduction to post-’68 European continental thought and culture, including radical psychiatry and discourses on power, to an American audience.⁴⁷ For our purposes, it serves as a remarkable document through its affirmation of much new thought of the preceding decade, and the fluid verbal-visual manner of its presentation. Angela Woods describes this as ‘perhaps the last major antipsychiatric event’; underscoring the heavily politicised stance of 60s and 70s antipsychiatry, the colloquium’s content centred on a critique of the role of Western traditional psychiatry in advancing late capitalist hegemonic norms.⁴⁸ The individual schizophrenic was cast as an emblem of a number of related discourses: the dissenting non-normative militant ‘schizorevolutionary’ as elaborated by Deleuze and Guattari, which will be treated in more detail later in this introduction; the schizophrenic as symbol of political, cultural and economic oppression; and finally, the schizophrenic as representative of alienated groups more generally - the ‘infirm, the illiterate, and the schizos.’⁴⁹

In the book following the *Schizo-Culture* convention, we observe a mixed catalogue of the written word - including creative prose, poetry, manifestos,

⁴⁵ S. Lotringer and D. Morris (eds.), *Schizo-Culture: The Event, The Book*, 2 vols., New York, Semiotext(e), 2014.

⁴⁶ Woods, *The Sublime Object of Psychiatry*, p. 132.

⁴⁷ *Schizo-Culture*, blurb.

⁴⁸ Woods, p. 132.

⁴⁹ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. R. Hurley, M. Seem, and H.R. Lane, University of Minnesota Press, 2000, p. 370-1. See also Woods, p.130.

essays - and the visual arts - including collage, visual imagery and advertising – often blended throughout the collection. The contributions include a manifesto on antipsychiatric principles titled ‘The Boston Declaration on Psychiatric Oppression’ and an article on politico-social issues by key antipsychiatrist David Cooper called ‘The Invention of Non-Psychiatry.’ The antipsychiatry movement provides one historical frame for this thesis; in particular, the writing and praxis of Italian antipsychiatrist Franco Basaglia, who was associated with many of the leftist intellectual strands of the *neoavanguardia*, will be discussed in relation to Edoardo Sanguineti.

These texts are joined by a William Burroughs essay titled ‘The Limits of Control’ on the classic themes of paranoia and governmental mind control, and Gilles Deleuze’s ‘Politics,’ on the lived life, control and the divisions humans experience in society. Interspersed with these articles are creative works, such as Louis Wolfson’s prose piece ‘Full Stop for an Infernal Planet’ and Kathy Acker’s ‘The Persian Poems,’ an interesting piece of writing invoking Persian and English grammatical copy-books and translations, revealing disturbing themes of sexual violence and menace. To add to its militant character, the anthology also includes Ulrike Meinhof’s ‘Armed Anti-Imperialist Struggle.’⁵⁰

The most striking aspect of the collection is its very emphasis on mixed media, verbal-visual modes and genre-breaking structure. The theme of ‘splitting’ is at the forefront of its methodology and theoretical orientation. Indeed, in an interview William Burroughs explicitly points to the convention’s use of the cultural baggage of ‘split mind’ in discussing artistic and cultural fragmentation :

I think “schizo-culture” here is being used rather in a special sense. Not referring to clinical schizophrenia, but to the fact that the culture is divided

⁵⁰ Interestingly, Meinhof is referenced briefly in Patrizia Vicinelli’s *Apotheosis of schizoid woman*, as I will explore in more detail in my chapter on trauma in Vicinelli.

up into all sorts of classes and groups, etc., and that some of the old lines are breaking down. And that this is a healthy sign.⁵¹

Interestingly, Burroughs' conceptualisation of this new schizo-infused cultural language as contributing to a 'healthy' breakdown of rigid distinctions between 'classes and groups' had already received treatment in an interview translated and published in *Quindici* in September 1968, where he argued that the dividing line between science and art was rapidly dissolving, and that scientists would inevitably become more creative even as writers would become more scientific.⁵² Seen in light of the later debates surrounding the *Schizo-Culture* convention, Giuliani's conceptualisation of 'visione schizomorfa' in the early 1960s seems all the more prescient: his description of this literary process as encompassing a rupture of genre boundaries and an exploitation of the estranging possibilities of fractured language was ahead of its time in its productive blending of artistic and clinical discourses.

Somewhat paradoxically, Giuliani argues that a poetry operating along 'schizophrenic' and 'schizomorphic' principles would by its nature be situated at the *centre* of its 'precarious' historical moment, rather than existing on the margins of society as one might expect.⁵³ 'La visione schizomorfa,' with its characteristic traits such as 'la discontinuità del processo immaginativo,' 'l'asintattismo' and 'la violenza operata sui segni' is configured not as avant-gardist in the classically understood 'marginal' or 'programmatic' sense of the term, but rather as a cultural practice that struck to the very centre of unstable reality.⁵⁴ In this way Giuliani seeks to renegotiate the terms of the traditional position of the avant-garde, placing 'schizomorfismo' at the core of this position.

⁵¹ Interview with William Burroughs, S. Lotringer and D. Morris (eds.), *Schizo-Culture*.

⁵² 'L'alterazione romanzesca: Intervista con William Burroughs,' *Quindici*, no. 12, September 1968, p. viii: 'L'arte e scienza si fonderanno sempre di più. Gli scienziati stanno già studiando i processi creativi, e penso che l'intera linea divisoria tra arte e scienza si spezzerà e che gli scienziati, spero, diventeranno sempre più creativi e gli scrittori più scientifici.' This interview originally published as: C. Knickerbocker, 'William Burroughs: An Interview,' *The Paris Review*, 35, 1965, pp. 13-49.

⁵³ Giuliani, 1961 introduction, *I Novissimi*, p. 19.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

This resonates with Shoshana Felman's later characterisation of the central paradox attendant to investigations of cultural madness more generally:

The fact that madness has currently become a *common* discursive *place* is not the least of its paradoxes. Madness usually occupies a position of *exclusion*; it is the *outside* of a culture. But madness that is a *common* place occupies a position of *inclusion* and becomes the *inside* of a culture [...]. It is rather our entire era that has become subsumed within the space of madness.⁵⁵

Felman's vision of 'our entire era' as 'subsumed within the space of madness' inevitably recalls Giuliani's crucial characterisation of the role of poetry as 'mimesi critica della schizofrenia universale,' a 'rispecchiamento e contestazione di uno stato sociale e immaginativo disgregato.'⁵⁶ Far from constituting a largely irrelevant and excluded outside, madness is transformed into the only adequate discourse through which to conceptualise the world around us. The inversion envisioned by Giuliani will be addressed in more detail in my chapter on Edoardo Sanguineti.

Giuliani's concept of a 'visione schizomorfa,' I argue, ultimately constitutes the crucial link between the visual and the delirious that forms the core of my thesis. Building on the theoretical insights of Giuliani, Adriano Spatola's critical writings offer a fascinating further account of the neo avant-garde interest in 'cultural schizophrenia.' I argue that this interest is linked to his approach to spatial forms in poetry. In his 1969 critique elaborating his theory of an intermedial, integrated 'poesia totale,' Spatola reaffirms the trope of 'schizophrenic' chaos as mimetic of the process of reading and creating literature.⁵⁷ In a section detailing formal continuities from the Surrealists to the poetry of his own time, Spatola discusses cut-ups from newspapers and the media,

⁵⁵ Felman, *Writing and Madness*, pp. 13-14.

⁵⁶ Giuliani, 1965 introduction, *I Novissimi*, p. 7.

⁵⁷ A. Spatola, *Verso la poesia totale*, Salerno, Rummo editore, 1969, p. 93.

and the arbitrary combinations, linguistic randomness, chaos, and asemanticity that stems from such techniques. He cites Giuliani's own interpretation of cut-up techniques, ranging from 'una impazienza linguistica' to the practice of 'maltrattare i giornali e la loro abitudine di razionalizzare momentaneamente in titoli e colonne il tragico, il vano, l'incontrollabile, il sordido, il patetico.'⁵⁸ Spatola positions Giuliani's visual poems as a response to the 'incongruità squisitamente schizofrenica' of reading juxtaposed media in an arbitrary, conflicting manner.⁵⁹ Further quoting Giuliani, he writes:

Spingendo l'arbitrio fino in fondo [...] è possibile estorcere ai frammenti ritagliati e poi incollati un riflusso di significati o di non significati, fortissime suggestioni nucleari, sicché la disarticolazione e riarticolazione (sperimentale) del testo rivela certe costanti strutturali del nostro mondo linguistico.⁶⁰

Spatola points out the echoes of Giuliani's comments on 'incongruità squisitamente schizofrenica' with the Surrealist device of 'exquisite cadavers,' a method of arbitrary literary creation. He consequently posits the fundamental Surrealist poetic aim as the invention, and recovery, of 'un linguaggio schizofrenico.'⁶¹ This association, between the visual products of randomness (cut-ups, fragments, disarticulations of text), and an understanding of 'schizophrenic language' is a compelling indication of the neo avant-garde relationship between visuality and the unfathomable 'other' of delirium.

In *I Novissimi*, Sanguineti engages in a debate on the poetic representation of a 'nervous breakdown,' introducing another strand into the discussion of the relationship between psychological rupture and poetic form. In his essay 'Poesia informale?' first published in *Il Verri* in 1961, Sanguineti is drawn to respond to a

⁵⁸ Giuliani, cited in Spatola, *Verso la poesia totale*, p. 93.

⁵⁹ Spatola, *Verso la poesia totale*, p. 93.

⁶⁰ Giuliani, cited in Spatola, pp. 93, 95.

⁶¹ Spatola, *Verso la poesia totale*, p. 95.

comment made by fellow poet Andrea Zanzotto about the latter's perception of an 'esaurimento nervoso' in *Laborintus*, Sanguineti's landmark 1956 poetic work.⁶² He offers a correction to Zanzotto's view, asserting that what he had in fact conveyed was 'un oggettivo "esaurimento" storico' – in so doing he points towards a deeper dialectic between the personal and the universal, between privately suffered and societally damaging ills. Umberto Eco refers to this incident in a chapter of his *Opera aperta* entitled 'Del modo di formare come impegno sulla realtà,' a wider discussion of how the ruptured linguistic forms employed in avant-garde literature speak directly towards a historical reality of alienation, rather than obscuring it.⁶³ Eco, like Sanguineti, seeks to foreground a kind of 'objective' reason-within-chaos as the operating principle of this process:

... l'operazione dell'arte che tenta di conferire una forma a ciò che può apparire disordine, informe, dissociazione, mancanza di ogni rapporto, è ancora l'esercizio di una ragione che tenta di ridurre a chiarezza discorsiva le cose...⁶⁴

Eco's description of an art-form that gives shape to what might at first appearance seem as disordered, dissociated and lacking in all logic further points to a neo avant-garde commitment to reformulating the expressive capacities of language.

In his own critical writings, Sanguineti provides us with further clues as to how he conceptualised the limitations of semantically coherent language in representing the reality of the contemporary world. Significantly, he references the work of the French playwright and theorist Antonin Artaud, and the dramatic theory most associated with him, the 'Théâtre de la Cruauté.' In an article entitled 'Per una letteratura della crudeltà,' published in *Quindici* in 1967,⁶⁵ Sanguineti

⁶² E. Sanguineti, 'Poesia informale?,' *I Novissimi*, p. 202; *Il Verri*, no. 3, 1961.

⁶³ U. Eco, *Opera aperta*, Milano, Bompiani, 1997 (1962), pp. 286-290. Originally published in 1962 in *Il Menabò* 5.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 289-90.

⁶⁵ E. Sanguineti, 'La letteratura della crudeltà,' *Quindici*, No. 1, June 1967, in N. Balestrini (ed.), *Quindici: Una rivista e il Sessantotto*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 2008, pp. 15-17.

expands on certain topics concerning the avant-garde and the idea of ‘cruelty,’ positioning literature as a site for the renegotiation of ‘words and things’:

[...] l’esperienza delle parole condiziona (precede) quella delle cose. [...] La letteratura, come luogo della crudeltà, è allora lo spazio sperimentale dove si decide la dialettica, come si ama dire oggi, delle parole e delle cose.⁶⁶

One of Artaud’s fundamental points in his manifesto *The Theater and its Double* is the insistence on the limitations of language to truly represent trauma and suffering, leaving words open to be used as haunting, visceral phonic presences rather than signifying units.⁶⁷ While Artaud’s response looked to the dynamic *sound* qualities of words and language as ephemeral tools for the stage, the same rejection of the linear and representative uses of words is palpable in visual, concrete and cut-up poetry’s capacity to approach the unfathomable.

The literary programme of the Gruppo 63 and the Novissimi was intent on defamiliarising language and destabilising the use-value of the word, and the visual manner in which Sanguineti, Spatola, Niccolai and Vicinelli achieve this (albeit in different ways) is, I believe, especially pertinent when considering the themes of madness, delirium and trauma. Suggestively, Artaud himself once wrote that ‘delirium is as legitimate, as logical, as any other succession of human ideas or acts’⁶⁸: Sanguineti’s reference to Artaud’s radical practice demonstrates once more the rich literary potential of delirium, and signals the lure of the often paradoxical discursive levels of cultural schizophrenia for the *neoavanguardia*.

⁶⁶ E. Sanguineti, ‘La letteratura della crudeltà,’ *Quindici*, No. 1, June 1967, in N. Balestrini (ed.), *Quindici: Una rivista e il Sessantotto*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 2008, pp. 16. Sanguineti’s choice of phrase hints at Michel Foucault’s influential *Les mots et les choses: Une archéologie des sciences humaines*, Paris, Gallimard, 1966.

⁶⁷ A. Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, (*Le Theatre et son Double*, Gallimard, 1938) Trans. M.C. Richards, New York, Grove Press, 1958. See also R. Vork, ‘The Things No One Can Say: The Unspeakable Act in Artaud’s *Les Cenci*,’ *Modern Drama* 56, 3, 2013.

⁶⁸ M. Esslin, *Artaud*, London, Fontana, 1976, p. 52.

Clinical and Cultural Exchange in the Italian *Neoavanguardia*

“*Quindici*” continua a occuparsi di modelli di una scrittura “altra ...”

Quindici, no. 12, September 1968⁶⁹

Giuliani and Sanguineti’s writing on ‘folia,’ alienation and radical forms of literary language were produced in a charged cultural and historical context, in a period of rapidly shifting assumptions and interpretations on the nature of mental illness. An investigation of contemporary Italian journals of art, culture and the psychopathological sciences from the 1960s reveals that there were profound crossovers between explorations of mental illness and the visual and literary arts during this period. In April 1964, the ‘Società italiana di psicopatologia dell’espressione’ held a convention inviting contributions from contemporary figures on the topic of ‘aggiornamenti metodologici per l’utilizzazione dell’espressione psicopatologica plastico-figurativa ai fini clinici.’⁷⁰ The collected papers range from discussions surrounding the application and benefit of the arts in the medical and psychiatric arenas, the collecting of visual artworks by patients in psychiatric institutions, the intersections between art and psychiatric issues, and the attendant methodological issues involved in approaching and documenting such intersections.⁷¹ An earlier convention in Bologna in 1963 featured papers by many of the same authors and treated similar topics under the rubric ‘Psicopatologia dell’espressione.’⁷²

What is especially relevant for this dissertation is the extent of authorial and thematic overlap between the papers in these and other medical-clinical

⁶⁹ N. Balestrini (ed.), *Quindici: Una rivista e il Sessantotto*, p. 327.

⁷⁰ I^a tavola rotonda, ‘Atti della riunione della società italiana di psicopatologia dell’espressione,’ (Milano, 1964), *Annali di neurologia e psichiatria*, Maggio-Agosto 1964, vol. LVIII, f.2.

⁷¹ See for example: C. Trabucchi, V. Andreoli, A. Pasa, ‘Dalla espressione grafica come mezzo di comunicazione alla espressione grafica come mezzo diagnostico,’ pp. 107-114; F. Basaglia, ‘Ambiguità ed oggettivazione dell’espressione figurativa psicopatologica,’ pp. 125-131; S. Piro, ‘Rapporti fra linguaggio e arti plastiche: problemi metodologici in psicopatologia dell’espressione,’ pp. 131-146.

⁷² G. Maccagnani (ed.), *Psicopatologia dell’espressione*, Imola, Editrice Galeati, 1966; ‘Atti del 2° colloquio internazionale sull’espressione plastica, Bologna: 3-5 Maggio 1963.’

journals, and papers in literary and cultural journals of the day. In particular, I refer to the prominent avant-garde publication *Il Verri*, founded in 1956 by philosopher and critic Luciano Anceschi. In 1964, the same year as the Milan convention, *Il Verri* published a special issue titled ‘Psicopatologia dell’espressione,’⁷³ which included articles by antipsychiatrist Franco Basaglia, psychiatrist Sergio Piro, phenomenological psychiatrist Eugène Minkowski, and Robert Volmat, who wrote extensively on psychopathology and art.⁷⁴

Basaglia and Piro submitted papers to both the Milan psychiatric convention and *Il Verri*: Basaglia wrote on the themes of ambiguity and kitsch, respectively, in psychopathological figurative art, with Piro’s articles concerning the relationship between language and the visual arts in the psychopathology of expression. Minkowski’s ‘La portée vitale de l’expression (Quelques réflexions),’ included in the Milan psychiatric convention, was translated in *Il Verri* as ‘La portata vitale dell’espressione,’ revealing the extent of linguistic and interdisciplinary transfer. Volmat, on the other hand, considered issues surrounding the study of artworks by the mentally ill, and the related question concerning the mental health of the artist and the Romantic discourse on the relationship between genius and madness.⁷⁵

In the same vein, but within the context of the 1963 Bologna convention, Basaglia’s paper ‘L’incontro con l’espressione figurativa malata’ questioned the distinction between artworks made by mentally ill patients from those of professional artists, inquiring whether one can be considered more ‘valid’ than the other.⁷⁶ Another aspect of Volmat’s thought is illustrated in his paper from 1963, titled ‘La création délirante et la création artistique: L’oeuvre et l’hallucination,’ where the authors directly analyse visual artworks produced by patients on new

⁷³ *Il Verri*, no. 15, June 1964: ‘Numero speciale: Psicopatologia dell’espressione.’

⁷⁴ See R. Volmat, *L’art psychopathologique*, Presses Universitaires de France, 1956.

⁷⁵ F. Basaglia, ‘Kitsch ed espressione figurativa psicopatologica,’ pp. 27-34; S. Piro, ‘Analisi del linguaggio e psicopatologia dell’espressione,’ pp. 71-88; R. Volmat, ‘I problemi dell’arte dell’ammalato di mente e della sanità mentale dell’artista,’ pp. 89-93; E. Minkowski, ‘La portata vitale dell’espressione,’ pp. 6-13; F. Barison, ‘Arte e schizofrenia,’ pp. 136-142.

⁷⁶ F. Basaglia, ‘L’incontro con l’espressione figurativa malata,’ in G. Maccagnani (ed.), *Psicopatologia dell’espressione*, pp. 147-151.

psychiatric drugs, in particular Psilocybin, relaying in great detail the oneiric, hallucinatory effects induced.⁷⁷ The radical, experimental approaches described in these and other papers from the era tread a fine line between scientific experimentation characterised by objectifying tendencies, and mind-expanding artistic research.

In 1968 *Il Verri* published 'Numero speciale: Psicoanalisi e poesia' with an introduction highlighting the fairly recent advent, in the Italian context, of psychoanalysis being seriously considered as a science to be studied in relation to culture, and its significance as a revolution whose influence is as profound as other 'scientific, socio-political, or ethical revolutions.'⁷⁸ This issue advertises Feltrinelli's translation of Ronald D. Laing's *The Politics of Experience*, underlining the cross-disciplinary interest in the 'psych' disciplines, philosophy of psychiatry, the visual arts, and cultural studies. Other papers include 'Psicoanalisi, antropoanalisi, estetica' by Renato Barilli⁷⁹ (who had outlined a vision for an oneiric literature in the Palermo 'dibattito' five years earlier that has resonances of Laing's mystical and positive evocations of schizophrenia⁸⁰) and Jean Starobinski's 'Freud, Breton, Myers,'⁸¹ again highlighting a free negotiation between visual culture, textual culture, philosophy, and the 'psych' disciplines. My point is to draw attention to the textured layers of discourse and debate being

⁷⁷ R. Volmat and R. Robert, 'La création délirante et la création artistique: L'oeuvre et l'hallucination,' in G. Maccagnani (ed.), *Psicopatologia dell'espressione*, p. 119.

⁷⁸ 'Intervento,' *Il Verri*, n. 28, September 1968: 'Numero speciale: Psicoanalisi e poesia,' p. 3, 4.

⁷⁹ R. Barilli, 'Psicoanalisi, antropoanalisi, estetica,' pp. 66-78. In this presentation of currents in new psychoanalytical and psychiatric theory, Barilli brings together many strands, from the concept of 'being-in-the-world' within phenomenological psychiatry, to Ludwig Binswanger's *Daseinsanalyse*, and, interestingly, suggestions towards radical and anti-psychiatry. He discusses the theory of the weakening distinction between the 'normal' and the 'abnormal': 'Anche ciò che a tutta prima si presenta come abnorme possiede una norma intrinseca, uno stile e una coerenza. Si attenuano i confini tra normalità e irregolarità, tra salute e malattia, perché in ogni caso avremo a che fare con progetti umani in qualche misura voluti e sofferti' (p. 69). He references the highly controversial work of radical psychiatrist Thomas Szasz, 'The Myth of Mental Illness (1961),' which had in 1966 been translated into Italian. Barilli, however, ultimately appears to affirm the practical need for the 'psych' disciplines. His intervention, I argue, is emblematic of the compelling clinical-cultural-philosophical ferment emerging at this watershed moment.

⁸⁰ R. Barilli, 'Il dibattito,' p. 393: '[...] allora vediamo che quell'onirismo ha il compito di allargare i nostri confini, di conquistare alla conoscenza, di riscattare, di illuminare tante zone della nostra vita che fino a questo momento rimanevano nell'ombra, è quindi un compito eminentemente positivo che a sua volta, attraverso mediazioni che certamente saranno da compiere, potrà rifluire nel complesso di una visione del mondo, di una ideologia generale.

⁸¹ J. Starobinski, 'Freud, Breton, Myers,' pp. 5-19 in *Il Verri*, n. 28, September 1968.

established between the visual and literary arts and not only the various psychoanalytical schools,⁸² but also the ‘schools’ of antipsychiatry and philosophy of psychiatry as well.⁸³

In the contemporary political and literary journal *Quindici*, founded and edited by members of the Gruppo 63, we also note an intense interest in issues surrounding political clinical-cultural crossover. The anti-psychiatry duo Franco and Franca Basaglia appear with the article ‘L’incidente psichiatrico’ in November 1968, arguing against the traditional closed psychiatric institution, and in favour of a more innovative open model.⁸⁴ The closed, ‘custodial’ institutional system, with its oppressive cult of dehumanising rules, objectification of patients, the removal of any sense of responsibility or agency, all too often results in acts of rebellion through the only possibility available, the lure of death, ‘which presents itself with the illusory face of liberty.’⁸⁵ The article poses many of the questions raised in Basaglia’s wider writings, which I consider in more depth in chapter one, on psychiatric institutions and autonomy, liberty, social exclusion, violence, the economic worth of the human, and the measure of normality. The example of a figure such as Basaglia writing for a lay audience in a literary journal such as *Quindici*, alongside articles on the student protests and FIAT workers as well as critical pieces on literary aesthetics,⁸⁶ vividly demonstrates the contemporary

⁸² The vast field of psychoanalytical schools and thinkers, and a foray into the undoubted engagement of members of the *neoavanguardia* with psychoanalytical thought, are beyond the scope of this dissertation. For an interesting exploration into Lacanian psychoanalysis in the poetry of Andrea Zanzotto, for example, see L.E. Dyson, ‘Schizophrenia as a Poetic Model in Andrea Zanzotto,’ *Forum Italicum*, n. 28, 1994, 342-57.

⁸³ In terms of scholarly work in this field, see: A. Dolfi (ed.), *Nevrosi e follia nella letteratura moderna: atti del seminario*, (Trento, May 1992), Rome, Bulzoni, 1993. This volume collects papers from a wide range of authors, looking at aspects of the themes of madness and psychoanalysis, mostly in the Italian 19th and 20th century novel. One paper considers the literary *neoavanguardia*, briefly noting Giuliani’s ‘visione schizomorfa’ and the discussion between Sanguineti and Zanzotto on the topic of the ‘esaurimento nervoso’ in *Laborintus* (pp. 581-2), before turning to the work of Manganelli and Samonà in more depth: G. Di Fonzo, ‘Follia, nevrosi, linguaggi in Manganelli e Samonà’, pp. 577-594.

⁸⁴ F. and F. Basaglia, ‘L’incidente psichiatrico,’ in N. Balestrini (ed.), *Quindici: Una rivista e il Sessantotto*, pp. 347-352. Originally published in *Quindici*, 13, November 1968.

⁸⁵ F. and F. Basaglia, ‘L’incidente psichiatrico,’ p. 349.

⁸⁶ Edoardo Sanguineti’s 1967 article ‘La letteratura della crudeltà’ and Giulia Niccolai’s 1968 ‘La noia della insensibilità,’ for example, retain a literary-critical premise alongside articles related to political praxis.

atmosphere of interdisciplinary and clinical-cultural ferment in which the journal operated.

Here we witness a confluence not only between the cultural, political and clinical spheres, but also between analyses of the visual and the literary arts. The limited example of intellectual exchange between psychiatric conventions and *Il Verri* is reflective of this era's commitment to breaking down boundaries between disciplines. That figures within psychiatry were approaching the artworks of mentally ill patients, and that their interpretations garnered equal interest in medical and cultural journals, showcases how this commitment to rupturing disciplinary boundaries was configured as an intellectual practice that could open out towards enhanced modes of perception. This interdisciplinary mutability supports my thesis that the poetics of the 60s *neoavanguardia* was fully immersed in an intensely intermedial countercultural milieu. Emerging at a historical flashpoint that is readily aligned with a host of linguistic, artistic, and epistemological crises, the verbal-visual mode offers a crucial entry-point to questions surrounding delirium, madness and trauma that are beyond the reach of purely textual investigations precisely *because* of its 'otherness,' its liminal position *between* divergent representational codes.

Countercultural Alterity in Wider Theoretical Perspectives

Can we not see that *this voyage is not what we need to be cured of, but that it is itself a natural way of healing our own appalling state of alienation called normality?*

- R.D. Laing, *The Politics of Experience*⁸⁷

Influential factions in the *neoavanguardia* then, in both its literary and theoretical practices, were engaged in a debate on the linguistic and literary significance of ‘split form,’ the disruptive potential of ‘schizomorphic’ devices and the political aspects of poetic ‘irrationality’ and ‘abnormality.’ Opening out from these specific parameters, I contend that Giuliani, Sanguineti, Spatola, Niccolai and Vicinelli each engage dialectically with the multifarious interpretations of a more broadly defined ‘cultural madness’ in their critical and literary writings. In order to trace this discourse with more precision, it is illuminating to look to theoretical investigations of the relationship between madness and art from the contemporary moment of the 1960s, as well as more recent writing on these complex debates.

In her account of madness in western literature, Lillian Feder describes madness as an age-old site of oscillation reaching back to classical thought. She identifies ‘two opposing states of madness that can be seen in literary representations: madness as despair, fear, and horror, and madness as a mind-expanding, revealing, mystical experience.’⁸⁸ In his own comparative work on clinical schizophrenia and Modernist art, Louis Sass describes a similar duality, outlining ‘the poles around which images of madness have revolved for so many

⁸⁷ R.D. Laing, *The Politics of Experience*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1984 (1967), p. 136.

⁸⁸ L. Feder, *Madness in Literature*, Princeton University Press, 1980, p. 282. See also Baker et al., ‘Literary representations of madness also exist on a continuum – from the view that madness is a mind-expanding state or veritable celebration of madness, standing in opposition to the generally accepted view that madness is one of the worst things that can happen to any individual, through to representations that emphasise the abject terror of those experiencing the horror of madness.’ C. Baker et al., *Madness in Post-1945 British and American Fiction*, p. 22.

centuries.⁸⁹ On one pole lies an understanding of schizophrenia as encompassing ‘notions of defect and decrepitude, of blindness, even of death itself.’⁹⁰ On the other interpretive pole, we encounter a radically different model that foregrounds ‘ideas of plenitude, energy, and irrepressible vitality – a surfeit of passion or fury bursting through all boundaries of reason or constraint.’⁹¹

Questioning the parameters of this duality, Sass undermines a characterisation of madness as depriving ‘the soul of its most essential feature – its lucidity.’⁹² For Sass, madness might ‘in at least some of its forms’ in fact be imbued with an *excess* rather than a deficit of consciousness, and ‘an alienation not from reason but from the emotions, instincts, and the body.’⁹³ Sass’ wider argument seeks to draw parallels between ‘certain formal or structural aspects or pervasive infrastructures of experience’ in schizophrenic-type illnesses and ‘the sensibility and structures of consciousness’ found in perceived-to-be inaccessible Modernist art and literature.⁹⁴ I argue that the complex literary and artistic fragmentation I will discuss in the coming chapters of this thesis might also be readily likened to schizophrenic ‘infrastructures of experience’ and structures of consciousness. In a later text, Sass elaborates on the philosophical complexity of schizophrenia through a nuanced interpretation of Daniel Paul Schreber’s *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* in the context of Wittgenstein’s analysis of philosophical solipsism.⁹⁵ Schizophrenia, Sass contends, does not encompass a loss of rationality, but is rather the far point in the trajectory of a consciousness turned in upon itself.

⁸⁹ L. Sass, *Madness and Modernism: Insanity in the Light of Modern Art, Literature and Thought*, p. 3.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

⁹¹ *ibid.*

⁹² *ibid.*

⁹³ *ibid.*, p. 4.

⁹⁴ L. Sass, ‘Some reflections on the (analytic) philosophical approach to delusion,’ *Philosophy, Psychiatry & Psychology*, vol. 11, no. 1, March 2004, p. 75. See also L. Sass, *Madness and Modernism*, chapters ‘Cognitive Slippage,’ ‘Disturbances of Distance,’ and ‘Languages of Inwardness.’

⁹⁵ L. Sass, *The Paradoxes of Delusion: Wittgenstein, Schreber, and the Schizophrenic Mind*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1994.

By engaging closely with the philosophical questions raised by schizophrenia, Sass' methodology enables us to reflect upon the abstract *figure* of the marginal, dissenting and disruptive 'other.' Both the inherited binary definitions of schizophrenia described by Sass (regressive and defective on the one hand, Dionysian and irrepressible on the other) and his own more nuanced characterisation of the condition as encompassing hyperreflexive and hyper-conscious patterns of thought, set up fascinating frameworks through which to look retroactively at the innovative theoretical and artistic output of the Italian *neoavanguardia*. Whilst avoiding a romanticised notion of schizophrenia and other mental illnesses, Sass seeks to illuminate some of the less easily understood aspects of these mental states through equations to modernist art practice, demonstrating that 'much of what has been passed off as primitive or deteriorated is far more complex and interesting – and self-aware – than is usually acknowledged.'⁹⁶

To return to the notion of *schizomorfismo*, Giuliani (also openly rejecting any idealisation of mental illness) in a certain way straddled the dual interpretive poles of defect and irrepressible vitality laid out decades later by Sass and Feder. In his 1965 introduction to *I Novissimi*, Giuliani presents a vertiginous and conflicting view of 'la follia':

Intendiamoci: non c'è nulla di più squallido e straziante che la condizione della follia. Il fascino dell'analogia è nondimeno quasi irresistibile per chi sa che le assurde tecniche dell'alienato sono tentativi mal riusciti di

⁹⁶ Sass, *Madness and Modernism*, p. 8. It should be noted that Sass' comparative method does not provide an ultimate explicative or causative model for the aforementioned affinities between schizophrenia and modernism; rather, his aim is to trace and describe such similarities from the perspective of a clinical practitioner, and to 'reinterpret' schizophrenia, from the standpoint of these art forms, as highly complex, self-conscious, and hyperreflexive. A critique of Sass' project is found in Liah Greenfeld's *Mind, Modernity, Madness*, Harvard University Press, 2013, pp. 167-171, where Greenfeld cautions against comparisons between poetic language and glossomania on the basis of diverse modes of intentionality. I take into account these issues; for the purposes of this dissertation, however, Sass' tracing of linguistic and narrational features of literature, through the comparative lens of schizophrenia, provides enriching terminology and insight into the literary processes of the works of these four poets, allowing me to investigate more deeply my thesis regarding the *significance* (not the explication) of 'madness' in these works.

congiungersi con la propria ombra e di confondersi nella reciprocità di un'assoluta trasparenza entro un rapporto di vita. La povertà, l'opacità della follia sono soltanto il resto percepibile di un processo non sappiamo quanto ricco e diffuso.⁹⁷

Whilst acknowledging the obvious problems involved in adopting analogies with an illness that has the potential to cause unspeakable hardship, Giuliani ultimately reaffirms the allure of such an analogy – despite the ‘poverty’ of madness, it nonetheless contains the potential for a hidden ‘richness’ of expression. His characterisation of schizophrenia and madness more generally thus overlaps somewhat with the non-psychically regressive, non-infantilising understanding of Sass. I contend that the neo avant-gardist theoretical and philosophical approach to the nature of madness opens up the space for a poetics centred on a dialectic of the dissenting ‘other.’

Elaborating his conceptualisation of the relationship between schizophrenia and modernity, Sass adapts the key Foucauldian formulation of the ‘paradoxical doublet’ – the view that Modernity has ushered in an excessive faith in humanity’s own consciousness, which Sass identifies with the schizophrenic paradox of extreme solipsism on the one hand and self-denigration and self-erasure on the other. For Sass, Foucault emerges as the ‘prime critic’ of modernity’s ‘myths of emancipation and enlightenment through self-knowledge,’ exposing the contradictions, paradoxes and dilemmas underpinning modern modes of thought in ways that almost ‘defy summary’:

All these dilemmas do, however, have something in common, for they all derive from a certain duality in the status of human consciousness – a duality bound up with the hyperreflexivity of modern life, with what

⁹⁷ Giuliani, 1965 introduction, *I Novissimi*, 2003, p. 7.

Foucault sees as our ultimately self-deceiving preoccupation with, and over-valuing of, the phenomenon of our own consciousness.⁹⁸

Sass' engagement with Foucault strengthens his contention that a complex schizoid 'hyperreflexivity' is a defining aspect of modernity, humanity caught up in an endlessly reflexive task of self-commentary. In the first two chapters of this thesis, I will explore how Sanguineti's *T.A.T.* and Spatola's *Reattivo per la vedova nera* explode, in diverging ways, many of these 'myths of emancipation and enlightenment through self-knowledge' through their extreme disruption of the assumptions and worldviews underlying the principles of psychological testing. In my chapter on Giulia Niccolai, I consider in more detail Sass' thought-provoking category of hyperreflexivity and how it engages with textual collage. Sass, then, highlights many of the frameworks within which the *neoavanguardisti* had been foregrounding marginal, unconventional, and dissenting voices in the 1960s and 1970s.

Any consideration of the relationship between 'schizophrenic' patterns of consciousness and wider social structures in the 20th century must acknowledge a certain debt to the philosophical work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, whose definition of the figure of the 'schizorevolutionary' was an important aspect of the 1975 *Schizo-Culture* convention described earlier in this introduction. Deleuze and Guattari had introduced these lines of intellectual debate in their landmark work *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, first published in 1972. In this complex and often impenetrable text, schizophrenia and the 'schiz' are flexibly applied categories – rather than proposing an analysis of schizophrenia in any clinical sense, the figure of the 'schiz' is instead advanced as a delirious, disorganised revolutionary who 'scrambles all the codes' and who represents an entity which flows over all pre-ordained historical and societal assumptions.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Sass, *Madness and Modernism*, p. 327.

⁹⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 15.

The work of Deleuze and Guattari is particularly significant for this thesis as it returns us to the relationship between visuality and cultural configurations of schizophrenia. I argue that in *Anti-Oedipus* one can discern a sustained under-the-surface celebration of the dissenting capacity of the image and of the realm of the visual generally, which parallels an investigation of the ‘schizorevolutionary’ *qua* figure or essence. The very unruliness of Deleuze and Guattari’s configuration of the ‘schiz’ is reflected in the uncontrollable, constantly shifting power of icons, paintings, and images. Their commentary on the changes in Venetian painting around the rise, and then fall, of commodity capitalism is highly suggestive; the painting of the latter period is identified with ‘something break[ing] out in this painting [...] another world open[ing] up, an other art, where the lines are deterritorialized, the colors are decoded.’¹⁰⁰ This process is the iconic equivalent of those passages associated with the ‘overflows’ of syntax and language, which will be considered in relation to Adriano Spatola’s poetry later in this thesis.

As Angela Woods writes, ‘by arguing that it is the direct or unfettered expression of a naturally rebellious desire, Deleuze and Guattari depathologise the process of schizophrenia and imply that the search for its origins *as pathology* is no longer necessary.’¹⁰¹ Deleuze and Guattari thus seek to undermine the clinical foundations that might characterise the schizorevolutionary as appertaining to traditional categories of mental illness. The authors cite Foucault, who in turn posits a distinction between the idea of madness as a productive, non-pathological mental process, and madness as a ‘mental illness.’ As Foucault notes (as cited in *Anti-Oedipus*), ‘Perhaps one day one will no longer know clearly what madness really was... Artaud will belong to the ground of our language, and not to its rupture. [...] Madness is breaking its kinship ties with mental illness, [...] madness and mental illness are ceasing to belong to the same anthropological entity.’¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p. 369.

¹⁰¹ Woods, *The Sublime Object of Psychiatry*, p. 10.

¹⁰² M. Foucault, ‘La folie, l’absence d’oeuvre,’ *La table ronde*, May 1964, cited in Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 132n.

In seeking to renegotiate ‘pathological’ definitions of schizophrenia, Deleuze and Guattari engage with the work of the radical psychiatrist R.D. Laing, whom I have already briefly mentioned and whose work was known to the Italian *neoavanguardia* in the late 1960s. In his 1967 *The Politics of Experience* (Feltrinelli’s Italian translation of which was advertised in the 1968 special edition of *Il Verri*¹⁰³), Laing’s understanding of schizophrenia approaches ideas of the sublime. Here he lauded the return to interiority as attaining to the state of a ‘mystical revelation’, imbued to a certain extent with a Romantic sense of anti-rationality and a regaining of lost authenticity. For Laing, far from being an illness, schizophrenia constituted the key with which to redefine what he considered to be arbitrary poles of ‘sanity’ and ‘madness.’ Deleuze and Guattari, in *Anti-Oedipus*, cite the words of Laing thus:

If the human race survives, future men will, I suspect, look back on our enlightened epoch as a veritable age of Darkness. They will presumably be able to savor the irony of this situation with more amusement than we can extract from it. They will see that what we call ‘schizophrenia’ was one of the forms in which, often through quite ordinary people, the light began to break through the cracks in our all-too-closed minds [...] Madness need not be all breakdown. It may also be breakthrough [...] Our sanity is not ‘true’ sanity. Their madness is not ‘true’ madness. The madness of our patients is an artifact of the destruction wreaked on them by us and by them on themselves.¹⁰⁴

Deleuze and Guattari were influenced by Laing’s antipsychiatric construction of conventional ideas of ‘sanity’ as being relative and in constant flux. Crucially, this important passage by Laing is appropriated in *Anti-Oedipus* in a remarkable

¹⁰³ See also Aldo Tagliaferri’s ‘Dal “Pasto Nudo” a “Nova Express”’, *Il Verri*, no. 29, December 1968, p. 95, this being the subsequent special issue on Burroughs; Tagliaferri cites Laing’s *The Politics of Experience* as an opening citation to his article, reflecting the intercultural and interdisciplinary exchange taking place in the circles of the journal.

¹⁰⁴ Laing, *The Politics of Experience*, p. 129; cited in Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 131.

description of their figure of the ‘schiz’ in the context of a Turner exhibition, lending a visual aspect to the account through the device of an unconventional and amorphous ekphrasis:

The canvas turns in on itself, it is pierced by a hole, a lake, a flame, a tornado, an explosion. The themes of the preceding paintings are to be found again here, their meaning changed. The canvas is truly broken, sundered by what penetrates it. All that remains is a background of gold and fog, intense, intensive, traversed in depth by what has just sundered its breadth: the schiz. Everything becomes mixed and confused, and it is here that the breakthrough—not the breakdown—occurs.¹⁰⁵

Here the ‘schiz’ is presented in terms of a cultural category and an essence rather than an individual; in the rich depiction of Turner’s late works we observe the aesthetics of that which is ‘mixed and confused,’ a form that is both highly visual and unfathomably difficult to grasp. Significantly, in their dizzying ekphrasis Deleuze and Guattari tie Laing’s conception of ‘madness’ as ‘breakthrough – not...breakdown’ inextricably to the realm of the visual.

The pulsating aura of the visual realm in the Deleuzo-Guattarian model of schizophrenia is extremely suggestive, and my chapter on Spatola in particular further explores the poetic possibilities of this kind of hallucinatory visuality. More generally, Deleuze and Guattari’s subtle linking of marginal, outlying, or alternative subjectivities and the form of artworks (both literary and visual) provides an important starting point for this thesis. I take their suggestive connection further, and argue that in the work of the four poets treated in this dissertation, both marginal subjectivity and verbal-visuality are essential and intertwined components of their poetic practice. It is in fact precisely their very visual sensibility that allows us to enter into the discursive negotiations of cultural schizophrenia embedded in their work. As we have seen, foregrounding issues of

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*, p. 132.

delirium and madness in cultural production often had its analogue in a broader impulse to disrupt accepted codes, shatter traditional genre boundaries and revitalise linguistic forms. Nowhere is this more powerfully instantiated, I contend, than in an experimental turn towards the visual *in* the literary.

Poetic Visuality and Dissenting Subjectivities

The image/text is neither a method nor a guarantee of historical discovery; it is more like an aperture or cleavage in representation, a place where history might slip through the cracks.

- W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory*¹⁰⁶

How exactly might visuality itself be conceptualised as an effective tool through which to represent a dissenting ‘other,’ both to conventional structures of verbal language and constructions of so-called ‘rational’ subjecthood in the works of Sanguineti, Spatola, Niccolai and Vicinelli? The answer, I believe, lies in the diverging ways in which images and texts have been conceptualised in western culture over the centuries. As is well-documented, the visual image and processes of visuality more generally have been recurring targets of suspicion, contempt and misunderstanding in sacred and secular contexts: iconophobia and iconoclasm have long social and anthropological histories, which vividly reveal the unique and uneasy power often ascribed to images across a wide variety of regions, cultures and time-periods. When brought into dialogue with the word, images have been frequently associated with the realms of irrationality and unreason, the conveyors of dangerous, uncontrollable and even magical forces.

William Mitchell, a leading critic in word and image studies who works at the intersection of cultural studies, literary studies and art history, has written illuminatingly about the fraught nature of the encounter between images and texts in the shared space of ekphrasis. Mitchell asks why in ekphrastic descriptions texts so often ‘seem compelled to reach out to their semiotic “others,” the objects of visual representation.’¹⁰⁷ Underscoring the uneasiness of the intermedial encounter, Mitchell elaborates a theory of the stages of ekphrastic ‘acceptance’,

¹⁰⁶ W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, p. 104.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, p. 109.

encompassing progressively ekphrastic ‘indifference,’ ‘hope’ and ‘fear.’¹⁰⁸ For Mitchell ‘ekphrastic hope’ encompasses a reciprocal ‘exchange and transference between visual and verbal art’ where texts encounter their ‘semiotic others’ and ultimately strive to overcome that otherness.¹⁰⁹ More interesting in the context of this thesis is his category of ‘ekphrastic fear,’ which on the contrary describes a profound *distrust* between word and image. The word-image reciprocity of ekphrastic hope is here perceived as a ‘dangerous promiscuity,’ and so the borders between these media must be regulated with ‘firm distinctions between the senses, modes of representation, and the objects proper to each.’¹¹⁰ The project of ekphrastic hope is now unrecognisable:

All the utopian aspirations of ekphrasis - that the mute image be endowed with a voice, or made dynamic and active, or actually come into view, or (conversely) that poetic language might be “stilled,” made iconic, or “frozen” into a static, spatial array - all these aspirations begin to look idolatrous and fetishistic.¹¹¹

What we learn from Mitchell is the extent to which historical critics have sought to undermine the image *in* literature as an example of breaching semiotic boundaries and an embrace of deception and artifice. His conceptualisation of ‘ekphrastic fear’ is particularly suggestive in its historic identification of the image with the irrational and marginal. In ekphrastic theory the image has been frequently coded as feminine through its apparent stillness, passivity, muteness, and beauty, as argued at length in Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s 1776 treatise *Laocoön*.¹¹² Elaborating on the ‘powerfully gendered’ structures of traditional

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 151-181.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, p. 156.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 155.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 156.

¹¹² This work is often cited as the first modern study of word-image inter-relations, and considers such topics as temporal and spatial modes of storytelling, and the singular ‘pregnant moment’ in painting as a counterpoint to the narrative flow of the literary arts. See G.E. Lessing, *Laocoön, Or, The Limits of Poetry and Painting*, trans. W. Ross, London, Ridgeway and Sons, 1836.

ekphrastic theory, James Heffernan points to its binary construction of duels between male and female gazes in which ‘the voice of male speech’ strives to ‘control a female image that is both alluring and threatening, [seeking] to overcome the fixating impact of beauty poised in space.’¹¹³ Part of what Mitchell describes as ‘ekphrastic fear’ can be attributed to this gendered coding, with its associated distrust of supposedly ‘feminine’ traits of irrationality, unruliness, hysteria, and epistemological fluidity.

Mitchell’s category of ‘ekphrastic fear’ deconstructs the traditional characterisation of the ‘feminine’ image as inherently passive and mute by pointing to the capacity of the image to challenge the imperialist gaze of rational, male-coded verbliness. In a reading of Percy Shelley’s ‘Medusa,’ Mitchell posits this ekphrastic image as deterring the male gaze and thus logocentric domination.¹¹⁴ Mitchell’s re-reading demonstrates that the semiotic ‘other’ – that is, visuality – has in many theoretical configurations been associated not only with the feminine other, but also with the categories of the irrational and the dangerously uncontrollable. The visual is thus in a sense *already*-other, and it is this that renders it a compelling tool in poetic constructions of unconventional, marginal, destabilising, and dissenting subjectivities. Mitchell demonstrates how visuality constitutes not merely a formal ‘other,’ but is also capable of destabilising conventional reading patterns, breaking expected genre codes, and generating novel elements within the confines of verbal discourse.

Exploring the various ways in which the traditionally gendered politics of the verbal-visual relationship might be challenged, and consequently how the visual ‘other’ might be reconceptualised in poetry, is a topic of increasing scholarly relevance. A special issue of *French Studies* recently proposed new and innovative approaches to theorising the ekphrastic subject, seeking particularly to

¹¹³ J.A.W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words; The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*, University of Chicago Press, 1993, p. 1.

¹¹⁴ For Mitchell’s analysis of Shelley’s poem a perfect reflection of ‘ekphrastic fear,’ in which the feminine image threatens to rupture the coherent borders between media, gender and the senses as it ‘exerts and reverses the power of the ekphrastic gaze, portrayed as herself gazing, her look raking over the world’ see Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, p. 172.

transcend the trope of poetry speaking *for* the mute image. In her introductory article ‘New Ekphrastic Poetics,’ Susan Harrow acknowledges Heffernan’s important investigations of the ‘struggle for mastery between image and word’ in ekphrastic descriptions, but seeks to look beyond that discourse by drawing attention to an ‘anti-hegemonic’ ekphrastic paradigm found in ‘new ekphrastic forms that are defined by their refusal to colonize art.’¹¹⁵

Throughout the issue, the spirit of an anti-hegemonic ekphrasis is felt in the idea of a ‘more fluid form of ekphrasis that is hospitable rather than imperialistic towards its “silent other.”’ By experimenting with linguistic defamiliarisation, these newer forms of ekphrastic poetry subtly gesture towards more than what poetry alone, or the visual arts alone, can communicate.¹¹⁶ An ekphrastic model in which the poem embraces rather than dominates the ‘silent otherness’ of the visual work seems to mark a moment of egalitarian accord between word and image. I contend that this notion of ‘translating, yet preserving, the otherness of the visual’ offers a productive model through which to examine the neo avant-gardist spirit of verbal-visual relations. Rather than seeking to tame the otherness of the visual sphere, preserving and somehow foregrounding this otherness is intrinsic to the affective and subversive power of the poetic works I will consider - whether we are dealing with modernist ekphrasis, visually rich concrete and typographic texts, or word-collages.

My own argument moves beyond traditional forms of ekphrasis based around specifically delineated images and expands this debate to visibility more

¹¹⁵ S. Harrow, ‘New Ekphrastic Poetics,’ *French Studies*, Vol. LXIV, No. 3, p. 258. Demonstrating the continuing vigorous debate within word-image relations, Harrow notes that Stephen Cheeke, in his 2008 book *Writing for Art*, resurrects and propagates a traditional binary-form version of ekphrasis, determining that ‘the idea of writing as supplementing pictorial art, deemed too mute to articulate its own desires and imperatives, is consistent with more traditional definitions of ekphrasis.’ (p. 259).

¹¹⁶ C. O’Connor, ‘Translating Non-Figuration: Heather Dohollau’s Poems on “Pure Visuality”,’ *French Studies*, Vol. LXIV, No. 3, p. 288. In her contributing article on Welsh-French poet Heather Dohollau, O’Connor similarly points towards an ekphrasis which is less reliant on direct representations of visual art, and instead takes on the non-figurative aspects of the subject matter to form an oblique poetic response. Dohollau’s ekphrasis ‘defamiliarizes language in order to welcome within it some of the otherness of visibility. By translating, yet preserving, the otherness of the visual, this ekphrasis points at a significance that remains always in excess of what any single semiotic system can deliver.’ (p. 288).

generally, which I position as a destabilising force for literary avant-gardism. Visuality in poetry has the capacity to short-circuit certain logocentric processes, invoking novel modes of reading and seeing and enhancing the expressive potential of the word alone. It is the bleeding from word into image, from ‘ways of reading’ into ‘ways of seeing,’ that constitutes the dissenting potency of the neo avant-gardist poetry I will investigate in what follows. But just as the visual mode is a ‘semiotic other’ to the logos, I contend that thematic categories of madness, delirium and trauma are often also employed in these poetic oeuvres as other forms of unconventional, dissenting subjectivities. As a kind of ‘twin other,’ the formal and affective potency of the visual aspects of this poetry is uniquely capable of approximating this destabilising process.

To return to one of the critical questions of the Palermo ‘dibattito’ described at the beginning of this introduction, whether these twin attempts to disrupt traditional linguistic forms and bring conceptualisations of madness to the centre of artistic practice sought to represent the *already broken* state of society, or instead stage a protest against the oppressiveness of normalcy, does not find a definitive answer in the verbal-visual poetry of the *neoavanguardisti* treated here. Instead, these two positions exist in a constantly negotiated sense of flux, a flux that this thesis seeks to trace rather than resolve. It is not, moreover, the aim of this dissertation to assess which of the many and contradictory cultural accounts of madness advanced in both clinical and more purely cultural contexts in the second half of the twentieth century are more valid, more ethically correct, or more medically sound. Nor do I aim to pinpoint examples in these poetic oeuvres where specific psychological pathologies are explicitly represented. Rather, the approach this dissertation takes stems from a recognition that this richly suggestive and heretofore understudied corpus of Italian neo avant-garde visual poetry frequently reflects wider contemporary preoccupations with madness, delirium, and trauma in both cultural and socio-political spheres. As we have seen, the latter twentieth century has produced a wealth of innovative thought on madness and its cultural significance, and I buttress my close-readings of the links

between literary madness and verbal-visuality in the *neoavanguardia* with readings from these important theoretical works.

In this dissertation I do not propose a traditional literary-historical methodology. My methodology is a deductive one that has been decisively guided by the corpus of the poets under discussion. I propose a series of close readings that branch outwards towards wider hermeneutic and interpretive possibilities, in each case guided by the material evidence of the poems themselves. In the case of these extraordinarily allusive and eloquent poetic texts, I believe close readings, with particular attention to language and form, are most insightful. The interpretive direction of this dissertation moves from my reading of the primary texts towards secondary materials. I have taken secondary theoretical directions according to affinities with particular idiosyncrasies of these texts, rather than imposing a historically linear timeline of secondary authors. For example, in my readings of Sanguineti and Spatola I look both to secondary readings that emerge in a historically coeval moment, and also to more recent thought. In the case of Vicinelli, I move away considerably from contemporary writings towards a literary trauma model, which I deem highly valuable and enlightening for the particular strategies of Vicinelli. The diversity of the primary texts I explore leads inevitably to a certain level of divergence in my modes of reading and analysing, leading to a mixed methodology which, I believe, befits the individual specificities of these works. Rather than propose a kind of ‘master reading’ where there is a singular overarching interpretation which holds true across all the works, I argue that such a plural approach, which is open to both divergent and concurring interpretive possibilities, allows for a more enriching exploration.

The texts have led autonomously to thematic concerns that might be gathered under the umbrella terms of ‘madness,’ ‘delirium’ and ‘trauma.’ These are, of course, not interchangeable terms, nor are they equal in their clinical usage, history, or level of specificity. ‘Delirium’ conjures an archaic, historical understanding of mental breakdown, often associated with physical illness, and not bounded by the terminological confines of modern science.¹¹⁷ ‘Madness’ meanwhile is currently used anecdotally and in quotidian speech to refer to mental

¹¹⁷ O.E.D., 3rd edn., 2010, ‘delirium’: ‘An acutely disturbed state of mind characterized by restlessness, illusions, and incoherence, occurring in intoxication, fever, and other disorders.’

illness and breakdown, without holding clinical weight in contemporary psychiatry.¹¹⁸ ‘Trauma’ differs from the other two in that it is a clinical term, deriving from the syndrome Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (P.T.S.D.); yet, on the other hand, it equally invokes non-clinical usages in literature, culture, and the arts, codified in the advent of Literary and Cultural Trauma Studies. My examination of these terms makes no claims towards scientific or clinical specificity, and indeed the imprecise and shifting ways in which this terminology has been adapted in the theoretical and poetic works examined in this thesis strikes to the heart of my argument: madness, delirium and trauma have been described, exploited and problematised in the verbal-visual poetic sphere as adaptable and fluid cultural-diagnostic tools that have the unique capacity to say something profound about contemporary society and artistic practice.

It should indeed also be clarified that this dissertation is not a psychoanalytical study of texts or of their authors, but rather a project dealing with cultural *representations* and *renegotiations* of madness, delirium, trauma, and schizophrenia, an analysis of what it means to invoke these as cultural categories, and how discursive clinical-cultural thought might relate to experimental poetry.

I now discuss how this thesis is situated within the established secondary and critical landscape regarding the history, ideology, and practice of the Italian literary *neoavanguardia*. In relation to this existing scholarship, this thesis seeks to contribute to the critical field by proposing a more in-depth reading of certain texts and a primary interpretation of others. In expanding on existing critical voices, and bringing contemporary critical discourses to bear on the chosen literary corpus, this thesis aims to broaden understanding of the scope of the *neoavanguardia*. The collections of poetry that I have chosen are, for the most part, outlying and under-examined, yet offer a rich terrain for analysis.

Chapter one addresses the work of Genovese poet Edoardo Sanguineti, considering elements of discursive play in the representation of visual projective

¹¹⁸ See this introduction, p. 9 fn. 3, for a discussion of the usage of the term ‘madness.’

psychological testing in his short collection *T.A.T.* I argue that this verbal-visual collection presents a biopolitically aware critique of the binary comprising ‘madness’ and ‘sanity,’ in line with much of the contemporary theory that this introduction has traced. *T.A.T.* seeks to resist hermetic separations of life and madness, and of society and history, through positing the formal inextricability of word and image. As I will suggest, however, Sanguineti’s ironic treatment of the material of the ‘psych’ disciplines ultimately leaves the question of ‘societal madness’ ambiguously open.

Is madness, following what might be described as a ‘modernist-realist’ position, induced by the alienating aspects of contemporary late-industrial society, with ‘delirious’ and ‘mad’ tropes in literature reflecting and revealing this reality? Or, conversely following an ‘anti-psychiatric’ position in line with the writings of Laing and Basaglia, does society over-diagnose madness in lives lived unconventionally, extending even to the cultural forms emerging from these lives? This oscillation between literature as reflecting an alienating, traumatising and ‘schizophrenogenic’ world on the one hand, and as a medium where schizophrenic expression resounds with a revolutionary and sublime liberty on the other, permeates Sanguineti’s *T.A.T.*, and the visual aspects of the clinical test constitute the key into the poet’s interrogation of this issue.

My chapter on Sanguineti presents an original reading of *T.A.T.* which analyses the visual and discursive strands of the work. *T.A.T.* is relatively overlooked in criticism, with a handful of mentions (the literary critics Gilda Policastro, Antonio Pietropaoli and Gabriella Sica make brief reference to *T.A.T.* in contrasting it with other contemporaneous collections¹¹⁹) but little in-depth

¹¹⁹ See G. Policastro, *Sanguineti*, Palermo, Palumbo, 2009, p. 59; A. Pietropaoli, *Unità e trinità di Edoardo Sanguineti. Poesia e poetica*, Salerno, Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1991, p. 90, p. 18 n.13. See also this thesis p. 60, fn. 9; G. Sica, *Edoardo Sanguineti*, Florence, La Nuova Italia, 1974, pp. 49-50.

analysis (Elisabetta Baccarani and John Picchione provide an overview in order to compare the work with longer writings from the same period¹²⁰).

My contribution to Sanguineti studies hinges on my reading of the collection with reference to its meta-textual features, as well as a development of the possibilities of the work as a ‘phantom’ ekphrastic text. While acknowledging the ‘nihilistic’¹²¹ effect of complete linguistic rupture, I go beyond an interpretation of the work as merely communicating incommunicability and poetic impotence¹²² and seek to engage more actively with the discursive potential of the text.

Sanguineti’s engagement with psychological testing has a counterpart in Adriano Spatola’s vision of the repressive consequences of the universalising ‘reattivo,’ or psychological-personality-aptitude test. Spatola’s 1964 prose-poem *Reattivo per la vedova nera* ostensibly takes its cue from the premise of a ‘reattivo,’ and approaches madness as the embodiment of out-of-body experiences: body-world fluidity and word-image fluidity are observed alongside corporeal aspects of *furor scribendi*, or a ‘frenzy of writing.’ In approaching Spatola’s text, I consider the anti-psychiatric and anti-psychoanalytic elements of Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, discussing in particular their idea of ‘flows’ resistant to the repressive structures of psychological personality tests.

Although secondary research has been undertaken in relation to Spatola’s life and oeuvre,¹²³ *Reattivo per la vedova nera* has not, to my knowledge, been considered in any secondary criticism. My original reading of this text, drawing on the aforementioned discourses, makes a focused critical contribution to studies on Spatola.

¹²⁰ See E. Baccarani, *La poesia nel labirinto: Razionalismo e istanza ‘antiletteraria’ nell’opera e nella cultura di Edoardo Sanguineti*, Bologna, Il mulino, 2002, p. 255-6; Picchione, *The New Avant-Garde in Italy*, pp. 123-4. See also this thesis, p. 60.

¹²¹ *ibid.*

¹²² Sica, *Edoardo Sanguineti*, pp. 49-50.

¹²³ See this thesis, p. 93, p. 94 fn. 4, p. 96 fn. 15, p. 97 fn. 18.

The next two chapters place particular emphasis on the creative and subversive potential of word play, extending from punning and humorous linguistic constructions in the case of Giulia Niccolai, to serious experiments with typographic functions in the work of Patrizia Vicinelli. Word play in these poets operates not only through flexibility in semantics, but equally by means of a *visual* perception of words and language. Both poets also exploit the linguistic categories of glossomania and schizophasia¹²⁴ in their experimentation with the visual and graphic possibilities of the poetic form. I have sought to follow on from Lucia Re¹²⁵ and advance the study of women authors of the *neoavanguardia*, and in this vein this thesis expands on existing research into Niccolai and Vicinelli by Cecilia Bello Minciocchi, Alessandro Giammei, Milli Graffi, Sarah Patricia Hill, Niva Lorenzini, Lucia Re, and Rebecca West.¹²⁶

Niccolai's stimulating and thought-provoking oeuvre employs a variety of literary techniques, linguistic innovations and verbal-visual modes. These include cut-ups, where ready-made text is found, cut up, and reorganised by the poet, with or without additional modifications; I look specifically at the collections *Dai Novissimi* (1970-1972) and *Sostituzione* (1972-1974) in this regard. Programmatic and schematic poetry feature heavily in the work of Niccolai, where a pre-ordained system or template is created in which ideas and language are coded, leading to both unpredictable and highly deliberated poetic works, as seen in *Greenwich* (1971). I examine a number of these engineered collages of words and drawings, in attempting to trace Niccolai's interplay of odd literary 'grammars'; in particular, I discuss the utilisation of hyperrational and hyperreflexive modes of writing which entail the fragmentation and dispersal of the traditional poetic subject.

I contend that Niccolai's playful use of punning, visual-verbal wordplay, as exemplified in *Humpty Dumpty* (1969), and the practice of cutting and pasting

¹²⁴ I look to Louis Sass in chapter one to consider these categories in detail.

¹²⁵ See this introduction pp. 18-20.

¹²⁶ See this thesis p. 131 fn. 5, fn. 6, fn. 7; p. 155 fn. 60, p. 186 fn. 91, p. 201 fn. 2, p. 202; p. 270 fn. 117.

texts reveals a thought-provoking exploration of the creative literary process, along with a philosophical meditation on the excesses of rationality and its ultimate collapse into nonsense. The phenomenon of creative ‘recycling’ of poetic and prose material, and the attendant questions of authorship, will be discussed as a key consideration in Niccolai’s corpus. In this context I draw attention to Niccolai’s intertextual (and intersemiotic) encounter in *Webster poems (1971-1977)* with Adriano Spatola’s concrete collection *Zeroglifico (1966)*.

While attention has been paid to Niccolai’s novel *Il grande angolo* by Hill and West,¹²⁷ there has been limited study undertaken on *Greenwich* (other than that found in an engaging introductory article by Alessandro Giammei¹²⁸), and there have been no investigations into the cut-up collections *Dai Novissimi*, *Sostituzione* or *Webster poems*. My reading of *Greenwich* expands on interpretive work done by Giammei, and my analysis of the cut-up texts reveals original research in identifying exact fragments of text taken from external sources.

Literary trauma studies is posited as an unexamined contemporary approach to the rich psychological visual texts of a lesser-known figure of the *neoavanguardia*, Patrizia Vicinelli. Characterised by experimental visual typography, disjointed text, syntactic and semantic instability, and temporal dissociation, Vicinelli’s poetic works are a compelling site for the exploration of psychic trauma and affect, shifting away somewhat from the neo avant-gardist tenet of a rigid ‘riduzione dell’io.’ In exploring Vicinelli’s elaboration of a ‘strozzata apparizione,’ I argue for the intrinsic place of the visual in attempting to fathom the ruptures and instabilities of trauma, considering avenues relating to feminist trauma theory. I argue that Vicinelli’s works *à, a. A*, and *Apotheosys of schizoid woman* function as a critique of phallogocentric discourse and writerly commodification in their prioritising of visual modes. In *Apotheosys of schizoid woman*, an enhanced biopolitical perspective appears through the evolving

¹²⁷ *ibid.*

¹²⁸ *ibid.*

materiality of the work, which shifts among diverse fictional genres and verbal-visual forms.

The life and work of Vicinelli have seen a recent increase in scholarly interest but secondary writings are limited. Cecilia Bello Minciocchi's recent *Patrizia Vicinelli - Non sempre ricordano: poesia, prosa, performance* is a necessary and timely collection of Vicinelli's works with a biography and selected essays by, among others, Bello Minciocchi and Niva Lorenzini. My chapter seeks to expand on this important scholarship and proposes a relatively in-depth reading of the aforementioned works by Vicinelli within the framework of contemporary literary trauma studies, contributing both to recent directions in trauma and women's writing, and to the growing body of research centred on Vicinelli.

Ultimately, I argue, my contribution lies in the exploration of the manner in which literary visuality, and the evocation of various kinds of alterity, are inextricably woven together in the profoundly intriguing poetry of these four *neoavanguardisti*.

Chapter One

Phantom Ekphrasis and Projective Testing in Edoardo Sanguineti's *T.A.T.*

Introduction

Una crisi di linguaggio, quale io intendevo stabilire e patire nei miei versi, trovava conforto e analogia in affini esperimenti pittorici (e musicali), assai più che in esperimenti di ordine letterario: il privato richiamo ad altre situazioni artistiche era un modo di rompere, in solitudine, la solitudine stessa di poetica in cui mi trovavo praticamente gettato.

- E. Sanguineti, 'Poesia informale?'¹

The diverse literary and critical oeuvre of Genova-born Edoardo Sanguineti (1930-2010) - poet, novelist, playwright, and critic – holds a compelling allure for the exploration of visuality, madness and delirium. An established intellectual in Italian public, cultural, and academic life from the postwar period through to the twenty-first century, Sanguineti's roles, often intertwined, included that of erudite academic and translator as well as critical writer and political commentator. One of the original *Novissimi*, the five poets united by their desire to radicalise what they saw as the tired and hackneyed literary landscape of Italy in the 1950s, Sanguineti was, from the beginning, a socially conscious critic who was adept at analysing literature and its place in the world.² Although primarily a poet, the confluence within literature of various inter-artistic points of reference is a well-traversed terrain in Sanguineti's aesthetic foundation. The lure of other art forms such as painting and music was vibrantly manifested in Sanguineti's collaborations with key figures of the period,

¹ Sanguineti, 'Poesia informale?,' p. 202.

² See, for example, E. Sanguineti, *Ideologia e linguaggio* (1965), E. Risso (ed.), Milan, Feltrinelli, 2001, for a collection of Sanguineti's essays where he elaborates on the relationship between literature, literary institutions and society, treating both twentieth-century literature and offering perspectives on contemporary literature and the new avant-garde. See in particular 'Sopra l'avanguardia,' 'Avanguardia, società, impegno,' 'La letteratura della crudeltà,' 'Il trattamento del materiale verbale nei testi della nuova avanguardia,' 'Brecht secondo Benjamin,' and 'Poesia e verità.'

for example painter Enrico Baj and composer Luciano Berio.³ In relation to Sanguineti's *Laborintus* of 1956, John Picchione traces the palimpsestic echoes and linguistic discord embedded in the poem, while demonstrating Sanguineti's enthusiasm for a poetry which could be rejuvenated by 'moving close to coeval experiments in the field of painting and music':

The atonality of *Laborintus* – together with its semantic dissonances, agitated rhythms, and lack of hierarchical coordinations of discourse – is a poetic equivalent of the conflicting and disharmonising elements present in serial music or Action Painting.⁴

Visuality and psychic breakdown, in particular, are interwoven themes that appear in *Laborintus* and develop in Sanguineti's writing throughout the 1960s. The opening citation to this chapter, from Sanguineti's 1961 essay 'Poesia informale?' attends to a desire to reach beyond writing, to the 'sister arts' of painting and music, to overcome the loneliness of a contemporary existential crisis, a 'crisis of language.' In these few words, we are thrown into the crux of the crisis depicted by Sanguineti: a pull towards formal 'others' - in this case, painting and music - and a pervasive sense of artistic alienation.⁵

This chapter will focus on the short poetry collection *T.A.T.*, and the junctures linking the visual sphere with the topography of literary delirium. First,

³ See L. Berio, *Laborintus II: per voci, strumenti e registrazioni*, text by E. Sanguineti, Milano, 1965. Indeed, Edoardo Sanguineti and artist Enrico Baj enjoyed a prolific inter-artistic relationship throughout the 1950s and 1960s, including both commissioned works by Baj to accompany texts of Sanguineti, and poetry by Sanguineti dedicated to extant works by Baj. This compelling interart dynamic is documented in a number of studies, among which are Federica Schettino's *Ut pictura poësis: Enrico Baj-Edoardo Sanguineti - una curiosa coincidenza*, Rome, Aracne, 2013. See also P. Chirumbolo, 'Edoardo Sanguineti and the Visual Arts: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue' in P. Chirumbolo and J. Picchione (eds.), *Edoardo Sanguineti; Literature, Ideology and the Avant-Garde*, London, Legenda, 2013; also P. Chirumbolo, 'Signs and Designs: Sanguineti and Baj from *Laborintus* to *The Biggest Art-Book in the World*' in Chirumbolo et al. (eds.), *Neoavanguardia; Italian Experimental Arts and Literature in the 1960s*. Here Chirumbolo agrees, in turn, with Picchione's account of Sanguineti's interartistic sensitivity, citing *Laborintus* as notably 'inspired by the avant-garde projects of painters such as Fautrier, Gorky, Pollock and de Kooning [...] and their experiments with alternative techniques and materials.' (p. 236).

⁴ Picchione, *The New Avant-Garde in Italy*, p. 117.

⁵ The interart and interdisciplinary approach remains a compelling line of enquiry into the sphere of verbal-visual analysis, and I will return to the relationship between theoretical art criticism and poetry in later chapters. However, this dissertation is not focused on historical collaborations between these poets and visual artists, so much as it is an exploration of tendencies within the literary arts to cleave to the visual, in a variety of ways, as a way of grasping something that is 'other' in a dialectic sense.

my reading will explore the experimental linguistic and thematic textures of *T.A.T.*, considering Louis Sass' descriptions of glossomania, timelessness and literalism in order to discern the presence of 'literary delirium.' Next, I look to potential dialectic approaches to the invocation of projective testing in poetry, arguing that *T.A.T.* foregrounds the presence of a dissenting, disruptive 'other.' *T.A.T.* is a text which playfully subverts discourse, in citing the words of German philosopher and theorist Theodor Adorno while ironically evading ideological or interpretive closure. Ultimately, rather than singularly representing delirium and madness, *T.A.T.* obliquely queries the categories themselves, and interrogates the premises of visual projective testing.

The earlier *Laborintus*, in its plurilinguistic, asyntactical, non-linear journey through a defamiliarised, infernal landscape of deformed organic and technological forms, has provoked interpretations of a Jungian, post-apocalyptic, post-capitalist, Neo-Dantean hell.⁶ Elisabetta Baccarani notes the poem's parallels with a thematic and linguistic 'schizophrenia':

La critica ha più di una volta parlato, per *Laborintus*, di raffigurazione di un universo mentale schizofrenico, o di schizofrenia (razionalissimamente costruita) del linguaggio raffigurante.⁷

Published a decade later, Sanguineti's short volume of poetry *T.A.T.* (1966-1968)⁸, starts from a rather different premise. Although formally sharing

⁶ For a Marxian-Jungian review of Sanguineti's *Triperuno* (*Laborintus*, *Erotopaegnia* and *Purgatorio de l'Inferno*), see E. Livorni, 'Edoardo Sanguineti's Early Poetry: Between Language and Ideology' in Chirumbolo and Picchione (eds.), *Edoardo Sanguineti; Literature, Ideology and the Avant-Garde*, pp. 56-70: '[Sanguineti] insists ... that for the poetic experimentation of *Laborintus* Jung was useful as a deposit of symbols that offered a new language to be employed as a mythology.' p. 58. Jung and visuality are readily linked in Sanguineti; he references his own ekphrasis, found in his novel *Capriccio italiano*, of the illustrations in Jung's *Psychology and Alchemy*; see T. Lisa (ed.), *Pretesti ecfrastrici: Edoardo Sanguineti e alcuni artisti italiani, con un'intervista inedita*, Florence, Società editrice fiorentina, 2004.

⁷ Baccarani, *La poesia nel labirinto: Razionalismo e istanza 'antiletteraria' nell'opera e nella cultura di Edoardo Sanguineti*, p. 54.

⁸ I will cite *T.A.T.: VII poesie, 1966-1968* in E. Sanguineti, *Segnalibro: Poesie 1951-1881*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 2010. *T.A.T.* was compiled together with *Reisebilder* into the larger collection *Wirrwarr* in 1972. The collection also appears in *Catamerone: 1951-1971*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 1974. I note that *T.A.T.* is relatively overlooked in secondary criticism, in contrast to the collections appearing before (*Purgatorio de l'Inferno, 1960-1963*) and after (*Reisebilder, 1971*). A brief reading is found in Baccarani, *La poesia nel labirinto: Razionalismo e istanza "antiletteraria" nell'opera e nella cultura di Edoardo Sanguineti*, pp. 255-6. See also F. Fastelli,

many of the fractures and ‘forme falsificate e caotiche’ seen in *Laborintus*, literary critic Antonio Pietropaoli deems *T.A.T.* to be a ‘fiore fuori stagione, colpa di coda e insieme culmine parossistico dell’avanguardia sanguinetiana.’⁹ John Picchione sees in *T.A.T.* a ‘linguistic derangement that, in many ways, is even more radical than the disorder expressed in *Laborintus*.’¹⁰

Although displaying a typographical structure which is experimental and visibly discontinuous, Sanguineti’s *T.A.T.* advances a psychic and visual poetics which diverges from the typographical strategy, as I will demonstrate in later chapters, of Spatola and Vicinelli. Rather than the tendency towards non-linear, shifting literary forms, as seen in Vicinelli and Spatola’s ruptured visual poetics, we observe the ancient literary device of ekphrasis at play. I refer here to the engagement of literature with the visual arts and visuality, or in James Heffernan’s canonical definition, ‘the verbal representation of graphic representation.’¹¹ In the case of Sanguineti, we encounter the ekphrastic or quasi-ekphrastic poetic experience of image-based psychological testing. The test in question is the ‘T.A.T.,’¹² or Thematic Apperception Test, a projective assessment whereby the subject is shown individual pictures depicting people in a variety of situations and relationships to each other, and which the subject is then required to narrativise or comment on verbally (see figs. 1 and 2). Developed in 1935 by American psychological professionals Christiana Morgan and Henry Murray, the test is designed to maximise engagement from the subject via the detachment offered by the cards and their objective representations. The rationale, according to Morgan and Murray, lies in the belief that when a person ‘attempts to interpret a complex social situation he is apt to tell as much about himself as he is about the phenomenon on which attention is focused.’¹³ The test links this to the belief that

Il nuovo romanzo: La narrativa d’avanguardia nella prima fase della postmodernità (1953-1973), Florence University Press, 2014, pp. 190-1.

⁹ Pietropaoli, *Unità e trinità di Edoardo Sanguineti: Poesia e poetica*, p. 90, p. 18 n.13.

¹⁰ Picchione, *The New Avant-Garde in Italy*, p. 123. See chapter ‘Edoardo Sanguineti and the Labyrinth of Poetry’ for a study of Jungian archetypes in *Laborintus*: ‘... the process of individuation, the search for the totality of one’s self, the unity of private and collective, the integration of conscious and unconscious.’ p. 118.

¹¹ J. A. W. Heffernan, ‘Ekphrasis and Representation,’ p. 299.

¹² From this point, I will refer to Murray’s ‘Thematic Apperception Test’, unitalicised, as the T.A.T. and Sanguineti’s text as *T.A.T.* so as to avoid confusion.

¹³ P. Cramer, *Storytelling, Narrative, and the Thematic Apperception Test*, New York, The Guildford Press, 1996, p. 9. For a review of the subgroup of projective tests based on this general premise, see also F. Del Corno, M. Lang (eds.), *Psicologia clinica, Volume 3: La diagnosi testologica: Test neuropsicologici, test d’intelligenza, test di personalità, testing computerizzato*,

‘a great deal of written fiction is the conscious or unconscious expression of the author’s experiences or fantasies.’¹⁴

Louis Sass is similarly interested in the *narrative* potential of the T.A.T. and asserts that the projection of ‘standard narrative form,’ that which is composed of a past, present and future, is usual for the majority of subjects. It is the schizophrenic subject, in particular, who ‘deviate[s] from this standard form of narration in a way that indicates a profound difference in the very structure of their experience.’¹⁵ The following sections will examine some linguistic and formal aspects of Sanguineti’s *T.A.T.*, namely glossomania, literalism, timelessness, and deixis, in relation to Sass’ account of ‘schizoid’ language, narration and discourse. There will then follow a discussion of the issues that might arise in making analogies between ‘schizoid’ language and literature.

Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2nd ed., 1997, p. 81. These kinds of tests are geared to provoke a wide range of response formats, and include free association tests, phrase-completing tests, drawing tests, toy-based games, inkblot tests, and drawing interpretation tests.

¹⁴ Cramer, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

¹⁵ Sass, *Madness and Modernism*, p. 155.

Part I
Evocations of Linguistic Delirium

Glossomania and Materiality of Language

Sanguineti's *T.A.T.* takes the form of a series of agitated, fragmented, chaotic 'snapshot' poems, creating logorrheic bursts of frenetic energy. I contend that there is an underlying *phantom* ekphrasis at work here, and that each poetic outburst responds to a figurative test image; however, any capacity of language to approach description is ironically denied and forcefully dislocated. The visuality of *T.A.T.* stems precisely from this ekphrastic framing device which, while hinting at an analogy between photographic and poetic series, reveals substantial gaps between the interpretive possibilities of seeing and writing.¹⁶

Rhyming, word play and arbitrary associations are made throughout, conveying a sense of irrational unreliability. Sanguineti captures, in his ekphrastic meditations on the T.A.T, a highly unnerving, dissociative outlook on the arbitrariness of everyday things and a perceived overabundance of possibilities and choices to be made. *T.A.T.* embodies, both in its form and in its impression on the reader, an uncanny sense of the 'unanchored and vacillating quality of schizophrenic thinking.'¹⁷ In Sanguineti's *T.A.T. 2* (fig. 3) we read a 'response' to an unknown test picture:

poi la città. che
è circondata da tante (mettete un foglio di carta) foreste; (e se tu metti un
cerchio (sopra due porte (sopra due torte)), tu ci puoi mettere, poi ('I
NODI DI')
due frecce):
e in alto, sopra ('agli crematori'? 'agli scrematorii'? 'agli eremi-

¹⁶ It should be noted that in the same period, Sanguineti produced the experimental narrative work *Il giuoco dell'oca* (1967), which embodies a similar ekphrastic pretext; in using descriptions of external, unseen images from a range of sources, the work plays with a verbal-visual mesh of codes, enigmas and puzzles. Running through both *T.A.T.* and *Il giuoco dell'oca* are a notable visual impulse, ludic incongruities in tone and categorisation, and a parodic reimagining of projective testing techniques. See E. Sanguineti, *Il giuoco dell'oca*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 1967/1991. For a discussion of this text, see Baccarani, *La poesia nel labirinto: Razionalismo e istanza "antiletteraria" nell'opera e nella cultura di Edoardo Sanguineti*, pp. 253-255.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 121.

tori-i'?)'; (in alto); e giù ('visi'? = 'fisi'?), in basso:

There is an obsessive fixation on the shape and rhyme of the words themselves, and the use of repetition - as in the unlikely switch from 'porte' to 'torte' - indicates an acknowledgement of the arbitrariness of the words used to refer to the shapes on the card. There is a sense that the words chosen here are linked by their rhyming endings and phonological associations rather than their reference to identifiable entities depicted on the card. This feature, *glossomania*, which functions as a poetic technique in Sanguineti, is treated as a pathological linguistic phenomenon by Sass:

Autonomization [...] involves tendencies for language to lose its transparent and subordinate status, to shed its function as a communicative tool and to emerge instead as an independent focus of attention or autonomous source of control over speech and understanding. In what is known as *glossomania*, for instance, the flow of speech will be channelled largely by acoustic qualities, or by irrelevant semantic connotations of one's words.¹⁸

John Picchione, in his chapter 'The Poetry of the *Neoavanguardia* and the Materiality of Language' speaks of the broader agenda within the *neoavanguardia* poets to:

... Explore the materiality of the word and to delve into the flesh of language, with the ambition of forcing life to rewrite itself. By reducing language to a material entity, they attempt to break off the trammels of referentiality and of authorized syntactic and semantic constructions.¹⁹

The legacy of the historical avant-garde reverberates throughout these statements. One is tempted to revisit the content of the Dadaist and Surrealist manifestos of the early twentieth-century, with their emphasis on cut-up poems and 'automatic' writing as direct access to the symbolic store of the unconscious

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 178.

¹⁹ Chirumbolo et al. (eds), *Neoavanguardia*, p. 150.

or ‘pure latency without interference.’²⁰ The apparently uninhibited spontaneity of glossomania might appear to reflect Paul Éluard and André Breton’s *The Immaculate Conception*: ‘Do not prepare the words you yell... speak according to the madness that has seduced you.’²¹ Sanguineti, however, referring to *Laborintus* in ‘Poesia informale?’ addresses the borrowings from these movements and subsequent leap enacted in his theory and practice:

Si trattava per me di superare il formalismo e l’irrazionalismo dell’avanguardia (e infine la stessa avanguardia, nelle sue implicazioni ideologiche), non per mezzo di una rimozione, ma a partire dal formalismo e dall’irrazionalismo stesso, esasperandone le contraddizioni sino a un limite praticamente insuperabile, rovesciandone il senso, agendo sopra gli stessi postulati di tipo anarchico, ma portandoli a un grado di storica coscienza eversiva.²²

It is this *conscious* exasperation and manipulation of such ‘formalist’ tendencies, of autonomisation and glossomania, which, according to Sanguineti, constitutes the break with Breton’s expressions of ‘irrationalism’. I believe this theoretical distinction holds true for *T.A.T.* as for *Laborintus*. In Sanguineti’s *T.A.T.*, the glossomaniac confusion is enhanced and manifested in a rather playful way²³, evoking a level of discursiveness which resonates with Sass’ concept of ‘hyperreflexivity’. This ‘hyperreflexive’ understanding of literature is, in the view

²⁰ M. Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-gardes*, Princeton University Press, 2006, p. 192, p. 190: ‘Automatic writing is most often described as a technique of recording, a method of transcribing something that is beyond the reach of rational thought and action, an attempt to capture the latent in a pure state.’

²¹ P. Éluard and A. Breton, *The Immaculate Conception*, trans. J. Graham, London, Atlas Press, 1997, p. 114. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, in his 1912 ‘Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista’, promotes a form of semantic glossomania (spontaneous word associations) as one of his linguistic formulas: ‘Ogni sostantivo deve avere il suo doppio, cioè il sostantivo deve essere seguito, senza congiunzione, dal sostantivo a cui è legato per analogia. Esempio: uomo-torpediniera, donna-golfo, folla-risacca, piazza-imbuto, porta-rubinetto.’ F.T. Marinetti, ‘Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista’ (1912) in L. De Maria and L. Dondi, *Marinetti e i futuristi*, Milan, Garzanti, 1994, p. 79.

²² Sanguineti, ‘Poesia informale?’, p. 203.

²³ Glossomania and ‘word salad’ (a nonsensical jumble of words) would reappear frequently in Sanguineti’s poetic oeuvre, in works such as ‘Alfabeto apocalittico’ (1982), a series of twenty-one poems written in octaves, each based on one letter of the alphabet, and where every word begins with that letter. This work is an extreme version of the glossomania we see in *T.A.T.*, and words are drawn to each other purely on the basis of their alliterative and assonant kinship, creating a phonetic hodgepodge of sounds and associations, for example, ‘anime amiche all’aspro astro afroditico...’

of Sass, ‘reminiscent of schizophrenia’, ‘for these art forms are characterised not so much by unreflectiveness and spontaneity as by acute self-consciousness and self-reference, and by alienation from action and experience – qualities we might refer to as ‘hyperreflexivity’.²⁴ I argue that Sanguineti utilises glossomania, autonomisation, and, as we shall see, other disorienting linguistic features, as *exemplifications* of ‘schizoid’ processing. Ultimately, these manic yet discursive tendencies function as part of a conscious neo avant-gardist strategy.

What is interesting in *T.A.T.* is that these glossomaniac tendencies are apparently being appointed, at least within the logic of Murray’s T.A.T. test, to verbalise or narrativise static visual images. Whereas a ‘standard narrative response’ might involve prose description of the events in the pictures, Sanguineti’s poems resist the subordination of language to communication, and afford language a role as an autonomous entity – a primarily concrete (and secondarily signifying) system. The ‘schizoid’ response to a visual message, in this case, may be to approach it, obliquely, using the very ‘flesh’ of language, to *embody* rather than describe the texture of the world it seeks to approximate. A playful example of glossomania is found in *T.A.T.* 1:

e: O (una ciambella deforme che termina nella pagina (oscena); nella pagina seguente);
je ne médite plus; perché scrisse (: e tu sei un teatro anatomico):

From the perspective of the poem, the primary perceptual value of the ‘O’ lies in its *shape*, as seen from its characterisation as a ‘deformed doughnut,’ rather than its denotative status as a letter of the alphabet. The ‘flesh’ of the ‘O’ draws the reader’s attention to the forms of letters themselves and invites a reappraisal of the highly graphic nature of the verbal structures of the poetic series. The employment of glossomaniac language in a test response to a visual image, however, presents a contradiction. In drawing our attention to the absurdity of conveying meaning using arbitrarily chosen words for an unavailable, unknown

²⁴ Sass, *Madness and Modernism*, p. 8.

image, *T.A.T.* exemplifies the limitations of language in its engagement with the visual sphere.

Flatness and Timelessness

Another, related form of non-standard response in the T.A.T. is literalism. Sass highlights a strange phenomenon in schizophrenic responders, despite the instructions asking to narrativise a given picture, to fixate on the image as material:

The tendency to focus on the medium of representation – on the T.A.T. card itself, for instance – has often been seen as a sign of a concretistic mentality, as showing an inability to transcend the literal, physical presence of a stimulus-object by perceiving it as representative of some meaning or some hypothetical world existing beyond itself...²⁵

Sanguineti's *T.A.T. 2* discloses an obsessive attention to detail, staging aspects of this literalism and concretism:

è in fondo ('8.5 x 5.5 cms'), il cancello: è in ALFAC *DECA-DRY*; con i buchi; e piú in fondo, ancora, e sopra, la torta:
che è la placenta, la tavolozza; che è un serpente (è quello che tu vedi, in trasparenza; che è con i buchi):

Similarly, in *T.A.T. 1*:

... (: e tu sei un teatro anatomico): vedi E3 sopra la carta (ma pensa 6D, con il Parc d'Egmont, nella notte, e con il conservatorio, e con l'albergo stesso d'Egmont, e con tutto, insomma, con tutto); e perché

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 157.

scrisse: j'écris; (e: j'écris encore); (e: j'écris moins);

encore moins:

In both poems, the sense of compulsiveness is uncanny; pathological over-specification and repetitiveness in small details is a notable characteristic. In the case of 'ALFAC DECA-DRY', the type and brand of paper used is highlighted, confirming the perception of the test card as a tangible object and subordinating the card's representative and symbolic qualities to its mere physicality.²⁶ The insistence that the card is 'con i buchi' interrupts the listing of disparate items (placenta, tavolozza, serpente), which are possibly represented on the card. Any reference to depicted items, such as 'il conservatorio' and 'l'albergo' appears flat and objective in tone. Sass describes as 'schizoid' a type of perception which is two-dimensional, both in terms of timelessness in telling a story, and in compulsive concretism relating to the test image.²⁷

Similarly, psychologist Phebe Cramer, in her practical manual on administering and assessing the TAT, uses the term 'catatonic stance' in relation to the description of an image given in a particularly frozen, unnatural way, where the characters are not shown to be relating to one another or moving.²⁸ Timelessness is reinforced by the use of spatial rather than temporal adverbs; Cramer, in her interviews with patients, notes 'a concern with delineating and separating locations and people, consistent with a concern around boundaries. [...] Along with the persistent concern about location and position, the stories have a superficial and static quality, as if the characters were frozen.'²⁹ This feature is immediately recognisable in *T.A.T.*, with its constant switching of spatial adverbs and prepositions (in fondo, in alto, sopra). The so-called 'infinite present' is a loss of the chronological ordering of past, present and future, and, according to Sass, this disintegration of 'standard' narration is a common feature of schizophrenic discourse.

²⁶ The detail in sheet dimension in *T.A.T.* 2 ('8.5 x 5.5 cms') is readily compared with Vicinelli's 'a. à, A' and a reference to paper size 'bifor' (B4).

²⁷ Sass, *Madness and Modernism*, p. 155-6.

²⁸ Cramer, *Storytelling, Narrative, and the Thematic Apperception Test*, p. 123.

²⁹ *ibid.*

Sanguineti's *T.A.T.* 4 (fig. 4) enacts this loss of forward narration: with logically inconsistent verbal tenses, objects and descriptive details that are arbitrary and unrelated to one another, and incongruous shifts of perspective:

il 4 è blu, il pianoforte è a coda; (è rosso):

l'arpa è un girasole; le
labbra (their lips) non si toccavano; la girandola è dentro un giardino;
(è di plastica); la girandola si scioglie; è dentro; (è un plastico di
plastica): è con i fiumi; che colano; (oscene):

...

è
quel profilo di donna, con la sagoma sola dell'anca; (rosso); (nuda);
aujourd'hui
je rentre; ma sono quelle parole; (nudo); (che sono scritte); (e io); (nere);
de
l'Hôpital; (sono capovolte); sono *imagination and*, da quella parte; (e
ancora:);
(sono capovolto); (e io); ma da
quell'altra parte, sono
reality:

Deixis, Process, Self-Reflexivity

In a similar vein, *T.A.T.* 6 brilliantly illustrates the notion of the 'infinite present' through compulsive deictic³⁰ ambiguity and the centrality of language. There follows an obsessive focus on the *process* and shapes of writing which supersede the meaning of the final product:

scrivo 'cosí'; (cosí)

scrivo: CO (sopra, prima); e poi: SÍ (sotto, dopo);

(cosí: CO

SÍ); e poi scrivo (ma la *b* è guasta): 'boules de lampe torche'

³⁰ O.E.D: 'relating to or denoting a word or expression whose meaning is dependent on the context in which it is used (such as *here, you, me, that one there, or next Tuesday*).'

The subject transcends the basic instructions of Murray's T.A.T. to include a commentary on the process of writing the test response itself, broken down into single syllables and the typographical layout. Standard narrative form has been replaced by a highly reflexive account of *how* the story is being devised. The richly visual nature of the descriptions heightens the dominance of presentism over temporality:

(ma
la s è trafitta dalla caduta di una piccola sfera colorata, che precipita giù,
sopra una piccola sfera galleggiante:
giù, da una bocca di porco): e tanti cerchi
si allargano, allora; giù, concentrici; come in uno stagno blu (se ci
precipitano
le piccole pietre, dentro, giù); (le piccole sfere):
(così):

The intermingling of the depiction of letters, shapes and colours traverses the often-distinct categories of word and image, treats them as materials of equal validity, and further adds to the quality of in-the-moment 'thingness' of the ambiguous items described.

Deictic self-consciousness and reflections on process are further reinforced by linguistic idiosyncrasy. Sanguineti's distorted and disorientating use of language further supports the argument for a self-conscious schizoid poetic process. Sass speaks of 'impoverishment' as language which conveys little or is lacking in meaningfulness and authenticity in carrying its topic; this is often seen with pompous, overblown and repetitive language.³¹ Sanguineti's *T.A.T. 5* strays perhaps most radically from the spirit of Murray's T.A.T., which, we remember, relies on the direct narrativisation of the prompted image:

il ritratto (la statua); (oh! la statua!...); di SHADOW WOMAN; (who died); j'ai
pensé; à vous; aleph!

³¹ Sass, *Madness and Modernism*, p. 180-1.

(che vale, anche: scientia); (che vale: heu!); che sta sotto;
(sotto un gancio: A): un animale giallo ci cammina sopra; un animale nero
ci incrocia (2 volte);

perché varca un ponte; perché descrive un seno; e
ritorna; (così: REFLECTO); (killed in a duel); perché fa una sua curva, a
sinistra; (*Fe è FERRO LAD*); e ritorna; (che si può scandire così):

The ‘story’ given, rather than a description of the contents of the test card, is instead based on the pre-existing comic-book characters Shadow Woman, Reflecto and Ferro Lad, which appear alongside Superman in a 1967 issue of Adventure Comics (fig. 5). The details involving the deaths of Shadow Woman and Reflecto (killed in a duel in the original comic) are direct citations from the original. The fate of Ferro Lad is cited verbatim, then reiterated and annotated:

(che si può scandire così):

/ WHO GAVE / HIS

LIFE THAT / THE GALAXY / ; (oppure così):

/WHO GAVE HIS LIFE / THAT THE

GALAXY / ; (e così, poi, in ogni caso):

/ MIGHT LIVE/

The articulation of the verse and its cadence are adjusted by use of slashes to separate the phrases, while these variants are metapoetically analysed and annotated between phrases. The notion of language as an ‘alien substance’ is palpable in these lines. Sass speaks of the schizophrenic experience of writing as disengagement, of writing as foreign matter which *happens to* the individual rather than as a ‘medium imbue[d] with meaning’.³² The words lend a sense of external, strange speech overlaid onto the consciousness of the speaker and stylistically unrelated to the words ‘owned’ by the speaker in the annotations. *T.A.T. 5* might thus be compared with Patrizia Vicinelli’s *coinVOLT* (which I will discuss in chapter four), in its suggestion, through split dialogues, of a dissociative personality. In both, this is achieved through typographic divisions between

³² *ibid.*, p. 179.

phrasing; in the case of Vicinelli, the bifurcated columns of text channeling the voices of patient and doctor, in Sanguineti, the interlinguistic interlacing of discrete voices, separated by brackets, slashes and changes of case.

The overblown and ostentatious rhetoric borrowed from comic book language is not merely ‘alien’ in tone and style, but wholly detached in terms of content and in the context of the T.A.T. test. The delusional aspects of *T.A.T. 5* text rest on the projective premise of Murray’s T.A.T., that the subject describe and narrate a story based on the deliberately characterless figures on the cards. In projecting the Adult Legion fantastical characters onto the bland, neutral figures of the standard test, *T.A.T. 5* self-consciously deviates, to a radical degree, from the instructions of the standard T.A.T. test. Rather than provide a description and narrativisation of the realistic characters on the cards, the subject plucks these comic book characters out of the air and sets them in bizarre, contrived relationships to each other. These unsettling delusions in the context of a test which is designed to prompt ‘standard’ stories, function not only as sites of ‘schizoid’ processes, but as an extreme example of resistance against the limiting ideology of the T.A.T.

The last two verses complete the description of the image and intersperse Italian with formal French ‘(j’ai en vous ... une confiance... (absolue)...)’ :

poi discende diritto, ci

punge in basso (2 volte); (diretto); j’ai en vous; (replica); une confiance; il problema; (il punto); n. 10; e ritorna; (absolue); che dice: questa ragazza disse:

che

dice: mi dedico alla felicità; disse; (animum REFLECTENS): alla felicità; (di qualcuno);

(così); (2 volte); (che vale, anche: la scrittura); che dice:

che amo:

This last section returns to the reflective and questioning ‘lower-case’ voice; with reflections on the value of writing, projected onto ‘questa ragazza’. The disparity between the jocular superheroes, the context of psychoanalytic testing, and this writerly self-reflection evokes an incongruous sense of playfulness and seriousness. The last two verses act as a sort of solemn

contemplation on earlier juvenility: ‘animum REFLECTENS’ (reflecting mind) echoes ‘Reflecto’, and the former fantastical exuberance gives way to a metaliterary consideration of writing itself.

The contradictory and wide-ranging features of ‘schizophrenic’ language, including glossomania, concretism, deictic ambiguity and self-consciousness, appear to have much in common with many experimental literary characteristics in Sanguineti’s *T.A.T.* Yet what is at stake when we make analogies between the language of schizophrenia and modernist and avant-garde literature? Can we be content with the recognition of formal or even experiential correspondences between the clinical and the cultural, or need we read more closely to see what is embedded in such cultural expressions? These and related questions will form part of the investigation into cultural representations of ‘madness’ and ‘schizophrenia’ in Part II.

Part II

Dialectics of Projective Testing

As has been elaborated in section I, Sanguineti's *T.A.T.* reflects many of the linguistic dissonances described in Sass' account of schizophrenia,³³ with its poetic representation of interior psychic disintegration. Section II will examine how these poetic discontinuities might also be called to account for their role in highlighting disintegration on a broader scale, that of societal alienation. *T.A.T.*, I argue, experiments with a *schizomorphic* vision whilst simultaneously questioning what it means to be 'mad'³⁴. It challenges psychological testing and a perceived impulse to label individuals according to artificial binaries such as sane/mad and normal/abnormal, which create a class of the 'other'. In experimenting with the visual and verbal conventions of Murray's T.A.T. test, Sanguineti's *T.A.T.* decentres the premise of the psychological test, throwing into disarray concrete ideas of 'madness' through distortions of form and genre. The question this section seeks to explore is: what can these poems by Sanguineti tell us about *how* the mind, psyche or madness are represented and to what extent is there a struggle or antagonism in this representation within a dominant mode of thinking about madness?

Schizomorfismo: Visions of Personal or Societal Breakdown?

In 1961 Alfredo Giuliani, leading theorist of the Italian *neoavanguardia*, coined the term 'visione schizomorfa' in an attempt to identify a major preoccupation common to the poetry of his contemporaries. He conceived of a new poetic vision through which poetry 'prende possesso di sé e della vita presente,'³⁵ rendering the role of poetry as both diagnostic and critical of societal alienation in the contemporary moment. In his 1965 preface to *I Novissimi*, he writes:

³³ See my introduction, p. 21 fn. 40, for a full discussion on definitions of the term 'schizophrenia.'

³⁴ See my introduction, p. 9 fn. 3, for a discussion on the uses of the term 'madness.'

³⁵ Giuliani, 1961 introduction, *I Novissimi*, p. 19.

[La poesia è] mimesi critica della schizofrenia universale, rispecchiamento e contestazione di uno stato sociale e immaginativo disgregato.³⁶

His statements on ‘la follia’ describe an appropriation of the ‘schizoid’³⁷ process or, in his own words, ‘le assurde tecniche dell’alienato’, as a model for a formal and aesthetic ‘linguaggio letterario’:

L’affettività turbata dallo sconvolgimento dei termini di relazione, l’intelligenza che registra la dissociazione degli eventi mediante la distorsione semantica, le conseguenti stesure intrecciate del discorso, i giochi linguistici (neologismi, schizofasie), la similarità tra il linguaggio del sogno e l’espressione della psicosi, la giustapposizione degli elementi di logiche diverse, il linguaggio-sfida, il non-finito: tutto ciò coincide con l’attitudine antropologica che precise condizioni storiche hanno esaltato fino alla costituzione di un linguaggio letterario che *fa epoca* e da cui non si può tornare indietro.³⁸

In a parallel line of argument, however, Giuliani characterises the ‘alienated’ historical moment in which he writes precisely as an ‘età schizofrenica’ and views the discordant machinations of the current poetic aesthetic as pushing back against the silence that leads to the deterioration of language as an entity.³⁹ John Picchione notes the paradox inherent in the theorising of schizophrenia as both linguistic model and object of critique:

This calculated linguistic derangement is geared to produce both an autonomous formal structure capable of generating its own realities and, at

³⁶ Giuliani, 1965 introduction, *I Novissimi*, p. 7.

³⁷ The O.E.D. defines the term ‘schizoid’ in general use as ‘resembling schizophrenia in having inconsistent or contradictory elements.’ Giuliani’s understanding of these linguistic processes has, I believe, a lot in common with Louis Sass’ ‘schizophrenic discourse’, which displays ‘[...] lack of a cohesive theme or narrative line, of conventional space-time structure, of comprehensible causal relations, and of normal regulation of the symbol-referent relationship.’ Sass, *Madness and Modernism*, p. 156.

³⁸ Giuliani, 1965 introduction, *I Novissimi*, p. 7.

³⁹ Giuliani, 1961 introduction, *I Novissimi*, p. 18: ‘[...] Noi siamo andati certamente più in là nello smascheramento, sfidando il silenzio che sempre consegue, insieme con le chiacchiere, al deperimento di un linguaggio, esasperando l’insensatezza, rifiutando l’oppressione dei significati imposti, raccontando con gusto e con amore storie pensieri e bolle di questa età schizofrenica.’

the same time, an *ersatz* aimed at providing a critique of the schizophrenic disintegration that characterizes, according to Giuliani, the society of the late 1950s and early 1960s.⁴⁰

How, we ask ourselves, might this work in practice - this mimetic *reflection* of the ‘tales and lies of this schizophrenic age’⁴¹ whilst providing a critique of the historical moment in which we find ourselves, the moment of late capitalism and pervasive alienation? I argue that the contemporaneous debate on literary schizophrenia is greatly enriched and complicated by Edoardo Sanguineti’s critical and poetic contributions. Sanguineti enters the discourse on the subject of the disintegration of society in his own work. In his 1961 essay ‘Poesia informale?’ published by Giuliani in the same volume, Sanguineti makes a key point about the crisis of language in relation to his seminal 1956 poem *Laborintus*:

E quanto alla crisi di linguaggio stabilita e patita, mi aiuta proprio quella battuta di Zanzotto, per cui si giudicava degno di punizione il mio *Laborintus*, qualora non fosse ‘sincera trascrizione di un esaurimento nervoso’. Posso rispondere che effettivamente il *Laborintus* si salvava nell’angolo indicato, ma con una non piccola correzione: e cioè che il cosiddetto ‘esaurimento nervoso’ che io tentavo di trascrivere sinceramente era poi un oggettivo ‘esaurimento’ storico.⁴²

Sanguineti’s declaration is that the breakdown portrayed in *Laborintus*, rather than a personal or neurotic breakdown, was an objective breakdown of history itself, of alienation. This standpoint touches on a vast field of thought traversing psychology, psychiatry, politics, and literary and artistic theory. Sanguineti’s political, theoretical and aesthetic orientation conceives of poetry as

⁴⁰ Picchione, *The New Avant-Garde in Italy*, p. 13.

⁴¹ See fn. 38.

⁴² Sanguineti, ‘Poesia informale?’ p. 202. Picchione translates this phrase as ‘objective historical predicament’ in *The New Avant-Garde in Italy*, p. 23. On Zanzotto’s response to the *Novissimi*, see S. Tamiozzo Goldmann, ‘Zanzotto sui “Novissimi” e una lettera a Carlo Della Corte,’ *Quaderni Veneti*, 3, 2014; for a discussion of Zanzotto’s divergent views on the role of the poet’s sincerity and authentic experience, see J. Johnson, ‘The Problem of Theory in the Poetics of Andrea Zanzotto,’ *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 95, No. 1, January 2000, pp. 92-106. See also my introduction, p. 34 fn. 82, fn. 83.

a historically grounded and ideologically permeated product, which can become a medium of opposition to capitalist-bourgeois aesthetic norms.⁴³ This, in his view, is the role of the literary avant-garde, whose tactics of otherness and resistance, are described overtly in terms of pathology versus normality:

È insomma chiaro che, nelle strutture fondamentali dell'ideologia borghese, si è costituita una normalità, anche a livello linguistico, che l'avanguardia si rifiuta di accettare, a prezzo di apparire, di fronte alla normalità borghese costituita, immediatamente, come pura patologia.⁴⁴

Such an oppositional and revolutionary force, then, would not be conceived of simply in terms of content or subject matter, but in terms of linguistic and ideological *form*:

Per essere autenticamente critica, e autenticamente realistica, l'arte deve energeticamente uscire dai limiti della normalità borghese, cioè dalle sue norme ideologiche e linguistiche.⁴⁵

Well-versed in Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin's accounts of the relationship between society and literature, economic base and cultural superstructure, Sanguinetti relates his own *Laborintus* to the various interpretations of 'alienation' as a medical-political-aesthetic concept. He reads the foremost, clinical meaning of 'alienation' as 'l'esaurimento' or 'nervous breakdown', which manifests itself as deliberately 'esasperato e provocantemente sottolineato.'⁴⁶ Sanguinetti adds to this the sense of the Marxian *Veräusserung* as social alienation and finally Brecht's theatrical technique of *Verfremdungseffekt* or 'estrangement', whereby the audience is deliberately distanced from identification with the characters onstage. Taking all these interpretations on-

⁴³ See Sanguinetti, 'Avanguardia, società, impegno,' *Ideologia e linguaggio*, E. Risso (ed.), pp. 67-83.

⁴⁴ Sanguinetti, 'Il dibattito,' p. 383.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶ Sanguinetti, 'Poesia informale?,' p. 202.

board, he theorises the ‘crisis of language’, as seen in *Laborintus*, as indicative of ‘an *objective* state of alienation.’⁴⁷

Sanguineti’s transcription of the breakdown of history itself in *Laborintus*, I believe, is a precursor to the rupture of understanding and representation in *T.A.T.* The latter work, written between 1966 and 1968, provides a space for the continuation of exploratory ideas regarding personal, societal and aesthetic breakdown, where the two meet, and where they diverge. Does *T.A.T.* exemplify, through its engagement with psychological testing, a portrait of the individual mind and its struggle? Or is the predicament of the personal always already tied up with that of society? And finally, to return to Giuliani’s *visione schizomorfa*, can poetry truly work as a *rispecchiamento* as well as a *contestazione* of the conditions in which it exists?

Adorno and Murray’s TAT

An equally relevant thread in the approach to Sanguineti’s *T.A.T.*, and in the discourse surrounding the creative mind and literature in the 1960s, is the relationship between psychoanalysis and cultural production. Sanguineti’s *T.A.T.* opens with an epigraph which manifests the series’ self-reflexivity:

Kunstwerke sind kein Thematic Apperception Test ihres Urhebers
(Artworks are not *Thematic Apperception Tests* of their makers)

The epigraph throws into disarray the apparent premise of the collection. It interrogates the notion of psychological foundations for the production of artworks, by rejecting the idea that art is the manifest function (exterior display) of latent psychological content (inner workings of the mind). The filter or medium for the transcription of interior content, it is implied, is the Thematic Apperception Test itself. We may ask ourselves, why is Sanguineti’s *T.A.T.* preceded by a critique of the validity of the T.A.T. qua psychological test? This ironic, metaliterary conflict is achieved, of course, through intermedial form, that is, the engagement of literary practice with visuality and perception.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 202.

The above citation is taken from Theodor Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, from the section 'The Art Theories of Kant and Freud.'⁴⁸ Adorno discusses the focus on dreams in psychoanalysis, the implication of any artworks produced into the realm of dreams and the automatic linking of thematic material in artworks with the sphere of the mind. He rejects the psychoanalytic rationale of affording a documentary value to artworks and 'displac[ing] them into the mind of the dreamer.'⁴⁹ This, he argues, 'reduces artworks to crude thematic material, falling strangely short of Freud's own theory of the "dreamwork".'⁵⁰ He argues that this conceptualisation of artistic production neglects the work's form and physicality:

In the process of production, what is projected is only one element in the artist's relation to the art-work and hardly the definitive one; idiom and material have their own importance, as does, above all, the product itself; this rarely if ever occurs to the analysts.⁵¹

The citation used in *T.A.T.* is found at the end of this provocative statement:

Psychoanalysis treats artworks as nothing but facts, yet it neglects their own objectivity, their inner consistency, their level of form, their critical impulse, their relation to nonpsychical reality, and, finally, their idea of truth ... Artworks are incomparably less a copy and possession of the artist than a doctor who knows the artist exclusively from the couch can imagine. Only dilettantes reduce everything in art to the unconscious, repeating clichés. In artistic production, unconscious forces are one sort of impulse, material among many others. They enter the work mediated by the law of form; if this were not the case, the actual subject portrayed by a work would be nothing but a copy. Artworks are not *Thematic Apperception Tests* of their makers.⁵²

⁴⁸ T.W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, G. Adorno and R. Tiedemann, (eds.), trans. R. Hullot-Kentor, London/New York, Continuum, 2004 (1970), p. 11.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 10.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 10.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 10.

⁵² *ibid.*, p. 10-11.

Taking this citation within the context of *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno demonstrates a distrust of traditional psychoanalytic methodology for the study of artworks. He does not discount completely the unconscious as a factor in artworks, but cites it as ‘material among many others.’ He criticises those who consider artworks as mere tokens of the unconscious, implying instead the transgressive, critical, and dialectic function of artworks as autonomous entities, touching on his reading of the artistic avant-garde generally.

Sanguineti cites this particular extract, and subsequently goes on to engage with the T.A.T. test as a verbal-visual device, suggestively ironising the test in utilising its intriguing capacities. The extreme semantic deformation of the poetry toys with, and launches from, the idea that the ‘artwork’ (in this case the poem) *could* be a psychological projection of the author (Sanguineti). This is the irony of which I speak, which translates into a discursive critique of the idea of the ‘projective test’ *qua* ‘artwork.’ This labyrinthine intertext, then, invokes a tangle of issues circulating contemporaneously on the psyche, the artist, and his product: the artwork. My reading revolves around the belief that, rather than unequivocally implement the Adornian critique, *T.A.T.* reveals a level of discursive interest, a reflection of the discussions surrounding the potentially repressive testing ideologies of the time, and a consideration of the plight of marginalised ‘others’ within institutionalised settings. I argue the collection also ironically contrasts these politicised discourses of the ‘other,’ with the ‘bourgeois’ trope of the individual plumbing the depths of the psyche on the psychoanalyst’s couch.

Does *T.A.T.* lead us down the intertextual rabbit-hole, whereby Sanguineti’s poem follows Adorno, who follows Murray, who follows Freud? The ingenuity of the series lies in the ambiguity of its enactment or non-enactment of this epigraph. *T.A.T.* problematises its own making and is party to its own undoing. It becomes an experimental ground for concepts in theories of the mind and mental disturbance, literary theory, and the role of culture. The inclusion of the citation from Adorno is significant, yet whether it is played out or negated in the series is yet to be explored. I argue that the poem’s ‘working through’ (to use a psychotherapeutic phrase), of the consequences of Adorno’s statement, while neither fully exemplifying nor denying it, resides in its indirect engagement with the visual mode and that mode’s insistent complication of what Adorno terms ‘facts’ and ‘subjects’. Isobel Armstrong, in her remodelling of contemporary

directions in aesthetic discourse, terms ‘serious play’ ‘a transitional mode where knowledge and meaning can be constantly disarticulated and reassembled.’⁵³ I contend that Sanguineti’s epigraph is a punctual point, a moment of ‘serious play,’ a space for renegotiation, mediation, or interference with the text to follow. It disrupts the very idea of a simple or linear reading by drawing attention to its polemical origin whilst pointing forward to the poems. The liminality that arises out of the counterbalance of epigraph and text evades doctrinal closure, and functions instead as a puzzling web of signifiers.

In taking a (visual) psychological projective test as its thematic premise, but initiating the series with a citation which fundamentally critiques such foundations for artistic production, Sanguineti’s *T.A.T.* not only ironically challenges certain psychological theories of the creative process, but also transgresses its own rationale to great poetic effect.

⁵³ R. Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, Routledge, 2008, p. 79: ‘In a recent project to revive the category of the aesthetic, Isobel Armstrong has argued that culture provides a space of (serious) play, a transitional mode where knowledge and meaning can be constantly disarticulated and reassembled.’

Antipsychiatry and Franco Basaglia: *Madness in Life*

The 1960s heralded a variety of interrelated revolutions: political, social, sexual, cultural. Perhaps less famously, but no less significant in the general interrogation of long-established institutions, a revolution was underway in the approach to how mental illness was conceptualised.⁵⁴ As I discussed in my introduction, writers in both clinical and cultural journals throughout the period demonstrated a profound cross-disciplinary interest in applications of the visual and literary arts in psychiatry and psychology, as well as a growing interest in political and humanistic issues within psychiatry. While Giuliani in 1965 referred to ‘schizophrenia universale’ to expand the parameters of the historically *interiorised* illness, giving it a potentially global reach, anti-psychiatrist David Cooper in 1967 exemplified ‘the shift in interest from the schizophrenic individual to a *schizophrenogenic world*’⁵⁵ in his definition of the condition:

Schizophrenia is a micro-social crisis situation in which the acts and experiences of a certain person are invalidated by others for certain intelligible cultural and micro-cultural (usually familial) reasons, to the point where he is elected and identified as being ‘mentally ill’ in a certain way, and then is confirmed (by a specifiable but highly arbitrary labelling process) in the identity ‘schizophrenic patient’ by medical or quasi-medical agents.⁵⁶

The progressive and radically countercultural nature of these claims is similarly echoed in the writings of Scottish psychiatrist R.D. Laing, who in his article ‘What is schizophrenia?’ asserts that the condition ‘schizophrenia’ is a label, and this ‘label is a social fact... a *political event*.’⁵⁷ What concerns us here

⁵⁴ Woods, *The Sublime Object of Psychiatry*, p. 130. See in particular her chapter ‘Antipsychiatry: Schizophrenic Experience and the Sublime’; See also A. Sforza Tarabochia, *Psychiatry, Subjectivity, Community: Franco Basaglia and Biopolitics*, Bern, Peter Lang, 2013, specifically the chapter ‘The 1960s: Challenging Psychiatry.’

⁵⁵ Referring to a world conducive to the development of schizophrenia. Woods, *The Sublime Object of Psychiatry*, p. 130, italics mine.

⁵⁶ D. Cooper, *Psychiatry and Anti-psychiatry*, St Albans, Paladin, 1970, p. 16.

⁵⁷ R. D. Laing, ‘What is schizophrenia?’, *New Left Review*, 28, November/December 1964, p. 64; Italics in the original.

is the turn in the *line* of questioning within this intellectual climate, and the breadth of this challenge, spanning the medical and the philosophical fields.

Michel Foucault, in his highly influential 1961 work *Folie et déraison: Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*,⁵⁸ attempted to trace the evolution, from the medieval period, of the concept of madness and the systems of thought out of which such a concept might have grown. Many of the socio-philosophical-historical points raised by Foucault were echoed in an emerging strand of psychiatric thought which was vehemently critical of mainstream psychiatry, and whose practitioners and theorists collectively came to be known as foundational to the antipsychiatry movement. Alvise Sforza Tarabochia, looking to trace the significance of Foucauldian thought for the theorists of the antipsychiatry movement, especially the Italian anti-psychiatrist Franco Basaglia, pinpoints a change in the conceptualisation of the *relationship* and *opposition* between reason and unreason as Foucault's innovation. He outlines how Foucault borrows the image of grafting from botany, whereby 'different plants can be grafted to form new hybrids.'⁵⁹ The significance of this 'graft' for psychiatric power in the age of the asylum is explained:

When Foucault describes madness as a graft onto the world of reason, his use of the term 'graft' highlights the inequality between the two elements rather than their fusion or, to put it another way, it defines the fusion between them in terms of their original inequality. For it to participate in the totality of the social body madness must first be marked as different, separated, stigmatised and then grafted onto reason, from which, like a grafted plant, it derives all its sustenance. [...] Overall, Foucault's entire reflection on psychiatric power can be seen as an archaeological interest in the graft between madness and reason.⁶⁰

It is here that the theoretical writings of Italian psychiatric reformer Franco Basaglia enter the debate on how madness is conceptualised. Whereas Foucault studied the historical evolution of psychiatric power and discipline and the

⁵⁸ M. Foucault, *Folie et déraison: Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*, Plon, 1961. Eng: J. Khalifa (ed.), *History of Madness*, trans. J. Murphy and J. Khalifa, London/New York, Routledge, 2006.

⁵⁹ Sforza Tarabochia, *Psychiatry, Subjectivity, Community*, p. 80.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 80, 81.

nineteenth-century reshaping of madness as ‘mental illness’, Basaglia, as a practitioner, advocated a complete overhaul of the psychiatric system in the 1960s. Basaglia’s worldview and thought, owing much to Foucault, was based on the conviction that psychiatry as it was practised by his contemporaries in Italy and beyond was essentially predicated on distinguishing between productive and non-productive individuals. Psychiatric asylums were legally sanctioned by political powers to separate, monitor and diagnose as ‘mad’ those individuals who did not contribute to society and the economy, labelling them as ‘sick’ and ‘un elemento di disturbo, da escludere.’⁶¹ Basaglia’s contention was that madness, like reason, existed in life and society as a neutral fact, and which was not ‘sick’ until it was labelled so:

Non so cosa sia la follia. Può essere tutto o niente. È una condizione umana. In noi la follia esiste ed è presente come lo è la ragione. Il problema è che la società, per dirsi civile, dovrebbe accettare tanto la ragione quanto la follia. Invece questa società riconosce la follia come parte della ragione, e la riduce alla ragione nel momento in cui esiste una scienza che si incarica di eliminarla. Il manicomio ha la sua ragione di essere, perché fa diventare razionale l’irrazionale. Quando qualcuno è folle ed entra in un manicomio, smette di essere folle per trasformarsi in malato. Il problema è come sciogliere questo nodo, superare la follia istituzionale e riconoscere la follia là dove essa ha origine: nella vita.⁶²

Basaglia, then, believed that madness must be understood as part of life and places the treatment of madness back *into* life, as was put into practice in his psychiatric reforms and development of community psychiatry in Italy. Whilst not claiming to know the true essence of madness, he questions the logic behind a system of categorisation which labels the individual ‘mad’ outside the institution and ‘sick’ once inside the institution. Echoing Foucault’s notion of the graft, he

⁶¹ F. Basaglia, ‘La comunità terapeutica e le istituzioni psichiatriche,’ in F. Ongaro Basaglia (ed.) *Scritti*, vol. 2, Turin, Einaudi, 1981, pp. 3-13, p. 7 in Sforza Tarabochia, p. 109. See also: F. Basaglia, *Psychiatry Inside Out: Selected Writings of Franco Basaglia*, New York, Columbia, 1987, p. 159.

⁶² F. Basaglia, *Conferenze brasiliane*, Milan, Cortina Raffaello, 2000, p. 34 in Sforza Tarabochia, p. 95.

illustrates the paucity of the drive to set up a binary opposition between madness and reason, and queries the ensuing pathologisation of what originates *in life*.

Part III

T.A.T. as a Discursive Site

Besides, this distinction between normal and abnormal seems quite untenable: who, after all, is normal? Where is he, your normal man? Show him to us! Can the artistic act, with the extreme tension that it implies and the high fever that accompanies it, ever be deemed normal?

-Jean Dubuffet, 'Art Brut Preferred to the Cultural Arts'⁶³

Although grounded in diverse schools of thought and practice, Basaglia's anti-psychiatric thought and Adorno's suspicion of psychoanalytic criticism share a concern, rooted in the intellectual climate of the day, with the re-examination of the mind and how it was perceived in life and culture. They both question the extent to which a blueprint of the mind can be extracted from the subject and reveal a common distrust of conventional explanations of the mind and the potential disturbances therein. I argue that Sanguinetti's *T.A.T.*, in the spirit of 1960s countercultural conceptions of the mind, enacts a penetrating and darkly parodic revisiting of the original T.A.T. test.

As has been noted in Section I, Murray's T.A.T. test is predicated on the assessment of discord and abnormality in mental and behavioural processes, through the analysis of real responses to a visual stimulus, in its aim to engender genuine reactions through a proxy of lived life. In doing so, this assessment arguably pathologises the creative 'work' of the patient in deeming certain narrative styles, descriptive approaches and portrayals of time as straying beyond the bounds of normative narrative coherence. The test as used for the study of serious psychopathology by Singer and Wynne (1966), particularly in relation to

⁶³ J. Dubuffet, 'Art Brut Preferred to the Cultural Arts' (1949), trans. P. Foss and A.S. Weiss, in A.S. Weiss, *Shattered Forms: Art Brut, Phantasms, Modernism*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1992, p. 85.

young adult schizophrenics, is detailed by Phebe Cramer under the heading ‘communication deviance’:

... Certain individuals, when telling stories, fail to establish and to maintain a shared focus of attention with the listener. [...] The resulting deviance in communication is seen in closure problems, disruptions, and peculiar language and logic. Aspects of *closure problems* include the failure to create a story; the use of fragments of words, phrases, or ideas that are dropped into the story and left incomplete; the expression of passages that are unintelligible, inconsistent, contradictory, or that the listener is expected to interpret; omissions or confusions about central aspects of the picture; and, finally, the failure to complete the story. [...] *Peculiar perceptions and verbalizations* include significant misperceptions of the card, the assignment of idiosyncratic meaning to details of the picture, referring to the picture as representing a dream, the use of odd phrases or words, slips of the tongue, peculiar reasoning, and the undue repetition of words, phrases, or ideas.⁶⁴

Within the psychodiagnostic framework of the test, then, everything within the response is psychically significant, dissectible and analysable. Sanguineti’s *T.A.T.* tries to resist the uncomplicated separation of life and pathology in its ‘performance’ as both analysand’s test response and poet’s literary piece. If we view *T.A.T.* as a continuation of the work begun in *Laborintus*, where the poetic form functions not as ‘the earnest transcription of a nervous breakdown,’ but as ‘an objective historical breakdown,’⁶⁵ then life, society and history seep even further into a global understanding of madness rather than madness as a hermetic entity.

T.A.T. stretches Murray’s T.A.T. to its limit with its incongruous verbal-visual play, ludically elaborating a ‘phantom ekphrasis,’ in describing and invoking images which are not available to the reader, or which may not exist. The collection subverts the premise of the original T.A.T. test by diverging wildly from narrative fluidity and classic visual description. The ‘phantom ekphrasis’ is

⁶⁴ Cramer, *Storytelling, Narrative, and the Thematic Apperception Test*, p. 309.

⁶⁵ Sanguineti, ‘Poesia informale?’, p. 388.

further ironised when established as a poetic meditation on a visual work which holds a pragmatic or didactic value, rather than the traditional ideal of a painting or sculpture.

Sanguineti and ‘Abnormality’ in ‘Il Dibattito’

In creating an ironic dialogue between image and text, Sanguineti’s *T.A.T.* highlights the liminal space between the agency of literature and the objectifying forces of psychiatric and psychological labelling. The collection dramatises the moment when a (nominally) healthy but ‘odd’ narrative, with an agency and logic of its own, is transformed into a pathological narrative, through monitoring, assessment, and the application of a clinical label. This dramatisation, ultimately, serves to reveal the underlying drives and motivations of the text itself. On the relationship between the imagination of the writer and irrationalism, Sanguineti draws our attention to the question of *who* decides what is ‘normal’ and what is ‘abnormal’:

Conviene allora chiarire con molta puntualità che, quanto più l’elemento immaginativo è stato associato sino alla pura identificazione all’elemento irrazionale, e come tale represso rispetto alle norme tradizionali, tanto più viene accuratamente conservato un baluardo fondamentale dell’ideologia borghese, la quale ha perfettamente deciso, per conto proprio, che cosa è razionale e che cosa non lo è, che cosa è normale e che cosa non lo è, che cosa appartiene all’ordine della realtà e che cosa appartiene invece alla sfera della sfrenata fantasia dell’immaginazione privata.⁶⁶

Taken together, these eruptions of radical thought surrounding perceptions of irrationality and abnormality are of fascinating relevance in relation to cultural productions of the period. Sanguineti, in Adornian fashion, posits these questions of ‘otherness’ in terms of class politics, in the association of bourgeois ideology with a rigid hierarchy of ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ characteristics. I draw on these debates not to argue for the rationality or irrationality of *T.A.T.*, but to argue that

⁶⁶ Sanguineti, ‘Il dibattito,’ p. 383-4.

the collection provides a locus for the mediation of ideas surrounding marginal, unconventional and dissenting subjectivity.

The poems of *T.A.T.* recall aspects of the clinical-cultural debates of the day, drawing on more countercultural readings of the role of ‘unreason,’ and attempting to put life itself back into the categories of madness, delirium and irrationality. *T.A.T.*, viewed in light of the radical thought processes and ideas of this psychopathological⁶⁷ revolution, manifests a similar spirit of subversive disruption - against oppressive labels, and ultimately, against its own starting point, the Thematic Apperception Test itself.

T.A.T. 3: Linguistic and Discursive Dissent

T.A.T. performs what I have termed ‘dissenting subjectivity,’ through its linguistic experimentation, its configuration of the visual ‘other,’ and its entering into contemporary clinical-cultural discourse. The poems reveal the alterity of literary visuality, as well as an uncanny strangeness in their verbal and linguistic processes. The ‘phantom ekphrasis’ is an intriguing invocation of the visual sphere, setting up a ludic puzzle where diverse issues are mediated and negotiated.

The dissenting subject is likewise immanent in how the poems resist the linguistic normalisation implied by the ideology of the test. In confusing the usual aesthetic categories of time and space and manifesting the formal inextricability of word and image, within the apparent premise of a projective test, *T.A.T.* constitutes a poetic process that blurs the boundaries between diagnosable madness and sanity.

Something akin to ‘communication deviance’ and ‘closure problems’ are part of a neo avant-gardist *schizomorphic* tactic in the first half of *T.A.T. 3*, in its *rispecchiamento* of what is seen as a schizophrenic age and schizophrenogenic world. *T.A.T. 3* equally resists the idea that poetry and real-life ‘abnormality,’ as might be found in a test response, are easily or necessarily separable:

it fits! (‘URSUS HORRIBILIS’): *E ALLOR* per un *Totale* di = 9:
(*palloni*); e il decimo (già) cade; di fianco; (là): sopra le azzurre pietre;

⁶⁷ I define ‘psychopathology’ as the scientific study of mental illness and disorders.

verso un BZZ .. azzurro; e con 9: (palloni); (puntini); (.....): e con
la freccia (femminile); che cade, dunque,
(giú); sopra un rettangolo (giallo);
cade
con le ciambelle, con il trattore che va (che sta); che sta (che va); verso
sinistra; sopra un triangolo, con la trattrice: ...

As indicated in section I, *T.A.T.* can be read or experienced as a highly visual text, with many ludic and intellectual games relying on typographic experimentation, concrete handling of verbal and semantic units, and continual references to seeing and visualising. In the above extract, any efforts to grasp the sense of the text are frustrated by the lack of observable images. This glossomaniac textual experience has already operated against normative temporal modes of narration, linear reading and semantic coherence. Many aspects of *T.A.T.* are disconcertingly recognisable from the list of typical irregularities displayed by young schizophrenics as detailed by Singer and Wynne, further emphasising the disruption and subversion of the underlying rationale of the test by the text itself. By undermining the T.A.T.'s linking of standard narration with a healthy mind, Sanguineti's *T.A.T.* reveals the test's linguistically limiting, restrictive basis. Through the very act of multimedial literary practice along with its own inimitable 'communication deviance,' *T.A.T.* resists the totalising strategy and ideology of normativity represented by Murray's T.A.T.

One mode of resistance in Sanguineti's *T.A.T.* is an opposition to linguistic prescriptivism,⁶⁸ as I hope to illustrate. The second half of *T.A.T.* 3 takes a bizarre turn towards an oneiric, dissociated world of measurements, details and polite conversation:

... e con una
successione di; (con fori circolari di); con 5 cm. di diametro (e con 10 cm. di
profondità);
(s.d. ma 22/6): et/je/me/sens/;
e svuotato; svuotata; et/tout(e)/transformé(e)/; e con

⁶⁸ I understand 'prescriptivism' here to pertain to the condition of rigidly enforced or imposed grammatical and language rules.

una successione di ecc.; e disposti in cerchio; e tu disposta; come il cavallo ‘Snippy’; (‘HORRIBILIS’); svuotato; e io ecc.; io svuotato; disposto; (a 30 km. da Alamosa); tanto disposto ecc., adesso; e tanto svuotato ecc.; (con un diametro di 23 m., adesso); (di 3 anni ecc.):

e con affettuosità (circolari), ormai, a tutti voi, così e allor ecc.; così, a presto:

In the midst of the unsettling allusions surrounding ‘il cavallo “Snippy”’⁶⁹ we find a compelling example of the exposition and ironic denunciation of language at its most generic and universalising: ‘(s.d. ma 22/6): et/je/me/sens/; / e svuotato; svuotata; et/tout(e)/transformé(e)/; e con ...’ This extract plays with conventions in the elucidation of grammar points. In the manner of standard grammar books, the syntax of the first phrase is visibly divided into conjunction, subject pronoun, reflexive pronoun and verb. The masculine and feminine adjective endings in Italian and French are left open for the user to choose, as might be seen in a template sentence aided by parentheses and slashes. The extract capitalises on notions of artificial language and default, pre-determined linguistic usage, tying in with the characteristic neo avant-garde desire to reinvigorate tired and hackneyed language forms.

In the context of Murray’s T.A.T., where the patient’s verbal response is immediately ripe for analysis, the use of this hyper-generic grammar is suggestive. The old grammar book ‘learned’ language is rehashed and rendered flat and meaningless, contrasting with the genuine language of free association. The ideology of Murray’s T.A.T. is, once again, confronted with the artificiality of fluid, perfected and normative language through a staging of the (il)logical extremes of such language. The test’s prescriptive linguistic agenda, its insistence on a clear distinction between the language of the sane and that of the disturbed, is

⁶⁹ Surprisingly, this extract consists of a fractured recounting of some of the details from a true incident of unsolved animal mutilation: that of ‘Snippy’ the horse in Alamosa, Colorado in 1967. The story gained a global reach due to its unusual details, like the circles of dirt surrounding the horse’s body and the clean, bloodless way the horse had been mutilated. (B. Hardin, ‘The Legend of Snippy Hollow,’ *Life* (magazine), 22 March 1968, p. 82) In *T.A.T.* 3, the physical dimensions from the news reports are detailed, including the diameter and depth of the holes (‘con 5 cm. di diametro (e con 10 cm. di profondità)’) and the age of the dead horse (‘di 3 anni ecc.’). The incident is roughly contemporaneous with Sanguineti’s *T.A.T.*, demonstrating his openness to strange and esoteric documentary-material-within-art.

ironically denied through Sanguineti's hypercorrect text.⁷⁰ Taking into consideration the function of the T.A.T. as a subconscious confessional, the text hints at expressions of inner emptiness and inner revelation, wrapped up in the ambisexual grammar of the textbook, devoid of human content.

The diaristic nature of this confessional is contrasted with the formal bibliographic language used in the dating: '(s.d. ma 22/6)'. The sporadic use of formal letter-writing language also appears in the form of 'e con affettuosità (circolari), ormai, / a tutti voi, così e allor ecc.; così, a presto.' The language of courteous communication carries a more sinister message, however, when interlaced with the unsettling details in 'il cavallo 'Snippy'; ('HORRIBILIS'); svuotato.' The nightmarish dissociated imagery and banal trivialities hinge on the blocking and flowing (using parentheses) of various levels of dialogue and levels of categorisation.

The dissociated outbursts ('HORRIBILIS') might equally be likened to flashbacks or spliced shots in cinema, alluding to subliminal messaging and to the building of paranoia. These linguistic details and jumps in perceptual categorisation further the oppositional strategy used in the poem; since Sanguineti's language embodies the 'peculiar perceptions and verbalizations'⁷¹ which denote pathology in the rhetoric of the T.A.T. practitioners, the poem re-appropriates the language of pathology *in* poetry.

T.A.T. as a Revelatory and Dissenting Visual Text/Test

In the case of *Laborintus*, formal, linguistic and structural discord functions as a revelatory device which tears down conspiratorial attempts to cloak the broken nature of society with artificial language and content:

The formal disorder of *Laborintus*, then, reflects an attempt to bring to the surface (to consciousness) an actual state of social and individual alienation and to subvert literary models and practices that serve the

⁷⁰ John Picchione views the use of dissonant formal devices in *Laborintus* as a means of transcribing the effects of mental breakdown, but also as serving 'a subversive role by contesting the appeasing effects of a balanced and graceful poetic language.' *The New Avant-Garde in Italy*, p. 116. It is interesting to see how in *T.A.T.*, this hyper-banal rather than hyper-destructive use of language, produced equally self-reflexively, serves a subversive purpose.

⁷¹ Cramer, *Storytelling, Narrative, and the Thematic Apperception Test*, p. 309.

purpose of disguising it. It is in this respect that poetic forms can serve as a strategy of negative dialectics.⁷²

Sanguineti's *T.A.T.* is a similarly revelatory text, manifesting both literary *approximations* of madness and delirium, and the global alienation often confused with madness; a further consideration, I have argued, is the (open-ended) probing of assumptions underlying the designation of 'normality' and 'abnormality.' The manner in which this revelatory process operates, furthermore, relies on the inherent visuality of its own form. The visual 'other' (in the form of phantom ekphrasis) works reciprocally with this revelatory, interrogative process.

The schizomorphic discourse of *T.A.T.* reflects private breakdown and social alienation through the representations of moments from Murray's T.A.T. test, which in turn, I have argued, is critiqued as a tool of power wielded by the bourgeois-patriarchal psychiatric and psychological forces of the era. In the case of Sanguineti's *T.A.T.*, however, the model which serves the purpose of disguising social alienation as 'folia,' of pathologising life, is the T.A.T. test itself, on which the poem is formally and thematically based. The collection is shaped in the form of a T.A.T. test experience, with short 'snapshot' poems reflecting the image cards and the series of seven poems mirroring the serial nature of the enacted test. The T.A.T. constitutes the model for its own critique, creating a circular and reciprocal text which is fuelled by its own means of existence. Visuality, as the thematic and structuring point of departure in the series, is the driving force behind this cycle of mimesis and subversion.

Ultimately, I contend, Sanguineti enacts the pathologised subject within the logic of the T.A.T. test, with a view to negating the legitimacy of such pathologisation. Rather than merely using the T.A.T. as a stimulus for poetic production, Sanguineti profoundly challenges the discrete boundaries between the art of poetry and the linguistic structures expressing delirium and madness.

I close by returning to a key question regarding literary madness and delirium in the neo avant-garde. Does Sanguineti's *T.A.T.* cleave to a 'schizomorphic' literary paradigm, involving a simultaneous mirroring and contestation of the true ruptured nature of contemporary society? Or is there a

⁷² Picchione, *The New Avant-Garde in Italy*, p. 116-7.

cultural ‘antipsychiatric’ hermeneutic at play, looking also to the individual within society, but revealing an anti-pathologising viewpoint, a resistance to rigid hierarchies of ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal,’ while elevating the artwork to speak autonomously? My own interpretation is that ekphrastic and visual poetry can be read as an experimental site for the playing out of dialectical issues. In *T.A.T.*, this site of negotiation revolves around the cultural *significance* and *reception* of madness and delirium, how these complex categories speak to broader concerns about the marginal subject. In a sense, both the ‘schizomorphic’ and more radical ‘antipsychiatric’ paradigms reveal underlying countercultural positions on literary aesthetics as representative of alterity and the ‘other.’ The dissenting entity in *T.A.T.* is the *spectre* of delirium and madness as a trope into a wider discussion of societal others, and the *significance* of madness as a cultural category. The reading of visual poetry as an experimental site for explorations of the themes of madness, delirium, and marginal subjectivity continues in the next chapter on Adriano Spatola.

Chapter Two

Spatola's *Reattivo per la Vedova Nera*:

Delirium and Dissent

Introduction

La poesia deve essere attiva, da 'dire,' e deve oscillare tra due poli: da una parte fotografie di figure in disfacimento, colte nell'attimo più doloroso, e più assurdo, della loro passione; dall'altra, una malignità compiaciuta e consapevole del poeta-fotografo, che colleziona istantanee compromettenti per ricattare il mondo.

- A. Spatola, 'Poesia a tutti i costi'¹

The poetry of Adriano Spatola is characterised to a great extent by a balance between a powerful sense of the material and physical world, and a sense of the world as shaped by human psychology, ideology, and society. Spatola's poetics conjure a visceral corporeality, revealing elements of the macabre, the grisly and grotesque. This sensitivity to the body and organic matter is evoked through the evocation of unsettling, disquieting and disturbing motifs, enhanced by distorted linguistic forms. Along with many of those working within the Italian *neoavanguardia*, Spatola's works demonstrate the disruptive potential of poetic experimentation.

Born in Sapjane, Croatia, Adriano Spatola (1941-1988) studied in Bologna, where his literary formation began, before moving to Rome to work for *Quindici*, and then settling in Mulino di Bazzano, Emilia.² Spatola co-founded the experimental literary periodical *Malebolge* in 1964 along with Giorgio Celli and Corrado Costa, as well as founding the *Geiger* publishing house in 1967³ and,

¹ A. Spatola, 'Poesia a tutti i costi' (Part II), *Malebolge*, 1.2, March 1964, p. 53.

² N. Balestrini, and A. Giuliani (eds.), *Gruppo 63: L'antologia / critica e teoria*, p. 940; G. Fontana, 'L'avventura sonora di "Baobab," poesia della voce in Emilia Romagna,' p. 18n5.

³ *ibid.*, p. 4: 'Ma è proprio con GEIGER, l'antologia-laboratorio che permette agli artisti partecipanti di 'seminare nel campo del vicino', e con le omonime edizioni di poesia, che si allarga il giro dei suoi rapporti. L'antologia, pubblicata periodicamente, raccoglie i fermenti di una sperimentazione poetica ampia per tendenze e ambiti geografici e si fa strumento sostenitore di quel progetto di contaminazione universale che Spatola vede progredire 'verso un'arte totale'.'

with Giulia Niccolai, the poetry periodical *Tam Tam* in 1971. His collections of poetry include *Reattivo per la vedova nera* (1964), *Poesia da montare* (1965), *L'ebreo negro* (1966), *Zeroglifico* (1966), *Majakovskiij* (1971), and *Diversi accorgimenti* (1975). He published his only novel, *L'Oblò*, in 1964. His critical works include a study on concrete and visual poetry, *Verso la poesia totale* (1969), and a collection of writings, *Impaginazioni: Scritti Critici* (1984). Also within his critical oeuvre are a number of journal articles and reviews covering topics such as poetics, politics, and technology, in journals of the day including, along with *Malebolge*, *Il Verri*, *Nuova Corrente*, and most notably *Quindici*, where he worked as an editor and contributor.⁴

Adriano Spatola's prose-poem *Reattivo per la vedova nera* was first published in the literary periodical *Malebolge* in 1964, its illustrated title page and typographically irregular form creating an arresting visual effect.⁵ In this work we observe the subject of psychological testing once more, which in this instance appears in the form of personality and aptitude testing. *Reattivo per la vedova nera* is presented in the form of a seven-page prose-poem, where free verse is combined with discursive prose in a typographically experimental, discontinuous cacophony. The typographical irregularity, at some points reminiscent of the work of Vicinelli, displays jarring gaps and cuts mid-phrase and mid-sentence, and a heavy reliance on parentheses, slashes and hyphens. Other visually striking punctuation features include the arbitrary use of italics and modifications in font size. The visual elements of the poem are enhanced by an instance of graphic collage, through the inclusion of 'Poesia' in large font, surrounded by curved arrows. The effect, on first reading (and viewing), is suggestive of stream-of-consciousness techniques, owing in part to the presence of longer prose phrases that lean towards semantic disjointedness.

The prose-poem's title is intriguing in its terminology. The term 'reattivo,' when used in the field of psychology, is broadly applied to refer to a range of psychometric tests⁶ which usually pertain to measuring individual personality and

⁴ G. Fontana, 'Adriano Spatola: la vita, la teoria, la prassi,' Archivio Maurizio Spatola, 2009, p. 1.

⁵ A. Spatola, 'Reattivo / per la vedova nera,' *Malebolge*, 1.2, March 1964, 43-47.

⁶ M. Cardwell, *Dictionary of Psychology*, London/New York, Routledge, 2014, p. 187: 'Psychometric testing refers to the practice of measuring psychological factors in a person. It can apply to almost anything, but the most common examples are in intelligence, personality and aptitude. [...] The use of intelligence tests in particular came under intense attack in the 1960s,

psychological characteristics.⁷ ‘Reattivo’ can refer to a kind of test which is administered in both clinical psychological settings and in institutions such as schools, hospitals, industry and organisations, hence possessing a scope extending from psychopathological concerns to questions of aptitude.⁸ In terms of historical context, ‘reattivo’ can encompass projective tests, such as the Thematic Apperception Test, which came into use from 1938, the Rorschach (inkblot) test, from circa 1935, and the 1939 Wartegg Drawing Completion test.⁹ The proliferation of these tests continued throughout the postwar period until the occurrence of a backlash, reaching a high point in 1965, in the form of an anti-testing movement.¹⁰ This repercussion formed part of a wider public and professional questioning of the validity and neutrality of psychological and psychiatric practices, coinciding moreover with the anti-psychiatry movement.¹¹ Spatola’s usage of the term in 1964, then, chimes with a historical understanding of the ‘reattivo’ as available for controlled clinical usage as well as less rigorous, popular and public usage. I believe this non-specific usage of ‘reattivo’ precisely contributes to the cultural debate around the test itself, namely the thesis that the test is represented not as a neutral instrument but a tool of social commentary and engineering.

Reattivo per la vedova nera remains a highly allusive title, suggestively juxtaposing the clinical idea of the test with the mythical figure of the sexually cannibalistic female spider, and by extension, her murderous human equivalent.

when it was claimed that test results were being used to discriminate for jobs and educational opportunities as well as to bolster racial discrimination.’

⁷ Treccani online, ‘reattivo’: ‘In psicologia, *r. mentali*, le prove psicologiche consistenti in un compito che il soggetto deve eseguire in condizioni determinate e che, attraverso la misura dei risultati, permette di valutare le caratteristiche individuali. Più frequente nell’uso è il termine inglese *test*.’

⁸ L. Pedrabissi, ‘I test psicologici: storia e metodo’ in F. Del Corno, M. Lang (eds.), *Psicologia clinica, Volume 3: La diagnosi testologica*, p. 81.

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 81.

¹⁰ *ibid.* Pedrabissi speaks of an increasing distrust in such tests, stirring in the 1950s through to the 1960s, and the growing ‘convinzione delle pesanti implicazioni sociali dell’uso dei test.’: ‘Tale rivolta, che ha toccata il suo apice intorno al 1965, ha avuto come punto di partenza gli Stati Uniti, dove più massiccio era stato l’impiego di test nei vari contesti della vita pubblica e privata, ma ha avuto risonanze anche in tutti i paesi del mondo occidentale.’

¹¹ *ibid.*: ‘Tali strumenti per la valutazione della personalità, anche se trovarono facile applicazione nel campo del counseling scolastico, dell’industria, degli ospedali e delle cliniche psichiatriche, considerati da un punto di vista strettamente psicometrico, hanno evidenziato notevoli limiti e carenze, rappresentati fondamentalmente da una scarsa attendibilità e validità.’ When considering Spatola’s *Reattivo* in light of Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus* later in the chapter, I will explore certain continuities between anti-testing in *Reattivo* and the underlying anti-psychiatric thought and practice of Guattari.

Are we, the reader, undertaking the uncanny task of imagining the ‘psychological test result’ of the archetypal figure of the black widow? Does the poem’s *furor scribendi* – or ‘frenzied eruption of writing’¹² – represent the delirium, anxiety and paranoia of this shadowy phantom, or rather, does it speak to the dynamics of the test itself? These are some of the allusive questions surrounding the work, in a sense recalling the discourses of the ‘schizomorphic’ paradigm, where linguistic rupture structurally reflects a ‘schizophrenic’ society, and the radical psychiatric paradigm, where the labels are themselves interrogated.

In ‘Poesia a tutti i costi,’ published in the same 1964 issue of *Malebolge* as *Reattivo per la vedova nera*,¹³ Spatola rails against the aesthetic values represented by contemporaneous currents in left-leaning literature, arguing that what he terms ‘il patetico’ calls on the emotive reserves of language, miring it firmly in ‘il conformismo sterile,’ and denouncing it as ‘la sfera del disimpegno totale.’¹⁴ His account of literature counters the classical interpretation of ‘impegno,’ or engagement, embedded within literary content, in favour of a structural overhaul of language and literary forms.¹⁵ Poetry must aim to profoundly subvert, on a structural level, the perceived ‘logica pseudoumana’ on which history itself is based, rather than to exist as a superficial bearer of ideological messages.¹⁶ He views the category of the ‘grotesque’ as the medium in which the poet must work:

Il grottesco, come ironia del patetico, e categoria del tragico, è la dimensione entro la quale deve lavorare oggi il poeta. L’attività a più voci, l’ampliamento ad libitum della tastiera, l’esplosione dei grumi ideologici, la stratificazione culturale come compresenza, ecc., sono immagini di una disarmonia radicale, di una ambiguità critica in atto, e, al limite, di una

¹² *Furor scribendi* – ‘madness for writing,’ ‘a rage/passion for writing,’ *World Dictionary of Foreign Expressions: A Resource for Readers and Writers*, Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 1999. Appears in historical dictionaries as ‘an itch for writing’; often accompanied by *furor loquendi* – ‘an eagerness for speaking’ in D. E. Macdonnell, *A Dictionary of Quotations, in Most Frequent Use: Taken Chiefly from the Latin and French, But Comprising Many from the Greek, Spanish, and Italian Languages*, 7th Ed., London, G. & W.B. Whittaker, 1819.

¹³ Spatola, ‘Poesia a tutti i costi’ (Part II), pp. 51-53.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 51.

¹⁵ Mario Moroni provides an illuminating introduction to *Malebolge* and its founders, the ‘Parasurrealist project’ and its relationship to the original Surrealists, the ‘Gruppo 70,’ and technological poetry, in M. Moroni, ‘Parasurrealism and Technological Utopia: The Project of *Malebolge*’ in Chirumbolo et al. (eds), *Neoavanguardia*, pp. 74-95.

¹⁶ Spatola, ‘Poesia a tutti i costi’ (Part II), p. 52.

condizione di schizofrenia calcolata, e coltivata come conditio sine qua non del fare poesia. Lo scopo della poesia è oggi quello di provocare nel lettore una *inquietudine ideologica*, e di mettere in crisi la geometria euclidea della sua visione del mondo.¹⁷

Spatola's idea of the 'grotesque' is contrasted with the 'pathetic' and 'tragic' and tends instead towards polyphony, dissonance, plurality, anti-totalising tendencies, and ambiguity. His account of 'a condition of calculated schizophrenia' is associated with 'critical ambiguity' and 'radical disharmony,' drawing on the trope of literary schizophrenia to comment on formal and critical features within poetry. In specifying '*calculated* schizophrenia,' he contradicts and inverts existing literary models of automatism, randomness, and the unconscious (associated with certain experiments in historical Dadaism and Surrealism), and spontaneous interiority (the inner revelations of the 'mad' poet), in favour of controlled experimentation. Indeed, his *Malebolge* co-founder Giorgio Celli many years later described Parasurrealism as a demystification of the unconscious, a model which borrows certain creative techniques and uses them metapoetically as a 'manierismo del surrealismo, un surrealismo freddo, alla seconda potenza.'¹⁸ Such discordant yet premeditated features operate, Spatola states, to invoke an *inquietudine ideologica* ('ideological disquiet'), a poetic premise aligned with what I describe as dissenting, unconventional, and marginal subjectivities. In *Reattivo*, I propose that Spatola intertwines the literary model of a 'calculated schizophrenia' with a discursive thread probing the oppressive aspects of testing, indirectly invoking the problematic rigid hierarchies discerning 'normality' and 'abnormality.'

In his *Malebolge* essay 'Gruppo 70 apocalittico e integrato' (a nod to Umberto Eco's 1964 *Apocalittici e integrati*), Spatola outlines his theory of both the capabilities and dangers of technological poetry, focusing at one point on the insidious power of a network of technical forces, arguing that the world produces:

¹⁷ *ibid.*, 51-52.

¹⁸ G. Celli, 'Prefazione,' P.L. Ferro (ed.), *Adriano Spatola poeta totale*, Genoa, Costa and Nolan, 1992, p.7 cited in: M. Moroni, 'Parasurrealism and Technological Utopia: The Project of *Malebolge*,' p. 81.

[...] sempre nuove e più specialistiche élites di tecnici, che si trovano ad avere poteri che non sarebbe inesatto definire dittatoriali, soprattutto nell'ambito di una cultura (in senso antropologico) come la nostra, che si permette il ricorso al *mental test* come a un *criterio di valutazione-discriminazione* la cui unità di misura è data dalla norma socialmente più "utile".¹⁹

Edging towards the territory of biopolitics and a Foucauldian understanding of 'capillary' or 'nondisciplinary' power (which I consider in depth in the poetry of Patrizia Vicinelli²⁰), Spatola engages directly with principles of the anti-testing movement, and with the antipsychiatric critique of the concept of 'social usefulness' in labelling individuals. We remember Basaglia's writings on the designation, in the psychiatric system of his era, of the unproductive as 'un elemento di disturbo, da escludere.'²¹ A comparable clinical-cultural node is foregrounded once more in Spatola's essay. We can equally look forward to Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway's theorisations of new biotechnological forces, to observe a more recent interpretation of the dark power of the faceless 'biotechnician,' casting fresh light on 1960s anxieties surrounding such 'élites tecnici':

... in the age of biopower the embodied subject is 'cannibalized' by the practices of the scientific technoapparatus [...] and the disembodied gaze of the biotechnological apparatus. The biotechnician, as the prototype of high-tech power, represents the modern knowing subject [...].²²

¹⁹ A. Spatola, 'Gruppo 70 apocalittico e integrato,' *Malebolge*, 1.2, March 1964, 60-61.

²⁰ Spatola's description of these specialised, insidious, unidentifiable technical entities anticipates many concerns within biopolitical research arising in the late 1960s into the 1970s. In my chapter on Vicinelli I consider the links between cultural and literary trauma and Foucault's biopolitical categories of 'new nondisciplinary power' and 'massifying power.' (M. Foucault, 'Society Must Be Defended,' trans. D. Macey, in *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, M. Bertani and A. Fontana (eds.), New York, Picador, 1997/2003, p. 243).

²¹ Basaglia, 'La comunità terapeutica e le istituzioni psichiatriche,' in F. Ongaro Basaglia (ed.) *Scritti*, vol. 2, pp. 3-13, p. 7 in Sforza Tarabochia, p. 109. See also: F. Basaglia, *Psychiatry Inside Out*, p. 159.

²² Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, p. 198. Braidotti draws on Donna Haraway's influential 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s,' *Socialist Review*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1985, pp. 65-108.

Both Sanguineti and Spatola engage openly with psychological testing, drawing attention to an area of interest that lies liminally between medical, cultural and political spheres. It is noteworthy that Spatola references the broad category of the ‘reattivo,’ whereas Sanguineti identifies the particular ‘reattivo’ in question, the Thematic Apperception Test. Spatola represents his ‘reattivo’ both in terms of a test which measures behaviour along a normal-abnormal continuum, as well as an aptitude test for productivity in work, channeling and interrogating manifold cultural notions of the test as somewhere between science and industry, medical-pathological and moral-capitalist. The argument for viewing madness as belonging on a continuum, rather than at a fixed and rigid point, is pertinent in my reading of the texts of Sanguineti and Spatola.²³ Both poems suggest representations of psychopathology at certain points, while simultaneously forcing the reader to reconsider the nature, origin, and classifying institutions of ‘pathology’ itself.

It is within this context of a historical moment open to clinical-cultural exchange, that I explore Spatola’s *Reattivo* in relation to the issues of aptitude, personality and economic productivity. Testing is represented in diverse and interrelated ways throughout *Reattivo*, and Spatola weaves an interiorised experiential voice with an external dissenting voice together, conjuring a dissociative cacophony of scattered phrases and verbal units. The tumultuous poetic texture of *Reattivo* encompasses fractured languages, genres, and visual forms, addressing themes as diverse as physical illness, mental health, war, work, mechanisation, cognition, consciousness, and music in a highly asyntactic and asemantic manner. My reading of *Reattivo* explores the mode through which the poem represents and debates questions, prescient in *neoavanguardia* discourse, concerning mental, psychological, and personality testing. In doing so, I argue that *Reattivo* also foregrounds its own textuality, revealing a meta-textual perspective on how the text itself enacts some of these schizorevolutionary

²³ A contemporary perspective on the continuum model is detailed in: R.P. Bentall, *Madness Explained: Psychosis and Human Nature*, Penguin, 2003, p. 117. ‘The line between sanity and madness must be drawn relative to the place at which we stand. Perhaps it is possible to be, at the same time, mad when viewed from one perspective and sane when viewed from another.’ Baker et al. affirm this view: ‘[Bentall’s] detailed exploration of madness in all its forms broadly suggests that madness and sanity exist on a continuum of experiences without a universal and clear point of binary oppositional division.’ C. Baker et al., *Madness in Post-1945 British and American Fiction*, p. 21.

concerns, through performing the ‘reattivo,’ the test itself. Its dissenting capacity (usually externally voiced) is performed textually and visually, and I call on certain literary approaches based on Deleuze and Guattari’s schizoanalysis to isolate what ‘occurs’ in the poem.

I first examine the representation of fluidity between the thematic categories of mind, body and world, looking to trace how these literary mutabilities reflect the hypothetical anxiety and psychosis of the test-taking figure of the *vedova nera*. This represented literary madness is interspersed with an interrogative thread; we observe an ironic, parodic disruption of the test’s logic through a darkly humorous unveiling of the test’s desire towards productivity and punctuality, invoking, amongst others, the establishments of the priesthood and the military. Ultimately the very suggestive nature of the material lends itself even more to a schizoanalytic reading, in which I argue that the visually intriguing aspects of the text highlight how something might ‘occur’ in the text. Moving from thematic towards formal concerns, I look to Deleuzo-Guattarian aesthetics in showing how the form of the poem enacts ‘something,’ and I show how this occurrence is visually centred.

Part I

Fluidity of Body-Mind and Human-Environment:

The Black Widow's *Furor Scribendi*

Body-Mind-World

The linguistic texture of *Reattivo* is characterised by the juxtaposition of high and low dialogue: the style veers between colloquialisms, business-speak, advertising jargon, medical language, psychiatric-psychotherapeutic language, and academic-humanistic language. The poetic voice switches rapidly between a detached descriptive mode and an envoiced dialogue. Subjects covered include history, bomb shelters, Marxist theory, the workplace, geography, music, human anatomy and death by hanging, along with references to medical categories such as psychosis, sclerosis, aphasia and neurosis. The first section provides an example of the broad leaps of theme and discordant twists of language and tone:

reattivo / per la vedova nera:
che non prescinda dai dati culturali
che l'attenzione il conflitto l'equilibrio / coscienza la
memoria / neurosi e il fato lo stimolo / reazione e a conti
fatti (se ancora parlano i fatti) dinamica di gruppo e sclerosi
e afasia e linguaggio è psicosi ma condurre condurre
la lotta in questa prospettiva e tener botta e illudersi che
in queste condizioni con la forza (che la ragione ammette)
e con gli sforzi quando trabocca la goccia per l'avis in
piazza di dona il sangue quando la corda non regge
e l'impiccato di disimpicca già morto... ah! psicoterapia
ah! il reattivo mentale ah! il sogno lo stimolo il fiato la
socialità che correnti che metodi che gruppi che
individui formati che totalità che moderne
complete condizioni del profondo del corpo degli odori
(odori buoni) degli odori (cattivi odori) della mescolanza
e della percezione – effetti a tutti i costi risultanti - e
del buon tempo che ancora non fa e della pioggia che

certo cadrà del trasversale sapore che lega nel cancro
la lingua e lega i denti e lega le terra all'orbita e dietro
la schiena lega le mani ma (mah!) non ci saranno
già più ... (22)²⁴

Spatola compresses subjects and concepts belonging to different categories into a small poetic space, creating the impression that the order of things has been uncannily squeezed and contorted. As is suggested in ‘...della mescolanza e della percezione,’ the fabric of the text overflows with mixings and perceptions. There is a striking emphasis on the corporeal and visceral, from odours - ‘odori buoni ... cattivi odori’ - to blood donation - ‘quando trabocca la goccia per l’avis in / piazza di dona il sangue’ - to illness - ‘sapore che lega nel cancro / la lingua e lega i denti.’ On the other end of the scale, however, a restrained, academic tone is palpable – ‘dati culturali,’ ‘dinamica di gruppo,’ ‘effetti a tutti i costi risultanti’ – amalgamated likewise with conversational language – ‘e / del buon tempo che ancora non fa e della pioggia che / certo cadrà’ and ‘(mah!).’ The perceptions run fluidly into each other without warning, breaking their categories and lending a discordant quality to the work. One of the most notable aspects of the poem overall lies in the recurring consideration, in radical neo avant-garde mode, of age-old dualities, such as those between the mind and body, body and world, and body and machine.

The intense conflation of categories in *Vedova nera* suggests the dissolution of boundaries between the mind and body, creating a vivid landscape of continuity between concepts and materials. This continuity overflows into the intermingling of associations of the ‘pathological’ body with concepts of the ‘pathological’ mind, by forging a sense of extreme fluidity between these categories. The litany of named psychopathologies including ‘neurosi’ and ‘psicosi’ are filed near references to cancers, odours and body parts. References to delusional beliefs and cognitive dissonances are implicit in ‘l’impiccato di disimpicca già morto,’ emphasising the hallucinatory and oneiric aspects of a poetics interested in drugs, out-of-body experience and mental illness. Equally disconcerting are the repetitions – ‘ma condurre condurre’ – and scattered

²⁴ I cite the bilingual anthology: Adriano Spatola, *The Position of Things: Collected Poems 1961-1992*, B. Cavatorta (ed.), trans. P. Vangelisti, København & Los Angeles, Green Integer, 2008.

exclamations – ‘ah! psicoterapia / ah! il reattivo mentale ah! il sogno lo stimolo il fiato la / socialità’ – which amplify the perception of delirium, while countering the medical terminology. Interpolated among the pathologies ‘neurosi’ and ‘psicosi’ are the related therapies – ‘psicoterapia ... il reattivo mentale.’ The maladies of psychosis and neurosis are listed alongside their counter-maladies, conflated to the point of suffocation with the archetypal infrastructures of knowing and curing. The representation of the mind and body as fluid continuity recurs throughout the work:

ah! intensità sonore percepite e descritte e sotto il nome
 possibile evocate: in funzione di confusione di condizione
 di cerebrale corteccia tachimetro che oscilla guscio
 vuoto di terra sferica schiacciata ai poli endecasillabo in
 lieve pendenza e fiducia e speranza in un rialzo alla borsa
 ma tu salta! cavallo! libera nos a malo orma dentro
 la roccia e riempita di sabbia e dopo soffocante la terra che
 smotta e dopo ancora di più che fragili polmoni, che
 delicati palati, che bronchi inoffensivi, che incisivi malati
 da usare da sperimentare un gruppo continuo – non
 differenziato - ... (24, 26)

Spatola intensifies the recital of bodily pathologies, with an emphasis on the fragility of the physical self. Likewise, the poem conjures a chaotic upheaval of sense perceptions and vulnerabilities: aural, tactile, olfactory and visual. We observe a continuity between brain anatomy - ‘di confusione di condizione / di cerebrale corteccia’ (cerebral cortex – understood as the seat of the more profound levels of brain function including that of attention, perception, cognition, awareness, thought, language, and consciousness²⁵) – and these sense and cognitive perceptions.

²⁵ M. O’Shea, *The Brain: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, OUP, 2005, p. 64: ‘More than any other brain structure, it is the cerebral cortex that makes us human. Within the cortex plans are made, volitional behaviour is initiated, the neural machinery of language is located, and conscious perceptions are assembled from sensory information. It is the locus of all of our creative intelligence and imagination. If indeed we have free will, then it is in the cortex that its secret will be found.’

Further along the continuum of the relationship(s) between the body and mind is a probing of the parameters of the given human brain. After depicting the flow between the cerebral cortex and sense perception, there follows a conceptual shift in the line ‘tachimetro che oscilla guscio / vuoto di terra sferica.’ Mixed in among the imagery of sonorous perception, the brain is identified with an oscillating speedometer, housed in its skull, an empty shell; the ‘brain as engine,’ then, is represented on the other end of the spectrum from the mind as pure immateriality.

The famous psychological conditioning experiments of Ivan Pavlov with dogs, on links between stimuli and physiological responses,²⁶ are briefly, yet intriguingly, cited:

... lo stimolo/reazione ...salivazione abbondante ...
... ma stimolo ma resta contrasto ma perché Pavlov sui cani / soltanto?
(22,24,28)

Echoing this thematic thread, a later section shifts incongruously between the anatomical and experiential mind-body complex:

... notare che ciò che viene asportato non è il midollo
spinale spesso non è nemmeno qualificato irrigato dissolto in polvere
sopra i concimi sopra la frutta notare (nella corteccia reticolare) un
dispendio dei cinque sensi il consumo del sesto l’abbassamento di quel
livello di percezione ... (32)

The central nervous system referenced in ‘midollo spinale’ (spinal cord²⁷) and ‘corteccia reticolare’ (reticular cortex²⁸), is integrated with the interrelated ‘cinque sensi,’ ‘percezione,’ ‘coscienza’ and ‘dopocoscienza’ into an asyntactic whole. There is, arguably, an insinuation of the organic foundation of intelligence;

²⁶ I.P. Pavlov, *Conditioned Reflexes: An Investigation of the Physiological Activity of the Cerebral Cortex*, London, Oxford University Press, 1927.

²⁷ O’Shea, *The Brain: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 18: The spinal cord extends from the brain to the peripheral nervous system: ‘As the spinal cord, your brain extends the length of the backbone, periodically sprouting nerves that convey information to and from every part of you.’

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 63 - This most likely refers to ‘reticular formation’ which ‘has a primary role in the control and regulation of the arousal state of the brain.’

alongside the intricate processes of the ‘midollo spinale’ and the ‘corteccia reticolare,’ we are reminded of their perishable chemical constituents, ultimately reducible to powder: ‘irrigato dissolto in polvere.’ Likewise, we recall the identification of the cerebral cortex with an engine - ‘di condizione / di cerebrale corteccia / tachimetro che oscilla.’ The idea of the machinic brain (strikingly associated with early modern medical language) is just one position on an epistemological scale moving from extreme immaterial and spiritual perspectives on the nature of consciousness and the soul, to extreme material and mechanical understandings of the brain.

Once more, the functions of the anatomical brain, the body, psychic consciousness, and the environment flow into one another, not following any hierarchy or order of causation. In this sense, after raising the spectre of mind/body duality, *Reattivo* obliquely undermines a Cartesian understanding of the separate domains of the mind and body, where the immaterial mind holds sway over the material body through the conduit of the pineal gland. *Reattivo* instead conjures an agitated linguistic and thematic terrain, abruptly shifting from the various biological and philosophical explanations of human consciousness: body, brain, cortex, chemicals, mind, the senses, perception, etc. The consistent thread, then, is the suggestion of an ongoing mutability among these conceptual and material phenomena.

In addition to the various epistemological strands raised in relation to the inward workings of the brain, mind and consciousness, *Reattivo* reveals echoes of the liquid relationship between the outward body and its environment. The physical experience of the body is represented as leaking outwards into the environment. Bodily functions and features are implied as fluidly coterminous with the workings of the observable world, with this perspective then posited in relation to the orbit of Earth in space:

... del trasversale sapore che lega nel cancro
la lingua e lega i denti e lega le terra all’orbita e dietro
la schiena lega le mani ma (mah!) non ci saranno
già più – difficile è ormai ritrovarli – la seta è bruciata si è
sciolta nell’acqua nel tempo che scorre che batte sui denti
che tira che spacca consuma la giacca fa lisi i polsini le calze

di nylon e tutti ma tutti i risparmi ...

... guscio

vuoto di terra sferica schiacciata ai poli endecasillabo in
lieve pendenza ... (22, 26)

In this nightmarish extract, the body appears to spill over and melt into its surroundings, the effects of cancer on the body are insinuated, body parts appear to fuse together, and time flows and is felt on the teeth. The sequence implies both murder and paranoiac body horror; the evocation of the macabre, yet blackly comic, imagery of tying up and consequently losing the hands is uncannily detached: ‘e dietro / la schiena / lega le mani ma (mah!) non ci saranno / già più – difficile è ormai / ritrovarli.’ We intuit a dissociated impression of the body being reconstituted back into the earth, along with its material vestments which are no longer needed: ‘la seta ... la giacca ... i polsini le calze / di nylon.’ This fluidity between body and environment, I argue, far from a positive environmentalism, indicates a dark and disorientating confusion central to the aesthetic of the *vedova nera*.

The human actions associated with binding of the tongue, teeth and hands, are transcendently identified with the universal laws governing the binding of Earth to its orbit. The disconnect between the neutral laws of physics and the subjective actions of humans are further complicated with a Latin citation from the Lord’s Prayer, ‘deliver us from evil’:

‘libera nos a malo orma dentro / la roccia e riempita di sabbia e dopo
soffocante la terra che / smotta e dopo ancora di più ...’ (26)

There are allusions to palimpsestic inscriptions on the Earth in the form of fossils and geological strata (‘orma dentro / la roccia’), along with the suggestion of landslides and the subsequent danger of suffocation, both human and environmental: ‘e dopo / soffocante la terra che / smotta e dopo ancora di più.’ The line ‘*ma il gas dell’intenso è velenoso la frutta è marcia e alcuni*’ (28), which I will explore further in part II, refers unambiguously to the toxic fumes deep within the Earth, and arguably, the annihilation facing plant life in the event of environmental catastrophe. Suffocation is indicated not only in relation to the

gasping planet, but equally with regard to our human ‘fragili polmoni’ and ‘bronchi inoffensivi’ (26) mentioned above. The collocation of the religious plea against evil with ecological destruction and suffocation leads us back to the question of the human body in flux with, and indistinguishable from, the world itself. The apocalyptic and diseased imaginary of the poem blurs the categories of mystical, psychic, man-made, natural, and supernatural phenomena.

As I have argued, *Reattivo* creates an uncanny and delirious fluidity in both its thematic and formal fabric. The poem’s disjointed language and syntax, I propose, mirrors the non-sequential activity and causation between the brain, mind, body and environment. The sudden switches between statements and questions, intrusive parentheses, shifts between high and low dialogue, and fluctuating epistemological stances serve as a literary reflection of a delirious and anxious state of mind. Is this a depiction of the obsessive inner dialogue of the *vedova nera*, or perhaps a representation of a frenzied response to the ‘reattivo’ itself? Another possibility, not foreclosing these interpretations, rests on a reading of *Reattivo* which considers its visual propensities, forms and processes.

Part II

Destabilising Form:

Textual Flows in *Reattivo per la Vedova Nera* and Deleuze and Guattari's 'Schizorevolutionary'

The delirium evoked in *Reattivo*, represented by elusive fluidities between the brain, mind, body and environment, feeds into a schizorevolutionary poetics which is woven throughout the prose-poem. This delirious and disruptive poetic aesthetic lends itself, I will contend, to the idea of 'the literary work as a machine or practical object,' within the area of Deleuze and Guattari's schizoanalytic poetics. In parallel to viewing *Reattivo* as an expression of the *vedova nera*'s distress, or an impression of the extreme possibilities of the test response, the poem equally invites a fertile reading based on the autonomy of its form. The instabilities between different aspects of the physical inner and outer body, brain, mind and psyche are played out in the thematic intensities of *Reattivo*. There is also, as I shall explore, a visual and concrete aspect to how these phenomena are represented and experienced by the reader. In this section, I make a case for the poem to be read as 'schizorevolutionary' in its texture and form, which runs parallel to the elaboration of its ironic and disruptive aspects in part III.

Deleuze and Guattari, in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, construct their model of the 'schizorevolutionary' as belonging to one end of a spectrum which names certain 'fascisizing' tendencies at the other end:

But on the other, the schizorevolutionary, pole, the value of art is no longer measured except in terms of the decoded and deterritorialized flows that it causes to circulate beneath a signifier reduced to silence, beneath the conditions of identity of the parameters, across a structure reduced to impotence; a writing with pneumatic, electronic, or gaseous indifferent supports, and that appears all the more difficult and intellectual to intellectuals as it is accessible to the infirm, the illiterate, and the schizos, embracing all that flows and counterflows, the gushings of mercy and pity knowing nothing of meanings and aims (the Artaud experiment, the Burroughs experiment). It is here that art accedes to its authentic

modernity, which simply consists in liberating what was present in art from its beginnings, but was hidden underneath aims and objects, even if aesthetic, and underneath recordings or axiomatics: the pure process that fulfills itself, and that never ceases to reach fulfillment as it proceeds—art as “experimentation.”²⁹

‘All that flows and counterflows,’ then, constitutes the schizorevolutionary impetus, detailed here with metaphors relating to the dynamic movements of gases and liquids. Art, within this schema, is not ‘measured’ and ‘valued’ in the classic sense of uncovering ‘aims and objects’; and artistic or writerly form organically and indiscriminately flows away from ‘structure[s] ... meanings and aims’ and are more readily produced and received by the ‘infirm, the illiterate, and the schizos.’

The very fabric of *Reattivo per la vedova nera* lends itself to be approached in the light of the schizorevolutionary aesthetic; besides its intrinsic strange premise as a test-within-a-poem, and its play along the continuum between normality and abnormality, the work performs a visual-concrete function. The constitution of the psychological test as site of mind-body fluidity, and this flow between normality and abnormality has an analogue in how the work is experienced visually. The confusion of the fluidities examined above is literalised through the concrete format of *Reattivo*, whereby the experience of reading the text is as integral to the prose-poem as its thematics. Although not as radically disfigured as Spatola’s *Zeroglifico* of 1966, *Reattivo* utilises typographical devices such as font size changes, gaps and parallel text, prompting a spatial awareness of the unfolding text. The section commencing ‘sociogramma di gruppo (30),’ which will be discussed further in part III, is split from the rest of the text and aligned on the right rather than the left, creating a jagged visual disjunct. Further down, the asterisk following ‘entro / dieci secondi rispondi a ciascuna di queste domande*’ draws the eye to the (literal) ‘small print’ below starting ‘*notare che...(32),’ enacting both a quotidian legal reading and a spatial, concrete reading.

²⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 370-1.

In an earlier section, an especially graphic visual effect is generated in the exploitation of repetitions and italicisations, alluding to an oneiric, perhaps hellish, environmental catastrophe. What is conveyed could almost be described as a stream-of-consciousness mode of writing, only with our subject utterly afflicted by a case of *furor scribendi*:

*ma il gas dell'intenso è velenoso la frutta è marcia e alcuni
ma il gas dell'intenso è velenoso la frutta è marcia e alcuni
ma il gas dell'intenso è velenoso la frutta è marcia e alcuni
ma il gas dell'intenso è velenoso la frutta è marcia e alcuni
ma il gas dell'intenso è velenoso la frutta è marcia e alcuni
ma il gas dell'intenso è velenoso la frutta è marcia e alcuni
ma il gas dell'intenso è velenoso la frutta è marcia e alcuni
ma il gas dell'intenso è velenoso la frutta è marcia e alcuni
ma il gas dell'intenso è velenoso la frutta è marcia e alcuni ... (28)*

This is followed by a diagram depicting two arrows pointing to 'Poesia' in large font. The repetitions of the same phrase, but with fluctuating italicisations, lend the fragment an aura of obsessive logic: the stream of thought is caught in a loop until the typography is perfected. The unstable italics draw attention to where the stress lies in a phrase, and the wide variability of modulations possible in a phrase. The evocation of incomplete thought processes is intensified in the ungrammatical, truncated sentence, where the phrase is compulsively revised but evades any sense of resolution. The block of text itself is visually arresting, and the italicised words play a part in conjuring, through both semantic and visual signification, an oneiric landscape confounding the simple separation of mind and body.

In a sense, *Reattivo* elicits the Deleuzo-Guattarian figure of the 'schizorevolutionary' from *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, whose 'flows' are posited as bodily-pathological, libidinal, frenzied, and erratic. Crucially, the 'schizophrenic flow' is identified with words which resist encoding; words which, in their liquid state, inundate established syntaxes, signifiers and structures:

But through the impasses and the triangles a schizophrenic flow moves, irresistibly; sperm, river, drainage, inflamed genital mucus, or a stream of words that do not let themselves be coded, a libido that is too fluid, too viscous: a violence against syntax, a concerted destruction of the signifier, non-sense erected as a flow, polyvocality that returns to haunt all relations.³⁰

The syntactical structures being surpassed, I propose, call to mind the archetypal psychological texts of the neo avant-garde poets, and in particular, Spatola's conjuring of the associated rigid instructions and methodologies: 'entro dieci secondi rispondi a ciascuna di queste domande* ... metodo laboriosissimo cauto paziente ... metodo astuto metodo non in esilio e in percentuale ...' *Reattivo* interposes an ironic take on the archetypal language of psychological testing, with the hallucinatory linguistic production of delirium: the latter being the very symptom which the former is designed to measure, diagnose and cure. In doing so, *Reattivo* displays both the old 'Oedipal' structures alongside those identified as the 'schizzes-flows,'³¹ the fluid which drains away and streams over unpredictably. The volatile impressions given by the poem, the fluidity between word-body-mind and word-image relations, trace an intense inter-medial flux. The word-body-psychic frenzy encapsulated in the schizorevolutionary flow, then, suggests an embedded resistance to the repressive structures of psychological testing. Deleuze and Guattari expand on the movements and flows of language beyond the parameters of meaning, and how such a conception relates to literature:

That is what style is, or rather the absence of style - asyntactic, agrammatical: the moment when language is no longer defined by what it says, even less by what makes it a signifying thing, but by what causes it to move, to flow, and to explode - desire. For literature is like schizophrenia: a process and not a goal, a production and not an expression.³²

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 133.

³¹ M. Seem, Introduction, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. xxi: 'Such a politics dissolves the mystifications of power through the kindling, on all levels, of anti-oedipal forces—the schizzes-flows—forces that escape coding, scramble the codes, and flee in all directions: *orphans* (no daddy-mommy-me), *atheists* (no beliefs), and *nomads* (no habits, no territories).'

³² Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 133.

Reattivo can readily be viewed as a text in which language is compelled ‘to move, to flow, and to explode.’ I contend that it is the *vedova nera*’s ‘desire’ and delirium which channel certain visible movements, as well as the text’s underlying undulating form, rousing some deep dissenting activity through asyntactism itself. We recall once more Spatola’s conjuring of the dual poles of process and goal in his bizarre ‘reattivo’; the poem clearly tends to the former, deriding the idea of personality, aptitude, and human endeavour as goal-oriented.

It is this dual possibility of delirium and dissent which is drawn out in Buchanan’s reading of Deleuze and Guattari’s schizoanalysis: it maintains that ‘art’s function is both political and aesthetic – it changes perception. If one cannot change perception, then, one cannot change anything politically.’³³ Buchanan identifies schizophrenia as ‘an ontological minority’ which escapes current capitalist conditions and which is ‘a mode of being that does not obey the dominant conditions, and is insurgent.’ Within this understanding, ‘the “minority” therefore marks a continuation of class politics, but in a form that is defined ontologically and aesthetically rather than economically or politically in their traditional senses.’³⁴

The strong dialectical focus in *Reattivo per la vedova nera* and its stream of allusions to mind/body conflicts and oppressive testing is compelling. I believe this dialectic is engaged with, and simultaneously constituted by, the forms and processes the poem takes. Along with exploring the political and thematic aspects of *Reattivo*, I believe an equally rich reading may arise out of looking to see where something might ‘occur’ in the text, taking this as a cue in the attempt to ascertain the text’s particular mode of dissent. In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari set out an approach to the work, derived from the ‘question posed by desire,’ which rejects the psychoanalytic obsession with content (of dreams, texts, art) and proposes a schizoanalytic focus on process and the ‘work as machine’:

The question posed by desire is not “What does it mean?” but rather “*How does it work?*” ... Desire makes its entry with the general collapse of the question “What does it mean?” No one has been able to pose the problem

³³ I. Buchanan and L. Collins (eds.), *Deleuze and the Schizoanalysis of Visual Art*, London, Bloomsbury, 2014, blurb; also p. 37.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 37.

of language except to the extent that linguists and logicians have first eliminated meaning; and the greatest force of language was only discovered once a *work* was viewed as a machine, producing certain effects, amenable to a certain use.³⁵

Ian Buchanan, in his book exploring schizoanalysis, zeroes in on Deleuze and Guattari's dismissal of the question "What does it mean?" in favour of "How does it work?" Buchanan elaborates thus:

First, it suggests that a schizoanalytic reading of a text should be oriented around those 'pragmatic' moments – embodied in linguistic blocs, refrains, formulae and so on – when meaning swings over to use, where something 'occurs' in the text rather than being signified or represented.³⁶

The extract comprising nine fluctuating repetitions of '*ma il gas dell'intenso è velenoso la frutta è marcia e alcuni*' typifies this moment in which something 'occurs' in the body of the text itself. The effect of this extract is in the contact with the block of text itself, in the very act of looking at and coming face to face with the 'assignifying or non-representational particles.'³⁷ The 'serious play' of deciphering what the unstable italics might *do* surpasses the question of what they might mean. Brian Massumi's open reading of *Anti-Oedipus* touches on form *as* dynamism:

The form of the encounter we extract is not a "form" as we normally think of one. It is not static. It is a dynamism, composed of a number of interacting vectors. [...] The dynamism can be rethingified, reactualized, by a further translation, into written or oral language (phonemes or written characters in their syntactical interrelation). Meaning for Deleuze and Guattari is this process of translation.³⁸

³⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 108.

³⁶ I. Buchanan et al. (eds.), *Deleuze and the Schizoanalysis of Literature*, London, Bloomsbury, 2015, p. 5.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 2.

³⁸ B. Massumi, *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1992, p. 14.

Reattivo's rippling, undulating italics, circular in their repetition yet spontaneously self-renewing in their slight modifications from line to line, enact a kind of dynamism and process while remaining tangibly fixed on the page. It is, I believe, the concreteness of the form of these lines that renders them more than the sum of their parts, material forms where (potential) meaning is emergent and embryonic. The syntactical unfinishedness of the individual sentence itself translates as dynamism – a form which isn't static, but rather 'a diagram of a process of becoming.'³⁹ The question 'how does it work?' surely entails, then, the initial visual grasp of the text as a block of words. This visual, concrete reading prefigures the thematic experience of the poem. The later sequence which begins 'entro / dieci secondi rispondi a ciascuna di queste domande*' leading to the 'small print' '*notare che...,' raises questions of functional language conventions and spatial re-readings. Embedded in these lines are several operational occurrences. We observe certain dynamics and moving parts of the text, among which is the reader's eye movement between textual regions, prompted by the universal asterisk. The concrete change of font size from 'normal' to 'small' enacts what would, in an actual legal text, be a performative change in how the text is to be comprehended. These operative functions of the text verge upon, I propose, the 'pragmatic moment,' or the 'work as machine, amenable to a certain use.'

Spatola's creation of a prose-poem muddled with the distorted linguistic formulae of psychological testing approaches, I argue, 'a vision of the literary work as a machine or practical object composed of asignifying or non-representational particles discernable in blocs, traits and figures.'⁴⁰ The encounter with the striking graphic aspects of the text, its strange typographic tics and unsettling cuts, marks *Reattivo* as a work whose presence is made known before its signifying function. *Reattivo* demonstrates the dissenting potential of form, achieved through concrete experimentation and syntactic rupture, in revealing the dynamic figure taken over by *furor scribendi*. The delirious figure of the *vedova nera*, whose un-encoded flows of words are unrestrained by univocal structures, embodies many aspects of the 'poetic schizorevolutionary.' The notion of the

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ Buchanan, *Deleuze and the Schizoanalysis of Literature*, p. 2.

schizorevolutionary as both a figure, and a literary and visual aesthetic, is brought to bear in the rest of *Reattivo*, as I will explore in the next part.

distinguere il valore dei soggetti
selezionare individui secondo l'ampiezza
e separare gli idonei

numero degli individui selezionati
metodo laboriosissimo cauto paziente come il serpente
metodo astuto metodo non in esilio e in percentuale
saggezza per scandigliare per valutare per non commettere
errori sopra la crosta di ghiaccio troppo sottile circa
l'ambiente (e nella famiglia di Bach 13 compositori 13 in
cinque sole generazioni) distribuzione - con uno scarto
del 31% del nostro non comune talento distribuzione nel
supermercato del romanzo lavato del poema incrostato ... (30)

There unfolds, I argue, a parallel exploration on the topic of the 'psych' disciplines, involving psychological testing for patient productivity as a measure of patient health, and testing for worker productivity and aptitude. These various applications of the 'reattivo' – sociological research, individual mental health, worker aptitude – are encountered in equal measure among incongruous references to the body ('che fragili polmoni'), the environment ('sopra la crosta di ghiaccio'), and the history of music ('e nella famiglia di Bach 13 compositori 13 in / cinque sole generazioni'). The represented 'reattivo' (likewise the T.A.T.), in aiming to uncover the 'dialogo interiore,' endeavours to externalise *internal* thoughts, abilities, motivations, fears etc. The linguistic emphasis lies in measuring, gauging, distinguishing, selecting and evaluating ('distinguere... selezionare... saggezza per scandigliare per valutare per non commettere / errori') - all verbal cyphers for the clinical voice, not unlike that seen in Patrizia Vicinelli.

More broadly, *Reattivo* taps into a societal obsession with control, through the representation of an obsessive stream of consciousness on rates, figures, gradients, graphs, groupings, expediencies and efficiencies. The invocation of the quasi-mechanised human, regulated and observed by the forces of the test, contributes to the disquieting themes of dehumanisation and alienation that pervade the poem. The objectifying language inherent to 'il valore dei soggetti,' 'selezionare individui secondo l'ampiezza e separare gli idonei,' and 'per scandigliare per valutare per non commettere / errori' taps into a discourse on the

human as use-value and as a productive machine, kindling the anxieties of the organic human edging towards the futuristic age of the transhuman. Likewise, the demeaning treatment of individuals as a homogenous mass is channeled in ‘da sperimentare un gruppo continuo – non / differenziato.’

The incongruous leaps from bureaucratic jargon, to the comment on the Bach family of composers, to environmental issues, jolt the reader from one stratum of discourse to another. The poem constitutes a locus for a parody of the clinical language of testing, and simultaneously a representation of the black widow’s delirious test response. Another discursive level, introduced as an analogous point to the warped ideology of the aptitude test, involves the culture industry. The familiar *neoavanguardia* position on the degradation of literature in the age of commercial lobotomisation of public taste is particularly palpable in this extract. Industrial waste rates are discussed in the same breath alongside literary talent - ‘con uno scarto / del 31% del nostro / non comune talento ...’ – drawing attention to the incalculable value of the literary arts. This is followed by the invocation of the ‘distribuzione nel / supermercato’ of the ‘romanzo lavato’ (washed novel) and the ‘poema incrostato’ (encrusted poem), which calls to mind Sanguineti’s Adornian statements on the culture industry and the ‘reificata e neutralizzata’ aspect of the so-called ‘museo borghese.’⁴³ Spatola’s representation of the washed (sanitised?) language of the supermarket novel, and decorative popular poetics, similarly recalls Alfredo Giuliani’s challenge to the deterioration of contemporary language, the superficial inanity and oppressiveness of the literary and linguistic norms of the era.⁴⁴

In satirically muddling literary endeavour with the language of efficiency and waste, this excerpt forms part of a larger critique of ideologies surrounding human productivity. The allusive reference to supermarket economics touches on *Reattivo*’s broader challenge to the test as a tool of aptitude measurement and labour control. The warped nature of the personality test is ironically literalised with an intensely disjointed syntax and typographic style:

entro

dieci secondi rispondi a ciascuna di queste domande*

⁴³ Sanguineti, ‘Il dibattito,’ p. 403.

⁴⁴ Giuliani, 1961 introduction, *I Novissimi*, p. 18.

perché come la storia anche la tecnica del mental test ha
 la sua preistoria si pensi ad esempio al rito di iniziazione
 alla consacrazione alla psicologia militare un'alta
 percentuale di non idonei tra i sacerdoti a scagliare oltre il
 confine la lancia pochissimi erano adatti a pilotarci
 sopra il Giappone quasi nessuno si sa se la sente
 oramai di schiacciare il bottone ... (30, 32)

The arbitrary timing demands ('entro dieci secondi') of the personality test, its conditions, instructions and small print are parodied. The social history of the test is raised, indirectly questioning its scientific neutrality by hinting at the import of historical context: 'come la storia anche la tecnica del mental test ha / la sua preistoria.' The test is also identified with ancient rites, consecrations, and the phenomenon of (unsuitable) vocation to the priesthood: 'un'alta / percentuale di non idonei tra i sacerdoti.'⁴⁵ The test functions as a dark tool of 'psicologia militare,' in aiding the selection of the rare individuals capable of dropping the atomic bomb on Japan.

The representation of the detached test as distinguishing, in the same breath, unsuitable priests and suitable combatants forms a disturbing critique of what Foucault has termed the 'massifying' treatment of the mass population by biopolitical power: '... The new nondisciplinary power is applied not to man-as-body but to the living man, to man-as-living-being ... So after a first seizure of power over the body in an individualizing mode, we have a second seizure of power that is not individualising, but [...] massifying, that is directed not at man-as-body but at man-as-species.'⁴⁶ This extract from *Reattivo* engages with the absurdly 'massifying' effect of a single test for all, devoid of individualisation and contextualisation, designed to define and direct its agitated test-takers. The

⁴⁵ Interestingly, in 'Gruppo 70 apocalittico e integrato' Spatola comments on the 'initiation rite' as an anthropological precursor to the 'mental test,' drawing on a 1964 Feltrinelli edition of Peter Hofstätter's book *Psicologia (Psychologie)*, and again enlisting Umberto Eco's *Apocalittici e integrati* in positioning it in relation to a Dionysian mystical-magical model. In echoing elements of the wording, Spatola obscures the divisions between his own critical and creative writing: 'Si pensi al *mental test* come a un rito di iniziazione (nel quale l'adolescente delle società primitive affronta una serie di prove per dimostrare la sua idoneità ad assumere diritti e doveri dell'adulto) e si tenga presente l'osservazione di Eco sulla canzone come una "medicina delle passioni", un rituale dionisiaco, per esempio, e comunque magico-religioso.' Spatola, 'Gruppo 70 apocalittico e integrato,' p. 61.

⁴⁶ M. Foucault, 'Society Must be Defended': *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, p. 242-3.

syntactic disarray of the sudden gaps and spliced (yet individually coherent) phrases intensifies the implications of the ‘reattivo’ as complicit in a mind control dystopia.

In these sections *Reattivo* hints at a form of poetic genealogy; it invokes a method of uncovering embedded themes in inherited cultural stories, in this case, the themes of war machinery and mind oppression key to 1960s counterculture. We recall the inclusion of strands of antipsychiatric thought in the Paris 1968 demonstrations,⁴⁷ and the addition of ‘the schizophrenic’ among the ranks of other oppressed groups such as ‘women, homosexuals, low-paid workers, prisoners, and army conscripts.’⁴⁸ Despite Spatola’s text being written in 1964, it anticipates much of the cultural awareness of these strands of medical-political (later biopolitical) protest so key to the ferment of 1968. We remember Franco Basaglia’s interpretation, in the first half of the decade, of mainstream psychiatric and societal exclusion of the schizophrenic on account of their perceived non-productivity.⁴⁹ While not referring explicitly to psychiatry or antipsychiatry, *Reattivo* brings to light the absurdities in the kind of testing, used in the ‘psych’ disciplines but also generally in society, to distinguish and diagnose non-productivity in the most fundamental sense.

Far from coming into existence as an objective and neutral tool within a vacuum, the ‘tecnica del mental test’ (bearing in mind the associations of *techne* with craftsmanship) has its own ‘preistoria.’ Situated within a particular socio-anthropological framework, it reflects and echoes a lineage deriving from this prehistory, one that is tied up with human invention and even disciplinary power. In invoking initiation rites and consecrations in the same context as vocational testing, a sense of continuity through the long history of human power relations is suggested. The hierarchical structures of initiation ceremonies, pagan and Christian alike, are ancestral echoes of the new secular scientism of testing for desirable behavioural traits. This distrust in the sclerotic structures of institutions, so palpable in the dissenting voices of Spatola’s work and cultural formation, anticipates many ideas in the field of biopolitics (which I will address more fully with Vicinelli); Foucault, in fact, traces the evolution of disciplinary power from

⁴⁷ Woods, *The Sublime Object of Psychiatry*, p. 130.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ Basaglia, *Psychiatry Inside Out*, p. 159.

the Christian ‘pastoral power’ model, focused on the inner spiritual life of the individual, to the modern secular (governmental) model emphasising health, productivity and practical competence.⁵⁰ *Reattivo* unsettles, in the 1960s cultural spirit of anti-war and anti-mind control, the very idea of ‘distinguere il valore dei soggetti’ (30). In its part-perplexing, part-lucid mode of signification, *Reattivo* compellingly draws together these myriad links and ties of human existence, and the indistinct ways in which they are categorised. Here the poem reveals its double role – a performative reflection of the frenzied and erratic test-taker, and a darkly humorous work which disrupts certain rigid and formulaic perspectives on normativity.

The section which follows (previously discussed in relation to the organic nature of nerve function), is differentiated graphically due to its smaller print and asterisk, linking it back to ‘entro / dieci secondi rispondi a ciascuna di queste domande*...’ This visual splice draws attention to the legal quagmires associated with ‘small print,’ (along with the paradoxical realisation that the time limit of ten seconds includes reading the small print), while thematically shifting between brain anatomy, consciousness, and work:

*notare che il controllo volontario non si ripresenta la seconda volta
 una volta aumentato in ascendenza notare (sotto forma di uguale fatica
 uguale benessere) che talora il lavoro è coscienza ed è il dopolavoro
 la dopocoscienza notare che ciò che viene asportato non è il midollo
 spinale spesso non è nemmeno qualificato irrigato dissolto in polvere
 sopra i concimi sopra la frutta notare (nella corteccia reticolare) un
 dispendio dei cinque sensi il consumo del sesto l’abbassamento di quel
 livello di percezione notare l’azione dell’ordine nuovo in relazione agli
 orari e infine notare (suspense!) che è più cosciente naturalmente ciò
 che si ignora (32)

The ironised discourse of the psychological test’s ‘prehistory’ is expanded here in an economic-scientific linguistic pastiche, from the formulaic tendency of ‘uguale fatica / uguale benessere’ to ‘il lavoro è coscienza ed è il dopolavoro / la dopocoscienza,’ where the prefix ‘dopo-’ nudges the phrase into senselessness.

⁵⁰ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-78*.

This line, additionally, is an absurdist sendup of the kind of political slogan based on repeatable sounds rather than meaningful ideas. The tangle of sociological, economic and pseudoscientific verbosity conveys the continued uncovering of the warped logic of the mental test: itself obsessive in its goal to diagnose the obsessions of its test takers.

The test-effects encroach on psychological and neural autonomy: within the image of ‘un / dispendio dei cinque sensi il consumo del sesto l’abbassamento di quel / livello di percezione,’ the reader intuits that the senses and perception are vulnerable to external interference. Individual sense perception, that which is classically considered so integral to human experience, is open to being controlled: the ‘cinque sensi’ are measured and ‘dispensed’ and ‘quel / livello di percezione’ is lowered at the behest of some hidden external power. This ominous power is invoked in ambiguous proximity to ‘l’azione dell’ordine nuovo,’ perhaps referencing the postwar neo-fascist movement of the same name. The sardonic ‘infine notare (suspense!) che è più cosciente naturalmente ciò / che si ignora’ touches once more upon the idea of the test’s power in regulating consciousness and awareness, intruding insidiously on the individual’s psychic autonomy. The next section of *Reattivo* confronts the topic of individual aptitude in work, punctuality and the measure of productivity:

la regola si sfalda si sgretola rinunzia sul
comportamento sul modo irregolare di porgere le dita della
mano se modifica il gruppo la composizione (o i dati dello
schieramento) se non giunge in orario se rifugge – a titolo
di esempio – la distribuzione: considera che il caso (come
caso) difficile che sia puntuale *considera l’inizio*
del lavoro come curva 1 e i tempi di controllo siano controllati
e si pensi

che la deviazione, dalla norma, tra l’eccesso e il difetto,
come anormale normalità (regolare irregolarità) come dito
nell’occhio, voglio dire, come schema irrelato che l’avvento
dell’elettricità ... (32)

Putting into relief the language of the disruptive ‘other’ – ‘modo irregolare,’ ‘la deviazione, dalla norma,’ ‘l’eccesso,’ ‘il difetto,’ ‘anormale’ – displays a return to the discussion of the test as control over the deviant and the abnormal. The reference to a time-control-punctuality scale in proximity to ‘anormale normalità (regolare irregolarità)’ reinforces the description of the forces of the law and compliance with a set of controls. Insinuations of irregular and unpunctual behaviour proliferate - ‘se non giunge in orario se rifugge’ - along with, perhaps, corporal punishment in ‘sul modo irregolare di porgere le dita della / mano’ (and then echoed in ‘come dito nell’occhio’). The schematised notion of supervision of supervision time lends a ludicrous circular logic to the italicised phrase ‘*considera l’inizio / del lavoro come curva 1 e i tempi di controllo siano controllati.*’

These suggestions of oppression and subjugation aided by the controlling measures of the personality test recall the dichotomy, seen in Sanguineti’s *T.A.T.* and Vicinelli’s *à, a. A.*, between the bureaucracy of the clinical test and the unclassifiable complexity of humanity. We recall also the historical context of the anti-testing movement, gaining influence throughout the mid 1960s, claiming that such tests constituted a tool of hegemonic social engineering, and enacted an insidious manipulation of the individual, especially those from disadvantaged and minoritarian groups.⁵¹

In relation to these currents, and returning once more to the interrelated debates within radical psychiatry, it is worth noting Guattari’s promotion of a political-revolutionary rather than a mystical-utopian psychiatry.⁵² In response to the utopian psychiatry of Laing, Guattari spoke of the need for ‘... a revolutionary psychiatric practice, that is, of a non-utopian psychiatry that is susceptible to being taken up en masse by the avant-garde of mental health workers and by the

⁵¹ Pedrabissi, ‘I test psicologici: storia e metodo,’ p. 82. Pedrabissi proposes a number of reasons for the rise of the anti-testing movement: ‘I test in generale, ma specialmente quelli di personalità, rappresentavano, in certa misura, una forma di intrusione nella sfera della vita privata di un individuo, una violazione della sua intimità; i test, soprattutto quelli di intelligenza, fornivano una classificazione rigida, inflessibile e permanente degli individui, ingiustamente selettiva nei confronti dei soggetti appartenenti a gruppi etnici minoritari e a certi socio-culturalmente svantaggiati.’

⁵² Woods, *The Sublime Object of Psychiatry*, p. 5: Guattari was himself active in radical psychiatric and antipsychiatric circles, taking part in the *Schizo-Culture* convention in Columbia University in 1975. While supportive of the institutional reforms of Franco Basaglia, he warned that aspects of antipsychiatric ideology erred in not preserving the specificity of ‘madness.’ He approved of Germany’s SPK (Sozialistisches Patientenkollektiv), which ‘... established an inextricable link between political struggle and mental illness, making madness the concern of everyone’ (F. Guattari, ‘Mary Barnes’s trip’ in G. Genosko (ed.), *The Guattari Reader*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1996, p. 4, 7; in Woods, *The Sublime Object of Psychiatry*, p. 5).

mentally ill themselves.’⁵³ The subtle ‘anti-testing’ dialectic running through Spatola’s poetic and critical *Malebolge* writings from 1964, then, reveals another thread in the rich discursive tapestry of the *neoavanguardia*, reflecting (and anticipating) many debates key to our conception of the countercultural 1960s.

In the reference to the concept of ‘anormale normalità,’ *Reattivo* raises the issue of diagnosing dissent *as* pathology, and the role of the psychological test as a tool in the measure of abnormality. By generating the paradoxical statement ‘anormale normalità,’ hyperextending the bounds of semantic logic, *Reattivo* confounds the extent to which human and psychological phenomena can be quantified.

I argue, then, that the poem engages with the notion of a continuum of psychological and behavioural abnormality-normality, within the context of the neo avant-garde poetic aesthetic of linguistic and semiotic distortion. By highlighting the strange and compulsive logic propagated by this testing ideology, *Reattivo* interrogates the idea of an uncomplicated binary between rational and irrational and normal and abnormal. It questions whether the irrational syntactic verbalisations and the delirious impulses of the *vedova nera* are, in fact, any less rational than the senseless regulatory apparatuses and bizarre false logic of the test. The dissent of the *vedova nera*, then, is not merely expressed through delirious linguistic and visual ‘flows,’ as we saw in part II, but also embedded in the ironic and revelatory characteristics of *Reattivo per la vedova nera*.

The final section alludes especially to the psychological, non-verbal predicament of the precariously employed, contrasting the anxiety, disorientation and shame of human hunger with machinic functionality. It creates a scenario with overt Marxist connotations, engaging with the conflict between humans and machines, and noting the anxieties inherent in the idea of their interchangeability. In stating this ostensibly Marxist doctrine, then denying it (‘come Marx non diceva’), then hinting towards it once more, Spatola arguably draws attention to hermeneutical conflicts within the field of political philosophy:

... eccola lì che si mangia le unghie
si vergogna e tira in ballo questioni di buona

⁵³ F. Guattari, ‘Mary Barnes’s trip,’ p. 51.

educazione come schema irrelato l'avvento della
pubblicità ...

 e a quale scopo il tema preferito si esercita
sul fatto di un rapporto (proprio come conflitto) tra mac-
china e macchina specializzata – come Marx non diceva – e
adesso, lo sai, ci sono calcolatrici disoccupate, e macchine
da scrivere che appena si sposano si trovano già licenziate
e non hanno più niente da mangiare (34)

In terms of a straightforward reading, the anxiety teased out here explicitly signals the dehumanisation entailed in the idea of the human as a 'macchina specializzata.' Spatola cites Marx partly verbatim here: 'Machinery is misused in order to transform the worker, from his very childhood, into a part of a specialized machine.'⁵⁴ This line of thought relates directly to the shifts in the industrial era in the relationship between human and machine, and the loss of agency and ownership of the worker's products in the move from artisanal work to factory work: 'In handicrafts and manufacture, the worker makes use of a tool; in the factory, the machine makes use of him... [It] is the movements of the machine that he must follow.'⁵⁵ This resonates likewise with an earlier citation referring to 'confusione ... di cerebrale corteccia / tachimetro / che oscilla,' of neural activity being conflated with mechanical operations.

The unyielding tone of the discourse suggested by 'macchina specializzata,' however, is unsettled by a surreal and darkly humorous reference to feminine machines, adding a layer of disorientation to any such classic interpretation. Spatola's play with doctrinal orthodoxy - 'come Marx non diceva' - involves a creative elaboration of the Marxist concept of the human as part-specialised machine, imbuing the otherwise restrained notion with an oneiric and fantastical quality. Here, 'calcolatrici disoccupate' and 'macchine da scrivere che appena si sposano si trovano già licenziate,' are ironically represented as humanised feminised machines or mechanised female humans, blurring humanoid-machine ontology but also highlighting the particularly gendered

⁵⁴ K. Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. One, trans. B. Fowkes, New York, Vintage, 1977, p. 547.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 548.

relations of human *to* work itself. The gendered-linguistic attention paid to the plight of the ‘calcolatrici’ and ‘macchine’ emphasises their double bind, wherein they remain alienated and marginalised equally for their gender as for their vulnerable labour status.

Spatola’s Marxist invocations engage readily with the issue of the psychological test as measure of the use-value of the human, and the messages of worker oppression and psychological subjugation are vividly rendered in the emblematic figure of the vulnerable human crushed by anxiety-inducing testing: ‘eccola lì che si mangia le unghie.’ Concurrently, however, we observe a playful probing of any ideology that presents itself as fixed. The suggestion of creative misquoting and misrepresenting of classical Marxism can be readily interpreted as an interrogation of all-encompassing grand narratives. On trial here, I contest, is the mindless and inflexible repetition of formulaic dogmas, agendas, and schemas; whether stemming from myopic test instructions – ‘entro / dieci secondi rispondi a ciascuna di queste domande*,’ bizarre work-time targets - ‘*considera l’inizio / del lavoro come curva 1 e i tempi di controllo siano controllati,*’ or from exhausted political phrases - ‘il lavoro è coscienza ed è il dopolavoro / la dopocoscienza’ - both ultimately collapse into absurdity.

Spatola's *Reattivo* and Sanguineti's *T.A.T.*

The projective psychological or personality test emerges as an unconventional site for exploring destabilising countercultural currents. Both Spatola's *Reattivo* and Sanguineti's *T.A.T.* harness the visual 'other,' and foreground the discursive potential of the test, in their creation of marginal, unconventional, and dissenting subjectivities. Deleuze and Guattari, I argue, offer a highly suggestive account of the intersection between the project of revolutionary and dissenting 'schizophrenia' with the aesthetic models of concrete poetry: language as *material* as well as symbol and sign. I contend that *Reattivo*'s 'ironic disruption' of testing, while concurrently playing with the text as an autonomous set of 'non-representational particles,' sets into motion a rich plurality of discursive possibilities. Sanguineti's brief but charged citation from Adorno, implying a distrust of transactional psychoanalytical readings of literary or visual artistic works, gains a fresh perspective when viewed from the retrospective standpoint of Deleuze and Guattari, when they proclaimed the task of schizoanalysis:

Destroy, destroy. The task of schizoanalysis goes by way of destruction—a whole scouring of the unconscious, a complete curettage. Destroy Oedipus, the illusion of the ego, the puppet of the superego, guilt, the law, castration. It is not a matter of pious destructions, such as those performed by psychoanalysis under the benevolent neutral eye of the analyst. For these are Hegel-style destructions, ways of conserving.⁵⁶

Of course, Deleuze and Guattari's polemical invective extends to breaking point the stirrings of suspicion, suggested in Adorno and many others, of classical psychoanalysis viewed as a complete system. The 'pious' bourgeois destructions enacted by psychoanalysis are surpassed by the 'complete curettage' of schizoanalysis:

⁵⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 311.

We have seen how the negative task of schizoanalysis must be violent, brutal: defamiliarizing, de-oedipalizing, decastrating; undoing theater, dream, and fantasy; decoding, deterritorializing—a terrible curettage, a malevolent activity.⁵⁷

It is the extreme activity of ‘undoing’ that characterises the schizorevolutionary, in often diffuse and opaque ways, through rechanneling and upsetting fixed systems. This relatively open treatment of delirium as a suggestive, creative mode resonates with the cultural-clinical exchange taking place, already in the 1960s, in the special issues in *Il Verri* and *Quindici*. I draw attention once more to the variety of *visual* modes of expression in attempting to approximate the alterity of the ‘mad’ or ‘delirious’ experience. I refer particularly to *Quindici*’s editorial promotion of ‘una scrittura altra,’⁵⁸ a propensity towards verbal-visual experimental techniques, and solidarity with the plight of the biopolitically marginalised.⁵⁹ I also note, approaching from a different perspective, the interest in the visual arts and creative writing of those experiencing altered mental states in the *Il Verri* issue ‘Psicopatologia dell’espressione.’⁶⁰ Deleuze and Guattari likewise appeal to the visual sphere, both in how they conceptualise the ‘schiz’ - ‘a background of gold and fog’ - and in how they conceptualise literary language, attending to how it performs, and its material qualities.

Ian Buchanan states that fascism, for Deleuze and Guattari, had in the postwar period ‘migrated to a deeper, and more recessed quarter of the psychosocial matrix of Western society,’ and that May 1968 was the ‘flashpoint,’ the point of rupture where this reality rose to the collective consciousness.⁶¹ I read Spatola and Sanguineti’s works as permeated with a grasp of the cultural-political *significance* of madness, and the discursive possibilities of madness within visual literature - anticipating this seismic break.

As with Sanguineti’s *T.A.T.* and the contemplation of madness and society in visual psychological testing, Spatola’s *Reattivo per la vedova nera* enters into

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 381.

⁵⁸ See for example, Sanguineti, ‘La letteratura della crudeltà,’ *Quindici*, No. 1, June 1967.

⁵⁹ F. Basaglia and F. Basaglia, ‘L’incidente psichiatrico,’ *Quindici*, 13, November 1968.

⁶⁰ *Il Verri*, no. 15, June 1964: ‘Numero speciale: Psicopatologia dell’espressione.’

⁶¹ Buchanan et al. (eds.), *Deleuze and the Schizoanalysis of Literature*, p. 7-8.

an ironic dialectical relationship with the field of psychological and personality testing. Furthermore, the poetic texts themselves constitute, in their formal embodiments, moments of opening out of perception, of sense, of logic; and a parallel, contradictory non-connection of these categories. The moments where something ‘occurs’ in these texts penetrates most profoundly the intersection of the visual and the psychologically marginalised, where representation is bracketed in favour of the preverbal and unfathomable.

A key issue to consider is whether, or how, *Reattivo* engages with *schizomorfismo*: does the poem reveal the perceived ‘madness’ of the contemporary world, through a fragmented analogue of its ‘split form’? Is there, then, an element of disruption in response to this diagnosis? Likewise, does *Reattivo*, through its visual literariness, contest the societally fixed nature of the categories ‘normality’ and ‘abnormality,’ proposing instead a fluid continuum between the two? Does the poem probe any of the psychiatric concerns beginning to take hold in 1960s activist culture?

In relation to these concerns, I believe *Reattivo* holds a revelatory role, in the fractured thematics of the military, economic and psychological anxieties of its contemporary moment. Cultural madness is represented as induced by and inherently wrapped up in society itself. Equally, it constitutes a critique of the repressive tendencies of the psychological test, in a manner comparable to the process of Sanguineti’s *T.A.T.* I have argued that *T.A.T.* hints ironically at societal diagnoses of madness in lives lived unconventionally, and makes reference to the cultural works emerging from these lives. Approaching psychological testing from a different perspective, Spatola’s *Reattivo* addresses the alienating and dehumanising qualities of workplace personality testing, while emphasising the fluidity between the body, mind and machine through formal linguistic and typographic distortions.

Chapter Three

La Lucidità del “Nonsense”¹: Giulia Niccolai and Hyperreflexive Collage

Introduction

What matter who's speaking, someone said what matter who's speaking.

- Samuel Beckett, *Texts for Nothing*²

Una odiosa ossessione mi perseguita infatti da anni: nei cosiddetti momenti vuoti, quando ad esempio guido l'automobile e sono sola e dunque non parlo e nemmeno penso, esaspero me stessa cercando rime inter-linguistiche in un demenziale balbettio da turismo di massa e da Fiumicino.

- Giulia Niccolai, *Webster Poems and Russky Salad Ballads*³

Giulia Niccolai's identification of a collection of her own poetry with an 'esperimento di esorcizzazione'⁴ is emblematic of the paradoxical nature of much of her work, condensing in one phrase the precision of the experimental scientist along with the uninhibited frenzy of the possessed. Niccolai's collections encompass verse which is stark and metaphysical, along with poems that are effusive, playful, and uncontrolled. In Niccolai's more challenging work lies an impulse to look beyond the traditional poetic resources of authorial interiority and intimacy, and towards an exterior store of 'found' text from dictionaries, maps, essays, books and nursery rhymes. Invention, however, is fundamental to Niccolai's work, whether it relies on 'found' or 'authored' text – Niccolai's innovation lies in the kind of ludic inquisitiveness which reveals the often arbitrary nature of such categories. Niccolai's use of 'found' text coincides with

¹ 'La lucidità del "nonsense"' phrase taken from C. Sitta, 'Dentro la poesia,' *Nuova corrente*, 64, 1974, p. 385.

² S. Beckett, *Texts for Nothing 3*, in *Stories and Texts for Nothing* (1967), New York, Grove Press, 2007.

³ G. Niccolai, introductory note to *Webster Poems and Russky Salad Ballads*, *Giulia Niccolai: Harry's Bar e altre poesie 1969-1980*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 1981, p. 105.

⁴ *ibid.*

an elaboration of the possibilities of ‘nonsense’ as a poetic practice, and an examination of literary nonsense, hyperreflexivity, and hyperrationality, and where these categories coincide and diverge, is central to this chapter.

Born in Milan in 1934 to an American mother and an Italian father, Niccolai worked initially as an international photojournalist before turning to writing. Her early vocation is reflected in the particular kind of photographic visuality which pervades her novel *Il grande angolo* (1966).⁵ She founded and ran, along with Adriano Spatola, the literary review *Tam Tam*. She was present at the 2nd meeting of the Gruppo 63 in Reggio Emilia, and became editor for the journal *Quindici*.⁶ Her collections of poetry, spanning textual, concrete and verbal-visual contributions, include *Humpty Dumpty* (1969), *Dai Novissimi* (1970-1972), *Sostituzione* (1972-1974), *Greenwich* (1971), *Poema & Oggetto* (1974), *Rusky salad ballads & webster poems* (1977), and an anthology *Harry's Bar e altre poesie* (1981). A more recent comprehensive anthology of her works *Poemi & Oggetti* was published in 2012.⁷

⁵ See S.P. Hill, ‘The Bigger Picture: A Reconsideration of Giulia Niccolai’s *Il grande angolo*,’ *Italica*, Vol. 87, No. 2, Summer 2010, pp. 209-228. Hill’s study of *Il grande angolo* offers a consideration of such themes as the photographer as narrator, the ethics of the gaze, and the function of photography as a hermeneutic tool.

⁶ S.P. Hill, ‘Poems as Objects: The Visual Poetry of Giulia Niccolai,’ in K. Brown (ed.), *The Art Book Tradition in Twentieth-Century Europe*, Ashgate, 2013, p. 132.

⁷ For an introduction to Niccolai and an anthology of her work, see G. Niccolai, *Poemi e oggetti: Poesie complete*, M. Graffi (ed.), Florence, Le lettere, 2012. See also the anthology *Harry's Bar e altre poesie 1969-1980*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 1981, which includes a colourful preface by Giorgio Manganelli, and which I cite for all collections. For a chapter-length introduction to Niccolai, see R. West, ‘Giulia Niccolai: A Wide-Angle Portrait’ in Chirumbolo et al. (eds), *Neoavanguardia*. West affirms Niccolai’s poetic orientation being in line with the other poets of the *neoavanguardia* in the ‘conviction that poetry should be about language, about poetry itself in its ontological status as a linguistic sign rather as an instrument for the expression of self, reality or transcendental meanings.’ (p. 220) Another overview of Niccolai’s work is to be found in the article of A. Giammei, ‘La bussola di Alice: Giulia Niccolai da Carroll a Stein (via Orgosolo) fino all’illuminazione,’ *Il Verri*, 51, 2013, pp. 33-77. Other studies on Niccolai include Sarah Hill’s more focused study of ludic and conceptual aspects in Niccolai’s visual poetry: S.P. Hill, ‘Poems as Objects: The Visual Poetry of Giulia Niccolai,’ in K. Brown (ed.), *The Art Book Tradition in Twentieth-Century Europe*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2013. Here Hill examines Niccolai’s work of the 1960s and 1970s, with particular attention to her concrete ‘poem-objects’ in *Poema & Oggetto*, and her unique style of punning, plurilingualism and ludic wordplay. Hill argues for a close association between these works of the 1960s and 1970s and the broader Italian *neoavanguardia* movement, whilst setting Niccolai apart in ‘her career-long fascination with linguistic and visual games.’ Hill explores the links between Niccolai’s early career as a photojournalist, and the enduring emphasis on the visual in her literary work. She attributes the rise of visual poetry in Italy to the social, consumerist and political shifts taking place after WWII and the increase in feminist and worker protests and activity from 1968. She also makes reference to the spread of literary and critical theories of semiotics and psychology, as well as increased internationalism and movement between borders.

In this chapter, I aim to examine the frequently paradoxical role of excessive reflexivity, or hyperreflexivity, in both the restrained and ludic modes of *il già scritto*⁸ - the 'already-written' - and cut-up poetry in Niccolai's collections *Sostituzione*, *Dai Novissimi*, *Webster Poems*, and *Greenwich*. In particular, I propose that these collections of visual and cut-up poetry enact a series of what I will refer to as 'hyperreflexive grammars,' a term adapted from Louis Sass' notion of hyperreflexivity in his exploration of the conjunction between literature and schizophrenia in the twentieth century. Bringing hyperreflexivity into dialogue with Alfredo Giuliani's concept of *schizomorfismo*, and then extending this inquiry to consider Fredric Jameson's 'schizophrenic disjunction or *écriture*,' I examine how Niccolai's visual and cut-up texts advance a hyperreflexive idiom, characterised by fragmented syntax and dislocated subjectivity, which engages with a broader neo avant-garde debate on cultural schizophrenia.

Within the context of my overall thesis, I consider how Niccolai's visual and cut-up poetry relates to explorations of the mythologised 'schizophrenic' as a countercultural literary *figure* within both the Italian *neoavanguardia* and global neo avant-garde movements more generally. I make the case that Niccolai's collections should be read in the context of a contemporary growing interest in human psychology within these neo avant-garde movements, and an evolving understanding of the cultural power of psychologically insightful literary forms. Through their ludic fragmentation and open-ended intertextuality, Niccolai's cut-up collections interrogate fundamental questions concerning the identity of the poetic subject, reason and non-reason, and the breakdown of what Roland Barthes has called the 'theological meaning' of the text.⁹

⁸ In 'La bussola di Alice,' Alessandro Giammei notes that, rather than implementing a personal or communal code, Niccolai 'borrows' from sources that are invented by others and which don't obviously benefit poetry. The locutions are drained of their original meaning and given a novel and revelatory semantic focus. He likewise mentions Niccolai's own frequent usage of the word 'chartered' to describe her 'borrowing' of language. (p. 51) It should be noted, however, that to my knowledge there have been no detailed investigations in secondary criticism into Niccolai's cut-up corpus; I argue that close readings on these kinds of cut-up texts uncover interesting intertextual dynamics.

⁹ R. Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, trans. S. Heath, London, Fontana, 1977, p. 146.

In a manner quite distinct from descriptions of the alienated voice in much literary criticism on earlier European avant-gardes,¹⁰ Niccolai's poetic paradigm explores language, syntax, and the radical possibilities of intertextuality, undermining any straightforward relationship between the authorial voice, interiority and language. The subject and questions of subjectivity are at the forefront of my examination of Niccolai's oeuvre. Can we speak of a grammatical subject in intertextual poetry, or poetry which 'borrows' text from other sources, and what happens to the grammatical subject in visual poetry, which relies as much on looking as it does on reading? Central to Niccolai's opus is linguistic ingenuity, an emphasis on the words themselves, and how words combine to achieve effects which do not always produce coherent or teleological messages. Much has been written on 'schizoid features' in narrative and theatre in relation to authors such as Samuel Beckett and Antonin Artaud, and the absent, wandering, unlocatable subject remains a central theme in modernist literature.¹¹ Niccolai's poetry, I argue, presents an extreme case of ruptured subjectivity through its erratic combination of visual and verbal modes of perception. Equally pertinent to this argument is the neo avant-garde emphasis on the 'riduzione dell'io,' a dictum Niccolai exemplifies in the schematic and cerebral form of much of her work. Most acute, however, is the literary manifestation of the 'schizoid feature' termed hyperreflexivity, to which I will now turn.

In his thesis on the deep structural affinities between modernist aesthetics and schizophrenia, Louis Sass repeatedly returns to the pervasive and illuminating notion of 'hyperreflexivity,' or, 'acute self-consciousness and self-reference, and ... alienation from action and experience.'¹² Sass moves freely between discussions of the hyperreflexive both as a clinical symptom of schizoid thinking,

¹⁰ I anticipate my section on *Greenwich* when I think here of Fredric Jameson's theorisation of 'schizophrenic disjunction or *écriture*,' as a point of departure from the 'older affects of anxiety and alienation,' characterising high modernism, in favour of 'more joyous intensities.' F. Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, London, Verso, 1991, p. 29. Without comprehensively absorbing Jameson's interpretive split between high modernist 'alienation and anomie' and postmodern 'schizophrenic depthlessness,' I note certain *affective* if not structural resonances in Niccolai's works.

¹¹ B. Keatinge, 'Breakdown or Breakthrough? Deleuzoguattarian Schizophrenia and Beckett's Gallery of Moribunds,' in S.E. Wilmer and A. Žukauskaitė (eds.), *Deleuze and Beckett*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015; M. Bryden, 'The Schizoid Space: Beckett, Deleuze, and "L'Épuisé",' *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui*, Vol. 5, 1996, pp. 85-94; E. Barry, 'All in My Head: Beckett, Schizophrenia and the Self,' *Journal of Medical Humanities*, June 2016, Vol. 37, Issue 2, pp. 183-192.

¹² Sass, *Madness and Modernism*, p. 8.

and an aesthetic feature in literature, the visual arts, and philosophical thought. For Sass, the hyperreflexive encompasses:

[...] forms of exaggerated self-consciousness in which a subject or agent experiences itself, or what would normally be inhabited as an aspect or feature of itself, as a kind of external object.¹³

This compulsion to externalisation can be experienced abstractly, but also concretely, as exemplified in Sass' description of the hyperreflexive experience of the body in schizophrenia:

'[...] what might have been thought to be inalienable aspects of the self come to seem separate or detached. This may affect not only a tool but also one's arms or legs, one's face, the feelings in the mouth or throat, the orbital housing of the eyes - even one's speaking, thinking, or feeling. All these may come to seem objectified, alien, and apart, perhaps even like the possessions of some foreign being.'¹⁴

This terrifying description of dissociation of self from body, self from thoughts, and even self from self, chimes with much of the theoretical output and cultural production of the Italian neoavanguardia, echoing a broader pattern in mid twentieth-century avant-garde literature. Elizabeth Barry writes of a similar sense of disembodiment in Beckett's novel *Malone Dies*, for example, where the character Malone describes his own feet and head as existing in different realms, physically and psychologically.¹⁵ Yet in Niccolai's verbal-visual poetry, for want of a character or narrator, we observe a more sublimated and complete reduction of the linguistic subject. What Sass describes as hyperreflexivity and hyper self-consciousness is carried to an extreme in Niccolai's writerly practice. The old authorial certainties of 'one's speaking, thinking, or feeling,' are, in Niccolai, shattered and externalised, turning the linear poetic work into a work that approaches visually-oriented collage. I argue, then, that a hyperreflexive mode of

¹³ L. Sass and J. Parnas, 'Schizophrenia, Consciousness and the Self,' *Schizophrenia Bulletin*, vol. 29, no.3, 2003, p. 428.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 432.

¹⁵ Barry, 'All in My Head: Beckett, Schizophrenia and the Self,' p. 186.

experience has affinities with Niccolai's poetic practice. Theorising 'hyperreflexive grammars,' along with the related hyperrational turn, provides a framework for the exploration of Niccolai's highly cerebral verbal-visual corpus.

Sass argues that many of the hallmarks of modern Western thought, such as a rise in the awareness of consciousness, and related formal structures in aesthetics, partake in a cycle of reason and unreason; indeed, he states that 'these forms of incongruity are actually products of a kind of hyperrationality: forms of irrationality generated by rationality itself.'¹⁶ While Sass offers a general overview of the centrality of an awareness of self to Western intellectual history's preoccupation with rationality in the wake of Enlightenment principles, I make the case that the programmatic poetry of Niccolai can be viewed through Sass' prism of 'forms of irrationality generated by rationality itself.' It is precisely the non-authored material in her poetry, that which might be assumed to be more objective and rational, which engenders the extreme irrationality and 'nonsense' of the authored, creative product.

In a sense, Sass' understanding of the hyperrational - the extremely rational collapsing into the irrational - is an inversion of Carlo Sitta's incisive phrase referring to Niccolai's poetry, 'la lucidità del "nonsense".' By extension, I contend that Niccolai's 'nonsense' poetry, rather than seeking to represent absurdity or unreason as an object, exemplifies a shift towards a hyperrational mode, one which involves an *excess* of reason, which then collapses into forms and structures which resemble unreason. According to Sass, the hyperreflexive and hyperrational operations are intrinsic to one another, as an excess of consciousness stems from an excess of rationality (both symptoms of the modern era); these phenomena he observes both in 'schizophrenic thought' and in the more obscure and experimental facets of modernist thought and art. I aim to explore aspects of Niccolai's oeuvre between 1969 and 1977 which engage with these interrelated hyperrational and hyperreflexive modes, with particular attention to the radical echoes of what Sass deems 'alienation from action and experience.'¹⁷ We have seen from chapter one and two that schizoid language and processes feature as a point of reference for theorists and writers in Italian experimental literature. How might we, then, consider the relationship between

¹⁶ Sass, *Madness and Modernism*, p. 326.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 8.

hyperreflexive and hyperrational processes, verbal-visual aesthetics, and the particularities of *neoavanguardia* literary theory?

Part I of this chapter explores Niccolai's visual and concrete poems, that is, works which incorporate typed and handwritten words with photographic and drawn images. In defining 'visual poetry' I look to Sarah Patricia Hill's characterisation of 'poesia visuale' as encompassing figurative images *composed* of text, as distinguished from 'poesia visiva,' where both text and imagery is used; Niccolai avails of both of these techniques.¹⁸ The two collections which most acutely underline the functioning of the hyperreflexive idiom through verbal-visual media are *Humpty Dumpty* and *Poema & oggetto*, and I explore the positioning of the literary category of 'nonsense' in Niccolai's linguistically rich hyperrational schema.

Part II concerns the central role of cut-up and word collage techniques in Niccolai's *Sostituzione*, *Dai Novissimi*, *Webster Poems*, and *Greenwich*. Here I examine the interplay of ideas surrounding intertextuality, authorship and subjectivity in Niccolai's assemblage and rehabilitation of pre-existing texts. I look to Sass' category of hyperreflexivity in more detail, drawing into dialogue his theory of the externalising and fragmentary subject with Niccolai's multi-authored and split collages. In part III, I turn to *Greenwich*, exploring how Niccolai attends to the trope of the globetrotter through her schematic map-poems, combining toponymic wordplay with the implied spatial representation which the poems encode. In this collection, the adoption of a 'hyperreflexive grammar' emerges even more acutely. In the invocation of an extreme form of 'looking back,' Niccolai's reader is transported through a multiplicity of discursive levels: from the language of verse, to the implied map, through to the material world the map represents.

¹⁸ Hill, 'Poems as Objects: The Visual Poetry of Giulia Niccolai,' p. 135-6.

**Alfredo Giuliani's *Schizomorfismo* and Louis Sass' Hyperreflexivity:
Metaphysical Madness, Schizophrenic Departures**

In the theoretical discussions and debates taking place in the inner circles of the Gruppo 63, the ideas linking syntactic and generic disorder in poetry with interpretations on the state of the world diverge considerably. The extent to which poetic experimentation addresses seismic shifts in the perceivable world sheds light on our reading of Niccolai. Does neo avant-garde discord imply a correlation with the degenerating and broken social structures of the real world, and in attesting to such disorder, democratise responses to it as a sort of disruptive realism? Or, conversely, is this disorder read as the suggestion that reality is never truly accessible, sounding the death of all ideologies, as ideology cannot live without some relative grasp on reality?

To return to the literary theory of Alfredo Giuliani, in his 1965 elaboration of his literary device *schizomorfismo*, he attempts to synthesise the experience of schizophrenia (only ever externally perceived) with the formal capabilities of literature as both experimental and reflective of reality.¹⁹ He describes *schizomorfismo* as having a revelatory function, of throwing off the deceptive cloak of descriptive language and temporal clarity, and revealing an 'objective' anxiety expressed in linguistic disorder. Through this impulse of 'smascheramento,' *schizomorphic* poetry 'exasperates irrationality,'²⁰ an ambiguous statement which appears to both preserve and surpass the irrational encounter.

In exploring the areas of reason, rationality and logic, he subverts certain expected interpretations; rather than positioning *schizomorfismo* within the order of the irrational and illogical, he declares it 'una logica del pensare corretto.'²¹ He embraces the quality of challenging literature as having 'una struttura arbitraria e maniaca'²² but approaches this characteristic in terms of what he terms 'realismo dell'invenzione'²³; continually teasing out the possibilities of an objectively contorted literary structure. He states: 'se non c'è conciliazione con la società, e

¹⁹ Giuliani, 1965 introduction, *I Novissimi*, p. 9.

²⁰ Giuliani, 1961 introduction, *I Novissimi*, p. 18.

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 25.

²² Giuliani, 'Il dibattito,' p. 374.

²³ *ibid.*, p. 376.

neppure convivenza pacifica con le ideologie della realtà, la poesia deve porsi nel rigore dell'anarchia, quale estremo tentativo di conferire un senso all'insensatezza quotidiana.'²⁴ Again, the unexpected role of poetry to counter the perceived senselessness of the everyday world with anarchical forms feeds into a process which might be considered an extremist rationality, despite appearances of unreason, illogicality, and irrationality. Non-linearity is *not* equated with nonsense, but with truth. The role of poetry as societal truth-teller, not via social realism or naturalism, but through discontinuous and non-coherent form, is an opposing rationale to oneiric irrationality as personal or latent expression. Squaring anarchical, protest literary forms with depersonalisation and estrangement, then, to follow Giuliani's reasoning, constitutes a highly objective, rational approach. As we have seen in the writing of Robin Suleiman, the miscegenation of visual and verbal art forms (as well as the confusion of genres within literary forms) can be understood as belonging to the orders of the perverse and the anarchical; I argue that visuality in Niccolai's poetry constitutes an anarchical role in the face of this everyday senselessness. The paradoxical cycle of rationality and irrationality, and its attendant development in hyperreflexivity, is, I argue, fundamental to both Giuliani's and Niccolai's poetry and critical writing.

A juncture may be identified between Giuliani's schizomorfismo and Louis Sass' category of hyperreflexivity, namely in the exteriorising aspects of their theories. Sass' thesis holds that the structures of schizophrenic expression have affinities with the modernist emphasis on the form of artworks, and on their particularly hyperreflexive attribute of 'looking back' at the self. Sass, needless to say writing from a diverse perspective to Giuliani, is at pains to draw attention to the sophistication and logic of non-linear art forms by shedding light on their affinities with schizoid thinking. The radically disorientating effects of *schizomorfismo* arise from an *accurate* depiction of consciousness, through the poetic conjuring of things rather than ideas. The externalising impulse in hyperreflexive thought, the shift from authorial centre to scattered periphery, is succinctly captured by Giuliani in a later essay, 'L'avventura dentro i segni,' where he 'identifies poetry as an activity in which 'one looks at oneself writing'

²⁴ Giuliani, 1965 introduction, *I Novissimi*, p. 7.

(‘guardarsi scrivere’) and, at the same time, ‘is looked at by language’ (‘essere guardati dal linguaggio’)²⁵ The essence of the hyperreflexive, then, the extreme observation of the self from the exterior, continually reverberates throughout the critical work of Giuliani. In my consideration of the relationship between literary schizophrenia and visual *neoavanguardia* poetry, Sass’ elaboration of the hyperreflexive and hyperrational turn is, I believe, particularly suggestive in attempting to parse some of Giuliani’s more obscure theoretical concepts, in this case, *schizomorfismo*.

In an opposing interpretation of discordant and fragmented literary forms, critic Angelo Guglielmi takes an altogether more doubtful approach to the ability of literature to comment on or access reality. Rather than represent the split world (and in the context of this study, the split mind as its microcosm), the extreme discord of experimental literature taps instead into the unreliability of representation and of language, and the resultant futility of any ideology: ‘È caratteristica propria dell’avanguardia rifiutarsi a esprimere una qualsiasi idea sul mondo, resistere a ogni tentazione definitoria.’²⁶ Such an approach results in Guglielmi’s urging of contemporary avant-garde writing to utilise pastiche and differing cognitive levels as literary devices. He advocates authors who put into practice:

[...] una letteratura di pastiche, cioè una letteratura che, essendo un intreccio di modi espressivi e conoscitivi differenti, ha forzosamente una apparenza torrentizia, ridondante, impura.²⁷

These techniques, for Guglielmi, shock and dislodge expectations of the reader, demystifying all relationships to perceived reality. Does the invocation, then, of ‘schizoid’ thought processes in experimental poetry, however formal and thematic in nature, lead to an understanding of the world as split, or as inaccessible? Do Niccolai’s cut-up works reveal the shattered but authentic underlying structure of the world, or reveal the futility of linguistic representation and ideologies which are dependent on it? This question brings together elements

²⁵ A. Giuliani, L’avventura dentro i segni’, in *Le droghe di Marsiglia*, Adelphi, 1977, p. 21-22, taken from: Picchione, *The New Avant-Garde in Italy*, p. 15.

²⁶ Guglielmi, ‘Il dibattito,’ p. 376.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 377.

of the Gruppo 63's theoretical body of work with Niccolai's praxis. My argument follows that Niccolai's inventive experimentation, involving the nonsensical ordering of cut-up fragments, penetrates the slippery grammar of hyperreflexive 'split form' not fully in the service of either interpretation, but rather in the service of play as a discursive process in its own right.

As we shall examine, the *già scritti* of *other* critics, writers, cartographers, and lexicographers, have not been fully rehabilitated in the verse of Niccolai; nor do they possess, in their decontextualised state, any resemblance to their original state and function; they float in a liminal space away from grounded signification and context. Rather than 'revealing' either the true chaotic structure of the world or, conversely, argue for the futility of any representation, Niccolai's works generate a new syntax out of the artifacts of older writing, a novel product which enacts and dramatises a bizarre way of thinking. Niccolai's schemas, I believe, should not be cast within the post-Structuralist mould of Guglielmi, whereby their fragmentation belies their inherent futility: these *già scritti* are decontextualised for a reason. Rather, I contest, their liminal nature *enacts* a performance of the uncanny, of the 'beyond rational', so as to processually 'enter' into the (very much non-futile) idiom of the atomised subject.

Niccolai's collections *Humpty Dumpty*, *Sostituzione*, *Dai Novissimi*, *Webster Poems*, and *Greenwich* provide a rich site for the exploration of literary hyperreflexivity and hyperrationality. The particular emphasis on the cut-up method lends itself to an examination of multiple points touched on by Giuliani and Sass, while transcending either critic's interpretation of the poetic encounter with 'schizoid' thought processes. Despite marked disparities in tone and form throughout these collections, I argue for a consistent disengagement from experience, dislocation of a locatable subject, blurring of genre, with a simultaneous focus on process over encapsulated meaning. The hyperreflexive turn is intrinsically linked with the demythologisation of the author-function, whereby the formation of poetic language is exterior to the poem, producing a defamiliarised effect. In the engagement with the visual and material aspects of the cut-up method, and the affinities with experimental collage, these collections, I propose, extend the possibilities of visual-verbal aesthetics to processually enact a 'schizoid,' hyperreflexive grammar in the poetic form.

Part I

Nonsense, Hyperrationality and Play in Image-Text Poems

Humpty Dumpty meets Alice: Intertextual Play and Puzzle-Solving

Niccolai's 1969 concrete poetry collection *Humpty Dumpty* is a compelling exploration of the possibilities of verbal-visual hyperreflexive intertextuality. The collection initiates a dialogue from its opening epigraph, inviting the reader to process the dictionary convention of deferral from one term to another:

A term whose meaning is recorded under the entry of some other term is (if it seems to require separate entry at its own alphabetical place) entered thus:

Desdemona, n. See Othello

Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (Explanatory notes)²⁸

Despite not being Niccolai's only use of 'linguaggio noleggiato'²⁹ from the Webster Dictionary (we observe a programmatic use of dictionary forms again in *Webster Poems*), Niccolai illustrates a certain fascination with intertextuality and functional language in this quotation. In an elliptical and ironic manner, Niccolai sets up the terms of discourse for the collection: the processes of representation and signification, deferral among signs, and the hyperreflexive results of such an engagement. Beyond this reference to word association is a coded feminist assertion of the gendered bias of even the most 'neutral' phraseology of the dictionary. The methodology of the dictionary, then, is probed and unsettled in *Humpty Dumpty*, just as, it will be argued, literary criticism is disrupted in *Sostituzione* and *Dai Novissimi*. The traditional children's rhyme 'Humpty Dumpty' provides a clue to the kind of ludic exercise being performed: we remember that the egg-shaped Humpty falls off a wall, and 'all the king's

²⁸ *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1961, in: Niccolai, *Harry's Bar e altre poesie 1969-1980*, p. 10.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 105.

horses and all the king's men / couldn't put Humpty together again.' Just like the broken shards of Humpty, Niccolai's cryptic verbal-visual literary pieces resist restoration and rationalisation.

The collection combines extracts from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871) with concrete poems in a variety of typographical formations, allowing for varying degrees of reciprocity and exchange between them. The humorous and whimsical effects are created by the co-operation of verbal and visual elements, generating a type of poetic punning which is based on the dual modality of the representations. For example, the word 'cheese' is stretched and curved upwards into a grinning 'smile' (fig. 6); referencing, of course, Alice's encounter with the mischievous Cheshire cat. The word 'juggler' is read vertically as the letters balance precariously one on top of the other (fig. 7). Along with an extract describing the gradual disappearance of the cat, starting from his tail, we read 'Tail off,' progressing from large to small font across the phrase (fig. 8). Similarly, after 'The table was a large one,' we observe the same phrase but with an oversized number '1' laid out horizontally like a table (fig. 6). There follows an extract from *Alice*:

The Queen bawled out
"He's **murdering**
the time!"

Opposite we see a response in which 'Kill time' is brought to life, with an 'I' brandished as a sword, slashing the word 'time' (fig. 10). Following an extract where Alice takes a jar from a shelf, which turns out to be empty, the opposite page has the words 'a jar' appear repeated in rows and columns. The final iteration of 'a jar' is contracted to 'ajar', allowing a small space to appear; like a door which is ajar, a literal entry point into the block of text (fig. 11). These literalised puns function on varying levels of perception: they appear on the page materially and visually, are read verbally, and processed intellectually. Furthermore, *Humpty Dumpty* makes playful use of verbal rearrangements and permutations for humorous effect. For example, in an extract from *Through the Looking-Glass* (fig. 12):

The Red Queen shook her head.

“You may call it **nonsense**
if you like”, she said,
“but **I**’ve heard nonsense,
compared with which
that would be as sensible
as a **dictionary!**”

The echo-response consists of the word ‘dictionary’ scrambled into individual letters and ordered into columns by letter, then reformed at the bottom of the page thus:

y
ry
ary
nary a word

This operation functions as a puzzle to be visually deciphered, and in doing so deconstructs the medieval Latin roots of ‘dictionary,’ ‘dictio’ (speaking) and ‘-arium’ (room, place). From ‘speaking place’ to the English ‘nary a word,’ the poem cuts across linguistic and etymological boundaries, toying with rules and presenting semantic polar opposites through clever manipulation. The binaries ‘nonsense / sense’ and ‘speaking / not speaking’ are staged using a visually-oriented device which decentres conceptions of language as stable and closed. The ‘irrational’ aspects of the poem, then, are intrinsic to its rational metaliterary operation. *Humpty Dumpty* codes within itself the tools for its own deconstruction and unravelling; ‘nonsense,’ perhaps, points the way towards sense.

In taking Carroll’s celebrated expressions of nonsense and stimulating new visual responses to his often thought-provoking ontological puzzles, Niccolai engages in an intertextual and reflexive exercise. In re-presenting an extant work, and reordering concepts from Carroll in novel visual formulations, Niccolai initiates the dislocating and destabilising process observed in later collections. In a manner similar to the deferral of Desdemona onto Othello, Carroll’s nonsensical tropes are displaced and moderated by Niccolai’s visual interpretations. The

hyperrational drive is apparent in teasing out etymological inconsistencies and idiosyncrasies, while embracing absurdity in cases of excessive literalism. *Humpty Dumpty*, as its title suggests, is fragmentary and contingent, pointing to texts contained within itself and not offering any bounded messages other than drawing attention to the procedures of creation. Giammei comments on the links between Humpty Dumpty's Carrollian roots, '[il] nonsense vittoriano' and an oppositional response to contemporary visual overstimulation:

Il nonsense, nella sua rivelatrice transcodificazione concreta dotata di rigore filologico, si fa dunque con Niccolai strumento di difesa dall'insensatezza delle immagini contemporanee e dalla nozione pigramente acquisita di significato.³⁰

The subversive linguistic and thematic elements of Carroll's literature for children is captured alongside its illustrative and visual features; Niccolai's *Humpty Dumpty* grasps the uncanny familiarity of the logic of Wonderland, while using the visual image to maximise the effect of this extended, upside-down logic. The literalised play with metaphor and locution, whilst straight out of the Carrollian playbook, enacts at yet another remove rationality stretched to breaking point, fulfilling a 'hyperrational grammar.' The functioning of Humpty Dumpty relies on a mutual understanding of the visual mode and the subversive suspension of 'normal' reason, in order to be appreciated as a meta-text. The hyperrational here relies on the interaction of words with pictures, and the visual-verbal, conversely, relies on the reader's assuming a hyperrational mind-set to truly 'read' the poems. I now turn to 'word collage' as another technique in which visual and textual processes work together to produce a 'hyperreflexive grammar.'

³⁰ Giammei, 'La bussola di Alice,' p. 43.

Part II

Word Collage and Hyperreflexive Grammar: The Process is the Message

Niccolai's use of the cut-up method is, undoubtedly, linked with the visual order that permeates her work in general. This visual awareness is overtly demonstrated in the photographic precision of her only novel *Il grande angolo*, the verbal-visual puns of *Humpty Dumpty* and the ekphrastic invention of *Russky Salad Ballads*. In *Sostituzione*, *Dai Novissimi*, and *Webster poems* the visual framework, although more conceptual than concrete, is no less germane in Niccolai's elaboration of a distinctively hyperreflexive poetics.

Niccolai's development of a hyperreflexive grammar is closely linked, I will argue, with how these visual aspects of the cut-up method are carried out. I define the 'cut-up' method as a literary method where text, usually from an external source, is cut, reorganised (either at random or with deliberation) and pasted in a new order. I argue it is Niccolai's *process* of creating these kinds of texts, not the finished result, which has an affinity with the hyperreflexive idiom. This process, which I believe has an analogy in visual collage, taps into the odd grammar which pushes the reader to confront the nonsensical and the unreasonable.

Niccolai wrote the article 'La noia della insensibilità' for the September 1968 issue of *Quindici*.³¹ The piece presents a passionate defense of play, imagination, pleasure, instinct, and ambiguity, in the face of what Niccolai perceived, in that moment, as encroaching repression, submissiveness, rigidity, and rationality. She points to three authors (highly dissimilar, by her own token) - Burroughs, Sade and Reich - who are in her estimation 'eversivi ... rivoluzionari ... (Diremmo anche profetici),' and whose literature reveals the 'stupefying' effects of societal restrictions on individuals, reduced to 'polli da allevamento'³²:

³¹ G. Niccolai, 'La noia della insensibilità,' *Il Verri*, no. 12, September 1968: in Balestrini, N. (ed.), *Quindici: Una rivista e il Sessantotto*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 2008, pp. 324-327.

³² *ibid.*, p. 326.

Caracolliamo ammaestrati (hoplà!) bisognosi d'approvazione come miti bestioni da circo verso lusinghe, valori e conquiste che in realtà sono trappole per il nostro narcisismo e la nostra insicurezza. [...] Rigidi e razionali, non conosciamo più l'abbandono e la confidenza; guardiamo con superiorità e accondiscendenza a tutto ciò che è "piacere", fantasia, gioco, convinti che sia giusto e nel naturale corso delle cose il fatto che ci siano preclusi.³³

The aforementioned authors show us, according to Niccolai, the extent of our own inhibitions, our terror in the face of natural instinct, along with an 'inability to face the conflicts inherent in ambivalence.'³⁴ What are instead extolled, by implication, are incongruity, illogic, inner impulses, ambiguity, liminality, aporia, etc., resonating with Louis Sass' description of primordial, Dionysian 'alienation from reason' or related conceptions of romantic-mystical irrationality.

This idea, of the 'revelatory' potential of subversive literature, is certainly aligned with the neo avant-garde theory of 'smascheramento,' along with an increased value placed on aporia, incongruity, and a sensitivity to alterity. I wish to draw attention, however, to the particular critique of the 'rigidi e razionali' in society, and 'l'incapacità di far fronte ai conflitti delle ambivalenze.' Despite having much in common with the contemporaneous countercultural resistance to repression in all forms, Niccolai's praxis reveals a subtle deviation from this paradigm, in how it engages with logocentrism and logic. This ties into my reading of Niccolai's own works. The paradox of Niccolai's poetry is that, while it seemingly presents poetic irrationality, this is in fact backwards engineered from a hyperreflexive hyperrationality: a *hyperrationality* falling into *senselessness*. What follows, I argue, is a rationality extended to breaking point, or a (quite literal) *reductio ad absurdum*. I will explore this ludic paradox in more detail when considering Niccolai's 'odd grammars.'

In many of her poetic works and critical addenda, Niccolai explicitly references Gertrude Stein, who pioneered the technique of breaking the syntax of

³³ *ibid.*
³⁴ *ibid.*

text, allowing it to adopt new meanings.³⁵ The writer who was perhaps most associated with the cut-up method in the postwar period was American novelist William S. Burroughs, whose critical and fictional works were published, and were the subject of articles, on more than one occasion in the journal *Il Verri* in the period 1968-1969,³⁶ and in *Quindici* in 1968.³⁷ Niccolai later cites Burroughs, Kerouac and Beat literature of the 1960s as cultural touchstones, particularly commenting on her unique bilingual relationship with American writing.³⁸

The links between the literary cut-up and the visual art collage have been revisited over the course of the twentieth-century.³⁹ In the postwar period, the role of the literary cut-up as an analogue to collage in the visual arts was readily acknowledged by Burroughs. Accompanied by his friend Brion Gysin, who was reported to have proclaimed ‘writing is fifty years behind painting,’⁴⁰ Burroughs theorised and experimented with found phrases and scrambled pre-existing texts.

³⁵ In fact Niccolai translated Stein’s *Geographical History of America* into Italian, and discusses her literary influence in: L. Del Giudice, P. Verdicchio and P. Vangelisti, Intervista con Giulia Niccolai: *I think I’m becoming Japanese, Carte Italiane*, 1(6), 1985, p. 1, 9. Her *Prima e dopo la Stein* (1978-1980) is a collection of prose-poetic vignettes revealing uncanny scenarios through interlinguistic play.

³⁶ See *Il Verri*, no. 29, December 1968, for a special issue on Burroughs, in particular the articles: D. Manganotti, ‘William Burroughs, lo scrittore del silenzio’; Un’intervista con William Burroughs (originally printed in *Paris Review* no. 35, Autumn 1965), here pp. 37-64; reprinting of short story by Burroughs, *They Do Not Always Remember* (Argosy, March, 1967) translated by Manganotti, pp. 65-67; extracts from Burroughs and Gysin, *The Third Mind*, later compiled and published in 1977; Marshall McLuhan, ‘Appunti su Burroughs,’ pp. 89-94, translated by D. Manganotti from *Notes on Burroughs* (originally published in *The Nation*, 28 December 1964, pp. 517-519).

³⁷ See ‘L’alterazione romanzesca: Intervista con William Burroughs,’ *Quindici*, no. 12, September 1968, pp. vii-viii.

³⁸ See: L. Del Giudice et al., Intervista con Giulia Niccolai: *I think I’m becoming Japanese*, p. 12. When asked about the influence of the ‘beat generation’ on her poetry, Niccolai responds: Io avevo già letto alcuni “beat.” Avevo conosciuto brevissimamente Kerouac a un pranzo a Roma, e ... È molto difficile rispondere a questa domanda. Dalla loro vita, più che la poesia stessa, è stato significativo per me un certo comportamento. Il fatto che, per esempio, tre o quattro di loro son diventati buddisti, mi ha fatto molto pensare e capire molte cose. Dopo però c’è una grossissima differenza tra quello che loro hanno rappresentato in America nel momento della guerra del Vietnam e da come sono rimbalzati in Europa. A me, essendo bilingue, sono forse rimbalzati in un modo ancora più personale. Per esempio, Burroughs è una persona che mi affascina enormemente, se si considera Burroughs un “beat” in America.’

³⁹ Adriano Spatola, in his critical overview of the history of visual and concrete poetry, *Verso la poesia totale* (1969), discusses ‘poem-collages,’ concrete typographical works that are fragmented and spliced to the point of illegibility (including his own *Zeroglifici* within this category). Spatola compares the strategy of poets who use typographical material this way with the role of the ‘bricoleur,’ one who is faced with an infinite store of signs, materials, and ‘già scritti.’ (Spatola, *Verso la poesia totale*, p. 88, 90, 92.) See also Sanguineti’s 1961 ‘Poesia informale?’ where he discusses borrowing terminology from the visual arts, for example, ‘collage filologico’ and ‘action poetry’ and applying it in poetry criticism. (Sanguineti, ‘Poesia informale?’ *I Novissimi*, p. 201.)

⁴⁰ W. S. Burroughs, ‘It Belongs to the Cucumbers’ (1976), in *The Adding Machine: Selected Essays*, New York, Arcade Publishing, 1993, p. 52.

Although originating in Dadaist and Surrealist experimentation of the early twentieth century, the process of recycling ‘found’ text in literature, and found fragments in the visual arts, experienced a resurgence in postwar culture. Burroughs uses the term ‘montage’, then, to refer to the process of cutting up texts and rearranging them on the page. In the essay ‘The Fall of Art,’ he surmised that, in the same manner that the advent of photography forced painting to reject representation and to experiment with new formal techniques and aesthetic goals, writing had similar work to do.⁴¹

The cut-up, then, arises out of a need to set new horizons in writing, to consider a novel mode of perceiving the world, a ‘montage of fragments’: ‘Consciousness *is* a cut-up; life is a cut-up. Every time you walk down the street or look out the window, your stream of consciousness is cut by random factors.’⁴² Although I believe the cut-up method of Niccolai stems from a strategy of distancing language from self and externalising bounded subjectivity rather than the kind of realism of consciousness Burroughs appears to be approaching, the synaesthetic manner in which he jumps between descriptions of cut-ups in writing, and montage in the visual arts, is telling. Burroughs, in his consideration of both of these forms, advances a compelling verbal-visual mutability.

The visual and spatial rupture created by deliberately disjointed textual fragments is tied to the *semiotic* rupture engendered by the art of the cut-up. Burroughs goes on to elaborate on the fruits of his creative journey with Gysin:

Subsequently we cut up the Bible, Shakespeare, Rimbaud, our own writing, anything in sight. We made thousands of cut-ups. When you cut and rearrange words on a page, new words emerge. And words change meaning. The word “drafted,” as into the Army, moved into a context of blueprints or contracts, gives an altered meaning. New words and altered meanings are implicit in the process of cutting up, and could have been anticipated.⁴³

⁴¹ W. S. Burroughs, ‘The Fall of Art,’ in *The Adding Machine: Selected Essays*, p. 60-61.

⁴² *ibid.*, p. 61.

⁴³ Burroughs, ‘It Belongs to the Cucumbers,’ p. 52.

Burroughs thus invokes polysemy, or the condition of having multiple meanings. The intertextual process creates new meaning within given texts, or brings to light previously unconsidered meaningful relations between words, phrases, and content. Edward S. Robinson offers an insightful introduction to Burroughs' use of cut-up techniques, outlining both the formal innovations and their historical precedents. In tracing the differences between the historical avant-garde's automatic and chance writing methods, and their postwar iterations, Robinson raises a pertinent point about the role of the cut-up in the real world:

The Dadaists and Surrealists explored these techniques and used the mechanism to invoke the unexpected through juxtaposition and chance, creating a fantastic reality outside the everyday world. The key difference between the works of Burroughs and Gysin and their forbears was that they sought to create and explore a compelling reality within the everyday world. While Ernst and his associates looked to create something new from their collision of images and objects, [in] post-Surrealism the aim would be to use the impact to decode what was already there.⁴⁴

Robin Lyndenberg details the adoption by Burroughs and Gysin of T.S. Eliot's phrase 'Who is the third who walks beside you?' to describe the 'collaborative consciousness' which arises out of their cut-up process, an invisible third position which could generate new connections, 'a third mind free of the restrictions of context, culture and subjectivity.'⁴⁵ In *The Third Mind*, Burroughs states that 'cut-ups make explicit a psychosensory process that is going on all the time anyway.'⁴⁶

In the Burroughs interview published in *Quindici* in 1968 (printed directly after Nicolai's own 'La noia della insensibilità'), he discusses the cut-up technique at great length, claiming its uniquely generative potency, the possibilities for 'infinite variations' in images, and the ability to create new connections between images and words. In cutting up text, the new associations

⁴⁴ E. S. Robinson, *Shift Linguals: Cut-Up Narratives from William S. Burroughs to the Present*, Amsterdam/New York, Rodopi, 2011, p. 9.

⁴⁵ R. Lyndenberg, *Word Cultures: Radical Theory and Practice in William S. Burroughs' Fiction*, Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1987, p. 45.

⁴⁶ W. Burroughs and B. Gysin, *The Third Mind*, Viking Press, 1978, p. 4.

made between ‘images’ work to ‘expand the field of vision’ of the individual.⁴⁷ The explicitly *visual* nature of text alteration is at the forefront of the *Quindici* article, as well as a contemporary, countercultural rejection of the tyranny of logical linguistic constructions:

Non è il modo in cui succedono le cose, e sono dell’idea che tutta la costruzione aristotelica sia uno dei più grossi guai nella civiltà occidentale. I cut-ups tendono a distruggere questo modo di pensare.⁴⁸

In aiming to bring writing closer to the fragmentary nature of real life, Burroughs’ methods emphasised the process of writing and its sensory, visual analogues in how reality is perceived. This model has its roots, then, in a synaesthetic, stream-of-consciousness paradigm of modernist writing. A similar dichotomy in interpreting the significance of concrete collages is observed in Martin Puchner’s study of the political photomontage; whereby collaging readymade images can be read as reflecting the chaos of the world as it is, or as generating a new reality through juxtaposition.⁴⁹ Niccolai’s cut-up works, however, do not neatly fit the model of either ‘decoding’ observable reality, or juxtaposing arbitrary items to ‘invoke the unexpected.’ I contest that the fragmentation and reconstitution of critical prose, the dictionary, and the geographical atlas forges a ‘code’ of its own, to enter into the well-trodden ground of institutional normality and disrupt the certainties assumed within them. This ‘code’ is what I have termed ‘hyperreflexive grammar,’ an oddly familiar but ungraspable, hyperrational cipher which explodes the systemic principles of representational processes.

Literary critic Marianne DeKoven approaches the issue with the aim of positioning Burroughs between modernist and postmodernist templates; while acknowledging the stream-of-consciousness novel as an exemplar of a high modernist model of literature as truth-seeking, she ultimately posits Burroughs’ cut-up within a ‘democratising, deauthorising’ model of postmodern ‘participatory’ culture. Her central argument places Burroughs’ cut-up operations

⁴⁷ ‘L’alterazione romanzesca: Intervista con William Burroughs,’ pp. vii-viii.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. viii.

⁴⁹ Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-gardes*, pp. 160-1. I discuss Puchner’s account of collage in full in chapter four.

firmly within a conception of literature as ‘activity,’ more broadly identifying ‘... a [...] general sense of the literary in the twentieth century as a locus of the *activity* of unanswering interrogation.’⁵⁰ Although DeKoven’s subject here is Burroughs, the thesis of the ‘literary as activity’ is very suggestive in relation to Niccolai (and the Gruppo 63 in general) in that it provides multiple hermeneutic possibilities for the cut-up technique, just as art historians have disagreed over the intentionality of plastic collage.⁵¹ In situating the cut-up as participatory and deauthorising, DeKoven is aligned with many theories of the Gruppo 63 and Novissimi, notably the ‘riduzione dell’io’ and the *opera aperta*.

Alfredo Giuliani makes the connection between textual and plastic ‘montage’ in his comments on Nanni Balestrini’s cut-up poetry, for example, in his notes to *Apologo dell’Evaso* and in Balestrini’s verse generally. In the 1961 introduction to *I Novissimi*, he describes Balestrini’s fascination with all kinds of materials:

[...] come i biglietti scaduti, le banconote svalutate, i vecchi avvisi economici, i morti titoli di giornale dei collages di Kurt Schwitters, le parole già scritte che Balestrini preleva dal fuggevole mondo quotidiano sono pezzetti di realtà di per sé insignificanti e destinati a scomparire nella ruota del consumo; recuperati e sorpresi nella loro inattesa libertà e capacità di sopravvivenza, essi vengono montati nel più stupefacente e ordinato disordine che si possa immaginare.⁵²

Balestrini’s praxis is founded on shifts between material and textual sources, involving the extraction of external scraps from high and low cultures, indicating that his aforementioned ‘orderly disorder’ aligns acutely with the notion of the literary as a activity, rather than as a closed product. Niccolai’s own ‘orderly disorder’ treats ready-made texts in a visually inspired collagistic manner, invoking the artisan who deals with materials, and raising the question as to

⁵⁰ M. DeKoven, ‘The Literary as Activity in Postmodernity’ in E. Beaumont Bissell (ed.), *The Question of Literature: The Place of the Literary in Contemporary Theory*, Manchester University Press, 2002, p. 106.

⁵¹ See, for example, chapter ‘In the Name of Picasso’ in R. E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths*, MIT Press, 1986; and B. Buchloh, ‘Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art,’ *Artforum*, September 1982.

⁵² Giuliani, 1961 introduction, *I Novissimi*, p. 34.

whether we are speaking of a ‘revealing’ or ‘generating’ cut-up manoeuvre. Giuliani, likewise, was highly sensitive to the issue of process and the subject in his own work, and his description of ‘gestural and non-conceptual thoughts’ is readily associated with the notion of materiality in literature:

Perciò il discorso tende a manifestarsi in forma di pensieri non concettuali ma “gestuali”, non preordinati, non dilatanti il già pensato. Io non voglio esprimere me stesso, ma l’esperienza che il “me stesso” fa rispecchiando e anche *resistendo* al rispecchiamento, determinandosi *sopra* la determinazione storica. L’esperienza non è risultato, è biografia della coscienza. In altre parole, suppongo che l’aspirazione delle mie poesie sia di far diventare i pensieri visibili come cose, non quali argomenti.⁵³

This conception of the material, the ‘parola-oggetto,’ lends itself to the discussion of textuality as ‘activity,’ by breaking down the metaphorical and symbolic functions of the literary, in order to more directly access the word as a value and unit itself. In the case of Niccolai, the ‘activity’ being undertaken is that of cutting up the text of prose critics and rearranging the fragments as verse. To refer again to DeKoven’s democratising model of ‘activity’ in literature, the idea of the sentence as belonging to everyone, and thus its openness to being broken into its constituent units, can be considered, I argue, alongside Giuliani’s phenomenological idea of poetry, as directly grasping consciousness as a series of things rather than ideas or concepts. This possibility considers the processual function of literature: not the replication of pre-conceived and packaged ideas, but rather the capture of ‘gestural’ thoughts, the process consciousness itself undergoes without the intervention of external description. I argue that Niccolai takes this distancing effect even further, by completely removing hints of authorial ‘consciousness’ or traces of the God-author-function. DeKoven notes the undermining of the ‘priest-like power of the modernist artist’⁵⁴ in cut-up literature:

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 25.

⁵⁴ DeKoven, ‘The Literary as Activity in Postmodernity,’ p. 119.

[...] the cut-up/fold-in method works through postmodern pastiche, based on the deauthorisation of the author, the vitiation of the uniqueness of the authorial literary voice, and therefore of the authenticity upon which modernism depends.⁵⁵

It is not within the aim of this chapter to explicitly propose the categorisation of Niccolai's work within a 'modernist' or 'postmodernist' paradigm as much as explore the significance of the cut-up as a tool and a method. My aim, rather, is to examine the visual elements which permeate this type of cut-up, through affinities with plastic art-collage, the transgressive possibilities of the material word-object, as well as the blurring of spatial and poetic spheres in the toponym-coded map-poem. These visual aspects contribute to the creation of a hyperreflexive grammar, not merely through their estranging, nonsensical effects, but through the analogy of the word-collage with the fragmented author-function. The cut-up, then, emerges as the mode through which these collections of Niccolai reveal various embedded discourses surrounding hyperreflexivity, visuality and poetic processes; the collaging process, in other words, constitutes both the visual mode and the processual mode by which the 'grammar' of hyperreflexivity can be comprehended.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 113.

Sostituzione and Dai Novissimi

In examining elements of hyperreflexivity in Niccolai, I turn to two collections where I argue that language, conventionally considered an intrinsic aspect of self, is represented as an external process. In *Dai Novissimi* (1970-1972) and *Sostituzione* (1972-1974), through the intertextual method of the cut-up, the hyperreflexive object is the trajectory of language itself. The practice of the cut-up, where text is scrambled and reorganised either through chance or strategic techniques, allows the linguistic process itself to be the driving force of poetic realisation.

Dai Novissimi is presented as a series of nine short, single-verse poems, yet the material is almost completely taken from critical essays and notes from the original anthology *I Novissimi* (1961); in particular, Alfredo Giuliani's commentary notes to Edoardo Sanguineti's *Laborintus* and Nanni Balestrini's 'Apologo dell'evaso.'⁵⁶ In an introductory note to the 1975 edition of the collections, Niccolai briefly reviews the work of the original *Novissimi*, its 'internal tension of language' and the place of Giuliani's critical essays; she then prefaces *Dai Novissimi*, noting the work consists of cut-ups from Giuliani's literary criticism. The poems are, in her words, 'directly connected to their work but using, instead of the imaginative material of their poetry, the critical one which had served to explain their writing.'⁵⁷

Sostituzione also uses critical material in this way, in part derived from Fausto Curi's collection of essays *Metodo, storia, strutture*.⁵⁸ Such a procedure serves, Niccolai elucidates, to 'create an internal tension in the language, allowing the reader to experience the same sort of excitement one has in reading a philosophical text.'⁵⁹ In the case of both *Dai Novissimi* and *Sostituzione* I have

⁵⁶ Giuliani (ed.), *I Novissimi: Poesie per gli anni '60*. I note here that besides extracts from Giuliani's notes to Sanguineti's *Laborintus* (pp. 95-96), and Balestrini's 'Apologo dell'evaso' (pp. 137-138), *Dai Novissimi* no. 3: 'Dall'esterno il motivo adeguato' includes short fragments from Antonio Porta's 1960 essay 'Poesia e poetica' (pp. 193-5), and Balestrini's 1960 'Linguaggio e opposizione' (pp. 196-7). A full dissection of the sources used in these poems is, however, beyond the scope of this chapter.

⁵⁷ G. Niccolai, *Substitution*, Eng. trans. G. Niccolai and P. Vangelisti, Los Angeles and Fairfax, The Red Hill Press, 1975. The cited introduction appears only in this 1975 Italian-English facing text. The edition I will refer to henceforth is *Giulia Niccolai: Harry's Bar e altre poesie 1969-1980*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 1981.

⁵⁸ F. Curi, *Metodo, storia, strutture*, Turin, Paravia, 1971.

⁵⁹ Niccolai, *Substitution*, introduction.

located the majority of the precise source texts across a variety of essays and articles by Giuliani, Curi and Marcello Pera, most of which had been published (with the exception of the original *I Novissimi*) in the period from 1969 to 1974, contemporaneous with Niccolai's dates for her collections.⁶⁰

In a 1985 interview with the author intriguingly titled *I think I'm becoming Japanese*, Niccolai discusses bilingually⁶¹ her poetry and the evolution of her poetic practice from the early cut-ups to later works, including the later *Greenwich* and beyond: '[...] *Substitution*, which are some of the first poems I wrote, in which I don't say a thing of my own. [...] I realized that, at a certain moment, I got the desire to write poetry, but evidently I was either too scared or not ready to say anything, so I chose to do the *Greenwich* poems and *Substitution*. As I go on in *Greenwich*, I say more. I become more and more verbal and make statements. It took from '69 to '80, as I looked for my own style, my own form.'⁶² As I go on to argue, I believe the very act of not (explicitly) saying 'a thing of my own' is precisely the functioning of hyperreflexivity, revealing that the cut-ups possess greater layers of complexity than are at first acknowledged.

Niccolai indicates there is a calculated schema at play in these collections. I argue that, beyond discussions of 'self-conscious' literature, an invocation of hyperreflexive thinking is a key element in the creation of this linguistic internal tension and association between reading poetry and philosophy. The cut-up foregrounds issues relating to formal correlations between disorganised thinking, the jumbling of textual fragments, and the significance of 'nonsense' that may arise out of the procedure. The suggestive possibilities of recycled and

⁶⁰ A further detail on the source texts can be found in Rebecca West's chapter 'Giulia Niccolai: A Wide-Angle Portrait,' where West quotes Niccolai on *Dai Novissimi* and *Sostituzione*: '... sono diversissime da tutte le altre. Infatti sono dei collages dai testi critici dell'antologia dei Novissimi e di altri saggi critici (ricordo un libro di Fausto Curi di cui però non ricordo il nome).' Cited in West's email correspondence with Niccolai, 15 August 2005, in: West, 'Giulia Niccolai: A Wide-Angle Portrait,' p. 220. The 'saggi critici' that I have identified in the course of my research include those by Fausto Curi (included in the book *Metodo, storia, strutture*), which I will itemise when looking more closely at Niccolai's collections. In Niccolai's *Sostituzione*, 'Risultato e funzione del complesso' is a cut-up of Marcello Pera, 'La scienza a una dimensione? Un esame delle epistemologie di G. Bachelard e K.R. Popper,' *Nuova corrente*, no. 64, 1974, p. 296-298. I do not treat this particular poem, but I wish to note the wide range of source texts taken and rearticulated by Niccolai.

⁶¹ On the condition of being bilingual, Niccolai comments in a tongue-in-cheek manner: 'Inside myself I am always playing with words; it is an exercise I do automatically. In knowing two languages there is schizophrenia, but there is also the fact that one language enhances the possibility of the other one.' Del Giudice et al., *Intervista con Giulia Niccolai: I think I'm becoming Japanese*, p. 2.

⁶² *ibid.*

disorganised text, and analogies with disordered thought patterns, point towards this the ‘looking back’ on the process of writing itself, or, in other words, the hyperreflexive impulse. The collection *Sostituzione*, as is suggested by its title, confronts the malleability and contextual nature of language itself. Through the processes of recycling and reusing text, verbal dislocation, and interchangeable signification, *Sostituzione* provides an intriguing insight into how hyperreflexive and hyperrational thematic and linguistic patterns might be conceived in poetry. Complicating matters, the intertextual aspects involved in recycled text raises spectres from the historical avant-garde, both in terms of early examples of the cut-up concept, and the very material used by Niccolai.

Polysemy and Decentring in ‘Sostituzione’ and ‘Positivo e negativo’

Sostituzione (similarly to *Dai Novissimi*) operates within a formative twentieth-century creative tradition – that of collage and montage, both within the visual arts and in literature. The protagonists of automatic literary experiments of the historical avant-garde, particularly those affiliated with Dada and Surrealist movements, claimed mixed and confused signifiers allowed a more profound mode of access to the subconscious, as well as embodying an oppositional mode to the prevailing aesthetic canons of the era. Tristan Tzara’s 1920 *Pour faire un poème dadaïste* functioned as much as a performance piece as a literary work – the list of instructions entailed the cutting up of a newspaper article into words, combining them in a bag, pulling out and then pasting the words in the resultant random order. The iconoclastic assault on the author-function was, as a fundamental conceptual principle, more significant than any particular finished product. Yet the extent to which such experiments could ever be truly ‘automatic’ is pertinent to our study. In Niccolai, we observe a rather more curated amalgamation of textual fragments.

The first two poems are assembled with material from Fausto Curi’s article ‘Il sogno, la crudeltà, il gioco,’⁶³ and are presented in the process of paraphrasis, subject to re-writing and schematising. The inversions often maintain

⁶³ F. Curi, ‘Il sogno, la crudeltà, il gioco’ (1968), in: Curi, *Metodo storia strutture*, 1971; originally published in *Il Verri*, no. 29, December 1968, pp. 18-30. Interestingly, this was the special issue of *Il Verri* dedicated to William Burroughs.

their sense when set against each other but don't make sense overall in the poem. The opening poems of the collection, 'Sostituzione' and 'Positivo & negativo' are as follows:

Sostituzione

Sostituisci alla perdita del centro
la distruzione del centro
alla perdita di un senso
la negazione di un senso.

Puoi individuarlo nella misura
in cui è imprevedibile:
misurare tutta la distanza
dovunque (e in nessun luogo).

Così
la reversibilità del segno
l'evanescenza del senso
l'opposto dell'insensato

una moltiplicazione d'insensatezza
una farsa inventata con arte.

Positivo & negativo

Ogni cosa può accadere
avere un senso o non averlo.

Non ha verità da proporre
mantiene aperto il significato
il senso nasce nominando le cose.

Un'impaginazione
una comunicazione di forme
l'ipotesi di una realtà in
movimento:
una vertigine di inversioni
infinite e diverse.

E ciò che ad esse si oppone
può essere sempre rovesciato:
nel proprio contrario.

I argue the poems' hyperreflexive act is illustrated decisively with respect to the originating text, an extract where Curi discourses on the heart of the historical avant-garde, specifically Tristan Tzara, Dada and the origins of art which rejected bourgeois sense and logic:

... Alla alienata monosemia, alle strutture ideologiche unicentriche e irrigidite della società borghese, *Dada* oppone una vertigine di permutazioni e di inversioni, un'inesauribile polisemia. Alla perdita del centro sostituisce la distruzione del centro, alla perdita di senso la negazione di senso. La scoperta di Dada è l'ubiquità e l'evanescenza del

senso e la permutabilità e la reversibilità del segno. Il senso è dovunque e in nessun luogo, esiste nella misura in cui è imprevedibile. Quanto alla parola, essa è l'opposto del Verbo, è sempre gratuita e fungibile, può sempre esser rovesciata nel proprio contrario. Dada non ha alcuna verità da proporre, si limita a mantenere aperta e inquieti i significati, così da insinuare l'ipotesi di una realtà in continuo movimento e mutamento, del tutto imprevedibile, dove ogni cosa può accadere e avere un senso o non averne alcuno o averne infiniti e diversi.⁶⁴

In his account of the historical avant-garde, Curi emphasises the *deliberated* nature of desemanticisation in artistic endeavour, the role of play, the flexibility of signs and the inexhaustible nature of meaning. Tzara, of course, pioneered the technique of the literary cut-up, in *Pour faire un poème dadaïste*. In fact Curi points out that Tzara's innovation is the complete 'ludification of the real' and the 'desublimisation of art', processes with which Niccolai certainly engages and to which she makes reference in her notes and poetry.

Niccolai's poetic intervention with Curi's text, however, achieves a rather more nuanced effect than a simple syntactical switch. From the start Curi's text is compromised with Niccolai's small but potent interventions. In contrast to Curi's employment of the third person form in 'Alla *perdita del centro* [Dada] *sostituisce la distruzione del centro*,' we are confronted with Niccolai's imperative 'Sostituisci,' altering the dynamics of the phrase from one of critical description to personal exhortation. The addition of the indefinite article '*un senso*' to '*alla perdita di senso la negazione di senso*,' shifts the emphases within the poetic phrase. Crucially, however, this modification draws attention to the ambiguity surrounding the prior and new use of 'senso' – what exactly is being referred to, semantic meaning, linguistic 'sense,' bodily 'sense,' logic, or all and none?⁶⁵ A fruitful analysis might query not what 'Sostituzione' 'means' in its reiteration of Curi's words, but what might be drawn from this setting in relief of language *itself*, and the foregrounding of the operations and nuances which shape and alter the linguistic process. Yet it is meaning-making which is at stake in such an

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p. 172, underline added to highlight phrases which appear in 'Sostituzione.'

⁶⁵ The issue of polysemy (the quality of having multiple meanings) as a factor in intertextual and cut-up literature is incidentally raised by William Burroughs in 'It Belongs to the Cucumbers,' p. 52.

operation, and the contextual provisionality of the words of Curi and Niccolai demonstrates their fluid signification, ultimately establishing an interrogation of the author-function.

The next two verses are composed of rearrangements of Curi's various pronouncements relating to the nature of 'senso' in Dada, with Niccolai mediating between these theoretical considerations, identifying and emphasising the natural binaries and contradictions in Curi's rhetorical style, such as 'dovunque / nessun luogo' and 'individuarlo / imprevedibile':

La scoperta di Dada è l'ubiquità e l'evanescenza del senso e la permutabilità e la reversibilità del segno. Il senso è dovunque e in nessun luogo, esiste nella misura in cui è imprevedibile.

... quando [Tzara] afferma "Dada ne signifie rien", possiamo misurare tutta la distanza che lo separa dai grandi maestri della crudeltà ... Nella completa ludificazione del reale e nella totale desublimazione dell'arte è la novità di Tzara. Il senso è dovunque e in nessun luogo, si è detto.⁶⁶

Without truly subverting any semantic sense through the disrupted syntax, the effect achieved is nonetheless one of distance and estrangement from fully elaborated meaning. Torn from the prose sentence, the three phrases 'la reversibilità del segno,' 'l'evanescenza del senso,' and 'l'opposto dell'insensato' float aimlessly, offering evocative suggestions but never fulfilling their original statement. Yet the liquid and free-floating nature of signs in Dada, as Curi presents them, is thus insightfully dramatised as such. The poetic form frees these phrases from syntactical obligations to grant them another function – that of performativity. When Curi posits that 'meaning is everywhere and nowhere, and exists inasmuch as it is ungraspable', Niccolai retains traces of these words while exploring the polysemous nature of what they purport to say.

Incominciando col ricordare ciò che ci ha mostrato Tzara (Sept manifestes Dada). Che, cioè, l'opposto dell'insensato "sérieux" borghese può essere

⁶⁶ Curi, 'Il sogno, la crudeltà, il gioco,' p. 172, 173.

una ludica moltiplicazione di insensatezza... Poiché “la vie est une mauvaise farce”, il partito migliore è contrapporre una farsa inventata con arte, ... un colossale e ininterrotto gioco che non ha altra regola che “la continuelle contradiction”.⁶⁷

Curi’s reading of Dadaist ideology which approaches life as a bad farce, needing to be countered with an artful, deliberate, contradictory farce, confirms the essence of hyperreflexivity. Niccolai picks out two charged and intriguing phrases in a sort of final ‘couplet,’ both decontextualised, producing a hyperreflexive distancing while leaving the poem open and unresolved.

In this way, ‘Sostituzione’ enacts many of the very themes of the original text, pushing the reflexive impulses of neo avant-garde poetics and criticism to a logical ‘beyond reflexive’ extreme. The hyperreflexive encounter, then, has removed almost all traces of authorship and foregrounded the words and phrases themselves, divorcing them from their previous incarnation and set them up in new relationships to each other. The continual replication and reiteration of found phrases such as Curi’s ‘il senso è dovunque e in nessun luogo, esiste nella misura in cui è imprevedibile’ draw our attention to questions of borrowing and reintegrating with renewed and even undermined meaning. Niccolai shifts accents and linguistic inflections within Curi’s already philosophical and ambivalent pronouncements, adding another layer of opacity to the work. The interrogation of ‘sense’ and ‘meaning’ is key in this text, and Curi’s theorisation of ‘meaning’ is fluid and contextual. Niccolai enacts this point through material and visual shifts in her use of cut-ups, but also draws our attention to how these statements might be subverted, how the same verbal materials in the hands of another ‘author’ might decisively alter their original purpose.

Similarly, in ‘Positivo e negativo,’ Niccolai doesn’t invert the meaning of Curi’s prose directly as much as destabilise the reader’s process of reading it sequentially, arguably rendering the reader a Barthesian ‘producer’ rather than ‘consumer’ of text. Niccolai jumps about the text in her cut-up, modifying adjectives in gender and number, altering simple tense forms to continuous forms, and leaving out qualifiers. Due to the shifts in ordering, for example, ‘esse’ now

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p. 172.

more likely refers to ‘inversioni infinite e diverse’ rather than Curi’s ‘parola’. The noun denoted as ‘ciò che’, which is left unnamed, hijacks Curi’s ‘parola’, leading to a switch from ‘rovesciata’ to ‘rovesciato.’ We know, then, that Curi speaks of the inversion of the theoretical ‘parola,’ but we are led nowhere definite with Niccolai’s fragmented version: what exactly is being reversed? The overall effect is a meditation on the many and various forms of meaning, sense and reality, and the way in which these are perturbed, altered and shifted. Without the knowledge of the reader, the poem inhabits the world of Dada, reactivates its inconsistencies and contradictions, and reframes its essential qualities in poetic form. Niccolai’s text implicitly holds existential links with Curi, and in turn, with Curi’s forebears, the Dadaists. The openness of meaning ties all three actors together in terms of methodology, but also in terms of the exercise of hyperreflexivity. Niccolai takes Curi’s far-reaching critical ideas and reformulates them as creative texts, amounting to a reversal of the usual poet-critic relationship, and a subversion of the classical notion of poet-as-subject.

In contemplating Niccolai’s relationship with not only Curi’s writing, but also the historical avant-garde as processed *through* Curi, it might be helpful to consider art historian Hal Foster’s question ‘are the postwar moments passive repetitions of the prewar moments, or does the neo-avant-garde *act* on the historical avant-garde in ways that we can only now appreciate?’⁶⁸ Foster addresses the question as to whether the neo avant-garde serves to sanitise the original transgressive political power of the historical avant-garde by institutionalising it. His general thesis follows that the neo-avant-garde serves as a way to look back with more comprehension on the historical avant-garde, unravelling it in parts. In psychoanalytical terms the neo-avant-garde looks back at the traumatised historical avant-garde having come to terms with some hidden trauma.⁶⁹ I find Niccolai’s contribution especially suggestive to this debate because her cut-ups are literal destabilisations and reformulations of secondary writings dealing with the historical avant-garde. *Dai Novissimi* and *Sostituzione*

⁶⁸ H. Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*, MIT Press, 1996, p. 4. Here Foster responds to Peter Bürger’s key 1974 critical work *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, taking issue with the idea of postwar avant-gardism as ‘repetition in bad faith that cancels the prewar critique of the institution of art. [...] for Bürger the repetition of the historical avant-garde by the neo-avant-garde can only turn the anti-aesthetic into the artistic, the transgressive into the institutional.’ (p. 8, 11).

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p. 28-9.

do not 'passively repeat' the features of prewar avant-gardism; rather they 'act on' and even *enact* the spirit of the psychological transgressions of Dada and Surrealism. Yet they do this in a calculated manner, through the hyperreflexive process; the formulation of linguistic oddities, I argue, are the exasperated result of the probing and analysis characteristic of a highly tuned self-conscious process, one which 'looks back.'

**‘Il soggetto è il linguaggio’ and ‘Sintattico e verbale’:
Authorship, Violation, Subjectivity, Irrationality**

Il soggetto è il linguaggio

Un’idea di rivalsa: la rappresaglia
o la vendetta della parola pensata
(compiere il gesto di inventarsi una lingua
compiere l’atto con cui ci si appropria del linguaggio).

Anche se contigui o sovrapposti vicendevolmente
individuo e parola sussistono come soggetti separati:
non un reciproco accordo di parole e di cose
ma il gusto della manomissione.

Le cose esistono per essere dette
e la lingua racconta. Oltraggia a sua volta
in un linguaggio già violato da altri
avere il linguaggio è un modo di essere.

Il soggetto è dunque il linguaggio
con cui perpetrare una personale violazione.

‘Il soggetto è il linguaggio’ takes as its starting point the questions of intertextuality and authorship, with a decisive shift towards a probing and forceful vocabulary revolving around revenge, violation, and appropriation. Again the writing of Fausto Curi features, with fragments taken from his review article ‘Poesia nera,’ published in *Quindici* in 1968.⁷⁰ The article centres on the linguistic strategies of Giuseppe Guglielmi, poet and brother of the *Gruppo 63* critic Angelo Guglielmi. Curi discusses issues such as the invention of language through its memorialisation, literary appropriation, and even violation of the language of

⁷⁰ F. Curi, ‘Poesia nera’, *Quindici*, 7, Jan/Feb 1968, p. 4. Partially reprinted in R. Roversi, *Per Giuseppe Guglielmi*, Edizioni Pendragon, 1999, p. 24-5.

other writers, the notion of literary interference, the contradictions inherent in ‘subjective’ poetic language and the possibility of its sabotage and subsequent reification. He paints the possession of language as a ‘way of being,’ as social and material capital, and describes the act of tampering with language as a sign of a sense of ownership of it.⁷¹ This linguistic interference arises from the ‘extreme grade of alienation’ deriving from the lack of communication which ‘not having’ language creates. He invokes Barthes in identifying a desire for simultaneity of language as medium and language as subject; an intertwining of material subjection and language.⁷²

Niccolai confronts and re-assimilates the language of violence, revenge and reprisal: ‘rivalta,’ ‘rappresaglia,’ ‘la vendetta della parola pensata.’ The act of ‘inventing a language’ is starkly juxtaposed with that of ‘appropriating language,’ without any explicit grammatical linking of the two statements. The suspension of these two pronouncements invites reflection and precludes a definitive conclusion. Broaching the topic of the appropriation of language, and the interference with it (as in ‘gusto della manomissione’), within a radically intertextual and multi-authored text brings the hyperreflexive vein running through the collection to bear. The violence done to language through its commodification and reification in mass media and advertising is discussed at length in the critical circles of the *neoavanguardia*, yet here the prevailing refrain appears to be situated around the violation of language as an abstract essence. A sense of ominous disruption pervades the otherwise impenetrable ‘in un linguaggio già violato da altri / avere il linguaggio è un modo di essere. / Il soggetto è dunque il linguaggio / con cui perpetrare una personale violazione.’ ‘Altri’ might be read to be other poets or writers, or simply other users of language, contributing to the poem’s strong intertextual current. Yet Niccolai deliberately departicularises the subjects and protagonists of the original text,

⁷¹ Roversi, *Per Giuseppe Guglielmi*, p. 25: ‘Il gusto della manomissione è il fatale risvolto psicologico dell’alienazione principalmente come depauperazione esistenziale, privazione di vita, assenza di beni. Il linguaggio è l’unico oggetto disposto alla violenza di chi patisce la violenza dell’‘essere & non avere’. Avere il linguaggio è finalmente un modo d’essere, sottrarlo e manometterlo è rovesciare l’umiliazione dell’indigenza nell’orgoglio soddisfatto del possesso. [...]’

⁷² *ibid.*, p. 25: ‘Il soggetto delle poesie di Guglielmi è dunque, per un verso, il linguaggio, in un senso abbastanza simile a quello in cui Barthes parlava alcuni anni or sono di ‘faire du langage un sujet, et cela à travers le langage même ... Si tratta, in definitiva di un unico soggetto: la frustrazione linguistica. Il ‘non avere’ è, alla fine, non avere una lingua; ridottisi i beni alla possibilità di comunicare, la perdita di tale possibilità è l’estremo grado dell’alienazione...’

leaving a set of speculative metaphysical considerations. It is within this open-ended and fragmentary cut-up schema that the creation of meaning is deferred and even reflected back onto the reader. The representation of the poetic processes undergone by an undefined, floating language-subject further underscores elements of Louis Sass' idea of hyperreflexive consciousness. 'Il soggetto è il linguaggio' shifts between a menacing landscape of exploitation and violation and the rather abstracted insistence on the separation of subject and individual, imparting an impression of unsettled indeterminacy.

Similar grammatical ambiguity is seen in the second verse, where although the adjectives 'contigui' and 'sovrapposti' elaborate on the relationship between 'individuo' and 'parola,' such a link is comprehended implicitly. On a conceptual level, the categorisation of 'individuo' and 'parola' as 'soggetti separati' penetrates contemporary discussions in the neo avant-garde more broadly, surrounding the so-called myth of authorial possession of one's writing. The reader is invited to consider the distinct subjecthood of the individual and the word, a break from the predominant humanistic notions of authorial mastery, originality and uniqueness. An understanding of 'words' and 'things' as co-existing in a seamless reciprocal relationship is likewise questioned. 'Soggetto' might equally be understood as 'theme,' as well as the philosophical and grammatical 'subject'. Equally central is an ideology of language as having its own 'inner logic' befitting study in its own right. The emphasis placed on language not just as a discursive tool, but as a topic or subject, is in itself reflected in the title 'Il soggetto è il linguaggio.' Niccolai's intervention comments on one of the central tenets of the neo avant-garde project: the belief in the status of language as a subject in its own right, not merely as a vehicle for thought or mode of expression.⁷³

Approaching the poem as a rumination on the multiple expressions of 'subjectivity' reminds us of Niccolai's premise in her introduction: '[To] create an internal tension in the language, allowing the reader to experience the same sort of excitement one has in reading a philosophical text.' Yet does this dislocated and reconstituted text capture the rupture of the bounded authorial and experiential self, or comment on the newly advocated demystification of authorship? Niccolai

⁷³ In particular, see 'Gruppo 63: Il dibattito'; Giuliani's introductions to *I Novissimi*; Spatola's 'Poesia a tutti i costi.'

dramatises the literary criticism of Curi through tampering with his syntax and setting his locutions in new and unprecedented relations to each other. Does she, however, go further and reject the boundaries of the authorial bounded self by demonstrating how liquid such structures of consciousness are? And to what extent might this operation be construed as ‘hyperreflexive’ and even ‘schizomorphic’? I argue that Niccolai’s poems in *Sostituzione* demonstrate a schizomorphic logic in the effort to inject meaningfulness back into tired forms by interfering with their basic systems, and a hyperreflexive logic in the externalised and abstracted manner in which this is done. It is here that the idea of ‘de-authorialisation,’ or the undoing of authorial possession over a particular text, comes into focus.⁷⁴ Niccolai’s intervention into issues raised by Curi surrounding authorship, subjecthood and violation, has the effect of highlighting those issues anew, complicating and dramatising the relationship between different kinds of ‘author.’

‘Sintattico e verbale’

Sintattico e verbale

Un ordinato spazio verbale e sintattico
ordisce l’inganno dei reperti di oggi:
si rende impraticabile volentieri
con perfetta arbitrarietà e noncuranza.

Associando oggetti ed eventi nell’immaginazione
la buona materia raccolta nei testi
acquista un netto e immediato risalto
una raccapricciante volontà di pensare.

⁷⁴ We have observed DeKoven speak comparably of ‘deauthorising of the author’ as the ‘vitiating of the uniqueness of the authorial literary voice.’ (M. DeKoven, ‘The Literary as Activity in Postmodernity’, p. 113) It is my intention to distinguish more decisively between the (related) ideas of ‘de-authorialisation’ as ‘undoing of authorial possession’ and ‘deauthorisation’ as ‘taking away authorisation.’ A rare usage of ‘deauthorialisation’ can be found in: Sean McQueen, ‘Michel Foucault’s “What is an Author?” and Adaptation,’ Monash University, *Colloquy text theory critique* 24, 2012.

Seminando frantumi e ritagli
in una specie di dissolvenza incrociata
investe le membrature del testo
(oggetto della propria operazione).

Evidentemente non si può dire
che vuole distruggersi di continuo.

‘Sintattico e verbale’ borrows freely from Curi’s article ‘Poetica del nuovo terrore,’⁷⁵ published in 1969 and reprinted in *Metodo storia strutture*. The article discusses the ‘terroristic’ creative techniques of the surrealists of the historical avant-garde, André Breton and Paul Éluard, and attempts to draw comparisons and contrasts with neo avant-garde poet Antonio Porta. Curi sets out to outline Porta’s project of making poetry as it had been practiced ‘impossible’. He emphasises the arbitrariness of Porta’s narrative fragments, their strangeness and anti-naturalistic tendencies; the totality of which do not amount to a ‘racconto,’ but a continual vacillation between acts of creation and destruction. He examines Porta’s innovations in the structural techniques of rhythm and dynamics in the literary and narrative process; identifying a ‘vibrazione cinetica’ and ‘fluidità ritmica’ embedded in the frameworks of the text. Through multiple filmic and photographic metaphors, Curi describes the shocking snapshot ‘cuts’ from verse to verse and line to line, which flicker and disappear at random. He credits Porta with the creation of a kind of poetic ‘dissolvenza incrociata,’ or layered cinematic fade-out, and describes his snapshot fragments as ‘squallidi o atroci *flash* narrativi.’ Niccolai reworks these cinematographic echoes in the phrase ‘seminando frantumi e ritagli / in una specie di dissolvenza incrociata,’ focusing intensely on the visual aspects of the original text.

Curi speaks of a metaphoric association between text and film, one which Niccolai extends and even literalises in the act of the cut-up. What is particularly compelling is the common approach of Curi and Niccolai to the poetic text as *material*. The photographic metaphor, along with its visual component,

⁷⁵ F. Curi, ‘Poetica del nuovo terrore’ (1969), *Metodo, storia, strutture*, pp. 207-214; also published in *Il Verri*, no. 32, March 1970.

approaches the historical avant-garde cut-and-paste paradigm in theoretical terms, in the realisation that *art* itself comes into being, first and foremost, as a material entity. Porta, in turn, recognised the vicarious nature of the sign and took the word itself as a starting point. Niccolai comes full circle in taking Porta and Curi's texts and, combining their strategy with a montage technique derived from the visual arts, reveals the *materiality* of the given verbal signs. The translation of verbal poetics into cinematic fragments befits Niccolai's cut-up technique, whereby narrative snippets function as flexible pieces in a mosaic of text.

The poet's interventions also create a deferred argument, where the subject pronouns shift from line to line, and the floating clauses are never truly resolved, syntactically or semantically. In the third verse, a phrase in brackets - '(oggetto della propria operazione)' – is placed at the end, neither enhancing, problematising, nor concluding the information already given in the verse. Similarly, the final couplet 'evidentemente non si può dire / che vuole distruggersi di continuo,' impels a return to earlier verses or even the start of the poem to locate the subject, (il testo, la buona materia, un ordinato spazio?), in a sort of endless, circular logic. Of course, the shards of text which create this puzzling mosaic had been initially employed in Curi's prose criticism, and the overall effect is one of a deliberated, intellectualised schema of salvaging and recycling. The idea of a hyperreflexive 'grammar,' I argue, is manifested in the notable distancing between language as a transparent medium of communication and language as constitutive of moveable pieces.

In her analysis of 'Sintattico e verbale', literary critic Laura Incalcaterra McLoughlin points out the poem's lack of sense wrapped up in a syntactically 'correct' form:

In "Sintattico e verbale", la Niccolai esemplifica graficamente la relazione tra la realtà contemporanea e il mezzo con cui rappresentarla: l'ordine formale del linguaggio nasconde l'inganno dell'assenza di comunicazione, allo stesso modo in cui un ordinato spazio architettonico nasconde l'assenza di associazione.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ L. Incalcaterra McLoughlin (ed.), *Spazio e spazialità poetica nella poesia italiana del Novecento*, Leicester, Troubadour Publishing, 2005, p. 46.

McLoughlin touches upon the concealed ‘inganno’ at the core of what the poem enacts: a structural frame which partially obscures the poem’s inherent meaninglessness. We may recognise traces of themes common to *neoavanguardia* debate, but the poem is beset by non-sequiturs, unfinished ideas and incomplete syntax. The disjunct between cogent form and incomprehensible content naturally invokes Sass’ conception of hyperreflexivity in relation to art forms, ‘characterised not so much by unreflectiveness and spontaneity as by acute self-consciousness and self-reference, and by alienation from action and experience.’⁷⁷ The radical reflectiveness, or hyperreflexivity, implicated in the ‘inganno’ of ‘Sintattico e verbale’ is wrapped up in the related surfeit of rationality which characterises Niccolai’s schematic poems, and to which I will return when considering the hyperrational more broadly in the collection *Greenwich*. While syntactically and semantically not ‘making sense,’ the poem enacts its own hyperrational logic through its form – an insistence on the presence of the textual signifier, despite its absence of communication. Hyperrational thought processes, which are not bereft of reason but go *beyond* it, are manifested in how the poem is led by the intellectual enactment of a cut-up theme, rather than by ‘expressing’ the theme of rupture. This estrangement of the forms of language from what they might signify feeds into, I contend, the distancing of the subject from a centralised voice that is indicated in the hyperreflexive.

The operation of a hyperreflexive grammar once more calls to mind Isobel Armstrong’s idea of ‘serious play,’ whereby cultural production functions as a site for the dismantling and reconstruction of meaning.⁷⁸ Niccolai, in cutting up Curi’s text, focuses on those filmic images which refer to fragmentation and splicing, without, it appears, arriving at new conclusions about film or cinema *per se*. Rather, it is the visual order which is revealed once more, not merely in the cinematic imagery, but in the cut-up form of the poem itself; the scriptor toys with and reassembles the pieces of the past, manifesting something more about the ‘serious’ *process* of play than about the new creation.

⁷⁷ Sass, *Madness and Modernism*, p. 8.

⁷⁸ Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, p. 79. See this thesis p. 80, fn. 53.

Dai Novissimi (1970-1972)

Così desunto:

creature che non vogliono crescere
nei crateri lunari.

In un mondo di terra e di acqua, incesto
racchiuso nel corpo che nuota.

(L'impresa dell'unione
o della disunione: l'armonia siderale.)

La descrizione di un paesaggio
mentale, l'unità del desiderio
di esaltare gli opposti.

This first poem from *Dai Novissimi* is formed of extracts from Alfredo Giuliani's critical notes to Sanguineti's *Laborintus*, in the original *I Novissimi* anthology.⁷⁹ We again observe the creative use of text originally written from a literary critical standpoint, which raises questions concerning the interpretation of the original text and its adoption into a different genre. In this case, Giuliani's commentary centres on a description of the landscape of *Laborintus* 1, attending to the physical and psychological topographies of Sanguineti's oneiric creation: 'Il poema si apre con la descrizione di un paesaggio mentale in disfacimento, una cartografia metafisica lunare al cui centro è la "Palus Putredinis".' Giuliani emphasises the alchemical and Jungian aspects of the poem, and their strong association with metaphors of maternity and genesis:

'L'immagine della madre, con le sue implicazioni cosmologiche e antropologiche, è un simbolo polivalente dell'unità e del desiderio di abolire gli opposti ... Come la psicologia del profondo, l'alchimia è un *regressus ad uterum*: l'impresa volta all'unione dell'inunibile non è che l'opera di integrazione della coscienza con l'inconscio.'⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Giuliani, *I Novissimi*, pp. 95-6.

⁸⁰ *ibid*, p. 95, 96.

Giuliani links the psychotherapeutic hermeneutic of maternity and the desire to return to the womb with the case of Renée, renowned patient of the psychotherapist Marguerite Sechehaye:

‘... quando Renée, la giovane schizofrenica curata dalla signora Sechehaye, trova il primo contatto con la Mamma ... sente di essere racchiusa nel corpo di lei come in un mondo di terra e di acqua che chiama *palude*.’⁸¹

Giuliani interprets Sanguineti’s ‘i nani extratemporali’ as ‘gli homunculi alchemici,’ once again relating the symbolism of generation and conception with theories of the unconscious:

‘Gli homunculi alchemici (“i nani extratemporali”) sono i moti dell’inconscio, creature del nanismo mentale che non possono crescere nel cratere lunare...’⁸²

In *Dai Novissimi*, Niccolai rearranges and modifies these extracts in a more unconstrained manner with respect to *Sostituzione*, revealing an underlying ludic freedom in the treatment of Giuliani’s phrases. Niccolai simplifies his above statement, switching *possono* to *vogliono* to subvert the intentionality of the phrase: ‘creature che non vogliono crescere / nei crateri lunari.’ Instead of ‘abolire gli opposti,’ we read ‘esaltare gli opposti’; there are additions of ‘che nuota’ and ‘incesto,’ confounding the syntax detailing the maternal imagery. What Niccolai leaves uncut, tellingly, is the imagery of a terrain which resides between physical and psychological modes of representation/spheres. The inclusion of ‘la descrizione di un paesaggio / mentale,’ with a jarring break between noun and adjective, serves to emphasise the metaphorical association of mind and concrete matter. Renée’s identification with the world of land and water, or the womb, is inherent to her psychological state. The ‘creature’, for Giuliani symbols of ‘i moti dell’inconscio,’ are again linked with the landscape, in this case, the lunar craters.

⁸¹ *ibid.*, p. 95.

⁸² *ibid.*, p. 96.

The figures of the conscious mind and the unconscious emerge in ‘l’impresa dell’unione o della disunione,’ juxtaposed with the cosmic ‘l’armonia siderale’; another example of interiority contrasted with exteriority.

Yet for all the exegetical intelligibility of Giuliani’s excerpts, in the context of Niccolai’s cut-up treatment, the whole is beset by baffling incompleteness and fragmentariness. The cut-up process subverts the interpretive, exegetical discourse, which relies on logic, sequentiality and erudition. Niccolai effects an intrinsic change in the function and tone of Giuliani’s prose by rewriting it; not merely in terms of literary form, but also in terms of levels of discursivity.

Where, then, does this leave the subject, whether viewed as creator-poet, artisan, or author? A possible reference point is Julia Kristeva’s category of the ‘semiotic,’ a linguistic mode, often associated with pre-verbal and pre-social psychoanalytic theories, capable of rupturing the communicative, linear, coherent forms which are figured with entering into the category of the ‘symbolic.’⁸³ Kristeva, when expanding on her use of the term ‘process’ and ‘unstable identities’ in the texts of Antonin Artaud, delves into the disturbing aspects of his work, along with his experience of madness. She writes:

Anyone who reads Artaud’s texts will realise that all identities are unstable: the identity of linguistic signs, the identity of meaning and, as a result, the identity of the speaker. And in order to take account of this destabilization of meaning and of the subject I thought the term ‘subject in process’ would be appropriate. ‘Process’ in the sense of process but also in the sense of a legal proceeding where the subject is committed to trial, because our identities in life are constantly called into question, brought to trial, over-ruled.⁸⁴

One might be tempted, along with Kristeva’s ‘subject-in-process,’ to approach the undermining of prose by poetic forms as aligned with *l’écriture*

⁸³ R. Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change*, Harvard, 1989, p. 33-36.

⁸⁴ J. Kristeva, ‘A Question of Subjectivity: An Interview,’ *Women’s Review*, no. 12, 1986, pp. 19-21. Reprinted in M. Eagleton, *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1996, p. 351.

feminine, associated with the philosophy of Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, a plural, fluid and disruptive response to writing driven by the phallus, often referred to in French-inflected feminist theory as *phallogocentric* writing, writing driven by the phallic insistence on a very restrictive kind of ‘masculine’ logic and order, derived from a broadly Cartesian ‘logic of the Logos.’⁸⁵ Certainly, Niccolai’s discontinuous reordering of Curi and Giuliani’s texts evades, and unpacks, the kind of linear discursive style expected in prose criticism. In doing so, the contours of genre between prose and poetry are briefly dissolved.

Yet the question remains as to the position of the subject and subjectivity in the cut-up texts. My approach lies with an evaluation of Niccolai’s cut-up texts not along the lines of the ‘eroto-linguistic play,’ as is associated with *l’écriture féminine*, nor as ascribing to any notion of the linguistically closed, mastered, bounded subjective self, but rather, a third way which involves a revelation of externality to the text itself. Niccolai’s cut-ups do not disclose a stable authorial identity, and imply a creative conception somewhat akin to Julia Kristeva’s ‘subject-in-process,’ but I believe any form of gender essentialism is absent from these schemata. Despite a potent rejection of the language of phallogocentrism, and an insistence on the genre fluidity of poetic form, I contend that the ‘polysemic, disruptive’ codes in the cut-up works disregard the call of bodily experience, and approach, moreover, a technological, ‘posthuman’ aesthetic. Rather than a ‘feminine’ writing or aesthetic, I believe the positioning of the cut-up, as a textual proxy for visual collage, approaches the notion of a de-subjectified, de-authorialised poetic project.

Niccolai’s textual interference reveals such fault lines in the conception of the bounded, stable identity qua ‘author’. The intertextual practices of *Sostituzione* and *Dai Novissimi* cut through multiples levels of ‘boundedness,’ the cohesion of sequential logic, the integrity of genre, and the fully realised literary circumscription of the subject. Louis Sass’ description of ‘schizoid depersonalisation’ as an enduring aspect of modernist literature features many similar ruptures to Niccolai’s cut-up works. Niccolai, in choosing extracts relating to the schizophrenic patient Renée, and her struggles with derealisation,

⁸⁵ D.C. Stanton, ‘Language and Revolution: The Franco-American Dis-Connection,’ H. Eisenstein and A. Jardine (eds.), *The Future of Difference*, Boston, G.K. Hall, 1980, pp. 75-87; and M. Eagleton, *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*, 1996, p. 317.

identification with self, and issues around subjectivity, enacts many of these themes in an indirect and ironic way, allowing the form of the cut-ups to shape their reception and exemplify, rather than describe, their intrinsic polyvalence. Unlike other authors associated with the *neoavanguardia*, who strove to create unprecedented and shocking effects through breaking syntax and setting up inconceivable relations between thematic categories, Niccolai disrupts a ‘found’ text; rendering her action theoretical as well as aesthetic. The textual rupture exemplified in *Sostituzione* and *Dai Novissimi* establishes a critique of linear rationality, alongside a reappraisal of schizomorphic depersonalisation and de-authorialisation. The critique of textual linearity corresponds, furthermore, with a formal propensity towards spatial and visual configurations of poetry.

Niccolai’s cut-up works, as we have seen, raise the philosophical and ontological question of the location of the subject. At the same time, they invoke the idea of ‘serious play’ in presenting the cut-up as an enigma, in combining the experience of visuality with that of philological endeavour. As with Vicinelli, tendencies towards visuality and multi-modality in writing often coincide with a rejection of sequentiality and temporally ordered narrative. Drawing on visuality is found in both authors alongside resistance to logocentric rationality.

Akin to the kind of visual collage composed of ‘found’ scraps of daily life, such as newspapers, theatre tickets, media images, photographs, the collections *Sostituzione* and *Dai Novissimi* are composed of ‘found’ textual signifiers. These original textual shards initially maintain their original meaning, but then lose it once inserted into the new context. This operation has the effect of undoing the authorial voice – de-authorialising – both the ordinary writers, and the poet. Such a process makes interesting illuminations regarding the bounded, mastered nature of the author as ‘Io.’ This can be likened to the hyperreflexive turn in the creative process – the ‘looking in from without’ and also harks back to the visual fragmentation of the collage, and the spectre of the fragmented, desubjectified self.

Webster Poems (1971-1977): Signs, Definitions, Images

Niccolai's collection *Webster Poems* draws once more upon what she terms 'linguaggio-chartered o noleggiato,' but here intersected with novel visual elements. The ten poems are all dedicated to a mixture of individual authors and visual artists, and some are prefaced with the name of a particular work. In her introductory note, Niccolai mentions the absence, for the reader, of the original works and the attendant autonomy of the poetic form, rendering the collection an exercise in an enigmatic sort of ekphrasis. The elliptical nature of this framework is further complicated by the source material of the poems: each consists of an entry for an unspecified word from the Webster dictionary, cut up and rearranged. For the 1971 poem 'A motion action or gesture by which a thought is expressed or a command or wish made known in the work of Adriano Spatola,' such a technique produces an intriguing and intangible effect:

Something indicating
the existence of a thing
a token
a prodigy
an omen.
A trace
vestige
as no sign of life.
A trace a spoor
as a bear sign.
A character indicating
the relation of quantities
or an operation performed on them
as the signes + (plus) – (minus)
also any abbreviation
or conventional mark
having a fixed meaning
as the integral sign
the radical sign.

Niccolai's strategy in the poem, including its title, is to 'borrow' the Webster entry for the word 'sign' and alter its syntax and sequence. Such a procedure draws attention to the polyvalence of broad concepts like that inscribed in the word 'sign' as well as highlighting the multiplicity of contextual possibilities. Simultaneously, when considered alongside Spatola's 1966 collection *Zeroglifico*,⁸⁶ the poem sets up a dialogue with that collection's engagement with the word and notion of 'sign,' expanding the verbal-visual perspectives of both poetic collections (see figs. 13, 14, 15, 16).

The process of cutting up dictionary entries raises some intriguing questions regarding the texture of the poet's ordinary materials, prompting debate on the neutrality of language as a straightforward device for expression. In the *Webster poems*, the dictionary is considered: a highly structured, formalised text, whose authoritativeness resides in its order and sequentiality. The very rationale of the traditional dictionary, its clarity and lucidity, is denied in reading *Webster Poems*. The decontextualised and cut-up definitions make no 'sense' alone, and unaccompanied by that which they define, amount to a type of puzzle or game, circuitously indicating (back) towards the word 'sign'. This deferred action is inverse to that noted in the epigraph to *Humpty Dumpty*, where the term 'Desdemona' is recorded at a second remove under 'Othello'. There, the term that is re-categorised and defined is known, yet we observe a corresponding system of proliferating signs, where signification functions as a hall of mirrors. In *Webster Poems*, the crystallisation of the reflexive cut-up process lies in the line 'also any abbreviation or conventional mark having a fixed meaning' – the 'fixed meaning' which the Webster attributes to 'sign' has been ironically subverted in Niccolai's reworking and decontextualisation of the dictionary text. This destabilisation of the dictionary's logocentrism in *Webster Poems*, I argue, constitutes an act of resistance to rationality.

The two following poems from the same collection reference specific works of Spatola, while continuing to draw on dictionary entries:

⁸⁶ A. Spatola, *Zeroglifico*, Bologna, Sampietro, 1966.

For Adriano Spatola's
"Zeroglyphic" (April 1971)

For Adriano Spatola's
"Divisible: indivisible" (April 1972)

A mark made by pressure
a line figure impressed
an imprint
a stamp dye or mold
printed state or form as
a butter "print"
also that which receives
an impression from a stamp
mold
printed state or form as
put into "print"
printed matter
a printed publication
printed letters
impression form type as
small "print"
clear "print"
an impression taken
from anything
"in print"
in a printed form
published
to the letter
with accurateness
still on sale by the publisher
"out of print".

A brief remark
being
divisible
into smaller
units
being capable of
independent
use
by combining
a single base
with various elements
written
or printed.

The former works overtly with the definition of 'print,' and the latter indirectly with that of 'word.' Again, any sense of syntactical continuity is broken through the use of cut-up and collage. The various permutations of diverse uses of

the word ‘print’, randomly arranged, bring to light the relative constructedness of the poem.

In both poems, the objective, lucid tone of the spliced phrases is not diminished by their treatment. On the contrary, the intertextual experimentation foregrounds the jarring encounter between functional language and verse format. The ‘found’ phrases undergo ‘de-authorization’ through their recalibration as poetic shards; in being set into a wholly different genre, they are stripped of their legitimacy *qua* definitions. Simultaneously, the creative and subjective ‘I’ is undermined; the explicitly ‘official’ and authoritative tenor of the citations confirms the propensity towards deauthorialisation, or away from subjective writerliness. The oscillation among opposing genres, and slippage between diverse levels of ‘validity’ lends these poems a reflexive detachment indicative of discursive play.

The related questions of authorship and the hyperreflexive are particularly fraught here. *Webster* involves cutting and splicing the work of quasi-anonymous lexicographers, whose compilations of words and definitions are based, in theory, on a premise of neutrality and objectivity. *Webster*, as a mosaic of descriptive shards, imbues the (otherwise objective) words and phrases with the subjective touch of the poet, whilst simultaneously, denying the poem any subjective core by revealing its non-authorship. The hyperreflexive impulse is, once again, implicit in the deliberated distancing of the ‘possessor’ of the words and phrases from the process of poetic creation itself; reading the poem is observing the relatively external processes involved in its creation. This mosaic is not only composed of different texts, but different *kinds* of text, shifting between dictionary language and poetic language; equally, it engages with different modes of representation, from Spatola’s concrete works to Niccolai’s ekphrases *of* these works. The multi-faceted, intertextual nature of the collection provides a site for the exploration of the visually oriented tendencies of the hyperreflexive idiom.

The highly cerebral, ludic wordplay continues in the treatment of the definition of ‘word’ in ‘Divisible: Indivisible.’ In selecting parts of the definition which relate to the word’s indivisibility, and then illustrating the divisibility of the sentence by dividing the words of the prose into verse, there is an active performance of the concepts of the definition itself. The fidelity of this process to the original phrasing is undermined, however, by the playful omission of

‘without’ from the borrowed phrase ‘a speech sound or series of speech sounds that symbolizes and communicates a meaning usually without being divisible into smaller units capable of independent use.’ The general exploration into the relative divisibility and indivisibility of words and phrases, exemplified in such a stark and brief verse, tends to abstraction and flatness, which is the heart of what Sass calls ‘alienation from action and experience.’ The poem questions the notion of resolution and completeness in literary texts by revealing the relativity and interdependence of parts to the whole, constituting a critique of monosemous interpretation.

By isolating the verbal units and splitting the horizontal sentence into terse, vertically ordered verse, Niccolai’s technique *visibly* exemplifies the abstracting, condensing impulse of the grammarian, which lies at the crux of ‘Divisible: Indivisible.’ Moreover, the graphic language of hieroglyphics is invoked via Spatola and the ekphrastic turn. ‘Divisible: Indivisible,’ like the other *Webster* poems, engages with Spatola’s concrete poetry; simultaneously an ekphrastic textual encounter with the visual sphere, and an active commentary on the material nature of signifiers through a hyperreflexive probing of grammatical and semiotic concepts.

The reorganisation of these dictionary entries, as with any collage of readymade materials, is visual as well as syntactical. Again, we are confronted with the recycling of found text as an exercise in verbal-visual practice, as the poet-scriptor-artisan renders the process of meaning-making (and meaning-breaking) as an exteriorised activity. The almost clinical precision of the cuts and splices of the original dictionary text, combined with the deliberated manner in which the text signals its abstraction, chimes decisively with the notion of the hyperreflexive mode. Far removed from the interpretation of non-sense as uncontrolled and uninhibited, the affect achieved in these three poems, and in the collection overall, tends towards an antithetical ‘grammar’ of rationality *sans* meaningfulness, reflexivity *without* a central reflecting subject.

Furthermore, the interrelated matters of universality and anonymity are foregrounded when considering this absent reflecting subject. Niccolai’s collage process interrogates the assumed universality of standard definitions of terms as provided by a dictionary such as the *Webster*. The question is implicitly posed as to the applicability of the *Webster* definitions of ‘sign,’ ‘print’ and ‘word’ across

genre, cultural and vernacular boundaries. In reordering the definitions of the term ‘print,’ for example, the resultant lack of ‘sense’ draws attention to the polysemous and contextual nature of the word, its specificity within a syntactically orderly context, in addition to a culturally defined one.

The dictionary source, moreover, causes the poems to undergo a shift towards anonymity; unlike the authored critical prose of Niccolai’s cut-ups in *Dai Novissimi* and *Sostituzione*, the citations from the Webster are effectively anonymous. De-authorialising (and de-authorising) an already anonymous text, queries the extent to which a dictionary can be neutral and anonymous in the first place. The broad expectations of universal objectivity in the Webster, carried out by anonymous (and therefore neutral) actors, are, I believe, brought to trial in the very act of cutting-up. From an external vantage point, the act of ‘looking back’ at the textual material, estranging it from its original function, brings to light its own structural anomalies.

The fragmented subject, represented by the scattered shards of dictionary phraseology, is further complicated by the relationship of word to image. Adriano Spatola’s concrete poetry experiments with the most rudimentary and, perhaps, essential component of the sign: its existence in space. The poems consist of large-font text subjected to radical cuts and splices across letters, rendering the works illegible to the eye. For all the deformation and disintegration undergone by the typography, the poems are still recognisably composed of letters and numbers, albeit highly compromised in terms of legibility (figs. 13, 14, 15, 16). Fellow concrete poet Achille Bonito Oliva states:

Il segno aspetta di essere visto, e soltanto allora comincia a trasparire ed a significare, cioè a vedere il mondo.⁸⁷

While Spatola’s concrete techniques probe and unsettle the primary, visual signifying properties of the sign, Niccolai’s poem approaches the notion of ‘sign’ from a different angle, creating the possibility for interference in the reading of Spatola. In citing the prosaic dictionary interpretation of ‘sign,’ and the various verbal accounts which might be prompted by a complete reckoning with the term,

⁸⁷ A. Bonito Oliva, ‘Zeroglifico metonimico,’ *Geiger*, Torino, 1969, no. 3, in ‘Adriano Spatola e la poesia concreta: *Zeroglifico*’ Archivio Maurizio Spatola, p. 22.

an interesting contrast is set up between Spatola's operation of exploding the 'sign' and Niccolai's proliferating of the 'sign'. Instead of a classical ekphrasis, which relies on the description of or inspired meditation on the visual work of art, Niccolai's work attempts to encounter Spatola's work from a different perspective, via a diverse perceptual pathway: by developing a dissecting, analysing logic analogous to the visual artwork.

In this way, the poem's ekphrastic gesture towards another work allows it to be discursive on the nature of intertextuality and intermediality. The *Webster Poems* for Spatola enact the very semiotic impasse which Spatola's works epitomise, demonstrating the contingent value of floating signs when detached from an orderly centre. Oliva, in his discussion of *Zeroglifico*, emphasises the micro-particles of language produced by Spatola, the zooming in of the lens at the expense of the bigger picture, characterising the collection as:

Un processo che atomizza il linguaggio istituzionale cancellandone tutti i significati obbligati, orientando la disposizione del segno sullo spazio estetico in maniera da costituire a linguaggio anche gli interstizi tra una particella linguistica ed un'altra.⁸⁸

The operation of atomisation, then, renders the spaces *between* the letters (which had previously been incidental) as equally valid to the letters and words themselves: granting the shapes and forms valence within the 'institutional' language. The fragments of linguistic signs and the cracks between them, in other words, are restored as a function of language, holding an intrinsic (visual) value, and split from any direct signifying function. Does Niccolai's ekphrastic response, then, build on or respond to such a technique? Niccolai's response is both intertextual, in that it borrows from another text, and intermedial, in that it references a work of visual poetry. Unlike Spatola's *Zeroglifico*, Niccolai's *Webster Poems* do not undergo desemanticisation, the deliberate stripping of meaning from linguistic form, and its reduction and rearrangement as split constituent units. Niccolai works on the syntactical level, and her dislocation of the classic dictionary format works *within* the bounds of legible language. Yet in

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

terms of principle, both unsettle the use of language as a straightforward device for expression.

Through this disruption of institutional language, attention is indirectly drawn to the graphic and material qualities of Spatola's work, revealing a thematic knot between word and image. The intertextual and intermedial significance of the word 'print' as the focus of 'For Adriano Spatola's "Zeroglyphic"' is compelling. The poem anglicises the title of the collection, *Zeroglifico*, a portmanteau of 'zero' and 'geroglifico,' which in turn derives from the Greek 'sacred engraving.' A tension or contradiction is created between the negating 'zero' and the notion of a *hieroglyph* as an affirmative, physical, denotative inscription or imprint. The crux is further illuminated by the associations with photographic negatives, whereby the negation or inversion of light and shade is inherent to the recording of the 'imprint' itself. Niccolai's rumination on the verbal nuances of 'print' and 'imprint' invokes, by analogy, the visuality of Spatola's *Zeroglifico* and its emphasis on the material and transferable elements of print and typography. His letters and numbers, being disfigured through the procedures of fragmentation, exist somewhere *between* denotative symbols and purely graphic contours and shapes. In so doing, and like the hieroglyphics intrinsic to the collection title, the forms take on the qualities of a language that communicates both verbally and visually. Niccolai's found uses of 'print,' then, through their ludic and polysemous web of signification, function as ekphrastic reminders of the texture and materiality of language *itself*. Putting into relief the visual properties of ink on paper creates another remove from the classical notion of the poet as 'I' and subject, in full possession of her texts and intertexts; visuality, once more, acts as a key to the multiple discursive levels of the *Webster poems*.

Sostituzione, Dai Novissimi and Webster Poems:

Fragmentation, Subjectivity, Hyperreflexivity

The collections *Sostituzione, Dai Novissimi* and *Webster Poems* feature text recycled from diverse sources into poems which cultivate a range of distancing and disorientating effects. I have argued that a characteristic common to these texts is the manner in which the fragmentation of the *già scritto* is

synonymous with a diminishing authorial centre. Niccolai's theoretical orientation has much in common with the Novissimi and the rest of the Gruppo 63 in their emphasis on the 'riduzione dell'io', or the reduction of the Ego or conscious self in literature, and the corresponding minimisation of authorial traces in the work. Niccolai's cut-up texts are programmatic and conceptual in how their language filters reality. The form of the text, in theory, corresponds with the philosophical rupture, in the modern age, of a sense of bounded self, and the simultaneous dislodgement of authorial possession of the text, which leads ultimately to the thematic, semantic and syntactic rupture of the text itself. Sass' theorisation of schizophrenic fragmentation of self as analogous to the great break in modern consciousness runs parallel to such a conception of the cut-up text. Umberto Eco's pronouncements regarding linguistic form and truth, albeit more global in reach, bring similar consequences to light:

[...] è un universo in crisi. È in crisi perché all'ordine delle parole non corrisponde più un ordine delle cose (le parole si articolano ancora secondo l'ordine tradizionale mentre la scienza ci incita a vedere le cose disposte secondo altri ordini oppure addirittura secondo disordine e discontinuità) [...].⁸⁹

The rupture of the bounded self in modernist texts, and the analogous reduction of authorial traces in the work, harks back to Sass' notion of hyperreflexivity as an externalising and distancing of the subject or the experience of self. I contend that, in Niccolai's cut-up poetry, the conceptual interpretation of modern broken consciousness which gives rise to textual fragmentation has many structural links with the visual 'word collage' process. The rupture of the circumscribed poetic subject is conceptualised in terms of the cut-up text, an intertextual mosaic involving multiple authors or none, an a-grammatical and distorted structure and an aura of alienated strangeness. Roland Barthes, in 'The Death of the Author,' bridges a growing awareness of the intertext with an acknowledgement of the diminishing function of the singular author-as-God; elaborating a notion of the *scriptor* as distinct from that of the Author:

⁸⁹ U. Eco, 'Del modo di formare come impegno sulla realtà,' *il Menabò*, 1962, 5, pp. 217-218.

We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.⁹⁰

In Niccolai, the cut-up approaches visibility through an intertextual and spatial process of word collage, invoking Barthes’ *scriptor* to reveal an artisan-poet who gathers and splices (not necessarily deliberately or consciously) from literary phenomena already in existence. The centrality of visibility is demonstrated in the conceptualisation of the intertextual poet as a scribe or artisan working with verbal fragments, and forging a verbal-visual collage. Barthes recognised the fluid and diffuse nature of literary imagination, and the concomitant problem of authorial originality. The metaphor of the ‘tissue of quotations’ implies an acknowledgement of the craftsmanlike and collagistic aspects of the textual cut-up, and Niccolai’s *Sostituzione, Dai Novissimi* and *Webster Poems* draw attention to the workings of intertext in an exceptionally literal manner. In tapping into the hyperreflexive possibilities of the poetic form, these collections trace a rupture of individual bounded consciousness through to a recognition of the diffusion of authorial possession – this is then represented and enacted in the collection as a visually-derived collage of the writings of others. The textual collage, then, in a spatialised rather than typically narrational configuration, is read as an intriguingly jarring, incongruous, unsettling work, lacking a pervasive, interior authorial voice. The *figures* of the ‘scribe’ and ‘artisan’ working with language fragments *as* materials are highly suggestive in this reading of Niccolai’s cut-up poetry. The very interchangeability of visual and textual collages feeds into the notion of what DeKoven has described as a high-modernist ‘plasticity of language,’ and speaks to the closer identification of the ‘sister arts’ of poetry and painting in twentieth-century culture. In these collections of Niccolai, the dispersal of the whole into parts addresses a modernist

⁹⁰ Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, p. 146.

preoccupation with intermedial forms of fragmentation, along with a profound study of the ruptured authorial subject.

The act of cutting up text is central to the hyperreflexive idiom in Niccolai's *Sostituzione*, *Dai Novissimi* and *Webster Poems*, contributing to this strange sense of dissociation from any authorial centre. As we shall see in the collection titled *Greenwich*, this hyperreflexivity is brought about through a 'mapped' combination of words and implied places, where the particular incongruities of cartography meet the poetic form.

Part III

Greenwich and the Armchair Traveller: A Verbal-Visual Cartography

Giulia Niccolai's intensive focus on coded systems arguably finds its most radical exemplar in the 1971 collection *Greenwich*, a series of twenty-seven poems engaging in a novel poetic strategy – the use of the World Atlas as a source for verbal material. In its position in *space* as a marker for *time*, the town of Greenwich, of course, acts as a metonym for a wider discussion about how physical places relate to other phenomena. With its allusive title, the collection *Greenwich* enters into the realm of how real space is mapped, how locations and geographical phenomena are recorded in both the world and the map, and how the conventions of cartography open up a rich source of toponymic and etymological material, ripe for the perceptive poetic eye (and ear).⁹¹

In an introductory note, Niccolai provides a point of origin anecdote for her poetic concept, detailing the boredom arising from time spent watching departure boards at airports, and the private rhyming games invented from experimenting with place names in all their rich linguistic detail.⁹² *Greenwich* is a further example of 'linguaggio noleggiato' but with a cartographic schema rather than a lexicographical one. The poetic process is projected outwards towards the world, charting a verbal and etymological journey through the gathering of place names into verse by a combination of phonetic and thematic associations. *Greenwich* has an equally visual component, through its implied representation of a 'viaggio' through real and mapped space, and it is this poetic coding of the visual as verbal that I argue illustrates further the hyperreflexive visuality of Niccolai's corpus. In her introductory note, Niccolai describes *Greenwich's* conceptual schema as 'una specie di viaggio non nei territori del linguaggio ma nel linguaggio dei territori.'⁹³ *Greenwich* tests the limits of the possibilities of the

⁹¹ Two secondary sources which include detailed readings of *Greenwich*, and which I have consulted, are: M. Graffi's introduction 'L'action writing di Giulia Niccolai' in: G. Niccolai, *Poemi e oggetti: Poesie complete*, M. Graffi (ed.), Florence, Le lettere, 2012; and Giammei, 'La bussola di Alice: Giulia Niccolai da Carroll a Stein (via Orgosolo) fino all'illuminazione,' pp. 33-77.

⁹² Niccolai, *Harry's Bar*, p. 73.

⁹³ *ibid.*

deauthorised and deauthored text, creating a hyperreflexive idiom, glancing back at its own action, centred on the mappable word and the verbalised map.

Greenwich and the Hyperrational

Greenwich enacts a self-conscious ludic ‘grammar’ based on cartographies and etymologies, rather than classical semantic and syntactic ‘sense.’ The continual renegotiation of the role of sense *within* nonsense is recognised by Alessandro Giammei in his discussion of the collection. Giammei notes Niccolai’s open indebtedness to Lewis Carroll’s poem ‘Jabberwocky,’ which substitutes nonsense words within a grammatically coherent structure, but goes on to highlight Niccolai’s originality as an ‘ingegnere del nonsense’ through her ‘meditazione sul senso.’⁹⁴ I argue that this new grammar is both a nonsensical one and one which strives towards a different idea of ‘sense’ - contributing to what I will refer to as hyperrationality, or ‘*beyond* rationality.’ The ‘chartered,’ programmatic conceptual framework allows these ‘nonsense’ poems to nonetheless be systematically ‘mapped,’ implicating a system, albeit one which is externally engineered. What initially appears to be a merely verbal and linguistic journey is translated into the visual mode when the poems are ‘mapped,’ revealing their multimodal and stratified play. Geographic place names, often governed by etymologically archaeological accretions, are re-engineered as phonetic matter, creating a visual map derived from history, etymology and sound. In reiterating an account of nonsense as a type of hyperrationality, the poem-maps make little semantic sense, but re-affirm their rationality as linguistic *traces* of a cartographic journey.

The hyperreflexive ‘looking back’ on the self is foregrounded in the excess of consciousness at play in the formulation of these poems, an operation taken to an extreme in *Greenwich*. In teasing out the linguistic symptoms and implications of hyperreflexivity, with particular reference to modernist literature, Louis Sass invokes the ‘apotheosis of the word’ (to which I will return) and which holds recognisable correlations with the *neoavanguardia* concept of ‘la riduzione dell’io.’ I have argued that the ‘reduction of the I’ in Niccolai is manifested in the

⁹⁴ Giammei, ‘La bussola di Alice,’ p. 47. Carroll’s ‘Jabberwocky’ appears in *Through the Looking-Glass, and what Alice Found There*, 1871.

dispersal of the subject (through the technique of word cut-ups) and the consequent ‘looking back’ at these pieces of subjectivity, realigned and re-engineered. In *Greenwich*, rather than the cut-up and paste method of words and phrases providing the visual impetus, the map is the site of the visual imprint which the poems encode. The hyperreflexive ‘looking back’ is on the dispersed geographic *facts* of place names, through the surreal non-facts of the poetic phrases.

This externalising tendency is witnessed in how words and language are drawn not from the inner core of the poet, but in looking towards the world itself and how it is factually described, and in how the atlas delivers a rich stock of extant etymological material, collected from an almost infinite number of minor and major histories, and subject to variations in toponymy, or place-naming. The poems draw attention to cultural exchange and migration; for example, some overlap is found in the place names in the United States which might equally refer to their ancestral forebears in Italy and Spain, as is the case with the references to Lodi and Laredo. Conversely, the reader notes that other place names, such as Rising Star and Sweet Water, Texas, have a more immediately discernable and literal connection with the territory they name. The poems bring to light not only the vast depository of unique place names which exist on Earth, but also the hugely diverse range of naming *strategies*: from names with an otherwise hidden etymological and etiological origin, to names based on natural beauty and topographical features, to names embedded in a particular colonial or migratory history. Niccolai’s unusual poetic device extracts hidden possibilities and operates within a classic *straniamento*, whereby certain previously familiar geographic names assume a peculiar aura in their new context within the verse. Giammei argues for a reading of *Greenwich* which emphasises the fixed and enduring nature of toponyms, as distinct from other categories of language which evolve and adapt over time:

Cosa sono d'altronde i toponimi se non il nocciolo più duro e conservativo del lessico, l'inalterabile classe di lemmi indeclinabili e riferiti a oggetti immobili che più lungamente resiste alla rapida evoluzione della lingua e dei significati? Solo i nomi di luogo più celebri sono traducibili e quasi nessuno subisce rilevanti mutazioni in altre lingue; tutti conservano, come

rovine ben mantenute, vestigia di fenomeni linguistici ormai irrintracciabili nella lingua comune; [...] Sarà anche divertente e nonsensical, ma una poesia costituita di parole tanto speciali è evidentemente anche ambiziosa: il codice di cui è composta è universale e fissato nel tempo, durevole, come una pregiata qualità di marmo.⁹⁵

Indeed, Milli Graffi notes the solidity of the linguistic source material, guaranteed by the authority of the atlas:

L'atlante garantisce l'autenticità del materiale usato. È come un codice o una formula, che si arroga il posto pubblico generalmente attribuito al dizionario; è una sorta di disciplina interiore e privata che spazza via il normale uso comune delle parole codificato dal dizionario. [...] Il materiale verbale scavato fuori dall'atlante garantisce la propria appartenenza a una lingua vera, esistita ed esistente, ben radicata nella tradizione, e addirittura può arrivare ad estendere la propria garanzia sulla solidità della lingua in questione a tal punto che continuerà a cedere la propria carica di senso anche quando viene usato modificando radicalmente il referente.⁹⁶

Evidently the institution of the atlas houses its own codified 'interior discipline' and Niccolai exploits these odd, archaic codes, probing the unusual linguistic material which emerges to great idiosyncratic effect. We might question, however, the supposed universality and permanence of the atlas' codes, in view of the fact that place names can change: abruptly, as a result of historical, social and geopolitical factors, but also gradually, evolving over time. Certain toponyms are durable and outlive changes which happen around them, affirming Giammei's use of a 'marble' metaphor. Yet changes in the natural landscape, micro-histories, colonisation, and de-colonisation all have an influence on how and why a place has a particular name, and are often contingent on the power relations of those who 'name.'

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 46.

⁹⁶ Graffi, introduction to: Giulia Niccolai, *Poemi e oggetti: Poesie complete*, p. 20.

While it is evident that toponyms preserve rich etymological details which may otherwise be lost to contemporary language usage, I believe it is precisely the idea of topological and toponymic history as unchanging that is disrupted and undermined, and the *fluid* nature of language, as it relates to place, that is revealed in *Greenwich*. Giammei argues for a ‘grounding’ impulse in Niccolai’s strategy, yet the defamiliarising and confounding effect of juxtaposing place names based on phonetics and associative semantics instead subverts their groundedness and relative etymological fixity.

Greenwich, I contend, subtly acknowledges that language is not neutral, and that the dynamics surrounding the topographers and their language and rationale are directly linked to power. The poetic strategy of *Greenwich* implicitly undermines the certainty with which we might approach toponyms and interrogate how they are founded, developed, changed, and translated. Far from ludic wordplay being used to show the arbitrariness of linguistic and toponymic forms, this strategy of cutting up according to phonetic and thematic similarities reveals how *insecure* the foundations of place names can be, and how dependent on a multitude of accretions they are. Niccolai, I argue, is more interested in the materiality and phonetics of toponymic language, than in the fixed kernel of place and space, disrupting the idea of any ‘natural’ essence of a place. In the poem ‘Palermo-Orgosolo,’ starting with Sicily and Sardinia, locations across Italy are drawn together:

Ortisei donnalucata?
Lanusei donnafugata?
Ansiei leonessa amatrice?
Premilcuore flumendosa lampedusa
Crevalcuore formosa generosa signora pulita!
Raddusa agira il regalbutto
Sciacca siracusa il racalmuto.
Cianciana cianciana contessa Entellina...
Alto ulassai
Acuto ussassai
Staiti muta femmina morta!

The poem immediately raises issues regarding language as bearer of functional meaning as opposed to language as allusive, unfinished, open-ended, and based on presence rather than representation. The poem can be equally read as bearing an oblique meaning, as a collection of locations arranged a particular way. The language of the poem works simultaneously on two planes – both referring to a series of mini-facts, in this case geographical locations, but also choreographing these pre-existing facts in a manner that holds certain allusions. The Sicilian towns of Agira and Siracusa represent those very places, while simultaneously being scanned by the reader as third person conjugations of coined verbs ‘agirare’ and ‘siracusare.’ The words exist in a limbo between the concrete fact of the towns, and the briefly convincing, but ultimately mythical, verb-concepts that they appear to represent. The Sardinian town of Ortisei hints fleetingly, perhaps, at the phrase ‘ora ti sei,’ particularly when followed by the feminine suggestiveness surrounding the Sicilian town of Donnalucata; indeed, the closing question mark almost brings a legitimating order to the sentence, as it does with the following phrase.

Attention is drawn, through this schema, towards the hidden evocativeness of feminine-sounding towns and names, ‘leonessa amatrice’ ‘flumendosa lampedusa,’ but also highlights the unanticipated and unequivocal ‘Femmina Morta.’ The town of Cianciana, for example, invokes the local gossip (stereotyped as feminine) of a small town, and both the verbal traces of ‘ciancia’ and the semantic traces are foregrounded in how this word is orchestrated. The poem is at once ‘about’ an image of sensuous, feminised, southern *italianità*, and a highly structured selection of towns from a particular region, heightening the incongruous nature of its creation. Like the other poems in the collection, ‘Palermo-Orgosolo’ is imbued with the odd, the unexpected and the humorous; in the contradiction between the rigid processes of its making, and its resulting impression, lies a sense of jovial, rather than disturbing, estrangement from reality.

Yet there resides another layer of discourse in *Greenwich*. The poems provide intriguing alliterations, oblique allusions and lend themselves to linguistic-toponymic decoding. Another factor of these poems lies in their hidden visuality, via their internalised maps. These existing geographic locations have been extracted from the World Atlas, and likewise, can be retraced back onto the

topographical plane. Examining the vestiges of the poems within the map constitutes an acknowledgment of the origins of the toponyms, as well as an awareness of the spatial aspect of the collection. The cartographic aspect of the poems remind the reader that the linguistic and spatial roots of places are linked to one another – sometimes in an explicitly literal way. The linear verse conceals a visual mode, a mappable reality coded in the form of toponyms, which often literalise the natural features they designate. In using text which also encodes the visual sphere, I argue that Niccolai's *Greenwich* follows *I Novissimi*, *Sostituzioni*, and *Webster poems* in recycling text in a visually relevant manner. These poems, which all cut up and splice text from various 'official' sources of language, draw the creative process towards the ludic and spatial rather than the semantic, linear and logical. These collections all work towards splitting the 'theological message' of the single author, and instead memorialise, in spatially significant terms, the many competing messages that litter and crowd our day-to-day existence. *Greenwich* uses these mini-texts and found fragments in the manner of a collage, but goes even further in the invocation of the visual through its sketch of a cartographic journey. More than a textual analogue of visual collage, *Greenwich* encodes a (quite literal) map within its verbs and prepositions.

The poem 'Rising star' is composed exclusively of urban and rural locations in the state of Texas, U.S., and is used by Niccolai in her notes to explain how the atlas code works. It appears thus in the collection:

Home sweet home sugar land
richland
dripping springs of sweet water
golden acres where sudan
glen rose a sunray
cross plain and blooming grove.
Laredo!
May the crystal sterling silver rising star
fall on dallastexas.

This synthesised hyperrational grammar, concentrating on the linguistic plasticity of the toponymic units, nonetheless conjures a thematic archetype; the

more immediately recognisable aspect is an overarching bucolic theme, evoking a rich, fertile, homely land. The thematic and alliterative links between these toponyms are prioritised over their place in a logical itinerary. When mapped, the poem creates a zig-zagging pattern across large swathes of the state of Texas, evoking at once the American literary trope of the road trip, immortalised in Jack Kerouac's beat novel *On the Road*. Yet the linear, purposeful voyage across the wilderness in the classic American novel contrasts with the tautological, illogical path traced by Niccolai's poem. Beyond their common location in Texas, the toponyms are connected according to an almost impenetrable grammar: nouns turn into verbs ('May the crystal sterling silver rising star') and intransitive verbs become transitive verbs ('glen rose a sunray'). Describing Niccolai's linguistic strategy as 'un disinvolto plurilinguismo pentecostale,' Giammei notes the inclusion of such 'toponimi sintatticizzati,' and the linkage of place names with their respective languages: '[...] usando toponimi stranieri accordati con articoli, congiunzioni e preposizioni tratte dalla grammatica del luogo.'⁹⁷

It might be here that Louis Sass' category of the 'apotheosis of the word' most helpfully comes into play. Sass describes a particular analogy between the language of modernism and schizophrenic language in 'a new recognition of the independent nature of language, an acknowledgement of its existence as a system imbued with its own inherent mysteries and forms of productiveness – what I call the apotheosis of the word.'⁹⁸ Niccolai's hyperreflexive and hyperrational idiom in *Greenwich* is a compelling illustration of the potential for language to design an internal logic proper to itself. The schema provides a thought-provoking case study through which to re-read Nanni Balestrini's formative pronouncement in his 1961 essay 'Linguaggio e opposizione':

E da ultimo non saranno più il pensiero e l'emozione, che sono stati il germe dell'operazione poetica, a venire trasmessi per mezzo del linguaggio, ma sarà il linguaggio stesso a generare un significato nuovo e irripetibile.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Giammei, 'La bussola di Alice,' p. 51.

⁹⁸ Sass, *Madness and Modernism*, p. 184.

⁹⁹ N. Balestrini, 'Linguaggio e opposizione,' in Balestrini and Giuliani (eds.), *Gruppo 63: L'antologia / critica e teoria*, pp. 536-538.

The notion of language as *generative* of meaning rather than merely passive and descriptive reverberates with a Sassean view of the ‘apotheosis of the word.’ Niccolai’s *Greenwich*, I contend, is a vivid example of the intersection of a self-generating hyperreflexive grammar and a decisively neo avant-garde paradigm of language. The plasticity of the word itself ensures the hyperreflexivity of the text, and enables its particular quality of moving more readily between the verbal and the visual, as we will observe when considering the cartographic attributes of *Greenwich*.

As well as indicating many characteristics of the ultimate hyperreflexive text, Niccolai’s *Greenwich* can be read as a verbal-mappable illustration of Fredric Jameson’s account of the postmodern as ‘schizophrenic spatiality,’ as explored in his influential book *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Jameson presents a stimulating account of the intersections between the verbal experience of (cultural) schizophrenia, relayed via the work of Lacan, and the visual spontaneity and continual ‘present’ of contemporary, everyday experience for humanity in advanced capitalist societies. Jameson describes a shift in twentieth-century culture from what he calls the ‘modernist thematics’ of alienation and estrangement of the subject, to a newer, ‘postmodern’ decentring and even complete fragmentation of the subject altogether.¹⁰⁰ He clarifies that he is interested in schizophrenia not as a clinical or diagnostic label, but because it provides ‘a suggestive aesthetic model’¹⁰¹; like many theorists who use the term ‘schizophrenia’ (or related coinages, such as ‘schizomorfismo’), the aesthetic, cultural and descriptive possibilities of the term are a driving factor. Without necessarily making a case for the positioning of *Greenwich* as a postmodern text, I believe Niccolai’s generation of ‘odd grammars,’ viewed as part of ‘una scrittura altra,’ has an interesting parallel in Jameson’s linking of linguistic disorder with spatialising tendencies.

Jameson draws on Lacan’s language-based account of schizophrenia as a ‘breakdown in the signifying chain ... the interlocking syntagmatic series of signifiers which constitutes an utterance or a meaning.’¹⁰² When such a rupture

¹⁰⁰ Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p. 14-15.

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁰² *ibid.* I further comment that in Del Giudice et al., ‘Intervista con Giulia Niccolai,’ Niccolai explicitly states the associations between ‘poetry-making’ and ‘incest,’ positing the poetic process as ‘being incestuous with words and with objects and with people, that is, making love to these

happens in the order and wholeness of the sentence, the resulting shards are described as a distinctly schizophrenic ‘rubble of distinct and unrelated signifiers,’¹⁰³ evoking the vestigial and the archaeological. The links between this linguistic ‘rubble’ and the shards of the psyche are interpreted thus:

If we are unable to unify the past, present, and future of the sentence, then we are similarly unable to unify the past, present, and future of our own biographical experience or psychic life. With the breakdown of the signifying chain, therefore, the schizophrenic is reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers, or, in other words, a series of pure and unrelated presents in time.¹⁰⁴

The effect of temporal, frame-by-frame experience being compressed into a simultaneous present tense is presented as overwhelming and intense:

... that present suddenly engulfs the subject with undescrivable vividness, a materiality of perception properly overwhelming, which effectively dramatizes the power of the material - or better still, the literal - signifier in isolation.¹⁰⁵

The ‘material’ or ‘literal’ signifier chimes with Niccolai’s use of the toponym, a verbal unit which, in the context of the *Greenwich* poems, constitutes a presence rather than a representation, idea or symbol. ‘Rising star’ stands for just that – a particular place in Texas, despite alluding thematically, in the poem, to agrarian bounty.

According to Jameson, this vividness and ‘hallucinogenic intensity’ is palpable in many avant-garde works in the visual arts, narrative and music – he makes reference to John Cage’s spontaneous, non-linear clusters of sounds and

things and entering them.’ (p. 7). I note an interesting parallel with a Lacanian reading of ‘incest’ as a breakdown of the metaphorical kinship bonds of syntax, and a disobedience towards the laws of language. ‘Incest’ acting as a metaphor for the transgressive aspects of poetry-making (meddling with language) is thus aligned with a reading of ‘schizophrenic’ language as breaking kinship rules.

¹⁰³ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p. 27.

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*

Beckett's conjuring of an inescapable present tense at the expense of narrative time.¹⁰⁶ Not all such cultural expressions of eternal presentness need be disturbed and alienated, he notes, as the 'euphoric' aspects of this kind of experience open up paths to 'joyous intensities' displayed with relish in much cultural production of the late twentieth century, the analysis of which goes on to become the main subject of the book.¹⁰⁷

In what way, however, might the oddly generated poems of *Greenwich* illuminate, and be illuminated by, this now well-established theoretical discourse? I argue the disintegration of the bounded subject, literalised through the rupture and amalgamation of diverse texts and textual genera, speaks to Jameson's account of postmodern schizophrenia as spatialised temporality. The source material from the atlas is recycled into poetry, cut up and sutured together in semantically allusive ways, but it is also a code which can be reverse engineered back into an actual map. Both the exploded source text and its mappable possibilities render *Greenwich* a collection that plays with both verbal and spatial modes simultaneously, capturing an aspect of the mesmerising, eternal-present grammar described by Jameson. In compiling toponyms from the World Atlas, Niccolai works with alliteration, assonance, and glossomania, that is, with the phonetic capacities of words, while also creating visual itineraries encoded in how these words are transmuted from Atlas to poem. The poet's craft in moving from word to word is simultaneously mirrored in the traveller's spatial journey as they scan the map. In this sense, Niccolai's multi-layered, visually encoded collection is revealed as hyperreflexive, as a work which comments on its own subjectivity.

In their 2008 manifesto on the threatened category of the 'radical other,' Jean Baudrillard and Marc Guillaume wrote 'spectrality is not the destruction or disappearance of the subject. Spectrality is the dispersion of the subject.'¹⁰⁸ Ultimately, I contend that Niccolai's cut-up collections, with their emphasis on collaged text and the dispersal of the single-authored message to the fragmentary and multi-authored non-message, draw attention to self-deceiving conceptions of bounded consciousness in the art of poetry, and conjure instead a sense of the odd, uncanny, decentred, heterogeneous 'other.' *Greenwich* takes as its source a text

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, p. 28.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, p. 29.

¹⁰⁸ J. Baudrillard and M. Guillaume, *Radical Alterity*, MIT Press, 2008, p. 39.

which is not single-authored, or even multi-authored, but a compendium of the toponymic authorship, or, the evolving drive to name natural phenomena, of different populations over many ages – perhaps the most diffused authorial drive of all. Yet, since the editors of the World Atlas make executive decisions in selecting which toponyms are deemed official and which are folkloric, another discursive phenomenon is raised – the question of who decides what a place or feature is called - local population, government, or the Atlas itself. The hyperreflexive drive is particularly acute in the conception of *Greenwich*, as any sense of a poetic or authorial ‘I’ is dissolved and replaced by the often-recognisable place names substituting for other parts of speech. This process undermines poetic self-consciousness and self-knowledge, replacing them with hyper-consciousness; demonstrating, by reflecting on authorial creation, how readily fragmented and dispersed the consciousness which names, which describes and which writes, can be.

Conclusion

Niccolai's Hyperreflexive Collage: Disruption, Nonsense, Impenetrable Grammars

My aim has been to explore conceptions of 'cultural madness' in 1960s *neoavanguardia* counter-culture, and the literary strands which coincide with this renewed interest. Niccolai's poetic collections emerge from this period, signalling an implicit questioning of the traditional role of the author-poet as one who unveils inner turmoil or eternal truths, and instead draws attention to the process of literary creation and the difficulty in locating and circumscribing the idea of the bounded subject. As part of his inquiry into the parallels between schizoid 'infrastructures of experience' and the processes underlying modernist artworks, Louis Sass terms hyperreflexivity a 'focus on aspects or processes of action and experience that, in normal experience, would simply go unnoticed.' Rather than any Romantic invocation of internal disturbance as a source of creative power, we find suggestions of creative activity as an externalised and de-subjectivised process. Far from displaying a lack of logic or reason, these dislocations reach beyond established reason, towards what can be termed the hyperrational. It is an *excess* of thought itself, and a subsequent level of intellectual play that unravels its own codes and falls, ultimately, into absurdity. These hyperrational and hyperreflexive tendencies are observed in Niccolai by examining underlying codes in her work, and recognising patterns of sense rendered nonsensical.

In Niccolai, the hyperreflexive turn is manifested as the objectification of existing texts, images and concepts: in borrowing, decontextualising and recontextualising these works, Niccolai ultimately turns them into material in the manner of a collage artist. In *Sostituzione* and *Dai Novissimi*, authored critical texts are cut up, splitting them from their historical and literary context, and changing the genre and affect from formal prose to verse. The hyperrational impulse emerges in an indirect awareness and comprehension of the original texts, and the subsequent reworking and re-approximation of their form and genre.

Along with hyperrationality, these cut-up collections indicate a literary hyperreflexive grammar in their externalisation and distancing of the poetic process. In the poems of *Sostituzione*, the primary syntax appears to function from

a cursory glance, but no sense is garnered from the phrases; thus the aporia between form and meaning is heightened, creating the sense of a dispossessed or unclaimed language. The phrases cohere in an automated sense, but are devoid of any subjective or animated characteristics. The focus on how the original material is processed, and the forms it takes on, rather than a final encapsulated message, further draws us away from the author as conscious creator of meaning, but as an external mediator of potential pre-existing and plural meanings.

In the *Webster* poems, the fractured dictionary definitions are de-authorised and divorced from their ‘factual’ status, rendering them less authoritative as definitions but rehabilitated as material for literary endeavour, drawing parallels between textuality and visual collage and montage. Undoing the structure and authority of the dictionary form, and using the material fragments in establishing a novel work, amounts to an abstract game - hyperrational in its excess of thought in the management of formal text and reconfiguration of sense as nonsense. The crucial malleability, or materiality, of the text is central to this hyperreflexive and hyperrational play.

Greenwich uses linguistic material borrowed from the World Atlas and woven into dynamic yet disorienting verse; while syntactically and semantically meaning little, each individual poem traces an itinerary concretely grounded in the coded universe of the atlas. The distinct lack of accessible sense wrapped in an intriguing, externally procured grammar draws attention to alternative, primarily visual, modes of poetic creativity. Overall, these collections, characterised by extracting text from extraneous sources and rehabilitating it in verse, enact a distancing from sensation and human affect, ultimately externalising, and making an object of, their own production.

What, then, is the point of Niccolai’s ‘nonsense’? I have attempted to argue that the puzzles and curiosities that are drawn out of Niccolai’s corpus, rather than establish merely a ludic exercise, penetrate a series of untapped grammars which investigate the desubjectifying and externalising tendencies seen both in schizoid discourse and formally referred to in visual experimental poetry. These collections, I contend, make prescient points beyond embodying the visually ludic and the linguistically playful. The cut-up which leads nowhere provokes an uncanny unease in the reader, entering into the realm of the

tragicomical and the 'pseudo-logical'.¹⁰⁹ The dispersal of the subject and the dislodgement of logocentric processes are deceptively embedded in verbal-visual playfulness. Niccolai's work contributes to the wider subject of this thesis in how the visual and concrete elements, through their emphasis on inter-media, are intrinsically entangled in the operation of this hyperrational and hyperreflexive idiom.

¹⁰⁹ Spatola, 'Poesia a tutti i costi' (Part II), p. 52.

Chapter Four

Patrizia Vicinelli's Textual Webs of Trauma

Introduction

Must this multiplicity of female desire and female language be understood as shards, scattered remnants of a violated sexuality? A sexuality denied? The question has no simple answer. The rejection, the exclusion of a female imaginary certainly puts woman in the position of experiencing herself only fragmentarily, in the little-structured margins of a dominant ideology, as waste, or excess, what is left of a mirror invested by the (masculine) "subject" to reflect himself, to copy himself.

- Luce Irigaray, 'This Sex which is Not One'¹

In the poetry of Patrizia Vicinelli (1943-1991) we observe the manifestation of a transgressive poetic subject through a radical reworking of the possibilities of visual poetry. Vicinelli's permutational, typographic and collage poetry makes use of a variety of temporal, visual, and linguistic ruptures, representing the traumatic gap between knowing and not knowing, and elaborating a 'nomadic' dissenting subjectivity.

Born in Bologna, Vicinelli's creative output spans literature, dramatics, cinema and the visual arts. Her early involvement with the literary *neoavanguardia* was documented in her appearance at the Gruppo 63 meeting of La Spezia in June 1966, where she performed her phonetic and sound poetry, capitalising on her vocal talents, striking appearance and gesturalism.² Having

¹ L. Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One* (1977), trans. C. Porter and C. Burke, New York, Cornell University Press, 1985, p. 30.

² C. Bello Minciocchi (ed.), *Patrizia Vicinelli - Non sempre ricordano: poesia, prosa, performance*, Florence, Le lettere, 2009, p. xxvii. See also Vincenzo Accame's 1967 first-hand account of Vicinelli's dynamic performance of 'CoinVOLT' at La Spezia: V. Accame, 'Storia e cronistoria di tre a.,' *Malebolge*, quaderno n. 1, Spring-Summer 1967, pp. 57-59: '... legge: lenta, calma, con voce suavisiva e piena di sfumature; [...] i mezzi toni, le parole spezzate, le sillabe sussurrate, le dolci inflessioni di voce che fanno musica, un discorso tutto volto verso l'interno, con gli sguardi che corrono sul foglio alla ricerca di quei frammenti verbali che escono dagli

published texts from 1962 in Adriano Spatola's journal *Bab Ilu* and Emilio Villa and Mario Diacono's *Ex*, Vicinelli's volume of poetry *à, a. A.*, was published by Lerici poesia publications in 1966.³ *à, a. A.* includes a range of untitled highly visual and concrete poetic works dedicated to Emilio Villa,⁴ 'coinVOLT' (which had been previously published in the journal *Malebolge* in 1966⁵), the titular poem 'à, a. A.' as well as rectilinear verse-format works from 1963, 'Preventivo di castrazione' and 'Nobel alla cardiomanza.' Cecilia Bello Minciocchi, in her evaluation of Vicinelli's poetic corpus, stresses the centrality of sound itself, down to the phonetic constituents of words, along with the union of word and action.⁶

After a conviction for drugs possession in the late 1960s, Vicinelli went into a ten-year period of exile, most of which was spent in Tangiers, Morocco. It was here, between 1969 and 1970, that one of her most radically verbal-visual⁷ works was composed, a pamphlet-collage entitled *Apotheosys of schizoid woman*, but which would not be edited and published until 1979.⁸ This volume of diary excerpts, personal letters, newspaper cuttings detailing bombings and assassinations, medication prescriptions, drawings, poetic fragments, conversational snippets and politico-philosophical quotations serves as an unique document on the cross-pollination of visuality, poetics and traumata.

Vicinelli represents an alternative viewpoint within the archetypal neo avant-garde aesthetic and theoretical paradigm, due to a less rigid distinction between poet and work. Her own comments shifts the discourse away from the complete abstractions of the 'riduzione dell'io' towards one where the poet and

altoparlanti così tenuamente e sottilmente differenziati [...] (p. 57). Vicinelli is mostly briefly mentioned in relation to broader movements rather than in her own right: for example, as a contributor to *Malebolge*, the Gruppo 70, and the Gruppo 63 readings in La Spezia in 1966; see Barilli, *La neoavanguardia italiana: dalla nascita del "Verri" alla fine di "Quindici"*, p. 260.

³ P. Vicinelli, *à, a. A.*, Milano, Lerici editori, 1966; my page citations are from this edition. This short collection is reproduced in Bello Minciocchi (ed.), *Patrizia Vicinelli - Non sempre ricordano*. A selection from *à, a. A.*, also reproduced in: N. Balestrini and A. Giuliani, *Gruppo 63: L'antologia*, Milano, Bompiani, 2013, pp. 127-131.

⁴ According to Bello Minciocchi, these are the texts likely to have been performed at La Spezia in 1966 (Bello Minciocchi, p. xxxiii).

⁵ *Malebolge*, quaderno n. 3/4, Autumn 1966, pp. 24-5.

⁶ Bello Minciocchi, *Non sempre ricordano*, p. xxviii.

⁷ I refer to 'verbal-visual' works as works which combine verbal or literary elements, with visual or perceptual elements. Although in this section I will consider poetry where text is arranged in visually innovative ways, my usage of 'verbal-visual' extends to works, like *Apotheosys of schizoid woman*, which mix drawings, photographs, graphic design etc. with text. 'Verbal-visual' also applies to ekphrastic works, where visual concepts and themes hold a central role in the text.

⁸ Bello Minciocchi, *Non sempre ricordano*, p. xxxvii.

their work are not so easily separable. Her statement in 1987 on the all-encompassing nature of lived life and creativity can be read as a fascinating insight into the *material* basis of artistic experience:

Non è importante ciò che il poeta pensa ma ciò che dice e che fa. La persona è un tutt'uno con l'opera e non è possibile essere dei grandi creativi se non si vive creativamente rischiando. I grandi – Artaud Genet Alighieri – hanno avuto una vita dolorosa e in qualche modo epica avendo alla base un bisogno di eticità. È verità assoluta da portare agli uomini che ne valuteranno l'autenticità.⁹

Taking into account the notion of the 'creatively lived' artwork, I propose a reading of Vicinelli's *à, a. A* and *Apotheosys of schizoid woman* where, although the unity of author and work is tangible through material clues, the texts produce their own nuanced, unstable meaning which is embedded in a visually charged web of traumatic signifiers.

This chapter will explore the reflective potential of literary visuality, as well as its dissenting capacity, in approaching the dark topic of traumatised and marginalised subjectivity in the understudied poetry of Patrizia Vicinelli. I look to diverse models and methodological possibilities in my reading of the visual and delirious 'other' in Vicinelli's typographic and collage poetry. I find certain strands within the literary and cultural trauma studies paradigm highly suggestive, in particular the model of temporal belatedness, elaborated by Cathy Caruth after Sigmund Freud. I revisit Louis Sass' illuminating descriptions of linguistic and cognitive slippage in *Madness and Modernism* in my reading of Vicinelli's complex verbal constructions. Although Sass' phenomenological approach to schizophrenia operates within a wholly different field to that of literary trauma studies, I contend that bringing these two accounts into dialogue can illuminate the underexamined literary forms and strategies of Vicinelli. I believe that Sass' usage of terminology from phenomenological psychiatry aids an examination of

⁹ P. Vicinelli, in P. Bacchi, *UT PATRIZIA POESIS*, Interview with Patrizia Vicinelli, in *Mongolfiera*, January 1987.

visually-charged dissociation¹⁰ and rupture in her linguistically experimental work.

In part I, I propose a reading of traumatic temporal and spatial rupture in Vicinelli's typographically experimental book of poetry *à, a. A*, focusing on visual features that engage with literary unknowability, unrepresentability and traumatic dislocation. Part II explores the pamphlet-collage *Apotheosys of schizoid woman*, discussing Vicinelli's creation of an evolving concrete idiom, and considering readings of 'perverse,' reflective and interrogative collage. Part III posits concrete poetry as biopolitical critique, shifting the emphasis towards the concept of 'insidious trauma' and its incarnation in the evolving materiality of the collage medium. In relation to *Apotheosys of schizoid woman*, and as part of a wider reading of Vicinelli's invocation of marginal and dissenting subjectivity, I look to the thought of Rosi Braidotti and her critique of phallogocentrism.

I look first to the theorisation of literary trauma as a rupture of time and space. The field of literary trauma studies has, by and large, looked to the novel, the memoir, and the film as the classic literary loci of psychic trauma. There has been a critical focus on the fascinating and challenging processes of temporal, spatial and perceptual rupture in textual and cinematic *narrative* forms.¹¹ Vicinelli, I contend, offers a mode of visual and linguistic disruption that can be read within a *non-representational*, non-narrative poetic trauma paradigm.¹²

¹⁰ I use this term to refer broadly to phenomena relating to detachment from emotions, the body, memory and reality; in cultural trauma studies it is often used to refer to detachment from memory or 'absence' from the self after traumatic experience. See R. Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy*, Chicago, 2000, p. 1, 8; also M. Balaev, (ed.), *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory*, p. 3, 5, 6.

¹¹ See C. Caruth (ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995; C. Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996; S. Felman and D. Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, London, Routledge, 1992; M. Nadal and M. Calvo (eds.), *Trauma in Contemporary Literature: Narrative and Representation*, New York, Routledge, 2014; M. Balaev (ed.), *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory*, Basingstoke/New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014; G. Buelens et al. (eds), *The Future of Trauma Theory: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism*, London/New York, Routledge, 2014; D. M. Horvitz, *Literary Trauma: Sadism, Memory, and Sexual Violence in American Women's Fiction*, Albany, SUNY Press, 2000. See R. Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy*, Chicago, 2000 for a critique of Caruth's interpretation of the 'literal nature of traumatic memory' (p. 265). For a broader work of the cultural history of trauma, as well as trauma in narrative representations, see R. Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, London, Routledge, 2008.

¹² I maintain that poetry, especially visual and concrete poetry, has been overlooked in literary trauma studies due to an emphasis on narrative forms. See, however, A. Rowland, *Poetry as Testimony: Witnessing and Memory in Twentieth-century Poems*, New York/London, Routledge, 2014, for a querying of the notion of poetry as 'non-representational' and a study of 20th-century war poetry as 'testimonial performances.'

The study of trauma in such narratives has its origins in the appearance of post-traumatic stress disorder as a medical category. Leading trauma theorist Cathy Caruth defines post-traumatic stress disorder as ‘a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event.’¹³ Caruth’s understanding of trauma lies in the nature of its temporality:

The pathology consists, rather, solely in the *structure of its experience* or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event.¹⁴

The spectre of belatedness informs Caruth’s reading and interpretation of traumatic texts, films and history itself, in her call to ‘examine the implications of this paradoxical experience for the ways we represent and communicate historical experience.’¹⁵ Questions surrounding the belatedness of the *experience* of the traumatic event, whether this necessarily translates to unknowability and unspeakability, and whether we can speak of the veracity, specificity or universality of traumatic experience, have been at the centre of the debate ever since Caruth’s work. In *Unclaimed Experience*, Caruth looks to distinguish trauma as a ‘wound’ which ‘cries out’ *after* the fact:

It is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language.¹⁶

¹³ Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, p. 4.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 151.

¹⁶ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, p. 4.

The conception of trauma as an intrinsically delayed phenomenon is echoed in much scholarly work on trauma, and has a history of its own:

Freud's concept of *Nachträglichkeit* (translated as 'deferred action,' 'belatedness,' 'afterwardsness') encapsulates the paradoxical temporality of trauma, which implies a recurrent tension between the traumatic impact and its delayed response [...]. Thus, the peculiar temporal structure of trauma involves unfinishedness and repetition. Since the survivor experiences trauma 'one moment too late,' s/he is forced to confront the primary shock over and over again [...].¹⁷

Vicinelli not only alludes to but also visibly exemplifies traumatic traces in her work, through typographical experimentation and visual punctuation effects. In a manner comparable to Caruth's characterisation of the 'wound,' the poetic form of *à, a. A*, 'cries out' with the visual marks of its split form.¹⁸ The phenomenon of unspeakability, of the loss of the rational use of language, regains expression in the form of visual traces in the text. *à, a. A*, stages a bewildering and contradictory accumulation of silence, linguistic profusion and irrational fragmentation. This poetic form, when combined with typographic experimentation, is a fitting medium for the various debates surrounding the representability and non-representability of trauma. The verbal-visual medium very *literally* stages rupture, in its gaps and elisions; concurrently, it is fragmented on a syntactical and verbal level, rendering it ill-equipped to express any form of 'linear' story.¹⁹ The language of trauma, according to Caruth, must be conscious of the problems in expression which are inherently tied up in the delayed appearance of the wound:

¹⁷ Nadal and Calvo, *Trauma in Contemporary Literature: Narrative and Representation*, p. 3.

¹⁸ See Caruth's reading of the story of Tancredi and Clorinda in Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, p. 4.

¹⁹ By 'linear/linearity' I refer to certain interpretations of form in narrative, poetry and language, and conversely with 'non-linear,' I attend to a plurality of disruptive gestures. Regarding linear narrative, I refer to the general use of teleological metanarrative approaches. I define linear poetry as verse formed in stanzas, rather than 'non-linear' typographically irregular concrete forms; linear prose, by extension, is text in a rectilinear printed format. Linear linguistic constructions imply syntactically and grammatically logical phrases, undermined, for example, by non-logocentric poetic practices. Rosi Braidotti, as we shall see, extends the usage of 'linearity' to refer to a kind of epistemological linearity as tied up with the project of phallogocentrism.

Such a question [...] must, indeed, also be spoken in a language that is always somehow literary: a language that defies, even as it claims, our understanding [...] a literary dimension that cannot be reduced to the thematic content of the text or to what the theory encodes, and that, beyond what we can know or theorize about it, stubbornly persists in bearing witness to some forgotten wound.²⁰

Vicinelli's poetry may certainly be characterised by language which 'defies understanding' and resists fixed meaning, through the use of plurilinguistic voices and heterogeneous registers, inner speech, and polysemy (multiple meanings).

More recent models in literary trauma studies have sought to expand on such definitions and theorisations of trauma, which include a call to venture beyond the confines of the singular, all-encompassing 'wound'.²¹ Other approaches are perceived in the shifts towards alternative genres of writing, including hybrid genres and non-linear writing, which 'disrupt, interrupt and rupture oppressive dominant discourses of truth-telling.'²² My argument follows

²⁰ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 5.

²¹ For example, Michelle Balaev seeks to move away from what she calls the 'classic model' of trauma, which risks 'universalising pathology' and which only conceives of the phenomenon in terms of unspeakability and unrepresentability. She proposes instead a plurality of approaches, openness to global expressions of trauma, and a closer look at social and cultural contexts of traumatic experience. See: Balaev, 'Literary Trauma Theory Reconsidered' in Balaev (ed.), *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory*, 2014.

²² See, for example: T. Rodrigue, 'PostSecret as Imagetext: The Reclamation of Traumatic Experiences and Identity,' in O. Amihay and L. Walsh (eds.), *The Future of Text and Image: Collected Essays on Literary and Visual Conjectures*, Newcastle, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012, p. 47. Tanya Rodrigue's chapter represents a more recent tendency in trauma studies to expand cultural exploration of trauma beyond the singular 'event par excellence,' as described by Shoshana Felman: 'Trauma is, one might say, the event par excellence, the event as unintelligible, as the pure impact of sheer happening' (S. Felman, *The Juridical Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2002, p. 179). Rodrigue has argued that 'the most popular medium for the representation of traumatic experiences today is life writing genres, genres that demand the telling of 'true' experiences, such as autobiography and memoirs' (T. Rodrigue, p. 41). She proposes a return to W.J.T. Mitchell's category of the 'imagetext' as a medium that resists 'dominant discourses that have guided traumatized individuals in representing their experiences and thus identities in genres such as autobiography or memoir.' 'The term "imagetext" designates composite, synthetic works (or concepts) that combine image and text.' W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*, p. 89. Wendy Hesford and Wendy Kozol have highlighted the paradox inherent in the invocation of the 'real' and of 'crisis' in documentary, photographic and verbal accounts of violence and trauma and how these issues intersect with accounts of the fragmented subject and the instability surrounding moments of crisis. W. Hesford and W. Kozol (eds.), *Haunting Violations: Feminist Criticism and the Crisis of the Real*, University of Illinois Press, 2000.

that, if trauma's unknowability cannot be adequately represented by traditional, linear, teleological metanarratives, and if non-linear narratives have gone some of the way in providing the type of voice which befits trauma, then why not break with the *physical* line on the page altogether? It would appear that the logical extension of the aesthetic of a fragmented, ruptured mode of story-telling is one which is not confined to the rectilinear grid at all, in the form of verse or prose which breaks out of spatial linearity on the printed page.²³ The temporal shifts and ambiguities so widespread in the trauma novel find a radical alternative in the jarring cruxes of verbal and semantic units in the visual poem; not merely in the *representation* of dislodged time, but in the reader's applied temporal engagement with the materiality of the text in the act of reading. Willard Bohn examines the task of the reader in the encounter with visual poetry as a time-bound process:

At the purely verbal level, the mind proceeds cumulatively, holding the words in suspension while ordering and reordering them in a continual search for meaning.²⁴

Visuality, delineated here in its broadest terms as an aesthetic mode in literature and the arts, is naturally at home in cultural trauma studies. Lisa Saltzman and Eric Rosenberg, in their examination of the visual arts in relation to trauma, strongly believe that the visual mode holds equal, if not more, force than the verbal or descriptive:

The formulation of trauma as discourse is predicated upon metaphors of visuality and image as unavoidable carrier of the unrepresentable. From primal scene to flashback to screen memory to the dream, much of the language deployed to speak trauma's character is emphatically, if not exclusively, visual. It may even be argued that the very form taken by trauma as a phenomenon is only, how asymptotically or not, understood as or when pictured. The inability to frame trauma in and of

²³ See this chapter, p. 206 fn. 19, for a definition of 'linear/linearity.'

²⁴ W. Bohn, *Reading Visual Poetry*, Lanham, Maryland, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2011, p. 16.

itself lends the form almost naturally to a process of visualization as expiation.²⁵

It is this emphasis on the visual mode as the initial carrier of the messages of trauma, the vehicle for preverbal and automatic imprinting of traumatic content, which I wish to highlight in examining neo avant-garde traumatic texts. While Saltzman and Rosenberg take visual artworks as their primary objects of study, Roger Luckhurst looks to the genealogy and intellectual history of the category of trauma itself. Luckhurst's *The Trauma Question*, a study on the aetiology (causation) and cultural representation of trauma as a phenomenon of the modern era, includes a chapter on the relationship between the processes of photography and the historical and contemporary conceptualisation of trauma.²⁶ He acknowledges that a defining characteristic of trauma is that it defeats the 'linguistic register' as a 'form of representation':

One of the central ways in which contemporary trauma has been conceived is around the symptom of the intrusive or recurrent image, the unbidden flashback that abolishes time and reimmerses you in the visual field of the inaugurating traumatic instant.²⁷

Art theorist Jill Bennett, in *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma and Contemporary Art*, studies affective imagery for its ability to not merely thematise traumatic events, but to 'act as a trigger, inciting an affective response':

Although words can clearly serve sense memory, vision has a very different relationship to affective experience – especially to experience that cannot be spoken as it is felt. The eye can often function as a mute witness by means of which events register as eidetic memory images imprinted with sensation.²⁸

²⁵ L. Saltzman and E. Rosenberg (eds.), *Trauma and Visuality in Modernity*, Hanover, NH, 2006, p. xi-xii.

²⁶ Luckhurst, 'The Intrusive Image: Photography and Trauma' in *The Trauma Question*, pp. 147-176.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 147.

²⁸ J. Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma and Contemporary Art*, Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 2005, p. 35.

Writing in 1968, fellow concrete poet Adriano Spatola located Vicinelli's *à, a. A.*, within the experimental current, related to the historical avant-garde, of approaching 'una neodisumanizzazione dell'arte'; he speculated about a desire to bring to the surface 'le radici di un male che è vecchio quanto l'avanguardia,' using new creative techniques in the elaboration of 'una visione inedita, anche se elementare, della realtà.'²⁹ What Spatola described as the seeking to uncover, through art, the source of evil and pain via an unmediated vision of reality and suffering, raises the spectre of an experimental poetic trauma before the widespread academic debate on literary trauma appears. Spatola read in Vicinelli an oscillation between extremes of silence and vocalisation, between the mute 'trionfo dell'afasia' and the glossomaniac 'parola per eccesso,'³⁰ likewise engaging, I argue, with many of the thematics of linguistic and communication breakdown raised more recently in literary trauma readings.

It is in light of both established and recent developments in literary trauma theory that I propose to explore the possibility of a distinctive *poetic* and *visual* form of trauma, one which, I believe, is strikingly exemplified in the visual poetry of Patrizia Vicinelli. The pivotal link between visuality and traumata in Vicinelli's texts paradoxically resides in the notion of rupture, gap or scission, and which resonates with Caruth's influential theory of traumatic time. These destabilising aporias, I argue, ultimately draw our attention to the alternative and marginal subjectivities which form the crux of Vicinelli's radical neo avant-garde practice.

²⁹ Spatola, on *à, a. A.* (in a review of works by Vittorio Bodini, Achille Bonito Oliva, Giuliano Gramigna and Patrizia Vicinelli) in *Il Verri*, 27, June 1968, p. 105.

³⁰ Spatola, 'Situazione della poesia, I' (1968) in *Impaginazioni, (Scritti Critici)*, Torino, Tam Tam, 1984, p. 44.

Part I

Impasto: Words and Thoughts in à, a. A,

Vicinelli's collection of poetry *à, a. A*, displays many of the features of rupture, fragmentation and spatial and temporal disturbance described by Sass in his illumination of the affinities between 'the sensibility and structures of consciousness'³¹ found in modernism, and the schizophrenic disruption of normative mental processes.³² In relation to the classic literary trauma model, the poems manifest a wide range of literary and visual features evoking traumatic splitting and dissociation, notably those elements of 'linguistic indeterminacy, ambiguous referentiality and aporia.'³³ See 'coinVOLT'³⁴ (fig. 19):

ho vinto la pappina pappetta della attention de la
maison neuve em ! zia la Mariuccia l'incostante: sono fregato l'
imprevu: Q.I. inferieur 60. mi farà hahhà, dire ancora hahha la pappina
pappet
ta del imprevu riCCCon volgimento beurr.sono fregato mank a.
em ! restio ; bisogna intro à la moins zero;
) Il catarofrangente. Il
cataplegico. Neuroconsul=
to. Votatore di insetti.
Il catato-plegico avan=
zato, £. 5.000. Puah, l'
onirico suadente.
: ri (riCCCon volgimento , (anche.

The works in *à, a. A*, are composed of verbal 'collages' of fragmentary conversation and phrases arranged in a visually intricate manner on the page, and rely heavily on a plurilingual and cacophonous *mélange* of verbal and phrasal units.

³¹ Sass, *Madness and Modernism*, p. 8.

³² Sass, see chapters 'Cognitive Slippage,' 'Disturbances of Distance,' and 'Languages of Inwardness.'

³³ Balaev, *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory*, p. 1.

³⁴ Vicinelli, 'coinVOLT,' in *à, a. A*, Milan, Lerici, 1966, p. 20.

This technique results in a quasi-painterly ‘impasto’ of language, where the apparently random juxtaposition of linguistic units alternates with interlinguistic synchrony and coherence. On the intralinguistic level, in this case pertaining to Italian, a proliferation of neologisms is immediately apparent. The title ‘coinVOLT’ itself starts from a position of ambivalence, with ‘coinvolto’ invoking the relatively neutral ‘involved’ or ‘included,’ to ‘engaged’, ‘captivated’ (emotionally or artistically), but also the negative connotations of ‘implicated’ or ‘incriminated.’ ‘coinVOLT’ plays with interlinguistic polysemy, inasmuch as it could equally be read as an amalgamation of the English ‘coin’ and ‘volt,’ automatically altering not only its signification, but how it signifies.

Within the poem ‘coinVOLT’, we encounter such portmanteaus as ‘fuocore’, which amalgamates ‘fuoco’ and ‘core’, ‘respintoma’: ‘respinto’ and ‘ma’, and ‘condottelato’: ‘condotto’ and ‘telato’. In the extract above, the coinages ‘catarofrangente,’ (similar to ‘catarifrangente’) ‘cataplegico’ (possibly a merging of ‘cataplasma’ (poultice) with ‘paraplegico’) and ‘catato-plegico’ (‘catatonico’ and ‘plegia’) all include the Greek prefix ‘cata-’ (*katá*: ‘downwards’). As well as imparting connotations relating to ‘down,’ ‘reverse,’ ‘backward,’ ‘degenerative,’ the neologisms capitalise on the Greek roots of many medical signifiers, further reinforced by the presence of ‘neuroconsulto’ (‘neuro-’: ‘sinew,’ ‘tendon’, ‘cord’). Along with the unsettling pathological associations of these neologisms, their almost recognisable verbal forms give rise to an oneiric sense of the uncanny.

This recognition and elevation of the mutable nature of language, combined with erudite etymological play, is raised in a variety of feminist writings on language. Rosi Braidotti’s critique of phallogocentrism entails an understanding of the inherently non-linear qualities of language and uses a biological-botanical-zoological metaphor to illustrate the autonomy of linguistic evolution:

[...] Linearity may well be an ideal in phallogocentric cultures and as such be constantly promoted and ubiquitously praised; nonetheless it is both unachievable and undesirable. This is due to the dynamic nature of language, which is living matter: words grow, split and multiply, sprouting new roots or side branches and resonating with all kinds of echoes and

musical variations. Like insects, they mutate and grow antennae or extra limbs and new organs without any apparent strains. They simply carry, perform and transform energy as a matter of fact.³⁵

Braidotti's thesis is suggestive in that it gives legitimacy to non-linear language forms through an association with nature, arguing that structured, linear language constitutes an artificial repression of autonomous language flows. Vicinelli's verbal creations create flows between etymological roots, between polysemic terms in multiple languages, and across the usual functions of punctuation and capitalisation; they also flow in syntactical and physical space, stretching across the page, breaking the rectilinear grid. Braidotti's organic metaphor is similarly visual-spatial, with an emphasis on dynamic flows in multiple and incongruous directions, rather than in structured, linear, sequential formations.

Thus, paradoxically enough, the very linearity that the phallogocentric system celebrates as a law cannot be imposed easily on the polysemic structure of language. In some ways, linearity is unachievable, undesirable and fundamentally unattainable.

I argue that Vicinelli's 'impasto' poetic strategy, incorporating neologisms and typographic irregularities, enacts the leaking out of this unruly polyvalency, counter to the pre-ordained orderliness of phallogocentrism.

Louis Sass approaches non-linear perceptions and verbalisations from a rather different angle. In his characterisation of 'schizoid speech,' Sass speaks of the 'contamination percept' as the phenomenon in which 'two objects or perspectives appear to be present simultaneously, as if overlaid on each other as in a photographic double exposure,'³⁶ freely mediating between visual and verbal modes in the illumination of his examples. In both schizophrenic artwork and in verbal discourse, Sass reads this feature as a symptom of ambivalence: 'taking 'all the possibilities into simultaneous consideration,' [...] leading to a competition among incongruous and incompatible modes of response.'³⁷ Sass treats

³⁵ R. Braidotti, *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2006, p. 175.

³⁶ Sass, *Madness and Modernism*, p. 130.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 129.

fragmentation in modernist literature as comparable to the proliferation of perspectives achieved in cubist and futurist collage, which he describes as ‘an intermingling, self-referential and self-questioning, not just of disparate objects but of the motley contexts from which they derive [...], creating heteroclitics and perspectival fluctuations similar to what occurs with schizophrenia.’³⁸ In psychoanalytic discourse, another example of the interlinguistic intermingling of perspectives occurs in the famous case of Breuer’s patient Bertha Pappenheim, but this time on the sentential level:

In the process of time she became almost completely at a loss for words. When words failed her, she would put them together laboriously out of four or five languages and became nearly unintelligible. Here is a reconstruction of Pappenheim’s linguistic mélange: ‘Jamais acht nobody bella mio please lieboehn nuit.’³⁹

Here it is the ‘loss’ of the (standard) use of words which, according to Breuer and Hunter, channels the production of language towards the plurilingual and heterogeneous. Vicinelli’s poetic economy channels a similar dissatisfaction with words and structures *as they are*, and fills the ensuing gaps with typographical and linguistic reformulations, along with visual-verbal experimentation.

‘à, a. A,’ fuses visual perception with verbal ‘impasto’, with its eyewitness testimonial ‘entro qui con gli occhi.’ In this first section the ostensibly confessional tone continues: ‘tuTTto quelcheho – chehodaDire’ along with a compulsive emphasis on writing : ‘cosescritte cosescritte cosescritte’⁴⁰ (fig. 17):

entro qui con gli occhi
v e (n) do

tuTTto quelcheho – chehodaDire – (entro – ve(n)do): mi sembra ve(n)do
coME NieNte – nTE
- TE

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 137-8.

³⁹ D. Hunter, ‘Hysteria, Psychoanalysis and Feminism: The Case of Anna O.’, K. Conboy et al., *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, New York, Columbia, 1997. p. 260.

⁴⁰ Vicinelli, ‘à, a. A.’ in *à, a. A.*, p. 6.

....

LA RAZIONALIZZAZ. DELLE COSESCRITTE

- e ve(n)do e / ci ho pensato e n t r o la cometa le come/te come

una cosa colTA/FATata

- una cosa vOLTA/FATT(acci)a – cosescritte – cosescritte, cosescritte

Along with the impulse to write is the simultaneous reference to seeing/selling, a pattern we will see again in Vicinelli: ‘ve(n)do.’ Vicinelli sets up an opposition between allusions to the *furor scribendi*, or the frenzied eruption of writing,⁴¹ and the commodification of verbal capital in a market where everything is rationalised and controlled: ‘LA RAZIONALIZZAZ. DELLE COSESCRITTE.’ The twin poles of the dehumanised and abstract ‘logic’ of the market, and the extreme unreason of the unbridled scribe, trace the binary of psychological extremes, of madness set against sanity. Throughout ‘à, a. A,’ the theme of ‘seeing/selling’ reappears, with both the body and words themselves rendered objectified and marketable. An intensification of the relations between the categories of bodily capital and writing capital - ‘mi sembra ve(n)do / coME NieNte – nTE’ - foregrounds the extreme and abject reification of such a process. The concealed play of ‘NieNte’ with the capitalised ‘MENNTE’ further emphasises the psychological aspects of this seeing/selling binary construction. By freely associating the scopic impulse, the sale of writing, and the rationalisation of ‘things written,’ within a paradoxically frenzied and *visibly* disruptive poetic format, a broader discussion of the voice of the marginalised ‘other’ comes to the fore. The feminine in *à, a. A*, and *Apotheosys* is evoked alongside other figures, what we might call other ‘alternative subjectivities,’ such as the traumatised and the exiled, in their standing outside of meta-narrative completeness and grammatical and linguistic totality.

The constructions of the frenzied writer, the rationaliser and the confessor shift rapidly and randomly from one to another, with gaps and punctuation marking extreme code switches. The poem manifests a type of play-in-process using fluid verbal materials, illuminating parts of speech, through capitalisation,

⁴¹ See this thesis, p. 96, fn. 12.

to reveal alternate meanings. The twisting of ‘colta / fatata’ to ‘volta / fattaccia’ signals one of many ambiguous shifts in possible signification, of meaning coming-into-being. The obsessive repetition of variants on ‘vedo/vendo’ continues to the end of the first verse⁴² (fig. 17):

io Meleve(n)do qui
in due o tre
d(entro) ve(n)do e poi

The question of multivalence and polysemy is central to Vicinelli’s textual webs. The above fragment suggests four readings, based on the reader’s reconfiguration of the parentheses: ‘dentro vendo e poi’, ‘dentro vedo e poi’, ‘entro vedo e poi’ and ‘entro vendo e poi’. Sass describes as ‘schizophrenic’ the manner in which expression can take on an unrestricted multitude of potentialities. On schizophrenic reception of language he says:

Instead of grasping the overall meaning of something read or heard, schizophrenics will often attend to material qualities of the signifier, to the sounds of words or their graphic appearance on the page, or they will become aware of a large number of the potential, but normally irrelevant, meanings of words. [...] Schizophrenics often seem hypersensitive to the polysemous nature of language; as a result, they may be prone to making puns or, in listening and reading, to feeling overwhelmed by the plethora of possible meanings.⁴³

Vicinelli’s four possible readings, framed for consumption by parentheses, and which are performed by a mere handful of letters, demonstrate the often arbitrary nature of signification and allow an open handling and interpretation of the text. The graphic appearance of the fragment, then, may be seen as equally relevant to the final effect as the interpretation chosen by the reader. Another

⁴² Vicinelli, ‘à, a. A,’ in *à, a. A.*, p. 6.

⁴³ Sass, *Madness and Modernism*, p. 178.

polysemous fragment combines the same linguistic units in yet another variety of ways⁴⁴ (fig. 17):

n
N
 ve do ve do ve(n)do VE DO ve d ve()do – ve-n-do V E N D O VEDO
n
o

The incorporation of new punctuation marks, variable permutations of letters, irregular capitalisation, and ‘dropped’ letters further demonstrate the equal significance of semantic and visual effect. The patterns of letters flowing not merely horizontally but also diagonally convey a sense of overwhelming boundlessness of expression whilst also tending towards obsessive repetition. It is in Vicinelli’s highly graphic and material engagement with language where both visual and psychic traces are located.

Yet the ‘othering’ of the mysterious, the irrational, even the monstrous, has itself been queried and probed. The figures of the traumatised subject, the body for sale, and the frenzied writer are often amalgamated in *à, a. A.*. The specificity of the visual forms, I have argued, conjures up a literary fabric whereby the gaps and elisions represent unrepresentability, or at least the silence that follows the belated traumatic moment. It might also be argued, however, that the logocentric system in which these amorphous figures act bestow on them their status as irreducibly messy and unrepresentable in the first place. Adriana Cavarero, in her feminist materialist philosophy of sexual difference and embodiment, outlines the sexed nature of human beings and correlative grammatical structures in language, critiquing the positing of the masculine as universal in phallogocentric systems, and the status of the feminine as ‘other’.⁴⁵ Vicinelli’s verbal-visual poetics of trauma, I argue, by extension cross-reference not only the feminine ‘other,’ but the ‘mad’ other and the visual, non-narrative other: a network of non-linear formal and thematic entities which undermine the hegemony of logocentric poesis.

⁴⁴ Vicinelli, ‘à, a. A.’ p. 6.

⁴⁵ See A. Cavarero, *Nonostante Platone*, Rome, Riuniti, 1990; also *Corpo in figure: Filosofia e politica della corporeità*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 2000.

Weaving, Violation, Dissociation

Vicinelli's neologisms might be read, then, as expressive of a fragmentation and multiplicity of perspectives, further radicalised by the manipulation of punctuation and capitalisation. In these synthetic forms, words mutate from one into the other, simultaneously existing as separate words and new words together. These new forms are perceived not as whole pre-existing units, but as flexible composites, emphasised graphically by the use of capitalisation. The semantic import and graphic representation of these forms work simultaneously, drawing on different levels of perception within the reader. Similarly, parentheses serve as a device with which the poet creates synthetic composites, as seen above in the example of 've(n)do', inviting the reader to contemplate the differences between 'vedo' and 'vendo' and which constructs a thematic landscape alluding, perhaps, to voyeurism and prostitution. In the case of 'FORNIreindiCAZIONI', the unit is read twice, first as the inconsequential 'fornire indicazioni,' then as the more charged 'FORNICAZIONI,' drawing attention to the material and graphic qualities of the ink on paper, as well as to its palimpsestic echoes. The theme of sexual anxiety intensifies in this section, accompanied again by suggestions of obsessive, neurotic writing (fig. 17):

COSesCRITTE COscritte qui, inTENDO meleve(n)do qui, e ri-entro qui,
e,

ovviamente,

è quanto segue:

che ve(n)dendole qui ora qui tutte le componenti nevrotiche cui tengo
tanto mi SpellANO dENTRO

The initial brutality of 'mi spellano dentro' is re-articulated graphically and then semantically as 'ANO ENTRO,' adding to the multiplication of perspectives and further buttressing the poem's refrain of sexual anxieties and violations - particularly when viewed alongside the phrase 'tutte le componenti nevrotiche.' This fluidity of perspectives, and attendant ambiguity of content, produces a powerful account of the gap between knowing and not knowing, of an

aporetic understanding of trauma. ‘Cose Scritte’ is alternatively read as ‘Coscritte’ (conscripts), creating a split which is both literal and semantic. Numerous, and often conflicting, messages are coded in the text, reinforcing the complete implosion of linguistic and signifying processes which can attend traumatic experience. The metaphorical sale of apples, of the body, of ‘cose scritte’ simultaneously points to writing as another form of prostitution, of words themselves as commodities. Sexual anxiety, the psychological violence of the market, and writerly endeavour form part of the same traumatic idiom. These dislocations, I believe, are visually constituted in *à, a. A*, and it is precisely the visual and graphic experience of the text which determines its traumatic relatability. Vicinelli, in fact, directs the building menace of violence towards imagery of painting and painterly materials:

io Meleve(n)do qui
 in due o tre
 d(entro) ve(n)do e poi
 vedersi (n) e IMPASTO(r)o c c h i ARE (VENdo) tutto. Imp’e’stare tutto.
 E S T A R E.
 QUicosì.

The verse combines ‘impasto’, ‘impastare’, ‘pestare’; all terms relating broadly to mixing, but also more specifically to the preparation of pigments for painting, along with the verb ‘occhiare’ indicating the viewing process. Again, Vicinelli’s creative process of fusing words together has evident parallels, both metaphoric and concrete, in the sphere of the visual arts and visibility. Material textures such as the ‘tattered and torn red of maps’ are strongly alluded to in the next verse, alongside suggestions of weaving in the classic psychoanalytic trope of the spider’s web (fig. 18):

M’interessa comunicarequestecose perché:
 (m’interessa, comèvidente add(entro) il contesto cerebrico della mia
 mano picchiettata –
 (m’interessa, masticando (d-entro) il rosso stracciato e abbastanza sbrindo
 delle mappe

psich. un segno conto traccia - de-entro - o un f(i)ato - della composizione
aracne

(m'interessa – che mi / nel v(entr)e – v(e(n)do, col tempo, col tempo, col
tempo

Mi INTER – a s s – a:a) la tessitura non) mi riguarda

In invoking Arachne and the spider's web, this verse looks to the visual traces of weaving, a craft long associated with domesticity and which reinstates the theme of imaging sexual oppression around enforced silence.⁴⁶ The thematic material of weaving and 'arachnid compositions' enhances the interpretation of Vicinelli's textual practice as an interlacing of perspectives and a subsequent multiplication of uncontrolled meanings. The threat (or perhaps the realisation) of violence is brought to its apex in the plurilingual effusion and paranoia of the next verse (fig. 18):

il panorama letterario m'interessa. Perché certo vorrete sapere mille cose di me. E,
per favore, chiudere un momentino quella finestra please justalittle – why, I'd
ratherthinkI / ma per qualsiasi particolare, prego, consultate il mio agente.

Dev'essere

in giro, tra Torino e Roma, penso. Troppo caldo ancora nella stanza?

Bisogna chiudere,

tutto, d-entr-o. Io ve - uffa you damn' getaprickandletmealone - Intendevo,

più caldo,

prego. Fino alla soffocazione, prego. Please. Tirare lacamicia di forza fino please
a produrre mancanza completa d'aria e afasia critica prego. Poi io v e (n) d o e n –

t r ' a c t i o n

Sel'avessimofatto,

l'avessero, veramenteindueotre,amicimieidueotre,epoisimontasse,

⁴⁶ Although it is beyond the scope of this study to focus on psychoanalytic themes in Vicinelli, it is worthy of note that the trope of the spider's web is found in various psychoanalytic texts, for example, in Karl Abraham's 'The Spider as a Dream Symbol' (1922) as highly symbolic of sexual fears and entrapment. Sigmund Freud's brief comments on women and weaving are read as 'a metaphor for lack' in K. S. Kruger, *Weaving the Word: The Metaphorics of Weaving and Female Textual Production*, Susquehanna University Press, 2001, p. 21.

tuttoin-

sieme, potrebbedarsi

potrebbedarsichequestarobacrescerebbe susestessa sussesesso e storico-analogica
e

magaridegnissimacultura con quei grandiamici colti ma davvero coltissimi

dico

che dico, ci ho

dopo la faccenda di La Spezia che

Here the manifestation of sexual anxiety proceeds graphically to suffocation and aphasia.⁴⁷ The utilisation of Italian, English and possibly French (in ‘en-tr’action’) serves to emphasise the chaotic flux of intention, resistance and desire: ‘getaprickandletmealone’ followed by ‘Tirare lacamicia di forza fino please.’⁴⁸ The enjambment of long sections of text suggests vocalised effusion as well as inner streams of consciousness. The combined, but contradictory, intimations of orgiastic experience, coercion and justification all indicate a poetic practice of oblique referentiality. Plurilingualism and formal, typographical disorder function simultaneously in their appeal to the reader to hunt for meaning, to mentally test word permutations for ‘sense’ and to process multiple languages in their reader response. This poetic chaos asks to be disentangled, rather than simply read, and this is necessarily performed on a spatial plane of rationalisation. Towards the end of the last verse, linguistic impoverishment, meaningless repetition and large gaps become prominent. This slow breakdown of language is interspersed with snatches of lucidity and standard conversation ‘quei grandiamici colti ma davvero coltissimi’ and ‘dopo la faccenda di La Spezia che...’ The poem approximates the semantic and verbal loss associated with violence, through these radical linguistic and graphic interventions, alluding antithetically to silence and linguistic profusion at once. Again, the question of aporetic distance between the representation of a traumatic event and *retrieval* of that event comes into focus.

⁴⁷ ‘Aphasias are... characterised by poverty of production at the phonemic, morphemic, and semantic levels, whereas schizophrenic speech manifests an excessive richness at all of these levels.’ A.R. Lecours and M. Vanier-Clement, ‘Schizophasia and jargonaphasia,’ *Brain and Language*, 3, 1976, 516-65 in Sass, p. 478, 4n.

⁴⁸ It might be pertinent to quote the views of Deborah M. Horvitz in relation to the complex relations between desire and resistance: ‘Masochism, sometimes mistakenly understood to mean the enjoyment of pain, is, in fact, a complex psychodynamic in which powerlessness becomes eroticized, then entrenched within the victim’s self-identity.’ D. M. Horvitz, *Literary Trauma: Sadism, Memory, and Sexual Violence in American Women’s Fiction*, p. 4.

Similarly, the fluidity of perspectives and ambiguity about *who* is speaking raises questions about the fractured subject and the gap between knowing and not knowing.

Yet does this contradictory strategy of verbal loss and abundance correspond with accounts of traumatic phenomena such as incomprehensibility, unknowability and delayed response? The ruptured form and ambiguous referentiality of *à, a, A*, certainly captures the gap between unspeakable disquiet and dissociated moments of lucidity. Non-narrative and non-mimetic literary and filmmaking practices have attempted to convey such a gap in *experience*, but what might visual poetry reveal about the after-effects of trauma, of post-traumatic memory? Vicinelli's intersemiotic poetics offers an innovative exploration of how such memory might be processed. Art theorist Jill Bennett looks to Caruth in her exploration of post-traumatic memory and affect in visual culture. Bennett's distinction between an autonomic or involuntary 'sense memory' and conventional 'common memory' is key to her argument:

If thinking in sense memory is a mode of thought like the artist's (the painter's, the performance artist's), the idiom of which is sensation, it does not reflect on past experience – although it is undoubtedly motivated by such experience – but rather registers the lived process of memory. The art of sense memory, then, does not make a claim to represent originary trauma – the cause of the feeling – but to enact the state or experience of post-traumatic memory [...]. Traumatic memory is, in this regard, resolutely an issue of the present.⁴⁹

Vicinelli's poetry does not provide us with a represented root cause or any direct traumatic event, as traumatic narrational literature often does. Its poetic form offers instead a present state of memory and an enactment of it via the sense impressions inscribed in the words and their movement on the page. Fragments of past dialogue are mere suggestions of 'conventional' memory, but the poetry's true traumata reside in its portrayal of process, its performativity and its affective qualities. Just as Bennett demonstrates that painting and performance art have the

⁴⁹ Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma and Contemporary Art*, p. 39-40.

capacity to provide the essence of ‘sense memory’, I argue that Vicinelli’s concrete and visual poetry, in its reception, can communicate via the idiom of ‘sense’ and not merely via description. Whilst ultimately providing a *literary* response to a perceived trauma, Vicinelli’s poetics function equally closely with the visual arts and their enactment of ‘sense memory’, in its visual rather than narrative form. Bennett goes on to examine the diverse roles of word and image in traumatic encounters:

Words [...] are on the side of thought: common memory, narrative memory. Although words can clearly serve sense memory, vision has a very different relationship to affective experience – especially to experience that cannot be spoken as it is felt. The eye can often function as a mute witness by means of which events register as eidetic memory images imprinted with sensation. [...] Visual artists and those who theorize about art and its function have long exploited this allegiance of sight to affective memory.⁵⁰

Vicinelli’s ‘mute witness’ is a central figure in these texts, as we have seen in relation to allusions of sexual anxiety and violence. The open references to ‘mancanza completa d’aria e afasia critica’ and ‘fino alla soffocazione’ directly link violence and silencing. Yet although *à, a. A*, exemplifies gaps and silence concretely and thematically, it simultaneously resists such violence in its weaving and manipulating of text in a manner that circumvents the primarily rational or verbal experience. The witnessing power of the eye, its ‘allegiance to affective memory’ is channeled in verbal-visual form into Vicinelli’s texts, creating a heuristic poetics that relies as much on affect as rationalisation. The visually experimental text approaches the traumatic aporia precisely as it foregoes logocentric linearity.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 35.

‘coinVOLT’: Alien Consciousness and The Clinical Voice

The phenomena of splitting and dissociative personality constitute a traumatic feature of Vicinelli’s ‘coinVOLT’ where the affective visual form precedes the reader’s verbal assimilation of the work. The contemporary official psychiatric category of Dissociative Identity Disorder offers generalised aspects of the multi-faceted personality:

Particular identities may emerge in specific circumstances and may differ in reported age and gender, vocabulary, general knowledge or predominant affect. Alternate identities are experienced as taking control in sequence, one at the expense of the other, and may deny knowledge of one another, be critical of one another, or appear in open conflict...⁵¹

Roger Luckhurst gives a detailed history of the emergence of the clinical phenomenon, returning to the work of Pierre Janet and linking the now defunct notion of the ‘split personality’ with dissociation:

In Multiple Personality Disorder the trigger is a traumatic event, but the mechanism of psychic defense, the agency that creates the ‘splitting’ of personality, is *dissociation*.⁵²

‘CoinVOLT’ employs many of the linguistic fragments, neologisms and typographical innovations seen in *à, a, A*, with an even more radical structural form. Text is clustered together, with each site manifesting a different linguistic character and level of narrative function. On the right there is a fractured story of an individual being approached and pushed off a balustrade, told three times with small variants, and shaped as a wedge (fig. 19):

⁵¹ American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*, 4th rev. edn, Washington, APA, 2000, p. 526, in Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, p. 102.

⁵² Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, p. 41.

mortechelato in sus (pen) sione,
 Introdotta nella stanza nota, lo av=
 vicinarono alla bala ustra, e così
 tanto legatolo, lo spinse; che
 non poté accorgersene cre=
 diamo. Così, intro=
 dotto nella stanza nota
 nota, lo avvicinarono
 alla balla ustra, e
 così tanto lega=
 tolo, lo spinse;
 che non possibile
 accorgersene, credia
 mo. Intanto, intro=
 dotto nella stanza nota, lo
 avvicinarono, e così da legato,
 non poteva la spinta. Già. Se in=
 trodotto.

In contrast to the relative comprehensibility of this text, the opposite section manifests extreme repetition and discontinuity (fig. 19):

coinVOLT ehmm! sissi coinVOLT hhhha la.
 pappinapappetta hahaha volto di sotto coin
 ...
 il riCCon volgimento beurr! beurre di astiacappe

I argue that the poem stages, very literally, the splitting of consciousness into two contrasting textual experiences: the horrific event, which is retained in relatively clear terms, and the dissociated linguistic jumble. In the second verse of ‘coinVOLT’, Vicinelli creates a bifurcated textual system where, again, the two columns of text diverge in linguistic register and in typographical uniformity (fig. 20):

invasendoSi paSS a dentRo mare Si /
fini invadendosi atRaversa lo sapevo,

...

Si sente inva-invadersi

...

calare su. dentRo James: Dill

attato?

ECCO: mediato atRaversa quando

dove trovo quando vedo non spara

sparare James IRRadiato? dove ti sei

okej okej spargendosi /

:) irradiato James?

allòAllò. allò

allò allò allò. James?

...

votre Q.I. c'est inferieur 60.

Devo farcela.

) a parte che lo sapevo.

This is followed by a descending, curving phrase (see original typographic format for shape and interlocking of text, fig. 20):

il violatore / erore della

il violinista SI-SI, si aVV olA OLAVA IN SU

The section features multiple 'narratives' unfolding contemporaneously: a chorus of resistance to the threat of violence on one side and an isolated clinical voice on the other. The linguistic ingenuity and use of neologisms in conjunction with themes of violation, invasion, insemination and nursing is immediately apparent. The form 'dillattato' combines 'dilatato', meaning 'dilated' or 'expanded', 'allattato' 'breastfed', and 'lattato' a more clinical term meaning 'lactated'. 'Il violatore', close to 'violentatore' or 'violator/rapist' occupies a parallel space to 'il violinista', drawing attention to phonetic over semantic

similarities. The phrase ‘il violinista si avvola OLAVA IN SU’ appears to mix the verb ‘avvolgere’, (to roll or wrap up, bind) ‘vola’, volava in su’ (hinting at ‘violava in su’). We might read the halting ‘inva-dersi’ or hesitant syllables ‘si avvola-olava’ as traces of aphasia, of obstacles to verbalisation. The undulating shapes of these phrases combined with these figures of impeded expression demonstrate the visual and performative, rather than verbal, emphasis of trauma in the poem. The traumatic stream of anxiety is starkly contrasted with the register of the opposite column, where the obsessive repetition of ‘votre Q.I. c’est inferieur 60’ is reminiscent of a mind-control dystopia (fig. 20):

ZZZZZZZZ, zed zed: attention attention

l’imprevu de la maison neuve imprevu

votre Q.I. c’est inferieur 60.

; okej, okej. Quelli dell’INCOMPLEX

linguaggio in K me. Calcolato.

Quadratura in bifor, natura da

squibb selvago fratto cir=

votre Q.I. c’est

colo di confusione T. okej, okej.

inferieur 60.

Calcolato. zeta meno due alla cric

in evolutivo zero, sta nascosto al

la pietra nort costone Merrons.zed zed/ attention

okej okej. Calcolato. imprevu de la maison

neuve. Attention. C’est inferieur 60.

Calcolato.

) a parte che lo
sapevo,

Krosta Keo disparvenza

solito soluto in àpnea

di bàse constantemen

te càrcom

à, a. A,

It is to be noted that the final word ‘càrcomà’ is reminiscent of the Spanish word ‘carcoma’ (‘woodworm’) and also akin to the verb ‘carcomer,’ meaning to consume or to eat away. Equally suggestive is the positioning of the final ‘à’ of ‘càrcomà,’ which forms the title of the following poem ‘à, a. A,’ and reveals the recursive, uninterrupted format of the collection. In the left-hand column, the striking switch to French (in the form of unusual locutions) and to a more formal and detached tone is most apparent. This interjection of a foreign, quasi-automated voice bears a striking resemblance to the schizophrenic phenomenon, noted by Sass, of an ‘alien’ consciousness superimposed in the form of words and language which are not ‘owned’ by the subject.⁵³ The belief in the presence of an ‘alien consciousness’ was also recorded in Josef Breuer’s classic case of hysteria, in his patient Bertha Pappenheim, more commonly referred to as Anna O. Dianne Hunter explores aphasia and language disruption in Breuer’s accounts of Pappenheim’s breakdown:

She claimed to be divided into two selves: ‘a real one and an evil one which forced her to behave badly’. Two states of consciousness would alternate, one of which would interrupt while the other was speaking. Breuer refers to the pauses in Pappenheim’s speech by the French term *absences*. This suggests that for Breuer as well as for Pappenheim, the abnormal states of consciousness represented foreign parts of the self, parts alien to signification in her native tongue.⁵⁴

In a similar vein, Sass speaks of ‘dispossession’ as a schizophrenic tendency towards ‘passivization and sense of alienation from one’s own mental processes.’⁵⁵ He sees the presence of verbal hallucinations and streams of plurivocal consciousness as symptoms of an ‘externalisation of involution’, ‘a way in which the patient’s closely watched (and closely watching) inner life fills the external world, virtually crowding out everything else.’⁵⁶ A notable characteristic of verbal hallucination is the repetitive intrusion of contradictory or critical voices, often resisting the initial thought processes of the subject. This

⁵³ Sass, *Madness and Modernism*, p. 179.

⁵⁴ Hunter, ‘Hysteria, Psychoanalysis and Feminism: The Case of Anna O.,’ p. 260.

⁵⁵ Sass, *Madness and Modernism*, p. 235.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 233.

feature is powerfully conjured in the clinical voice of ‘coinVOLT’, as it coldly proclaims the subnormal intelligence of the presumed subject. This clinical voice suggests an analogy with theories of the clinical gaze in biopolitical writings, most notably those of Rosi Braidotti. In the section ‘The Detached Clinical Gaze’ in *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, Braidotti outlines the potent status of the eye, viewing and visualisation in the development of scientific practices in the Modern period. She argues that the potential of visualisation for ‘self-mastery’ and ‘scientific mastery’ is often bound up with the tendency towards domination within logocentric humanism:

Modern science is the triumph of the scopic drive as a gesture of epistemological domination and control: to make visible the invisible, to visualise the secrets of the organism.⁵⁷

She turns to the rise of clinical anatomy as emblematic of the anthropocentric desire for self-knowledge, detailing the drive to *see* inside the body, thereby aiming for scientific mastery through *scopic* mastery. While Braidotti examines the anatomist’s desire to acquire knowledge through opening the body, and the attendant wielding of power over the body in question, ‘coinVOLT’ (and later *Apotheosis*) stages the wielding of power through the graphically represented encounter between the clinical voice and the traumatised voice. The dissociated clinical identity portrayed in this manner, alien in tone and typographic presentation, visibly signals the traces of ‘epistemological domination.’

Rather than positing the process of visualisation as underpinning the anatomist’s power and desire to know the inner workings of the body, the visual arrangement of ‘coinVOLT’ illustrates multiple perspectives on different ‘knowing selves,’ identifying the hierarchical dynamics of power in the asylum. Foregoing temporal narrative, the poem achieves this through the play of text as visual material, privileging immediate affect over description. Vicinelli’s innovation lies in the concrete design of the text: the detached, institutional utterances are embodied in a more ordered typographical form to the cascading

⁵⁷ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, p. 196.

‘word salad’ of the traumatised subject. The concrete forms of ‘coinVOLT’ recall once again the potential of visual textuality to literalise the thematic content, and conversely, to rupture any semblance of clarity or linearity of authorial intent. The split nature of the poem points to both the unstable parameters of traumatic rupture, and the concrete biopolitical oppression of the asylum, which will be discussed further in *Apotheosys of schizoid woman*.

As we have seen in *à, a. A.*, Vicinelli’s experimental typographical poems do not lend themselves to linear, uninterrupted looking or reading due to their radically fractured form. I propose that these discontinuities defy any uncomplicated ‘scopic’ mastery, any mastery of the gaze; correspondingly, the format disrupts the grasp of ‘self-legitimizing systems of thought’⁵⁸ central to logocentric discourse. While the typographic ruptures reflect the power dynamics of the asylum, I will argue that Vicinelli’s textual visuality has an oppositional facet which unfolds in parallel. Visuality as a non-logocentric mode of representation, and the thematics of the traumatic subject, are interwoven throughout this corpus. In destabilising visual-scopic mastery, and fracturing phallogocentric clarity and linearity, Vicinelli’s visual poems reflect and challenge traumatising oppression and provide a platform for multiple and intersecting alternative subjectivities.

Vicinelli’s collection *à, a. A.* provides a rich topography for the exploration of traumatic dissociation, rupture, and aporia, which are both concretely and thematically exemplified in her work through striking typographic innovations and linguistic experimentation. The literary trauma model of ‘unspeakable’ gaps within temporal memory is a powerful and enduring theory pertaining to the individual and their embodied subjectivity. I believe Vicinelli’s fracturing of line and verse attempts to instantiate these aporias with a textuality that is interpreted visually as well as linguistically. Louis Sass’ paradigm of affinity between certain formal characteristics of ‘schizophrenic’ verbalisations, and innovations in modernist literature and arts, also provides a framework with which to approach the radical linguistic, verbal and typographical fragmentation created in Vicinelli’s *à, a. A.* I turn now towards the performance of radical states of being in Vicinelli’s collage method, to address the tension between conceptions

⁵⁸ Def. ‘logocentrism,’ S. Gamble (ed.), *Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, Routledge, 2004.

of trauma which pertain to the individual, and those that look from the individual to society as a whole.

Part II

Patrizia Vicinelli's *Apotheosys of Schizoid Woman*: Traumatic Visualities and Collage

With Patrizia Vicinelli's *Apotheosys of Schizoid Woman* (1969-70),⁵⁹ we observe the movement from the traumatic rupture of the literary rectilinear grid, as seen in the collection *à, a. A.*, to an even broader engagement between word and image, in the form of intersemiotic collage. In amalgamating photos, drawings, and text, Vicinelli's *Apotheosys* develops a ruptured and transgressive form of intersemiotic collage, creating disturbing dissonances in its engagement with quotidian violence. I explore the manner in which the particular collage form of *Apotheosys*, characterised by both verbal and visual fragments, illuminates traumatic aporias by revealing themes of violence and anxiety in a non-linear and dissonant way. This intermedial form draws attention to questions of personal and universal trauma through the nuanced revelation of material in a temporally and spatially fractured manner.

This section will aim to account for the positioning of the collage medium as both a 'reflection of' and 'protest against' the notion of a disintegrated society, to refer back to Alfredo Giuliani's category of *schizomorfismo*.⁶⁰ Firstly, I will consider how the fractured and multimodal medium of poetic collage expands the possibilities of the literary project of *forma scissa*,⁶¹ taking elements of both the traumatic and schizomorphic paradigms into consideration. Vicinelli's *Apotheosys* might be termed a 'trauma collage poem' (as distinct from the category of the 'trauma novel'), with its emphasis on temporal discontinuity, disruptions of genre and style, and thematics of explicit and implied violence. I consider the extent to which these formal and thematic ruptures might be read as reflective, or constitutive, of the 'stato sociale disgregato' of which Giuliani speaks. To this end, I examine the historical association between collage and political activism,

⁵⁹ P. Vicinelli, *Apotheosys of schizoid woman*, Reggio Emilia, Tau/ma 6, 1969/1970. Reprinted in *Patrizia Vicinelli - Non sempre ricordano: poesia, prosa, performance*, C. Bello Minciocchi (ed.), Florence, Le lettere, 2009. I hereafter refer to the work as *Apotheosys*. There does not appear to be, to my knowledge, any in-depth analysis of this work existing in secondary literature.

⁶⁰ Giuliani, 1965 introduction, *I Novissimi*, p. 7.

⁶¹ Giuliani, 2003 preface, *I Novissimi*, p. viii.

ranging from the avant-garde Dadaist disruptive utilisation of ‘found’ heterogeneous material, to the photomontage as a propagandist tool.

Secondly, I will argue for an interpretation of *Apotheosys* as an interrogation or ‘contestazione’ of the societal and material conditions from which the alienated and traumatised subject emerges. Ultimately, I contend that *Apotheosys* generates a dialogue regarding the biopolitically aware subject’s experience of ‘insidious trauma.’⁶² The unique idiom of collage poetry, with attendant questions about the differentiation between fiction and autobiography, addresses the materiality of a biopolitical trauma, where the work reflects, and then contests, the ‘insidious trauma’ of quotidian violence, drug use, oppression, dispossession, and exile. Vicinelli’s collage represents a timely literary attempt to engage with the biopolitical infringement of external powers, and self-regulatory powers, on the life of the ‘asintattico, anormale’⁶³ individual. I examine how the *visual* specificity of the collage medium, with an emphasis on collected and handwritten artifacts from life, and an evolving temporal structure, constitutes a penetrating response to questions regarding the biopolitically conscious representation of family, motherhood, exile, narcotics, and incarceration.

Produced in exile in Tangier, Morocco, in the years 1969-70,⁶⁴ the fifty-page collage-work *Apotheosys of schizoid woman* compiles an array of multilingual found text, written text, photographs, and drawings in constantly shifting relationships to one another. The material includes diary excerpts, personal letters, newspaper cuttings detailing bombings and assassinations, doodles, commercial images, family tree outlines, family photographs, photo reportage, poetic fragments, everyday functional language, coined phrases and politico-philosophical quotations. The use of English and bizarre spelling of ‘apotheosis’ in the title produces an effect of estrangement which echoes throughout the collage. The format is unusual in that the work is designed to be read in backwards order, and odd-numbered pages reveal a slow evolution of new

⁶² L.S. Brown, ‘Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma’ in C. Caruth (ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. I will fully elaborate on my usage of this phrase in part II.

⁶³ Giuliani, 1961 introduction, *I Novissimi*, p. 19; also Sanguineti, ‘Il dibattito,’ pp. 382-3.

⁶⁴ According to Bello Miniciacchi, Vicinelli fled Italy for Morocco after a drugs possession conviction, and created *Apotheosys of Schizoid Woman* whilst in Tangier, Morocco; however, it was edited and published in 1979 in *Tau/ma* 6. See *Patrizia Vicinelli: Non sempre ricordano*, p. xxxvii. The date stamp on the work itself states ‘Tangeri, 1969-70’. Niva Lorenzini, in the preface of the same volume, states its publication in *Tau/ma* in 1979, p. xiii.

images and detail, each building on the last. This gradual revelation of snippets of information, page to page, forming a bigger picture, is expanded according to a spatial rather than a linear schema. Even-numbered pages, on the other hand, feature the construction, through doodles and handwritten scraps, of a disconnected narrative based around the theme of the beach, sea and sun. Each page of this ‘story’ focuses on different details of the seascape, relying on a variety of typographical and pictorial techniques, combining drawings and text shaped to reflect the content. These macro-literary features place *Apotheosys* in the wider context of concrete poetry, in highlighting the equal emphasis on the *act* of reading and the content of the work.

Apotheosys of Schizoid Woman bears many of the hallmarks of traumatic verbal-visual poetics, from its arresting title to its various references to violence. As with *à, a. A*, and *coinVOLT*, cognitive and perceptual dissonances abound as the reader attempts to read and untangle the corpus of fractured material. From the first page we are presented with phrases such as the printed ‘con il cuore spaccato in due da una coltellata,’ ‘il buvait trop,’ and the handwritten ‘uccisa’ (fig. 21). Some of these phrases are partially obscured at first, and revealed multiple pages later; the reader is held in a limbo between seeing, but not being able to read, the text. The phrase ‘il buvait trop’ is uncovered to reveal ‘Ma MAMAN a sauvé mon PAPA IL BUVAIT TROP.’ ‘Uccisa’ is flanked by the gradually revealed ‘uccidente’; the past participle and present participle set in contrast in this way draw attention to active and passive forms. In a different section we see ‘HA UCC SELV’; another incomplete suggestion of killing. A photograph of the bottom half of a woman’s face is printed, then reprinted as a full face, then deleted. On each occasion, this mutable face is flanked with a new piece of information, often journalistic in style: ‘chiesti 15 ergastoli’ (fig. 21), ‘revolver, l’assassino, delitto, vittima’ (fig. 22), ‘oggetto,’ and then finally, ‘accoltellatore di Porta Ticinese.’ Later, in place of the photograph, we observe ‘SULLA SPIAGGIA’ handwritten and askew, along with repetitions of ‘CANI,’ ‘vittima’ and ‘difesa’ (fig. 23). A stick figure doodle is accompanied by the handwritten words ‘bambina rovesciata in sotto’ (fig. 30). These numerous and diverse impressions and suggestions, rather than tell a straightforward narrative, function as accretions in a verbal and visual web of progressing anxiety, dissociation and torment. In attempting to trace the specific aspects of this traumatic affect attributable to collage, I address the

manifestation of tonal and cognitive dissonances, looking to the metaphorical figure of ‘perversion.’

Vicinelli’s ‘Perverse’ Collage: Rupture, Transgression, Dissonance

In her 1990 book on gender in twentieth century art and culture, *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics, and the Avant-garde*, critic Susan Robin Suleiman examines collage as an archetypal practice of culturally subversive avant-garde movements. In attempting to explore the operations behind collage, specifically in Surrealist art and poetry, she draws on the category of ‘perversion,’ proposing a ‘discussion of perversion as a figure, or as an aesthetic choice, rather than as a clinical disorder.’⁶⁵ Collage, it follows, constitutes a literal exemplification of the art of breaching genre and modal boundaries, of advancing ‘new combinations of new shapes and new kinds.’⁶⁶ For Suleiman, this ‘erosion of differences’ is exemplified in the ‘hybrid form’ of collage, which of necessity utilises ‘heterogeneous verbal, visual, and tactile elements.’ She cites André Breton’s work *Nadja* (1928) as an archetypal example of the hybrid novel, ‘combining fiction, autobiography, case history, photographic essay, and literary manifesto.’⁶⁷

Suleiman extends her reading of ‘perversion’ as an aesthetic ordering principle in hybrid texts to also include the fragmentary and non-teleological nature of narrative in Surrealist literature.⁶⁸ Indeed, Suleiman is interested in the figure of ‘perversion’ as an interpretation of subversive gender in experimental practices, and she goes on to outline this operation thematically in Surrealist painting, among other examples, in Marcel Duchamp’s ‘L.H.O.O.Q.’ and Max Ernst’s ‘The Blessed Virgin Chastises the Christ Child before Three Witnesses.’ In relation to collage, ‘perversion’ is equally suggestive as an interpretation of the

⁶⁵ S. R. Suleiman, *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics, and the Avant-garde*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard, 1990, p. 149.

⁶⁶ *ibid.* Suleiman draws on her application of ‘perversion’ from psychoanalyst Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, who represents ‘perversion’ in terms of the breakdown of kinship, law, and biblical norms: ‘According to Chasseguet-Smirgel, the interest of the law has always been to maintain separations and distinctions – witness the many biblical injunctions against mixing heterogeneous kinds, or the meaning of the Greek word for law, *nomos*: “divided into parts.” ... Chasseguet-Smirgel argues that perversion, in contrast to the law, espouses mixture and the hybrid; it aims for the erosion or “homogenization” of differences.’ *ibid.*, pp. 148-9.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p. 149.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p. 149-50.

literal destabilisation, via the material rearrangement of incongruous images and texts, of a hitherto sacrosanct rule of law, aesthetic, biblical and familial.⁶⁹ Yet Suleiman's Surrealists are characterised by ironic, tongue-in-cheek subversion; perverting long-held cultural and religious norms through 'not respect[ing] the law of differentiation... challeng[ing] God.' The disruption of pictorial integrity, thematic clarity and narrative progression is taken up by Vicinelli in a manner which is similar in form, but divergent in terms of affect. The perverse nature of *Apotheosis* doesn't rely so much on irreverence towards tradition and faith, as it does on the juxtaposition of the banal with the ultra-violent, and the familial with the traumatic. Vicinelli's work deploys inter-genre cuts across found text, written text, and image, and simultaneously insinuates familial (and filial) rupture, a breaking of the law of kinship, in a reference to patricide (fig. 34):

‘DEAR ALDO, UCCIDENDO TRANQUILLAMENTE I SUOI PADRI,
ADDIO’

This free-floating phrase invokes severe dissociation from reality and sensation paired with, not only a denial of paternal obedience, but a complete and disturbing breakdown of filial values. The affective distance between the epistolary conventions 'Dear Aldo ... addio' and the conceptualisation of 'uccidendo tranquillamente' generate this effect of serious, rather than irreverent, perversion.

The spliced nature of the collage-work is powerfully displayed on the following page. The concrete patchwork consists of medicinal labels for various prescription drugs including barbiturates ('Nembutal') and opioids ('Sedol'); alongside are labels for the tincture 'Elixir parégorique' with slogan 'elixir magique provoquant passion irresistible,' and energy-enhancing amphetamine 'Maxiton,' with the intriguing 'initiez-vous aux mysteres de la vie' (fig. 35). The proximity of these factual and direct labels with the handwritten 'DEAR ALDO' breaks categories of tone and genre, as well as drawing attention to their very real material and fragmentary origin.

⁶⁹ This position resonates with Giulia Niccolai's comments in: Del Giudice et al., 'Intervista con Giulia Niccolai,' p. 7, where she refers to poetry-making, especially using innovative methods, as a kind of 'incest [...] being incestuous with words and with objects and with people.'

The slow trickle of information throughout the collage, its revelatory aspect, enhances the disjointed nature of the narrative. These shifts between prosaic and violent attitudes are, of course, intrinsically tied up in the cutting and splicing of written narrative with visual elements, as likewise seen in the unfinished letters interrupted by the drug labels and printed headlines. This ‘story’ – part-diaristic, part-epistolary, part-illustrated, part-found – reveals its artifacts, of different genera, in an uneven, syncopated schema. The erratic plurilingual switches intensify the unsettled sense of dissociation and dislocation, on the one hand exhibiting freedom and worldliness, and on the other, disconnect from the familial language, the ‘mother tongue.’ Cognitive dissonance, too, is suggested: plurilingualism can indicate an expanding freedom of global expression, but it can equally suggest glossolalia, the ritualistic practice of speaking in tongues, or languages generally unknown to the speaker. In the context of the ‘holiday postcard,’ plurilingualism is, undeniably, represented as an emblem of frenzied and disembodied experience, with verbal immediacy taking precedence over description.

Ambiguity and dissociation feature heavily in a splicing of the headline ‘MANICOMIO’ with an unexplained text in cursive writing, surrounded by doodles and a photograph of an unnamed man (fig. 24):

Il riflesso dilatantesi le sue pupille la/
sua bocca mostrantesi la lingua/
il corpo proiettantesi avanti il na/
so dilatantesi il respiro le mani/

This intriguing text is followed a few pages later by undulating handwritten lines which reflect the movement of the sea (fig. 25):

Il suo occhio rifluentesi di luci / rifratte la sua mano adagiand / osi la sua
bocca chiu / dentesi il suo corpo / rilassato

And then again in the same script, in the shape of a tower (fig. 26):

la sua fro / nte il sudor / e il sudore le / sue ascelle il / pube il suo sud / ore
il sangue b / attente il suo pol / so alle tempie il su / o sangue battente / il
posto del cuore / il respiro concord / ante aria calda entra / nte alito umido
uscent / e

Underneath are the printed fragments ‘I guardiani della Torre di Londra,’ ‘La tragedia,’ and ‘con il cuore spaccato in due da una coltellata’; followed by handwritten ‘uccisa / uccidente uccisa / uccisa uccidente / uccisa.’ The pictorially detailed focus on the effects of reflected and refracted light on eyes, and on parts of the body, alternate between disturbingly suggestive and explicitly violent. The subject of the final wounding is unclear – is there a separate perpetrator and victim? Whose body parts and suffering are depicted? Is the feminine participle ‘uccisa’ referring to the bleeding and breathing figure? The alternation of ‘uccisa’ and ‘uccidente’ leaves the question of the ‘killed’ and ‘killing’ unresolved. What is less ambiguous is the construction of traumatic artifacts in the overall evolution of the collage, and how these disparate elements function both in accord and in conflict, creating disorientating effects which I have considered a serious, rather than irreverent, manifestation of the ‘perverse.’ In *Apotheosis*, then, Vicinelli forges a traumatic and aesthetic category of ‘perversion,’ with the collage mode intrinsic to the juxtaposition of incongruous, jarring snippets detailing death alongside mundanity.

The ‘perverse’ collage form of *Apotheosis*, through its material and inter-genre junctures, heightens the effect of cognitive and tonal dissonances. Alongside the disconcerting details of aggression from the start of the work are mundane media-derived phrases ‘le condizioni del tempo nel mondo,’ ‘libres opinions’ (fig. 30), ‘5 PAS VERS LA JOIE DE VIVRE,’ ‘L’amour à volonté’ (fig. 27), ‘ENFIN DES GENS HEUREUX,’ and ‘POURQUOI PAS VOUS?’ (fig. 33) Similarly, functional and descriptive language abounds, in printed snippets such as ‘di colore bleu,’ ‘I guardiani della Torre di Londra,’ ‘le miroir magique’ (fig. 33), and ‘INVIATO DENARO’ (fig. 26). The insertion of these fragments, in typical ‘cut-up’ fashion, appears wholly unsystematic and not led by correlation between word and image. Flanking disturbing evocations such as ‘bambina rovesciata in sotto’ are factual newspaper items: ‘Saisie de 50 kilos d’héroïne à Cannes’ (fig. 30). Everyday material also appears in the form of images for

commercial products, such as the candle company ‘*Compagnie Marocaine des Bougies “Aam El Khir”*’ (fig. 32), a magazine promotion ‘BON pour le BONHEUR’ (fig. 31) and a sports centre poster. Due to their proximity, the banality of many of these snippets bleeds into the shock effect of those insinuating death and violence, generating an unsettling dissonance.

The epistolary mode features heavily in *Apotheosis*, further diversifying the dissonances of genre. The drifting printed phrases ‘ENTE VINTA,’ ‘le condizioni del tempo nel mondo’ and ‘INVIATO DENARO’ are wedged between an accretion of handwritten letters, claustrophobically compressed together among doodles and printed headlines (fig. 34). Scraps of unrelated text are superimposed on parts of the letters, concealing key words and impeding communication. The presence of printed and handwritten cut-ups - ‘S – Sch – Sch – Sch – Scicch’ (schiacciare?) and ‘prendo’ - among the letters impels the reader to engage in a cognitive, and visual, leap between ‘readymade’ text and authored, literary text. The mini-letters are fragmented, unfinished and discontinuous in style and content; although ostensibly letters, one approximates the form of a postcard, another a fairytale, and the other two are confessional and intimate. The tightly bound mosaic of enigmatic texts, partially printed phrases and scrawled images disrupt boundaries of category and logic, amplifying the manifestation of cognitive dissonance overall in *Apotheosis*.

Each mini-text is addressed to a different interlocutor, and each is characterised by syntactical and linguistic incongruity. ‘Dear Renato’ almost resembles a holiday postcard from Morocco, with evocations of sun, sea, and leisure, yet interlinguistic textuality is prioritised over any consistent representation of reality. Spanish, French and English are interposed intermittently with Italian, and some glossomantic tendencies are observed (fig. 34):

Dear Renato, perché / salida saluda / solida solana (in / Spagna) salt / ando saltante...

... Sí arrocca / le Roi. l’étoilé / da indicare con la / mano se rap / pelle d’un toi, sen / za fine brillante / brulante , ah mais but yo quiero que m’explica, [.....?] / dal legno del faggio nel colle dal mare, vedendosi al

mare pas / saronò barche, l'ENS qui tombant/ après la chute de son vedé /
dans la ronde d'une partie d'échecs / à la / table / de la cafeteria al centro /
d'un pays / royal du sud / dell'Equatorial circle / of the world, / see you in
/

The recognisable details of Morocco – the sea, boats, chess playing, Equatorial climate – are distorted in such a way as to undermine communication and instead produce a chaotic stream of impressions and non-sequiturs. This dislocation is all the more absurd in the postcard format, which is habitually considered an elementary form of communication. The drawing of a woman in traditional dress as a postage stamp, seen in the right-hand corner, along with the abrupt 'see you in,' confirms the superficial template of a postcard. Yet the invocation of a sunny idyll and the expectation of an easily assimilated message lie in stark contrast to Vicinelli's disorientating textual motifs. Directly below is a letter addressed to 'Patricia' (fig. 34):

Dear Patricia, c'era una volta / un bosco. una collina. un / fiume. un orco
dentro un cas / tello nel bosco. Una strega / fra gli alberi volante la notte /
il giorno. il sole, la luna. / Più lontano di lì c'era una / volta / il ma / re Più
/ lontano di lì c'era una volta le stelle /

The naïve tone of this mini-fairytale, complete with a witch, an ogre, and a castle in the woods, jars with the turbulent nature of *Apotheosys* as a whole. In its address to 'Patricia,' there lies a suggestion of the ominous presence of an alter ego, an alternative 'Patrizia'. The fairy tale acts, arguably, as a proxy for the dissociation which occurs between writing and reality. The next two letters display yet another tonal shift (fig. 34):

Dear Claudio, / rompendo le lame / della sua tagliente / giovinezza o astro
/ o miroir, o ombra, que pasa nelle tue / ventane deserte ? come un asino
bastonato a freddo. / courant au point de fugue. /

Dear Gianfranco, dalla fissità delle / epoche. Così tanto e semplicemente /
sondabili. Interminata estasi / logorroica. E domandando se ci / fosse fra
essere e non essere combien / tu veux pour être 'heureux'? /

Finally, on the bottom left corner, the handwritten 'ADDIO' is fully revealed as:

'DEAR ALDO, UCCIDENDO TRANQUILLAMENTE I SUOI PADRI,
ADDIO.'

These texts, while broadly impenetrable, are imbued with a sublimated traumatic aura through sense impressions, intellectual knots, suggestions – about suffering, escape, suicide, killing, prostitution, time, and writing. The characterisation of writing as an activity somewhere between ecstasy and pathology, as might be interpreted in the phrase 'interminata estasi logorroica,' chimes with Vicinelli's poetic aesthetic generally. *Logorrhoea*, or an extreme abundance of words, finds common ground with *glossolalia*, a profusion of words or syllables, often in a language not known to the speaker and associated with mystical and spiritual rituals. The historical connotations between religious mysticism and madness become palpable in this fragment, when considering the Greek etymological origin of the word 'apotheosis' – 'deification, making into a god' – and taking into account the schizophrenic phenomena of grandiose delusions and self-identification as a deity. Religious 'ecstasy' has been understood to incorporate suffering with mystical exhilaration, and Vicinelli's phrase alludes to a similarly opaque oscillation between pain and pleasure in producing a stream of words. We are reminded of the notion of 'furor scribendi,' or 'frenzy of writing,' an uncontrollable flow of words which invokes the figure of the mad literary genius. Furthermore, *logorrhoea* has connotations with *glossomania*, which, as already noted, is often used in psychiatry, and refers to a stream of words associated phonetically rather than semantically, creating absurdist verbal constructions. The following utterance shifts again, combining a cerebral meditation on 'being and not being', most likely invoking Hamlet's famous soliloquy, with a suggestive and discordant line in French:

‘E domandando se ci / fosse fra essere e non essere combien / tu veux pour être ‘heureux’?’

The myriad allusions to literature, mysticism, religion, etymology, folk tales, etc., in a variety of written modes (epistolary, diaristic), textual (commercial, journalistic) and visual modes (photographic), combine to create a discordant, at times oneiric, collage, continuing the aesthetic of traumatic rupture observed in *à, a. A.*. The narrational and intermedial fragmentation, paired with the linguistic and cognitive dissonance of *Apotheosis*, constitutes a rich illustration of Suleiman’s category of the ‘perverse’ text.

Temporality and Collage: From Punctual Rupture to Layered Evolution

The creation of dissonances in genre, affect and medium through visual and spatial cut-ups finds a correlation in the functioning of temporal progression, especially in how it pertains to literary trauma and the classic paradigm of belatedness. Much like *à, a. A.*, *Apotheosis* balances the disclosure of viscerally direct fragments - ‘cuore spaccata in due [...] l’assassino, vittima’ - with gaps of knowledge in the overall picture. The various textual references to violence are undermined by their visibly shifting context within the work, whereby the meaning of a phrase is dependent on its textual surroundings; individual words move, conceal other words, and reappear in different locations within the collage-work.

The signifying process is further complicated by the use of visual fragments, which filter and condition the text that they accompany. The collage features the repeated use of a photograph of an anonymous woman, first uncaptioned, then displayed alongside the text ‘chiesti 15 ergastoli,’ then ‘revolver, l’assassino, delitto, vittima,’ followed by ‘oggetto.’ This example demonstrates such a filtering operation, drawing the reader towards certain conclusions, and then snatching away the possibility of confirming any lasting meaning. It is specifically a collage format that allows these scraps of text and image to be concealed and revealed, as the layering up of printed text on paper is

a physical process, witnessed from page to page.⁷⁰ The manner in which the work consists of strata of discourse, remodeled over time, imparts the echoes of a palimpsest, executed on a visual as well as an inscriptive level. Akin to an unreliable narrator, Vicinelli crafts a temporally contingent ‘narrative’ based not on prose but on the unraveling of a visual palimpsest.

We are reminded once more of Cathy Caruth’s emphasis in trauma studies on the ‘paradoxical temporality of trauma which implies a recurrent tension between the traumatic impact and its delayed response. [...] Thus, the peculiar temporal structure of trauma involves unfinishedness and repetition.’⁷¹ Can we link the physical layers of *Apotheosys* with the theory of trauma as a belated response to a horrific event? Or are we dealing with, in this work, not a temporal *gap* so much as temporal progression or evolution? Caruth often returns to the singular, seminal event of trauma in the novel (and in factual accounts), which is relived through disturbing thoughts, dreams and actions, often unconsciously or compulsively, and which locks the sufferer in a trap of recurring horror. Vicinelli’s *Apotheosys*, on the other hand, tends to gather momentum and foster a sublimated sense of diffuse traumatic feeling. Collage, literally ‘gluing,’ entailing layering up and stripping away fragments, is a medium which indicates a sustained, evolving conception of trauma. I argue that this feature is reflected in Vicinelli’s title, *Apotheosys of Schizoid Woman*, suggesting a teleological or redemptive quality, a flight from trauma towards a higher or transcendent state.

Another way of approaching *Apotheosys* is found in the Deleuzo-Guattarian paradigm of ‘philosophical nomadism,’ elaborated to address fresh ethical and subjective concerns by Braidotti in *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics*. The nomadic paradigm is presented as a vision of the subject which rejects singularity, linearity, unitary presence, sequentiality, and specificity of origin, owing much to Irigaray’s feminist thought and Deleuzo-Guattarian rhizomatic and schizoid models of philosophical thought: ‘Philosophical nomadism rests on a cartography of our historical condition that highlights the relevance of a non-

⁷⁰ The manner in which this type of collage would probably have been created, in an era before digital manipulation, further draws attention to the physical and concrete layers involved in its production.

⁷¹ Nadal and Calvo (eds.), *Trauma in Contemporary Literature: Narrative and Representation*, p. 3.

unitary vision of the subject.⁷² Braidotti treats nomadism as a ‘mode of non-origin, non-purity and not-Oneness,’⁷³ continuing a tradition of anti-phallogocentrism in her critique of metaphysical, linguistic, and socio-political models of linearity. She writes:

Philosophical nomadism is a creative process. Becoming nomadic is neither the swinging of the pendulum of dialectical opposition, nor is it the unfolding of an essence in a teleologically ordained process leading to the establishment of a supervising agency - be it the ego, the self or the bourgeois liberal definition of the individual. Nomadic becomings are rather the affirmation of the unalterably positive structure of difference, meant as a multiple and complex process of transformation, a flux of multiple becomings, the play of complexity, or the principle of not-One.⁷⁴

I propose that *Apotheosys* be viewed in light of the ‘nomadic’ paradigm, not merely arising out of its nomadic origins in Morocco, but attending to how the text itself enacts a political and philosophical nomadism in its material and thematic processes. As with Suleiman’s category of the ‘perverse,’ Vicinelli’s text is illuminated by the theoretical aesthetics of metamorphosis, intersection and amalgamation. The exemplars of metamorphosis explored by Braidotti, such as the man-machine, the insect, and the monster,⁷⁵ evoke the metamorphosing process in *Apotheosys* of the text-into-image and the fairytale-into-diary-into-letter.

Such a reading of the evolving, fragmentary *Apotheosys*, as a working through and piecing together of different stages and scenarios, events, places, levels of consciousness approaches Braidotti’s idea of ‘a flux of multiple becomings.’ Through the multi-faceted prism of the visual-verbal and collagistic text, the poetic subject represented in *Apotheosys* is in a process of becoming, nomadic in its conjuring of subjectivity. Braidotti calls the ‘virtual feminine’ that which undermines ‘the feminine as codified in the phallogocentric code of the

⁷² Braidotti, *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics*, p. 11.

⁷³ *ibid.*, p. 68.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p. 145.

⁷⁵ See R. Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2002, for an in-depth study of the monster or ‘teratological other,’ the insect and the ‘becoming-machine.’

patriarchal imaginary’ and instead promotes the ‘movement of destabilization of identity and hence of becoming.’⁷⁶ Vicinelli crafts a literary work which interrupts the phallogocentric code on multiple levels and provides a literal, thematic and concrete exemplar for the dislocating forces of which Braidotti speaks.

Collage and Reality: Reflections, Interrogations, Schizomorphisms

The interpretation of the collage manifesto as a form of social and political rupture is taken up by cultural historian Martin Puchner. Puchner examines the role of dada in the wake of the First World War, viewed not as a unified movement but a broad, global network of avant-gardist phenomena. Intrinsic to the spirit of dada, however, was its resistance to both established and burgeoning avant-gardist movements closely aligned with propagandist nationalism in Europe, crucially Italian *futurismo*.⁷⁷ Puchner argues that ‘dada,’ a nonsense word predicated on sound rather than meaning, exemplifies the process of ‘denationalisation’: despite engagement with many languages, dada does not *belong* to any one language.⁷⁸ In exploring the aesthetics of ‘manifesto art’ in dada, Puchner analyses the techniques of photomontage, and its significance for the relationship between word and image. Akin to Suleiman’s account of collage, he emphasises the heterogeneity of materials, the shock value of surprising juxtapositions, and the decontextualisation of slogans and images when plucked from their original sources.⁷⁹ He identifies two strands in how photomontage is theorised, which might be respectively termed ‘impressionistic’ and ‘interrogative.’ Combining ‘different perspectives’ highlights the idea that such an artform *reflects* an impression of fractured, discontinuous reality:

Indeed, a common understanding of the photomontage is that it mimics the disintegration of society, capturing the effects of the modern metropolis

⁷⁶ Braidotti, *Transpositions*, p. 183-4.

⁷⁷ Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos and the Avant-Gardes*, p. 135-6.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p. 136.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p. 159-60.

that overwhelms the senses of humans with a torrent of simultaneous impressions, as described by Georg Simmel.⁸⁰

The dislocation suffered by the modern metropolitan subject, as described in Simmel's psycho-sociological account of city stimuli,⁸¹ as well as in Marx's account of alienation, is by the same token reflected in the overwhelming confusion and simultaneity of the metropolis captured in the collage.

Alternatively, the collage or montage might be interpreted as the forced amalgamation of unrelated images and text, marrying phenomena which do not belong together, the effect of which is the *invention* of the collage itself. Puchner draws on photos and images from print media:

What this view stresses instead is that the photomontage assembles material taken from different spheres—images of politicians or crowds; clippings from newspapers, advertising, and political rhetoric; elements of everyday life—but actively extracts them from their respective context to make them collide with one another. This collision is not what happens out there in the world but the work of the montage itself. In this account, the montage can be regarded as a critique of separation, an attempt to expose the cutting up of the social world into largely autonomous spheres and systems.⁸²

This 'critique of separation,' which dislodges the fragment from any 'natural' context, dissolving limits on genre and syntax, harks back to Suleiman's positive 'perversion' as hybridisation, and is also notably reminiscent of certain strands in the *neoavanguardia* project. Rather than indicate a passive mimesis, this bolder, more discursive slant on collage aesthetics is highly suggestive in relation to Vicinelli.

Such a conception has as long a history as collage itself, as can be seen in Pablo Picasso's account, in which 'papier collé' revolves around 'the idea that different textures can enter into a composition to become the reality in the

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p. 160.

⁸¹ See G. Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' in D. Frisby and M. Featherstone (eds.), *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings*, London, Sage, 1997, pp. 174-186.

⁸² Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution*, p. 160-1.

painting that competes with the reality in nature.’ This new reality, of the art-object created from disparate, pre-existing materials, carries with it its own unshakeable ‘strangeness,’ emerging from the fact it belongs neither to one source category nor the other.⁸³ What Puchner emphasises is the ‘critique of separation,’ which provides the collage aesthetic with an engaging hermeneutic: if the literal cutting up and merging of found fragments (as well as authored ones) can engender an ideological, not merely sensory or impressionistic, response, where might Vicinelli’s synthesis of material phenomena be positioned? Does Vicinelli’s collage highlight trauma in an interrogative, or merely reflective way?

In considering these questions I look again to certain strands in *neoavanguardia* literary theory. The elements of collage which hinge on interlinguistic and intersemiotic confusion, whether viewed through the perspective of Suleiman’s ‘perversion’ or Puchner’s social critique, are not dissimilar to those features of *schizomorfismo* outlined in the foundational theories of the Gruppo 63. As we have seen in chapter one, in 1963 Sanguineti considered the uncomplicated classification of mental phenomena into normal and abnormal, rational and irrational, as a facile exercise and a function of ‘bourgeois ideology.’⁸⁴ This stridency is linked, then, to the advocacy of a more fluid understanding of rationality and a correlated heterogeneity of aesthetic and literary forms.

Suleiman’s reading of ‘perversion’ as an intrinsically avant-garde disregard for ‘the law of differentiation,’ of mixing what is biblically ordained as separate, chimes with the Sanguinetian rejection, in the sphere of mental phenomena, of ‘normalità borghese’ in favour of ‘pura patologia.’ The discourse surrounding hybrid forms, political and aesthetic, addresses many of the same issues as literary madness and trauma, in their common theoretical examination of ruptured and shifting boundaries. Giuliani’s formulation of *schizomorfismo* allows literature, within a historically unprecedented level of fragmentation in life, to approximate a contemporary ‘sense of reality,’ not mimetically or naturalistically, but through forcing the reader to confront the reality of language itself through an agitation of what language, and by extension, poetic forms, can do. This schema is

⁸³ P. Picasso, cited in M. Perloff, *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture*, University of Chicago Press, 1986, p. 44.

⁸⁴ Sanguineti, ‘Il dibattito,’ p. 383-4.

both an ironic revelation - ‘uno smascheramento’ - of the superficiality of the historic moment, and a challenge to its linguistic oppressiveness,⁸⁵ or what Nanni Balestrini termed ‘anemic and amorphous’ language.⁸⁶ He repeats that ‘non-sense’ is the ‘content,’ the ‘iconic material,’ of his contemporary era, and poetry functions as a critical mimesis of this diffuse ‘universal schizophrenia’:

Il non-senso è diventato un “contenuto,” un materiale iconico come le Madonne e gli Angeli delle annunciazioni trecentesche.⁸⁷

... [L]’idea della poesia quale mimesi critica della schizofrenia universale, rispecchiamento e contestazione di uno stato sociale e immaginativo disgregato.⁸⁸

Puchner’s dual interpretation of avant-gardist collage as a technique that either ‘mimics the disintegration of society’ or constitutes a ‘critique of separation’ shares, I believe, many of the same characteristics as Giuliani’s *neoavanguardia* discourse on poetry as both a ‘mirror’ and a ‘contestation’ of a perceived ‘universal schizophrenia.’ The association between collage, then, and the fracturing impulse of this ‘schizomorphic vision’ is, I argue, theoretically entwined and mutually revealing in Vicinelli’s *Apotheosis* collage. Puchner’s examination of collage-montage as a site of commentary on the unnatural division of social roles, environments and classes in the twentieth century, speaks equally to avant-garde (and neo avant-garde) concerns surrounding alienation, both psychological and economic. Collage can be viewed as an interrogative art form, one which functions as a critique through its material and visual form. Giuliani’s 2003 pronouncement, retrospectively elucidating ‘visione schizomorfa’ as ‘l’intenzionalità alla forma scissa’ confirms the role of split form as a guiding principle. Vicinelli’s literary visuality, via what Giuliani terms ‘forma scissa,’ conveys this thematic rupture and the invocation of alienation and trauma. ‘Schizomorfismo’ and ‘visione schizomorfa’ are illustrated in the photomontage and verbal-visual collage of *Apotheosis*; the distinctive collage of artifacts

⁸⁵ Giuliani, 1961 introduction, *I Novissimi*, p. 18.

⁸⁶ Balestrini, ‘Linguaggio e opposizione,’ p. 536.

⁸⁷ Giuliani, 1965 introduction, *I Novissimi*, p. 4.

⁸⁸ Giuliani, 1965 introduction, *I Novissimi*, p. 7.

evolves in such a way that the material itself *enacts* the propulsion towards split form, reflecting the existence of these divisions while hinting at the structures that underlie their formation.

Part III

From the Individual Traumatic Wound to Global Traumatic Networks: Materiality, Biopolitics and ‘Insidious’ Trauma

How might *Apotheosys* approach a nuanced construal of ‘schizomorfismo’ and exemplify a ‘critique of separation,’ and to what end? There is evidently a ‘rispecchiamento’ of traumatic spatial and temporal processes, through the incongruencies, gaps and cuts which characterise the collection, features which offer a penetrating study of the notion of ‘schizomorphic vision.’ Furthermore, my contention is that this ‘mirroring’ of the absurd traumas of modern life lends itself to a ‘contestation’ or interrogation of these traumas and their meaning. I propose that Vicinelli’s particular interrogation of trauma in *Apotheosys* can be viewed through a number of interrelated perspectives, namely: the discourse surrounding ‘material’ versus ‘immaterial’ literary trauma, the dispersal of the ‘punctual’ traumatic event into an underlying, evolving trauma, and, by extension, the fluid interchange of trauma between the private sphere and the collective and public arena.

Vicinelli’s mode of contestation, in *Apotheosys*, lies in the relationship between literature and violence which implicates, then transcends, the individual psyche, and looks towards more global manifestations of trauma. The characteristically visual mode of writing employed by Vicinelli constitutes the disruption and destabilisation of a notion of ‘immaterial’ traumatic suffering, borne by the individual psyche, and the reevaluation of a ‘material,’⁸⁹ outward-looking basis of trauma, which takes into account alienation and dislocation as both individual and societal. This reconciliation of the individual and global facets of trauma is a current concern in literary trauma studies. What has literature to say, then, when faced with the traumatic encounter which is not characterised solely by the individual psyche and the punctual event, but which is imbued with a ‘sense of the traumatic experience of modernity,’ the psyche *as part of society*?

In *The Trauma Question*, as has been noted in part I, Roger Luckhurst traces trauma as a historically-grounded phenomenon, as well as a scientific

⁸⁹ G. Bistoien, *Trauma, Ethics and the Political Beyond PTSD: The Dislocations of the Real*, p. 4, 31.

category. He invokes Bruno Latour's notion of 'hybrid assemblages' in approaching trauma as an example of a 'conceptual knot' and a 'tangled object,' which constitutes a uniquely contemporary concern:

Increasingly, we have to deal with 'tangled objects,' imbroglios that mess up our fundamental categories of subject and object, human and non-human, society and nature. [...] things that seem to emerge somewhere between the natural and the man-made and that tangle up questions of science, law, technology, capitalism, politics, medicine and risk.⁹⁰

Among other current voices theorising the reach of trauma beyond the individual psyche is Michelle Balaev. Balaev, in her introduction to *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory*,⁹¹ presents a critique of the perceived universalising tendencies of the 'unspeakable' and 'unrepresentable' classic trauma theory model, and, along with her contributors, proposes a wider-ranging plurality of approaches, looking more closely at social and cultural contexts of traumatic experience, as well as considering semiotic and rhetorical questions of traumatic language.

In their preface and introduction to the volume of essays *The Future of Trauma Theory*, Michael Rothberg and Gert Buelens outline the wide array of new approaches in the trauma field, visiting an expanded horizon of possible applications and topics.⁹² A notable current throughout the essays in the book involves the question 'trauma as history,' of trauma as it fits into a wider interdisciplinary perspective, a topic which necessarily entails discussion of trauma as experienced on an individual or collective level, or crucially, both. Among these more recent developments is Sam Durrant's contribution with 'Undoing Sovereignty: Towards a Theory of Critical Mourning.' Durrant

⁹⁰ Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, p. 14-15.

⁹¹ Balaev, 'Literary Trauma Theory Reconsidered,' Balaev (ed.), *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory*.

⁹² M. Rothberg, preface; G. Buelens, introduction; in G. Buelens et al. (eds.), *The Future of Trauma Theory: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism*. Noting the contribution of Luckhurst, Michael Rothberg, in his preface, anticipates ecological applications of trauma theory along the lines of the 'implicated subject' in the trauma incurred by neo-liberal globalism and the inhabitants of the 'Anthropocene' (man-controlled planet), and the 'slow violence' of climate change upon it. (p. xv) The preface anticipates the volume's notable querying of the anthropocentric nature of cultural trauma studies, inviting a reconsideration of the traditional sites on which trauma might be theorised.

examines the shifts in approaching trauma from the perspective of the individual to the collective, but instead of ‘imagining a traumatized collective psyche,’ he proposes that ‘trauma studies is on surer ground when it theorises the state’s role in the process of subjectification’:

The distinction between historical (event-based) and structural trauma would seem to have been eclipsed by the recent turn to the biopolitical. Where once talk of structural trauma seemed to constitute a depoliticization of discrete events or even ‘unique’ events such as the Holocaust, [recent work] has emphasized the importance of understanding trauma as an inevitable part of our ideological construction as subjects, our subjection to the state and the myriad forces of modernity.⁹³

The ever-closer identification of trauma with modernity itself is an enticing thesis that creates, I believe, a theoretical knot (rather than alignment), with the *neoavanguardia* idea and practice of *schizomorfismo*. Sanguineti’s elaboration of the literary figure of the ‘Palus Putredinis ... dell’anarchismo e dell’alienazione,’⁹⁴ the swamp of putrid historical alienation, of the irrational contradictions of capitalist modernity, shares some of the signals of the broader reach of trauma. Along with Luckhurst’s account, which traces trauma as strongly correlated with the rise of capitalism, science, law, and industrial machinery, Durrant arrives at trauma from a complementary angle, approaching the constitution of the individual as subject to the ‘myriad forces of modernity.’ He looks to the writings of Walter Benjamin in identifying the acute trauma of the individual as historical, a ‘sense of the traumatic experience of modernity.’ He remarks on Benjamin’s reading of Paul Klee’s print ‘Angelus Novus,’ the angel looking back on the long chain of historical ruin, as ‘... *the* figure for the traumatized witness, a witness not to one historically locatable event but to history itself, as one long catastrophe.’⁹⁵

Another contribution in *The Future of Trauma Theory* is Peter Vermeulen’s ‘The Biopolitics of Trauma,’ where he investigates the shared

⁹³ S. Durrant, ‘Undoing Sovereignty: Towards a Theory of Critical Mourning,’ G. Buelens et al. (eds.), *The Future of Trauma Theory: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism*, p. 92.

⁹⁴ Sanguineti, ‘Poesia informale?’ p. 203, 204.

⁹⁵ Durrant, ‘Undoing Sovereignty: Towards a Theory of Critical Mourning,’ p. 93.

origins of trauma and biopolitics as both products of European modernity itself. Vermeulen engagingly brings Roberto Esposito's biopolitical theories of 'immunitary technology' into the debate on the future of trauma studies and provides a critical introduction to how these discourses might speak to one another, and problems which arise. In accounting for the effects of creeping biopower on the lives of individuals, Vermeulen takes issue with the assumed universality of the classic trauma model which maintains that 'trauma is essentially a sudden and punctual event that afflicts the subject from without.' He elaborates thus:

This notion all too easily assumes a solid and stable sense of self that is simply not available to many disenfranchised groups, and thus fails to account for the detrimental effects of the 'ongoing and sustained dynamics of social injury and deprivation' that affect the lives of non-dominant groups suffering from social injuries such as 'racism, misogyny, homophobia and economic exploitation.'⁹⁶

He cites Laura Brown's and Maria Root's notion of 'insidious trauma,' elaborated in Brown's essay 'Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma' as 'the traumatogenic effects of oppression that are not necessarily overtly violent or threatening to bodily well-being at the given moment but that do violence to the soul and spirit.'⁹⁷ Vermeulen argues that 'insidious trauma' – in his words, 'a term that conjures biopolitics' capillary and invisible mode of operation'⁹⁸ - corresponds with an obliquely felt type of experience that feeds directly into a biopolitical interpretation of traumatic phenomena. Such an interpretation repositions trauma as a phenomenon which is materially infiltrated by bodily and social relations at large. Vermeulen cites Foucault's theorisations on the elusive effects of sovereign biopower in his lecture 'Society Must Be Defended,' in particular the operations of the 'new

⁹⁶ P. Vermeulen, 'The Biopolitics of Trauma' in G. Buelens et al. (eds.), *The Future of Trauma Theory: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism*, New York, Routledge, 2014, p. 144. Vermeulen cites S. Moglen, *Mourning Modernity: Literary Modernism and the Injuries of American Capitalism*, Stanford, 2007, p. 19.

⁹⁷ L.S. Brown, 'Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma,' in C. Caruth (ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, p. 107.

⁹⁸ Vermeulen, 'The Biopolitics of Trauma,' p. 145.

nondisciplinary power' in shifting from 'power over the body in an individualizing mode' to 'power that is not individualising, but, if you like, massifying, that is directed not at man-as-body but at man-as-species.'⁹⁹ Vermeulen suggestively harnesses this account of diffused, sublimated power over the human species to illuminate the similarities with the indefinable effects of the trauma-inducing politico-society on the individual. The individual body and mind, by the same token, if not necessarily directly and corporeally targeted, nonetheless suffers this elusive influence.

Brown's theorisation of 'insidious trauma' and Vermeulen's linking of it with biopolitical awareness are particularly germane to an examination of Vicinelli's poetry. In *à, a. A*, and *Apotheosis*, we have observed oblique, aporetic and evolving uses of traumatic language, structure and visuality. In *Apotheosis*, we have examined the slow depositing of details which suggest intermittent distressing events, rather than relate temporally graspable and distinct moments of anguish. Such literary-visual techniques evoke phenomena such as gaps between knowing and not knowing, temporal rupture between the horrific event and psychic grasp of the event, and the inability of standard linear language to approximate the wound, or the aftermath, of trauma. Moreover, such experimental features, in their unfinishedness and unintelligibility, go further in relating surreptitious oppression, sense of insidious threat, and a generalised erosion of bodily integrity, which align perhaps more explicitly with a biopolitical and systemic understanding of traumatogenic society.

The Foucauldian idea, related by Vermeulen, of 'capillary power' is an insistent, but subtle, undermining of undesirable bodily and psychological behaviour in society, and by extension, an undermining of subjective identity, by invisible external powers. We are reminded of Basaglia's radical anti-psychiatry readings of the political aspects of the categorisation and treatment of the ill in 1960s Italy (and the West generally), and how these currents of thought have evolved more recently to incorporate trauma theory in the work of Vermeulen and others. While Basaglia was largely engaged with the rights of the mentally ill and the socio-political function of the asylum, the same issues are pertinent in how trauma as a discourse, and the traumatised as individuals, are tied up in the

⁹⁹ Foucault, 'Society Must Be Defended,' p. 243.

‘infrastructures of biopolitics,’¹⁰⁰ the functioning and curation of the modern society.

Consequently, the idea that trauma might not only emerge as a result of a ‘punctual’ and explicit event, but alternatively as a dripfeed of low-level traumata, conceivably concealed within the fabric of society, is highly intriguing for questions of literary trauma. Vicinelli’s works considered here, (as well as Sanguineti’s works in chapter one), represent a specifically poetic and visual attempt to deal with the biopolitical infringement of external powers on the life of the ‘asintattico, anormale’ individual. Vicinelli’s material collage offers a combination of documentary and fantasy, opening a window onto drug use and violence, which at once registers the ‘insidious trauma’ underlying the life of the dispossessed, and which slowly wears down rather than explodes the psyche. Yet, on the other hand, *Apotheosys* materially rejects normative femininity and pushes back against biopolitical spectres.

These theoretical shifts between various modes of approaching the traumatic encounter speak readily to *neoavanguardia* literary concerns. The opening out of the consideration of literary trauma to encompass broader manifestations of ‘wounding’ has suggestive implications for the exploration of the traumatic collage-poem. Vicinelli’s *Apotheosys* is a penetrating study of the spectre of insidious and elusive violence, in its rejection of a phallogocentric linear idiom and the adoption of a ‘perverse’ literary texture.

In relating traumatic materiality to aesthetic materiality, Vicinelli’s contribution in *Apotheosys* (as well as *à, a. A.*) can bridge the gap between poetic experimentation and certain directions in current trauma theory. Vicinelli’s practice of collage and ‘material’ typography (based on the physical rearrangement of text and image) works as a literary, and literal, interrogation of the complex interwoven traumatic archetypes – the internal, ineffable, ‘unspeakable’ wound and the wound of humankind, the planet, and history itself. The verbal-visual material collage illuminates the fracturing and rupture central to the literary expression of deep personal trauma, and it equally disavows the depoliticisation of trauma, taking into account the socio-political burden of trauma and its contextual specificity. Whilst Vicinelli’s works are indeed complex,

¹⁰⁰ Vermeulen, ‘The Biopolitics of Trauma,’ p. 145.

fragmented, disjointed and open-ended due to gaps, fissures and cuts, I argue her formal experimentation does not end at reflecting the anguish of psychic trauma, but pushes back against the contemporary socio-political reality which has a part to play in a broader, societal, collective trauma.

Vicinelli's corpus conjures questions of the personal and the public, of family, writing, drugs, and violence, through collected and collaged artifacts from life; in this respect, I contend that the material 'stuff' of her work tie together elements of the traumatic and the biopolitical. Material as *itself* constitutive of language and culture introduces an alluring perspective for the study of *Apotheosys*. A turn towards 'materiality' and the place of biopolitical phenomena as thematic fabric have opened up interesting theorisations in relation to literature. In this vein, literary critic Christopher Breu, in *Insistence of the Material: Literature in the Age of Biopolitics*,¹⁰¹ links certain themes in postwar experimental and avant-garde novels with a current return (after what he terms the 'linguistic and cultural turns') to the 'material'; a theorisation he views through many different prisms, such as the ongoing reappraisal of the biological body in gender and feminist theory, the rise of object and 'thing' theory, and the continuing attention paid to biopower and biopolitics as 'material,' life-shaping thematics in literature. I propose that Vicinelli's *Apotheosys* embodies, in concrete-poetic rather than novelistic form, such a return to the 'material.'

The collage composed of material artifacts, shaped by textural, textual and genre irregularity, recalls Suleiman's concept of 'perverse' collage and certain strands in *neoavanguardia* literary aesthetics. Drawing an analogy between the irregularity of literary forms and the shape of the societal landscape is once again reminiscent of Alfredo Giuliani's notes on the potential of 'visione schizomorfa' in poetry. 'De-homogenising' the 'homogenized food powder,'¹⁰² in the way Giuliani had described the bland, standardised literature of his time, and reintroducing texture and 'perversity,' might, I contend, reflect both the insidious and punctual trauma caused by violence, and counter the commodification and control of alternative subjects and subjectivities. The disturbed and hybridised

¹⁰¹ C. Breu, *Insistence of the Material: Literature in the Age of Biopolitics*, University of Minnesota, 2014.

¹⁰² Giuliani, 1965 introduction, *I Novissimi*, p. 1.

forms of *Apotheosis*, whether described in terms of ‘perversion’ or ‘pathology,’ ultimately persevere in their ‘anormalità.’

The heterogeneity embodied in the work, the reaching of one medium outside to another, reminding the reader of the ‘ground’ or the material signifier, analogically conjures the material, socially contingent world in which the work is created. Yet, at the same time as recalling the truthfulness of the diverse and multi-textural, the nature of insidious trauma is that it is evolving and unfinished. In this sense we can describe the poetics of *Apotheosis* as based in an evolving materiality, which operates around the elusive influence of biopower on the subject which manifests in the labels and diary excerpts which slip through the cracks. I will now examine more closely the material and artifactual poetics of *Apotheosis*, and the embodiment of ‘insidious trauma’ through the evolving form of the poetic cycle.

The Evolution of ‘Insidious Trauma’ and Biopolitical Consciousness in *Apotheosis of Schizoid Woman*

In Vicinelli’s *Apotheosis*, there are focal points where, I argue, the issues of insidious trauma and biopolitical consciousness come to the fore within a poetic strategy that suggests the threat of subjugation but eludes resolution. The central themes centre around the institutions of family, the state (and exile from it), and the asylum; as well as contested sites of individual subjectivity including the body and psychological ‘anormalità.’ The overall structure of the collage-work, as noted above, is temporally fragmented, with intrusions from past and present, in the form of old newspaper clippings, preserved diary excerpts and quotidian bureaucratic fragments. This format, which provides decontextualised details, revealed over the course of the collage but ensuring little clarification, generates an evolving sense of menace. This insidious aspect is exemplified, among other instances, in the ominous representations of struggle and tension on the beach, evoking the escalation of threat but no real conclusion or outcome. Equally indicative of an overarching traumatogenic environment, rather than a purely punctual event, is the continual emergence of newspaper headlines detailing murder and brutality (‘ACCOLTELLATORE/ DI PORTA TICINESE’ /

‘chiesti 15 ergastoli’); the onslaught of violence represented in these stories, and particularly gendered violence - ‘bambina rovesciata in sotto’ - impress on the reader a generalised sense of destructive potential. Contrasting with the official reportage of such events, the diary entries and letters describe harm and devastation in a more subjective style – ‘con il cuore spaccato in due da una coltellata’ (fig. 26) – continuing the infiltration of trauma into the everyday. Recalling Brown’s formulation of ‘incessantly quotidian trauma,’ the dispersal of the single traumatic event into an ongoing programme of subjugation finds an apposite illustration in the intricacies of Vicinelli’s labyrinthine poetics.

The photo of an unidentified woman, reprinted over three pages, and overwritten with various inscriptions - first ‘chiesti 15 ergastoli,’ then ‘revolver, l’assassino, delitto, vittima,’ and finally ‘oggetto’ - demonstrate three possible (external) perspectives on an otherwise mute photograph. The variety of reportage captions and legal descriptions demonstrate, firstly, the capacity for words to speak for images and the people represented in them; secondly, the captions prove the instability of the designating-power through which the photographed person might be equally considered a murderer *or* a victim. The collage evolution of the labelling of the photo reveals the power assumed by those who label, and the relative inconsistency of the act of labelling.

Biopolitical discourse is formally and thematically inscribed into the various strata of *Apotheosys*. The collage-work alludes to unfinished and unresolved acts of physical, sexual, and psychological aggression. It also draws attention to the indirect reality of quotidian violent acts, mediated through newspaper clippings, fueling a sense of diffuse violent inevitability, or ‘insidious trauma.’ As well as evoking the biopolitical in demonstrating the normalised nature of trauma, *Apotheosys* responds to the threat of the biopolitical incursion into, and mastery over, life itself, the optimisation of biological life and the attendant ‘technologies’ which operate on this aim. The visual and material aspects of Vicinelli’s work are at once a metaphorical study of language, gaps and silence, yet in another way the obsessive repetitions of violence, flashes of possible events, the ‘thereness’ of photography, the rich real detail of family, all are ‘material’ artifacts; these knots show that, indeed, the lived traumatic life crosses the metaphorical with the literal constantly. The inclusion of vestiges, such as drug labels, point to a twofold interpretation of biopower: in the

suggestion that the threat of bodily mastery is present in the power of narcotics to subdue belligerent and unruly individuals, but equally in the representation of the power of narcotics to *negate* the mastery of the external world over the individual mind.

Family, The Maternal Body and The Asylum: Insidious Technologies

The institution of family and the role within of the maternal body are particularly pertinent in an examination of ‘insidious’ trauma and the biopolitical in Vicinelli’s *Apotheosis*. The collage features a verbal-visual sequence which foregrounds a ‘perverse’ and textured materiality, creating dissonances of tone and affect - bridging, I argue, heterogeneous form with biopolitical commentary. The revelatory form of the collage charts an uneven progression from familial joy to abjection, from home to exile - an incisive manifestation of underlying, insidious trauma through an aesthetic of evolving materiality.

The sequence features an abundance of information regarding (nominally) the family of the author. A photomontage of individuals of varying ages (fig. 28) is followed by a handwritten record of seventeen members of the Vicinelli family, listed by name and relationship to the author, thus: ‘Armando Cappelletti, nonno morto il pittore’ (fig. 29). This family tree, rich with autobiographical detail concerning a particular chronicled family, raises interesting questions regarding its presumed historicity, and by extension, the limits of fiction and autobiography, poetry and documentary. The affective, handcrafted details of Vicinelli’s close family tree embody the most marked disjunct between private and public, local and universal. Crystallised in the layered montage, where photographs and names align, is the historic reality of a particular family, captured at a particular time. The extended family tree, presenting distinctively Italian names and faces, undoubtedly replete with hidden private histories, serves as a characteristic embodiment of local and personal memory.

Drawing attention to the family is rendered more acute in the temporally contingent format of the evolving collage. The innocuous depiction of the Vicinelli family line is drawn into sharp relief, a few pages later, with a series of

cut-ups, documenting new fractured items and revealing previously invisible ones.¹⁰³ A handwritten scrap of paper spells ‘CARCERE’ near the vertically printed text ‘ENFIN DES GENS HEUREUX,’ and ‘POURQUOI PAS VOUS?’ (fig. 33) Above are indistinct, ambiguous doodles and diagrams suggesting, perhaps, the uterus and female genitalia, bordering the labels ‘LE MIROIR MAGIQUE’ and ‘AVANT APRÈS.’ Squeezed between these, we discover an obliquely angled handwritten script:

Dear Gianni, dalla grande / madre, fica color di prugna / color d’arancio
oceano / di lamenti. voce di / piuma. occhio / che ribatte al / cervello la /
fantasia svelan/te là – mettere al mon / do – che effetto fa / essere nella
pancia di / una puttana, di una don/na, di una madre, se si na/sce? E se
volesse dir qualcosa / nascere decapitati in uno sta / dio di immobili
egocentrici?¹⁰⁴

The evolving traumatic material builds steadily in the gap between the family chronicle and this cut-up of both mundane and dramatic fragments. Motherhood emerges as a key theme in both, but unlike the formalised categorisation of various mothers in the Vicinelli family chronicle, maternity here is presented in fatalistic, melancholic, desolate terms. The shape of the writing is graphically striking, enhanced by discordant phrasing and violent imagery. The extract is suffused with a sense of birth as suffering and sadness, from the intimations of natal blood, to the consciousness that those brought into the world are voiceless, impotent, even dead - ‘voce di piuma ... nascere decapitati.’ The universality of the womb, as origin of all who are born, transcends how the individual woman is perceived: whore, woman or mother. In the context of the evolving collage, this (materially) uncovered text reveals a traumatic viewpoint on motherhood and family, shifting in genre and tone from photo-catalogue to intimate epistolary form.

We are reminded of Suleiman’s category of the ‘perverse,’ and its subversion of a biblical and familial understanding of the divinely ordained ‘law

¹⁰³ Vicinelli, *Apotheosis*, p. 420-22.

¹⁰⁴ Due to indistinct writing and a large gap, it is unclear whether this phrase is ‘immobili,’ ‘ignobili’ or even a third possibility; however, I contend ‘immobili’ is most likely based on a comparison with other examples of Vicinelli’s handwriting.

of differentiation.’ In the oneiric world of the collage, the neat classification of mothers in the family tree is dislocated by the messy reality of the representation of the suffering and silenced mother in the above text - testing and challenging familial law with the form and thematics of the ‘perverse’ collage. Embedded in these intersemiotic, interdependent markers, perhaps, lies a representation of the traumatic rejection of maternal law and female familial bonds.

The treatment of family and the maternal body in *Apotheosis* incisively addresses the biopolitical through its ‘perverse’ dissonances in format and genre. The neutral representation of the family chronicle constitutes one of the instances in *Apotheosis* where we might speak of historicity and the genre of autobiography. The contrast, then, with the expression of maternal hopelessness and the desubjectification of the human from their first breath - ‘nascere decapitati’ – underscores the biopolitical suggestivity of the collage form. Equally biopolitical is the reference to the biological universality of the womb, offset by the political influences governing the perceived social value of the mother. The material significance of the family photographs spliced into the work among more literary genres demonstrates the variables in play in regarding biopolitical, as well as psychic, trauma. The ‘perverse’ literary texture resides in the restless shifting from the photographic to the handwritten, and from stable, familiar maternity to maternal anguish, emphasising the material artifacts of biopolitical interpretations. Such a material emphasis recalls what Christopher Breu has termed ‘uncoded stuff,’ a direct reference to what is, in Burroughs’ *Naked Lunch*, ‘a frozen moment when everyone sees what is on the end of every fork’:

Moments of the return of the material repressed, then, become the sites where syntax breaks down and where violated, exploited, and abject forms of materiality break through the web of the symbolic and forcefully intrude into the subject’s field of perception, insisting on an accounting in the field of desire.¹⁰⁵

The idea of materiality in literature as the possibility for the most abject elements of life to break through the order of the symbolic, is reminiscent of, to a certain

¹⁰⁵ Breu, *Insistence of the Material*, p. 40.

extent, Roland Barthes' conception of the *punctum* in photography, wherein the shocking detail leaps out and pierces the viewer from the photograph itself.¹⁰⁶ The 'violated, exploited [...] uncoded stuff' theorised by Breu, readily addresses the maternal body as it informs the biopolitical in Vicinelli. The epistolary fragments, in both their handwritten form and in their visceral content – 'fica color di prugna' – cleave to the experiential body itself, exemplifying those elements which are unmediated and non-symbolic. In subsequently linking female genitalia back to the universal womb or 'pancia,' the biopolitical linking of biology and society is complete.

In addressing psychological and physical distress in birthing and maternity as in some measure tied up in societal expectations of motherhood, and the social status of mothers, Vicinelli hints towards the juncture between the traumatic and the biopolitical, calling to mind Luckhurst's 'tangled objects' and Brown's 'insidious trauma' as necessarily '*within* the range of human experience.' The material splicing of photographic maternity and literary maternity functions on the level of the collage aesthetic, but also in terms of the material realities of the traumatogenic society.

However, in another instance, an apparently technical description of neural processes alludes to the overlap between the chemical and emotional body, complicating matters in the intimation of a biomedical perspective (fig. 27):

il suo pensiero i neuroni raggiungenti / sinapsi / il calcio unentesi il sodio /
il potassio al suo fosforo / i suoi codici eccitati¹⁰⁷

Nearby, the slogan in bold print:

L'AMOUR à volonté

This juxtaposition between a glimpse of the chemical processes underlying human phenomena such as sexual desire, pregnancy, birth, maternity, emotion, and the counter-cultural slogan 'free love,' strongly associated with the 1960s

¹⁰⁶ R. Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. R. Howard, London, Vintage, 1993.

¹⁰⁷ Vicinelli, *Apotheosis*, p. 408.

student protests and the sexual revolution, pits a purely biological viewpoint (chemical desire) against its biopolitical counterpart (rebellion against statal repression of desire), once more tangling up the medical-biological with the socio-political. The printed snippets from magazines ‘ENFIN LES GENS HEUREUX’ and ‘BON pour le BONHEUR’ impress again a top-down conception of the provision of happiness; if happiness is chemical, the crystallisation of otherwise elusive well-being can be engineered, and drawing attention to this is perhaps reminiscent of what Foucault called the ‘massifying’ rather than ‘individualising’ effects of biopower.

I look again to Braidotti’s illuminating work on the body and maternity to consider the clinical reduction and classification of the emotional-social body in *Apotheosys*. Whereas Vicinelli signals the dissection of happiness into its chemical constituents (automatically invoking the pharmaco-industrial complex), Braidotti analyses the surgical precision of scientific imaging. In the course of her explorations into theories of embodied nomadism in *Nomadic Subjects*, Braidotti comments on contemporary interior imaging practices in science and medicine. Having discussed the dominating ‘scopic drive’ behind the acquisition of knowledge in early modern clinical anatomy and its correlation with ‘a discursive dismemberment of the body,’¹⁰⁸ she goes on to theorise the intense magnification and visualisation practices central to echography, and the scrutiny of the developing fetus in the womb:

Modern techniques of visual reproduction, especially echograms and echography, mark a powerful intensification of this trend. Our bioscientific technologies have acquired the means of intervening in the very structure of the living organism, right into the basic/genetic program. The biomedical gaze has grown to extreme proportions, allowing for an unprecedented investigation of the most intimate and infinitesimal fibers of nature. [...] It amounts to suspending time in the illusion of total vision, of the absolute transparency and control over living matter.¹⁰⁹

While visibility, when used as an expressive medium alongside textuality, can

¹⁰⁸ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, p. 196.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, p. 196-7.

enhance the situatedness and power of the voice, the dark side of visual-scopic biopower is seen in the ever-probing possibility of the hyper-representedness of the internal body by the visual image or representation. The implicit reduction of the whole to its parts is described by Braidotti as akin to ‘organs-without-bodies,’ (an inversion of Deleuze’s and Guattari’s concept developed in *Anti-Oedipus*¹¹⁰), and draws attention to the desubjectifying tendencies of both early anatomical practice and extreme visualisation technologies.

In the letter from ‘la grande madre,’ Vicinelli implicates the primordial function of the eye, its preverbal role in the primary reception of images to be projected onto and processed by the brain: ‘occhio / che ribatte al / cervello la / fantasia svelante là.’ The eye is positioned as key to the ‘fantasia svelante,’ and more generally, as a conduit for the whole spectrum of lived embedded experience, psychic or bodily, traumatic or joyful. The binary power of the visual in literature is here embodied in the ability of the material-visual collage to give ‘ground’ to the silenced and marginalised subject, but also show how intensive visualisation can remove agency from the same subject. This dualistic potential of visuality serves as a reminder of how Vicinelli works in revealing underlying structures, challenging logocentric norms by giving literary ‘matter’ to the figure of the traumatised subject, and ultimately emphasising the open-endedness of the traumatic poem. The visual and concrete elements of the collage, from the scribbled letters to the drawings and found photos, represent a challenge to ‘scopic mastery,’ as much as they defy logocentrism and syntactical continuity.

The positioning of family and motherhood in *Apotheosis* indirectly raises certain biopolitical issues in its treatment of the historical *within* the literary. The emotive list of mothers and fathers (fig. 29), and the fact of Vicinelli’s own birth in 1943, hint at untold histories of wartime Italy. We remember that many of the figures in the Vicinelli family inventory would have lived, and possibly died, during the Fascist era. The invocation of maternity, through this catalogue of mothers, is all the more acute when recalling Mussolini’s contemporary laws on

¹¹⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 19: ‘The body without organs is an egg: it is crisscrossed with axes and thresholds, with latitudes and longitudes and geodesic lines, traversed by *gradients* marking the transitions and the becomings, the destinations of the subject developing along these particular vectors.’

the preservation, and propagation, of the Italian family.¹¹¹ The historical fact of maternity and paternity biopoliticised in this way adds, I believe, yet another layer of discursive potential in the appreciation of Vicinelli's *Apotheosis*. The suggestiveness of Italy's biopolitical history is uncomfortably woven into the material reality of these particular photographs and names.

As a counterpart to maternity, the representation of childhood in *Apotheosis* likewise reflects the dissociating effects of 'insidious trauma.' In the diverse patchwork of handwritten letters is the mini-fairytale (fig. 34), populated by an ogre and a witch, both mythical creatures particularly associated with having malevolent intentions towards children, and often emblematic of child abuse and cannibalism. The context within the collage is significant, spliced among the other explicitly disturbed letters - 'interminata estasi logorroica' - it is presented rather as an allegorical text, distanced from fact or reality. When considered in light of other family relics, such as the photo catalogue, and textual shards - 'DEAR ALDO, UCCIDENDO TRANQUILLAMENTE I SUOI PADRI, ADDIO' - the fairy-tale introduces another ambiguous piece in an incoherent mosaic of heterogeneous familial attitudes. The contrasts between the classic family photos and the ominous markers of violent or disturbed childhood - 'bambina rovesciata in sotto', 'Ma MAMAN a sauvé mon PAPA IL BUVAIT' allude to a rupture between conflicting memories of a (lost) childhood; added to that are the particular contrasts with *adult* trauma which are intuited throughout the work.

The 'insidious trauma' paradigm is all the more pertinent in questions of unresolved childhood traumas, where issues of distant time and memory can further impede intelligibility; *Apotheosis* powerfully conjures the buried nature of childhood memories, and the shifting, stratified layers of incomprehensible relics embedded in visual textuality. The biopolitical looms large in this interpretation - the inevitable externality of the traumatising phenomenon to its subject is what renders it invisible, unlocatable, and pervasive throughout the human lifespan - from childhood to old age. The evolving materiality of *Apotheosis* adopts, I argue, such a conceptualisation of living trauma.

¹¹¹ A. Righi, 'The Personal is (Bio) Political! Italian Marxist Neo-Feminism and its Historical Trajectory' in A. Righi, *Biopolitics and Social Change in Italy: From Gramsci to Pasolini to Negri*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

A biopolitical reading of family and trauma is, in Vicinelli, intertwined with the haunting spectre of the asylum. Along with the prison, the asylum remains one of the fundamental sites of the poststructuralist discourse surrounding biopolitics and biopower. In *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault outlines the evolution of what he recognises as the Christian practice of ‘pastoral power’, which centres around concern for the salvation of the individual and interior truth-seeking. This focus redirects, in the secular era, towards a communitary and individual concern for security, health, and well-being, undertaken by institutions such as the family, education system, medicine, and psychiatry.¹¹² Vicinelli’s *Apotheosis* implicitly recognises the links between these institutions and their double-sided potential to protect and control life, and by engaging specifically with family and psychiatry, the cycle explores the traumatogenic effects of dislocation within these powerful life-moulding entities.

Apotheosis (and to a certain extent *à, a. A.*), are, I believe, trauma texts which are reflective of, and engage in, a critique of the traditional asylum as a foundational site for the control and construction of subjectivity. Pieter Vermeulen has made a convincing case that trauma studies moves in similar spheres, and speaks to similar concerns, as the biopolitical, and these two works demonstrate the crossover of a formal, linguistic understanding of traumatic textuality, with the key biopolitical themes which, I believe, underlie this particular experimental literature.

The ‘perverse’ texture of *Apotheosis*, specifically, lends itself to the conception of the ‘asintattico, anormale’ figure, through the evocation of deviance, otherness, and madness, whilst simultaneously providing a contestation of the biopolitical infringement on the life of the individual. The shifting representation of the asylum, and the insidiously quotidian trauma implied in the ‘free’ individual’s life are not represented as separate modes of existence. Rather, the impression of the asylum is integrated into the collage, embedded within the creeping threat of generalised violence, and presented as simply another form of oppressive biopower.

The solitary handwritten phrase ‘indicenti il sole indicenti il sole’ is partially visible from the start of the collage, the rest repeatedly obscured by other

¹¹² Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 215.

incongruous texts, doodles, and photographs. The complete text is revealed directly under a window view, with the printed heading ‘MANICOMIO’ (fig. 24):

Il riflesso dilatantesi le sue pupille la/
sua bocca mostrandesi la lingua/
il corpo proiettantesi avanti il na/
so dilatantesi il respiro le mani/
indicenti il sole indicenti il so/
le indicenti il sole indicenti il sole/
indicenti il sole indicenti il sole/
indicenti il sole indicenti il sole/¹¹³

The representation, in this extract, of a forced medical examination, or psychiatric evaluation, is tinged with violence. The lack of subject pronouns and unclear possessives create ambiguity – whose mouth, tongue, nose, body is this? The display of isolated body parts, the opening of the mouth, the reflection in the pupils, has connotations with a clinical examination, and the ‘projecting’ body might hint at signs of struggle or need for restraint. The repetition of ‘indicenti,’ which might be construed as ‘unspeaking’ and which has undertones of ‘indecenti,’ is perplexing: who or what are ‘unspeaking’? ‘Indicenti’ might refer to unspeaking/indecent hands; equally, people or voices might be ‘unspeaking’ or silent during an impersonal, clinical examination. The sun and light are repeatedly referenced over the course of the collage, and hold powerful allusions to freedom and the threat of its withdrawal; both the prison and the asylum, of course, symbolise this loss.

The text is equally suggestive of sexuality, insecurity, and obsessiveness. The neat, repeated handwritten lines invoke, at once, schoolwork and compulsiveness. The syntax and phrasing is unpredictable and erratic. Taking into consideration the title ‘MANICOMIO,’ the extract suggests compulsive writing undertaken in mental institutions or found in psychological tests or activities, not unlike the literary suggestions of psychic testing in Sanguineti’s *T.A.T.* poems. The threat of real or imagined violence, in the newspaper headlines throughout the

¹¹³ Vicinelli, *Apotheosys*, p. 401.

collage, is sublimated here into a traumatic incantation, dissociated from any structured narrative but instead fixated on the evocation of detail. The voluntary or involuntary ‘exercise’ involved in repeated lines, undertaken for personal meditative reasons, or for an authority figure, conveys a disquieting sense of subjugation. Yet the very fact of a writing-subject recording these disquieting thoughts, collected along with other documents, reasserts the contestation of the textured collage work in the face of biopolitical force. Through the inclusion of this small material artifact, a certain agency is reclaimed from the homogenising power of the asylum. We are reminded of Franco Basaglia’s anti-psychiatric formulations from 1979:

Il manicomio ha la sua ragione di essere, perché fa diventare razionale l’irrazionale. Quando qualcuno è folle ed entra in un manicomio, smette di essere folle per trasformarsi in malato. Il problema è come sciogliere questo nodo, superare la follia istituzionale e riconoscere la follia là dove essa ha origine: nella vita.¹¹⁴

The ‘work’ produced by those in the asylum is only labeled as mad by the logic of the institution; otherwise, recording such an excerpt and assimilating it in the flow of the ‘perverse’ collage is a reclamation of the rationality of the work by remembering its locus – life itself. The absolute autonomy, perhaps, of the life-produced collage work, and its attendant material presence, is a mobilisation of that which is ‘asintattico’ and ‘anormale’ against biopolitical potencies.

Alongside the ‘MANICOMIO’ text is a photograph of an unnamed man, further complicating our reading with a decontextualised image, neither illustrating the text, nor completely detached from it. When considered in relation to the polyvocal phrases in ‘coinVOLT’ – ‘votre Q.I. c’est inferieur 60. Devo farcela.) a parte che lo sapevo’ – an interesting counterpoint between the photograph and the detached clinical voice is formed. The inscription of the institution onto individual consciousness and subjectivity is a theme common to both poems. In ‘coinVOLT,’ the intrusive ‘alien’ consciousness is concretely represented in the typographic gaps between the divergent voices; similarly, in

¹¹⁴ Basaglia, *Conferenze brasiliane*, p. 34.

Apotheosis, this pasted photograph represents a material ‘other’ that attempts to intrude and overwrite the asemantic, asyntactic text produced by the writing-subject of the asylum. These visual and material dialogues, in operating across the collage-work and addressing various levels of discourse, enact a ‘contestation’ against insidious, private and global violence, characterising, I contend, a critical biopolitical aspect of Vicinelli’s *Apotheosis*.

Another perspective on the cultural power of the asylum lies in Braidotti’s account of clinical power, both in terms of the radical visual-scopic practices of early modern anatomy, and the phenomenon of hysteria, the ‘women’s disease’ intrinsically tied up with the reproductive female body itself:

The medicalization of pregnancy and childbirth and the progressive emergence of hysteria as the end-of-the-nineteenth-century “women’s disease” frame a specific clinical space where the medical gaze clashes with women’s lived experience.¹¹⁵

I contend there is a continuation of the poetics of bodily disconnection and alienation throughout *Apotheosis*. Firstly, the imagery surrounding birth whereby the body undergoes, rather than participates in, the bringing forth of new life, is expressed in an idiom of melancholy and hopelessness - ‘oceano / di lamenti. voce di / piuma. occhio / che ribatte al / cervello la / fantasia svelan/te là [...] nascere decapitati.’ In turn, the ‘MANICOMIO’ fragment stages an excruciatingly depersonalised psychiatric examination undergone in the asylum, which is furthermore suggestive of physical violence. The automated ‘voice’ and faceless image, graphically disjointed in the act of reading and looking, intensify the invocation of an ‘alien consciousness’ that intrudes upon the traumatised subject. The collision of medical, psychiatric and psychosexual frameworks is enacted in *Apotheosis* through an evolution of material-visual and material-textual fragments, foregrounding the rupturing effects of trauma in both its violent and insidious modes. The slippery representations of a variety of oppressive institutions, combined with a destabilised idiom of visual and textual, constructs a dialogue between the readily represented and the ungraspable and unspeakable.

¹¹⁵ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, p. 193.

Should we, then, view the intermedial and structural fragmentation of *Apotheosys* as merely *reflective* of the insidiously traumatic grip of societal biopower over the subject? Or rather, do those features of the poem constitute a protest against the ‘epistemology of the eye,’ the linear way of looking, whose origins lie in the dominating desire for ‘scopic mastery’ over the human body? Do the material forms of the poetic cycle offer resistance against the biopolitically charged issue of insidious trauma? The visual and concrete aspects, by disrupting the reading process and genre distinctions, enact the biopolitical struggle against the clarity of biological certainties, against the reduction of the whole to the parts, and against the insidious symbolic and concrete intrusion inwards.

The Subaltern Body / State: Individual and Public Violence

Apotheosys represents, through fragmentary artifacts, geographical movements from home to exile abroad, discursively engaging in issues relating to the biopolitical economy, incarceration and the protections of citizenship, or lack thereof. The handwritten word ‘CARCERE’ appears in two instances,¹¹⁶ the latter near the letter to Gianni about ‘la grande madre,’ juxtaposing two of the most decisive ruptures brought on by imprisonment – separation from family and from freedom itself (fig. 33). The shadow of a looming prison sentence permeates the visual and textual poetics of *Apotheosys*. The handwritten timestamp and location details read ‘Vicinelli, Tangeri, 1969-70’ and place the creation of the collage directly within Vicinelli’s years of self-imposed exile after a conviction for narcotics possession.¹¹⁷

Interestingly, as a product of its time and place, the collage addresses questions of citizenship and belonging through the very material artifacts it encompasses. The collage, beyond mere representation, hints at the double

¹¹⁶ Vicinelli, *Apotheosys*, p. 420, 417.

¹¹⁷ Bello Minciocchi, *Non sempre ricordano*, p. xxxvii. Also Lorenzini, p. xiii. Bello Minciocchi clarifies that *Apotheosys of schizoid woman* was written in Tangiers in 1969/70, during Vicinelli’s first period of exile, but went unpublished and unedited for a decade. Originally titled *Segni di esilio*, it was finally published in 1979 under Tau/ma, reproduced in black and white and titled *Apotheosys of schizoid woman*. In the preface of the same volume, Niva Lorenzini notes that Vicinelli underwent her prison sentence at Rebibbia in 1979 for nine months (p. xiv).

function of statal power: the power imposed by the Italian state on the individual by the legal passing of a prison sentence, when (temporarily) circumvented through exile, as in Vicinelli's case; ceases to perform another function – that of validator of citizenship. That same power to incarcerate, when restated as a potent force of citizenship, is lost once the individual becomes an outlaw in an extra-comunitary region, in this case, Morocco. The spectre of detention, then, runs parallel to, and shares the same spaces as, the underlying sense of insidious trauma and vulnerability to violence.

The state-sanctioned power wielded against the freedom of the individual, against the exiled clandestine, recalls philosopher Roberto Esposito's categories of *communitas* and *immunitas*; the former seen not merely as a geographical group or community but as a theoretical understanding of a mutual obligation or social contract, and the latter the entity which assures immunity against undesirable elements within the same *communitas*, as well as outside of it.¹¹⁸ The modern project, he argues, has refined the conditions whereby the individual, clothed in civil and political rights, is reliant on *immunitas* to shield themselves (via institutions stemming from the realm of the private over the public) from the possibility of 'contagion' from within *communitas*. The principle of immunisation, however, transposed by Esposito from the biological to the biopolitical sphere, follows that small quantities of the 'contagion' in question are necessarily introduced in order for immunity to function.

Apotheosis, I argue, dramatises the situation of those who both belong to and are outside the *communitas*, and who are subject to the immunisations from within the community, against those who fall outside of its remit. The lingering links with family are emblematised in the discontinuous postcard addressed to 'Dear Renato' (fig. 34). The postcard, although usually a medium for describing holidays, represents the subject who is legally separated from family, and distanced from what family symbolises – health, belonging, and protection of the state. The formal characteristics of this exile show in the scraps: the scrapbook form is a kind of 'travelogue,' but one founded on the plight of exile rather than leisurely travel. Vermeulen convincingly aligns Esposito's balancing of inside and outside as functions of immunisation with the trauma paradigm:

¹¹⁸ See R. Esposito, *Immunitas: protezione e negazione della vita*, Torino, Einaudi, 2002; *Bíos: Biopolitica e filosofia*, Torino, Einaudi, 2004.

It is remarkable to what extent the account of the constitutive tension between *communitas* and *immunitas* dovetails with the common understanding of trauma as, in Roger Luckhurst's words, 'a piercing or breach of a border that puts inside and outside into a strange communication.'¹¹⁹

Vermeulen compares Esposito's metaphors of inside and outside immunitary boundaries and the infection of wounds, to Freud's assertion in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*: 'we describe as 'traumatic' any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield.'¹²⁰ The exiled, traumatised individual, whose protective barrier has been broken, can still, in theory, be cast as the carrier of 'contagion' against which *others* need immunity, doubling up the paradigm of traumatic rupture. The individual who is traumatised by insidious and violent traumatic events, once exiled or cast as undesirable, is reassigned on the other side of *immunitas*: an individual trauma reformulated as another individual's *risk* of trauma.

In the case of *Apotheosys*, the predicament of the exile who is subject to the forces of *immunitas* in their own state, and who cannot automatically subscribe to the protections or the social contract inscribed in *communitas*, in the host state, is played out in a nuanced and open-ended manner. The 'piercing' of the border between inside and outside, I contend, is conjured by the textured nature of the collage, the potential for multi-national, multi-linguistic and multi-modal aspects to bleed into one another. The connotations of violence and insidious trauma are all the more penetrating in the context of the outlaw who finds themselves exiled by their own judicial status, but also the possibility of vulnerability due to their *extra-jurisdictional* geographical position. *Apotheosys* dramatises Luckhurst's traumatic 'breach of the border' in communicating the unexpected travelogue of the 'citizen of nowhere.'

The extra-national location of Tangier is viewed as a significant factor by Christopher Breu in his study of 'different registers of materiality' in William

¹¹⁹ Vermeulen, 'The Biopolitics of Trauma,' p. 149, quoting Luckhurst, p. 3.

¹²⁰ S. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1920; quoted in: Vermeulen, 'The Biopolitics of Trauma,' p. 149.

Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*.¹²¹ Breu argues that the conception of the novel in the 1950s when Burroughs was residing in the international zone of Tangier, an 'extranational space,' was geographically significant in its looking forward to the new economic order of global capitalism. This particular location, he argues, anticipates now recognisable biopolitical economies:

The colonial location of Tangier [...] thus allowed Burroughs to construct a fictional landscape that is built around biopolitical production, including sex work, the trade in narcotics, the biomedical economy, and the traffic in life and death that would only become a more dominant part of the world system (one not primarily situated in colonial and neocolonial spaces) in our own moment.¹²²

The prospect of a pending period of detention heightens the connotations of the assembled and collaged artifacts in *Apotheosis*, in headlines such as 'Saisie de 50 kilos d'héroïne à Cannes.' For the most part, however, the collage obliquely alludes to certain forms of 'biopolitical production,' such as sex work and the narcotics trade, referred to by Breu as the 'traffic in life and death'. Rather than any direct reference to black market transactions, and entangled with the language of self-help and lifestyle promises, these intimations are conjured up from the haphazard amalgamation of various fragments, from the letter to Gianfranco and elsewhere: 'E domandando se ci / fosse fra essere e non essere combien / tu veux pour être 'heureux'?' - 'INVIATO DENARO,' '5 PAS VERS LA JOIE DE VIVRE.' In *à, a, A*, the uncertainty surrounding the construction 've(n)do' recalls this transactional allusion - the commodification of the body, contrasted with the act of seeing itself, are irremediably fused.

Directly after the volatile personal letters appears the collage of medicinal and pharmacological labels (fig. 35). This collocation of concrete shards discursively frames the biopolitical theme of the crossover between the chemical, corporeal and psychological. The advertising copy for 'Maxiton' - 'initiez-vous aux mysteres de la vie' and 'Elixir parégorique' - 'elixir magique provoquant passion irresistible' – dramatises the limits of the sexual body qua chemical

¹²¹ Breu, *Insistence of the Material*, p. 38.

¹²² *ibid.*, p. 37.

matter; the inclusion of these items acutely emphasises the material base of, in this case, the ‘traffic in life.’ The commodification of sex through sex-enhancing products might be spontaneously categorised as part of the ‘traffic in life,’ yet the boundary between the ‘traffic in life and death,’ when viewed in the context of the whole collage, loses clarity and is represented as unstable. The distorted context of the medication in the collage, fully estranged and decontextualised, accentuates these material, and biopolitical, realities. The chemical-psychological framing of human thought in ‘il suo pensiero i neuroni raggiungenti/sinapsi’ (fig. 27) is similarly invoked in these blunt slogans, promoting their product as distilled passion.

The collage of drug labels, moreover, exists as an almost neutral compendium of artifacts, and the realities they represent engage with the traumatic and the biopolitical in contradictory ways: on the one hand, the painkillers and sedatives can be interpreted as antidotes to episodes of traumatic terror; equally, the same drugs can be theorised as weapons of external biopower, in the loci of the asylum, the clinic, the prison, even as regarding technologies of population control.¹²³ This ambiguity nonetheless feeds into the unsettling and ominous construction of an underlying traumatic terrain through the visually suggestive medium of collage; the chemical body is of necessity intertwined with systemic trauma. Overall, the concrete nature of these sources continually harks back to the material, bodily, and often biological, basis of insidious traumatic experience. The geographic stamp of Tangier, rather than merely providing biographical information, stimulates debate about the idea of the subject in exile, the attendant freedoms and restrictions within a foreign jurisdiction, and the body as a crucial marker of the dispossessed subject.

The exploration of the citizen’s lack of statal protection in foreign jurisdictions is, moreover, countered by the question of statal violence against the individual. Near the end of the collage, the threat of violence in the domestic jurisdiction is indicated, further stimulating the discussion of biopolitical power. The final three pages of *Apotheosis* mark a shift in affect, genre and subject; the first features a collage of wartime photographs of Fascist motorcycle militias,

¹²³ Jemima Repo provides a startling genealogical account of the twentieth-century construction of the notion of gender, and a broader account of biopolitical agenda in birth control and other reproductive technologies, in *The Biopolitics of Gender*, Oxford, 2016.

spliced with ‘all’assassino’ and ‘le condizioni del mondo’ (fig. 36). The penultimate page reveals a newspaper headline printed vertically - ‘La police voit dans le suicide d’un anarchiste detenu un “acte d’auto-accusation” ’ - surrounded by a long prose text, ‘La falsa violenza,’ and illustrated above with a fantastical collage-based depiction of a smiling face (fig. 37). The long text is a grammatically and syntactically coherent piece of activist prose, encompassing a manifesto for peace and a denunciation of the ‘false violence’ of men, or mankind. The piece mentions the instinct as the ‘antico es dell’uomo,’ referring to the Es or Id, the deepest part of the psyche, once more drawing together psychology, society and politics.

Taking the newspaper headline and prose piece together, these final pages mark a decisive shift from domestic and ‘private’ violence to violence enacted on a global stage. The vertical headline within the prose reads ‘La police voit dans le suicide d’un anarchiste detenu un “acte d’auto-accusation”.’ It very likely references a violent event of lasting national significance, the 1969 death of the anarchist Giuseppe Pinelli,¹²⁴ widely believed to have been caused by police during questioning at the questura of Milan, and the circumstances surrounding which have continued to be the subject of intense discussion and cultural and political reference. What is intriguing about the inclusion of a renowned and politicised historic event in *Apotheosys* is its assimilation into the collage aesthetic, treating, I argue, other ‘insidious’ violent phenomena as equally political; private and public trauma is, then, entangled and manifest within the evolving, visual and material qualities of collage.

To call on Giuliani once more, the “visione schizomorfa” della composizione [...] l’intenzionalità alla forma scissa,’ as manifested in *Apotheosys* through the manifold configurations of dissonance and evolutionary temporality, conjures a transgressive and revolutionary figure, both part of an alienated and traumatogenic landscape, and an autonomous critic of such a landscape’s most insidious, and materially threatening, aspects. The individual plight of incarceration and exile, familial and maternal despair, violence (and the threat of it), is positioned on the same spectrum as the collective indignation surrounding

¹²⁴ Lorenzini, *Non sempre ricordano*, p. xiii, interprets this headline as regarding the death of Pinelli; Minciocchi, *Non sempre ricordano*, p. xxxvii, adds to the discussion with a consideration of the German Baader-Meinhof terrorist group.

the murdered, blameless everyman; the constant appears to be the presence of sublimated biopolitical imperatives underlying traumas, or wounds, of all genera. The elements of folktales, memoir and family history position *Apotheosys* outside of Giuliani's archetypal vision for neo avant-garde poetry, and distinguish this work from the poetry of the other three poets I have discussed. Vicinelli's collage moves decisively away from the 'riduzione dell'io' characteristic deemed central to Giuliani's theory of the *neoavanguardia*, demonstrating the potential for a remarkably experimental non-logocentric poetry, which nonetheless maintains a sense of the 'I,' or at least a renegotiation of how the 'I' might work. While *Apotheosys* certainly manifests the 'rispecchiamento' and 'contestazione' aspects of 'schizomorfismo,' I contend the work ultimately rewrites *how* such effects might be achieved, in creating a biopolitically engaged poetic 'nomadism.'

Apotheosys reflects and channels, through its 'split form,' the unstable and discursive manifestations of modern traumata, whilst performing the role of the transgressive, defiant, 'asintattico' figure, resisting the overcoding of biopolitical normativity, and representing 'anormalità' in the face of biopower. Braidotti links the potential of the traumatic moment to erase memory with the erasure more generally of identity:

A trauma is by definition an event that shatters the boundaries of the subject and blurs his or her sense of identity. Traumas cancel and even suppress the actual content of memories. As memory is the data bank of one's identity, the struggle to remember or retrieve the embodied experiences that are too painful for immediate recollection is formidable. It also makes for no less formidable narratives.¹²⁵

The evolving materialism of *Apotheosys* is a penetrating collection-in-motion of the shards of the past, being worked through in the present. The reliability of memory is questioned, and the material scraps, though 'real,' can only be interpreted, existing as they are out of context. 'Forma scissa,' achieved through the blurring of genre, verbal and visual *impasto*, and narrative-temporal disunity, create a system in which *Apotheosys* reflects the insidious horror and ruptured

¹²⁵ Braidotti, *Transpositions*, p. 167.

memory of trauma, but also *resists*, through those same disconnected material fragments, the imprint of an alien, superimposed, (phal)logocentric narrative.

Vicinelli's *Apotheosis* and *à, a. A.* speak in the context of a wider cultural consciousness surrounding madness, trauma and alternative subjectivities in the Italian literary and artistic *neoavanguardia*. Yet Vicinelli's particular contributions involving a profound exploration into the experimental potential for collage, concrete poetry, and visual-verbal poetry are significant. In harnessing the strikingly visual, material and affecting possibilities of these literary forms, Vicinelli's poetry reveals, and then protests, the fragmented spectrum of the psychological and material experiences of the oppressed and traumatised.

Conclusion

What do we learn from a reading of experimental visual forms as tangled up in questions of madness, delirium, and trauma? When we loosen these parameters further, we might speak of different kinds of ‘others’ – visuality as an ‘other’ to verbality, an unruly, mutable, fluid mode of expression which is subject to its own insight and logic, and which is often employed in non-logocentric forms of writing. The categories of madness, delirium and trauma have been invoked, in 20th century culture, to account for a diverse range of states, from bleak alienation to transcendental liberation. These figures have likewise been coded as ‘others’ in cultural approximations. I have argued that, in dynamic moments of verbal-visual experimentation within the Italian *neoavanguardia*, we witness the dissenting potential of both madness and visuality, twin ‘others’ that rupture and fundamentally decentre conventional modes of thinking and writing. The poets of the *neoavanguardia* that I have explored harness the very ‘otherness’ of the visual and the delirious, to advance a poetics which interrogates a linear, logocentric view of the world.

As I have argued throughout this dissertation, visual poetry comes in many forms: from concrete poetry (Spatola’s *Zeroglifico*) and typographical experiments (Vicinelli’s *à, a. A.*) through to word collage (Niccolai’s cut-up collections), and word-image collage (Vicinelli’s *Apotheosys of schizoid woman*), as well as the ekphrastic ‘implied’ image (Sanguineti’s *T.A.T.*). These poetic forms can be considered ‘visual’ in their syncretic and synaesthetic approach to word and image; they evoke the perceptual fluidity which encompasses shifting between reading and looking, and which is embedded in the synaesthetic interpretation of ‘split form.’ While working primarily with language(s), these poets have reached beyond pure verbality and textuality, incorporating, in various ways, intermedial and visual elements into their poetry.

I argue that these visual elements function alongside configurations of madness and delirium, advancing dialectically what I refer to as dissenting subjectivities. In subverting linear language through asyntactism, and disrupting the sequential mode of reading through typographic and word-collage based experimentation, I contend these poets more generally disrupt epistemologies of normality. Through literary devices such as ekphrasis, ludic punning, cut-ups, and

treating language as material, these poets engage discursively with both dominant and alternative cultural accounts of madness and delirium. The stimulating discussions in the 1960s regarding ‘split’ and ‘fragmented’ forms, in relation to cultural approximations of the mind, while by today’s standards problematic in their objectification of mental illness, conjure up a fascinating countercultural idiom steeped in novel perceptions. This idiom is flexible in its clinical interpretations, functioning primarily as a profoundly destabilising cultural *figure*. Spatola wrote in 1966: ‘lo scopo della poesia è oggi quello di provocare nel lettore una *inquietudine ideologica*, e di mettere in crisi la geometria euclidea della sua visione del mondo.’ He underlines the precise structural, philosophical and *visual* disturbance that such an ideological disquiet might prefigure, and this arrives in the form of a dissenting, subversive ‘condizione di schizofrenia calcolata.’ Sanguineti, in turn, sees visual poetry as ‘una sorta di “terza lettura”’ chiming with a wider countercultural view of intermedial literary forms as ‘una scrittura altra.’ The idea of a verbal-visual ‘third reading,’ I add, in implying a continual rearticulation of meaning, speaks to the complexity and fragmentary potential of discourses surrounding the marginalised and unconventional ‘other.’ Literary visibility, in this climate of social and political change, works as a prism through which other embedded discourses take form and are revealed.

I propose that the currency of visibility and multi-modality in the artistic production of the *neoavanguardia* intersects with questions regarding the exploration and appropriation of madness, schizophrenia and trauma by writers and theorists in similar circles. As well as formal affinities between the fragmentary nature of verbal-visual literature and the metaphor of the fragmentary psyche, the very radicalism of verbal-visual poetry resonates with a sensitivity towards the aporias, ruptures and liminalities of those subjectivities on the margins, and considered ‘other.’

Looking forward to future directions that the study of neo avant-garde visual literature might take, the idea that visual-verbality challenges the valorisation of literature as a consumer product, in its liminal position between that which is read and that which is viewed, is worthy of future analysis. It might be seen that the potential processes, and effects, of museumification and neutralisation might take different forms in the case of literary visibility, as a result of its ungraspable modalities.

It might be argued, of course, that the historical avant-garde revels in the novel possibilities stemming from the newly established psychoanalysis, whereas the neo-avant-garde turns instead to the political struggles of mental illness and social exclusion by expanding its metaphors beyond the parameters of interiority. The evocation of alienation and dissociation in the poetry of the *neoavanguardia*, as with figures in the broader literary and artistic neo avant-garde, is certainly a fundamental concern.

I return to Giuliani's account of poetry as a 'mimesi critica della schizofrenia universale, rispecchiamento e contestazione di uno stato sociale e immaginativo disgregato.' The thesis of poetry as a 'mirroring' of an *existing* societal rupture, then, might be framed as in opposition to the model of poetry as drawing attention to the *terms* in which a society views abnormality and fragmentation. Certainly, 'schizomorfismo' is framed as a formal analogue of the supposed fragmented characteristics of the 'split mind,' which is also a metaphor for the contradictory and illogical material conditions of the contemporary moment – 'questa età schizofrenica.' Yet at the same time, there are moments of rebellion, even against the idea of the 'schizomorphic' association of abnormality with brokenness.

What the idea of 'schizomorfismo' hadn't perhaps extended to its (logical) conclusion was the extent to which the concept could comment on its own undoing, an undoing of the logocentric rituals which kept ideas of 'fragmentation' and 'disintegration' as objectified, descriptive categories. I have argued that there are hints of the liberating value of 'schizomorfismo' when viewed from the perspective of self-critique. My own interpretation of these texts is that revelatory and interrogative readings are in flux, querying the terms and designations that give rise, perhaps, to objectification, and foregrounding the dissenting capacity of their autonomous linguistic and visual forms.

Perhaps inconsistency and irregularity are to be celebrated in their own right, as Niccolai suggested in 'La noia della insensibilità,' and furthered as part of a dissenting, *autre* subjectivity, moving away from readings that code 'splitting' and 'contradictory' as superficial and nihilistic. Is cultural schizophrenia 'autre' and revolutionary, or indicative of the contradictory trappings of late capitalism, the 'irrational' workings of the relations of production? This is, I contend, the ultimate crux and problem of neo avant-gardist

thought, and one which becomes ever more ‘tangled up’ with discordant voices. ‘Abnormality’ is a coded category that slips according to context. I have read these texts as autonomous entities, embodying dynamics that echo beyond clear-cut elucidation. My aim has not been a master reading of this code, to designate an ultimate interpretation, but to demonstrate the fact of the code’s *fluidity*, and the *significance* of such a fluid category in the first place. The liminal forms of literary visuality, then, *reflect* such conceptual fluidity, while, at the same time, act as interrogative devices, destabilising and undermining any sense of logocentric certainty. Ultimately, through the poetic invocation of diverse dissenting subjectivities, this literary visuality reflects, and contests, the fluid code of ‘abnormality.’

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Images



Fig. 1
Example image for the Thematic Apperception Test

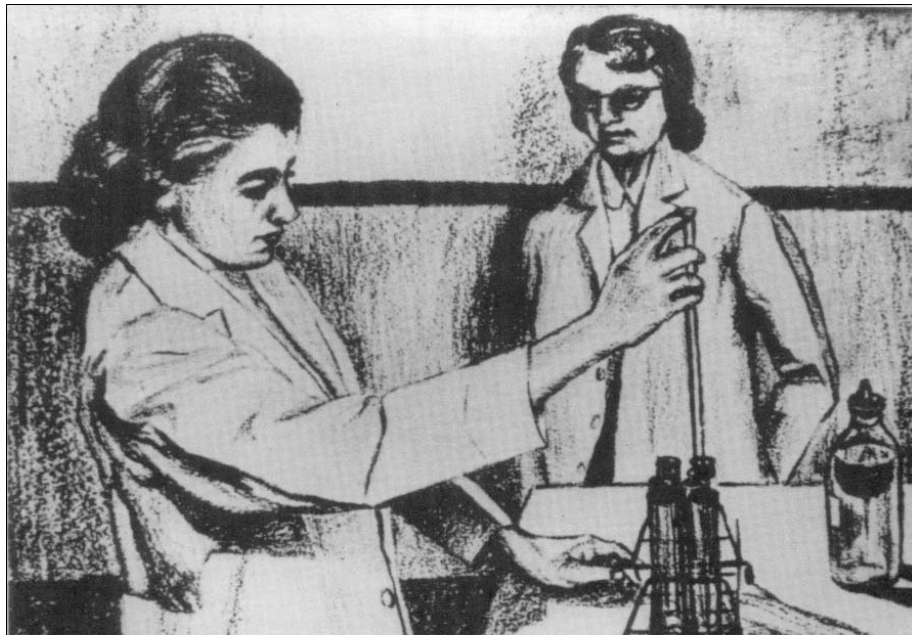


Fig. 2
Example image for the Thematic Apperception Test

Edoardo Sanguineti

2.

è in fondo ("8.5 x 5.5 cms"), il cancello: è in ALFAC *DECA-DRY*; con i buchi; e piú in fondo, ancora, e sopra, la torta:

che è la placenta, la tavolozza; che è un serpente (è quello che tu vedi, in trasparenza; che è con i buchi):

poi la città, che è circondata da tante (mettete un foglio di carta) foreste; (e se tu metti un cerchio (sopra due porte (sopra due torte)), tu ci puoi mettere, poi ("I NODI DI") due frecce):

e in alto, sopra ("agli crematorii"? "agli scrematorii"? "agli eremitori-i"?); (in alto); e giú ("visi"? = "fisi"?), in basso:

(e strofinatelo, sotto); dalla "I" (maiuscola) sale a gomito, sale duro; e poi sale, incerto; e poi si perde in filamenti, che emana, in bacilli: e

in fibrille (che sono le rosee fibrille (e uno stampo, come un'orma (umana)) fiorite); in "*lacrime dure*"; dure "*come*" (un piccolo tratto di prato verde? di parto roseo? un frammento di sedia?);

e tu, tu lo puoi strofinare, in fondo (e poi sale, indipendente, e si duplica, e si moltiplica); limbosigne, se tu vuoi, a(l)phone (...); laggíú (là in mezzo ai fiori, fioriti):

come un'orma (egiziana):

Fig. 3

Edoardo Sanguineti, '2.,' *T.A.T.: VII poesie, 1966-1968, Segnalibro: Poesie 1951-1981*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 2010

4.

il 4 è blu, il pianoforte è a coda; (è rosso):

l'arpa è un girasole; le
labbra (their lips) non si toccavano; la girandola è dentro un giardino;
(è di plastica); la girandola si scioglie; è dentro; (è un plastico di
plastica): è con i fiumi; che colano; (oscene):

è to B., (to be); the
Father: è di panna montata (è il plastico), con una cannula (con
un cannellino); (rossa); (osceno); e cola; (quella goccia); (di
quel sangue); of all verse; è rossa:

è
quel profilo di donna, con la sagoma sola dell'anca; (rosso); (nuda); aujourd'hui
je rentre; ma sono quelle parole; (nudo); (che sono scritte); (e io); (nere); de
l'Hôpital; (sono capovolte); sono *imagination and*, da quella parte; (e ancora:);
(sono capovolto); (e io); ma da
quell'altra parte, sono

reality:
un YES, WELL (...), adesso; ma non s'eran detti addio; e poi è
un Mark well, anche; la macchina scoperta correva veloce; correvano così,
nel vento, nella notte,

nel sole (their lips); correvano; (e quell'orto è
un paradiso); (e adesso scendiamo); (è una clinica); (e si prosegue); correvano
(a rovescio); (a piedi):

et notre vie va commencer:

Fig. 4

Edoardo Sanguineti, '4.,' *T.A.T.: VII poesie, 1966-1968, Segnalibro: Poesie 1951-1981*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 2010



Fig. 5

Adventure Comics, no. 354, March 1967; featuring characters Shadow Woman, Reflecto and Ferro Lad.

Giulia Niccolai

Excerpts from: Giulia Niccolai, *Humpty Dumpty*, Turin, Geiger, 1969

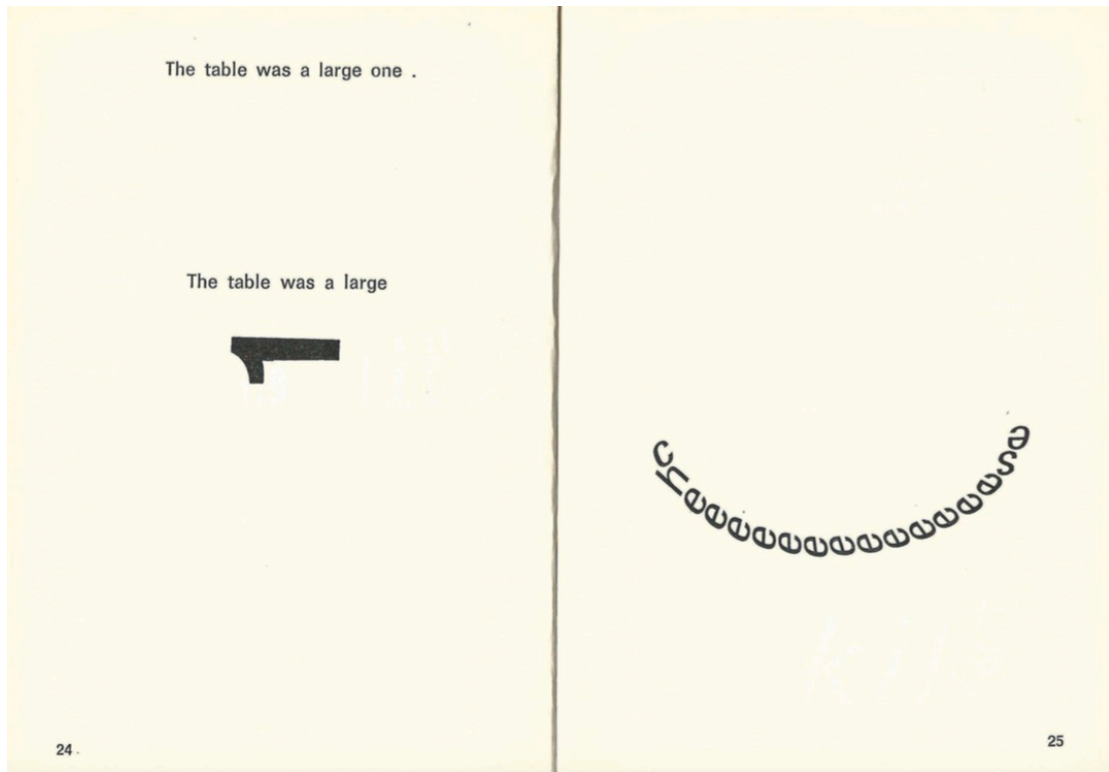


Fig. 6

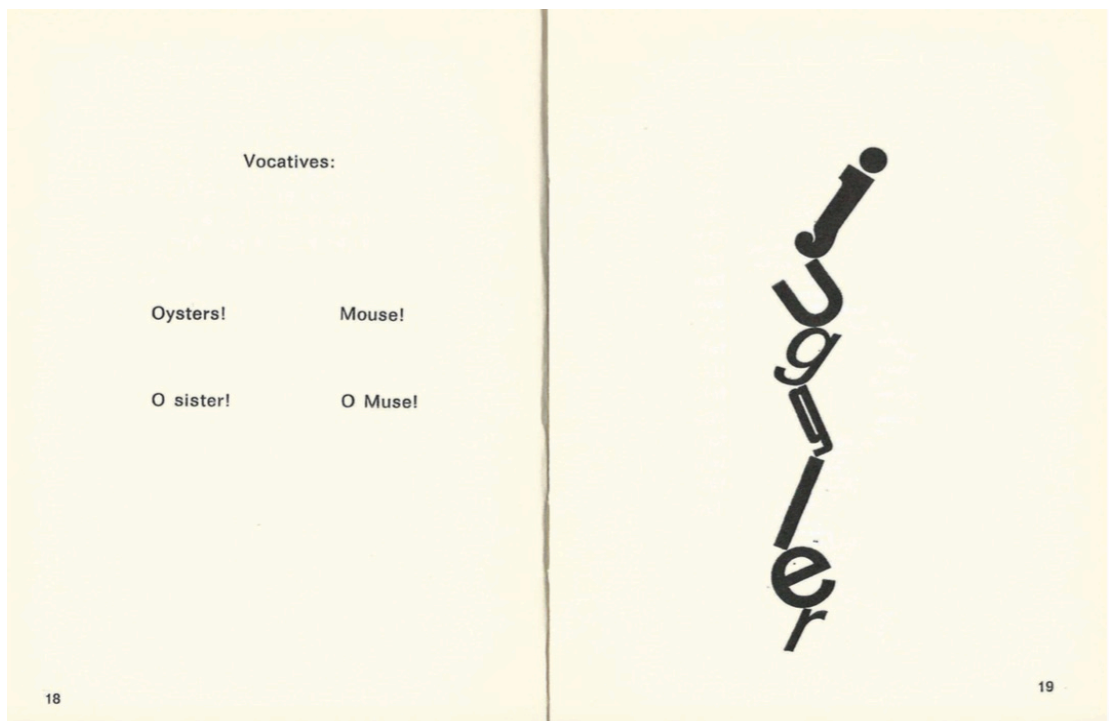


Fig. 7

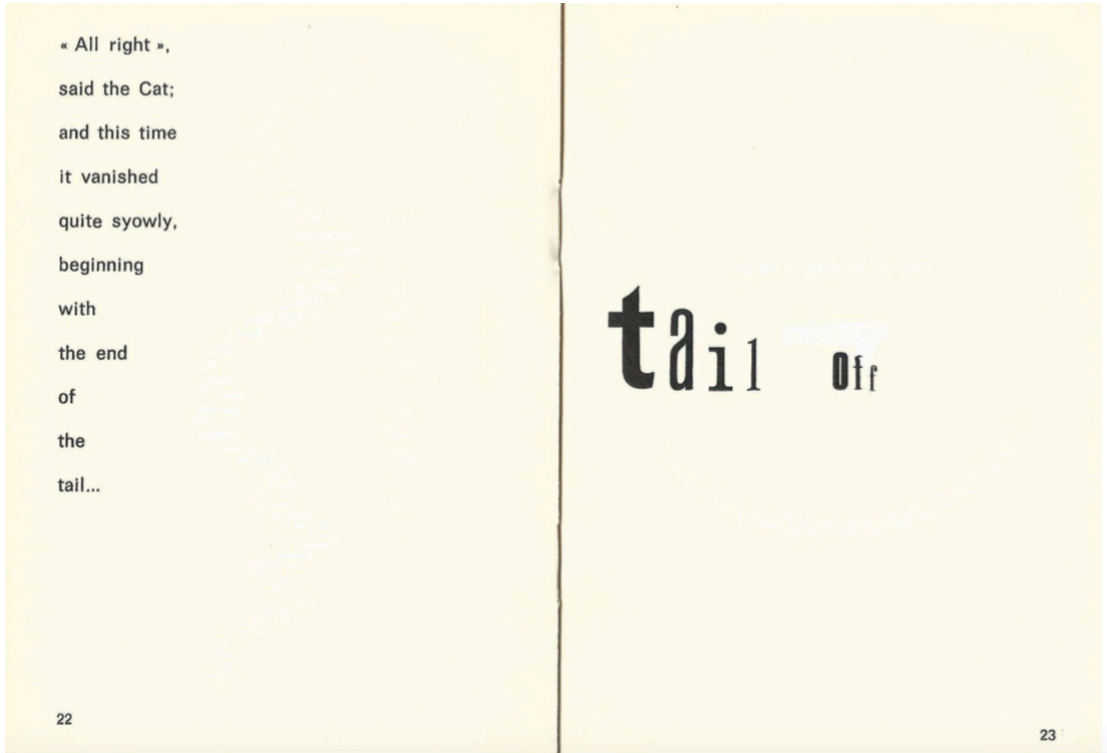


Fig. 8

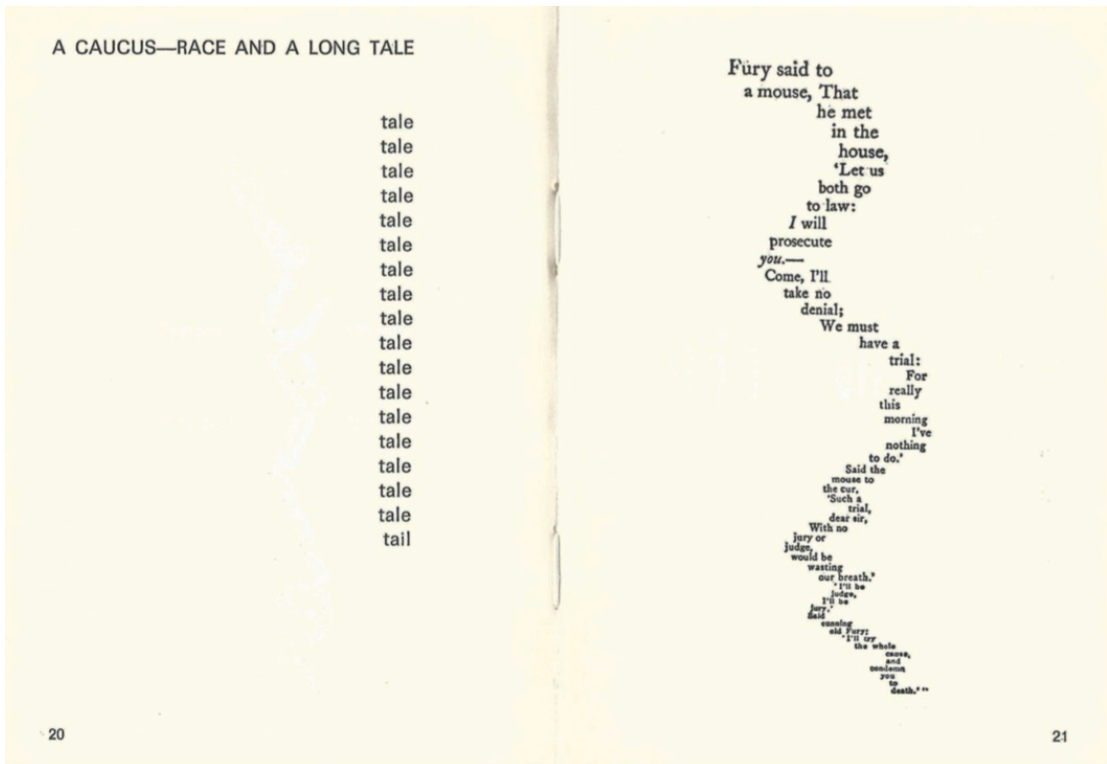


Fig. 9

The Red Queen shook her head.
« You may call it **nonsense**
if you like », she said,
« but I've heard nonsense,
compared with which
that would be as sensible
as a **dictionary!** »

d i c t i o n a r y
i
o n
c o a y
i a
d t o r
i o n r
d c i o r
y
r y
a r y
n a r y a w o r d

Fig. 12

Adriano Spatola

Excerpts from: Adriano Spatola, *Zeroglifico*, Bologna, Sampietro, 1966

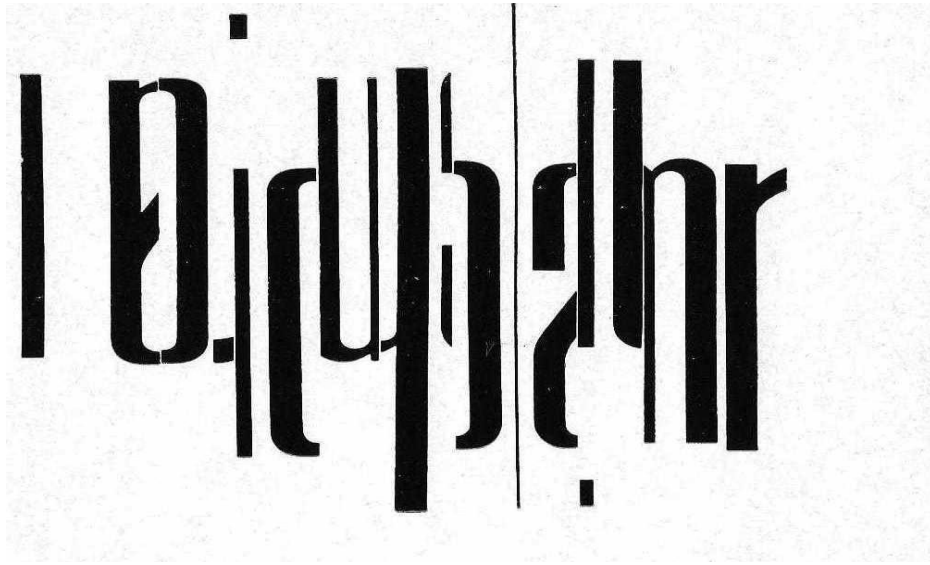


Fig. 13



Fig. 14

entro qui con gli occhi
 ve(n)do
 tuTTo quelcheo - chehodaDire - (entro - ve(n)do): mi sembra ve(n)do
 coME NieNte - nTE
 - TE
 entro - se non - entro - se non / sapESSI la vita a puntaTE - VE(N)DO -
 VEeemenzaENTRO - la (vita a) puntate di quella BamboLA rinVENUTA
 a 3500° C - essi, te,
 ve (n) do vetro - bambola venuta nell'alone sECCO della COMEta
 delle COMEte comeTE
 ed io qui tuttoquelche HO - NienTE - ve(n)do NO
 LA RAZIONALIZZAZ. DELLE COSESCRITTE
 - e ve(n)do e / ci ho pensato entro la cometa le come/te come
 una cosa colTA/FATata
 - una cosa vOLTA/FATT(acci)a - cosescritte - cosescritte, coscritte

$$\begin{matrix} n & N \\ \text{ve do ve do ve(n)do VE DO ve d ve()do - ve-n-do V E N D O VEDO} \\ n & o \end{matrix}$$

 V E D O VENDO V + E
 COSesCRITTE COscritte qui, inTENDO meleve(n)do qui, e ri-entro qui, e,
ovviamente.
 è quanto segue:
 che ve(n)dendole qui ora qui tutte le componenti nevrotiche cui tengo tanto mi
 SpellANO dENTRO si

 In questa weltanschauuuuung non sono, pertanto, ricorso ad alcuno
 (n e s s u n o : ve do nessun amico ricco / nessun amico colto / nessuno con la villa

$$n$$

 ai Caraibi e il motoscafo-biblioteca con lo sperma di Dante / nessuno fatto bene - -
 n essu no Oduss eus d(entro) - ohdisse, non VOGLIA - VOGLIA fare sfoggio
 di unacul-
 tura, fornIRE, FORNIreindiCAZIONI. Mi piacerebbe, invece:
 che qui(co)scrivessero, per mio conto evece - CON-tratto - con - VE-noN)do clausele
 - CLAUSolenTROFOBia) e add(entro) decisaMENTE mentementemente,

$$\text{DeCiSaMeNtE mente}$$

 decisamente in disac(cor)do, che qui scrivessero senza saperne

$$\text{nienTE di nienTE almeno}$$

 io Meleve(n)do qui
 in due o tre
 d(entro) ve(n)do e poi
 vedersi (n) e IMPASTO(r)o c c h i ARE (VE!do) tutto. Imp'e'stare tutto.

$$\text{E S T A R E.}$$

 QUicosì.

Fig. 17

Patrizia Vicinelli, 'à, a. A,' in *à, a. A*, Milan, Lerici, 1966

condotto
condotto
condotto perma
nocondottomor
condotto

ma
ma respintoma condotto mor
che condotto mor
chelato mor
che condottelato mor
m o r (pen)
sortechelato in sus^{pen}sione,
Introdotta nella stanza nota, lo av-
vicinarono alla bala ustra, e così
tanto legatolo, lo spinse; che
non poté accorgersene, cre-
diamo. Così, intro-
dotto nella stanza nota
nota, lo avvicinarono
alla bala ustra, e
così tanto lega-
tolo, lo spinse;
che non possibile
accorgersene, credia-
mo. Intanto, intro-
dotto nella stanza nota, lo
avvicinarono, e così da legato,
non poteva la spinta. Già. Se in-
trodotta.

coinVOLT ehmm! sissi coinVOLT hahaha la .
cappinapappetta hahaha volto di sotto coin
pappinalapappetta hahhàcoin
il ricCon volgimento beurr! beurre di astiacappe
mamma
zerò

em
! restio
intro:
per ma
nocon
dotto
mamor
(cher-ri
come r
iluce
oggi
che pensiero gentile
gridi
e que
li pi
ccoli
mamor
luce anche
oggi. GRI
di dolinie fuocore. ma

alle intro
verso
mamma : mamma mamma.
mamma : mamma mamma.
mamma : mamma mamma.
mamma : mamma mamma.

ho vinto la pappina pappetta della attention de la
maison neuve em !zia la Mariuccia l'incostante : sono fregato l'
imprevu : Q.I. inferieur 60. mi farà hahhà, dire ancora hahaha la pappina pappet
ta del imprevu ricCon volgimento beurr. sono fregato mank a.
em ! restio ; bisogna intro à la moins zerb;

) Il catarofrangente. Il
catapledico. Neuroconsul-
to. Votatore di insetti.
Il catato-plegico avan-
zato, £. 5.000. Puah, l'
onirico suadente.

: ri (ricCon volgimento , (anche.

Fig. 19

Patrizia Vicinelli, 'coinVOLT,' in *à, a. A*, Milan, Lerici, 1966

composto ; gccccg
 c
 c
 c
 c
 c
 : composto

l'a solo organico, camente dai produt-
 tori dif^ase (al
 50/100 Surbadati
 7,4 dissà cche
 1% d'associazione

ecco lo sapevo. lo sapevo Si Sente calare su: In Im
 allò. butRon quanto Si.
 :) irradiato JAMES? invadendoSi paSSa dentRo mare Si
 allòAllò. finl invadendosi atRaversa lo sapevo,
 allò allò allò. allò. JAMES? Primo Em Restio : " dillat
 tato?" Secondo Em
 James..... Restio mediato. In Im=
 butRon irradiato butRon. Si Sente inva=
 derSi non quanto Si paSSa
 sparare MES... dove ti sei lo sapevo JA
 sono io quando ti
 calare su. dentRo James: Dill B!
 attato? ECCO: mediato atRaversa quando
 ti dove trovo quando vedo non spara
 sparare James [RRadiato? dove ti sei
 okej okej spargendosi

votre Q.I. c'est inferieur 60.
 Devo farcela .
) a parte che lo sapevo.

ilviolatore della
 ilviolinista SI-SI, si avvolgOLA in su
 della
 scorgenza;
) a carte che lo sape
 sapevo

ZZZZZZZ, zed zed: attention attention
 l'imprevu de la maison neuve imprevu
 votre Q.I. c'est inferieur eO.

; okej,okej. Quelli dell'INCOMPLEX
 linguaggio in K me. Calcolato.
 Quadratura in bifor, natura da
 squibb selvago fratto cir=
 votre Q.I. c'est colo di confusione T. okej, okej.
 inferieur 60. Calcolato. zeta meno due alla cric
 in cvolutivo zero, sta nascosto al
 la pietra nort costone Merrons.zed zed/ attention
 okej okej. Calcolato. imprevu de la maison
 neuve. Attention. C'est inferieur 60.
 Calcolato.
) a parte che lo sapevo,
 Krosta Keo disparvenza
 solito soluto in àpnea
 di base constantemen
 te carcom
 à, a. A,

Fig. 20

Patrizia Vicinelli, 'coinVOLT,' in *à, a. A*, Milan, Lerici, 1966

Patrizia Vicinelli

Excerpts from:

Apotheosys of schizoid woman, Reggio Emilia, Tau/ma 6, 1969/1970.

These images in: C. Bello Minciocchi (ed.), *Patrizia Vicinelli - Non sempre ricordano: poesia, prosa, performance*, Firenze, Le lettere, 2009

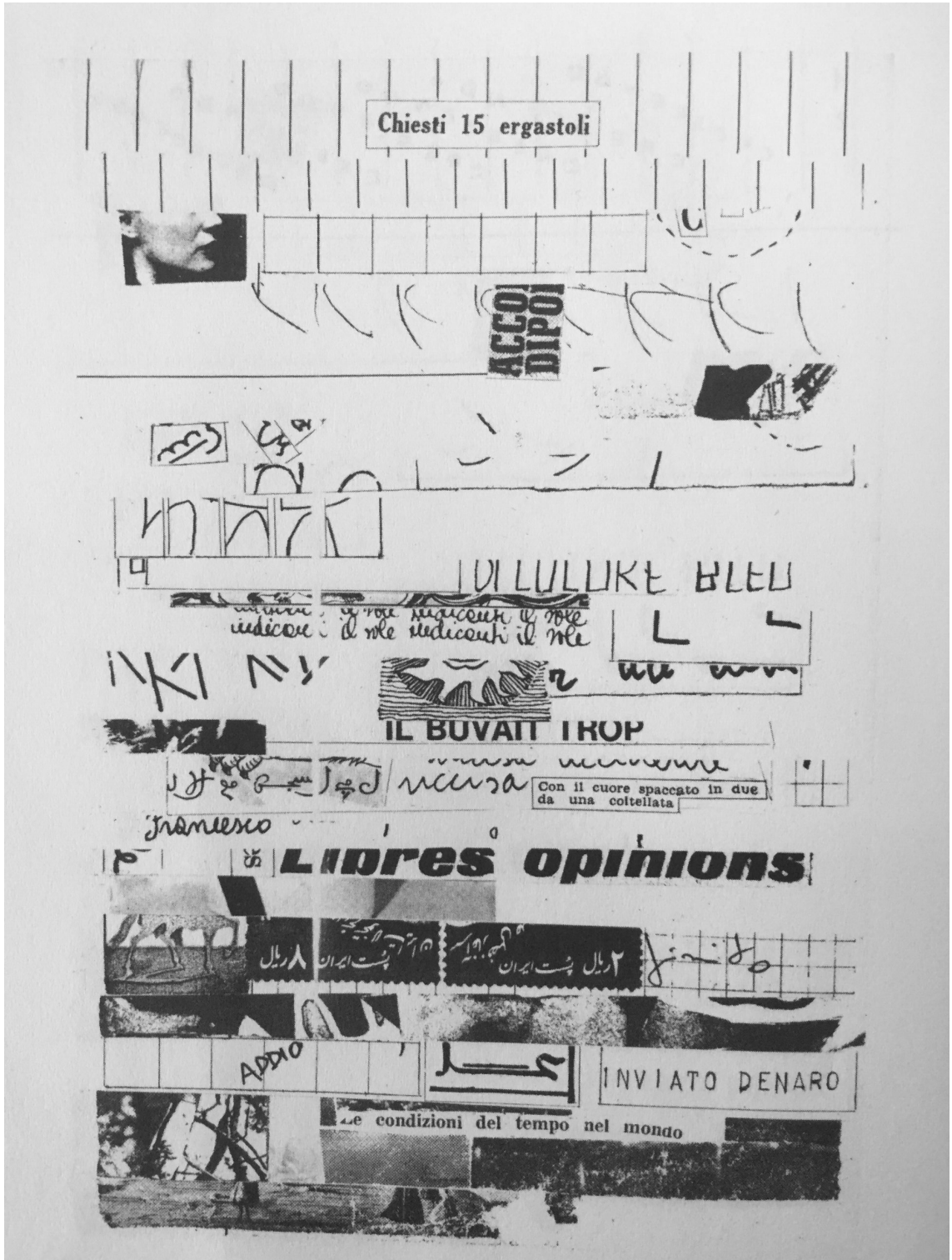


Fig. 21

P. Vicinelli, *Apotheosis of schizoid woman*, p. 379

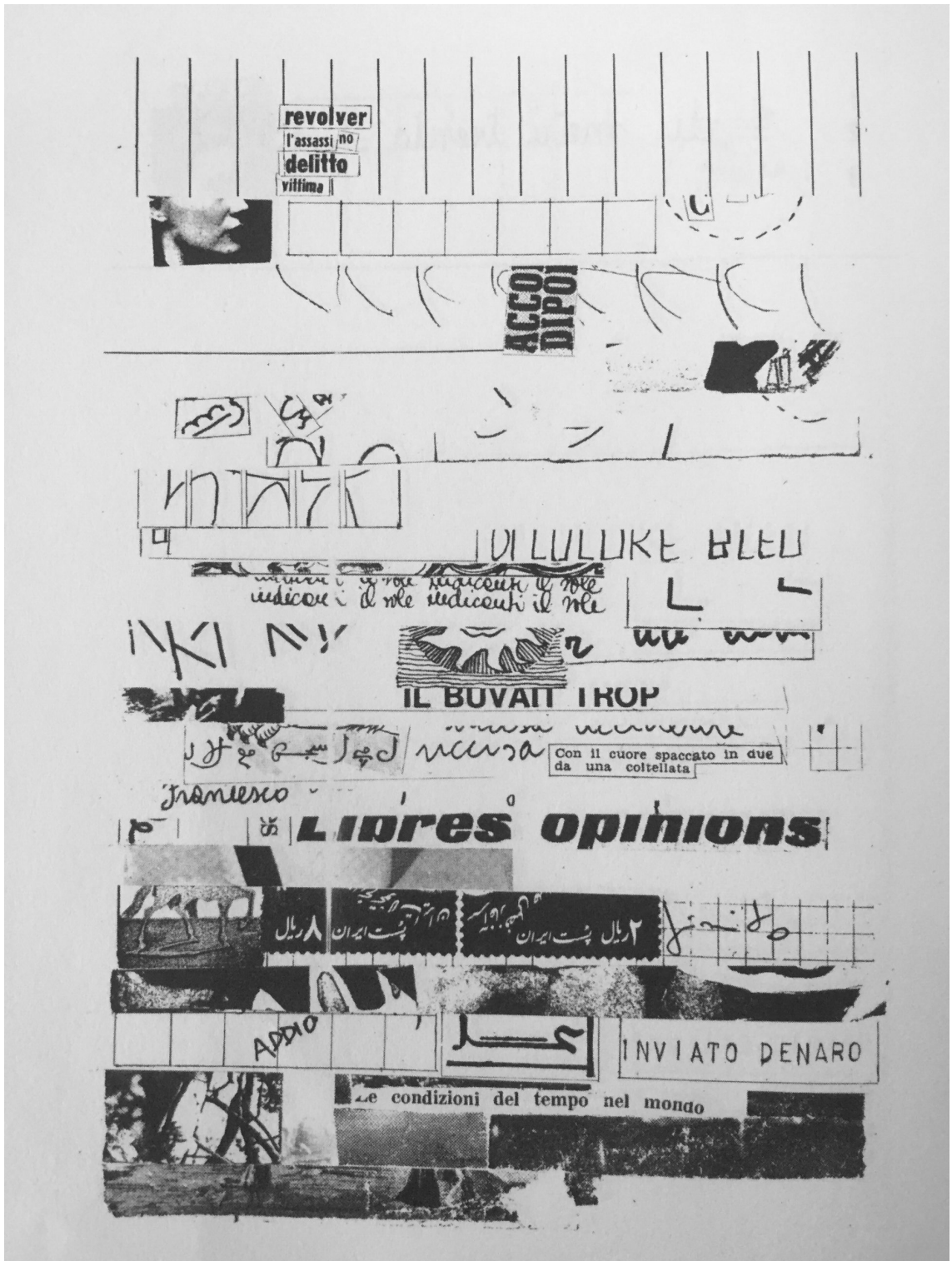


Fig. 22

P. Vicinelli, *Apotheosis of schizoid woman*, p. 381

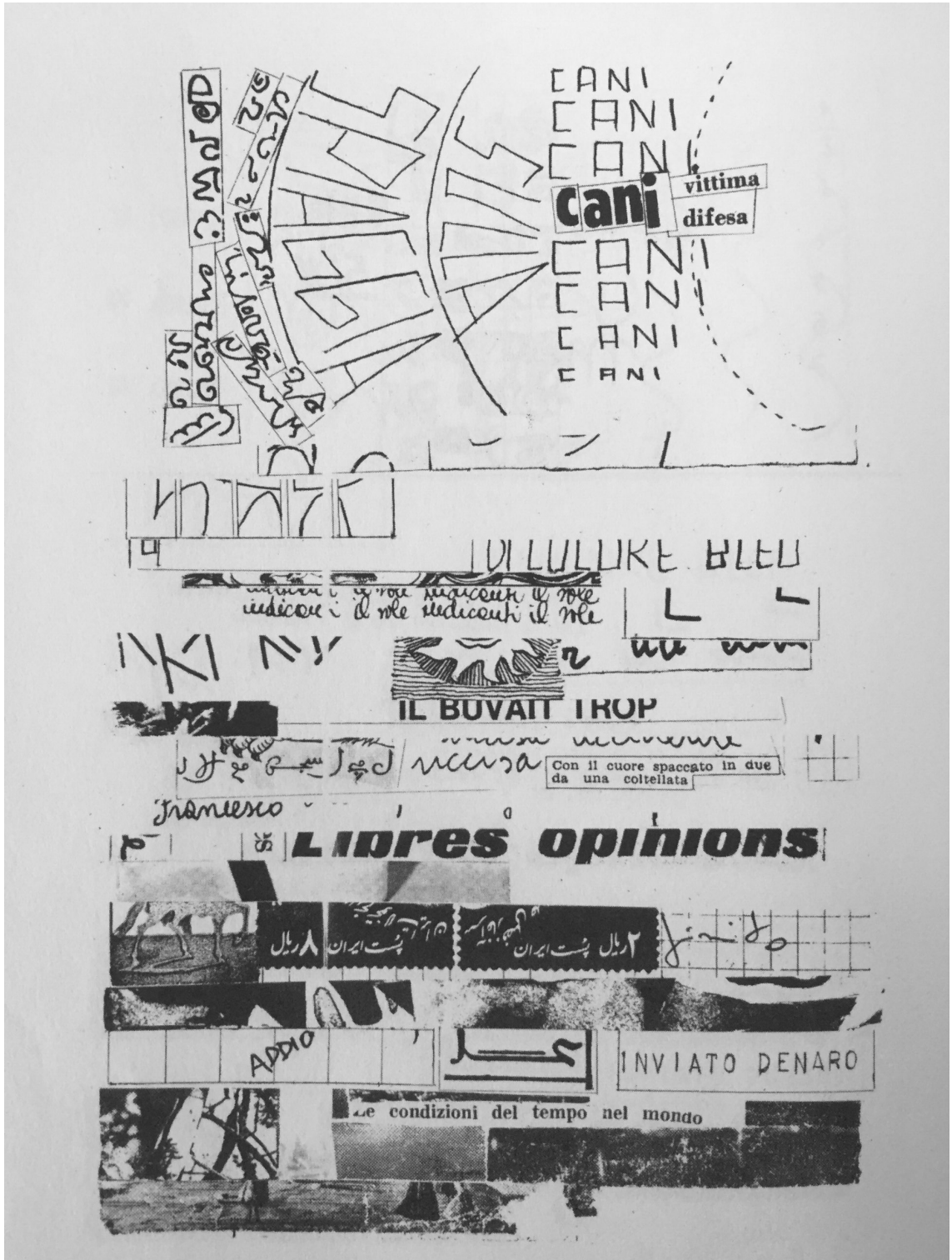


Fig. 23

P. Vicinelli, *Apotheosis of schizoid woman*, p. 389

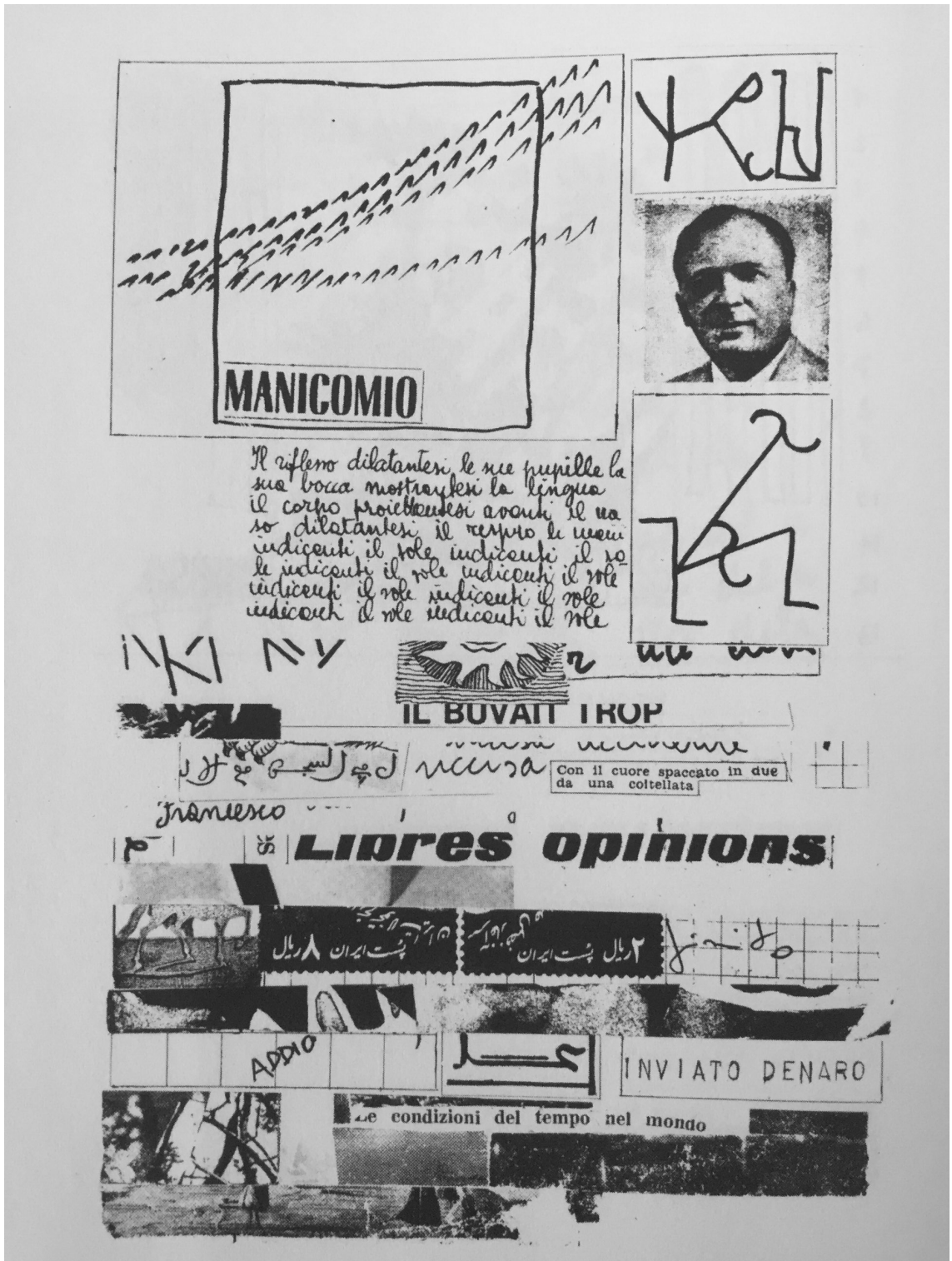


Fig. 24

P. Vicinelli, *Apotheosis of schizoid woman*, p. 401

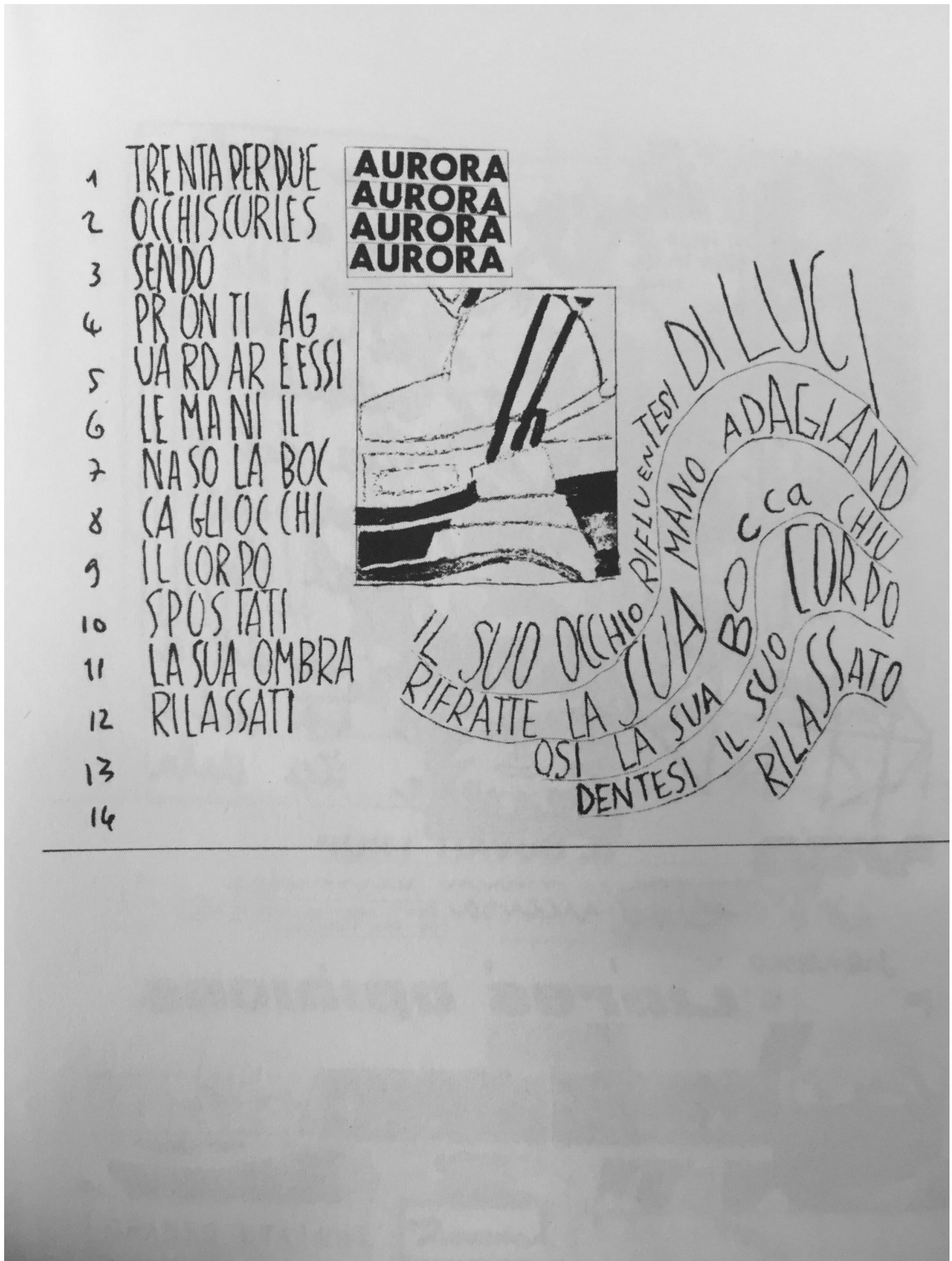


Fig. 25

P. Vicinelli, *Apotheosis of schizoid woman*, p. 404

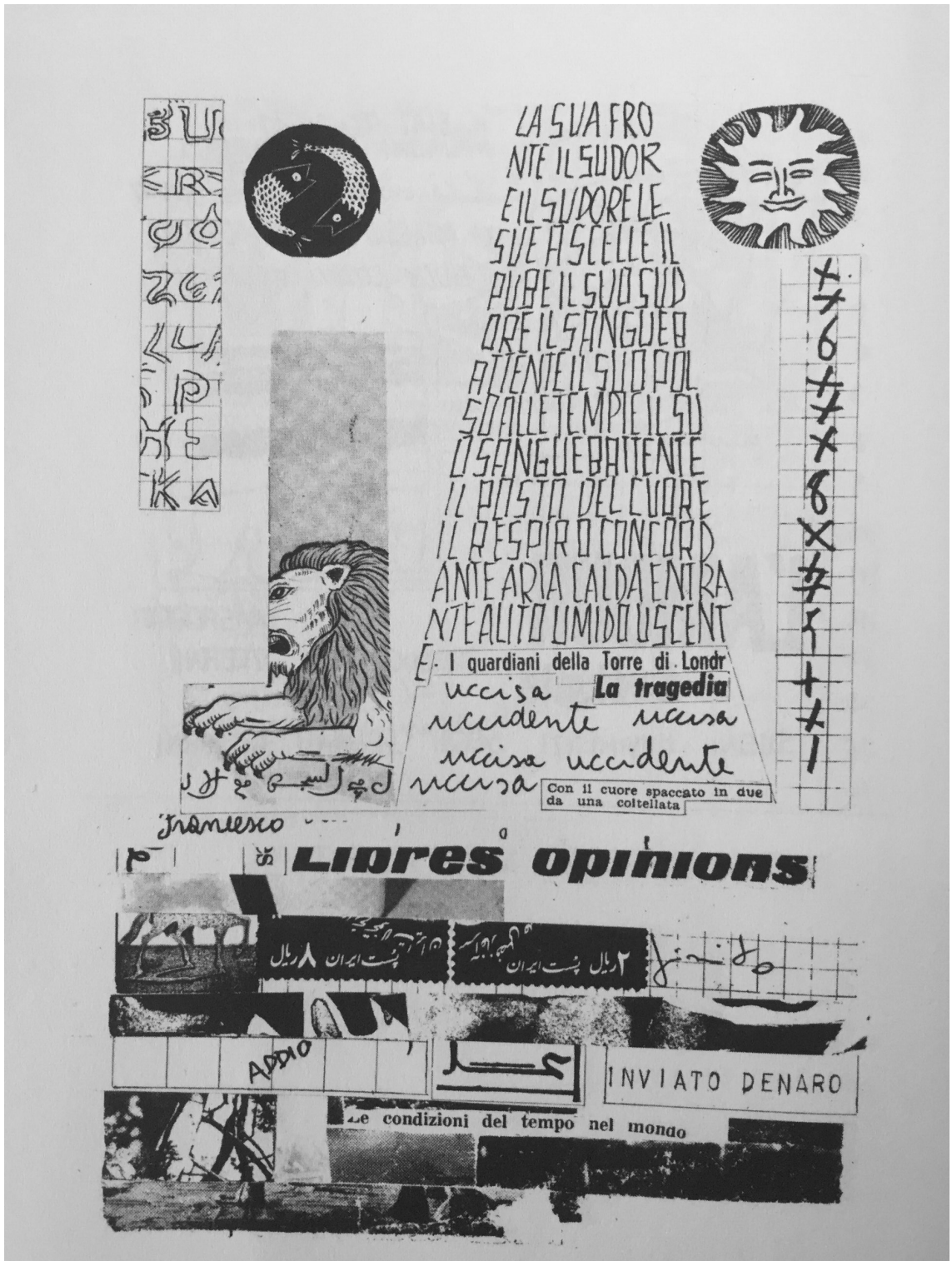


Fig. 26

P. Vicinelli, *Apotheosis of schizoid woman*, p. 407

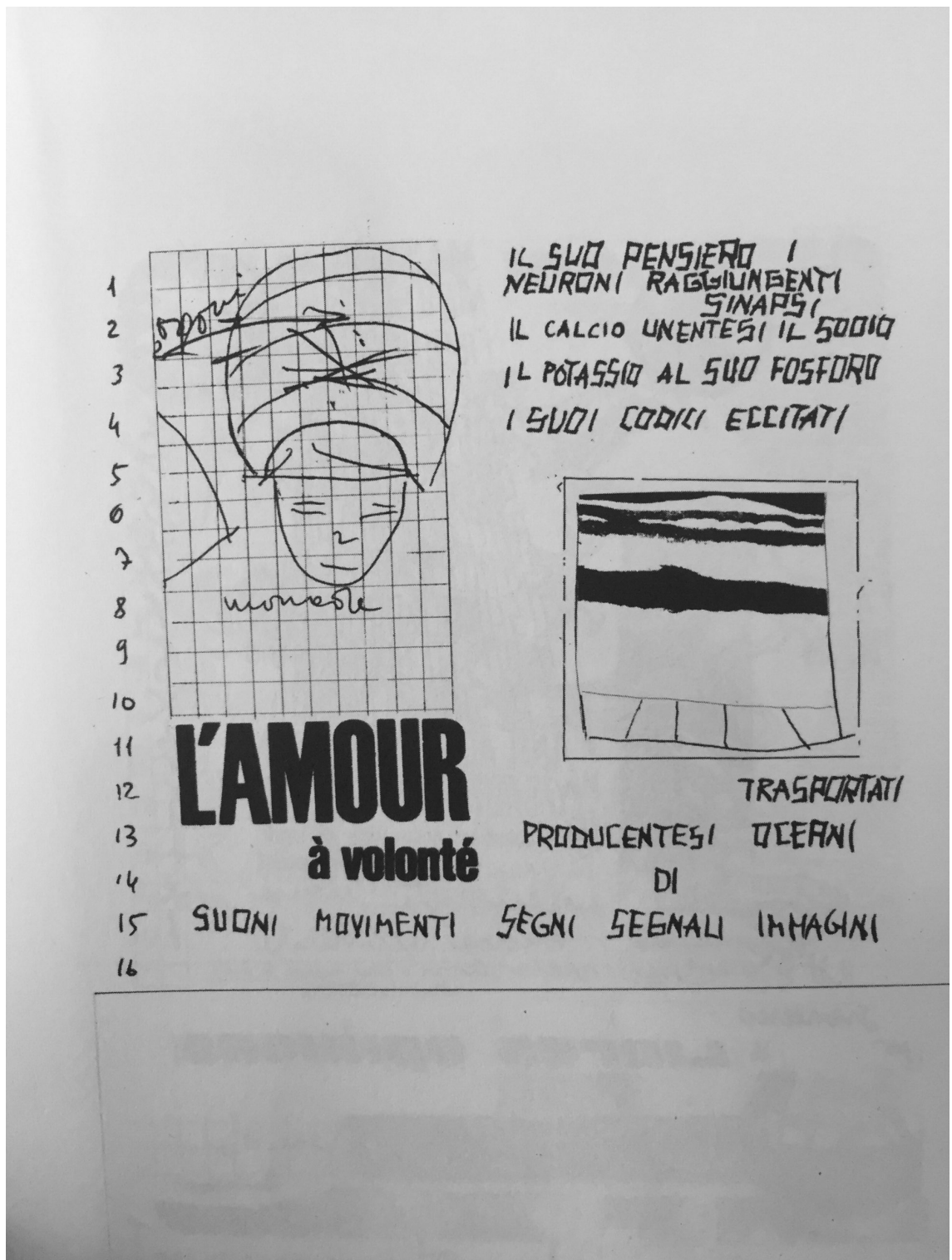


Fig. 27

P. Vicinelli, *Apotheosis of schizoid woman*, p. 408



Fig. 28

P. Vicinelli, *Apotheosis of schizoid woman*, p. 410



Fig. 29

P. Vicinelli, *Apotheosis of schizoid woman*, p. 411

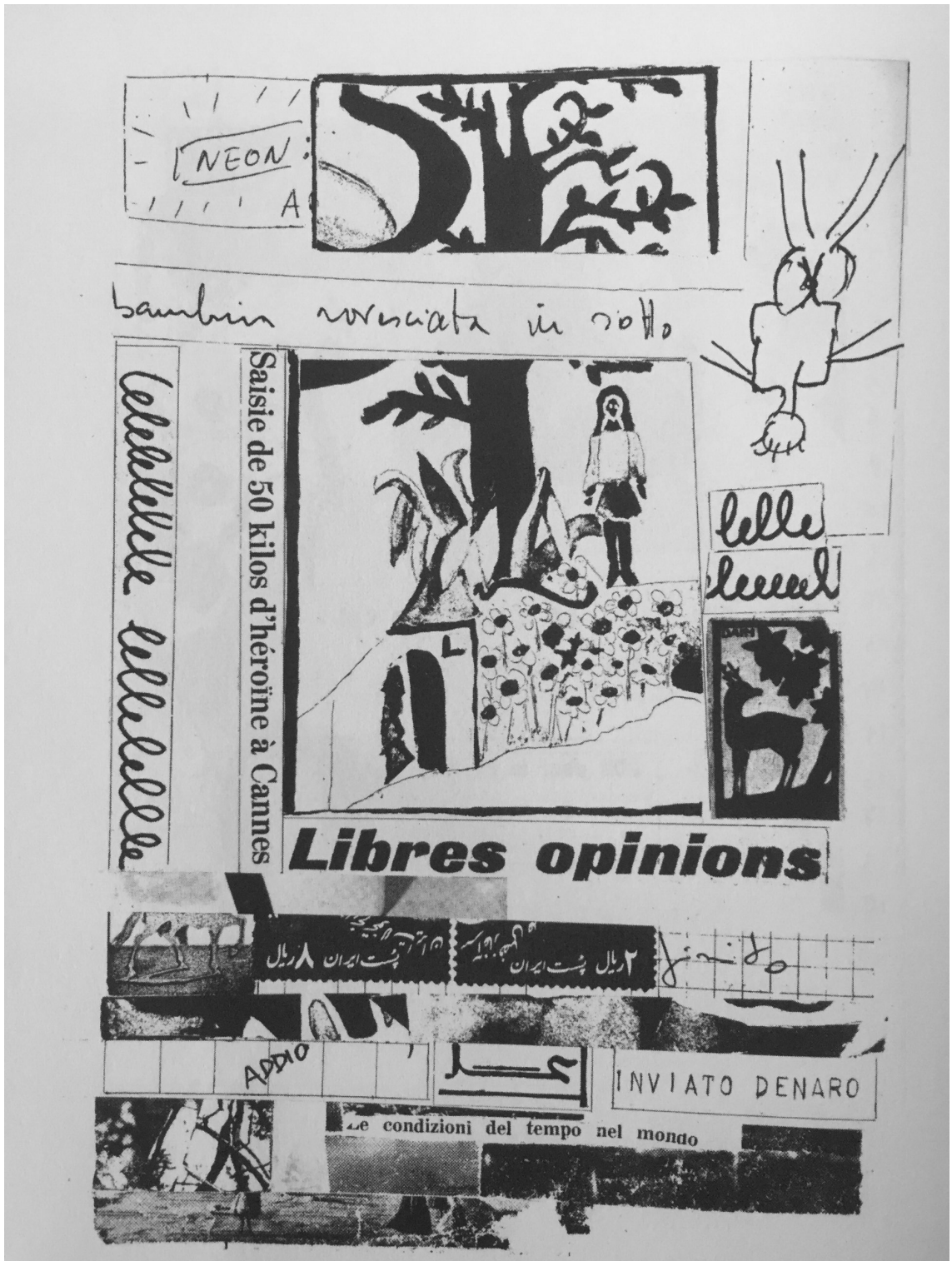


Fig. 30

P. Vicinelli, *Apotheosis of schizoid woman*, p. 413



Fig. 31

P. Vicinelli, *Apotheosis of schizoid woman*, p. 414

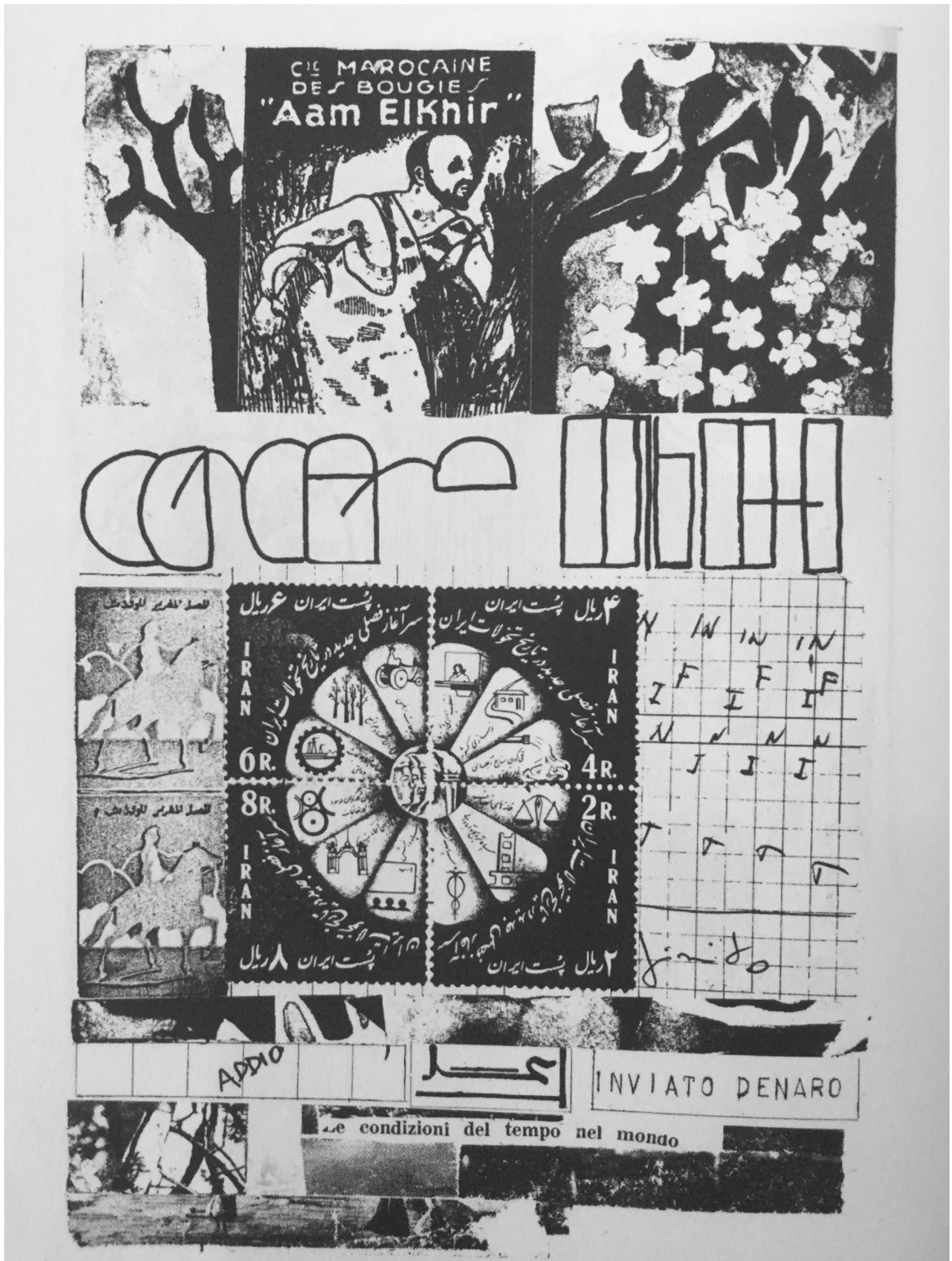


Fig. 32

P. Vicinelli, *Apotheosis of schizoid woman*, p. 417

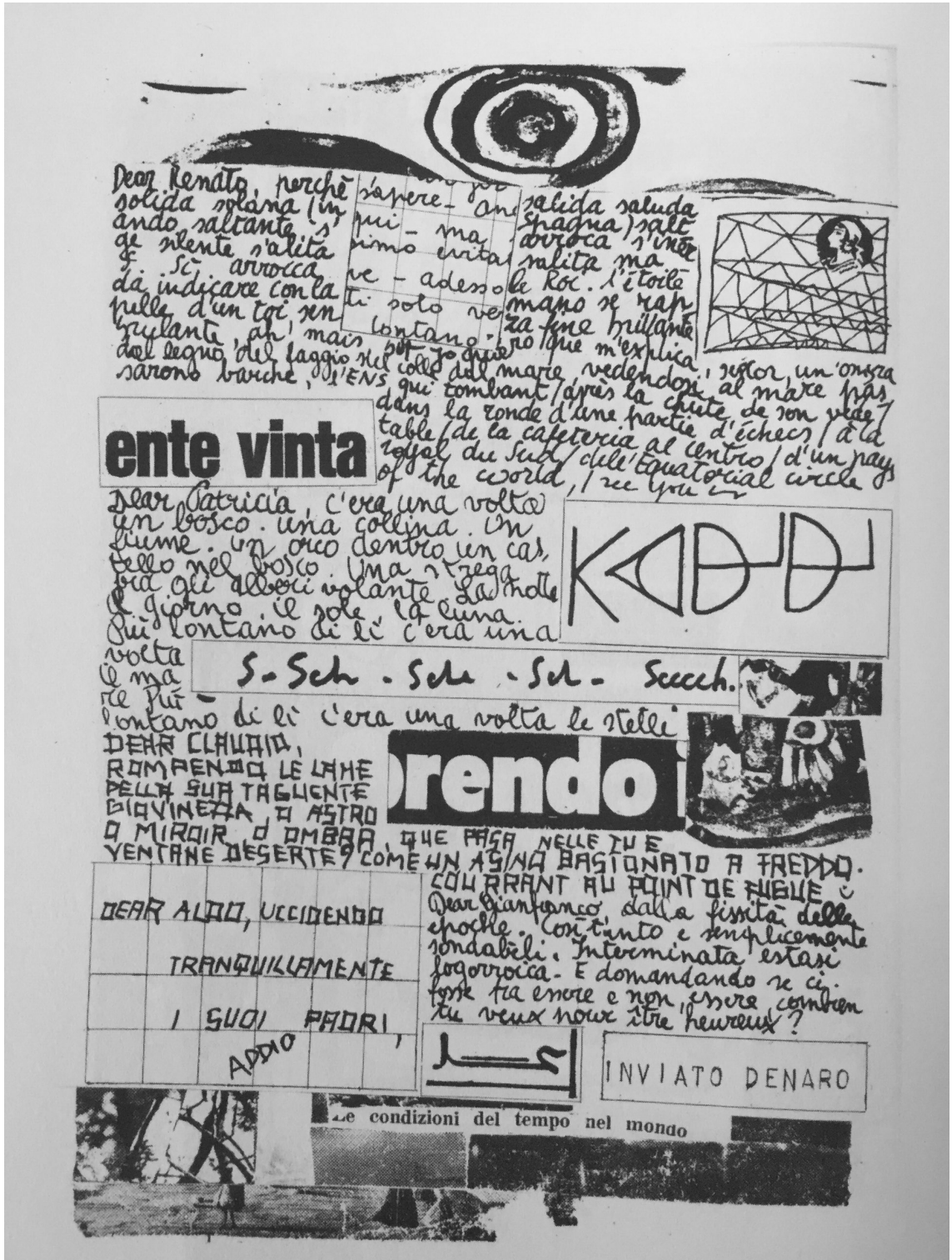


Fig. 34

P. Vicinelli, *Apotheosis of schizoid woman*, p. 421

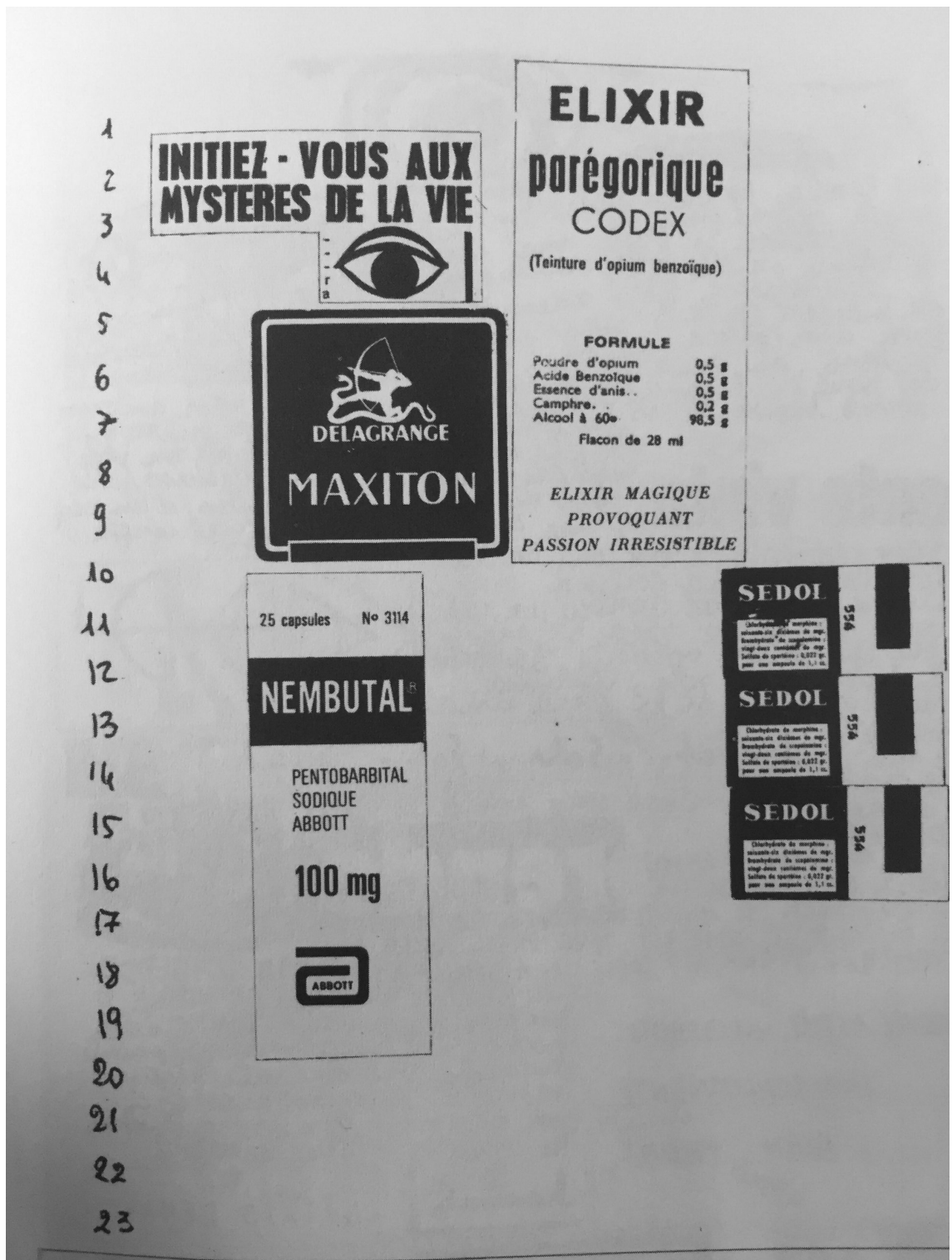


Fig. 35

P. Vicinelli, *Apotheosis of schizoid woman*, p. 422



Fig. 36

P. Vicinelli, *Apotheosis of schizoid woman*, p. 423



Fig. 37

P. Vicinelli, *Apotheosis of schizoid woman*, p. 424

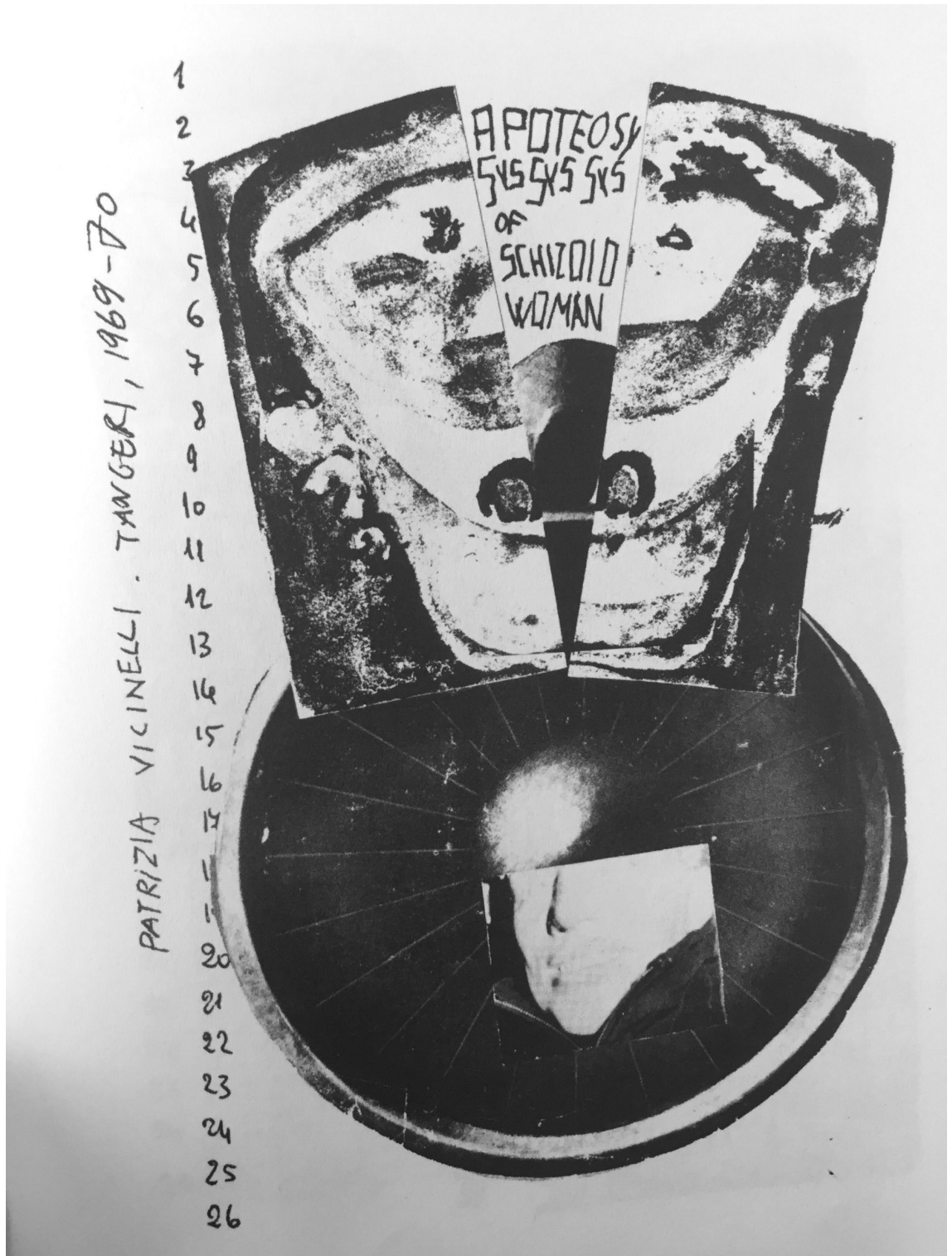


Fig. 38

P. Vicinelli, *Apotheosis of schizoid woman*, p. 426