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**Abstract**

Gruppo 70 was an Italian neo-avant-gardist group of artists and critics, including Lamberto Pignotti, Eugenio Miccini, Lucia Marcucci, Luciano Ori, Ketty La Rocca, Giuseppe Chiari, Emilio Isgrò, Roberto Malquori, and Michele Perfetti, which opened up the genre of poetry to the performative and visual languages of mass communication. In this article we focus on some of the key debates revolving around Gruppo 70, in order to explore what form of *impegno* developed in their theoretical writings and creative interventions, and how this *impegno* was negotiated in the works of artists such as Lamberto Pignotti and Ketty La Rocca in particular. More specifically, we are concerned to investigate the interconnections between *impegno,* media and gender in the shift from theory— the theory of *impegno* was principally developed by male artists and critics—to artistic practice, a field in which, as we shall see, the work of female artists developed a strong critique of mass society and technological culture but remained largely marginalised.

**Keywords**

Gruppo 70; Italian neo-avant-gardes; visual poetry; poetry and technology; impegno; gender

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**Technological Poetry**

**Interconnections Between *Impegno*, Media and Gender in Gruppo ’70 (1963-1968)**

*Lo si voglia o no, ogni forma di espressione, ogni forma d’arte, risulta ormai determinata dall’industria*

[Lamberto Pignotti, ‘L’industria che non si vede’, *Questo e altro*, 1962]

Gruppo 70 was an Italian neo-avant-gardist group of artists and critics that was officially formed in 1963 on the occasion of the Florentine conference entitled *Arte e comunicazione*. It included names such as Lamberto Pignotti, Eugenio Miccini, Lucia Marcucci, Luciano Ori, Ketty La Rocca, Giuseppe Chiari, Emilio Isgrò, Roberto Malquori, and Michele Perfetti, and helped open up the genre of poetry to the performative and visual languages of mass communication. One year earlier, in an article entitled ‘L’industria che non si vede’ (1962), published in the journal *Questo e altro*, their poetic experimentation was given the name of *poesia tecnologica* [technological poetry] by Pignotti.[[1]](#footnote-1) In addressing one of the most debated topics of his time, namely the relationship between the arts and industry, Pignotti argued that the latter was not a separate entity, something *out there*, that was to be found only in the machines and factories we usually associate with industrial production. Rather, through its technologies, industry had become pervasive in all aspects of our daily lives, from our food to our entertainment — this is what he meant by ‘l’industria che non si vede’, the industry you cannot see. As Pignotti highlighted, the assumption was that poets could no longer ignore that industry had an impact on the aesthetical relationship they establish with objects — as Pignotti provocatively argues, ‘the poet should ask himself whether the flower of his dreams, isn’t perhaps made of plastic before releasing his imagination at full gallop’.[[2]](#footnote-2) Hence, poets should modernize poetic language in such a way that it could both incorporate and critically reflect on these new languages and values.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Yet, *how* to translate such poetic aspirations into artistic practice was another matter. It was in fact the crucial question which Gruppo 70 discussed in two landmark conferences *Arte e comunicazione* (1963) and *Arte e tecnologia* (1964), organised at Forte Belvedere in Florence, as well as in numerous articles and books that emblematized the artistic activity of the group from 1963 to 1968. At the same time, while all these artists shared the belief that art should come to terms with the changes in technology and communications in their society, their own personal styles interpreted such a relationship in different ways, in what Pignotti called ‘singular gestures’. Ultimately, they all significantly contributed to that broader artistic movement that Miccini dubbed *poesia visiva*, visual poetry (and later ‘new writing’ or ‘verbo-visual writing’). Having sprung from the experience of Gruppo 70 and their *poesia tecnologica,* following the culmination of group’s early experience in 1968 it went on to further develop the relationship between ‘writing and art, word and image, discourse and icon, language and representation’.[[4]](#footnote-4) The movement subsequently passed through a series of phases which in 1996 Pignotti retrospectively and succinctly summarised as follows: ‘the Sixties, years of extroverted and ideologized art; the Seventies, years of auto-reflexive and intransitive art; the Eighties, years of eclectic and pluri-dimensional art; the Nineties, years of art in the remaking’.[[5]](#footnote-5)

In this article we focus on some of the key debates revolving around Gruppo 70 in the phase of ‘extroverted and ideologized art’, in order to explore what form of *impegno* (a conceptclosely related to ideology, commitment to social and political issues, and direct engagement with audiences and society) developed in their theoretical writings and creative interventions, and how this *impegno* was negotiated, particularly in the works of artists such as Pignotti and La Rocca. More specifically, we are intent on investigating the interconnections between *impegno* and gender in the shift from theory— the theory of *impegno* was chiefly developed by male artists and critics—to artistic practice, a field in which, as we shall see, the work of female artists formulated a strong critique of mass society and technological culture but overall remained marginalised. We argue that questions centred around the interrelationship between gender and *impegno* emerge significantly at the intersection between theory and practice and that despite the apparent and declared centrality of its theorisations, the marginalization of the female condition of Gruppo 70, remained bound in the gendered confines of the early neoavanguardia / new vanguard. This is the reason why we initially focus in particular on how *impegno* was theoretically formulated in relation to ‘stile tecnologico’, theories of inter-subjectivity, and ‘*interartisticità/interdisciplinarità*’ before looking at how this culminated in the singular gestures of the male and female artists considered (Pignotti and La Rocca).

**Technological Poetry: *Impegno* as a Technological Style**

*Potrei cominciare col dire, “Un fantasma si aggira per l’Europa: è il fantasma dell’arte tecnologica”. Personaggi illustri si mostrano inquieti, perdono la calma, come i soriani di razza assaliti dalle pulci*

[Miccini, ‘Trasformare i mass media in mass culture’, *Marcatré* 11-12-13 (1965)]

*Poesia tecnologica* originated at a time when the debate on the relationship between the arts, industry and technologies was at fever pitch. In the early 1960s, Italy was experiencing the so-called ‘economic miracle’ (1958-1963),[[6]](#footnote-6) becoming an international protagonist in technological progress, especially in the chemical, electronic and automobile sectors. Celebrating the centenary of the Italian unification, the Turin exhibition *Italia 61* could not have expressed more effectively the euphoria of those years, epitomised by the ‘*made in Italy’* brands that were triumphing worldwide in fashion, architecture, cinema and design.[[7]](#footnote-7) At national level, the *new* Italian lifestyle associated with the ‘economic boom’ had spread top-down to the masses through advertisements in television broadcasting, cinema and the press, in a circular relationship of mass communications-consumerism-industrial development. Although the ‘economic miracle’ did initially bring welfare for many Italians and was perceived as an exciting promise of a prosperous future, there soon emerged issues of economic inequality and class, increasingly associated by Left-wing intellectuals who followed a certain tradition of *impegno*,[[8]](#footnote-8) with the capitalist model and the *Western way of life* imported from the United States. Moreover, the rapid shift Italy went through from a rural-based, dialect-speaking society to an industrialized, urbanized country where the Italian language (and the new culture associated with it) was imposed through the mass media, could not but generate a series of tensions and contradictions. Many intellectuals, including Pasolini, Calvino, Sanguineti, as well as the members of Gruppo 70, took a clear polemical stance against issues such as the cultural and linguistic standardization produced by consumerism and the sense of alienation of individuals in a society dominated by the mass media.

In these years, the concept of *impegno* in the arts evolved in relation to the evolution of political commitment *per se*. As Jennifer Burns points out, ‘the dedication to communism which the Resistance movement in Italy had helped inspire, began to be questioned in the mid-1950s, and the adherence to the Italian Communist Party (PCI) was partial and at times ‘gauche’ over the next thirty years’.[[9]](#footnote-9) In particular, after the Soviet invasion in Hungary1956, the idea of commitment to social and political issues went through a metamorphosis in terms of values, forms of action and expression in the arts, opening itself to artistic experimentalism. In this respect, 1956 marks a crucial turning point in literary debates — Pier Paolo Pasolini’s articles in *Officina* (‘Il neo-sperimentalismo’, 1956; ‘La libertà stilistica’, 1957) and the subsequent controversial debates with Edoardo Sanguineti (‘Una polemica in prosa’, 1957), prove the centrality of the relationship realism-*impegno*-experimentalism, and at the same time demonstrate the different interpretations of the relationship language-ideology.[[10]](#footnote-10)

For some artists, such as those of Gruppo 70, this relationship was viewed as a form of engagement with the new languages of mass communication and technology. This interpretation of *impegno* found itself flanked by the two radical positions of the post-idealists, namely those supporting the separation between art and non-art, and the ‘neo-mechanicists’ [*neo-meccanicistici*], or those who saw the total co-dependence between art and technology.[[11]](#footnote-11) But it was also fiercely opposed by those who believed that engaging with the technological languages of capitalism was tantamount to accepting its values and integration into the system. Romano Luperini, for example, makes this point clear in ‘Per una letteratura di opposizione’, *Quartiere* 27-28 (1966)[[12]](#footnote-12) while Umberto Eco also succinctly represented the split between the *apocalittici* and and the *integrati.* The former were those who refused to accept the cultural transformation of Italian society and adopted a more conservative and even regressive ideological position as a form of resistance, while the latter, such as Gruppo 70, believed that critical awareness could only develop from the direct engagement with the languages of industry, technology, and mass media.[[13]](#footnote-13)

In the visual arts, critical perspectives had already taken into account theories of semiology, semiotics, Gestaltung, cybernetics, on the wave of Gillo Dorfles’ seminal studies *Discorso tecnico sulle arti* (1952)*, Il divenire delle arti* (1959), *Simbolo, comunicazione, consumo* (1962). In literary fiction and poetry, however, new experimental artistic practices only began to develop from around 1963.[[14]](#footnote-14)

In poetry, it was clear that language had to be renovated/renewed/, as many felt that in its traditional form it was unable to convey the experience of contemporary life, or engage with the new areas of modern modes of communication. As Dorfles claimed in 1959: ‘La poesia, più ancora delle altre arti — proprio per il suo esser legata alla parola: a questo veicolo significante — si trova oggi in una situazione di estrema perplessità’.[[15]](#footnote-15) However, when it came to experimentalism the most obvious reference were the avant-garde movements of the early century. As Pignotti noted:

Il discorso delle avanguardie, alla fine della seconda guerra mondiale, era stato dato per esaurito. Quel discorso invece era stato solo interrotto. A me era parso naturale riprenderlo, a partire da alcune sue valenze lasciate vistosamente aperte. A me attraevano ancora il potenziale espressivo e la reimpostazione linguistica messi in moto da certo futurismo, da certo dadaismo, da certo surrealismo. A me interessavano da tempo scrittori come Marinetti, Palazzeschi, Tzara, Joyce, Breton, Pound. Avendo avuto modo, fin dalla metà degli anni Quaranta, di entrare in contatto anche con le esperienze più avanzate nel campo delle arti visive, e avendo anzi lì sperimentato le mie prime prove artistiche, prevalentemente sotto forma di disegno, una delle mie aspirazioni era pure quella di far esprimere in qualche modo la parola, mezzo associato al tempo, anche nello spazio.[[16]](#footnote-16)

It was a context that enabled all those experimental movements usually associated with the *neoavanguardia* to flourish. In 1963, respectively in Florence (May) and in Palermo (October), Gruppo 70 and Gruppo 63 held their first founding events,[[17]](#footnote-17) but numerous other groups revolving around journals such as *Questo e altro*, *Marcatré, Linea Sud, Trerosso, Malebolge, Linea Struttura, Made In* were also beginning their artistic experimentation at this time. What they shared was a sense of transformation of linguistic structures in relation to the new conditions of industrial society, the centrality of group work as an alternative to movements and individualism and the joint activity of critical reflection and poetic practice. Add to this the ‘contamination’ or interdisciplinarity of languages used in poetic expression; indeed, each group and each single artist developed their own specific identity.

From the outset, Gruppo 70 distinguished itself from Gruppo 63 for their broader understanding of language as an interdisciplinary, interartistic and interactive experimentation where verbal, visual, and sound/acoustic/auditory signs converge and invite the audiences to a more active role in cultural production.[[18]](#footnote-18) They used the term ‘medium-specificity’ to describe how they differed from the literary avant-gardes who were traditionally ‘endoliterary’,[[19]](#footnote-19) ‘i.e. it arose out of literature and, although “proceeding” by negation (dialectical negation as the source of history), added to its fabric, creating “new” tradition, and resolving itself once more in literature’; *poesia visiva* on the other hand, placed itself outside of literature. *Poesia visiva* ‘is not complimentary to it (literature), nor does it directly make use of its models or respect its “genres”, even advancing itself as an alternative.[[20]](#footnote-20) Gruppo 70 worked deliberately between two or more media/disciplines and drew on their implicit codes in order to engage critically and politically with the dominant culture.

Gruppo 70’s first *Arte e comunicazione* (1963) conference included poets Miccini and Pignotti; painters Antonio Bueno, Alberto Moretti and Silvio Loffredo; musicians Sylvano Bussotti, Giuseppe Chiari and Pietro Grossi; literary critics Luciano Anceschi, Gianni Scalia, Eugenio Battisti, Dorfles; and theorists Eco and Aldo Rossi. The group set itself the goal of broadening the codes of poetry through the contamination of words with other linguistic systems because, as they noted, ‘this necessity arose from an awareness that “words sound derisory and are not able to survive noise” if they are not supported by images, as the new media of communication created by mass society teaches/claims/professes’.[[21]](#footnote-21) In December 1963, two exhibitions — *Arte letteraria nella figurazione* (14-31 December 1963) at the gallery *Il Fiore* and *Tecnologica* (19 December 1963-8 January 1964) at the gallery *Quadrante* in Florence — showcased the idea of the relationship between literature and images and the collaboration between different artists and artistic disciplines. It is important to note that no female artists were included in these exhibitions despite the fact that both La Rocca and Marcucci, as we shall see, were already active at the time.[[22]](#footnote-22) These exhibitions were followed by two other forms of experimentation across the arts, in line with the motto ‘uscire fuori dalla pagina’. One was *Cinepoesie*, a montage of different filmic frames taken from documentaries, film, and newsreel, following the cut’n’mix technique and another was *Poesie e no* (1964-1966), a series of performative events including painters, musicians and poets, as well as audiences which saw the active participation of Marcucci, who had a particular interest in this form of active interartistic and intermedial collaboration with other artists and the public.[[23]](#footnote-23) As Pignotti remarks in the catalogue of *Tecnologica:*

Ci è dato assistere sempre con maggior frequenza al lavoro occasionalmente congiunto di poeti con pittori, di musicisti con poeti, di pittori con musicisti. Ma esaurite le combinazioni matematiche e le occasioni dell’incontro, ognuno torna alla propria attività a dimostrare invece che le suddette esigenze — quella di gruppo e quella di relazioni tra arti diverse — possono saldarsi insieme rendendo meno aleatori i vantaggi di una reciproca verifica estetologico-culturale che non può non incidere positivamente sulla consapevolezza critica e autocritica dei singoli artisti.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Pignotti’s artistic language was strongly influenced by Max Bense’s *tecnologismo* — namely an aesthetics that employs theories of information technology, communication, cybernetics and logics to determine the artistic value of artworks —[[25]](#footnote-25) and therefore could not but be developed on the basis of an analogy with the languages of mass communication. As Eco claims, art is an epistemological paraphrase, by which he meant it reflects science and the methodology of an era. In this broad understanding of ‘apertura alla relazione’, for Gruppo 70 *impegno* was thus conceived in terms of a *technological style,* where, following the principle of ‘estrazione-astrazione’, the symbols, icons, and images of mass-communication were ‘extracted’ and subsequently ‘abstracted’, or re-employed, with a different critical and aesthetical purpose. John Picchione rightly points out that ‘these artists transgressed the boundaries of poetry as a verbal practice towards a more comprehensive idea of “general art of the sign” [where] the materials of mass communication are constantly de-contextualized and de-mystified through the use of desecrating and provocative collages’.[[26]](#footnote-26)

***Impegno* between interdisciplinarity** **and collaboration**

It was on the occasion of the second conference, *Arte e tecnologia* (1964), that the members of Gruppo 70 illustrated how their *stile tecnologico* related to *impegno*. Organised by Pignotti and Miccini, the event included important contributions by an all-male cast of theorists; among them were Dorfles (‘Arte e tecnologia’), Mauricio Kagel (‘Per discutere: avanguardia e accademia’), Eco (‘Comunicazioni di massa’) and Rossi (‘Letteratura e/o tecnologia’).[[27]](#footnote-27) As Pignotti claims in his article, the characteristics of technological art are ‘La suggestione di Gordon Flash’, the direct relationship between what we might call the creative intervention and technological, mass society.[[28]](#footnote-28) Rather than operating exclusively within their own areas of specialization, artists develop their work in a relational field in which all the experiences of their time converge. They act synchronically, not diachronically. They use what Pignotti calls technological languages (‘l’assunzione di linguaggi tecnologici’): the language of advertising, journalism, *narrativa rosa*, thrillers, science fiction, humour, logic-science-mathematics, bureaucracy, business, economy, law, and so on. As Pignotti further explains in his article, their work is based on principles of interdisciplinarity and interartisticity (*interdisciplinarità, interartisticità*), and includes works produced by groups of artists and/or individuals. They also encourage the use of new and more powerful means of communication (‘l’urgenza di nuovi e più potenti mezzi di diffusione’), including poetry read via loudspeakers at stadiums and painting exhibitions shown along the motorways. This is also how they conceived their *collages*, based on sampling materials taken from newspapers, comics, *fotoromanzi*, and advertisements, through *découpage*, which can be traced back to the legacy of the historic avant-garde movements,[[29]](#footnote-29) which were coming to the attention of a new generation of critics and artists in the early 1960s.[[30]](#footnote-30) Yet, the sense of their operation was different (Yet the inspirations for the modus operandi were different).

In ‘La suggestione di Gordon Flash’, Pignotti distances himself from the historic Avant-Garde movement as he called into question some of the perceived different ideological purposes of the experimental movements during the first half of the twentieth century. While Gruppo 70 and *poeti* *visivi* could relate to movements such as Futurism, Dada, Surrealism in terms of artistic practices, the actions of the latter were often viewed as being irrational and destructive. Contrariwise, in line with a certain idea of *impegno* in those years, *poesia tecnologica* aimed to somehow engage with society and the audience,[[31]](#footnote-31) which could be summarised in their slogan ‘transforming mass media into mass culture’. The sense of transformative action in society through culture was thus crucial to their practices. Miccini argues this very point in an article first presented at the same conference *Arte e tecnologia,* ‘Trasformare i mass media in mass culture’ (1964):

La letteratura di oggi deve operare il riscatto estetico, anziché utilitario, dei simboli dell’attuale civiltà; utilizzare i ricalchi semantici di tutti i materiali (verbali e non) che la civiltà tecnologica disperde, toglierli dal loro tragitto comunicativo per inserirli in un diverso contesto e livello di comunicazione: concisione, contrazione sintattica, costante riferimento al discorso comune, cioè all’universo di esperienza comune nel quale entrano continuamente le informazioni e i messaggi espressi nei codici tecnologici, codici che – per dirla in termini di mercato – hanno abbassato il prezzo per aumentare il consumo.[[32]](#footnote-32)

Along these lines, their commitment to audiences and society manifested itself in actions of direct engagement with the masses, following a tradition of *impegno* that believed in the emancipating and possibly revolutionary value of culture.

 Most crucially, the debates which began during the conference *Arte e tecnologia* and continued apace in journals such as *Quartiere*, *Marcatré*, *Trerosso* and *Malebolge*, demonstrating how the relationship *impegno*-interdisciplinarity was both controversial and fundamentally gendered, especially in relation to the central theoretical tenet and creative practice of *interartisticità*. As claimed in a seminal article published in *Questo e altro*, ‘Le ragioni dei gruppi. Il singolo è disperatamente solo nella folla’ (1963) by Giulio Carlo Argan, group work was intended as a fundamental cultural strategy to respond to the massification of individuals and as the underlying vehicle for interartistic exchange and creative practice.

È […] estremamente importante, in un momento in cui i tempi del deprecato processo di “massificazione” si accelerano paurosamente, sapere se siano possibili esperienze e attività di gruppo e non di massa. La massa, nella sua inerzia, non conosce la esigenza estetica e non può dare arte [...] Chi voglia difendere la libera attività dell’individuo dalla inerzia torpida e letale della massa deve riflettere, anzitutto, che la qualità fondamentale della persona umana è la capacità, la volontà di mettersi in relazione, di associarsi ad altri per un fine comune, di coordinare la propria azione all’altrui, di fare gruppo, infine, e costruire così una società che trovi nel proprio dinamismo l’impulso a superarsi e progredrire.[[33]](#footnote-33)

Aside from taking the dismissive attitude towards the mass(es) as a passive and amorphous whole rather than a central interlocutor, Argan does place collaboration and group work at the core of interartistic activity in a way which recalls illustrious forebearers such as the Bauhaus, the work of László Moholy-Nagy and Josef Albers, and the more recent *Gestaltung* school in Ulm, Germany. For Argan the advantages of group work lie in the potential for dialectical relationships that can be established at a time when traditional ‘artistic languages’[[34]](#footnote-34) were seen as weathering the storm of a fundamental crisis. For example, in his contribution for the exhibition *Tecnologica* Artists such as Pignotti viewed collaboration with artists from different disciplines as a unique opportunity to develop aesthetic and critical awareness at a time when there was a widespread perception that diverse artistic languages were converging. Others, more radically, considered group work as the essential platform to developing collective thought, or ‘*senso comune’*, as they defined it. Based on the assumption that the development of sectorial competences would lead to disciplinary boundaries imposing their own vision of the world, whilst also preserving their own privileges, collective work was thought to be the ideal vehicle to achieving a ‘total experience’ in the arts, ultimately overcoming human individuality. Issue no. 1 of *Trerosso* (May-June 1966) revolved specifically around the rigid separation of disciplines and languages in relation to neo-avant-gardist experiences and how these projected a different conception of art.

 Undoubtedly, such debates on collaborative and collective practices in the arts played an essential role in the development of new artistic languages and genres.[[35]](#footnote-35) However, we argue that in its attempt to overcome individualism against mass standardization, group work often neglected to consider issues of gender and contributed further to the persistent marginalization of the female experience and voice. Whilst this is in many respects unsurprising given the constraints of patriarchy on Italian society and culture at the time, and the persistent marginalisation of female artists of the Avant-Garde,[[36]](#footnote-36) it is particularly striking in relation to the centrality of the critique of technological culture and the female condition, which was a foundational/primary concern for Gruppo 70.

**Technological Poetry and the Female Voice**

In post-war Italy, the politics of exclusion was overwhelmingly dominated by patriarchal institutions and a deep-seated patriarchal culture; the alienation of women from cultural, political and social arenas, especially in the period of the economic miracle, created close-to-unsurmountable barriers for female artists. Whilst the work of a number of radical women artists who were active in the 1970s has received critical attention (e.g. Gina Pane, Marisa Merz, and La Rocca), the received chronology of such explicitly feminist interventions in Italy is still firmly rooted in the 1970s. As noted by Judith Russi Kirshner, it was in this decade that the first and most radical wave of theorization of Italian feminism was spearheaded by Lea Vergine, Carla Lonzi and Annemarie Sauzeau Boetti.[[37]](#footnote-37)

Yet, female artists who were closely associated with the creartion of Gruppo 70 and the early experimentation of *poesia tecnologica* and *poesia visiva* contributed to raising consciousness around a number of issues related to the female condition. In particular, they debated the role and place of women in Italian society from an explicitly feminist perspective at a much earlier date and specifically in relation to the expressive mechanisms of the culture of mass media and the double syntax (to use Luce Irigaray’s concept) of the culture of the media.[[38]](#footnote-38) In the 1960s, the work of La Rocca (1938-1976) and Marcucci (1933-) emerged in the context of the early theorizations and artistic practices of Gruppo 70 and endeavoured to find a place for the female voice within Italian culture with a particular focus on what Irigaray would later call the phallomorphic representation of woman which pervades patriarchal society and the culture of mass consumption.[[39]](#footnote-39) What is interesting to note, in relation to the work of both La Rocca and Marcucci in the early 1960s, are the means of expressive chosen by the two artists, vis-à-vis the overwhelmingly male-dominated field of theoretical interventions on word and image relations and technological culture which was the chief concern of Gruppo 70. Women artists at this time were active but were either unable to find space in the theoretical debate or consciously decided not to express themselves through this medium. As already noted, the result was that the voice of the male critic tended to lead the theoretical field throughout the 1960s and continued to dominate the early attempts to systematize and historicize the movement in the 1970s and 1980s.[[40]](#footnote-40) It is thus even more important that, when we look at the role and place of this movement and the boundaries of the Italian *neoavanguardia* in and around 1963, we focus critical attention on the work of women artists and on their creative output as a means to counteract the tendency of over-relying on the male critics, who have always usurped the role of translators/interpreters of both female artists and work on the female condition.

In relation to the development of early feminist contributions, it is also important to reflect on the centrality of the challenge in the work of the artists associated with Gruppo 70 in the 1960s, with regard to the iconographic and narrative constructs of women in the Italian mass media. This is particularly interesting in the context of their theoretical and creative input dealing with the interaction between word and image which focused on the mediatised image of woman and the language of difference enacted by the media. As we shall see, La Rocca exposed the power of the visual and textual paradigms of femininity as not only being linked to the complex difference between men and women but also as a vehicle to personify/exemplify the difference between woman and the reified image of woman as ‘other’.

Woman and femininity are seen by all artists belonging to Gruppo 70 in the 1960s as central to the new culture of consumerism and technological culture. Pignotti, for instance, combined both his critical and poetic production to focus on the appropriation and reification of the image of woman in advertising, revealing how it had become doubly implicated in the culture of consumption. Women were both a target of advertising as a consumer, and an object exploited in advertising—he uses the expression ‘super-merce’ in relation to the centrality of woman in consumerism.[[41]](#footnote-41) In the volume *Una forma di lotta*, which combines poetry, creative prose and other writings, Pignotti returns obsessively to this theme.[[42]](#footnote-42) In the poem ‘Ai limiti dell’assurdo’, the internal monologue of a young woman is dominated by the relentless rhythm of the language of the media mixing slogans from advertising campaigns, phrases lifted off the pages of women’s magazines, and lonely hearts columns:

*Poesie* è la mutandina-guaina invisibile!

*Poesie* slancia, delinea, snellisce senza comprimere.

Dona una linea tanto più femminile.

Ammiratevi!... avete indosso un modello firmato

*Triumph International*.

[…]

Piú bella … ogni giorno piú bella con *Cadum* il sa-

pone di Parigi.

Il profumo aggiunge eleganza.

Per la bellezza del vostro viso,

Una maschera di succo di cocomero fresco;

lasciate asciugare e dopo sciacquate con acqua fred-

da.[[43]](#footnote-43)

Pignotti critiques/lambasts the obsession with the crass commercialization of woman in contemporary society and the alienating effect it had on women: the young woman in the poem, tearing herself away from the relentless flow of narratives directed at her, looks out of a window and tries to imagine her own future but is ultimately unable to connect with the world that surrounds her.[[44]](#footnote-44) Pignotti stresses what we might call a process of imbrication (‘un intreccio aggrovigliato e fantastico’, p. 15) in which real life, future promises and admonitions of the language of technological and mass culture seem to converge. Women are portrayed as empty vessels of consumerism, defined by the diktats of the latest advertising campaigns and urged to conform to an idea of femininity that requires a rejection of her own body and self. What Pignotti also stresses is the power of the symbols of consumer culture specifically in relation to the way in which both visual and narrative constructs, by their ubiquity and immediacy, become familiar and hence also naturalised.[[45]](#footnote-45)

Pignotti had already tackled this theme is two collages of 1962 belonging to the series *Una forma di lotta*, 1962 (collage, cm 31x21, priv. coll.). Whilst it is possible to see similarities with Surrealism and the citation technique of Dada and Pop Art, Pignotti embraces the technique of *découpage*— in itself significant of the layering of messages in contemporary culture—together with what Rossi calls an *agencement*, the new ‘layout’ of words and images in order to dis-locate the codes that underpin the symbols of mass culture.[[46]](#footnote-46) This technique also exposes the coercive forces and symbols of technological society and relates openly to the notion of *impegno* that underpinned the work of the artists associated with this movement.

In the volume *Simbolo comunicazione consumo*, Dorfles posited that the chief characteristic of the age of mass communication was the re-emergence of symbols—‘riaffermarsi dell’elemento simbolico’.[[47]](#footnote-47) Within the logic of consumerism, street signs, logos and labels, street advertising, the centrality of styling and design for products destined to mass consumption, and the widespread use of different jargons out of their original context, all point to the importance of communication and specifically the immediacy of communication which the use of such symbols elicits. In order to promote effective and immediate communication we rely on symbols and their implicit coding. Whilst language retains its centrality, Dorfles and the artists of Gruppo 70 explicitly call attention to the symbolic and communicative power of visual material and photography in particular given the special status conferred on it by its seemingly unmediated relational connection with reality—the Barthesian *analogon*.[[48]](#footnote-48) The language of advertising was at the time targeted both by social theorists and in terms of the politics of advertising in society. In the same volume, Dorfles mentions the power of ‘pubblicità subliminale’.[[49]](#footnote-49) This seems to have been a source of particular concern at the time and became an area of intense theorisation, with Gestalt theory and theories of perception at the forefront of the debate.[[50]](#footnote-50) What one senses is a deep-seated fear of the power of symbols at a time when their proliferation seemed unstoppable and their efficacy unquestionable given the pace of industrialisation and consumerist capitalism.

This is precisely where the theoretical and creative outputs of Gruppo 70 create a space for critical and political interventions/contributions.[[51]](#footnote-51) The visual and narrative symbols of the age of communication and consumption are both the target and the vehicles for critical and creative interventions that aimed to disrupt the dominant ideology which sustained the growth of technological and mass culture. Miccini spoke openly about the violent confrontation with the culture and ideology of the establishment envisaged by the *poeti visivi*, in the 1960s: ‘violenza è la trasgressione dalle norme della tradizione linguistica e stilistica, trasgressione della società opulenta e del suo razionalismo cinico e autoritario’.[[52]](#footnote-52) This act of disdainful refusal of the new culture is also (and above all) an act of resistance against what many artists and critics at the time saw as the coercive power of the mass media, as well as an acknowledgement of the importance of unveiling the mechanisms which underpinned the persuasive power of the dominant mediatic language and culture.

In the 1965 collage *Trazione anteriore* (fig. 1, Archivio Tullia Denza, MaRT, Rovereto), La Rocca challenges the construction of woman portrayed as the natural realm of femininity in the media, and places consumerism and the female condition at the core of her verbal/visual interventions/artwork. Many of her works at this time, in line with other artists of Gruppo 70, exclusively employ cutouts from magazines and newspapers in order to engage directly with the images and texts of the mass media.[[53]](#footnote-53) Whilst other artists make the process of their own creative mediation more visible (by for instance inserting handwritten words or marks in *poesie visive*), La Rocca holds back and focuses on the act of selecting and framing the material. The seemingly unmediated reemployment of the symbols and narratives of the media ‘encourage[s] rereading the familiar as a way to begin the process of changing the very nature of language itself’.[[54]](#footnote-54) Ambrosio calls it a ‘*détournement’* of the linguistic element which confers an element of novelty on everyday language that leads to what Dorfles has called a renewal of information (‘rinnovamento informativo’).[[55]](#footnote-55)

The small format of *Trazione anteriore* (common to La Rocca’s collages at the time) also directly recalls the printed media and advocates an alternative way of reading a familiar verbal/visual text. The collage is constructed around five blocks—three purely textual and two purely visual. The large characters of the two titles—‘SONO FELICE’ [I am happy] and ‘TRAZIONE ANTERIORE’ [Front-wheel drive]—vie for our attention (the former more dominant than the latter). Happiness is depicted visually by the unblemished and perfected beauty of the fashion model staring directly at the viewer. The accoutrements of glamour are placed directly above the euphoric declaration ‘sono felice’—a lipstick, powder compact and nail varnish—but they are also directly under the secondary title placed at the top of the collage (‘trazione anteriore’), suggesting the unstoppable nature of consumer society. The final block of text at the bottom of the composition places the woman emphatically in a domestic environment: the humdrum nature of a woman’s daily grind (washing up, laundry, and cleaning) is presented in poetic form as a quatrain. The insistent repetition of the term ‘dopo’ indicates the monotonous nature of women’s existence, its limited scope and the secondary subservient position of woman in society—‘dopo i piatti / dopo i panni / dopo i lavori / domestici’. In keeping with the dominant discourse of patriarchy, the living space occupied by women is presented as one with clear confines, defined by domesticity and the reification of the female body through the discourse on beauty and self-improvement. By introducing an extraneous piece of jargon, the reference to front-wheel drive is the key to the disruption of the common codes of communication which upholds the subversive aim of La Rocca’s works. ‘Trazione anteriore’ is also a reference to the symbols and semantic field of masculinity in the language of advertising and the mass media. The result is that the image of femininity reflected and constructed by the media is uncovered by La Rocca as a construct of patriarchy in which the realm of the male relentlessly pulls woman into pre-established and constantly reinforced boundaries. The coercive nature of the mediatic construction of femininity is exposed and hence her work becomes overtly political in the sense that, as Carlo Verzotti noted: ‘socio-political reality (for example, the exploitation of woman’s body, the threat of war, and the political and ecclesiastical manipulation of consciences) emerges as the hidden, repressed part of mass-media discourse’.[[56]](#footnote-56)

La Rocca’s work exposes the silencing of women within society in a series of works which address the issue with her characteristic irreverence.[[57]](#footnote-57) In another collage of 1965, *Elettro…addomesticati* (fig. 2, Archivio Tullia Denza, MaRT, Rovereto) the cutout of the head of a smiling model is gagged whilst the title plays with the space of domesticity in the double pun in which the reference to electrical appliances (elettrodomestici), in their alleged contribution to freeing women from domestic chores, are turned into instruments of domestication, taming and subjugation (addomesticati). The play on the etymological relationship between the terms is ironic but also overtly political; it is aimed at uncovering the symbols and values that underpin normative femininity in the age of consumerism.

The focus on language and the female condition remained central in the work of La Rocca. In the 1960s, she consistently attacked the symbols and syntax of technological culture and exploited the key processes employed by Gruppo 70, in order to de-familiarize the discursive and normative constructions of femininity in mass consumer society.[[58]](#footnote-58) At a time when the Russian Formalist concept of *ostranenie* was much discussed in Italy, de-familiarization and de-contextualization are the means through which La Rocca performs an un-mooring of the text/image from its original context and medium. The unmasking and subsequent disruption of the codes and tenets of technological society is key to La Rocca’s *impegno* at this time. What is important to stress here is that the way her *impegno* manifests itself, the way it is performed and acted upon is through her creative intervention which has both an aesthetic and theoretical function.

Vis-à-vis the extensive theorization on the medium as the principal holder and facilitator of the message, La Rocca exploited the role that both context and medium have in the process of signification.[[59]](#footnote-59) Both the contexts and media referenced in her work are associated with the fast consumption of images and texts in the mass media, and their equally fast disappearance in what Dorfles called the ‘iconic remains’ of our memory.[[60]](#footnote-60) Images and texts are produced for fast consumption which necessarily relies on a perceptive and cognitive automatism allowed by the familiarity and implicit coding of technological language. The ethical and political dimension of La Rocca’s work is inextricably linked to the anchoring of the image/text to a new context which plays deliberately on the act of disruption of the familiar. It is a re-orienting of the reading of the image/text which is made possible by both challenging the code of the original message and by uplifting the image/text from the realm of ephemera to that of art/poetry. The latter can also be linked to an attempt to re-democratise poetry, by rethinking the range and reach of poetic language and its perceived elitism.[[61]](#footnote-61)

This poetic recycling of the ‘leftover waste’ of the symbols and language of technological culture uncovers another paradox: the apparent polyphony of the dominant language (advertising, popular literature, journalism, jargons etc.) is exposed by La Rocca and Gruppo 70 in often overtly Marxist tones, as being fundamentally monolithic and authoritarian, because, as Adriana Cavarero observes, in relation to language and women: ‘each of the definitions of herself that woman finds in language comes to her from a language that is not hers […] a language that does not recognise her, and even denies/discards her as a subject’.[[62]](#footnote-62)

There is however a further distinction that needs to be made in relation to the surfacing of the female voice in the context of the critical and creative interventions which take the female condition as their target. If we compare Pignotti’s ‘Ai limiti dell’assurdo’ with La Rocca’s poem ‘Una buona idea’, originally published in 1966 in the journal *Letteratura*, we notice a fundamental difference between the work of proto-feminist artists and their male counterparts in Gruppo 70.[[63]](#footnote-63) In ‘Ai limiti dell’assurdo’, the female figure is marginal and silenced; only the language of normative femininity emerges through the language of advertising which constructs woman in relation to man’s desire. The protagonist of La Rocca’s ‘Una buona idea’ is still caught up in the web of a construction of woman rooted in patriarchy but, significantly, her voice is audible. And, whilst it remains caught up in the web of a reified construction of woman, the protagonist attempts to engage critically with the patriarchal discourse. The refrain ‘mi verrà senz’altro una buona idea’, is indicative of the bourgeoning feminist critique of manufactured normative femininity exemplified by the many references to the cosmetic and beauty industry or to the popular tear-jerker *La novia*, by Italian singer Tony Dallara, in which a bride—‘bianca e splendente’ as the refrain goes—is about to marry the man she doesn’t love and embark of a life of unfulfilled potential. Marriage and the Church are singled out as obstacles to women’s emancipation and contributing to the strict boundaries that surrounded women in Italian society at the time.

**Conclusions**

Ermanno Migliorini described *poesia visiva* as occupying an interstice within the field of *ut pictura poesis*, the centuries-long complex debate and dialogue within the arts.[[64]](#footnote-64) Rossi saw this interstice as a place of potential disruption and creative freedom: ‘della parola si occupa la linguistica, dell’immagine la critica d’arte [...] nelle opposizioni, appunto, si creano le zone franche, gli intervalli, che possono essere riempiti da tutti quei fenomeni di sincretismo, di ibridazione, giocati sull’operazione del raccostamento per contiguità o distanza’.[[65]](#footnote-65) This attempt to contextualize and find a space for this movement however risks reverting back to a position of marginality for those movements who don’t fall easily within the established boundaries of individual artistic and/or literary disciplines. The idea of interstice is useful in so far as it highlights the potential for cross-cultural contamination and collaboration but it is also metaphorically linked to ideas of the margins, and the falling into and disappearing in between more prominent spaces.

This metaphor is however particularly apt in the reassessment of Gruppo 70 and the early development of *poesia tecnologica* and *poesia visiva*. These interconnecting movements, as Migliorini pointed out, suffered critical neglect insofar as they were left at the margins of the critical assessment of both the art and literature of the time. In its act of resistance toward the logic and ideology of the dominant culture, *poesia tecnologica* in the 1960s consciously decided to occupy an in-between space from which it could push the boundaries between the different arts, and unveil and critique the underlying discourse and dominant ideology of technological society. Interartistic practices and collaboration underpinned an important body of theoretical observations which has also been marginalised in the wider context of the development of theories of word and image relations and interdisciplinarity in the second half of the 20th century. They were theories that remained over-reliant on French theory and Anglo-American foundational texts.

Above all our aim was to refocus attention on the importance of reframing our understanding of what constitutes theoretical and political interventions. *Impegno* as traditionally conceived in Italy in the postwar period was fundamentally male not only because of its protagonists and their place in Italian cultural history but also because it was over reliant on a conception of *impegno* as fundamentally linked to a logocentric tradition. The analysis of some works by La Rocca, especially in relation to the theoretical and creative intervention of her male counterparts, has shown the still widespread tendency to separate theory from creative practice and in doing so the risk of further marginalising the female voice. By reiterating the centuries-old hierarchy between logos and techne, we deny the latter status and agency. La Rocca is a case in point in so far as her powerful manipulation of the verbal/visual strategies of technological culture have been left in the shadow of a body of traditionally conceived theoretical texts, taking the shape of essays, book-length pamphlets, articles, conference papers etc..

Ultimately, by reassessing the notion of *impegno* in Gruppo 70, within a broader and interdisciplinary perspective, this article has also highlighted the centrality and relevance of the theoretical contribution of female practitioners, ironically central to the debates and yet marginalised, due to the perpetuation of a highly gendered division of labour, despite the declared theoretical centrality of group work. This approach has allowed us to emphasize how the profound interconnection between *impegno* and early feminist discourse was most significantly enacted when words and images (and later live performance) fused together in their artistic practice/production; in other words, at the point where traditional theoretical boundaries were crossed, leaving space for artistic experience as a place where theory turned into action and *impegno* became artistic activism.

1. *Questo e altro* was a literature journal published in Milan between 1962 and 1964 which revolved around the relationship between culture and everyday reality with a focus on the boundaries of literature. The programmatic question is raised in the first issue in these terms: ‘Quali sono oggi i confini della letteratura, tra l’arcadia e il proclama, il laboratorio e la denuncia, il soliloquio e l’elogio? [...] proprio qui, nella domanda che sopra ci siamo posti, quali siano oggi, i confini della letteratura, è da ricercarsi il tema centrale della nostra rivista, che si propone di organizzare attorno ad esso un libero repertorio di testimonianze d’ogni natura, affidando agli uomini della letteratura il compito di definirne, oggi, limiti, significato, valore. In questo potremmo confessarci illuministi della letteratura: che crediamo nella ragione letteraria’. Cfr. ‘Perché *Questo e altro*?’, *Questo e altro,* 1 (1962), 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Lamberto Pignotti, ‘L’industria che non si vede’, *Questo e altro*, 1 (1962), 59-60, quoted in English from Melania Gazzotti and Nicole Zanoletti, ‘Lamberto Pignotti poet, artist, essayist and the experience of Gruppo 70. From literature to visual art, from Florence to Rome’, in *La poesia ve lo dice prima, la poesia ve lo dice meglio. Opere dal 1945 al 2010* [Visual Poetry Tells It First, Visual Poetry Tells it Better. Works From 1945 to 2010], ed. By Lamberto Pignotti (Brescia: Berardinelli, 2010), p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Lamberto Pignotti, ‘L’industria che non si vede’, *Questo e altro*, 1 (1962), 59-60. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Lamberto Pignotti, ‘Visual poetry, verbo-visual writing’, in *Experimental-Visual-Concrete. Avant-Garde Poetry Since the 1960s*, ed. by K. David Jackson, Eric Vos and Johanna Drucker (Amsterdam/Atlanta: Rodopi, 1996), p. 233. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid, p. 233. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See Paul Ginsborg, ‘The “Economic Miracle”, Rural Exodus and Social Transformation’, in *A History of Contemporary Italy. Society and Politics 1943-1988* (London: Penguin, 1990), pp. 210-253; Nicholas Crafts and Marco Magnani, ‘The Golden Age and the Second Globalization in Italy’, in *The Oxford Handbook of The Italian Economy Since Unification*, ed. by Gianni Toniolo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 69-107. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See G. Lee-Maffei and K. Fallan (eds.), *Made in Italy. Rethinking a Century of Design* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013); Stephen Gundle, ‘Fame, Fashion and Style: The Italian Star System’, in *Italian Cultural Studies. An Introduction*, ed. by David Forgacs and Robert Lumley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 309-326. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Originally associated with the idea that culture had a moral role of commitment to society, in line with the agenda of Italian Communist Party (PCI), from post-war Italy to our day, the notion of *impegno* in the arts has undergone multiple metamorphoses. For an evolution of the term, see Romano Luperini, *Il Novecento: Apparati ideologici, ceto intellettuale, sistemi formali nella letteratura italiana contemporanea* (Turin: Loescher, 1981); Jennifer Burns, *Fragments of Impegno* (Leeds: Northern University Press, 2001), Elizabeth Wren-Owens, *Postmodern Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007); Pierpaolo Antonello/Florian Mussgnug *Postmodern Impegno* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009)*,* Stefano Jossa/Claudia Boscolo, *Scritture di resistenza* (Rome: Carocci, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Jennifer Burns, *Fragments of Impegno* (Leeds: Northern University Press, 2001), p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. In ‘Il neo-sperimentalismo’ (1956), Pasolini argues for an engaged, but not ‘party affiliated’ form of poetic experimentation and suggested instead that *impegno* should question the bourgeois language which had informed the party-led ‘national-popular’ project in literature and cinema, as epitomized in *neorealism*. He further clarifies his idea of experimentalism in ‘La libertà stilistica’ (1957), provoking Sanguineti’s response in ‘Una polemica in prosa’ (1957), that further marked the difference between the two poets’ ideas of experimentalism. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See ‘Arte e tecnologia’, *Marcatré* 11-12-13, 2 (1969), 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. In response to a series of articles on *impegno* and mass media society published in the journal *Quartiere,* Romano Luperini argues that, through their ‘fetishism’ of technology and mass media culture, Gruppo 70 was accepting the logics of neo-capitalistic society’. See Romano Luperini, ‘Per una letteratura d’opposizione’, *Quartiere*, 27-28 (1966), 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. In fiction, the topic of industry was at the centre of a series of novels such as Ottiero Ottieri’s *Tempi stretti* (Turin: Einaudi, 1957), *Donnarumma all’assalto* (Milan: Bompiani, 1959), *La linea gotica. Taccuino industriale* (Milan: Mondadori, 1962), Paolo Volponi’s *Memoriale* (Milan: Garzanti, 1962), Luciano Bianciardi’s *La vita agra* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1962). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Early debates about linguistic and formal experimentalism were channelled into journals such as *Officina* (1955-1959), founded by Pasolini, Roberto Roversi and Francesco Leonetti, *Il Verri* (1956-), directed by Luciano Anceschi, and *Il menabò* (1959-1967), directed by Elio Vittorini and Calvino. Issues n. 4 (1961) and 5 (1962) of *Il menabò* are particularly interesting in relation to the debate on *impegno* and literary theory and practice. Issue n. 4 (1961) revolved around the theme of industry and fiction, and the following issue (n. 5, 1962) focused on the question of language and representation, featuring two key theoretical contributions: Calvino’s *Sfida al labirinto* and Eco’s *Del modo di formare come impegno sulla realtà.* [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Gillo Dorfles, *Il divenire delle arti* (Turin: Einaudi, 1959), p. 226. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. ‘Prime Prove dagli anni 40 ai 60 [Beginnings 1940s-1960s]’, in *La poesia ve lo dice prima, la poesia ve lo dice meglio. Opere dal 1945 al 2010* [Visual Poetry Tells It First, Visual Poetry Tells it Better. Works From 1945 to 2010], ed. By Lamberto Pignotti (Brescia: Berardinelli, 2010), p. 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Gruppo 63 was created by the poets of the anthology *I Novissimi* Alfredo Giuliani, Elio Pagliarani, Edoardo Sanguineti, Nanni Balestrini e Antonio Porta, together with critics and scholars such as Angelo Guglielmi, Gillo Dorfles, Luciano Anceschi, Francesco Leonetti, Amalia Rosselli, Luigi Malerba, Giorgio Manganelli, Alberto Arbasino and Pignotti himself. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. In spite of the different poetics coexisting under the label ‘Gruppo 63’, a common characteristic was that they mainly operated at verbal level, experimenting with language and the disruption of the poetic and narrative form. Gruppo 70 pushed this poetics beyond the boundaries of verbal language. *Poesie e no*, for example, implied the involvement of audiences in the performance. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. In ‘Trasformare i mass media in mass culture’, Miccini claims: ‘Al rapporto letteratura-letteratura dobbiamo sostituire il rapporto letteratura-tecnologia. Dobbiamo rovesciare il determinismo romantico ‘ispirazione artistica-riflessione critica’, p. 107. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Eugenio Miccini and Michele Perfetti, ‘Poesia visiva’, *Chicago Review*, 26. 3 (1974), 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Melania Gazzotti and Nicole Zanoletti, ‘Lamberto Pignotti poet, artist, essayist and the experience of Gruppo 70. From literature to visual art, from Florence to Rome’, in *La poesia ve lo dice prima, la poesia ve lo dice meglio. Opere dal 1945 al 2010* [Visual Poetry Tells It First, Visual Poetry Tells it Better. Works From 1945 to 2010], ed. By Lamberto Pignotti (Brescia: Berardinelli, 2010), p. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Both the exhibition *Arte letteraria nella figurazione* (1963) and *Tecnologica* (1964) included only men (respectively, Eugenio Miccini, Mario Luzi, Alfonso Gatto, Franco Fortini in the former and Eugenio Miccini, Lamberto Pignotti, Sylvano Bussotti, Giuseppe Chiari, Antonio Bueno, Alberto Moretti, Silvio Loffredo in the latter). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Marcucci’s interartistic interventions in *Poesie e no* are evidenced by her interest in the idea of performance which had links with both Futurism and Dada. See *Lucia Marcucci. Poesie visive 1963-2003*, cat. of the exhibition, ed. by Lucialla Saccà (Florence: Centro d’Arte Spaziotempo, 2003), pp. 18-24 (p. 19). On *Poesie e no*, see also M. Minnini, *Arte in scena, la performance in Italia 1965-1980* (Ravenna, 1995)’. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Melania Gazzotti and Nicole Zanoletti, ‘Lamberto Pignotti poet, artist, essayist and the experience of Gruppo 70. From literature to visual art, from Florence to Rome’, in *La poesia ve lo dice prima, la poesia ve lo dice meglio. Opere dal 1945 al 2010* [Visual Poetry Tells It First, Visual Poetry Tells it Better. Works From 1945 to 2010], ed. by Lamberto Pignotti (Brescia: Berardinelli, 2010), pp. 5-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. See Max Bense, *Aesthetische Information* (Baden-Baden and Krefeld: Agis, 1956). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. John Picchione, ‘The New Avant-Garde in Italy: Theoretical Debates and Poetic Practices’, in *Experimental-Visual-Concrete. Avant-Garde Poetry Since the 1960s*, ed. by K. David Jackson, Eric Vos and Johanna Drucker (Amsterdam/Atlanta: Rodopi, 1996), p. 233. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. The same year, the conference was followed by an exhibition at Santa Croce, poetry readings and concerts at the Forte Belvedere, including another edition of *Poesie e no* at the Gabinetto Vieusseux. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Pignotti defines it as ‘rapporto diretto fra operazione estetica e società tecnologica, di massa’, in ‘La suggestione di Gordon Flash’, p. 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. See the pioneering work of Guido Ballo: *Pittori italiani dal futurismo a oggi* ([s.l.]: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1956); *Preistoria del futurismo* (Milano: Maestri, 1960); and his influential monograph on *Boccioni: la vita e l’opera* (Milan: Il saggiatore, 1964). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. The question of ‘*technological style’* raised by Gruppo 70 in terms of interartistic practices, collaboration, interactivity, multimedia and performativity, is at the heart of current debates on intermediality and interdisciplinarity in the digital age. Regarding creativity, interesting interconnections can be drawn between what was perceived as a form of transgression of artistic boundaries in the 1960s and what has become common practice in our days. At a time when all artistic media are digital and ‘bits commingle effortlessly’ (Nicholas Negroponte, *Being Digital* ((New York: Vintage Books, 1995), p. 18) and travel across multiple media platforms (Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture. When Old and New Media Collide* (New York: NYU Press, 2006)), we are exposed to the development of new intermedia genres, migration of stories and reuse of images across media platforms, users’ involvement in artistic practices through co-creation and participation. But implicit in the notion of ‘*technological style’* is also the use of digital technologies in non-digital texts for research and teaching ― what is today commonly known as Digital Humanities. Digital culture encourages us to go beyond our areas of specialization to enhance our understanding of our subjects, to use the ‘more powerful means of communication’ of digital technologies for cultural analytics and visualization of data. For a survey on the impact of digital technologies on Modern Languages, see Claire Taylor, Niahm Thornton at al, ‘Modern Languages and The Digital: The Shape of a Discipline’, *Modern Languages Open*, 2017.

http://www.modernlanguagesopen.org/articles/10.3828/mlo.v0i0.156/ [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. As Jennifer Burns rightly notes, what characterizes *impegno* is the presupposition of a relationship charged with a moral significance: ‘In the context of literature, this relationship has two representations, which are not necessarily distinct from one another: indeed, one is perhaps a metaphor of the other. The two relationships are between the writer and the reader and between the writer and society in which he writes’. See *Fragment of Impegno*, p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Eugenio Miccini, ‘Trasformare i mass media in mass culture’, *Marcatré*, 11-12-13 (1965), 106. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Carlo Giulio Argan, ‘Le ragioni dei gruppi. Il singolo è disperatamente solo nella folla’, *Questo e altro*, 1: 11 (1963), 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. We use here, and below, the expression ‘artistic languages’ as a literary translation of ‘linguaggi artistici’. These terms were used by Gruppo 70 and others precisely to question the idea that language is only verbal. On this assumption, they formulated their concept of ‘visual poetry’ as an phenomenon developed across arts and media - they talk about ‘interartisticità’ and ‘interdisciplinarità’ as fundamentally the same area of experimentation, insofar as ‘visual poetry’ was challenging the traditional boundaries of ‘poetry’ as a verbal art. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. The theory and artistic practice of Gruppo 70 strongly resonates with questions of intermediality in the digital age, namely the constant and rapid generation of new hybrid artistic and cultural formats. At a time when all artistic media are digital and ‘bits commingle effortlessly’ (Nicholas Negroponte, *Being Digital* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), p. 18), we are exposed to the development of new genres, migration of stories and reuse of images across media platforms, users’ co-creation and participation in artistic practices. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. On women and the Futurist movement see Paola Sica*, Futurist Women: Florence, Feminism and the New Sciences* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). See also Ruth Hemus, *Dada Women* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. ‘Theoretical feminism in Italy began in the 1970s’, Judith Russi Kirshner, ‘Voices and Images of Italian feminism’, in *Wack! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, catalogue of the exhibition organised by Cornelia Butler, Los Angeles, The Museum of Contemporary Art (London and Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2007), pp. 385-99 (p. 386). Russi Kirshner positions artists like La Rocca within this lineage: ‘La Rocca is the paradigmatic feminist artist’, (p. 390) and focuses on La Rocca’s work from the 1970s which is more overtly feminist and deals with issue of self-representation and the body, like in the *Craniologia* series of 1973. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985). See also Hilary Robinson, *Reading Art, Reading Irigaray: the Politics of Art by Women* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. For a critical reading of Irigaray’s conceptualisation see Judith Butler, ‘The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary’, in J. Butler, *Bodies That Matter. On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London and New York: Routledge 1993), pp. 57-92. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. See in particular *La poesia visiva (1963-1979)*,ed. by Gillo Dorfles, Vittorio Fagone, Filiberto Menna, Ermanno Migliorini, Luciano Ori, catalogue of the exhibition, Florence, Palazzo Vecchio, 1980 (Florence: Vallecchi, 1980). This was the first exhibition which attempted to historicise the movement. Given the constraint of space only a very small selection of works were on show but the exhibition was an attempt to provide an overview of the movement, its main phases, protagonists and the publications which supported its development. The critical interventions were exclusively male. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Lamberto Pignotti and Egidio Mucci, *Marchio e Femmina. La donna inventata dalla pubblicità* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1978), with a preface by Carla Ravaioli, especially the chapter ‘La donna inventata dalla pubblicità’, pp. 23-30, (p. 23). [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Lamberto Pignotti, *Una forma di lotta: contro l’anonimato dei prodotti in serie della civiltà tecnologica* (Mondadori: Milano, 1967). [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Ibid, p. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. ‘La ragazza si era avvicinata alla finestra / come se volesse guardare fuori: / era chiaro che non poteva vedere niente di inte- / ressante nella strada. / Si sforzava soltanto di immaginare il suo buio fu- / turo. / Un’avventura ai limiti dell’assurdo’, Lamberto Pignotti, *Una forma di lotta: contro l’anonimato dei prodotti in serie della civiltà tecnologica* (Mondadori: Milano, 1967), p. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Pignotti tackled these same issues in his artwork produced in the 1960s and in a number of influential critical interventions in the 1970s. Among them*: Fra parola e immagine. Arte e comunicazione nella societa di massa* (Padua: Marsilio, 1972); *Nuovi segni: catalogo di modelli culturali e artistici in trasformazione* (Padua: Marsilio, 1973); *Il supernulla. Ideologia e linguaggio della pubblicità* (Rimini and Florence: Guaraldi, 1974); *Il discorso confezionato. Informazione, arte, cultura, nella società dei consumi* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1979). [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. *Lamberto Pignotti*, with a preface by Aldo Rossi and Gillo Dorfles (Beniamino Carucci Editore, 1975),p. vii. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Gillo Dorfles, *Simbolo comunicazione consumo* (Turin: Einaudi, 1962), p. 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Roland Barthes, ‘The rhetoric of the image’ in *Image Music Text* (London: Fontana, 1977). See also R. Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981) and Susan Sontag, *Susan Sontag on Photography* (London: Allen Lane, 1978). [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Dorfles, *Simbolo comunicazione consumo*, p. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Dorfles is particularly indebted to Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception* (London: Faber & Faber, 1956) translated in Italian as *Arte e percezione visiva* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1962), and Herbert Read, *Icon and Idea. The Function of Art in the Development of the Human Consciousness* (London: Faber & Faber, 1955). Equally influential at this time in Italy was the work of Ernest Gombrich, especially *Art and Illusion. A study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (London: Phaidon Press, 1960). The latter was based on Gombrich’s A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts delivered in 1956. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Stefania Stefanelli frames Gruppo 70 within the resurfacing of the avant-garde in the 1960s and views the Italian new avant-garde of the 1960s as characterised by ‘impatto sociale […] orientate esplicitamente alla critica dei comportamenti passivi indotti dai mass media’, *Il gruppo 70 tra parola e immagine. Con uno scritto di Lamberto Pignotti*, ed. by Stefania Stefanelli (Florence: Società Editrice Fiorentina, 2004), p. vii. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Eugenio Miccini quoted by Ermanno Migliorini in *La poesia visiva (1963-1979)*, p. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. ‘I materiali iconici utilizzati sono in definitiva delle immagini standardizzate, presentate quasi come *object trouvé*, *ready-made*, icone prelevate dal vasto territorio delle mitologie della cultura di massa’, Matteo D’Ambrosio, ‘Poesia visiva’, in *La poesia in Toscana dagli anni quaranta agli anni settanta*, ed. by Franco Manescalchi and Lucia Marcucci (Florence; Messina: Casa Editrice G D’Anna, 1981), pp. 215-230 (p. 223). [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. *Wack! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, cat. of the exhibition, organised by Cornelia Butler, Los Angeles, The Museum of Contemporary Art (London and Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2007), p. 289. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Matteo D’Ambrosio, ‘Poesia visiva’, in *La poesia in Toscana dagli anni quaranta agli anni settanta*, ed. by Franco Manescalchi and Lucia Marcucci (Florence; Messina: Casa Editrice G D’Anna, 1981), p. 221. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Carlo Verzotti, ‘Ketty La Rocca at Galleria Carini’ in *Artforum* 28. 7 (March 1990), 171 (p. 171). [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. On La Rocca and the condition of women in Italian society see also: Cathy Margaillan, ‘Remise à zero: l’oeuvre hybride de Ketty La Rocca (1938-1976), *Cahiers de Narratologie*, 19 (2010), 1-11. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. See Lamberto Pignotti, ‘Formazione del messaggio e lettura della poesia visiva’, in *Istruzioni per l’uso degli ultimi modelli di poesia* (Lerici; Rome: 1968). In this essay, Pignotti singles out the following techniques: *calco* (word loan or in visual terms the mould); *trascrizione* (transcript); *contaminazione* (contamination); *paradosso* (paradox); *ripetizione* and *variazione* (repetition and variation); *concentrazione* (concentration) linked to the linguistic frugality and immediacy of the language of communication. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. The obvious reference is Marshall McLuhan’s seminal text *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, 1964, published in Italian as *Gli strumenti del comunicare* (Milan: Il saggiatore, 1967). Aldo Rossi, commenting on the work of Pignotti and Gruppo 70 more broadly, also noted: ‘the medium is the message: that is, there is no escape from the materiality of the communicative vehicle. The sign, even when it is not specifically an ideogram, in some way always has iconic implications’, Aldo Rossi in *Lamberto Pignotti*, with a preface by Aldo Rossi and Gillo Dorfles (Beniamino Carucci Editore, 1975),p. xi. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Lamberto Pignotti, *Una forma di lotta: contro l’anonimato dei prodotti in serie della civiltà tecnologica* (Milan: Mondadori, 1967), p. xxiii. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. ‘Il prelievo del repertorio tecnologico (pubblicitario, commerciale, burocratico, televisivo etc.) […] è voluto col fine di riattualizzare e democratizzare il linguaggio poetico, divenuto una pratica elitaria, presentandolo con termini contemporanei in una provocatoria e utopistica dimensione quotidiana ovvero nelle autostrade, nelle piazza, negli stadi’, Lucilla Saccà, *Ketty La Rocca. I suoi scritti* (Turin: Martano Editore, 2005), p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Adriana Cavarero, ‘Towards a theory of Sexual Difference’, in Sandra Kemp and Paola Bono eds., *The Lonely Mirror: Italian Perspectives on Feminist Theory*, pp. 189-221 (p. 201). [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Ketty La Rocca, ‘Una buona idea’, in Saccà, *Ketty La Rocca. I suoi scritti*, p. 25-27. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. *La poesia visiva (1963-1979)*, p. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Aldo Rossi in *Lamberto Pignotti*, with a preface by Aldo Rossi and Gillo Dorfles (Beniamino Carucci Editore, 1975),p. v. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)