Certain texts explicitly point to the fact that they are texts; in other words, their identity is a linguistic as well as a narrative one. While it is obviously true that all literary texts are composed of words, the overt variety of self-consciousness about the processes of language thematizes both this fact and awareness of it. The focus can be either the immense potency of words in creating worlds or the inadequacy of language as a means of communication, cognition or creation in art, and by extension, in life. This kind of narcissism is no less “vital,” no less connected to “life,” for its linguistic self-recognition.

As was the case in Chapter Four’s discussion of this kind of overt auto-referentiality on the level of narrative, the most effective method of analyzing the extended thematization of linguistic identity is by the detailed study of one particular text which can then act as a model both of the form (and techniques employed) and of its implications for the theory of fiction and for the act of reading. An Italian novel has been chosen for several literary historical reasons. It is not only in French or American literature today that one finds blatant linguistic self-awareness. Italian fiction too shares this self-regarding penchant, and not only in the more extreme forms of the neoavant-garde. Paolo Volponi’s novels are all, for instance, important statements of the thematized concerns of much recent Italian fiction—such as the nature of creativity and the constructing through language of autonomous fictive worlds. They are especially significant in their parodic response to the neorealistic heritage of Italy, for there that nineteenth-century novelistic “illusion” has continued to thrive. Italian metafiction is thus
more explicit in some ways and provides a particularly clear illustration of the issues involved. Volponi's second novel, *La macchina mondiale*, is therefore of interest because it specifically employs the various overt techniques of linguistic self-consciousness discussed in the last chapter-stylistic parody, static and dynamic awareness of the textual medium, and thematically functional word play. These are used to bring to the fore the linguistic and formal themes which many critics have been disinclined to attribute to anything outside the French *nouveau roman*.

This novel has no blatant narrating novelist à la Fowles, but rather presents the reader with Anteo Crocioni, a self-taught peasant, writing two simultaneous works: first, a journal, which is the text given to the reader, interspersed with quotations from the second, Anteo's treatise on his own mechanical theory of the creation of the world and its implications in the forming of an academy of friendship. However, once again there appears that complex Chinese-box *mise en abyme* structure typical of so much metafiction, for the "Avvertenza" informs the reader that the treatise is a real one, written (according to Paolo Volponi⁰) by a friend of the author, a certain P.M.V. These initials (plus the facts that this man, like Volponi, is said to be a *Marchigiano* living in Piedmont, and is a man of about Volponi's own age) suggest a certain self-conscious game-playing on Volponi's part, as does the syllabic similarity between An/te/o Cro/cio/ni and Pa/o/lo Vol/po/ni. The important point lies, however, not in any autobiographical mirroring on any level, but in the fact that Anteo's theories of the mechanical nature of creativity on a *scientific* level gradually modulate into *aesthetic* propositions which are seen to be shared not only by Volponi himself, but by, more importantly, his earlier and later writer-heroes, Albino Saluggia² and Girolamo Aspri.³ To each of these men, it is imagination that is the form-making faculty and Anteo clearly demonstrates the imaginative freedom of "Kantian man"⁴ in rising above nature and society by creating purposiveness within his creative vision. His failure is that he relates the teleology of art to a purpose outside his art- to a socio-scientific theory. It is only in the end when he sees that he has created in words a fictive (artistic) construct and when he renounces his operative intent, that he can really attain that "purposeless purposiveness" that is the novel he has written and just completed.

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² See *Memoriale* (Milano: Garzanti, 1962), p. 176, where the reader is told that man is no longer made in God's likeness, but rather in the likeness of machines, that is, of a totally different race.
³ *Corporale* (Torino: Einaudi, 1974), pp. 28, 76. All further page references will be in parentheses in the text.
Herein lies Volponi’s parodic response to the social and political intentions of the language-oriented neoavant-garde (as Chapter Eight will show) as well as to those of the neorealistic tradition in Italy. The broader Chinese-box of P.M.V., as established in the “Avvertenza,” functions as a guarantee of the autonomy of the inner world, and not as a naturalistic proof of its direct link to any external life situation. As with much self-conscious fiction, this novel finds its mimetic justification in its relating of the act of reading to that of writing—two creative processes thematized and allegorized within the structure and content of the novel itself.

Although the reader is witness to Anteo’s attempts at finding precise verbal terms and at telling everything in the proper order in his journal, it is the act of writing the treatise (the book within the book) that he is made constantly aware of. At the end, however, when Anteo remarks that he is content and proud that no one has ever tried, at least in San Savino and probably even in the Marche and all of Italy, to do what he tried to invent and create, the reader is led to note that what is true of Anteo’s creation is probably true of Volponi’s as well.

Volponi’s own fascination with self-consciousness of this sort is seen in his delight in one particular figure in Masaccio’s painting, “Resurrezione del figlio di Teofilo e san Pietro in cattedra” (Cappella Brancacci, Chiesa del Carmine, Firenze). It is the one figure of all Masaccio’s silent men who actually seems about to speak, who alone lifts his eyes upward to look at the viewer. It is, in fact, the figure that is the painter’s self-portrait. This same narcissism is evident in some of Volponi’s early poetry, but especially in his other fiction. Albino’s madness in the first novel is also a visionary one, that of a poet transforming objects and creating for them a web of analogies.

Volponi’s third novel makes even more explicit the self-consciousness of La macchina mondiale. Volponi himself saw Corporale’s plot as a discourse on language and on novelistic structures, as well as a social and moral comment on the post-atomic bomb world. The discussion in this novel between Overath and Girolamo, the narrator, is revealing, for in it Girolamo denies that he is a poet, and that his idea of a bomb shelter is “poesia.” In response to Overath’s questioning, he also denies that it is a novel or a diary, in fact, that it is any kind of literature. Overath then argues against his claim that it is a “teorema” because if it were it would have to have meaning for everyone; otherwise it would be a mad game. Girolamo the pointedly inquires: “E invece cos’è la cattiva letteratura?” Overath replies that bad literature is

5 La macchina mondiale (Milano: Garzanti, 1965), p.274. All further references will be in parentheses in the text.
7 Gian Carlo Ferretti’s interview about the author’s work in progress in his Volponi (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1972), p.2.
the history of this society, "la degna storia di questa società" (p. 445). In Part Two of Corporale, Girolamo becomes his fantasy-Joaquin Murieta, Mexican revolutionary—and the first-person narration changes to third-person. Or, as Joaquin notes in his diary, in this part of his life (and of this novel), there is no protagonist, that is, someone with a central idea who determines and judges (pp. 155-56).

Perhaps the most interesting piece of self-consciousness in this last novel is a description of the earlier one, La macchina mondiale—given in the form of Girolamo's lie to Corboli about why he wants to live in the Marche countryside. He claims to want to write a novel, to write the truth about a peasant from that area of central Italy. He will write about a man working his land but who is a man of a superior destiny too. He plans to include all the relevant historio-economic information regarding institutions, families, in fact, everything about that rural society (p. 303). As Overath had remarked, Girolamo's bomb shelter (the real reason for wanting to live in the area) is literature—Volponi's—just as Girolamo's fictional novel here is Volponi's as well.

Volponi's thematized concern in this earlier novel is explicitly with the means used to create such fictional worlds as these. This does not mean merely the author's interest in the juxtaposition of the technological abstract language of the treatise with the more lyrical tone of Anteo's journal expression. That language is central in a more important way to Volponi's own theory of narrative is clear in his own early turning to verse, and his refusal to write prose because, as he admitted, his literary and cultural level at that time did not give him a language sufficient to order things fully. In fact, he went on to state, he only attempted Memoriale when he was almost forty, when he felt finally in possession of an active linguistic instrument, capable of an order of original values and able to maintain an autonomous structure beyond either any lyricism or any narrative mechanism. In his second novel language is the novel, with a precise and essential significance. Anteo, like his creator (and, of course, like the reader), needs a language to order things as well as to create his world.

The reader notices a curious and almost untranslatable metaphor in the first pages on the novel: Anteo feels as if he lives on “una lingua di terra ancora disarticolata ed ancora con gli accenti dei vari fenomeni naturali che vi battono spora” (p.8, my italics). Similarly the mechanical joints of an animal’s body, as soon noted by Anteo, are articulated joints (p.30), so that the union of language with a mechanical theory of nature is made early in the novel. As he writes the treatise too, the ink, he fears, “avesse potuto disarticolarsi, liberarsi e cambiare una delle sue molecole” (p. 46, my italics).

Like Volponi, Anteo looks to language as an inherently ordering phenomenon. He orders words be sounds—“colto, coltivo, coltura,

8 Volponi’s 1963 autobiographical sketch, reprinted in Ferretti, Volponi, p. 79.
coltivare, continuare, confortare; auto, automa, autore, automatico; genio, geniale, genitale, generare" (p. 30) and understands that words placed together like this are articulated according to their syllables and their sounds in such a way that a construction already exists. Moreover, this is an autonomous construction, one that has no need of support from his thoughts, but rather forms its own thought by means of its power, its design, and its structures. Indeed it becomes a new and perceivable thing beyond the meaning each word first had on its own (p. 30).

Like modern French theoreticians, Anteo has discovered that language orders, that it is not merely instrumental but is in itself an autonomous system. Anteo's own word play is not at all gratuitous within the context of the novel. Words, seemingly arbitrarily connected (by sound), set out the themes to come: "colto" is "cultivated" -both for land and for men; "coltivo" means "arable" and that which is already cultivated; "coltura" is again cultivation of land, but also both the learning of man's mind, and his breeding. Anteo, the farmer, sees that one can cultivate ("coltivare") both land and friendship; hence his academy of friendship. And, it is only in continuing ("continuare") his endeavours that he can find any comfort ("confortare") for himself and for others. The "auto, automa, autore, automatico" connection suggests to him his entire theory of mechanical evolution and creation by the automi-autori. This shall be considered in more detail later.

The "genio, geniale, genitale, generare" group of associations is more complex. "Genio," as in "il genio militare," is significantly the engineering corps of an army. Of course, it also suggests Anteo's "talent" which he feels entitles him to "genius" status, and metaphorically to an understanding of the "genio" or "spirit" of language, the law, the land, or whatever. "Geniale" means both clever and friendly, and ironically also means nuptial, as in "letto geniale" -the possible link with "genitale" and of course with "generare," the procreative, constructive force both of his theories and his life; his wife's denial of this in the murder of their son therefore decides his own suicide. From his desire to be cultured ("colto"), though a mere farmer ("colto, coltivo, coltivare"), Anteo is drawn to his theory of the automa-autore and then to his final self-destruction. The verbal play here is functional in a microcosmic, narcissistic manner.

The same is true in Corporale, although Girolamo's word associations are more frequent. He too, however, sees language as a means of ordering the chaos of life (p. 142). Volponi himself has claimed that the autonomous novel form has the capacity to revivify that part of reality that is structured and developed through language.9 Obviously lan-

9 Interview with Ottavio Cecchi, "Lo 'Strega' e la macchina," Rinascita, 10 luglio 1965, p. 28.
language has both aesthetic and social (even moral) functions in all narrative and in a very particular thematized manner in *La macchina mondiale*.

According to his wife, Anteo is a no-good, lazy fellow who lies about whole days staring into space or writing his mad treatise. Anteo, on the other hand, feels that the petty demeaning work at which his father slaved was much worse than that of finding a language to express a significant world vision. His theories are not useless or inhuman; on the contrary, their aim is to better a dehumanized, uncreative society. He seeks to discover and then to give thought to machines as well. Then he feels man should begin to construct as many machines as possible in order to help, to exalt, and even to supersede man. Otherwise if man continues to make more and more machines for purposes restricted by the rules society has established, these machines will only be bestial- that is, monotonous, inert, immutable (pp. 77-78).

Anteo explains to his friend, Liborio, that man must be liberated, must free himself from the prison of society (its rules and its language) so that he can perform actions which today are not even foreseen by the very words he uses. Anteo sees that in his society, even words are fictions and the concepts behind them are hypocritical (p. 215). He intuitively makes the link between language and what Wittgenstein called the "form of life"; he learns that every language contains within it certain designs or forms by which man apprehends his world. There- fore as a social rebel, Anteo must rebel in his language usage as well.

His mechanical philosophy is also paradoxically- a "vitalistic" protest against the mental fixity and ignorance of his society. Most of his neighbours reject him; Liborio, the priest and his only friend, sees that, while he himself represents faith within the church, Anteo is "liberty" (p. 49), despite his very necessary solitude which is, ironically, a result of his desire for science to work, through invention and through the academy of friendship, to become an instrument of liberation (p. 163).

Anteo does not want to explain the origins of man and his position in the world out of scientific disinterestedness: he wants to single out the formulae needed for man's liberation and for the creation of a new academy of friendship for all men- once these same men have acknowledged the validity of his psychological arguments and his scientific code, and have accepted a theory of automatism which respects and makes use of the integrity and dynamism of each element involved (p. 8).

Anteo's relationship to the *automa-autore* (and his to P.M.V. and to Volponi) centres on the coherent world each creates and inhabits. The working of these superior machines, according to the treatise, is perfect insofar as it exempts its *autore* (author, creator) from any direct intervention. However, he is always indirectly present in that the administrators have had full liberty of action-but only the liberty to
serve the law that governs the universe. Only by faithfully serving such a law can the automa-autore satisfy his function; outside of this he will find nothing but self-destruction (p. 69). This last prophetic notion refers as well to the end of both Anteo's life and also the innermost fictive world of the novel.

Anteo rejects the servility and misery he sees around him in a society where, as he says, bread and life have the meaning and position that are really due to the freedom to live and to construct (p. 72). To be free is to live, and for Anteo to live is to construct, to create. In a double sense, since his life depends on Volponi's creating, he can say at the end of his life (and of Volponi's novel) that he feels he has expressed in his life-in full awareness and with sufficient "liberty" and "purity"-the infinite progression of each "particle" and "molecule" and "body." He feels he has attained great scientific results solely by means of his own life, by means of the constructing of the ideas that sustained it (p. 275). As a fictive character on one level, and as a social rebel on another, Anteo enjoys an unparalleled liberty. Each of the socially unacceptable, pathological "case histories" that Volponi chooses as hero for his novels functions within his own world in the same way that Volponi wishes his novels to function within the reader's world- that is, as a challenge.

Anteo uses language as his main instrument of social protest, telling the court officials that he refuses to understand their bastardized words, because they exchange and use words like cards and at the end of the game, they count up the points. He accuses them of having the dirtiest cards that anyone ever used to play with, and concludes that they are, in effect, without a language-"senza lingua" (p. 261). In a lecture in 1965, Volponi himself echoed these sentiments claiming that his novel-its language, its narration-was outside the rigid, static status actualis of society and its language. Like Volponi, Anteo attacks institutions through their all too revealing language and wants to create a new language for the constructs of his imagination.

Writing novels for Volponi is, like the writing of the treatise for Anteo, a subversive activity. The writer is free enough from the rules of society to act as its conscience. This is perhaps where Volponi's parodic and problematic response to the radical Gruppo 63 is most clear. Is Anteo's scientific theory a parody of that "literature of the laboratory" which paradoxically has extramural political and social intentions? Yes- but the creator of the automa-autore still believes in imagination's control over technology, in the anthropomorphizing, not computerization, of the world by man. More significantly, his revolt against society is more than just a linguistic contesting of the system; in fact, it reveals the limits of what Volponi has called the neoavant-garde's dogmatism and delight in forming precepts. As a metafictionist, Volponi prefers

10 In Ferretti, Volponi, p. 57.
11 In Stajano, "Paolo Volponi: il contadino in gabbia," p. 38
to reform from inside conventions, experimenting linguistically and stylistically through parody in a very self-reflexive manner. What begins as a linguistic revolt becomes part of a broader cultural one, based not on the neovanguardist political and ahistorical semantic upheaval, but on literary, historical, moral, and social grounds. In fact, Anteo's scientific failure can be read as a gloss on Volponi's discussion in an interview in *L'Unità* of the dangers of limiting the revolt to linguistic terms. He feels that many of the radicals (who theorize on the rediscovery of reality as a hidden physical material), through the use of all the possible expedients of "the laboratory," actually limit themselves. They believe that once the instrument of research has been invented, the reality itself has been conquered. To Volponi, this is really only another form of the usual bourgeois concept of science and technology as ends in themselves. He links, therefore, this new type of literature which is an end in itself to the "prosa d'arte." In other words, it is not so very radical. (Chapter Eight will investigate this accusation more closely.)

Volponi's own professed intentions for reform are also Anteo's, but his revolt is the whole novel, and not only Anteo's *mise en abyme* theoretical treatise, just as Masaccio's revolt was the whole of his art. Both Anteo and Volponi aim, as many metafictionists so explicitly do, at the reader's literary, moral, and social prejudices and blindnesses. Volponi's visionary heroes seem to resemble saints or poets in their possibility of being above reality, or perhaps living in a superior or at least different reality (a fictive linguistic world) of their own making. The theme of all his novels is that the possibility of freedom is anchored in our "culture" and is indispensable for judging or changing the world, and for constructing a new one. That "culture" both contains and is constituted by language is a theme that requires closer attention.

Why does Anteo write the journal, create his heterocosm? Is it because (as in Volponi's novel as a whole) in many of the facts of his life lie the proofs of the scientific theories of his treatise? Anteo writes of the dynamics and the consequentiality of every one of his compositions (in words and numbers) with the "inventions" he kept discovering (like all good "inventors") around him and which he linked up to each other and to his own life (pp. 14-15). Anteo sees as well as Langer or Wittgenstein the inevitable connection between language, creation, and reality. From this intuition, Anteo reasons that to reform society he must reform the language it uses. Like the catechism which, according to church dogma, contains all the answers (p. 12) and like the university professor's insistent view that he cannot listen to Anteo because it would be useless to discuss matters for which there were no doctrinaire answers already given (p. 164), the language of a society reflects, or rather *is*, its limitation.

12 In Ferretti, "Il Gruppo '63 e l'area dello sperimentalismo" in his *La letteratura del rifiuto* (Milano: Ugo Mursia, 1968), p. 287n.
Anteo comes to realize that the referents of words are often not at all real but fictive and that, like his own mechanical vision, society’s world view creates a coherent fictional universe—this time, alas, far from his own experience of those words and their referents. In a long denunciation of the court’s verbal testimony against him (p. 79), Anteo claims that the words therein establish facts that never existed in the reality created by those words—implying certain motives and consequences. He feels that if one adopts words “bloccate dall’uso,” blocked by the use made of them by a certain society, one will never conquer the rules—the blocks—of that society. These are blocks which any society builds around itself to impede the flux of reality, to transform it. For this reason he plans to write his treatise “in modo diverso,” in such a way that he can use words in a new sense, avoiding the meaning they carry in a history he rejects and wants to conquer. Otherwise, he fears, his treatise would merely be another testimony in support of the view that he is really a lazy good-for-nothing, a lunatic, a persecutor of his wife, and an enemy of the priests and of God. This key passage reveals Anteo’s understanding of the nature of the referents of words and the autonomous worlds created by them. Written in ordinary language (that is, with accepted real referents) the work will merely prove to others that he is quite mad. Volponi suggests that if Anteo persists in viewing it as science and not as art, the true realm of fictive referents, he indeed might be.

Anteo knows that language and the question of reference are greater problems than most people—other than novelists—realize. He attacks the speech of the Christian Democrat spokesman, Dr. Colombari, who claims everyone knows the meaning of those words (family, work, religion) which Anteo disputes. They just mean what they say (p. 153). Anteo rejects this simplistic view of reference; each family is different, and work and religion are, to him, merely instruments of oppression. Anteo tries to break the linguistic prison of society’s hypocrisy and simplistic mimetic view of reference, and he offers the only alternative he sees—a communist utopia that seems at least closer to his own linguistically inspired, academy-of-friendship, social ideal.

Society’s view of Anteo, however, is ironically accurate at least once. The court-appointed lawyer defends Anteo with the idea that his theories are the fruit of his madness, composed essentially, in their absolute vacuity, of “espressioni e solo di espressioni, cioè di parole più o meno stravaganti, ermetiche e confuse, dalla cui resonanza l’autore è suggestionato e rapito. Il suo è quindi un pensiero autistico, organizzato con onomatopeie, assonanze, stereotipie, bizzarrie” (pp. 260-61, my italics). What the lawyer is saying, in essence, is that Anteo is an artist, not a scientist, and that his figurative, extravagant language creates an autonomous world. What the court does not see is the social and moral intent behind that created universe—the same extroverted
impulse that can be seen in many seemingly introverted metafictions. While Anteo creates a visionary world that is admittedly fictional, it is out of a desire to free himself and so to help others-in this case, to help found a universal academy of friendship.

Language has a moral and social dimension, even when (or perhaps especially when) its referents are fictive. Language is, to Volponi, an evaluating, ordering, and liberating force. But Anteo, the free but outcast rebel, must go his way alone and poorly equipped verbally- "con pochi strumenti e poche parole" (p. 32). He must forge a world to fit his vision. Science becomes poetry as fictive referents create a whole fictive utopian world which challenges the social, psychological, historical, literary, and linguistic assumptions of the rejected society. Anteo's universe is the creation of a paranoid not unlike Don Quijote, a man who creates for himself a complete system- biographical and linguistic- in which he can live. The reader in the act of reading shares in the creating of that system, in which he temporarily is also living. The language that creates and is Anteo's world is apocalyptic, rigorously rational, yet intensely lyrical, archaic in its distance from the society it exists to oppose. As in all metafiction, however, this novel and its language are not estranged from the reader's reality. Anteo's is no more an artificial language than any other novelist's; it too is verified against (because it refers to) Anteo's vision, which in turn, however, illuminates a possible new mode of structuring reality for his reader. Language is not merely utilitarian to Anteo, but is itself the very close connection between the creation of his visionary world and his living in the social world. Volponi's heroes often reason from the syntax of the language to the syntax of reality. In all fiction, as in Anteo's visionary treatise, the people, things, events are inseparable from the words. The artist, like Anteo the scientist, must make a world, not merely describe one (real or potential), through technical skill with words. The fictive universe and the language that creates it have moral meaning, but the "analogon" with reality may be more in the process of making fictions through that human language, than in ally structural or detailed mimesis of character, event, or object.

Therefore, the question of what language to use in creating a fictive free world is tied to a larger concern for the nature of creativity, a concern shared by most metafiction. People in society, Anteo realizes, are unthinking and unimaginative and therefore inhumane. He knows that they have never even thought about an academy of friendship. Nor have they ever tried to understand human destiny. In fact they never even really look at others-except perhaps as enemies or lovers.

14 See Pier Paolo Pasolini, "Un 'piccolo vangelo' anarchico," L'Europa letteraria 6 (maggio-giugno 1965), 92.
or parents, that is, blinded by some prevailing emotion, rather than as objects of their possible mediation or creation. No one ever sees himself as an artist who might “fare qualcosa di diverso, muoversi, esistere, compiersi” (p.20, my italics). The verb *esistere* here is contrasted in the novel to mere *vivere* (to eat, to reproduce, to merely live) by the presence of a dynamic organic creative element: “per esistere occorre ogni giorno ricostruirsi, cioè obbedire ad una legge superiore che governa l’universo incarnate e vivente nei corpi di material organics” (p. 22). Anteo’s utopia would harness this creative force in a *collective* effort to make *science* the basis of life (p.78): Volponi’s would make *art* the basis of an *individual* effort, for the reader.

To see little or no connection between the treatise and Anteo’s story would be to fail to understand a central point of the novel- that regarding the nature of creativity- as well as the explicit lesson of the protagonist. Anteo claims (p. 79) that he wants the treatise to be free, the words to be new. He wants to write science as science demands- in such a way that it becomes art, “la più dolce delle poesie.” Then it will be for each person new, different, rich in infinite “liberations.” Only then, he feels, can he overcome the image formed of him by the “vecchi segni,” the old signs he equates with “i poveri servi della miseria.” Only then will he really be, in the eyes of all, a philosopher and inventor. His treatise will be true science and *therefore* true poetry (p. 81). Both are manifestations of the creative impulse, an impulse even the professors do not comprehend: they find his work beautiful but not mechanical, more poetry than engineering (p.170). Only by such creative, dynamic means, suggest author and character both, could society be reformed- morally and linguistically. The aim of science, writes Anteo, is to help us to express ourselves in the best possible way and therefore to correct and modify ourselves to the point of total reform of law and even each “forma preesistente” (pp. 247-48).

Volponi’s own belief in the close links between art and science can be seen in his interest in Masaccio’s painting in which art, science, and social criticism are united. Fifteenth-century painting is, to Volponi, revolutionary in its view of the artisanal, mechanical nature of art which is founded on science. “Popular” workers in the “mechanical” arts were elevated to the dignity of those in the liberal arts, with the result that a double social and cultural integration was possible. That fifteenth-century ideal of a secular culture (to oppose the theological one) was attained at the same time as was the cognitive, scientific ideal- made manifest in the concrete logic of Masaccio’s “pitturascienza.” In this novel, it is more a question of “poesia-scienza.”

As Sarah teaches Charles in Fowles’s novel. To live is to create; to create is to be free. Science seems to Anteo the one way to make man alive and free (p.84). Just as man has been created or constructed, his
fate too is to construct even better creatures. Anteo's desire to find the roots and evolution of man connect him to a basic narrative impulse of man - the impulse to myth. His treatise is indeed a mythic construct but one designed to explain the creativity as well as the existence of man. Rewriting Darwin somewhat, Anteo sees the future of all life as inorganic (p. 48). 'The past is seen as "il passato del naturale" but the future is man's, and this means man's creativity: "il futuro dell' artificiale," that is, of all that can be made by man (p. 41, treatise italics). Man is a kind of automa-autore who creates another even greater than himself. Anteo writes in his treatise that in progressive civilizations which better living (mere "vivere") by developing existence, "esistenza" (from "esistere"), everything happens by a superimposition of new things. Therefore, he feels, evolution is the essence of the formation of the automa-autore (p. 171). Therefore he postulates a more powerful creator figure, not incompatible with the God of Christianity (pp. 54, 168, 194).

It is clear here that Volponi is attracted to the rural society of Italy and to the society too of rebels and misfits, because it is there that he can still find people who invent, who still have the courage to criticize their empirical reality and to dream and even construct a different one. According to his creator, Anteo's powerful fantasy lies in his search for a new reason behind engagement, human and political, and in his proving that man is not the slave of his surroundings, but the proud and potent animal who can modify both internal and external realities.\(^{15}\)

For the understanding of this concept of freedom and creation, Anteo's theories must be examined more closely. As a boy, looking at the stars, he felt he perceived the mechanism, the unity of the universe, in such a way that he could use this knowledge to create other elements which would fit into this construct (pp. 32-33). He looked at his feet and saw that someone had made them. This concept of fabrication, as if by an author, led him to conceive of not one, but a whole race of primary, absent creators and from these he proceeded to an anatomy of the immense "macchina del creato" and of the infinite "tecnica della creazione" (pp. 10-11). In this vision of wholeness: "Automa, Autore = Homo sapiens; Automa, non autore = regno minerale e vegetale" (p. 10, treatise italics). The source of life is therefore the same (automated), but man is differentiated by his authorial or creative capacity. When Anteo first sees Massimina he feels at once that he must have designed and created her in all her beauty. He too is an author.

Anteo's theory of creativity is a mechanical version of Coleridge's organic metaphor for the imagination and its constructs. The creative moment is still eternal and god-like. Anteo's powerful socialist-scientific rhetoric is almost untranslatable:

\(^{15}\) Volponi in the interview with Camon in *Il mestiere di scrittore* (Milano: Garzanti, 1973), p. 141.
What begins as a mechanical project aiming at perfection and happiness, ends as a recognition of the creative, poetic properties of that project that is Anteo's life; he equates poetic feeling and artistic vision and makes both instruments of science. He concludes that "la felicità delle macchine libere" is "una felicità artistica" (p. 274). And this happy, artistic, mechanical freedom is a social and moral one based on intention and result, as well as the very presence of fantasy.

Volponi too claims in an early autobiographical sketch that he writes with the idea of finding-through the novel form-another rational, poetic, and therefore historical possibility for reality. Just like the whole of Volponi's novel universe, Anteo's mechanical vision has its own moral code meant to relate to society or reality at large. It is because Anteo's machines have this moral dimension that physics becomes philosophy. Since the basis of his machine construction program was "profondamente morale," each move toward mechanical progress and perfection would be a move toward "un concetto superiore," as he claims, "in senso filosofico" (pp. 150-51).

This evolutionary creative meliorism leads to not a few questions regarding the ending of the novel. In a certain sense, Volponi is parodying the existential commonplace of the suicide. On the other hand, Anteo's death is also not a defeat. It is a rational, calculated act of freedom, not despair. It is a self-assassination for which the reader has been carefully prepared. Anteo makes a comment early in the novel that in telling all about his fate he risks abandoning the treatise and ending the journal just before he ends his own life, "soltanto il giorno prima di finire la mia vita" (p. 14). This is in part Tristram Shandy's problem of how to both live life and write about it, but it is also in part Anteo's intuition that the act of writing will lead him unavoidably to death, just as to reject the language of society because of all it represents can only lead to silence-or perhaps to new creation. "Adesso comincio"- "Now I begin"- are the final words of the novel.

Before this, however, Anteo begins preparations for his death coldly and carefully, as he always claimed he would when he began to feel he had reached that point at which he judged himself an inefficient machine, when his ideas became cumbersome and even compromised by "un meccanismo non controllabile" (p. 225)- that is, the point at which his scientific language became unclear, contaminated (by pain) with naturalistic artistic expressions (p. 263). Massimina's murder of their child, the antithesis of his human, aesthetic, and scientific hopes
for a more creative, free society, reveals to him the madness of society and makes his suicide decision firm—but never is it a defeat. It is an act of progress, "di andare avanti" (p. 273), even at the end.

Perhaps it is that Anteo gives up on the idea of reforming society by scientific treatise, realizing that he cannot change the world on a large scale, scientifically, but only on a limited one, through his journal-novel and through the reader to whom he addresses the words of his aesthetic vision. The reader, at least, will see the new referent of his language, the new way of viewing and creating things in his world. It is therefore fitting that his self-assassination weapon should be his amulet, both a work of art and a representative of the society he hates (that is, the religious statue he stole from the countess, which accompanied him on his travels and in his studies). His death is not a gesture of love for society, nor is it one of despair. It is the victory of the aesthetic poetic vision, a victory which Girolamo Aspri carries forward, living his fantasies as Joaquin Murieta beyond the last page of *Corporale*.

As this and the other linguistically narcissistic texts examined in the last chapter thematically reveal, there is a two-way pull of contradictory impulses in regarding the language of fiction—for both writer and reader. There is the impulse to communicate and so to treat language as a means (to order as well as to meaning), and there is also the impulse to make an artifact out of the linguistic materials and so to treat the medium as an end. The reader of overtly self-conscious works learns that he is indeed in a paradoxical position: while the text demands that he acknowledge the fictive and linguistic artifact that is its universe, it also teaches and indeed compels him to respond "vitality," to attribute human significance to the process of creating imaginary worlds in words.