

ARTICLES / SAGGI

PULP, NOIR OR NEO-NOIR? ALDO NOVE'S 'CANNIBAL STORIES' IN SUPERWOOBINDA

GRAZIA SUMELI WEINBERG
(University of South Africa)

Sommario

Uno dei maggiori giocolieri del linguaggio degli ultimi anni, Aldo Nove esordisce con una raccolta di racconti-monologhi, Woobinda e altre storie senza lieto fine, nel 1996, raccolta che egli amplierà in Superwoobinda nel 1998. Annoverato nel gruppo di novelli autori di Gioventù cannibale, antologia di racconti uscita anch'essa nel 1996, Nove, nella sua opera, oltre a dividerne il gusto compiaciuto per la violenza e l'orrore, esprime una morbosa ossessione per soggetti umani alla deriva, ripugnanti, psicopatici e del tutto plagiati dal fascino della pubblicità, del marchio, del mondo della televisione, del sesso. Libro di culto, Superwoobinda è soprattutto un'opera eclettica in cui si fondono i vari generi della cultura popolare – da pulp, trash e splatter al noir e neo-noir –, dando avvio al meccanismo dell'auto – riflessività in letteratura. Infatti, dalla struttura formulare dei racconti che verte sull'assurdo e il grottesco, scaturisce il comico, ovvero il tragi-comico quale antidoto all'influenza e alla potenza distruttiva che i media e la pubblicità possono avere sulla società dei consumi.

For the past decade, both in the cultural pages of newspapers and to a lesser degree in academic articles, critics in Italy have been seriously evaluating the impact on Italian literary traditions of a new generation of young writers. Since their debut in the mid Nineties, these authors have openly rejected the canon, refused to acknowledge any allegiance with their predecessors, and severed ties with the past. From Niccolò Ammaniti to Silvia Ballestra, Enrico Brizzi, Aldo Nove e Isabella Santacroce, to name a few, these writers have turned their attention to contemporary issues dominated by television, marketing and consumerism, and their use of language reflects the modalities of the cognitive world of the young, their emotions, their desires, their relationship with others (Mondello 2007:11). Indeed, they themselves were raised in the shadow of a TV set, absorbing the proliferation of commercials, the fast-track plots and quick-fix solution of action films, the kiss-and-tell psychology of talk shows, the tantalizing glitter of female nudity and the allure of explicit sex. However, most importantly, the language used by these authors expresses the violence and alienation inherent in the process of socialisation.

In this essay I shall turn my attention to Aldo Nove, a poet, prose writer, musician, literary critic and journalist, whose real name is Antonio Satta Centanin, and who is, in my view, one of the most outspoken and daring of the young writers. I shall deal with his most well-known work and one which has raised the interest of the public: his collection of short stories, *Woobinda e altre storie senza lieto fine* (Woobinda and other stories without a happy ending), published in 1996, and its enlarged edition under the title of *Superwoobinda* in 1998. 'Woobinda', an Aboriginal word meaning "tender of animals", is a title taken from a television serial shown in Italy in the 1970s and based on the events involving a veterinarian practising in a fictitious Australian town. Nove's

choice of this title for his collection of stories is casual: the author relying mainly on a mnemonic association with his own past.

From the start *Superwoobinda* presents a number of characteristics which belie the sketchy randomness of its content. The fifty-two stories which make up the collection – each centred on a specific character who is also the narrator – refer symbolically to an annual cycle, much like Pirandello's *Novelle per un anno*. Moreover, their reliance on a stereotype, the hero of a TV serial which endlessly reproduces in various permutations the vicissitudes of his life (in order for the genre to be economically successful), seals the fate of all of Nove's protagonists who collectively constitute a modern representation of everyman. Yet, since everyman in this case is presented as a depersonalized individual, it is perhaps the television set with an eye in the centre of its screen, as the drawing on the cover of the Einaudi edition clearly shows, and not the human figure, which may, after all, be the unchallenged protagonist of Nove's stories. It is this relationship of characters with television that reveals the latter as a powerful medium which rivals and, perhaps for the first time in modern society, even annuls parental influence. Nove's discourse spells out the predicament of the modern individual and the disquieting interfusion of the material and the immaterial – of real existence, verifiable beyond the screen, and the world endlessly promised by digital technology which has become our collective memory.

Restricted to a narrow urban environment, the world depicted in Nove's short stories relates the effects of consumerism on the individual in our modern society which, according to Jean Baudrillard, "has grasped the whole of life" (in Poster 1988:33). It will become increasingly apparent in the course of this essay how Nove's characters exemplify an extreme form of the human being's submission to the logic of the market. In his short stories Nove presents the "complete conditioning of time and

space” (Baudrillard in Poster 1988:33) influencing individual behaviour. Nove, moreover, provokes the reader by an excessive use of horror. It is this last feature in particular which links his writings to a group of other young authors dubbed the *Giovani cannibali* (Young Cannibals).

The term *cannibali* is derived from an anthology of stories, *Gioventù cannibale. La prima antologia dell'orrore estremo* (Young Cannibals. The first anthology of extreme horror), published by Einaudi in 1996. “The portrait these new writers offer of the Italians”, explains Stefania Lucamante (2001:13), “particularly of Italian youth, is a desperate and an alienated one, and the piercing ability with which they achieve the desired effect is what constitutes perhaps their innermost original trait”. Another achievement of these *cannibali*, in Lucamante’s view, is that they have created “a wholly original, unmistakably Italian form of Pulp firmly rooted in the tradition of the *giallo*, the Italian thriller” (2001:15). Nove’s work, because of its tendency to mingle genres and codes, fits the labels of pulp, noir and neo-noir which have invaded the latest forms of writing in Italy while at the same time earning a respectable place in the world of Italian letters as Sinibaldi (1999) and Mondello (2007) have promptly asserted.

Artistic endeavour, commonly associated with postmodernism, has long reflected a strong blurring of the lines between high/traditional art and popular forms of expression, between the written word and the visual medium. The trend set by the *Giovani cannibali* in fiction writing, as mentioned above, has attracted the attention of critics who have long disputed the merits and demerits of modern works, defining such products as *pulp*, not only because of their indebtedness to pop culture/art, but also for their open reference to Quentin Tarantino’s cult film *Pulp Fiction* which appeared on the screen in 1994. Following Tarantino’s example, and the success of *American Psycho*, a novel by Bret Easton Ellis written

in 1991, these popular Italian authors describe the horrors of metropolitan life characterized in their works by much bloodshed and outpouring of other organic liquids, by ultra violence everywhere, with the result that, in addition to *pulp*, their books could also be defined as *trash* and *splatter*.

Originally *pulp* in the Thirties referred to cheap, popular, American magazines dedicated to thrillers or science fiction stories of mediocre content. As a cinema genre, after Tarantino's film, *pulp* became synonymous with crude and bloody images. In Italy *pulp* in the hands of these young writers is distinguished by the influence of television, as in the case of Nove, and by a combination of modes of expression, from cinema to literature, from comic strips to music, all mingled in a context of sordid violence without any justification or objection. Moreover, the *cannibali* boastfully display a cynical view of life, taking ostensible pride in the commodification of their work. Their view is inherently sardonic, making fun of the ephemerality of their work as far as the market is concerned. In an act of open defiance towards established practices, Aldo Nove even attempts to empty the word *pulp* of its meaning – a label to which he owes his fame as a writer:

We have been given the label of *pulp* writers, and we have gladly accepted it; after all one label is as good as another; we are not writing for posterity/eternity, we have had our fifteen minutes of celebrity [as Andy Warhol said], and in fifteen minutes' time it will be given to someone else. We have played, we've had fun, and it is good that others can also enjoy themselves; we willingly will give them our place. (Nove in Mozzi 2008) (My translation)¹

¹ Ci hanno messo addosso l'etichetta di narratori *pulp*, e volentieri ce la siamo presa; tanto una vale l'altra; non scriviamo certo per l'eternità, oggi abbiamo avuto i nostri quindici minuti di celebrità

Nove's collection presents an astonishing collage of everything that is on offer today in the culture industry: from literary *pop art* to the myths and icons of pulp fiction; from *trash* to *splatter*. The form of the stories, as with the TV counterpart on which it is moulded, is formulaic and mechanical, following the genre's dictates of quick consumption and the demand for endless reproduction. The content is vulgar and outrageous, as well as contemporary, relying chiefly on violence and erotica. The stories are so brief and flimsy that even the term short seems inappropriate to describe what is, in fact, a collection of fragments, snippets of writing which often end abruptly, in the middle of a sentence or a word, inconsequentially as in the fashion of zapping, shifting from one TV channel to another, since there is no before or after the events described. The formal features reflect more accurately the format of TV ads or that of billboards. With these fragments, Nove indulges in his choice of aberration by presenting a typology of human behaviour worthy of a place in studies of the criminal and the mentally ill. Taken at face value, his characters are mostly weird and repulsive, his material graphically explicit and even offensive. Nove toys with transgression in which life is characterized by excesses, but this is not surprising since pulp is generally defined as a magazine or book containing lurid subject matter.

With the exception of critics like Marino Sinibaldi (1997), Filippo La Porta (1999), Stefania Lucamante (2001) and Elisabetta Mondello (2007), the academic establishment in Italy has on the whole snubbed the *cannibali*, categorically dismissing them as adolescents and faddists (Lucamante 2001). Critics such as Giulio Ferroni, writing in the pages of

(come diceva Andy Warhol), tra quindici minuti li avrà qualcun altro. Abbiamo giocato, ci siamo divertiti, è anche bello che possa giocare e divertirsi qualcun altro; lasciamo volentieri il posto.

a newspaper, accuse them of emptiness, of having nullified meaning as well as all forms of shared experience:

Today among young and less young fiction writers there is a widespread use of 'transgressive' genres: it is a form of literature which seems to have yielded to the new, more swift and 'visible' cultural forms, and which assumes that the way ahead is by provocation and excess, by plunging into distortions, in mush, in all types of wicked actions, by manipulating sex into every form and resolutions imaginable. Literature has always dealt with these things. But now one has the impression that these transgressions are reduced to a conforming reproduction of a norm dictated by the media, to plastic and polystyrene games, to transcriptions based on *pulp fiction*. These are acts through which the writer endorses the annihilation of experience, approves the loss of meaning and of any common 'civil' ground, and bends to the dominant power of advertising. (1996) (My translation)²

Critics like Ferroni forget, however, that literature's ability to reflect contemporary society by using all the available forms of expression is not only a matter of a suitable choice as he seems to suggest: 'transgression', as far as these young writers are concerned, lies in the very heart of pulp

² Nella narrativa, giovane e meno giovane, sembrano oggi molto diffusi dei generici modi 'trasgressivi': una letteratura che si sente alle corde rispetto a forme culturali più veloci e più 'visibili', sembra potersi fare strada solo con la provocazione e con l'eccesso, immergendosi in deformazioni, poltiglie, cattiverie di tutti i tipi, manipolando il sesso in tutte le forme e le scomposizioni possibili. Sono cose con cui la letteratura ha sempre commerciato. Ma ora si ha l'impressione che queste trasgressioni si riducano alla conformistica riproduzione di un imperativo posto dai media, a giochi di plastica e polistirolo, trascrizioni da *pulp fiction*: atti con cui lo scrittore sottoscrive la nullificazione dell'esperienza, ratifica la perdita di ogni significato e di ogni terreno 'civile' e condiviso, si piega al dominio dell'effetto pubblicitario.

as a genre because of its status as a popular art form and because of its fluidity in incorporating the most heterogeneous material.

In “Cannibalizing the Avant-garde” (in Lucamante 2001: 38-56), Pierpaolo Antonello further argues that the *Giovani cannibali* cannot be considered an avant-gardiste movement similar to the ‘Gruppo 63’, for by commodifying their own works they play with subversive intention. He states, moreover, that the *Giovani cannibali* are excluded from any avant-garde lineage because they fail to attack art as an institution. The whole operation, he argues, “is not ideologically or stylistically motivated, but is rather *constructed* as a form of publishing promotion, as a precise utilization of the traits that are considered to be subversive instruments and literary innovation for commercial ends” (in Lucamante 2001: 44).

However, it is ironic that two of the doyens of Italian literature and members of the same avant-garde ‘Gruppo 63’ have understood the spirit of the times from the moment the *Giovani cannibali* was launched. Edoardo Sanguineti (1996) has words of praise for this new wave of writers in Italian letters:

Anarchic revolution is the true value of our century. The best fruits of the twentieth century in all fields, from the political to the literary-philosophical, owe their origin to transgression in relation to what exists. The new literary genre, the so-called ‘literature of the young’, which has emerged in recent years, that is, literary works written by the young and for the young, which speak of their world of rock, of TV, of computers, is also transgressive. [...] At last we have a literature worthy of the utmost respect. (My translation)³

³ La rivolta anarchica è il vero valore del secolo. I migliori frutti del Novecento, in tutti i campi, da quello politico a quello letterario-filosofico, hanno origine da una trasgressione rispetto

Renato Barilli (1996) also adds his own positive reflections:

The aim of narrative works worthy of note is to move beyond the known, to explore new hunting grounds. [...] For certain, we have writers today who are 'hot', virulent and transgressive, who are inclined to practise some form of mannerism, but the entire literary-artistic search is always a question of manner, of stylistic choices; one cannot expect temperance, or the holding up of a docile and conforming mirror. [...] Everyone can see that life has undergone a process of acceleration. Why, therefore, should these writers be asked to 'slow down'? How can one expect that new authors adopt a grammar or lexicon which has become increasingly ossified, removed from present realities? (My translation)⁴

The various literary genres chosen by Aldo Nove, be they *pulp*, *cannibali*, *horror*, *thriller*, and so forth, can also be grouped under the label of what in fiction has been called *noir*. For Mondello (2008), *noir* writings reject a definite form; do not presuppose a happy ending; do not accept the

all'esistente. Il nuovo genere letterario 'letteratura giovanile', nato negli ultimi anni, e cioè una letteratura non solo scritta da giovani ma che parla anche dei giovani, del loro mondo del rock, della tv, dei computer, è anch'essa trasgressiva. [...] Finalmente è apparsa sulla scena letteraria una generazione di tutto rispetto [...].

⁴ Il compito di ogni narrativa che si rispetti [è] portarsi al di là del noto, frugare in nuovi terreni di caccia. [...] Certo, statisticamente oggi prevalgono i trasgressivi 'caldi', virulenti, portati a praticare un qualche manierismo; ma l'intera ricerca artistico letteraria è sempre questione di maniere, di scelte stilistiche; non si può pretendere da essa la medietà, lo specchio docile e conforme. [...] Che la vita abbia subito un'accelerazione, è sotto gli occhi di tutti, e allora perché gli scrittori giovani dovrebbero 'rallentare'? Come pretendere che i nuovi autori rientrino in una grammatica o in un lessico sempre più ossificati e lontani dall'attualità.

boundaries between Good and Evil; do not reassure the reader with the discovery of the killer, but rather lead him to face the disturbing and anguishing horrors of a condition which exists despite the fact that much is done to exorcise it. Fabio Giovannini admits that *noir* is not really a category, but rather a tendency of the *imaginaire* that cuts across genres and subgenres alike, adding however that it does possess some essential traits:

Noir has become [...] a general label that covers all violent and dark stories (but not supernatural), with central characters who are ambiguous or negative, and often having no happy ending. Or it can become a synonym for thriller (*giallo*) [...] In Italy the term noir is used both for the classic type of investigative stories as well as for humourous parodies. (1997:9)⁵

The stories in *Superwoobinda* present a stylized and fragmented world in which the absence of an outside reality produces horror and disgust shifting beyond the boundaries of morality. Nove's characters, who are the living reflections of their two-dimensional television counterparts, have no psychological depth and portray a delirious and disconcerting world-view. Claudia Bernardi has captured the essence of Nove's writing in the following comment:

The pathological condition of his characters is expressed through a language flattened to the level of media advertising

⁵ Noir diventa [...] un'etichetta elastica che può coprire tutte le storie violente, cupe (ma non soprannaturali) e con personaggi centrali ambigui o negativi, spesso prive di lieto fine. Oppure può tramutarsi in sinonimo di "giallo". [...] in Italia sembra andare bene la parola noir tanto per le classiche investigazioni del giallo quanto per le parodie umoristiche.

jargon, by way of exclusively paratactic sentence constructions, vocabulary streamlining, repetitiveness of psychological situations, homologation of registers. The shock effect of Nove's stories, with their bloody and violent endings, derives from a monotonous linguistic surface meant to echo a flattened human perception. (1999:6)

Yet Nove's form of violence is paradoxically not without an ethical, and hence political, content. The excessive and grotesque representation of violence in these stories is hyperbolic and functions as a self-reflexive device which triggers much amusement in the reader, creating in his/her consciousness the necessary condition for ironic distance. Humour, or better still black humour, in Aldo Nove, as a form of parody of the *noir*, betrays ultimately the flatness of the surface and offers an unsentimental critique of the state of modern society.

Though the stories in *Superwoobinda* unfold a gruesome sequence of random acts of inhumanity, Nove's representation of brutality is qualified by a recurring feature in late twentieth century popular culture: the counterpoint of extreme violence and humour which plays on the emotion of the reader thanks to pulp's notorious use of sensationalism and kitsch. By means of repulsion and attraction, the reader is inextricably drawn into a web of signifiers all pointing to a multiplicity of readings. Indeed, the presence of simultaneous and contrasting reactions has the power to disorientate the reader, to alert him/her to a blurring taking place between reality and fiction. This positioning of the reader has been described as the "space between" created by black humour, where the "tragic and the comic [are] not construed as simply tragic-comic but as a puzzling experience calling forth understanding and intelligence" (Horvay Barnes 1978:17). Moreover:

Black Humor must be understood as the space between emotions, between words, between allegiances, ideas, or states of consciousness. [It] reveals itself as open-ended process [and] in placing rational man in an irrational world, sets up a dialectical conflict without resolution [...] for only the process remains. (Horvay Barnes 1978:7)

As such, black humour draws attention more to its own practices, to the techniques of its own art rather than to the finished product. Viewed in this light, Nove's work is self-reflexive, relying on the sub-text for ironic effects.

Humour, according to Umberto Eco (1983:258), demands an explanation for the laughter, and thus functions as a hermeneutic practice. Humour is a conscious and explicit critique of the comic which is always linked to an underlying norm to which the characters conform. Humour goes beyond the mere reflection on narrative instances and operates on the metasemiotic and metatextual levels. However, can one speak of norms for an author who is aware of the collapse of all grand narratives and metanarratives and has opted instead for fragmentation and discontinuity? Comparing the condition of the artist in an advanced capitalist society to that of the schizophrenic, Fredric Jameson describes it as an "experience of isolated, disconnected, discontinuous material signifiers that fail to link up into a coherent sequence; [...] an undifferentiated vision of the world in the present" (1996:195-6). Nove's characters, for example, simply cannot dwell in the realm of verisimilitude: they are stylized and reduced to stereotypes, figures with no real weight.

I believe that, by turning to popular literature, a product of mass consumption, Nove creates his own referential code in exploring the condition of the individual in the post-industrial age. And by way of varieties of aesthetic play, of which the juxtaposition of violence and

humour is the key, he brings to the reader's attention the inherent contradictions of modernity. Clive Bloom notices how many critics find pulp too fleeting for serious consideration, too mundane, banal and bizarre. It is a genre which is "at best repetitive and at worst abject" (1996:14). By way of contrast, he amplifies his own opinion:

Pulp is public expression lived out privately. [...] Pulp is the child of capitalism and is tied to the appearance of the masses and the urban [...]. As such it is the embodiment of capitalism aestheticized, consumerized and *internalized*. Hence it is both oppressive and liberating, both mass manipulation and anarchic individualistic destiny. Pulp is our daily, natural heightened experience: a product and a channel for a moment in human self-consciousness and its aspirations lived in the banal and in the now. (1996:14)

Pulp's strength, it seems, lies in the ability to combine the conventional, dictated by market forces, and the anarchic, postulated by modern consumerist multiplicity. The transient nature of pulp and its illicit and secret pleasures are so seductive as to constitute *per se* a rebellion against accepted norms of morality. According to Bloom, in the marginal world of pulp, in its nonconformity and subversion, and in its status as an underclass of literary production is the essence of the imagination of our times (1996:14).

The dominant feature in Nove's stories is the way characters celebrate their status as consumers and their uniqueness as individuals in their freedom to express personal preferences. However, in seeking self-fulfilment and self-expression through the objects of desire they expose the underlying system of psychological conditioning at work. Objects are no longer consumed according to their usefulness or to specific needs.

Advertising has invested them with intended meaning, thus creating a network of images or signs which have the capacity to incite desire, endlessly. Jean Baudrillard argues that, through planned motivation, the advertising industry “takes over the moral responsibility for all of society and replaces a puritanical morality with a hedonistic morality of pure satisfaction, like a new state of nature at the heart of hypercivilization” (in Poster 1988:12-3). By defining themselves in relation to objects, Nove’s characters, it seems, now need only conform to themselves.

By sharing their same ethos as consumers, Nove identifies with his characters, be they mostly hyperbolic, purely fictional, replicas of himself as everyman. His choice of representation, therefore, can be viewed as a quest in which to affirm his own “anarchic individualistic destiny”. In the blurb to the pocket edition of *Superwoobinda*, Nove is mockingly defiant when describing his own experience:

Woobinda is a book I have written to gain success with women and to appear in a show on the telly. I’ve made it. *Superwoobinda* is even greater. There are lots more new stories! I tell the story of a terrible dream I had. I tell the story of the time I went to see the Spice Girls at a live show. I tell in an engaging way of the times I went to the telly. Once on TV I met Alberto Bevilacqua. I have a neighbour, a lady, who is in love with Bevilacqua. Myself as a child, I dreamed of becoming like Bevilacqua. In my opinion, with *Superwobinda* I’ve made it. (My translation)⁶

⁶ *Woobinda* è un libro che avevo scritto per avere successo con le donne, per partecipare a qualche trasmissione televisiva. Ce l’ho fatta. *Superwoobinda* è molto di piú. Ci sono un sacco di storie nuove! Racconto di un sogno tremendo che ho fatto. Racconto quella volta che sono andato a vedere le Spice Girls dal vivo. Racconto in modo avvincente tutte le volte che sono andato alla tele. Una volta, alla tele ho conosciuto Alberto Bevilacqua. Io ho una vicina di casa che è

Nove's attitude is, of course, both playful and provocative, and it certainly borders the deliberate in its anti-modernist stance. Much has been said about the predicament of the contemporary writer who has to come to terms with every product invented and diffused by the media; with the myths of modern artifice which have replaced the natural; and with the absence of an autonomous subject. Nove's self-conscious celebration of the insubstantial points moreover to a conflation of art and life where both share a single destiny, each echoing the other to reveal that human interaction is the effect of language and that there is no longer a position outside of culture (Jameson 1996:185-202). "Literature", says Nove, "is a constant, osmotic and deranged interchange with all languages" (in Cuccaroni 2007).⁷ It is a world in which meaning has been lost and the materiality of words has been transformed into an image (Jameson 1996:197). Because of its fluidity as a commodity, pulp or *noir* serves as a dynamic model for Nove's own personal fantasies as a writer. Given their anarchic status, outside of the literary canon, these genres in fact act as a perfect conduit for the superficial, the obsessive and the sentimental, and for the wholesale plundering of everything that culture can produce. In other words, Nove is drawing from what Roland Barthes defines as the 'infinite text' (Barthes in Hutcheon 1988:128). According to Linda Hutcheon, if Barthes's definition of the intertext is understood as "the impossibility of living outside the infinite text", then intertextuality is the very condition of textuality (1988:128).

innamorata di Bevilacqua. Io, da bambino sognavo di diventare come Bevilacqua. Secondo me, con *Superwoobinda* ce l'ho fatta.

⁷ La letteratura è un interscambio continuo, osmotico e confusionale con tutti i linguaggi.

Nove's intertextual practice includes elements of pastiche, parody and, at times, of satire. Hutcheon in her book on parody declares that our present systems have the ability "to refer to themselves in an unending mirroring process" (1985:1). For Jameson, on the other hand, modern works can only be defined as pastiche because they mimic

without parody's ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something *normal* compared to which what is imitated is rather comic. Pastiche is blank parody, parody that has lost its sense of humour. (1996:188-9)

This may be true for the gratuitous imitation of anything that is available from the past in the many video clips, films or commercials, but in the case of Aldo Nove's 'plundering' something is at work which defies Jameson's definition. If, as Hutcheon suggests, no integration into a new context can avoid altering meaning, then modern parody, like Nove's use of pastiche, "is repetition with critical distance marked by its range of intent – from the ironic and playful to the scornful and ridiculing"(Hutcheon 1985:6). Nove's stance, not unlike that of Swift,⁸ is surprisingly serious and unequivocal when answering the following questions during an interview:

What is the role of literary language (e.g.: communicative, expressive, social, revolutionary)? Do you think that other discourses and means of communication are more suitable

⁸ In his letter to Alexander Pope, 29 September 1725, Swift declares that "[...] the chief end I propose to my self in all my labors is to vex the world rather than divert it", *The Writings of Jonathan Swift*, Robert A. Greenberg & William B. Piper (eds), Norton Critical Edition, N.Y., Norton, 1973: 584.

for the purpose today? What is the relation between literature and these means of communication?

A.N. I would need at least one hundred pages to answer your question (to try and reach some understanding). I'll attempt to do so in five lines (five and a half). Literary discourse gives me the chance (the only one I have at my disposal, since I can't act and I sing very badly) of provoking. 'To provoke' means 'to turn towards something'. With irony. And anger. Towards reality. Which is a complete mess (in Cuccaroni 2007). (My translation).⁹

Moreover, for Hutcheon, modern works are not restricted to a parody of the same medium or genre (1985:18). Nove's adoption of pulp and *noir*, therefore, is parodic in that it allows within its structure the ironic inversions of the most disparate manifestations of popular culture. A pertinent example is the formula adopted to introduce a great many of his characters, a formula which imitates directly the style and content of individual letters sent to agony columns in popular weekly magazines: "Sono una ragazza di ventisette anni. Mi chiamo Stafania e sono Ariete cuspidi Toro. Mio marito si chiama Gianni, ha quarant'anni e fa l'agente di finanza" (I am twenty seven years old. My name is Stefania and I am an Aries on the cusp with Taurus. My husband's name is Gianni, he's forty and he is a customs officer) (Nove 1998:17); "Siamo un gruppo di ragazzi. Marco 17 anni, Cancro, non fidanzato. Enrico, 17 anni, Gemelli,

⁹ Che ruolo affidi al linguaggio letterario (es.: comunicativo, espressivo, sociale, rivoluzionario)? Pensi che in tale ruolo altri linguaggi e mezzi di comunicazione siano oggi più efficaci? In che rapporto deve essere la letteratura con tali mezzi?

A.N. Per rispondere ci vorrebbero cento pagine (per cercare di capirci qualcosa). Provo a farlo in cinque righe (cinque righe e mezzo). Il linguaggio letterario è per me occasione (l'unica di cui dispongo, cantando malissimo e non sapendo recitare) di provocare. 'Provocare' vuol dire 'rivolgere verso qualcosa'. Con ironia. E rabbia. Verso la realtà. Che è un gran casino.

non fidanzato. Salvatore, 16 anni, Toro, non fidanzato” (We are a group of friends. Marco, 17 years old, Cancer, not engaged. Enrico, 17 years old, Gemini, not engaged. Salvatore, 16 years old, Taurus, not engaged) (Nove 1998:55); “Mi chiamo Rosalba, ho ventisette anni e sono un attimino bella. [...] Ciò dipende dal fatto che sono Bilancia ascendente Bilancia, cioè curo molto l’estetica” (My name is Rosalba and I am twenty seven years old and I am a tiny bit beautiful. [...] This is because I am a Libra with Libra ascendant, and I care a lot for my looks) (Nove 1998:69). In these instances, Nove’s text can be viewed as satirical because the parody of the formula highlights an obsession with identity where only pseudo-individuality is possible in the context of a culture of unfettered consumerism. Indeed, reliance by each character on mass-produced human features – such as the signs of the horoscope – to help them differentiate their personality from that of others shows not only a lack of imagination, but a blind belief in the concrete referentiality for everything that is found in the media.

A brief look at Nove’s opening story ‘Il bagnoschiuma’ (The Bath Foam)¹⁰ will exemplify his brand of black humour and the double coding which underscores it. If, on the one hand, the story manifests its open allegiance to the world of pulp, and hence offers itself up as a product for immediate consumption, on the other, it unmasks the ideological effects on the individual of modern consumer society resulting in a progressive abstraction of commodities from any real human context. What emerges most vividly from this juxtaposition of the two registers, however, is that the character’s relation to the object of his desire is not direct, despite his strong illusion of agency, but always mediated by the sign.

¹⁰ There is no English translation of *Superwoobinda*. See the “Unpublished/Inediti” section of this issue for my version of this story.

In this story the narrating voice defines the parameters of referentiality, thus giving us a glimpse of the set of coordinates which constitute his reality: television and publicity. As a subject he is so enmeshed in the images promoted by advertising that he can no longer recall their usefulness as products. On the contrary, memories of the running horse connected to Vidal bath foam have become part of his *imaginaire*. Neither does Vidal bath foam have any exchange value, that is, of drawing meaning from its equivalence to some outside standard, in this case to Pure & Vegetal bought by his parents, for any feasible comparison between the properties of the two products (like keeping the skin moist) is ignored by the subject. Instead, he has personalized and internalized these images to such an extent that they replace all real life counterparts. Hence, no identity is possible outside the object of his desire. As signifiers, moreover, images become so emotionally charged, so vested with a spiritual dimension, so imbued with a sense of purpose or meaning that they have the power to act as symbols of a new ideology or religion. Consequently, the subject's self-possession and the coherence of his argument effectively describe his real pain and anger at the withdrawal of the object of gratification, thus justifying his deed: the killing of his parents. He is morally outraged by his parents' lack of consideration which he understands as a denial of his very being. He lives, therefore, in a state of hyperreality where signs and simulation dictate the nature of his existence. It is a world of simulacra in which objects are endlessly reproduced and have long lost their original value. "Simulation", says Baudrillard, "is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" (in Poster1988:166).

It is by his choice of narrator and focalization that Nove's stories in *Superwoobinda* could *anti litteram* also be defined as *neo-noir*, a term referring to the writings of groups of authors in Milan, Bologna and Rome who, having superseded the *cannibali*, claim for themselves a new fictional genre based largely on the precepts of the *noir*- in which the narrating I as the main character is also the killer. *Neo-noir* fiction describes moods, emotions, violent acts from the perspective of the 'baddy', such as to involve the reader in an insidious process of identification (Mondello 2008). The reader is therefore forced to look at reality from the point of view of the perpetrator; to accept the psychology of the dark side of an individual, and to understand the motivation and pleasure of a subject who at a rational level would be considered a monster. According to Mondello (2008), *Neo-noir* writings place the reader in a disturbing situation which reflects the horror of daily living, since evil is not to be found elsewhere, but under the appearance of normality. Some *Neo-noir* writers have polemically accused the *cannibali* of not being true to the genre (Giovannini & Tentori 1997:35-45). They claim that the *cannibali*'s use of irony and the grotesque as a distancing device smacks of sensationalism and panders to the rules of the market and do not allow the reader to come face to face with crude reality and the deeper tensions within each individual.

The mapping of the position of the reader in Nove's *Bagnoschiuma*, serves to unravel the double coding embedded in the text. Laughter is naturally engendered at the very beginning of the short story by the juxtaposition of the subject's obsession with trivia and the seriousness of the crime. A double murder has been committed over a bottle of bath foam. It is seemingly both absurd and incomprehensible. Laughter is further sustained by the maniacal logic of the speaking subject in which an ironic inversion takes place in the normal order of relationships

between objects and people which, in this case, leads to the obliteration of parental authority. And laughter, in all these instances, turns into loathing when considering that the character's deed is based upon premises which are fundamentally meaningless. Repulsion and laughter, however, are not the only responses called forth by the text. Attraction is the other, even if it is secretive and illicit. In spite of Nove's hyperbolic rendering of his story, the setting is all too familiar to us, the ruthless affirmation of self all too present, thus making identification with his character inevitable, however vicariously. Though his actions, as inscribed by the choice of genre, may belong to the world of fantasy and excesses, they are not improbable. All too often are we reminded of such incidents in the headlines of newspapers. Our attraction, therefore, has its chilly side. Paul Lewis in the Preface to his book *Comic Effects* describes "humor as one of the three primary responses to incongruity – the other two being curiosity and fear" (1989:x). I believe that Nove's text has elicited all three.

Bibliography

- | | | |
|-------------------|------|---|
| Barilli, Renato | 1996 | "Se non pesca nel torbido, il 'buonista' è una lagna". <i>Corriere della sera</i> , 7 maggio. |
| Bernardi, Claudia | 1999 | "Experiments In Writing And Criticism: Ricercare (1993-1999)". <i>Bulletin of the Society for Italian Studies</i> , 32:3. 10 April 2008 http://www.leeds.ac.uk/sis/publications/bulletin/bulletin1999.pdf . |
| Bloom, Clive | 1996 | <i>Cult Fiction. Popular Reading and Pulp Theory</i> . London: Macmillan. |

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|------|--|
| Cuccaroni, Valerio | 2007 | “Lo scrittore e il mondo”. 7 October
http://sparajurij.com/ta.../INTERVISTA1%20scrittore%20e%20il%20mondo.ht . |
| Easton Ellis, Bret | 1991 | <i>American Psycho</i> . New York: Vintage Books. |
| Eco, Umberto | 1983 | “Il comico e la regola”. <i>Sette anni di desiderio</i> . Milano: Bompiani. |
| Ferroni, Giulio | 1996 | <i>Corriere della sera</i> 30 aprile. In Mozzi “Pulp oggi, quale domani? Il caso italiano”. 3 April 2008 http://nautilus.ashmm.com/9608it/mozzi/mozzi2.htm . |
| Giovannini, Fabio | 2000 | <i>Storia del Noir. Dai fantasmi di Edgar Allan Poe al grande cinema di oggi</i> . Roma: Castelveccchi. |
| Giovannini Fabio & Tentori, Antonio | 1997 | <i>Cuore di Pulp. Antologia di racconti italiani</i> . Viterbo: Stampa Alternativa. |
| Horvay Barnes, Linda | 1978 | <i>The Dialectics of Black Humor: Process and Product</i> . Berne: Peter Lang. |
| Hutcheon, Linda | 1985 | <i>A Theory Of Parody</i> . London: Methuen. |
| Hutcheon, Linda | 1988 | <i>A Poetics Of Postmodernism</i> . New York and London: Routledge. |
| Jameson, Fredric | 1996 | “Postmodernism And Consumer Society”. In John Belton (ed) <i>Movies and Mass Culture</i> . New Jersey: Rutgers University Press. |
| La Porta, Filippo | 1999 | <i>La nuova narrativa italiana</i> . Torino: Bollati Boringhieri. |

- Lewis, Paul 1989 *Comic Effects. Interdisciplinary Approaches to Humor in Literature*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Lucamante, Stefania (ed) 2001 *Italian Pulp Fiction. The New Narrative of the Giovani Cannibali Writers*. Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses.
- Mondello, Elizabetta 2007 *In principio fu Tondelli*. Milano: Il Saggiatore.
- Mozzi, Giulio 2008 “Pulp oggi, quale domani? Il caso italiano”. 3 April <http://nautilus.ashmm.com/9608it/mozzi/mozzi2.htm>.
- Nove, Aldo 1998 *Superwoobinda*. Torino: Einaudi.
- Poster, Mark (ed) 1988 *Jean Baudrillard. Selected Writings*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Sanguineti, Edoardo 1996 *La Stampa* 4 maggio. In Mozzi, “Pulp oggi, quale domani? Il caso italiano”. 3 April 2008 <http://nautilus.ashmm.com/9608it/mozzi/mozzi2.htm>.
- Sinibaldi, Massimo 1997 *Pulp. La letteratura nell'era della simultaneità*. Roma: Donzelli Editore.