

The Mediatic Body of the *Cannibale* Literature

1. Introduction

Only three years after its emergence into the Italian literary panorama, we are already able to historicize a phenomenon like the Pulp or *Cannibale* narrative fiction. This should not come as a surprise, as this has been, in many ways a phenomenon of literary consumption and, as such, is destined to become an ephemeral one. Thus, three years after its appearance, we can paradoxically celebrate its sudden *dis*-appearance. Aside from the phenomenon in itself, some of the authors among whose work has been defined by such labeling, have left a profound imprint while they are simultaneously marked as significant 'traces' of aspects of the Italian society that go beyond the boundaries of the literary realm. To clarify the concept, these authors have placed their texts and their participation in Italian literature at the crossroads of literary, anthropologic, technologic and mediatic mutations, while becoming 'narrative interpreters' of such mutations.

Before proceeding in this assessment of their role in Italian literature, it is necessary to briefly explain how this group of writers saw its literary birth. Even inherent to their denomination as a 'group', there is a notion that should be revisited. While it has always been problematic to classify assorted writers and artists within literary groups (even for those who, surely, had much in common, especially a strong theoretical base), it appears even more difficult to mention the word 'group' in respect to writers like Niccolò Ammaniti, Isabella Santacroce, Aldo Nove, Matteo Galiano and others. To speak, in their case, of a 'conscious' common critical or theoretical substratum could, in fact, be misleading. This lack of such common theoretical substratum constitutes only

one of the reasons for which, in his essay, Pierpaolo Antonello discants a specific avantgardistic denomination for the *Cannibali*. In this terminological confusion, Italian criticism has taken with great frequency alternatively names of authors like Tiziano Scarpa, Enrico Brizzi, Simona Vinci and Silvia Ballestra both in and out of this 'group'. Each of these authors has found the label '*Cannibale*' or Pulp to be a rather cumbersome burden to carry, even if, at some point, all of them have dealt, or still deal, with topics and stylistic elements that are definable as ones pertaining to *Cannibali* or 'pulp'. The truth of the matter is that the term 'group' is a convenient way for the classificatory intent which underlies any discipline, literature included, to catalog and define with names, adjectives, and propriety, its own objects. An obsolete and rigid instrumentation has been thus utilized in order to delimit the new emerging field. I believe that never more apparently than now, has a field in question revealed itself to be virtually without boundaries. Its vastness is not that which determines this absence of 'borders' but rather, it is the extreme indeterminacy of the field in question.

It is not a mere coincidence, in fact, that the literary polemic that gave general recognition to the *Cannibali* writers' birth was fueled by a surprising and unusual terminologic distinction, which eventually led to define the traits of their writings. This is the distinction between *buoni* and *cattivi*. Within the past few years, such distinction has simultaneously covered a double role in Italian culture: on the one hand, it has been used as a critical category within the literary field while, on the other hand, it has represented a form of political demarcation in the rising era of the *Ulivo*, the party that saw Romano Prodi, Walter Veltroni and other Italian politicians as the *buoni* of the

“Seconda Repubblica.”¹ For a strange concomitance of events, the *buoni-cattivi* [bad-good] terminologic dichotomy has thus contributed both to the birth of a new generation of writers, the so-called pulp or ‘*Cannibali*’ ones, and to a new political formation, as well. The paradox, or the irony of it, lies in the fact that both spheres, the literary as well as the political, have denoted themselves by marking their respective categories in opposite ways. Within the political sphere, the *buonisti* have represented, as they still do, the winning faction, the center-left coalition that in 1996 aspired to lead Italian politics and to bring the country into the European Community within the much decanted (or deplored) Maastricht parameters. Within the literary sphere, however, the situation was the opposite of that in politics: good-*buoni* (feelings) were, and are, at exclusive use of the bad-*cattivi* (writers). Conversely, bad feelings, trash, and pulp were, and are, the distinctive traits of the good writers (the best of Italian literature in these years).

The *querelle* on the *cattivi*-good writers, on the *Cannibali*, that is, is born out of the juxtaposition of their works with the work of other authors, the *buoni*-bad writers, such as Marco Lodoli, Susanna Tamaro, Sandro Onofri, to name a few. This fragmentation is primarily born from newspapers and weekly publications (*Espresso*, *Panorama*, etc.), and only subsequently has it landed to literary symposia, among which “RicercaRE” in Reggio Emilia has been the most attentive at registering the pulse of

1. See Goffredo Fofi’s *Sotto l’ulivo* for more insights on this particular stage of Italian politics and literary politics.

Italian literature. A series of articles summarized by Alberto Piccinini on the pilot number of *La Bestia* (www.bestia.org/bestia1/Bombe/piccinini.html) gives a full account of the general adverse position of Italian criticism to the arising *Cannibale* group, particularly offering details of the gratuitous cannonades against the new literary trend. By analogy, it is this long series of articles summarized by Piccinini that determined the formation of the group of *buoni* and *cattivi* critics, maintaining, in this way, the ambiguity that often characterizes the Italian *intelligentsia*. This ambiguity resides in both sides of the front; evidence of this is Giulio Mozzi's *Manifesto* (is he a 'Pulp'writer? Is he a *Cannibale* writer?), a document that proclaimed the birth of a literary *buonismo* which very little had to do with the forming *Cannibale* literature.

In the reality, there was one issue that neither critical side, the 'good' critics nor the 'bad' ones, thought of raising within this *querelle*: That is, that the critical category of the *buonismo* did not have, and does not, have any historical, logical, critical or philosophical foundation. Quite the opposite, the concept that good sentiments could produce good literature is certainly ancient, but it is also erroneous as it has always been denied by the facts. Ethics, a specific ethical thought, has never been the object of literary art. The problem is ill placed, almost in a naive fashion, as if being good or bad could actually be a direct consequence of writing about good sentiments or bad ones. The *querelle* has, afterwards, been astutely inflated in magazines and newspapers, with a marketing *escamotage* that can be credited with escalating the sales figures of books placed at both sides of this 'line', and with strengthening the respective ideological positions in both "factions." The only visible result of all this pseudo-polemic has been that of creating terminological confusion, often sustained by a dose of bad faith, both cultural and editorial, about a suspected lack of ethics, need for ethics, and so forth.

Harold Bloom, a critic who, in his investigations surely never dealt with the Italian *Cannibali* authors, addresses the issue correctly:

If we read the Western Canon in order to form our social, political, or personal moral values, I firmly believe we will become monsters of selfishness and exploitation. To read in the service of any ideology is not, in my judgement, to read at all. (29-30)

Bloom speaks as a literary historian and critic when declaring that the main theme of his investigation, which for him evidently coincides with the *object* of literature, focuses on the aesthetic.

Aside from the bizarre nomenclative issues regarding the 'group,' there is a second aspect regarding the birth of Italian pulp literature which is a point of interest. It is a given that this trend has, from its start, enjoyed a series of attentions, of appreciation and of harsh criticism that stupefy due to the fact that this excess of information and 'critical' exuberance sometimes occurs before a production which does not always reveal itself to be at the height of such attention. From 1996 until today, countless reviews and journalistic reportages on this group, both on private and public radio stations and on television, have been done. This is a peculiar phenomenon as Italian literature has never been in 'good health,' at least on the more limited narrative/novelistic aspect of it. The 'therapy' found lately for its eternally 'critical conditions' does not concern an actual improvement of the narrative structures and the intents of the individual writers, but, on the contrary (and coherently with Pierpaolo Antonello's findings) it consists of the design and realization of a better marketing launch in its favor. The literary *packaging* has become the new battle field for any editorial production that tries to strive in our asphyxiated book market. The *Cannibali's* product emerges from this perspective: first of all, these authors are born as a name

and as a category, while the press campaigns have done the rest. And they have often been accused of obscenity, of vulgarity, of gratuitous or excessive use of the horrific and of consumerism, so that astounded Italian readers/buyers would be convinced into buying the new literary product.

The impression deriving from all this chaos is that many of these writers and denigratory critics have used the pen to recall, once again, those who thought they were the tutelary Gods of other, never quite accepted, artistic experiences of the Italian twentieth century. And thus, even against the authors' specific claim of disregarding a specific influence for their works, a screening of all the possible ascendencies of the *Cannibali* writers, from Filippo Marinetti up to the Gruppo '63 avant-garde, has been carried out incessantly in order to 'reveal' a sense of continuity between the *Cannibali* and other preceding groups, and, as a corollary of this found thread, likewise would their scarce literary value be perceived as a Romantic 'lack of originality.' This excessive attention of the critics has also turned into a paroxystic attempt to label the group with any kind of names and labels, even insulting ones. Randomly drawing from Piccinini's aforementioned article, militant critics have called them 'pulp,' continuing with 'cattivi,' 'splatter' (*La Repubblica*) and, in a sort of ascending climax, one both fast and cruel, we arrive from Paolo Guzzanti's 'trash' (with definitions taken from the Treccani encyclopedia), to Paolo Di Stefano's 'nuovi *freak*,' in passing, 'cattivisti,' 'maledettisti,' 'tremendisti' to ultimate apex, reached by Roberto Cotroneo's definition of them, as authors of "*pulp trash fuck and virtual insanity*."² The difference between such neologizing fervor and the actual depth of textual analysis is, I could not stress enough,

2. In English in the text.

quite disconcerting. As a result of this disparity between the clamor arisen from the *querelle* and the actual work on the texts, these assorted authors have been artificially placed within a group that does not retain a thematic nor a stylistic common denominator save its explicit intention and desire to reject the most immediate Italian literary past, a communal tendency for *trashy* situations, profuse blood, wounded flesh and, finally, certain anagraphic commonalities. While reading the huge archive of articles already piled on them (meticulously kept by large publishers such as Einaudi and Feltrinelli), the presence of these authors would appear of no extraordinary interest, except from a sociological point of view, as was earlier mentioned. The truth, however, is that these writers do *indeed* have something to say.

After my preamble on the origins and distorted criticism about this narrative trend, I enter the topic of my essay, which is a double kind of analysis. The starting point of the present study is the book that, both on the wave of the literary-journalistic polemics of 1996, and those of *RicercaRe* of the same year, saw its publication that fall; *Gioventù cannibale: la prima antologia dell'orrore estremo*, an anthology edited by Daniele Brolli and published in the Einaudi 'Stile libero' series. I will focus the object of my analysis on two of the anthologized stories: "Seratina," by Niccolò Ammaniti and Luisa Brancaccio, and Aldo Nove's "Il mondo dell'amore."³ I will first take into examination few thematic elements that mark these so-called *Cannibali* writers. I will then analyze themes that are intertwined with the more specifically fictional ones, but external to the narrative, or at least external to my actual textual analysis, as they deal with more theoretical issues. The red line connecting the two different readings is the

3. For both stories, I have used the English translation by Francesca Mordini and Stefania Lucamante, as it appears in this present collection of essays.

topic of the body, its mediatization, its modification, and even its disappearance.

II. The Texts

I would like to propose immediately my thesis: Italian *Cannibale* literature⁴ has nothing that can be assimilated to actual 'Pulp' stylistic traits. Roberto Terrosi maintains that the supposed reference to pulp writers is "the spectacular garbage that arrogantly presents itself in its self-justification, the simulacrum that reveals itself in its metaphysical self-substantiation"(59).

In opposition, Tommaso Labranca's definition of *trash* as the differing delta between the author's intention and the actual result of such effort in the work (22), 'pulp' operates neither a shameful mimicry nor a recycling of materials, since, as opposed to *trash*, it does not hold any critical or moral intention, declining, in this manner, the relevance of the concept of *intentio* in Jamesonian terms. Characters can be amusing and the situations might be comical, but everything is plunged into a setting that is seemingly devoid of sense since the described reality, far from being unlikely to exist, has taken forms of extremism often bordering absurdity. In Terrosi's words, 'pulp' represents the extreme phase of the 'show-business' as it has been theorized by Debord, "the one in which, having exhausted the mechanism of novelties, the show-business retrieves the scraps of its own cultural disposed material, hoping to provoke at least an obtuse smile"(60). This is a phase that is next to indifference and atonia; a phase searching for ever louder noises, bigger shocks, new special effects and unspeakable violence merely in order to sustain for few more seconds the attention

4. At this point, one could try to draw a map of the 'pulp' writers, defining which writers and why they should be considered as such. The basic discriminating factor would be their literary use of the body. From that point of view, Aldo Nove appears to be by far the most radical one.

span of its spectators. At this point, the latter are utterly exhausted by this intellectual circus.

The writing by these authors is tuned instead to linguistic euphuism, to a verbal game that exudes its own limits to enter the visual 'pulp.' This writing reveals traits of kindness and pleasantry that only superficially contradict the *narratum*. The horror that these authors try to instigate in the readers is empty and fictitious and traits of plainness are carefully avoided in favor of a declared artificiality. This operation of manifestly conscious artificialization of the *narratum* produces an effect of de-sublimization of the 'pulp' narrative (Carboni 12) which undermines its very notion of 'terrifying', while making clear to us that we are in close proximity of a danger whose 'ray of action' can be seen. We do not enjoy a 'negative pleasure,' we are not simultaneously attracted and rejected by what it fictionally presented to us, there is not a true and actual 'horror' from which we feel protected. *Cannibale* narrative abandons the fields both of the esthetic and of the sublime (as they do not even belong to its writerly horizon) to enter an aseptic and impersonal dimension. Aldo Nove's *Woobinda* stories are exemplary of this narrative fashion. We are before a *serial writer* who methodically and coldly exercises the same narrative mechanism with insistent obsessiveness and maniacal recurrence. From story to story, repetition is the most emerging figure of effect, the serial structure of which could - once started - run the narrative mechanism virtually *ad libitum*. This is a kind of 'pulp' that is unquestionably mediated and mediatic: the blood and the flesh that *Cannibali* writers throw to us in their texts are the same ones we see in films or, even better, in television series. There is no chance that this flesh could be mimetic of a real 'Italian' experience: they are not *The Flesh* or *The Blood*. After all, 'pulp' is not an Italian term.

Pulp fiction, Quentin Tarantino's movie, was released the year before the appearance of the *Cannibali* pulp writers and, as Filippo La Porta explains in his mapping of the phenomenon, it stirred many reflections in Italy, often improperly quoted by many critics with respect to the new Italian fiction. The subsequent denomination of this emerging kind of writing as '*Cannibale*' has meant going beyond the cinematographic origin (understood on a nominal level) of the trend; still, the inspiration for the name comes from a mediatic sector, and this visual side of the fiction is a mediation amply reflected in the stories I have analyzed.

A. "Seratina"

Ammaniti and Brancaccio clink many times to the television medium in the course of this story. Already in the first pages, the name Cori given to the Filipino maid recalls a television cheese commercial in which a girl named Khaori appears. Another instance occurs in successive scene in which Emanuele, when speaking of the perfume used by Melania, associates it with *Baygon*, a roach pesticide. The whole body of the text is interspersed with references to ads or television programs that disseminate the whole text. For their centrality to the mediatic aspect of this narrative, I have chosen two relevant episodes by which to examine in "Seratina": the nocturnal trip to the zoo in Rome and the final scene with Nunzia, the transvestite.

In the first scene, Emanuele, the protagonist of the story, finds himself at the zoo after a series of, more or less interesting, misadventures. He is there against his own will, almost without the precise knowledge of what he is about to do and how, exactly, he managed get to the other side of the fence at the zoo. He ends up inside the cage of a kangaroo because of a silly game between him and his friend, Aldo: he must steal the cub from the mother kangaroo. While he is about to perform the misdeed, the mother

wakes up. On the verge of a nervous breakdown, Emanuele frantically examines his competence in the matter, in order to try and escape from this dangerous situation. The only information that comes to his mind is that which he has collected from watching television documentaries about wild life. His competence, of course, is thus strictly limited to television material. What does “a wild life documentary” mean? It is a tacit admission of complete ignorance, in respect to the animals, by its very own formulation. Or at the very least, it is an admission of lack of information. Emanuele’s suspicion is that what he saw about animals on television is not much and certainly not all he needs to know in order to face the enraging mother kangaroo. A documentary can be very nice and informative on a theoretical basis, but it is still a documentary, and , by its own definition, brief and somewhat generic. The suspicion of the insufficiency of television-generated erudition grows stronger in the boy, just as Emanuele’s sense of danger for the situation facing him continues to grow; it is a situation which is not mediatic and which, unfortunately, cannot ever become one. Emanuele can not conceive of the danger because he lacks the actual experience of it. The only possible experience he retains is the one mediated from the television. That is to say, an experience which is merely a virtual one. This mediatic facet of his reaction is well demonstrated when paralleled to a recent Italian advertisement in which a teacher asks a group of kids in elementary school what is the actual size of a cow. The children all answer that yes, they know it: using their hands, they indicate that a cow is as big as a yogurt container. Needless to say, when asked the second question, if they know where a cow lives, all the children answer with admirable coherence: in the refrigerator!

The value of reality, when it becomes unrecognizable for objective reasons, as, today, not everybody can say to have seen a cow up-close and even fewer can say to

have seen and known kangaroos, also becomes the value of what has been 'projected' toward another system of knowledge, a system of which is not given to evaluate the actual soundness and/or completeness. What I want to point out is the fact that, in the present situation, Emanuele suffers from a kind of cognitive knowledge that we could define as 'perceptive-mechanic,' in opposition to the symbolic-reconstructive as defined by Franco Antinucci (20-23). The form of knowledge that derives from this system is closer to the one given by the object that one knows (the first system) than by the theoretical or abstract study of it (the second system). The means utilized for a knowledge of the theoretical or abstract kind of knowledge are essentially perceptive, as they are, in other words, visual, tactile and kinesthetic ones, in conjunction with the motility of the object in reaction to, and function of, its own actions. Surely Emanuele does not possess this latter aspect of cognitive knowledge, if not in a mediated form. He knows that in some circumstances an animal can become dangerous, but he knows this only via a theoretical-perceptive manner that he has never experimented, but merely 'seen.' Emanuele must quickly reconstruct that which is lacking in his knowledge, the part which is necessary for him to emerge from his deadly contact with the kangaroo. Everybody has seen documentaries on tigers, lions and other ferocious animals which, precisely for this attribute, are usually portrayed in their most congenial activity, hunting. Perhaps it is more uncommon to have seen on television the proportions of violence and power of which the kangaroos are capable. Emanuele has learnt that kangaroos are animals whose habitats are specific to certain areas of the planet, that they are vegetarians, that they have pouches, etc. Such limited knowledge can suffice for a person living in a European city like Rome, even for a person who occasionally goes to the zoo, while the same amount of information is certainly insufficient for a person when

facing that very animal in flesh; an animal that has furthermore become aggressive, as it feels threatened in its own territory, the cage and its cub. In the moment of danger, Emanuele has suddenly discerned the difference between the virtual reality that he had experimented by the means of the television placed comfortably in his family living room, and the actual reality that is being brutally offered to him in its most immediate (and un/mediated) way on this horrific Roman night that he is spending within the all-too-real cage. He has instantly discovered that television gives back a perceptive knowledge that is flat, bi-dimensional and ultimately passive. It does not permit the manipulation of the objects that it represents, nor does it permit any interaction with them. Watching television is an experience assimilable to that of turning the pages of a book whose images move by themselves. Furthermore, even when providing its viewers with forms of knowledge that retain perceptive attributes, television can only do so on the basis of a symbolic-reconstructive system. Television images are reconstructed point by point by a complex process of elaboration by machines which is based on the calculus and formulation of human representations, that are once again logic-deductive ones. In short, Emanuele has mental representations of the animal through another medium: they are mediations of mediations.

In his attempt to escape from the cage, Emanuele is assailed by the kangaroo and is hit on his back with extreme violence. Panic overcomes him. Only now, has the knowledge of the true danger been exacted. Emanuele is on the ground, literally cornered, and *in front* of him, exactly like in front of a TV-screen, he sees an angry kangaroo that has jumped out of the flat television diaphragm and, in flesh and blood and extremely three-dimensional, is on its asset of killing him:

*You are now dying in a kangaroo cage, his mind informed him. Not from a heart attack, not from cancer, not because you were going 180 km/h on the highway. No. You are about to be killed by a fucking kangaroo. Because kangaroos are the cruelest, most violent animals in the world and they do not only live in Quark.*⁵

At this point it is a matter of instants: the kangaroo jumps ready to hit again. Emanuele finds the gun that his friend Aldo had momentarily lost and, with a gesture that is at once instinctive and immediate, pulls it out of his pocket, shoots and kills the animal, as “[t]here was no conscious reasoning or thought in this act, just the fear of death printed in his DNA.”⁶ Any logic or symbolic capability, any ability of abstraction or elaboration has vanished from Emanuele’s brains. The survival instinct makes him react automatically. Another type of knowledge has been channeled into his previous ones. This kind of knowledge shows complete disregard for the documentaries and films with which Emanuele is familiar, and it thus establishes itself as a kind of knowledge to which he never has, and will never, have access. From the bottom of his experience (his own DNA) the necessary and unconscious energy to subjugate Emanuele’s logic abilities and practical-mechanic ones has truly emerged. It is this energy which made Emanuele hold the gun and shoot at the animal.

5. “*Stai morendo nella gabbia di un canguro, lo informo la sua mente. Non d’infarto, non di cancro, non a centottanta sull’autostrada. No. Tu stai per essere ammazzato da un fottuto canguro. Perché i canguri sono gli animali più cattivi del mondo e non stanno solo a Quark*” (30; emphasis original). *Quark* is a popular television program on natural life, conducted by Piero Angela.

6. “E in quel gesto non c’era consapevolezza ma solo l’istinto, la paura della morte scritta nel DNA” (31).

“Second scene”: First of all, I do not use the term ‘scene’ casually as this short story is composed by a relentless series of scenes and frames that are put together afterwards as in a playback sort of mechanism. “Setting”: on the road, at night. The car is speeding, naturally. Emanuele’s friend Aldo is driving. Suddenly, Aldo stops the car, approaches the curb and stops by a transvestite with the obvious intent of verbally abusing him. The reaction of the transvestite is clearly an upset one: he tries to ditch Aldo, but first calls him “figlio di papà”[spoiled brat]. At this point, the speed of the story accelerates. As Aldo gets off the car to go after the transvestite, Emanuele does not realize what is happening. Within few minutes, the scene is going to change again:

“It was pitch black around them, and the cone shaped flood of light coming from the street lamps illuminated them. Two actors on a stage. Emanuele was the audience, closed inside the car.”⁷

Aside from his clear intuition of the performance his friend Aldo is staging before him - performance which is still and always a ‘mediation’ of something - the important annotation is the one regarding the public. Even before a stage, the public, which is here represented by Emanuele alone, does not experiment direct contact with the actors, but limits his ‘duty’ to watching them through the small square window of the car, precisely as one does in front of a television screen. And the show gets harder. In the following scene, Aldo spreads his legs in a cowboy-like fashion before the transvestite and points a gun to his head. This is the pantomime of an execution reproducing the

7. Tutto attorno era buio e loro erano illuminati dal cono di luce spettrale del lampione. *Due attori su un palcoscenico. Emanuele era il pubblico, chiuso dentro la macchina.* (37; emph. added).

countless scenes and photos the two young men have seen upon countless occasions. The way by which Emanuele reminds Aldo of reality is, in itself, rather explicit:

*“You take it easy, moron! We’re not in a Western movie here, we’re on the Flaminia road.” Aldo’s answer apparently seems to catch the obvious notion Emanuele is conveying to him, but he grasps it only so he can immediately juxtapose it with a new reality, with his personal reality: “It’s true, we’re not in a cow-boy movie, but we’re also not on the Flaminia road. We’re on**Lascia o raddoppia!**”⁸*

And, as in the example of the cow for the school kids, he consequently invites his friend Emanuele to play the ‘Vanna White’ of the situation. For Emanuele, the tragedy starts again: just like in the cage with the kangaroo, he is meddled between a fiction that pretends to be reality and a reality that mimes fiction. Again, he must quickly elaborate a psychological scheme of his performance that can encompass both aspects, or else all the realities he has been able to create will perish with him, too. The actual reality: *Lascia o raddoppia*, a quiz-show that has indelibly marked the Italian imaginary collective construct of the 1950's and 1960's, has actually managed to drag itself up to the edge of the third Millennium, in spite of all the television shows that later followed it. Aldo becomes Mike Bongiorno, the host of the show and undiscussed ‘divinity’ of all quiz-hosts in the phantasy of the Italian television-viewers (Eco 30-35). A series of geography questions are posed to the only participant in Aldo-Mike Bongiorno’s show, the transvestite Nunzia. The prize, clearly, is Nunzia’s own (and

8. “Vacci piano, stronzo! Qui non siamo in un film western, siamo sulla Flaminia” [...] “È vero, non siamo in un film di cow-boy ma neanche sulla Flaminia. Qui siamo a ... LASCIA O RADDOPPIA!” (38).

real) survival. At this point, Emanuele tries to diplomatically transport Aldo back to the everyday reality he thought he shared with him. But, when faced with Aldo's complete dumbness to any of his attempts (or his complete folly, to put it in slightly different terms), Emanuele is left with little choice but to accept Aldo's world, thus accepting to change the parameters of his own reality and enter the absolutely 'mediatic' ones of his friend, who has momentarily lost his mind. In his attempt to put an end to this utterly surreal and gratuitously cruel scene, Emanuele points out to Aldo that he is asking ill-posed questions to the transvestite. In this way, Emanuele becomes at once the 'referee' of the show, and even the host, director and producer of the spectacle. In hope of rescuing Nunzia from his friend's crazyness, Emanuele has to play a part. Furthermore, there is a price to pay: by accepting to play a role in his friend's fictitious reality, Emanuele ultimately allows Aldo to establish the price for the program. This price is not money or the elimination from the game, but, rather, pure and simple Russian roulette. If Nunzia answers wrongly, Aldo shoots him. The story here is at its upmost point of tension: the transvestite does indeed answer the last question incorrectly, "What is the capital of the United States?"; and Aldo, entranced, shoots at him. At his foot. The diegesis will unroll at a vertiginous speed until the end of the story. The wounded transvestite is abandoned at the curbside. The kangaroo cub stolen by Emanuele is released on the street. After few instants, the cub is hit and killed by a car. Every action, however, the kidnaping of the cub, the wounding of the transvestite, has taken place with surreal tranquillity. In the whole text there is only a moment, almost at the beginning, in which Emanuele pauses to reflect on the nature of these 'fine' evenings spent with his friends:

Lately though, these evening jaunts were becoming a pain in the ass for

Emanuele.

The evening jaunts are a tunnel. You get stoned out of your head and wasted and then you can't study and it all starts to slip through your fingers and weigh you down, your shitty little bedroom and dinner with your mother and weddings in Siena. So what do I do? I avoid them like the plague.⁹

But his are just ephemeral thoughts, mostly dictated by boredom rather than by an authentic reflection on life. A sense of nausea for his life comes forth. These thoughts being the first glimpse of a change that needs to be undertaken for his future life. Ultimately, there is a bourgeois ending, as Emanuele leaves for himself the possibility of improving his life style. It is this 'glimpse' of an alternative life that makes Ammaniti's stories (all of them) radically different from the hopeless situations that Nove narrates in his serial stories.

From "Seratina" one fact emerges: any (apparently normal) routine or action might possibly hide an unforeseeable, terrible and absurd event. Normalcy *is* the dress under which absurdity hides. Any moment can be the one that brings your life to an end; any moment can initiate an irreversible instance of destruction; any moment can open itself onto unspeakable violence and horror. You go to a club and lose three fingers, you go to a zoo and a shoe gets stuck in some carcass. You shoot and kill a kangaroo that was in turn trying to kill you at its defense. You steal a cub. While wandering in the Roman night, you end up shooting a transvestite after torturing him with a TV-quiz

9. "Ma da un po' di tempo a Emanuele quelle seratine incominciavano a stargli un po' sulle palle. *Le seratine sono un tunnel. Ti sfondi di canne e stai a pezzi e non riesci a studiare e tutto ti sfugge di mano e ti pesa addosso, la tua stanzetta del cazzo e le cene con tua madre e i matrimoni a Siena. Quindi le evito come la peste*" (7; emphasis original).

show. The absurdity does not lie so much in the combination of these elements (all of which are clearly absurd). Rather, the absurdity lies in the fact that, behind an apparently normal, or even banal life, each episode can be read against the grain and reveal the terrible 'other' from itself. Existence thus becomes one of complete uncertainty if any move can hide a tragedy or a horror. Perhaps it is not mere chance that in the '90s Italian strips have met such wide success with the public. I refer, for instance, to Dylan Dog, the mysterious investigator of the absurd. The episodes of which he is the uncontested protagonist always depart from common elements of everyday life, and nevertheless they are absurd and inexplicable, while they arrive to the peak of the fantastic and/or of the horror. Each event is the key to something else. Each event has, like Janus, two faces, the bad and terrible one hiding behind the good one. Ammaniti avoids mysterious or magic events. In his stories¹⁰ even the justification of a magic relation between the events is eliminated. Everything quietly proceeds from normal to horror or absurd. Everything is normal, *ergo* everything is absurd.

B. "Il mondo dell'amore"

The title of this short story by Aldo Nove reminds me of some of the films produced in the 1970's. In those films, there was the unspoken promise of miserable, erotic scenes to the viewing of naive spectators. In accordance with the most immediate image that we picture when reading such a title, the topic of the short story concerns the purchase of a video tape that is appositely produced to titillate the soft-porn *pruderie* of the customers of a large department store. These good male Italians, model fathers and

10. ("Seratina" but also "L'ultimo capodanno dell'umanità").

devoted husbands, are all accompanied by their wives and children for the ritual weekly shopping. The center of the story revolves around the television set, both at home and in a department store. The television set is indirectly present, as it has to be physically present in order to see the videocassettes. The actions and the gestures of the characters are rhythmic in their monotone observance of an observance that is performed with obsessive cadence. The initial sentences of the story are all repeated for three times at the beginning of each paragraph of the story, with a total of four paragraphs. The beginning, extremely brief, introduces the protagonists of the story:

“My name is Michele and I am an Aries. Sergio is my best friend.”¹¹ The characters are only sketched, they are almost two caricatures:

In the car, me and Sergio always go :‘Tàtta tàra tattà tatàtta!’

We do that, like in the beginning of OK. The Price is Right¹²

Along with these two sketched characters appears the big *Iper Market* in Malnate, near Varese. On Saturday, people from all of Brianza go shopping to the new large malls:

Me and Sergio are normal, so that’s why, every Saturday afternoon, we get together and go to the Iper-Market of the Crowd in Malnate.¹³

11. “Mi chiamo Michele e sono un uomo dell’Ariete. Sergio è il mio miglior amico” (53).

12. “In macchina, io e Sergio facciamo sempre ‘Tàtta tàra tattà tatàtta!’ Facciamo così, come all’inizio di OK. Il prezzo è giusto” (53).

13. “Io e Sergio siamo normali e per questo, ogni sabato pomeriggio, tiriamo su e andiamo alla Iper della

But on Saturday afternoon one goes to the large suburban malls because, as Michele later states, there is nothing else to do. Normalcy becomes an empty space, devoid of references to one's own thought and existence. The fracture is so profound and sharp that the only way to connect things, and the only way, finally, to recognize oneself, is precisely to go to see the others who don't know what the hell to do.¹⁴

The two protagonists roam about the big hyper-market, new cathedral of the third millennium, where everybody goes on Saturday for their official weekly duty. Here, Sergio and Michele finally buy a videocassette, the choice of which is determined by their limited economic resources: "Il mondo dell'amore" [The World of Love]. It is from one of these videocassettes that the final sequence of the story begins. At some point, Sergio and Michele watch the castration of a man who wants to become a woman. The sense of reality has vanished: the two guys get a knife and, just for fun, try to repeat on each other's bodies, the operation just seen on television. They want to become women so as to comprehend "all the lesbo videos they did not understand", yet they do not realizing the imminent disaster that is about to fall upon them. Michele and Sergio castrate themselves. No panic follows the sight of their own blood as, in their hallucinated eyes, their blood is the same 'television' blood they always see; it is identical to the same, innocuous blood that makes everything else painless. Michele's perception is highly troubled and, precisely because of this, detached from any relation with reality. With his broken Italian he records this moment:

Folla di Malnate" (54).

14. "A guardare gli altri che non sanno cosa cazzo fare" (55).

*It was as if I was dying.*¹⁵

“As if”: again, as in the case of Emanuele and the kangaroo in “Seratina,” the character can not master the knowledge of his occurring death. He has seen death on television, but, until now, he has obviously never had any direct knowledge of it. And now, some thing of which he has no direct knowledge like death, has become a comparison, “as if.” A comparison to what, we might ask ourselves. When they finally are dying, the two characters drag themselves beneath their only world: that of the television. Here, they realize their desire for oral sex:

That was the last sixty-niner of my entire life.

*My first as a woman. And my only one as someone dying.*¹⁶

This is a written television story. Not a script. This is a fictional piece of narrative that wants to become television. Nove’s writing is ‘televisive’: flat, linear and sequential. It is brief, precise and given in jerks like a series of frames. Boundaries between reality and fiction have been deleted. For certain in its aspect, the story reminds one of *Last Action Hero* with Arnold Schwarzenegger. But the logic inherent to Schwarzenegger’s movie has been reversed. In the movie, it is the actor who risks destruction when trying to enter human life. In Nove’s story, the two protagonists are destroyed when attempting

15. “Era come se morivo” (61).

16. “Fu, quello, l’ultimo sessantanove della mia vita. Il primo da donna. E l’unico da moribondo” (62).

to enter television reality. They simply die. Television explicitly pervades the whole story, citing names of public figures and of popular programs, and even repeating some ads. The world becomes a small agglomeration of places: the *Iper-Market*, the parking lot, the video arcade and, finally, the television room. Television becomes the world. All that is left to try and oppose some of its strength against the power of television, is the corporeal presence body. In their attempt to come out of their bodies, the two protagonists die. They die as they pursue a modification of their bodies in accordance with some television scheme. Aldo Nove's simply sketched, almost serialized characters have no perception of the distance between this corporeal reality and the virtual one proposed by television. More than having lost the distance, they have actually obliterated it. Their reality is just enough to allow them to watch television. They have no scruples, not in the sense that they are immoral, but rather, in the sense that they do not possess ethics, as ethics would be completely unnecessary in an existence such as theirs. They do not have second thoughts. These are, in a way, much more radical characters than Ammaniti and Brancaccio's Emanuele and Aldo, as the latter ones, even if only hypocritically, are still linked to a system of expectations about them, about their life and their future; this is something totally absent in Nove's personages. Nove's sketched people have a very short life, they are completely plunged into the present and are devoid of any perspective, not only as characters, but on a writerly level as well. They do not have a 'tomorrow.'

When comparing the two stories I have analyzed, one radical difference emerges, namely a different relationship between life and death. If, in Ammaniti's story, death still sustains a connection to its main characters' everyday reality as it still holds ethical and physical valence for them as well as for the marginal ones revolving around

Emanuele and Aldo (like Nunzia the transvestite and Melania), in Nove's fiction death is nothing but a change of condition, only a modification of one object into another. Bodies are containers of objects that can be organs or other things. They can thus be emptied out, turned inside out, opened, and cleaned out. The extremism of such narrative labeled as *cannibale* is the extremism to which a certain concept of technology that has completely disembodied reality has also arrived. Surely, television has played a significant role in this process and now the new technologies and the new media are doing the same in their race to virtual reality. But the very same virtual reality goes through the destruction of the body in order to be able to reconstruct it. The difference lies in the parameters given to this reconstruction. This is a reconstruction that no longer goes through the motory-perceptive system but, rather, reconstructs the body in accordance to a symbolic-deductive algorithm. The abstract reconstruction of the body is based on a kind of knowledge that is practically Cartesian. Perhaps Derrich de Kerckhove should rectify his statement when he claims that society is going back to the body (58). Perhaps he should say that the return to the body first goes through its annihilation.

Italian *Cannibale* literature goes through the annihilation of the body. Opposite to the tendency revealed in all the male authors (Nove, Ammaniti, Brizzi in *Bastogne*) Isabella Santacroce is the sole exponent of a narrative who, in her writing, brings the presence of the body to the extreme and to the excess, in a trajectory that makes itself more and more explicit in her trilogy, *Fluo*, *Destroy*, and *Luminal*. The three novels show an excess of corporeal presence, whose cumbersome weight reveals itself to be just as destructive in the body of the text as its absence. If the *Cannibali* writers' fictional narrative seems to be proceeding towards a plain and artificially simplified road devoid

of apparent obstacles, Santacroce's fiction has assumed a vertical direction in the sense of a descent and exploration of the body/*inferus* through a writing curiously tied in a double-knot with the chemical-physical body process.

3. "Corpi and non/corpi." Of Bodies and Artificial Bodies

In Homer, in Virgil, or in Dante's description of Mahomet (*Inf.* XXVIII, vv.22-27) there are many cruel passages. This does not suffice to define Homer, Virgil and Dante as *Cannibali* writers. The substantial difference between their descriptions of cruelty upon the human body and the *Cannibali*'s fictional use of cruelty lies, in fact, in their relationship with the actual motif of the body. Furthermore, when reading Rabelais one can discover that the relationship with the body was so close in this author's work, that very little could be perceived when talking about intestines or any other internal organs. It is the authors' perception of the body as well as their readers', which is central to the distinction in the treatment of this motif. In order to understand the level of literary representation that the motif of the body has in the *Cannibale* literature, we need to mention a few basic notions about its tradition of interpretation.

First of all, there is great difference between to be, to own and to inhabit a body. Usually, one reasons in terms of sheer possession of the body. Or in terms of inhabiting one. In this respect, we have not been much helped by any traditional line of thought, be it religious or other. The body has always been seen as a prison of the soul, the true receptacle of Evil and base desires, the part that always brings us down, to our 'inferior' selves, in fact. Its materiality also constitutes the gravity element tending to the terrain, conversely to its spirituality and to the elevation that characterizes the soul. We often do not behave like inhabitants or owners of a body, but rather like bodies ourselves. We

are our bodies. In this case, the substantial continuity existing between the self and the body operates in such a way that makes it impossible to perceive ourselves as the 'other' from the self: the body is superimposed upon us and it thus becomes our way of thinking and acting, while constructing our emotions. Probably today this distinction is no longer formulated in the same terms, but it has surely passed through and remains in the polarization that we now have in computer science. *Hardware/ software*, or *hardware/wetware*: the process of artificialization of the body has not eliminated the dichotomy; it has merely transformed its field of application.¹⁷ In this instance, the computer becomes metaphor of the Self and of the Body. With this step, to be detached from one's own body and to consider it as an object in opposition to one's mind, becomes a much plainer task. Even if objectively linked to the matter (brain = *wetware*) our mind can, hence, be opposed to our body; the body perceived as the 'animistic' part of it, its being in the self, in the word, in its software.

The initial steps leading to this new identification date back to XVII century. Starting then the body begins to be considered as an object belonging to another order of complexities. Interpreting and viewing the body as a machine led to the birth and the affirmation of the idea of a body that becomes perfectible, easy to disassemble, analyzable in its details and repairable in its defects; one which becomes, ultimately, substitutable. A machine whose fundamental enigma could be unveiled once explained

17. The artificial and the natural are not merely two concepts defined in an antinomic manner, one with respect to the other. As one witnesses the artificialization of the body as well as of nature, one also witnesses the naturalization of the artificial. And this happens because also technology stratifies itself inside our mind and our body. We fear only of what appears to us as technologically advanced, while what has been part of our everyday experience continues to be lived with extreme 'naturalness.' As Capucci maintains, the artificial and the technological are always present in the natural and viceversa. We should then revisit how the limits between these two terms are shifted, with the artificial ever shifting to the external side of the human being, but also with the natural being prepared to extroject the human being upon what had been previously considered artificial.

its mechanism precisely in virtue of its renewed interpretation. Paradoxically though, the evolution of this line of thought which has not still taken place, has consequently led to the inversion of perspective. In turn, the machine tries to humanize itself, to gain a physical aspect and, above all, a thinking ability that can be paralleled to the human one. Science-fiction movies are evidence of this shift. Stanley Kubrick's *2001-Space Odyssey*, in which HAL9000 is still an enormous computer, rough in its immense physical appearance but gifted with an incredible thinking ability and human sensitivity to the point of determining the death of other human beings. HAL9000 is a machine that, like our bodies, comes with a brain. And as such, it also comes with a sort of conscience, a primitive one. Another example is *Blade runner*, a movie in which the process of assimilation of humanoid-cybernetic organisms is well under way; or *The Matrix*, in which human bodies are no longer needed, nor are machines made visible. A computer will be in charge of recreating a fictitious life for lethargic human bodies by providing them with a completely virtual world and by coordinating all the thoughts and emotions of every brain. In short this machine appropriates and reshapes all thoughts and emotions of these inertial bodies. This computer becomes a sort of *body* to all the brains in a true technological triumph.

While in science-fiction movies and novels it is a question of computers which imagine themselves to become humans, in reality it is just the opposite which occurs. It is humans who aspire to become computers, or rather, to assume the very elevated abilities of computers which they, as beings, lack.. In actuality, it does not seem that anybody is really trying to build machines that will eventually behave like men: it seems, instead, that humans are being pushed to reach the capabilities that, for now, are only detained by machines. We are still living in the Cyborg era, an era that just began, while

our present literature and fiction, in general, are preceding us by many generations. Naturally, the process of assimilation man/machine presupposes a continuous and accurate study of the human body which has begun to progress in an exceptional manner, also in this case, beginning with XVII century. There is a curious concomitance in that, while the knowledge of the human body is noticeably increasing on a specialistic level (i.e. the *medical imaging*), the average human subject is losing such 'knowledge.' The unawareness by which we move within our bodies, the scarce attention to its needs, to its noises, smells, and sounds is truly stupefying. The knowledge of the human body proceeds much faster in an abstract way, while the concrete one is slowly abandoned. The everyday individual often does not perceive his/her own body as if he/she were absent from it, even while applying terrific care of its 'involucre' (hair, teeth, clothes, shoes, etc.). But these are not exits from the body. The sciamanic exits from the body were something else entirely. Today we do exit our body: we simply ignore it until the moment in which it violently comes back on the scene to revenge its own right to existence through pain.

About the Progressive Artificialization of the Body

In the everyday struggle for survival, humans have always invented, created or found instruments that could make up for the apparent limits of human individuals. The process of artificialization is deeply rooted in the evolution of society. Each invented human instrument corresponds to a new prosthesis of the human body itself. The final result of this process is that the body becomes in turn a prosthesis and, as such, each of its parts, become a prosthesis of another prosthesis, thus becoming modifiable in each sense of the term, even genetically. Prostheses have an interesting evolution. The

invention of glasses took place four centuries before that of the telescope. The two inventions, however, more than chronologically, are separated by a conceptual difference. In the first case, the glasses are useful to correct a body deficiency, one of its non-natural limits, in the sense that a 'normal' human organism should not have visual deficiency; glasses are needed in that they bring the visual function nearly back to its original limit (20/20). In short, glasses, like other prostheses, help to re-establish a balance of certain bodily functions, bringing them back to a limit already possessed in theory, or at least, one which should have been possessed in theory but which has, for assorted reasons, been lost. In the case of the telescope, there was no need to recuperate any limit or lost ability of the body. Being able to see small objects at incredible distance does not pertain, in fact, to any of the natural abilities of human beings. In this case, the prosthesis allows human beings to 'depart' from their own natural limits and go beyond them. From this point of view, the telescope is not a prosthesis of substitute, but rather, an empowering one. The telescope is an instrument invented at the dawn of XVII century, and it is not a coincidence that its birth date falls within the same years that saw individuals new, muted attitudes towards their own body. Nothing prevents one from thinking about incorporating the mechanism and the power of an artificial eye adequate to allow for human capacities to be raised starting already with the body. From this aspect, the bionic man of a famous television series has been the ancestor of the future cyborgs, among which *Terminator* and *Blade Runner* are just two names.

The real problems in the construction of artificial bodies are all lie in the codifying system of sounds, images, perceptions and movements. Great uncertainties are still present about the calculus of perceptive abilities. It is well known that a computer can

play chess with great results by simply signaling the next moves. But a computer that actually 'moves' the pieces on the chess-board does not yet exist. The calculus ability of the actual electronic manufacturers would be barely sufficient to simulate the perceptive abilities of an insect. Perhaps, never as apparently as in these years, have the connections between the issue of knowledge and the issue of vision been understood to such effective terms. Long ago, the Greeks had already understood such connections: **οἶδα** , which means *knowledge* is the perfect tense of the verb **εἶδω**, which means *to see*. To see is thus to know. Οἶδα = I saw, thus I know.

The general tendency concerns that of reproducing a perceptive level that is as human as possible on a behavioral point of view. The same can be said for the environment surrounding machines and humans. A quite relevant aspect of this tendency is the perennial effect of exchange between humans and machines. As such feedback or inter-exchange between the two poles generates, on the one hand a decreased general and concrete knowledge of the body is available to individuals, while on the other, an augmented knowledge of the human is being made available to the machine. This constant exchange lies also at the basis of the virtuality concept. Virtuality thus can be thought as an attempt of 'similarization' among the human processes and those specific of the 'machine' (Maldonado 87). In Terrosi's words, virtual reality can not be thought merely as unreality. Virtual reality is made of another substance that is different but, nonetheless, able to be quantified, ordered and managed. It should not be forgotten that virtual reality is a sequence of binary codes; it represents "the extreme border of the materiality of the world" (Terrosi 73), the border-limit has now become *trait-d'union* among territories that, until recently, were mutually exclusive because the concepts of body and soul were mutually exclusive. We should

think to the virtual one as an asymptotic process that will never be complete. At the present, given our ever-developing degree of both technological and theoretical knowledge, we can still count on a large margin of space; but the proximity to human-computer is narrowing. I believe that there is a impassable limit beyond which virtuality intended as a process of similarization and approach will no longer be possible, but mere substitution will take place. The process of similarity is destined to proceed *ad infinitum* precisely for its impossibility to reach a closure.

The body is destined to become a useless, limiting, or foreign object, certainly insufficient to its own needs. Hans Moravec exacts that the body can only be likened to gelatine for its unusefulness. Such a contemptuous simile is linked to the conception of the body as something actually vulnerable and unreliable. The mind becomes the only safe place as the processing-elaboration center of thoughts. Moravec is not the only one to believe this, as Stelarc shares his beliefs and, even more radically, maintains that “it is time to ask ourselves if a biped body, that breaths, doted with binocular vision and a 1400 cc. brain actually constitute an *adequate biological form*” (63; emph. original). According to Stelarc, the body is completely obsolete whereas the true freedom of the individual lies in the DNA’s self-determination. The function of the body as a subject ceases in order to become an object, albeit an object that is able to redesign itself. From this point of view, technology does not invade the body but it actually composes it. And clearly, if the body is obsolete and needs redesigning, the same is true of emotions: its chemistry, based on carbon, **generates obsolete emotions**” (Stelarc 73; bold original). Lastly, cognitive processes need renewal as well. Likewise, knowledge has always been perceived as something abstract and incorporeal, as something neutral, even sexually; although this neutrality has always been used in the masculine. Even the Goddess of

Science Artemis was a virgin born out of Zeus' skull.

Departing from Cartesius, the body has increasingly been put aside in the scientific construction of the world to favor a logical, formal and structural elaboration of data that was based on symbols, but not on the symbolic of which the body is form. They are mathematic symbols, of which the most striking example is the attempt of analytical geometry of mapping the human thought. To think and to be were the terms of the Cartesian equivalence, where the being is connected to the thought. Once again, the being is linked to the process of knowing, not to the mere fact of existing. If we look at the phenomenon from this point of view, we should not be surprised to find an historically determined path departing from the body to progressively abandon it in favor of an abstract conceptualization of the world that, in being so, cannot possibly be left unconsidered. In this process of progressive shifting of the individual from his/her own body, the attention of the individual is not projected towards nature, by now considered unmodifiable, but towards the body itself: the corporeal modification begins as being strictly related to the augmented perception of the inability of the human body limits together with the consciousness that there are the proper tools of intervention to bypass them.

Human beings, after having adapted themselves to their surrounding environment, proceed to adapt the environment to themselves and to their own needs. This is the first step for the creation of a technological habitat. Terrosi maintains that at some point such artificial landscape escapes from the cultural control that human beings always impose on it forcing the latter ones to return to adapt to the habitat created by humans (98). I, for one, find this to be true. More simply, I think that the ever more sophisticated process of creation of a technological habitat is becoming unstoppable

(not in an evolutionist sense of the term), and that it proceeds in its path while forcing human beings to surrender to continuous shifts of condition. In short, it is the technologically advanced habitat created by human beings that, in turn, forces them to proceed in a bio-technological way. On the other hand, with the furthering of the environmental and human transformation, the concept of nature itself assumes a very different significance.

For this perspective, death also ceases to be a limit to human potentiality, as Moravec aptly demonstrates in the final part of his essay, almost a science-fiction story (110-12). In this part, the body is eliminated to favor another body-machine and even the brain, layer after layer is delicately removed and, after, each of these layers is re-mapped as digital knowledge, as a digital mind. What remains of all this is a machine with a human mind, completely digitalized: the true completion of Hal9000.

One question is left : What is the ideal space of representation of a body that is no longer or not only body but also object and image? This space has been, and presently still is, television. Television has virtualized bodies, it has flattened them, it has taken away any possibility of depth from them, has subtracted any carnality. From its appearance, television has worked on the imaginary taking it out of us. If there is something that writers like Ammaniti or Nove, Scarpa or Santacroce, under a common denominator, this 'something' lies in the language. It is an exteriorized language; it is a language, as in the exemplary case of Aldo Nove's "Il mondo dell'amore," that does not allow itself to be interiorized.

De Kerckhove observes that to watch television organizes the nervous system and the sensibility according to new modalities. Television requires the "total exteriorization of the imaginary" (45-60) The written word, as is interiorized in the novel

as its vehicle of meaning, conduce to the re-appropriation of the self. Television instead, turns our creative individual constructs into a collective and public imaginary one; our mind becomes the screen onto which everybody looks, and from which everybody is seen: television had exteriorized thought, sensorial life, conscience, and the imagination, turning them into direct perceptions, stimulations originating from the outside of the body, a sensorial- visual, auditive, and tactile cognitive organization on the television screen. (54)

The phenomena that de Kerckhove foresaw, years ago, for the hippies has had slower repercussions in the literary panorama. It is a given that, at some point, also literature has some trouble when facing this phenomenon of exteriorization. How, then, does literature react? Literature must deal with a new creative construct that slowly tries to conform its system to new parameters. The mind becomes tele-visual, external. It leaves the body. Literature reacts, and it does so by re-proposing, in an explicit verbal key, what television has done in an implicit non-verbal key. If television exteriorizes the imaginary construct, literature then exteriorizes the body, it turns it inside-out, like a glove, and then spreads it on the pages of a novel or a short story. But, in order to do so, it is necessary to break it, to fold it, to open it, to cut it, to make holes in it. To see blood running, to show the intestines, the muscles, the bones, the nerves, becomes necessary as well. Anything intimate, precious, inaccessible about one's body now goes on public view, as in television. Flesh and blood become materials for the construction of this *Cannibale* literature. A kind of verbal splatter must distinguish this type of narrative from other ones, while touching the intimate cords of repulsion for many readers, and the visceral cords of repulsion for others.

These are not the flesh and blood materials that were used in the Iliad though. In

works like Homer's, or in the Aeneid, the body is always present. It is in the contemporary works of authors such as Ammaniti or Nove that the body is hopelessly annihilated. The exteriorization of the body parallels, in fact, the exteriorization of the consciousness and of the imaginary. The mind has gone public. And Nove's story demonstrates it quite convincingly. The two protagonists, Michele and Sergio make comments on gays ('frocì') and Southern immigrants ('teroni') that are not only their thoughts, but those of everybody; they act as a sort of general thought. They belong to that exteriorization of the social construct de Kerckhove was referring to when speaking about television. But I think that, also in this case, Italian literature has experienced some delay in delivering its product. While in Italy, literature is taking distances from the body, the new technologies are trying, thanks to the virtual reality technologies, to make the inverse trajectory.

At this point I would like to end my study with a statement regarding the literary value of the *Cannibali* writers. I do not think that the works I analyzed here are masterpieces. I sincerely doubt that Ammaniti or Nove will ever become 'canonical' writers. But this does not necessarily mean that the critics who tried to disclaim their importance were right. On the contrary, they have been unfair. The actual gift of this group of narrators has been that of pulling away a veil of obtuseness that was depositing itself upon our narrative, and posing the great risk of suffocating it completely. I believe that these authors can be, or can represent, the humus on which another, more self-confident, literary generation will finally see its birth.

Gian Paolo Renello

Trans. Stefania Lucamante