

Pulp: youth language, popular culture and literature in 1990s Italian fiction

Thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

at the University of Leicester

by

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June 2006

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In this thesis I analyse a selection of Italian pulp fiction from the 1990s. My approach combines sociolinguistics and literary criticism, and uses textual analysis to show how this writing fuses influences from contemporary youth cultures and languages, and Italian literary tradition. The key themes of my analysis are pulp's multifaceted relationships with anglophone culture, in particular punk music, its links to previous generations of Italian authors and intellectuals, and its engagement with contemporary Italian social issues. In Chapter 1, I review the existing literature on 1990s Italian pulp. Following on from this, I outline how a primarily linguistic approach allows me to consider a selection of authors, such as Rossana Campo, Silvia Ballestra, Aldo Nove, Enrico Brizzi and Isabella Santacroce, from a unifying perspective, and how this approach offers a means of considering the varied but complementary perspectives on Italian culture, society, politics and literature offered by this group of writers. In Chapter 2, I show how pulp authors construct their linguistic style on the basis of spoken youth language varieties, and consider their motivations for doing so. Chapter 3 traces the literary precedents for this use of language, using comparative textual analysis to examine the nature of the relationships between pulp and American literature, and late twentieth century Italian fiction by Arbasino, Tondelli and Pasolini, in order to question some of the myths surrounding the literary sources of pulp. Chapter 4 deals with the relationship between pulp and popular culture, contrasting the notion of popular culture presented in this fiction to that proposed by earlier generations of Italian intellectuals, and discussing the theoretical perspectives that this reveals. Finally, I debate the extent to which pulp's often disturbing and controversial subject matter reflects an attempt to deal with ethical issues, and consider pulp's success in achieving these aims.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks go to the University of Leicester for giving me the opportunity to start this project, to George Ferzoco for his help in securing this initial assistance, and to the AHRB for subsequent funding. Thanks also to Marina Spunta, Sharon Wood, and other colleagues in the Faculty of Arts who have offered advice and support throughout my research. I am grateful to Einaudi and to Rizzoli for sending me much useful material, to Feltrinelli for allowing me access to their archives, and to Rossana Campo and Enrico Brizzi for taking the time to speak to me.

Special thanks to Phil and Sally for all kinds of help, and for being challenging and generous friends.

Chapter 1: Introduction

GENRE, GENDER AND GENERATION

1. 'Punk'

Che cosa c'entra il punk? Sono passati vent'anni! Eppure il significato del punk nell'economia politica della comunicazione è: se hai qualcosa da dire, fallo subito. Imbraccia la chitarra, accendi l'amplificatore e urla nel microfono. Gli accordi farai sempre in tempo a impararli dopo, mentre suoni. [...] Grado zero del rock, le band punk sono state ricettacolo dei peggiori musicisti mai esistiti, e allo stesso tempo dei migliori comunicatori degli ultimi tempi.

[...] Ma la letteratura c'entra? Uno dei rimproveri più frequenti rivolti a scrittori giovani e giovanissimi è proprio quello di non saper maneggiare strumenti retorici più grandi di loro, non avere consapevolezza critica, non tenere conto di che cos'è successo nei romanzi che li hanno preceduti. Capo d'imputazione: lesa maestà nei confronti della letteratura (Scarpa 2000 p60-61).

Punk rock might not seem an appropriate reference point for Italian fiction. However, 1990s Italian pulp demonstrates many points of comparison with punk, many of which are alluded to in the above short extract of literary criticism by Tiziano Scarpa. In this article, entitled 'Punk', Scarpa invites a comparison between the controversial and unrefined nature of punk rock and 1990s pulp, drawing attention to the innovative language, the provocative image and the controversial themes of this writing, as well as to its links with non-literary and non-Italian cultures. This comparison with punk underlines the challenging façade of pulp and its highly self-referential and often self-deprecating style. Pulp's allusive and cryptic language suggests an engagement with youth cultures and languages, but also an often ironic and subversive rewriting of a plurilingual tradition in Italian literature. 'Pulp' is an apt term to describe fiction in which references to 'high' literature are integrated into a cultural mix dominated by youth cultures and languages, pop music and poor quality television, to form a complex web of meaning. Some pulp texts are comic, although in a wry, ironic and frequently bitter way, whereas others are sentimental or even violent. Pulp sometimes has provocative and ethically problematic subject matter, but this feature alone should not be taken as a prerequisite for a pulp text, which is likely to be more comic or sentimental than macabre.

Pulp was part of a boom in Italian prose fiction that resulted from the rapid shifts in demographics, economics and culture of the post-war period in Italy, which, by the 1980s, 'had created a mass public, while the media, in particular television, and geographical mobility had helped forge a national language' (Hallamore Caesar 1996

p250). The number of books published by ‘new’ authors in Italy increased significantly from 36 titles in 1986 to over 200 in 1995: such was the focus on young authors making their literary debut that half of these ‘new’ authors published only one novel (Cardone, Galato et al. 1996 p11). In this climate of interest in young Italian writers, a number of literary research projects headed by prominent Italian authors and publishers sought to identify the new young authors of this decade. Celati’s *Narratori delle riserve*, Mondadori’s *Italiana*, and three volumes in Tondelli’s *Under 25* series – a total of five anthologies focussing on young authors – were published between 1986 and 1992. This period also saw the appearance of Tondelli’s short-lived *Mouse to Mouse* series, aimed at young/debut authors, and the foundation of the *Oscar Originals* in 1989.¹

This editorial interest in young authors and pulp’s apparent rootedness in youth culture has lead some commentators to view pulp as a highly commercialised literary genre, which lacks any literary or theoretical basis. All pulp authors were born in the 1960s or 1970s and therefore share a common cultural and generational background, even though their writing demonstrates very specific artistic individuality.² For this reason, I shall suggest an approach to pulp that maintains the link with youth, by focussing on a selection of works that all challenged the critics’ perceptions of literary language and were published when their authors were in their twenties. In my analysis, I show how a critical appreciation of this fiction should first take into account how these texts relate to youth culture and language, before considering how pulp relates to its literary predecessors and contemporary popular culture. Moreover, I propose pulp as a loose group of texts, firmly rooted in the socio-cultural context of the 1990s. Pulp novels and short stories express their engagement with youth cultures, critical theories and ethical issues through their linguistic choices. Rather than focussing on the writing and evolution of one pre-defined group of authors, I illustrate the major trends in youth fiction, by selecting some of the most significant pulp writers of the 1990s. I focus on specific texts for their marked and critical engagement with their cultural context, and for their use of a language that shows a close relationship to youth language varieties.

Silvia Ballestra (born 1969) was first promoted by Tondelli in the anthology *Under 25 III: Papergang* (1990) and has subsequently revealed herself to be one of the more versatile authors of her generation. Besides her pulp writing she has also

¹ Only two books were published in *Mouse to Mouse*, both in 1988: *Fotomodella* by Elisabetta Valentini and *Hotel Oasis* by Gianni De Martino. The more successful *Oscar Originals* series, also published by Mondadori, was not just for debutants, although they were frequently included in it, e.g. Lara Cardella’s *Volevo i pantaloni* (1989) and Ballestra’s *Il compleanno dell’iguana*.

² For this reason, Carmen Covito, who published her first novel, *La bruttina stagionata*, in 1992, and who attended the 1993 *Ricercare* conference, but was born in 1948, is not included in my analysis.

experimented with a wide range of genres, themes and narrative perspectives. Her writing is ironic and comic, and among the more erudite and theoretically-oriented prose to emerge from pulp fiction: this is especially the case in *La via per Berlino* (1990), *La guerra degli Antò* (1991) and *Gli Orsi* (1993). Rossana Campo (born 1963) has emerged from Celati's collection, *Narratori delle riserve* (1992), and has since proved to be a prolific novelist: here I will concentrate on *In principio erano le mutande* (1992), *Il pieno di super* (1993), *Mai sentita così bene* (1995), and *L'attore americano* (1998). Her novels take a wry approach to her female characters' problems, and she subverts the popular genres of romance and detective fiction to produce colloquial and comic novels. Aldo Nove (born 1967) represents the authors of *Gioventù Cannibale* (1996), in which his short story, 'Il mondo dell'amore', was published. He is also the author of the collection of short stories *Superwoobinda* (1996, an expanded edition of *Woobinda*, 1995), and of several novels, beginning with *Puerto Plata Market* (1997).³ Nove's writing is interesting for its standpoint on consumerism and mass culture, particularly television. Enrico Brizzi (born 1974) engages with different facets of popular culture in his pulp writing: his fiction demonstrates an influence from a wide range of cultures, including American literature, comic books, and pop, rock and punk music. His first novel, *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* (1994), was an instant bestseller and was followed by *Bastogne* (1996), *Tre ragazzi immaginari* (1998) and *Elogio di Oscar Firmian e del suo impeccabile stile* (1999). Like Brizzi, Isabella Santacroce (born 1968), author of *Fluo* (1995), *Destroy* (1996) and *Luminal* (1998), was 'discovered' by a small publisher, but was subsequently propelled to greater fame by Feltrinelli, which was eager to capitalise on growing enthusiasm for new, young writers.⁴ Although Santacroce, like Campo, deals exclusively with female characters in her novels, her writing is more cryptic and controversial, and often expresses concerns for vulnerable women in an aggressively selfish and consumer society. All of these authors have subsequently achieved some kind of literary longevity based both on popular success and – at least eventually and from some quarters – critical acclaim. Their situation differs from some of their contemporaries, who have faded from the

³ Although these were Nove's first publications in prose, he had previously published three collections of poetry under his real name, Antonello Satta Centanin: *Tornando nel tuo sangue* (Edizioni Polena, 1989), *Musica per streghe* (Edizioni del Leone, 1991), and *La luna vista da Viggiù* (Edizioni del Leone, 1994).

⁴ I have taken Santacroce's date of birth from Gervasutti 1998. Santacroce is reluctant to disclose biographical information: 'non ama le biografie Isabella. Di lei si può dire che è nata a Riccione, che ha frequentato il Dams a Bologna che ha partecipato ad alcune mostre d'arte, che ha studiato organo liturgico. Tutto il resto è nella sua scrittura' (Lucamante 2002 p9).

literary scene after one book, for example, Nicola X, who published *Infatti purtroppo* (1995) when he was just fifteen.⁵

As this selection of authors suggests, the aim of this study is not to provide a comprehensive overview of pulp fiction which analyses every work that might be included within this trend, nor to identify a very limited selection of texts which alone may be seen as ‘true’ pulp. Those I have chosen are among the most accomplished pulp authors, whose fiction reveals a greater depth than critics initially discerned. Ballestra, Brizzi, Campo, Santacroce and Nove should be seen as a representative sample of the various strands of writing that constitute 1990s Italian pulp. I will also refer to texts by other pulp writers, who have similar origins, but offer complementary perspectives to the ones on whom I focus. They include Matteo Gializzo and Niccolò Ammaniti, who also published in *Gioventù Cannibale*; Giuseppe Culicchia, who made his literary debut in the same *Under 25* anthology as Silvia Ballestra, and Tiziano Scarpa, a critically aware author who, like Ballestra, is able to manipulate varied linguistic and cultural codes. In my analysis, I attempt to strike a balance between breadth and depth of critical debate and thus to redress the imbalance of focus that has either been very general or excessively specific. With this choice, I aim to move on from earlier, less detailed investigations into pulp, by providing both a coherent analysis of pulp fiction that explores the work of these authors in detail, and a critical overview of the most significant elements and themes of pulp fiction.

Throughout this study I discuss the relationship and points of contact between the language of Italian fiction in the 1990s and various facets of youth, mass and popular cultures, and the language varieties with which they are associated. My methodology is principally informed by the theory of contemporary Italian sociolinguistics and literary criticism, whilst it also owes a conceptual debt to literary linguistics and stylistics (see for example Fowler 1981 and Toolan 1990), as well as to some elements of cultural studies. By paying close attention to pulp’s language, I aim to overcome the judgemental and descriptive approach taken by many critics to this fiction, and to highlight pulp’s reflective and critical stance towards the cultures that influence it. I will show how a linguistic-based criticism of pulp is the only approach that has remained constant and viable throughout the 1990s and into the next decade for a group of authors whose works would retrospectively be considered ‘disparate in style, content, and thematics’ (Lucamante 2001b p15). I explore how pulp uses language to

⁵ From this point on, I will refer to these primary texts by their titles and to secondary texts by the author-date system.

engage with contemporary issues and to offer thought-provoking and frequently ambiguous reflections on the society and culture in which it is set. The reader's reaction to the text and their ability to read the cultural and linguistic meanings expressed by the many cultural references made in pulp are key elements in my analysis. Firstly, I will show how the syntactic and lexical innovations of pulp's demonstrates an engagement with youth languages. Following on from this, I show how, when addressed to a reflective and educated reader, the use of this language reveals a network of literary references. I then go on to demonstrate how pulp authors both develop and challenge their predecessors' theoretical concepts by incorporating them into a cultural mix that also includes youth, mass and popular cultures. By way of introduction to my own reading of these texts, I first consider how other critics have read pulp and how their theoretical presuppositions have informed their readings of this fiction.

2. Literature review

2a. Introduction

Pulp's challenging linguistic style, its controversial subject matter, and its seemingly ambivalent ethical stance have provoked a broad and varied critical response, resulting in a critical bibliography that is often both confusing and polemical. Yet the majority of critical reaction to pulp remains piecemeal and scattered, partially because some of the debate around this tradition has been oral rather than written. There have been a number of literary conferences on pulp fiction, the most well-known of which are the annual *Ricerche* meetings in Reggio Emilia, which I discuss below. There have also been several one-off events, including Alessandro Baricco's *Narrare dopo 'Pulp Fiction'* (Turin, May 1996). Pulp authors have also appeared in group discussions on television, for instance, on Rai Due's *Altra edicola*, and their works have been the subject of much debate in the general press. Works of pulp fiction have been reviewed in many different publications, from intellectual reviews such as *L'indice dei libri del mese*, to teenage magazines like *Mucchio Selvaggio* and *Cuore*, to the major dailies (*La Stampa*, *La Repubblica*, *Il Manifesto*, *L'Unità* and *Il Corriere della Sera*), which have also featured interviews with pulp authors.⁶

⁶ I am grateful to Einaudi, Feltrinelli and Rizzoli for allowing me access to their archives of press cuttings on *Gioventù Cannibale* and on works by Rossana Campo, Isabella Santacroce, and Silvia Ballestra respectively. Some of these cuttings from newspapers do not have complete page reference details. When this is the case, it will be noted in the footnotes and in the bibliography. For unattributed articles in newspapers or magazines, the title is given in place of the author.

Most commonly, serious criticism and analysis of pulp fiction is to be found in journal articles, edited volumes, conference proceedings, or literary encyclopaedias. These articles are necessarily limited in scope and depth, mostly focussing on a single author or work. Although this approach gives a good indication of pulp's relationship to its literary context, it does not allow for a detailed investigation of this fiction in its own right. These texts are often part of a wider thematic collection, addressing issues such as the developments in post-war Italian literature, the boom in Italian literature in the 1990s, or linguistic developments in Italian fiction. Much of the written bibliography on the subject therefore lacks critical depth: there are, as yet, very few works on pulp alone that aspire to a more coherent and thorough treatment of the subject. Of the half dozen books that take pulp fiction as their exclusive subject, discussed below, some offer little critical polemic or lack cohesion; others deal with only one aspect of this fiction and can appear biased, others still are good at identifying broad trends and thematic tendencies, but lack specific and detailed textual analyses. Some attempts have been made to redress this imbalance with the establishment of two specialist journals, *La bestia* and *Pulp*, to serve as a critical forum for debate between pulp authors and their critics. However, the lack of coherent theoretical impetus behind pulp fiction is illustrated by the short lifespan of *La Bestia*. This journal was created largely through the efforts of the 1960s avantgarde, and lasted for just one issue in 1997, which is now unobtainable.

A further problem with much of the critical reaction to pulp has been that critics have adapted their approach to this writing from pre-existing methodologies that have been developed in response to other kinds of fiction, produced in different socio-political and cultural contexts. This is certainly true of the three main themes that run through the critical reaction to pulp, which can be defined broadly as genre, gender and generation. Critics initially attempted to rationalise pulp in terms of genre, focussing closely on definition and description in an effort to find an appropriate name for this 'new' genre. These analyses often become so enmeshed in nomenclative issues that they lack a polemical thrust. Following on from the critical preoccupation with genre, a relatively small number of critics have analysed pulp in terms of gender. As I will show in my overview of this fiction, this approach has added an important ethical dimension to the debate on pulp fiction, but the complex and ambiguous nature of pulp means that there are also many problems with this approach to this specific type of fiction.

Instead, many critics have considered this fiction in terms of generation, and this has ultimately proved the most productive critical perspective. This kind of criticism has two dominant strands. The first, fostered almost exclusively by ex-associates of the

1960s literary avantgarde movement, the *Gruppo 63*, has sought to inscribe pulp fiction within a tradition of Italian avantgarde literature. These critical works are often heavily biased, and do not always do justice to other aspects of this fiction. A second generational strand sets pulp in a context of 1990s language and culture. Although this is still in its infancy, it represents an innovative and significant step forward in the analysis of pulp fiction. In the following section, I give an overview of each of these critical strands, paying closer attention to the more significant works in each area. Following on from this, I explain how my own approach to pulp builds on the study of pulp in its wider cultural and linguistic context, and, by focussing on its language, allows for a text-based analysis of pulp that considers its relationship with Italian literature, and youth and popular cultures, within one encompassing framework.

2b. Genre

An understanding of what may be expected from a genre shapes the expectations of readers and critics alike, making this an important issue in a discussion of pulp. Many literary critics have encountered problems in finding a logical and consistent way of defining 1990s narrative in a way that takes into account both its themes and linguistic style. This has resulted in an overwhelmingly taxonomic approach that has led one critic to remark that ‘the difference between such neologizing fervor and the actual depth of textual analysis is [...] quite disconcerting’ (Renello 2001 p139). The fundamental difficulty of naming pulp is revealing, as it points to ambiguities within the genre, which in turn raise interesting questions about the readership of this fiction: a complex issue to which I will return in this study. The lack of critical consensus on the ways in which this fiction should be described has ultimately disadvantaged and obscured deeper analysis of pulp, as parameters valid for one set of texts have been applied to others that they are less fitted to, resulting in turn in terminological and conceptual confusion. Many of the genre labels proposed have focussed on the more superficial aspects of this writing, and for this reason should be treated with caution. Nonetheless, the descriptive approach taken by many critics is a useful starting point for some of the issues underlying the critical debate on pulp fiction. All of the terms offered to describe pulp focus on one of its significant aspects, but they lack an overarching structure that links the highly varied styles of different authors. In this section, I discuss the most commonly used labels for this writing, beginning with the most generic, ‘giovane/nuova narrativa’ (the two being largely coterminous in 1990s Italy); the notion of ‘tribù’ and

its subdivisions, the opposed strands of ‘buonisti/cattivisti’ writers, and finally two trends within the ‘cattivisti’ strand, ‘cannibale’ and ‘pulp’.⁷ In conclusion, I will summarise the reasons for which I have chosen this last term to designate the fiction discussed in this study.

The most generic approach to 1990s fiction was to define it as ‘new’ (‘nuova narrativa’), or as ‘giovane narrativa’, and its authors as ‘giovani narratori’. This was a legacy of the definitions applied to young writers in the 1980s: but even then, it was not entirely accurate, as some of the authors included in this group, like Antonio Tabucchi, were far from young when they started publishing. One positive aspect of this overarching label is that it identifies youth as the single biggest innovative force in 1990s Italian literature. Many of the new authors who first achieved success and critical acclaim in the 1990s were born in the 1960s and 1970s, and a consideration of youth culture is important for an understanding of the cultural context and themes of much of this fiction, particularly of pulp. However, simply categorising this group of authors as ‘young’ or ‘new’ encourages a descriptive approach and does not allow for distinctions between different types of fiction. A typical example of this approach can be found in Luca Gervasutti’s *Dannati e sognatori: guida alla nuova narrativa italiana* (Campanotto, 1998).

Dannati e sognatori is effectively a collage of extracts from interviews with the protagonists of Italian pulp – authors and critics alike – taken either from Gervasutti’s own material or from other critical works on pulp. As Gervasutti puts it, the book offers ‘una mappa del nuovo mondo letterario visto dal suo interno’ (Gervasutti 1998 p13). Gervasutti’s basic premise is that ‘il nostro passato letterario viene quasi totalmente trascurato dalla maggior parte degli autori che hanno esordito negli anni Novanta. La nuova tribù dei narratori cerca infatti di operare un rinnovamento radicale delle strutture e del linguaggio muovendosi entro nuovi filoni di matrice extra-letteraria’ (Gervasutti 1998 p55). He emphasises the importance of cinema, television and rock music for pulp, devoting a chapter to each and calling rock music ‘l’aspetto culturalmente più ricco delle nuove generazioni’ (Gervasutti 1998 p28). In his view, this does not exclude links with Italian literature, constructing 1990s authors as an avantgarde with connections to literary tradition: ‘sebbene uno dei tratti distintivi della tribù dei nuovi romanzieri sia l’appartenenza a una generazione che non conosce maestri, tuttavia spesso anche tra gli scrittori della *nouvelle vague* italiana risulta evidente e dichiarata una continuità con la

⁷ Apart from in initial definitions, in which I discuss the appropriateness of these terms, they will be treated as simple nouns and will not be placed in inverted commas.

tradizione' (Gervasutti 1998 p50-51). Although he defines these authors a 'tribù': a term which conveys notions of savagery that is present in all appraisals of 1990s pulp fiction, he acknowledges their individuality, describing the 1990s literary scene as 'un panorama complesso e poliedrico che, certo, non facilita il compito dei critici' (Gervasutti 1998 p14). Despite the descriptive nature of Gervasutti's book, it does contain moments of insight, and some of the points he touches on, such as the relationship between literary and popular cultures in pulp fiction, and the extent to which pulp can be defined as 'politically engaged' fiction, suggest potentially fruitful critical perspectives on pulp fiction. Gervasutti's book is more useful for examining the public face of pulp than for deconstructing the myths created around this fiction by the authors themselves and their publishers, and it remains an informative contribution to the critical bibliography on pulp. It also has a thorough, useful and ample bio-bibliographical reference section, which lists many significant pulp authors and their critics.

As the generic notions of nuova/giovane narrativa and tribù have revealed themselves to be inadequate to all but the most superficial analyses of 1990s Italian fiction, some critics have sought to make a useful, but still general, thematic distinction within these amorphous categories, between a group of 'buonisti' and their 'opposites', the 'cattivisti' (for instance, Bernardi 1997 and Renello 2001).⁸ Many synonyms have been offered for these two terms, which has often just confused the critical debate.⁹ Among the buonisti are many 1980s giovani narratori (Daniele Del Giudice, Andrea De Carlo and Antonio Tabucchi), and others who are seen to be influenced by this group, such as Susanna Tamaro, Alessandro Baricco and Giulio Mozzi. The buonisti's fiction has been described as 'personal, private and non experimental narrative [...] uninteresting from the linguistic point of view [...] focusing mainly on middle class characters and their familial and psychological interactions' (Bernardi 1997 p4). Whilst the elaborate and complex style of authors like Baricco questions some aspects of this definition, the buonisti's writing is less rooted in mass and popular cultures than the cattivisti's, and it is also less challenging to other aspects of critical tastes.

The cattivisti's work has also been referred to as trash, splatter, pop, punk, noir, cannibale and pulp, or any combination of these terms, such as splatterpunk. Far from

⁸ Although Bernardi observes that the 'cattivisti' write explicitly sexual and violent fiction, she is wise to be wary of over-generalisation, noting that 'the two main tendencies of the New Fiction, *buonista* and *cattivista*, ask for a deeper reading than the simplifications initially proposed' (Bernardi 1997 p9, her italics).

⁹ For example, the term 'vegetariani' is proposed by Lucamante 2001b as a synonym for buonisti, but its use elsewhere is limited.

being applied pejoratively, though, these labels can have positive implications, because ‘bad feelings, trash, and pulp were, and are, the distinctive traits of the good writers (the best of Italian literature in these years)’ (Renello 2001 p136). The proliferation of synonyms for the ‘bad’ strand of 1990s fiction demonstrates the degree of interest in this type of writing. The *cattivisti* group includes, but is not limited to, Niccolò Ammaniti, Aldo Nove, Tiziano Scarpa, Silvia Ballestra, Rossana Campo, Enrico Brizzi, Giuseppe Caliceti and Isabella Santacroce as well as the writers published in the anthologies *Gioventù Cannibale* (Einaudi 1996) and *Cuore di Pulp* (Stampa Alternativa 1997). The publication of these two anthologies clearly altered the terminology used to describe 1990s *giovane narrativa*. Although the terms ‘cannibale’ and ‘pulp’, originally taken from their titles, were only applied to fiction by young Italian authors after 1996, they have nonetheless remained the most enduring labels for their writing, even though some of it was published before this date. A consideration of the ways in which these terms have been used, and of the implications of their different interpretations, shows how and why pulp authors and works of pulp fiction that apparently have little in common can and have been grouped together.

The use of the term ‘cannibale’ to designate a broader group of authors than those included in *Gioventù Cannibale* is thematic, as it denotes the heterogeneous cultural influences that act upon this fiction. This point has been picked up by various commentators, for instance Thomas Stein, who perceptively defines *cannibale* as ‘the attitude of all-devouring voyeurism so typical of the modern Italian society shaped by mass-media (especially but not exclusively television) from which it springs’ (Stein 2002 p102). Bernardi 1997 and Mozzi 2002 have also seen this metaphor in the term, along with some critics in the press: ‘li hanno chiamati “cannibali” perché si nutrono di generi diversi, di frammenti narrativi e non disdegnano l’horror’ (Rebuffini 1998 p15). These uses of ‘cannibale’ are among the more enlightening appropriations of the term, but are too restrictive on two accounts. Firstly, the association with horror and genre fiction is inapplicable to much of the *cattivista* writing, which is not all particularly violent. Secondly, the use of this label over-emphasises the importance of Einaudi’s anthology, often at the expense of other equally interesting texts, such as those by Ballestra, Santacroce, Campo and Brizzi. Although I will occasionally use the term ‘cannibale’ in this study, this will only refer to authors or texts in *Gioventù Cannibale*.

‘Pulp’, on the other hand, is not as strongly linked to a specific text and can therefore be used generically with comparatively greater freedom. The term was first used in Italian literary criticism because the gratuitous and excessive violence in

Gioventù Cannibale and *Cuore di Pulp* (Stampa Alternativa 1997) clearly evoked memories of Quentin Tarantino's equally violent and hugely successful film, *Pulp Fiction* (1994). The use of apparently similar themes in these anthologies led to the labelling of these texts as 'pulp'. This in turn prompted some critics to recall earlier 20th century American pulp fiction magazines, printed on poor quality paper, which purveyed horror, noir and detective fiction to the masses at a low price. Because *Gioventù Cannibale* and earlier 1990s giovane/nuova narrativa both emphasised the importance of new, young writers, and had apparently similar sources of inspiration, critics perceived both this anthology, and, by thematic association, *Cuore di Pulp* as part of the same narrative trend as authors like Ballestra, Brizzi, Campo, Culicchia and Santacroce. This inevitably led to some conflation of already unclear critical categories, and 'pulp' became a label applied to a whole generation of authors. Nicoletta Di Ciolla McGowan sums up neatly the hectic genesis of the 'pulp' label:

l'attributo 'pulp' è stato assorbito nella cultura popolare italiana assumendo per antonomasia il significato di rivisitazione irriverente, in chiave contemporanea o 'pop', dei miti e delle icone dominanti della nostra cultura di fine millennio. La critica letteraria italiana ha adottato il termine, ed affiancandolo al sostantivo 'generation' – mantenendo così intatta la referenzialità linguistica e culturale nordamericana – ne ha tratto un'altra definizione omnicomprensiva con la quale riferirsi genericamente ad un'intera ondata di scrittori. All'interno della 'pulp generation' vengono fatti convergere tutti quegli autori – anche chiamati 'giovani scrittori' o 'nuovi-nuovi narratori' – nati tra gli anni Sessanta e Settanta, esplosi all'attenzione di pubblico e critica negli anni Novanta e fautori di una vera e propria rivoluzione nella scena letteraria, di un'azione sovversiva nei confronti del canone romanzesco (McGowan 1999 p167).

The disadvantage of this apparently simpler approach is that because the term 'pulp' has multiple roots and many potential interpretations, not everyone has understood it in the same way. This is illustrated by the most recent work of criticism on pulp, Stefania Lucamante's collection of essays, *Italian Pulp Fiction: the new narrative of the Giovani Cannibali writers* (Farleigh Dickinson and Associated University Press, 2001). This book has three main merits: it is the most extensive text in English on this subject; it discusses many important issues relating to Italian pulp, and it puts forward several useful arguments that I will draw on in the course of this study. However, it has done little to clarify the terms 'pulp' and 'cannibale', or to define which authors should be included within these groups. Despite acknowledging the terminological confusion in which 1990s narrative is mired, Lucamante adopts existing definitions of pulp and cannibale without further qualification. She treats the two terms as synonyms, and apparently accepts the inclusion of all young 1990s authors within these categories. This

is not a view shared by the other contributors to this volume, all of whom have a different opinion on who may be called pulp and who may not. This is confusing for the reader, especially one unfamiliar with the subject matter, at whom this book is aimed. There are several other difficulties with Lucamante's book. For instance, Lucamante persistently dates the beginning of interest in young authors to 1996, which is not the case. Brizzi, Santacroce and Nove published their second books in 1996, whilst Ballestra and Campo had already published three books each by this time: the first critical texts relating to this group of authors had been published in 1995. Lucamante also credits Einaudi with the first significant interest in young authors: a questionable assertion that is more the product of Einaudi's press releases than any independent critical analysis. It may well be argued that the smaller publishers who first brought young writers to critical attention were at least as influential in their subsequent success as Einaudi, which has never published anything by Campo, Ballestra, Brizzi or Santacroce, all of whom are discussed in Lucamante's book.¹⁰

One of the clearest definitions of 'pulp' is offered by Filippo La Porta in *La nuova narrativa italiana* (Bompiani 1999). Although quite descriptive in its approach, this text takes a more discerning stance towards the application of the genre labels than some other critics. La Porta sees the practice of homogenizing 1990s fiction into one category as disadvantageous to the authors involved, preferring to use instead the umbrella term 'nuova narrativa' with clear subdivisions, in order to highlight 'l'estrema varietà di temi e opzioni stilistiche nei nostri narratori' (La Porta 1999b p26). La Porta's observation of the heterogeneity of this fiction is a key concept, to which I will return in outlining my own approach to pulp later in this chapter. Originally published in 1995, *La nuova narrativa italiana* was re-issued with an additional chapter on *Gioventù Cannibale* in 1999, thus introducing an element of chronology into the label 'pulp'. At the beginning of this chapter, La Porta explains the term as follows:

¹⁰ A further difficulty for the readers of Lucamante's book is that many translations of primary texts are inaccurate to the extent that they obscure either the sense or the cultural references indicated in the original. This is not an insignificant criticism when dealing with writing that relies specifically on its complex network of cultural references and linguistic style for its meaning, nor for a book which aims to 'introduce the works of these important new authors to Anglophone readers and critics and to initiate an in-depth discussion of the dynamics that allowed this particular group of Italian writers of the mid-1990s to commence what we believe is a profound and radical evolution in the form and the very ethics of modern Italian literature' (Lucamante 2001b p13).

la definizione di pulp appare incerta (così come quella di *trash*) e ha dato il via a innumerevoli discussioni e disquisizioni [...]. In prima approssimazione consideriamo pulp quella produzione letteraria, visiva ecc. che oggi utilizza o ricicla materiali ‘bassi’, popolari, legati ai generi (o ‘fumettari’ o di ‘appendice’: trame forti, psicologie elementari, sangue a profusione), però con una consapevolezza e con un’ironia che permettono di uscire dalla inerte serialità del genere. Avanguardia e consumo, standardizzazione e trasgressione, linguaggio della pubblicità e ricerca ‘seria’ (La Porta 1999b p261).

This description of pulp is one of the more comprehensive and useful of the various ones proposed, not least because La Porta acknowledges the hazy and uncertain use of the term whilst proposing a definition that covers all the characteristics that have been included within it. La Porta’s definition of pulp is perceptive in its identification of the incongruous and diverse influences on pulp and the ways in which they are manipulated.

The labelling of the particular kind of Italian fiction under discussion here as ‘pulp’ implicitly labels this writing as ‘genre fiction’ (Barenghi 1999), the validity of which is questioned in Italian literary criticism (Contro 1996, Lucamante 2001b).¹¹ The cautious inclusion of genre fiction within the realm of Italian literature can be seen as the legacy of Eco’s success with *Il nome della rosa*, which uses the detective novel genre and draws upon varied and ‘low’ linguistic registers (Pomilio 2000). 1990s pulp has been linked to various kinds of genre fiction, among them horror, 1980s minimalism and detective fiction, which enter into Italian literature mostly through translations from English (Pezzarossa 1999, Cardone, Galato et al. 1996). Beyond making these superficial associations, few critics have examined the relationship in any real depth.¹² Other critics have also remarked on an affinity between 1990s pulp and Stephen King (Gerosa 1996, Gervasutti 1998), whilst Pezzarossa 1999 suggests that Italian pulp is a continuation of the Italian ‘giallo’. This genre took its name from the ‘Giallo Mondadori’ series of the 1950s, which was itself a response to (and sometimes a translation of) the *Black Mask* magazine, at the heart of American pulp (Pezzarossa 1999). However, links between pulp and genre fiction should not be read as a criticism

¹¹ For example, one critic classifies *Gioventù Cannibale* as ‘l’operare all’interno di un genere letterario ben preciso, che si rifà a materiali e a altri generi (quali il fumetto) assai consolidati come letture di consumo e strettamente popolari’ (‘Non esageriamo’ 1996 p5).

¹² ‘Se il lettore italiano vuole ricostruire i lineamenti di questa “matrice” letteraria, è libero di farlo (e dovrebbe farlo), rinunciando una volta per tutte a fissazioni “nazionalistiche”, e a spocchiose distinzioni tra letteratura *seria* e letteratura *di genere* (o “popolare”, come si dice)’ (Contro 1996 p16). The implication is that Anglophone literature is more receptive to genre fiction than its Italian equivalent, that ‘finalmente nella produzione letteraria – e soprattutto editoriale – del nostro Paese c’è un po’ di spazio anche per la forza espressiva, maleducata e grezza, di uno *Splatterpunk* rivisitato e adattato; si è aperta una porticina da cui forse – lungo un percorso inverso rispetto a quello seguito dagli anglosassoni – potrà forse uscire un *neogotico italiano*, un’esplorazione del *fantastico* che, qui da noi, ha scarsissimi precedenti’ (Contro 1996 p16).

of Italian pulp, which treats these narrative forms in the same ways as it draws on other cultural influences: intelligently and critically, often parodying them for stylistic effect.

Allusions to youth, innovation, and the ironic treatment of popular and youth cultures are encoded to various extents in the many labels used to define the 'bad' strand of 1990s Italian fiction: *giovane/nuova*, *cattivisti*, *cannibale* and *pulp*. 'Pulp' conveys the essence of this writing better than any of the other labels that have been proposed for it, such as *cannibale*, *splatter* and *trash*, which are too restrictive in terms of genre and carry pejorative connotations. Although the term has been applied to a wide range of fiction, this versatility may also be seen as its greatest asset. Its multiple and flexible meanings articulate all the qualities of youth, innovation, popular culture and irony present in this fiction, recalling not only the horror/noir/detective fiction of cheap American magazines (thus covering fiction such as *Gioventù Cannibale* that appropriates these genres) but also covering the mix of cultural sources which inform many texts by authors like Nove, Ballestra, and Santacroce. I suggest, therefore, that pulp should be taken as a metaphor for the heterogeneous mix of cultural and linguistic sources that inform its language and reference system.

2c. Gender

A significant theme to emerge from the debate on genre is an association between 1990s Italian fiction and 1950s American pulp, perceived by many as a fundamentally misogynistic genre that portrayed women merely as two-dimensional characters and objects of sexual pleasure. This has given rise to a strand of criticism that has analysed pulp in terms of gender, and has explored themes relating to the body and women's writing in 1990s Italian pulp: authors like Rossana Campo, Isabella Santacroce and Simona Vinci are often discussed in these terms. Significantly, by approaching this fiction from a critical perspective that is already sensitive to notions of inequality, some critics have shown greater understanding of the ethical concerns voiced in pulp fiction. Unfortunately, the tendency of this strand of criticism to focus most closely on writing by women, and the ways in which women depict female characters, means that some very interesting points about the ethics of representation of gender and the body risk being overlooked, particularly in men's writing. The representation of women by men is often dismissed briefly as two dimensional and ethically dubious, whereas the representation of men by women, and the innovative treatment of the body by authors like Tiziano Scarpa and Niccolò Ammaniti is not often discussed at all.

Whereas these are valid starting points for debate, in my analysis I suggest that the reality is more complicated and ambivalent than analyses such as these imply.

Nonetheless, some critics have approached pulp in terms of a comparison between male and female pulp authors. Claudia Bernardi's 2003 article, 'Exiles/nomads: journeys through language and gender in Italian women's pulp fiction of the 1990s', adopts a gendered reading of the condition that she describes as 'exile'.¹³ She argues that male protagonists of pulp fiction remain firmly linked to their provincial Italian roots, whereas female protagonists display greater abilities in dealing with their 'exile'. She analyses the expression of the journey/return motif in female authors like Ballestra, Campo and Santacroce, contrasting the facility with which their female characters negotiate international linguistic and cultural boundaries, with the problems faced with male characters in adapting to foreign cultures (Bernardi 2003 p61). She identifies foreign words, youth languages, and the ironic use of the languages of media and popular culture as 'the linguistic components of "pulp fiction"', which reveal the estrangement of the writers of the 1990s from the standard narrative' (Bernardi 2003 p58). The extent to which this fiction really is estranged from Italian literature is debatable, though, and this is a point to which I will return in Chapter 3. Bernardi identifies in men's writing a different kind of cultural fluency to that found in pulp fiction by women, and one which has very different narrative outcomes:

While Nove succeeds perfectly well in reproducing the sexism inscribed in the culture and language of consumerism, he fails to or chooses not to escape the confines of that language in order to introduce their voices [...], which might speak in alternative to the one through which the story is narrated and focalised. In Nove's, Brizzi's, Caliceti's novels and short stories, female characters are for the most part deprived of voices and identities, becoming extensions of the male narrators' world of reference (Bernardi 2003 p64).

In this analysis, Bernardi appears to see one of the strategies through which pulp articulates its ethical point as a defect in the writing. Other critics who have approached pulp from the standpoint of gender theory have pointed more emphatically to the importance of non-literary linguistic influences on this writing. In *C'era una volta il pulp: corpo e letteratura nella tradizione italiana* (CLUEB 1999), Fulvio Pezzarossa remarks on the use of genres such as autobiography, pornography, and eroticism by women pulp writers, and suggests that this implies a departure from earlier traditions of women's writing (Pezzarossa 1999 p68). Although the book aims to discuss the

¹³ This article is essentially a more sophisticated version of her 1998 article, "'The Road to Berlin': Displacement and Cultural Exile in the New Italian Fiction of the Nineties', in *New Readings*, 1998, 4, 23-38.

representation of the body in pulp fiction, the focus is more on Italian literary tradition than on pulp. Long sections of the book deal with the representation of human corporality in Italian literature, from hagiography through Dante, Boccaccio and Tasso to 20th century Italian authors such as Gadda, Pasolini, Arbasino, Busi and Tondelli. Because of the emphasis on tradition, much relevant introductory material, such as a definition of the pulp genre and a list of what it might encompass, is confined to an appendix at the end of the book rather than appearing at the beginning, as the reader might prefer. In this appendix, Pezzarossa proposes an excessively inclusive list of more than seventy pulp authors, but acknowledges it to be ‘un catalogo, confuso, casuale e arbitrario’ (Pezzarossa 1999 p213).¹⁴ Pezzarossa’s approach presupposes an extensive familiarity with this genre and the critical debate around it, as he never deals with the primary literature in any detail and instead relies on theoretical and secondary literature. His scholarly approach is evident, with lengthy footnotes that demonstrate familiarity with an extensive secondary literature on pulp, the body in literature, and the sociology of literature, but he provides no textual evidence from pulp fiction to support his claims, in contrast to extensive quotations from more ‘canonical’ texts throughout the book.

Nonetheless, Pezzarossa makes several interesting observations on the nature of pulp and on the critical reactions to it. He notes that pulp is ‘un fenomeno espressivo carente di strumentazioni interpretative specifiche’ (Pezzarossa 1999 p20), and also has cause to remark on the difficulties of defining this writing, commenting that ‘manca un canone auto o etero certificato che cataloghi gli scrittori della stagione pulp italiana’ (Pezzarossa 1999 p213). Regarding the fiction itself, he observes that ‘è lo stesso filone pulp a definirsi come scrittura di nicchia giovanile, con la disarmante e semplice oggettività di una generazione intera che ha perso i consueti riferimenti dell’ideologia e pertanto motivi e spinte per aprire polemiche con vecchi e autorità’ (Pezzarossa 1999 p14-15). He sees pulp as linguistically divorced from any kind of previous literature: ‘tagliati almeno in apparenza i ponti con la precedente letteratura, [pulp] modula il proprio statuto comunicativo sulla nervatura dell’oralità’ (Pezzarossa 1999 p59-60), a point which I challenge in Chapter 3. Pezzarossa also emphasises that familiarity with youth cultures and languages is a prerequisite for a successful reading of pulp, because ‘senza tali coordinate di riferimento, risulta assolutamente spiazzante se non impenetrabile un discorso che a tratti pare deliberatamente offrirsi come costitutivo di una controlingua, a metà tra rozzezza trascurata e l’esito mimetico di un raffinato gergo

¹⁴ Pezzarossa takes as his starting point the list of authors considered ‘pulp’ by *La Bestia*: Ammaniti, Ballestra, Brizzi, Caliceti, Campo, Culicchia, Gializzo, Massaron, Mozzi, Nove, Piccolo, Santacroce and Scarpa.

giovane' (Pezzarossa 1999 p59-60). He also comments on the relevance of music and television for pulp (Pezzarossa 1999 p61-62; p70 and p79 respectively), and also remarks on the important theme of consumerism in pulp (Pezzarossa p76), but does not develop these notions in any detail: these are all points I examine in more depth in this study.

Gian Paolo Renello's article, 'The Mediatic Body of the *Cannibale* Literature', (in Lucamante 2001c) focusses on those aspects of the body in pulp that Pezzarossa does not consider, and is one of the better contributions to Stefania Lucamante's collection. By way of introduction, Renello deals incisively with the issue of naming pulp, before offering analyses of two stories from *Gioventù Cannibale*, Ammaniti's 'Seratina' and Nove's 'Il mondo dell'amore'. This leads him to consider the representation of the body and of violence in pulp fiction, linking the 'progressive artificialization of the body' with what he calls an 'exteriorized language' (Renello 2000 p153 and p156) in the writing of Nove, Ammaniti and Santacroce. He concludes that 'if there is something that places writers like Ammaniti or Nove, Scarpa or Santacroce, under a common title, this "something" lies in the language' (Renello 2000 p156). This is an important point, and although he does not pursue his linguistic analysis further, it is a standpoint that I adopt in my own analysis.

Stefania Lucamante's essay, 'Everyday Consumerism and Pornography "above the Pulp Line"' (in *Italian Pulp Fiction*), which focusses on pornography and sexuality in Isabella Santacroce's writing, also analyses pulp from a critical perspective that is steeped in gender theory. Lucamante's argument is that pulp writing by male authors such as Brizzi and Nove is crude and violent, whereas female pulp authors display greater ethical sensitivity in their work. Writing by male pulp authors is cast as misogynistic: according to Lucamante, male pulp writers create women writers 'in a two-dimensional way, devoid of psychological depth [...] male writers typically present these female characters as vehicles to inform the reader of a generic situation of chaos and disorientation' (Lucamante 2001a p102). Lucamante perceives the male writers' female characters as stereotypical sexual objects: this narrative 'completely revolves around the schizophrenic psychology of Northern Italian, alienated, suburban males' (Lucamante 2001a p104).

In contrast, she describes the fiction of Ballestra, Vinci, Santacroce, Campo and Mazzucato as 'an almost overwhelming stream of obscenity, sexual activity, and emotions, which are related to the representations of women's traumas, alienation, and despair. They are rendered in a rather crude lexicon reminiscent of male cuss words, but

not always limited to this language register' (Lucamante 2001a p100). According to Lucamante, this group of writers fictionalise 'an unprecedented behavioral "model" for Italian women. This "model" constructs a new type of individual who rejects programmatic social behaviour and focuses on alternative strategies to subvert women's oppression and repression' (Lucamante 2001a p100). One of her basic premises is that women of Santacroce's generation have moved on in literary and theoretical terms from 1970s feminist writers, and that they are not afraid to appropriate traditionally 'male' genres, such as pornography and eroticism, in order to articulate their transgressive opinions. Lucamante considers the implications of this for discourses on gender and materialism in contemporary Italian fiction, examining the representation of the family and women's bodies in *Fluo*, *Destroy* and *Luminal*.¹⁵ She makes the valid point that 'Isabella Santacroce's trilogy is important precisely because family values and a stance against mass consumerism and pornography are moot points, as is the author's position with respect to the high culture' (Lucamante 2001a p99), but also somewhat controversially states that 'ethics and a programmatic stance are not at the core of [Santacroce's] work' (Lucamante 2001a p113): as I point out in Chapter 4, there are strong ethical elements in Santacroce's writing.

Although Lucamante's argument is substantiated by a sound theoretical framework, I argue that the issues of gender and ethics in pulp are more complex than her a male/female divide suggests. As I discuss in Chapter 4, the nature of the ethical ambiguities in Santacroce's writing, and the ways in which these are expressed, points to strong links with authors like Nove and Brizzi, just as much as it indicates connections with other women writers, like Campo and Ballestra. For this reason, I develop Renello's point that pulp authors are united by their use of language. Critics who have dealt with issues of gender in pulp have, however, opened the discussion of this fiction to important concerns. Two points arising from this strand of criticism are particularly important and will be developed further in my analysis of pulp. Firstly, these critics have raised ethical and socio-political concerns relating to pulp; although in some cases, particularly in book reviews in the press, this has taken the form of simple moralising. Furthermore, the discussions about the representation of gender issues in pulp has fostered a more analytical approach to this fiction. Many of the critics who have discussed the way that gender is constructed in pulp have also pointed to the

¹⁵ A view also expressed by Adalagisa Giorgio in 'The Novel 1965-2000' (in *A History of Women's Writing in Italy*, eds Letizia Panizza and Sharon Wood, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000 218-237), in which she argues that 1990s women writers must be interpreted with reference to a different set of cultural parameters to their predecessors in the 1960s and 1970s.

importance of language in this fiction, observing in particular that a linguistic analysis of this writing can point to thorough literary and theoretical knowledge behind pulp's projected image of youthful transgression. On a more negative note, this criticism's emphasis on women's writing may be read as an inference that women's fiction is linguistically, thematically and ethically distinct from pulp writing by their male peers: secondly, it may also be taken as an implication that writing by women is unambiguously ethical, whereas pulp writing by men adopts exactly the opposite stance. As my selection of a mixed group of male and female pulp writers indicates, there are many similarities between pulp writing by men and women, as well as differences between them. As I will argue in Chapter 4, the key to interpreting much of the ethical argument in authors like Brizzi and Nove lies in an understanding of the reasons why they are deliberately provocative, and 'choose not to' articulate an alternative and more politically correct point of view. Similarly, it is an oversimplification to interpret fiction by authors like Santacroce as unambiguously ethical. On a positive note, a gender-based analysis of pulp can ask important questions of this narrative, such as the extent to which pulp authors are 'exiled' from, or antagonistic towards their national culture; but, as some of the critics acknowledge, pulp fiction cannot always be divided easily along gender lines.

2d. Generation

Critics who have discussed gender and the body in pulp fiction have also pointed to an aspect of generational development in this writing. This type of criticism is one of the most dominant reactions to pulp, as well as a very productive way of approaching this writing, and it has two principal strands. The first of these, which portrays pulp as the third wave of 20th century Italian avantgarde movements, is firmly rooted in established literary-critical perspectives. The second, which has been developed contemporaneously with pulp in order to respond better to the challenges it poses, contextualises this writing as part of 1990s youth cultures and languages. This is revealing itself to be both the most flexible, and ultimately, more productive, of all the critical perspectives on pulp. This approach focusses on authors who have been invited to participate in the *Ricerca* conferences held annually since 1993 in Reggio Emilia, including Ballestra, Campo, Brizzi, Culicchia, Caliceti, Santacroce, Scarpa, Nove, Galiazzo, Nove, Mozzi, Massaron and Covavich.

i) Pulp as the third 20th century avantgarde

The process of linking 1990s literature with the neoavantgarde Gruppo 63 began with the formation in the late 1980s of the Gruppo 93, a group of experimental poets, who set the year 1993 as the date for the dissolution of their group. In choosing a name that so obviously recalls the Gruppo 63, the Gruppo 93 clearly sought to link their own project to the neoavantgarde. Associations between linguistic experimentation in 1990s fiction and the Gruppo 63 were theorized in the papers from the conference, *63/93 Trent'anni di ricerca letteraria: convegno di dibattito e di proposta* (Elytra, 1995), in which members of both groups analyse the extent and nature of the relationship between them.¹⁶ Alongside the critical discussions involving the Gruppo 93, a number of works of criticism were published which focussed on avantgarde literature, and potential links between literature in the 1960s and the 1990s. In general terms, this criticism hypothesised a series of twentieth century Italian avantgardes, centered around Futurism in the early decades of the 20th century, the Gruppo 63 in the 1960s, and pulp in the 1990s. Many of the critics who emphasise a relationship between 1990s pulp and the Gruppo 63 have themselves had associations with this latter group and have been eager to demonstrate the influence of their own activities.

One such work is *È arrivata la terza ondata: dalla neo alla neo-neo avanguardia*, by the art and literary critic Renato Barilli (Testo & Immagine, 2000). The book theorises the links between the Gruppo 63 and the young authors listed above, who read extracts of their prose at the *Ricerca* conferences. The first half of the book deals with literature in the 1970s and 1980s; the second half of the book discusses young 1990s authors. With this in mind, Barilli's book should be read in conjunction with the anthology *Narrative Invaders* (also Testo & Immagine, 2000), a collection of extracts of prose read by young authors at the *Ricerca* conferences between 1993 and 1999. Barilli describes how the *Ricerca* meetings reprised the format of the Gruppo 63's meetings, based on public readings and discussions of unpublished texts, a structure that the Gruppo 63 had itself in turn adopted from the practices of the German Gruppe 47 (Barilli 2000 p80-81). In order to emphasise the link between the neoavantgarde and young 1990s authors, Barilli depicts 1970s writing as uninteresting save for the contributions of some of his own contemporaries, such as Balestrini and

¹⁶ Other works on a similar theme include Bettini, F. and Muzzioli, F. *Gruppo '93: la recente avventura del dibattito teorico letterario in Italia* (Piero Manni, 1990), and D'Oria, A.G. (ed.) *Gruppo 93: Le tendenze attuali della poesia e della narrativa. Antologia di testi teorici e letterari*, (Piero Manni, 1992), which contains both literary texts and essays on literary theory. See also Arvigo, T. (1997) 'La narrativa italiana degli anni novanta', in *Nuova corrente*, 1997, 44, 377-414.

Celati, and concentrates on 1970s poetry rather than prose. He establishes continuity between fiction in the 1980s and the 1990s, describing Tondelli's *Altri Libertini* as 'perfetto nell'anticipare temi e toni degli anni Novanta' (Barilli 2000 p37).¹⁷ For this reason, his treatment of the 1980s giovane narratori (Tondelli, Busi, De Carlo, Tabucchi and Del Giudice) is more sympathetic than that of 1970s prose authors.

Barilli is not at all shy of pointing out his own theoretical and editorial contributions to literature, and throughout the book there is a strong emphasis on the importance of both his and the Gruppo 63's influence on the young prose writers of the 1990s. He makes a link between the objectives and style of the neoavanguardia and the group of pulp authors that he terms the 'neo-neoavanguardia', in that 'se già per l'ondata seconda si doveva parlare di un appiattimento, rispetto al titanismo dei protagonisti delle avanguardie storiche, anche per gli esponenti della terza ondata si dovrà ripetere una diagnosi del genere, e dunque ripresentare un'etichetta di normalizzazione' (Barilli 2000 pxix). Barilli's analysis of 1990s authors focuses on their elaboration of the spoken language and the strong influence of the mass media and music on their prose. Although Barilli often praises these qualities in pulp, he criticises Ballestra's and Campo's novels for weak plot lines (Barilli 2000 p97). His focus on the musical qualities of this prose leads him to make some good points about the influence of pop and rock music on this writing, noting that 'il flusso di base su cui si regge tutta questa "terza ondata", è il flusso delle esecuzioni musicali' (Barilli 2000 p110). Musicality and voice have a significant structural influence on pulp fiction, and, as I will discuss in Chapter 4, these musical references articulate very specific cultural and ethical viewpoints.

However, Barilli's discussion of these authors is largely descriptive and often lacks textual evidence to support it. Certain aspects of this book, such as his concern for the impact of technology on society and literature, for class struggle, and for the implications of the massification of society reveals a critical perspective that remains rooted in the values and literary preoccupations of the 1960s avantgarde. Barilli's strong emphasis on the links between the Gruppo 63 and the 'terza ondata' gives rise to some doubts about the nature of this relationship and in some instances leads the reader to wonder whether the former adherents of the Gruppo 63 are imposing their model somewhat forcefully on this younger generation, rather than the younger authors themselves spontaneously moulding themselves into a truly avantgarde movement. One

¹⁷ In Barilli's opinion, 1980s fiction is characterised by a greater degree of accessibility than the Gruppo 63's writing (Barilli 1984). On this subject, see also Tani 1990, Spinazzola 1990, Bernardi 1999, Cardone, Galato et al. 1996.

example of this is Barilli's discussion of the short-lived journal *La Bestia*, 'progettato da Nanni Balestrini e da me per mettere a fuoco il fenomeno di cui sto parlando' (Barilli 2000 p110). Barilli also acknowledges the ways in which 1990s authors do not conform to traditional avantgarde types, indicating their lack of involvement in theoretical and critical debates (Barilli 2000 pxix). Despite his emphasis on the avantgarde climate created in the *Ricercare* meetings, Barilli describes the anthology *Gioventù Cannibale* as 'la prima occasione per far "precipitare" a nudo una situazione nuova, polemica, arditamente pervenuta a una dichiarazione di guerra contro l'establishment' (Barilli 2000 p138). Barilli's book demonstrates that the desire to associate pulp with the Gruppo 63 has not been entirely, or even mainly, motivated by pulp authors, but instead by former associates of the avantgarde movement, now firmly entrenched members of the cultural élite. Their actions have been interpreted by some critics, with some justification, as an attempt on the part of the Italian literary establishment to reclaim for itself a literature which, as my study shows, had grown up partly outside its boundaries and its influences, and which encompasses much elements that fall outside the traditional parameters of the Italian literary canon.

A less partisan analysis of the relationship between a selection of 1990s writers and 1960s avantgarde can be found in Silvia Contarini-Hak's article on the Gruppo 63's influences on Silvia Ballestra, Rossana Campo and Carmen Covito, published in an issue of the French journal *Narrativa* that is entirely dedicated to Italian youth writing in the 1990s.¹⁸ Although Contarini notes affinities between the neoavantgarde and Ballestra, Campo and Covito in their shared interest in comic and spoken registers and the relationship between literature and reality, she concludes that 'le opere proposte da scrittori giovani e meno giovani a suddetti convegni danno per il momento timidi segnali di una ripresa di interesse per la ricerca linguistica, nulla più' (Contarini 1995 p76). In Ballestra's writing, she notes – but does not give examples of – techniques reminiscent of Arbasino, specifically the use of different linguistic varieties and registers, as well as influences from rock music and television (Contarini 1995 p87). Like Barilli, Contarini also raises questions about the originality of Ballestra's plots and

¹⁸ 'L'eredità della neoavanguardia nei romanzi di Silvia Ballestra, Rossana Campo, Carmen Covito', in *Narrativa*, July 1995, 8, 75-100. This article is an adapted version of the chapter on 1990s writers in Contarini's unpublished doctoral thesis, *Le roman 'nouveau' en Italie du 'Gruppo 63' aux années quatre vingt dix* (Université de Paris IV Sorbonne, 1994-1995). The thesis' focus is not wholly, or even mainly, on 1990s writing, but on the notion of avantgarde and experimental writing, concluding with some observations on the relationships that some pulp authors have with this kind of literature. She hypothesises that 'an unbroken line can be traced back through the literary research of the past thirty years' (Contarini-Hak 1994-1995 p2), but ultimately concludes that 'le roman "nouveau" est celui qu'a ébauché le néo-avant-garde, il n'y en a pas eu d'autres' (Contarini-Hak 1994-1995 p471).

themes. She also questions the extent of variety in Campo's linguistic experimentation (Contarini 1995 p94), because, in Contarini's opinion, 'l'eccesso di semplicità, sebbene lucido e cosciente, diventa semplicismo' (Contarini 1995 p91), a point that I challenge in Chapter 2. Although Contarini observes many similar techniques in writing by the neoavantgarde and the 1990s generation, she perceives a difference in their application: 'i neoavanguardisti potevano scrivere per pochi iniziati e certi testi potevano essere illeggibili; gli scrittori postmoderni si rivolgono a un vasto pubblico di lettori e tengono conto di molteplici esigenze di lettura' (Contarini 1995 p99). The nature of the readership for 1990s pulp is, as Contarini recognises, very complex, and it is a recurring theme in my analysis. Contarini's emphasis on the differences between the neoavantgarde and pulp is interesting, as commentators like Barilli have focussed only on the similarities between them: I develop these points in Chapter 3.

Another perspective on the place of pulp in the Italian avantgarde tradition is offered in Pierpaolo Antonello's chapter on 'Cannibalizing the Avant-Garde' (in Lucamante 2001c). His analysis is refreshing and innovative as it is not restricted to literary movements, but instead traces the use of the 'cannibale' trope in a variety of avant-garde movements from Dadaism to the Italian comic strip *Cannibale* in the 1970s. Antonello's analysis of the relationship between the social contexts that gave rise to Futurism and to those that fostered a climate for the creation of the *Cannibale* comic strip, which establishes many parallels between the two movements, serves as an introduction to his discussion of pulp fiction and to a discussion on the similar self-promotional nature of these movements. He also links 1990s pulp to 1970s comic strips, noting similarities in:

the extreme use of violence, of a transgressive sexuality that surpasses any possible taboo, together with a linguistic force that draws from the most culturally assorted codes and references: from television to comic strips, from the slogans of advertisement to working class and youth jargon subcultures (Antonello 2001 p42-43).

Antonello's study does not set out to inscribe pulp into an avantgarde framework, but to debate whether or not it should be included within such a tradition. On one hand, Antonello presents as evidence that pulp fiction can be considered an avantgarde: its use of the cannibale trope, its distinctive linguistic style and its attempts to appear transgressive. He describes cannibale fiction 'as a step in the development of the specificity of Italian avant-garde' (Antonello 2001 p48). On the other hand, he argues that pulp fiction is not avantgarde because pulp authors lack 'a poetics than can be considered common to the whole group of artists' (Antonello 2001 p44), he does not

detect in their works any negation of or protest against past literature or the current literary hierarchy (Antonello 2001 p44), he does not see any socio-political purpose in their works (Antonello 2001 p49), nor does he perceive any conscious attempt from within the group to construct an avantgarde operation. In his words, ‘the *Cannibali* might believe, or be made to believe, that they are producing a kind of avant-garde in their writings, but they will *never* take themselves seriously, confirming that ironic, postmodern detachment, which is typical of the second Italian avant-gardistic wave’ (Antonello 2001 p49). Despite the thought-provoking debate, this article is ultimately inconclusive, as Antonello never really indicates whether or not he feels that pulp is an avantgarde, or what the implications of this may be. The closest he comes to a resolution of this debate is stating that ‘the experience of *Gioventù Cannibale* can be essentially read as the experience of an avant-group *fully normalized into the market*’ (Antonello 2001 p45, his italics), which may be read as a tentative suggestion that pulp should not be seen as an avantgarde, but rather as a type of experimental fiction that is aware of and exploits the mechanisms of the literary market. The acknowledgement of influences from outside literature is significant for an understanding of pulp, and it is a point that I develop in Chapter 4.

Another astute critic of pulp fiction, Claudia Bernardi, also challenges the validity of some generalisations propagated by the neoavantgarde about 1990s pulp and their relationship with it. In Bernardi’s analysis, pulp authors are both estranged from Italian literary traditions and paradoxically strongly attracted to them (Bernardi 2003 p45-46). In her article, ‘Pulp and other fictions: critical debate on the new Italian narrative’, Bernardi makes a significant step forwards in the debate on pulp, by observing that

the opinions voiced by the members of the Gruppo 63 can be considered useful, as they attempt to build traditions and genealogies of contemporary Italian literature. However, classifications are insufficient to account for the individual voices and tendencies expressed by the various authors. The problem now is how to attempt an interpretation of the young narrative that avoids generalizations and all-inclusive definitions (Bernardi 1997 p5).

In order to overcome the restrictions imposed by contextualising 1990s authors in a purely avantgarde framework, Bernardi suggests that it is

necessary to be able to recognize the cultural reference systems of Italian youth. Most critics mention the interaction between high and popular culture, a vocabulary elaborated from youth jargons which includes pop music, cinema, comic books, television and computer languages. It is, however, very rare to find a detailed analysis and appreciation of the direct models called into question (Bernardi 1997 p6).

In these statements, Bernardi makes many relevant points that I shall build on in this study. In particular, my focus will be on providing the detailed analysis that is so far lacking in the criticism of pulp fiction. In a later article, 'Experiments in Writing and Criticism: *Ricerca* (1993-1999)', Bernardi develops some themes of her earlier essay, portraying the Gruppo 63 as a stifling and restrictive influence on the writing of 1990s pulp authors, suggesting that 'the next step for the conference should be a tuning in of the critical language with the cultural discourses presented by the new body of fiction' (Bernardi 1999 p9). She also observes that 'the participants [at *Ricerca*] were able to see the evidence that the compact poetics of the *Neoavanguardia* could not be proposed as an aesthetics for the Nineties' (Bernardi 1999 p3).

Finally, Bernardi discusses the implications of a link with the neoavantgarde for the politics of pulp, claiming that 'members of the Gruppo '63 argued their own influence on the new writers of the Nineties both in linguistic and political terms' (Bernardi 1999 p4). She constructs the many synonyms proposed for this narrative in political terms, opposing the 'tame version of political engagement' espoused by buonisti like Susanna Tamarro and Alessandro Baricco, to texts by Santacroce, Ammaniti and Scarpa, which are more challenging 'both for their contents and for the effort required on the part of the audience to decode their language' (Bernardi 1999 p6). Bernardi acknowledges the political engagement of authors such as Silvia Ballestra (in *La guerra degli Antò* and *Gli Orsi*), but appears to accept that the writing of this generation has become politically neutral, even if this was not always the case, because 'the landscape of new and experimental Italian writing appears fragmented, monological in style and form, neurotic in content and politically disengaged' (Bernardi 1999 p9). For Bernardi, the result is that these writers are devoid of any unifying political purpose and that their linguistic experimentation is devoid of political intent. She also identifies a sub-group of 'scrittori freddi', who can be distinguished from the pulp authors 'for the linguistic and political regional elements introduced into their standard literary Italian' (Bernardi 1999 p7-8). I would suggest that these issues are more subtle than either the neoavantgarde or Bernardi indicate, and, as I discuss in Chapter 4, they are more related to the political context of their time and a kind of

political engagement that has moved on from associations with monolithic politic ideologies and is instead more closely linked with ethical choices.¹⁹

Bernardi's discussion helps to highlight how the persistent insistence on the connections between the Gruppo 63 and 1990s pulp has meant some critics have been unable, or at least unwilling, to consider pulp as valid in its own right and within its own context. By continuing to use critical criteria devised for different socio-cultural and literary contexts, commentators have often neglected to consider how changes in these wider circumstances impact on pulp. Although some illuminating points emerge from the discussion on the nature and strength of pulp's relationship with the Gruppo 63, this debate, especially in scholarly criticism, has somewhat obscured other debates about pulp's receptiveness to other literatures and extra-literary influences. Furthermore, as Bernardi remarks, this approach has fostered a point of view that sees the late 1970s and early 1980s as an uninteresting period in Italian literature, in order to focus attention on the relationship between the Gruppo 63 and 1990s pulp. Although avantgarde literature and the Gruppo 63 clearly have had some bearings on 1990s pulp, any analysis which insists too much on this fails to do justice to the wide range of non-literary influences present in this fiction and to a range of literature not by the Gruppo 63. For these reasons, a traditional literary critical perspective often reveals itself to be inadequate for an analysis of 1990s pulp. Arguments like Barilli's, which see 1990s pulp as a phase of a neoavantgarde movement, fall down precisely because they remain rooted only in the sphere of the Italian literary avantgarde. In Chapter 4 I will discuss the extent to which the 1990s generation adopt the same strategies as their predecessors, or rather appear to do so whilst taking a significantly different stance towards their material.

ii) Pulp and 1990s languages and cultures

Several studies that have contextualised late twentieth century literature as part of a wider cultural context stop short of the appearance of pulp on the literary scene in the mid 1990s;²⁰ consequently, some present a view which seems outdated and inapplicable to pulp. For instance, Pertile's introduction to *The new Italian novel* states that 'the consensus is for a "modern" language that does not reside anywhere in

¹⁹ The notion of fragmentation is put forwards in Jennifer Burns' *Fragments of impegno: interpretations of commitment in contemporary Italian narrative 1980-2000* (Northern Universities Press, 2001). This study looks at the evolution of political commitment in Italian authors from the postwar period to the 1990s: its penultimate chapter discusses the nature of political commitment in Silvia Ballestra's writing as an example of the nature of political and ethical engagement in pulp.

²⁰ For example, Barański and Lumley's *Culture and conflict in postwar Italy* (St Martin's Press, 1990) and Barański & Pertile's *The new Italian novel* (Edinburgh University Press, 1993).

particular, a language that is supple, precise, clear, and without local or social inflexions' (Barański and Pertile 1993 p14), and states that 'the question of the language is no longer a socio-political question, but one of style' (Barański and Pertile 1993 p15). As this comment suggests, many critics who have attempted to set pulp in a wider context have seen it in political terms. Burns suggests a parallel between the dissolution of the monarchy and the fascist regime in Italy in the 1940s and Italy's difficult transition between First and Second Republic in the early 1990s. She suggests that this is relevant to a study of the literatures of the two periods in that 'the former is the situation which gave birth to the idea of *impegno* in literature, so it seems incumbent on anyone interested in the way literature operates with or within a social context to ask how writers respond to the equivalent moment of acute constitutional crisis in the 1990s' (Burns 2001 p3).

Some critics have taken the lack of explicit political purpose in pulp as an indication that this fiction does not engage with socio-political issues, and that pulp 'has completely abandoned any kind of revolutionary thrust in a political sense' (Antonello 2001 p51). Fofi also doubts the degree of political engagement of some young authors, and criticises in their writing a 'mancanza di esperienza del mondo, di curiosità per il mondo, di dilemmi sociali e/o morali' (Fofi 1998 p144). It should be emphasised, though, that the accusations of lack of political engagement in pulp stem from comparisons between this fiction and earlier generations of young authors, whose fiction testified to direct involvement with political activity. Burns argues that political commitment is a part of late twentieth century prose narrative, which 'manifests itself as a piecemeal engagement with social issues' rather than political ideologies (Burns 2001 p1). Her hypothesis of 'fragmentation' is an apt one for a group of authors that has only been defined loosely, and who in their writing draw upon a wide variety of cultural and linguistic influences.

Other critics have also paid close attention to the social and cultural context of the 1990s. For example, Marino Sinibaldi's *Pulp: la letteratura nell'era della simultaneità* (Donzelli, 1997), which is concerned with broad trends within pulp fiction, makes a significant and often successful attempt to situate pulp in a contemporary context. Although this text is more analytical than other commentaries on pulp, in some respects Sinibaldi reveals a slightly conservative and traditional attitude to literature, as he is reluctant to pay careful attention to genre fiction and non-canonical writing. Like other critical commentaries on pulp, this book is relatively brief, and Sinibaldi does not

define what exactly pulp is, and which authors may be considered under this label.²¹ The nature in which the subject matter is treated requires from the reader an existing familiarity with the literature under discussion as well as the critical debate around it. He remarks that pulp ‘è termine ambiguo per costruzione’ (Sinibaldi 1997 p39), and remains content with a generic use of the term, to define ‘libri recenti e giovani scrittori che nell’Italia d’oggi sembrano segnare una novità *radicale*’ (Sinibaldi 1997 p45). In so doing he takes a metaphorical approach to the label, using it as a synonym for ‘cannibale’ and remarking that ‘ingoando frammenti provenienti dall’alta tradizione letteraria e dalle varianti più *junk* della cultura di massa, i migliori di questi testi rivelano una interessante e, per così dire, feconda natura cannibalica’ (Sinibaldi 1997 p70). However, he warns against the risks of irrelevance, degeneration into convention, and absence of ethics inherent in many pulp texts. Sinibaldi’s hypothesis is based on twin notions that he perceives as characteristic of contemporary modes of representing and perceiving the world: ‘horizontalità’ – the assimilation of a wide variety of cultural forms on the same level – and ‘speed’ – the rapidity with which they can alternate between these different forms (Sinibaldi 1997 p22). These two qualities are key to an understanding of pulp, which brings together many different theoretical discourses, linguistic varieties and cultural references, and treats them all seemingly on the same level.

Analyses like Sinibaldi’s which focus on pulp’s link with non-literary cultures and modes of communication invariably suggest that these factors condition the language of this fiction. Yet, although the characteristics of youth, innovation and subversion implied in the label ‘pulp’ are relevant to both its subject matter and its language, there is relatively little in-depth analysis of pulp’s relationship to more contemporary influences, particularly linguistic ones. No critic has yet considered in depth how youth languages may be used as a tool for analysing pulp. Some critics offer an opinion on the use of such a language in writing, but stop short of analysing what the use of references to youth cultures and languages bring to a reading of this fiction. All of Claudia Bernardi’s analyses mention the possible productivity of such an approach. For instance, she suggests that:

²¹ He justifies this by claiming that the importance of the texts discussed exceeds their quantity (Sinibaldi 1997 p83). Texts and authors discussed in this book are Giuseppe Caliceti’s *Fonderia Italghisa*, Brizzi’s *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* and *Bastogne*, Silvia Ballestra, Isabella Santacroce’s *Fluo*, Aldo Nove’s *Woobinda e altre storie senza lieto fine*, Niccolò Ammaniti’s *Fango*, *Gioventù Cannibale*, and Tiziano Scarpa’s *Occhi sulla Graticola*. It is common for all of these to be considered pulp.

“pulp”, an adjective which many critics used to refer to the violence and the crudeness of the plots, should in my view be interpreted as an attempt on the part of a number of new writers to invest the language with distancing and estranging power. Only in this sense can this term be used to describe an experimental (and political) purpose common to a mixed group of writers and to turn them into a movement (Bernardi 1999 p7).

Nonetheless, she also stops short of a linguistic analysis, as does Renzo Paris in *Romanzi di culto: sulla nuova tribù dei narratori e sui loro biechi recensori* (Castelvecchi, 1995). This book is one of the first attempts to offer a critical analysis of 1990s fiction, and it contains a strong generational element.²² Paris proposes the years 1994-1995 as a turning point in Italian literature, and the book is as much about the critical response to 1990s pulp as it is about pulp fiction itself. He quotes from numerous critics to prove their intransigence and their reluctance to move on from previous sociological and literary contexts: ‘rimasticare fintamente sdegnoso materiali critici di stagioni di certezze tramontate, ecco che cos’è diventata la critica italiana’ (Paris 1995 p22).²³ Like Bernardi, Paris sees the language of pulp writers as their distinguishing and unifying feature. He does, however, allude to more specific and meaningful links between the language of pulp and its cultural context, commenting that:

il linguaggio della nuova tribù appare ostico, criptico, comunque non letterario, non facendo parte del gergo medio-colto. Chi è nato in epoca pretelevisiva ha qualche problema con la telematica e con la nuova idea di realtà con cui le nuove generazioni si confrontano o sono chiamate a creare. È l’immaginario, oltre al linguaggio, che è cambiato (Paris p7-8).

Here Paris shifts the emphasis on communicative competence from the writer to the reader of pulp, suggesting that the language used in this fiction results from changing cultural, communicative and narrative context, and that it is up to the reader to gain familiarity with these codes to access these texts, rather than the writer’s duty to conform to canonical modes of expression.

Not all critics have perceived pulp’s language positively, not least because their approach lacks sensitivity to the context in which it was produced: accusations of a lack of erudition and culture have been levelled at pulp precisely because of the cultural context it reflects. Criticism of this kind has been aimed in particular at the anthology *Gioventù Cannibale*, a text accused of a lack of originality and culture, excessive

²² Paris deals with fiction by Brizzi, Ballestra, Tamarro, Nicola X, Santacroce and Culicchia.

²³ A significant disadvantage of Paris’ short pamphlet is that references to, and quotations from, interesting articles in the press by prominent critics are never backed up by full references, and there is no bibliography. Ironically, Paris himself reproaches one of these critics, Roberto Cotroneo, for not citing his sources.

reliance on citation, and recycling of mass and popular cultures (e.g. La Porta 1999b p261). Many reviews hint at a point which a review in *Il Piccolo* states bluntly: 'l'unico risultato certo in questi casi: la noia del lettore' ('Non esageriamo!' 1996a). Others have poured scorn on a mode of expression considered to be a-literary, of poor quality and limited appeal, implying that only hype and publicity underlie pulp's success. Filippo La Porta's *Manuale di scrittura creatina: per un antidoping della letteratura* (Minimum Fax, 1999) incorporates many of the negative criticisms aimed at pulp. In this text, La Porta is scathing of an apparent inversion of cultural values, according to which the works of young first time authors are presented enthusiastically and positively as 'l'immagine emblematica di tutte le porcherie, le merde, gli imbrogli, le mostruosità, il cattivo gusto di questo fine millenio' (La Porta 1999a p18). He accuses pulp of being inadequate and unequal to the challenge presented to fiction writing by contemporary audiovisual and multimedia narratives, and throughout the book uses the metaphor of doping in sport to claim that writing, like drugged athletes, is being artificially stimulated. He is critical of the importance of media and advertising hype around this writing ('doping-stampa'), perceiving the emphasis on language as an empty stylistic device. He notes disparagingly that in pulp, 'si prendono termini molto alla moda, tratti da subculture giovanili o da trasmissioni tv, tanto per "fare tendenza" o apparire estremamente spigliati' (La Porta 1999a p31). The adoption of language from colloquial and informal varieties, such as jargon and slang terminology, swearing and words from foreign languages and regional dialects, has been termed 'bad' language (Andersson and Trudgill 1992), and La Porta is not the only literary critic to have reacted to it as such. Fulvio Panzeri also denounces a 'scuola rock' of contemporary young authors, headed by Enrico Brizzi, Silvia Ballestra and Giuseppe Culicchia, for their 'fashionable' oral, colloquial and informal language. Panzeri is one of the fiercest critics of these writers' use of language, which he condemns as:

solo un girone infernale nel decadimento linguistico del nostro tempo [...] Libri come questi non meritano nemmeno una stroncatura: anzi il critico può parlare solo di dissenso, in quanto sente la necessità di opporsi innanzitutto alla degenerazione della letteratura e al rischio di far credere che queste carte stampate siano effettivamente materiali letterari (Panzeri 1994 p20).

Despite this negative view, many critics suggest that a measure of fluency in contemporary modes of communication and some acquaintance with youth and popular

cultures are important tools for understanding pulp.²⁴ Lucamante responds to their more negative views by rebuking critics

with rigid and entrenched opinions about literature, [who] suffer from a kind of intellectual limitation that makes them unwilling to evaluate such writers within the context of their time and sub-genre. They are unable to avoid judging them by past standards of literary approaches, and in terms of the rules and techniques of the genre they choose to participate in, as Italian high-brow culture refuses to confer any literary legitimacy whatsoever on what it sees as fringe, or popular culture sub-genres (Lucamante 2001b p17).

Although some studies have suggested a link between youth languages and the linguistic style of 1990s Italian pulp, they have focussed mainly on describing techniques used to represent youth language varieties in pulp and have not considered the implications of the use of this language. Furthermore, they have often concentrated on the representation of youth language varieties in a single text, usually Enrico Brizzi's first novel, *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*, because of the ample and obvious evidence this text provides of links with youth languages. One such text, Carla Marcato's article, "In para totale ... una cosa da panico": sulla lingua dei giovani in Italia' is principally a survey of the function of a number of metaphoric locutions from youth language varieties, supported by examples from various sources, including transcripts of radio programmes, and Brizzi's *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*. Another, Anna Comodi's pamphlet, *Tratti lessicali e morfosintattici del parlar giovane in 'Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo' di Enrico Brizzi* (Guerra Edizioni, 1998) begins with a brief introductory section outlining the principles behind and influences on youth language, along with some examples of the linguistic mechanisms by which it works. She then gives examples of non-standard linguistic usage in Brizzi's novel. Although Comodi provides an interesting perspective on the novel, this short text is not intended as a work of literary criticism but as a tool for teaching Italian as a second language to teenagers, perhaps because the cultural context and linguistic references in this text are seen as approachable to them. Whilst these studies do suggest that there is a firm basis for a linguistic analysis of pulp, they do not fully explore the implications of using youth varieties in written fiction, nor do they consider a range of texts that draw on this type of language: I address both these issues in this study.

²⁴ This approach is supported by some pulp authors, for example Silvia Ballestra: 'i critici delle generazioni passate spesso non riescono a comprendere le contaminazioni tra i vari linguaggi' (Gervasutti 1998 p87). Enrico Brizzi agrees: 'l'ottantacinque per cento dei recensori che mi trovo di fronte non conosce le mie fonti di ispirazione' (Gervasutti 1998 p88).

A rather more scholarly study of youth language in Brizzi's first novel can be found in Nicolò Messina's article, '*Pastiche e polifonia nella prosa italiana contemporanea. A proposito di Consolo e Brizzi*' (in Navarro Salazar 1998), which begins with an investigation of the use of the regionally marked verb 'nasare' in the two authors mentioned, and then expands to consider other peculiarities of Brizzi's lexis. Messina's analysis also remarks upon, and gives examples of, other non-standard lexical items (words borrowed from school jargons, Latin, Greek, and modern foreign languages), along with interesting and astute analyses of Brizzi's use of neologisms. He concludes, however, that despite Brizzi's use of multiple linguistic sources, *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* is not a plurilingual novel, but a 'libro monovocale, allora, che riproducendo una realtà giovanile usa come strumento espressivo di essa il linguaggio che le è proprio, in tutta la gamma dei suoi elementi fondanti: lingua mista di registri e repertori, ma in fondo monolingua, codice escludente i non appartenenti al gruppo' (Messina 1998 p365-366). As I explained at the beginning of this chapter, I situate pulp fiction, including Brizzi's first novel, in a plurilinguistic context, an issue that I explore in Chapter 3.

A sharp contrast to the point of view that relates the language of pulp to contemporary youth language varieties is provided by the in-depth analysis of some pulp fiction conducted by the linguist, medieval philologist, Gruppo 93 poet and novelist Marco Berisso. His article, 'Linguistic Levels and Stylistic Solutions' (in Lucamante 2001c), is a quantitative linguistic analysis of a selection of pulp texts.²⁵ Berisso's thesis is that youth language is a less predominant feature of pulp language than journalists and critics have indicated. His guiding principle – that linguistic analysis is a key tool for understanding pulp fiction – is a sound one, and he makes some good points. Some of his best examples focus on lexical changes between Aldo Nove's *Woobinda* (Castelvecchi, 1995) and *Superwoobinda* (Einaudi, 1996). He notes the Italianization of foreign words in the latter text, and that brand names such as 'king-bacon, regular, cheese' were capitalised in *Woobinda* but not in *Superwoobinda*, thus denoting a linguistic shift from brand names to neutral, generic terms. He also observes a marked linguistic evolution within pulp authors (Berisso 2001 p76), an important point that I consider in my own approach to this writing.

Berisso looks for several linguistic features in the language of pulp fiction in order to prove his hypothesis. Some of his criteria for linguistic change appear a little

²⁵ Berisso's analysis is based on extracts from *Cuore di pulp*, *Gioventù Cannibale*, *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*, *Luminal*, *In principio erano le mutande*, *La via per Berlino*, and *Woobinda*. He acknowledges that his selection of texts is partial.

anachronistic for 1990s narrative: the use of 'lui/lei' in place of 'esso/a', for instance, no longer indicates a significant linguistic shift downwards from the literary standard, as it has been accepted as a feature of neostandard Italian. The lexical features that he looks for are foreign words, swearing and dysphemism, and youth languages. However, it is difficult to separate these three lexical fields: sociolinguists have classified both dysphemism and foreign words as integral and important elements of youth language varieties. This appears to undermine Berisso's assertion that words from youth languages are scarce in this fiction, but words from these other categories are not. He counts over 500 occurrences of foreign words in the texts he discusses, and claims that the use of foreign words 'is devoid of any neologizing shift for the Italian lexicon. Thus, foreignisms are used as a stylistic element, with no other purpose' (Berisso 2001 p83). He also discerns a lack of regional influence in almost all pulp fiction, save for Ballestra's 'La via per Berlino' (Berisso 2001 p90); but subsequently contradicts himself by observing in *Fonderia Italghisa*, *Woobinda*, *In principio erano le mutande*, *Cuore di pulp* and 'Seratina' 'a strong diatopic connotation that clearly delimits the area in which narratives are set' (Berisso 2001 p88).

Furthermore, Berisso often reveals a deeply traditional notion of literary quality, expressing support for a conservative editorial policy (Berisso 2001 p78) and referring to the use of youth language as 'a fashion that fortunately seems to be in decline' (Berisso 2001 p83). He states two motivations for the use of youth language: to mimic the spoken language, as a result of a process of linguistic neo-standardisation, and to create an excessively cultured effect (Berisso 2001 p89). This point of view is incompatible with his claim that 'the lexicon derived from pop and rock music, composed almost entirely of Anglicisms, is decisively dominant' (Berisso 2001 p82). His conclusion that youth language is relatively insignificant in pulp fiction stems from the fact that he focuses on youth language as the source of a selection of well codified words. In fact, Berisso never offers a clear definition of youth language, so the reader has little idea of what he means by the term. His viewpoint assumes that youth language is both homogenous and well-documented in conventional written sources. These misapprehensions lead him to conclude that 'the presence of youth language-related terms appear to be relevant in only few cases, while it is entirely sporadic or even absent in others [...] Far from being the characterizing linguistic factor of the *Cannibali* narrative, this element appears to be entirely an optional register' (Berisso 2001 p89), certainly a view that is worth challenging, as I will explain.

3. Methodology

The wide but often piecemeal and superficial critical bibliography on pulp can offer little guidance in interpreting this fiction. There are many other articles on pulp that I have not discussed here, because much of the reaction to this fiction has been from the national press and popular magazines. What emerges from this overview of critical literature on 1990s pulp is a sense of fragmentation, incoherence and partiality. There is no lack of critical disagreement and polemic – to the extent that critics have often been more preoccupied with other critics' opinions than with actually analysing pulp fiction itself – but this critical body of work lacks a sense of coherence, despite containing many of the elements necessary for a more comprehensive approach to pulp. The critics concerned with how the pulp genre should best be defined have succeeded in highlighting many salient aspects of this fiction, including its provocative nature and its close relationship with youth and popular cultures. Nonetheless, their analyses are often descriptive, brief, generic and superficial. The many – sometimes slightly tenuous – links between pulp works may be seen as proof that there is some degree of unity between them; but as these links are always imposed from outside the group, there are clearly questions about the extent of its internal cohesion. Inherent in many of the genre labels suggested, including pulp and cannibale, are the implications that all this fiction is violent, or gratuitous and superficial, neither of which is the case. The implication within these names, that this fiction is more popular trash than literature, has disconcerted many critics, who are unable to reconcile the reality of 1990s Italian pulp with their expectations of the genre.

Likewise, critics who have taken a gender-oriented stance towards pulp fiction have revealed the difficulty of contextualising contemporary writing within existing literary critical frameworks, but they have advanced the debate significantly by raising issues of ethics in pulp that other critics have overlooked. The majority of the critics who have considered pulp as a generational movement have, on the whole, focussed too narrowly on the similarities between this loose group of authors and the Gruppo 63, but have revealed many interesting linguistic techniques used by these authors. The approach that considers pulp from a contemporary cultural and linguistic point of view has been used to pass negative judgement on this writing by some critics, like La Porta and Pezzarossa. Nonetheless, the type of analysis advocated by critics like Berisso and Bernardi has revealed itself the most flexible, and therefore the most able to situate pulp in the many contexts that its language and subject matter demand, but it remains at a

preliminary stage. The present study seeks to unify and develop aspects of these more successful approaches, in order to construct a more coherent and careful analysis of this fiction.

Previously, sociolinguists studying the genesis and evolution of youth language varieties in Italy (e.g. Radtke 1996, Còveri, Benucci et al. 1988, Còveri 1988) have identified the use of these varieties in a number of literary texts. Among these are Umberto Simonetta's *Tirar mattina* (Mondadori, 1963), Maria Corti's *Il ballo dei sapienti* (Mondadori, 1966), Rocco & Antonia's *Porci con le ali* (Savelli, 1976) and Pier Vittorio Tondelli's *Altri Libertini* (Feltrinelli, 1980) and *Pao Pao* (Feltrinelli, 1982). However, there is a significant difference between these analyses of previous generations of youth fiction and my approach to pulp. As sociolinguists, Radtke and Còveri's analyses are focussed on the use of youth language in literature as a means for spreading this variety around Italy, or as a way of documenting this spread.²⁶ Rather than focussing on the consequences for youth language varieties of their use in literary fiction, my emphasis is on the literary implications of the use of such varieties, something which is outside the scope of Radtke and Còveri's studies. Furthermore, Radtke and Còveri treat these texts as documentary evidence of youth language varieties, whereas I interpret the language of 1990s pulp as a literary elaboration of youth languages.

Although critics such as Pezzarossa have used the term 'gergo giovanile' to refer to the language used in pulp, this is not an entirely satisfactory term to describe it. Even though the language of pulp fiction draws on similar spheres of references to youth language varieties, making it cryptic to those not familiar with them, the terms 'gergo/gerghi' in Italian and 'jargon(s)' in English (and their many synonyms) have pejorative connotations that are not necessarily congruent with the use of youth languages in pulp fiction. Although pulp's language is closely related to youth languages, it also manipulates them knowingly and astutely, exploiting these varieties for their expressive potential and using strategies inherent in these varieties to reveal links with 'high' literature and cultural theory. This is not an impression conveyed by either the term 'gergo' or its most literal English translation, 'jargon', both of which have negative overtones. The use of these terms to describe pulp's language implies a negative disposition towards this writing: some critics have been scathing of fiction that

²⁶ For example, Radtke notes that in the 1960s, 'non sono ancora i mass media che diffondono un modo di comunicazione stravagante, come quello che sarà tanto apprezzato dai giovani negli anni Ottanta, ma i romanzi e i racconti di stampo angloamericano, che si rifanno a uno slang difficile da rendere in italiano' (Radtke 1996 p201).

uses a language built on these foundations, despite their own lack of fluency in 'gerghi giovanili'. To avoid any unnecessary pejorative connotations, I will follow the example of Italian sociolinguists who prefer the more neutral terms 'linguaggio/i giovanile/i' for spoken youth languages (for example, Cortelazzo 1994, Banfi 1992, Albrecht 1993, Holtus 1993, Banfi and Sobrero 1992) and use the term 'youth language varieties' to refer to this language in the written form.

Before discussing more specific linguistic theories in the next chapter, I can identify three key general properties of youth language varieties, which also provide significant keys to reading 1990s Italian pulp texts. Firstly, like youth language varieties, the language of pulp is strongly related to its context. Secondly, the heterogeneous nature of youth languages is a useful concept in understanding how these varieties can provide a conceptual framework for the language of pulp fiction. This allows for linguistic varieties to demonstrate individual interpretations of their elaborated common cultural background. The fiction that I discuss in this study offers a selection of varied, but mutually complementary representations of youth language varieties in the written form. Thirdly, the motivation for using these language varieties in the spoken form is mainly to declare a subversive intent, and as I will argue, this intent is echoed in the language of pulp fiction. In particular, several commentators mention the ironic appropriation and manipulation of words, phrases and techniques of other linguistic varieties in youth languages, which subvert the strategies of the standard language in order to elaborate a highly stylized jargon from them (Tosi 2001, Cortelazzo 1992, Còveri, Benucci et al. 1988, Radtke 1996). Irony is a common strategy in youth language varieties and also a crucial tool in understanding pulp, which draws on playful, ironic and potentially cryptic youth language varieties, whilst also taking a similarly subversive stance towards its own language and the fictional genres it uses. This use of irony in pulp suggests that this fiction is more sophisticated than critics such as Panzeri and La Porta have suggested. Like youth language varieties, the language used in pulp is polisemic and can be interpreted in different ways. Throughout this study, I argue that pulp may be read on a number of levels. Superficially, it may be read as some critics have suggested, as transient popular fiction, aimed at an audience seeking only instant gratification, whose concerns with style and fashions are reflected in the texts' most obvious cultural references. On a deeper level, pulp may be read as a sophisticated contemporary attempt to engage with the Italian literary tradition, as well as a complex comment on Italian culture.

These readings are not mutually exclusive, and within this framework pulp is also open to a number of other interpretations. For example, the close relationship between youth language varieties and the language of pulp raises interesting questions about the nature of pulp's readership. The nature of the relationship between author and characters reinforces the impression that pulp is purely a popular and ephemeral literary fashion, as critics like Panzeri have interpreted it. A great deal of pulp fiction is, if not autobiographical, strongly self-referential: the young protagonists of this writing often have much in common with the authors. However, as I will show in subsequent chapters, in many cases this apparent emphasis on youth and the use of youth languages masks a much more sophisticated engagement with literature and theoretical thinking. Pulp's engagement with high culture raises doubts about who the target readership of this fiction really is; some of the references used in pulp point to cultural associations belonging to older generations. Its complex relationship with Italian intellectual culture and literature, its ambiguous relationships between author, characters and readers, and the problematic and multifaceted question of pulp's target readership are all threads that run through this study.

In the following chapters, I explore the key elements and themes of pulp, considering it in a variety of different contexts, but always focussing on the language used in this fiction and what it reveals. I begin in Chapter 2 by outlining my methodology. Here, I show how pulp authors appropriate linguistic techniques of youth language varieties to situate their texts in the context of Italian youth. In Chapter 3, I question the commonly accepted critical territory of the relationship between pulp and the Gruppo 63. In this chapter, I use comparative textual analysis to discuss the relationships between pulp and the Gruppo 63's writing, focussing not only on the similarities between authors such as Arbasino and Ballestra, but also on the differences between them, and what these might reveal. In this chapter I also consider the links between pulp and foreign literature, and particularly American writing. Chapter 4 deals with the relationship between pulp and popular culture, beginning by contrasting the standpoint offered by this fiction to that proposed by earlier generations of Italian intellectuals, discussing the differing theoretical perspectives that this reveals and the implications of this. I then examine the various ways in which pulp is influenced by commercial youth, mass and popular cultures, and how, in some respects, it is fully integrated with them. Here I discuss the relationship between pulp and the publishing industry, as well as its interaction with other commercial youth cultures and narratives in other media, such as television, music and cinema, which conditions the linguistic

and textual structures adopted in this writing. Following on from this, I debate the extent to which pulp's often disturbing and controversial subject matter reflects a concern with ethical issues or a kind of political engagement. In my conclusions, I use the evidence from these textual analyses to return to the question posed by Scarpa, 'che cosa c'entra il punk?'

Chapter 2: Language

YOUTH LANGUAGE IN PULP

An understanding of pulp's language is both the key to recognizing the issues dealt with in this fiction and to appreciating why it has been the subject of such polemicized critical reactions. This chapter provides a linguistic overview of a wide range of pulp fiction, and shows how pulp links itself to youth and popular cultures by stylising many of the characteristics of youth language varieties. I begin with a brief discussion of the theoretical concepts relating to orality in writing, in order to outline the ways in which Italian youth language varieties affect the language of Italian pulp. Drawing on these theories, I look at the representation of the speaking voice in this fiction, with particular reference to Rossana Campo's writing. I then survey the ways in which pulp draws upon the lexis and the patterns of word formation of youth language varieties. Following on from this, I consider in more depth some of the traits of youth language varieties that are exhibited particularly strongly in some texts, or are used with a more critical and reflective quality. In this section, I discuss the influence of the media on youth language varieties and in pulp, with reference to Aldo Nove's *Superwoobinda* and Giuseppe Culicchia's *Bla Bla Bla*, which paints a bleak portrait of the individual's fate in a society that forms its values from mass culture and advertising. The third text discussed in this section, Matteo Galianzo's short story 'Il ferro è una cosa viva', offers an interesting example of the influence of the orality of 'new' media in the written form. This lexical overview introduces many of the themes that are explored in greater depth in subsequent chapters.

1. Sociolinguistic theory

1a. Language and context

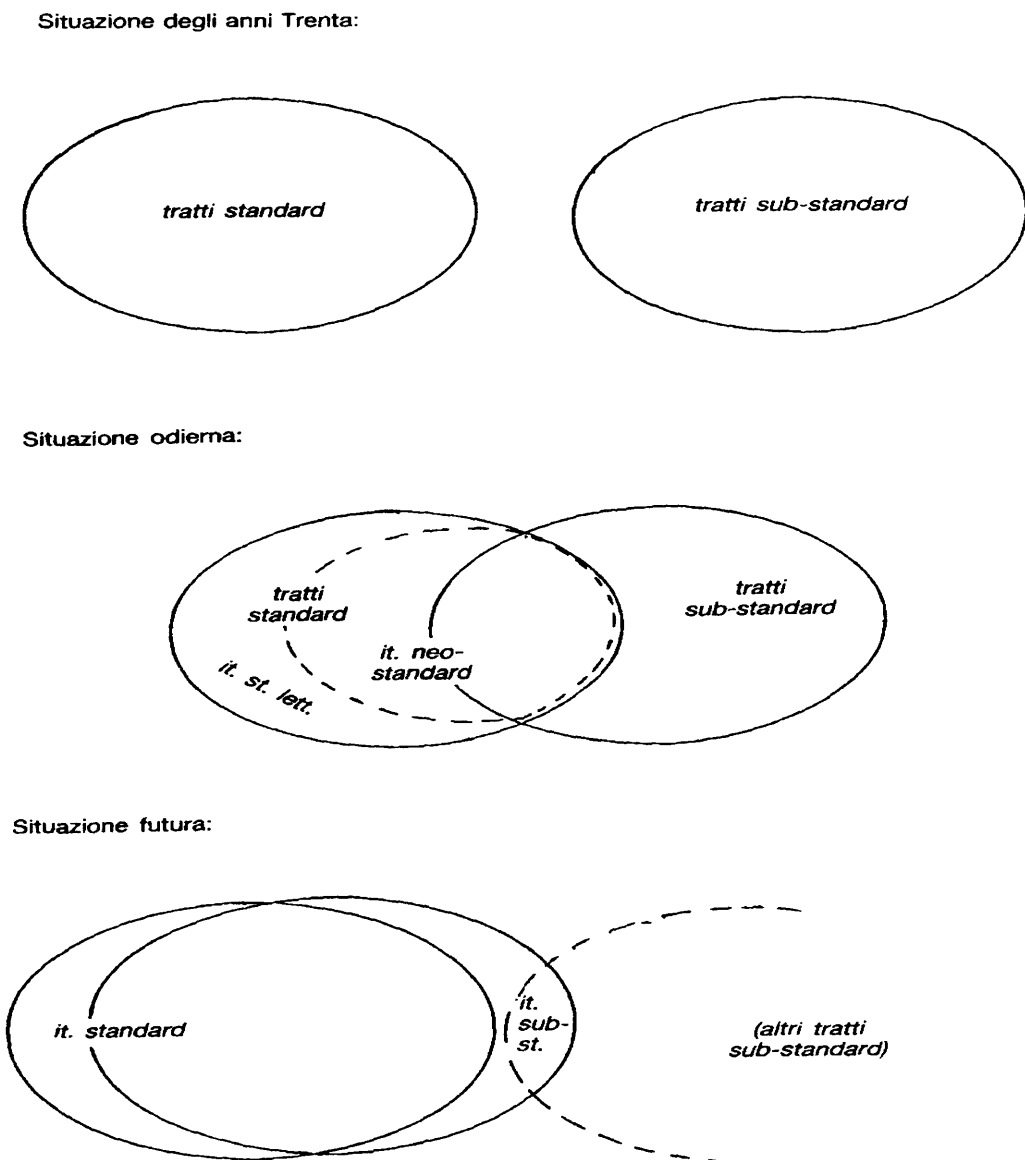
Like transient, allusive and often dysphemistic youth language varieties, the language of pulp inverts the prevailing linguistic power structure so that the youngest and least powerful create the linguistic code, to the disadvantage of their elders (in spoken varieties, the older generation or, in the case of pulp fiction, their critics). By representing in the written language a variety which is predominantly spoken, informal, colloquial and transient, and above all critically engaged with its context, the authors of pulp have succeeded in disconcerting the members of the literary establishment who, for

the most part are unable to define or meaningfully evaluate this writing in its proper context, have shown themselves to be confused by it. The representation of youth language varieties in literature necessitates the use of linguistic and stylistic techniques that are not accepted as 'standard' in the written form. This 'orality' may be defined as "parlato-scritto", ovvero la mimesi letteraria del registro orale della lingua' (Testa 1997 p10). This definition is, however, in need of some refinement, as an exact replication of a spoken variety in writing is rendered impossible by the diamesic shift involved. The fundamental differences between speech and writing, many of which lie in the circumstances of their production, create differences in the grammatical and syntactic constructions used in the two varieties (Bazzanella 1994). Writing may be typified as a highly planned and structured variety, which has a certain degree of permanence (Berruto 1987, Còveri, Benucci et al. 1988, Bazzanella 1994). At the opposite end of the diamesic spectrum, spontaneous speech is often analysed in terms of informal, face-to-face communication between peers, in order to facilitate a contrast with, and opposition to, writing (Bazzanella 1994, Goffman 1981, Còveri, Benucci et al. 1988, Mengaldo 1994). Informal speech is defined as being relatively unplanned, ephemeral and based on different syntactic structures to the written language because of the spontaneous nature of its production (Bazzanella 1994, Còveri, Benucci et al. 1988, Berruto 1987, Bernardelli and Pellerey 2001). Despite the useful dichotomy this definition provides, this approach is problematic as it reduces 'speech' and 'writing' to mere stereotypes, massively simplifying the vast range of overlapping varieties, which do not necessarily conform to these characteristics: there is no 'typical' form of either 'speech' or 'writing' to facilitate such a contrast (Violi 2001, Cardona 1983).

Rather than seeing speech and writing as two rigidly defined opposites, contemporary linguists observe an increasing blurring of the boundaries between characteristics of the 'written' and 'spoken' varieties. For instance, Spunta argues that 'the insistent orality of modern culture has shifted the traditional clear-cut opposition between speech and writing towards a notion of language *continuum*, allowing greater dynamism not only in the spoken but also in the written form' (Spunta 1998 p376). This notion implies a certain scope for fluidity between written and spoken forms, allowing greater capacity for linguistic change. One of the sites for this dynamic interchange of spoken and written forms is the 'neostandard' variety. The neostandard is described as the product of a process in which linguistic traits once perceived as 'sub-standard' language are eventually accepted into the standard by virtue of extensive use, only for new substandard characteristics to evolve and later take their own place in the

neostandard (Berruto 1987).¹ The concept of neostandardisation highlights a growing receptiveness to informal and colloquial structures in the standard language due to a gradual and continuous process of language change. Berruto illustrates this process with this diagram:

Figure 1: The neostandard



(Berruto 1987 p102)

Through this process, some (morpho)syntactic and grammatical properties of spoken and ‘substandard’ languages, such as split phrases, topicalisation and ‘incorrect’ grammatical structures (for example, the use of the indicative for the subjunctive in

¹ Sabatini 1985 gives the name ‘italiano dell’uso medio’ to a similar variety.

hypothetical clauses) become accepted into the written standard. Youth language varieties contribute to this process (Marcato 1997, Radtke 1996), particularly in the area of lexical innovations, and via the neostandard they exert an indirect influence on the language.² Due to this process of constant change, the distinction between youth languages and the neostandard is hazy and ill-defined.

Representation of either of these varieties in writing may be achieved through a process of 'translation', which reproduces the effect of a non-standard, spoken variety, rather than exactly reproducing its expressive strategies (Bernardelli and Pellerey 2001). This process allows for the use of textual means to represent the aural properties of spoken language: for instance, the use of space on the page and breaks in textual layout to represent pauses or longer periods of silence; the use of textual emphasis, for instance by italicization or capitalization, and the use of spelling changes to represent accent or pronunciation. Furthermore, it allows for the (morpho)syntactic properties of the spoken language to be moderated, in order to retain some coherence whilst still exhibiting a difference from the 'standard' language. In this chapter, I discuss some of these 'translation' processes, which are used to represent not only face-to-face interaction, but also the language and narrative structures of the mass media, by which pulp is informed.

The 'orality of modern culture' (Spunta 1998, above) that drives the process of neostandardisation is an important factor in shaping the language of pulp. Many late twentieth century theories of language and communication are characterised by a recognition of a shift in the style of communications governed by high technology and electronic media, which recuperate the strategies of the spoken language (Hunter 2001, Ong 1995, Simone 2000). Ong sees the late twentieth century as categorised by the 'secondary orality of present-day high technology culture, in which a new orality is sustained by telephone, radio, television and other electronic devices that depend for their existence on writing and print' (Ong 1995 p11). Simone 2000 identifies a similar variety, which he calls the 'third phase' of communication, characterised by visual screen media, whereas the previous two phases were characterised by the invention of writing and print respectively. Ong's 'secondary orality' and Simone's 'third phase' share a common concept of a spoken variety which is in itself removed from the

² Evidence of the influence of youth language varieties on the Italian standard is provided by the entrance of words originating in youth language varieties into the lexicon, as attested in the Zingarelli dictionary (1999); for example, *un casino* (n. 'a lot'), *sgamare* (vb. 'to understand/find out'), and *cuccare* ('to have success with girls', originally *rubare*, 'to steal') (examples from Simonetti 1998). These words have been introduced into the standard language via youth language varieties from Roman and Lombard 'gerghi' respectively, thus conferring on youth language varieties a 'ruolo mediatore del linguaggio giovanile, che funge da catalizzatore de-gergalizzante' and which is accompanied by a semantic shift from the original form (Radtke 1996 p222-223).

spontaneity of face-to-face, oral communication, as it originates from the written language. ‘Third phase’ and ‘secondary oral’ communications are reliant on other media for their existence, and the use of these modes of communication is also a conscious stylistic choice: in Ong’s words, ‘where primary orality promotes spontaneity because the analytic reflectiveness implemented by writing is unavailable, secondary orality promotes spontaneity because through analytic reflection we have decided that spontaneity is a good thing’ (Ong 1995 p137).

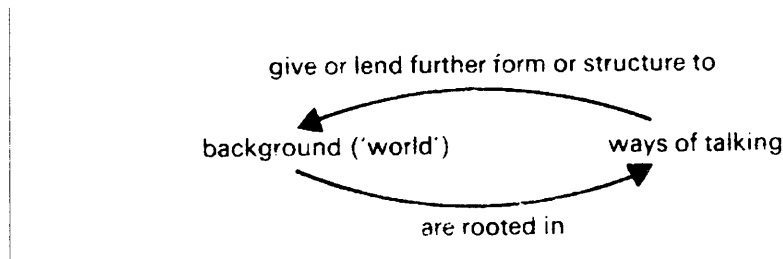
In this chapter, I argue that the self-conscious spontaneity characteristic of ‘secondary orality’ is also a deliberate narrative choice in this fiction. As I showed in Chapter 1, critics who have judged pulp most harshly, such as Panzeri and La Porta, read its language as a spontaneous, a-critical reproduction of the neostandard. Although the neostandard contributes to the orality of pulp fiction, I suggest that a deeper and more productive reading of this fiction can be achieved by considering how the language of pulp draws on a wide range of influences which include, but are not limited to, the neostandard. I suggest that the language of pulp should be seen as a written elaboration of spoken youth language varieties, rather than as a reproduction of the neostandard. This should not be taken as a suggestion that the language of pulp should be seen as an intentional and exact representation of a specific youth language, but instead that it builds upon many of the distinguishing features of these varieties. In this chapter I examine how the language of pulp elaborates on some of the distinctive morphological, lexical and (morpho)syntactic properties of youth language varieties in order to represent spoken youth language in the written form.

1b. Youth language

As close reference to youth cultures is accepted as a fundamental characteristic of pulp, my analysis of pulp’s language is based on descriptions of Italian youth language published in the late 1980s and the 1990s, as well as theoretical works on sociolinguistics and youth languages, many of which were also written by Italians. By accepting the principle that the language of pulp relates to its socio-cultural setting in the same way as spoken language varieties are linked to their context, it is possible to apply the same sociolinguistic theory used in the analysis of non-literary languages to 1990s Italian pulp fiction, whilst also taking into account a different set of variables that inform literary language.

Sociolinguistics operates on the fundamental principle that language is socially constructed. Shotter 1993 expresses the notion that language and culture are mutually informative in this simple yet functional model:

Figure 2: Shotter's model of language variation



(Shotter 1993 p36)

When applied to youth languages, Shotter's model emphasises how these varieties are firmly rooted in young people's peer groups, the places in which they socialise, their music and fashions: they are therefore a fully integrated part of their cultures (Còveri, Benucci et al. 1988 p102). Shotter's model is significant to a linguistic analysis of pulp in that it emphasises the reciprocal dependency between language and its socio-cultural context. Sociologists and sociolinguists have proposed many different theories about the relationship between an individual's linguistic usage and their social status (see Widdicombe and Woofitt 1995 for a summary of these), and although notions of the interplay between language, social status and power vary between theorists from different generations and schools of thought, all agree that language and power are linked. For instance, Bernstein 1971's socially deterministic notions of 'elaborated' and 'restricted' codes, which are the preserves of the wealthy/educated and the poor and uninstructed respectively, contrast with later theories outlined by Widdicombe and Woofitt, which perceive social identity as more fluid and the relationship between language and society as more reciprocal. Language can be therefore an acutely powerful tool: Lakoff states that 'language is the initiator and interpreter of power relations' (Lakoff 1990 p12-13).

The practice of adopting deliberately non-standard linguistic forms during adolescence has been identified as a part of a process of gaining independence (Eckert 1997), motivated by a desire for separation from the family and growing solidarity with the peer group (Chambers 1995, Comodi 1998). During adolescence, peer groups influence both the framing of group members' values and attitudes (Widdicombe and Woofitt 1995), and their linguistic behaviour (Comodi 1998). Teenage rebellion is

therefore ‘marked in a linguistically superficial way, by the use of a distinctive vocabulary called slang, in which terms become fashionable and serve as markers of in-group membership, and then quickly become outmoded in order to mark their users as outsiders’ (Chambers 1995 p170-71). Many definitions of the kinds of language used in youth peer groups highlight the almost exclusive usage within the group, describing ‘un parlato che vuole essere prima di tutto uno strumento per tenere legato il gruppo, e per legarsi, o tenersi legati, ad esso’ (Cortelazzo 2000, Còveri 1988 and Cortelazzo 1994).

Analyses of the genesis of youth language varieties in Italy suggest that they have historically been strongly linked to political activism. Studies identify three phases of development, each of which is linked to a distinct phase of political activity (see Còveri 1988, Radtke 1996 and Cortelazzo 1993). The first of these phases, identified as a ‘parlare snob’ among elite Milanese youth in the 1950s by Radtke 1996, and more generically termed ‘linguaggio paragoliardico e pre-politico’ by Còveri (Còveri 1988 p234), pre-dates the politicised student rebellions of the 1968. The second phase is contingent on the environments of post-war military service and the politicised student rebellions of the late 1960s and 1970s (Radtke 1993a, Còveri 1988). During this phase, youth language varieties become highly politicised and massively receptive to an influx of (left wing) ideological terminology, culminating in the 1970s ‘sinestrese’ variety (Còveri 1988).³

In a third, post-1977 phase, proposed by Còveri 1988 and Cortelazzo 1993, youth cultures and the associated linguistic varieties lose their political focus and instead reflect other preoccupations. These linguists suggest that changes in the perception of political activity, from something in which people participate directly, to something perceived through the filter of the media, has reduced competence in political language varieties to a weak and passive state (Cortelazzo 1993, also Gundle and Parker 1997a). Cortelazzo sees 1980s Italian youth language varieties as estranged from the influences of the 1970s politicized varieties and incompatible with political discourse: whereas in the 1970s ‘la lingua politica era uno dei modelli a cui cercavano di conformarsi molti giovani, negli anni Ottanta, no’ (Cortelazzo 1993 p159). In support of this, he compares letters written to newspapers by young people in 1977 and 1985 and notes in the later letters ‘un ridottissimo influsso della lingua politica, anche qui indipendentemente dal tema trattato’ (Cortelazzo 1993 p157).

³ For a more detailed discussion of youth movements in the 1960s and 1970s, see Balestrini and Moroni 1997.

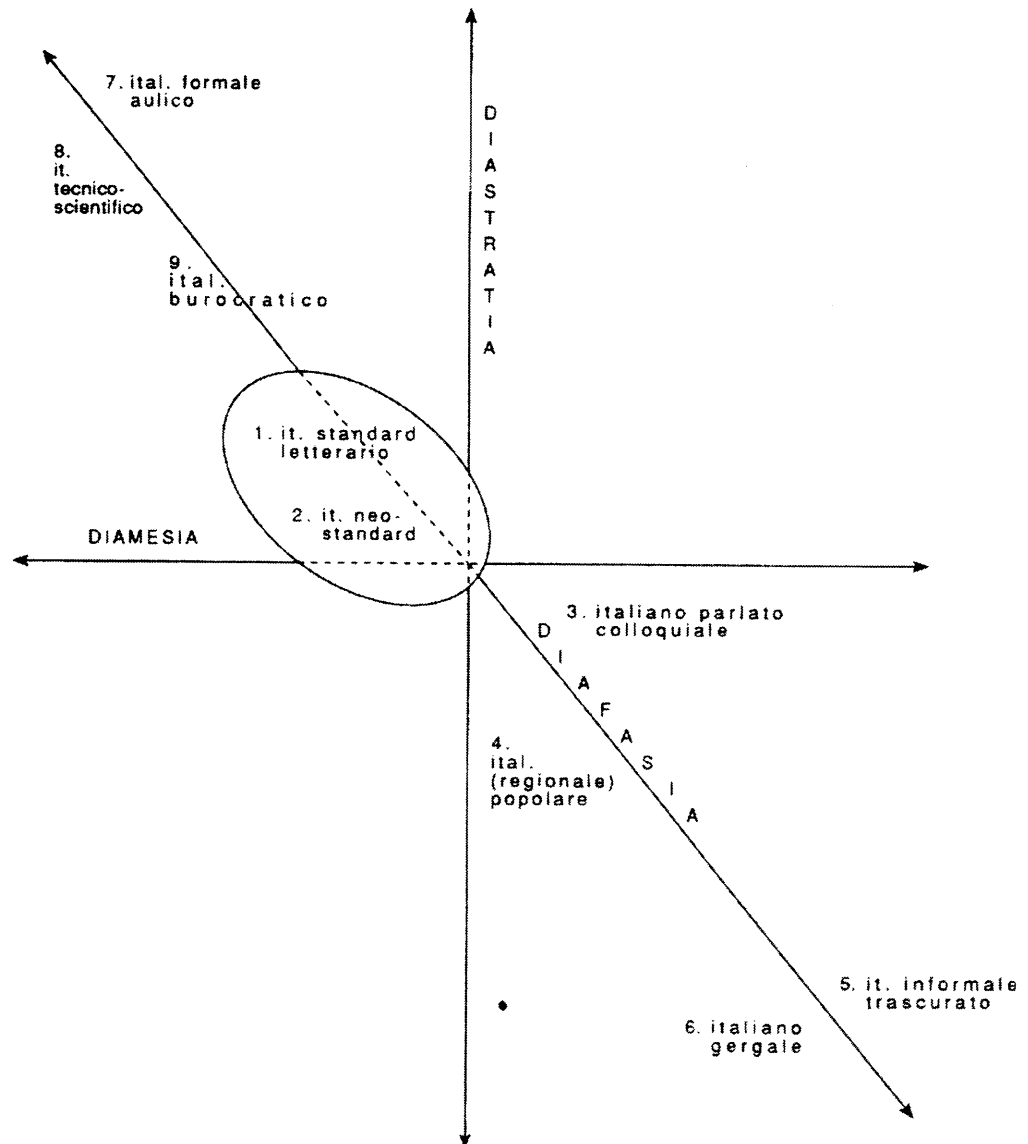
One of the most distinctive Italian youth languages of the late twentieth century, dubbed ‘paninarese’ originated in the ‘paninaro’ youth culture of a group of wealthy youths in Milan. This youth culture illustrates the trend away from politicized youth cultures in the 1980s: paninaro fashions were based on designer labels such as Lacoste and Ralph Lauren, and adherents of this group identified each other not only visually but also through their distinctive mode of speech (Radtke 1996).⁴ As the example of ‘paninaro’ indicates, youth language varieties are primarily stylistic, and related to other sign systems pertinent to youth cultures, such as fashion (clothes, hairstyles and accessories) and paralanguage (Finessi 1992, Comodi 1998). Further trends away from a politicized model for youth language varieties are indicated by the language used in 1990s pulp. The youth language varieties from which pulp authors elaborate their distinctive linguistic styles have the same kind of reciprocal relationship with youth cultures and the peer groups in which they are used as *paninaro* and its predecessors.

Although Shotter’s model is a useful starting point for explaining the relationships of youth languages to their context, it stops short of explaining exactly the parameters for linguistic variation. To understand how youth language varieties distinguish themselves from the standard, it is necessary to draw on a more precise model for sociolinguistic variation, such as that offered by the Italian linguist Gaetano Berruto (Berruto 1987). Berruto identifies four areas of language variation regulated by an internal hierarchy: diatopic (geographical) variation; diastratic (relating to society/social class); diaphasic (relating to register) and diamesic (relating to the medium in which language is used, e.g. writing or speaking).⁵ Within each of these areas of linguistic variation it is possible to identify a continuum of varieties, which are not separated by any firm or definite boundaries, but which have at their extremes two distinct and polarised varieties. These varieties also operate in conjunction with each other, so that language can vary along multiple axes at the same time: the diatopic dimension is the broadest and incorporates all the others. Berruto conveys all these concepts in the following model:

⁴ For a brief but informative summary of the *paninari* youth culture in 1980s Milan, see Forgacs 1996.

⁵ Albrecht 1993 contests the use of four axes of variation in favour of the hypothesis that language variation can be adequately described using only three axes of variation: diatopic, diastratic and diaphasic. He opposes the inclusion of a diamesic axis to categorise variation between the spoken and written language, which he includes in the sphere of diaphasic variation. However, as the contrast between spoken and written language will be useful later in this study, I shall adopt Berruto’s model as the most appropriate.

Figure 3: Berruto's model of language variation



(Berruto 1987 p12)

Youth language varieties are characterised as a diaphasic variety of Italian (Albrecht 1993, Còveri, Benucci et al. 1988, Radtke 1996, Còveri 1988, Cortelazzo 1994).⁶ Due to the strong relationship between youth language varieties and transitory youth fashions, and because youth slangs are above all oral language varieties, they are linked to their context and therefore characteristically ephemeral and unstable (Albrecht

⁶ Cortelazzo notes that there is a diastatic dimension to youth language 'l'utilizzo del linguaggio giovanile caratterizza, sia pure in modi diversi, i giovani di condizione sociale intermedia e quelli di condizione sociale più bassa, ma non quelli di condizione sociale alta' (Cortelazzo 1994 p294). Radtke 1996, on the other hand, states that the 'youth condition' is transitory and not analysable in terms of social class. The view that higher social classes are removed from youth culture seems dubious, as 'paninari' youth culture originated among wealthy young people from higher social classes. In view of the fact that the culture of different social groups is reflected in their language, I would suggest that, like other language varieties, youth languages reflect the cultures to which their speakers are exposed: different youth languages will therefore be spoken by youths of different social classes.

1993, Banfi 1994, Cortelazzo 2000, Còveri, Benucci et al. 1988, Radtke 1992, Nowotnick 1993, Forconi 1988). As youth language varieties are studied primarily in the context of spontaneous spoken language within peer groups, it is assumed that these varieties are fundamentally oral and colloquial. Furthermore, youth language varieties demonstrate a more accentuated linguistic dynamism than the 'standard' language, as they change along with youth fashions (Marcato 1997, Banfi 1994, Livolsi and Bison 1992).

Youth languages' close links with youth cultures and young people's peer groups can make them obscure to those outside these groups, and this has led some sociolinguists to categorise youth language varieties as a 'gergo' or 'gerghi' (e.g. Albrecht 1993). The existence of multiple youth language varieties reflects the heterogeneity of youth culture: there is no single 'youth' style or culture. Although many sociolinguists refer to youth language varieties in the singular, this is often to denote youth language generically, rather than to suggest that there is only one homogeneous variety (Radtke 1992, Radtke 1993a, Cortelazzo 1995, Banfi and Sobrero 1992, Còveri 1988, Giacomelli 1993, Holtus 1993, Nowotnick 1993, Tosi 2001). It is acknowledged that there are many, varied youth languages and that they should be referred to in the plural (Banfi 1992, Banfi 1994, Sobrero 1992, Còveri, Benucci et al. 1988, Radtke 1996), because 'non si potrebbe parlare di un "linguaggio dei giovani" in Italia, ma di tanti gerghi, in quanto ogni città, o meglio ogni quartiere cittadino, ne ha uno proprio, che si distingue da quello del quartiere vicino per tratti lessicali e modi di dire' (Comodi 1998 p7). A plausible justification for the use of either the singular or the plural is suggested by Còveri, who notes that 'oltre che in un gergo giovanile panitaliano, riflesso e propagato dai mass media, si riconosce anche in innumerevoli altre microvarietà giovanili' (Còveri, Benucci et al. 1988 p102).

'Gerghi' are low diastratically and diaphasically, near speech on the diamesic axis on Berruto's model of variation (Fig. 3, point 6) and 'below' the standard written variety (Albrecht 1993; Còveri, Benucci et al. 1988, Cortelazzo 1994). To use Marcato's definition, a spoken 'gergo' 'presuppone l'esistenza di un gruppo i cui membri adottino intenzionalmente un mezzo di comunicazione sapendolo limitato ad essi e precluso a estranei' (Marcato 1988 p255). Other linguists are more cautious of applying this definition to spoken youth language varieties, noting that although they share some characteristics of jargons, such as clearly delineating a social group, they also have functions which 'gerghi' do not, such as expressing playful and personal qualities (Cortelazzo 1994). Youth language varieties are identified as lighthearted,

imaginative and jokey slangs (Cortelazzo 2000, Còveri 1988, Sobrero 1992, Radtke 1993a, Simonetti 1998), which are fundamentally innovative and which manipulate the standard language through their lexical, phraseological, morphological and morphosyntactic peculiarities (Banfi 1992). By so doing, they express opposition to, or at least difference from, the standard 'adult' language (Còveri 1988, Cortelazzo 1995, Nowottnick 1993). Still others contest the notion that youth language varieties are intentionally cryptic (Sobrero 1992, Tosi 2001) and therefore not intentionally antagonistic towards the standard (Livolsi and Bison 1992). The written 'literary' language (Fig. 3, point 1) is diaphasically and diastratically 'higher' and closer to literary writing on the diamesic axis than youth language varieties (Fig. 3, between points 3 and 6). When the system of linguistic variation is schematized in this way, it is easy to see how the representation in a written, literary form, of this 'lower' linguistic variety, clearly involves the reconciliation of two quite different linguistic varieties.

2. Representation of speech in writing: Rossana Campo

Pulp frequently uses the first person narrator as a narrative device to overcome this gap and to involve the reader. Santacroce's first three novels are all written in the first person, as is all Rossana Campo's and Giuseppe Culicchia's fiction, Brizzi's *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*, many works by Silvia Ballestra, Tiziano Scarpa, Niccolò Ammaniti and the stories of *Gioventù Cannibale*. In some of these texts, the narrator addresses the reader(s) directly as 'tu' or 'voi' (for example, in Brizzi's *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* and *Tre ragazzi immaginari*, Ballestra's *La guerra degli Antò* and Campo's *L'attore americano*). Together with the first person narrator, this address to the reader suggests a representation of spoken language, and therefore of a voice in this fiction.⁷ Although free indirect speech may also be used as a device to represent the voice, as is the case in Brizzi's *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*, this more sophisticated technique is less common in pulp texts. Instead, pulp authors use a first person narrator, using a language based on spoken youth language varieties, to project a youthful, transgressive image, to a certain extent attempting to obscure the literary and theoretical sources of this fiction.

⁷ This in turn links pulp to a tradition of experimentation with register and non-standard linguistic varieties in Italian literature, which can be seen in the work of authors like Celati and Calvino in postwar Italian literature. This plurilingual tradition is discussed in Chapter 3. A further related area of study deals with the theme of vocality and representation of the voice. For instance, Cavarero's study of vocality, *A più voci*, (Feltrinelli, 2003) touches on themes such as musicality and rhythmicality, which are also relevant to an understanding of pulp. These points are discussed in Chapter 4 in relation to pulp's links with pop music.

In a lot of pulp this represented voice is highly self-referential, even autobiographical. Rossana Campo's distinctive linguistic style, based on the stylisation of the spoken language, provides one clear example of this. Campo was born in Genoa to a Neapolitan family, and she now divides her time between Rome and Paris. This geographical and cultural formation underpins her writing, much of which narrates stories about young women or girls in northern Italy or expatriate Italian women living in France.⁸ Here I shall discuss the techniques used to stylise the speaking voice in her first novel, *In principio erano le mutande* (Feltrinelli, 1992) and her third novel, *Mai sentita così bene* (Feltrinelli, 1995). Both these novels have attracted critical attention – albeit of very different kinds – for their low linguistic register. A comparison between *Mai sentita così bene* and *In principio erano le mutande* demonstrates a significant evolution in Campo's linguistic style towards a sophisticated and eloquent representation of spontaneous informal speech.

Campo's first novel, *In principio erano le mutande*, met with harsh judgements from some critics for its oral and colloquial language, whereas others, fewer in number, perceived her style as promising and refreshing.⁹ Her novels also have a comic touch: in *In principio erano le mutande* the narrator describes her romantic (mis)adventures, culminating in a liaison with an artist who bears a strong resemblance to Pavarotti, all of which is coupled with flashbacks to her childhood. In common with the rest of Campo's writing, the female protagonist narrates her story in a highly informal and colloquial style. The opening of this novel immediately announces the oral tone which continues throughout. It begins with a conjunction, 'dunque', which can be used in speech as a filler, to give the speaker time to organise their thoughts. It also expresses consequence, and its use as the first word of a paragraph (or, in this case, novel) creates the impression that something has gone before, and that the reader has found the narrator picking up the thread of her narrative, as follows:

⁸ *In principio erano le mutande* (1991) and *Il pieno di super* (1992) fall into the first category; the second includes *Mai sentita così bene* (1995), *L'attore americano* (1998), *Mentre la mia bella dorme* (1999), and *Sono pazzo di te* (2001). *L'uomo che non ho sposato* (2003) combines both themes. It narrates the story of the forty year old Rosi, who lives in Paris, where by chance she meets the man who was her first boyfriend, triggering narrative flashbacks to her adolescence in southern Italy.

⁹ Negative reviews include: Cotroneo, R. 'Il coraggio di scrivere', in *L'espresso*, 14 June 1992 p91, and Guglielmi, A. 'Belle mutande, ma senz'animo', in *L'espresso*, 21 June 1992 p96. A more positive view is offered by Giuliani, A. 'Sballa, Rosa, sballa', in *La Repubblica*, 1 July 1992 p31.

Dunque, la storia comincerebbe così. Che io sono lì che sto per tornarmene a casa con le mie borse della spesa non pesanti e poi fa caldo e c'è tutta la puzza del vicolo che sale si espande e si diffonde, poi vedo una con qualcosa attaccato alla schiena che si sbraccia e essendo lei molto scura e essendo io abituata alle donne africane mie vicine di casa qui nel vicolo mi pare di riconoscere Akofa e la saluto e tiro dritta perché nessuna voglia di parlare e poi devo correre a casa a pensare subito a chi chiedere prestito per restituire i soldi all'amico Luca che ormai mi telefona tre volte al giorno per riavere le sue trecentomila lire.

I miei trecento sacchi, dice lui così (*In principio erano le mutande* p11).

In this extract, Campo stylises the propensity of speech to use fewer and less elaborate constructions than writing (a tendency observed by Mengaldo 1994). For example, she favours paratactic rather than hypotactic constructions, and structures sentences around a series of co-ordinated clauses. Although there are some subordinate clauses introduced by the simplest relative pronoun 'che', the most complex structure in this extract is in the split phrase introduced by the 'che polivalente', 'che io sono lì che sto per tornarmene a casa'. Furthermore, she echoes the tendency of speech to use a lesser range of conjunctions of all kinds (identified in Mengaldo 1994, Bazzanella 1994, Berruto 1987), but, in recompense, to make much greater use of the 'che polivalente' and other multipurpose semantic connectors, such as 'e' and 'allora'. She also uses the 'spoken' model of short clause structures, based to a considerable extent on the sequential linking of simple paratactic clauses rather than a more elaborate structure made up of subordinated clauses (see Mengaldo 1994, Bazzanella 1994). In the above extract, only two co-ordinating conjunctions, 'e' and 'poi', are used to join paratactic clauses. 'Perché' is used as the sole causal conjunction, introducing the elliptical clause 'perché nessuna voglia di parlare'. The second sentence of the above extract, which consists of many paratactic clauses linked by conjunctions, is thrown into sharp relief by the short, pithy sentences that frame it: this in turn gives the novel a distinctive introduction that immediately draws the reader into the narrative. Campo emphasises this effect in order to mimic the situational and context-based nature of speech, by using cataphora in combination with the spatial deixis 'lì' and 'qui', only later revealed to be 'il vicolo'.

In spontaneous spoken language, the use of complex syntactic structures like cataphora results from the minimal planification of speech (Bazzanella 1994, Còveri, Benucci et al. 1988, Berruto 1987). In the extract below, also taken from *In principio erano le mutande*, Campo stylises some of these elaborate constructions, in order to render the complexity of the spoken language:

Be' come è andata. È andata che passiamo dei giorni con io che continuo a scoppiare dentro per la felicità e lui il futurista tutto gentilissimo premuroso per farvi un esempio grandi pranzi, grandi cene con grandi bevute che mi offre. Bellissimo. Inoltre sono appena iniziate le vacanze, io che ho mollato gli handicappatini, lui che tanto dice che può anche mollare per un po' i suoi quadri rivoluzionari futuristi d'avanguardia che tanto non ha neanche molte richieste al momento e mi propone quindi di partire insieme per delle bellissime romantiche vacanze d'avanguardia dove voglio io e che se non mi secca offre lui. A me non mi secca no. E anzi penso che mi viene ancora più da gridare dentro per la felicità immensa e ancora come l'altra volta mi dico che mica è vero che ci ho questa sfiga cosmica che mi perseguita e mi accompagnerà alla tomba, macché, anzi va a finire che io è capace che sono pure una di quelle persone bacciate in fronte dalla fortuna, sì non è da escludere (*In principio erano le mutande* p59).

In this extract, Campo emulates the syntactic and semantic fragmentation of speech with incomplete utterances that, in speech, result from minimal forward planning (Còveri, Benucci et al. 1988, Berruto 1987). She achieves this by using strategies like 'false starts' (e.g. 'io è capace che'), but counters this lack of cohesion by using resources characteristic of speech to enhance textual continuity. In the second extract, she uses repetition to create textual cohesion, for instance in the constructions 'come è andata. È andata che', 'io che [...] lui che' and 'se non mi secca offre lui. A me non mi secca no'. The reformulation indicators 'macché' and 'anzi', used in speech to paraphrase and clarify a previously stated point, are also used here to create an artifice of the fragmentary construction typical of spoken discourse, and in so doing, to emulate the rhythms of speech. Exemplification is also used here with a similar purpose to the fake reformulation ('il futurista tutto gentilissimo premuroso per farvi un esempio grandi pranzi, grandi cene con grandi bevute che mi offre'). Incomplete utterances and low textual cohesion give rise to 'redundancies', such as the particle 'ci' with 'avere' and tautologies (see Bazzanella 1994): these are reflected here in the phrases 'ci ho questa sfiga cosmica' and 'a me non mi secca no'. Also 'redundant' for the purposes of written discourse, but important in speech for holding the floor whilst the speaker formulates their utterance are fillers and hedges, such as 'be'' (abbreviated from 'beh' to reinforce the impression of a speaking voice) and 'tanto', used in the above extract. Campo uses these redundant features of speech, alongside minimal clauses (for instance, 'bellissimo', in the above extract) to confer a lively, vivacious rhythm onto her narrative and to create an artifice of a speaking voice. In order to reinforce this further, she uses the indicative in the place of the subjunctive after the verb 'penso che', and the conjunctions 'è capace che' and 'mica è vero che', in an imitation of the convention that the subjunctive is used less widely, or at least less correctly, in speech than in writing (Mengaldo 1994, Berruto 1987, Bazzanella 1994).

In her later novels, Campo further elaborates a style based on the spoken language. Her second novel, *Il pieno di super*, was perceived by some as a slightly more sophisticated representation of the spoken language than *In principio erano le mutande* (e.g. Barilli 1993), whereas her third, *Mai sentita così bene*, was widely and warmly received as a theatrical masterpiece (La Stella 1995, Giuliani 1995) – as Barilli notes, ‘mai espressa così bene’ (Barilli 1995 p2).¹⁰ Like *In principio erano le mutande*, *Mai sentita così bene* is a comic novel. The protagonists are all Italian women living in Paris, who gather for dinner, and the novel’s plot unfolds through their conversation. *Mai sentita così bene* is a much more polyphonic text than *In principio erano le mutande*. Much of the narrative takes the form of stories recounted by the characters during the evening, and the novel’s plot is constructed from the many intersecting and overlapping narratives. During the evening, the protagonist of the novel describes her affair with a much younger man, whilst her husband has been away on a botanical expedition; her friend, Ale, is set upon in the toilet by the jealous German ex-wife of her partner, Gianni; and one of the other characters, Betty, complicates the situation further by announcing that she is expecting Gianni’s child. *Mai sentita così bene* offers a more sophisticated representation of the spoken language than *In principio erano le mutande*, and is structured around conversation and dialogue from the very first pages. Once again, the novel plunges the reader straight into the narrative, with no preliminaries:

Quella paracula della mia amica, la Monica, ne ha combinata un’altra delle sue. Ore nove e tre quarti mattutine e quella tutta isterica e schizzata c’ha già una parlantina da stenderti secca. Io ancora in coma per il risveglio pessimo, bocca impastata, pensieri allucinati, e lei a urlare nella cornetta: Oè, testona, che fine hai fatto? Che stavi facendo, porcate? (*Mai sentita così bene* p9).

Here Campo immerses the reader into the informal and intimate circle of female friends on whom this novel focuses. This impression is reinforced throughout by the narrator’s constant address to the reader in the informal plural ‘voi’, as if confiding in one group of friends about another: for example, ‘vi dico che è tutta un po’ sull’esagerato la mia amica’ (*Mai sentita così bene* p11), ‘con la Nadia dovete sapere che siamo state molto amiche per un periodo’ (*Mai sentita così bene* p46).

In *Mai sentita così bene* Campo builds on the linguistic style established in *In principio erano le mutande* by using textual means to emphasise the representation of a speaking voice. In particular, she uses punctuation and capitalisation to convey the intonation, volume and rhythm of the speaking voice in her prose. For example, capitals

¹⁰ La Stella 1995 is an article without complete reference details, supplied by the Feltrinelli archive.

and phonetic spelling are used to convey shouting, exclamation, or emphasis, for example: ‘grida ARRIVOOOOO...’ (*Mai sentita così bene* p61), ‘grido con la voce strozzata: JEAN-CLAUDEEEEE... CI SE-EEIIII???!’ (*Mai sentita così bene* p125). As these examples indicate, punctuation is also used for emphasis: exclamation marks, question marks and indicators of pauses and ellipsis (...) are used in combination with each other and in an unconventional way, to structure the narrative rhythms of *Mai sentita così bene* around those of the speaking voice. As many as eight characters participate in the free-flowing discussions which constitute the novel, and the polyphonic impression of many narrative voices is further reinforced by the ways in which Campo depicts dialogue, as in this passage:

No, guarda io sono incazzatissima adesso.
 Con chi?
 Con Hervé. E anche con me. Perché lui mi faceva venire i seni di colpa.
 Che cosa?
 I sensi di colpa.
 Hai detto i seni di colpa.
 No, ho detto i sensi di colpa.
 Hai detto seni, avete sentito che ha detto seni?
 Hai detto seni, ha ragione la Ale.
 Vabbè, vai avanti,
 Ih, che ridere, i seni di polpa, fa la Betty,
 Dai continua,
 Che cavolo stavo dicendo? (*Mai sentita così bene* p88-89).

Here direct speech is not separated from narrative passages by conventional punctuation – Campo often preferring to use only commas – thus minimising the pauses between turns and conferring on the whole novel the air of a continuous, vivacious dialogue. The speaker is not always clearly designated in the text and Campo occasionally adds this information in parentheses; for example, ‘E cosa c’è da dire. Meglio fare. (È la Nadia che dice questo)’ (*Mai sentita così bene* p59). In addition, Campo disturbs the logical order of adjacency pairs, the straightforward question/response formula described in Goffman 1981, to create a more convincing aura of spontaneous discourse.

Many of the (morpho)syntactic structures that I have described as features of the spoken language in *Mai sentita così bene* and *In principio erano le mutande* are also identified in the neostandard. Left dislocation, split phrases, the *che* polivalente, the substitution of the indicative for the subjunctive in the present tense are all techniques used by Campo to represent the speaking voice and are also recognised among the characteristics of the neostandard (Berruto 1987). Nonetheless, the language used in Campo’s writing is not limited to the neostandard. By addressing the reader directly,

and structuring her text rhythmically, using textual indicators of ellipsis and emphasis to punctuate her writing, Campo stylises the characteristics of the spoken language to represent a warm, comic and colloquial speaking voice.

3. Lexical variation in youth language

Youth language varieties distinguish themselves from the standard chiefly by means of their lexical variants, either by coining neologisms or by adopting existing words and subjecting them to a semantic shift in meaning. Here, I use a range of examples from pulp fiction to indicate how this genre draws on the processes of word formation and the lexical resources characteristic of youth language varieties, to show that the language of pulp is strongly rooted in these varieties, and how it uses them to reflect on 1990s Italy. Following on from my discussion of the (morpho)syntactic properties of speech, I focus on the coining processes used in youth language varieties to create neologisms and the lexical resources used by this variety. I then discuss the use in pulp of words from ‘historic’ jargons (which pertain to social ‘underclasses’), youth cultures, high culture, drug-user jargons, taboo and dysphemism, all of which are identified by sociolinguists as significant features of youth language varieties. These elements are present to differing extents in pulp texts, as all authors draw upon a different lexical mix in their writing.

3a. Processes of word formation

Contemporary youth language varieties inherit from historic jargons coining processes and mechanisms of word formation, particularly those which deform the appearance of words (Cortelazzo 1994, Còveri, Benucci et al. 1988, Marcato 1997, Tosi 2001, Radtke 1993a). Among the most commonly used of these coining processes is the addition of affixes, which is consciously mimicked by the ironic affix in ‘*Seratina*’, the opening story of *Gioventù Cannibale*. Although a conventional diminutive, the word has special ironic meaning for the protagonists: ‘nel loro gergo significava sfondarsi di canne, rigorosamente senza fidanzate, e tornare a casa a orari improbabili addobbati come alberi di Natale’ (‘*Seratina*’ p7). Affixes are also used by other authors to coin neologisms: in *La guerra degli Antò*, Ballestra describes one of her characters as ‘cumpa’ cinematografaro e ramazzottimista’, a word derived from ‘ramazzotti’ and

‘ottimista’ (*La guerra degli Antò* p213).¹¹ In *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* Brizzi uses the suffix *-aro* in the term ‘fughinaro’ (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p60) for a truant, and employs a pejorative suffix to describe his friend’s parents as ‘massonimprenditorialrot-taryani’ (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p42).¹² Banfi 1992 notes the common use in youth language varieties of the prefix ‘s’, as in *sputtanare*, *scazzar(si)*, *sfiga*, and *slinguare*, all used by Rossana Campo: ‘mi son detta, vabbè ci siamo slinguati tutta la sera’ (*Mai sentita così bene* p26). Affixes in youth language varieties are often hyperbolic (Còveri 1988, Còveri, Benucci et al. 1988, Fiori 2000, Marcato 1997, Nowotnick 1993, Tosi 2001, Radtke 1993a), and this is echoed in the language of 1990s pulp. For example, in *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*, the noun ‘un megafugone’ (from ‘fare fuga’, also related to ‘fughinaro’) has both hyperbolic prefix and suffix. Hyperbole and exaggeration also appear in phrases such as ‘arciconvinto’ (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p104), and in other pulp fiction, for example: ‘stramaladettissimo’ (*Fluo* p12), ‘c’è un mega pannello con dei mega bottoni dipinti’ (*Fluo* p91), ‘ultraputtana’ (*Destroy* p47), ‘maxischermo’ (*La guerra degli Antò* p192). Youth language varieties manipulate the morphology of existing Italian words, for instance by forming plurals in ‘s’ (Còveri, Benucci et al. 1988).

Other coining processes used by youth language varieties display similar semantic and linguistic creativity to those related to historic jargons (Banfi 1994). Light-hearted metaphor and other similar shifts in or extensions of meaning give rise to the creation of items for the youth lexis (Albrecht 1993, Còveri 1988, Còveri, Benucci et al. 1988, Marcato 1997, Nowotnick 1993, Tosi 2001). The language of 1990s pulp echoes this with the use of metaphors, particularly in relation to sex, drugs and alcohol. A sexual metaphor, which summarises the themes of the novel and the preoccupations of its protagonists, provides the title of Campo’s *Il pieno di super*. Brizzi uses another fuel metaphor to describe drinking: ‘mi benzinavo di birre medie’ (*Bastogne* p49). The metaphor ‘addobbati come alberi di Natale’ used in ‘Seratina’ (above) also describes a state of extreme intoxication: as opposed to the expression ‘in para totale’ to denote a state of extreme boredom and inactivity, derived from drug-user jargon, in Brizzi’s *Jack*

¹¹ A reference to Italian singer Eros Ramazzotti, whose musical style is based on a mix of rock and ballads.

¹² Messina’s analysis of Brizzi’s neologisms, formed by the addition of affixes, is particularly astute. He notes of this instance of ‘rot-taryani’, ‘invece del corrente *rotariani* con una geminazione enfatica e uno *spelling* che più che alla *rota* simbolo del noto Club rimandano forse all’ingl. *rot* ‘imputridimento, decomposizione, putrefazione, marciume, carie’ o *rotter* ‘cialtrone, mascalzone’ [...] non è da escludere l’allusione a *rotti* [...] in senso stretto o gergale ‘tossicodependenti dalle braccia del tutto rovinate’ o a un disfemico *rottinculo*’ (Messina 1998 p362). All of these meanings may of course exist alongside each other as polysemy is a feature of youth language.

Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo (Marcato 1997). Drug and criminal jargons influence youth language varieties (Banfi 1992, Cortelazzo 1994, Còveri 1988, Còveri, Benucci et al. 1988, Finessi 1992, Giacomelli 1988 and 1993) and metaphors deriving from them are also evident in pulp. For example, Caliceti uses the metaphor ‘è completamente anfetaminico’ (*Fonderia Italghisa* p15), and in *Bastogne* particularly good music is ‘musiche da zballo’ (sic) (*Bastogne* p15).¹³ The influence of drug-related jargons and expressions is not just related to the field of metaphor, but also shows in direct borrowing from this jargon, such as in an incident of excessive drug taking in *Bastogne* that leads the narrator to remark ‘Wow. Cousin Jerry sta flipando’ (*Bastogne* p34).¹⁴ In this violent and drug-ridden novel, the protagonist also illustrates perfectly the polysemic nature of youth language varieties by replying to his father’s innocent enquiry as to whether he likes football, ‘mi piacciono l’odore dell’erba e il bianco perfetto delle righe, babbo’ (*Bastogne* p112).

Youth languages also use the related word-formation mechanism of metonymy – the action of substituting for a word or phrase denoting an object, person, etc., a word or phrase denoting a property associated with it (Còveri 1988). The most obvious example of this in pulp is in the names and nicknames given to some of the characters in *La Guerra degli Antò*. The novel is about a group of four friends who share the name Antò: Antò Lu Purk, Antò Lu Mmalatu, Antò Lu Zorru and Antò Lu Zombi. Their pseudonyms (Lu Purk, porco/pig, or, as suggested by the narrator, a variation on ‘luna park’; Lu Zorru, Zorro; Lu Mmalatu, malato/sick; Lu Zombi, zombie) designate a personality trait or other defining characteristic, but lack the vitriol and venom of those adopted by punk icons, who changed their names to pejorative adjectives, like (Johnny) ‘Rotten’ and (Sid) ‘Vicious’. Instead, the Antòs choose to voice their ‘oppositional’ stance through manipulation of the Abruzzese dialect. The name given to the protagonist of Santacroce’s *Destroy* is also metonymic: ‘Misty’ encapsulates the detached, abstract and ephemeral nature of her existence. Similarly, in *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*, the mass of students at the protagonist’s school are ‘i lobotomizzati’ (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p53) or ‘degli studenti zombi’

¹³ ‘1. Nel gergo dei drogati, il momento immediatamente successivo al buco, che dà una sensazione di grande benessere: *essere in sballo*. 2. Situazione, cosa, persona che piace ed eccita straordinariamente: *stasera sei uno sballo; che sballo!, è uno sballo!*, è una meraviglia, c’è da perdersi la testa; *da sballo*, eccezionale, fantastico: *un disco da sballo*’ (Forconi 1988 p186). Also: ‘*sballo* “detto di persona o cosa bellissima, che colpisce e piace” (da cui *sballare* “ubriacarsi, drogarsi”, quindi “fare qualcosa che ecciti in modo particolare” e *sballoso* “eccitante, piacevole”)’ (Cortelazzo 1994 p308, original italics).

¹⁴ ‘Flippare – nel gergo dei drogati, drogarsi, assumere droga, specialmente con riferimento agli effetti: *guarda che se flippi male sono cazzi acidi* (termine probabilmente derivato dall’espressione inglese *to flip out*, letteralmente “spingersi oltre”, usata nel gergo dei drogati)’ (Forconi 1988 p83).

(*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p79), or in the case of girls ‘semprevergini’ (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p120). At the opposite extreme, in both *Fonderia Italghisa* and *Fluo* the proper noun ‘lolita’ is used to refer to attractive and promiscuous young girls. This indicates a literary dimension to pulp, which I discuss in the next chapter.

Other unconventional morphological forms, such as the substitution of ‘k’ for ‘c’ in certain words, which is appropriated from the language of graffiti, denotes ‘a derogative meaning of military and authoritarian flavour, probably from the post-1968 *sinistrese* which introduced *OKKUPAZIONE*, *AMERIKA*, *KAPITALISMO* and *KOSSIGA*’ (Tosi 2001 p197). This spelling change is used in several pulp texts to express political comment or unease: for example, in *La guerra degli Antò*, ‘gli amerikani se so’ messi a spara’ da tutte le parti’ (*La guerra degli Antò* p108). Later in the novel Ballestra also substitutes ‘k’ for ‘q’ with a similar intent in the exclamation ‘in Irak ci sono più di centomila morti’ (*La guerra degli Antò* p279). Ballestra and Brizzi also use a spelling change from ‘Italia’ to ‘Itaglia’: for instance in ‘figli di un’ignoranza itagliana senza complessi’ (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p57) and ‘certe riflessioni amare sull’Itaglia’ (*La guerra degli Antò* p285). Deeper political criticisms lie behind these spelling changes, targetted at American and Italian politics and society, which I compare to treatment of similar subjects by previous generations of Italian authors in Chapter 3.

3b. Lexical resources

The foundations of youth language varieties are in youth fashions and cultures (Banfi 1992, Cortelazzo 1994, Radtke 1993a), which are also a significant influence on the language of pulp. On the most superficial level, these cultures provide the epithets for their adherents. Hence in Ballestra’s early short stories, set in the late 1980s, the ‘paninari’ are opposed to the ‘punk’. In Brizzi’s *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* the protagonist also styles himself ‘punk’ and ‘il nostro rocker’, and assumes the costumes and styles associated with these subcultures: ‘una delle ragioni alla base del look muy aggressivo del vecchio Alex: differenziarsi dai diciassetenni in polo ralph lauren’ (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p63). The protagonist, Alex, highlights the relationship between youth cultures and youth language varieties as follows:

‘Basta sentire come parliamo’, rifletteva fra sé quel roccioso. ‘Noialtri, per esempio, ci lanciamo in tutte quelle acrobazie sintattiche che non hanno ancora nulla del magnifico menefreghismo di chi sbaglia i congiuntivi senza complessi ... Il nostro gergo’ rifletteva il vecchio Alex, ‘riguarda soprattutto la sfera scolastico-masturbatoria, senza quel distacco da frequentatore di jazz club che io spero tanto riusciremo ad acquisire col tempo’ (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p133).

As Brizzi indicates in this extract, youth languages take terms and other inspiration from specialist and sectorial languages (Banfi 1994, Cortelazzo 1992), and this is reflected in pulp. Among the sources which can be firmly linked to youthful circumstances are words drawn from the jargon of military service (Marcato 1997, Radtke 1993a) and, as Brizzi indicates in the above extract, from school and university environments (Cortelazzo 1994, Còveri 1988, Banfi 1992).

‘Cultismi’ are one such variety: consisting of highbrow expressions or Latin words used with ironic intent in informal situations (Còveri, Benucci et al. 1988). They are integrated into the lexis of pulp as many of the novels and short stories are set in schools or universities (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*, *La via per Berlino*, and Culicchia’s *Tutti giù per terra*), or the world of Italian literature (*Gli Orsi*, *Elogio di Oscar Firmian e del suo impeccabile stile*), where the use of such terms is congruent with the setting. For example, in *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* the narrator calls his exams ‘còmpitus’ and the night before his exams laconically remarks ‘due Never Mind The Bollocks più tardi era di nuovo lunedì mattina, et illo non aveva studiato fisica’ (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p50). The archaic sense of the latter phrase is conveyed effectively in the English translation ‘and he hath yet to study physics’ (*Jack Frusciante has left the band* p42). In Ballestra’s *La guerra degli Antò*, ‘cultismi’ are juxtaposed with the protagonists’ dialect-based youth language, giving rise to examples of ‘italiano popolare’. This is defined as

la varietà sociale per eccellenza dell’italiano, vale a dire quell’insieme di usi frequentemente ricorrenti nel parlare e [...] nello scrivere di persone non istruite che per lo più nella vita quotidiana usano il dialetto, caratterizzati da numerose devianze rispetto a quanto previsto dall’italiano standard normativo (Berruto 1987 p58).

For example, Ballestra plays on the Latin phrase ‘carpe diem’, which, in her characters’ mouths, becomes ‘scarpe diem’. Ballestra exploits the comic potential of this linguistic incongruity at her characters’ expense, for example, she addresses the uncouth Antò Lu Purk as ‘egregio sir Anthony Lu Purk mmine’, (*La guerra degli Antò* p127): Lu Mmalatu mistakes Saddam Hussein’s name for ‘Saddà Mussein’ (*La guerra degli Antò*

p106), and, in an indirect ironic reference to Vittorini's resistance novel, declares 'noi siamo contro. Siamo tipo Uomini Contro, Uomini e No, Uomini Contro e No' (*La guerra degli Antò* p242). Ballestra charges this statement with irony, as her characters are anything but resistance heroes and have only the smallest understanding of the war that gives this novel its name, but this irony is completely lost on Lu Mmalatu himself. 'Cultismi' are not so frequent in pulp as other elements of youth language varieties, but highbrow references, which may be seen as the equivalent of 'cultismi' in the written form, are abundant.¹⁵

Much pulp fiction is set against a backdrop of petty underworld activity, drug dealing and other crimes (for instance, *Bastogne*, many of the stories in *Gioventù Cannibale*, and to a certain extent, Santacroce's *Destroy* and *Luminal*). Historic jargons, many of which originate from a similar context, furnish contemporary youth language varieties with models for coining neologisms (see section 3a, above), whilst also constituting a significant lexical resource for them (Banfi 1992, Banfi 1994, Cortelazzo 1992 and 1994, Còveri 1988, Còveri, Benucci et al. 1988, Marcato 1997, Tosi 2001, Radtke 1993a). Unlike words from specialist languages, words from these jargons do not undergo any great semantic shift when they enter the youth variety as they are already marked by a significant difference from standard Italian (Cortelazzo 1992). Among the words from these sources (identified by Banfi 1994 and Cortelazzo 1994) which can also be found in 1990s pulp are: 'pula' for 'polizia' in Campo's *Il pieno di super*: 'speriamo che non ci becca la pula' and 'c'è anche la pula' (*Il pieno di super* p135 and 136), and '(s)lumare' for 'guardare'.¹⁶ Already in the introduction to *Giovani Blues* (an anthology of short stories by young authors published in 1986), Tondelli remarks upon the frequent use of 'slumare' by young writers, which he mimics with ironic intent: 'chi scrive è sempre dannatamente strafatto su un materasso a slumare il soffitto' (*Giovane Blues* p20). 'Slumare' and its variations survive particularly in pulp from the first half of the 1990s, for instance: 'l'aveva slumato in modo terribilmente diretto' (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p58); 'si slumava i film' (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p71), 'impara anche tu a lumarti delle belle fiche vecchie' (*Il pieno di super* p52), and 'ci luma di brutto' (*Fluo* p16).

¹⁵ I will discuss some of these highbrow references in Chapter 3, which deals with the literary influences on this fiction.

¹⁶ Cortelazzo 1994 summarises well the debate on the provenance of this word: 'la voce, soprattutto nella sua variante *lumare*, è molto diffusa nella lingua dei giovani, ed è stata connotata negli ultimi anni come tipica dei paninari. Ma si tratta di un *revival*: non solo è voce dei gerghi tradizionali, ma era diffusa nel linguaggio giovanile degli anni Sessanta, soprattutto per influsso della rivista *Linus*, nella quale compariva l'espressione "lumare le pupe"' (Cortelazzo 1994 p306). This word perhaps also has a literary origin, in the poetic 'lumi' for 'occhi'.

Like ‘slumare’, some words originating in youth language varieties have established themselves on a long term basis in less formal varieties of the common language, and their continued presence in youth language varieties may be attributed to this source as much as to their root in youth varieties (Cortelazzo 1994). These words are also common in 1990s pulp, where they may be read as both an indicator of a close relationship between the language of this fiction and youth language varieties, and as a reflection of ‘sub-standard’, colloquial register of much of this fiction. Cortelazzo 1994 lists a number of words from pre-1990s youth languages that persist in the lexes of contemporary youth language varieties. Many of these also occur frequently in 1990s pulp, for instance: ‘forte’ (bello/in gamba), as in, ‘sei troppo forte, Natascia, fa la Gabi esprimendo il pensiero di tutte’ (*Il pieno di super* p98); ‘frocio’ (omosessuale), used frequently in Ballestra’s *Romanzi e Racconti*, Culicchia’s *Tutti giù per terra*, Caliceti’s *Fonderia Italghisa*, Santacroce’s *Fluo* and Brizzi’s *Bastogne*; and ‘gasato’ (che si dà arie) ‘è la police in moto, quella più gasata che si è iniettata direttamente in vena un tot di puntate very anni ottanta di Chips e si sente da dia sciabolando di notte a cavallo di certi bolidi bicolori’ (*Fluo* p89). There are also occurrences of ‘cesso’ (brutto, in *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*), which is also present in the feminine plural, ‘cesse’, in *La guerra degli Antò*; and its opposite ‘figo’ (bel ragazzo), also in the form ‘fico’ and the associated feminine forms ‘fica/figa’ from which it probably derives (Zingarelli 1999) in *Il pieno di super*, *Fonderia Italghisa* and *In principio erano le mutande*. Other terms, such as ‘loffio’ (noioso), ‘se non siamo delle loffie lo facciamo anche noi’ (*Il pieno di super* p128) and ‘pirla’ (stupido/membro virile, Banfi 1992), ‘porca puttana cosa hai fatto di là con quel pirla’ (*Superwoobinda* p11) are relatively rare, whereas ‘scopare’ (fare sesso) is used in almost all pulp texts which touch upon this subject. Another of these long term youth language words, ‘limonare’ (baciarsi), carries infantile connotations. It is especially prevalent where the narrator is a child, such as in *In principio erano le mutande*, where it is occasionally capitalised to denote its importance: ‘sua sorella va a Limonare con Adriano’ (*In principio erano le mutande* p18). It also appears in *Il pieno di super* ‘giovani arrabbiati allungati sull’erba che limonano’ (*Il pieno di super* p129), and in Nove’s *Superwoobinda*: ‘quando per la strada vedo i ragazzi della mia età che limonano è come se mi esplodesse un’industria nel cuore’ (*Superwoobinda* p39).¹⁷

¹⁷ These meanings and uses of cesso, figo/fico, frocio, gasato, limonare, loffio, pirla, and scopare but not forte are listed in the 1999 Zingarelli: of these only figo/fico is denoted as jargon, thus underlining the view that these terms are progressively shedding their jargon connotations.

Equally associated with diaphasically and diastratically ‘sub-standard’ language varieties is the use of taboo terminology and dysphemism. These strategies are features of youth language varieties, in which they may be used with the intention of gaining covert prestige (Banfi 1992, Cortelazzo 1994, Radtke 1993a, Còveri, Benucci et al. 1988). This kind of language use is particularly common in the works of pulp which force the boundaries of political correctness (*Bastogne*, *Gioventù Cannibale* and *Fonderia Italghisa* among others). Caliceti’s *Fonderia Italghisa* begins ‘Salve suini! Come andiamo a figa? Il Nonno non si può lamentare. Anche quest’anno ha rovistato in una mezza dozzina di vagine’ (*Fonderia Italghisa* p11). Throughout the text ‘suini’ (metaphor) and ‘vagine’ (metonymy) are used as synonyms for the more neutral ‘ragazzi/ragazze’. The use of ‘fottuto’ in pulp has attracted particular attention. It has been argued that a frequent use of ‘fottuto’ and similar calques on English expletives is due to the influence of American pulp and genre fiction on 1990s Italian pulp, as these narrative forms make liberal use of vulgarities which Italians may only approach in translation. An imitation of this style may therefore rely on the liberal use of ‘fottuto’ instead of a more ‘natural’, dialect equivalent (Cardone, Galato et al. 1996, Drago 2001, Berisso 2001).¹⁸ The occurrence of this kind of language in pulp, however, varies in the work of different authors. In Enrico Brizzi’s *Bastogne*, the only incidence of this language is when Ermanno tells Biancalancia ‘no, guarda, vai a farti fottere che è meglio’ (*Bastogne* p97): otherwise most phrases of this kind are based around the word ‘cazzo’. In *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* there are also just a very few incidences of this language: ‘la fottuta porta dell’appartamento fottuto’ (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p164) and ‘questa storia fottuta legata al cattolicesimo in modo fottuto’ (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p51). This kind of language is also rare in Ballestra’s *La guerra degli Antò*, occurring only in the phrases ‘quella fottuta porta’ (*La guerra degli Antò* p143), and also what is apparently a calque on the English ‘bloody’ in ‘hai speso l’equivalente di ventinovemila sanguinose lire’ (*La guerra degli Antò* p91). Similar phrases are, however, more common in Ammaniti and Brancaccio’s ‘Seratina’: ‘quel suo fottuto mal di testa’ (‘Seratina’ p6), ‘è fottuto!’ (‘Seratina’ p9), ‘stai per essere ammazzato da un fottuto canguro’ (‘Seratina’ p30), and in Isabella Santacroce’s

¹⁸ The use of ‘fottere’ in written fiction is amply and angrily condemned by Drago: ‘dovrebbero dunque evitare di scrivere “fottuto” quando in inglese si trova “fucking”. E anche il verbo “to fuck” non va tradotto “fottere”. In italiano una “fucking situation” è una “situazione del cazzo” non una “fottutissima situazione”. E “you’ll be fucked” va tradotto “ti fregheremo”, non “ti fotteremo”, almeno credo. Così come “you’re fucking right” fa schifo se lo traduciamo “hai fottutamente ragione”’ (Drago 2001 p ix). ‘Fottuto’ is also used in genre cinema as a calque for ‘fuck’, in order to facilitate dubbing. I will discuss the implications of the influence of anglophone writing in the next chapter.

Destroy, ‘aspetta che abbia le mie mani su quel tuo fottutissimo collo’ (*Destroy* p19), ‘un fottuto killer professionista’ (*Destroy* p49), ‘fottuti pensieri’ (*Destroy* p58), to cite just a few examples. Minicangeli’s story ‘Il maiale non è morto’ in the anthology *Cuore di Pulp* also makes liberal use of this term.

3c. Diatopic variation in youth languages

The use of dysphemistic calques in pulp’s language raises the question of the ways in which diatopic variation influences the language of this fiction. The prominent use of dialect distinguishes Silvia Ballestra’s *La via per Berlino* and *La guerra degli Antò* from much other pulp, which draws to a lesser extent on dialect than on other non-standard languages.¹⁹ In some ways this validates the findings of some studies on the use of dialect in spoken youth language varieties (for instance, Radtke 1992, Banfi 1992, Còveri, Benucci et al. 1988, Marcato 1997, Cortelazzo 1994 and 1995, Còveri 1988, Radtke 1993a). These studies find that early youth language varieties were created in the environments of military service in the post-war years, and in the politicised student rebellions of the 1960s and 1970s: in these circumstances they may have replaced dialect for some speakers, and functioned as a de-provincialising, national slang with a bias towards words of non-dialect origin (Radtke 1996, Còveri 1988, Cortelazzo 1993, Radtke 1996). Some sociolinguists observe that this simple displacement hypothesis is too generic in a contemporary context, and that dialect has become just one of many stylistic means used by youth language varieties to articulate opposition to the norm (Cortelazzo 1995, Banfi 1994).²⁰ In *La via per Berlino* and *La guerra degli Antò* the protagonists’ language is a curious mix, described by the narrator as ‘un pessimo anglopescaresese’ (*La guerra degli Antò* p80).²¹ In ‘anglopescaresese’, Abruzzese dialect is combined with foreign words and other features of youth language, all of which are used to express opposition from the standard.

Not all Ballestra’s characters in *La guerra degli Antò* speak ‘anglopescaresese’: some of the older, peripheral characters express themselves only in Abruzzese dialect.

¹⁹ For a brief summary of dialect in literature in the 1990s, see Antonelli 2000.

²⁰ Banfi 1992 and Comodi 1998 argue that the use of dialect in contemporary youth languages varies according to the strength of dialect in any given area, whereas Cortelazzo 1995 has suggested that dialect words in youth language varieties are restricted to specific areas of use, such as insults, sexual terms, and to define scholastic failure.

²¹ Marinucci 1998’s short description of Abruzzese dialects suggests that Ballestra’s representation of the Pescaran dialect is largely accurate. Cortelazzo 1995 and Binazzi 1995 find that young men’s language adheres more closely to dialect than young women’s. Ballestra’s fiction echoes this: her characters who use a dialect-based language in 1990s pulp are also male, but in her later writing, that has female protagonists (e.g. *La giovinezza della Signorina N. N.* and *Nina*), dialect is a less significant linguistic influence.

For instance, in the sections of the novel that focus on Antò Lu Purk's family, dialect is the principal form of language used for direct speech, but the characters codeswitch to Italian in less intimate surroundings. Many of the passages that represent this particular dialect are accompanied by 'translations' into standard Italian in parentheses in the text, indicating that Ballestra believes her readership to be insufficiently fluent in this variety to understand it without help, for example: 'Sciù, sciù, Busbà, frìna co' jochi! Làssa sta' li cittadini jóppede jóppeda, capítíu? Lassali sta, o tistùro! (Giù, giù, Busbano, basta giochi! Smetti di molestare i signori in lungo e in largo. Smettila, o tistùro!)' (*La guerra degli Antò* p156). Ballestra represents dialect through three levels of regional linguistic indicators: accent, dialect words and regionalized grammar. The phonetic shifts caused by the Abruzzese accent are represented in the written text by spelling changes. The phoneme 'gli' is written as 'j', as in 'come je pare', 'vojo' and 'fijeto' (*La guerra degli Antò* p191). The 's' sound is sonorized, as in 'ce penzo io', 'penza' and 'perverzo' (*La guerra degli Antò* p191, p87, p90). There is also doubling up of consonants, as in 'bbene', 'mme', 'Mmarine', 'raggione' and 'ppe' ccui' (*La guerra degli Antò* p191), 'dde che' (*La guerra degli Antò* p119) and 'robba' (*La guerra degli Antò* p128). There are other significant changes in the vowel sounds: the 'uo' diphthong may be shortened to the closed vowel 'o' or the open vowel 'ò': hence 'uomo' becomes 'omo' and 'può' becomes 'pò' (*La guerra degli Antò* p191), 'buono' becomes 'bòno' and 'vuole' becomes 'vòle' (*La guerra degli Antò* p125 and p86). 'O' and 'e' vowel sounds are also further closed to become 'u' and 'i/i' respectively: for instance, 'sturnà, pp'ccà tutt' ti vulímm' bbe'', (torna, perché tutti ti vogliamo bene) and 'vínne, o almíno tilífona' (vieni*, o almeno telefona, both *La guerra degli Antò* p191).

Ballestra also uses geosynonyms and regional and dialect lexical variations in combination with this representation of accent. For instance, the regional 'mò' is used in place of the more diatopically neutral 'adesso', and the southern and diamesically marked form 'manco' (Còveri, Benucci et al. 1988 p52) is used in place of 'neanche' by narrator and characters alike. The regional masculine singular pronoun 'lu' is frequently used in place of 'il/lo', and there is evidence of regional verb collocations such as 'tenere' for 'avere' (Còveri, Benucci et al. 1988 p50), e.g. 'tíng 'na fame!' (*La guerra degli Antò* p195). Regional morphological variations can also be seen in the use of 'sòreta' (*La guerra degli Antò* p113) for 'tua sorella'.²² Ballestra reproduces regional

²² Marinucci 1998 observes in Abruzzese dialect traces of archaic forms for nouns denoting family relationships, such as 'sorore' (with the characteristic regional truncation of the final syllable, 'sòre') for 'sorella'. He also notes the frequent practice of joining unstressed possessive pronouns to nouns, hence 'sòreta' for 'tua sorella'.

verb forms, such as the truncation of the final syllable by dialect speakers, for example, Lu Zorru's uncle: 'je vojo fa' capi' che nun pò fa' sempre come je pare, torna', parti', parti', torna' (*La guerra degli Antò* p99) and other regional verb declensions, including 'prima fàmo, prima magnamo' (*La guerra degli Antò* p262). Some sentences also reveal a structural influence from dialect, for instance, 'mi capisco' for 'mi faccio capire' (*La guerra degli Antò* p88).

The narrator's own language complements 'anglo-pescaresè' with sprinklings of Spanish and French – 'entretemps' is used idiosyncratically as a conjunction (*La guerra degli Antò* p155) and Spanish and French characters express themselves in their native languages. The 'dialogue' that the narrator maintains with her characters further highlights the linguistic and cultural contrast between them. The narrator manipulates many languages with skill and rhythmic sensitivity, using foreign words for their stylistic effect ('oh, yes, anche la sottoscritta c'era', *La guerra degli Antò* p150) in close juxtaposition to colloquial Italian and dialect. These words are used as a refrain in the short story 'Yes ja oui ja sì!'.²³

Foreign cultural influences bring to the lexes of youth language varieties foreign or pseudo-foreign words, particularly from Spanish and English (Cortelazzo 1994, Albrecht 1993, Còveri 1988, Còveri, Benucci et al. 1988, Marcato 1997, Radtke 1992 and 1993a, Tosi 2001). An analogous tendency to use foreign words as a stylistic device can be observed in 1990s pulp, in which they are used for a similar purpose: to create a cosmopolitan style. Often this expresses a desire (for both author and character) to appear different: in other cases, which I will discuss in the next chapter, this linguistic mix has another facet, showing a close relationship to some Italian models. In Brizzi's *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* most foreign words, like those in spoken youth varieties, come from English and Spanish (although there are also some borrowings from French and German) and are often mixed indiscriminately. Almost all the protagonists of the novel have a foreign pseudonym: Alex anglicises his name from Alessandro to give him kudos and, for those who know his cultural references, to confer on him a slightly menacing aspect – he shares his name with the ultra-violent protagonist of Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*, to which Brizzi refers many times in the novel. Alex's mother is 'mutter', his brother 'frère de lait', his friends – the 'amigos catholic punk' (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p26) – are Oscar, Depression Tony and Hoge. Other foreign words used in this novel have a similar and

²³ The refrain 'oh yes' is used in a similar way to punctuate Vassalli's novel, *Abitare il vento*, as in 'inzomma tanto ci penzo che alla fine mi addormento, oh yes' (*Abitare il vento* p10) and 'e speriamo che la Fernanda e il Lessandro durino poco anche loro, oh yes' (*Abitare il vento* p46).

purely stylistic purpose: for example, ‘sabati sera molto più strong’ (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p45), ‘look muy aggressivo del vecchio Alex’ (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p63), and ‘un’amica part time’ (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p119).

Foreign words are also used to denote youth and fashionable status in Isabella Santacroce’s *Fluo*. Among the most frequently used words and phrases in this novel are ‘girl(s)’, ‘boy(s)’, ‘lady/ladies’, and the construction ‘in very [...] style’, e.g. ‘senza esagerazioni da tamarro in very burino style’ (*Fluo* p101) and ‘noi bianche in very murder style’ (*Fluo* p102). ‘Very’ is often used as a straightforward substitute for the Italian ‘molto’, sometimes integrating smoothly into the grammar of the Italian sentence, as in ‘mimetizzo il tutto sparando notevolmente Beastie Boys incazzati in very hard sound’ (*Fluo* p11), but sometimes a little more awkwardly: ‘i mega abiti buttati addosso in very streetwear’ (*Fluo* p109: note also the use of ‘mega’ as a hyperbolic prefix) and ‘io in very maquillage dark’ (*Fluo* p56). ‘Baby’ is used in the sense of small, young: ‘questi baby-zingari’ (*Fluo* p56) and ‘baby vergini’ (*Fluo* p34). Although in this novel Santacroce’s English lexis is not excessively broad, the insistent and repeated inclusion of a relatively small number of English words is sufficiently disruptive to the Italian text to endow it with an estranging effect, especially because some of these anglicisms are also fashionable brand names, for example, Starlet names: ‘i pant giganti della Stussy e le T-shirt al ginocchio della World Tribe a righe’ (*Fluo* p40) and ‘spazzolini di Paul Smith’ (*Fluo* p15).²⁴

Rossana Campo’s style shares with Santacroce’s and Brizzi’s the assumption that the reader should understand the foreign words on the same level as the Italian text. Occasionally in her first two novels, Campo adds a touch of naivety befitting of the child narrators, by spelling foreign names phonetically, for instance, ‘è bello come ROGER MUR’ (*In principio erano le mutande* p21), ‘una canzone degli stranieri Rollin Ston’ (*In principio erano le mutande* p11), and ‘la donna più bella del mondo a parte noi tre è Liz Teilor’ (*In principio erano le mutande* p20). The use of foreign words in some of Campo’s later novels (*L’attore americano*, *Mai sentita così bene*, *Mentre la mia bella dorme*, *Sono pazza di te*) is slightly different, as these novels have a multi-national and polyglot culture from the outset. For instance, many of the crucial turning points in *L’attore americano* are narrated wholly or mainly in English. The ‘motor statement’ (Lucamante 2001d) which triggers all the action in *L’attore americano* is one

²⁴ This technique may also hold a certain fascination and appeal for speakers whose limited knowledge of English is built largely on the foundations of popular and consumer cultures (Tosi 2001). For a survey of the ways in which Italian youth language varieties use English words, see Jezek 1993.

of these sentences: the protagonist accosts the American actor of the title with the words (entirely in English in the original), 'Hey Steve! You're a great actor and a beautiful man! Call me if you want!' (*L'attore americano* p20). At the same time, she distances herself from this language, seeing it in some ways as inadequate and false. After one particularly cliché-ridden dialogue between the protagonist and Steve Rothman she apologises: 'non è colpa mia se mi tocca scrivere simili dialoghi, sono gli americani che parlano a questo modo' (*L'attore americano* p36).

The assumption inherent in this use of foreign languages is that the reader is relatively sophisticated: it is presumed that readers who are conversant with the novel's cultural and linguistic context are sufficiently fluent in the linguistic codes it uses that the use of foreign languages is not disruptive to their understanding of the text (for Rossana Campo's view on this, see Litherland 2004). In contrast, Ballestra, the only pulp author to use a regional dialect in her writing, albeit for comic purposes, provides 'translations' into standard Italian of her more challenging dialect passages. In the cultural world of Italian youth as depicted in pulp fiction, fluency in global cultures and foreign languages is clearly in the ascendancy, at the expense of competence in dialects and Italian regional cultures.

3d. The mass media

Words and phrases from foreign languages enter youth language varieties via the media, which permit contact with young people over a broad geographical area, allowing youth cultures and languages to spread throughout and between nations (Nowottnick 1993, De Angelis 2000, Radtke 1996). In other words, 'è il mondo dei media che offre una fonte, e contemporaneamente uno specchio, al linguaggio giovanile' (Simonetti 1998 p177). Here I discuss the relationship between youth language varieties and the mass media, and consequently the relationship between the language of pulp and the media. I begin with a discussion of Giuseppe Culicchia's *Bla Bla Bla*, whose protagonist feels overwhelmed by the constant stream of media information by which he is surrounded. I then concentrate on Aldo Nove's elaboration of advertising language in *Superwoobinda*. Finally, I consider the ways in which the 'new' media influence the written language with reference to Matteo Galianzo's short story, 'Il ferro è una cosa viva'.

Studies on the spread of words used in 'youth' television programmes, such as *Striscia la notizia* (which draws on Genoese youth language varieties), *Drive In* (informed by the 'paninari' youth culture in the 1980s), and *Twin Peaks* (an American

murder mystery series) attest to a reciprocal relationship between youth cultures and languages (see Finessi 1992, Cortelazzo 1992 and Marcato 1997). Concentrating on two towns in Liguria, Genoa and Savona, Finessi 1992 notes that terms originating in the ‘paninari’ youth culture, such as ‘gallo’ (ragazzo in gamba), ‘sfitinzia’ (ragazza) and ‘cuccare’ (prendere, imbrogliare, rubare, fare l’amore) have spread through the media beyond their Milanese origin to young people in other areas. Although Finessi’s study acknowledges the spread of words from the ‘paninaro’ variety through the media, she also notes that the media spread a dubious, unauthentic caricature of ‘paninari’ language; a point backed up by Radtke 1993a, who notes that the term ‘sfitinzia’, perhaps originating in the northern ‘squinzia’, owes its spread to a character from *Drive In*. The language of *Drive In* is still evident in some 1990s pulp: the terms ‘truzzo’ and ‘tamarro’ (described by Marcato 1997 as ‘rozzo, provinciale’) form part of the characters’ essential vocabulary in Silvia Ballestra’s *La guerra degli Antò*, and as I have shown, also occur in some other pulp texts by Nove and Santacroce (see section 3c, above).²⁵

It is acknowledged that the media have been instrumental in the past in helping to improve competence in Italian, and that in contemporary Italy the mass media are equally important in increasing familiarity with foreign languages. The mass media serve as a major conduit for the dissemination of foreign and technical words and neologisms: Beccaria 1973a attributes the spread of anglicisms such as ‘slogan’, ‘supermarket’, ‘standard’, ‘beat’, ‘party’, ‘fans’, and ‘hippy’ in Italy to the press. Much evidence suggests that the mass media are also a significant factor in spreading words from youth language beyond their sphere of origin (Nowottnick 1993, Cortelazzo 1988; Marcato 1997 and Radtke 1993a). This is especially the case as much youth culture, particularly pop music, comes from anglophone sources (Cortelazzo 1998 and Nowottnick 1993). Of all the mass media, television is the most effective in spreading linguistic innovations, perhaps because of its popularity. Although television is a potent method of spreading youth language varieties, it does not invent them: in Cortelazzo’s words, ‘certo il fenomeno della diffusione di un modello di lingua giovanile grazie alla televisione è fenomeno rilevante, ma parla a favore della potenza del mezzo audiovisivo, non del prestigio della sua lingua’ (Cortelazzo 1992 p79). Radtke 1993a identifies the terms ‘tosto’ (in gamba, interessante, che piace molto) and ‘togo’ (bravo, duro) among many others that have spread throughout Italy via the mass media; the former through youth television and the latter through Kawasaki advertising.

²⁵ For a more detailed analysis of the language used in *Drive In*, see Ricci 1992.

The influence of the mass media and the languages of advertising, alongside the commercially-oriented culture that creates them, is a significant theme in Giuseppe Culicchia's writing. Culicchia first published several short stories; 'Una questione d'intuito', 'Vita da cani', 'Il sorriso di Jessica Lange', 'Fuori programma', and 'Il grande sogno americano' in the anthology *Under 25 terzo: Papergang*, the same anthology in which Silvia Ballestra's writing first appeared. Culicchia has subsequently published four novels: *Tutti giù per terra* (1994) and its sequel *Paso Doble* (1995), *Bla Bla Bla* (1997) and *Ambarabà* (2000). Of these, *Bla Bla Bla* deals most specifically with the themes of marketing and advertising. This is declared in the quotation that opens the novel: 'Tragedy or comedy? Probably publicity' (Leftfield, Leftism, Open Up). The novel begins with the protagonist on holiday in a foreign city: whilst waiting for his partner outside the toilets of a bland shopping centre in which he is besieged by a constant barrage of slogans and brand names, he impulsively decides to abandon his life and disappear. The protagonist narrates in the first person his progressive deterioration from tourist to vagrant as he runs out of money and is reduced to begging on the streets. The constant theme of *Bla Bla Bla* is the protagonist's sense of disorientation and dislocation: he is not only physically distant from Italy (the city in which the story takes place remains nameless but bears strong similarities to London), but he is also linguistically estranged from the world in which he lives. As the title indicates, the constant barrage of advertising to which the protagonist is subjected makes language meaningless to him, and he lapses gradually into silence. Throughout the novel, the narrator depicts some brand names, words on signs, posters, and other adverts in block capitals, in order to emphasise the aggressive nature of this language and the way in which the protagonist feels assaulted by it, for example: 'due tette enormi in un reggiseno nero mi sorridono da un manifesto pubblicitario, A CHE COSA PENSI GUARDANDOCI?' (*Bla Bla Bla* p13), 'i neon esclamano a intermittenza parole incomprensibili nello stesso linguaggio dei manifesti sotterranei, MAZDA, HONDA, HYUNDAI (sic), NINTENDO' (*Bla Bla Bla* p27), and 'le mie dita giocano con la carta della Telecom. GRAZIE ALLA TELECOM PUOI COMUNICARE CON CHI VUOI, DOVUNQUE SI TROVI, DA DOVE VUOI, c'è scritto sopra a caratteri d'argento' (*Bla Bla Bla* p78). In sharp contrast to the emphasis on brand names, the protagonist himself remains anonymous among the 'miliardi di frammenti umani' in the city (*Bla Bla Bla* p26). This isolation is thrown into sharper relief as he is the only character in the novel not to have a name, thus emphasising his vulnerability and his dislocation from the city's society.

On several occasions in *Bla Bla Bla*, the protagonist remarks on his disorientation and his increasingly desperate attempts to attract help. His sense of estrangement is made all the more acute because others are insensitive to it, for instance, during a conversation in a crowded restaurant:

Hai mai avuto la sensazione di essere sempre fuori posto? È questa la domanda che leggo sulle labbra di Eva [...] Sì, vorrei gridarle in faccia, soprattutto ora, davanti al foglio dove sono elencati i piatti, dove leggo espressioni come ‘miso’, ‘bak’, ‘relish’, ma lei continua a fissarmi con quei suoi occhi grigio chiaro (*Bla Bla Bla* p50).

On one occasion he calls the Italian consulate in an attempt to re-establish meaningful contact with something familiar, but his appeal for psychological help is misunderstood as a banal administrative query: ‘Senta, ho smarrito la mia ... Esito. La sua? Il giovanotto ha fretta. Non so come mi esce dalla bocca: identità. La sua carta d’identità? Non c’è problema, mi rassicura lui, basta ... Lo interrompo: no, non la carta d’identità’ (*Bla Bla Bla* p75). *Bla Bla Bla*’s protagonist lives in a world made of incomprehensible fragments, and the multifaceted (physical, linguistic, psychological) estrangement he suffers is a recurrent theme in pulp.

Similar themes of fragmentation and disorientation are prominent in Aldo Nove’s writing, which also draws heavily on the languages of advertising, merchandising and television, that are in turn strongly influenced by foreign languages. Nove’s manipulation of these linguistic forms implies that fluency in these discourses – although not fluency in language as such – is needed to make sense of the world. Like Culicchia’s character in *Bla Bla Bla*, Nove’s characters are unable to successfully interpret the multiple and often fragmentary streams of information that construct the world around them. In *Superwoobinda*, foreign languages (predominantly English) are used in reference to pop songs and groups, for example ‘Like a prayer’ (*Superwoobinda* p57) and ‘Black Sabbath’ (*Superwoobinda* p43) and films like *Pulp fiction* (*Superwoobinda* p86); but, above all, Nove uses English in conjunction with brand names and advertising. In many narrative fragments in the collection, the narrators recite with fastidious precision the brands and products that give meaning to their lives. For example, in ‘Vibravoll’, in which the narrator’s life is dominated by her mobile phone, she announces ‘il mio telefono cellulare è uno Sharp TQ-G400 [...] il display devo dire che è veramente molto bello, indubbiamente più bello di quello del Pioneer PCC-740 che ha Maria’ (*Superwoobinda* p17).

In other texts in *Superwoobinda*, Nove constructs a narrative style that moves away from its foundations in media-based orality, towards a more poetic and even more

stylized language. In 'Argentina Brasile Africa' (*Superwoobinda* p45-46) syntactic fragmentation echoes the narrator's disturbed state of mind. The narrator, Luigi, has just lost his job, and the story narrates his agitation, panic and progressive breakdown as he digests the implications of this. The story begins in a very disjointed fashion, with the narrator trying to park his car, and his train of thought is disrupted by the sound of car horns:

Adesso come faccio a dirlo a mia moglie, com'è che le telefono per dirglielo se abbiamo ancora tre anni di mutuo da pagare per la casa e due anni di mutuo tatatattà

Per la macchina. Adesso parcheggio, qui in mezzo a piazza Loreto. Adesso parcheggio qui adesso (*Superwoobinda* p45).

In this story, sentences finish abruptly: incomplete clauses are long, complex and hypotactic, rather than short, simple and paratactic. Nove couples this technique with poetic repetition and a rhythmical beat, and the technique of disjointing sentences by truncating them in mid-line, to resume them, capitalised, at the beginning of the next paragraph, a technique that reaches a climax in the final four paragraphs of the story:

è come se tutta quanta l'

AFRICA adesso sotto questa pioggia mi abbracciassero sotto di questa

Pioggia mi abbracciassero e basta con questo caos come se ero un cornicione come se tra poco mi

Dissolvessi in questa pioggia che piove oggi mercoledì ventiquattro gennaio tra poco non esisterò più perché così adesso scendo dall'automobile e ogni goccia cade adesso ogni goccia che

cade adesso (*Superwoobinda* p46).

The breakdown of language in this story echoes the narrator's mental breakdown: as in the rest of *Superwoobinda*, Nove's language highlights the confusion and disorientation of his characters, who are unable to cope with the pressures placed on them by contemporary society. The combination of literary techniques and banal subject matter that Nove uses creates a startling mix of the poetic and the prosaic, on which the effectiveness of Nove's writing depends.

3e. Electronic media

‘New’ and electronic media, related to computer technologies, internet and electronic communications, many of which lie on the boundaries between mass media and information technology, are by nature more interactive than the passive medium of television satirised by Nove. There is a consensus among linguists that these electronic technologies have a demonstrable effect on language (Ong 1995, Cortelazzo 2000, Pietrini 2001, Tosi 2001, Hunter 2001, Nenti et al 2000).²⁶ For this reason, it is relevant to consider the impact of these technologies on the language of fiction. There is some evidence of such an influence on pulp: in *Destroy*, Santacroce draws on contemporary and ‘youth’ modes of writing influenced by these technologies, which substitute symbols for some words, most frequently ‘+’ for ‘più’ (Cortelazzo 2000), for example ‘come si trattasse della modella + culo del momento, e della troia + tette del momento, e della vacca + latte della storia’ (*Destroy* p34). Nonetheless, ‘new’ media are not generally a prominent theme in pulp, some of which was first published in the early 1990s when these technologies were only just becoming widely available. In order to consider the impact of new media languages on written fiction, I will discuss a short story written by a contemporary of the group of pulp authors on whom I focus, which is interesting for the ways in which it develops many of the themes present in pulp.

Matteo Galianzo published his first short story, ‘Cose che io non so’, in the *Gioventù Cannibale* anthology in 1996, followed by ‘Gestalt’ in the *Anticorpi* anthology (Einaudi, 1997). He has since published his own collection of short stories, *Una particolare forma di anestesia chiamata morte* (Einaudi, 1997) and a novel, *Cargo* (Einaudi, 1999). His short story, ‘Il ferro è una cosa viva’ (2000), was published in a book entitled *Se un giorno un email*, clearly a reference to Calvino’s *Se una notte d’inverno un viaggiatore*. This short story is particularly relevant to a discussion on language, orality and the media as it combines the language of email, itself closely linked to a recuperation of the strategies of the spoken language, with the epistolary genre: a narrative form that is recognised as adopting linguistic styles which stray from

²⁶ Some technologies, such as internet access to music, straddle the boundary between mass media and information technology (Tosi 2001). This raises questions as to the continued validity of theories that treat ‘mass media’ and ‘information technology’ as separate entities: as the distinction between them becomes increasingly blurred, some of the older critical theories relating to their influence on language lose their relevance. For further discussion of this point, see Murray 2000, Hunter 2001 and De Angelis 2000.

the written standard towards a style characterised by greater informality and orality.²⁷ In Galiazzo's story, the narrator is a translator working on an article about satanic rituals in the production of iron, who needs to know the meaning of some African words. To find out, he corresponds via email with his missionary friend in Africa, who in the course of the correspondance becomes caught up in the same rituals.

'Il ferro è una cosa viva' is thematically related to many pulp texts, in that it narrates a similar sense of displacement, and in order to do so, it draws on the language of a medium of which it is also critical. In this short story, Galiazzo creates a contemporary epistolary narrative by manipulating the structures and lexis of email and computer technologies, which are closely linked to youth language varieties. Email and text messaging have gained a firm foothold among young people, and as a result the communicative strategies of these varieties are mirrored in, but also informed by, spoken youth language varieties (Cortelazzo 2000, Nenti et al 2000). In common with some aspects of youth language varieties, these forms of communication use a language that mimics colloquial and spontaneous speech in style and substance, using elementary syntax, abbreviations and acronyms (Pietrini 2001, Tosi 2001, Cortelazzo 2000). In high technology written varieties such as these, the boundaries between spoken and written forms are ambiguous: it has been noted that 'what is significant about the devices and techniques used in email hailings, and other electronic communication, is [...] that electronic communication is closer to the oral than the written' (Hunter 2001 p67). The inherent orality of email is clearly evident in the epistolary passages, distinguished from those written in the narrator's voice by the use of a different font, as the correspondents reproduce interjections, tags and fillers in their written narrative in the manner of informal speech. For example, one character remarks 'non so come tu abbia potuto tirare fuori una tesi in ingegneria in queste condizioni. Bah. Comunque mi pare che nessuna acciaieria ti abbia ancora assunto, eh?' ('Il ferro è una cosa viva' p21-22).

Throughout the book Galiazzo uses the lexis pertaining to email and internet technologies: for example the adapted anglicism 'me l'ha forwardizzato' ('Il ferro è una cosa viva' p14), the unadapted borrowing 'non ci sono i fonts di Windows' ('Il ferro è una cosa viva' p16), and the calque 'disco rigido' ('Il ferro è una cosa viva' p21). The narrative also contains longer passages that use the language of new media as a

²⁷ See Hunter 2001 for a discussion of how these forms have gained 'literary value' in the late 20th century. There is also some use of epistolary narrative in Santacroce's *Destroy*, and of the diary genre in Enrico Brizzi's *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*, in which the protagonist's records an audio diary, 'l'archivio magnetico del signor Alex D'.

metaphor for the narrator's own condition. In this passage, the missionary tells his correspondent in Italy about the unexpectedly perfect functioning of his computer, and in so doing, reflects on his own isolation in the remotest parts of Africa:

Sento che nel mondo tutti si lamentano che i sistemi Microsoft vanno in tilt. Qua tutto invece funziona alla perfezione. Navigo continuamente per i siti Internet meno raccomandabili [...] mi scarico programmi sperando di infettare il mio c:\ con qualche virus. Macché, tutto come un orologio. Quasi quasi speravo nel millenium bug, ma anche quello ha girato al largo dal terzo mondo ('Il ferro è una cosa viva' p20).²⁸

In this passage, as in much of the story, the narrator uses the language of email to voice his own sense of estrangement and displacement. He is not only isolated physically, but also psychologically: although he loathes his computer, he is unable to rid himself of it. These feelings of dislocation and disassociation are made even more acute by the obvious distinction of the email passages through the use of the different font. In common with Culicchia's nameless protagonist in *Bla Bla Bla*, Galiazzo's character uses the languages and cultures that form the context of his narrative to reflect on the postmodern conditions of fragmentation, dislocation and disorientation. The idiosyncracies of email are an integral part of the plot and thematic structure of 'Il ferro è una cosa viva', and the narrative contains many metalinguistic commentaries on the difficulties of email communication. For example, plot developments are revealed to the narrator in an email sent to him in error ('con questo programma di posta elettronica non fai in tempo a iniziare il nome che subito lui completa l'indirizzo. Una schifezza', 'Il ferro è una cosa viva' p32). Furthermore, each epistolary passage has an email header, which adds to the mystery of events at the end of the narrative, as the messages arrive out of order, some apparently before they have been sent. This is something that the increasingly disconcerted narrator attempts to pass off as technological quirks: 'non ci sarebbe niente di strano, probabilmente si erano accumulati da qualche parte nella rete e poi erano partiti tutti assieme, e mi sono arrivati tutti assieme. Se non fosse che l'ultimo portava la data 29 marzo, e io li ho ricevuti il 28' ('Il ferro è una cosa viva' p53).

²⁸ A similar technique of distinguishing different types of narrative with different typefaces is used in the English translation of *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*, *Jack Frusciante has left the band* (Brizzi 1998, trans. Stash Luczkiw), but not in the original Italian. Tiziano Scarpa's *Occhi sulla Graticola* also brings together a wide variety of different narrative forms, from the epistolary to factual writing and a variety of other experiments with textual forms. Murray 2000 refers to these techniques as 'multiform narratives', characteristic of an era of rapidly evolving multimedia technologies.

On one level, Galianzo's short story is a commentary on email; on another it is a narrative on satanic ritual and a discourse on the postmodern conditions of displacement and cultural exile. Like other texts discussed above, Galianzo's story offers a critical reflection on contemporary media. Although Galianzo's use of email language remains more faithful to the medium than Nove's manipulation of advertising language, 'Il ferro è una cosa viva' and *Superwoobinda* are linked by their ironic and ambiguous stance towards the media, whose language they manipulate. In 'Il ferro è una cosa viva', in common with many of the texts that I have discussed in this chapter, this irony is achieved through the use of a first person narrator commenting critically on the characters' language (for instance in Ballestra's *La guerra degli Antò*, and Campo's *L'attore americano*): in other texts, such as Aldo Nove's *Superwoobinda* and Isabella Santacroce's fiction, which I analyse in Chapter 4, this irony arises from the difference between the narrator's use of language and the author's stance on the cultures that influence it.

4. Conclusions

Throughout this chapter I have argued that the written language of pulp is a stylisation of spoken youth language varieties. The relationship between pulp's language and informal spoken Italian is a close one, as youth language varieties originate in the spoken language. In a written variety that shows many parallels with youth language varieties, it is possible to detect many characteristics of spoken Italian. These traits overlap to some extent with the neostandard, as tendencies to simplify the range of conjunctions and to convey information in topicalised and split sentences have entered the neostandard via their use in the spoken language. The use of these forms in conjunction with self-conscious first person narrators, and a setting which is strongly informed by youth, mass and popular cultures, suggests that the comparison between youth language varieties and the language of pulp is a viable one.

The lexis of pulp is a significant factor in distinguishing its language from neostandard Italian and orienting this language towards a stylisation of spoken youth language varieties. Pulp draws on processes of word formation and lexical inspiration that indicate a link between the language of this fiction and youth cultures and languages. For instance, in appropriating many of the same coining processes as spoken youth language varieties, the language of pulp shows many parallels with youth language varieties, without necessarily depicting any one specific variety. The relationship between the two languages is further reinforced by the inclusion in pulp's

lexis of many words drawn from the same resources that inform spoken youth language varieties: in particular, both pulp and youth language varieties draw words from foreign languages, youth cultures, specialist and sectorial languages, historic and 'underworld' jargons, and, to a lesser extent, from dialect. Whereas pulp uses some words that have been identified in these categories, the lexes of these varieties are fluid rather than fixed, and pulp attests to this by using a wide range of words, some innovative and invented, that fall within the same semantic areas. Berisso's argument that the use of specialist, sectorial and slang terms is stylistic, rather than having any specific connotations of youth, therefore demonstrates many inconsistencies. Style is the very essence of youth language varieties, which are created in the image of the cultural reference points of their users, and are therefore non-uniform, like the literary styles of 1990s pulp authors. The creation of a distinctive style is the fundamental aim of spoken youth language varieties, and therefore the inclusion of stylistic elements similar to those in youth language varieties in the language of pulp is an argument for, rather than against, a relationship between the two varieties.

However, this should not be read as a suggestion that the language of pulp is a uniform category. The styles of the fiction I define as pulp is heterogenous and highly diverse. In the introduction I suggested that youth language varieties are characterised by a similar diversity: although they draw on common sources of inspiration, such as youth cultures, historic jargons and drug-related slangs, they interpret these in many ways, so that many different youth language varieties can exist alongside each other, in different subcultures and peer groups and in different regions of Italy. The same traits can be identified in pulp. In demonstrating a wide variety of influences, the language of pulp exhibits a linguistic mix that draws upon the diverse lexical resources of youth language varieties. Operating within the general parameters of youth cultures and linguistic innovation, the authors of pulp texts create a language that echoes the cultural context in which youth language varieties are created and that has many lexical, morphological and structural similarities with these slangs. The suggestion should not be that all Italian 1990s pulp fiction contains all the elements associated with youth language varieties in equal measure, but that this writing contains enough of these elements of youth language for it to form a unifying element between them.

The texts by Aldo Nove and Matteo Galianzo that I have discussed in this chapter reflect the languages of the same media that inform youth language varieties; Silvia Ballestra's 'anglopescares' is created from a blend of dialect and foreign languages; Rossana Campo's distinctive style is based on a mix of colloquial Italian and

foreign languages, whereas others, such as Enrico Brizzi and Isabella Santacroce, elaborate a distinctive and youth-based jargon from a network of references to youth cultures. This lexical mix has a dual appeal. On the one hand, it appeals to a youth readership, who can identify with the cultural reference system used in this writing. On the other, it may also appeal to a different readership, less familiar with this cultural context, who can find elements both of the exotic and the familiar in this writing. The Gruppo 63's enthusiasm for highlighting continuity between pulp and their work, and their emphasis on the influence of youth culture on pulp, testifies to the presence of such a readership among the left-wing intellectual classes in Italy.

Furthermore, in using these languages, the protagonists of pulp articulate a sense of estrangement and displacement from the society in which they live. In choosing to write in a plurilingual, often cryptic and highly stylised language, these authors signal an affinity not only to Italian youth cultures, but also to some non-canonical, and often non-Italian fiction. The representation of an oral variety in the literary language has been associated with avantgarde literature (Portelli 1992), but can also be discerned in other types of fictional writing. The 'oral' linguistic style of 1990s pulp serves not only as a basis around which pulp authors elaborate their own variations of youth language varieties, but also as an indicator of the literary texts that inform this writing. The next chapter looks at the presence and influence of literary texts in 1990s pulp. It concentrates specifically on post-war Italian and American prose fiction, and makes particular reference to the language used in this writing.

Chapter 3: Literature

YOUTH CULTURE OR YOUTH: CULTURED?

1. Introduction

Pulp's distinctive linguistic style points to a wide range of literary influences. Many pulp authors have sought to link themselves with authors renowned for experimental or controversial writing, whilst showing reluctance to accept associations with Italian authors, especially of recent generations. Some, however, are willing to accept links with the Gruppo 63. However, it is to some extent necessary to disentangle what these authors say about their literary preferences from what they reveal in their writing. For instance, Silvia Ballestra names 'gli americani, i minimalisti, Hemingway' among her favourite authors (*baobab*), and despite acknowledging an influence from Arbasino, Balestrini and Tondelli, states 'gli autori italiani del passato li trovo invece estremamente noiosi, non mi hanno influenzato in nessun modo; non amo particolarmente nemmeno gli scrittori che hanno esordito negli anni Ottanta' (Gervasutti 1998 p56). Ballestra has also hotly denied links with the politicised 1970s youth novel *Porci con le ali* (Trecca 1995), as has Rossana Campo (Novello 1993): instead, Campo quotes among her influences Virginia Woolf, Jane Austen, Ivy Compton-Burnett, Céline, Henry Miller and Hemingway (Litherland 2004). Gervasutti's *Dannati e sognatori* devotes one short section to the views of pulp authors on their predecessors, and there is remarkable consistency in the kinds of views that these authors express. Of all the Gruppo 63 authors, only Arbasino and Balestrini are cited as influences (by Ballestra and Brizzi, and Ballestra and Nove respectively): pre-twentieth century, European canonical authors like Dostoevsky are shunned by all pulp writers save for Tiziano Scarpa, but the majority attempt to link their writing with twentieth century American writers, naming, for example, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Dos Passos, Carver, Easton Ellis, Salinger and Kerouac (see Gervasutti 1998 p55-58).

Some of these claims stand up to closer scrutiny than others, but nonetheless they demonstrate two key elements in pulp's literary ancestry: the Italian tradition of plurilingualism, and an alternative, a-canonical standpoint. In this chapter, I begin by testing pulp's dependence on twentieth century American writing, focussing on the example of the relationship between Enrico Brizzi's *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* and J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*. I then discuss the impact of some major late twentieth century Italian authors and literary movements on pulp, focussing

in particular on Alberto Arbasino's influence on Silvia Ballestra, and then on a tradition of writing about marginalised youth, stretching back to Tondelli and Pasolini. These discussions reveal how the claims made by pulp authors about their works are not always well-founded, with pulp fiction revealing close links with Italian literary tradition.

2. Pulp and Anglophone literature

Pulp authors' desire to associate their fiction with American literature is reinforced by literary references in their texts: for example, the narrator of Culicchia's *Tutti giù per terra* announces: 'leggevo tutto il giorno. Hemingway. Fitzgerald. Ginsberg', 'leggevo Hemingway e Bukowski' (*Tutti giù per terra* p19 and p96). Santacroce's protagonist in *Fluo* reads Ginsberg's *Howl*, despite protesting that 'l'unica carta stampata che riesco a tenere fra le mani è di tipo esclusivamente mondano' (*Fluo* p36); the protagonist in *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* announces 'leggo Kerouac, e non mi rompete i coglioni che leggo Kerouac' (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p159). Many of the American authors named by this group as significant influences – Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Bukowski, Ginsberg, Kerouac and minimalists like Bret Easton Ellis – have lead famously hedonistic and transgressive lives as well as writing controversial fiction. In choosing to focus their attention on this group of authors, by now a somewhat clichéd reference for alternative lifestyles, pulp authors attempt to project a transgressive image, but unwittingly reveal a more conventional stance than they might wish.

A further reason for pulp's insistence on links with Anglophone writing lies in these authors' confused opinions on Italian literary tradition, which manifests itself in negative attitudes towards Italian literary models. Many pulp authors have protested about a lack of tradition on which to draw, or of oppressive linguistic conformism in the Italian canon: views that do not appear to be mutually exclusive for Rossana Campo, who claims 'essere uno scrittore italiano è un handicap, ti devi aggrappare a una tradizione che non c'è' and 'la lingua letteraria è una lingua artificiale, una lingua delle classi dominanti' (Litherland 2004 p131 and p128). Because of this, pulp authors like

Campo attempt to position themselves within a tradition of representing demotic language in writing, which these authors perceive to originate from outside Italy.¹

As I argued in Chapter 2, pulp adopts a variety of colloquial styles that have many points in common with spontaneous, informal and oral language varieties. Portelli's *Il testo e la voce* (Manifestolibri, 1992), an Italian analysis of American fiction, suggests that the use of such an oral, colloquial style is an inherently American mode of writing. He argues that this style aspires to encapsulate America's democratic ideals, and that, in its literary form, this practice translates as mimicry of colloquial, demotic and spontaneous spoken language. By extension, Portelli argues that narrative genres and structures which translate the micro structures of clauses used in the spoken language onto a macro level of textural structure are also inherently American, and that these genres and structures embody the same 'democratic' values: 'episodi o racconti autosufficienti, in sequenza aperta, lineare, spesso liberamente digressiva, come le clausole nella frase paratattica, tenute insieme solo dall'identità del narratore o del protagonista, sono un'esplicita metafora democratica' (Portelli 1992 p99). Although it is stretching a point to argue that in appropriating these narrative modes and structures, pulp is making a stand for democracy, it is reasonable to suggest that in using an accessible, non-literary written style, these authors are seeking to project an image associated more with American than with Italian literature. Pulp authors prefer to affiliate themselves to a style of writing inspired by American rather than Italian authors, as they see American writing as more accessible. The genres that Portelli sees as inherently American, the picaresque novel and the short story, are also popular genres in pulp. Rossana Campo's novels and Ballestra's *La guerra degli Antò* may be described as 'picaresque'; and anthologies of short stories such as Tondelli's *Under 25* series, Celati's *Narratori delle riserve* and Mondadori's *Italiana* collection have been a much-used method for launching groups of seemingly disparate new and young authors in the 1990s.

By seeking a model in American literature, pulp authors attempt to disassociate themselves from an Italian tradition that they perceive as restricted and stilted, and also link themselves with ground-breaking and controversial Italian writers of the 1930s and

¹ In this respect, Campo and her contemporaries adopt a Gramscian standpoint on the importance of foreign language for the Italian novel. Gramsci attributes the popularity of foreign writing in Italy to a gap between the language of the Italian people and its literature, which operates to the detriment of Italian writing: 'la "classe colta", con la sua attività intellettuale, è staccata dal popolo-nazione, non perché il popolo-nazione non abbia dimostrato e non dimostri di interessarsi a questa attività in tutti i suoi gradi, dai più infimi (romanzacci d'appendice) ai più elevati, tanto vero che ricerca i libri stranieri in proposito, ma perché l'elemento intellettuale indigeno è più straniero degli stranieri di fronte al popolo-nazione.' (Q 21, § 5, p211).

1940s like Cesare Pavese and Elio Vittorini, as well as with the Gruppo 63 and 1980s authors like Tondelli. Along with other authors of their generation, Pavese and Vittorini were prodigious translators of American literature, and as Vittorini admits, their own literary language was influenced by this work: ‘io non rinnego affatto la loro influenza: so che, traducendoli, ne ho ricevuto grande aiuto nella formazione del mio linguaggio’ (Vittorini 1985 p121). Vittorini worked on translations of American authors like Edgar Allan Poe, besides translating, annotating and compiling the anthology of American fiction *Americana* (1941), banned by the censors in its original form but published the following year with significant alterations.² Pavese translated novels by Herman Melville, John Dos Passos, Gertrude Stein, John Steinbeck and William Faulkner. For Pavese, American literature provided an insight into an alternative to Italian culture under Fascism and fed oppositional sentiments to the regime (see Pavese 1962 p193-196). For both Pavese and Vittorini, American literature articulated an alternative to the culture of Fascist Italy, and translating this writing constituted a deliberately transgressive political act in the cultural climate of the time.

Whereas authors like Pavese and Vittorini saw American literature and its ‘democratic’ language as a political, as well as a literary and linguistic model, pulp authors take a more complex stance towards America that lacks the direct political challenge inherent in Pavese’s and Vittorini’s relationship with American writing. Although pulp authors express admiration for the prose style of Hemingway and Kerouac, they also demonstrate an influence from subsequent generations of American writers, including Salinger and 1980s minimalists like Bret Easton Ellis, who are themselves highly critical of American ideals. Whilst the protagonists of pulp idolise American bands, wear American clothes, and watch American television channels, America is also the object of bitter cultural and political criticism, and many protagonists of pulp express blatant hostility to American ideas and ideals.³ Pulp is

² Both Burns 2001 and Pertile 1993 suggest a parallel between *Italiana* and Vittorini’s *Americana*, which ‘was meant to send shockwaves through the old Italian literary establishment and was indeed censored by the fascist regime. Now Italy had its own homespun *Italiana*: the myth of America had been replaced by the myth of Italy; or rather, the suggestion was that the myth of America had come true in Italy’ (Barański and Pertile 1993 p3-4). Yet despite Burns 2001’s parallel between the political situation in 1940s and 1990s Italy, there is a fundamental difference between the function of American literary models for the two generations of authors. Whereas in the 1940s Italian authors such as Pavese and Vittorini were able to hold America up as a political, as well as a cultural ideal, pulp authors must reconcile their admiration of one with disapproval of the other.

³ A point also observed in relation to late twentieth century European cultures: ‘the enthusiastic embrace of American culture by many people of the world has happened simultaneously with the eruption of anti-American sentiments. People on all continents protest the foreign policy of the United States while wearing American-designed baseball caps. They criticize American materialism yet flock to Hollywood films in which abundance is conspicuously displayed. They find fault with American individualism and dance to American music’ (Moore and Vaudagna 2003 p5).

peppered with comments hostile to America, for instance: in Brizzi's *Elogio di Oscar Firmian e del suo impeccabile stile*, the narrator declares 'l'America è un grande deserto frequentato da forse cento milioni di pazzi armati. Ognuno lo sa quanto me' (*Elogio di Oscar Firmian e del suo impeccabile stile* p301).⁴ In Brizzi's *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*, on the eve of Aidi's departure to America a peripheral character greets her with 'la battuta più triste e stonata che Alex avesse mai sentito: 'Ma cosa ci vai a fare, laggiù, che l'America è qui! L'abbiamo trovata qui, la nostra America!' (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p154). His suggestion that the 'American Dream' has come true in Italy provokes Alex's bitterness and fury, as this is not his perception of his country (see below). Similar criticisms are expressed in Campo's *L'attore americano*.⁵ References to American literature in pulp remain almost exclusively within a set of well known authors from the first half of the twentieth century and from the 1980s, suggesting that pulp authors are more interested in associating themselves with a specific image cultivated by these authors, than with any specific literary or linguistic model.

The extent of pulp authors' engagement with the narrative models offered by American fiction is further questioned by their degree of competence in foreign languages. Unlike Pavese and Vittorini, it is not certain that pulp authors have read American literature in the original, and the issue of how they might have approached foreign writing is a difficult one to deal with. Of all the authors I discuss in this study, only Silvia Ballestra is evidently fluent in several languages besides Italian, having studied *Lingue e Lettere Straniere Moderne* at Bologna University: she has also translated into Italian from English and French. The extent to which other pulp authors are fluent in foreign languages is uncertain, although many have some competence in other languages and foreign literature, having studied a literary subject at university and/or completed Liceo Classico. Some may have acquired knowledge of other languages elsewhere: for instance, Rossana Campo, whose writing demonstrates

⁴ The perception of European peoples as America's benevolent older guardian, expressed by Fabio di Vasto in Ballestra's *La guerra degli Antò*, appears here too. The narrator continues 'e quando un Paese così ragionevole decide d'imporre l'ennesimo e provvisorio vitello d'oro, non è che noialtri antichi, da qui, riusciamo a fargli cambiare idea' (*Elogio di Oscar Firmian e del suo impeccabile stile* p301).

⁵ The protagonists of Rossana Campo's novels embody the tensions between Italy and America. All except Campo's first two novels are set outside Italy: their protagonists are Italian expatriates living in Paris (also Campo's place of residence) but who travel also to Britain and America. In leaving behind Italy for the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic cities of Paris, London and New York, these characters express directly the tensions between the attractions of cosmopolitan cities in northern Europe and America and an attachment to Italy (they are secretly nostalgic for the familiar customs of home). The protagonists of *Mai sentita così bene* remark that: 'il vantaggio di vivere all'estero è che te li puoi scegliere gli italiani che ti va di vedere, in Italia invece te li devi sorbire in blocco' (*Mai sentita così bene* p101).

knowledge of French, lives for much of the time in Paris. However, it should perhaps be inferred from the lack of obvious formal foreign language training that many pulp writers are likely to have approached foreign literature in translation rather than in the original. In the case of older American writing, it is even possible that they have read translations done by Pavese or Vittorini. This has implications for their understanding of the texts, and for the ways in which they are used as models for pulp. In the following section, I discuss how Anglophone literature influences one of the best-selling pulp novels, Enrico Brizzi's *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*.

2a. Salinger and Brizzi

Enrico Brizzi has vociferously denied any links to Italian writing, particularly at the beginning of his career. Whenever he has spoken of his literary influences, he has tried to distance himself from Italian writing of most kinds, not just canonical fiction, stating for instance that:

come riferimenti culturali, come enciclopedia di conoscenza, sono molto più vicino a *Supertifo*, *Mountain Biking* o qualunque giornale musicale che a good ol' Carlo Emilio Gadda o a qualsiasi altro presunto mostro sacro della nostra tradizione letteraria (Gervasutti 1998 p55).

Like many of his contemporaries, Brizzi prefers to compare his writing to American fiction. In the long interview *Il mondo secondo Frusciante Jack* he states 'I'm a rebel e leggo solo cose moderne!' (Gaspodini 1999 p134) and 'i classici, comunque, grazie, no' (Gaspodini 1999 p50). In *Il mondo secondo Frusciante Jack* he singles out Silvia Ballestra's *Il compleanno dell'iguana* and J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* ('un incontro folgorante', Gaspodini 1999 p36) as significant influences on *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*. The reputation of both these texts preceeds them: even by 1994, Ballestra was established as a reference point for young Italian authors, whereas *The Catcher in the Rye* had been a symbol for disaffected youth for several decades. In linking *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* with these texts, Brizzi establishes it within a tradition of transgression that is familiar to many readers outside his peer group.

The extent of Brizzi's familiarity with the original English text of *The Catcher in the Rye* has implications for its influence on the language, tone and themes of *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*. Brizzi himself has indicated that he knows American literature only in translation:

ciò che consideravo più desiderabile, era di leggere la scrittura come fosse una musica. La musicalità intuitiva delle frasi, l'accordarsi dei periodi, la pagina che se la leggi ad alta voce è proprio un canto, il riguardarsi i libri dopo che li hai terminati e subito aprirli a caso e pronunciare una frase come fosse in un blues, in una ballata, o dentro un riff di rock. Con Tondelli funzionava, e con altri, assolutamente no. Con gli stranieri poi, meno ancora. Sarà stato per problemi di traduzione, immagino (Gaspodini 1999 p47-48).

Brizzi's relationship with Salinger's text is selective, and shows considerable engagement with the novel's themes, but not so much familiarity with its linguistic strategies, thus indicating that he is more familiar with the translation than with the original. Instead, Brizzi's use of language points more to the influence of another Anglophone text, Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*, which I will discuss at the end of this section.

The Catcher in the Rye was first published in America in 1951. It is narrated in the first person by the seventeen year old Holden Caulfield. Having been expelled from school, Holden spends a few days wandering around New York before returning home, trying to assuage his loneliness with a combination of alcohol, meetings with acquaintances, and girls: Sally, whom he dates, and his friend Jane. Holden is an archetypal angry young man: he feels unable to integrate with his peers; he fails at all of the exclusive boys' boarding schools that his parents send him to, and he is constantly troubled by the death of his thirteen year old brother Allie, four years previously. *The Catcher in the Rye* attracted a good deal of negative attention for its subject matter – too explicit for 1950s America – and also for its use of slang and profanity, which led to it being banned in some areas. It attracted further notoriety in 1980 for its associations with the shooting of John Lennon. In choosing to connect *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* with this text, Brizzi links his novel to a known precedent for the use of slang and non-standard language, youth and discontent, but also builds into his novel a series of extra-literary associations with pop music and controversy: these links with popular culture and transgression pick up on themes that are present in *The Catcher in the Rye* itself.

Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo tells the story of Alex D, a rebellious 16 year old, who lives in Bologna, likes rock and punk music, and has a relationship with Aidi (which echoes Holden's platonic relationship with Jane), who is about to leave to study in America for a year. A significant sub-strand of the plot deals with Alex's friend, Martino, who lacks no material privileges and who seems thoroughly at ease with himself, but who eventually commits suicide. The novel's title refers to the departure of guitarist John Frusciante from the band The Red Hot Chili Peppers, just as

they become famous. This is an event of great significance to Alex, who struggles to understand the reasoning behind such a course of action. 'Leaving the group' becomes a metaphor for any assertion of individuality in the novel, including Martino's suicide and Alex's refusal to conform to the middle-class norms encouraged by his family and his school. The same theme of being 'the odd one out' is present in the title of *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*, along with similar ambiguities. The metaphor of 'uscire dal gruppo' occurs often throughout the novel. It is used by Martino in his suicide note to Alex: 'se sei un barbone, un drogato, un immigrato, un albano, sei fottuto. Ti isolano, sei fuori dal gruppo' (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p110). Martino recalls this concept by describing suicide as 'un salto fuori del cerchio che ci hanno disegnato intorno' (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p111) and in the 'archivio magnetico', Alex ponders 'sono io nel gruppo? Sono io fuori dal gruppo?' (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p142). In this novel, it is unclear whether it is Alex, Martino, Frusciante, or all three who really leave the group.

The novel is narrated in the third person by a 'conoscente del vecchio Alex e persona informata dei fatti' (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p11) – evidently an older Alex – with sections in the first person, entitled 'dall'archivio magnetico del signor Alex D', narrated by the sixteen year old Alex. There are many direct references to Salinger's novel in *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*: clear comparisons are made between Alex's actions and opinions and those of Holden Caulfield, for example: 'durante quegli anni da marpioni sfessati, come direbbe il Caulfield' (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p57); Alex and Aidi are described as 'loro due che intagliano le iniziali nelle patate, H e J, come il Caulfield e la vecchia Jane' (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p116).⁶ Brizzi's novel also contains a number of direct quotations from *The Catcher in the Rye*: 'if there's one thing I hate it's the movies. Don't even mention them to me', says Holden on the first page of his narrative (*The Catcher in the Rye* p5); in the Italian translation 'se c'è una cosa che odio sono i film. Non me li nominate nemmeno' (*Il giovane Holden* p4); in Brizzi's novel 'come direbbe il Caulfield, se c'è una cosa che odio sono i film. In un certo senso, diciamo. Comunque, non me li nominate nemmeno' (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p170). The exact replication of phrases from *Il*

⁶ The characters in *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* in many senses live in a very literary world. Piero Gelli's introduction to the book makes explicit the influence of *The Catcher in the Rye* on this novel. Furthermore, the protagonist, Alex, announces at the beginning of the novel that reading De Carlo's *Due di Due* has had a profound effect on him. He also admires Baudelaire and discusses e. e. cumming's poetry with Aidi. Although he is no admirer of canonical literature, he is familiar with it: 'la domenica è la giornata peggiore della settimana. Non me la nominate nemmeno. Del resto lo dicevano anche Leopardi e Vasco' (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p30): an interesting and ironic juxtaposition of a canonical 19th century poet and a contemporary Italian pop star.

giovane Holden in *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* gives a clear indication that Brizzi has read this text in translation. Critics and linguists have also remarked upon the links between the two novels (e.g. Arvigo 1997, La Porta 1999b). Còveri 1988 highlights the stylistic use of youth language and many other registers in J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, the significance of which is also noted by Pomilio, who discerns 'l'adozione quasi acritica del modello-Salinger' in *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*, which he terms 'ipersalingeriano' (both Pomilio 2000 p665).⁷

However, Brizzi's familiarity with the style of *The Catcher in the Rye* is debatable because of the probability that he knows the text only in translation. Superficially there are many similarities in the subject matter and themes of the two novels. Both Holden and Alex are dissatisfied with their situation, despite their privileges; the American dream, relationships and disillusionment with the world are also recurrent themes. To a certain extent, the setting of both books is autobiographical: Salinger, like Holden Caulfield, was sent to many different boarding schools, whereas Alex D.'s Liceo Caimani bears a resemblance – indicated by the rhyming names – to Bologna's Liceo Galvani, where Brizzi was a student.⁸ Like Holden, Brizzi's Alex D. speaks in a youthful idiolect, and makes many references to the popular culture by which he is surrounded.

However, the Italian translation of Salinger's text introduces some subtle differences into the text, some of which can be detected in *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*. Some of these differences are exemplified in the novel's title. *The Catcher in the Rye* was translated into Italian in 1961 as *Il giovane Holden*, a serviceable and descriptive title, but one which lacks some of the nuances present in the English. The title *The Catcher in the Rye* refers to a line in a Robert Burns' poem, 'gin a body meet a body/coming through the rye', which Holden Caulfield mis-hears a child chanting, and remembers the lines 'if a body catch a body/coming through the rye'. This thought remains in Holden's mind, and in a conversation with his younger sister Phoebe about his future, he tells her that the only thing he would like to be is 'the catcher in the rye': the only adult among a group of children playing in a rye field, who has to catch the ones who risk falling over the cliff. This fantasy is bound up with memories of his

⁷ It is interesting to note that Alessandro Baricco's creative writing school in Turin is named the *Scuola Holden*: 'Nella speranza che Salinger non lo venga mai a sapere, la Scuola è intitolata a Holden Caulfield, il protagonista di *The Catcher in the Rye*. Il ragazzino che non ne voleva sapere di scuole, colleges, insegnanti, materie ed esami. È un impegno: questa scuola gli sarebbe piaciuta' (<http://www.scuolaholden.it/lascuola.htm>, last viewed 14th May 2004).

⁸ The Liceo Galvani was also used as the set of the film of *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*, directed by Enza Negroni (1996).

brother Allie, and, in many respects, *The Catcher in the Rye* is about Holden grieving for him. Holden is unable to move on from his brother's death, and repeatedly harks back to the time when Allie was alive. It is no accident that, for example, when Holden remarks on his own childish behaviour, he says 'sometimes I act like I'm about thirteen' (*The Catcher in the Rye* p13). He buys a red hat that he wears almost continuously throughout the novel, in an echo of Allie's red hair, and keeps Allie's baseball mitt (the *catcher's* glove), covered with poems, with him at school. In some respects, therefore, it is unclear whether it is Holden or Allie who is the 'catcher' of the title. The relationship between Alex and Martino recalls Holden's attempts to keep the memory of Allie alive by assuming his role as 'catcher'. Brizzi portrays Alex as an increasingly disaffected and rebellious teenager after Martino's death, in his attempt to assume Martino's role as the school's anti-hero.

Though central to much pulp fiction, the theme of belonging (or not) to a group is particularly evident in *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*, as in *The Catcher in the Rye* and its Italian translation. Compare these statements about school from *The Catcher in the Rye*, *Il giovane Holden*, and *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*:

It's full of phonies, and all you do is study, so that you can learn enough to be smart enough to be able to buy a goddam Cadillac some day, and you have to keep making believe you give a damn if the football team loses, and all you do is talk about girls and liquor and sex all day, and everybody sticks together in these dirty little goddam clicks. The guys that are on the basketball team stick together, the Catholics stick together, the goddam intellectuals stick together, the guys that play bridge stick together. Even the guys that belong to the goddam Book-of-the-Month club stick together (*The Catcher in the Rye* p137).

È pieno di palloni gonfiati, e non fai altro che studiare, così impari quanto basta per essere furbo quanto basta per poterti comprare un giorno o l'altro una maledetta Cadillac, e devi continuare a far la commedia che ti strappi i capelli se la squadra di rugby perde, e tutto il giorno non fai che parlare di ragazze e di liquori e di sesso, e tutti fanno lega tra loro in quelle piccole sporche maledette cricche. Quelli della squadra di pallacanestro fanno lega tra loro, i cattolici fanno lega tra loro, i maledetti intellettuali fanno lega tra loro, quelli che giocano a bridge fanno lega tra loro. Fanno lega perfino quelli che appartengono a quel dannato Club del Libro del Mese! (*Il giovane Holden* p153).

Questo è il mio piccolo mondo facile, liceo ginnasio Caimani di Bologna, dove intreccio rapporti più o meno amichevoli, compro la merenda, si controlla il mio grado d'omologazione. Questo è il pollaio in cui mi insegnano a interagire coi miei simili. A stare nel gruppo, a non alzare la testa (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p144).

These extracts express very similar notions. Holden's repetition of the phrase 'stick together' (used six times in this short passage) reinforces the notion of unthinking

compliance that is present in both Brizzi's and Salinger's depictions of school. Success in Holden's school is achieved by conformity to stereotypes: success for Alex is also measured by uniformity, 'il mio grado d'omologazione'. The metaphors of 'il pollaio', 'stare nel gruppo' and 'non alzare la testa' highlight this and indicate a strong thematic influence from *The Catcher in the Rye* on Brizzi's text. The pressure to conform, which both protagonists feel, is reflected by the use of recurring constructions and vocabulary in both texts. Salinger's text is particularly repetitive, both structurally and linguistically – for instance, 'goddam' is used four times. The first sentence of Salinger's text is composed of five main clauses and one dependent clause, linked by commas; the main clauses are also linked by the conjunction 'and', creating a cumulative effect. Within this framework, the construction 'and all you do' is repeated twice, further emphasising the conformism that Holden intensely dislikes in his school. There is also repetition in the construction 'learn enough to be smart enough', which is effectively replicated in the translation 'impari quanto basta per essere furbo quanto basta'. The second and third sentences, each effectively a list of groups that 'stick together' are structured equally repetitively.

This structure is replicated in the extract from *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*, which is also based on repetition and listing. The first two sentences begin 'questo è': the first of these is structured around a series of main clauses linked by commas. This structure is picked up again in the third sentence, which consists of two infinitive constructions linked by commas. Like Salinger, Brizzi chooses a simple and repetitive sentence structure, with uncomplicated verb forms for this section of his text. In both cases the invectives against school begin with a long list, which is then followed by much shorter sentences. Rhythmically, this structure reflects the monotony and pressure to conform that both protagonists feel.

The notion of exclusion from the group expressed in the above extract from *The Catcher in the Rye* is related to another prominent theme in the novel: Holden's reaction to American popular entertainment. *The Catcher in the Rye* narrates a similar sense of cultural estrangement to that which pervades pulp. Holden shares with the protagonists of much pulp an uneasy relationship with the society he lives in and its 'popular' pastimes. Consider this statement on a popular pastime by Holden Caulfield, and its translation into Italian:

Everybody was on their way to the movies – the Paramount or the Astor or the Strand or the Capitol or one of those crazy places. Everybody was all dressed up, because it was Sunday, and that made it worse. But the worst part was that you could tell they all *wanted* to go to the movies. I couldn't stand looking at them. I can understand somebody going to the movies because there's nothing else to do, but when somebody really *wants* to go, and even walks fast, so as to get there quicker, then it depresses hell out of me. Especially if I see millions of people standing on one of those long, terrible lines, all the way down the block, waiting with this terrific patience and all. Boy, I couldn't get off that goddam Broadway fast enough (*The Catcher in the Rye* p122).

Stavano andando tutti al cinema – al Paramount, all'Astor, allo Strand, al Capitol o un'un'altra di quelle gabbie di matti. Erano tutti in ghingheri perché era domenica e questo peggiorava le cose. Ma il peggio era che si capiva benissimo che *volevano* andare al cinema. Non ce la facevo a guardarli. Posso capire che uno vada al cinema perché non ha nient'altro da fare, ma quando uno *vuole proprio* andarci e si affretta perfino per arrivare prima, questo mi riduce proprio a terra. Specie se vedo milioni di persone impalate in una di quelle tremende file lunghe quanto tutto l'isolato, che aspettano con una pazienza atroce di trovar posto e via scorrendo. Ragazzi, non sarei uscito mai abbastanza alla svelta da quella maledetta Broadway (*Il giovane Holden* p136).

Holden's thorough dislike of 'the movies' is a constant theme in *The Catcher in the Rye*, which he announces at the very beginning of the novel. His description of the ritual of cinema-going in the English text highlights the reason behind his dislike of it: the isolation that Holden feels from the many small groups at school is magnified in proportion to the size of the group from which he is excluded.⁹ There is a contrast in the extract between the crowd's motives and actions and Holden's reaction to the scene. The English text makes this particularly clear: as in the previous extract, Salinger makes his narrator speak in repetitive structures, which are used to underline his bleak and lonely state of mind. In the English text, the contrast between the cheerful Sunday crowd and the isolated, unhappy Holden, is emphasised in the language. Holden is bitter about his detachment from the group, indicating that it is involuntary. The repetition of 'everybody' in the first two sentences, and the positioning of this word at the very beginning of each ('everybody was on their way', 'everybody was all dressed up'), stresses Holden's detachment from the crowd and his sense of lack of conformity. This is reinforced by his exaggerated estimate of the size of the crowd: 'millions of people' standing in 'long, terrible lines', which are contrasted to the lone figure of Holden. In the English text this contrast is substantiated by the use of 'all' in the third sentence 'you could tell they all *wanted* to go to the movies'.

⁹ The use of the term 'gabbie' in the Italian translation establishes links with Brizzi's description of Alex's school as a 'pollaio' (above).

Some of these elements are lacking in the Italian translation. 'Millions of people' and 'long, terrible lines' are accurately translated as 'milioni di persone' and 'tremende file lunghe'. However, the repetitive element of the first two sentences is lost because 'tutti' is moved around the sentence, and is placed in a less stressed position than the English 'everybody': 'stavano andando tutti al cinema' and 'erano tutti in ghingheri'. It is omitted altogether in the third sentence, where the English has 'all': 'si capiva benissimo che *volevano* andare al cinema'. Consequently, the contrast between Holden and the crowd is significantly less in the Italian translation than in the English, which reduces the sense of isolation projected by the language.

In contrast to Holden's attack on the crowd queueing for the cinema, consider Alex's diatribe against his family watching television in *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*.

Alex aveva arrampicato le scale di casa con in testa il presagio, meglio, con in testa la *telefoto*-presagio, della sua famiglia barricata in tinello a guardare le pattonate americane via grundig. Un istante più tardi, non s'era ancora sfilato il parka, aveva dovuto prendere atto che la telefoto, di un realismo agghiacciante, gli provava quanto le sue facoltà di preveggenza stessero raggiungendo, con l'età, livelli negromantici sbalorditivi: erano *tutti* in salotto, e tutti variamente sgomenti o assorti di fronte alle forzute vicende del Rocky IV; il frère de lait, risucchiato nel video, che già sognava di diventare pugile professionista, un giorno; la mutter, pericolosamente in bilico fra la visione di quelle forzute vicende e la lettura delle Bologna's Chronicles su Repubblica; il Cancelliere, seminghiottito dalla poltrona e inutilmente sorridente, che accompagnava gli uppercut dello Stallone nano con battutine da sistema nervoso in pezzi e imitazioni, depressive, della voce robotica d'Ivan Drago.

'Gesù grande', aveva mormorato il vecchio Alex, sentendosi improvvisamente senza forze. 'Questi poveri esseri costituivano, anni luce fa, una famiglia d'italiani viventi?' (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p16).

Immediately, the thematic influence of Salinger's novel is clear, although the socio-cultural context is clearly very different. In both novels, the invective is triggered by American film, but whereas the target of Holden's diatribe in *The Catcher in the Rye* is the ritual of cinema-going in 1950s America, in 1990s Italy Alex takes issue with television viewing habits. Both Brizzi and Salinger equate these habits with conformism and passivity, and both their protagonists speak out against this. Like Holden, Alex observes a popular pastime with distaste, and from outside the group participating in it. In *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden is disgusted by the monotony and conformity of the crowd queueing for the cinemas: a sentiment of social unease which is provoked by his exclusion from the group. This sentiment is echoed in the above extract by Alex's comment on his family, who are reduced to a passive, unreflective state in front of the

television: ‘questi poveri esseri costituivano, anni luce fa, una famiglia d’italiani viventi?’. However, Alex’s observations lack the vitriol of Holden’s invective against ‘the movies’: unlike Holden, Alex is expressing individuality, not isolation. Although there are faint echoes of Salinger’s repetitive constructions in the phrase ‘erano *tutti* in salotto, e tutti variamente sgomenti o assorti di fronte alle forzute vicende del Rocky IV’, the tone of Brizzi’s narrative is very different to Salinger’s. Alex’s family are depicted with irony and humour (two elements completely lacking in *The Catcher in the Rye*) as comic caricatures of the typical middle class Italian family.

Much of this difference comes from the differing amounts of lexical variation in the two texts. The repetition of vocabulary in *The Catcher in the Rye* also reinforces a statement that Holden makes at the beginning of the novel, ‘I have a lousy vocabulary’ (*The Catcher in the Rye* p13). This is translated into Italian as ‘ho un modo di parlare schifo’ (*Il giovane Holden* p12), and the different meaning of the translated statement has both linguistic and thematic implications. In the English text, Holden’s language is repetitive, monotonous, restricted in terms of vocabulary and level in tone. In *Il giovane Holden* the repetitive element is reduced and in some cases the inflection is changed. This is shown in the first extract from *Il giovane Holden* above, in which ‘a goddam Cadillac’, ‘dirty little goddam clicks’, ‘goddam intellectuals’, and ‘goddam Book-of-the-Month club’ are translated as ‘una maladetta Cadillac’, ‘piccole sporche maledette cricche’ and ‘i maledetti intellettuali’, but ‘quel dannato Club del Libro del Mese!’. There is no linguistic reason for the use of ‘dannato’ instead of ‘maledetto’ here, especially as the repetition of certain words and phrases, including ‘goddam’, in the English text reinforces Holden’s bleak mood and his preoccupation with his brother’s death. Similarly, Holden praises something good with the words ‘it killed me’, but the morbid imagery inherent in his language is lost in many of the various translations of this phrase in *Il giovane Holden*: among them, ‘mi lasciò secco’, ‘uno spasso da morire’, ‘la trovava fantastica’, whereas the less dramatic ‘it knocked me out’ is translated variously as ‘una cosa da lasciarti secco’, ‘lo mise fuori combattimento’, ‘che mi lascino proprio senza fiato’, ‘mi stavo divertendo da morire’.

The tone of *The Catcher in the Rye* is clearly altered in subtle but significant ways in the translation, and aside from the recourse to a linguistic variety that is closer to spoken varieties rather than the written standard, the tone of *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* does not reflect that of Salinger’s original text. Brizzi’s novel has two narrating voices, the omniscient third person narrator and Alex. The relationship between *The Catcher in the Rye*, *Il giovane Holden* and *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal*

gruppo is therefore one of progressive distance from, and development of, Salinger's text. The use of a more varied lexis in *Il giovane Holden* than *The Catcher in the Rye* has two effects. Firstly, it alters the tone of the narrative and projects a different impression of Holden Caulfield, who becomes slightly distant from Salinger's monotonous, morbid character. The wider lexical range in *Il giovane Holden* makes Holden appear a more articulate and less brooding character than in the original English text. Secondly, this creates a different precedent for *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* than the English text of *The Catcher in the Rye*. Salinger's original text functions as a conceptual precedent for *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*: it provides the notions of exclusion, self-referentiality and adolescent angst that are the foundations of Brizzi's novel. Certain relationships in *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* are modelled directly on Salinger's novel: for instance, Alex's relationship with Aidi recalls Holden's friendship with Jane, and Alex's desire to emulate Martino, and his reaction to his death, has much in common with Holden's relationship with Allie. Linguistically, however, it is *Il giovane Holden*, not *The Catcher in the Rye*, that provides a model for *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*. Brizzi's character has a wide vocabulary, enriched by words from foreign languages (in the above extract alone there are phrases from French, 'frère de lait', German, 'mutter', and English, 'uppercut', 'Bologna's Chronicles') and inventive neologisms. This language is more comparable with the description of Holden's language in *Il Giovane Holden* ('un modo di parlare schifo') than the one in *The Catcher in the Rye* ('a lousy vocabulary'). Whereas Salinger's level tone is presented as the linguistic product of a character without the linguistic skill to consciously vary his speech, Brizzi's deliberately uses the rich lexical resources of youth language to show opposition to highlight his oppositional image. Brizzi identifies with his character, but Salinger does not, and the distinction between author and narrator is consequently much clearer in *The Catcher in the Rye* than in *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*.

Brizzi's linguistic strategies point to an influence from another Anglophone text frequently alluded to in his novel, Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*.¹⁰ Brizzi mentions to this text several times in *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*. When Alex

¹⁰ *A Clockwork Orange* was published in English in 1962, and translated into Italian as *Un'arancia a orologio* in 1969. Kubrick's film version, released in 1971, was, however, known in Italy as *Arancia meccanica* and subsequent translations of the book have taken this title. In a further twist, Kubrick's film was based on the American version of the novel, from which the last chapter had been removed at the publisher's insistence, thus altering the nature of the ending and disturbing the book's otherwise perfectly symmetrical structure and numeric unity. Translations of the novel into foreign languages, including Italian, were nonetheless based on the original British version (*A Clockwork Orange*).

goes to visit his rich friend Martino, he notes that ‘l’arredo del luogo appariva paurosamente simile alla casa della donna che il protagonista ultravivace di Arancia meccanica sprangava a morte servendosi del solito cazzo in ceramica’ (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p39); at another friend’s house, Alex partakes of ‘un mangia&bevi degno del vecchio Burgess’ (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p63).¹¹ Later, he recollects a scene from *A Clockwork Orange* in which the protagonist is set upon by a vengeful crowd of pensioners, and makes the bus journey home in fear that the crowd around him, disapproving of his drunkenness, ‘l’avrebbero fatto a pezzi come in Arancia meccanica’ (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p74). Furthermore, in anglicising his protagonist’s name from Alessandro to Alex, Brizzi makes explicit his character’s cultural preferences and creates a clear association with the protagonist of Burgess’ novel. In Burgess’ discourse on the validity of free choice, the name Alex carries a symbolic meaning (‘*a-lex*: without, or outside the law’, *A Clockwork Orange* p ix). Traces of this meaning linger in *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*, whose protagonist also sees himself as radical, but suggests that he rebels out of boredom: he and his friends are ‘a proprio agio nei nuovi panni di neosvogliati e rinselvaticiti’ (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p12).

Although the characters in Burgess’ novel are adolescents, their highly stylized language is not based on any real teenage slang, but is a largely invented and highly politicised discourse. The Anglo/Russian/American argot of both Burgess’ book and Kubrick’s film version is ‘nadsat’ – a word taken from the Russian suffix for ‘teen’ – and many of the words in it have Slavic origins. Given that Burgess’ book was first published in the year of the Cuban Missile Crisis, such a language clearly has political implications. In *A Clockwork Orange* this argot is mixed with other linguistic codes, such as archaic and literary language, for example, ‘O my brothers, remember sometimes thy little Alex that was’ (*A Clockwork Orange* p141): something that is replicated in Brizzi’s use of ‘cultismi’ and other terms from other language varieties. Burgess also uses techniques of antilanguage, most frequently in the repeated use of the word ‘horrorshow’, which, although apparently negative, is adapted from the neuter form of the Russian word ‘good’, *kharashó*, and is therefore a positive term (Blake Morrison in Burgess 2000).

¹¹ Alex’s friends’ fruit juices are mixed with liberal quantities of vodka, just as in *A Clockwork Orange* the characters drink ‘milk-plus’ laced with drugs, in the narrator’s words: ‘you could peet it with vellocet or synthemesc or drenchrom or one or two other veshsches which would give you a nice quiet horrorshow fifteen minutes admiring Bog And All His Holy Angels and Saints in your left shoe with lights bursting all over your mozg’ (*A Clockwork Orange* p3).

Even in translation, many (although not all) of the Russian derivatives in *A Clockwork Orange* remain true to Burgess' original choices. Significantly 'horrorshow' is not one of these, and this gives a further indication that Brizzi knows this text in translation too. In *A Clockwork Orange*, Alex describes one of his friends as 'a horrorshow filthy fighter and very handy with the boot' (*A Clockwork Orange* p4), which in the Italian translation becomes 'un porco picchiatore cinebrivido e molto svelto con lo stivale' (*Arancia meccanica* p11). 'Cinebrivido' is a term used in *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* to slow the pace of the narrative, as in 'okay. Cinebrivido' (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p69 and p81). In borrowing this word from the translation of Burgess' novel, Brizzi shows that he has also taken from *A Clockwork Orange* the notion of language as a tool to articulate an oppositional stance.

Some of Brizzi's linguistic strategies are analogous to those used by Burgess. For instance, there are parallels in the use of adapted borrowings from Russian in *A Clockwork Orange* and the borrowing of American English words and phrases in *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*, both of which distinguish the youthful protagonists from the older generations. Brizzi's choice of linguistic opposition in *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* is not as ideological as Burgess' in *A Clockwork Orange*, but instead manipulates the strategies of youth language varieties that I described in Chapter 2. Burgess' use of Russian equates to antilanguage: a technique also used in modified form by Brizzi, who gives pejorative nouns and adjectives a positive slant, referring, for example, to his characters as 'il nostro diavolo d'un uomo' (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p112), 'quei pirati' (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p88) and 'quel matto' (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p130). Brizzi frequently uses the confrontational spelling change from 'c' to 'k', as in 'kranio' (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p18, p27), 'kazzeggiato' (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p72), 'la loro ironia del kazzo' (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p79), 'skazzati' (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p104) and 'skazzato' (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p133), 'i kaschi' (for 'la polizia', *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p107), and 'kazzo', used repeatedly. Brizzi's borrowings from foreign languages come from English and Spanish, either in adapted borrowings – 'aveva semifloppato l'interrogazione di fisica', (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p121) or as direct borrowings, often combining both languages, for instance in '[il] look muy aggressivo del vecchio Alex' (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p63) and the repeated phrases 'amigos catholic punk' and 'red catholic punk'. Brizzi also uses 'drinking under age' (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p130), 'straight edge' (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p37), and 'strong' to mean

‘hedonistic’ (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p45): sometimes these borrowings are used ironically, as indicated by the italics in ‘[le] sue – mio Dio – *partners*’ (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p26). Brizzi also articulates his oppositional stance by coining neologisms like ‘una cena funky bruciapaghetta’ (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p119); inventing metaphors such as ‘sono in cassa totale’ (for ‘very drunk’ *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p73), and ‘Alex inutile e triste come la birra senz’alcool’ (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p29), and using suffixes ‘l’ultradisciplina’ (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p79) and ‘un tramonto ultracoreografico’ (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p25), some of them pejorative, such as the suffix ‘rotaryani’ (as in the phrase ‘massonimprenditorialrot-taryani’ *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p42: also used on p49, p58, p104, see Chapter 2, note 10, for an explanation of this suffix).

Although *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* reveals a strong influence from *The Catcher in the Rye*, this influence is more thematic than linguistic. The notion of being outside the group is central to Salinger’s text, and this clearly has a powerful influence on Brizzi’s novel: both *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* challenge the middle class values of their respective times and countries, but although Brizzi takes his central metaphor and his cynicism from *The Catcher in the Rye*, his expression of them is less closely linked to this text. Although the fundamental linguistic principle of both novels is the same, in representing colloquial, youthful speech, this takes different forms in *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* and *The Catcher in the Rye*. In this respect, *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* is representative of other pulp texts, many of which deal with the theme of social exclusion, membership of a marginalised group, and transgression of middle class values – *Gioventù Cannibale*, *Fango* and *Superwoobinda*, plus *Fluo*, *Destroy* and *Luminal*, to name just some. In common with these texts, in *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* Brizzi makes use of a different precedent for his linguistic usage, and draws on the tradition of plurilingualism in Italian literature.

3. Pulp and Italian literary tradition

Although Brizzi chooses to link his fiction to a tradition of linguistic ‘opposition’ in Anglophone writing, there are also precedents for this hybrid style in Italian literature. Some pulp fiction, such as Aldo Nove’s *Superwoobinda* and Silvia Ballestra’s *La guerra degli Antò*, eschews too close a relationship with American

writing and instead exhibits close links with Italian literature. Like other pulp writers, Brizzi's mix of many different registers – from Latin to cryptic, dysphemistic youth slang – contrasts sharply with the firmly established Italian situation of 'diglossia', a tradition that dates back to the Middle Ages, and one which has its roots in the separation of scholarly language (Latin and subsequently the Tuscan dialect that becomes standardised Italian) from vernacular speech. However, one reason for Brizzi's and other pulp authors' reluctance to acknowledge models from literary tradition lies in its associations with the use of dialect: a linguistic variety that, as I showed in Chapter 2, pulp authors are cautious of using. As Italy remained a policentric and highly regionalised country until well into the twentieth century, a situation arose in which the national language, identified with the written language, remained estranged from the linguistic varieties in active use throughout the country. Levels of literacy, and therefore competence in the national standard, remained relatively low until the advent of mass education and easily accessible mass media, such as radio and television, introduced many dialect speakers to Italian. Nonetheless, writing in dialect has remained a significant component of Italian literature, and it is especially prominent in poetry and theatre. This tradition is still evident in the twentieth century in the work of Eduardo De Filippo, who exploits plurilingualism to comic effect in *Filumena Marturano*: some of the characters use only dialect, others only Italian, and others are capable of code-switching between the two. Others have continued to publish both poetry and prose in dialect, even when (sometimes because) it has been controversial to do so, for example, Pasolini published poetry in the Friulian dialect. Although widely used in post-World War II Italian literature, dialect fiction faded from prominence after the 1960s, only to return, in the late 1980s and 1990s in the works of authors like Lara Cardella and Silvana Grasso. As I will show in the example of Silvia Ballestra's writing, in pulp, dialect is seen as indicative of a backward-looking, restricted mindset that is remote from many of the situations it describes and inadequate to express many of pulp's central concerns.

Pulp may be more successfully interpreted as the most recent incarnation of a type of plurilingualism that has been part of Italian literature at least since Dante's *Commedia*, in which the language is adapted to suit the character using it, thus creating a range of varieties from the language of courtly love (*Inf.*, V 73-142) to bitter invectives (*Inf.*, XXXIII 79-90). A more accentuated use of this type of plurilingualism can be seen in the *commedia dell'arte* plays of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, in which each of the stock characters used a different linguistic variety, using, for instance,

Venetian dialect to denote Pantalone, the avaricious merchant, and Bergamasque dialect for the clever and devious Arlecchino. This practice was absorbed into subsequent theatrical usage in plays such as Goldoni's *La Locandiera* (1752), in which the characters are unmasked and portrayed more subtly than in the commedia dell'arte, while retaining characteristics designated by the language that they use. Plurilingualism is therefore traditionally used as a tool in Italian literature to indicate aspects of a character's background, and their significant personality traits. Rather than in a patchwork of local dialects, this type of plurilingualism has manifested itself in twentieth century literature in the use of different registers, for example, in the demotic linguistic subversions of Dario Fo's theatre, in Vassalli's mix of different languages and registers, and Celati and Balestrini's use of 'low' registers (which I discuss in Chapter 4). These examples show that plurilingualism has been a powerful critical instrument in Italian literature. This is also the case in pulp, which lays down cultural, linguistic, theoretical and ethical challenges to Italian society, literature and culture.

Although pulp makes use of plurilingual traditions, its interaction with other forms of culture, particularly anglophone mass cultures, makes pulp very different from other recent incarnations of this tradition. In the following sections, I discuss how pulp relates to some of the key writers in the plurilingual literary tradition of the late twentieth century. I use textual analysis to explore pulp's relationship with these traditions, with particular emphasis on plurilingual fiction written in the post-war period. I focus on Pasolini's *Ragazzi di vita* and *Una vita violenta*; the work of the Gruppo 63, specifically Arbasino's *Fratelli d'Italia*, and Tondelli's *Altri Libertini* and *Pao Pao*. In my conclusions to this chapter, I will discuss how the nature of pulp authors' relationship to this tradition has implications for an understanding of their fiction.

3a. Pulp and the Gruppo 63: Arbasino and Ballestra

Many analyses of pulp have focussed on its relationship with the Gruppo 63, as much has been made of the apparent similarities between these two groups. However, there are several problems with this form of analysis. Firstly, this point of view always begins from a set of assumptions about the Gruppo 63, and then considers pulp in the light of these. Partly as a result of the Gruppo 63's sometimes forced emphasis on continuation between their writing and pulp, the relationship between them is usually described in terms of a set of superficial and general assumptions, in which analysis

plays a relatively small part. Secondly, as the impetus behind the *Ricerca* conferences and the failed review *La Bestia* demonstrates, the link between pulp and the Gruppo 63 is largely fostered by the members of the Gruppo 63 themselves: any analysis resulting from this is therefore strictly one-way, considering pulp in the light of what members of the Gruppo 63 say about it. In this section I question some of the more commonly propagated declarations about the nature of the relationship between pulp and the Gruppo 63. Instead of attempting to speak in generic terms about the whole of the Gruppo 63 and pulp, as is conventional (but rather superficial), I will focus on the specific comparison between Silvia Ballestra and Alberto Arbasino, who is a recurrent reference point in Ballestra's pulp fiction. By using comparative textual analysis, I will highlight both similarities and differences in their use of linguistic strategies, and consider what this might imply.

Arbasino (born 1930) began publishing fiction in 1957, and has written poetry, non-fiction and essays. Arbasino was also active in promoting and organizing the *Ricerca* meetings in the 1990s, and Ballestra can be linked to Arbasino through her participation in *Ricerca* in 1993. As this indicates, she was one of the first pulp authors to establish herself on the Italian literary scene in the 1990s. She was born in the Marche region of Italy in 1969, and went on to publish her first short stories, 'La via per Berlino' and 'Cronaca de' culti di priapo rinnovati a Bologna', in Tondelli's *Under 25: Papergang* anthology in 1990, whilst she was still a student.¹² Ballestra's fictional writing can be divided into two phases, the first of which extends from 'La via per Berlino' (1990) to *Gli Orsi* (1994).¹³ This fiction explores subjects such as Italian youth culture and students' problems. It is comic, ironic, and sometimes slightly bitter, but above all linguistically innovative and challenging, not least for its subversion of many different genres, not all of them literary. This writing is 'pulp' in the metaphorical sense of the word, as Ballestra integrates many different linguistic forms and cultural references into complex and challenging texts. In this phase, she rarely tackles subject

¹² *Under 25 III: Papergang*, ed. by P. V. Tondelli, Ancona, Transeuropa, 1990. Parts of 'Cronaca de' culti di priapo rinnovati a Bologna' were then assimilated into 'La via per Berlino' for inclusion in her collection of short stories, *Il compleanno dell'iguana* (Ancona, Transeuropa, 1991 and Milan, Mondadori, 1991).

¹³ Although Ballestra has published ten books with six different publishers between 1990 and 2005, only four of her publications consist entirely of original material. The other five contain previously published material, sometimes rewritten, and previously unpublished short stories. 'La via per Berlino', has been published in four different guises, whilst the other short stories of *Il compleanno dell'iguana* have appeared in three different collections, and the novel *La guerra degli Antò* has been published four times. Her *Romanzi e racconti* (Theoria, 1999) unites *Il compleanno dell'iguana* with *Il disastro degli Antò* (Baldini & Castoldi, 1997, itself a reprint of *La via per Berlino* and *La guerra degli Antò*) and four new stories. *Senza gli orsi* (Rizzoli, 2003) once again reprises the stories of *Il compleanno dell'iguana* (minus *La via per Berlino* this time), three stories from *Romanzi e racconti*, and two previously published in other anthologies, plus five new stories. *La guerra degli Antò* was republished in 2005 by Einaudi.

matter that is violent or subversive, but like many of her contemporaries, Ballestra's fiction is highly self-referential. During the gap of four years following this phase, Ballestra worked on non-fiction, editing and translation.¹⁴ Although *Nina* and *Il compagno di mezzanotte* look back nostalgically to the protagonist's adolescence, the second phase of Ballestra's fiction writing, from *La giovinezza della signorina N.N* (1998) onwards, is characterised by a thematic shift from student life and the problems of youth to a growing concern with introspection and maturity. In conjunction with the new subject matter, Ballestra adopts a more even tone and style than in her earlier fiction.

Unlike other pulp authors, who have sought to minimise comparisons between their work and Italian literary tradition, Ballestra has always acknowledged Arbasino's influence.¹⁵ The links between Ballestra and Arbasino are most evident in her pulp fiction, particularly *La guerra degli Antò* and the title story from the collection *Gli Orsi*, which reveal a significant and evolving link between Ballestra's writing and that of her predecessor. In particular, Ballestra emphasises the importance of one specific work by Arbasino, his 1963 novel, *Fratelli d'Italia*, subsequently republished with significant alterations in 1976, 1993 and 2000.¹⁶ Several critics have mentioned the similarities between Ballestra's and Arbasino's writing, but few have extended this to a comparative textual analysis.¹⁷ By doing so, I seek to demonstrate the extent of Arbasino's influence on Ballestra, and, in more general terms, of the Gruppo 63 on pulp. My emphasis will be on reference to Arbasino in Ballestra's work, as well as on direct textual borrowing from his writing. By considering not only Ballestra's statements on her predecessor, as well as the extent to which they are either borne out or belied by references to and borrowing from Arbasino in her writing, I reveal the complexity of the links between her writing and Arbasino's. Furthermore, I will consider whether references to and borrowing from Arbasino in Ballestra may equate to approval of his literary style.

¹⁴ Between 1994 and 1998 Ballestra published an interview with Joyce Lussu, *Joyce L. Una vita contro* (Baldini & Castoldi, 1996), edited the anthology *Under 25: Coda* (Transeuropa, 1996) with Giulio Mozzi. She has also translated Jack Kerouac's *Scrivere bop* (Mondadori, 1996) from English; and from French Prévost's *Manon Lescaut* (Rizzoli, 2003) and Ramón Chao's *La mano negra in Colombia* (Editori Associati, 2000).

¹⁵ For example, 'fondamentali per me sono stati Arbasino, ovviamente Tondelli' (<http://www.municipio.re.it/manifestazioni/baobab/invito/ballestra.htm>): see also Trecca 1995 and Gervasutti 1998.

¹⁶ As my purpose here is to compare Arbasino's writing with Ballestra's, I will use the 1976 version of the text, which would have been the edition available to Ballestra when writing *La guerra degli Antò*.

¹⁷ For example, Filippo La Porta's *La nuova narrativa italiana* (1999). The exception to this is Silvia Contarini-Hak's doctoral thesis, which is based on comparative textual analysis, but this is as yet unpublished. See S. Contarini-Hak (1994-1995) *Le roman 'nouveau' en Italie du 'Gruppo 63' aux années quatre vingt dix*, Université de Paris IV Sorbonne.

To establish a point of comparison, I begin by discussing an extract from *Fratelli d'Italia*, from which Ballestra borrows the theme, structure and linguistic model for her narrative. The plot deals with a group of four youths who travel around Italy during their summer holidays. The narrative focuses on the wealthy student, nicknamed 'l'elefante', who narrates the novel in the first person; his Italian friend Andrea, and his French and German friends Jean-Claude and Klaus, who aspire to making a film together. The novel also features a whole cast of their high society acquaintances, who wander around Italy, allowing the novel to digress into lengthy disquisitions on culture. The real emphasis is on these discussions, making the text more of a theoretical debate on the validity and function of certain cultural forms than a traditional novel. These themes are introduced early in the book, when Arbasino establishes a complex relationship between author, characters and narrator, which works on multiple layers of fiction:

5 Sentite, – fa, – utilizziamo a ogni costo il gran tema del Viaggio in Italia? Riallacciamo i rapporti? Facciamo i conti una buona volta con questo imbarazzante paese? A un patto, si capisce: questa vacanza come una trama
10 narrativa, però in una forma che non si saprebbe davvero immaginare più dissimile dal tradizionale itinerario così geograficamente e sentimentalmente ordinato dal Grand Tour, non facciamo passare per stupidini. Dunque allo schema del viaggio geografico, cioè gli Anni di Pellegrinaggio nella Culla della
15 Classicità, sovrapponiamo subito il tema della Formazione, il calco degli Anni d'Apprendistato... Wilhelm Meister, e in più Grand Tour... cioè Bildungsroman, appunto... quell'esperienza irripetibile che si può compiere una volta sola nella vita... nell'età formativa, decisiva... E se non possono essere anni, si riducono a Mesi di Viaggio, a Settimane di Esperienza... sfrenate, frenetiche... come sarebbe anche giusto, col poco tempo che c'è oggi per tutto...
(*Fratelli d'Italia* p19).

In this statement, Arbasino sets out three different levels of discourse, which continually interact in the novel. The proposal of 'questa vacanza come una trama narrativa' is not only a suggestion to the other characters for the plot of their film, but also a clear suggestion to the reader that the formative cultural journey around Italy should be seen as the framework for a theoretical discussion on Italian culture and the Italian novel. *Fratelli d'Italia* should therefore be read as a work of literary and cultural reflection, as well as a novel. At this point, the lines between the novel's different narrative and theoretical levels begin to blur: the theorist is present in the attitudes of the author and in the views expressed by his characters. From this point onwards, *Fratelli d'Italia* becomes almost entirely a self-conscious discourse on cultural theory: in particular, there are many long discussions between the characters on the subjects of

literature, genre, music, theatre and film, which pre-empt the cultural concerns displayed in Ballestra's writing.

Arbasino has described *Fratelli d'Italia* as a 'romanzo-conversazione' (Barilli and Guglielmi 1976 p191), 'un omaggio "critico" ai maestri del romanzo moderno [...] ma dialettico' and 'romanzo-saggio' (Barilli and Guglielmi 1976 p191). In the novel the characters themselves praise this genre as 'il meglio dei due mondi' (*Fratelli d'Italia* p53) as it allows for the integration of critical discourse within the novel's plot. *Fratelli d'Italia* is a thoroughly serious and often unashamedly theoretical meditation on different forms of culture, especially the novel. Many of the themes of Arbasino's 'essay' are articulated in the short paragraph above: the characters' desire to reconcile themselves with Italian culture, the related theme of a formative journey around Italy, and a preoccupation with literary and cultural discourse.

The theme of the 'viaggio in Italia' reoccurs frequently in the novel. One of the novel's four central characters, the German musician, Klaus, writes an opera entitled *Viaggio in Italia* (already the title of a film made by Rossellini in 1953): this is also the projected title of Andrea's planned film, and the film is the basis of the novel's plot structure. Following the tradition of the Grand Tour, the characters travel around Italy's cosmopolitan capitals, rediscovering its artistic heritage: their engagement with culture is therefore limited to 'high' culture. Although this group of privileged young men are producers and consumers of culture, they limit their artistic production to more exclusive cultural forms: opera, experimental cinema and literature. Both *Fratelli d'Italia* and Andrea's film *Viaggio in Italia* start from the premise of a formative 'Grand Tour', but subvert the idea of 'formation' that underlies it. Andrea questions the validity of traditional narrative forms in the above extract (his film is to take 'una forma che non si saprebbe davvero immaginare più dissimile dal tradizionale itinerario'), as Arbasino does in *Fratelli d'Italia*'s structure. He speaks of his film as a calque on Goethe's eighteenth century novel, *Wilhelm Meister's Bildungsjahre*. Despite his claims to subvert the Bildungsroman, Andrea reveals a conventional and uncomplicated relationship to his literary predecessor: he wishes to follow the established model closely. His concession to the passage of time is that, instead of years of formative pilgrimage, a reduced timescale will reflect the more hectic modern condition.

As the narrator foretells, the film is never finished, thus falling short of the model that it seeks to replicate. Similarly, *Fratelli d'Italia* has a circular structure, which ties the novel's plot to its underlying theoretical discourse (the characters end up exactly as they began, and are no wiser for their experiences) as well as introducing a

self-reflexive note. Parts of the above passage, from the beginning of the novel, are integrated almost unchanged into two passages at the end, reinforcing the circularity of the narrative ('Blurb I per il Giangiacomo', p653 and 'Blurb II per il Giangiacomo', p656). This is reinforced by the novel's closing paragraphs. One of these reads 'siamo qui a Fiumicino aspettando due miei amici che arrivano adesso da Parigi' (*Fratelli d'Italia* p658), which is almost identical to the novel's opening statement: 'siamo qui a Fiumicino senza colazione aspettando due amici di Andrea che arrivano adesso in ritardo da Parigi' (*Fratelli d'Italia* p3). The characters are thus returned to their original situations, but none the wiser for their experiences. At the end of the novel, the elegant society lady Desideria commits suicide, and *Fratelli d'Italia* concludes 'non aveva parlato a nessuno? No. Non ha lasciato scritta qualche cosa? No, niente' (*Fratelli d'Italia* p659). The accumulation of negatives in these last lines summarises Arbasino's criticism of the Bildungsroman, which itself has precedents in modernist thought. Arbasino's narrative is circular, and the characters who do not die futile deaths find themselves unchanged, as they were at the beginning of the novel, having gained nothing from their experiences.

Travel and formation, linked in the idea of the Grand Tour and the traditional Bildungsroman, are no longer synonymous in *Fratelli d'Italia*. Culture, however, remains a central theme, as it is in Ballestra's *La Guerra degli Antò*. The comparison between Italy's past (high) culture and its present state, defined as 'imbarazzante', is echoed in the conversations between the characters throughout *Fratelli d'Italia*, who are competent in many different critical discourses, and use them freely. Their discussions of contemporary culture, of literature and literary theory mention very few Italian figures, but instead look to other countries. In the space of just two pages in one of the first literary discussions in the novel, the characters refer to Conrad, Dickens, Diderot, Emily Brontë, Faulkner, Robbe-Grillet, Petronius, Cervantes, Proust, Dante, Sade, Joyce, and Lukács (*Fratelli d'Italia* p68-69). This international cultural display, coupled with a multinational cast of characters, allows Arbasino an easy passport to plurilingualism. Arbasino's characters are from Germany, France, Italy and Switzerland, and words and phrases in these languages, and also in English, are scattered throughout the novel, to lend a cultured, cosmopolitan tone to the narrative. On occasions, Arbasino uses more extended passages (whole sentences, or even paragraphs) in one of these languages, but also mixes many languages in a single sentence.

The concept of the novel as a combination of conversation and theoretical discourse, as well as Arbasino's subversion of genre, his narrative's circular structure, and his use of plurilingualism are all absorbed by Ballestra in her novel. *La guerra degli Antò* is linguistically, structurally and thematically challenging. Besides Ballestra's many acknowledgements of Arbasino's influences, some editions of *La guerra degli Antò* are prefaced by a long quotation from *Fratelli d'Italia*. In addition, Ballestra assimilates many structural, linguistic and thematic qualities of *Fratelli d'Italia* into her novel. Like *Fratelli d'Italia*, *La guerra degli Antò* has four central characters, is self-consciously narrated in the first person using an experimental and plurilingual linguistic mix and is, in its own way, a cultural commentary. However, the setting of Ballestra's novel is very different from *Fratelli d'Italia*, which immediately indicates her intention to subvert the model that she takes from Arbasino. Ballestra is one of the more reflective pulp authors and she redeploys Arbasino's concepts with irony and humour.

La guerra degli Antò reprises the characters and settings of Ballestra's first short story, 'La via per Berlino'. Both follow the misadventures of four provincial Italian youths from Pescara: Antò Lu Purk, Antò Lu Mmalatu, Antò Lu Zorru and Antò Lu Zombi. 'La via per Berlino' concentrates on Antò Lu Purk, destined to fall short of the achievements of those he measures himself by, something which Ballestra underlines from the very start, by contrasting his birth to a pinnacle of human achievement: 'Antò Lu Purk è nato a Montesilvano, provincia di Pescara, nel '69, lo stesso giorno che l'uomo ha conquistato la luna' (*La guerra degli Antò* p9). After a provincial childhood and adolescence, Lu Purk goes to university in Bologna, but progressively abandons his studies and, after a spell as a DJ for an obscure radio station, he takes a job on a building site. Once again he is unable to reconcile his expectations of himself with his abilities and, after tackling a job that he has been repeatedly warned against, falls from a high scaffold. The accident results in the amputation of one leg, but Lu Purk remains oblivious to his shortcomings, and sets off for Berlin in search of punk soulmates. At this point 'La via per Berlino' ends, and its plot continues in *La guerra degli Antò*. In this novel, the focus shifts from Lu Purk to Lu Zorru. Like Lu Purk, Lu Zorru is not a very thoughtful young man, and when he receives a postcard announcing that he has been conscripted for service in the first Gulf War, he fails to realise that it is a prank, and panics. Assisted by student friends in Bologna, particularly Fabio di Vasto, he flees to join Lu Purk, now in Amsterdam. Whilst Lu Purk and Lu Zorru's doomed attempts to craft themselves into streetwise and stylish punks are never far from the focus of attention, the novel also closely follows events in Pescara. The novel alternates,

therefore, between various plot strands. Lu Purk's student friends (including one Silvia Ballestrera, sic) struggle against the twin demons of student poverty and unscrupulous landlords in Bologna, whilst Lu Zorru's sister and brother-in-law are stranded when their car breaks down in a freak snow storm in the Pescara countryside. Lu Zombi and Lu Mmalatu leave a tap running whilst watching television, inadvertently causing a flood, and a search is launched for the missing Antòs Lu Purk and Lu Zorru which culminates in a televised appeal for their return.

The novel is, however, more complex than a summary of its plot suggests. In keeping with Arbasino's precedent, Ballestra takes a critical stance towards her literary model. This is illustrated by the single explicit reference to Arbasino in *La guerra degli Antòs*. It comes near the end of the text, in the middle of a heated pseudo-political discussion between the character Silvia Ballestrera and Fabio di Vasto, who accuses Ballestrera:

‘Sci ttu che tti sci cupiàte l’Arbasíne, per cuntesta’ la Storia al cuntadíne. (No, Ballestrera, sei tu che hai scimmiettato Arbasino per contestare il Modello Economico Marchigianello)’ (*La guerra degli Antòs* p284).

Ballestra's deliberately ambiguous choice of vocabulary in both Fabio's words and the translation into standard Italian raises interesting questions about the nature of her relationship with Arbasino's writing. Whereas Fabio's dialect word, 'cupiàte' ('copiato'), could be read as an admission of simple textual borrowing, and therefore admiration of Arbasino, Ballestra is careful to qualify this immediately in her 'translation' into standard Italian. 'Scimmiettare' may indicate mimicry, but this might be construed either positively or negatively, in which case it might also be read as 'mockery', thereby giving a very different meaning: 'hai ridicolizzato Arbasino' as opposed to 'hai copiato Arbasino'. Certainly, Ballestra's use of Arbasinian strategies is not without manipulation or irony. Whether this expresses admiration for, or mockery of, his writing is deliberately ambiguous, as both elements are present in this text.

Many of these points are illustrated in this extract, in which the narrator summarises the events thus far:

5 Inzomma, un periodo schiantanervi. Ma il mio è niente, confronto alle merolate degli Antò, i corsi di rieducazione ideologica di Paolo Cicoria (a cui per altro mi sono iscritta a metà gennaio), le performances dei coniugi Tallatu e Flavia Possis d'Arno in quel Se n'è ito e mi sa che non ritorna, lu più bille programma telediurnalistico degli ultimi dugento anni.

10 E allora che altro vi devo dire?, vediamo almeno i dettagli conclusivi, le “chiusure” de 'sta cronaca marziana in maniera un po' particolareggiata. Ne farei volentieri a meno, giuro – siamo in febbraio, la guerra del Golfo ancora non è finita e già Saddam sembra sul punto di dichiararne un'altra e il primo libretto mio è *seriamente* sparito nel ciberspazio – ma il rispetto della sottoscritta nei confronti vostri è *totale*.

15 Sí, la navetta della Buriniade ha praticamente ultimato il suo giro, e, come in ogni lunapark che si rispetti, sta tornando alla base avida di nuovi passeggeri. L'equipaggio attuale, infatti, dopo cento e passa pagine di avventure focomeliche si è praticamente decomposto: Antò Lu Purk, Lu Zorru, Fabio di Vasto, gli altri due Antò allagati, Paolo Cicoria, Laura Mei, la Zarina, Johnny Guitar e Peppinello, Mimmo, Cesaretto, Teo Fortuna e il contadino Marino Severini, sono, volenti e nolenti, giunti al termine del loro periglioso viaggio. Invecchiati di quindici anni in pochi mesi, si direbbe – sderenati vivi, si direbbe
20 – ma giunti. O almeno, *quasi*.

Poveri truzz, dispersi ai quattro angoli del Pianeta! Due che ancora si stanno a litigare per colpa di un bidone aspiratutto; sette otto altri in attesa del telegiornale della notte, inutilmente speranzosi che i Sud del Mondo si riscattino e gli yankees vengano rispediti a casa con la coda fra le gambe; Franca Fortuna,
25 incinta da due giorni, che già sferruzza babbucce all'uncinetto: babbucce *gialle*, in quanto ancora non si sa se è maschio o femmina o Rosemary's baby, il frutto concepito; Teo, che non è certo un Cassavetes, e tuttavia ha già deciso di lasciare il posta da dirigente all'Upim, assecondare certe inconfessate smanie di gioventù per il teatro: dieci a uno che pure il cognato del Purk c'ha un 666 tatuato su una
30 spalla, adesso; e poi il contadino Marino Severini, che non tornerà a casa mai più.

Duole dirlo, ma è così (*La Guerra degli Antò*, p252-253).

This extract's comic, colloquial and familiar tone, full of hyperbole and irony, is representative of the tone of whole novel: *La Guerra degli Antò* is a 'romanzo-conversazione' of a very different type to *Fratelli d'Italia*. This is in large part established by Ballestra's use of an unconventional linguistic mix, in which youth slangs, regional dialects and elevated literary language co-exist on the same level. Rare, antiquated and literary words and structures are mixed with words from the opposite end of the linguistic continuum, resulting in some unlikely juxtapositions. For example, in the above extract, pejorative and vulgar terms from youth language varieties, such as 'bidone aspiratutto' (line 23) to refer to an unattractive woman who has had many partners, co-exist with references to epic literature and lexical items borrowed from dialect. Furthermore, Ballestra uses other colloquial and non-standard linguistic forms, particularly nouns, such as 'merolate' and 'truzz' (lines 2 and 22 respectively). 'Merolate' is not listed in any dictionary: possible interpretations include a corrupted

variation of the term ‘merlo’ (or, in its more archaic form, ‘merolo’) in its figurative sense of ‘persona schiocca e ingenua’, hence the term ‘merolate’ as a possible synonym for ‘sciocchezze/ stupidaggine’.¹⁸ It is also used at the beginning of the novel to describe Antò Lu Purk’s aborted stay in Berlin as ‘tre settimane di merolate isteriche e rovelli interiori’ (*La guerra degli Antò* p86).

Ballestra’s linguistic mix is biased towards colloquial, spoken Italian and dialect, as shown by the representation of the Abbruzzese accent in the sonorized ‘s’ sound in ‘inzomma’ and the shortened vowel sound in ‘bille’, as well as in the hardening of the consonants in ‘procramma teleciornalistico’ and the softening of the central consonant in ‘dugento’: she also uses dialect-based verb forms (‘se n’è ito’ and ‘mi sa’). However, with the English words ‘performances’ (line 3) and ‘yankees’ (line 24), there is an indication of the cosmopolitan elements of her linguistic mix that elsewhere shows more strongly. At the very beginning of the novel, the narrator comments on Lu Purk’s brief and unhappy stay in Berlin:

Inutile negarlo, Antò, tu le lingue non le conosci, e quando cerchi di parlare inglese il telaio delle frasi è tutto compromesso e stravolto dalla costruzione pescarese. Facciamo un esempio: “Egli è un mio amico”, “He’s a friend of mine.” Tu invece pensi “Collù è amicc’ a mme” e dici “Ittís e frínd to mmi” (*La guerra degli Antò* p86).

In this wordplay, Ballestra exhibits her own high degree of competence in English, and demonstrates her capacity for highly articulate and varied language. This is in sharp contrast to her characters: wherever the Antòs speak in dialect, Ballestra links their lack of linguistic fluency to personal failure, and in so doing, contrasts their linguistic inabilities with the narrator’s competence. The comedy that arises from the contrast highlights a key theme in the novel. Fluency – or lack thereof – in both linguistic and cultural codes stand at the centre of Ballestra’s critical discourse; something which is underlined by the narrator, who remarks that ‘prima della Storia, della Sociologia, a noi c’incula la Geografia. L’Antropologia. La Linguistica’ (*La guerra degli Antò* p283). For Ballestra, fluency in many languages equates to fluency in different cultures and to competence in relating to the contemporary world. Both author and narrator have these skills, but the Antòs do not. By incorporating dialect into her own meta-diegetic commentary (note also the use of the first person plural pronoun, ‘a noi ci incula la Geografia’), and thereby showing herself to be competent in it, Ballestra reveals the divide between her reflective, critical use of this language and the inability

¹⁸ Definitions from the Zingarelli, 1999 edition.

of the Antòs to move beyond the confines that dialect represents. As Claudia Bernardi has pointed out, the Antòs' linguistic shortcomings are indicative of more deep-seated limitations: they are unable to escape the effects of their provincial upbringing in order to embrace more cosmopolitan cultures, however much they may wish to do so (Bernardi 1998). By portraying the Antòs in this way, Ballestra associates her novel with the traditional representation of uncouth, unrefined dialect-speaking characters as comic buffoons. The reader is made powerfully aware of the Antòs' linguistic failings by the contrast between these characters, the narrators and the multilingual cast of characters, including a young French couple and a Basque cinematographer, Xavier Muñoz, who surround Antò Lu Purk and Antò Lu Zorru in their hostel in Amsterdam.

Ballestra's use of dialect is therefore not mimetic. In contrast to the Antòs' faltering linguistic skills, the author alone is fluent in the full complex system of cultural references and varied linguistic codes (including dialect, standard Italian and foreign languages) used in this novel. Dialect becomes a critical tool, representing the provincial mindset of her characters: a character whose linguistic repertoire is limited to dialect is shown to have a limited cultural and intellectual outlook. Mental geography is fundamental to anglo-pescarese, and the narrator's exclamation, 'poveri truzz, dispersi ai quattro angoli del Pianeta!' (line 22) highlights this. The four Antòs are not even spread around the geographical extremes of Europe, let alone the world, as two remain in Pescara and the other two are in Amsterdam.

Ballestra's linguistic mix reflects her familiarity with a mixture of high and low culture. Among the many irreverent and ironic, self-reflexive references to her novel in this extract – 'cento e passa pagine di avventure focomeliche' (lines 15-16) and 'cronaca marziana' (line 8) – is a title that illustrates the breadth and depth of her cultural knowledge, and which is used repeatedly throughout *La guerra degli Antò*, 'la Buriniade' (line 13). This label encapsulates the irreverent fusion of high and low cultures that characterizes the novel and marks it out as noticeably different from *Fratelli d'Italia*. The term 'burino' is used in Abruzzese dialect to denote 'persona rozza', and the narrator explains the title thus: 'attribuisco a tale accezione il significato letterale di "magnifica epopea dei burini"; così come l'Eneide lo è stato gloriosamente degli eneidi, l'Iliade degli iliadi, l'Odisseide di Ulissèo' (*La guerra degli Antò* p172). The curious juxtaposition of this term, from a dialect which does not have a long and distinguished literary tradition (Palermo 2001), with some of the most historically established and elaborate epics in literary history has several important implications for an understanding of the novel. It replicates the tragi-comic contrast between noble, high

aspiration and comic, humiliating failure that is a theme throughout the narrative, particularly in Antò Lu Purk's failure to emulate his punk idols, and his humiliating enforced repatriation from Amsterdam with Lu Zorru. It also demonstrates that Ballestra does engage with 'high' culture – a point I will discuss in more detail below – and ironically proposes *La guerra degli Antò* as a contemporary epic.

Like Virgil's *Aeneid*, Dante's *Commedia* and other works in classical and Italian literature, such as Arbasino's *Fratelli d'Italia*, *La guerra degli Antò* is based on the theme of a journey. The use of the ferris wheel metaphor to describe the novel ('ha praticamente ultimato il suo giro, e, come in ogni lunapark che si rispetti, sta tornando alla base avida di nuovi passeggeri', line 13) is an interesting juxtaposition to this epic model. By comparing *La guerra degli Antò* to a frivolous, transient entertainment, Ballestra apparently derides her novel rather than exalts it, and reinforces the difference between her 'epic' and its predecessors. The ferris wheel metaphor recalls the circular structure of *Fratelli d'Italia*, and is used to underline the circularity of the characters' 'journey'. The narrator refers to Lu Purk's journey as a 'viaggio di sformazione' (*La guerra degli Antò* p127), a valid epithet that continues the popular appropriation of high cultures and languages that I have discussed above, as it is utterly devoid of cultural richness. She reproaches Lu Purk 'Antò, non sei manco andato a un museo. Allo Stedelijk ti potevi aquistare il catalogo di Malevich, almeno. E invece niente. Perso anche quello. E a Montesilvano non si trova' (*La guerra degli Antò* p127). In many ways, Antò's journey is the antithesis of the epic journeys with which Ballestra invites a comparison. Like the journey undertaken by the characters in *Fratelli d'Italia*, the Antòs' journey is futile and has the opposite effect to the one intended. The notion of return to one's starting point is crucial in this novel. Like people on a ferris wheel, the characters of the novel are 'giunti al termine del loro periglioso viaggio' (line 19) and like them too, the Antòs arrive back at exactly the same point they left. Although they travel a considerable distance, they fail to engage with any challenging, intellectual aspects of foreign cultures, and learn nothing from their experiences.

The ferris wheel image also picks up the televisual metaphor that dictates the novel's structure and which also provides one of its key themes. The image of the revolving ferris wheel that 'ha praticamente ultimato il suo giro' (line 13) picks up the notion of the whirring round of film in television cameras and, in turn, the continuous cycle of television news and the ever changing parade of journalists on channels like CNN and RAI 3. The characters watch these avidly for news of the Gulf War: 'perché i giornalisti di Rai Tre *ruotano*, non sono come i fossili del Tg1 e Tg2' (*La guerra degli*

Antò p136, original italics). In this context, Ballestra's comment in the above extract – 'che altro vi devo dire?, vediamo almeno i dettagli conclusivi, le "chiusure" de 'sta cronaca marziana in maniera un po' particolareggiata' (line 7) – is telling. Note the use of speech marks to denote the unreliability of the 'conclusions', and the first person plural of 'vedere', which implies an association with watching a narrative unfold, thus underlining the association with television. News broadcasting is not the only televisual genre that is inherent in the structure of *La guerra degli Antò*. The many different plot strands focus on a relatively small group of characters, in different locations, often featuring exaggerated and incongruous situations, such as the freak snow storm in Pescara that strands Lu Zorru's brother and sister-in-law, and offer complementary perspectives on the same events in order to build up a complete set of circumstances. The narrator cuts from one plot strand to another, leaving one set of characters poised in a perilous, tense or volatile situation to pick up the adventures of another group, in a parody of a soap opera.

The televisual metaphor also underlines a preoccupation with ontological uncertainty that pervades the novel. This theme arises often through the use of continually shifting names: not only for the novel, but the television programme that runs the search for the missing Antòs, referred to in the above extract as 'Se n'è ito e mi sa che non ritorna' (line 5), is given a different title every time it is mentioned.¹⁹ The title of the television programme is distinguished only by a capital for the first word, which integrates it into the text like any proper noun, unlike song titles, or the title of Ballestra's collection of short stories, *Il compleanno dell'iguana*, which are italicised each time they are referred to – a technique that further contributes to the merging of different narrative levels in the novel. The programme is a barely disguised skit on *Chi l'ha visto*, which has been broadcast on Italian television since 1989, and which encourages public participation in tracking down missing people. The reference to it here as 'lu più bille procramma telediornalistico degli ultimi dugento anni' (line 6, note the spelling change to denote a regional accent) is clearly ironic, as Ballestra portrays it as amateur in the extreme. The programme is fronted by a character named Raffaella Raffai, a name that suggests both Raffaella Carrà and Donatella Raffai: respectively, a presenter of many variety programmes, such as *Domenica In*, for both Rai and the commercial channels since the 1970s, and a former presenter of *Chi l'ha visto*? She presides over an amateurish reconstruction of Lu Purk's habitual movements and

¹⁹ Also: *Indovina chi è scomparso* (p210); *Hai saputo chi è sparito?* (p211); *Perché cavolo si è nascosto?* (p224); *Date un nome al fuggiasco* (p233); *Denuncia chi è fuggito* (p240); *Inseguite quel bastardo!* (p250); *Ovunque lo vediate spaccategli la faccia* (p250); *Stanateli vivi o morti accidenti avvòi!* (p250).

conducts interviews with his closest friends, a reading from his diary and a studio phone-in of dubious quality, during which there is a progressive degeneration in the presenter's professional calm. The programme is portrayed as tacky, amateur and cheap, shot by a camera crew who seek to release pent-up artistic instincts with 'creative' and unconventional camera work. Ballestra satirises low quality regional television by mocking the excessive changes of camera angle and the comically inappropriate visual techniques used.²⁰

The uncertain and sometimes tenuous relationships between fact and fiction in this television programme are replicated within the novel, as Ballestra casts doubt on her authorial ability to manipulate the actions of her characters. As a result, the relationships between author, characters and narrator in *La guerra degli Antò* are highly complex: the characters in the novel are also the subject of the television programme, which itself offers dubious 'reconstructions' of real events. Ballestra's summary of events, above, creates an impression of authorial control, but this is belied by the notion of struggle in the phrase 'volenti o nolenti' (line 19), and the resumé's place in the novel. Despite its tone of apparent finality, it comes with over a quarter of the novel left to run; with events therefore seeming to run out of the author's control. The intrusive, self-conscious and irreverent narrator portrays the characters as self-governing entities, acting independently of her authorial will and contesting her views, complaining that 'quel che mi fa impazzire, è la *testardaggine* dei truzz. Tutte 'ste cocciutaggini in libera uscita che vogliono dire la loro sul Mondo, la Condizione dell'Uomo Europeo davanti al Tremila' (*La guerra degli Antò* p237).

The use of the televisual metaphor ensures that Ballestra's cultural discourse is integrated into the structure of her novel more smoothly than Arbasino's in *Fratelli d'Italia*. Ballestra's narrator (clearly a self-referential figure) is a student in the department of Lettere at the Dipartimento di Arte Musica e Spettacolo at Bologna University, the twenty-two year old Silvia Ballestra. She addresses the character Antò Lu Purk as 'tu', and the readers as her contemporaries, 'voi'. By establishing a dialogue between narrator and characters, and narrator and readers, Ballestra invites the readers to identify with characters and narrator, and, by extension of this, with the author

²⁰ For example, 'la troupe di cameramans teatini, intanto, galvanizzata dall'entusiasmo del regista locale, contagiatisi un casino l'un l'altro e resi euforici dalla certezza di star facendo un figurone davanti a mezza Italia, lavorano su primissimi piani e dettagli degli ospiti in studio, decisi a mettere in pratica, in un colpo solo, tutti gli insegnamenti di regia di Paolo Uccello' (Ballestra 1999 p240). This is perhaps a reference to the experimental use of perspective by the early Renaissance painter Paolo Uccello (1397-1475) in frescoes such as *Il diluvio* in Santa Maria Novella in Florence: techniques which, in the less skilled hands of the cameramen, become comical.

herself. This process culminates in a 'spazio riservato ai lettori', a form complete with gaps for the reader to complete answers to spoof questions like 'Ho trovato casa in affitto a Bologna (No) . . (Mai) . . ('Na volta, 'n'amico mio pareva che forse, da 'na vecchia, pareva, ma era il solito falso allarme) . .' (*La guerra degli Antò* p231). Despite the apparent parity between narrator, characters and readers, Ballestra does indicate some significant differences between them.

Although this dialogue is established on the basis of extensive reference to popular cultures such as rock music, television and youth fashions, Ballestra always links her use of these cultural references to 'high' culture. The novel is addressed to an equally cultured and knowing reader, who can detect the erudite cultural references behind this façade. Although it is implied that the author and reader are equals, they are separated from the characters in the novel by a gulf in cultural knowledge. The Antòs share youth and popular cultural references with the narrator and, it is implied, the readers, but author and readers are also able to relate these discourses to 'high' culture, literature, art and film. For the Antòs, punk is purely an aesthetic statement: they lack the understanding to realise that their style has its roots – at least partly – in a politicized standpoint. In an intelligent and witty wordplay, the narrator rebukes Lu Purk, 'tu hai la coscienza politica di una suora. Di una suocera' (*La guerra degli Antò* p87). Although this wordplay is obscure to a non-anglophone reader, Ballestra is evidently cultured and witty enough to play on the ambiguities of the English term. 'Gulf' is therefore a key word in the novel: the characters are affected by the war in the Gulf, but there is also a gulf between their wanting to be punks and what they actually are: a group of provincial teenagers who merely copy and recycle existing elements of youth culture without investigating its roots in 'high' culture.

A satire on the depiction of the first Gulf War in the Italian and American media, and the reception of it in Italy, are fundamental to Ballestra's novel. Television is not only a source of entertainment, but also constitutes the characters' major source of information about the Gulf War, and the division between its two functions is ambivalent. Through her naïve characters, Ballestra criticises American television for its role as a propaganda vehicle for the country's political stance, whilst also holding Italian television to account for young people's ignorance of political issues. On the basis of information gleaned via his television set, Antò Lu Mmalatu exclaims 'lo sapete o no, la storia de lu Kuwait e di Saddà Mussein? Isso è uno dittatore [...] che si ha voluto pappare tutto il petrolio nostro!' (*La guerra degli Antò* p106). Once again, Ballestra plays on the difference between her character's ignorance and the reader's

understanding to make Antò a figure of ridicule. Ironically, his strongly held point of view accurately reproduces widespread suspicions about the right-wing American government's motivation for going to war. Through this – sometimes bitter – humour, Ballestra criticises her characters' unthinking approach to popular culture that prevents them taking a more critical view on world events.

The cultural myth of America is further explored through the character of Fabio di Vasto, who passionately recites the clichés of anti-Americanism throughout the novel. At one point in the narrative, he is described singing along to an anti-war rap by the Isola Posse All Stars, entitled *Stop al panico*.²¹ In an ironic twist befitting the themes and tone of the novel, the song protests against the American war in the Gulf by appropriating an American artistic form (rap). Fabio views the whole North American continent as 'il regno più inconsulto e nefasto della decadenza contemporanea' (*La guerra degli Antò* p167), and constructs an oppositional relationship between Europe and America, in which Europe is perceived as a dignified elder, desecrated by America, the young, trashy and impudent upstart. In an invective against American foreign policy and mass culture - both, in Fabio's eyes, aggressively expansionist - he asserts:

'sti ex-desperados del Pianeta Terra ora ci impongono la loro cultura subumana [...] per espandere la quale 'sto popolo di ex-galeotti moralisti, 'sta schiuma western della terra, oggi assedia le nostre civilissime città, deruba l'inconscio nostro, e con la scusa di aver debellato Hitler è cinquant'anni che rompono i coglioni con le due cacature di cazzo corazzate Wisconsin e Missouri, 'ste guerre stellari, 'ste stanze dei bottoni (*La guerra degli Antò* p167).

Like Lu Purk, Fabio becomes a figure of ironic amusement, as he too is a victim of the constant stream of information to which he is exposed. In Fabio, Ballestra creates a character who, for all his good intentions, lacks the critical skills to discern between the cultural influences with which he is bombarded. The narrator describes his outburst as having 'ben bene rimescolato duecento anni di storia statunitense a fumetti in meno di venticinque righe' (*La guerra degli Antò* p167), and later accuses him of learning about historical characters from war films on television (*La guerra degli Antò* p280): a

²¹ The origins of 'posse' are described in Carrera 2001. Filippa 1996 describes this musical style as 'an Italian version of the politicized rap which originally came from the USA, and it combines the slogans of political demonstrations with the campaigning slangs of earlier decades to create a kind of equivalence between Afro-American radicalism and the Italian university occupations: a fragmentary, violent style, a patchwork of sounds and voices' (Filippa 1996 p338). She offers the following transcription of the lyrics to *Stop al panico* (Isola Posse All Stars, Century Vox, 1991): 'niente pace, niente giustizia. Ne ho sentite troppe di cazzate e vomita sentenze e di una bocca che scrive parole di fuoco su un gioco con un buono ed un cattivo, un Occidente indignato (è l'ONU che l'ha dichiarato) e accanto un pacifismo violento. Attento: non confondo Saddam con Che Guevara ma a Panama è la Casa Bianca che spara' (Filippa 1996 p340).

conflation of fact and fiction which is a theme throughout pulp and which is always portrayed negatively.

The characters' failure to approach the media critically is attributed to the aestheticization of politics in the medium itself. The distinction between fiction and reality is always unclear in the minds of Ballestra's characters, and Antò Lu Mmalatu's confused and uncritical acceptance of everything he sees on television is portrayed as one aspect of this. Lu Zorru, on the other hand, has the perspicacity to see beyond at least some of the media hype and provides one of the many voices which speak out against America in this novel, accusing his friend of '[fare] proprio i discorsi della Cia mentre gli amerikani se so' messi a spara' da tutte le parti e vogliono risolve' i problemi sempre alla stessa maniera, a forza de napalm e cannonate?!' (*La guerra degli Antò* p108). In the pejorative spelling change to 'Amerika' lies a deeper criticism of American politics and foreign policy, which highlights a fundamentally ambivalent stance towards America in pulp. As in Brizzi's *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*, in *La guerra degli Antò* American popular culture and politics are the subject of much criticism, whilst its twentieth century fiction is held up as a model to be emulated. Whilst previous generations of Italian authors like Pavese and Vittorini were able to hold American literature up as a political, as well as linguistic ideal, in pulp the link between the two is broken, which results in a more overtly critical depiction of American ideals in this fiction.

Although Ballestra is no less critical of Italian provincialism than American expansionism, she is less openly antagonistic to Italian literary models than Brizzi, and clearly borrows a great deal from *Fratelli d'Italia* in *La guerra degli Antò*. However, both Ballestra's and Arbasino's novels are firmly rooted in their own socio-political contexts. The differences in the nature of the authors' concerns, and the ways in which they choose to articulate them, constitute the contribution that pulp makes to the evolution of Italian literature. Arbasino parades his knowledge of high and classical culture on every page of his novel, with abundant references to opera, theatre, and literature. His characters participate in serious intellectual discussions about the best theoretical model for the novel, thus presenting the very novel in which they are characters as a theoretical discourse. In contrast to the exclusive and 'high' cultural discourse in *Fratelli d'Italia*, Ballestra displays a more eclectic cultural background, in a more indirect, ironic way. Although to the cultured and reflective reader she flaunts her familiarity with Italian and world literature, high art and high culture, she tempers this with a number of references to 'lower' cultural forms. This means that although

both texts are, to use Arbasino's phrase, 'romanzi-saggi', they approach their subjects in different ways. Both display a preoccupation with culture and engagement with it, and both use their novels as tools to expound their own views on this subject. Both require familiarity with high culture – especially literature – to decode properly the network of cultural references on which an understanding of these novels rely. Although Arbasino uses the discussions between the characters as a forum for cultural and theoretical debate, Ballestra integrates her cultural discourse into the structure of her novel, and relies on the reader's competence to extrapolate it.

Superficially, though, the rhetorical strategy of the two texts is remarkably similar. Arbasino uses a complex plurilingual mix in *Fratelli d'Italia*, and plurilingualism and cultural discourses are also present in Ballestra's novel, but they reveal an entirely different face. One of the significant changes in Ballestra's novel is the more prominent role of Italian dialect. Whereas Arbasino's novel starts from the metropolis of Rome and visits centres of Renaissance art and culture, with the characters participating in theoretical and cultural discussion, Ballestra's novel starts from the opposite premise: provincial youths, lacking in savoir-faire, whose passive consumption of 'culture' (in the broadest sense of the term) underlies many of their cultural failings. In this respect, Ballestra mirrors Arbasino's and the Gruppo 63's wariness of dialect in literature, using Pescarese only to demonstrate the limitations of the mindset it represents. Whereas Arbasino's characters are cosmopolitan and urbane, only Ballestra's narrator has these qualities: the characters have an unsophisticated, narrow provincial outlook, which is reflected in their language, and of which the narrator clearly disapproves.

A fundamental difference between *Fratelli d'Italia* and *La guerra degli Antò* lies in the degree of complexity of the texts. Both novels operate on multiple layers of fiction. The reader of *Fratelli d'Italia* is merely a spectator to the events that unfold in the novel, and does not participate in the theoretical discourse that is addressed to them, whereas the web of ontological uncertainty that Ballestra creates is infinitely more complex. This results in a relationship between reader and narrator that reveals the intervention of postmodernism, and which is far more complex than that proposed in *Fratelli d'Italia*. One significant aspect of this is that Ballestra's text uses humour and irony, whereas Arbasino's is more openly theoretical. Like *Fratelli d'Italia*, *La guerra degli Antò* functions as a critical tribute to its predecessors. Arbasino's influence is evident, but at the same time Ballestra is not afraid to treat her novel with irony and humour.

This is further underlined in the collection of short stories, *Gli Orsi*, published two years after *La guerra degli Antò*. Like *La guerra degli Antò*, *Gli Orsi* is a plurilingual text, but in this collection of short stories, plurilingualism takes the form of experimentation with different registers and literary genres. As in *La guerra degli Antò*, there are many layers of metadiegetic narrative in the stories of *Gli Orsi*. This allows Ballestra to mix often incongruous or contrasting linguistic varieties and registers in a single text. For example, the longest, central story, 'Lettere a Polonio (Paraguay)' is composed of two separate but linked narratives, one of which may be read entirely as a political allegory. The framing narrative remains within the parameters set by *La guerra degli Antò*: it is a self-referential, self-deprecating first person narrative, told by a student and aspiring writer. In the framing narrative, Silvana Libertini (a pseudonym for Ballestra?) meets the young author Polonio, who faxes to Silvana one of her short stories which she edits for publication. Polonio's text, 'L'amante del Paraguay', makes up the metadiegetic part of the story and the part of the text which constitutes a political allegory. In this story, the first person narrator goes to see a mime show performed by two identical, apparently Chinese artists. Seduced by one of them, they go back to a room which the narrator describes as 'uno schifo, ma a me piaceva immensamente tutta quella decadenza e putrefazione di vecchi mobili in disuso, povere suppellettili e cornette del telefono anche abbastanza unte' (*Gli Orsi* p92). If this story is to be read as a political allegory, as Burns 2001 argues it should, this room may be seen as a metaphor for Italy at the end of the First Republic: decaying, decadent, and dated. During the night the mime artist assumes several different personae ('un giovane boemo trentenne' and 'un americanone forse quarantacinquenne', *Gli Orsi* p92), changing his features and his physique to do so. In the morning, the narrator wakes up to find that she has been robbed and the mimic has disappeared. When she eventually tracks him down, he disintegrates into a foul-smelling puddle before her eyes. Burns points out the obvious political criticism in the narrator's accusation to him: 'il vostro lurido corpo politico ha ridotto il paese in ginocchio sui gomiti e adesso venite a dirmi che la politica non c'entra?' (*Gli Orsi* p98). As Burns suggests, the body of the mime artist stands here for the body politic of the First Republic, which disintegrates before the eyes of the Italian public into a mire of bribery and corruption, mirrored by the foul mess into which the metaphorical creature disintegrates. The narrator's subsequent comment, 'vi lascio il 100% di quest'odore per la vostra prossima, bellissima, campagna elettorale' (*Gli Orsi* p98), suggests that the Second Republic will be tainted by the remains of the first.

Although linked by the common thread of socio-political satire, other texts in the collection draw on very different genres. ‘La fidanzata di Hendrix da piccolo’ represents a link between the youthful slang of *La guerra degli Antò* and the more mature, less marked prose of Ballestra’s ‘signorina N. N. trilogy. In ‘1974’, Ballestra narrates a child’s perceptions of that year: a mixture of the first experiences of school and a vague awareness of political terrorism in Italy. Burns argues that ‘by discussing her first attempts at writing stories against this background, Ballestra makes it clear in this story that for her generation, writing and political consciousness are essentially linked: to tell stories of her world is to address political tensions’ (Burns 2001 p152). Other stories in the collection are more allegorical: ‘Cozze marroni, non fatelo!’ is a satire on the pre-Tangentopoli political class, in which the wealthy and privileged are portrayed, literally, as aliens to the narrator (Burns 2001).

The title story, ‘Gli Orsi (63-93)’ is introduced by a quotation from Leopardi that indicates Ballestra’s desire to distance herself from her literary models: ‘se si dovessero seguire i gran principii prudenziali e marchegiani di mio padre, scriveremmo sempre sopra gli argomenti del secolo di Aronne’ (*Gli Orsi* p7). As much as the introductory quotation to *La guerra degli Antò* expresses deference to Ballestra’s literary ‘padre’, Arbasino, this one expresses unwillingness to follow meekly in his footsteps. This attitude is borne out by the text itself, a fictionalised account of the 1993 *Ricerca* conference at which Ballestra read an extract from *La guerra degli Antò* and also from Tondelli’s *Altri Libertini*. The ‘orsi’ of the title are the young writers invited to the conference by the Gruppo 63, and the text is a blatant and cutting satire of the Italian literary world, which is portrayed as self-important, excessively introspective and extremely pompous. The penultimate paragraph of the story warns that, however far from this attitude the young authors may consider themselves to be, ‘da orso a pavone il passo è brevissimo’ (*Gli Orsi* p29), and the portrait of the Gruppo 63’s frontmen in this text is certainly not a flattering one.

Ballestra does not hesitate to name names in this story: including Leonetti, Balestrini, Sanguineti, Pagliarani, Porta, and Guglielmi. Her – once more eponymous – narrator is summoned to the conference by Renato Omissis (immediately recognised by literary critics as Renato Barilli) who is at pains to point out that he is important, whereas she is not. No deference is shown to the well-known Italian critics and authors satirised in ‘Gli Orsi (63-93)’: Ballestra refers to Stefano Benni as ‘vecchio cocco di casa’; Walter Pedullà as ‘intellettuale contadino’; Aldo Busi is characterised as a troupe of ‘danzatori di mambo fra i più autoriferiti mai visti’ and Cavazzoni becomes ‘una fata

coi baffi' (all *Gli Orsi* p23). The most sustained description of any of the Gruppo 63 is devoted to Arbasino, but it is evidently satirical. The praise heaped on Arbasino ('il re di tutti i re', 'il maestro', 'mito', *Gli Orsi* p24 and p25) reaches ironic excess. His contribution to the 63-93 conference, made by video link, is mocked for his appearance, self-importance and propensity to name-drop:

la bibliografia e i meriti sono sterminati, l'importazione di idee, effetti, dispositivi, più che grandiosa; in pochissimi anni sprovvincializzando a colpi di revolverate entusiastiche e lacanismi e psicologismi e genettismi il Pecorame Muto che aveva caratterizzato la cultura italiana prima, durante e dopo il Ventennio (*Gli Orsi* p24).

In this text, Ballestra's awareness of Arbasino's literary techniques is not used to invite comparisons with Arbasino's work, but to distance herself from it. Ballestra's satire on the Gruppo 63, and particularly Arbasino, expresses a desire to move away from the close links with earlier generations of authors, fostered by the *Ricerca* conferences, towards a more individual and mature literary style. In conclusion, there is a clear, but evolving link between Ballestra and Arbasino in Ballestra's writing. Although in her early work Ballestra acknowledges Arbasino's influence, she always adopts a critical stance towards his writing and challenges the linguistic and structural techniques employed in *Fratelli d'Italia* by their ironic redeployment in her own work. In *Gli Orsi*, however, she challenges Arbasino and also the rest of the Gruppo 63 more explicitly, in an attempt to separate her writing from being associated with theirs.

3b. Marginal youth: Pasolini, Tondelli and Santacroce

Rather than highlighting associations with the avantgarde, if pulp authors have linked themselves to any Italian tradition at all, it is a line of writing both about and from the standpoint of dissident, marginalised youth, specifically to Tondelli's writing in the 1980s. However, this tradition stretches back further than this, to Pasolini. Guided by declarations made by pulp authors themselves, critics have passed over pulp's potential associations with Pasolini in order to focus more closely on Tondelli, who functioned as an editorial guide, as well as a literary model for young authors in the late 1980s and early 1990s. He is widely credited with pioneering interest in young authors during this time through a number of editorial initiatives, including the successful *Under 25* project. *Under 25*, launched by Tondelli in conjunction with Transeuropa publishers, aimed to give young and previously unpublished authors a foothold in the publishing industry. Invitations to submit texts were published in youth magazines, such

as *Rockstar* and *Linus*. A selection of the texts were published in the *Under 25* anthologies: *Giovani Blues* (Transeuropa, 1986), *Belli & Perversi* (Transeuropa, 1987) and *Papergang* (Transeuropa, 1990). The *Papergang* anthology contained texts by authors subsequently classified as pulp, such as Silvia Ballestra and Giuseppe Culicchia. Critical treatment of Tondelli's influence has focussed on the narrow group of young authors who published in these *Under 25* anthologies.²² In order to move on from this, after some general indications of how Pasolini's and Tondelli's influence are expressed in pulp, I will consider how this dissident tradition is manifested in the work of an author not involved in Tondelli's *Under 25* project, Isabella Santacroce's novel, *Fluo*.

Pasolini's *Ragazzi di vita* (1955) and *Una vita violenta* (1959) provide some of the first precedents in postwar Italian literature for pulp's representation of the language of marginalised youth and for the sometimes violent depiction of social exclusion and otherness. The contrast between Pasolini's controversial public persona and the views that he reveals in his writing is very similar to the ways in which pulp authors project an image of their work that is not always entirely substantiated by analysis of the texts themselves. *Ragazzi di vita* and *Una vita violenta* may be perceived as both thematic and linguistic precedents for pulp. Both are set in Roman slums and follow the lives of a group of male petty criminals (adolescents, men and boys). *Ragazzi di vita* is structured as a series of short narratives about a group of these characters, whereas *Una vita violenta* has a more conventional novel structure. There is a lot of casual brutality in both novels: the characters lead hard, poverty-stricken lives, behave with an ingrained callousness towards each other, suffer terrible accidents and many die young. Tommaso Puzzilli, the protagonist of *Una vita violenta*, dies of tuberculosis at the end of the novel at the age of twenty; his twin younger brothers both die in infancy, one through illness and the other in an accident; Tommaso's friend Lello has an accident that mutilates his hand and leg, and is reduced to begging in the street with his wounds on display; whilst in the final story of *Ragazzi di vita* Il Riccetto watches a younger boy, Genesio, swept away by the river that he is trying to swim across, and although he is moved almost to tears, he knows it is futile to try to save him.

²² For example, G. Ronchini, *Il cammino degli "Under 25": Percorsi della narrativa italiana negli anni novanta*, On Demand, www.guaraldi.it (last viewed August 2004). See also A. Spadaro, *Laboratorio 'Under 25': Tondelli e i nuovi narratori italiani*, Reggio Emilia: Edizioni Diabasis, 2000, and by the same author, 'Giovani narratori tra esuberanza e smarrimento. G. Culicchia, S. Ballestra, E. Brizzi', in *La civiltà cattolica*, 1995, 2, 118-131. Tondelli's influence on pulp is also discussed in C. Bernardi, 'Pulp and other fictions: critical debate on the new Italian narrative', in *Bulletin of the Society for Italian Studies*, 1997, 30, 4-12, Filippo La Porta's *La nuova narrativa italiana*, Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1999; M. Trecca's *Parola d'autore*, Lecce, ARGO, 1995 and L. Gervasutti's *Dannati e sognatori*, Paisan di Prato: Campanetto, 1998.

Both *Ragazzi di vita* and *Una vita violenta* are narrated in the third person: the characters' language is dysphemistic and mainly borrowed from Roman 'brigante' slang. The characters of *Ragazzi di vita* speak only in this dysphemistic dialect, characterised by its non-standard verb forms and slang words, mainly but not only in the semantic fields of money, crime and sex. For example, they use 'piotta' and 'fronna' for a 100 lire note, 'corpo' and 'sacco' for a 1000 lire note, 'carbubba' for 'carabinieri', 'cassetto' for 'vigile', 'beverino' for 'carcere', 'arrazzare' and 'arrappare' for 'eccitare', and 'zinne' for 'seni'. There are also many indicators of non-standard pronunciation, and the repetition of verbs, for example in the phrase, 'è ito a fasse 'a comunione, è ito' (*Ragazzi di vita* p4). The narrator speaks a more standardised language than that used by the characters in both novels. For instance, although the narrator of *Ragazzi di vita* reveals traces of slang usage, this is mainly on a lexical level, for instance: 'era quel fijo de na mignotta del Riccetto con degli altri amici. Così andò in giro con loro' (*Ragazzi di vita* p4).

Many thematic and linguistic precedents for this dissident literary strand, and ultimately for pulp, emerge even from this brief summary. In depicting characters who use a regional, urban slang to express themselves, Pasolini sets a precedent for some of the patterns of language use in pulp. Pasolini's novels are thoroughly imbued with a concern for marginalised social groups and cruelty that is central to many pulp texts such as *Gioventù Cannibale*, Isabella Santacroce's writing, Culicchia's *Tutti giù per terra*, *Paso Doble* and *Bla Bla Bla*, and Nove's *Superwoobinda*, whilst the injury suffered by Antò Lu Purk in *La guerra degli Antò* recalls the mutilation suffered by Lello in *Una vita violenta*. Niccolò Ammaniti's short story, 'Seratina', in *Gioventù Cannibale*, co-written with Luisa Brancaccio, and his collection of short stories, *Fango*, shares its Roman setting and some elements of its language with Pasolini's novels.²³ Like Pasolini's characters, Ammaniti's characters use non-standard language and slang, albeit of a different kind: although they are not the poor, slum dwelling thieves of Pasolini's Rome but wealthier, often middle class characters, who use a youthful slang. For example, in 'Seratina', they use their own neologisms alongside interjections like 'non esiste' ('Seratina' p11), borrowings and adaptations from English, for example 'il giubbotto oversize' and 'sniffata', from the verb 'to sniff' ('Seratina' p12), and also

²³ Stein has suggested that the title of this collection is adapted from the film *Fargo*: however, it could also be interpreted as a reference to Pasolini. 'Fango' and 'fanga' are much used terms in *Ragazzi di vita* and *Una vita violenta*, and mud becomes emblematic of the deprived circumstances in which the novels are set. By entitling his collection of short stories *Fango* Ammaniti makes a connection between the scenarios depicted by Pasolini and his own writing.

suffixes which turn 'canna' (meaning 'spinello') into 'cannino' and 'cannetta' ('Seratina' p7 and p14 respectively).

In both Ammaniti and Pasolini there is a common concern for social cruelty and violence: brutality, futile death and callousness permeate Ammaniti's *Fango* and 'Seratina'. The cast of characters in *Fango* – drug traffickers, criminals and sexual deviants – is consistent with the type of characters used by Pasolini, and in this sense, Ammaniti's social world is akin to Pasolini's. Likewise, there is a great deal of brutality and futile death in Ammaniti's pulp fiction: for instance, gang rape and murder are the subjects of 'Rispetto'; 'Ti sogno, con terrore' is about a serial killer, and in the opening story, 'L'ultimo capodanno dell'umanità', all the inhabitants of an apartment block are killed in an explosion, except for the one who was attempting to commit suicide. Elements of these concerns are also present in Ammaniti's later works, set outside the city: *Ti prendo e ti porto via* also deals with similar themes of exclusion, and *Io non ho paura* examines a young child's increasing awareness of social brutality, as the plot centres on a boy who discovers that his parents are involved in a kidnapping.

However, the nature of Pasolini's social concerns, and the way in which he expresses them, is distinct from pulp. Although Pasolini goes some way to adopting the language of his characters, his narrator is removed from the social group described in his novels: he has only the role of observer and commentator. Pasolini's involvement with the social groups and scenarios that he depicts is questionable: he approaches them from a sympathetic, intellectual, but above all nostalgic standpoint. Pasolini's portrayal of these characters is clearly highly politicized, tied to nostalgia for a pre-mass culture society, and imbued with notions of 'folk' culture, pertaining to lower social classes. The inclusion of a glossary at the end of both *Ragazzi di vita* and *Una vita violenta* further highlights this stance, revealing a different relationship between author, characters and readers than that expressed in pulp.

Even Ammaniti, who is unusual for a pulp author in that he uses the third person narrator in many of his pulp short stories, adopts a language similar in register and cultural references to his characters. As shown by the examples of Enrico Brizzi's writing, and Silvia Ballestra's work, a great deal of pulp is narrated in the first person. Furthermore, the narrators of pulp texts frequently address the reader(s) directly, as their equals and in their own non-standard language. This raises interesting questions about the relationship between author, characters and narrator in Pasolini and pulp: relationships that reveal the authors' stance on the cultural scenarios depicted in their novels. Pasolini maintains a certain linguistic, as well as cultural distance from his

characters, and expects the linguistic gap between character and reader to be greater still. Pulp authors' linguistic expectations are very different. The first person narrators of pulp fiction are often highly self-referential characters, and their youthful slang is indistinguishable from that used by the other characters. Furthermore, no effort is made to explain youth slang terms to the reader, who must rely on their own cultural and linguistic competence to extract meaning from sometimes very cryptic texts. As I showed in the example of Rossana Campo's writing in Chapter 2, this competence is expected to cover foreign languages; but as Ballestra's writing demonstrates, dialect is not part of this linguistic world. Linguistically, therefore, pulp authors are closer to their characters than Pasolini is to his, and the reader is expected to be so too. Culturally, however, an element of distance between authors and characters remains in some pulp texts. This is particularly evident in works like Ballestra's *La guerra degli Antò*, in which the narrator accepts and is fluent in the same cultural codes as the characters, but uses greater fluency in these codes to criticise the characters' less reflective approach to them. Whereas the narrators and character of pulp fiction have a shared cultural background, many pulp authors are careful to establish a critical distance between themselves and their characters. Furthermore, the ideological and ethical stance inherent Pasolini's use of language is also different to that used in pulp. I will return to these points in my discussion of the use of popular culture in the next chapter.

For most pulp fiction, Pasolini's influence is filtered through Tondelli's writing, rather than providing a direct source of inspiration. Pasolini's concern for the socially disadvantaged, his representation of marginalised youth, his treatment of sexuality, and his use of a youthful, urban slang provide a clear precedent for Tondelli's *Altri libertini* (Feltrinelli, 1980), which has in turn been identified as a mandatory point of reference for many pulp authors by many critics (Pezzarossa 1999, Trecca 1995, Carnero 1998, Gervasutti 1998, Pallavicini 1999, Panzeri 1994, Pomilio 2000, Spadaro 1995, Berisso 2001, Arvigo 1997). Like Pasolini, Tondelli was a controversial figure: openly homosexual, willing to challenge linguistic, literary and cultural conventions in his writing, and prosecuted for obscenity because of this. Both *Altri libertini* and Tondelli's second novel, *Pao Pao*, are set firmly in the world of youth culture and formative experiences. *Pao Pao* narrates the story of a young man during his year of military service, whereas the narrators of *Altri libertini* tell the stories of young homosexuals, transsexuals and drug users from their own standpoint, and use 'their language in a calculated assault on standards of literary convention' (Duncan 1999 p60). The lexical mix in *Altri libertini* has more in common with the stylisation of youth language in pulp

as described in Chapter 2 than the language used by the Gruppo 63, as illustrated by the example of Arbasino, above.²⁴ Tondelli uses words from youth slangs, such as ‘una medusa’ (‘un attaccabottoni molto noioso’); foreign expressions and adapted borrowings, such as ‘freakettino’, from the English ‘freak’ (*Altri Libertini* p45) and ‘un drinkaccio’ (*Altri Libertini* p109); neologisms such as ‘ramazzare’ (‘scontrarsi, cozzare’), and ‘intorto’ (‘a chat up’); dialect words and phrases, ‘l’è minga veira’ (*Altri Libertini* p9), and vulgarities. Like many pulp texts, Tondelli frequently uses ‘cazzo’, ‘fottuto’ and other dysphemisms, as in ‘a noi non ci frega un bel niente della nostra reputazione, soprattutto in questo merdaio che è Rèz, cioè Reggio Emilia, puttanaio in cui per malasorte noi si abita’ (*Altri Libertini* p25) and this string of insults, hurled from one character to another ‘bruttafiga, smaialata, trojara, mangiacazzi a tradimento e bocchinara e chiavicon a paciana e gugiolona’ (*Altri Libertini* p125).

Tondelli’s initiatives to help young authors, and his early death, have helped to make him a cult figure for pulp authors, and the influence of his linguistic style is evident in much of their writing. In his recommendations to young authors sending texts to the *Under 25* project, Tondelli advised the use of language and themes broadly similar to his own, with an emphasis on youth cultures and colloquial, oral linguistic styles, claiming that ‘il modo più semplice è scrivere come si parla (e questo è già in sé un fatto nuovo, perché la lingua cambia continuamente), ma non è il più facile’ (Tondelli 2001).²⁵ The links between the type of language used in *Altri Libertini* and the language of 1990s pulp is also emphasised because *Altri Libertini* pre-empts many of pulp’s stylistic preoccupations.²⁶ In particular, critics observe Tondelli’s willingness to experiment with a variety of ‘low’ linguistic varieties and cultural influences, such as music, film, literature, slangs and dialects (Spadaro 1995, Pomilio 2000). In uniting

²⁴ In the following paragraph, definitions of words given in brackets are taken from Campbell 1987, which contains a brief glossary of youth language and other non-standard terms in *Altri Libertini*. The editions of *Altri Libertini* and *Pao Pao* used are contained in P. V. Tondelli (2000) *Opere: Romanzi, teatro, racconti*, Milan: Bompiani.

²⁵ It may be argued that the later and varied development of the *Under 25* authors shows that Tondelli was not attempting to impose a uniform ‘youth style’, but instead to use *Under 25* as a well defined cultural project (Cardone, Galato et al. 1996). Contarini-Hak 1994-1995 points out that Tondelli’s strategy is not strictly literary experimentation but instead a response to commercial imperatives: that in removing the difference between the spoken and written language, writing becomes accessible to non-habitual readers, who are more familiar with other, audiovisual cultures: ‘c’est permettre aux lecteurs de s’identifier à des personnages qui parlent comme leurs copains, comme leurs héros quotidiens, comme eux-mêmes’ (Contarini-Hak 1994-1995 p381).

²⁶ In the introduction to *Giovani Blues*, Tondelli made an observation which holds equally true for young writers in the 1990s: ‘questa generazione di ventenni [ha] alle spalle l’universo indiscriminato della società culturale o più semplicemente dell’informazione di massa. Abbiamo detto di tutta una serie di archetipi e di eroi desunti dalle strips di avventure, dai serial televisivi, dal cinema, dalla letteratura di consumo. Inevitabilmente tutto ciò confluisce nello stile e nel linguaggio letterario dei ragazzi. In alcuni casi, pochi in verità, il background generazionale viene assunto ironicamente come vero e proprio linguaggio’ (*Giovane Blues* p23).

these varied elements, Tondelli brings together a host of 'high' and 'low' cultural and linguistic influences in his writing, from both Italian and Anglophone cultures, thus creating a model for 1990s pulp.

Like pulp, Tondelli's work draws on literary models that include Pasolini, American literature, and the Gruppo 63.²⁷ Tondelli's characters feel deeply rooted in their region of origin (Emilia-Romagna) but, like the characters of 1990s pulp, are at the same time strongly attracted to foreign cultures: many also undertake 'formative' journeys but return home with their expectations unfulfilled. In *Altri Libertini* 'Viaggio' and 'Autobahn' also deal with the theme of youthful journeys, and reprise the circular narrative structure of both *Fratelli d'Italia*, which precedes Tondelli's book, and *La guerra degli Antò*, which follows it. Tondelli's writing displays an attraction towards Northern Europe, particularly Amsterdam and Berlin, but also to America (see for instance, 'Viaggio' in *Altri Libertini* and *Un Weekend Postmoderno* for evidence of this), locations that are also highly charged with mythical connotations for the protagonists of pulp. Furthermore, the American authors cited by Tondelli in *Altri Libertini* and *Pao Pao* (Chandler, Burroughs, Kerouac, Bukowski) are the same as those referred to in pulp (La Porta 1999, Tani 1990): for example, in *Pao Pao* the narrator shuns an American girl he meets in Rome, because 'non conosce i romanzi di Kerouac, Scott Fitzgerald le dice niente, Norman Mailer meno che meno, Hemingway, be' questo sì, ha fatto un riassuntino a scuola del Vecchio e il mare. Basta! Basta! Mi alzo' (*Pao Pao* p211). Tondelli's obvious receptiveness to these American authors may be one reason why pulp authors, who also find American writing more accessible than much Italian fiction, have so willingly accepted him as a model: and vice versa, their use of his writing as a model may also explain their admiration for American literature.

The stories in *Altri Libertini* narrate a similar sentiment of social marginalisation to Pasolini's characters, and in turn create a model for pulp fiction. Like Pasolini, Tondelli is concerned with the representation of marginalised youth, usually focussing on male drug users, petty criminals and homosexuals, although one of the stories, 'Mimi e istrioni', focusses on a group of predominantly female friends: the narrator, Pia, her female friends Sylvia and Nanni, and their bisexual male friend Benny.²⁸ Like Tondelli

²⁷ See Pomilio 2000, Tani 1990, Contarini-Hak 1994-1995 and La Porta 1999b for a number of perspectives on Tondelli's function as the link between the Gruppo 63 and pulp. This point of view argues that Tondelli's writing draws together literary and cultural influences of the 1960s and 1970s. Nonetheless, there is an opposing point of view that argues that Tondelli, Palandri and others of their generation are estranged from the practice of avantgarde experimentation and are not actively politically engaged (Bernardi 1998): both claims have some validity.

²⁸ 'Mimi e istrioni' in *Altri Libertini*, p25-48, Bompiani, 2000.

and Pasolini, Santacroce is concerned for the fate of vulnerable young people who are brutalized by their circumstances. However, Santacroce adapts the models provided by Tondelli and Pasolini to make them relevant to 1990s youth culture, whilst maintaining both their controversial nature and elements of social and ethical concerns. Whereas Tondelli and Pasolini created controversy in their times (but would not necessarily have done so in the 1990s) with their representations of male homosexuality, much of Santacroce's fiction explores issues around female sexuality. In particular, her later novels *Destroy* and *Luminal* are concerned with female homosexuality, a subject which has only a marginal presence in Italian literature. Furthermore, Santacroce moves away from Tondelli's and Pasolini's concerns with the dehumanising effects of economic and social poverty to focus on the equally damaging consequences of emotional poverty and deprivation. Whereas Pasolini and Tondelli emphasise society's brutal treatment of young male homosexuals, and the effects that this has on the characters concerned, Santacroce's focus is also on the family's importance in providing emotional support for young people. Most of Santacroce's writing explores the effects of family break-ups and the negative emotional effects that dysfunctional families, and particularly neglectful mothers, have on vulnerable young women. At several points in *Fluo* the negative impact of the narrator's family break up is explicitly stated, specifically when she states 'la paura che il sogno diventi incubo è grande, come mio padre e mia madre che raccontano il loro amore finito' (*Fluo* p104).

Fluo details the adventures of the eighteen year old Starlet, on holiday in Rimini with her parents. Starlet's father has disappeared after starting an affair with a much younger woman, and her mother deals with the situation with a combination of tranquilisers and beauty therapies, leaving Starlet to cope alone. She attempts to fill the emotional void left by her parents' lack of interest in her welfare by experimenting with drink and drugs with her group of friends. The associations between *Fluo* and Pasolini's novels can be seen in Santacroce's treatment of sexuality, her depiction of the casual brutality and (in this case, sexual and emotional) violence that surrounds her characters, and her characters' use of an urbanised, cryptic slang. Like *Ragazzi di vita* and *Una vita violenta*, Santacroce's novels are full of wasted young lives, as her characters struggle to deal with their circumstances. The narrative revolves around the protagonist, Starlet, Edie, her bisexual male friend, and her female friends, Moni, Nina, Laura and Sabrina. Edie's parents are so disinterested in their son that they believe him to be a naïve virgin, leading Starlet to wonder 'come si fa ad avere un figlio con così tanto casino addosso e non accorgersi di niente' (*Fluo* p43); Nina's brother is a heroin addict with AIDS, and

rapists, tricksters and drug dealers create a climate of fear in the area where she lives; Laura's mother, terrified that her promiscuous lifestyle may have left her with AIDS, lives on a combination of whisky, tranquilisers and other medications; whilst the fourteen year old Sabrina, who 'a undici anni è stata violentata da uno schifoso pederasta amico di family, così pensa mangiandosi un tot di ecstasy di salvare la sua testa' (*Fluo* p77), has been left at home alone whilst her parents go on a romantic holiday to Cuba. The group of friends lead a hedonistic lifestyle, turning their apartment into a filthy hovel and spending all their money on alcohol and drugs, whilst relying on casual acquaintances to buy them food.

The similarities between Santacroce's *Fluo* and Tondelli's 'Mimi e istrioni' are so striking that this short story may be described as a template for Santacroce's novel. The wayward, hedonistic behaviour of the characters in *Fluo*, the way in which they are treated by characters outside their group, and the author's attitude to their characters is extremely reminiscent of Tondelli's text. The composition of the group in *Fluo* is very similar to that in 'Mimi e istrioni'. Both Tondelli's group of friends, 'le Splash', and Santacroce's characters are presented as marginalised individuals. 'Mimi e istrioni' begins with a declaration of social exclusion by the narrator, Pia: 'i maligni noi ci chiamano le Splash, perché a sentir loro saremmo quattro assatanate pidocchiose che non han voglia di far nulla, menchemeno lavorare e solo gli tira la passera [...] è del tutto inutile che quando ci vedono passare a braccetto o in auto ferme al semaforo, ci gridino dietro uscendo dai bar e dai portici o abbassando i finestrini delle loro Mercedes: "Veh le Splash, i rifiùt ed Rèz"' ('Mimi e istrioni' p25). Santacroce's narrator describes a similar condition. Starlet feels the negative judgements of others: after dying her hair purple, Starlet remarks 'c'è chi si sdegna, chi spettegola sullo schifo di certi giovani, chi borbotta "ma dove siamo arrivati", chi si gira dall'altra parte, chi conclude "avrà l'Aids", chi allontana i bambini e storie del genere' (*Fluo* p34). Negative judgements about Starlet's sexual behaviour, based only on her appearance, are even made by members of her family: 'mia madre dice che sembro una puttana. I pantaloncini sono troppo corti, i tacchi troppo alti, il rossetto troppo scuro, tutto troppo insomma e più mi rompe il cazzo con convinzioni schife, più io esagero' (*Fluo* p14), and 'come dice mia nonna è l'abito che fa il monaco. Proprio così. Sembro una drogata: sono una drogata. Sembro una puttana: sono una puttana. E così via fino alla nausea' (*Fluo* p33). In both *Fluo* and 'Mimi e istrioni', the author sides with the characters against those who voice these negative judgements, presenting their marginal condition as the product of a brutal and judgemental society. Santacroce's sympathy for her

characters is evident in her explanation of their transgressive and hedonistic behaviour in her descriptions of their family backgrounds. The two narratives also follow very similar timescales: both sets of friendships are finite, and the end of the friendships corresponds with both the end of the narratives and the death of one of the characters. The narrative of *Fluo* is confined to the summer months of Starlet's holiday: in 'Mimi e istrioni' Pia announces that 'le Splash' split up for a month every summer, but 'quando ci si ritrova a settembre si capisce che qualcosa di nuovo è purtroppo arrivato. E non sarà mai più come prima' ('Mimi e istrioni' p46). Starlet's excesses culminate in the discovery of a nameless Dutch acquaintance's corpse in the bathroom, thus replicating the ending of 'Mimi e istrioni', in which Nanni dies from a drug overdose.

In 'Mimi e istrioni', the protagonists' main preoccupations are sex and clothes. There are clear parallels between the detailed descriptions of the protagonists' often provocative dress in *Fluo* and similar descriptions in 'Mimi e istrioni'. For example, 'ho su dei blue-jeans stinti stinti con le bretellone pal-color e una comicetta aperta sul davanti che mi fa le tette penzolari, che mi piace così, e inoltre due stivalacci di pecora che purtroppo si vedono solo se sto aggrappata allo sgabello dell'American bar' ('Mimi e istrioni' p36). Similarly, the narrator of *Fluo* describes her appearance in obsessive detail, for example 'sempre più magra e sempre più pallida, con vestiti barboni addosso e quell'aria vissuta che mi piace tanto. Infilo collant bucati neri, anfibì distrutti e abondo con l'eye-liner' (*Fluo* p14). On several occasions in the book Santacroce goes into great detail about Starlet's tastes in clothes and make-up. Appearance is a significant component of the system of meaning in *Fluo* and decoding Starlet's style provides an insight into the criticisms that Santacroce articulates in this novel.

Starlet's controversial and striking dress is a means for her to exteriorize her emotional insecurities. Starlet refers to her style as 'barbone', and emphasises her taste for clothes with holes in them, 'adoro le smagliature, i buchi vistosi' (*Fluo* p11). Even the soles of her shoes are almost worn through 'vecchie Creepers bicolori comprate al Jack and Gill dalla suola ormai a sottiletta' (*Fluo* p11). The holes in Starlet's clothes stand for emotional, rather than financial poverty: Santacroce uses them as a metaphor for the emotional void left by her mother's lack of affection for her. Although Starlet's mother never appears as a character in the text, Starlet's sparse but telling references to her emphasise the extent to which she feels her absence. For example, 'mia madre si sarà svegliata e girerà in ciabatte per casa cercando una figlia non ancora rientrata alle cinque del mattino' (*Fluo* p50); 'forse in questo momento starà facendo della ginnastica facciale e sentirà la mia mancanza quando allo specchio non potrà avermi vicino

immobile per almeno cinque minuti di face-control' (*Fluo* p77), and in the midst of her birthday party 'vorrei tanto che mia madre fosse qui' (*Fluo* p89). Starlet's fantasies that her mother is missing her are all the more tragic as the reader is fully aware that Starlet's mother is totally self-absorbed.

Starlet's obsessive attention to appearance and fashion also invites associations between *Fluo* and American writing, particularly Bret Easton Ellis' satirical novel *American Psycho*. Starlet draws attention to this link twice in the narrative, referring to her friend's tales about her mother as 'racconti alla Bret Easton Ellis con lady-manager in Jaguar cabrio a ingoiare Librium e Valium e Nembutal e cicatrici di lifting facciali ben nascoste e minorenni nudi dentro Jacuzzi milionarie' (*Fluo* p67), and remarking that 'dopo *American Psycho* sono andata di testa per storie di ordinaria follia' (*Fluo* p54). *American Psycho* alternates between gruesome and detailed descriptions of the violent acts committed by the first person narrator on his female victims and relentless inventory of the designer products from which he carefully constructs his image. The obsessive and precise listing of designer products in Santacroce's text shows clear parallels with Ellis' writing. Patrick Bateman, the protagonist of *American Psycho*, narrates his morning preparations in extensive detail:

I prefer to use Greune Natural Revitalising Shampoo, the conditioner and the Nutrient Complex. These are formulas that contain D-panthenol, a vitamin-B-complex factor; polysorbate 80, a cleansing agent for the scalp, and natural herb [...] before applying the Mousse A Raiser, a shaving cream by Pour Hommes, I press a hot towel against my face for two minutes to soften abrasive beard hair. Then I always slather on a moisturizer (to my taste, Clinique) and let it soak in for a minute (Easton Ellis 1991 p26-7).

Starlet goes into similar obsessive detail about the application of her make-up:

devo usare sulle palpebre della polvere oro 'Les quatre ombres satins et mats 04', poi sfumare il tutto con la matita arancio 24 ore di Deborah, usare il mascara allungatore della Collistar viola lavorandolo come si conviene senza dimenticare le tre essenziali passate, intensificare lo sguardo con 'Le Regard noir de Chanel', così in trend con il face piercing, e per finire enfatizzare le sopracciglia con 'Moduleur ombre et lumières magenta 06' (Santacroce 1999 p59).

Starlet's use of cosmetics also speaks of a desire to shock, and also to disguise herself. On several occasions, descriptions of excessive, unnatural make-up in the book clearly recall the make-up used in Kubrick's film of *A Clockwork Orange*. For instance, 'uso il fondotinta bianco neve appena importato da Londra e il rossetto Silver glitter sempre importato da capitali britanniche. Lo metto dappertutto, sulle palpebre, sulle labbra,

sulla lingua. Decoro la narice destra con un anellino veramente indio e la fronte con brillantini azzurri ipersfaccettati' (*Fluo* p37), and more explicitly 'Moni si è comprata delle ciglia finte che fanno molto Arancia meccanica. Fantastiche, tenere e violente, come lei. In questo periodo si trucca moltissimo, a volte non la riconosco' (*Fluo* p42). The association with *A Clockwork Orange* is an important one, because, as in *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*, it serves to underline the transgressive image that Santacroce seeks to project. The transgressive, provocative subject matter of *Fluo*, its focus on marginalised youth, the promiscuous, experimental sexual behaviour of the characters, and the importance of a cryptic, youth slang to the narrative all link Santacroce's writing to the precedents provided by Tondelli and further back, by Pasolini's writing.

4. Conclusions

An understanding of the gap between the projected, superficial image of pulp, and the textual references revealed by a deeper analysis are key to understanding many of the important themes and tensions in this writing. Pulp authors have claimed to disassociate their writing from many novels by previous generations of Italian authors, but this has not impeded their desire to emphasise links with foreign literature, or often controversial figures from recent Italian literature, like Tondelli. In constructing affiliations with foreign authors and some contentious Italian figures, whilst attempting to minimise links with canonical literature and some other Italian authors, pulp authors attempt to set themselves apart from previous Italian literature in order to create a more exotic, edgy and fashionable image for themselves. Whereas pulp writers make statements linking their work to American literature, and include similar references in their fiction, the language, themes and structures of pulp texts reveal a strong link between pulp and the Italian plurilingual tradition.

Associations with Anglophone and American writing serve mainly to project a transgressive and subversive image. These associations are also posited as a form of literary justification for the use of non-standard, colloquial and frequently dysphemistic language in written fiction. Like Italian youth language varieties, pulp therefore explicitly declares an affinity to Anglo-American cultures, but it also articulates an unease, if not an opposition, to some elements of this country's culture and politics. Pulp therefore oscillates between a desire to embrace American culture and a need to maintain a distance from it. Although the notion of using the spoken language as a

model for the written, literary variety, is absorbed by pulp at least in part from American fiction, as Brizzi's writing shows, the contact with American literature only in translation mediates this influence. It is further tempered by an influence from the writing of some of the Gruppo 63, like Arbasino. This raises questions of pulp's complex relationship with Italian literature, the multifaceted relationship between reader(s), author, and narrator in this fiction, and, perhaps most significantly, who the intended reader might be. Although pulp's language, discussed in Chapter 2, seems to suggest that pulp is aimed at a young readership, its engagement with literature and literary theory implies that there is more critical and thematic depth to pulp than the language initially suggests. This in turn suggests that pulp is intended for educated and sophisticated readers who are also able to detect pulp's dual relationship with Italian literature.

Pulp authors are reluctant to openly acknowledge their relationship with the Italian literary tradition, which leads to a convoluted and confused treatment of this tradition in their writing. On the one hand, pulp draws on the Italian plurilingual tradition, by adapting models created by Pasolini, Arbasino and Tondelli. On the other, it takes a critical stance towards the models that it recognises as influential, subverting them and treating them with irony. There is a strong tension in pulp between a desire to appear different from the Italian literary establishment, and to appear shocking and transgressive, and an equally strong but less openly expressed aspiration to become part of this same establishment. As the example of Silvia Ballestra's writing shows, the extent of pulp's literary links with the Gruppo 63 are questioned by these authors, who use the linguistic and literary models provided by the Gruppo 63 as a springboard from which to develop their own literary style.

An understanding of pulp's close relationships to Italian literary tradition also reveals much about pulp's attitude towards popular culture and its social and ethical stance. Pulp authors are clearly influenced by a number of left-wing authors and intellectuals, including Pasolini and members of the Gruppo 63. Their concepts of what constitutes popular culture, and their attitude towards this culture, are clearly informed by this left-wing tradition, which they develop to suit the context of the 1990s. I suggest that a significant reason for the difference in pulp authors' attitudes to Tondelli and previous generations of Italian authors lies in the different attitudes that the latter authors have to the 'low' and 'popular' cultures and languages that they depict in their writing. In the next chapter, I discuss notions of popular culture present in pulp and how they are portrayed in literature. By comparing this to other representations of popular

culture in Italian literature, and how 20th century Italian intellectuals have interpreted popular culture, I consider the ethical implications of pulp's representations of 'low', 'mass' and 'popular' cultures.

Chapter 4: Popular culture

IMAGE AND IDEOLOGY: POLITICS AND ETHICS IN PULP

1. Italian intellectuals and popular culture

1a. Notions of popular culture in Italy

In the previous chapters I have shown how the associations between pulp and left-wing literature should be seen as complementary, rather than as contrary to its use of language. Understanding the nature of the relationship between youth languages (and cultures) and ‘high’ culture and literature is key to interpreting pulp’s reference system, its views on culture and its ethical stance. As pulp’s literary sources indicate, this writing has its theoretical roots in many of the cultural concerns expressed by twentieth century left-wing intellectuals, even though, in pulp, these are combined with notions received from foreign cultures, and rewritten in an innovative way. In this chapter, I discuss the nature of pulp’s engagement with youth, mass and popular cultures, considering how the notions of culture present in pulp relate to previous generations’ concepts of ‘popular’ culture in the 20th century, beginning with Gramsci and continuing in the work of Pasolini, the Gruppo 63 and Tondelli.

Gramsci’s notions of culture, which are predicated on the basis of a cultural schism between ‘the people’ and ‘culture’, are still present in pulp, although they are represented in complex and ironic ways. Gramsci’s cultural discussions focus to a great extent on book culture and the means by which ‘il popolo’ may be provided with access to it, noting for instance that:

In Italia il termine ‘nazionale’ ha un significato molto ristretto ideologicamente e in ogni caso non coincide con ‘popolare’, perché in Italia gli intellettuali sono lontani dal popolo, cioè dalla ‘nazione’ e sono invece legati a una tradizione di casta [...]: la tradizione è ‘libresca’ e astratta e l’intellettuale tipico moderno si sente più legato ad Annibal Caro o Ippolito Pindemonte che a un contadino pugliese o siciliano’ (Q 21, § 5, p2116).

From this, Gramsci goes on to develop a train of thought that sees ‘il popolo’ as distinct and separated from ‘gli intellettuali’. Elsewhere in the *Quaderni del carcere* Gramsci describes a long tradition of ‘cosmopolitan’ Italian literary and intellectual culture being conducted in a different language to that spoken by ‘il popolo’, which results in ‘una frattura tra il popolo e gli intellettuali’, because ‘l’italiano è di nuovo una lingua scritta e non parlata, dei dotti e non della nazione’ (Q 3, § 76, p353 and p354 respectively). In

opposing 'culture' to 'the people', Gramsci establishes several principles that remained constant in left-wing cultural theory until the 1960s: namely that culture should be understood as something to be introduced to 'the people' rather than something created or enjoyed by them; that this culture should be indigeneous to Italy, and that the process of providing 'the people' with 'culture' should be politicized and educative. In this context, the role of intellectuals should be to assist 'the people' in accessing culture.

Gramsci, therefore, mainly thinks of popular culture in terms of culture 'for' the people, and these paternalistic notions remained the basis of left-wing thought after the fall of Fascism, even though Italian intellectuals and the traditional Left were increasingly forced to reckon with the influx of mass and American cultures into Italy. Intellectual reactions to 'the popular' have not always kept pace with developments in Italian society that have in turn forced changes in the nature of popular culture. Both Stephen Gundle and David Forgacs have described how, after 1945, the Italian Communist Party (hereafter PCI) continued to insist on a set of cultural policies that also emphasised the importance of book learning for the working classes and aspects of 'genuine' (Italian and folk, i.e. culture of the people) popular culture.¹ The latter included the establishment of local 'sections' for workers, women and young people that provided opportunities for recreational activities, albeit in a politicized context: for example, the Case del Popolo, the Circoli del Cinema, API (Associazione di Pionieri Italiani, disbanded in 1960) and the FGCI (Federazione Giovanile dei Comunisti Italiani). However, these policies failed to take account of 'mass' culture, like television, which soon began to displace cinema in terms of numerical popularity, thereby betraying an attitude still rooted in a dichotomous approach to culture that sees the people as estranged from 'real' culture (Gundle 2000).

As a result of the impact of mass culture, some Italian analyses of the popular began to distinguish between 'popular' culture (indigenous to Italy, dialect-based, some of which had its origins in religion and folk practice) and 'mass' culture (optimistic and light-hearted films, pop music and fashions imported from America, and a general

¹ These included policies of education for the masses, such as building up libraries and establishing reading and discussion books in its local sections; establishing the Centro del libro popolare to promote the habit of serious reading, which also organised various other initiatives, including the distribution of booklets in rural areas. In 1957 trade unionists, left-wing intellectuals and parliamentarians formed ARCI (Associazione Ricreativa Culturale Italiana) which arranged films, music, debates and lectures for its members. The PCI also established its own publisher, Editori Riuniti, in the 1950s, which published Gramsci's writings. For a more thorough discussion of these policies, see D. Forgacs, 'The Italian Communist Party and Culture', in Barański, Z.G. and Lumley, R., eds (1990) *Culture and conflict in postwar Italy: essays on mass and popular culture*, New York: St Martin's Press, p97-115 and S. Gundle (2000) *Between Hollywood and Moscow: The Italian Communists and the challenge of mass culture, 1943-1991*, Durham and London: Duke University Press.

impetus towards consumerism). Pasolini's views on mass culture are indicative of left-wing hostility towards the latter: for example, in *Scritti corsari* he singles out for particular scorn the notion of a consumer society, the impact of television and the homologisation of the youth culture. Pasolini describes television as 'un'opera di omologazione distruttrice di ogni autenticità e concretezza' (Pasolini 1975 p32) because 'non c'è niente infatti di meno idealistico e religioso del mondo televisivo' (Pasolini 1975 p73). He equates mass culture with America, and terms it a 'new fascism', which aims at 'la riorganizzazione e l'omologazione brutalmente totalitaria del mondo' (Pasolini 1975 p63). Views such as these, which condemn mass culture so unequivocally, but celebrate an idealised, rural 'folk' culture seem to have relatively little to offer in terms of precedent to pulp, in which fashion, pop music, and television are key references. However, Pasolini's underlying concerns for the fate of individuals in a mass society, and the unease about the divide between 'high' culture and 'the people' that has preoccupied left-wing thinkers back to Gramsci, still resonate strongly in pulp.

Although Pasolini's criticisms of mass culture linger in pulp, pulp authors look more to the Gruppo 63 for a theoretical model that at least acknowledges the impact of mass culture on Italian culture and society. Many of the Gruppo 63 still remain active members of the cultural establishment, with critics like Angelo Guglielmi and Renato Barilli instrumental in the launch of pulp and in guiding the critical reception of 1990s fiction. Not least for these reasons, this group's influence is very strong in pulp. In his analysis of the Gruppo 63's purposes, Renato Barilli considers the influences on the group from a socio-cultural, rather than a literary perspective.² Whereas the PCI sought to 'educate' the people and thereby distance them from their dialect-based traditions in an effort to bring them closer to 'real' culture, the Gruppo 63 turned away from dialect because the society in which it was spoken was being left behind in post-economic miracle Italy. Barilli says that neo-avantgarde members:

ritenevano che il compito primario, in quella stagione, fosse di allargare i freni, di far affluire una piena semantica, acquisendo tutte le risorse consentite da nuovi gerghi, nomenclature, usi, tenendo anche conto che, ormai, le singole lingue nazionali si andavano sempre più mescolando con apporti di lingue straniere; e che inoltre in questa crescita generale di ricchezza linguistica perfino le espressioni burocratiche [...] dovevano essere accettate: il burocratese era pur sempre preferibile al 'poetese', entro cui la tradizione aristocratica del passato aveva preteso di mantenere inchiodata la produzione lirica (Barilli 1995b p10).

² R. Barilli, (1995) 'Un percorso vettoriale', in *63/93 Trent'anni di ricerca letteraria: convegno di dibattito e di proposta*, Reggio Emilia: Elytra, p9-18.

Barilli characterizes the Gruppo 63's 'nuovo romanzo' in terms of 'normalizzazione' and 'abbassamento' (Barilli 1995b p16): a novel that aimed to reduce a perceived gap between the common language and the language of literature, and which was therefore very closely linked to the social climate of 1960s Italy – examples of this can be seen in Nanni Balestrini's novels, *Gli invisibili* and *Vogliamo tutto*, which I will discuss shortly in comparison to Aldo Nove's writing.

Despite this acknowledgement of a cultural shift in Italy towards a more urban, industrialised society, some of the Gruppo 63's theorists still display an element of 'culture for the people' that recalls Gramsci's concerns.³ In Umberto Eco's *Opera aperta* (Bompiani, 1962), mass culture means standardized, homogeneous and unchallenging culture, imposed on the masses from above and received passively by them. Like Gramsci, Eco sees the role of contemporary culture as one of educating the masses from this stultified state and enabling them to reclaim some cultural originality for themselves (*Opera aperta* p143).⁴ However, in *Apocalittici e integrati* (Bompiani, 1965), Eco takes a much more complex stance towards mass culture. To a certain extent he maintains his basic perception of mass culture voiced in *Opera aperta*, but he also shows willingness to move away from it. Although he declares that 'la cultura di massa è l'anticultura', which contradicts the cultivated, aristocratic and refined nature of 'true' culture (*Apocalittici e integrati*, p9-10), he maintains that mass culture is an important part of contemporary society. Eco argues for a need for discrimination in the study of mass culture, some of which he sees as having artistic, aesthetic and ideological merit. More than half of *Apocalittici e integrati* is devoted to the analysis of these popular culture forms: the cartoon strips 'Steve Canyon' and 'Peanuts', Superman and pop songs. Eco's notion that high and low culture are linked, that through careful analysis, popular culture can reveal theoretical concepts equal to those in 'high' culture, and can therefore be considered on the same level as more elevated cultural forms, is crucial to an understanding of pulp.

³ For example, Franco Fortini and Italo Calvino's establishment of the politicised musical group 'Cantacronache' in 1964, may be interpreted as an attempt to improve the 'quality' of popular music.

⁴ 'Malattie sociali come il conformismo o l'etero-direzione, il gregarismo e la massificazione sono appunto il frutto di una passiva acquisizione di standard di comprensione e giudizio che vengono identificati con la 'buona forma' in morale come in politica, in dietetica e nel campo della moda, a livello dei gusti estetici o dei principi pedagogici. Le persuasioni occulte e le eccitazioni subliminari di ogni genere, dalla politica alla pubblicità commerciale, fanno leva sull'acquisizione pacifica e passiva di 'buone forme' nella cui ridondanza l'uomo medio si riposa senza sforzo. Ci si chiede dunque se l'arte contemporanea, educando alla continua rottura dei modelli e degli schermi [...] non possa rappresentare uno strumento pedagogico con funzione di liberazione; e in tal caso il suo discorso supererebbe il livello del gusto e delle strutture estetiche per inserirsi in un contesto più ampio, ed indicare all'uomo moderno una possibilità di ricupero e di autonomia' (*Opera aperta* p143).

This link between ‘low’ and ‘high’ culture is not only present in Eco’s theorizing but is also inherent in the cultural activities pursued by Eco himself and other members of the Gruppo 63. Although their paths diverged significantly after the 1960s, many have been involved with the type of culture historically seen as ‘mass’ culture in Italy: for instance, the mass media, particularly television. Despite some of Eco’s criticisms of mass culture, he has always been active in the higher echelons of ‘mass’ cultural: in the 1950s he began working on cultural programmes for RAI radio and television and writing and editing for Bompiani, and in 1965 he began writing a regular column for the weekly magazine *L’espresso*. His most famous novel, *Il nome della rosa* (Bompiani, 1980), conforms to his notion of ‘opera aperta’, as it is open to many different interpretations. Although *Il nome della rosa* is not a ‘popular’ text on many levels, it may be read as one of the most ‘popular’ of written genres, the detective novel.

Other members of the Gruppo 63 have had similar interests: for instance, Angelo Guglielmi has an involvement with RAI television dating back to 1955, and was appointed director of RAI 3 in 1987, a post he held until 1994, but even this may be interpreted as production of culture ‘for the people’. Notwithstanding this engagement with mass forms of ‘popular’ culture, members of the Gruppo 63 remained actively involved in intellectual and ‘high’ culture. Umberto Eco is Professor of Semiotics at Bologna University, where Renato Barilli lectures in Estetica and Storia dell’Arte Contemporanea: Edoardo Sanguineti has taught Lettere at the Università di Genova, and both Barilli and Sanguineti have also been involved in the *Ricerca* meetings in Reggio Emilia. These more academic activities have contributed greatly to linking pulp authors and the Gruppo 63, as many pulp authors have come into contact with their literary and cultural theories while at university.

Like Pasolini and Tondelli before them, Ballestra, Brizzi and Santacroce have studied in Bologna.⁵ Enrico Brizzi has studied at the Faculty of Scienze della Comunicazione, founded by Umberto Eco, and Isabella Santacroce has studied in the Dipartimento di Arte Musica e Spettacolo (DAMS): although she is reluctant to disclose any information about her life outside her writing, it appears that her studies had a more musical bias. It is unclear how far through their courses either Brizzi or Santacroce progressed, or if they have ever graduated; but, as I will discuss with reference to Santacroce’s writing, the influence of figures like Eco can be seen in their work.⁶

⁵ Tondelli was also taught Anglo-American literature at Bologna University by the author Gianni Celati.

⁶ In an interview with Brizzi dated 31/08/2004, the author claimed that he was still registered as a student at the Università Statale di Bologna (<http://www.mediazone.info/site/it-IT/PERSONAGGI/Personaggi/brizzi.html>).

Although not all pulp authors have studied in Bologna, connections between them and previous generations of left-wing intellectuals are revealed in their writing. Rossana Campo is more thoroughly steeped in the Gruppo 63's ideas than other pulp authors: she studied Lettere at the Università di Genova under the direction of Edoardo Sanguineti, where she wrote her dissertation on Luigi Malerba.⁷ Aldo Nove has a degree in Filosofia Morale, and wrote his undergraduate dissertation on the late 19th century Marxist philosopher, Antonio Labriola; however, as I will discuss later in this chapter, his writing shows strong ideological and linguistic connections to Nanni Balestrini's.⁸ All these authors have participated at the *Ricercare* meetings in Reggio Emilia organised by ex-members of the Gruppo 63, and it is therefore reasonable to expect that they are well versed in the theories and practices of this group.

Unlike the Gruppo 63, Pasolini, or any of their predecessors, the 'pulp' generation has grown up with mass culture; a factor that has enabled them to overcome the divide between notions of 'mass' and 'popular' cultures that have coloured their predecessors' attitudes towards culture. The language of many pulp texts indicates an equally strong formative influence on these authors from mass culture. Pulp demonstrates considerable concern for the nature of contemporary mass popular culture: the setting of pulp narratives and their cultural reference systems are embedded in it. In this respect, pulp's concern for the nature of Italian 'national-popular' culture strongly echoes Gramsci's thought. Certain concerns that are foregrounded in pulp, such as the influence of foreign culture on Italian mass/popular culture can be traced directly back to Gramsci, even if the notion of what constitutes 'popular' culture for pulp authors is very different from earlier concepts of it. Pop music, television, consumption and popular fiction are fundamental to pulp's cultural reference system, and all pulp texts demonstrate critical engagement with at least one of these forms of culture. Furthermore, pulp includes fiction as a part of popular culture, and frames itself within this context. It is therefore not afraid to subject itself to the same acerbic attentions as other aspects of popular culture. The form of popular culture that each pulp author chooses to engage with, and the nature of their relationships with it illustrates these authors' artistic and intellectual individuality within the overarching framework of pulp, its theoretical stance and ethical perspective. In the rest of this chapter I discuss pulp's notions of culture, the nature of its engagement with it, and the implications of this for

⁷ Luigi Malerba, 1927–, real name Luigi Bonardi. Member of the Gruppo 63 and author of novels, plays, television and cinema scripts as well as literary criticism. Campo's links with the Gruppo 63 are personal too: her partner is Nanni Balestrini.

⁸ Antonio Labriola 1843–1904. In the early 1870s Labriola was a writer and editor for the liberal press, including the *L'Unità Nazionale* and *Il Piccolo*.

pulp's ethical and political stance. In my conclusions I discuss how pulp's standpoint on popular culture develops the line of thought on the subject that originated with Gramsci, tempering his model with non-Italian influences.

1b. The shift from politics to punk

One significant difference between the notions of popular culture expressed by previous generations of Italian intellectuals and that portrayed in pulp is that in this writing popular culture is unlinked to specific political ideologies. In 1990s Italy, party politics no longer attract the mass engagement that it did in the 1960s and 1970s.⁹ It has been remarked that:

i giovani stanno semplicemente perdendo il gusto del *fare* politica, a favore di modalità comunicative ed espressive assai più legate al *dire*, quel processo di spettacolarizzazione della politica che è uno dei portanti di questi anni [...] la politica, infine, è essenzialmente informazione (tenersi al corrente) senza partecipazione (Buzzi, Cavalli et al. 1997 p113).

Cortelazzo and Còveri's studies of the relationship between politics and Italian youth language varieties endorse this suggestion by indicating that political issues are not among the major influences on 1990s Italian youth linguistic varieties. To a certain extent, though, this disengagement with conventional political parties is counterbalanced by a piecemeal and fragmentary engagement with single issue politics. The 1997 IARD report notes that over half of Italian youth are members of an association or club, over 60% of which are recreational, whilst the remainder are groups campaigning on student, women's and human rights, ecological issues, youth issues and involvement with organisations for 'impegno sociale e assistenza' or 'collettivi'. This is reflected in pulp through its comments on social issues and the mass media, but a reluctance to comment on orthodox political issues or ideological divisions.

Italian 'youth fiction' from the 1970s, such as *Porci con le ali* (Savelli, 1976) and *Boccalone* (Bompiani, 1979), reflects the atmosphere of political engagement of this decade: both are set in the context of 1970s political terrorism and student rebellion

⁹ The 1997 IARD survey describes an apparent paradox between declarations of political activity and actual activism among 15-29 year olds. On the one hand, the number of young people who declare themselves 'politicamente impegnati' or 'al corrente della politica senza parteciparvi personalmente' reaches a high of 53.5% in 1996, compared to 42.7% in 1992. On the other hand, this apparently high level of involvement with political issues is clearly contradicted by other markers of political activity, which indicate an increasing estrangement from direct involvement in orthodox party politics.

in Italy, and both adopt a left-wing stance on these events.¹⁰ The protagonists of *Porci con le ali* protest at student demonstrations, and in *Boccalone* there are similar implications that the protagonist is involved in underground political and even terrorist activities.¹¹ In contrast, Tondelli's first two novels, *Altri libertini* (1980) and *Pao Pao* (1982) deal with social issues, such as drug use, marginalisation, homosexuality and displacement, and are removed from discourses on political ideologies such as those present in *Porci con le ali*. His stories of marginalised youth echo the increasing preoccupation with individual, rather than collective concerns, perceived in the youth cultures of that decade by critics such as Còveri 1988. This example is followed in pulp, in which the gap left by mass youth engagement with political activity is replaced by a growing preoccupation with cultural consumption. This difference is encapsulated in one metaphor, 'farsi una pera di' (to shoot up on), appropriated from drug-user slang, that is used in both *Boccalone* and *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* to refer to something enjoyable. Whereas Palandri's Enrico says 'mi faccio una pera di politica' (*Boccalone* p16), in *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* Alex opts to 'farsi una pera di MTV' (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p81). This metaphor offers an insight into a trend in pulp away from political engagement, and indicates a corresponding increase in engagement with mass forms of popular culture.

Much pulp pours scorn both on the nature of Italian politics and young people's unwillingness to engage with it, whilst also criticizing the ineffectiveness of this kind of activity. Both Brizzi's *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* and Culicchia's *Tutti giù per terra* are scathing of the ease with which the 1968 generation has abandoned its youthful commitments in favour of middle-class comforts. *Tutti giù per terra* is set in the context of the Pantera student demonstrations, but this setting only highlights more strongly the political apathy of the characters and the disillusionment they feel towards political action. Walter, the first person narrator-protagonist, comments that

¹⁰ *Porci con le ali* was published in a series entitled *Il pane e le rose*, which originated from a 1970s left-wing youth magazine of the same name. The preface to the book announces 'del vecchio giornale la collana eredita quasi tutto: dai curatori [...] al principio ispiratore, alla forma sempre un po' provocatoria, all'avanguardia del linguaggio parlato fuori delle formulette codificate del "sinistrese" [...] l'età del pubblico a cui *Porci con le ali* e tutti gli altri titoli si rivolgono, i sedici-diciotto anni vivi e contraddittori delle piazze e delle scuole, la sua voglia di capire e la povertà dei mezzi di approccio alla "cultura" con cui la classe dominante lo ghettizza, rendono essenziale, determinante, questo sforzo' (*Porci con le ali* p8).

¹¹ As Burns points out, the postfaces to the 1988 and 1997 editions of *Boccalone* demonstrate a changing approach to the political context of the novel. Whereas in the 1980s Palandri depicts the book as a document of his youth, in the 1990s he is defensive of the views he expresses within it. In the 1980s, Palandri, like Tondelli, is careful to distance his work from specifically political issues.

leggendo i giornali sembrava che fossimo di fronte a una specie di nuovo '68, per fortuna meno compromesso con pericolose ideologie... Me li immaginavo gli autori di quegli articoli, quasi tutti exsessantottini ora trasformati in affermati professionisti, in competizione quotidiana per la villa al mare, l'auto prestigiosa, le vacanze esclusive... Se dopo vent'anni i risultati sarebbero stati quelli, speravo proprio che non si trattasse di un nuovo '68 (*Tutti giù per terra* p69).

Here Walter is scathing of the actions of the 1968 generation, tempted away from their revolutionary actions, with the result that their political action has changed nothing. Walter criticises the mechanisms of democracy in Italy, where apathy leads to the rise of right-wing politics: 'arrivarono le elezioni. Come sempre al governo non cambiò nulla. L'opposizione si era frantumata così docilmente da non esistere praticamente più. Le leghe invece misero insieme un bel mucchio di voti' (*Tutti giù per terra* p72). For Walter and his contemporaries, politics is so openly corrupt that involvement with it is pointless. One of his friends dismisses political issues in just a few words: 'Per chi voto? io non sono mai andata a votare. Tanto è inutile. La maglietta me la metto questa sera allo Space-Lab?' (*Tutti giù per terra* p58). These words also resonate with a criticism that runs throughout *Tutti giù per terra*, against a preoccupation with trivial entertainment, devoid of meaning, which eclipse more significant contemporary issues: 'aumentavano i morti di AIDS e i deserti, il prezzo della benzina e l'uso di eroina, il debito pubblico e i topi nelle corsie degli ospedali, aumentava il divario tra i ricchi sempre più ricchi e i poveri sempre più poveri, eppure avevamo il campionato di calcio più bello del mondo, perché preoccuparsi?' (*Tutti giù per terra* p72).

Brizzi's Alex also criticises the 1968 generation, commenting that the mother of his friend Martino is 'perfettamente a suo agio nei panni di Signora in clark's che impiega il suo Passato Proletario solo per fornire qualche brivido esotico ai nuovi amici massonimprenditorialetaryani' (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p42). Unlike Walter, who is passively critical, but espouses no firm political belief of his own, the protagonist of *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* declares himself to be a 'red', a rebel and an anarchist: 'si sentivano rossi, radicali, anarchici. Odiavano, ricambiati, gli stronzi nazisti che proliferavano nella loro scuola, figli di figli di bottegai, commercialisti, dentisti, figli di un'ignoranza itagliana senza complessi [...] soprattutto odiavano i pinocchi di piombo delle organizzazioni di partito' (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*

p57).¹² Alex is also disillusioned with politics, with Italian political parties, and with the corrupt values they espouse, convinced that

ovunque spadroneggiava la forza e l'ignoranza, fosse quella del boss mafioso con la catena d'oro al collo e l'Uzi nel cassetto, o quella del professore supponente che ghignava delle opinioni politiche o del modo di vestire degli studenti, o quella del sottosegretario che s'ingozzava di pasta al salmone nei ristoranti romani senza pagare mai il conto (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p124-125).

This novel contains an invective running to almost three pages against the Italian political system, which includes references to the murder of judge Falconi, the mafia, Tangentopoli and the terrorist attack on Bologna station in 1980. Alienated from party politics, Alex is not passively apolitical like Walter, but instead declares affiliation to extreme political causes and organisations: 'insomma, bisognava costruire una nuova Italia, poiché la Prima Repubblica era fallita, e intanto il vecchio Alex era tornato anarchico in attesa di unirsi alla colonna Durruti con la sua bandiera rossa e nera: l'anno seguente avrebbe avuto i diciotto anche lui, e alle elezioni sarebbero stati kazzi per tutti' (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p107).¹³ Here, however, Alex typifies the kind of youth identified in the 1996 IARD report, who profess high political ideals but fail to endorse them with actions: despite his grand pronouncements, Alex takes no specifically political action in the novel. Through such apolitical and disaffected characters, the authors of pulp censure a popular culture that is devoid of intellectual foundations.

Such characters are also used to define popular culture in 1990s pulp. In a society such as the one depicted in pulp, where the existence of 'mass' cultures such as television, commercial pop music and popular fiction is an accepted fact, any definition of popular culture is complicated by the involvement of commercial interests, because 'whatever popular culture is, what is certain is that its raw materials are those which are commercially provided' (Storey 2001 p10). This success, 'popularity' in the commercial sense of the word, is measured quantitatively, and some quantitative calculation should therefore contribute to an understanding of what constitutes popular culture, but 'on its own, a quantitative index is not enough to provide an adequate definition of popular culture' (Storey 2001 p6).

¹² Note here the spelling change in 'itagliana' to denote disapproval. A similar form is used by the character of Fabio di Vasto in Ballestra's *La guerra degli Antò*, who makes 'certe riflessioni amare sull'Itaglia' (*La guerra degli Antò* p285).

¹³ Note here the spelling change from 'k' to 'c' to denote disapproval.

Considering both Italian intellectuals' concepts of popular culture and views such as these, that are more accepting of mass culture, in the rest of this chapter I discuss pulp's relationship with aspects of contemporary Italian youth and popular cultures. I focus in particular on music, television and popular fiction, which are the most frequently reoccurring contemporary cultural reference points in this fiction, whilst their statistical popularity is also greatest among the 'young' (18-25 year old) Italian population. Quantitatively, television is by far the most popular medium in 1990s Italy, as over 90% of all Italians watch it at least once a week (ISTAT 2000), but viewing figures peak among 15-29 year-olds, whose choices are dominated by films, soap operas, cultural and pop music programmes, talk shows and 'youth' programmes (Buzzi, Cavalli et al. 1997). Figures for radio listening also reach their peak in this age group, as does the popularity of reading books, even though this is the least statistically popular of the media examined in the survey (ISTAT 2000). Although pulp's notions of popular culture are no longer informed by monolithic ideologies, it still uses representation and manipulation of popular cultures to convey political and ethical concerns.

2. Music

2a. Punk

The notions of popular culture present in pulp situate this fiction in a line of left-wing thought beginning with Gramsci and continued in the postwar period by Pasolini and the Gruppo 63. However, pulp is also strongly influenced by anglophone popular music from the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. In particular, 1970s British and American punk and glam rock is a constant and crucial thematic influence in pulp. More than showing close intertextual engagement with specific songs and bands, as is the case with literary texts and music from the 1990s, in many cases pulp's relationship with punk is based on appropriation and re-use of its imagery and cultural constructs. Punk's influence is conceptual rather than specifically textual, and constant notional reference to punk in pulp is used to position this fiction within a tradition of transgression. Punk may be used as a metaphor for pulp in many ways: it was linked to subversive and often shocking imagery; it was politically and ethically ambivalent, the skills of punk musicians were often doubted, and in some cases it was uncertain whether a band was driven more by creative impulses or their manager's commercial strategies. Because of these latter ambiguities questions of authorship and identity are central to an analysis of punk;

questions which also reoccur in pulp. Even though the origins of both punk and pulp can be traced back to at least the 1950s, both enjoyed only a relatively brief season of intense notoriety before evolving into different forms of expression. Parallels with punk music inform pulp's stance on all forms of culture, not just pop music, and reference to punk underpins many of pulp's social, political and ethical criticisms. Punk may also be used as a referential basis for a skeptical critical approach to pulp, which sees this fiction as less sophisticated than I have so far suggested.

Punk's influence on pulp reveals itself on two levels. Firstly, and most explicitly, punk bands and songs are named in many pulp texts: the Sex Pistols are mentioned in Ballestra's *La guerra degli Antò*, Santacroce's *Fluo*, *Destroy* and *Luminal*, and Brizzi's *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*, which also refers to other 1970s punk bands like The Ramones. Introductory quotations to pulp works highlight the importance of punk to this fiction: Culicchia introduces *Tutti giù per terra* with a quotation from an English punk song ('Ghetto defendant', Combat Rock, The Clash, 1982), and Santacroce introduces *Destroy* with a quotation from The Sex Pistols. Furthermore, there is a veiled reference to Iggy Pop in the title of Ballestra's collection of short stories *Il compleanno dell'iguana*. In the link with 1970s punk, pulp authors create an image that is distinctly different from authors of the previous generation, even those they admire, like Tondelli. In pulp, references to punk and glam serve the same purpose as pulp's explicit associations with anglophone literature. In specifically drawing attention to a relationship with this music, pulp authors attempt to project the same image of transgression, provocation and anti-establishmentarianism that is inherent in many of their cultural references. To a limited extent, these references also provide indications of what may be expected from pulp fiction itself.

Awareness of one's own image and the ways in which it might be manipulated to maximum effect is a fundamental aspect of both pulp and punk. In punk, as in pulp, names provide keys to understanding a process of negotiation between image and acknowledgement of influence or a more considered theoretical stance. Whereas Poly Styrene's name openly questions the extent to which her public persona was an artificial construct, the pejorative adjectives adopted by other punks (such as Rotten), asked the same question in more subtle ways. By taking derogatory names, punk musicians both accepted the insults aimed at them by those outside their group, and used them to justify excessive and offensive behaviour (Savage 2001): post-punk groups, like John Lydon's

Public Image Ltd, continued this theme.¹⁴ Like pulp authors, punk bands sought to highlight their dilettantism, although for some this hid a thorough grounding in music and a more coherent theoretical foundation. Savage points out how The Ramones (a group who all took the surname Ramone as a tribute to Paul McCartney's first stage name), 'knew their pop history, but they played dumb. "1-2-3-4!" bass-player Dee Dee Ramone shouted at the start of every song, as if the group could barely master the rudiments of rhythm' (Savage 2001 p90); this was practice not only in live performances, but also on some of their recordings. Similarly, Sid Vicious, the Sex Pistols' second bass player, took his surname from a song on Lou Reed's *Transformer* album (1972).¹⁵ A comparable process operates in many pulp texts, in which names are used to point to significant reference points and to align this fiction with well known, once transgressive figures who have subsequently become cult figures. The ironic, irreverent self-referentiality, completely lacking in any of the literature that informs pulp, but inherent in these choices, points clearly to an influence from punk on this writing. Just as Brizzi names the protagonist of *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* Alex to point to associations with *A Clockwork Orange*, Silvia Ballestra gives the name Silvana Libertini to the central character of her short story 'Lettere a Polonio (Paraguay)' in *Gli Orsi* to emphasise the associations between her writing and Tondelli's *Altri libertini*. She also gives her provincial punks feebly derogatory nicknames to indicate that they are comic parodies of their punk idols.

In drawing the reader's attention to possible parallels with these controversial cult figures, pulp authors to project a façade that echoes the confrontational and deliberately offensive stance associated with punk. Punk set out to shock, and presented a deliberately coarse, unrefined and confrontational face to the world. Whilst punk clothes were fashioned from materials like leather and rubber, more usually associated with fetishistic garments, hair was often dyed in bright, unnatural colours and styled in spikes or mohicans. Furthermore, punks' deliberately ripped clothing, held together with safety pins 'theatricalized poverty' (Savage 2001 p374), and was intended as an exterior display of punk's nihilistic 'no future' philosophy and the anarchistic politics behind the music. In keeping with the ethos that image should be constructed by

¹⁴ As demonstrated in the lyrics of 'Public Image' (1978): 'Two sides to every story/so somebody had to stop me/I'm not the same as when I began/I will not be treated as property'.

¹⁵ Punk's contemporary, glam rock, also exerts a strong influence on pulp. Glam rock often subverted gender stereotypes: male glam musicians like David Bowie created alternative androgynous gender identities (Ziggy Stardust) and wore make-up. Lou Reed's album *Transformer* has clear connotations relating to gender and sexuality in its title, allusions that are echoed in tracks like 'Walk on the wild side'. In re-using these images, pulp authors show that they identify with controversial figures, and thereby align themselves with a tradition of transgression.

individuals themselves, from a range of incongruous elements (Frith 1984), punk put deliberately shocking and transgressive imagery to ambiguous use.¹⁶ Bands like the American glam rockers The New York Dolls, The Ramones, Siouxsie and the Banshees and the Sex Pistols occasionally wore swastika motifs or armbands; the lead singer of the Sex Pistols, Johnny Rotten, also posed for photographs in a crucifixion pose. The use of these symbols laid punks and punk bands open to accusations of espousing right-wing views, anti-social and non-ethical behaviour. The bands themselves, and commentators sympathetic to punk, widely claimed that the use of the swastika was symbolic, intended to articulate opposition to the older generation's culture and the generally obnoxious image that the bands wished to project (Savage 2001 p64). Pulp's language mirrors this image: in using a slang elaborated from transient fashions, diastatically low varieties and dysphemism, pulp authors present a belligerent, provocative façade and feign ignorance of rhetoric, even though their writing reveals closer links to Italian traditions than they care to admit.

Pulp's oblique use of image and imagery also points to other comparisons with punk that pulp authors may prefer to keep hidden. In both punk and pulp, image is a key construct, bound up with ambiguities relating to authorship. As punk stage names indicate, punk (like pulp) was fuelled by an often uneasy mix of creativity and marketing strategies (Lydon 1994, Savage 2001, Street 1998). The Sex Pistols, a fundamental punk reference point for Ballestra, Brizzi, and Santacroce, were created by their manager, Malcolm McLaren to promote clothes from his shop, 'Sex' (the often contradictory accounts of the group's formation credit McLaren with various degrees of input). Similarly, like punk, pulp claims to have little regard for the marketing and commercial structures that support it, but, as I will discuss using with reference to Rossana Campo's writing, pulp is deeply reliant on this commercial dimension for its success.¹⁷ The Sex Pistols' use of the swastika may be traced back to the use of this image on some of McLaren's clothes. The 'Anarchy' shirt, designed to accompany the single 'Anarchy in the UK', juxtaposed portraits of Karl Marx, inverted swastikas, and

¹⁶ The legacy of this may be seen in an increasingly 'pastiche' or 'bricolage' approach to youth cultures in the post-punk era: 'typical for the 1990s, media-related youth culture is that the importance of fan cultures has moved to younger age groups whereas older teenagers tend to put more emphasis on building up an individual identity than relying on any particular subculture [...] the role and meaning of *peer culture* has changed insofar as belonging to any one subculture is no longer total and exclusive; rather, a person can belong to and identify with several subcultures and several peer groups – some real life and some only virtual-simultaneously' (Livingstone and Bovill 2001 p218).

¹⁷ Commentators on contemporary Italian fiction have argued that commerce and literature are linked, and that discourses relating to both should be recognised as equally relevant to literary criticism (e.g. Raboni 1988). This 'commercialised' approach to fiction has met with criticisms and accusations of dumbing down, as well as fears that less accessible forms of literary writing will be marginalised (Pedullà 1999).

anarchist slogans, intended to be ‘an explosion of contradictory, highly charged signs’ (Savage 2001 p188). Collectively, this jumble of images was proposed as a challenge to the capitalist ethic in the context of the economic crisis in 1970s. Although the subtle political meanings that a handful of provocative orchestrators of punk were trying to encode into this mixture of signs may not have been explicitly right-wing, that is not to say that followers of punk or other users of these signs understood them in this way, or that they used and interpreted them from an equally critical and intellectual perspective. As I will discuss using the examples of Aldo Nove’s *Superwoobinda* and Brizzi’s *Bastogne*, some pulp texts are open to similarly ambiguous and ethically ambivalent readings.

The strong influence of punk and glam rock on pulp also explains the mythological status of Berlin in this writing. During the 1970s the ideological divide symbolised by the Berlin Wall provided the inspiration for many punk and glam rock musicians, including David Bowie (“*Heroes*”, 1977), Lou Reed (*Berlin*, 1973), Iggy Pop (*Lust for Life*, 1977), and The Sex Pistols (‘Holidays in the sun’ on *Never mind the bollocks*, 1977). Berlin is a recurrent topos in Italian writing in the 1980s and 1990s, but the cultural myth of the city is often revealed to be a sham. The city receives similar treatment in some punk music: for instance, ‘Holidays in the sun’ begins with the sound of marching feet, and includes the line ‘a cheap holiday in other people’s misery’. For instance, in Lara Cardella’s *Volevo i pantaloni* (Mondadori, 1989), the narrator’s older brother goes to Germany hoping to make his fortune, but is constantly obliged to ask his parents for financial help. Eventually he has to sell everything he has in order to pay for his journey back to Italy, thus acknowledging his failure to make a new life for himself in Germany, and also providing confirmation of Germany’s failure to live up to his expectations. The narrator of Tondelli’s short story ‘Ragazzi a natale’ (in his *Opere*, Bompiani 2001, but dated 1985) is an Italian student who finds himself alone in Berlin at Christmas, isolated and unable to speak the language properly: he provides a clear model for Ballestra’s Antò Lu Purk.¹⁸ Berlin (again, Kreuzberg) provides the setting for two texts, ‘Un cosiddetto giorno di festa’ and ‘Ondate di calore II’, in Alessandra

¹⁸ The similarities between Tondelli’s character and Ballestra’s can be seen in this extract from ‘Ragazzi a natale’: ‘la vera tragedia è che sono qui, solo, con nemmeno tanti soldi in tasca, a girare come un disperato nel traffico della città, a sentire che tutti si augurano “buon natale” e “buon anno”, e io ancora non ho imparato bene questa benedetta lingua. La guerra, la vera guerra, dice Klaus, è questa: non l’odio che getta le persone l’una contro l’altra, ma soltanto la distanza che separa le persone che si amano. Stasera, stanotte, in questa vigilia natalizia, non sono che un povero studente italiano di ventiquattro anni perduto nella metropoli, senza un amico, senza una ragazza, senza un tacchino farcito da divorare bevendo *sekt*. Per questo, in un certo senso, io sono in guerra’ (Tondelli 2001 p742).

Montrucchio's collection of short stories, *Ondate di calore* (Marsilio, 1996). These stories are set at Christmas, like Tondelli's 'Ragazzi a Natale', and like this text, they contrast the romantic myth of Berlin as a place of great cultural and creative activity, with the character's own sense of displacement and isolation: Montrucchio's narrator comments, '*Bel quartiere hai scelto, neanche un cristiano e un mucchio di strampalati con la cresta in testa*' (*Ondate di calore* p21, italics in original). Berlin is also portrayed as a hub for politicized youth in Helena Janeczek's short story that narrates the life stories of a group of female friends, *Versione per quattro* (in Montanari 1998).

In 1990s pulp, Berlin retains its mythical power along with its associations with alternative lifestyles and radical politics, but for pulp authors, writing after the fall of the wall in 1989, the city's iconic status is interpreted differently. Berlin becomes a highly charged symbol of potential, and a focal point for change. Berlin in the early post-unification period is identified with the transitory state of youth narrated by many of pulp's protagonists. In an echo of the anti-bildungsroman model that much pulp takes as a template, experiences of Berlin in this writing are decisive, but still often negative. Although in Campo's *Mai sentita così bene*, the timid, neurotic Lucia elopes to Berlin with a stranger, and returns transformed for the better, Berlin is where Ballestra's provincial 'punk', Antò Lu Purk, is forced to confront his own limitations, and in Santacroce's *Luminal*, the narrator, Demon, murders her friend Desdemona on her return from a trip to Berlin. Berlin attracts the protagonists of pulp because of its reputation for alternative and politicised youth cultures, but the reality of the city is far removed from this fiction, as is the case for their contemporaries. In pulp, this lack of any contact with German realities is symbolised by the lack of German linguistic influence on pulp: although this writing borrows extensively from many cultures and linguistic varieties, the only instance of borrowing from German in the texts included in this study is in Brizzi's *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*, in which Alex calls his mother 'mutter'. This nostalgic association with Berlin and pulp's use of twenty-year old music as a cultural reference point shows how pulp once again has recourse at least to convention, if not to cliché: associating itself with an image of what has been controversial, rather than with what is currently transgressive. By the mid 1990s, punk was no longer shocking, but retro: the surviving Sex Pistols even reunited briefly in 1996, the same year in which The Ramones also toured Italy. In some respects, pulp is ultimately conservative, and its use of punk as retro symbolism completely subverts one of punk's original aims, to force contemporary issues onto the cultural agenda whilst

reinvigorating a music scene that, according to some commentators, was dominated by nostalgia.

Punk's influence is evident in pulp's preoccupation with image, its self-referentiality and self-irony, even when this music is not specifically mentioned in a text. In pulp, punk's concepts manifest themselves in a deliberate intent to shock, the cultivation of an untutored image, an emphasis on image rather than on the substance of the texts, in self-referentiality and self-irony, which extends to ironic commentary on contemporary society, and in particular, their own medium. In an echo of the waning interest in political activity as a focus for youth culture, pulp's relationship with popular music stops short of engagement with the more politically engaged punk bands, like The Clash. In the rest of this chapter, I discuss how 'punk' attitudes manifest themselves in pulp's treatment of various forms of popular culture; principally music, television and genre fiction. In the conclusions to this chapter I will consider how the concerns expressed in pulp, however tempered by the influence of anglophone popular music and cultures, relates back to Italian left-wing notions of popular culture.

2b. Female voices: Isabella Santacroce

The influence of punk can be seen in Isabella Santacroce's fundamentally ambivalent use of imagery and cultural reference points as well as in the many references to music in her writing. Santacroce's novels explore themes relating to female sexuality and the commodification of the body, suicide and mother/daughter relationships. The figure of Alice in Wonderland reoccurs in all three of Santacroce's pulp novels, *Fluo*, *Destroy* and *Luminal*, and is used as a motif for the lost innocence and the happy family that Santacroce's protagonists crave.¹⁹ The plots and settings of *Destroy* and *Luminal* in particular are not easy to define, because the protagonists of these novels, like the emblematic Alice, find themselves in circumstances that they neither can explain nor control. The unresolved endings and the deliberate lack of rigid chronology in these novels (in *Destroy*, as in *Alice in Wonderland*, time goes awry and clocks read improbable hours like 30.15) are used to provoke an equivalent sense of displacement and disorientation in the reader. In the place of a chronological structure,

¹⁹ In *Fluo*, a quotation from *Alice in Wonderland* introduces the novel, and Starlet reads the book (*Fluo* p69); in *Destroy*, Misty states 'brucio l'ultima pagina di *Alice nel paese della meraviglie*, ma prima che tutto si trasformi in cenere leggo l'ultima riga e l'annoto con il rossetto sulla parete: "... ricordo della propria infanzia e delle felici giornate d'estate' (*Destroy* p60); in *Luminal*, 'sognando appena paesi delle meraviglie dove passeggiare con Alice tra fantastici fiori. E ora chiudi gli occhi e prova a immaginare cosa si prova' (*Luminal* p17), and 'precipitando come Alice gli inferi mi accoglievano non sorpresi' (*Luminal* p46).

intertextual references to popular music are used to ground the novels in a context to which the reader can relate. Santacroce's writing is firmly anchored in commercialised youth cultures, but at the same time, her highly referential and cryptic style assumes an ethical stance on the family and late twentieth century cultures of consumption. In this, she reveals an Eco-esque elevation of 'popular culture' to level of high art: many of her criticisms of society are made through references to popular music, and the reader who cannot make the connections misses the criticisms inherent in her cultural choices. In particular, music is strongly tied to a network of other cultural references, which are used to articulate the theoretical and ethical standpoint of her writing. Her prose displays a high degree of rhythmical awareness that is echoed in the 'soundtrack' to each novel, and subtle differences in the use of musical references in each of Santacroce's novels indicate an increasing degree of literary, theoretical and ethical sophistication in her writing.

In her first novel, *Fluo* (Castelvecchi, 1995, subsequently republished by Einaudi), Santacroce's musical references remain mainly within pulp's conventional territory: 1970s British punk and glam, and late 1980s/early 1990s British and American rock and grunge bands. In this text, musical references are used in a relatively simple way: to announce and, for the initiated reader, to reinforce Starlet's feelings. This makes Santacroce's text fully accessible to only a limited, specific subculture, and therefore a very exclusive text. Listening to music is a cathartic experience for the young protagonist, who finds an outlet for her frustration and unhappiness in the aggressive, moody and sometimes vitriolic music of punk, pop and rock bands.²⁰ Starlet articulates her feelings through references to 'Public Enemy che urlano la mia incazzatura' (*Fluo* p113), 'Beastie Boys incazzati in very hard sound' (*Fluo* p11), and 'decibel arrabbiati di Cult vecchia maniera' (*Fluo* p111).²¹ Santacroce attributes Starlet's unease to her dire

²⁰ In *Fluo* she names the Beastie Boys ('Jimmy James', 'Revolutionary generation'), Public Enemy, Oasis ('Supersonic' and 'Slide away'), 'Light my fire' (originally The Doors, but also covered by The Ramones and many other bands), Velvet Underground, Jimmy Somerville, The Rolling Stones, The Sex Pistols, Nirvana and Kurt Cobain, Bob Dylan, Rage Against the Machine, New Order, Julian Cope, Green Day ('Longview'), The Pet Shop Boys ('Go west'), Siouxsie and the Banshees ('Playground trust'), Black Crowes, Freddie Mercury ('We are the champions'), David Byrne, Sinéad O'Connor, Cult, Sisters of Mercy, Tuxedomoon ('The cage'). Santacroce's highly sophisticated taste in music is evidently beyond the musical and cultural knowledge of a less reflective character like Starlet. Many of her musical points of reference are from the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, and will therefore appeal also to older generations: *Fluo* is in some ways not a 'youth' text at all. This makes the text a multilayered one: the encrypted deeper reading, accessible to relatively few of Starlet's peers – the readers at whom the text is apparently aimed –, reveals a highly educated and culturally aware aspect of pulp that is not promoted by the publishers and one which has escaped some of Santacroce's harshest critics.

²¹ As some of these references indicate, the 'pop' culture in *Fluo* is linked not only to fashion and pop music, but also to drugs. Starlet is fuelled by a chemical cocktail of narcotics: aspirin, acid, marijuana, valium, and ecstasy and other medicines: 'Pasadei da 0,5 mg' (*Fluo* p32), 'Xanax ripieno di Alprazolam da 0,25 mg' (*Fluo* p43), 'Etizdam in "very intermediate-short-acting"' (*Fluo* p67).

family circumstances: she attempts to 'buy' happiness in the form of designer clothes, narcotics and make up, and, like her mother, by seeking refuge in drink and drugs. At the very beginning of the book, Starlet strives to perfect her body in order to try to achieve peace of mind, or at least to distract herself from her difficulties: 'cerco divagazioni al mal d'animo spraiando d'oro nitro vecchie Creepers bicolori comprate al Jack and Gill dalla suola ormai a sottiletta' (*Fluo* p11). However, at a hedonistic party organised by her friends for her eighteenth birthday, she confesses to the reader 'vorrei tanto che mia madre fosse qui' (*Fluo* p89), explaining in this single line the ethical stance that pervades all her fiction.

The link between music and consumerism, which is present but not fully explored in *Fluo*, is developed in a much more sophisticated and articulate way in *Destroy* (Einaudi, 1996). In this novel Santacroce names a wide array of bands, but her sphere of musical references is distinct from the other pulp authors because it encompasses many female bands and singer/songwriters, as well as other groups and musicians who debate gender roles and stereotypes in their work and public personae. Intertextual references to music have a structural and thematic function in *Destroy*, but in order to realise this, the reader must be familiar with the musical references used, and aware of the cultural discourses behind them. The novel itself is structured like a CD, i.e. in terms of tracks, rather than chapters. Most of the short units into which the book is divided, which are never more than a page or two long, have *Destroy* in their titles. Many are numbered (the book begins with *Destroy no.1*) and others have short titles – such as *Appleseed Destroy*, *Train Destroy* and *Fuck off Destroy* – some, like the latter, repeated throughout the book.²²

In *Destroy*, music is linked to sex, and sex means prostitution. The protagonist, Misty, works as a prostitute in London, and one of her regular jobs is to watch a female client masturbate in her bathroom. The first musical reference in the novel is made in a description of this scenario: 'ascolti i Massive Attack nel tuo cesso personale. Se ascolti *Sly* a occhi chiusi non riesci a non toccarti' (*Destroy* p8).²³ This is a key reference in the

²² 'Destroy' is the nihilistic last line in the Sex Pistols' 1997 song 'Anarchy in the UK', screamed into the microphone by Johnny Rotten. Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood also designed a 'Destroy' t-shirt to go with the band: it featured an inverted cross, a swastika, a broken Queen's head, and the word 'destroy' (Savage 2001 p284). Given her repeated references to this band, it is likely that Santacroce knows this song and wishes to recall the scream and the confused imagery in her repetitions of 'destroy' in her chapter headings. This confused imagery is also replicated by the jumble of images on the cover of the Feltrinelli Universale Economica edition of the book.

²³ Santacroce is evidently aware of the strand of critical theory that has its roots in psychoanalysis (e.g. Lacan). Her uses of this theory are covered amply by Stefania Lucamante in her discussion of Santacroce's first three novels in 'Everyday Consumerism and Pornography "above the Pulp Line"' in Lucamante 2001b.

novel, as it gives an indication of many of the novel's themes and also provides an insight into its ethical stance. 'Sly' is a track on Massive Attack's 1995 album, *Protection*. The title is never explicitly stated in the novel; but for a reader who knows this reference it immediately highlights key themes in the novel: both Misty and her client feel that their actions are justified if they are being watched, and consequently both feel protected by the gaze of others.

In *Destroy* Santacroce articulates her views on Misty's circumstances and the social values that they represent, through her references to music.²⁴ Misty transgresses social norms by working as a prostitute: the female rock bands she listens to transgress by appropriating a traditionally male-dominated genre, and, according to Stefania Lucamante, Santacroce transgresses by writing in an often dysphemistic and sexually explicit style (Lucamante 2001a). In *Destroy*, Santacroce makes many references to the American grunge band Hole, especially their lead singer and guitarist, Courtney Love. In their metonymic name, Hole draw on the punk precedent for deliberately provocative and sexualised names (for instance, The Slits) which are used to challenge notions of female sexual subservience, and a misogynist, patriarchal perspective that sees women only in terms of their sexual function. Hole's noisy, aggressive musical style is also informed by 1970s punk: Courtney Love's singing voice is deep and raucous, and the occasionally indistinct lyrics are often almost screamed over the loud music. In *Destroy*, Santacroce names many tracks from Hole's 1994 album, *Live through this*, and also makes several other oblique references to the album, which guide the discerning reader to a fuller understanding of *Destroy*'s themes. *Live through this* is the first album released by Courtney Love after the well-publicized suicide of her husband, Kurt Cobain, and the last track, 'Rock star' is clearly about him.²⁵ It is at once an album about surviving emotional trauma and an inquisition into femaleness and femininity in contemporary society; notions that are articulated in *Destroy* by reference to this

²⁴ Massive Attack, P J Harvey ('C'mon Billy'), Faith No More, Sonic Youth, Hole ('Doll parts', 'Credit in the straight world', 'I think that I would die', 'Asking for it', 'Miss World', 'Jennifer's body'), Joy Division ('Love will tear us apart'), Sex Pistols ('Anarchy in the UK', 'Submission', 'Pretty vacant', 'No feelings'), Nick Cave, Jeff Buckley ('So real'), Sinead O'Connor, The Red Hot Chili Peppers ('Melancholy mechanics'), The Smashing Pumpkins ('Jellybaby', 'Bullet with butterfly wings', Billy Corgan: The world is a vampire – lyric), David Bowie ('The voyeur of utter destruction', 'The bad side of the World'), Simply Red, Jerry Lee Lewis ('Great balls of fire'), Beastie Boys ('Sabotage'), Chemical Brothers.

²⁵ Kurt Cobain was the lead singer and guitarist in the Seattle band Nirvana. He shot himself at his home in 1994 after escaping from a clinic where he was being treated for drug addiction.

album.²⁶ The link with *Live through this* is made most explicit when Misty addresses the reader directly:

Vorrei che Courtney Love fosse mia amica e che mi cantasse tutte le sere *Doll Parts*, stesa in sottoveste nel suo letto. Vorrei che ascoltaste *Doll Parts* mentre leggete quello che voglio scrivere, seduti a terra con la sua voce vicina, leggete lentamente quello che segue e toccatevi le braccia, se volete pensate che vi sto guardando appesa al soffitto (*Destroy* p21).

Although Santacroce refers to many other bands and songs in *Destroy*, this statement indicates that *Live through this* must be seen as a crucial influence on the novel. At this point Misty is sitting in a Chinese restaurant in Soho, surrounded by businessmen talking on their mobile phones and women chattering. This paragraph is sandwiched between two extracts of their conversation, creating a stark contrast between the everyday life that surrounds Misty, and her own bleak internal world. Misty lives in an emotional void: another fundamental theme of Hole's music and something that is also hinted at in the group's name.²⁷ The prevalence of soft 'l' and sibilant 's' sounds in this passage (for example, 'stesa in sottoveste nel suo letto') makes Santacroce's writing replicate the slow beat and low tone of 'Doll parts', one of the more downbeat and subdued tracks on *Live through this*, which echoes Misty's feelings of worthlessness and isolation. 'Doll parts' is about the female body as an object, the abyss between aspirations and circumstances, and the gap between appearances and reality.²⁸ In asking the reader to listen to this song, Misty is attempting to give voice to her loneliness and isolation, and is making a direct appeal for understanding and compassion.

²⁶ The front cover of *Live through this* shows Courtney Love as a victorious beauty queen, wearing a tiara on top of her dyed blonde hair, clutching a bunch of pale pink roses that are exactly the shade of her perfectly manicured painted nails, with mascara smudged all over her face. This is a sharp contrast to the picture of her as a child on the back cover. In it, she is standing barefoot on a road, wearing black trousers and an oversize shirt open almost to her waist, her straggly dark hair falling around her shoulders as she looks directly at the camera. The music is about what stands between the two pictures, the extent to which the provocative glamour queen is present in the child, and also the degree to which the vulnerable child remains in the apparently confident woman. It also asks exactly what growing up means for girls, and questions the ethics of this process: for example, 'I think that I would die', one of the tracks referred to in *Destroy*, has a repeated lyric: 'she lost all her innocence'.

²⁷ This also recalls the holes in Starlet's clothes in *Fluo*, as discussed in Chapter 3.

²⁸ The lyrics are 'I am doll eyes. Doll mouth. Doll legs. I am doll arms. Big veins. Dog bait. Yeah, they really want you, they really want you, they really do. Yeah, they really want you, they really want you, but I do too. I want to be the girl with the most cake. I love him so much it just turns to hate. I fake it so real I am beyond fake. And someday, you will ache like I ache. And someday, you will ache like I ache. And someday, you will ache like I ache. And someday, you will ache like I ache. And someday, you will ache like I ache. I am doll parts. Bad skin. Dull heart. It stands for knife, for the rest of my life. Yeah, they really want you, they really want you, they really do. Yeah, they really want you, they really want you, but I do too. I want to be the girl with the most cake. He only loves those things because he loves to see them break. I fake it so real I am beyond fake. And someday, you will ache like I ache (repeated)'.

The deliberately provocative and ghoulish ending to this paragraph, ‘se volete pensate che vi sto guardando appesa al soffitto’, contrasts with the beginning of the chapter: ‘voglio pensare a quanto tutto il mio esistere mi piaccia’ (*Destroy* p21), just as the singer of ‘Doll parts’ contrasts her high ambitions with her painful situation. This is replicated in the high position of the suicide and the lowly positions of the readers (‘seduti a terra’) in the scenario that Misty describes. The figure of the body looking down on the reader also recalls the notion of the protective gaze with which the novel begins: here, though, the corpse’s gaze is far from reassuring.²⁹ Rather, Misty is asking the reader to feel disconcerted by her gaze, her words, and the song that articulates her feelings. In this paragraph, Santacroce is effectively telling the reader that there is a strongly ethical dimension to her novel: she is asking the reader to empathise with the vulnerable Misty, not to condemn her many transgressions. The need for the gaze of others is a recurring one in Santacroce’s female characters, who are all fundamentally lacking in self-esteem and the support of a family. Misty, like her client, and like Starlet in *Fluo*, is reliant on the looks of strangers for approval and ultimately for her self-image.

Hole’s musical influence also provides a clue to understanding the most cryptic passage of the book. ‘Doll Parts’ reaches a crescendo towards the end of the song, with the repeated refrain ‘someday, you will ache like I ache’ increasing in volume and vitriol, before fading back to the same low drawl with which it began. This pattern is replicated in *Destroy*. The penultimate chapter of this novel consists of a single sentence written entirely in block capitals, covering the whole of a single page: ‘[...] BACIAMMI NON MANGIARE NOIA ALTRUI CAZZO PENSAVI LO SO COSA PENSAVI SAREBBE BELLISSIMO VERO BELLISSIMO LADY MASSIVE NON SO DOVE CAZZO NONSODOVECAZZOSONO UN BEL SUICIDE ROVINA LA TORTA LADY E RABBIA E IMPOSSIBILITÀ DIVENTANO GIORNO DOPO GIORNO PIÙ GUERRIERI [...]’ (*Destroy* p107). This passage, reminiscent of Courtney Love’s lyrics, marks both the culmination of Santacroce’s highly codified and allusive style and the accumulation of all the pressures on Misty. It is 31 December, Misty is in a nightclub, and has been taking drugs and drinking: in these circumstances she becomes confused and distressed, and struggles to articulate her thoughts over the deafening music. At the end of this page, Misty closes her eyes and faints: the next chapter, set outside the club, reverts to the same style as before.

²⁹ However, this introduces a note of ambiguity into her ethical stance, perhaps implying a glorification of suicide. I will discuss this theme in relation to *Luminal*, below.

Themes expressed in many of the other tracks from *Live through this* are also dealt with by Santacroce in *Destroy*. 'Plump' and 'Softer. Softest' deal with soured mother/child relationships, whereas other tracks like 'Asking for it' address the theme of prostitution and rape ('Everytime that I sell myself to you, I feel a little bit cheaper than I need to [...] Was she asking for it? Was she asking nice? If she was asking for it, did she ask you twice?'). The juxtaposition of the two themes points to a connection between breakdowns in family relationships and recourse to emotional consumerism, followed inevitably by prostitution. A similar process operates in *Destroy*, in which Misty's estrangement from her family is equated with her emotional isolation. Misty, like Starlet in *Fluo*, buys clothes in an attempt to fill an emotional void. This process is developed more fully in *Destroy* than in *Fluo*. In *Destroy*, the notion of the body as a commodity to be bought and sold is a central theme. Misty thinks of everything, including herself, as a commercial product available on a whim: she comments that one of her clients, 'mi ha scelta come un paio di Nike più interessanti di altre' (*Destroy* p9). Here Santacroce is evidently speaking out against the all-embracing reach of consumerism, but also against the kind of society that allows commercially available sexual contact to dominate over emotional ties.

Similar notions are inherent in Santacroce's references to the British female singer/songwriter P J Harvey, and her album *To bring you my love* (1995). In contrast to Courtney Love, P J Harvey has a delicate, high-pitched voice which is often contrasted to deep harsh sounds in the musical accompaniment to her tracks. In some tracks she almost whispers the lyrics over a deep, discordant backing track, which makes the singer appear all the more vulnerable in contrast to the music. The contrast between the delicate voice and the sometimes dissonant rock accompaniment in P J Harvey's music is replicated in *Destroy* by the vulnerability of Misty's voice and the contrast this presents to the unfeeling, self-centred world in which she moves, where personal dignity and relationships are reduced to the value of commercial exchange. In *Destroy*, Misty's struggle to make her delicate voice heard over the noise of the city replicates this contrast. In other tracks, P J Harvey's voice is artificially distorted to appear more raucous. When listening to P J Harvey Misty states: 'questo è il sonoro che voglio. Un sonoro eccitato. Eccitato e cattivo. Eccitato, cattivo e stanco' (*Destroy* p108). In contrast to this sound, P J Harvey projects an image of physical fragility: Misty states 'la sua anoressica presenza riempie lo spazio e sconvolge di maquillage sfatto che le scivola sugli zigomi per poi gocciare sulla sottoveste' (*Destroy* p12). This both recalls the photograph on the front cover of *Live through this* and Santacroce's description of

Misty's own stature: 'Peso 49 kg. Sono alta 1 metro e 70. Più che perfetta forse più' (*Destroy* p36).

With these words, Santacroce questions media-based notions of female beauty and femininity; notions that the reader can identify in the image projected by P J Harvey. P J Harvey chooses to use (non-gender specific) initials, not her full name (Polly Jane) in her work, despite the obviously feminine perspective expressed in her music, thus raising questions about commonly received notions of gender. This ties in with many of the other musical references in Santacroce's writing: David Bowie, Marilyn Manson and Sinead O'Connor. Such references open Santacroce's discourse to questions of gender and identity, and returning to the notion of the importance of another's gaze with which *Destroy* begins. Bowie (real name David Jones) has constructed a further alternative identity in Ziggy Stardust; like him, Misty, obviously a pseudonym, has a number of different identities (for instance, she advertises her services in phone booths using the name of Kitty) although she is in control of none of them. Her identity is unstable, and only conferred on her by the gaze of others, as Santacroce indicates in the first scene of the novel. Without knowledge of bands like Hole and Massive Attack, and singers like Bowie, P J Harvey and Sinead O'Connor, the musical references in *Destroy* become just a crude inventory of pop music. With some knowledge of this music, however, the reader gains an insight into Santacroce's ethical stance, and the debates about feminism and consumerism contained in her work. Furthermore, Santacroce's artful use of musical quotations reveals sophisticated and erudite cultural knowledge, infinitely more refined than that of her characters and far more sophisticated than critics such as Panzeri have given her credit for. Ironically, many of the albums to which Santacroce refers have positive and upbeat titles (*Protection*, *Live through this*, to name just two), whereas *Destroy* itself is negative and nihilistic.

If music is central to *Destroy*, then musicality is the linguistic basis of *Luminal*. In this novel, the list of bands referred to is much shorter than in *Fluo* and *Destroy*, with only a dozen references to pop music.³⁰ Nonetheless, the few performers that Santacroce names have a telling thematic influence on the novel, and even more so than in *Destroy*, they are used to highlight Santacroce's stance on the dominance of consumerism in contemporary popular culture. Whereas the linguistic patterns in *Destroy* recall the music of performers like Courtney Love and P J Harvey, *Luminal* moves away from

³⁰ Among the long list of famous suicides that constitutes the dedications in *Luminal* are Kurt Cobain, Ian Curtis, Nick Drake and Michael Hutchence. There is also an introductory quotation from the Sex Pistols. The bands and songs named in the novel are Pain Killer ('Scud Attack'), The Doors, The Prodigy ('Smack my bitch up'), David Bowie ('Heroes', 'Look back in anger'), Sneaker Pimps, Portishead, Tindersticks, Marilyn Manson, and Siouxsie and the Banshees.

rhythmical reliance on others' music, towards its own self-sufficient, internal structure, reminiscent of the refrains of popular song. Repeated phrases and refrains which are used to punctuate and change the pace of the narrative include 'Vorrei. Essere. Meno. Agitata.' (*Luminal* p12, p44 and p85); 'leccatemi bastardi non talentuosi leccatemi' (*Luminal* p17, p30, p40, p49, p56, p61, p66, p76, p86, p90, p96); 'questa è la storia di Demon e Davi' (*Luminal* p11, p12, p36, p67, p99); 'Io sono Demon e la luna è mia madre' (*Luminal* p11, p28, p49, p73). In this novel, Santacroce creates a closed internal network of references, with the result that *Luminal* reads more as an exercise in literary and poetic experimentation than the crude inventory of commercial culture expressed in *Fluo*.

Luminal displays a greater degree of ethical ambiguity and sophistication than either *Destroy* or *Fluo*. The novel takes its title from the drug which is food and drink to its protagonists, Demon and Davi, both bisexual hostesses in Zurich's nightclubs. As in *Destroy*, the novel is not structured around specific plot developments, but around a series of events that have meaning within the novel, rather than outside it. Demon and Davi inhabit a dream-like and ethereal nocturnal world of music and prostitution, structured principally around their addiction to the drug 'luminal': at one point, the narrator states bluntly, 'Luminal. A fanculo il resto' (*Luminal* p40). As in *Destroy*, the protagonists' insular and isolated world is anchored to situations and themes that the reader can recognise through Santacroce's cultural references. In this novel, these are also used to articulate an ethical stance that is charged with ambiguity. This is illustrated most clearly in the murder of Demon and Davi's friend, Desdemona. The name of this character, drawn from Shakespeare's *Othello*, further underlines the themes of transgressive (female) sexuality and death that pervade the novel. As Shakespeare's Desdemona is involved in a transgressive relationship with Othello, Santacroce's character (along with Demon and Davi) steps outside the boundaries of 'conventional' behaviour by being both a prostitute and a lesbian. The two Desdemonas also meet similar deaths, both due to (sexual) jealousy: whereas Shakespeare's Desdemona is smothered by Othello, Santacroce's Desdemona is shot by Demon, who is jealous of her physical perfection. The 'soundtrack' to this scene is provided by the 1990s rock band Marilyn Manson: a clue that enables the knowledgeable reader to read much into the novel's ethical stance and the many refrains that help to structure the novel (*Luminal* p73-74).³¹

³¹ Marilyn Manson is both the name of the band and the stage name of its lead singer. Marilyn Manson are deliberately provocative, and their live shows have been banned in some areas of America because of

The reference to Marilyn Manson in the novel's pivotal scene is a fundamental clue to Santacroce's ethical ambiguity in *Luminal*. The band's original line-up created their stage names by juxtaposing the first name of a female popular culture icon with the surname of a serial killer. Hence the lead singer, Brian Warner, takes the name Marilyn Manson (Marilyn Monroe/Charles Manson); the keyboard player, Stephen Bier, Jr., adopts the stage name Madonna Wayne Gacy (Madonna/John Wayne Gacy), and the drummer is Ginger Fish (Ginger Rogers/Albert Fish). In juxtaposing male and female names, Marilyn Manson challenge gender stereotypes: and in choosing this band as a cultural reference point, Santacroce highlights a key theme in her writing. Furthermore, this naming technique may be interpreted as a criticism of American popular culture, which awards equal fame and status to pop singers and mass murderers: whether this criticism is confirmed or negated by some of the band's more questionable activities is uncertain. The link between fame and notoriety suggested by the reference to Marilyn Manson ties in with *Luminal*'s sinister initial dedications: all are famous suicides, from figures of ancient history such as Seneca and Cleopatra, to those of more recent and ephemeral fame, such as Kurt Cobain and Michael Hutchence. These dedications are in turn linked to *Luminal*'s last sentence, in which Santacroce closes the thematic circle that links music, popular culture, death and ethics, with Demon and Davi's joint suicide on Luminal: 'guardaci con rabbia perché non abbiamo più cuore sveglio in overdose di milligrammi da diva dentro sonni eterni voliamo immortali regine maldestre ora le nostre urla non sono che un canto' (*Luminal* p100). *Luminal* gains its structural unity from these links between fame achieved through success in popular culture, and notoriety gained from tragedy. The recurring refrains that punctuate *Luminal* underline the novel's inherently ambiguous ethics: 'J.F.K. The History of Erotic Suicide. Lady D. Rock'n'roll' (*Luminal* p60, repeated with slight variations on p14, p31, p39, p80, p85).

Whether or not this implies an ethical stance in the novel is uncertain. To a certain degree, *Luminal*, like *Destroy* and *Fluo*, is a deeply ethical novel. Santacroce juxtaposes episodes of abuse from Demon and Davi's childhood (entitled 'REW') with events in their adult lives. In so doing, she both creates disjointed, patchwork character portraits, which highlight her characters' psychological fragility, and forces the reader to link their unhappy childhoods with their joint suicide. In *Luminal*, just as in *Fluo* and *Destroy*, consumerism is portrayed as the last socially acceptable resort of the

exhibitions of nudity, unethical use of animals and self-harm. The lead singer's dress often questions gender stereotypes, as much as it challenges public taste: for example, the cover of the *Mechanical Animals* album (1998), features Marilyn Manson dressed in a white lycra bodysuit which gives him an androgynous appearance. After protests in some areas of America, the record company was obliged to alter the image so that the album's title was printed over Marilyn Manson's 'breasts'.

emotionally desperate. In *Destroy* and *Luminal*, prostitution is portrayed as the logical result of consumerism, as young women who have been starved of affection become further estranged from social norms by selling their bodies for sex, and ultimately resort to suicide. However, the ambiguities inherent in Santacroce's cultural references make her ethical stance less clear. Like Marilyn Manson, Santacroce conflates notions of fame and infamy in her choice of cultural references, and it is sometimes uncertain whether she is celebrating or condemning her characters' more extreme transgressions. The last line of *Luminal* implies sympathy for Demon and Davi's fate, but also lays the novel open to accusations that it glorifies suicide (it is useful to recall here the 'high' position of the suicide in relation to the 'low' position of the readers in the scenario depicted in *Destroy*). Given the ambivalent dedications at the beginning of the novel and the musical references within it, Santacroce's condemnation of an emotionally empty consumer culture can appear less than wholehearted. In *Luminal*, these notes of ambivalence already present in *Destroy* are more fully developed, encouraging readers to reflect on the problems posed in the novel for themselves.

3. Pulp and television: Aldo Nove

A similarly ambiguous ethical stance on contemporary popular culture is present in Aldo Nove's collection of short stories, *Superwoobinda* (Einaudi, 1996; first published as *Woobinda*, by Castelvechi, 1995), 'Il mondo dell'amore' in *Gioventù Cannibale* (Einaudi, 1996), and the novel *Puerto Plata Market* (Einaudi, 1997). The spectre of punk manifests itself in Nove's work in his self-referential and ironic imitation of dilettantism, as well as in the dubious ethical stance of some of his stories. As in Santacroce's writing, Nove's ethics revolve around the notions of cultural consumption, but he also links this with concern for the impact of mass media, and particularly television. Whereas Santacroce elaborates her stylistic model from a fusion of Umberto Eco's critical theory, punk and contemporary rock music, Nove's narrative model, especially in *Superwoobinda*, has roots in the structures of contemporary television viewing and Nanni Balestrini's prose writing.³² Nove manipulates the language and structures of televisual narratives to satirise a passive reception of an equally passive medium. Like Santacroce, though, Nove displays an element of

³² Aldo Nove has edited a collected volume of Balestrini's novels, *Vogliamo tutto, Gli invisibili, and L'editore. La grande rivolta* (Bompiani, Milan, 1999) also includes a selection of critical essays on the novels. Nove's contribution, which is just a paragraph long, closes with unequivocal praise for Balestrini. 'Nanni Balestrini è l'unico poeta epico del Novecento italiano' (*La Grande Rivolta* p355). Subsequent references to Balestrini's novels are to this volume.

compassion for his characters, who he depicts as victims, unable to rationalise the constant flow of factual and fictional information in which they are immersed. By portraying his characters in this way, Nove encourages the reflective reader to share in his pity for them. The short stories in *Superwoobinda* are usually no longer than two or three pages and many finish abruptly with no resolution or conclusion, in order to mimic the rhythm of changing television channels. Similarly, the many characters are two-dimensional in a figurative sense, recalling the flatness of the characters on the television screen. Nove often abruptly truncates stories in mid-sentence, for example, ‘la mia ragazza ha preso un king-cheese e il fish e una patatine small e la coca max’ (*Superwoobinda* p29, no punctuation in the original), or even in mid-word, for example: ‘ci versai dentro il Pure & Vegetal, dovevano capitare che t’ (*Superwoobinda*, p9), ‘ci faceva sentire uniti tutti, ora le forze sono m’ (*Superwoobinda* p16).³³

Both the style and underlying concerns of *Superwoobinda* recall Balestrini’s *Vogliamo tutto* (1971). In this novel, Balestrini protests against the effects of massification and industrialisation on rural Italian society and culture, themes announced by his narrator-protagonist:

Nel sud erano già quindici anni che era cominciato. L’intervento Cassa le nuove industrie la campagna che deve essere industrializzata. E nei comizi che si sentivano allora si diceva che per il progresso nel mezzogiorno bisognava lavorare. Per una nuova dignità umana bisognava produrre. Che ci voleva un nuovo sud lo sviluppo pane per tutti lavoro per tutti eccetera. Lo diceva la Dc lo diceva il Pci lo dicevano tutti (*Vogliamo tutto* p3).

Here Balestrini constructs sentences based on numerous paratactic clauses, often omitting punctuation between them and eschewing more complex hypotactic structures. This deliberately reductive and apparently simplistic linguistic model is appropriated by Nove in *Superwoobinda*: like Balestrini, Nove uses this language to speak out against the homogenisation of society by ‘mass’ culture. Both are concerned for the loss of cultural diversity and a lack of compassion in society. Balestrini attributes this to the industrialisation of Italy: his concern in *Vogliamo tutto* is for the migrant workers who move from southern Italy to work in the factories, the effect that their displacement has on them, and their struggle for workers’ rights. In *Superwoobinda*, Nove’s concern is for the kind of cultural homogenisation effected by television.

³³ Nove is not alone in using this technique: in *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*, Brizzi also leaves sentences and occasionally chapters unfinished. Sentences are truncated at an unexpected point – one chapter ends ‘non è neanche da dire che’ (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p38) – or finish with suspension points ‘sono i ragazzi a non avere le idee chiare...’ (*Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* p54).

In *Superwoobinda* Nove creates characters whose life barely extends beyond what they see on the television screen. They are a series of nameless narrators, who tell their stories in piecemeal narrative fragments: the true protagonist of *Superwoobinda* is the television. Although Nove accepts television as part of popular culture, he is critical of the centrality of unthinking, populist television in Italian popular culture, the mendacity of the medium and its inadequacies when it is the sole source of culture. In structuring his stories around the narrative patterns of this medium, Nove ironically exemplifies the fact that 'television is becoming a means of punctuating and of ritualising the activities of everyday life' (Wolf 1990 p289). In *Superwoobinda* television is criticized for homogenising factual information and fiction in its programming and consequently also in the minds of the viewers, which is seen to have a stultifying effect on their critical capacities.³⁴ The narrators' passive reactions to significant events, and their lack of empathy for the suffering of others are all attributed to television.

Balestrini's stance against the massification of society by industrialisation in *Vogliamo tutto* is clearly highly politicised, and elements of left-wing political thought are also evident in Nove's condemnation of television's homogenising effect in *Superwoobinda*. In this text, televisual entertainment and politics are presented as mutually distorting and disadvantageous forces.³⁵ The uneasy mix of politics and low quality television represented in Nove's fiction may also be read as a metaphor criticising the powers vested in the person of Silvio Berlusconi.³⁶ The story that originally gave its name to Nove's collection of short stories, 'Woobinda' (*Superwoobinda* p15-16) takes its name from a children's television programme. The

³⁴ Some criticisms of Italian television suggest that the lack of discrimination between 'high' and 'low' culture and fact and fiction are a feature of this medium: 'Italian television demonstrates how different cultures have become intermingled and fused in a flow of fiction that is impressive if only in terms of its quantity' (Curti 1990 p321).

³⁵ The 1996 IARD report notes that television is linked to political allegiance: 'i giovani italiani (e presumibilmente anche i loro genitori) si dividono fra conservatori e progressisti innanzitutto in base alla emittente televisiva cui accordano la loro fiducia o la loro sfiducia' (Buzzi, Cavalli et al. 1997 p116). The links between the Italian mass media and political influence are explored by Parker and O'Sullivan 1997, who note that the collapse of the First Republic 'resulted in the media themselves, and especially television, taking on a central role in furnishing new reference points, even though their having been closely bound up with the old order meant that they were not always well qualified to do this' (Parker and O'Sullivan 1997 p206).

³⁶ Parker and O'Sullivan 1997 rationalise Berlusconi's success in the 1994 elections partially in terms of his media influence, as 'over a period of 15 years, Fininvest networks had furnished Italians with a new set of values and aspirations. Through variety shows, quizzes, innumerable spot announcements, sponsored slots and imported soap operas, substitutes had been offered for the old reference points that were in decline: the Church, the parties of the Left, the organised Labour movement, values of parsimony and sacrifice. The channels supplied models of living in terms of consumerism, change, efficiency, conformism and modernity that were reinforced by sport, films and family magazines' (Parker and O'Sullivan 1997 p216).

narrator of this story explains in very simplistic terms that Berlusconi's influence has had a negative impact on Italian television, beginning his narrative with the announcement that 'da quando ci sono le televisioni di Berlusconi non fanno più vedere Woobinda [...] questo è uno degli effetti della destra' (*Superwoobinda* p15). In this story Nove makes explicit the conflation of politics and the media in 1990s Italy and the dominance of television by a right-wing political agenda that is ultimately detrimental to both. In *Superwoobinda* the link between visual media and politics leads to the 'dumbing down' of the latter, and acts as a barrier to active political engagement: politics is portrayed as yet another spectacle.

This theme is developed in two stories that deal with the portrayal of war on television and the reception of it in Italy, 'Ruanda' (*Superwoobinda* p58-59) and 'Baghdad' (*Superwoobinda* p121-122). 'Ruanda' deals with the civil war in Rwanda in the 1990s as viewed by a voyeuristic Italian television addict with a gruesome obsession with death and violence. This character is accompanied everywhere by a raft of televisions: in his car, his bathroom, on his wristwatch and even an underwater one in his swimming pool. He has elided the difference between reality and televisual entertainment: he watches the genocide in Africa with an insouciance that suggests he sees it as both fictional and entertaining. The confusion between fact and fiction which is the nexus of Nove's criticism of television is described in *Ruanda* in terms of signal interference. The protagonist comments:

spesso la ricezione è disturbata e succede che al Ruanda si sovrapponga Video-Music vedo contemporaneamente delle cantanti sexy delle teste di bambino delle coca-cola delle pubblicità elettorali un cronista una fucilata al posto di un colpo d'accetta a seconda della zona in cui mi trovo vedo delle cose diverse (*Superwoobinda* p59).

Nove is careful to include in this confusing mix many of pulp's defining elements, namely pop music, marketing, violence and politics, in order to point out the confusion between fact and fiction in the mind of his narrator, which is echoed by the disjointed language in this text. Like much of Nove's writing, 'Ruanda' relies for its impact on the power of suggestion and the contrast between the narrator's and the reader's analytical powers. The narrator's facile, a-critical perception of the genocide in Rwanda is made more disturbing as any reader with better critical skills than this character is aware of the extent of his insensitivity to suffering, and the role that television has played in forming his attitudes. The link made here between war on television and consumption points to a criticism in *Superwoobinda* that goes beyond the uncritical acceptance of

television exhibited by many of the ‘teledeficienti’, and targets practices of consumption that put genocide and pop music programmes on the same level.

A similar confusion is shown in *Baghdad*, in which Nove’s narrator describes the first Gulf War as an almost entirely televisual event:

A Baghdad fanno gli scudi umani, difendono i depositi di armi con Coccione.
Su Raidue si vede meglio.
Io torno dal lavoro quando inizia il telegiornale.
Ma questa guerra, di notte, si può ascoltare a volume alto, la guardano tutti
(*Superwoobinda* p121).

This character is unable to rationalise clearly the effects of the war in Iraq, because it is presented to him via the television screen. On the one hand, the war is for him distant and unreal: he is aware of it only because ‘tutti i telegiornali dicono che adesso c’è la guerra’ (*Superwoobinda* p120). Although he is dimly aware that these distant events may have wider repercussions, he can only rationalise them in mundane terms: ‘come scoppia la guerra da una parte della terra tutte le altre ne sono informate, e ugualmente la pasta diventa di difficile reperibilità’ (*Superwoobinda* p122). His inability to apply a sense of proportion to these events triggers an overreaction to the conflict, and he rushes immediately to the supermarket to stockpile provisions, including twenty tins of tuna, four varieties of pasta, ten packets of coffee and ten packs of beer, because ‘se c’è la guerra non si può uscire come prima’ (*Superwoobinda* p121). The contrast here between the character’s disproportionate reaction to circumstances and Nove’s satire on this provokes in the reader a mixture of humour, shock and reflection.

A similar point is made in Nove’s novel, *Puerto Plata Market*. The protagonist of this novel, Michele, flees the combination of a failed relationship and dull employment prospects to go to the Caribbean in search of a wife. In a further indication of the self-referential nature of pulp, Michele, like Nove, originates from a small town on the Italian side of the border with Switzerland. His arrival in the Dominican Republic triggers a reflection on the contrast between the Caribbean and Switzerland, which in turn he uses to evaluate his ideas of Italian culture. In a long consideration of the differences between Italy and Switzerland, Nove recites a list of Swiss clichés (clean streets, orderly behaviour, Toblerone), to which he adds a comment on the difference between Swiss and Italian television in his childhood. Swiss television is portrayed as reflective and perceptive, because:

alla televisione della Svizzera italiana facevano vedere questa cosa delle altre parti del mondo [...] nei servizi del telegiornale nei documentari vedevi tutti questi bambini incredibilmente magri. Erano degli scheletri viventi e con una pancia gonfia dilatata immensamente piangevano sullo schermo con la faccia tutta piena di mosche che si appoggiavano sulle labbra (*Puerto Plata Market* p50-51).

In contrast, the same events are portrayed entirely differently on Italian television – ‘per noi, il Biafra era un telefilm, era un film sui negri e sulla morte’ (*Puerto Plata Market* p52). This text makes it clear that the specific uses of television in Italy, rather than television in general, is the object of criticism, thus lending a political connotation to Nove’s narrative. More explicitly here than in *Superwoobinda*, Italian television is criticised for its ambiguous mixture of fact and fiction, and the trivialisation of significant political events.

Overtly politicised texts such as ‘Ruanda’ and ‘Baghdad’ form a relatively small part of Nove’s writing, emphasising that specifically political concerns are not a significant part of popular culture in the 1990s. Instead, many of the narrative fragments in *Superwoobinda*, along with his story in *Gioventù Cannibale*, ‘Il mondo dell’amore’, deal more explicitly with the social and cultural impact of television. ‘Il mondo dell’amore’ reads as an almost continuous citation of the trashiest and tackiest elements of popular culture. In common with many of the other texts in *Gioventù Cannibale*, this story narrates banal and mundane events which take a violent or sickening turn. ‘Il mondo dell’amore’ recounts one Saturday afternoon in the lives of Sergio and Michele, in which they buy a porn video from the hypermarket. The video turns out not to be the erotic film they had expected, but footage of a gender reassignment operation, which Sergio and Michele attempt to imitate, with gory and fatal results. The story is set against a background of lowbrow, mass entertainments: the protagonists amuse themselves by playing lottery scratchcards, watching quiz shows, going to the hypermarket and mocking the southerners – ‘i teroni’ (*Gioventù Cannibale*, p54, sic) – but principally by watching undemanding, low quality television. Together, these elements form the frequently cited cultural background for the story. This paragraph is one of several used as a refrain throughout the story.

In macchina, io e Sergio facciamo sempre «Tàtta tàra tattà tatàtta!»
Facciamo così, come all’inizio di *Ok il prezzo è giusto*.
Iva Zanicchi entra e c’è quella specie di festa, prima della pubblicità. Tutti saltano e gridano: - OK il prezzo è giusto! (*Gioventù Cannibale* p53).

The frequency with which Nove's characters quote from television highlights their unreflective dependency on it as a source of culture, and their reliance on the medium as a source of dependable, comforting routine. *Superwoobinda* is packed with characters similar to Sergio and Michele: in the words of the book's own cover, they are 'dei poveri deficienti o almeno dei disturbati'. In order to highlight this, many of Nove's narrators introduce themselves thus: 'Sono una signora di 52 anni, bionda ossigenata. Mi chiamo Maria e il segno a cui appartengo è Gemelli' (*Superwoobinda* p13).

Others begin in a far more shocking manner. The first story, 'Il bagnoschiuma', begins with the words: 'ho ammazzato i miei genitori perché usavano un bagnoschiuma assurdo, Pure & Vegetal' (*Superwoobinda* p7). Nove uses this character, like many others, to demonstrate the distorting influence of advertising and consumerism.³⁷ In 'Il bagnoschiuma' Nove indicates a confusion between fact and fiction in the mind of the narrator, who reveals himself to be excessively susceptible to the suggestive power of advertising:

[...] voglio che in casa tutti usino Vidal.
Perché ricordo che fin da piccolo la pubblicità del bagnoschiuma Vidal mi piaceva molto.
Stavo a letto e guardavo correre quel cavallo.
Quel cavallo era la Libertà.
Volevo che tutti fossero liberi.
Volevo che tutti comprassero Vidal (*Superwoobinda* p7).

The disturbed logic of this chain of thought that conflates reality and the idealised, fictional world portrayed in television advertising, results here in the narrator's belief that freedom can be guaranteed simply by buying a different brand of shower gel. The mode of expression, which parodies both television voice-overs and traditional political discourse, points to a gap between the simplistic sentiments expressed by the narrator and the more complex discourse that Nove tries to construct around this character. There is bathos in the narrator's bitterness at his parents for buying a different kind of soap because it is cheaper – 'provatevi voi a essere colpiti negli ideali. Per delle

³⁷ A similar point is made in Anna Maria Scaramuzzino's short story, 'Roba da supermercato' (in Wood 1993 p87-92), which also deals with the commodification of relationships and the detrimental effects of advertising on perception. In Scaramuzzino's text, the female narrator rationalises many of her experiences, including childbirth, in terms of consumer goods and supermarket shopping. Her child, born in the supermarket, is wrapped in one of the shop's plastic bags for warmth and in order to ensure maximum publicity for the store, whilst the narrator is stopped on her way to the ambulance and required to present a receipt for the child, who is presumed to have been 'bought' inside the shop. Unlike Nove's narrator, who accepts the bombardment of advertising slogans placidly and unthinkingly, Scaramuzzino's character (also nameless, in contrast to the brand names that are distributed liberally throughout the story) is aware of the nightmarish scenario in which she finds herself, and is forced to reflect on the degeneration of relationships to the status of commercial exchange.

questioni di prezzo, poi' (*Superwoobinda* p7). In common with many of the other narrators in *Superwoobinda*, the protagonist of 'Il bagnoschiuma' uses a language that constructs a façade of simplicity, consistent with his unreflective and uncultivated disposition. Three of the sentences in this extract consist only of one paratactic clause and observe the unmarked subject – verb – object order of elements, a technique also used in other stories in the collection to create an artifice of simplicity.

In 'La merda', Nove creates an equally impressionable character, who differs from the narrator of 'Il bagnoschiuma' in that he realises the deceit behind advertising:

Bisogna rispettare, sempre e in ogni cosa, i colori giusti ...
Mi fa ridere, che nelle pubblicità rovescino sugli assorbenti e sui pannolini
liquidi sempre blu!
Io, da bambino credevo di pisciare molto sbagliato, perché pisciavo giallo.
Guardavo la tele e la piscia era blu.
Ma è la pubblicità, che modifica le cose (*Superwoobinda* p66).

Here, as in 'Il bagnoschiuma', the 'teledeficienti's' apparently minimalist language is created by first person narrative constructed around mostly very simple language and constructions. In 'La merda', like in 'Il bagnoschiuma', this impression is reinforced by Nove's use of space in the textual layout. Most sentences begin on a new line, breaking up the text into small units, and creating the impression of slow, deliberate and uncomplex linear thought processes in his characters, cast in the mould of voice-overs in television advertising. By combining linguistic structures and textual layout to emphasise the simplistic, uncritical nature of his characters, Nove encourages the reader to take a more reflective stance on his subject matter, both to criticise and pity the 'teledeficienti' for their actions.

A similar motivation is behind the very different stylisation of language in 'Complotto di famiglia' (*Superwoobinda* p10-12). In this story, Nove represents the syntactic structures of speech as highly complex, making only the most minimal concessions to the conventions of standard written language. The story is narrated in the first person present tense by Eugenio, who reluctantly gives in to his wife's requests to try wife-swapping, only to discover that it is a prank organised for a television programme, 'Complotto di famiglia'. The story is narrated in a stream-of-consciousness fashion: paratactic clauses are once again the main mode of expression, but Nove reduces punctuation to an absolute minimum. He uses only full stops to separate clauses, and omits the speech marks that conventionally distinguish direct speech from diegetic passages, or mark different speakers' turns, as in the following passage:

Mia moglie quella troia con quel tipo Marco era di là io guardavo la tipa vicino a me sempre più vicina chissà come si sta divertendo tua moglie con mio marito adesso divertiamoci anche noi mi ha detto sí divertiamoci adesso quella troia di mia moglie le ho detto (*Superwoobinda* p11).

The diacritical and syntactic omissions mean that decoding Nove's language in 'Complotto di famiglia' requires considerable effort by the reader, as the text offers very little guidance. Although the language used here is very different to that used in 'Il bagnoschiuma' and 'La merda', it serves the same purpose in drawing the reader's attention to its unconventional nature. Nove's tone is once again ironic: in using a linguistic style that is deliberately 'sub-standard', he criticises the disorienting effect of the media on people's minds, shown in this 'teledeficiente's' lack of culture and clarity of thought. In this text, Nove also extends this criticism to show the destructive impact of television on communication, and in turn, on the family, once again revealing his conservative stance.

Underlying Nove's artifice of simplicity in 'Il bagnoschiuma' and 'La merda' is a deep sense of irony (and in 'La merda', also a note of humour): devices that Nove uses to articulate his disgust at the disproportionate importance of television in contemporary popular culture, despite its poor quality. The criticisms of television present in Stefano Benni's 'Un cattivo scolaro' and Italo Calvino's 'L'ultimo canale' (Penguin, 1999) provide useful points of comparison to Nove's strategies in *Superwoobinda*. Both Benni's and Calvino's texts are concerned with the impact of television on society and its effect on vulnerable individuals, but they articulate this concern very differently. Like Nove, Calvino and Benni satirize the impact of television, but their strategies for doing so are less ambiguous. Benni's 'Un cattivo scolaro' portrays a world in which intellectual values are inverted: instead of education being based on book learning, pupils are instructed to watch television programmes, and to memorize trivia about quiz shows and soap operas. The 'bad pupil' of the title dislikes this intensely, and reads natural history books instead, for which he is punished. In Benni's case, the reader is clearly invited to identify with the values of the 'bad pupil' in a topsy-turvy world: he is portrayed as a creative, original thinker in a society where unthinking conformism, spread by television, has become not only the norm, but also the dominant cultural and intellectual reference point.

Conversely, Calvino's story depicts a situation in which television's negative effects are articulated through excesses in the character's behaviour. The narrator of 'L'ultimo canale' can no longer distinguish between reality and fiction, and attempts to use his television's remote control to change the world around him, pointing it at his

fiancée on his wedding day, and at government officials during a state event, for which he is arrested. The reader is invited to take an objective distance from the narrator of 'L'ultimo canale', a conspiracy theorist and social misfit. However, the narrator of 'L'ultimo canale' is deceptively articulate: he is able to express his distorted point of view as if it were perfectly rational. For these reasons, it may be argued that Benni's and Calvino's criticisms of television are articulated more effectively than Nove's in *Superwoobinda*. Nove's unsympathetic, robotic, inarticulate characters, coupled with the author's irony and bitter humour, may have the effect of alienating the reader. Rather than questioning their own practices, and accepting the criticisms of television that are one of the central tenets of *Superwoobinda*, readers may simply feel superior to Nove's narrators, leaving his text open to accusations of cultural snobbery. If read in this way, the ambiguity of Nove's stance undermines the very arguments that it is meant to articulate: the pity that Nove appears to show for the 'teledeficienti' may appear patronising rather than compassionate, with the result that *Superwoobinda*'s cutting criticisms lose much of their potency.

For Nove, the overriding and homogenizing influence of television also impacts on other forms of culture, including literature. In 'Giovani scrittori' (*Superwoobinda* p138-140), Nove creates an eponymous protagonist who takes part in a television discussion involving a group of literary critics alongside other authors of his generation.³⁸ Throughout the story, the protagonist comments on the other writers and critics taking part in the show: for example, Nanni Balestrini ('è completamente immenso'), Niccolò Ammaniti ('è il mio scrittore preferito'), Isabella Santacroce ('con i libri che scrive, sta praticamente inculando tutti'), and Chiara Zocchi ('è una storia vecchia. Per me non ci sono speranze', all from *Superwoobinda* p138-140). 'Giovani scrittori' begins with an ironic meditation on the commercial nature of contemporary writing:

Quando le telecamere iniziano a inquadrarti allora sei uno scrittore. Uno scrittore senza televisione fa sghignazzare da mattina a sera, per dirla tutta lo scopo degli intellettuali che sono vincenti è andare sempre all'*Altra edicola*, una simpatica trasmissione di cultura che fanno vedere il giovedì sera su quel canale che è Raidue (*Superwoobinda* p138).

Here Nove makes an ambiguous and double-edged criticism of the relationship between writers and television. Although he is ironic about the use of writing as a passport to celebrity status, he recognises that written fiction is dependent on televisual promotion

³⁸ The television programme which is the subject of this story, *Altra edicola*, was broadcast on Rai 2 on 24th October 1996 at 8.30 p.m.

for its success, and that he too has exploited publicity for his own gain. Furthermore, this comment also hints at the integration of televisual techniques in written fiction, which is a constant theme of Nove's writing. Nonetheless, he is also critical of the lack of culture among the general population that the emphasis on television indicates, and in a swipe at this lack of erudition he claims, 'la cultura, è quando in televisione ci sono gli scrittori' (*Superwoobinda* p138). The story ends with a refrain that is used repeatedly throughout by the protagonist to put his failure to seduce Chiara Zocchi to the back of his mind: 'meglio rilassarsi e pensare a vendere' (*Superwoobinda* p140). This emphasis on sales and the ridiculous lengths to which publishers may go to maximise them is satirised in another of Nove's short stories, 'Un sogno che ho fatto' (*Superwoobinda* p185-190). In this story, Nove makes explicit the negative conflation of television, consumerism and literature, announcing ironically that:

ormai non basta andare al Costanzo, stracciare l'immagine del papa mentre canti da Baudo, o farsi riprendere da Canale 5 mentre sei a letto con Sgarbi! Oggi, per fare buona letteratura, ci vuole un marketing differenziato, una strategia che poggia sul nuovo, e questo sei tu -. Era il solito progetto di Aldo Nove come ottimizzazione di qualcosa che continua a essere speciale nel processo di circolazione delle merci! (*Superwoobinda* p185).

In *Superwoobinda*, television is held responsible for the low status of literature as just one more item for consumption. Nove appeals to the reader on two levels. On the one hand, he builds on Balestrini's narrative model, using humour and irony to encourage thoughtful readers to distance themselves from this culture and to reflect critically upon it. On the other hand, the combination of narrative fragments and abrupt truncations that create the distinctive style of *Superwoobinda* force the reader into approaching this text as if they were watching television and had surrendered the remote control to one of the restless, inattentive *teledeficienti* that fill this book.

4. Popular fiction? Pulp and genre writing

The self-reflexive quality of pulp's criticism points once again to the influence of anglophone punk rock on this writing. On the one hand, the marked presence of self-referential satire in pulp confirms the highly exclusive nature of this writing. In some quarters the book-buying Italian public is still seen as a select and elite minority (Clerici 1997). The extent to which reading and books are popular in the quantitative sense is frequently questioned in the Italian press, which has sporadic outbursts of angst about

the lack of reading in the country.³⁹ Italy does have one of the smallest reading markets in Europe, oscillating between 10th and 11th place of fifteen European countries for levels of reading. It has been estimated that 50% of Italians never read a book at all, that 44% read only very occasionally and that the entire book publishing industry is dependent on the remaining 6% of the population (Gambaro 1997). On the other hand, this kind of self-deprecating irony may be read as another facet of pulp's engagement with contemporary popular culture. It has been shown that Italian families spend more money – but not necessarily time – on books than on audio-visual media, and from this it has been inferred that books are more 'consumed' than these other media (Attanasio and Carfagna 1994). Other studies have confirmed that more young Italians read for pleasure than other age groups (ISTAT 2000 and Associazione Italiana Editori 2001).⁴⁰ The 2000 Associazione Italiana degli Editori (AIE) report on the publishing industry in Italy, which portrays written fiction as an integrated part of youth cultures, notes that 'in the 1990s books and reading have become part of a set of consumer goods and patterns of behaviour shared by the younger and more secular generations' (Peresson 2000 p6). It has been suggested that 'popular' and genre fiction are adolescents' preferred reading material (Boëthius 1995). Pulp's double-edged and ironic attitudes towards various kinds of genre fiction both invites associations with these reading patterns among younger generations, and highlights a sophisticated and manipulative critique of them.

As Nove indicates in *Superwoobinda*, critics have attributed the mass impact of young, first time authors in Italian literature in the 1990s to the efforts of the major publishers such as Feltrinelli, Einaudi, and Mondadori to promote fiction by young authors (Pezzarossa 1999). La Porta 1999a cites the practice of printing very small initial runs of new books, so that the publisher can legitimately claim that a book is in

³⁹ Over the summer of 1998, shortly after the zenith of Italy's pulp fiction frenzy in 1996, the *Corriere della sera* printed seventeen lengthy articles about young people and reading. These largely condemn young Italians as illiterate, and therefore uncultured (see *Corriere della sera* 10th, 13th – 15th, 18th, 19th, 23rd – 28th, and 30th August, 1st and 3rd September 1998). It has been noted that Italy has relatively low rates of completion for secondary, further and higher education (Attanasio and Carfagna 1997), but paradoxically, that higher levels of literary competence are more widespread among younger generations of Italians than in older age groups (see the International Adult Literacy Survey, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2000). Book promotions that emphasise low prices are targeted specifically at this youth readership (Clerici 1997), to whom the success of modern classics in 'supereconomiche' editions is also attributed (Cadioli 1994).

⁴⁰ These findings are corroborated by a Europe-wide study published in 2001, which found that older teenagers in Italy (along with Spain and Israel) were more likely than those in other European countries to use their own money to buy books (Livingstone and Bovill 2001); but paradoxically, Italian children were among the least likely to own their own books, with only UK children less likely to do so (Livingstone, Holden et. al 1999). The researchers noted that in Italy, low socio-economic status homes were less likely to own books, and used data from the 1950s to propose that reading is being displaced by television and interactive media.

its fifth edition within a very short time, thus falsely inflating its popularity.⁴¹ With this strategy, publishers play on the importance of the group in youth cultures, and the need among young people to express similarity with their peers. By creating an impression of quantitative popularity, publishers create a 'group' to which people can belong by buying the book, and therefore can boost sales further. However, as Nove's comments indicate, whilst these authors realise that publicity is one of the pillars of their success and that manipulation of it can be advantageous, there is also disagreement with its generic statements and sweeping generalisations.⁴² In some cases, the way in which pulp fiction was presented to the public contrasts sharply with the actual content of the novels. For this reason, many pulp authors began to contest the application of the generic labels by the publishing houses and in the press once they became more firmly established.

4a. *In principio erano le mutande*: Popular romance?

Feltrinelli's efforts to increase their market share of the youth readership extend to remodelling their bookshops to include a wider range of media and to make them more user-friendly. Feltrinelli has pioneered collaborations with Ricordi Media Store, firstly in Vigevano in 1999 and then in other towns, including the flagship bookshop in Milan. These shops mix books, music and other media according to subject matter, rather than dividing them into separate sections for each format, and offer free internet access with an on-line store database (Cardone 2001). Feltrinelli has also tried to have innovative book launches, held outside bookshops, in youth centres, which also feature live music and other events designed to appeal to young people. The launch of Rossana Campo's first novel, *In principio erano le mutande*, advertised alongside other similar events on this poster, was one such event:

⁴¹ This tendency has been exacerbated by the fact that many pulp authors, including Enrico Brizzi, Isabella Santacroce, Aldo Nove, Silvia Ballestra and Niccolò Ammaniti have moved between publishers, reprinting their first books after each move.

⁴² The editors' introduction to *Cuore di Pulp* accuses much other 1990s Italian pulp of being shallow and uninteresting, because it is based first and foremost on marketing strategies. Similar criticisms of *Gioventù Cannibale* were made in the press: see Signorile 1996 and Colombo 1997.

Figure 4: Advertisement for the launch of *In principio erano le mutande*

CALUSCA

**ASSOCIAZIONE CULTURALE CALUSCA CITY
LIGHTS
CENTRO SOCIALE AUTOGESTITO
CONCHETTA 18 (COX 18)
MILANO, VIA CONCHETTA 18 - TEL. 58105688**

Milano, fine Aprile 1992

**Al soci, ai compagni, agli amici e ai fratelli,
Con il prossimo mese di Maggio inizia l'attività
dello spazio dibattito della libreria.
In questo primo mese le iniziative avranno
queste caratteristiche:**

U-H-I-G-H-S

Sabato 9 Maggio dalle ore 18, la Shake Edizioni e la rivista Decoder presentano l'edizione italiana della rivista californiana "Re/Search", una delle più importanti della scena underground mondiale.

Nella stessa giornata verrà presentata l'edizione a fumettide "Il Pasto Nudo" di William Burroughs nell'elaborazione grafica e creativa del Professor Bad Trip.

Vi sarà inoltre una mostra di tavole originali e di collage sempre dello stesso autore. La serata proseguirà con la proiezione di video su e con W. Burroughs e sarà in funzione la "Dreamachine".

Sabato 16 Maggio alle ore 18, con la collaborazione della Casa Editrice Garzanti, incontro - dibattito con:

Claudio Camarca autore di "Il sole è innocente".

Claudio Camarca è un giovane romano che ha esordito nel 1989 con "Sottoroma" sotto la stella editoriale della Fondazione Pasolini. La sua scoperta è merito di Pier Vittorio Tondelli che pubblicò nell'antologia Giovani Blues il suo primo racconto "Tregua".

"Il sole è innocente" nasce dalle esperienze di Claudio Camarca nelle borgate romane. E' un racconto disperato, scritto con stupefacente abilità linguistica a livello sia lessicale, sia sintattico. Un "freddo rap per giovani incarogniti" che colpisce allo stomaco e segna l'enorme e apparentemente irreversibile differenza con le borgate raccontate da Pier Paolo Pasolini.

Giovedì 28 Maggio dalle ore 18, l'Associazione Calusca City Lights, il Centro Sociale Autogestito Conchetta 18 e la casa Editrice Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, in occasione dell'uscita del romanzo:

"In principio erano le mutande" di Rossana Campo

Feltrinelli Editore

organizzano una festa, un party, una kermesse, una performance, un soft-rave - ambient-music and free-sex.

Special guest: D.J. : Dix for Sex..& Gigi l'amoroso con musica e il Coxtail High Ball Spaceal Energy

(Source: Feltrinelli archive)

Feltrinelli's positioning of Rossana Campo's writing in the marketplace of cultural consumption invites a comparison with punk in that it raises many questions about the relationship of pulp writing to cultural industries (and also to the sex industry: the erotic note of this advertising positions Campo's writing awkwardly between pornography and literature, a recurrent theme in pulp and one which I will discuss in more detail in the next section). In this poster, Feltrinelli is clearly trying to link *In principio erano le mutande* with contemporary mass and popular cultures and a tradition of youthful transgression: note that many of the connections between young authors and other cultural influences quoted (Tondelli, twentieth century American writing and pop music) are the same as those to which pulp authors are eager to link their writing. Although Pasolini is mentioned, there is an effort to distinguish young writers from his fiction, echoing pulp's disinterest in drawing attention to potential links with this author. In other promotions, Feltrinelli attempted to reinforce links between Campo's writing and youth cultures by describing *In principio erano le mutande* as 'The *Porci con le ali* of the 1990s', to the puzzlement of some critics (Giuliani 1992, Barilli 1993), and to the displeasure of the author herself.⁴³

The extent to which Campo's fiction conforms to the image projected by Feltrinelli's marketing is questionable. Her novels are characterised by their irreverent stance towards many aspects of popular culture, and particularly by comic manipulation of the genres of popular written fiction. *In principio erano le mutande* parodies the conventions of popular romance fiction: not something that is indicated by Feltrinelli's advertising. Campo is clearly highly adept in satirising the elements of a whole range of written fiction: at the opposite end of the literary spectrum to the popular romances that she parodies, references to romantic literature are scattered throughout the novel: the first conversation between the narrator and her partner is about *Wuthering Heights*, and the narrator compares her own situation to a romantic heroine: referring to herself as 'autentica eroina da romanzo ammalata per passione sfigata' (*In principio erano le mutande* p136), which clearly invites comparisons with Emma Bovary and numerous other romantic heroines. The ending of the novel reinforces the comparison with romantic fiction: the narrator announces to her partner that she is writing a novel, and that he must decide whether it has a happy ending or not, whereupon he announces 'i romanzi che gli piacciono sono quelli che vanno a finire bene' (*In principio erano le mutande* p145).

⁴³ Campo protested against the kinship between *In principio erano le mutande* and *Porci con le ali*, announcing, 'direi che l'unica somiglianza sia l'argomento, l'insoddisfazione e il malessere giovanile'. (Novello 1993: article without complete reference details, supplied by the Feltrinelli archive).

Despite the somewhat clichéd ‘happy ending’, almost nothing else in the novel conforms to the conventions of popular romantic fiction. The ‘romantic hero’, ironically referred to as ‘l’infame numero tre’, is far removed from the traditional tall, dark and handsome romantic stereotype of the ‘principe azzurro’: instead, he is ‘un tipo sulla cinquantina molto grosso grande pancia capello lungo mezzo brizzolato insomma quasi più bello di Pavarotti’ (*In principio erano le mutande* p55). The plain-speaking narrator is depicted as inelegant, disorganised, permanently bankrupt and apt to get into difficult situations. She meets ‘l’infame numero tre’ at a party, and succeeds in seducing him despite making a graceless first impression:

sono lì che mi ingozzo [...] ho su un vestitino giallo acceso che ho preso per l’occasione di questa festa con un esproprio rivoluzionario da Rinascente - quindi ceffata in pieno la misura, penso che questo vestito mi starebbe benone solo che dovrei averci dieci anni di età (*In principio erano le mutande* p55).

This unsophisticated behaviour, uncharacteristic of a romantic heroine, is typical of Campo’s narrator. She is promiscuous and sex is frequently mentioned in the novel. It is frequently the subject of conversations between women: for instance, in the first chapter, she describes how her friend ‘fa l’elenco dettagliato delle posizioni e dei bellissimi romantici modi di come lui gliel’ha dato’ (*In principio erano le mutande* p15). This illustrates how the direct, dysphemistic, and occasionally vulgar tone and language of *In principio erano le mutande* are far removed from the conventions of romantic fiction. Campo manipulates these linguistic characteristics to lend a comic tone to her narrative. Much of the comedy comes from the contrast between hyperbole and understatement, or between elevated ideas and basic realities; for example when the narrator is forced to spend several days ill in bed, ‘senza dirlo a nessuno un po’ per vergogna di malattia decadente, amore e morte un po’ perché non ce la faccio a arrivare fino al telefono nell’ingresso’ (*In principio erano le mutande* p136). These contrasts are often replicated in the rhythm of clause structures when short, paratactic clauses are used to parenthesise longer and more complex ones, as in the following passage:

Una merda.

Dopo tre secondi suona il telefono e io penso: ecco qui signori il classico esempio di telepatia fra due persone che si amano come ci amiamo io e il futurista infame.

Pronto? Esulto io (*In principio erano le mutande* p127).

The frank and naive language used by Campo’s narrator indicates elements of critical awareness and depth to *In principio erano le mutande* that go beyond parody of popular romance, and link this novel with notes of ethical concern present in all pulp,

and its literary precedents. Both *In principio erano le mutande* and Campo's second novel, *Il pieno di super*, are critical of blinkered and discriminatory social attitudes in Italy. Both the first person narrator-protagonists are southern Italians living in the north of Italy, and both feel prejudice against them for their origins.⁴⁴ In *Il pieno di super* Campo's young narrator discovers discrimination against southerners when she moves north and starts school. On the first day, the teacher moves the southern pupils to their own corner of the classroom and systematically victimises them from that point onwards. This prejudice against southerners is reciprocated by the narrator's mother's negative feelings about northerners, whom she accuses of distant and avaricious behaviour: 'io al nord non ci vengo più. Oltretutto ci fa sempre freddo, e le persone pensano solo a accumulare soldi. Quella che abita sopra di noi dà del lei alla suocera e la chiama signora' (*Il pieno di super* p32).⁴⁵

There are strong echoes of Celati's early prose (*Le avventure di Guizzardi*, 1972; *La banda dei sospiri*, 1976; *Lunario del paradiso*, 1978) in both *In principio erano le mutande* and *Il pieno di super*. Like Celati's early prose, *In principio erano le mutande* is narrated in the first person, in a candid, oral style, sometimes by a child narrator. To emphasise the artifice of a speaking voice of a naïve narrator, Campo, like Celati, adopts an awkward, self-conscious narrative style, to remind the reader of the narrator's presence. Celati's narrator in *Le avventure di Guizzardi* uses this technique to move from one subject to another, and a similar strategy is also developed in *La banda dei sospiri*, in which the narrator introduces new subjects with phrases such as 'lo voglio descrivere' (*La banda dei sospiri* p17); 'adesso dirò qualche parola sulla nostra economia familiare' (*La banda dei sospiri* p22); 'adesso bisogna raccontare cosa succedeva' (*La banda dei sospiri* p27); 'dirò come era fatta questa scuola' (*La banda dei sospiri* p52); 'torno a parlare della scuola' (*La banda dei sospiri* p82); 'parlerò delle domeniche' (*La banda dei sospiri* p86). Many chapters in *In principio erano le mutande* have headings written in a similar style; for example, 'il primo capitolo dove introduco la mia vita di grandi miserie e presento anche l'amica Giovanna' (*In principio erano le mutande* p11), 'questo è un capitolo che torna indietro nei ricordi infantili' (*In principio erano le mutande* p17), and 'racconto che ritorno a casa e poi vado dalla famiglia' (*In principio erano le mutande* p104). Furthermore, the narrator adopts a similarly clumsy

⁴⁴ For more on north/south prejudice and the autobiographical nature of Campo's writing see Litherland 2004.

⁴⁵ This theme reoccurs in other pulp: for example, in *La guerra degli Antò* Ballestra attacks northern hostility towards southern Italians in the context of the exploitation of (southern and central Italian) students in university towns: in Bologna, looked down on as 'giovani marocchè che vengon qui a fare i comodi loro, inigano, sporcano dappertutto, deteriorano l'arredo' (*La guerra degli Antò* p174).

and self-aware technique to change subjects in her narrative, for example, ‘allora ve lo ricordate il ginecologo famoso’ (*In principio erano le mutande* p37), ‘m’innamoro di nuovo. E questo è un altro capitolo’ (*In principio erano le mutande* p44), and ‘ecco qui uno dei capitoli più importanti che si entra nel cuore del romanzo e è quello di come conosco questo mio grande amore infame della mia vita’ (*In principio erano le mutande* p55), to cite just a few instances.

Campo also uses dislocation and topicalisation techniques typical of the spontaneous spoken language in a manner that recalls Celati’s prose. Celati repeatedly uses left dislocation to emphasise the subject, with redundant pronouns at the beginning of the clause, and exemplification/rephrase, for example in the phrase: ‘io in questo ospedale la data precisa che ci sono entrato e venuto fuori non la posso dire con sincera precisione ma deve ritenersi essere stato un lungo pezzo di minimo circa due lune piene’ (*Le avventure di Guizzardi* p60). In *In principio erano le mutande*, Campo has frequent recourse to the same techniques of dislocation, topicalisation, redundancy and rephrase: for instance ‘io bisogna che vi dica che ci ho questo potere magico che appena arrivo in un posto sento subito che vibrazioni può avere, se questo posto va bene per me o no’ (*In principio erano le mutande* p99); ‘io anche se ci ho questo spirito antiborghese proletario questi cameroni vi dico che li ho sempre odiati’ (*In principio erano le mutande* p90); ‘io queste cugine e amiche porche ci passerei la vita a ascoltarle perché dove le impari tutte queste cose?’ (*In principio erano le mutande* p36). Campo’s use of language to highlight her narrator’s naïvety not only makes her a comic figure, but also a vulnerable one. Hidden behind the comic narrative is a note of concern for emotionally vulnerable women and girls that is present in much of Campo’s narrative, which is consistent with the social and ethical concerns expressed in all pulp.

This point is made more strongly in Campo’s *L’attore americano* (Feltrinelli, 1998), which also satirises popular romance, although in this case the focus is on romance in film. *L’attore americano* is more ironic and less comic than *In principio erano le mutande*: this is indicated by the quotation from Hemingway that introduces the novel, ‘Gli americani sono gli unici uomini al mondo da sposare’ (Lucamante 2001d). The narrator-protagonist is a film-obsessed Italian radio journalist living in Paris who idolises the American actor, Steve Rothman. After going to an interview with Steve following a screening of his latest film, she publicly propositions him. There follows a night of passion in his hotel and, while professing coolness about the whole affair, she goes to New York two months later in the hope of finding him. After much intensive searching she bumps into him by chance whilst waiting for a taxi, and they

renew their relationship. The liaison is short-lived, however, and when she discovers that he is both an alcoholic and prone to violent mood swings she returns to Paris. The bitterness with which the end of the relationship is narrated reveals a deep disillusionment with the romantic ideals pedalled by popular cinema. The shadow of Rothman's screen persona takes some time to dispel, suggesting that the narrator has fallen in love with the fictional character of Gary, rather than with the real man. Almost at the end of the novel, the narrator calls him by the name of his character, Gary, for which he reproaches her: 'mi chiamo Steve, *lui* si chiama Gary, il mio personaggio. Io mi chiamo Steve' (*L'attore americano* p142). The realisation that her relationship is based on fictional idealism, and her resulting disillusionment with her American actor, may be read as an authorial comment on the character's relationship to popular Hollywood cinema and the fallacy of its fiction. Contemplating the ruins of her romantic adventure, she tells herself 'maledico me stessa e [...] il giorno che sono entrata in quel cinema maledico. Eccolo qua il mio eroe romantico. Fanculo il romanticismo' (*L'attore americano* p161-162).

The disillusionment she experiences when she realises that the reality of the man does not live up to his screen persona is extended to the notion of the 'American dream', which Campo criticises for its false hopes and the unrealistic aspirations it inspires. Even her American actor bitterly condemns its essence: 'qui in America quello che cercano tutti è solo di avere abbastanza soldi da stare tranquilli, di avere due macchine, una casa, una donna. Tutto questo è solo un mucchio di merda per me. Il sogno americano è un falso dio, una fottuta chimera del cazzo' (*L'attore americano* p142).⁴⁶ The narrator herself is antagonistic to America's capitalist ethic, and her response to a barrage of endearments from her idolised American actor and an invitation to visit him in New York is a comically blunt rebuttal: 'tanto io non ci vengo in America [...] io sono tendenzialmente ostile ai paesi del capitalismo avanzatissimo' (*L'attore americano* p39). Tellingly, *L'attore americano* marks the end of Campo's parodies of popular romance. In subsequent fiction, she experiments with subversion of other genres, for example, manipulating the conventions of detective fiction in *Mentre la mia bella dorme*. Campo's critical engagement with such 'popular' genres is typical of pulp's use of genre conventions, but quite different from the image of her writing projected by Feltrinelli. Campo's guise of popular fiction is just a façade that masks a

⁴⁶ McGowan suggests that the novel's opening quotation from Hemingway, 'Gli americani sono gli unici uomini da sposare' is 'progressivamente refutato dagli eventi: l'attore americano si scopre un individuo isterico, confuso e solo, pericoloso per sé e per gli altri, ed il sogno americano, come Rothman stesso si trova a dover ammettere, si rivela per quello che è, un falso Dio' (McGowan 1999 p177).

more ironic and sophisticated manipulation of the genre, just as in many cases, the guise of dilettantism adopted by punk bands hid more thorough knowledge of music and youth cultures.

4b. 'Horror' and violence: *Gioventù Cannibale*, *Bastogne* and 'Jasmine'

A similar process operates in texts that draw on other genres, principally horror, and 1950s American pulp. Many pulp authors are informed by these genres, but this should not be taken as an indication that their fiction is straightforward 'horror', even if it is proposed as such. As is the case with a lot of pulp fiction, the image promoted by authors and publishers is often slightly different from the actual content of the text. Einaudi's anthology of 'horror' stories, *Gioventù Cannibale*, was published in Einaudi's *stile libero* series, which is aimed at a youth market, and by publishing *Gioventù Cannibale* in this series, Einaudi effectively branded it as a text aimed at a youthful readership.⁴⁷ Pulp authors too acknowledge that the *cannibale* label is almost entirely the product of Einaudi's press office. Alda Teodorani, whose short story, 'E Roma piange', appears in *Gioventù Cannibale*, comments 'credo che in diversi scrittori ci sia la ricerca dell'effetto sanguinario o comunque il desiderio di spiazzare il lettore. Al di là di questo, non vedo altri tratti comuni. Penso che dietro a quell'etichetta ci stia soprattutto un'operazione pubblicitaria' (e.r. 1998 p15). Giuseppe Culicchia echoes her sentiments, commenting that 'sono gli uffici stampa delle case editrici che hanno la necessità di creare il 'caso' per far parlare i giornali, per cui si cerca di rendere riconoscibili questi scrittori dando loro un'etichetta comune' (Rebuffini 1998 p15).

A further comparison with punk may be seen in the uneven quality of Italian pulp fiction. In anthologies like *Gioventù Cannibale* and *Cuore di Pulp*, the quality of

⁴⁷ *Stile libero* was launched in 1996, at the height of the boom in 1990s nuova narrativa and contemporaneously with the recognition of pulp as a part of this phenomenon. It is mainly dedicated to narrative by young Italian and foreign authors, and features some works accompanied by CDs or videos, because 'i giovani lettori di "stile libero" non sono lettori "forti", vengono da un'abitudine alla lettura veloce e saltuaria, da una scuola abbastanza disattenta a queste questioni. "Stile libero", quindi, significa anche scrittura abbastanza veloce e di superficie, spesso a contatto di gomito con la cultura musicale, quella del fumetto, del serial televisivo, del cyberspazio cinematografico e televisivo. Non a caso nella collana arrivano, con le loro scritture un po' occasionali, alcuni cantautori, attori cinematografici, registi, realizzando anche sul piano della committenza la libertà e mescolanza dei generi e delle forme di comunicazione. Le pratiche in uso nel mondo dei prodotti di consumo, l'uso di trade marks, slogan e campagne pubblicitarie fanno il loro ingresso nel mondo della produzione libraria' (Ceserani 1999 p93). The series is edited by Severino Cesari and Paolo Repetti, both of whom have strong backgrounds in publishing texts by and for young people. Cesari has edited the cultural pages of the left-wing newspaper *Il manifesto*, and was involved in Celati's *Narratori delle pianure* project. Repetti had previously worked at the publishers Theoria, particularly in the areas of genre fiction and as a 'talent scout' for young authors.

the writing is often patchy, and there is no consistent, ethical message behind the use of violence and brutality.⁴⁸ *Gioventù Cannibale*'s back jacket unambiguously announces its ethical intent to 'inventare linguaggi e stili finalmente "all'altezza" del Grande Nemico: la violenza e il male crescenti che, nell'indifferenza e nel chiacchiericcio generale, schiacciano i deboli, le vittime, e annegano ogni possibilità comune di salvezza' (*Gioventù Cannibale*). The texts in *Gioventù Cannibale* all feature characters who are socially disadvantaged or in some way vulnerable to and exploited by others who have entirely selfish motivations. The characters of Daniele Luttazzi's 'Cappuccetto Splatter', a parody of the fairy tale 'Little Red Riding Hood', are in every sense fashion victims. Like Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*, this text's style relies heavily on the citation of drug names and brand names, interspersed with descriptions of graphic violence. Alda Teodorani's story, 'E Roma piange', tells the story of a vagrant from Calabria, hired as a hit man to 'clean' the city 'della gente che mi pulisce i vetri ai semafori e di quelli che mi vogliono vendere gli accendini. Dei negri, degli zingari, compresa quella che mi ha rubato il portafoglio' (*Gioventù Cannibale* p47). In Massaron's 'Il rumore', the middle-aged narrator recounts an episode from his childhood in which he tries to gain the approval of his friends by participating in a sexual assault on a girl who later makes a fatal jump from a high window. The noise of the title, which has disturbed his sleep since that time, is the sound of the impact.

The proposed link between all these stories is an emphasis on a prevalent social cruelty, compounded by a sense of alienation and dislocation from others. The extent to which they take the 'moral' stance described by Brolli in the introduction is, however, less clear. Some pulp texts fully justify the many criticisms of shallowness and sensationalism that critics have made of this fiction. 'Cappuccetto Splatter', for instance, dwells in rather too much graphic and sickening detail on violence and mutilation for Brolli's claim of moralising motivation to ring true. Others, like Nove's 'Il mondo dell'amore', and Teodorani's 'E Roma piange' have a clear moral stance – but perhaps articulate it in rather obvious ways – and use the horror genre to express cutting socio-political criticisms. However, even their use of horror and violence has not always been interpreted in this way, and many pulp texts can seem to have an ambivalent ethical stance.

⁴⁸ The editors of *Cuore di Pulp* acknowledge the irony and emphasis on youth that dominates much pulp in the introduction to their anthology: 'Guai a prendere sul serio i generi letterari. Si incorre nelle ire dell'establishment culturale. I finti pulp sono accettati dal sistema letterario ed editoriale solo se sono demenziali, se fanno i goliardi ironizzando sul sangue e la violenza che mettono su carta' (*Cuore di Pulp* p8-9).

Many pulp texts have also provoked controversy for their use of sexual violence and violence against women, and critics have been unable to reach a consensus on whether this constitutes merely a perpetuation of misogynistic stereotypes (for example, Lucamante 2001a), or an ethical stance against them (for example, La Porta 1999). Enrico Brizzi's second novel, *Bastogne*, has stirred debate because of its ambiguous use of violence, and because of the sharp contrast between this text and the much gentler *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*.⁴⁹ Violence is inherent in the title of *Bastogne*, and this novel has an aspect of brutality that extends to the music and other forms of youth culture at the heart of the novel, as well as to the literary and philosophical references made by the protagonist.⁵⁰ The characters in *Bastogne* are the embodiment of the 'folk devils' often associated with youth cultures (Cohen 2002), and who have progressed from sympathy with the aggressive, anti-social ideas expressed in their favourite music, films, comics and books to living out these ideals. *Bastogne* details the misadventures of cousins Ermanno and Jerry Claypool and their friends Raimundo and Dietrich, who make a living from small-time drug dealing and other petty crime.

At the beginning of the novel there are indications of a predisposition to excessive violence. In an oblique reference to Tarantino's film *Reservoir Dogs* (translated into Italian as *Le iene*), Ermanno refers to himself and Jerry as children as 'noi scoiattoli-iene' (*Bastogne* p24).⁵¹ *Reservoir Dogs* is an extremely violent film, and Ermanno and Jerry's violent potential is amply fulfilled in the novel, which begins with the murder of a female character, Occhi-blu. Her friend, Palpebrabella, is raped and murdered (although the precise order of these events remains a little ambiguous),

⁴⁹ A similar note of ethical ambiguity can, however, be heard in *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* in the close relationship between this text and Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*, discussed in Chapter 3.

⁵⁰ *Bastogne* was the scene of protracted and bloody fighting during the Battle of Ardennes during the winter of 1944-45, which is acknowledged as a significant event in precipitating the defeat of Hitler. This is recalled in microcosm in Brizzi's novel by the protagonist, Ermanno, who mentions 'un altro gruppetto esclusivo, i Boneheads, una squadraccia di teste rasate che non mancava una trasferta. Noi modernisti eravamo studenti interessati alla ricontestualizzazione dello stile edoardiano; i Boneheads, nazisti nel cuore e per professione boscaioli, fabbri e garzoni di stalla. Si finiva spesso per scambiarsi complimenti a bottigliate in rue Bastogne o rue de la Somme e le altre stradine buie dove le famiglie parcheggiavano l'auto per venire allo stadio' (*Bastogne* p44). The youth cultures referred to here, Mods and Teddy Boys, were renowned for their confrontational styles: for example, in 1950s Britain, the working-class Teds challenged class conventions by dressing in smart suits, designed to project a tough image, which Teds were reputed to put into practice with acts of (racist) violence (Savage 2001 p10). With this reference, Brizzi indicates to the reader the racist attitudes of his characters. Ermanno also makes specific reference to *Bastogne* itself: 'e lui ha, a un palmo dagli occhi, la punta di quella cosa che arde e Bastogne, l'avamposto che hai davanti mentre tutta la foresta gela, mentre con gli altri disperati rispondi al fuoco nemico e vai incontro al tuo destino' (*Bastogne* p104-5).

⁵¹ An influence from Tarantino's film *Pulp Fiction* (1994) may also be detected in the circular narrative structure of *Bastogne*. *Bastogne* begins and ends with the murder of Occhi-blu and between this follows a linear structure, delineated by various sub-headings. *Pulp Fiction* has a broadly similar, but more complex narrative structure. It begins and ends with a hold-up in a restaurant, and in between follows three interrelated stories, centered on the film's leading characters: 'Vincent Vega and Marsellus Wallaces' wife', 'The gold watch' and 'Jules, Vincent, Jimmie and The Wolf'.

apparently because she dislikes Public Image Limited.⁵² The dénouement comes when Ermanno, Jerry, Raimundo and Dietrich attempt to hold up a Chinese restaurant. Contrary to their expectations, the proprietors do not capitulate to their demands, and the attempted hold-up ends in a bloodbath, with five deaths, whilst four other characters have sulphuric acid fired into their faces from the apparently innocuous water pistols carried by some of their assailants. Always the most shrewd of the quartet, Cousin Jerry and Ermanno manage to leave the country before they are caught by the police: Raimundo behaves with calculated cruelty towards his friends, leaving Dietrich to pay the penalty for all of them. Raimundo is subsequently killed (the implication is that Jerry is responsible), whereas Ermanno eventually returns from overseas to find Dietrich a broken man.

This plot ensures that *Bastogne* is violent, occasionally racist, and in places crude. Although a common reading of *Bastogne* sees it as an unsophisticated attempt to jump on the cannibale bandwagon, Brizzi strongly denies that it is an attempt to tap into the hype created by Einaudi around this group (Gaspodini 1999). An alternative reading of *Bastogne*, and perhaps a more viable one than seeing it as just a crude pastiche of the cannibali, is to see it also as an elaboration of the exaggeratedly fictitious worlds depicted in comics and pulp fiction of every kind. The novel's front cover is taken from an illustration by Andrea Pazienza, and the text itself displays an element of the comic book in the two dimensional characters' exaggerated lifestyles. The text contains references to comic books – the cat belonging to Ermanno and Raimundo is called Rankxerox, the name of a character drawn by Andrea Pazienza, to whom *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* is also dedicated. The ending of the novel emphasises the comic book effect:

Figure 5: 'Fine'



(*Bastogne* p208)

This is given further credence by the forthcoming publication of *Bastogne* in comic book form, with drawings by Maurizio Manfredi, planned for 2006. Even a

⁵² '[H]o deciso di devastarti quando hai detto che i Public Image Limited sono musica da tinello [.] i grandissimi PIL. Te lo insegniamo noi il rispetto, bocchinara. Un vocalista della portata straziante e punk di John Lydon, la chitarra di Keith Levene, con tutto l'odore di saga londinese che si lascia alle spalle. e Jah Wobble, spaventapasseri tossico, al basso. Tanto per citare solo la formazione originaria, caro il mio faccino di cazzo' (*Bastogne* p175).

reading of *Bastogne* as a pastiche of a comic book, though, cannot disguise the fundamentally misogynistic perspective voiced by the narrator of *Bastogne*, accentuated by the female characters' names. Some of these are references to drugs: Nicotine, Cannuccia (perhaps a diminutive of 'canna', used in youth language varieties: see Forconi 1988 p46, Giacomelli 1993, and Manzoni and Dalmonte 1980) and Biancalancia (which, in this context may contain a reference to 'bianca', cocaine: see Forconi 1988 p30). Other names, such as La Baronessa and Occhi-Blu, indicate two dimensional characters, typical of comic books, and *Bastogne* follows this through by depicting women only in terms of their appearance and sexual function. Women are frequently referred to as 'troie', and in a metaphorical aside, which also reveals the drug culture depicted in the novel, Ermanno remarks: 'io, le donne, non so, forse le odio. Forse mi piacciono troppo e non riesco ad accettare che siano tagliate con certe schifezze chimiche' (*Bastogne* p72). In a remark that reveals a literary aspect to the culture in the novel, he comments, 'aveva ragione, il vecchio Miller, quando gridava ai quattro venti che le troie non son mica donne, ch  loro son troie e basta' (*Bastogne* p113). Miller is just one of the many authors referred to in *Bastogne*: others include Jean Genet, C line, Sartre, Henry Miller, Nostradamus and Anthony Burgess. By choosing these authors as his characters' points of reference, Brizzi attempts to situate his text in a tradition of philosophical and respected transgression, and to offer a cultural justification for the deviance and violence in *Bastogne*. The extent to which he achieves this is not so clear. In associating these literary reference points with post-punk rock music, he is clearly trying to create a network of 'high' and 'low' cultural reference points in which sexual violence and ambivalent imagery is used provocatively, in an attempt to evoke philosophical and ethical reflections in the reader.

Indications of an ethical stance in *Bastogne* can be seen in descriptions of Ermanno's family life. This is narrated in a fragmentary and non-sequential way at the beginning of the novel, so that the reader has to reconstruct the circumstances for themselves. At various points Ermanno announces 'mamma era una bella donna dedita ai barbiturici, sposata con il prestante Gualtiero Claypool, collaudatore delle esclusive auto Bugatti nonch  padre del vostro affezionato' (*Bastogne* p23); that he moved to an apartment with his mother at an unspecified point after his parents' divorce, and that subsequently, 'la madre del vostro affezionato si era trasferita definitivamente altrove in compagnia dell'obeso Alfio Ancona, grossista di tessuti in grado di fornire tutte le sicurezze cui pu  aspirare una donna ormai intiepidita. Oltre al bourbon e i doppi misti al tennis club, intendo' (*Bastogne* p25). For Ermanno's father, everything is for sale and

all problems can be resolved with money. When he invites his son for Christmas, Ermanno remarks bitterly 'nella grande casa guadagnata col sudore della fronte, circondato da tutto ciò che è suo, pranzerà insieme al figlio, che non vede più di due volte l'anno, e una simpatica mignotta che ha bisogno di lavorare anche il ventiquattro, venticinque e ventisei dicembre' (*Bastogne* p105). Gualtiero Claypool's lack of concern for his son is such that he forgets these arrangements as soon as they are made, and Ermanno remarks, with more than a note of hurt: 'nemmeno si ricordava esattamente i nostri accordi, il vecchio Claypool. Nemmanco si è accorto che sono a tavola insieme a lui con un giorno e mezzo di ritardo' (*Bastogne* p111). Ermanno has apparently lacked for nothing in the material sense, but his relationship with his family is clearly devoid of any affection. If Ermanno's relationships with women are based uniquely on sex and violence, Brizzi shows this to be partly the fault of his father. By openly using prostitutes (and encouraging his son to do the same), Gualtiero sets a precedent for his son to see women as sexual objects.

The implication is that, as a result of his upbringing, Ermanno stands little chance of developing anything other than a warped moral perspective. His incapacity for affection, lack of compassion for others, and his consequent predisposition to violence are directly attributable to his parents' materialism, their poor example, and their disinterest in their son. In this sense, *Bastogne* takes a clear ethical stance against materialism and the culture of consumption, both of which are shown to have an adverse effect on compassion and the ability to love. These concerns link *Bastogne* to much other pulp fiction, including Ammaniti's *Fango*, Giuseppe Culicchia's and Isabella Santacroce's writing and Aldo Nove's *Superwoobinda*. However, Brizzi also emphasises Ermanno's coldness towards his victims and the ease with which he can forget the harm that he has done. For example, after the rape of Occhi-Blu, Ermanno remarks 'è incredibile la mancanza di resistenza di queste ragazzine' (*Bastogne* p21): a cool and detached perspective also adopted by the narrator in the description of the disposal of Occhi-Blu's body: 'c'è il rumore di un sasso che cozza contro il legno. Occhi-blu esce di scena con un gemito fievole fievole, da coniglia mortificata. [...] Ermanno ha voglia di un caffè' (*Bastogne* p22). Ermanno's misogynist language, his obvious delight in assault and rape, and his lack of understanding and compassion for Ermanno's victims in *Bastogne* raises the possibility that, to a considerable extent, Ermanno's choices are his own. Ermanno's decidedly unethical stance also lays *Bastogne* open to accusations of gratuitous depiction of sex and violence, and means that the ethics of the text are unclear.

Bastogne's ethical stance can be clarified by comparison to a short story in Aldo Nove's collection *Superwoobinda*. Like the other narrative fragments in *Superwoobinda*, 'Jasmine' (*Superwoobinda* p104-107) is a very short text, and all the characters, including the male ones, have very little psychological depth. Jasmine is a prostitute, hired by the narrator of the story to hide inside a large chocolate Easter egg as a surprise for his brother. When his brother opens the package, the narrator remarks coolly, 'Jasmine era morta. Aveva il volto paonazzo, con il cioccolato appiccicato sopra. Non potevo più prenderne un'altra' (*Superwoobinda* p105). The deliberate equation of the egg (a consumable product in every sense) with the prostitute indicates a deep-rooted emotional brutality in the narrator, who is typical of Nove's characters in *Superwoobinda*. The narrator considers Jasmine on the same level as the chocolate egg: both are disposable, commercially available products. His feelings on discovering her dead are mild annoyance and disappointment at the waste of money, but he soon recovers from this when he realises that she can still serve her purpose:

Jasmine è un maiale, non si butta via niente. Le aprii la bocca e le misi dentro il cazzo. Il fatto che avesse deglutito la lingua rendeva il chinotto più interessante. Io non avevo speso, per niente, cinque milioni. Infatti la bocca di una morta ha una temperatura congeniale al prolungamento del coito (*Superwoobinda* p105).

His complete indifference to Jasmine's death is conditioned by the fact that he does not see her as a person or as a woman, but merely as 'quella troia' (*Superwoobinda* p105). Afterwards, he puts Jasmine's body into a plastic bag and throws it down the rubbish chute. The story ends: 'sentivo Jasmine andare giù dalla scarpata. Andai da Quinto a prendere un gelato da diecimila' (*Superwoobinda* p106): there are clear parallels here with the disposal of Occhi-Blu's body in *Bastogne*. Callous juxtapositions of this kind are used in both texts to portray the narrator as a warped and unsympathetic individual.

There are many points of comparison between 'Jasmine' and *Bastogne* that point to a set of common concerns in 1990s pulp. In both 'Jasmine' and *Bastogne*, the narrators equate women to goods; both narrators murder women and perpetrate sexual violence against them; both are guilty of necrophilia. The uneasy fusion of sex and violence in these texts, and other pulp fiction (including *Cuore di Pulp* and *Gioventù Cannibale*), poses many more questions of this fiction's ethical stance than it answers. Sexual violence against women and descriptions of prostitution are clearly used in Santacroce's writing to speak out against social cruelty and the dominance of consumerist culture in contemporary society: but nonetheless there are other aspects of ethical ambiguity in her fiction. One of the reasons for this is that Santacroce writes

from the point of view of the victim, rather than the abuser, whereas, in *Bastogne* and in 'Jasmine', Brizzi and Nove adopt the other narrative viewpoint. The distinction between abused and abuser, exploiter and exploited is rather less clear in these texts. Ermanno Claypool clearly takes pleasure in inflicting harm on women, whom he views only as sexual objects, but by giving details of Ermanno's family background, Brizzi suggests that Ermanno's disturbed behaviour can at least be partly attributed to his upbringing. In 'Jasmine' Nove provides no such background information about his narrator, but by situating this text in *Superwoobinda*, in which the dominant theme is the stultifying effects of television and advertising on already uncritical, vulnerable individuals, Nove suggests that contemporary mass and popular cultures are partially responsible for the brutal actions of his character.

Like punk, pulp texts such as these use shock tactics to voice their social criticisms, but in both cases this risks creating ambiguities that might undermine any potential ethical message. In treading a line between using genres such as horror and pornography to articulate an ethical message, and becoming absorbed by the genre's more sensational aspects, pulp authors open their texts up to a continuum of many possible reactions. These may range from treatment of pulp as transient genre fiction, to a reading of it as extremely ethical writing. These reactions should not be seen as mutually exclusive: like the youth language varieties that inform the language of pulp fiction and Eco's notion of 'open work', the texts themselves are polisemic and open to many simultaneous interpretations. The most credible conclusion is that pulp's ethical stance lies somewhere between these two highly simplified extremes. Even in texts like Santacroce's, in which the ethical point is articulated much more clearly, there are some disturbing ambiguities relating to the notions of fame and notoriety, and the glorification of suicide. The presence of social and ethical concerns about values that reduce people to the status of mere goods is not consistent with the idea that these texts are simply intended as vacuous gratifications of a popular taste for violence, but at the same time, the ambivalent use of genres such as pornography and horror to articulate these concerns undermines any possibility that these texts are straightforwardly and unambiguously ethical, as La Porta suggests. Ultimately, readers must decide for themselves the extent to which pulp texts attempt to articulate ethical concerns, and the degree of their success in doing so.

5. Conclusions

Pulp's ambivalent and provocative stance, assimilated principally from anglophone punk music, sits alongside a clear influence from twentieth century left-wing cultural thought. There is a clear line of Bologna-based intellectual influence, going back from Tondelli in the 1980s, to Celati and Eco in the preceding decades: this line is, in turn, part of a wider school of cultural thought concerned with the nature of Italian popular culture. Pulp assimilates and re-presents elements of cultural theory that originated in the work of the Gruppo 63, Pasolini, and Gramsci: Pasolini's direct criticisms of television, Balestrini's use of language to express his concern about the massification of society, and Eco's literary and cultural model of 'opera aperta' all leave their imprint on pulp. The legacy of Gramsci's cultural theories also remain detectable in pulp, which, although abandoning any kind of nostalgia for folk culture, is still concerned with the potential formative effects of 'popular culture'.

In other respects, the differences between pulp authors and their intellectual predecessors are very clear. Pulp authors operate in an entirely different socio-political context to intellectuals in the First Republic, for whom cultural and political concerns could be articulated in terms of monolithic ideologies and mass participation in political action. In pulp, the fragmentation of cultural and political certainties in 1990s Italy translates into a piecemeal commentary on socio-political and cultural issues, filtered through extensive references to the mass media and popular and youth cultures. Pulp seeks to highlight the conflation of light entertainment and a right-wing political agenda in 1990s Italy; yet the closest that this fiction comes to taking any kind of specific political stance is the vague and non-specific anti-Berlusconism highlighted by Nove's character in 'Woobinda'. Unlike many of its literary predecessors, pulp lacks a specific political ideology: comparisons can be made, however, with the Gruppo 63. Like this group, pulp authors are fully assimilated into the mass cultural market and involved in the mechanisms of promoting their writing by using contemporary media, whilst also wishing to appear to be critical of it.

Pulp authors do appropriate the language of youth, mass and popular cultures, but interweave these with a significant string of references to 'high' culture. This self-awareness is often expressed as self-irony and satire, as pulp takes the conceptual foundations of punk and translates them to the context of 1990s Italy. Pulp fiction plays with the reader, using allusive and sometimes cryptic references to contemporary pop music, television and other mass media, to display a complex web of meaning only to

knowing readers. In so doing, pulp authors reveal a thorough familiarity with Italian plurilingual literary traditions that sometimes can appear incongruous when juxtaposed to the image of pulp fiction projected in its marketing. Pulp also shows itself to be a manipulative and highly self-referential genre that in many cases treads a very fine line between provocation and poor taste, or, in the most extreme cases, simple misogyny or pornography. The presence of such ambiguities in writing by women as well as by men points to a degree of thematic and conceptual unity among pulp authors that goes beyond distinctions made on the basis of their gender. Despite often disturbing ethical uncertainties, in the best examples of this writing, self-irony continually negotiates between a thorough grounding in tradition and an outward expression of transgression. In the constant interplay between pulp's public façade and the theoretical influences revealed by textual analysis, pulp's concern with the nature of Italian popular culture remains anchored in Gramscian concepts, even though in this writing, image prevails over ideology and punk takes precedence over politics.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

PUNK AND PULP

These considerations return to the question that I posed in the introduction: ‘che cosa c’entra il punk?’ The comparison between punk and pulp is appropriate because both are polysemic and ambiguous genres which, like Eco’s ‘open work’, can be interpreted in different ways according to the reader’s own experiences and cultural competences. Punk has many points of contact with pulp, and also serves as a useful metaphor for it. Like punk, pulp embodies a complex mix of many different discourses, and it is this ambiguous and complex mix of influences and meanings that sets pulp apart from other 1990s Italian fiction. Both punk and pulp have been judged on the basis of the image that they project. In punk, this image is created through the use hairstyles, accessories, and clothing. The aggressive, coarse, oppositional face of punk can be compared to the way in which pulp fiction uses language to project an image of youthful transgression, which in some texts assumes a more menacing aspect. Pulp’s image is therefore a linguistic one: its allusive, cryptic, often dysphemistic style, which mimics the coining strategies and lexical content of youth language varieties, appears to link this fiction with the transient world of youth fashions. The comparison between punk and pulp allows for the loose group of authors and texts that I have termed pulp in this study to be considered as a unified group. These authors all experiment with language in order to engage with both Italian literary tradition and contemporary popular culture.

An analysis of pulp’s language shows quite a different type of fiction to that proposed by pulp authors and their publishers. Pulp’s language demonstrates a thorough awareness of the strategies used in youth language varieties. Pulp authors also use many references to contemporary youth cultures, and aspects of contemporary mass culture which are popular among young people. The use of these two strategies, though, should not be taken as an inference that pulp is merely a transient and superficial fictional genre. Pulp can be seen as a thoroughly postmodern and ironic embodiment of the Italian plurilingual tradition, rather than as writing which makes an abrupt break with the Italian literary tradition, as is suggested by many pulp authors. As the comparison between *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* and *The Catcher in the Rye* shows, pulp has conceptual, rather than linguistic contacts with the kind of American writing by which pulp authors claim to be inspired. In pulp fiction there is a remarkable continuity of ethical concern and a certain similarity of ideological standpoint – albeit tempered by

the influence of contemporary youth and mass cultures. Pulp's obvious antagonism to the homogenising effects of mass culture, and its dislike of the influx of commercial American and mass culture into Italy are clearly informed by the stance developed by the Gruppo 63 in the 1960s, and before them, a tradition of left-wing thought in Italy that goes back to Gramsci.

An understanding of these, less obvious, aspects of pulp, can all be achieved through an analysis of its language. Although I have emphasised how pulp's cryptic language, which absorbs many of the features of spoken youth slangs, is its principal distinguishing feature, pulp is not the only contemporary literary genre to challenge perceptions of what constitutes 'literary' language. Much other fiction written during the 1990s has some theoretical origins in common with pulp, and some of the authors that have been influential on pulp continued their own literary experimentation in the 1990s. The link between the Gruppo 63 and 1990s literature was reinforced by the continued production of authors who were prominent in literature and literary experimentation in the 1960s. Alberto Arbasino, Luigi Malerba and Umberto Eco were just some of the writers who first published in the 1960s and who were still writing in the 1990s, and whose literary, critical and theoretical influence revealed itself to be relevant to pulp. The republication of three of Gianni Celati's early novels, *Le avventure di Guizzardi*, *La banda dei sospiri*, and *Lunario del paradiso*, in a collective volume (*Parlamenti buffi*, Feltrinelli, 1989) also represents a link between contemporary and 1960s fiction. Celati's interest in the representation of the spoken language and the concern for the socially marginalised expressed in his early prose resonate with many of the specific concerns of pulp fiction, and point to pulp authors' attraction to alternative, a-canonical models. A similar kind of linguistic experimentation, which elaborates a written language based on orality, is also evident in Antonio Tabucchi's fiction, in particular, in works like *I dialoghi mancanti* (Milan, 1988), *Sogni di Sogni* (Sellerio, 1992), *Sostiene Pereira* (Feltrinelli, 1994) and *Si sta facendo sempre più tardi* (Feltrinelli, 2001). Alessandro Baricco's writing, such as *Seta* (Rizzoli, 1996), *Castelli di rabbia* (Rizzoli, 1991) and *City* (Rizzoli, 1999) focusses on the rhythm and musicality of the language in the novels, and experiments with densely complex literary forms.

Interest in 'youth' writing in the 1990s is also attested to be the republication of earlier generations of 'young writers': for example, Enrico Palandri's first novel *Boccalone* was reprinted in 1997; Tondelli's collected works were also published by Bompiani in 2000, and interest in other 1980s 'giovani narratori', like Andrea De Carlo,

Daniele Del Giudice, and Aldo Busi, persisted throughout the 1990s. This group's contemporary writing remained thematically and stylistically in keeping with their work from the early 1980s: for instance, De Carlo's *Di noi tre* (Mondadori, 1997) has much in common with *Due di Due* (Einaudi, 1989). Busi also continued to write, with *Vendita galline 2km* (Mondadori, 1996) and *Suicidi dovuti* (Frassinelli, 1993), as did Del Giudice, whose 1990s fiction includes *Staccando l'ombra da terra* (Einaudi, 1994) and *Mania* (Einaudi, 1997).

Linguistic experimentation of a different kind was evident in immigrant writing, with the publication of novels like Pap Khouma's *Io, venditore di elefanti* (Garzanti, 1990) and Salah Methnani's *Immigrato* (with Mario Fortunato, Theoria, 1990). Although this represents a different kind of cosmopolitanism to that shown in pulp, its effects – challenging the literary status quo, its receptiveness to different cultural influences and its widening of the concepts of plurilinguism – invites many associations with pulp. At the opposite end of the geographical spectrum, the 1990s were marked by the resurgence in regional writing and dialect literature after almost thirty years of relative obscurity. A significant strand of 1990s fiction, exemplified by authors like Erri De Luca and Daniele Benati, reveals an influence from dialect or strong regional roots. Some 1990s women writers, like Silvana Grasso (e.g. *Nebbie di ddraunàra*, La tartaruga, 1993; *Il bastardo di Mantana*, Anabasi, 1994) and Lara Cardella (e.g. *Volevo i pantaloni*, Mondadori, 1989; *Voleva i pantaloni 2*, Mondadori, 1995; *Intorno a Laura*, Mondadori, 1992) used Sicilian dialect in their writing. As this demonstrates, writing by women, who had come to the fore in the politicized climate of the 1970s, remained prominent in the 1990s. Susanna Tamaro's highly sentimental novel dealing with female family relationships, *Va' dove ti porta il cuore* (Baldini & Castoldi, 1994), became one of the best-selling novels of the 1990s. Women writers established in the 1970s, like Dacia Maraini and Francesca Duranti, continued to publish in the 1990s, although the transparent, almost journalistic language in novels like Duranti's *Ultima stesura*, Rizzoli, 1991 and *Sogni mancini*, Rizzoli, 1996 reveals very different linguistic and literary preoccupations from pulp.

Pulp's linguistic experimentation stands out from that used in these other kinds of writing in that it is multifaceted, highly ambiguous, and superficially difficult to reconcile with certain well defined aspects of the Italian literary tradition. There is an evident influence on pulp from late twentieth century anglophone rock music, as well as more contemporary music. Pulp authors' musical sensibilities reveal themselves in allusions or direct references to this music, but also in their representation of

spontaneous spoken linguistic varieties in their fiction. Pulp's language reveals its close contact with the ephemeral youth language varieties that help to drive language change, but also with its dependence on the Italian literary tradition and cultural theory. The interplay between the ostentatious exhibition of fluency in contemporary youth, mass and popular cultures, and the more tacit acknowledgement of Italian literary and theoretical thought is at the centre of pulp's complex web of meaning. In order to understand these conceptual traditions behind pulp it is necessary to deconstruct the posturing around this fiction. It is not enough, however, to disregard the exterior image and focus only on the Italian literary and theoretical sources of pulp. Rather, one should be considered in the light of the other. Pulp's more vociferous detractors have been unable to escape from the notion that pulp is solely intended for the type of youth it describes; yet all of the texts discussed in this study are open to complex literary, theoretical and ethical interpretations. Nonetheless, they are not always successful in articulating such complicated concepts.

Music is one of four decisively formative influences on pulp, the others being twentieth century Italian literature, American writing, and contemporary youth fashions. Punk is, however, more prominent than these other elements as it is a symbol of transgression. As the reader's attention is drawn towards associations with punk by pulp authors themselves, associations between this writing and punk music should be seen as significant and symbolic, rather than casual. This contact with anglophone music distinguishes pulp authors from their literary predecessors, whereas the other prominent features of their writing (linguistic experimentation and plurilinguism) reinforce their links with previous generations of plurilingual Italian literature. In these circumstances it is unsurprising that pulp authors should draw attention to their links with this music rather than to their literary influences. The associations with punk also serve a useful critical purpose, in that punk is both a significant reference point of, and a useful metaphor for, pulp fiction. Punk is used in pulp as a symbol of rebellion: it represents associations with anglophone counterculture, irreverence, self-irony, and an ambiguous and sometimes uneasy relationship between commercial and artistic motivations.

Although pulp was marketed as the future of Italian writing, many pulp texts still exhibit an awareness of their literary and theoretical sources. Like punk, pulp therefore appears to travel forwards whilst constantly looking backwards. Punk's origins can be traced back to a mixture of nihilistic philosophies and Edwardian fashions, ultimately combined and given new meanings in order to present a challenge to its contemporary context. Pulp attempts the same goal through the use of youth

language and by manipulating established narrative models, pointing to an engagement with long-established traditions and specifically a line of theoretical and literary production originating from Emilia Romagna that includes the work of the Gruppo 63, Tondelli, Pasolini and many pulp authors themselves. The characteristic mix of youth language, plurilingual literary references and left-wing cultural theory makes pulp a highly self-referential genre, rooted in the experiences of a restricted group of young authors in the early and mid 1990s. In manipulating its sources in this way, pulp also demonstrates how it inherits from punk its concepts of self-referentiality and self-irony, concepts that are entirely lacking in the fiction of its literary models, such as Pasolini, Arbasino and Tondelli.

Paradoxially, pulp authors attempt to distance themselves from these Italian traditions by highlighting links with anglophone youth cultures. Linguistically, pulp authors seek to project this image by excluding dialect from their characters' and narrators' linguistic repertoires. If dialect is present at all, as in Ballestra's *La guerra degli Antò*, it is used as a symbol of provincial backwardness and narrowmindedness, to represent the speaker's limited mindset. In pulp, the reader is encouraged to identify, or at least to empathise with the cosmopolitan characters who are fluent in many different linguistic and cultural discourses: in Ballestra's writing, the witty, well read narrator; the vivacious, multilingual narrators of Rossana Campo's writing; the vulnerable, displaced narrator-protagonists in Santacroce's *Fluo* and *Destroy*, and the sentimental, sincere Alex in Brizzi's *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*. Even in writing where the protagonist is not a sympathetic character, or where the ethical stance of the work is much less certain, like Brizzi's *Bastogne*, the characters with a breadth of literary and cultural knowledge are portrayed with most sympathy. The reader is not encouraged to identify with speakers whose restricted linguistic and cultural fluency prevents them from perceiving their own limitations, like Antò Lu Purk, or Nove's 'teledeficienti' in *Superwoobinda* and *Puerto Plata Market*.

Of all the authors that I have discussed, Rossana Campo follows most closely the Gruppo 63's theories and practices, in elaborating an idiom based on the spoken language. Campo's language is less thoroughly imbued with terms borrowed from 1990s youth language than Brizzi's or Santacroce's, and instead relies more on terms that were already in use twenty or thirty years earlier. In common with all these authors, Campo's writing has a strongly self-referential element, but like Ballestra, Campo uses humour and self-irony as instruments of 'abbassamento'. Campo's writing, particularly her later work, also explores wider thematic and geographical territories than that of her

contemporaries, touching on sensitive themes, such as mental illness. Campo's work is less graphically shocking than Nove's or Santacroce's, but it has created polemic in other ways, through its deliberately non-standard use of language and the presentation of the spoken language as a literary object. This irreverence and self-conscious reflexivity provides one of the main links between Campo and the other pulp authors that I have discussed, connecting her writing in particular with Silvia Ballestra's *Il compleanno dell'iguana*, *La guerra degli Antò*, and *Gli Orsi*. There are also some points of contact between their later works: the strongly nostalgic tone of Ballestra's *La giovinezza della signorina N.N.* resonates with Campo's *L'uomo che non ho sposato*. The element of spatial displacement, coupled with the strands of moral and ethical concern inherent in all Campo's writing, and in particular her concern for the treatment of women and girls, indicates notes of concern also present in Isabella Santacroce's fiction.

Like Campo's characters, Santacroce's protagonists move outside Italy's geographical boundaries, but they do not engage with their settings. Rather, foreign cities are used as largely anonymous backdrops, in order to highlight the characters' displacement. In turn, the disturbed psyches of Santacroce's characters are portrayed as symptomatic of social ills: they are used by Santacroce to comment on the negative impact of family breakdown on the children involved. Of all the pulp writers that I have discussed, Santacroce is among the most extreme in her choice of subject matter, as well as her dysphemistic lexis and her challenging and cryptic linguistic style. In dealing with topics such as homosexuality, sexual violence and abuse, estrangement and despair, Santacroce treads a fine ethical line which can risk appearing to condone the extreme actions of her characters. This ethical ambiguity in Santacroce's writing can be partly attributed to the youth cultures and types of popular music that are an integral part of her cultural reference system. In common with Campo, Ballestra, Brizzi and Nove, Isabella Santacroce's work shows rhythmical sensitivity and innovative manipulation not just of the cadences of speech, but also of music. In Santacroce's writing, this musicality is also mixed with a number of highly charged references to anglophone popular music, which demand a considerable degree of knowledge from the reader in order for them to read the text as anything other than an inventory of youth culture.

In a similar vein, Enrico Brizzi elaborates an individual linguistic mix from a combination of contemporary youth language varieties and references to pop music. Brizzi differs from those of his contemporaries that I have discussed here in that his

manipulation of youth languages and youth cultures lacks the self irony and element of critical polemic that is present in much of his contemporaries' work. Although in *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* he draws on youth languages, and uses reference to youth cultures to convey meaning in a gently comic tone similar to the one Ballestra uses in *La guerra degli Antò*, his theoretical and ethical stance, as well as his attitude towards linguistic experimentation, is neither as substantial or as consistent as that demonstrated by Ballestra, Santacroce, Nove or Campo. Brizzi's five novels belong to five different genres (sentimental, violent, autobiographical, detective/travel), and they are also very different in terms of tone and language. His linguistic abilities are most evident in *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*, with his subsequent writing showing less flair and originality. Although *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* is a sentimental bestseller, the clear influences on this book from punk, rock, grunge and other contemporary alternative music, point to connections with the more violent and sexually explicit *Bastogne*, whereas punk's self-referentiality is increasingly evident in *Tre ragazzi immaginari* and *Elogio di Oscar Firmian e del suo impeccabile stile*.

In common with Brizzi, Aldo Nove's linguistic experimentation engages with one particular strand of popular culture. Although Nove's writing, like Brizzi's and Santacroce's, has its ethical ambiguities, his manipulation of televisual language suggests the possibility of a theoretical and ethical impetus behind his writing, thus conferring on his writing an element that Brizzi's fiction lacks. In drawing many of his cultural references from the most ubiquitous form of mass culture, and coupling citations from television programmes with a feigned linguistic 'simplicity', Nove creates texts that present an accessible, rather than cryptic, façade. This distinguishes Nove's writing from the other pulp fiction that I have discussed, much of which relies on the reader's familiarity (or lack thereof) with specific aspects of literary and youth of popular cultures. Nonetheless, Nove still requires reflective readers to reconstruct a network of associations for themselves, and to infer meaning from this. This oblique form of reference can suggest a dubious and ambiguous ethical stance. Nove's distaste for the effect of television on contemporary culture points to a link between his writing and the Gruppo 63, and further back, to Futurism. Beyond his specific concern for the dehumanising effects of television, Nove's writing is characterised by a concern for a culture of consumption and social cruelty. The element of social comment in Nove's texts, which in some cases assumes political connotations, also suggests links between his writing and concerns present in Silvia Ballestra's work.

Silvia Ballestra's pulp fiction is arguably the most complete of all the writers that I have discussed. All the tendencies that are present in the work of Campo, Santacroce, Brizzi and Nove are present in her pulp fiction. A wide range of influences are evident in *Il compleanno dell'iguana*, *La guerra degli Antò* and *Gli Orsi*, and in these texts she manipulates her sources with wit and clear intellectual impetus. Ballestra has always been less coy about the relationship between her work and the Italian literary tradition than many of her contemporaries, and Tondelli and Arbasino's influence are particularly evident in her writing. Her linguistic manipulation shows the greatest range, ability and cultural awareness of all these authors, mixing the circular narrative structure used by Arbasino (present in Campo's writing) with the structures and rhythms of television viewing (highly visible in Nove's fiction), with significant references to pop music (used to similar effect by Brizzi and Santacroce). Like Campo and Nove, Ballestra mixes her cultural cosmopolitanism with a generous dose of self-referentiality and self-irony. Although Ballestra is clearly familiar with punk music and the many discourses around this subculture, her punks are both temporally and physically out of place, hanging comically on to the coat-tails of a youth culture that enjoyed its heyday over a decade earlier, and reveal themselves to be intellectually as well as geographically out of place in northern European cities.

Like Campo's and Santacroce's protagonists, who are physically out of place, and Nove and Brizzi's characters who struggle to rationalise the culture in which they are immersed, Ballestra's protagonists have to cope with cultural dislocation and estrangement. Whatever form a text's engagement with popular culture takes, and however deep or superficial its engagement with the literary tradition, all pulp fiction deals with themes of dehumanisation, estrangement, and to a more variable extent, the debasement of culture. Whether pulp texts' engagement with popular culture takes the form of cryptic reference to pop, rock and punk music, or ironic commentary on television, youth fashions or popular fiction, all pulp texts are concerned with social cruelty and the fate of the individual in mass society, which in turn makes punk a singularly appropriate metaphor for this fiction. In choosing to manipulate the languages of contemporary youth and popular cultures, pulp authors situate their work within a long tradition of plurilingual Italian literature, but do so ironically. By so doing, they both contextualise their work within this tradition, and indicate its future development.

Although the pulp phase of Italian literature was confined to the period between 1990 and 1998, with the peak of the Italian literary and editorial interest in this fiction around 1996, several indicators point this fiction having a more long-term impact. There

is a parallel here in the development of pulp and the genesis of youth language varieties. As some elements of youth language varieties eventually lose their generational and cryptic status and are accepted into the neostandard, other aspects fade out of use completely. Similarly, later fiction by pulp authors reveals some traces of their earlier distinctive linguistic styles, whilst also exhibiting a shift away from youth languages and youth cultures, towards a more subtle integration of the spoken language into writing and, in some of them, a lesser degree of antipathy towards society. More recent fiction by Ballestra, Brizzi, Santacroce, Campo and Nove has revealed markedly independent stylistic and thematic evolutions in their writing. Ballestra encapsulates these sentiments in an interview given in 2001:

non mi sembra corretto [...] scrivere di ciò che non mi appartiene più. In questo cerco di seguire la lezione di Tondelli, raccontare solo ciò che si conosce. E io ho 30 anni. La mia vita è lontana dal mondo di Antò ed è lontana anche da quelle atmosfere, fine anni '80 inizio '90 (Macioce 2001 p29).

At the time of writing, the texts that I have discussed here are still in print: Ballestra's *La guerra degli Antò* was reprinted by Einaudi in 2005, and pulp fiction by authors like Ammaniti was still achieving bestseller status in the same year. As Galiano's short story 'Il ferro è una cosa viva' indicates, the youth, mass and popular cultures that were a significant element in pulp's linguistic mix are in a constant state of evolution. Acknowledgement of young writers' receptiveness to linguistic innovation strategies is provided by continued interest in new generations of 'young' authors and their language. This was attested to in the *Coda* series, intended as 'sequels' to the *Under 25* anthologies that themselves provided much of the impetus for pulp, and in the volume edited by Giuseppe Caliceti and Giulio Mozzi, *Quello che ho da dirvi: autoritratto delle ragazze e dei ragazzi italiani* (Einaudi, 1998), an anthology of very short and mainly autobiographical texts by teenagers and young people.¹ This continued interest in very young authors, coupled with the continuing popularity of pulp texts, points to a longer lasting impact of pulp fiction on Italian literature.

In time, writing by authors that I have called pulp has become more introspective and in some cases increasingly self-referential. Consequently, the links between Ballestra, Brizzi, Santacroce, Campo and Nove have become less clear towards

¹ Three *Coda* anthologies have been published, all edited by ex-*Under 25* authors: *Coda*, edited by Silvia Ballestra and Giulio Mozzi (Transeuropa, 1996), *Coda. Fifth* (Transeuropa, 1997) and *Coda 2. Tomo 2*, (Transeuropa, 1998), both edited by Andrea Demarchi. This title also conveys some thematic similarities with pulp in its association with music: in the words of Andrea Demarchi, 'il nome che è stato dato a questa iniziativa [...] deriva dalla terminologia musicale e indica "un passaggio a sé stante che segue la conclusione naturale di un movimento"; e, *Coda*, è anche il titolo dell'album che i Led Zeppelin pubblicarono subito dopo il loro scioglimento, avvenuto nel 1980' (Demarchi 1998 p9).

the end of the 1990s and in some cases these links disappear altogether. Although the experimental, polysemic, colloquial use of language that once linked this group of authors has left traces, their individual elaborations of this style has lessened similarities between them. This is illustrated by the prevalence of romantic fiction in their later work. Brizzi's fourth novel, *Razorama* (Mondadori, 2003) is a detective novel with a strong element of romantic intrigue set in Madagascar; Ballestra's trilogy of 'la signorina N.N.' – *La giovinezza della signorina N.N.*, (Baldini & Castoldi, 1998), *Nina* (Rizzoli, 2001), and *Il compagno di mezzanotte*, (Rizzoli, 2002) – is markedly more introspective, and also linguistically more neutral than her earlier writing. As a result of the increased degree of self-referentiality in their later writing, this work lacks the same kind of patchwork engagement with social and political issues that is a distinguishing feature of pulp. Similarly, in *Lovers* (Rizzoli, 2001) Santacroce moves away from the densely citational language of *Fluo*, *Destroy*, and *Luminal*, adopting a sparse, elegant linguistic style that contrasts sharply with her earlier novels. On the other hand, Aldo Nove's *Amore Mio Infinito* (Einaudi, 2003) and Rossana Campo's *L'uomo che non ho sposato* (Feltrinelli, 2003) show more stylistic continuity with their earlier writing.

The suggestion of using punk as an important reference point for pulp also highlights ambiguities relating to the nature of pulp's readership, as well as its theoretical stance. Punk is clearly an anachronistic reference point for pulp, and the use of it raises questions about whether pulp's readership is really to be found among the authors' own generation, or whether this fiction is aimed more at a left-wing readership who underwent their cultural formation in the 1960s. These questions echo throughout pulp's use of language, its literary and cultural references, and its attitudes towards popular culture. In using a language elaborated from contemporary youth language varieties, pulp authors construct a façade of youthful rebellion and transgression. On a superficial level, therefore, pulp may strike a chord with a readership that can recognise the linguistic codes used and can identify with pulp's many references to youth, mass and popular cultures, even though they may not detect the literary references and may not recognise the theoretical stance that underlies the work. This is the image of pulp projected by the publishers, who are eager to promote their products by associating them with well-known contemporary popular and youth cultures. This public face of pulp, coupled with an emphasis on youthful, enthusiastic amateurism in this writing, makes this an inconsistent genre. Some pulp works that have been included in this genre have been of questionable linguistic quality and dubious ethical taste. Some texts that claim to have been written in the same vein as pulp (such as the anthology *Cuore di*

Pulp and Alessandra Montrucchio's *Macchie Rosse*), or by the same authors (some of the texts in *Gioventù Cannibale*, or Culicchia's *Paso Doble*), lack a fresh and individual approach. Where the use of youth language lacks theoretical or literary depth, the prose reads as a mimetic and formulaic attempt to latch on to the success of the better Italian pulp. For these reasons, many of the young authors who were promoted in the early and mid-1990s have failed to translate the interest in their early work into long-term success. Although many pulp texts may be read as social and ethical criticism, some of the more controversial works, such as *Gioventù Cannibale*, *Superwoobinda*, and *Bastogne* are open to accusations of sensationalism, gratuitous use of violence and dubious ethical standpoints.

Readers who are less fluent in the cultural and linguistic codes of Italian youth in the 1990s may identify to a greater extent with the Italian literary and theoretical models for pulp. Former associates of the Gruppo 63 have been eager to associate pulp with their own work, emphasising the parallels between their own concept of linguistic 'abbassamento' and the conscious use of sub-standard and spoken linguistic forms in pulp. Nonetheless, the lack of coherent and formal theoretical impulses within the group of authors that I have called pulp distinguishes them from the Gruppo 63 and its avantgarde practices. Pulp clearly lacks the unifying theoretical stance of an avantgarde movement, even though there are clear theoretical influences on this writing from left-wing Italian thinkers like Eco. On a literary level, the influence of authors like Pasolini and Arbasino is also evident in many pulp texts. Pasolini serves as a model for a line of marginal, dissident writing that clearly encompasses pulp, whereas the circular structure of Arbasino's *Fratelli d'Italia* and the notion of the un-formative journey that it narrates is re-worked in pulp texts by Campo, Ballestra, Santacroce and Brizzi. The adoption of a plurilingual model by pulp authors reveals the strong connections with the Italian literary tradition, which underlies their ostentatious exhibition of immersion in contemporary popular and youth cultures.

In some pulp texts, punks also have a symbolic function. Because of punk's iconic associations with transgression and opposition, the punk is appropriated in pulp as a symbol of social dissatisfaction and cultural unease. In pulp, punks become a metaphor for dissent, even though they are sometimes provincialized, as in Brizzi's *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* and Ballestra's *La guerra degli Antò*, and in the latter case, made comic figures because of this. In writing by Brizzi, Ballestra, and Santacroce, the punk metaphor and the image of the displaced punk is used to criticize trends towards unthinking conformism and 'dumbing down' in contemporary Italian

popular culture. The inadequacies of provincialised Italian punks in Ballestra's and Brizzi's writing temper this criticism with a note of ambiguity, and poses questions about the fading of an image's potency as it is reproduced: questions which the literary critics have also posed in relation to pulp's re-use of literary devices and linguistic techniques experimented with by their literary predecessors.

The parallel with punk also points to pulp's short life and its dependency on a specific set of circumstances. 1970s punk rock was dependent on a specific combination of socio-cultural, creative and promotional circumstances that fell apart when one of these elements was removed. Likewise, pulp was elaborated from a particular combination of left-wing literary and cultural theoretical impetus, marketing opportunity and youth: a triad that disintegrated, precipitating the end of pulp, when the authors were no longer immersed in the cultures and languages of Italian youth. Pulp is characterised by its appropriation of the techniques characteristic of youth language varieties and a strong link to the cultural context of the 1990s. No longer the 'young' generation in need of the support of more established authors, nor reliant on the publisher's marketing strategies to create a frame of reference through which they could be introduced to the reading public, the authors have distanced themselves still further from the externally created groupings such as 'pulp' and 'cannibale', which in any case they had always treated sceptically.

Unlike the Gruppo 63 and Pasolini, pulp authors have always been reluctant to associate themselves with any specific political ideology, expressing their political views in the form of piecemeal engagement with single issues. Their political stance is ambiguous, often taking the form of opposition rather than expressing a coherent and positive ideology of its own. Nonetheless, pulp makes acute political and cultural criticisms, and it derides a lack of sophisticated cultural and political awareness, resulting from the constant stream of narratives from popular and youth cultures. The appropriation of non-Italian and non-literary narratives in pulp is strongly charged with ethical and political meaning, and it reflects on the political climate in 1990s Italy. The ambiguity underlying pulp's political, moral and social stance reflects similar ambiguities in the cultural forms by which it is informed, but is also intended as a commentary on those cultures. In negotiating the fragments of different cultures and languages by which they are surrounded, the protagonists of pulp articulate a sense of disorientation, and alienation from contemporary society. Pulp authors manipulate their linguistic sources ironically, in order to anchor their texts in a contemporary setting, whilst expressing bitter criticisms of the cultural context on which their fiction is based.

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