THE DIALECTICAL RELATIONSHIP
OF POWER AND FREEDOM
IN LUTHER BLISSETT'S AND WU MING'S
HISTORICAL NOVELS

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the literary representation of power and freedom in Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's historical novels (*Q* 1999; *Asce di guerra* 2000; *54* 2002; *Manituana* 2007; *Altai* 2009; and *L'armata dei sonnambuli* 2014).

In my analysis, I highlight how the events narrated develop through a dialectical relationship between power and freedom in a framework articulated in three moments: old power (fixity) / desire for freedom (instability) / new power (assimilation). In so doing, I employ Hegel's dialectics in which one concept, introduced as a 'thesis', develops into a second concept that negates or is opposed to the first ('antithesis'), which in turn leads to a third concept, the 'synthesis', that unifies the first two.

Shedding light on events that have been neglected by official historiography, Luther Blissett and Wu Ming create counter-history narratives that represent crucial moments of history from a new point of view and show how they strongly embody the relationship between power and freedom.

My aim is to demonstrate how, through this dialectical process, Luther Blissett and Wu Ming have demonstrated an engaging and politically committed use of literature intended as a "strumento di lotta". This form of *impegno* has the potential to contribute to the creation of a form of participatory culture whose very collaborative nature is to challenge History.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

I. The Ideological and Political Background of Luther Blissett and Wu Ming

This thesis explores the dialectical relationship between power and freedom in the six collectively-authored historical novels written by the Italian writers who firstly participated in the Luther Blissett Project and then created the Wu Ming group.[1] The works that I will examine were published over a fifteen-year period, between 1999 and 2014: *Q* (1999) as Luther Blissett; *Asce di guerra* (2000), *54* (2002), *Manituana* (2007), *Altai* (2009) and *L'armata dei sonnambuli* (2014) as Wu Ming. After the Introduction and a chapter dedicated to methodology, the thesis will follow the chronological order of the historical events narrated in the novels: in Chapter Two *Q* (1519-1555) and *Altai* (1569-1571); in Chapter Three *Manituana* (1775-1783); in Chapter Four *L'armata dei sonnambuli* (1793-1795); in Chapter Five *Asce di guerra* (1943-1958) and *54* (1954).

In this first section of the Introduction, I will focus on how the concepts of power and freedom are deeply entrenched in their activities as both writers and cultural activists. Although the authors (Roberto Bui, Giovanni Cattabriga, Luca Di Meo, Federico Guglielmi and Riccardo Pedrini) are almost the same in the two collectives, a clear distinction has to be made. The Luther Blissett Project was a transnational collective identity that emerged in different countries between 1994 and 1999.[2] Four Italian members of the Luther Blissett Project (Bui, Cattabriga, Guglielmi and Di Meo) announced the group's symbolic ritual *seppuku* in

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[1] These writers are Roberto Bui, Giovanni Cattabriga, Luca Di Meo, Federico Guglielmi as Luther Blissett (1995-1999) and with Riccardo Pedrini as Wu Ming since 2000 (Di Meo left the group in 2008 and Petrini in 2015).

[2] The name Luther Blissett is that of a former Jamaican footballer who played centre forward for Watford and for AC Milan at the beginning of the 1980s. Blissett's period with AC Milan did not leave a good impression on Italian fans and he is remembered for his poor performances on the pitch, which brought him the nickname "Luther Miss-it". 'This strange group has decided to use my name for their collective identity' Luther Blissett told the BBC in an interview in 1999. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sport/football/293678.stm (Accessed 14.03.17).

December 1999, a "suicide" that put an end to a five-year experience, to pursue other plans. In January 2000, after another writer (Pedrini) joined the group, the Wu Ming experience began. Through this new experience, the collective progressively evolved from an underground group of activists to mainstream writers. While there are various similarities between the two groups (such as similar principles of collectivism), many differences are in fact clear in their practices. That is what I want to highlight in the following paragraphs, always focussing on how power and freedom are fundamental aspects of both their activities and writings.

Created in 1994, the Luther Blissett Project spread to many countries, such as Italy, the United Kingdom, the United States, Holland, Germany, Austria, Finland, and Hungary. In addition to artistic performances, the Luther Blissett Project organised high-profile media pranks, happenings, performances in subways, articles and publications in newspapers.[3] Within a short period of time, Luther Blissett became one of the most fascinating international cultural projects of the late 1990s. As Tatiana Bazzichelli has correctly highlighted:

> Luther Blissett is not anyone, and at the same time everyone can be him. He was born like an urban myth, with the goal of sabotaging the power control centres through culturally destabilising activities, introducing himself into the media infrastructure like a worm in an apple, who corrodes everything inside, leaving only the skin intact. […] Luther Blissett was born as a media ghost, a mythological figure to which an even more mythical tradition attached the legendary names of Harry Kipper and Coleman Healy. A mysterious figure; an identity which is quite different from a pseudonym, not created to be shown in public. (2008: 25)

Insinuating himself into the media infrastructure, Luther Blissett quickly became a folk hero of the information society. Behind this 'media ghost', anyone could speak and subvert the cultural scene of the time. Roberto Bui, a founding member of Luther Blissett's Italian section, has stressed the importance of the concept of 'mythopoiesis' as being at the root of the collective:

> Mythopoiesis is the social process of constructing myths, by which we do not

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[3] The history and the documentation of the Luther Blissett Project can be found on www.lutherblissett.net, which describes Luther Blissett's other activities and documents the press coverage of the most famous cases.

mean "false stories", we mean stories that are told and shared, re-told and manipulated by a vast and multifarious community, stories that may shape some kind of ritual, produce some sense of continuity between what we do and what other people did in the past. (Wu Ming1 2002)

In the mid-1990s, Luther Blissett was the voice of people who, through the creation of this new folk hero fighting for freedom of expression, wanted on the one hand to subvert the power of the cultural industry and on the other hand to expose the tricks of media communication. Focussing on the rebellious nature of this peculiar media ghost, Luca Muchetti has given us a detailed portrait of Luther Blissett:

Luther Blissett siamo noi. Luther Blissett è chiunque voglia esserlo. In definitiva, tutti sono Luther Blissett. Quindi Luther Blissett è nessuno. […] Un Robin Hood inafferrabile e misterioso che colpisce il mondo dell'informazione, seminando il panico in quello dell'arte, firmando azioni di guerriglia mediatica, agitando l'universo della comunicazione. […] Un eroe popolare dai tratti indecifrabili, venuto da lontano. […] Un imbroglione di professione, un fuggiasco ribelle per natura, un borderline capace di infiltrarsi e affondare a ogni livello della società. […] Fuggevole. (2007: 21, 22)

'Media ghost', 'guerriglia mediatica' and 'eroe popolare' are only some definitions that have been applied to define Luther Blissett. The Italian members of Luther Blissett stated that they took inspiration from the Zapatista movement, especially for its media strategy and its collective essence, which will be also at the root of Wu Ming's "faceless revolution": 'L'esempio degli Zapatisti aiutò il LBP a definire il suo intento: strappare l'uso dei miti dalle mani dei reazionari'. (Wu Ming 2009).

The Zapatista National Liberation Army represented for many components of the Luther Blissett Project a remarkable example to follow. This guerrilla group was founded in Mexico in the late 20th century and named after the peasant rebel Emiliano Zapata (1879-1919). On the first day of 1994, the same year of Luther Blissett's birth, the Zapatistas staged a rebellion from their base in Chiapas, a southern Mexican state, in protest against economic policies that would negatively affect Mexican population. The Zapatistas' insurrections spread

quickly to other parts of Mexico, and many communities supported them, while dozens of pro-Zapatista municipalities declared themselves autonomous.

> La strategia mediatica degli Zapatisti faceva a meno dei soliti leader bramosi di telecamere. Nei primi giorni del Levantiamiento, Marcos dichiarò: "Io non esisto, sono solo la cornice della finestra", poi spiegò che "Marcos" era solo uno pseudonimo ed egli non era che un "sotto-comandante", perché era un bianco mentre i comandanti erano tutti indios. Aggiunse che tutti potevano essere Marcos, ed era quello il vero senso del passamontagna: questa rivoluzione non ha volto, perché ha tutti i volti. "Se volete vedere la faccia sotto il passamontagna, prendete uno specchio e guardatevi". Da lì prese le mosse Luther Blissett. (Wu Ming 2009)

As a real example of a fertile networking strategy, the Luther Blissett Project was in itself a work of art with strong political connotations, an open space adopted and shared by hundreds of artists and social activists. In the artistic environment in which Luther Blissett grew, the networked culture was characterised by a blossoming of artistic experiences, such as Situationist International (SI), which developed a critique of capitalism based on a mixture of Marxism and surrealism. A leading figure of the movement, Guy Debord, identified consumer society as the *Society of the Spectacle* in his influential 1967 book of that title. In the field of culture, situationists wanted to break down the division between artists and consumers and make cultural production a part of everyday life.[4]

Mail Art, Fluxus and also Neoism had a strong influence on Luther Blissett's activities.[5]

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[4] It is worth mentioning that Luther Blissett denied a direct influence from the SI: 'Molti commentatori hanno cercato di risalire a supposte "origini situazioniste" del progetto (vicolo cieco come mai ve ne furono)'. (Wu Ming 2009)

[5] Mail art began in the 1960s when artists sent postcards inscribed with poems or drawings through the post rather than exhibiting or selling them through conventional commercial channels. Its origins can be found in the work of Marcel Duchamp, Kurt Schwitters and the Italian futurists. But it was the New York artist Ray Johnson who, in the mid-1950s, gave rise to what eventually became known as the New York Correspondence School. From http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/m/mail-art (Accessed 02.05.17)

Founded in 1960 by the Lithuanian/American artist George Maciunas, Fluxus began as an international network of artists and composers, and was characterised as a shared attitude rather than a movement. Fluxus founder Maciunas said that the purpose of Fluxus was to 'promote a revolutionary flood and tide in art, promote living art, anti-art'. This has strong echoes of Dada, the early-twentieth-century art movement. Seeing themselves as an alternative to academic art and music, Fluxus was a democratic form of creativity open to anyone. Collaborations were encouraged between artists and across artforms, and also with the audience or spectator. From http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/f/fluxus (Accessed 02.05.17)

In this environment, the author becomes a networker, an operator of collective networks. At the same time, the network is comprised of political activists who promote and employ the self-managed use of media in their own actions and protests. Luther Blissett itself underlined this crucial aspect:

> La guerriglia mediatica è un metodo omeopatico di difesa dall'ingerenza/presenza dei mass media nell'immaginario collettivo e nella nostra vita. Rivoltando contro i media le loro stesse armi, e dando il più ampio margine di notorietà alla cosa, si pubblicizza un nuovo modo di fruire i mass media, interattivo e paritario, in cui la potenza dei grandi mezzi di comunicazione di massa viene ridimensionata, messa in ridicolo, e la coglionaggine degli operatori del settore risulta lampante. (2000: 19)

What emerged was the idea of the net as a political space, with the possibility of decentralised, autonomous and grass-root democratic participation. On this crucial point, I am convinced that the post-media and the rhizome concepts elaborated by the French philosopher Félix Guattari are of the utmost importance to understand not only the cultural background of Luther Blissett and Wu Ming but most importantly to see how these concepts emerge in their works, in particular in the creation of rhizomatic characters.

In his writings from the late 1980s and early 1990s, and also in a series of articles published in the newspaper *Le Monde* and in the journal *Chimères*, co-founded with Gilles Deleuze, Guattari used for the first time the term 'post-media', when referring to the emergence of the internet, at the end of the 20th century.[6] Guattari started his analysis with the independent media and free radios of the 1970s and went on to imagine a post-media era where the media would be a tool of dissent, modifying the relationship between producer and consumer. In fact

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'Neoism expresses itself through artistic practices and experimentation in the media. It embraces a philosophy that presupposes the use of multiple identities, the collection of pseudonyms, the discussion of concepts such as identity and originality and the implementation of pranks, paradoxes, plagiarism and fakes, components that come up again later in collective movements such as the Luther Blissett Project (LBP) and in the actions of different net artists, including the Italian 0100101110101101.org.' (Bazzichelli 2008: 22).

[6] See in particular *Soft Subversions* (2009), *Cartographies Schizoanalytiques* (1989), *The Three Ecologies* (2000), *Chaosmosis* (1995), *Molecular Revolution in Brazil* (2008).

Guattari argued that the use of mass media as an instrument in the hands of power and used to maintain consensus would decline in favour of a grass-roots use of these media as a tool for activists and counter-cultural movements. In this new use, Guattari saw opportunities for new emancipatory social practices against capitalist tendencies that tend to destroy collective values.

According to Guattari, capitalism and mass media have been interwoven, in particular from the 1950s to the 1990s, with the growth of many forms of totalitarian state repression in all developed industrial societies. Guattari argued that mass media are instruments exploited by power and that 'the modus operandi of this new type of capitalism involves a constant reinforcement of control by the mass media' (2009: 231). Due to this authoritarian use of mass media, he maintained, the new totalitarian regimes succeeded where the national fascisms of the 20th century failed, that is, in gaining control over many areas of society. Nonetheless, Guattari was convinced that decentralised groups would emerge, leading an independent and autonomous revolution (this is the case of Luther Blissett). In addition, he thought that independent and free communications would form across a stream of data, free from any deformations in the power of mass media. Therefore, it would be possible to expand the concept of democracy and freedom in a new open territory through the critical use of the new technologies.

In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Guattari and Deleuze describe a conflict between two types of society. The first is tree-like, or arboresque, and supports orders and hierarchies. This hierarchical root-tree system works with dualist categories and binary choices, with vertical and linear connections.

The alternative model of knowledge production in the world presented by Guattari and Deleuze went against the linear representation of knowledge. They maintained that rhizomatic

multiplicities should not be trapped in one-dimensional thought. A rhizome, in fact, has no

unity, no system, and no control:

> Multiplicities are rhizomatic, and expose arborescent pseudomultiplicities for what they are. There is no unity to serve as a pivot in the object or to divide in the subject. […] There are no points or positions in a rhizome. […] There are only lines. (2005: 8)

Guattari and Deleuze also claimed that 'a rhizome is made of plateaus [and that] a plateau is

always in the middle. […] A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle,

between things, inter-beings, *intermezzo*' (*ibid*: 46). Quoting the English anthropologist

Gregory Bateson's concept of plateaus, the two French philosophers argued that 'the word

plateau designates something very special: a continuous, self-vibrating region of intensities

whose development avoids any orientation towards a culmination point or external end' (*ibid*:

42).

In the novels that will be analysed in this thesis, the two types of society envisioned by

Guattari and Deleuze are at the core of each narration. In the dialectical relationship between

power and freedom, the tree-like arboresque society supports orders with a system of vertical

connections. The second one, rhizomatic, emerges with the rise of multiplicities that cannot be

confined in a hierarchical system.

Many years before the emergence of the internet, Guattari had already examined forms

of deterritorialisation[7] of the telecommunications system on the free radio movement of the

70s. Guattari perceived these experiments, as Gari Genosko has underlined, as a 'catalyst for

social change beyond the technical level in critiques of restrictive legislation, intellectual

property, autonomy from traditional organisations, from all levels of government' (2013: 21).

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[7] Guattari also argued that moments of deterritorialisation emerge when fixed orders fall apart and are transformed.

For Guattari, in fact, 'free radio is like a kind of match that you strike and then everything catches fire.' (2008: 171)

One of the most significant examples of a subversive use of mass media was, according to Guattari, the experiment of Radio Alice, an Italian free radio that was politically engaged with the autonomist movement, and which broadcast from Bologna via an ex-military transmitter on a frequency of 100.6 MHz. The first broadcast was on 9 February 1976, and a year later the station was closed by the authorities on 12 March 1977.

Guattari perceived Radio Alice as an embryonic form of media resistance that anticipated the post-media revolution coming in the 90s with the internet. Radio Alice indeed had the effect of de-centring the hegemony of the mass media, giving space to excluded and marginalised subjects such as homosexuals, women, the unemployed; all those who were underrepresented by the traditional channels of information. Guattari referred to Radio Alice as a 'generalised revolution, a conjunction of sexual, relational, aesthetic and scientific revolutions all making cross-overs, markings and currents of deterritorialisation' (1996: 84). He was particularly interested in the molecular revolution that was taking place around Radio Alice, with the production of new post-media forms of sensibility and sociability that the consensual state apparatus was not able to absorb.

During that period, Guattari met Franco "Bifo" Berardi, Italian philosopher and media activist who was one of the founders of Radio Alice. This encounter was of the outmost importance for both of them. Berardi has written a book, *Félix Guattari: Thought, Friendship and Visionary Cartography*,[8] that is more than a simple memorial or record of their friendship. In this work, Berardi focused his attention on Guattari's rhizomatic thought, shedding light on

[8] Berardi "Bifo", Franco (2008). *Félix Guattari. Thought, Friendship, and Visionary Cartography*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

some very important aspects of Guattari's personal trajectory and work, precisely in relation to the question of an emergent post-media sensibility.

In his *Félix and Alice in Wonderland: The Encounter Between Guattari and Berardi and the Post-Media Era*, Michael Goddard has analysed the transversal relations between the theories and practices of Guattari and Berardi. Goddard has laid emphasis on the interest shown by Guattari on the developments of interactive communicative technologies as the internet and their related social practices of network culture from the French Minitel system[9] to Radio Alice. In particular, Guattari was interested in the fact that Radio Alice operated in opposition to the repressive apparatuses of state control. This experiment clearly shows how the media were an important *locus* of struggle over the contemporary production of subjectivity.

Radio Alice was also an intervention into the language of media. Specifically, a shift was taking place from what Guattari called the bureaucratic-managerial language of the repressive power on a macro-political scale to a language of desire as micro-political phenomenon. Radio Alice and the other free radios, in Guattari's words cited by Goddard, 'invent new means and tend to lead straight to action; they begin by "touching", by provoking laughter, by moving people, and then they make people want to "move out", towards those who speak and toward those stakes of concern to them' (Goddard 1996). As Goddard has also outlined:

> For Guattari, Radio Alice was not an instrument of information but a device for destructuration of the mediatic system aiming for the destructuration of the social nervous system, which in the succeeding decades has continued with effects of liberation but also of panic and catastrophe. (*Ibid*)

According to Berardi, the free radio phenomenon was proof of the existence of these vectors of re-singularisation, and attractors of social creativity. It was a direct precursor of the internet

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[9] The Minitel was a Videotex online service accessible through telephone lines, and is considered one of the world's most successful pre-World Wide Web online services. It was active from the early 80s and switched off in 2012.

model, which incarnates what Guattari called 'Post-mediatic civil society' (Berardi 1996: 31). These free radios, and especially Radio Alice, based on an explicit model of counter-information and autonomy, 'anticipated a process of techno-communicative self-organisation prefiguring the end of the mediatic era. This awareness made Guattari a precursor of libertarian cyberculture' (*Ibid*).

Indeed, Radio Alice was an open, permanent meeting place where anyone had the possibility of expressing herself whenever she wanted about any subject, or rather, about those topics that were hidden by the state power. In addition: 'Radio Alice [...] was able to be used to create a self-referential feedback loop of political communication between producers and receivers, tending towards breaking down the distinctions between them' (Goddard 1996).

Referring to the end of Radio Alice, Guattari had already imagined that, even though the radio was closed and its animators arrested, someone would have pursued the revolutionary task: 'The police have liquidated Alice – its animators are hunted, condemned, imprisoned, their sites are pillaged – but its work of revolutionary deterritorialisation is pursued ineluctably right up to the nervous fibres of its persecutors' (2009: 64).

Luther Blissett first and then Wu Ming are, in my opinion, Radio Alice's continuers and successors. This assumption is validated by the fact that an important work by Wu Ming is the screenplay *Lavorare con lentezza* [*Working slowly*], written together with the director Guido Chiesa and released in 2004.[10] The film, part documentary and part fiction, explores the story of Radio Alice of Bologna and of the activities of the A/traverso group at the end of the 1970s. What emerges from the film is that the ideals and the practices of these movements inspired a great part of Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's political activism.

Focussing on the main aspects of the post-media aesthetics mentioned so far, it is possible to consider the Luther Blissett Project, and then Wu Ming, as an artistic continuation

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[10] http://guidochiesa.net/sceneggiature/lavorare-con-lentezza/ (Accessed 16.03.20)

of Radio Alice's experiment. Like Radio Alice, Luther Blissett and Wu Ming constitute an alternate production of subjectivity against the traditional media that, in their dominant form, are perceived as massive machines for the production of consensual subjectivity. Wu Ming's blog *Giap* disseminates, in my opinion, all the values of antagonism and freedom of speech that were at roots of Radio Alice. From this perspective, Wu Ming are pursuing what Radio Alice started, in the sense of supporting, in Guattari's words cited by Goddard, an 'immense movement of flight and the multitude of molecular mutations of desire that it has already unleashed' (1996).

Thanks to their formative years in Bologna and the influence of strategy of subversion brought forward by political activists like the Radio Alice collective, Luther Blissett emerged from the mid-1990s grass-roots communities of artists and activists involved in underground networking related to the contemporary use of social platforms. More specifically, underground networking generated an open configuration and a map of connections in progress, where people could transfer their own political, social, artistic relationships directly into creative use of the media. On this crucial aspect, Luther Blissett revealed in an interview that:

> Ci siamo formati nell'area underground della sinistra, nel mondo dei centri sociali. A Bologna collaboriamo a Radio Città del Capo, che fa parte del network di Radio popolare. Il nostro gruppo, composto da una trentina di persone, ha come origine e scopo la controinformazione. (In Messina 1999: 35)

The libertarian members of Luther Blissett were united by the idea of creating a web of activists who could subvert the rigid categories of media communication. Before its self-imposed and symbolic ending in 1999, the Italian section of the Luther Blissett Project was responsible for more than a dozen hoaxes and displays. Luther Blissett succeeded in creating a popular phenomenon through several pranks and fakes, such as the Neoist bus happening and collective adventure; the fake book *net.gener@tion manifesto delle nuove libertà* that Mondadori was

prepared to publish; and the disappearance of Harry Kipper on the TV show *Chi l'ha visto?*[11]

Regarding this latter event, Bazzichelli remarks that:

> One of the various pranks is the one where Luther Blissett took part in the television show "Chi l'ha visto?" [Who Saw Him?], in which investigators and the like searched for a fictitious artist named Harry Kipper. Luther Blissett said that the artist had disappeared on the Italo-Yugoslav border while on a mountain bike tour of Europe, during which the artist intended to trace the word "ART" on the map of the continent. Then a paradoxical game began in which the television crew followed the (false) traces of the missing person and only just before the show went on air, the crew discovered that the person they were looking for was in fact a ghost. (2008: 27)

As a final contribution to the Luther Blissett Project, over three years, between 1996 and 1998, four Italian members (Bui, Cattabriga, Guglielmi and Di Meo) wrote the novel *Q*. Set in 16th-century Europe, *Q* follows the uprisings during the Protestant Reformation and the subsequent schism from the Roman Catholic Church. The novel was published by Einaudi[12] in 1999 with a copyleft licence and translated into dozens of languages.[13] It sold hundreds of thousands of copies in Europe and in the US. At the same time, the four writers revealed their real names during an interview with *La Repubblica*, claiming to represent less than 0.04% of the LBP.[14]

In January 2000, after another writer joined the group, the Wu Ming experience began. Wu Ming is the pseudonym used by this new group of Italian writers working as a collective.

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[11] *Chi l'ha visto?* is a TV programme devoted to attempting to find missing people.

[12] Publishing with Einaudi, an established institutional protagonist of main-stream Italian cultural industry, has been considered a strategic contradiction by many readers. Wu Ming motivated their choice in this way: 'Noi crediamo che la contraddizione debba acuirsi, per questo seguiteremo a lavorare con l'Einaudi, finché questo sarà possibile. Noi apparteniamo alla medesima tradizione a cui faceva riferimento Alberto Asor Rosa qualche giorno fa: «Una tradizione che preferisce essere cacciata, piuttosto che rinunciare spontaneamente alla battaglia culturale […] Ci sono case editrici che per tradizione e libertà delle persone hanno resistito alla proprietà. Bisogna resistere con loro, aiutarli anziché complicare le cose.» "Uscire" sarebbe una scappatoia, equivarrebbe a rimuovere la contraddizione, o quantomeno a sdilinquirla, a farla passare in secondo piano. Da anni noi adottiamo la strategia opposta: non perdiamo un'occasione per sottolineare la contraddizione, per dire che esiste ed è stridente, che questa posizione non è per nulla confortevole e a un certo livello ci lacera, ma crediamo ne valga la pena'. https://www.wumingfoundation.com/giap/2010/08/boicotta-wu-ming/ (Accessed 14.05.20).

[13] A copyleft licence allows the partial or total reproduction of a book, in electronic form or otherwise, for non-commercial purposes.

[14] https://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/1999/03/06/luther-blissett-siamo-noi.html. (Accessed 14.02.18).

Wu Ming signifies either 'anonymous' or 'five authors' in Chinese depending on the pronunciation, and is a title often used by dissidents of that country as a form of protest. At the same time, the choice of name indicates a strong rejection of the show-business aspect of literature, which turns authors into celebrities. In fact, Wu Ming aim at deconstructing the modern idea of the author as a figure who is often constructed and exploited by the literary industry. At various stages in its life, the group included four, then five, then again four writers, finally settling on three in 2015. As individual authors, they identify themselves with numbers rather than names, i.e. Wu Ming1, Wu Ming2, Wu Ming3…, so as to question the role of authorship. However, they do not want to claim absolute anonymity. Their real names are known to all the readers, as Wu Ming have revealed that the numbered sequence corresponds to the writers' surnames arranged in alphabetical order: Wu Ming1 is Roberto Bui, Wu Ming2 is Giovanni Cattabriga and Wu Ming4 is Federico Guglielmi. The members who have left the group are Luca Di Meo (Wu Ming3) and Riccardo Pedrini (Wu Ming5).

Wu Ming declared in an interview that they usually compare their collective writing to 1970s Dutch 'Total Football' (Darroch 2009), played by Dutch football club Ajax and by the Netherlands National Football Team during the 1970s. In football terms, it represented a revolutionary tactical theory in which any player could take over the role of any other player in the team. In this changeable system, no player had a fixed role, and even the goalkeeper could play as a defender in particular circumstances. This kind of innovative strategy required a very efficient organisational structure and excellent team spirit. What Wu Ming aim to accomplish is a form of collective writing in which each member adapts his own skills to suit the needs of the collective. In their work, the difference between a solo and a collective novel is mainly in the editing process. When they are writing a group novel, every bit of text written by any of them is discussed and constantly revised by the whole collective.

Through their collective writing, Wu Ming (and also Luther Blissett in *Q*) have created

literary objects that strike a balance between popularity and complexity. Although the central plots of their historical novels do bear some resemblance to popular literature, they are woven into complex and challenging narrative structures with many subplots, asides, historical digressions and numerous characters that require attentive readers. In 2014, Wu Ming decided to stop writing historical novels in order to go beyond the genre, thereby forging literary intersections between investigative journalism, travelogue, narrative biography, environmental investigation and a postcolonial retelling of Italy's past. Wu Ming have called these writings UNOs, Unidentified Narrative Objects, in which they constantly stretch the rules of literary genres. In Wu Ming1's "Memorandum", he refers to the more experimental literary production of the last twenty years as "Unidentified Narrative Objects", or UNOs. He describes UNOs thus: «Non sono più romanzi, non sono già qualcos'altro» (Wu Ming 1 2009: 22).

Emanuela Patti and Dimitri Chimenti further explore this classification, defending Wu Ming1's theory not as an attempt to obliterate the novel genre but rather to advocate for its future evolution. Their analysis of the UNO makes the argument that these more experimental forms, which incorporate multiple genres, literary and non, can be labelled as an 'ibridazione eso-letteraria' (Patti & Chimenti 2010: 51) and perhaps represent a more sincere attempt to confront reality and call into question our means of communication: '[UNO] Sono la consapevolezza e la presa di responsabilità nei confronti del potere manipolatorio che il discorso letterario, così come ogni altro mezzo espressivo, esercita sulla realtà' (*Ibid*).

In 2013, during a presentation of the book *Point Lenana*, written by Wu Ming1 and Roberto Santachiara, the author and critic Tommaso De Lorenzis described this area of work and literary experimentations (UNOs) in these terms: 'Multi-person narrative mode (first person singular, then first person plural, then second person singular, then third person); a variety of prose registers; a multiplicity of storylines held together by careful narrative direction; a peculiar way of going beyond the biographical genre; paths that keep opening and

take us to other books, either existing or yet to be written… Books written collectively, using the most diverse materials; hybridisation of novel and essay; disruption of timelines, and much more'.[15]

Wu Ming's collective writing is also characterised by its openness to influences and interactions with their readers on the web, in particular on their blog Giap, created in 2010 and named after the Vietnamese general Vo Nguyen Giap (2011-2013).[16] Before exploring the importance of this blog, and highlighting how the discussions and debates on Giap are significant in the creation of their work, I want to briefly outline the importance of the internet for Wu Ming in terms of community and participatory culture.

The widespread diffusion of the internet from the 1980s to the first two decades of the 21st century, as well as the evolution of advanced networking infrastructures, have changed the way we communicate and access information. Compared to the past, when small numbers of users created countercultural movements, over the last ten years the underground-networked culture (from which Luther Blissett emerged) has been transformed into participatory culture (more closely related to Wu Ming's activities).

This participatory culture, as highlighted by Henry Jenkins in his *Convergence culture* (2008), emerged in the era of media convergence, thanks to the fact that the internet has given people the limitless opportunity to share and access freely-available knowledge. The internet has also contributed to the development of new ways to participate in events or debates, arguably building a stronger sense of community. Jenkins also points out that the new media facilitate a higher level of collaboration between users, allowing on the one hand the dissemination of news, ideas and creative works, and on the other hand the creation of communities around specific interests and cultural values.

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[15] https://www.wumingfoundation.com/giap/che-cose-la-wu-ming-foundation/ (Accessed 11.01.19).

[16] https://www.wumingfoundation.com/giap/ (Accessed 21.11.18)

In this context, artistic practices have been hugely influenced by these new, data-sharing platforms with the creation and development images, stories, audiovisual materials. In the light of these innovations, there have been radical changes in the arts, where a culture of reception has been replaced by a culture of participation. These cultural transformations, which are taking place in an age of media transition, have changed the relationship between media audiences and producers.

At the same time, popular culture is reshaping itself. Jenkins observes that there are different shades of meaning between mass culture and popular culture. The expression 'mass culture' stresses the way this culture is transmitted, i.e. through mass media (cinema, TV, radio, print etc.) 'from above'. On the contrary, popular culture emphasises the role of the people who receive it and then reappropriate it 'from below'. As highlighted by Benvenuti, all these transformations also characterise Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's work. In particular, the blog Giap is an outstanding example of participatory culture.

> Luther Blissett and Wu Ming utilizzano da sempre la rete come forma di aggregazione comunitaria, di discussione e di azione. La loro riflessione sull'appropriazione dal basso di contenuti mainstream, in consonanza con gli studi di Jenkins, riapre la questione di che cosa sia la letteratura nell'epoca dei nuovi media nella quale tutti gli scrittori (quelli post-'93 per riprendere la cronologia proposta nel New Italian Epic) hanno un proprio sito, nella quale il dibattito critico si è spostato in misura rilevante sui blog letterari. (2012: 74)

Wu Ming use the blog Giap to have online exchanges with their readers, who are encouraged to interpret the meaning of their work. Some discussions on Giap have been so prolific that Wu Ming have invited bloggers to form their own collectives. Within a short period of time, starting in 2012, collectives of writers and researchers have joined and formed different groups:

Nicoletta Bourbaki,[17] *Quinto Tipo*[18] and *Resistenze in Cirenaica*.[19] Because of this, Wu Ming called themselves The Wu Ming Foundation: a collective of collectives. As Wu Ming have stated in their blog:

> As writers, we never limited ourselves to telling stories: we always disassembled and reassembled them in public, criticised them, discussed them, transformed them, spun them off with the help of anyone who fancied leaving comments or even taking on the task of writing. We did it with any stories we deemed to be of interest, not only with those we chose for our novels. That's how this blog became a laboratory where «narrative toxins» can be analysed together. Far from being a «collateral activity», this is the very core of our work. This has become ever more apparent over time, which is why we started receiving invitations and proposals to organise conferences, workshops, seminars and courses.[20]

Since the beginning of their activities, Wu Ming have also experimented with other artistic forms such as songs and literary recitals.[21] They collaborate with many musicians, singers, rappers and other performing artists, including Yo Yo Mundi, Colle der Fomento, Mr. Phil,

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[17] Nicoletta Bourbaki is an enquiry group dedicated to the demystification of right-wing historical revisionism, history-related fake news and neo-fascist ideologies. The project, which started in 2012, includes writers, activists, historians and researchers from different disciplines. Nicoletta's inquiries mainly focus on neo-fascist manipulations of some Italian Wikipedia pages and on hoaxes about the *foibe* in Trieste and Istria. The foibe were mass killings where the corpses were thrown into foibas (deep natural sinkholes), perpetrated by Yugoslav Partisans mainly in Venezia Giulia, Istria and Dalmatia, against the local Italian population during and after World War II. With its investigations, Nicoletta contributed to reveal the falsity of the *foiba di Rosazzo*, also known as the 'flying foiba' because of its shifting location over time. In February 2017, Nicoletta curated a series of articles and interviews for the weekly magazine Internazionale with the title The History around the Foibe. In March 2018, Nicoletta published the book *Questo chi lo dice? E perché? Come riconoscere e smontare le bufale storiche. Una guida per la fruizione critica delle fonti fuori e dentro il web*.

[18] Quinto Tipo started in 2014 after several debates on Giap about the need to open another laboratory where to publish literary experiments Quinto Tipo is at once a series of books edited by Wu Ming 1 and published by Edizioni Alegre, a blog and a collective of authors and editors. Quinto Tipo has published ten books (by March 2018) which can be defined as unidentified narrative objects and hybrid narratives: Non-fiction novels, Creative non-fiction, narrative reportage, Faction, Docufiction, Docudramas, Mockumentaries.

[19] Resistenze in Cirenaica is a permanent cultural workshop and a meta-collective including Wu Ming and many others. This collective was born in a neighbourhood of Bologna and has been named Cirenaica after the eastern region of Libya conquered in 1911. Since 2015, Resistenze in Cirenaica has been researching the history of the neighbourhood in order to unearth stories of resistance to Italian colonialism and fascism. These stories are published in a review called *Quaderni di Cirene*.

[20] https://www.wumingfoundation.com/giap/what-is-the-wu-ming-foundation/ (Accessed 20.04.18)

[21] Wu Ming also have a musical section called the Wu Ming Contingent, a band whose line-up includes Wu Ming2 and other musicians (Yu Guerra, Cesare Ferioli, Egle Sommacal). Some of their songs expand on the content of their novels, such as, for example, the album *Schegge di shrapnel,* that transposes some passages of the book *L'invisibile ovunque* into music.

Klasse Kriminale, Massimo Volume, Subsonica, Skinshout, Xabier Iriondo, Switters, Yu Guerra, Nabat, Sikitikis, Modena City Ramblers, Osteria Popolare Berica and many others.

Although the stable line-up of Luther Blissett and Wu Ming consisted of (almost) the same writers, undoubtedly there are many differences between these two collectives. Luther Blissett was a transnational identity that aimed at challenging the established cultural power through media pranks and other activities. It was a network of artists and political activists who fostered a more decentralised democratic participation. Unlike the international open name Luther Blissett, Wu Ming on the contrary stands for a small group of writers who are active in literature and popular culture. In their work, Wu Ming aim to give new power to the literary word by combining ethics and style, and rethinking some essential literary concepts such as the role of the modern narrator. The choice of the name is significant for this group of militant storytellers: Wu Ming recalls both political dissidents reclaiming democracy in China and a rejection of the present cultural system that turns authors into celebrities and celebrities into authors. Through its various forms of expression, writing, blog, music, recitals, the Wu Ming Foundation is a project that strongly links literature and political activism in a thought-provoking way because the contents flaw across a range of media, overcoming the traditional written page and expanding in different platforms.

II. Multimodal Strategy as a Form of Engagement

In this second section of the Introduction, I would like to concentrate on an aspect that is crucial to understand the value of Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's oeuvre: transmediality. I refer to the fact that their historical novels can be considered as an "open space" in which the content goes beyond the written page and expands through various platforms. In this interpretation, their novels have the capacity to generate narrations that flow across a range of media (printed

materials, eBooks, "reading concerti," musical compositions, fan fiction, and Pinterest, among others), which can be shared by a community with common interests and similar cultural identity. As I have mentioned in the previous section, Wu Ming do not limit themselves to strictly writing historical novels. On the contrary, the written text is merely a starting point for the creation of multiple and diverse other worlds that offer a variety of perspectives on narration, reading, and media.

Before expanding my analysis further, I want to highlight two main features – creative networking and collective intelligence – that are at the root of Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's narrations. In relation to creative networking, in his analysis of *Q* Andrea Cortellessa has underlined some significant points, such as the notion that Luther Blissett's historical novel "overcomes" the traditional written page.

> Se è nella tradizione del romanzo storico il detournement allusivamente attualizzante delle vicende narrate [...], in *Q* lo "stile" non è nella pagina, bensì nel circuito comunicativo nel suo complesso, nella reticolarità degli interventi del "network creativo" che trascende le identità anagrafiche di quattro individui. (2011: 33)

With the expression 'network creativo', Cortellessa has focussed on Luther Blissett's ideological and creative background, rooted in the so-called 'networked culture'. I use the expression 'networked culture' in the sense that was highlighted by Bazzichelli in her book *Networking. The Net as Artwork*, where she argues that the network in itself becomes a work of art, where interactive platforms, free operative systems, independent experiments, community projects and hacktivist movements are presented as works of art.

Bazzichelli has concentrated on networks of individuals who act as an alternative to the standardised production of culture, information and art. In particular, she has analysed the different use of technology made by grassroots communities of artists and activists (such as the Luther Blissett Project) involved in underground networking processes, with the creative use

of new media. She has also pointed out that networking is a cultural strategy that generates an open configuration and a map of connections in progress, where people can transfer their own knowledge and experiences.

> Since the 80s, the platforms of networking have been an important tool to share knowledge and experience to create works of hacktivism and net art. The concepts of "Openness" and "Do-It-Yourself" today more and more relevant with the diffusion of social networks and Web 2.0, have been the starting point for the development of punk culture and hacker ethic. (2009: 2)

In the 1980s, the use of computers had undoubtedly given overwhelming opportunities to expand the sphere of knowledge. Such a libertarian use of computers has facilitated interpersonal relations and also the creation of self-governed (political and artistic) products of good quality with limited costs. In the 1990s, networking was developed further, taking on new shapes in the world of hacker ethic.

> Much like an artistic happening, this idea of networking cannot overlook the notion that technology should be critically seen as an open medium. Within the computer domain, the term hack literally means "ingenious find". It is associated with the concepts of exchange and social sharing; whose goal is the spreading of information and free knowledge. The intent of this approach to technology is not to destroy, but to create; to give life to open processes in which the use of the computer is an important medium, but not as a means to an end. (*Ibid*: 28)

The creation of underground alternative networks such as hacktivism, cyberpunk and the squatted social centres was a fundamental experience to the development of the countercultural movements emerging in Italy between the 1980s and the 1990s. Most importantly, many elements in these experiences, such as their antagonistic character and the use of new technologies, are the ideological and creative substratum of Luther Blissett.

The other feature I mentioned, collective intelligence, is related to the assumption that, as suggested by French philosopher Pierre Lévy, participatory knowledge is central to the task of restoring democratic citizenship. What is at stake is not possessing static and hierarchical

knowledge, but rather the social process that leads to the creation of a dynamic and inclusive one: 'The knowledge space is utopian, but it is an achievable utopia' (1999: 180). According to Levy, 'from a political perspective the major phases in the dynamic of collective intelligence are listening, expression, decision making, evaluation, organization, connection, and vision, all of which are interrelated' (*ibid*: 70).

The sense of equality and freedom is essential to the communitarian nature of collective intelligence, with 'exchange, attentiveness, respect, recognition, mutual apprenticeship, negotiation among autonomous subjects' (*ibid*: 86). This is why Lévy has envisaged the creation of a new Babylon, conceived not as a city in a fixed place, but rather as a "cyber city" all over the Earth, where each individual speaks to another on the same level, overcoming any categories and hierarchies. Lévy has avoided the cacophony of ancient Babylon, praising a multiphony of singularities through which each person can connect to the next. This is the so-called cyberspace. And cyberspace, used in an inclusive and fluid way, is central to the growth of collective intelligence. As Lévy has maintained:

> The virtual worlds of collective intelligence will develop new forms of writing: animated pictograms, cinelanguages that will retain the trace of the interactions of their navigators. Collective memory will organize and redeploy itself for each navigator on the basis of his interests and travels in the virtual world. The new, angelic space of signs will be sensible, active, intelligent, and at the service of its explorers. (*Ibid*: 109)

This new way of building and sharing knowledge is profoundly significant when analysing Wu Ming's narrative, which is strongly intertwined with their presence on the web. In the essay *Comunità, intelligenza connettiva: dall'open source all'opera aperta in Wu Ming*, Emanuela Piga has examined the main characteristics of web communities and, more specifically, the narratological and social practices through which people create a story together.

> Questa dimensione collettiva e connettiva [dei romanzi dei Wu Ming] si riflette in ambiti diversi, incluso quello più specificamente letterario: le opere in rete sono messe gratuitamente a disposizione della comunità dei lettori, che

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a sua volta le condivide e le trasforma, interviene sul tessuto della scrittura e sviluppa trame alternative, rizomi narrativi che prendono vita propria nella compresenza di comunità e singolarità. È il principio di quella che oggi è chiamata fan fiction, ma che coincide con desideri e pratiche antiche. (2010: 66)

In a similar way, Enrico Manera has underlined the fact that Wu Ming have created 'un'officina letteraria che è anche un cantiere di riflessione sociale e politica vasto e ramificato, fortemente radicato in rete e su Giap[22] in particolare' (2014). This particular 'literary factory', Manera has added:

Ha prodotto una folta comunità di lettori radicata in ambiti differenziati, una readership intergenerazionale che ha reagito chimicamente alla commistione di alto e basso: una voluta collisione di densità storica e concettuale e storytelling pop, risolta in uno stile anche eclettico ma riconoscibile, che produce oggetti narrativi di non/fiction di alta qualità. (*Ibid*)

By extending the boundaries of the traditional written text through digital tools, music, and physical performances, Wu Ming seem to invite increased agency on the part of their readership in a highly participatory way and seek to connect their followers across times and spaces, thus creating a borderless transnational community. On this last point, Melina Masterson has enphasised that:

Wu Ming's transnational community is largely enabled by the open nature of the digital realm, as the collective is able to foster relationships across borders that are not limited by time, space, or citizenship. The group's activity on multiple digital platforms also facilitates these connections. (2014)

In her volume *Narratology Beyond Literary Criticism: Mediality and Disciplinarity*, the literary scholar and critic Marie-Laure Ryan has defined 'problematic' the traditional speech-act approach to narrative. Considering narrative as a strictly language-based phenomenon, she argues, means that we can easily ignore both the visual and the musical. On the contrary, Ryan

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[22] http://www.wumingfoundation.com/giap/ (Accessed 12.09.2018)

sees narrative as cognitive, rather than verbal: 'There are, quite simply, meanings that are better expressed visually or musically than verbally, and these meanings should not be declared a priori irrelevant to the narrative experience" (2005: 10). The Wu Ming collective echoes, in my opinion, her view that narrative is more than just language. That is why Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's stories go beyond the boundaries of their original form (the novel) and progress in different ways, developing and transforming themselves across different platforms with the interaction of readers/followers who share their multisensorial approach to narrative. In terms of narration, we can consider the two collectives as "storytellers by every means necessary":

> We've made incursions into cinema, comics, roleplaying games. We came up through the Luther Blissett Project, which was as multimedia and cross media as you could imagine. Novels are perhaps our principal instrument of expression, but not the only one. (In Bertante et al. 2007)

Transmediality is a direct consequence of the "openness" and collective intelligence mentioned so far. When we talk about transmediality, it is worth pointing out that the mass use of the Internet in the 21st century has allowed the emergence of numberless hybrid practices halfway between literature and new media that have pushed the concept of "novel" far from its traditional material borders. In an environment of collective intelligence and participatory culture, not only have the roles of the writer/reader/user changed, but, most importantly, so has the concept of literature itself, as well as the traditional image of the author. In their introduction of *Transmedia*, Clodagh Brook and Emanuela Patti have underlined that:

> Facendo leva sui valori dell'ipersocialità e dell'interattività tipici delle web communities le storie si prestano oggi ad infinite diramazioni e ucronie, dalla fan fiction alla ricostruzione collettiva della memoria. Questo fenomeno ha chiaramente rivoluzionato il concetto di autorialità: da un'idea tradizionale di Auctor come auctoritas in grado di determinare in modo univoco contenuti e forma di una storia, si è passati a svariate sperimentazioni di scrittura collaborativa. (2015: 13)

Similar issues have been raised by Patti in two articles, 'Il romanzo nella "galassia internet": sperimentazioni transmediali nella narrativa italiana del XXI secolo'[23] and 'Letteratura oltre i confini del libro. Storie e narrazioni italiane attraverso i media'.[24] In these texts, she has examined how some Italian writers have dealt with the concept of convergence culture, at both the theoretical level and in narrative experimentations. Patti has focussed on works – with a particular interest in Wu Ming – that are halfway between traditional novels, new media and participatory culture.[25] The main aim of her analysis has been to explore how these works have exploited interactivity and immersion in the new narrative forms, contributing to building a collective identity and a sense of belonging. The mass circulation of new media has undoubtedly allowed the novel to widen the narrative and semiotic development of a story. On this point, Brook and Patti have highlighted that:

> Molte di queste sono scritture in collaborazione che, nel momento in cui l'oggetto-libro ha incontrato il web, si sono dimostrate spregiudicate nei confronti dei limiti e dei confini delle Lettere. L'opposizione tra vecchi e nuovi linguaggi è venuto a cadere. Il ventaglio delle ibridazioni possibili si è rivelato sempre più ampio. Si tratta perlopiù di opere basate su un rapporto omologico con i principi fondanti della rete (networking, interattività e multimedialità). (*Ibid*: 10)

The new transmedia environment, with its community-making and participatory aspects, offers countless possibilities to create and share, where cultural behaviour, individuals and societies related to the media are very much different from the past. Wu Ming act as militant activists, cultural agitators, writers, bloggers and transmedia storytellers, moving across different platforms to respond to a new aesthetical model of narrating stories. In so doing, they make

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[23] Patti, Emanuela (2015). 'Il romanzo nella "galassia internet": sperimentazioni transmediali nella narrativa italiana del XXI secolo', in *Transmedia. Storia, memoria e narrazioni attraverso i media*. Rome: Mimesis, pp. 33-54.

[24] Patti, Emanuela (2014). 'Letteratura oltre i confini del libro. Storie e narrazioni italiane attraverso i media', in Gargiulo, Marco (eds). *Lingua e cultura italiana nei mass media*. Rome: Aracne, pp. 33-57.

[25] Patti has also drawn attention to the collective writings by Kai Zen and Scrittura Industriale Collettiva (SIC).

strategic use of a number of devices such as books, blog, lectures, interviews, concerts. Wu Ming have expanded their ideas in an array of artistic and cultural expressions in order to stimulate a wider process of reflection on the content of their novels by readers/web users. On this important aspect, Wu Ming1 has claimed that:

> Oggi tutto quanto è multimediale, tutto l'immaginario è multimediale, anche le scritture più legate a uno specifico letterario subiscono a vari gradi l'influenza di ciò che avviene negli altri media, basti pensare a come il computer e la rete hanno cambiato l'approccio allo scrivere. (2008: 23)

Stories flow into the web through social networks and generate communities, transforming the traditional passive reader/viewer in an active user. From this perspective, close to 'participation' another keyword emerges: 'immersion'. In *The Art of Immersion*,[26] Frank Rose describes many cultural and artistic practices in the Internet age, explaining that we are no longer passive consumers/spectators of mass media, because we approach television shows, movies, advertising and so on as invitations to participate and as experiences to immerse ourselves in.

On this new model of media literacy, Wu Ming2 once stated that 'qualsiasi narrazione è un'opera collettiva' (2012: 503). A narrative can be collective not just because it is written by several authors, but also because the finished product is not simply the text but rather its paratext. In fact, the story can be made up with many strands taken from different sources: other books, newspapers, films, songs, and websites. Moreover, the active participation of readers is a significant component in their writing process. That is why Wu Ming see internet as an important dimension of their work: on the web, it is possible to create open links with readers to expand the narratives in different ways.

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[26] Rose, Frank (2012). *The Art of Immersion: How the Digital Generation is Remaking Hollywood, Madison Avenue, and the Way We Tell Stories*. London/New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Wu Ming's literature has emerged in an age of media convergence that is characterised by collective intelligence and synergic interactions where authors and readers, creators and interpreters, artists and critics form a 'circuit of expression with each participant working to sustain the activity of the others' (Lévy 1999: 89). On this point, Wu Ming1 has pointed out that: 'Every act of literary and artistic creation, every work of art, every novel bears the signs of what happens around, in a way or another.'[27] Masterson has correctly underlined that:

> The experience of a Wu Ming novel extends past the printed word, as the collective experiments with the tactile, visual, aural, and even the olfactory to enhance the way in which the reader lives the content on the page: soundtracks, hiking excursions, fan fiction, and photo exhibitions, among others, are just some of the ways they seek to go beyond the confines of the written text. (2014)

Wu Ming's narratives are so dense that they cannot be contained within a single medium. Their works therefore extend across multiple media, allowing each medium to generate new experiences for readers. In the form of transmedia storytelling, a topic may be introduced on Giap through discussions with its readers, then it can be expanded through literature and music, flowing into other (solo or collective) Wu Ming's novels. In so doing, Wu Ming can expand the topics of their stories in multiple directions, through as many different platforms as possible. As a result, the content will not be the same as it was at the beginning; it changes – or better develops – thanks to its readers' engagement and participation.

In his blog Jenkins states that 'transmedia storytelling is the ideal aesthetic form for an era of collective intelligence. […] Participants pool information and tap each other's expertise as they work together to solve problems'.[28] In this sense, transmediality entails active

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[27] Wu Ming1, *New Italian Epic: We're Going to Have to Be the Parents. The London Speech* by Opening talk at the conference "The Italian Perspective on Metahistorical Fiction: The New Italian Epic", Institute of Germanic and Romance Studies, University of London, UK, 2 October 2008.
http://www.wumingfoundation.com/english/outtakes/NIE_have_to_be_the_parents.htm (Accessed 18.10.17)

[28] http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2007/03/transmedia_storytelling_101.html (Accessed 05.03.20)

collaboration, new media experimentation, and commitment and curiosity to exploring the boundaries of storytelling.

As an important element in participatory culture, as said, readers/web users actively reshape the story according to their wishes, following up on bits of the narration across multiple media channels. Wu Ming's synergic texts are not designed to be read in a passive way, as they require attentive readers/web users that actively seek out information outside the book itself. In this new media landscape, this new relationship between writer and readers leads to the empowerment of readers, consumers, fans that are more deeply invested and actively engaged in the collaborative process of writing, as highlighted by Brook and Patti:

> L'assunto di partenza è che il coinvolgimento del lettore sia sinonimo di democrazia e prospettiva comunitaria e che interattività sia sinonimo di uguaglianza, di empowerment del lettore/utente. (2015: 16)

In this process, the active contribution and participation of readers/web users is crucial to creating a more engaging experience. Instead of the previous vertical relations writer – reader through which a work was received, now a horizontal mode has been devised, within a prolonged transition and a more dynamic tension. In the *Memorandum*, Wu Ming1 have explained that:

> Transmediale […] è la storia che prosegue in modi ulteriori, il mondo di un libro che si estende su altre "piattaforme". Non meri "adattamenti" della stessa storia, come avviene coi film tratti da romanzi, ma di una storia che sconfina, si evolve e prosegue con altri mezzi e linguaggi. Un'obiezione tipica: che ne è del valore artistico, estetico, letterario? La maggior parte di questi "omaggi" transmediali amatoriali (video su YouTube, fumetti, racconti etc.) sono di scarso interesse e spessore. È un errore giudicare l'interazione tra membri di una comunità solo in base alla qualità dei risultati (che tra l'altro è pure questione di gusti). Il premio è la virtù stessa, importante è che si collabori e comunichi. (2008: 23)

Wu Ming1 has pointed out that transmedia culture is getting day by day more participatory, opening up unknown spaces, increasing opportunities for expression and diversifying

aesthetical production. The content of communication moves across platforms obtaining widespread and pervasive distribution, and following a more participatory model to tell stories. Thanks to the extension and strength of connection in the new media, any experience will not be contained within a single media platform, but will extend across many media platforms.

The specific nature of Wu Ming's projects varies, as do the forms of media employed by the collective to enhance the narrative experience, but the ultimate objective of this constant innovation and expanding of narrative boundaries is to engage with the reader on a deeper level and encourage his/her active participation and collaboration on the project. The results of these interactions and synergies are numerous.

To mention a few, *Q* and *Altai* (Chapter Two) have experienced a transmedia journey across music and a card game. A band from Vicenza, Osteria Popolare Berica, in 2008 composed a song *La Canzone del Capitano Gert*[29] based on the adventures lived by the protagonist of the novel, after the conquest of the city of Münster from the hands of the German Princes, and the establishment of an ideal Christian commonwealth. Interestingly, the song focuses on how a new power emerging after a rebellion epitomise the features of a modern dictatorship.

The card game *Q il gioco di carte*[30] has been created by a reader, Enrico Trincherini, for the 10th anniversary of *Q*. It is about a strategy game in which:

> Ogni giocatore assume l'identità di un personaggio nella Venezia del 1549 e sostiene segretamente una fazione, gli Zelanti o gli Spirituali, in lotta per la conquista del Soglio Pontificio e dell'egemonia nella Chiesa. Al termine della partita, la fazione che ha più punti influenza a proprio favore l'elezione del nuovo papa e i giocatori che la sostengono sono dichiarati vincitori. Nel corso della partita è fondamentale capire quali siano i giocatori appartenenti alla propria fazione, senza dimenticare che anche la lealtà dell'alleato più fedele può sempre venir meno.[31]

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[29] https://www.antiwarsongs.org/canzone.php?lang=it&id=8502 (Accessed 07.04.20)

[30] https://www.wumingfoundation.com/images/Qcarte.pdf (Accessed 13.06.20)

[31] https://www.wumingfoundation.com/images/regolamentoQ.pdf (Accessed 13.06.20)

In 2010, the band Skinshout and Xabier Iriondo created soundtracks of *Altai* with ten songs which reflect the content of the novel: *Fuga da Venezia*, *Verso Salonicco*, *Il mercato di Salonicco*, *Le mura di Costantinopoli*, *I tre venti che flagellano Costantinopoli*, *Altai*, *Arrivo a Famagosta*, *Il bombardiere di Famagosta*, *La battaglia di Lepanto (Schieramento delle navi)*, *La battaglia di Lepanto (Galleggiare di vivi e morti e di detriti)*.[32]

Other musical adaptations of *Altai* have been performed by the Maxmaber Orkestar in 2009 and by *Compagnia Lirica di Milano* with the show *Altai Lyric Suite* in 2010-2011.[33]

Manituana (Chapter Three) epitomises the multimodal strategy as highlighted in the Introduction, such as creative network, collective participation, and the expansion of the story through fan-fiction and spin-offs. As correctly underlined by Giuliana Benvenuti:

> *Manituana* è un esperimento circa la creazione di mondi nel quale davvero true story and fiction si amalgamano secondo inedite prospettive, dal momento che potenzialmente ogni lettore può intervenire e contribuire alla proliferazione di storie che dal racconto epico si dipartono. E non solo di storie, la creazione collettiva prevede anche musiche, immagini, costruzione di oggetti, insomma un ampliamento creativo del romanzo in molteplici e imprevedibili direzioni. Il sito di *Manituana* è allora un esempio di riappropriazione dal basso di modelli mainstream, di sfruttamento alternativo non soltanto delle potenzialità interattive delle nuove tecnologie, ma anche di creazione alternativa di fandom. Il romanzo, o meglio ancora, l'oggetto-libro funziona così da innesco per chi alla comunità sia estraneo: il progetto consiste nel portarlo dentro un network nel quale è invitato a divenire architetto di ucronie, progettatore di utopie; nel quale, insomma, è invitato ad assumere una posizione attiva e non passiva, da mero ricettore di una o di un'altra forma testuale: la scrittura di Wu Ming, cioè, mira alla prassi, e soprattutto alla collettività. (2012: 80-81)

The interactive web page Manituana.com[34] offers supplementary information about the story, characters and the period in which the novel was set. Among others, Level 2 is an important section of manituana.com where the content can be expanded. Here the readers have the

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[32] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IFvsSI5GwsY (Accessed 02.04.20)

[33] https://www.wumingfoundation.com/giap/2019/11/altai-dieci-anni-dopo/ (Accessed 13.03.20)

[34] http://www.manituana.com/ (Accessed 24.09.17).

possibility to interact and work together in order to create "new worlds" inside *Manituana*, by writing subplots and side stories. According to Wu Ming themselves, *Manituana* is indeed:

> Una dimensione aperta, la cui piena definizione è ancora in corso. Un luogo pensato per rispondere a domande e crearne di nuove, appagare curiosità e diffondere narrazione comunitaria attraverso ibridazioni, incroci, confronti, visioni e condivisioni. Il Livello 2 è pensato per chi ha già terminato la lettura di Manituana, così da poter discutere in piena libertà senza rovinare sorprese a nessuno.[35]

Transmediality is a cornerstone of Wu Ming's overall project, a way to expand the text, and thus the readership, beyond the page. Most of the collective's novels have some sort of transmedial component, the presence of another medium (e.g., Pinterest, music, live performances, theatre) with which they seek to tell or re-tell the story found in the traditional written text. In the case of *Manituana*, Wu Ming create a clear transmedial project. The site www.manituana.com is indeed an example of a community-building transmedial project which also reveals the collective's affinities with video gaming culture.

Upon entering the website's portal, different links appear across the top of the page: the book, trailer, latest news, side stories, placemarks, visions, sounds, chronology, Level 2, and Pontiac. The text extends to both the visual and the auditory in the trailer, which features a narration with images in the background. The final product is not unlike a trailer for a film, which indicates that the novel has a natural visual and audio component as well, further proving the connection between Wu Ming's oeuvre and the cinematic genre. By providing this type of preview, the collective immediately gives the text a specific transmedial dimension and identity; like a film, they announce that the story that follows will be visual, musical, and at times interactive, in other words: a "motion picture".

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[35] http://www.manituana.com/documenti/83/0/it (Accessed 24.09.17).

The site www.manituana.com confirms that a text in itself has dynamic and transmutable nature. The site features interviews and articles that reference the continually evolving world both inside and outside of the pages of the novel. In an interview, Wu Ming 4 also comments on the type of community they are seeking to create through this project:

> To whomever wants to be guided on a journey through unexplored territories and to map out a fantastic world. Narration is the sharing of stories, nothing more. The more people choose to populate the *Manituana* world, the more possible it will be to expand it, render it vivid, give life to its peoples and characters (in Bertante et al. 2007)

Wu Ming claim that they see in their readers the potential to transform and improve their stories, and they view themselves as the 'hosts' of the Manituana world, rather than the editors. In an interview, Wu Ming make their objectives for this digital community clear:

> Raccontare una storia è scoprire un mondo. Le pagine di un libro sono uno degli ingressi magici che lo dischiudono. Si può scegliere di tenere chiuse le altre porte o si può cercare di spalancarle tutte, in segno di ospitalità. Ancora una volta si tratta di scegliere se offrire un universo da contemplare, intoccabile nella sua pretesa bellezza e perfezione, o se invitare a trasformarlo, a svilupparne le potenzialità. Non si tratta solo di estetica: se crediamo che uomini e donne assieme possano migliorare il mondo, faremo di tutto perché lettori e lettrici possano migliorare le nostre storie con ogni mezzo necessario (in Lipperini 2007)

One way in which their readers can improve their narrative universe is through the creation of what the collective calls *racconti ammutinati*, or side stories. The extra literary material also shows how the novel itself evolved during both the writing process and post-publication, proving that the narrative world is anything but static. To maintain this dynamism, the collective invites their readers to "enter into the pact" and take some ownership of that space:

> Nei mesi e anni a venire accoglieremo con gioia, selezioneremo e pubblicheremo i racconti e frammenti che vi salterà il ghiribizzo di inviarci, a condizione che vivano e respirino nel mondo che insieme andiamo costruendo.[36]

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[36] https://www.manituana.com/section/76 (Accessed 10.05.20)

What is important to note is that the collective's hospitality is not absolute: there are conditions to this participation. The group will select the stories which best reflect their ideology and narrative goals, and the final decision remains theirs as to whether or not these tales are suitable for the world they are trying to construct. As a reflection of Wu Ming's attempts to exercise control over who exactly can participate to their projects, it is worth mentioning a prerequisite clearly enlightened in Giap:

> This blog is open to the contributions and views of many, but not everyone. As long as you refrain from trolling, you can write what you want, subject to antifascist discrimination. Right-wing comrades and the like have many other places where they can spread their bile. This is a protected space.

As in many other novels, music also plays a major role[37] in the Manituana project. Under the sounds link, which is divided into Music and Words, there are numerous songs inspired by or dedicated to the novel, either commissioned by Wu Ming or contributed independently by the musicians such as Marco Bertoni, Yu Guerra or Casasonica to mention a few. Some songs do not directly reflect any character or scene of the novel but rather seek to capture the essence of the story through fragments of different voices and accents. Other songs, played by the group The Beans, reflect the main themes of the novel and the traditions of the culture of that time such as the music that the European immigrants (Scottish, English, Irish, French) brought to the colonies in the 1700s. As Wu Ming explain:

> I Beans suonano la musica che gli immigrati europei (scozzesi, inglesi, irlandesi, francesi) portarono nelle colonie d'Oltreatlantico nel corso del '700, ponendo le basi di quella che oggi suona all'orecchio come musica quintessenzialmente americana ma che non ha mai reciso le proprie radici europee. Sono le fiddle songs, le ballate, le gighe che suonavano, ascoltavano e danzavano i coloni bianchi negli anni che raccontiamo in *Manituana*.[38]

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[37] A detailed list of the songs and soundtracks created from Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's novels is available at https://www.wumingfoundation.com/giap/musiche/ (Accessed 10.07.20)

[38] https://www.manituana.com/documenti/78/8284 (Accessed 10.05.20)

In the first place, the sheer amount of work and engagement that a transmedial storytelling project entails is considerable, and Wu Ming's ambition to continually push themselves beyond the written word is admirable. The level of contribution they are able to elicit from their readers also points to a certain success of their overall project; in other words, they have managed to forge connections with people, and these contributors clearly take the Wu Ming project to heart. They compose songs, write fan fiction, organize presentations and excursions—all of these things point to a positive and fruitful fan culture and community of sentiment.

L'armata dei sonnambuli (Chapter Four) is another novel that can be considered an "open space". Only few weeks after its publication, some readers launched the proposal on Giap of a multi-authored anthology of fanfiction and spin-offs based on the protagonist of the novel, Scaramouche, with the title *Tifiamo Scaramouche*. As highlighted by Simone Scaffidi, who edited the anthology:

> *Tifiamo Scaramouche* è il terzo esperimento di tifo narrativo forgiato dalla fucina di Giap – il blog del collettivo di scrittori Wu Ming – e foraggiato dalla comunità di lettori che frequentano e animano questo fertile spazio sociale. Sorella delle esperienze che l'hanno preceduta – *Tifiamo Asteroide* e *Tifiamo 4* – anch'essa si connota come un'antologia di racconti multiautore, rivendicando fn dal principio il suo ruolo di spudorata fan-fiction e irriverente spin-off.[39]

Using Giap as a platform, some users have proposed to write a collective story around the character of Scaramouche from 1640 to 2014. This narration has been divided into 75 segments of 5 years each. The 75 bloggers/users who have replied to this proposal had to follow four rules in order to create a coherent and homogeneous narration: Scaramouche protagonist; Scaramouche involved in a historical event; writing on a wall; 20,000 characters. The 75 narrations have been later on collected in four volumes divided by the centuries (XVI, XVII,

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[39] https://www.wumingfoundation.com/giap/2015/06/scarica-i-4-quattro-volumi-di-tifiamoscaramouche-storie-di-guerra-di-classe-scaturite-da-larmatadeisonnambuli/ (Accessed 22.02.19)

XIX, XX) in which the stories were set. Each volume has its own title: *Terra canta*, *Carne brucia*, *Rivolta viene* and *Notte fugge*. Regarding the importance of *Tifiamo Scaramouche* inside the transmediality of Wu Ming, Scaffidi highlights that:

> Il lavoro culturale del collettivo Wu Ming, ormai da più di un decennio, è caratterizzato da una forte propulsione trasformativa, che affonda le sue radici nella trasversalità e transmedialità delle proposte che porta avanti. Non è un caso dunque che attorno alle storie del collettivo si sviluppino progetti che definire paralleli appare riduttivo. Questi infatti non corrono su binari separati ma intrecciano e sfilacciano forme e contenuti rielaborando storie autonome ma concatenate. Tifiamo Scaramouche è un tassello di questo universo trasversale, per nulla parallelo o etereo, un universo magmatico dove le storie si con-fondono l'una con l'altra dando vita a una narrazione corale. (*Ibidem*)

Apart from *Tifiamo Scaramouche*, many other trasmedial experiences have expanded from *L'armata dei sonnambuli*. It is worth mentioning the Laboratorio di Magnetismo Rivoluzionario led by the Italian writer and magician Mariano Tomatis. Séances of the laboratory have been scheduled in Turin (6 May 2014 and 28 January 2015), Mantova (5 September 2014), Carpi (22 October 2014).

> Ibrido tra Illusionismo e Letteratura senza precedenti, il Laboratorio di Magnetismo Rivoluzionario scritto da Mariano Tomatis insieme a Wu Ming è una versione pop-up de L'armata dei sonnambuli, il romanzo del collettivo bolognese ambientato nella Francia del terrore giacobino.[40]

As usually happens to many Wu Ming's novels, songs have been performed from *L'armata dei sonnambuli*, such as *Cura Robespierre* in the album *Bioscop* by Wu Ming Contingent.

> Volete Coca Cola senza caffeina, / volete sigarette che non facciano fumo, / dolcezza senza zuccheri, passione senza corpo, / guerra senza guerra, cioè che non vi tocchi./ Crociere avventurose, gelato di soia, / bombe intelligenti, né destra né sinistra, / sangue che non macchia, ripristino ambientale, / ossimori a quintali per non ingrassare. / Cura Robespierre! / Cura Robespierre! / Per gli edulcorati cura Robespierre! / Cura Robespierre! / Cura Robespierre! / Per questi tempi idioti cura Robespierre! / Cambiate i nomi al mondo perché vi vergognate / dell'abuso immondo che non volete cambiare. / Vi piace la paura, io preferisco il terrore / perché l'uguaglianza terrorizza l'oppressore. / Volete Gesù Cristo senza Apocalisse, / volete amare il prossimo purché non vi

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[40] http://www.marianotomatis.it/lab/ (Accessed 04.06.18)

disturbi, / volete Rivoluzione senza Rivoluzione, / ossimori a quintali per non ingrassare. / Cura Robespierre! / Cura Robespierre! / Per i moderati cura Robespierre! / Cura Robespierre! / Cura Robespierre! / Per questi tempi idioti cura Robespierre! [41]

In June and November 2017 *L'armata dei sonnambuli* was also adapted for the stage by Ente Teatro Cronaca Vesuvioteatro, director Pino Carbone, with Michelangelo Dalisi, Andrea de Goyzueta, Francesca De Nicolais, Renato De Simone, Rosario Giglio.

> *L'armata dei sonnambuli* è un progetto teatrale che trasforma l'opera letteraria in drammaturgia e in azione scenica. Il teatro, d'altronde, è l'altra grande e dichiarata metafora del racconto. Il romanzo stesso è diviso in atti e scene. Il tema della rappresentazione ritorna insistentemente e si fonde spesso in una dinamica meta-teatrale che si dipana tra la rappresentazione della Storia e quella dei personaggi e delle ambientazioni.[42]

As previously mentioned, Wu Ming's followers/readers share their multisensorial approach to narrative, in the sense that a novel can be at the same time read, heard and seen. One example of this approach is the monologue *Al placido Don. Fantasmi dal fiume* presented by Luigi Dadina at the Teatro delle Albe di Ravenna from the story narrated in *Asce di Guerra*.[43]

In relation to *54*, soundtracks have been created by the group Yo Yo Mundi, whose goal was to interpret the most significant moments of the book and to give voice and life to many of the protagonists.[44] The creation of the album *54*, a 'reading musicato, album e spettacolo teatrale'[45] was a transmedial project in itself. The representation was organized around the musical interpretation of various characters/events from the text, like Cary Grant and the McGuffin Electric television set. While the actors read and the musicians play, photographs featuring the various historical realities flash in the background.

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[41] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nxJ0Ef4iHlU (Accessed 15.07.18)

[42] https://www.enteteatrocronaca.it/produzioni/larmata-dei-sonnambuli/ (Accessed 12.05.18)

[43] http://www.teatrodellealbe.com/archivio/spettacolo.php?id=35 (Accessed 30.03.19)

[44] http://www.yoyomundi.com/storico/WuMing54/54_cover.html (Accessed 24.09.18)

[45] https://www.wumingfoundation.com/giap/musiche/ (Accessed 24.09.18)

From the music created by Yo Yo Mundi, the director Laura Bombonato has taken inspiration for the musical *54, anno incredibile* which is 'la naturale evoluzione in forma teatrale della lettura scenica-evento con una trama a narrare minime storie quotidiane che si intrecciano ai grandi fatti della storia'.[46]

As stated by Wu Ming, *54* is a 'choral' novel with so many plots that lead to a natural cinematic and theatrical adaptation. Moreover, another point they raised is their vocation of making literature, which is popular and music is definitely a component of that popular approach.

> E tra i nostri romanzi *54* è quello più corale, quello in cui le radici del nostro modo d'essere sono esposte mettendo in scena una varietà di maschere traboccanti, quello più denso di storie e quello che pare naturalmente adatto a una resa cinematografica o teatrale. In più, molte delle idiosincrasie e dei procedimenti tecnici del collettivo sono mutuati pari pari dalla musica.[47]

Apart from the six collective historical novels, which are at the core of my analysis, it is worth mentioning the collective "mosaic novels" such as *Tifiamo asteroide. Cento racconti per annientare il governo Letta*[48] (2013), and the so-called "tarocchi narrativi" *Tifiamo 4. 34 fotoracconti scritti sull'acqua* (2014) in collaboration with TerraProject, a collective of photographers.[49] In 2015, Wu Ming2 and the writer Ivan Brentari created the *Collettivo MetalMente*, entirely formed by metalworkers. They wrote a collection of stories on factory life and the class struggle, entitled *Meccanoscritto* (2017).[50] Wu Ming have also extended the practice of collective writing beyond their group. In fact, in 2002 Wu Ming2 launched a "call for papers" for an experiment in online collective writing. Wu Ming2 wrote the first, the fifth

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[46] https://www.wumingfoundation.com/italiano/54/yoyomundi_54.html#incredibile (Accessed 07.08.17)

[47] http://www.yoyomundi.com/54/ (Accessed 07.08.17)

[48] https://www.wumingfoundation.com/giap/2013/08/tifiamoasteroide-cento-racconti-per-annienta-il-governo-letta/ (Accessed 21.03.18).

[49] https://www.wumingfoundation.com/giap/2014/02/download-tifiamo4/ (Accessed 21.03.18)

[50] https://www.wumingfoundation.com/giap/2017/03/meccanoscritto-un-romanzo-metallurgico-e-collettivo-in-libreria-dal-23-marzo/ (Accessed 21.03.18).

and the ninth (and last) chapters of a novel entitled *Ti chiamerò Russell. Romanzo totale*, inviting six selected writers, who replied to the call, to complete the other chapters.[51]

Another significant example of transmediality can be found in Wu Ming2/Antar Mohamed's *Timira*, with their use of the idea-sharing social media site Pinterest, where writers and readers can post photographs, videos or other related images to a novel-specific "board".[52] These "boards" serve as bulletin boards, where users can attach information that is useful to a particular topic from the novel.

In the light of the above-mentioned considerations, the narrations cross the borders and go on with other developments and the feeling that readers' contributions can create new paths. In this way, a transmediatic journey always offers new possibilities of mythopoiesis (creation of new myths) and expanded creativity. Many of their narrations, thanks to the active participation of the readers who act as a 'collective intelligence', can be considered as "worlds" that keep bleeding from one medium to the other and absorbing in themselves contaminations and inspirations that come from their transmedia journey.

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[51] The novel is the story of a secret agent who travels the world looking for peculiar medical cases and exceptional deaths. When he eventually has direct experience with these cases, Russell creates new epidemics that can be used for the purpose of social control.

[52] https://www.pinterest.co.uk/einaudieditore/timira/ (Accessed 30.06.18)

I. Power and Freedom: Theoretical Framework

'I bei tempi non sono mai esistiti. Ogni epoca contiene già in se stessa la propria negazione e il proprio superamento' (in Merletti 2002). Pronounced by Wu Ming in an interview, these words summarise a crucial idea that lies at the very heart of Wu Ming's and Luther Blissett's novels, where the dialectical relationship between power and freedom emerges as a prominent feature. Every historical period always contains within itself its own antithesis, beliefs and movements that will ultimately bring it to its conclusion and to the beginning of a new era. But this new era will feature both fragments and concepts from the previous one, in a never-ending process.

Throughout this thesis, I will highlight how historical events develop in a framework articulated in the moments of fixity, instability and assimilation. This process involves a transition between opposite but complementary stages that develop into a new one, a new balance between power and freedom. Italian Marxist theorist Franco "Bifo" Berardi has correctly highlighted this crucial aspect, arguing that Luther Blissett and Wu Ming have focussed on how rebellions which overcome the old power, turn into a new form of dogmatism, and revolts into new power.

> There's no hope in history, there's no hope in dialectics. When the movement arising from everyday life designates itself as an avenging judge, when utopia takes the place of life, here comes the spectre of identity, and the rebellious body is imprisoned by sacrificial idealism. (Berardi 2000: 65)

What my reading of Luther Blissett and Wu Ming's oeuvre reveals is a Hegelian vision of history, in terms of dialectical relationship between power and freedom. The German philosopher constructed world history into a narrative of stages of human freedom, starting from the public freedom of the polis and the citizenship of the Roman Republic, then moving to the individual freedom of the Protestant Reformation, and finally to the civic freedom of the French Revolution. The ideal state created after the struggles for the concrete achievement of freedom would be that in which the private interests of its citizens are, at least in theory, in perfect harmony with the common interest. However, as I will analyse in Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's novels, the accomplishment of freedom is only temporary and never complete because the new society emerging from the revolution is never adequate to fulfil ideals that were thought to be right and just. In Hegelian words, 'history is a panorama of sin and suffering. […] The History of the World is not the theatre of happiness. Periods of happiness are blank pages in it'. (Hegel 1956: 22, 26). In the novels, freedom is just an illusion, not really practiced and not completely achieved.

In my analysis of the literary representations of power and freedom as they feature in Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's works, I will use the framework of the dialectical relationship as employed by the German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel, which relies on a process between contrasting sides that leads to an evolution of concepts opposed to one another.[53] The Hegelian dialectical process is structured in three moments: 'the abstract side or that of the understanding; the dialectical or negative/rational side; the speculative or positive/rational side' (Hegel 2010: 125). These three dialectical moments (understanding, dialectical, and speculative) have been traditionally associated with the idea that Hegel's dialectics follows a thesis-antithesis-synthesis pattern. It means that one concept is introduced as a 'thesis' or

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[53] Hegel provided the most extensive account of his dialectical method in Part I of his *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences* (also known as the *Encyclopaedia Logic*).

positive concept, subsequently developing into a second concept that negates or is opposed to the first one ('antithesis'), in turn leading to a third concept, the 'synthesis', which unifies the first two.

More specifically, the first moment (the understanding) is the moment of fixity, in which concepts or forms have a stable definition or determination. The second moment (the dialectical) is that of instability, when the determination that was fixed in the first moment passes into its opposite. The third moment (the speculative), that of assimilation, either grasps the unity of the opposition between the first two determinations, or is the positive outcome of the dialogue between the first two determinations (*ibid*: 125-134).

In the chapters, following the chronological order of publication, I will apply this pattern to demonstrate that the historical events narrated in the novels are charged with the dialectical relationship of power and freedom within the framework old power (fixity) / desire for freedom (instability) / new power (assimilation).

The historical events analysed are the following: in Chapter Two (*Q* and *Altai*) the Protestant Reformation and the fourth Ottoman-Venetian War; in Chapter Three (*Manituana*) the American War of Independence; in Chapter Four (*L'armata dei sonnambuli*) the French Revolution; in Chapter Five (*Asce di guerra* and *54*) the Resistance and post-war in Italy and the dictatorship in Yugoslavia.

I argue that, in all the novels, the narration pursues the same dialectical process in the development of events: at the beginning, a state of stability is followed by a revolution that destroys the foundations of the old power. Eventually, however, a new power emerges along with the assimilation of elements from the two previous moments (old power and desire for freedom).

The old power (the thesis) is introduced as a stable concept that then develops into a second concept, the desire for freedom (the antithesis), which negates or is opposed to the first.

Eventually the dialectical process leads, in turn, to a third concept (the new power, the synthesis) that unifies the first two. With this interpretation, I imply a process of development in which the dialectical moments are not in themselves a separate stage but rather a transition between opposing but complementary stages that develop into a more complex one (new power). Power and freedom are therefore only apparently opposite concepts, as, in fact, they are so closely dependent on each other that they cannot exist independently.

In the first stage, that of fixity, the concept of power has a stable definition and a fixed determination. In the novels, this fixity is represented by established powers such as the Church and the German princes in *Q* and the Republic of Venice in *Altai* (Chapter Two), the British Empire in *Manituana* (Chapter Three), the *Ancien Régime* in *L'armata dei sonnambuli* (Chapter Four), the Nazi-Fascists in *Asce di guerra* and Tito's dictatorship in *54* (Chapter Five).

In the second moment, that of instability, the determination that was fixed in the first moment (old power) develops in its opposite (desire for freedom). The transition from old power to freedom is, in Hegelian terms, a process of 'self-sublation' (*ibid*: 128). The English verb 'to sublate' translates Hegel's technical use of the German verb *aufheben*, which is a crucial concept in his dialectical method. Hegel explained that *aufheben* has a dual meaning: it means both 'to cancel' and 'to preserve' (*ibid*: 153).

The above-mentioned development materialises within the third moment, that of assimilation. This moment grasps the unity of the opposition between the first two determinations (old power and desire for freedom) when the mutual contradiction is reconciled in a third stage (the new power). Eventually, in fact, a new form of power assimilates revolutions and rebellions, together with the ideals of freedom which have overcome the old power. In the moment of assimilation, the elements of the two previous determinations are thus unified. It is, in Hegel's words, 'a unity of distinct determinations' (*ibid*: 119). In this transition,

the old power is not completely cancelled or negated; on the contrary, it is preserved in the sense that it is still part of the new determination.

The outcome of this dialectical process is the emergence of a new power that is more complex than the former one because it negates and at the same time contains its opposite (freedom). As I have explained, the superficial contradiction between power and freedom does not lead to the rejection of both concepts; quite the reverse, it leads to a progressive stage that unifies both. In so doing, the new power assimilates the old power and desire for freedom as it preserves them and, most importantly, relies on them for its own definition. In conclusion, the new power includes the two earlier determinations as part of its essence. However, it does not mean that it has evolved in something "better", but rather into something "different". And this will emerge, in a cyclical way, as the new moment of fixity in a next dialectical development.

In my analysis, I will apply the framework of this dialectical process to Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's novels, recognising that the moment of fixity (old power), due to some weakness and restrictedness in its own essence, sublates itself and evolves into another determination (freedom) during the moment of instability. The rise and fall of libertarian movements, together with the dialectical relationship between the oppressors and the oppressed, leads to the development of a new power in the moment of assimilation. Specifically, I will draw attention to how revolutions break out and soon turn into tragedy, drenched in fanaticism. The clash between revolution and institution, movement and stabilisation, rebellion and authority, is indeed a dialectical process that generates the imposition of a new power as a replacement of the previous one.

In Luther Blissett's *Q* (Chapter Two), the old power is represented by the Roman Catholic Church and the German Princes that, in different domains, were struggling to maintain their power against the rise of Protestantism and the increasing popular upheavals. In the rebel camp, the Anabaptists represent the anarchist opposition against any form of power. Their

revolt (which emerges in the moment of instability) leads to the taking of the city of Münster. In the moment of assimilation, the new power arising from the rebellion is represented by Jan Matthys who starts acting like a ferocious tyrant. Blinded by the cult of personality, he concentrated all power in his hands with ruinous consequences for the city. Massacres and extensive purges of people considered enemies of the city revealed the essence of the new power. Many were imprisoned, exiled or executed while a regime of terror began in the city that only a few days earlier celebrated its freedom against the previous oppressors.

In *Altai* (Chapter Two), in the moment of instability, the island of Cyprus is conquered by the Ottoman Empire against the old power represented by the Republic of Venice. In the plans of Joseph Nasi, who promoted the war, Cyprus should become the Land of Freedom for the Jews as well as for other oppressed populations scattered across the world. Differently from the other novels, freedom does not rise from below, through a revolution, but is implemented from above, by a military conquest. Nonetheless, blood, massacres and violent deaths are necessary to build the so-called Kingdom of Freedom, which appears as an imposition on the people of Cyprus.

In *Manituana* (Chapter Three), a new power, represented by the American settlers who claim their freedom from the old oppressive power of the British Empire, arises, to the detriment of Native Americans' freedom. The novel narrates how the rebel settlers supported an idea of freedom that is fulfilled through the liberation from the old power (the moment of instability). In order to accomplish it, the dissident settlers, after gaining their independence from the Empire, proceeded to conquer the Western lands, causing the annihilation of the Native Americans. At that point, the settlers' freedom was experienced as the new power destroying not only the old power but also the freedom of the indigenous population (the moment of assimilation).

In *L'armata dei sonnambuli* (Chapter Four), the French Revolution that, in the moment of instability, had swept away the *Ancien Régime* (the fixity of the old power), did not produce a space where freedom could finally emerge, due to the so-called Terrors (Jacobin and Thermidorian). These periods were characterised by punitive measures against nobles, priests, hoarders but also common people who were suspected of being enemies of the Revolution. The moment of assimilation starts at the end of the novel, with the *coup d'état* by General Napoleon Bonaparte (9 November 1799), who took power as First Consul of France, putting an end to the French Revolution but also spreading the revolutionary ideals throughout Europe.

The same dialectical developments can be observed in *Asce di guerra* and *54* (Chapter Five). In *Asce di guerra*, freedom is represented by the victory of the Resistance and Allies against the Nazi-Fascists (the old power) at the end of the Second World War. The moment of instability emerges during the civil war that characterised the years 1943-45, between the armistice (8 September 1943) and the end of the conflict (25 April 1945). However, the post-war reconstruction in Italy (the moment of assimilation) was characterised by the rise of a new power that betrayed the ideals of the Resistance. The protagonist of the novel, Vitaliano, unable to adapt to the new social and political context emerging after the war, leaves Italy to fight for the freedom of oppressed populations in Laos and Vietnam.

In *54*, Vittorio Capponi, who had left the Italian army to join the Communists in Yugoslavia after the end of the Second World War, which decreed the fall of the old Nazi-Fascist power, has remained in Yugoslavia, hoping to live in a new country under the banners of freedom and democracy. However, he experiences the ferociousness of the dictatorship of a new power (the Communist Party of Yugoslavia emerging in the moment of assimilation) which exiles him as a spy on a remote Dalmatian island.

Before expanding my discussion any further, I recognise the need to explain my choice of terminology, and specifically the meaning of the terms *power* and *freedom* as they emerge

in Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's works. The theories of Michel Foucault (power as a strategy), Pier Paolo Pasolini[54] (power that generates a new power from rebellion), Hegel (the social realisation of freedom), and Hannah Arendt (the political dimension of freedom) will provide a helpful theoretical framework for my analysis of the novels. My choice of these intellectuals has been made for two reasons. First, Luther Blissett and Wu Ming, who publicly discuss their own ideological, philosophical and political strategies, have often commented on these thinkers and authors as a source of inspiration about the concepts of power and freedom. Second, the way in which power and freedom are literary represented on the novels is inspired by the theories of the above-mentioned intellectuals.

Power and freedom do not have a clear-cut definition and they can be "declined" in different ways, depending on whom is experiencing them and in which social/historical context. Therefore I want to briefly focus on *power* to extrapolate its main connotation as emerges from Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's novels. Starting from the 16th century, thanks to the works of Machiavelli and Hobbes, the roots of this concept can be found in political theory and political philosophy. In the 20th century, the concept has become a linchpin of political science, and then it disperses into political sociology. With Lukes' and Giddens' works,[55] the concept moves out of the arena of political sociology to become one of the most important concepts in contemporary sociology. In the 80s, from Foucault's work, power has further developed its influence in the social and human sciences. Later on, the notion of power has expanded into areas of literary, film and textual criticism, social history, onto a widespread

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[54] Foucault and Pasolini are undoubtedly two of the most important thinkers whose thoughts have influenced Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's writing. On the blog Giap, Foucault's and Pasolini's work is often mentioned in cultural initiatives, interviews, debates, debunking or book launchings. See for instance: *Cosa fa un filosofo nella casa dei pazzi? Audio della «Serata Foucault»*; *Nostra legittima stranezza. Torna la «Storia della follia» di Michel Foucault*; *Foucault in Iran: rivoluzione, entropia, uguaglianza*; *Pasolini e Foucault: appunti per un «Vite parallele»*; *Pasolini e il suo orrore per ogni fascismo*; *La polizia contro Pasolini, Pasolini contro la polizia*; *(Nessuna) Pietà per la nazione che crede alle bufale su Pasolini*. Available at https://www.wumingfoundation.com/giap/. (Accessed 20.03.20)

[55] See Lukes, Steven (1974). *Power: A Radical View*. London: Macmillan; and Giddens, Anthony (1977). *Studies in Social and Political Theory*. London: Hutchinson.

intellectual terrain, showing its strong inter-disciplinary essence.

The foundations for the modern analysis of power derive from the contributions of the two most eminent early modern philosophers, Machiavelli and Hobbes. Indeed, Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1532) and Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651) represent the two main axes along which thoughts about power have continued to develop up to the contemporary time. While Machiavelli represents power as a means to an end, Hobbes provides a rationalised account of the order that power can produce. In other terms, Hobbes analyses power as a hegemony, centralised and focused on sovereignty, whereas Machiavelli depicts power as decentralised and as a mainly strategical tool.

I believe that the theories of Foucault around the concept of power as a strategy, developed from Machiavelli, are particularly important to identify what kind of power emerges in Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's works. As I will demonstrate, power is presented in Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's novels not as something extraneous or ethereal influencing the daily life of individuals. It is expressed in a horizontal way, with the focus on the human side of those who are responsible for exercising power.

As Foucault argued in many of his writings, power should not be understood as a possession or as something owned by those in power.[56] On the contrary, power is something that acts and operates in an active way; it is more a strategy than a possession. In relation to this crucial point, Foucault considered Machiavelli the precursor of the postmodern view of power, due to his examination of power as a strategical and decentralised tool. It is in the sense of decentralised power that Foucault's view is more aligned with Machiavelli's, with whom the French philosopher shared the reluctance to believe in a single and stable power. Therefore, Foucault decentred the *loci* of power, arguing that power cannot be interpreted as 'a single, all-

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[56] See for instance Foucault, Michel (1975). *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison*. Paris: Gallimard; Foucault, Michel (2004). *Sécurité, territoire, population* (1977-1978). Paris: Gallimard.

encompassing strategy' (1984: 103). Essential to Foucault's view of power is its tentacular spread through various aspects of social life. This fundamental aspect is extensively represented in all Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's historical novels.

It is important to note that Machiavelli wrote his *Prince* in a historical period characterised by a political vortex, so his interpretation of power reflects the necessity to propose different (and even contradictory) strategies in order to give the prince the most suitable tools in dynamic and unstable situations.[57] Machiavelli's works, in particular *The Prince* and *The Discourses*, have been read by Foucault as an attempt to create a model of precepts framed by strategy: to act in respecting the means in order to accomplish the ends that one serves. The focus is on strategies, deals, negotiations, frauds and killings in political scenarios that change unceasingly, obliging the prince to behave alternatively as 'fox' and 'lion'.[58] The prince, although in charge of political institutions, should not take any moral stance. Good and evil, through Machiavellian considerations, lose their importance: the only goal of the prince who wants to be powerful, is maintaining power, with shrewdness and violence when necessary.

Power is conceived by Machiavelli as expediency and strategy. In fact, the main features of Machiavelli's view about power come from a political world characterised by discontinuity and unceasing fluctuations. As a consequence, a priori mechanical or causal conceptions, which were at the roots of Hobbes' perspective,[59] had to be avoided in order to

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[57] In the 15th and 16th century, during a time of turbulence and crisis in Italy, Florence was in permanent turmoil with the fall and the rise of opposite governments, such as republicans and the Medici, that alternate themselves in ruling the town.

[58] Machiavelli uses the terms 'golpe' and 'lione': 'Sendo adunque uno principe necessitato sapere bene usare la bestia, debbe di quelle pigliare la golpe et il lione; perché il lione non si defende da' lacci, la golpe non si defende da' lupi. Bisogna adunque essere golpe a conoscere e' lacci, e lione a sbigottire e' lupi' (1960: 73-74).

[59] The social contract theories expressed by Hobbes (*Leviathan*, 1571) are the foundation of the modern analysis of the relationship between individuals and the state, based on the assumption that rational individuals would voluntarily agree to give up their freedom in order to obtain the benefits of political order. What emerges from Hobbes is the view of a state of order where the abandonment of individualistic claims is embodied in a sovereign in obedience to an established power. In Hobbes, power is carefully stipulated within a framework where it legislates for a political community and secures moral order with ethical laws that construct ultimate values. From

conceive power in terms of its dynamic strategies. Therefore, the actions of the prince should not be generalised or linked to universal assumptions. After all, according to Machiavelli, life is characterised by its radical discontinuities rather than led by the invisible hand of an architectonical reason.

In favour of a more contingent and local interpretation, Foucault has seen Machiavelli as the forerunner of the postmodern analysis of power. It is in this sense that Foucault's postmodern world of flux and discontinuity is more closely aligned with the early modern world of Machiavelli with whom he shares an analytical focus on shifting, unstable alliances and reluctance to believe in a single, stable power. Foucault has indeed decentred the *loci* of power, arguing that power cannot be interpreted as 'a single, all-encompassing strategy' (1984: 103). Focusing on strategic concerns, he has suggested that power should not be seen as monolithic but in its various expressions, or rather practices, in the everyday life.

Focussing on strategic concerns, Foucault suggested that power should not be seen as monolithic but as manifesting in various expressions, or practices, in everyday life. Foucault coined the expression 'microphysics of power' (1977: 68), as it is rooted in all social and symbolic relationships. The power is not imposed from above, but comes from under, not in the bilateral relations between the rulers and the governed, but rather in the relations of power embodied in the mechanisms of production within the family, small groups, institutions, and in the whole social body. Microphysics, as intended by Foucault, means that power is microscopic and penetrates strategic relationships within the struggles of daily life.

> I am not referring to Power with a capital P, dominating and imposing its rationality upon the totality of the social body. In fact, there are power relations. They are multiple; they have different forms, they can be in play in family relations, or within an institution, or an administration. (1988: 38)

Hobbes' *Leviathan*, some keywords related to the concept of power emerge, such as hegemony, order, law, authorisation, prohibition, which are deemed necessary to guarantee freedom to any individual.

At the same time, it is worth noting that freedom is power's enduring support. Without the possibility of resistance, in fact, power would be equivalent to mere physical determination. Individuals, in their relationships with power, are not objects but the subjects where power and resistance to it are exerted. Foucault analysed power not in a negative way, being coextensive with resistance. Moreover, freedom is not an effect of power but its prerequisite. In fact, he suggested that 'where there is power, there is resistance' (1978: 95). Foucault argued that, in the analysis of the essence of power, freedom is one of its constituent elements. In fact, power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free. This means that individual or collective subjects are faced with a number of possibilities in which several forms of actions may be performed. In this complex interplay, freedom is the condition for the exercise of power and simultaneously its precondition, as freedom must exist for power to be exerted upon it.

> When one defines the exercise of power as a mode of action upon the actions of others, when one characterizes these actions by the government of men by other men - in the broadest sense of the term - one includes an important element: freedom. (1982: 790)

Another significant aspect that emerges in the novels is related to the concept of power generating new power, by exploiting the revolution that has overcome the previous power. I refer here to Pasolini's view, that, in the complex interaction between freedom in action and power, the latter is in fact the force that generates and controls resistance.

> Il Potere [...] si è servito di chi si è ribellato a lui / in modo estremo, per avere estrema / coscienza di sé. [...] Il Potere, che sempre / si era ricreato uguale a se stesso, / questa volta è ricreato diverso da sé. / Chi lo criticava affabula quindi irreali anatemi, / E chi doveva sostituirlo / con un Potere nato altrove, / cioè nella coscienza del popolo, / ha seguito il destino dei suoi obiettivi: / la dissoluzione. (2001b: 322)

In other words, resistance to power acquires its means of struggling only from the current form of power. This aspect brings me to another important consequence that is clear in Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's novels: the existing power generates the very resistance that, in

theory, should fight power. These attempts at freedom are however used to create a new power from the old one, preventing the appearance of other maybe more dangerous and destabilising forms of resistance.

In the Manifesto *Dalle moltitudini d'Europa in marcia contro l'Impero e verso Genova (19-21 luglio 2001)*[60], Wu Ming defined power with the umbrella term 'Empire' from the concept expressed by post-Marxist philosophers Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. In *Impero, il nuovo ordine della globalizzazione* Hardt and Negri argued that, in the globalised world of the 20th century, the rise of the Empire coincided with the end of any national conflict. In *Giap, storie per attraversare il deserto* Wu Ming underlined the importance of this text:

> Di recente si è parlato molto di Impero, l'ultimo saggio scritto da Negri insieme a Michael Hardt, che è diventato una sorta di libro sacro. Impero è un compendio teorico e una riscrittura divulgativa di concetti che hanno modificato il nostro Dna politico sin dagli anni Ottanta (Wu Ming 2003: 34).

The enemy was no longer a state or a political system but the new order that, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, enveloped the whole space occupied by civilisation. Therefore, they claimed, the Empire could no longer be ideological or national.

> Il mondo sorto dopo il crollo del blocco sovietico è il mondo del libero mercato che ha travolto le frontiere dei vecchi stati-nazione. La sovranità è passata a una nuova entità, l'Impero, che non accetta limiti né confini, non ha centro né periferie, vuole controllare tutti gli aspetti del corpo e della mente, superare la storia e porsi come la fonte della pace, della legittimità, della giustizia. (Hardt & Negri 2003: 4)

Against this absorbing 'Empire', Wu Ming maintained that freedom could be reached in one way only, precisely through disobedience and the uprising of the masses, which are at the core of the historical events narrated in their novels.

> Noi siamo nuovi, ma siamo quelli di sempre. Siamo antichi per il futuro, esercito di disobbedienza le cui storie sono armi, da secoli in marcia su questo

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continente. Nei nostri stendardi è scritto "dignità". In nome di essa combattiamo chi si vuole padrone di persone, campi, boschi e corsi d'acqua, governa con l'arbitrio, impone l'ordine dell'Impero, immiserisce le comunità. [...] Oggi hanno un nuovo impero, su tutto l'orbe impongono nuove servitù della gleba, si pretendono padroni della Terra e del Mare. Contro di loro, ancora una volta, noi moltitudini ci solleviamo. (Wu Ming 2001)

In addition to the above-mentioned concepts of power, the Hegelian concept of the social realisation of freedom, and the political dimension of freedom as suggested by Arendt are of crucial importance to understand the profound meaning of freedom in the novels under investigation in this thesis. While, as previously mentioned, the dialectical relationship between power and freedom emerge as a direct reference to the Hegelian dialectics: 'I bei tempi non sono mai esistiti. Ogni epoca contiene già in se stessa la propria negazione e il proprio superamento' (in Merletti 2002), there is no direct intertextual relationship that can be identified between Arendt and Luther Blissett/Wu Ming. Yet I believe that there are strong connections between the authors and Arendt based on reception theory. History is one of the themes at the core of Arendt's studies, and her influence in contemporary debates on the philosophy of history has been consistent over the last decades.[61] Considering the detailed historical research that Luther Blissett and Wu Ming undertook during the creation and then the writing of their novels, along with their constant studying of historical subjects, I am convinced that Arendt's thoughts, in particular on the concept of freedom, are particularly illuminating of their narrations.

In his *Philosophy of History*, Hegel attempted to explain the profound meaning of freedom, underlining the fact that the term, when not combined with additional qualifications, is indeed indefinite and ambiguous. Moreover, freedom can be 'liable to an infinity of misunderstandings, confusions and errors, and to become the occasion for all imaginable excesses' (1956: 19). Similarly, in her essay *What is Freedom?* Arendt argued that a clear-cut

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[61] See for instance Bernstein, Richard J. (2018). *Why Read Hannah Arendt Now?* Cambridge: Polity Press.

definition of freedom would be a 'hopeless enterprise' (2006: 142), given the numerous interpretations that lurk behind this notion across different domains.

Nonetheless, both Hegel and Arendt aimed to give, if not a one-off definition, at least examples and contexts where freedom appears and consequently can be analysed. For Hegel, freedom initially takes place in an individual's consciousness, but then develops a social side, thus becoming concrete. In this sense, Hegel distinguishes between the principle of freedom and its application, focussing on how freedom moves from the abstract (individual) to the concrete (social dimension). There is a clear distinction, he argued, between individual freedom and social freedom. Freedom as a social concept contrasts with several other notions of freedom, such as an individual's freedom of free will, which has played a dominant role in the Christian tradition, where inner freedom is the inward space into which individuals may escape from external coercion.[62]

Arendt, who placed freedom in the realm of politics and human affairs, maintained that if an individual's freedom remains without outer manifestations, its political definition is irrelevant:

> In Greek as well as Roman antiquity, freedom was an exclusively political concept, indeed the quintessence of the city-state and of citizenship. […] Freedom was the very centre of politics as the Greek understood it. […] The ancient concept of freedom has exclusively political origin. (ibid: 156, 165)

In the novels analysed, we cannot find any notion of inner (individual) freedom. I am therefore convinced that Luther Blissett and Wu Ming rely on the tradition of thought that considers freedom as a practice that needs to be pursued in relationships with others. Therefore, freedom is intended as a political concept in the sense that it emerges in a given organised community

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[62] The early Christians, especially Paul and then Augustine, explained that freedom was not related to politics but only experienced as something occurring in the interaction between the self, and outside of the relationships between other individuals. Free will and freedom became synonymous notions. 'The solitude is the place where no man might hinder the hot contention wherein I had engaged with myself. […] The deadly conflict took place in the inner dwelling of the soul and the dark chamber of the heart.' (Saint Augustine 1997: 200).

as well as through the interrelationships between individuals.

In Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's historical work, freedom is possible only within the realm of political life inhabited by the many. Furthermore, freedom can be experienced in association with others and exercised in the political realm, where characters acknowledge their condition of being free in a concrete reality. Luther Blissett and Wu Ming use freedom as a radically political concept: it exists within the political sphere and only there can it succeed or fail. Borrowing Arendt's words to explain this point more clearly: 'We first become aware of freedom or its opposite in our intercourse with others, not in the intercourse with ourselves' (*ibid*: 147).

As established so far, in Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's work, freedom is related to politics and is not a phenomenon related to an individual. Inwardness as a place of absolute freedom, where the self is sheltered against the world and where no other person has access, displays a condition of false freedom, a condition of freedom that cannot be concretely experienced. In Arendt's terms, freedom exists:

> In the company of other men who were in the same state, and it needed a common public space to meet them in a politically organized world, in other words, into which each of the free men could insert himself by word and deed. (*Ibid*: 147)

Without a political public realm, in fact, freedom may not have a proper space to make its appearance. Consequently, following Arendt's views, freedom and politics coincide and are related to each other like two sides of the same coin. As I will show, the coincidence between freedom and politics is clear in every novel where freedom exists and functions as an interrelationship between individuals.

I argue that in Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's novels, freedom concretely manifests itself in what Arendt defines 'spaces of appearances' (*ibid*: 156), which are politically open spaces where the characters embody the concept of political freedom through their rebellion

against the established power.

In the different political domains narrated in the novels, the main characters embody the above-mentioned political consciousness of freedom. The young theology student with multiple identities in *Q* and Emanuele De Zante in *Altai* (Chapter Two), Joseph Brant in *Manituana* (Chapter Three), Leonida Modonesi in *L'armata dei sonnambuli* (Chapter Four), Vitaliano in *Asce di guerra* and Robespierre and Vittorio Capponi in *54* (Chapter Five), pursue with great passion the transformation of their societies in the light of what a good society might be. In order to be free, these characters experience freedom through action. Focussing on this point, we can find a clear analogy between Arendt and Luther Blissett/Wu Ming. To Arendt, freedom is the capacity to act, to begin, to start something new and unexpected. Action as the realisation of freedom is embedded in the fact that each new action represents a new beginning and the introduction of novelty in the world.

> The Greek word ἄρχειν which covers beginning, leading, ruling, that is the outstanding qualities of the free man, bears witness to an experience in which being free and the capacity to begin something new coincided. (*Ibid*: 164)

Creators of new beginnings and new actions are present in every one of Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's novels. Many violent acts, such as upheavals and rebellion, trigger chains of events initiated by the desire to be free. This is why, in the transition between the moment of instability and the moment of assimilation, freedom is experienced in new cities, new forms of government, new prophets, new laws and new societies.

For instance, in *Q* (Chapter Two) the Anabaptist utopian regime has seized power in Münster in an attempt to build a New Jerusalem before being crushed by German Princes. In *Altai* (Chapter Two), a free nation, Cyprus, is thought to be a new ideal state where everyone who has been persecuted in the past can find shelter. In *Manituana* (Chapter Three), a new country, America, emerges against the corrupt and crumbling British Empire. In *L'armata dei sonnambuli* (Chapter Four), Revolutionary France, emerging from the collapse of the *Ancien*

Régime, is characterised by a new social structure. In *Asce di guerra* (Chapter Five), some rebels escape from the discipline, normality, hierarchy and laws of post-war Italy to find new lands, i.e. Laos and Vietnam, where they can fight against the established powers. In *54* (Chapter Five), a new country, Yugoslavia, has been built to render freedom concrete.

II. Literature Review

In this section, I will give a comprehensive analysis of scholarly attention to Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's historical novels and pick out key texts and concepts related to my thesis. The purpose of this section is also to identify gaps in the current critical debates about their work.

Between the appearance of Luther Blissett's *Q* (1999) and Wu Ming's *L'armata dei sonnambuli* (2014), a huge range of articles and essays were written about their novels. A remarkable feature of this debate is that it is not restricted to the academic world: it had – and still has – great resonance on the Web, where readers share their opinions and partake in the analysis of the novels.

Although, as I claim, the literary representation of power and freedom lies at the core of Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's historical narrations, this fundamental aspect has largely been disregarded. Most of the critics have focussed on themes such as counter-historical narrative, epic, mythopoeia and allegory. Nonetheless, even if not directly related to the topic of my thesis, the above-mentioned areas of enquiry provide useful insights in particular on how Luther Blissett and Wu Ming have used history (as a discipline) and historical novels (as a literary genre) to create politically-engaged narrations.

In relation to counter-historical narrative, some scholars (Giuliana Benvenuti and Marco Amici) have seen Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's novels as a form of political action, in the

sense that they become a tool to tackle the narration of history as an ideological fabrication often operated by power to control consensus. In their novels, Luther Blissett and Wu Ming create counter-narrations, shedding light on events that have been overlooked by official historiography. On this point, Benvenuti argues that it is necessary to clarify the meanings of the term 'History' with a capital H, otherwise the actual meaning of 'counter-history' can be lost. The general understanding of official historiography is a piece of research produced under the influence of a government. Such writings are one-sided in tone and perspective, and consequently can lack historical objectivity. This bias may by weak or strong; if the latter, they are nothing but propaganda exercises. This kind of historical representation is largely influenced by the current ideology that, to a greater or lesser extent, explicitly permeates any given *status quo*. It is the history written by those who support and perpetrate this ideology and have a position of power allowing them to narrate their version of history. It is history as it is interpreted and explained by the "winners".

According to Benvenuti, who is opposed to this kind of historiography, Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's counter-historical narrations give the floor to the defeated, to those who have never had the chance to explain their own point of view.

> La contro-storia, si potrebbe dire, è la pratica di una negazione operata su una negazione: dissipando un oblio, essa riporta alla parola ciò cui la parola è stata tolta. [...] In un'epoca dominata dallo scetticismo generalizzato nei confronti della verità della Storia, quella che l'istituzione tramanda attraverso l'esercizio della propria autorità, la Storia maiuscolata, e dunque fabbricazione ideologica che si autoafferma e autolegittima attraverso dispositivi di soppressione, di esclusione e di controllo di consenso. (2012: 7, 8)

On this point, Mario Domenichelli underlines that writers of historical novels, as Luther Blissett and Wu Ming, should rummage through the "rubbish bins" that the winners have discarded.

> Il romanziere storico sa avvertire delle opacità, le cicatrici che testimoniano

alcuni traumi che così però permangono e continuano ad avere effetti sul presente. [...] Una molteplicità di altre storie inscritte e al tempo stesso celate, represse e tuttavia segnalate da quelle opacità che indicano altre dimensioni neglette e che sono dunque esattamente il luogo in cui porre l'interrogazione allo stesso discorso del potere, dei poteri che omologano, rimuovono, reprimono, cancellano, tutto disponendo secondo la prospettiva nella master fiction il cui potere si celebra, si afferma, si autolegittima. (2011: 113)

Working on the recovery of historical memory of what has been overlooked, Luther Blissett and Wu Ming are interested in the exploitation of authentic historical documents in a narrative way. For them, the act of narrating is connected to the formulation of hypothesis, which puts the historian and the writer on the same level. On this crucial point, it is worth mentioning that Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's novels reflect one important element of the Italian traditional historical novel, such as the concept of 'vero storico'. Since the appearance of the first Italian historical novels, between 1820 and 1840, the critical debate was enlivened by conflicting reactions. Classicists asserted that the historical novel was immoral and educationally harmful for the younger generations, and anti-artistic because it linked fiction and history. For them, art had to concern pure and ideal topics, not events that pertained the real world. On the other hand, romanticists, aiming to overcome the classical rhetoric, praised it for the creation of a new literary form. For them, the historical novel could shed light on events that were hidden by the official historiography. Beyond this argument, however, there was a deeper social and political confrontation between classicist aristocratic and romantic bourgeois intellectuals. The debate became harsher shortly after the publication of Manzoni's *I promessi sposi* (first edition 1827) that gave legitimacy to this new literary genre. Although even the historical novel's detractors unanimously considered this work a masterpiece, they still kept criticizing the historical novel as a 'hybrid genre' collecting two incompatible dimensions such as fiction and history. Manzoni replied to his critics with the essay *Del romanzo e, in genere, de' componimenti misti di storia e d'invenzione*, published between 1845 and 1850 but written between 1828 and 1831. He defended the use of fictional characters or events in a historical

plot, arguing that the objective truth, 'il vero storico', could have been better known in a narrative way.[63]

Marco Amici has pointed out that Wu Ming consider history as a counter-narration that tends towards a reconstruction of something that has been lost. In this kind of narration, there are inevitably many ambiguous dark areas or shadows not scientifically verifiable, which writers can bring out with their imagination, filling the gaps that official history has left.

> Concentrarsi su queste zone d'ombra è il presupposto del "metodo" Wu Ming: lavorare lungo il crinale che sta fra ciò che la storiografia ha rischiarato e ciò che ha lasciato nell'ombra. Un crinale incerto, dove pullulano le storie più piccole, a diffusione locale, tramandate o trascritte da quelle comunità che ne garantiscono l'esistenza. (2006: 200)

Related to this aspect, historian Adriano Prosperi has underlined that Luther Blissett's *Q* is a novel 'che si spinge laddove gli storici non osano' (1999), arguing that Luther Blissett's *modus operandi* consists of shedding light on what History has shrouded with oblivion.

Regarding this significant feature of Luther Blissett's writing, Andrea Cortellessa has drawn attention to the 'visione ipocalittica della Storia' in opposition to the 'visione apocalittica e "lineare" della Storia' (1999). The term apocalyptic describes something related to a revelation or a prophecy from a transcendent source ('dall'alto'): in Luther Blissett's novel, the revelation instead comes 'dal basso'.

> [In *Q*] si sostiene un'ipotesi ipocalittica: nella quale cioè la "rivelazione" viene dal Basso (con tutto ciò che di postmarxiano e postfreudiano resta in questa metaforologia: non a caso il nome col quale è più spesso noto il protagonista di *Q* è "Gert dal Pozzo"), e non in una prospettiva utopistica bensì di continuo, in un eterno presente accelerato [...]. Forzandola a fare da fondale allegorico di una partita che si intende giocare qui e ora, la Storia viene riscritta da "Blissett" con strumenti retorici e stilistici atti a darne

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[63] Il distinguere in un romanzo storico la realtà dall'invenzione, distrugge, secondo voi, l'omogeneità dell'impressione, l'unità dell'assentimento. Ma, di grazia, come si può distruggere ciò che non è? Non vedete che questa distinzione si trova negli elementi necessari e, dirò così, nella materia prima d'un tal componimento? [...] Prendendo in mano un romanzo storico, il lettore sa benissimo che ci troverà facta atque infecta e cose avvenute e cose inventate, cioè due oggetti diversi dei due diversi, anzi opposti assentimenti. E voi accusate l'autore di far nascere una tale discordia, e gli prescrivete di mantenere nel corso dell'opera un'unità ch'era già stata portata via dal titolo! (1981: 167)

un'immagine mossa, irrequieta, radicalmente incerta (continua è la metafora, apparentemente consunta, del "precipitare delle cose"). (*Ibid*)

In the background of 'ipocalittica' vision of history, Luther Blissett and Wu Ming have created "normal heroes" in every novel. Regarding this last point, it is worth mentioning the Marxist literary critic György Lukács who, in his *The Historical Novel*, argued that after the French Revolution, history was perceived as a perpetual process of changes in which masses dynamically participated to historical, political and social alterations. According to Lukács, the consequences of the French Revolution were the collapse of Enlightenment ideals of reason and harmony, and the acceptance of a contradictory progress through the clashes of opposing classes, nations and groups. Compared with the wars lead by mercenary armies in the epoch of Absolutism, the French Revolution revealed that no more separation between people and army was conceivable. Citizens, peasants and ordinary persons united together, were the protagonists of the revolution; they had the possibility to understand their own existence as something of historically defined. Lukács emphasised the historical awareness of common people as the most important aspect, linked with the concepts of consciousness of the masses, nationhood and motherland, that rose in that period and influenced the artistic representation of the past.

For the first time, it seemed clear that the course of history could have been influenced not only by extraordinary individuals or important historical protagonists such as kings, queens and generals, but also by common people. Lukács talked about a 'normal… mediocre hero' (1989: 148), a middling character who, setting at the intersection of different social groups, could represent a large amount of population. This particular character did not usually show astonishing qualities but was endowed with wisdom, strength of mind and moral dignity, as I will highlight in all Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's "normal heroes" such as the young theology student with multiple identities in *Q* and Emanuele De Zante in *Altai* (Chapter Two), Joseph Brant in *Manituana* (Chapter Three), Leonida Modonesi in *L'armata dei sonnambuli*

(Chapter Four), Vitaliano in *Asce di guerra* and Robespierre and Vittorio Capponi in *54* (Chapter Five).

It is worth mentioning that the 'ipocalittica' vision of history is also related to the epic mode that characterises Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's novels. This theme is at the core of the essay *New Italian Epic. Memorandum 1993-2008: letteratura, sguardo obliquo, ritorno al futuro*, published in the spring of 2008 by Wu Ming1 on behalf of the whole collective. The *Memorandum* appeared on the websites www.carmillaonline.com and www.wumingfoundation.com. It is worth considering that Wu Ming1's essay was not the first on the subject. In 2006, two years before the appearance of the *Memorandum*, Angelo Petrella published an article in which he emphasised significant changes in contemporary Italian literature regarding the transition from postmodernism to epic novels.[64] In September 2008, Wu Ming1 downloaded a new version of the *Memorandum* marked 2.0 with replies to some criticism and a closer analysis of the more controversial points. In January 2009, Einaudi published a further enriched and updated third version of the *Memorandum*, with the addition of three essays (*Sentimiento Nuevo*, *Noi dobbiamo essere i genitori* and *La salvezza di Euridice*) in the book series Stile Libero.

In this *Memorandum*, Wu Ming1 analysed a body of literary works written in Italy over fifteen years (1993-2008) that displayed interesting similarities, thematic constants and connections. As Wu Ming1 demonstrated in the *Memorandum*, many contemporary Italian writers (Lucarelli, Evangelisti, Saviano, De Cataldo, Genna) tried to go beyond ordinary narrative, towards a new type of literature. Their approach is defined by the use of stylistic and linguistic experimentation, new languages and idiolects and the creation of pseudo-historical documentation. The main features that characterised these works (defined as New Italian Epic,

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[64] See Petrella, Angelo (2006). "Dal postmoderno al romanzo epico. Linee per la letteratura italiana dell'ultimo Novecento" in *Allegoria*, anno 2006, n. 52-53, pp. 134-148.

NIE) were the refusal of postmodern irony, experimentation with unusual points of view, narrative complexity united with a "pop" attitude and the construction of alternative historical events (uchrony).[65] The publication of the *Memorandum* unleashed a great debate not only between scholars and critics, but also between writers and readers.[66]

In the context of the discussions that arose in the academic world around the novels considered part of NIE, and in particular around those that contained epic elements (i.e. wars, battles, voyages, adventures), Claudia Boscolo has examined *Manituana* in the lights of its epic essence: 'Con *Manituana* si è verificata una svolta nel riutilizzo dell'epica nella letteratura italiana contemporanea. Uno dei massimi generi nostrani ha finalmente ritrovato una collocazione specifica' (2008). She has also suggested that the Italian version of historical novels, such as Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's novels, for instance, allows epic, a classical genre, to be reintegrated into a modern one: the novel. In 20th-century literary theory, epic was associated with an obsolete mode of representation of the world and judged as having been superseded, in the late 18th century, by the creation of the novel which was more representative of bourgeois society. Luther Blissett and Wu Ming, on both thematic and formal levels, express

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[65] Claudia Boscolo (2010: 19) described NIE 'as a corpus of new metahistorical romances for the contemporary moment, a tool that enables readers to take an active part in the construction of meaning within a society that seems to have progressively forgotten how to interpret data, to the detriment of historical truth. This is achieved through the recalling of events in the form of allegorical narratives, which, while they do not recount Italian historical facts as such, evoke real events by referring to what has been left unsaid in Italian history'.

[66] Claudia Boscolo, Guglielmo Pispisa, Andrea Cortellessa, Paolo di Paolo, Carlo Lucarelli, Valerio Evangelisti, Alessandro Bertante, Dario Olivero, Paolo Di Stefano, Girolamo De Michele, Giancarlo De Cataldo, Letizia Muratori, Francesco Borgonovo, to mention a few, are the critics and writers who have contributed to the analysis of the NIE. Their articles about NIE, written in 2008, are gathered in *Oblique. New Italian Epic. Faction, Reportage.* A cura di Rachele Palmieri e Sara Trabalzi. Available at www.oblique.it/images/rassegna/mono/newepicitalian_mono.pdf. Other important contributions on this subject have come from Marco Amici, Dimitri Chimenti, Emanuela Patti, Emanuela Piga, Rosalba Biasini, Monica Jansen, Valentina Fulginiti, Maurizio Vito and Noortje Peverelli. Their work has focussed specifically on issues about the end of postmodernism, the evolution of the term 'epic' in contemporary Italian literature and the definition of 'unidentified narrative object' (UNO). It is noteworthy to underline that the first writing on the subject was not published in Italy, but in the UK. It was entitled *Overcoming Postmodernism: the Debate on New Italian Epic. Edited by Claudia Boscolo*, *Journal of Romance Studies*, Volume 10, Number 1, Spring 2010. New York; Oxford: Berghahn Journals.

a return to the epic mode within the modern genre of the novel. In so doing, they retrieve the sense of struggle and the political implications of the themes that emerge in their work.

In relation to the debate about the connections between epic and history in contemporary Italian novels, Rosalba Biasini has highlighted epic elements in *54*. In order to better understand the meaning of the term *epic* in Wu Ming's work, she has drawn a distinction between classical and modern epic. Biasini explained that, although epic is considered an outdated genre by contemporary criticism, the term continues to be used to describe modern and contemporary artistic forms where it is possible to retrace many epic features in both form and content.

> Beyond the characteristics of the epic genre, then, and beyond its formal aspects, the epic content of a text – the aspiration to establish certain values and to celebrate the founding moment of a people; a heroic vision of the world; the calling up of a stylistic and linguistic mode – is therefore traceable even in texts that do not belong to the precise genre, for instance in the novel such as a grandiosity of expression, a high style of representation. (2010: 74)

The other distinction proposed by Biasini is between epic as a genre and epic as a mode. Whilst the former indicates a codified literary genre, the latter refers to a wider category, a recognisable characteristic found in modern novels and in other artistic writing. Her reflection is linked to what Wu Ming1 has explained in his *Memorandum*, that is to say the attempt to identify, in some contemporary Italian texts, a shared desire for representation, inspired by the epic mode as a recurrent literary phenomenon.

Following these considerations, Wu Ming's collective novels cannot be considered (only) historical because they reveal something more, in terms of their use of epic components, allegories and narrative contamination. Giuseppe Genna, one of the writers who has been considered part of the NIE, has focussed on the epic elements of *54*:

> Ambizioso secondo premesse e riuscito secondo le stesse, *54* è un testo epico: da un lato, in quanto attesta una svolta epica che avviene tutta nel nostro tempo e alla nostra latitudine; d'altro canto, poiché la materia stessa di questo

pluriromanzo di Wu Ming è esattamente l'epica stessa, la fascinazione mitologica che resta la più clamorosa delle avance che la letteratura fa all'uomo. In quanto romanzo epico, *54* è tutto: lirica e canto corale, indagine e suspence, mito e storia, invenzione e realtà, attacco e difesa, favola e reportage. (2002)

In *54* Genna has identified the literary techniques through which Wu Ming have transformed historical fiction by using both classical and modern sources such as epic, crime, thriller, spy and adventure novels, thus creating a hybrid literary product, or in Genna's words a 'pluriromanzo' (multi-novel). On this significant aspect of their writing, in his review of *Q*, Paolo Cassetta has talked of 'contaminazione di generi' (1999), and Carlo Lucarelli has identified *Q* as a cross-genre novel:

> Per raccontare la sua storia Luther Blissett utilizza tutti gli espedienti della narrativa di genere: dalla capacità del fantasy di creare mondi a quella dell'horror e del noir di creare tenzione e interesse. Gli avvenimenti si rincorrono con un ritmo di colpi di scena e pause degno di un romanzo di James Ellroy. Le stragi, le fughe, gli intrighi e i falsi momenti di pace sono quelli di un grande romanzo d'avventura. (1999)

One of the main features that emerge from Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's cross-genre novels is intertextuality. It is worth mentioning that at the beginning of the 80s, there was a revival of the historical novel in Italy thanks to a new publishing market that conceived this literary genre as potentially able to attract various strata of readers. The so-called new-historical novels (also called pop-historical because they were thought for and sold to a wider public) were characterised by experimentalisms that transformed the classic historical novel in something different. For example, the new-historical novels present a mingling of different literary genres in one single text. Umberto Eco's *Il nome della rosa*, one of the most illustrative work of Italian postmodernism, can be considered a hyper-novel as it combines a plurality of genres such as crime, adventure, epistolary, philosophical novel.[67] Intertextuality is indeed one significant

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[67] Regarding the influences of *Il nome della rosa* on *Q* (see for example D'Aria, Pina (1999). 'Sembra il Nome della rosa, ma si legge *Q*' in Panorama, 25 February 1999), in an interview Luther Blissett declared that: 'Chiunque

feature that characterises this novel with references from art, literature, politics, music, cinema, and television, leading to a double structural level. The first level, which is the plot, is directed to the common reader, while the second level, that is mainly intertextual, is for a more erudite reader.

Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's novels are indeed literary objects balanced between popularity and complexity. Although the central plot of their historical novels does bear a resemblance to popular literature, it is embroidered in a difficult and challenging narrative structure with all kinds of subplots, asides, historical digressions and numerous characters that require attentive readers who are encouraged to interpret and construct the meaning of the novels also outside the fixed written page through a variety of platforms.

As mentioned before, one of the literary genres that Luther Blissett and Wu Ming use is epic. They indeed interpret epic as a way of rereading history by creating new myths, a technique, as we have seen, called 'mythopoeia'. On this crucial aspect, Benvenuti has pointed out that:

> Per molti autori degli anni Zero la battaglia si vince sul terreno dell'immaginario, con la creazione – è il caso Wu Ming – di una mitopoiesi dal basso, che rifunzionalizza la cultura pop e mainstream e reinterpreta il passato in chiave epica. (2012: 83)

Focussing on the creation of new myths from below, Marco Amici maintains that in Wu Ming mythopoeia means 'narrazione come pratica di opposizione' (2006: 201), referring to the fact that the production and the manipulation of new myths is generated in a situation of political

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abbia letto *Q* avrà visto che i due libri non hanno niente in comune: Calvino parlava di un'irrinunciabile dicotomia che ha sempre attraversato la letteratura: il romanzo modello-Iliade e il romanzo modello-Odissea. Ecco, *Il nome della rosa* è un romanzo modello-Iliade, con unità di tempo, luogo e azione. Per di più, si svolge in una sola settimana in un ambiente chiuso. È insomma un classico "whodunit", cioè un giallo all'inglese in cui devi scoprire l'assassino, tipo Edgar Wallace, Agatha Christie, S. S. Van Dine... *Q*, al contrario, è un'odissea hard-boiled, una vicenda corale ispirata ai film di Akira Kurosawa che si svolge in diverse città e nazioni d'Europa, e per più di quarant'anni'. Nonetheless, *Q* but also Wu Ming's novels share with Eco's works the plurality of generi such as crime, adventure, epistolary, historical in the sense of hyper novels.

and cultural dissent. As highlighted by the Italian critic Franco "Bifo" Berardi, myths are imposed by the established power 'come fondo condiviso che annulla le potenze della critica' (1996: 21). Therefore, the creation of new myths is the expression of a rebellion against established power and the purity of its mythology. As Luther Blissett stated in an interview: 'è questo che deve fare la letteratura: raccontare storie, produrre mito' (in Lipperini 1999). As correctly pointed out by Amici:

> All'interno di queste dinamiche, tutte incentrate su una nuova narrazione della realtà e sulla produzione di un nuovo immaginario, s'inserisce, dai primi anni Novanta, il discorso legato alla possibilità di una manipolazione e decostruzione dei miti al fine di una loro riappropriazione in chiave libertaria, la mitopoiesi. L'intento è di sottrarre al mito quella dimensione classica di narrazione cristallizzata di ordine "puro", al di fuori dello spazio e del tempo, e arrivare a considerarlo come una narrazione dinamica, da manipolare, da fare a pezzi e ricostruire, in modo da fargli acquistare senso ora, in questo spazio e in questo tempo. Un uso "consapevole" del mito che lo preservi dal rischio di regredire allo stato di icona chiusa, impossibile da riplasmare e svuotata della sua stessa essenza. (2006: 203)

Amici has acknowledged that the concept of mythopoeia is not only essential in Wu Ming's writing but also directly expresses their approach. In fact, the creation of new myths is the literary expression of their other activities.

> Wu Ming, essendo un progetto concentrato sulla dimensione della scrittura e, più in generale, sulla messa in evidenza dell'atto collettivo del narrare, pone il concetto di mitopoiesi come fulcro stesso della propria attività. La narrazione è infatti il motore della mitopoiesi: il racconto orale così come quello su carta costituiscono lo strumento attraverso cui il mito viene plasmato, rivitalizzato e attualizzato. Un atto che può definirsi primordiale, perché quella di raccontare miti, leggende, fiabe o storie, è una pratica che ha sempre accompagnato la vita dei singoli e delle comunità. (*Ibid*)

Similar thoughts are also expressed by Emanuela Piga who has added that Wu Ming's mythopoeic creation is 'a creative gesture that rescues history from a single reading and contains the erosion of significance, an articulation of post-traumatic memory' (2010: 63). Piga has also highlighted that in Wu Ming's novels the mythopoeic process is expressed in two stages. First, mythopoeia as "myth-making", from the Greek words *mythos* and *poiesis*. From

this point of view, attention is paid to the importance of the word in itself that, thanks to its strength, is able to (re)create events from the past. Secondly, she considers the creation of new myths as an escape from the anguish of collective traumatic events. In fact, the act of writing – or recreating – disasters, conflicts and wars, transforms very unusual and fearful events into something more comprehensible:

> The working out of the past through mythopoetic activity contained in the act of writing turns, what is, in Freud's terms, the *unheimlich* [uncanny] into *heimlich* [familiar], rendering the disquieting familiar and acceptable. (*Ibid*)

Consequently, mythopoeia rescues history from a single reading and at the same time includes an articulation of posttraumatic memory. She has also added that the tragic is profoundly tied to history and flows into the modern epic, whose plots are interwoven with the texture of the novel.

As highlighted above, many critical debates on Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's historical novels have focussed on mythopoeia, the creation of new myths considered as an act of revolt against the power and its own myths. Luther Blissett and Wu Ming, in fact, represent a paradigmatic case of 'ritorno alla narrazione […] con tonalità epiche' (Benvenuti 2012: 70). As already explained in the *Memorandum*, Wu Ming (and Luther Blissett earlier) have relaunched the image of the narrator as a powerful figure who believes in the power of words to achieve one main goal: to participate in society in an active way. As Benvenuti has suggested:

> Per loro [Wu Ming] la letteratura deve proporsi in quanto mito, racconto capace di dare vita a una collettività rifondando, attraverso le pratiche della narrazione, un discorso comune di appartenenza culturale, civile e politica. La narrazione, insomma, tenta una via per iscriversi nuovamente nella prassi. (*Ibid*: 71)

In addition to counter-historical narratives, epic and mythopoeia, the allegorical dimension is another significant aspect that many critics have highlighted, focussing on the parallels that the

stories narrated have with contemporary events. For instance, Fiorella Iannucci, Paolo Cassetta and Franco "Bifo" Berardi have argued that Luther Blissett's *Q* is a politically engaged novel with allegories of today's world. In fact, the religious, social, economic and political upheavals of Renaissance Europe, as told in the novel, can be compared to the mid-late 20th century: 'Il Cinquecento sembra il 2000. […] *Q* è una metafora del presente. Come somiglia questa Europa unita a quello sterminato impero di Carlo V, foraggiato dalle grandi banche tedesche, percorso da mille indipendentismi' (Iannucci 1999).

Other critics (Ron Jacobs, Gordon Darroch and Marc-Olivier Bherer) have also highlighted the allegorical dimension in Wu Ming's novels, for instance in *Manituana,* where the expansionist attitude that has characterised American history since its beginning is allegorically reflected in other more recent historical events (i.e. the war in Iraq). Jacobs has described *Manituana* as 'A Novel of the Fourth World', as not only does it talk about Native Americans, but also about other populations which, over the course of history, have been colonised and destroyed by European power: '[*Manituana*] is the story of India and the British Raj and it is the tale of the Algerian people and the French Republic's colonization of that land' (2009).

Flavio Pintarelli has highlighted the allegorical dimension of the events narrated in *Altai*, focussing on the elements of the novel that directly recall some significant recent historical event, in particular the comparison between the terrorist attack at the Venetian Arsenal and the terrorist attack against the United States on 11 September 2001.

The last novel, *L'armata dei sonnambuli*, has also been interpreted as an allegory by Girolamo De Michele and Franco "Bifo" Berardi, who have suggested that the army of sleepwalkers can be compared to the ordinary people of our times who, through a sort of collective hypnosis performed by the new media, lose their free will.

I believe that the above-mentioned areas of enquiry (counter-historical narratives, epic, mythopoeia and allegory) show Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's political engagement in the creation of counter-narrations of historical events with two main features. First, through fictional and nonfictional narrations, Luther Blissett and Wu Ming have given voice to those who have been silenced, excluded from history and have been shunted back and forth between old and new powers and between different forms of oppressions. Secondly, by exploiting a literary genre such as the historical novel, Luther Blissett and Wu Ming have constructed allegories of our contemporary world, suggesting original ways of rethinking history that enable more nuanced or critical understandings of today's political and social situations.

Taking into account all the elements so far discussed, I would suggest that Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's work could be included under the umbrella term of "engaged literature" or "literature of commitment". I refer here to a concept expressed by Jean-Paul Sartre who, in his essay *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (1947), claimed that engagement in literature (*la littérature engagée*) involves the responsibility of writers to "take a stand" on political, social or historical issues.[68] In his essay, Sartre condemned the way intellectuals sometimes withdraw from their obligations, stating that writers are directly involved in the problems of their age. In particular, Sartre focussed on the writers' duty to search for truth and then give expression to that truth through their work. To illustrate his theory, he praised Voltaire, Émile Zola and André Gide for the strong political commitment that clearly emerged from their writing.

Italian literature includes a huge number of intellectuals who have put engagement at the centre of their writings and activities in a wide array of differing perspectives, ideas and practices. Traditionally, the Italian word *impegno* has been associated with the idea of "political

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[68] Sartre, Jean-Paul (1988). *What is Literature? and Other Essays* by, translated by Bernard Frechtman. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

hegemony", as viewed by Gramsci. Engaged writers had to mould a collective consciousness

in order to achieve a revolutionary change of society. In Gramsci's words:

> One of the most important characteristics of any group developing towards dominance is its struggle to assimilate and 'ideologically' conquer the traditional intellectuals, but their assimilation and conquest is made quicker and more effective the more the group in question succeeds in simultaneously elaborating its own organic intellectuals. (1971: 10)

From the 1960s onwards, however, this view has progressively lost its impact to leave the floor

to other notions of *impegno* that reflect new attitudes towards the relationship between politics

and the arts. Since then, thanks to the writings of Calvino, Vittorini and Pasolini, to mention a

few, in contrast to any restrictive ideological definition, *impegno* has been considered

emancipatory and closer to social (rather than political) engagement. As Alfonso Berardinelli

correctly observed:

> Un interessante scrittore politico in realtà si occupa più di società che di politica. Il problema della politica italiana è che spesso si fa cogliere di sorpresa dai mutamenti sociali. I partiti non hanno tempo per capire il mondo: devono restare a galla e questo esaurisce tutte le loro energie. (1997: 53)

In this perspective, the relationship between politics and intellectuals has changed from

Gramsci's concept of hegemony. Intellectuals are no longer the "spokespeople" of existing

political needs, but are focussed on forthcoming social issues.

To avoid a list that would inevitably be incomplete, I prefer to briefly consider the

contemporary debates about engagement in today's Italian literature. Pierpaolo Antonello and

Florian Mussgnug have used the expression *postmodern impegno* in the assumption that

postmodernism, which has been frequently described as eclectic, sceptical, politically apathetic

or nihilistic, as having a playful attitude and irony towards social conventions and above all as

anti-historical, should be considered in other ways.[69] More specifically, Antonello's and Mussgnug's interpretation underlines that:

> Postmodernist anxieties about political legitimation can prompt new forms of political action and help us reformulate the goals of emancipatory struggle. There is more than one way of conceiving the relation between literature and art, just as there is more than one way of describing *impegno* in postmodernist terms. (2009: 3)

I believe that Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's writings can be considered as examples of *postmodern impegno*. Their novels are indeed full of postmodern features, from the multiple identities of the protagonists to the temporal distortion and fragmented narratives that often hop back and forth through the timeline of events. In particular, from the postmodern historical narration, Luther Blissett and Wu Ming exploit the concept of hyper-novel in creating an original literary product from an intermingling of different genres. As mentioned in the Introduction, Wu Ming have called them 'Unidentified Narrative Objects' (UNOs), texts that do not fall within any predefined literary genre, thus widening the borders of the literary to include new textual elements and produce innovative outcomes.

But despite the many postmodern elements in their novels, Wu Ming have claimed not to be postmodern writers because of their engagement, arguing that postmodernism and political commitment are diametrically opposed.

> Gli anni Novanta sono l'ultimo decennio della fase postmoderna, momento terminale, di vicoli ciechi e crisi mascherata da trionfo (una festa sull'orlo del baratro). È il periodo in cui il postmodernismo (ossia la cultura del postmoderno) si riduce a "maniera". [...] Il decorso del postmodernismo si può descrivere in una sola frase: col tempo il "buttarla in vacca" è divenuto sistematico. (Wu Ming1 2008: 13, 32)

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[69] Antonello, Pierpaolo; Mussgnug, Florian (2009). *Postmodern Impegno. Impegno Postmoderno: Ethics and Commitment in Contemporary Italian Culture. Etica e Engagement Nella Cultura Italiana Contemporanea*. Bern: Peter Lang.

Nonetheless, as Antonello and Mussgnug have pointed out in *Postmodern impegno*, postmodern writing can actually be politically committed.

In conclusion, it is clear that Luther Blissett and Wu Ming display a strong critical engagement with history in all their novels. Addressing the issue of narrating the past to talk about the present, Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's novels are a form of acting in the world that produces effects for which they take responsibility. In fact, a "pragmatic" dimension of their novels emerges from the dialectical relationship of power and freedom that is symptomatic of Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's constant engagement, in particular with those who have been defeated by History.

From the dark sides of History, and more importantly from the "wrong side" of History, Luther Blissett and Wu Ming have created new myths as a 'pratica di opposizione' (Amici 2006: 201) against the established power (the official historiography). When interviewed by Laura Giorgi, Wu Ming declared that there is no distinction between history and politics: 'Coincidono completamente, perché raccontare il nostro passato significa schierarsi nel presente. Non esiste un modo amorfo e neutro di raccontare il proprio passato, né individuale né collettivo. Scrivere e riscrivere la storia è sempre un atto politico' (2000).

In their novels, I argue that Luther Blissett and Wu Ming make an engaging and politically committed use of literature, in the sense that their works can be seen as a form of political action. Literature becomes a tool, "strumento di lotta", through which Luther Blissett Wu Ming fight the concept of history as an ideological fabrication operated by power to control consensus. Shedding light on events that have been cancelled or hidden by the official historiography, Luther Blissett and Wu Ming create counter-history's narratives of events that have been overlooked. In doing this, they focus their attention on crucial moments of history that strongly embody the relationship between power and freedom not yet properly explored.

In this chapter, I will analyse how the dialectical relationship between power and freedom is represented in two different perspectives: from below in *Q* and from above in *Altai*. Luther Blissett's *Q* (1999) introduced the dialectical process that would be used in all of Wu Ming's novels (*Asce di guerra*, *54*, *Manituana*, *Altai* and *L'armata dei sonnambuli*). Despite the fact that *Q* was written by Luther Blissett, I consider it vital to this thesis in order to highlight the extent to which both Luther Blissett and Wu Ming have constructed the relationship between power and freedom in their novels. In *Altai* (2009) the perspective of the dialectical process is reversed: the attempts to achieve freedom are not generated from below, as happened in *Q* through a revolution or a rebellion against the old power, but rather from above, with the involvement of another power.

I. The Allegorical Dimension of Power in Q

Q is a historical novel that focusses on the origins of modernity and, in an allegorical way, also deals with the contemporary world. *Q* is set in 16th-century Europe, a continent ravaged by religious wars and conflicts between old/new powers, characterised by a financial integration that went beyond borders and local wars. When interviewed by Loredana Lipperini, Luther Blissett explained the reasons for choosing the 16th century as the historical background of *Q*:

> Quanto al XVI secolo, lo abbiamo scelto perché è il secolo in cui nasce il moderno, e tutto ciò che oggi sta marcendo: l'Europa, la comunicazione di

massa, gli apparati di polizia, il capitale finanziario, lo Stato. (In Lipperini 1999)

Since its publication in March 1999, *Q* has received considerable critical attention in particular for its allegorical aspects. Almost without exception, the critical focus has in fact concentrated upon the strong allegory featured in the novel, with parallels between 16th-century Europe and the contemporary world. Reflecting on this type of narrative, which can be considered a reflection of the past, in her article *Il Cinquecento sembra il 2000* Fiorella Iannucci wrote:

> *Q* è una metafora del presente. Come somiglia questa Europa unita a quello sterminato impero di Carlo V, foraggiato dalle grandi banche tedesche, percorso da mille indipendentismi. [...] Come somiglia alla rivoluzione telematica quella di Gutenberg, idee stampate su libri, un sapere che travolge gerarchie e classi sociali. E si allarga, alle soglie del 2000, su scala planetaria e in tempo reale, grazie alla Rete. (1999: 20)

I agree with this interpretation, which highlights the similarity between the mid-1500s and the end of 1990s, considering *Q* not a story about the politics of the past, but as an allegorical reflection of the present with revolutions, wars, reprisals, ethnic cleansing, refugees, multinational powers, the growth of capitalism and the emergence of new media. In fact, contemporary Europe has many elements in common with Europe in the novel, which was united under the banner of Charles V's Habsburg Empire, bankrolled by the powerful German bankers (the Fuggers) and torn by struggles for independence and nationalism. Similarly, in his analysis of *Q*, Paolo Cassetta has argued that:

> Il Cinquecento di Q mette in forma un "fuck the power" che ha il merito di intrecciarsi con un'altra importante corrente emotiva: quella della difesa degli enragés di tutti i tempi, quella della rivendicazione persino provocatoria delle "mani sporche" e della colpa necessaria all'azione storica. Così, Müntzer trascolora in Robespierre e giunge a lambire il nostro passato recente. (1999)

Moreover, considering specifically the allegorical reflections that emerge from the novel which resonate with our society, Giuseppe Conte has suggested that *Q* 'è un romanzo che agita idee:

il contrasto tra ribellione e istituzione, tra movimento e stabilizzazione, tra vitalità rivoltosa e autorità mortifera, tra passione erotico-intellettuale e denaro. Contrasto vivo nel XVI secolo come oggi, tra noi' (1999).

In the novel, Europe is constantly reconstructed by political decisions that are determined by German bankers, in particular the Fuggers of Augsburg, the so-called 'Banchieri dell'Impero' (*Q*: 260). Their branches were scattered across Europe and at that time, all trade was under their control. Even Emperor Charles V would be lost without the money that the Fuggers put at his disposal to finance wars, trade, journeys.

> Non c'è un porto in Europa dove non ci sia una loro filiale. Non c'è commercio in cui non ci sia una loro anche minima partecipazione. I nostri mercanti sarebbero persi senza il denaro che i Fugger mettono a disposizione per finanziare i loro viaggi. Carlo V non sposterebbe un solo soldato se non avesse un credito illimitato presso i loro forzieri. Del resto, l'Imperatore deve ai Fugger la sua corona, la guerra contro la Francia, la crociata contro i Turchi e il mantenimento di tutte le sue puttane. Li ha ricambiati donando loro l'usufrutto delle miniere ungheresi e boeme, la riscossione delle tasse in Catalogna, il monopolio dell'estrazione mineraria nel Nuovo Mondo, e chissà cos'altro. (*Q*: 355)

In this scenario, all political and religious changes were determined by money. In particular, religious faith masked other interests and was protected by mercenary armies that would regularly resort to rape and plunder, to the detriment of defenceless populations. In the novel, 16th-century Europe was a continent criss-crossed by columns of refugees, where the rebellion of desperate people came up against the strong and united front of dominant families and emerging mercantile powers. Luther Blissett described these massacres in passages of the novel, in particular Frankenhausen (*Q*: 11-16) and Münster (*Q*: 311-323), claiming that there are parallels between the events narrated in the novel and those which took place in Yugoslavia at the end of the 20th century.

> Generic appeals to peace never roused our interest: war, today as four centuries ago, has a very solid *raison d'être*, rooted in the criminal decisions of states and supernational powers, the United States as well as Charles V's

empire. Ethnic cleansing and retaliations have their reason too, a reason that we reject and oppose, being aware that time won't stop rewarding with victories and defeats those who keep up this struggle, i.e. the only conflict worth enlisting for. These days of bloodbath coincide with our *Q* promotional tour all over Italy. It would be immoral and inconsistent with our long-time political practice not to seize this opportunity, that's why we're using our paradoxical "fame" to censure both the madness of rulers and the apathy of the ruled ones.[70]

Although they are four centuries apart, there are substantial similarities: columns of refugees leave their burning villages; desperate rebellion encounters the solid response of both old dynasties and new merchant powers. In *Q,* Luther Blissett emphasised that what happened in 16th-century Europe where Emperor Charles V, whose domain stretched from South America to the Balkans, tried to impose his rule with the support of the most powerful bank in the world, has similarities with events in contemporary Europe.

Following this allegorical interpretation, it is worth mentioning that, in the third part of the novel, the Anabaptists[71] were involved in an audacious operation that spread panic in the central system of economic power. It was a huge swindle against the Fugger bankers, who controlled much of the European economy in the 16th century and had accumulated enormous wealth. The Anabaptists produced fake letters of credit in order to steal three hundred thousand florins from the Fuggers' banks between 1538 and 1544. In a world dominated by global trade, commerce, money and the stock exchange (the 20th century seems so close to the novel's 16th century), the Anabaptists spread a financial virus at the heart of the economic power of the

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[70] From the press communiqué against the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia 'Down with the War Criminals', released by Luther Blissett on the 1st April 1999, during their *Q* promotional tour of Italy. http://www.lutherblissett.net/archive/419_en.html. (Accessed 09.02.17)

[71] Anabaptist, from the new Latin *anabaptista* 'one who is rebaptised', in turn derived from ancient Greek ἀναβαπτισμός 'to baptise again', was a Christian movement that traced its origins to the Radical Reformation in Europe. They rejected infant baptism in favour of believers' baptism. Since many of them had been baptised in their infancy, they chose to be rebaptised as believing adults. The Anabaptists evolved in the 16th century at a time of social and religious chaos, developing unique ideas about Church and state, and retaining a wildly radical view of society. The novel *Q* focusses on the extreme case of Münster in 1534-1535, when the Anabaptists came to power, practised polygamy and some of their leaders claimed revelations from God. In the light of these tendencies, the Anabaptists were persecuted by both Catholics and Protestants, and executed by fire, sword or drowning. In spite of persecution, the movement spread, mostly in the lower classes. See Gastaldi, Ugo (1992). *Storia dell'anabattismo. Vol. 1: Dalle origini a Münster (1525-1535)*. Turin: Claudiana.

time. Everything depended on money: war and peace, as well as commerce and luxury. The Empire, the Church and the Princes were driven by money within a huge mechanism that controlled the entire world.

> La vita di interi paesi e popolazioni gravita intorno al commercio. [...] Tutti dipendono dal denaro: i mercanti come l'Imperatore, i principi quanto il Papa, il lusso, la guerra e il commercio. [...] Pagare gli operai, trasportare i prodotti, armare una nave, assoldare un equipaggio, mettere in piedi un esercito che difenda i carichi dai pirati... Tutto questo puoi farlo con una cosa sola: il denaro. (*Q*: 367, 368)

Like modern hackers, the Anabaptists targeted the weakest links in the global financial chain, producing fake letters of credit in order to withdraw money from any branch of the Fugger banks in Europe (*Q*: 351-390). What could happen today is similar: fraudsters may acquire the access codes to the global, cross-border, bank-payment system and use them to trick a bank into transferring money to their accounts.

Pursuing the allegorical interpretation of the novel, it is worth recalling that in 1999, when *Q* was being written, Luther Blissett published the essay *Nemici dello Stato. Criminali, "mostri" e leggi speciali nella società di controllo*. Stefania Scateni and Andrea Cortellessa have highlighted the importance of this publication, which should be read in parallel with the novel. In fact, *Nemici dello Stato* and *Q* share some similar content, in particular the focus on the creation of a society of fear. In *Nemici dello Stato,* the most significant historical and political events that happened in Italy from the mid-1960s to the 1990s are outlined. Luther Blissett focussed on how the established powers (successive Italian governments, the secret services and the Vatican) created a permanent state of emergency in which to hunt down the so-called "public enemies". According to Luther Blissett, thanks to this state of emergency, a multifaceted power created an oppressive system. What emerged in the last decades of the 20th century, it is argued in the text, was the growth of an indiscriminate use of intimidation, threats

and other forms of pressure, forcing people to believe that the ultimate goal was to defend

democracy against dissidents, rebels, subversives, terrorists and antagonists.

> Chiamiamo "emergenza" una continua ri-definizione strumentale del "nemico pubblico" da parte dei poteri costituiti. Grazie all'emergenza, agli occhi della fantomatica "opinione pubblica" viene resa accettabile non solo la violazione ma la vera e propria sospensione delle libertà formalmente sancite dalle costituzioni e dalle carte dei diritti umani. Accettabile? Di più: necessaria e auspicabile al fine di "difendere la democrazia". In Italia, dagli anni Settanta in avanti, il metodo di governo è consistito interamente in un avvicendarsi di emergenze. In questo paese esiste da sempre una complicata dialettica dell'incostituzionalità, al cui interno l'emergenza ha stabilito una propria retorica, un compiuto ma fluido sistema di metafore, un peculiare modo di cristallizzarsi nel diritto scritto e nel costume nazionale. (Luther Blissett 1999: 3)

In the name of state defence, the rights and freedom of people were diminished or even

removed. Above all, Luther Blissett invited readers to reconsider all the mysteries not yet

explained in Italy, along with the secret services' intrigues, the alliances between political

power and magistrates, the corrupt use of the media and the strong presence of the Church in

Italian politics.

> L'esigenza primaria è la coercizione di cui sopra, il controllo sociale, la prevenzione di probabili "devianze" e antagonismi; le cosche si scontrano tra loro per assicurarsi il governo di tale prevenzione. [...] La svolta è stata imposta combinando diverse strategie. [...] L'uso terroristico dell'intero sistema dei media, con periodiche campagne d'allarme, tanto violente quanto strumentali, a cui seguono risposte in termini di "legge e ordine" da parte della "gente", groviglio indistinto di campioni statistici stimolati a colpi di slogan e sondaggi-farsa. (*Ibid*: 5)

In *Nemici dello Stato*, Luther Blissett re-told thirty years of Italian history, shedding light on

political, judicial and media mechanisms whose aim was to create an atmosphere of fear within

Italian society. As Luther Blissett mantained: 'La molecolarizzazione dell'emergenza si è

spinta dalla *res publica* ai microlegami sociali, dall'ordine pubblico alla privacy, fino ai recessi

delle differenze singolari' (*ibid*: 3). What emerges from this text is the image of a state that

plays the role of guardian, police officer and defender of the law, not for the well-being of its

citizens but to protect the political and economic *status quo*. Therefore, any forms of dissidence should be eradicated at source.

Nemici dello stato is fundamental because the same content is at the root of *Q*. Stefania Scateni has correctly pointed out that *Nemici dello stato* is: 'l'altra faccia di *Q* o, se vogliamo, una specie di manuale per leggere *Q*' (1999: 21). She has also underlined that *Nemici dello stato* is less captivating than the novel, because some sections are full of documents, data and laws. Nonetheless, it can be considered 'lo stesso libro. […] Se *Q* è un'allegoria del Blissett pensiero, *Nemici dello Stato* ne è la versione letterale' (*ibid*).

Similarly, Andrea Cortellessa has invited us to read *Q* and *Nemici dello stato* together, because they are almost one single book. Although the former is a historical novel set in the 16th century and the latter is an essay about Italian history in the late 20th century, they share many significant themes. The power of the Church and the banks is expressed – in the past as well as in the present time – through inquisition, repression and witch hunts: 'il metodo inquisitorio della repressione controriformistica vi viene indicato quale corrispettivo dello "stato di emergenza" moderno' (Cortellessa 1999). Therefore, the old witch-hunts, with their spectacular burnings at the stake, have been replaced by modern police harassment with the aim of suppressing any form of dissidence.

In the light of these considerations, I believe that the strategic essence of power (as outlined by Foucault) is strongly present in Luther Blissett's narrations. As Foucault argued, power is not a possession but rather a strategy that spreads like tentacles into every aspect of social life. Therefore, power should be understood in its various and strategic expressions, along with the practices through which it emerges in everyday life. Foucault talked about a system of relations that encompass the whole of society, and it is precisely this perspective that, I believe, Luther Blissett has reproduced in *Nemici dello stato* and *Q.*

The power […] is conceived not as a property, but as a strategy, that its effects

of domination are attributed not to "appropriation", but to dispositions, manoeuvres, tactics, techniques, functionings; that one should decipher in it a network of relations, constantly in tension, in activity, rather than a privilege that one might possess that one should take as its model a perpetual battle rather than a contract regulating a transaction or the conquest of a territory. (1978: 26)

II. Underground Networks of Freedom

Against the established powers that act in strategic ways to reduce the freedom of people in their daily life, Luther Blissett has narrated how, at the moment of instability, the rebels in the novel exploit the new technology of their time (the printing press) to spread the word about the rebellion. Following the allegorical interpretation of *Q*, I want to show that the "totalitarian" state in the novel, as well as the contemporary one, are subverted by a revolution being started by underground networks. In so doing, I will refer to post-media and the rhizome, two key concepts elaborated by Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze around the idea that new technologies have great potential for emancipation, independence and freedom. This is related to a new vision of technology, no longer an instrument in the hands of a few people, but one that lays the foundations for shared practices of collective intelligence with no borders, nor any type of discrimination. In this way, the revolution can spread everywhere (deterritorialisation), through different expressions (heterogeneity).

Before exploring the above-mentioned aspects, I would like to focus on the areas of networking and hacktivism, as well as on the authors' experiences of cultural and political activism that Luther Blissett has transferred onto the protagonist of the novel, a young theology student who becomes a fervent Anabaptist. In particular, I argue that through the experiences of libertarian experimentation following the circulation of new technologies, Luther Blissett has mirrored in the Anabaptists the horizontal and decentralised idea of communication

displayed by both 20th-century hacker and cyberpunk culture: neither hierarchical nor authoritarian, neither controlled nor censored.

At first, it is worth highlighting that the young theology student was an eyewitness of the dialectical process that started with the rebellion against the established powers of the time (the Church and the Princes) and continued until the emergence of a new power after the utopian victory of the Anabaptists in Münster. He lived through the most turbulent years of the Reformation, when a generation of students, teachers, theologians and peasants fought together for the creation of a new society based on religious tolerance and egalitarianism. Over more than three decades of adventures, wars, battles, bloodshed and romance, the young student-revolutionary rebel survived the ruthlessly repressed Peasants' Revolt of the 1520s, as well as the Anabaptist utopian regime that seized power in Münster in the 1530s. During the course of the whole novel, he lived through revolutions and rebellions, spreading the egalitarian word of the oppressed against the political, religious and economic powers of the time, represented by the Princes, the Roman Church and the banks.

As the Inquisition relentlessly pursued the young student, he took on a series of false names, wandering across Europe but always in the midst of religious and political uproar. He is named Gustav Metzger (*Q*: 32), Lucas Niemanson (173), Thomas Puel (177), Lienhard Jost (186), Gerrit Boekbinder aka Gert dal Pozzo (202), Swedartho the locksmith (290), Lot (364), Hans Grüeb (389), Ludwig Schaliedecker or Don Ludovico (443), Tiziano (503) and Ismael (662). 'Mi sono trovato sempre in luoghi diversi da quelli in cui le autorità mi avevano segnalato. […] Penso a quanti sono stato, fino a questo momento, ma non riesco a ricordare il numero esatto' (367).

If we consider the main features of Luther Blissett, I believe there are numerous autobiographical elements openly reflected in the protagonist of *Q*. In particular, like Luther Blissett, the young student is constantly fleeing, never showing up in the same place twice,

disappearing into the night without trace. The protagonist seems to be a mythological figure emerging from the underground scene of his time, like a ghost that tries to subvert the social and political system with his actions. One of the most detailed descriptions of the Anabaptist rebel comes from the Roman Church spy Qoèlet (aka Q), a hard-line heretics' hunter and an enemy of any compromise with Protestants and heretics. Qoèlet highlights the student's particular characteristics in the following terms:

> Non troverebbero il nostro missionario anabattista [Tiziano] nemmeno se lo cercassero per cent'anni. Mai due volte nello stesso posto. Ogni segnalazione proviene da una località diversa e tutte hanno come epicentro Venezia. Quasi un disegno. Basta mettere insieme tutti i pezzi. Un solo uomo si aggira tra i territori della Serenissima e il ferrarese ribattezzando la gente, lasciando trapelare il nome che ha scelto. Quando l'Inquisizione arriva, è già scomparso nel nulla, ripiombato nei meandri della storia che lo ha vomitato. È abbastanza ovvio: non si tratta di un pellegrinaggio, non lo si può inseguire. Solo singole puntate, a colpo sicuro, battezza, lascia il proprio nome ben impresso nelle orecchie e scompare. (*Q*: 539)

In outlining the protagonist's features, Adriano Prosperi, one of the most remarkable historians of the Inquisition, has pointed out that Luther Blissett was inspired by Tiziano, a 16th-century heretic rebel who tried to convert Pope Julius III to the Anabaptist heresy.

> Ecco il mistero che gli storici non sono riusciti - per ora - a decifrare. Negli anni e nei paesi di Tiziano Vecellio, negli stessi paesi del Veneto, visse un altro Tiziano: un ribelle, un eretico, un uomo dotato di grande fascino. Era "uno con la barba granda", "diceva cose grande". Apostolo di una religione rivoluzionaria e radicale, fu amato e seguito da una vasta rete di seguaci, che diffuse le sue cellule segrete nell'Italia centro-settentrionale e fu capace di riunire a Venezia, in barba a tutte le autorità, un concilio più affollato di quello cattolico di Trento. Come ogni rete cospiratoria anche questa ebbe il suo "pentito": un prete marchigiano, don Pietro Manelfi, nell'ottobre del 1551 ne svelò all'Inquisizione l'esistenza e ne consentì il rapido e violento smantellamento. Manelfi fece il nome di Tiziano e ne raccontò le imprese. (1999: 29)

The real Tiziano failed, was imprisoned and confessed. Prosperi has emphasised that, on this specific matter, historians can only refer to an altered and mutilated text of his confession; therefore, their efforts to rebuild the truth are hampered. At this point, the historian's and

writer's paths must inevitably diverge. The former has to stop due to the inadequacy of the materials, whilst the latter is free to create: 'D'altra parte, il documento storico, di per sé, è come un lampo improvviso nel buio del passato: svela l'esistenza di un mistero, non lo spiega' (*ibid*). From a historical event that is shrouded in mystery, Luther Blissett has elaborated an alternative history with plausible characters.

> Certo, quello vero, il Tiziano della storia, colui che aveva materializzato lo spettro dell'anabattismo in Italia, vicino al papato cattolico, anzi proprio al suo fianco, resta per noi uno sconosciuto. Il suo è uno dei tanti misteri nei quali gli storici si imbattono quando affondano la ricerca nei mondi segreti delle congiure e nella realtà sommersa delle classi subalterne. (*Ibid*)

Considering now the two main features of the Luther Blissett Project, networking and hacktivism, it is worth recalling that, between 1994 and 1999, Luther Blissett was a collective identity adopted and shared by hundreds of artists and social activists. Luther Blissett defined himself thus: 'The Robin Hood of the information age who waged a guerrilla warfare on the cultural industry, and ran unorthodox solidarity campaigns for victims of censorship and repression'.[72] The Luther Blissett Project became an example of a fertile networking strategy in the pursuit of a common cause. As highlighted by Luca Muchetti, Luther Blissett was:

> Uno pseudonimo collettivo internazionale. "Luther Blissett" diventa un personaggio "aperto", ridefinibile, a patto che chiunque in ogni parte del mondo usi quell nome per "firmare" le proprie performances, opera d'arte, contestazioni, rivolte, scandali, boicottaggi, fanzines, lettere ai giornali. (2007: 26)

In the artistic environment where Luther Blissett grew, network culture was characterised by a blossoming of artistic experiences – as already mentioned in the Introduction, Situationist International (SI), Mail Art, Fluxus and Neoism – reflecting the new role of the artist and author

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[72] 'Who is Luther Blissett? Birth of a Folk Hero' from http://www.lutherblissett.net/. (Accessed 02.03.2018)

who becomes a networker, an operator of collective networks. As pointed out by Tatiana Bazzichelli:

> Networking communication might be a virus that grows from contact to contact and expands through the multiple actions of people who develop collective processes of creation. These people and their multiple identities, their personal relationships become the interface, their exchanges become the medium. (2009: 4)

At the same time, the network included political activists who promoted and applied the self-managed use of media in their own actions and protests, exploiting the net as a political space, with the possibility of decentralised, autonomous and grass-roots, democratic participation.[73] Luther Blissett had its roots in the above-mentioned network environment, and absorbed many counter-cultural elements such as autonomy, collectivism and opposition against the established media and political power.

In relation to hacker culture, Bazzichelli has suggested that it has three main features: accessibility by everybody, information as a free commodity, and a mindful use of technology. The hacker ethic is also intended as a model for life and their action is dictated by deeply-held principles of collectivism and horizontality.[74] Accordingly, networking means the creation of systems of relationships where people can communicate in order to share their own experiences and ideas and experiment artistically. The network thus emerges as a form of critical information, spreading through independent and collective projects that share the common value of freedom of expression. The concept of cyberpunk is also close to hacktivism. According to Bazzichelli:

> (It) has taken on the connotations of a political movement, influencing a large part of the future Hacker reality and artistic experimentation in digital

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[73] See in particular Di Corinto, Arturo & Tozzi, Tommaso (2002). *Hacktivism. La libertà nelle maglie della rete*. Rome: Manifestolibri.

[74] On hacker ethic see Levy, Steven (1984). *Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution*. Nerraw Manijaime/Doubleday: New York. And also Himanen, Pekka (2001). *The Hacker Ethic and the Spirit of the Information Age*. Random House: New York.

technology. […] In Italy, Cyberpunk collects all of the libertarian utopias and the radical traditions of the preceding years, giving life to a unique current in its genre for a collective participation. In our country the punk tradition has met with that of Do It Yourself, so the need to create liberated spaces: new open technological possibilities; the attitude to share and to create networks; Cyberpunk and Hacktivism, as we intend it today, converge all in a particular ethic. (*Ibid*: 68, 73)

Bazzichelli has also argued that in Italy cyberpunk has emerged and developed into a dynamic network whose chief aim is to promote a conscious use of technology and free circulation of data with an uncontrollable communicative flow. The idea was using computer technology to create horizontal network relationships between individuals, in order to guarantee cyber-rights to everyone.[75] Between 1980 and 1990, the concept of Cyberspace was seen as a territory of reciprocal confrontation and of collective relationships where it was possible to share and circulate knowledge more freely.

The aforementioned dynamics, allowing the creation of connections between spaces of free discussion and information, have been widespread throughout Italy since the mid-1980s, especially within the circle of the *Centri Sociali Occupati* (Squatted Social Centres). These social centres have borrowed several ideas from hacker and cyberpunk culture such as the independent use of technology through the creation of collective practices with both artistic and political objectives. When squatted social centres first appeared, they were conceived as liberated areas where participants could to experiment autonomously and create something new.

Continuing the tradition of the "sub-proletariat circles" of the 1960s, the Social Centres progressively developed throughout all of Italy as interfaces of an "antagonistic" political movement which would see the height of its development in the 1980s and 1990s, especially in the bigger cities. (Bazzichelli 2008: 63)

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[75] I refer here to *Cyber Rights: Defending Free speech in the Digital Age* by Mike Godwin (1988) where he focusses on how technology gives people new powerful ways to exercise individual rights such as, in particular, freedom of speech.

More interestingly, as Bazzichelli has pointed out, 'during the second half of the 1980s, ideas were starting to spread that would connect those who frequented the Italian Social Centres to new technological instruments, like the first personal computers and the modem' (*ibid*: 67). Many of the practices described so far show a critical vision of technology no longer conceived as an instrument in the hands of a few people, but which lays the foundations for collective intelligence with no borders nor any type of discrimination.

Luther Blissett used its personal hacker experience to create the Anabaptists in the novel: they exploited the printing press as a form of new technology in order to spread the heretic values at the time of the Reformation. In relation to the powerful use of new media, Luther Blissett focussed on how, in the 16th century, the printing press enabled the unrestricted circulation of information and revolutionary ideas. In an allegorical way, it is similar to the internet, which enables a grass-roots use of the media as a tool for activists as well as for political and cultural movements to spread information in a freer way.

In *Q*, the young student/rebel Anabaptist represents the voice of a multitude of people (peasants, students, heretics) who wanted to subvert and overturn the established power of the Church and the German Princes. He uses the printing press as a tool to fight against what, in the novel, is described as a contemporary capitalist and mass-mediatised society. Those who represent power are soon alarmed by the fact that rebels have a printing press at their disposal, because their heretical words – written on paper – might reach revolts travelling through borderless territories. Within a short time, it becomes clear that a message printed on paper can be more dangerous than weapons. Written words are in fact described by the rebels as bullets to be fired in all directions, no matter from what distance, by the most powerful of cannons: 'Le mani trasformano l'inchiostro sulla semplice carta in caratteri di piombo che moltiplicano le parole. [...] Proiettili che verranno scagliati in tutte le direzioni dal più potente dei cannoni' (*Q*: 88). Words – not written in Latin anymore but in the vernacular – are accessible to

everyone, especially to the poor and humble people who could read. Messages are thus printed

from an underground network and distributed by hand, travelling around the countryside and

reaching brethren scattered everywhere.

> Da ogni imprimatur si potrebbero ottenere dei fogli sfusi, dove esprimere in poche righe efficaci il nostro messaggio, così da portarceli dietro agevolmente, e poterli distribuire a mano nelle campagne, in giro. Potremmo farli circolare attraverso i fratelli sparsi ovunque, potremmo raggiungere tutti. (*Q*: 90)

Through this allegorical interpretation, I argue that Luther Blissett has clearly created a parallel

between the printing press in the 16th century and the emergence of the Internet in the late 20th

century, through Guattari's post-media concept as highlighted in the Introduction. Bearing in

mind the parallels between the 16th-century printing press and the 20th-century Internet, the

Anabaptists of *Q* allowed the emergence of decentralised groups that fought against the

established powers, just like contemporary 'randagi hackers' (Cassetta 1999). In the novel,

power is represented by the Roman Catholic Church that, with its instruments such as the

Inquisition and the exclusive use of Latin, tried to maintain authority and control. To fight

against this hierarchical power, the heretic Anabaptists produced small single sheets that passed

easily from hand-to-hand and, written in a simple language, carried a powerful message to

humble people. Therefore, peasants would understand the written words in a more direct way.[76]

> Decidemmo di chiamarli *flugblatt* [fogli volanti] proprio per via di quella caratteristica di fogli singoli dalla forma ridotta, che potevano passare agevolmente di mano in mano, adatti alla gente umile, in una lingua semplice che molti avrebbero compreso direttamente o facendosene dare lettura da qualcuno. (*Q*: 93)

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[76] On this fundamental aspect, Franco "Bifo" Berardi (1999) has correctly highlighted that 'La parola, non più volante, acquista una potenza che non aveva mai avuto, con l'invenzione del volantino, del *flug-blatt*. I contadini e gli artigiani dei borghi ricevono un messaggio dotato di forza inoppugnabile. Il verbo si fa materia, si fa storia. Tutta la follia, il fanatismo, la crudeltà e la dedizione, la generosità e la violenza che si sprigionano nella lotta di classe moderna nascono da messaggi che circolano non più dalla bocca all'orecchio, ma di mano in mano, che si presentano all'occhio del lettore con la verità indiscutibile delle tavole della legge. La Bibbia è scrittura, ogni scrittura è Bibbia. La scrittura si diffonde, non è più appannaggio esclusivo di chi detiene il potere. Tutti possiamo far circolare il verbo, fare del verbo carne'.

Through these 1520s-flyers, Luther Blissett referred allegorically to the main features of both the post-media revolution theorised by Guattari and the Internet considered as a bottom-up medium with potential emancipation from the dominant mass media. In so doing, Luther Blissett described the Anabaptists as modern hackers who spread their heresy with extreme speed and ease. Moreover, I suggest that the Anabaptists are rhizomatic characters, referring to the philosophical concept of the rhizome that has been developed by Guattari and Deleuze to explain how information is spread in the post-media era.

The rhizome is characterised by trans-species connections that allow multiple and non-hierarchical entry and exit points in data representation and interpretation. The rhizome is the root of a plant that travels horizontally underground and proliferates unpredictably, and it is opposite to the vertical lines derived from the organisational structure. I argue that the Anabaptists followed this rhizomatic model, as they reached hundreds of people beyond any geographical boundary, developing and transforming themselves into new communities. As the spy Qoèlet said, the Anabaptist's movement did not have distinct borders. The rebels sprang up everywhere, appearing simultaneously in different regions and exploiting the vehicle of flyers through which they exported their revolutionary ideals.

> L'anabattismo si diffonde sotterraneamente; non ha un unico capo, che sia possibile spiccare dal collo per non pensarci più; non ha un esercito da sconfiggere in battaglia; non ha confini veri e propri, si sparge ora di qua ora di là, come fa il morbo nero quando saltando da una regione all'altra miete le sue vittime senza distinzione di idioma o stato, sfruttando il veicolo degli umori corporei, del fiato, del lembo d'una veste; degli Anabattisti sappiamo che prediligono i ceti meccanici, ma si può ben dire che costoro si trovano dovunque e quindi non v'è confine che possa essere sicuro; né milizia, né esercito infatti riesce a bloccare l'avanzata di questa invisibile armata. (*Q*: 238)

The Anabaptists are truly rhizomatic characters as described by Guattari and Deleuze: 'A rhizome may be broken, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines. […]

Transversal communications between different lines scramble the genealogical tree' (2005: 30). The autobiographical protagonist of the novel is also rhizomatic, since, like Luther Blissett, he concealed his own identity and embraced the principle of multiplicity: 'Tiziano non è Tiziano. È qualcun altro. [...] Tiziano nasconde la propria identità: alle gesta, invece, sembra voler dare la massima risonanza' (*Q*: 545). As productively underlined by Iannucci:

> L.B., il profeta della distruzione di ogni identità e dell'adozione di personalità multiple, con il dichiarato scopo di "portare il panico nei santuari del potere", offrendo falsi verosimili invece di verità fallaci, gettando lo scompiglio tra i media, mettendosi alla testa della protesta giovanile, straripando, perché no, fuori dalla Rete, con i suoi scritti febbrili di "controinformazione". (1999: 20)

Guattari and Deleuze also claimed that 'a rhizome is made of plateaus [and that] a plateau is always in the middle. [...] A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, inter-beings, intermezzo' (2005: 46). Quoting the English anthropologist Gregory Bateson's concept of plateaus, the two French philosophers argued that 'the word plateau designates something very special: a continuous, self-vibrating region of intensities whose development avoids any orientation towards a culmination point or external end' (*ibid*: 42).

From this perspective, I suggest that the Anabaptists operated in the novel as rhizomatic lines that spread their heresy underground. They did not have a beginning or an end, nor did they have a territory where they could be restricted.

> Ebbene, cosa succederebbe se si unissero? Cosa accadrebbe se cominciassero a riscuotere un sempre più largo successo con questo loro strisciare nei vicoli, nelle botteghe, lontani dal vaglio dell'autorità dottrinale? Cosa se nessuno, né un vescovo, né un principe quale è Filippo, né Lutero, sembrano in grado di arrestarli in questo loro avanzare sotterraneo, ma anzi li temono come la peste che si cerca di tenere lontana dai propri confini, ignari che essa avanza invisibile e può facilmente valicarli? (*Q*: 236)

Another significant element that derives from the rhizome concept and is reflected in the Anabaptists in the novel, is that of 'deterritorialisation' (Deleuze & Guattari 2005: 3). The two

philosophers drew attention to history, arguing that historical accounts are always written from a 'sedentary point of view' (*ibid*: 44), from a perspective chosen by the power and state apparatus to avoid any heterogeneity or anomaly in the narration of historical events. By contrast, Guattari and Deleuze presented history and culture as a wide-ranging cluster of attractions and influences without any origin. History, they argued, oscillates between periods of stable 'territorialization' (*ibid*: 33) and phases of 'deterritorialization' (*ibid*: 3), which correspond to the moment of instability when fixed orders fall apart. Luther Blissett exemplified the concept of the rhizome through the narration of the heretic Anabaptists' deeds, focussing on their nature as anarchists who spread their revolutionary ideals through forms of 'deterritorialization'.

In addition to 'deterritorialization', the other rhizomatic element is heterogeneity, which Luther Blissett introduced through a text quoted in the novel that echoed *Q* itself. In the last part of the novel, the Anabaptists were involved in the printing and dissemination of *The Benefit of Christ Crucified*, a radical text designed to subvert the Catholic doctrine, originally published anonymously under the title *Trattato Utilissimo del Beneficio di Iesu Cristo Crocifisso* (*Q*: 398). It was placed on the list of prohibited books during the Inquisition and almost all copies were burned.[77] I believe that the discussions emerging around the *Beneficio* can be read in places as an almost literal description of *Q* itself. Luther Blissett has employed this text to demonstrate how dangerous a weapon the printing press could be. In the *Beneficio*, the Protestant doctrine of the justification by faith alone was fully expounded, in a language easily understandable to anyone, as though this did not run entirely contrary to the doctrine of

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[77] Based on records from the Inquisition itself, the *Trattato* was written by a Benedictine friar, Benedetto Fontanini from Mantua. See Gastaldi, Ugo (1992). *Storia dell'anabattismo. Vol. 1: Dalle origini a Münster (1525-1535)*. Turin: Claudiana Editrice; Ginzburg, Carlo and Prosperi, Adriano (1975). *Giochi di pazienza*. Turin: Einaudi; Prosperi, Adriano (2009). *Tribunali della coscienza. Inquisitori, confessori, missionari*. Turin: Einaudi.

the Roman Church.[78] From the point of view of the spy Qoèlet, this was an attempt by the heretics to introduce elements favouring a reconciliation of Catholics and Lutherans at a doctrinal level, in complete acceptance of the doctrine of salvation proposed by the Protestants. The distribution of this book represented a threat for the whole of Christendom and in particular for the Church, as Qoèlet maintained: 'Se poi il libercolo trovasse plauso tra i notabili della Chiesa, potrebbe scoppiare un'epidemia di consenso per i protestanti in seno alla Chiesa di Roma' (*Q*: 399).

Thanks to the successful fraud against the Fuggers, the young student had the funds to publish the forbidden book *The Benefit of Christ Crucified*. With the help of wealthy friends and underground printers, the Anabaptist-heretic-hacker was ready to strike a blow to the Roman Church with the circulation of a prohibited and heretical underground book. Luther Blissett has chosen this book as an example of how it is possible to use a text as a powerful weapon in an attempt to shake the established power.

A character in the novel, Pietro Perna, an Italian bookseller interested in the distribution of the text, pointed out that its main positive features did not lie in the quality of its writing – it was a mediocre book that synthesised Calvin's thoughts – but in the fact that sometimes books can really change the world.

> Se questo libro si diffonde e ha successo, magari tra i cardinali e i dottori della Chiesa, forse voi e tutti gli altri non avrete l'Inquisizione che vi alita sul collo per il resto dei vostri giorni! Se questo libro trova il plauso della gente giusta, i cardinali intransigenti rischiano di trovarsi in minoranza, capito? I libri cambiano il mondo soltanto se il mondo riesce a digerirli. (*Q*: 425)

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[78] The formulation of the doctrine of justification by faith alone was the catalyst of the Western Schism and is commonly regarded as the foundation of Protestantism. This doctrine asserts that God's forgiveness of sinners is granted to and received by them through faith alone, without the need for good deeds or indulgences.

Like *The Benefit of Christ Crucified*, the novel *Q* immediately provoked debates in journals, newspapers and periodicals about who or what Luther Blissett really was.[79] In fact, beyond this collective pseudonym and multiple-use name, nobody at that time knew their real identity. The most common question was 'who wrote this historical novel?' The reception of the book in Italy has been very uneven. In the days that followed its publication, Luther Blissett's *Q* provoked surprise because of their subversive actions and 'guerriglia comunicativa' (Mezzena Lona 1999) with the aim to 'portare il panico nei santuari del potere' (Iannucci 1999: 20). On page 453 of the novel, *The Benefit of Christ Crucified* is described in terms that provide a straightforward connection with *Q*, through the reference to one of Luther Blissett's main characteristics, the art of camouflage:

> Si tratta di un libro scaltro, destinato a sollevare infiniti vespai, perché ha contenuti ambigui espressi in una lingua che tutti possono capire. Un capolavoro della dissimulazione, sul quale già in molti si arrovellano. (*Q*: 473)

Apart from being a masterpiece of dissimulation, *The Benefit of Christ Crucified* also showed a rhizomatic characteristic, heterogeneity, which we can also find in Luther Blissett's *Q*.

> La parola d'ordine adesso è commistione, capito? Com-mi-stio-ne! Quelle robe che ti lasciano col fiato sospeso, capito? E fino alla fine non capisci se si tratta di un autore eretico o ortodosso. Libri come *Il Beneficio di Cristo*, scritto da un frate cattolico ma pieno di temi cari alla fede d'Allemagna. (*Q*: 408)

The rhizomatic principle of heterogeneity proposed by Guattari and Deleuze may be applied to understand how Luther Blissett combined in *Q* different genres such as epic, crime, horror,

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[79] When *Q* was published, in 1999, its mysterious author Luther Blissett was only known as a group of cultural activists and media saboteurs who wanted to subvert the established powers of the media. See for example D'Aria, Pina (1999). 'Sembra il *Nome della rosa*, ma si legge *Q*' in *Panorama*, 25 February 1999, p.169; Mezzena Lona, Alessandro (1999). '*Q*: Un mistero da narrare dietro la maschera di Luther Blissett', in *Il Piccolo*, 30 March 1999; Stefania Scateni (1999). 'Tutti i misteri di Luther Blissett', in *L'Unità*, 30 April 1999, p. 21.

thriller, spy and adventure novels. By doing this, Luther Blissett has transformed historical fiction using both classical and modern sources to create a hybrid literary product.

> Lines and measurable speeds, constitutes an assemblage. A book is an assemblage of this kind, and as such is unattributable. It is a multiplicity […] Literature is an assemblage. […] All we talk about are multiplicities, lines, strata and segmentarities, lines of flight and intensities, mechanic assemblages and their various types, bodies without organs and their construction and selection, the plane of consistency, and in each case the units of measure. (Deleuze & Guattari 2005: 4)

I believe that the concepts of post-media and rhizome (along with forms of deterritorialisation and heterogeneity) express quite overtly the extent to which the Anabaptists, in the moment of instability, pushed the revolution through the libertarian use of the printing press. I have shown that, in an allegorical way, this new technology can be compared to the Internet, as instrument that fosters the outbreak of a revolution from underground networks. The protagonist, the young student, is a central figure whom Luther Blissett endowed with a desire for freedom that Luther Blissett himself had experienced as a hacker. By contrast, the last part of this chapter will consider how the revolution that had swept away the previous power would leave room for the emergence of a new power that, in turn, would erase the ideals of freedom held by the revolution itself.

III. The Emergence of a New Totalitarian Power

In the moment of assimilation, I maintain that the Anabaptists' upheaval can be allegorically compared to the Bolsheviks October 1917 Revolution in three key moments. First, what emerges from the reading of *Q* is that the Anabaptists represented a revolutionary movement against the established powers. Secondly, the Anabaptists succeeded in achieving what was considered impossible before: the abolition of class, the community of goods, and equality among people. Thirdly, the Anabaptists led by Jan Matthys took control of the town

of Münster, 'la nuova Gerusalemme' (*Q*: 202), forcing both the Lutherans and the Catholics to leave. Within a few months, an entire world was turned upside down (*Q*: 257-293). Therefore, I argue that Blissett depicted the Anabaptists as proto-communists who were capable of leading a peasants' revolution against the powers of the time (Princes, Catholics and Lutherans).

In order to be free, the Anabaptists experienced freedom through the creation of something new and unexpected. Here we can see a reflection of Hanna Arendt's thoughts about the realisation of freedom in action, and also the creation of a new beginning: 'being free and the capacity to begin something new coincided' (2006: 164). In *Q*, this concept of freedom is represented by the foundation of a new society based on the abolition of class and the community of goods.

In the novel, the Anabaptists are described by the spy Qoèlet as blasphemers who have taken the doctrines of Luther to their extremes, refusing the baptism of children and maintaining that the Holy Spirit can be received only with the consent of the believer who receives it. Most importantly, they have rejected the idea of ecclesiastical hierarchy and the doctrinal authority of the Church. The Anabaptists were united in communities and abhorred wealth and all secular forms of worship in the name of egalitarianism.

> Rifiutano la gerarchia ecclesiastica e si uniscono in comunità, i cui pastori vengono eletti dai fedeli medesimi; misconoscono l'autorità dottrinale della Chiesa e considerano la Scrittura l'unica fonte di verità; ma, in questo peggiori di Lutero, rifiutano anche di obbedire alle autorità secolari e pretendono che siano le singole comunità cristiane ad adempiere all'amministrazione civica. Inoltre avversano la ricchezza e tutte le forme secolari del culto, le immagini, le chiese, i paramenti sacri, in nome dell'uguaglianza di tutti i discendenti di Adamo. Essi vorrebbero sovvertire il mondo da capo a piedi e non è un caso che molti reduci della guerra dei contadini abbiano simpatizzato con essi, sposandone la causa. (*Q*: 141)

The Anabaptists represented an anarchical alternative to Catholicism and Lutheranism, and also a revolutionary movement against all authorities. After their taking of the city of Münster from the hands of the German Princes, the Anabaptists established an ideal Christian

commonwealth, with absolute equality and shared access to goods. With the motto *Omnia sunt communia*, the Anabaptists proclaimed the advent of a new era where the poor and disadvantaged overturned the established power in order to form a state based on justice and egalitarianism. In so doing, I argue that the "proto-communist" Anabaptists represent a concretisation of Marx's concept of prehistory-history, where the latter is the beginning of a fairer and more equal society. In Marx's reading of history, revolutions are not political accidents, as they are necessary manifestations of the historical progress of societies. To Marx, communism is the ultimate final stage where prevalence of equality among individuals will eventually emerge, together with no concept of private property ownership.[80]

Taking into account some passages from the novel, as previously stated, my analysis concentrates upon the resonances between the Anabaptist revolution and the October Revolution, when oppressed peasants rose up against landowners and then declared, through their elected representative body, that they did not recognise the former authority. In the moment of instability, a group that had been considered the dregs of society, could finally take control. Consequently, the new representatives of the city would be manual workers, blacksmiths, weavers and carpenters.

> La marea è montata fino a questo giorno cruciale. Ieri Redeker ha arringato i popolani sulla piazza del Municipio: come risultato ventiquattro di loro sono stati eletti al Consiglio. Maniscalchi, tessitori, falegnami, operai, perfino un fornaio e un ciabattino. I nuovi rappresentanti della città coprono tutto l'arco dei mestieri minori, la feccia cui mai si poteva immaginare fossero assegnate le sorti di questo mondo. (*Q*: 300)

However, the achievement of freedom was only a mirage. A new power has arisen from the revolution, in the dialectic moment of assimilation that followed the fall of the old power and the rise of freedom. In *Q* Luther Blissett endowed Jan Matthys with all the features of a

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[80] See Engels, Friedrich; Marx Karl (2015). *The Communist Manifesto*. London: Penguin Classics.

proletarian dictator: he concentrated all power in his hands and, blinded by the cult of personality, started issuing orders and installing his own men to rule the city. Spreading the word of "God", he was considered a 'Profeta' (*Q*: 290).

> Il profeta, il profeta è qui. - È arrivato! - Jan Matthys, il grande Jan Matthys è a Münster! Si spinge, ci si accalca verso la piazza centrale. Tutti vogliono vedere il messaggero di Dio, alto, scarnito, nero, ispido, scalzo. (*Q*: 303)

The consequences for the city were disastrous: Jan Matthys organised and led a massive purge of people considered enemies of the city. Many were imprisoned, exiled or executed, often without trial, while a regime of terror was installed in the city: 'un abisso d'orrore si era aperto sotto la Nuova Gerusalemme' (*Q*: 202).

As the Prophet Jan Matthys claimed: 'Se non toglieremo subito di mezzo il peccatore dal popolo dei santi, l'ira del Signore cadrà su tutti' (*Q*: 311). In terms of a comparison between the Anabaptists and the Bolsheviks, Jan Matthys acted in a similar way to Stalin who, in order to eradicate those regarded as enemies of the working class, instituted the Great Purge in which over a million people were imprisoned and at least 700,000 were executed from 1934 to 1939.

> I giudici, gli sbirri, il boia sono i nemici peggiori dei poveracci che hanno combattuto con noi. Quel figlio di cane parla del Dio della feccia. Ma chi è il suo Dio? Ancora un giudice, uno sbirro, un boia. [...] Quel pazzo fottuto ha rovinato tutto. Mi ha gelato il sangue. [...] Guardiamo la gente rifluire per le strade, mentre andiamo in cerca dei borgomastri. Svuotati, inerti fantasmi e sonnambuli che non riescono nemmeno ad avere paura. Gli hanno strappato l'Apocalisse, il Profeta non c'è più. Di Dio nemmeno l'ombra. Ma questa è davvero l'Ultima Pasqua, con le tombe scoperchiate e le anime dei defunti a vagare in attesa del giudizio. (*Q*: 313, 328)

Considering the tragic events narrated in the novel, Franco "Bifo" Berardi has seen in *Q* an allegorical representation of every proletarian rebellion that, in the 16th as well as in the 20th century, is always condemned to fail. *Q* is in fact a novel that leaves the reader with no hope. The experiences of libertarian and autonomous movements, Berardi has stated, are only built on the illusion that the condition of the poor will change. The truth is that revolutions are

inextricably linked to totalitarian fanaticism, and therefore a new power will rise to the detriment of those who hoped for a better world. In this way, the novel reflects a dialectical process that frequently occurs in history. In depicting the experience of libertarian and autonomous movements, Luther Blissett focussed on the communitarian mythology that has overcome the old power, turning the critique into a new dogmatism and revolt into a new (and ruthless) totalitarian power.

> *Q* è il primo romanzo italiano che faccia i conti con l'esperienza dei movimenti libertari ed autonomi e poi del terrorismo nel suo nesso inestricabile di fanatismo totalitario e di provocazione statale. Da questo punto di vista *Q* è un romanzo disperato. Non c'è speranza nella storia, non c'è speranza nella dialettica o nella rivolta. (Berardi 1999)

Similarly, Cassetta has highlighted that 'è la rivoluzione che divora se stessa nell'avvitarsi finale della repubblica di Münster' (1999). This origin of all delusions can clearly be found in the 16th century with the case of the Anabaptists, but it also follows a repetitive historical pattern without a specific spatial-temporal point of departure. This crucial aspect also emerges in Wu Ming's novels, as we shall see in the following chapters. In a cyclical process, the narratives follow the rise and the fall of libertarian movements, together with the dialectical relationship between the oppressors and the oppressed. Moreover, Luther Blissett – but also Wu Ming – have drawn our attention to how a revolution breaks out and suddenly turns into tragedy, drenched in fanaticism and utopian thinking. In a dialectical process, the clash between oppressors and oppressed generates the reinforcement, in the moment of assimilation, of a new power replacing the previous one.

> Gli stessi che hanno voluto riformare la fede e la Chiesa, hanno riformato anche il vecchio potere, gli hanno fornito una nuova maschera. Le speranze di voi Anabattisti erano legittime: sbugiardare Lutero e proseguire là dove lui si era fermato. Ma la vostra visione della lotta vi faceva dividere il mondo in bianco e nero, cristiani e anticristiani. Una visione del genere serve per vincere una battaglia giusta, ma non basta per realizzare la libertà dello spirito. Al contrario, può costruire nuove prigioni dell'anima, nuovi ricatti morali, nuovi tribunali. (*Q*: 366)

In the dialectical interaction between power and freedom, we can also find in *Q* the theories expressed by Pier Paolo Pasolini about the development of new power. Pasolini argued that the old power promotes the rebellions that should fight power. In this way, the attempts to obtain freedom are actually employed to generate a new power from the old one, preventing the appearance of other, possibly more dangerous, forms of rebellions: 'Il Potere [...] si è servito di chi si è ribellato a lui / in modo estremo, per avere estrema / coscienza di sé' (2001b: 322).

IV. The Reverse Perspective of the Dialectical Process in Altai

Although in *Altai* Wu Ming have placed the dialectical process at the centre of their narrative, the perspective is reversed: the attempts to achieve freedom are not generated from below, as happened in *Q* through a revolution or a rebellion against the old power, but rather from above, with the involvement of another power.

One historical character in the novel, Joseph Nasi, a Jewish statesman and financier who rose to a high status in the Ottoman Empire under sultans Süleyman the Magnificent and Selim II, has planned to conquer the island of Cyprus to the detriment of the old power, represented by the Republic of Venice (moment of fixity). In his intentions, Cyprus should become the Land of Freedom for the Jews and for other oppressed populations scattered all over the world (the moment of instability). Nonetheless, in the moment of assimilation, blood, massacres and violent deaths, which appeared to be necessary in order to build the Land of Freedom, are only manifestations of a new brutal power imposed on defenceless people. Joseph Nasi's troubled and adventurous story caught the interest of Wu Ming, who saw in him an exemplary character to embody freedom, or at least some particular elements of this concept.

Before beginning my analysis, it is worth briefly outlining the plot of the novel along with the traits of the three main characters (Joseph Nasi, Emanuele De Zante and Ismail), who embody contradictory features through which power and freedom are experienced from different perspectives. Published in 2009, *Altai* returns to 16th-century Europe, fifteen years after the end of *Q*, in 1555. In *Altai* Wu Ming have outlined a divided world where two great powers, the Republic of Venice and the Ottoman Empire, are on the verge of a historic conflict, the fourth Ottoman-Venetian War (1570-1573). *Altai* starts with a terrorist attack that has broken out in the Arsenal of Venice in 1569, setting in on fire. The primary suspect is Joseph Nasi (1524-1579), considered by Venice to be one of the most disreputable criminals and terrorists of the time. Similarly to many of Wu Ming's characters, Nasi used different names (Nassi, João Miques/Micas and Dom João Migas Mendes in a Portuguese variant, Giuseppe Nasi in Italian, and as Yasef Nassi in Ottoman Turkish) that were necessary because of his Jewish origins. Joseph was a Jew born in Spain at the time of the Inquisition, when Jews were not permitted to practise their faith. For this reason, Joseph's family, whose men were bankers of world repute, was forced to observe the Jewish practices secretly, changing their name to Mendez. Finding life in Spain unbearable, Nasi's family escaped to Lisbon, managing to save their enormous fortune while hiding their faith. These early experiences pushed Joseph Nasi to cherish the hope that, in the future, all Jews would be able to throw off their disguise and openly practise the faith of their fathers. Therefore, Joseph devoted his whole life to helping defenceless Jews to live in a safer place.

Persecuted by the power of the Inquisition, Nasi was forced to travel through several countries. Freedom for him (for both the real Nasi and the character in the novel) had been an idealised concept for a long time, when he got the opportunity to build a tangible place (Tiberias in the historical accounts and Cyprus in the fictionalised version) where the ideal of freedom could eventually be realised. In his plan, the Jews would no longer be unwelcome guests in the

countries where they lived, subjugated by powers that did not recognise their religion. They would no longer be fugitives, but would rather be settled in one place, where they could be masters of their own destinies and free to practise their faith.

Similarly to Nasi, Emanuele De Zante's identity is also fragmented into several elements. Manuel Cardoso was born in Ragusa (modern-day Dubrovnik) to a Jewish woman, Sarah Cardoso, and an unknown father who suddenly disappeared. As properly underlined by Gaia De Pascale:

> Così Manuel Cardoso è figlio di un padre (veneziano) assente e di una madre (ebrea) a sua volta figlia di "chissà chi". È Manuel Cardoso ed Emanuele De Zante, "giudeo mascherato da cristiano travestito da giudeo", questo e quello, a seconda delle circostanze, dei luoghi, della direzione in cui lo portano le sue alterne fortune. (2009)

After his mother's death, when he was fifteen years old, Manuel was taken by his father, a Venetian sailor, Gioanbattista De Zante, to Venice, where he was forced to hide his faith. The boy was offered another life with a new identity (Emanuele De Zante), a new religion (Christian), and in a new city (Venice). In the Serenissima, Emanuele soon found work in the city's security forces, becoming a secret agent with the supervision of *Consigliere* Bartolomeo Nordio. However, after the fire at the Arsenal, Emanuele, who had been a trusted agent for Venice and knew all the secrets of the Republic, suddenly fell into disgrace. Accused of being a spy, Emanuele was in fact blamed for the explosion and banned from Venice as an outlaw. Thus Emanuele became a fugitive, regained his Jewish identity (Manuel Cardoso), and ended up in Constantinople where he met Joseph Nasi. Together, they devised a plan to conquer Cyprus.

Emanuele's journeys from East to West and then from West to East are not just a self-discovery but also the reconstruction of a destroyed identity (Manuel Cardoso – Emanuele De Zante – Manuel Cardoso again). As underlined by Michael Thomsen:

> *Altai*'s plot circles around a similar absence of identity, with De Zante beginning as an impostor exposed and, through his journey east, discovering a hollowness in his own identity, a never-ending sequence of outer shells to be shed. (2013)

At the Ottoman court, Emanuele met the hero of *Q*, now called Ismail, who in the last pages of *Q* had been hosted by Nasi's family in Venice and then taken to Constantinople. The readers are told that Ismail had left Constantinople to live isolated in a small island on the Bosphorus. Summoned by Joseph Nasi who was looking for an ally for his enterprise, Ismail felt he owed a debt of gratitude to Nasi's family and so decided to team up with Joseph and Emanuele to pursue the conquest of Cyprus, participating in the siege of Famagusta (1570) that ended with the victory of the Ottoman fleet. Nasi's project was praiseworthy: the island of Cyprus would give asylum to the Jews and also to refugees, free spirits and victims of the Inquisition. Moreover, tolerance and harmony would be the foundations of the New Zion.

However, Ismail had already come across similar prophets of the so-called Kingdoms of Freedom (narrated in *Q*). To Ismail the main issue was the obvious distance between an abstract concept and its attainment. He had already fought similar battles, in particular in Münster, experiencing intense disillusions. Freedom, no matter how it was obtained, was just a mirage and never completely achieved. Overall, an intense feeling of disenchantment mixed with sadness invaded Ismail. That is why he decided to leave his companions after the conquest of Famagusta, acknowledging that Nasi's goal to create a land of freedom was only another ephemeral dream.

> – Io nella Nuova Sion ci sono stato, – replicò Ismail. – Ho visto all'opera i profeti del Regno.
> – Mi stai paragonando a loro? Ai pazzi di Münster? – Nasi scacciò quell'idea con un gesto brusco.
> – Non a loro, – rispose Ismail. – Al me stesso di quei giorni. (*A*: 144)

In an interview, Wu Ming underlined this fundamental switch in this character: 'C'è un'assunzione di responsabilità che il protagonista di *Q* non attua… se non appunto in *Altai*. Quando sceglie di sottrarsi alla faida, alla guerra di denari e religioni, per ritornare a "casa", cioè là dove sa di poter essere ancora utile a qualcosa e a qualcuno' (in Amici 2010).

Whilst *Q* has been given considerable critical attention since their publications, *Altai* has received comparatively little consideration. Yet in the few sources that I have drawn on, it is worth mentioning that *Altai* has been read by some critics (Tonino Bucci and Gaia De Pascale) as a novel centred on the theme of utopia. Bucci has argued that what defines the novel above all else is the historical 'riflusso' that characterises the actions of the protagonists: after the disillusions of *Q*, there is no room for other revolutions. Instead, in a more pragmatic way, freedom will be imposed from above by a new power. In keeping with Bucci's argument, and when viewed in this light, Joseph Nasi's actions could actually be seen as legitimising the attainment of freedom through a war of conquest.

V. The Autobiographical Reflections of the Lost Freedom

Although the public had been waiting for the sequel of *Q* for many years, Wu Ming never considered writing one, at least until 2008.

> Non tornammo mai più sull'argomento. Fino ai primi mesi del 2008, quando ci rendemmo conto che il decennale dell'uscita del libro era ormai dietro l'angolo e poteva essere l'occasione giusta per… tornare sulla "scena del crimine" (per alcuni il nostro esordio fu un vero e proprio crimine) e "fare i conti" con *Q*, un romanzo che ormai sentivamo molto distante ma che continuava (e continua tuttora) a condizionare la ricezione delle nostre opere successive. (In Amici 2010: 4)

In *Q*, the theology student with multiple names and identities (Gustav Metzger, Lucas Niemanson, Thomas Puel, Lienhard Jost, Gerrit Boekbinder aka Gert from the Well, Swedartho the locksmith, Lot, Hans Grüeb, Ludwig Schaliedecker or Don Ludovico, Titian and finally

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Ismail) had fought against the powers of the time for the freedom of oppressed people without, however, reaching any positive outcome. As the other Wu Ming's heroes, Ismail reflects the categorical imperative of pursuing freedom with no other purpose and of keeping fighting when the attainment of freedom appears to be unachievable. Together with his companions, in each rebellion and upheaval, Ismail had always been defeated. Nonetheless, he had managed to escape from the slaughters and thus had saved himself. This ending did not satisfy Wu Ming who noticed a lack of completeness in this character. He was still alive, but he had not accomplished anything. The spirit of rebellion inside him was "unworkable", as it merely helped him to move from one revolution to another, without any substantial fulfilment of his deeds. The most important goal for him was keeping on fighting, no matter what the final result would be.

> Questo è l'elemento "consolatorio" che oggi troviamo in *Q*. Il messaggio è: se ci si mantiene "puri" allora non si verrà mai davvero sconfitti e si potrà ancora solcare il mare, andare avanti, sempre avanti, fino alla prossima occasione rivoluzionaria. Questa coerenza assomiglia troppo all'incapacità di vivere e si mostra come un costante oscillare tra esaltazione e autocommiserazione, rivoluzione e repressione, presa della Bastiglia e Termidoro, fase eroica dei movimenti e riflusso etc. Alla fine che cosa resta? Se l'eroe non è mai in grado di "tornare", di portare indietro dall'avventura un "premio" utile al bene collettivo, a cosa serve? (In Amici 2010: 6)

As discussed in the previous sections, there are numerous autobiographical elements openly displayed in *Q* whose main hero, the nameless theology student, allegorically reflects some of Luther Blissett's features, especially the fact that he emerged like a 'media ghost' (Bazzichelli 2008: 25) who fought to subvert power.

Altai, written, as mentioned, ten years after *Q*, is a "container" where Wu Ming have transferred some important events from their lives, giving the novel a strongly autobiographical flavour. To properly understand this fundamental feature in *Altai*, it is necessary to go back to *Q* and precisely to the time between its creation in 1995 and its publication in 1999.

As already highlighted in the previous sections of this chapter, *Q* followed the uprisings in Europe during the Protestant Reformation and the German peasants' wars against the Catholic Church and Princes. Luther Blissett mirrored in the main character in the novel the essence of the fights against the media and political powers of the time. The analysis of Luther Blissett's ideological substratum (whose most important inspiration came from Zapata's National Liberation Army) and the impact that the "revolutionary events" have had on the creation of *Altai*, in particular the so-called Battle of Seattle in 1999 and Genoa's clashes in 2001, are crucial to a deeper understanding of *Altai*.

In *Spettri di Müntzer all'alba*,[81] a text written by Wu Ming on the tenth anniversary of *Q*, the writers admitted that Luther Blissett took inspiration from the Zapatista movement, especially for its media strategy and its collective essence, which would also be at the root of Wu Ming's "faceless revolution": 'L'esempio degli Zapatisti aiutò il LBP a definire il suo intento: strappare l'uso dei miti dalle mani dei reazionari' (Wu Ming 2009).

In the autumn of 1995, someone inside the Luther Blissett Project came up with the idea of writing a historical novel that would reproduce, in a literary way, the essence of the project. A story about peasants' insurgences and upheavals seemed to be the perfect option.

> Pregni com'eravamo di suggestioni zapatiste, decidemmo quasi subito di raccontare la storia di un'insurrezione contadina, anzi: della madre di tutte le insurrezioni moderne, contadine o no che fossero. Quel romanzo sarebbe diventato *Q*. (*Ibid*)

In an allegorical way Luther Blissett narrated the 16th-century German peasants' revolt as a reflection of the present and its revolutions, wars, reprisals, ethnic cleansing, refugees, multinational powers, the growth of capitalism and the emergence of new media. *Q*, set between 1518 and 1555 in a Europe defined by the rivalry between the Holy Roman Emperor

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[81] https://www.wumingfoundation.com/italiano/Giap/giap6_IXa.htm (Accessed 12.04.18)

Charles V Habsburg and Francis I of France, was about the rebellions of the German peasants against the powers of the Princes. At the height of these clashes, the peasants, together with heretics and rebels (i.e. the Anabaptists), were eventually crushed during the upheavals, with their leaders arrested, tortured and beheaded. The rebellions narrated in *Q* can be interpreted in many ways, thanks to the meta-historical allegories embedded in the text. As Wu Ming explained:

> Quegli anni tumultuosi sono, per storici e narratori, un serbatoio di preconizzazioni e tentativi pionieristici, perché i ribelli e i rivoltosi di quel periodo sembrano aver provato ogni sorta di tattiche e strategie. Se prestiamo al XVI secolo l'attenzione che ci chiede, incontreremo anarchici, proto-hippies, socialisti utopici, leninisti tutti d'un pezzo, maoisti mistici, stalinisti folli, le Brigate Rosse, l'Angry Brigade, i Weathermen, Emmett Grogan, Fra' Tuck, il punk, Pol Pot e il compagno Gonzalo di Sendero Luminoso. Una grande armata di spettri e metafore. Inoltre, troveremo sabotatori culturali, body-artists, autori di pamphlet, pubblicisti di fanzines etc. (*Ibid*)

Life and literature came together when Luther Blissett found themselves in the middle of the clashes that happened at the end of the 20th century in many parts of the world. For instance, during the presentations of *Q* in November 1999, the Battle of Seattle broke out. The Seattle protests, which involved a broad coalition of labour unions, student groups, non-governmental organisations, media activists and anarchists, consisted of a series of marches, direct actions and protests that disrupted the World Trade Organization (WTO) Conference. Most importantly, the Seattle demonstrations have been seen as the inauguration of the anti-globalisation movement and one of the first major international mobilisations coordinated via the Internet.

The Italian members of the Luther Blissett Project viewed the Battle of Seattle as profoundly resonating with the content of the novel *Q,* published just a few weeks earlier. The anti-globalisation movement challenged the political, economic and social powers of the time in the same way as the peasants' insurrections in *Q* tried to overturn the established powers in the 16th century.

> Quel nuovo movimento lanciava una sfida alle istituzioni globali che regolavano dall'alto il "libero mercato": il Fondo Monetario Internazionale, la Banca Mondiale, l'Organizzazione Mondiale del Commercio e svariati altri vampiri. Il 2000 fu un anno di intensa organizzazione, protesta e contestazione di importanti summit. Le manifestazioni più significative furono a Praga a fine settembre, quando migliaia di manifestanti ridicolizzarono un vertice congiunto di FMI e Banca Mondiale. C'eravamo anche noi. A un certo punto, il movimento decise che lo showdown, la prova di forza, sarebbe stato la terza settimana di luglio 2001, a Genova, dove era in programma un summit del G8. (*Ibid*)

To the protesters' eyes, the power was visibly represented by those multinational corporations that for decades had been seeking to maximise profit at the expense of work safety conditions, environmental protection, and the integrity of national legislative authority. Following the previous anti-globalisation demonstrations (West Berlin 1988, Paris 1989, Madrid 1994 and Seattle 1999), Genoa (in September 2001) would summarise all the protests that had sparked up before. Most importantly, in the few months that proceeded the G8 summit, the novel *Q* quickly became a sort of "guide to rebellion" from which anyone could take suggestions or advice on how to fight all the agents of power.

> Grazie al passaparola e a Internet, il romanzo [*Q*] stava diventando un best-seller internazionale. Iniziammo a vedere il motto *Omnia sunt communia* su pareti e striscioni. Iniziammo a vedere citazioni da *Q* usate come "firme" nelle e-mail di svariati attivisti. Nei forum del movimento, c'era chi adottava nickname come Magister Thomas o Gert dal Pozzo. Non era che il principio di una strana, controversa, tormentata relazione tra il nostro lavoro letterario e le lotte in corso. Nei mesi che ancora ci separavano da Genova, il nome Wu Ming finì per essere associato più alle nostre trovate "agit-prop" che alla nostra narrativa. (*Ibid*)

Because of the international success of *Q* and its impact with the protesters, Wu Ming were asked to write a Manifesto for the G8 summit, which would summarise the protesters' claims. Wu Ming produced a text entitled *Dalle moltitudini d'Europa in marcia contro l'Impero e verso Genova (19-21 luglio 2001)*[82] where they collected the most important European

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[82] https://www.wumingfoundation.com/italiano/Giap/giapxgenova.html (Accessed 30.01.18)

upheavals and insurrections since the Middle Ages. In this Manifesto, the 20th-century protesters were compared to the revolutionaries from the past, such as the peasants of the Jacquerie, the Ciompi from Florence, the Hussites, the Silesian weavers and so on. The enemies were always the same, even though they had different names throughout history. In a broader sense, power, in its multifaceted components, was perceived as something tangible that could eventually be overturned by the rebellious movements.

A close reading of the Manifesto allows us to appreciate that Luther Blissett's *Q* is strongly present in the writers' thoughts. It seemed to Wu Ming that what was written in *Q* could eventually find a concrete realisation in the real world, hopefully with a different outcome. The demonstrators of Genoa 2001 could take inspiration from the events of Frankenhausen and Münster as narrated in *Q*, trying to avoid the mistakes of the past. This Manifesto is important to Wu Ming, as both writers and activists, because it combined historical fiction with reality. Genoa was the place where the ideals of freedom against the established powers, at the core of both the novel and the anti-globalisation movement, could ultimately attain a concrete achievement.

In Italy, the Manifesto caught the attention of some newspapers.[83] Journalist Franco Cardini focussed on the examples presented in the Manifesto related to the rebels who, in different periods of history, were crushed in their attempt to overturn power. In a striking image, Cardini imagined these dead rebels marching together with the young protesters in the streets of Genoa.

> L'appello è una dichiarazione di guerra. Politica e storica: ma anche transtorica e transpolitica, metastorica e metapolitica. I potenti della Terra riuniti a Genova per il G8 e i loro colti e strapagati consulenti e collaboratori non si troveranno davanti solo il "popolo di Seattle", i ragazzini delle scuole, i ragazzacci dei centri sociali e un po' di disgraziati e di fricchettoni assortiti in vena di suonar chitarre e di spaccar vetrine. O meglio, quelli ci saranno,

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[83] *Siamo l'esercito dei ribelli. Ecco il manifesto di Genova*
http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2001/07/10/siamo-esercito-dei-ribelli-ecco-il-manifesto.html (Accessed 30.01.18)

> certo: ma con loro, dietro di loro, assieme a loro, dentro di loro marcerà un
> immenso Popolo di Morti. E il documento le passa in rassegna, queste armate
> coperte dalla polvere dei secoli e disperse dal vento della storia e le chiama
> per nome, con l'epica pignoleria dell'omerico "Catalogo delle Navi". (2001)

Although Wu Ming had conceived the Manifesto with genuine intentions, it is easy to observe an abuse of rhetoric in many sections of the text. Moreover, the main downside was to metaphorically indicate the 'Empire' as a castle to be besieged. While the image of a castle sieged by a multitude of peasants contains in itself a strong sense of rebellion against a concrete location (the castle) representing power, in Genoa, and more in general in the modern world, castles as centres of power no longer exist. The huge mistake in the Manifesto was to sell a metaphor (castle equals power) as real. In fact, there were no castles to be attacked in Genoa. In the light of the events that happened during the protests, Wu Ming were forced to admit this huge misconception of the whole situation.

> Benché suggestiva ed efficace, la metafora era fallace. Nessun assedio era in
> corso, perché non si poteva assediare un potere che era ovunque e la cui
> principale manifestazione erano flussi di elettroni in continuo transito di borsa
> valori in borsa valori. Quella fallacia avrebbe avuto conseguenze pesanti.
> Stavamo scambiando le cerimonie formali del potere per il potere stesso. (Wu
> Ming 2009)

Undoubtedly, the clashes between demonstrators and police, as well as the night raids led by security forces against activists and independent journalists at the Diaz-Pascoli and Diaz-Pertini schools,[84] would have happened anyway, with or without the publication of the Manifesto. From Wu Ming's point of view, however, these events would remain etched in their memories for a long time.

> Noi Wu Ming fummo tra i più zelanti nell'esortare la gente ad andare a
> Genova, e più di altri aiutammo il potere a tendere l'imboscata. Dopo il bagno
> di sangue, ci occorse un bel po' di tempo - e molto rimuginare - per capire

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[84] The raid has been called a 'Mexican butchery shop' by the assistant Chief of Police Michelangelo Fournier: 'Sembrava una macelleria messicana. Durante le indagini non ebbi il coraggio di rivelare un comportamento così grave da parte dei poliziotti per spirito di appartenenza'.
http://www.repubblica.it/2007/06/sezioni/cronaca/g8-genova/g8-genova/g8-genova.html (Accessed 02.02.18)

quali fossero stati i nostri errori, quelli specifici, nel quadro più ampio degli errori del movimento. Era evidente che qualcosa era andato storto nella nostra prassi "mitopoietica", la costruzione di miti dal basso che era - e per certi versi è ancora - il fondamento del nostro lavoro. [...] Noi finimmo per diventare "funzionari" alla manipolazione delle metafore e all'evocazione dei miti. [...] A Genova non si verificò una sconfitta "militare", ma una catastrofe culturale. (*Ibid*)

On this occasion, the creation of myths from below, mythopoeia, which is at the core of Wu Ming's literature, had disastrous consequences. The feeling of sorrow following that event, as well as the sensation of guilt for having misunderstood the profound meaning of the situation, weighed on their minds. The novel *Altai* emerged from that defeat and from how wrongly things turned out in those days, along with a sour sense of disillusionment. With *Altai,* Wu Ming wanted to reverse the concept of freedom as a pure ideal arising from below through a revolution against the old power, focussing on the conquest of freedom from above by another power. Nonetheless, it does not mean that this different process would reach a positive outcome. On the contrary, as I will highlight in the next section, the attempt to realise the attainment of freedom through the imposition of a new power will not end successfully. Ultimately, the desire for freedom, whether experienced from below (*Q*) or from above (*Altai*), has the same outcome: failure.

VI. From Q to Altai: the "Unworkable" Freedom

As mentioned in the previous section, *Q* narrates the adventures of an allegorical/autobiographical hero who, after many rebellions and defeats, at the end of the novel left Europe to reach Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire. While the figure of the resilient hero fighting for the freedom of oppressed people attracted the readers' empathy, the whole story left a feeling of incompleteness, as Wu Ming explained in an interview: 'Se l'eroe non è

mai in grado di "tornare", di portare indietro dall'avventura un "premio" utile al bene collettivo, a cosa serve?' (In Amici 2010: 6).

With *Altai*, Wu Ming aimed at overturning the idea of freedom as a pure ideal that cannot be concretely experienced, centring the narration around the historical figure of Joseph Nasi whose plan was the conquest of freedom from above. In *Altai*, the longing for freedom did not come from below, through a revolution against an established power, as happened in the other novels, but rather from above, as a result of the military conquest of Cyprus after the Ottoman invasion of Famagusta (August 1571). In Nasi's vision, the island would be the Land of Freedom for the Jews and other persecuted people in the world. As Tonino Bucci has noted, in *Altai* the rebels are thus eliminated from the scene:

> A differenza di *Q* in cui si raccontava di soggetti collettivi in rivolta contro il potere, di insurrezioni urbane, di contadini che nelle eresie religiose cercano uno strumento di ribellione contro sovrani e nobili, in *Altai* ci troviamo in pieno "riflusso". È finita l'epoca degli eretici che volevano costruire società comunistiche. Nessuno sogna più di poter realizzare in terra il regno dei cieli. Di quei sogni è rimasto solo il ricordo della sconfitta e del fallimento. I personaggi di *Altai* convivono spesso col tormento, il dubbio e la delusione anche se non smettono per questo di pensare a come cambiare il mondo. (2009)

In order to conquer Cyprus from Venice, Nasi did not need revolutions. In fact he took advantage of his position inside the Sultan's court to foster diplomatic relationships and thus gather a coalition against Venice and her catholic allies. In a pragmatic way, the "power of freedom" would be imposed from above, in the sense that Nasi made strategically clear his determination to build the Land of Freedom in Cyprus, a future free nation that, as said, would be a refuge for the Jews but also a haven for persecuted people in the world.

> Chi meglio dei giudei, da sempre perseguitati, potrà accogliere i perseguitati di tutta Europa? Il regno di Cipro potrà dare asilo ai fuggiaschi, agli spiriti liberi, alle vittime dell'Inquisizione. Non importa quale sarà il loro credo, purché siano disposti a costruire la casa comune. Tolleranza e concordia saranno le fondamenta della Nuova Sion. (*A*: 202)

Moreover, in Nasi's project, freedom was experienced as the capacity to act, to begin, to start something new and unexpected: 'Era pur sempre un inizio. La generazione successiva avrebbe ereditato un Regno' (*A*: 161). As already demonstrated in relation to the other novels, even in *Altai* one of the most significant features of freedom, as explained by Hannah Arendt, emerged: action as the realisation of a new beginning: 'being free and the capacity to begin something new coincided' (2006: 164). In *Altai*, freedom occurs through a particular beginning, when something new comes into the world: in Nasi's plan, this beginning is the creation of a new Zion in the land of Cyprus, where freedom can ultimately be attained in a concrete place.

> Immagina una terra in cui potremo vivere in pace, commerciare, coltivare la vite, l'ulivo e la tolleranza. Un luogo dove potresti scegliere la dimora che ti abbiamo promesso. Una libera nazione, che sia rifugio per tutti noi, per i liberi invisi ai despoti, e per chiunque sia perseguitato (*A*: 69)

After all, freedom would be imposed from above through a war of conquest led by a powerful empire (the Ottomans) to the detriment of another strong power (Venice), and not from below through a revolution. This point is of the outmost importance if we relate *Altai* to the other Wu Ming's novels (and also to Luther Blissett's *Q*) where, on the contrary, all the desires for freedom emerged from below, through rebellions led by oppressed people. In the light of this consideration, the main question that arises from *Altai* is the following: To what extent might freedom be achieved through the imposition of a stronger power? Other helpful questions related to this aspect have been posed by Bucci:

> Il vero tema affascinante di *Altai* è: si può cambiare il mondo sfruttando gli intrighi di potere? [...] Affidarsi agli eserciti e alle congiure di potere non finirà per contaminare la purezza dell'ideale? Bisogna rinunciare a intervenire nel corso degli eventi per timore di diventare uguali agli altri, di farsi corresponsabili delle atrocità della guerra e del potere? Oppure è inevitabile che ci si sporchi le mani per poter cambiare il mondo? Le vittorie, certo, possono arrivare, ma a quale prezzo? (2009)

In considering these questions, I want to isolate the motifs related to the dialectical relationship between power and freedom that, as said before, emerges in *Altai* from a different perspective. In so doing, I will consider this new viewpoint (freedom imposed from above by another power) as an important element of enquiry that is essential for a deeper understanding of the novel. Although the three moments of fixity, instability and assimilation in which the dialectical relationship is structured appear in *Altai* in a similar way to the other novels, what comes across most clearly is the difference in how freedom is "imposed" in the moment of instability. Here, in fact, the desire for freedom does not emerge from below through a revolution against power, but rather by the imposition of another power from above: the island of Cyprus is conquered by the Ottoman Empire to the detriment of the Republic of Venice's old power (which represents the moment of fixity). Consequently, the determination that was fixed in the first moment (old power) cannot move to its opposite (freedom). The moment of assimilation does not grasp the unity of the opposition between the first two determinations (old power and freedom) because there is no contradiction to reconcile.

> Nasi non si stava soltanto affidando all'esercito più potente del mondo: lo stava finanziando. Forse era questa la sua speranza: riscuotere il credito in una moneta ben più sonante dell'oro e dell'argento. Comprare la libertà del futuro regno. Non sarebbero stati gli israeliti a conquistare Gerico, ma il denaro di un ebreo lo avrebbe reso possibile. (*A*: 131)

As usually happens in the dialectical process between power and freedom as analysed in the previous chapters, in *Altai* Wu Ming have narrated the conquest of Cyprus through violent deaths and massacres which were a fair price to pay in order to build a Kingdom of Freedom. For this reason, in a crucial passage in the novel, Nasi declares that there has never been a kingdom on earth that had not been born from the blood of the conquered.

> Non vi è regno che non nasca dal sangue dei vinti. Il primo solco di Roma fu bagnato da un fratricidio. La mano del Signore aiutò i nostri padri a disperdere e annichilire le genti di Canaan. Le loro città vennero distrutte e gli abitanti passati a fil di spada. (*A*: 164)

Bloodshed is therefore necessary in order to obtain freedom from above. During the siege of Famagusta, resulting in the capture of Cyprus by the Ottomans, Wu Ming dwelled on a detailed description of the consequences of the battle with images of corpses burnt by the sun and ravaged by death, along with blood-thickened sea foam and the smell of gunpowder, pitch and saltpetre.

> Appena sbarcati, ci accolse l'odore di Famagosta. Penetrante, difficile da definire. Provocava disgusto persino a noi, ormai abituati al tanfo della nave. Effluvi di polvere da sparo e legna marcia, sentori di pece e salnitro. L'odore dei cadaveri, cotti dal sole e sfatti dalla morte. (*A*: 147)

As in the other narrations of war previously analysed in this thesis, in *Altai* the details are also efficient reminders of classic warfare, where the victims of conflicts lay where they had died for weeks, decomposing, while new corpses fell on top of them. There is no mercy for the defeated, whose blood will pollute the soil for generations to come. At the end, the siege of Famagusta ended with Nasi's success, together with the slaughter and the horrible death of the Venetian Captain-General, Marcantonio Bragadin, who was flayed alive on 17 August 1571.

> L'indomani, portarono Bragadin nella piazza principale. Il volto tumefatto, le ferite alle orecchie ridotte a piaghe purulente. A spinte e calci lo condussero al palo. Due rinnegati si incaricarono del supplizio, uno dicono fosse genovese. Lo vedevo parlare alla vittima, ma non coglievo le parole. Il brusio e gli scoppi di insulti cessarono. Sulla piazza calò il silenzio. Il genovese passò la lama di un coltellaccio da spalla a spalla, dietro la testa del rettore Marcantonio Bragadin. Dicono che non urlò. Mentono. Il genovese e il suo assistente, con meticolosa lentezza, scuoiarono quell'uomo. Prima la schiena, poi gambe e braccia, poi il tronco e il petto, scollando il grasso dalla pelle. Il Rettore mandava grida, si torceva, impedito dai legacci. Mosche volarono sulla carne viva. I miei compagni e io non distogliemmo lo sguardo. Al Rettore fu risparmiato di vedere la propria pelle sventolare davanti agli occhi. Reclinò il capo molto prima. (*A*: 162)

This excerpt is fundamental to a narrative in which Wu Ming have brought to light the conquest of freedom from above through a massacre. In many pages of the novel (*A*: 139-168), Wu Ming

have accurately described the siege to the Venetian fortress in Famagusta by the Ottoman Empire. The focus is on the last days of resistance, when the Turks eventually succeeded in conquering the city and their commander, Lala Mustafa, decided to take revenge on the Venetian captain Marcantonio Bragadin by flaying him alive.

Emanuele (through whom Wu Ming speak), a witness of the bloodbath, asked Nasi whether these could be the foundations of the New Zion. There was no happy conclusion after the massacre, and the victory should not be confused with the prospect of giving the wanderers of the earth a safe place to live. The conquest of the Land of Freedom ended with violated agreements and the slaughter of the Venetians who had previously surrendered. After the fall of Famagusta, the word *victory* seemed meaningless. The price paid in blood did not correspond to the ideal of freedom that Emanuele (and Wu Ming) had imagined. In the novels written before *Altai*, massacres and bloodbaths were necessary to the oppressed populations that wanted to attain or regain their freedom. In fact, the rebellions in *Q*, *Asce di guerra*, *54* and *Manituana* came from below, from the desperation of people (German peasants, Anabaptists, partisans, rebel settlers) who did not have any other way of attaining their freedom but through wars of liberation. In *Altai*, as already stated, the perspective has been completely overturned: freedom would be imposed from above thanks to a war conducted by a foreign army (the fleet of the Ottoman Empire) for the sake of the Jewish people.

> Nasi rispose che lo sapeva. Molte voci mi avevano preceduto. Usò la parola «vittoria». A quale prezzo, Yossef. Campagne depredate e devastate da non lasciare un filo d'erba. Sangue sparso a fiumi. Un immenso cimitero attorno a Famagosta. (*A*: 163)

To Emanuele's eyes, Cyprus would be stained with shame for centuries and the bloodshed would never be redeemed: 'Il massacro chiama vendetta. Sangue chiama sangue. L'uomo lava con sangue d'innocente il sangue versato in precedenza, finché una chiazza orrenda s'allarga sulla terra' (*A*: 161). This image of blood pouring over the ground (and all over the earth) was

evoked, in a metaphorical way, in a previous page of the novel where Nasi was examining the map of Cyprus before the beginning of the war. Accidentally, Nasi spilled wine on the map, leaving a huge wine stain on the picture of the island:

> Nasi riempì di nuovo il bicchiere e tracannò il vino in un sorso. Una goccia scivolò sulla barba e cadde dal mento. La mano scattò per impedire che macchiasse la mappa, il gomito urtò la caraffa. Il vino si allargò rapido sul disegno dell'isola. (*A*: 143)

Through this metaphorical description, Wu Ming anticipated the main theme of the novel: the "Promised Land" was soaked in wine/blood, a utopian place of freedom imposed by power from above. As correctly suggested by Gaia De Pascale, this oxymoron – freedom imposed by power – cannot be easily disentangled: such freedom, even though conceived with the best intentions, would always be lacking in "purity" and therefore doomed to fail.

> È nelle Scritture che risiede l'unica Terra Promessa possibile. È la Parola che costituisce l'unica vera patria che non sia solo terra dei padri ma anche, e soprattutto, terra dei figli. I libri dunque, quelli che riempiono la biblioteca di Nasi, possono essere il fondamento dell'identità di un popolo, e non la carta geografica macchiata del vino/sangue di una conquista calata dall'alto, di un'utopia costruita a tavolino e incarnata da un luogo fisico nel quale esercitare un potere, per quanto "buono" nelle sue intenzioni. (De Pascale 2010)

I would argue that Nasi's actions, along with his plan full of good intentions, reflect the Hegelian notion of 'unreason' in history that is associated with passions, violence and also righteous aims. In this perspective, in the development of the story Nasi behaved like a fool unable to recognise the meaning of the whole situation. Narrow-minded, he perceived only part of the entire picture. His ideal of building a Land of Freedom through a war of conquest, while animated by a legitimate goal, cannot succeed in producing a long-term peace. As Hegel maintained:

> Se consideriamo questo spettacolo delle passioni, ci poniamo innanzi agli occhi, nella storia, le conseguenze della loro violenza, della irragionevolezza

che è connessa non solo ad esse, ma anche, e ci si potrebbe persino dire soprattutto, a quelle che sono buone intenzioni, scopi giuridicamente legittimi. (1941: 57)

To Nasi, a supreme principle was represented by the battle of Cyprus whose massacres were only a necessary step: 'Tra cent'anni nessuno dei giovani di Cipro darà importanza a quel che è successo. Da oggi, questa guerra è il passato. Il nostro regno è il futuro. Il futuro di tutta la nostra gente' (*A*: 164). Some Hegelian reflections counterbalance the positive aspects envisaged by Nasi:

> Ma pure quando consideriamo la storia come un simile mattatoio, in cui sono state condotte al sacrificio la fortuna dei popoli, la sapienza degli stati e la virtù degli individui, il pensiero giunge di necessità anche a chiedersi in vantaggio di chi, e di quale finalità ultima, siano stati compiuti così enormi sacrifici. (Hegel 1941: 58)

In fact, the novel narrates how, after the conquest of Famagusta through bloodshed and the illusion of building the land of freedom, the Ottoman fleet was defeated in the Battle of Lepanto some months later (*A*: 175-181). Therefore, Nasi's project ended in tatters without any other opportunity to reverse the outcome of the battle. The attempt to attain freedom through a war of conquest did not end successfully.

If we now compare the ending of *Altai* to that of *Q*, summarised at the beginning of this chapter, it seems clear that the desire for freedom, no matter if born from below (*Q*) or from above (*Altai*), reaches the same conclusion: failure. Just as the rebellions in *Q* ended in total defeat, with the hero forced to flee to save his life, the same happened in *Altai*. Therefore, as correctly suggested by De Pascale, the utopia of a place where to live in peace would just reflect its etymological meaning of no-place (*οὐ τόπος*) because it cannot possibly exist.

> Yossef coltiva un folle sogno: regalare al popolo della diaspora la Terra Promessa, un'isola felice da cui ricominciare per riparare il mondo e fondare la nuova Sion. Ma il prezzo di questo sogno è altissimo: la conquista di Cipro a ogni costo, con l'appoggio del Sultano e il contrasto armato di Venezia e delle potenze cattoliche. Tutto si risolverà in un bagno di sangue, una macchia

rossa che allaga qualsiasi prospettiva di utopia realizzata dall'alto. (2010)

In *Storie di utopia a Istanbul* Bucci has underlined that Wu Ming have focussed on a historical event – the conquest of Cyprus – that could only theoretically realise the utopia of the attainment of freedom from above.

> Anno 1569. Le rivolte in nome delle eresie religiose sono fallite. Ora c'è chi vuol cambiare il mondo con gli intrighi di palazzo. [...] Di nuovo il collettivo si misura col tema dell'utopia. Di nuovo troviamo in *Altai* personaggi inquieti, alla ricerca di una vita diversa e di un mondo migliore. [...] Ma il rapporto con l'utopia è più pragmatico, più realista. [...] C'è innanzitutto lo stesso sforzo di narrare personaggi e vicende di utopia negli interstizi della Storia ufficiale. (2009)

In these 'interstizi della storia', as Bucci has suggested, Wu Ming worked on the recovery of a historical event that had been overlooked or misinterpreted.[85] As in their other novels, in *Altai* Wu Ming also created counter-narrations to shed light on some ambiguous dark patches or shadows where they could fill the gaps that official historiography had left unexplored. Wu Ming's novels are in fact characterised by experimentation with unexpected gazes and unusual perspectives that belong to those who have been on the "wrong side" of history, the defeated. Interviewed on this crucial aspect of *Altai*, Wu Ming underlined that:

> Noi spesso scendiamo tra i "demoni dell'inferno", in cerca di storie che valga la pena raccontare. Ma prima di tutto, noi cerchiamo di adottare punti di vista stranianti, e questo ricorso porta spesso (non sempre) a raccontare dal punto di vista degli sconfitti. (In Amici 2010: 6)

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[85] On this crucial point, Wu Ming explained that: 'Pochi giorni dopo l'uscita di *Altai*, *La Padania* uscì con il titolo cubitale: UN'ALTRA LEPANTO PER FERMARE L'ISLAM. È evidente che la Lega Nord non sa nulla di quella battaglia, o meglio, di quella guerra, che l'Occidente "perse". Il catenaccio dell'articolo diceva, tra le altre cose, che "La battaglia di Lepanto fermò l'ondata islamica in Occidente". A parte il fatto che in Occidente non vi era alcuna ondata islamica (e che in ogni caso l'Islam dell'impero ottomano non era quello di Al Qaeda), andrebbe spiegato a questi analfabeti storici che nel secolo successivo l'impero ottomano toccò il culmine della propria potenza, e che nel 1683 (centododici anni dopo Lepanto) i turchi arrivarono alle porte di Vienna. Ma *La Padania* non ha fatto altro che riportare una vulgata plurisecolare, costruita dalla propaganda successiva alla battaglia. Quindi, pur trattandosi di un episodio famosissimo, resta pochissimo conosciuto al di fuori delle cerchie di specialisti. C'è differenza tra famoso e conosciuto' (in Amici 2010).

In the end, this utopia ended very soon with the Battle of Lepanto (1571) and the success of Venice and her allies. Therefore, after the conquest of Famagusta and the brief dream of making Cyprus a Land of Freedom, the Ottoman fleet was then defeated in Lepanto one year later, destroying Nasi's project.

VII. Allegories of Terrorism

As I outlined in my Introduction and in the previous chapters, I have argued throughout this thesis that the texts produced by Luther Blissett and Wu Ming all contain allegory (in particular, meta-historical allegory) as a fundamental element representing the multi-faceted ways in which the dialectical relationship between power and freedom has been mirrored through time. Before considering the allegorical implications in *Altai*, I refer to what Wu Ming1 wrote in the *Memorandum* about how meta-historical allegory functions:

> L'allegoria metastorica si può descriverla come il rimbalzare di una palla in una stanza a tre pareti mobili, ma anche come un continuo saltare su tre piani temporali: il tempo rappresentato nell'opera (che è sempre un passato, anche quando l'ambientazione è contemporanea); il presente in cui l'opera è stata scritta (che, anch'esso, è già divenuto passato); il presente in cui l'opera viene fruita, in qualunque momento questo accada: stasera o la prossima settimana, nel 2050 o tra diecimila anni. (Wu Ming1 2008: 25)

In this section I would like to show how in *Altai* there are clear elements directly recalling a crucial contemporary historical event, the coordinated terrorist attack on the United States that happened on 11 September 2001, when nineteen men trained by al-Qaeda simultaneously hijacked four large passenger aircraft with the intention of crashing them into major landmarks in the United States. In order to do so, I will take into consideration the novel's opening, where an explosion is set off in the Venetian Arsenal.

> Il cuore della Serenissima in fiamme. [...] Nella calle, facce attonite si interrogavano a vicenda, avvolte da un silenzio spaurito. I più audaci

> sussurravano i nomi di Terremoto e Apocalisse. Intere famiglie abbandonavano le case, alcune saltando dai balconi come dalle murate di un vascello che affonda. La seconda esplosione disperse il gregge in una nube di ceneri e grida. Balzai al centro della calle per scansare una valanga di tegole, alzai gli occhi e le vidi. Due gondole volavano nel cielo di Venezia. Avevano ali di fiamma e parabole incerte, come di uccelli feriti. Una andò a schiantarsi sul campanile che batteva incessante l'allarme degli incendi. L'altra scomparve alla vista, oltre il sipario dei tetti. (*A*: 9)

If we compare this excerpt of the novel to the 9/11 terrorist attack, many correspondent elements emerge from the scenes. For example, the first gondola that crashed into the bell tower at the Arsenal's gates can correspond to the American-Airlines Boeing 767 that dived into the north tower of the World Trade Center in New York City. The other gondola is the second Boeing 767 that, 18 minutes after the first plane hit, appeared out of the sky and plunged into the south tower. Everything was shrouded in smoke while flames erupted from the towers. The collisions caused a massive explosion that showered burning debris over the surrounding buildings and onto the streets below. Images of people throwing themselves out of the windows of the buildings have been committed to our collective memory.

As seen in the above-mentioned excerpt, a similar attack has been narrated in the opening of *Altai*: the wind carried the smell of the explosion while flames were surrounding the Arsenal. In the streets, people were shocked and speechless in front of what appeared to be an apocalyptic earthquake. An evacuation of the tower (the World Trade Center and the Arsenal) got underway to find secure shelter for those who were trying to escape the attack. Like multitudes of people crowded onto the streets and bridges to evacuate lower Manhattan, so many walked across the bridges and *calli* in Venice (*A*: 10)

Through this allegorical interpretation, I would argue that the terrorist attacks, in New York just like in Venice, were intended to hit at the "heart" of the political and economic power of their times. In New York, the iconic twin towers of downtown Manhattan's World Trade Center were the hub of the busy Financial District, the symbol of America's unceasing progress and economic growth. Not only did the 9/11 attack destroy the twin columns of glass and steel

that over the years had come to embody the city itself, but, most importantly, they destroyed a symbol of power and an icon of popular culture.

Similarly to the Twin Towers, the Venetian Arsenal, at the heart of the city, represented one of the most important political and economic powers of the 16th century. In fact, thanks to the massive ships built in the Arsenal, through the centuries Venice was able to first dominate the Adriatic and then to compete with the Turks for the control of the eastern part of the Mediterranean (this theme is at the core of *Altai*). The Arsenal produced most of Venice's maritime trading vessels, which generated much of the city's economic wealth and power. What has emerged from *Altai* is a direct correspondence between past and present with clusters of events that repeat themselves throughout history. On this subject, Ian Sansom has pointed out that Wu Ming have re-enacted historical events (in *Altai*, it is the fourth Ottoman-Venetian War), with strong analogies to today's powers.

> Another Wu Ming trait is the use of historical fiction as a form of cultural protest. We sometimes forget that the historical novel, ironically, is essentially a form of experimental fiction – counter-factual, anti-realist, and anti the dull mid-range of our everyday experience. Using this apparently conventional form, Wu Ming are able to reinterpret and reconstruct reality according to their own aims and intentions. There are doubtless parallels, for example, between the despoiling, warring powers depicted in *Altai* and the rapacious nation states of today. (2013)

The allegory takes on great relevance when one fundamental feature of power emerges from the comparison: stability. In both cases, the World Trade Center and the Arsenal are emblematic symbols of the established powers that seemed steady and long-lasting. In the terrorists' perspective, power appeared to be strong both in its abstract and physical essences. In the analysis of this significant element, Flavio Pintarelli has emphasised the importance of "physicality" in the representation of power, focussing on the opposition between the verticality of power, which lasts over time, and the horizontality of the terrorists' attacks, which on the contrary happened only in a precise moment in history.

> Questa immagine [degli attacchi] si caratterizza in particolare per l'opposizione che si determina tra la verticalità del campanile e l'orizzontalità della gondola che vi si infrange contro. A questa opposizione di carattere topologico, verticalità/orizzontalità, corrisponde un'opposizione tra due categorie temporali: consuetudine/eccezionalità. Questo poiché alla verticalità del campanile si può associare l'immutabilità del tempo (non a caso, per molti secoli, il campanile ha assolto alla funzione di regolare il tempo e scandire la vita delle comunità) mentre all'orizzontalità della gondola l'eccezionalità di un avvenimento imprevisto, quale appunto l'attentato; idea suggerita anche dal fatto che la gondola si trova al di fuori del proprio elemento, l'acqua, e dunque letteralmente fuori posto. (2012)

With Pintarelli we can agree that the dichotomy verticality/horizontality is certainly an effective representation of the relationship between power and freedom, when the horizontality of the attacks, rebellions and revolutions represent the attempts to disintegrate (in a tangible way) the verticality of powers which appear to be stable and eternal.

In addition to the above-mentioned dichotomy, we can also identify the relationship West/East and Catholicism/Islamism not as clashes of civilisations but rather as solid interconnections between the two blocks. When asked about this issue in an interview, Wu Ming1 recognised that the two civilisations (the Western Catholic Republic of Venice and the Eastern Islamic Ottoman Empire) were in fact intensely intertwined:

> The fascinating thing about the Ottoman Empire and southern Europe in those days is that everything was multifarious. The two civilisations were connected, they were intertwined with each other. The battle of Cyprus is often depicted, especially by the Italian far right, as the moment that we defeated Islam, and it's described as a clash of civilisations as though those two civilisations were two solid blocks. But instead they were two fluid blocks merging with each other, contaminating each other, cross-fertilising. (In Legge 2013)

In this chapter, I have examined the ways in which the dialectical relationship between power and freedom emerged from two reversed perspectives. I have also analysed how the autobiographical elements reflecting Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's concept of power and freedom have converged in both *Q* and *Altai*. Through a close analysis of the thematic elements in the novel, I have shown how freedom is "unworkable", no matter from which perspective

(whether from below or above) it is wished. Yet freedom, as intended in Wu Ming's novels, is a political concept and it emerges in a given organised community and through the interactions between individuals. This political concept of freedom means that it exists within the political sphere and only there can it succeed or fail. As seen in the previous chapters, the attainment of freedom, hoped for in the moment of instability, is merely an illusion when the new power arises at the moment of assimilation. In *Altai*, although the perspective has been reversed, freedom is still "unworkable" and characters can see their condition of being free only as a mirage.

CHAPTER THREE

THE DIALECTICAL PROCESS OF THE AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE IN MANITUANA

This chapter will explore the representation of the dialectical process of power and freedom from the point of view of those who represented the old power. In fact, *Manituana* narrates the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783), also known as the American War of Independence, between the colonies of North America and the British Empire, mostly from the point of view of the Iroquois who sided with King George III. *Manituana* focusses on how the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy (Mohawk, Oneida, Cayuga, Onondaga, Seneca and Tuscarora), the dominant Native-American confederation in the British colonies, were divided between those who sided with the British allies and those who fought with the rebellious colonists. The war between rebels against loyal colonists and their Native Americans allies crushed the confederacy, destroying the mixed community of indigenous and white settlers who lived in the Mohawk Valley in New York, east of Lake Ontario. Here, Native Americans and the settlers loyal to the British Empire had managed to build a hybrid society where the traditions and customs of the indigenous people were maintained and respected.

I. Clashes between Power and Freedom

In their novels, Wu Ming narrate stories dealing with the eternal battle between the oppressors and the oppressed through a dialectical relationship. In *Manituana* this dialectical development has been seen in a different perspective, more specifically from the point of view of Native Americans who demonstrated (at least in the case of some tribes) a resilient commitment to the established power, the British Empire, against the afflatus of freedom

emerging from the rebellious settlers. In opposition to the stereotype of a rebellion led by brave patriots defending their noble ideals against an oppressive empire, Wu Ming have described the Revolution as an extremely violent war. Moreover, Wu Ming have also challenged the oversimplified images created in Western literature and cinema where the innocent Native Americans lived in harmony with nature and were sacrificed for the expansion of the white settlers.[86]

> When we think of American Indians,[87] we think of packs of wild horses, buffalo hunts on vast prairies, soldiers in blue destroying villages in the name of progress and the railways. We're all too influenced by the mythology created in the Western film genre. (In Bertante et al. 2007)

Therefore, in contrast to standardised images that for centuries, either in a good or bad way, have considered Native Americans as either noble savages or ruthless cut-throats, Wu Ming have argued that for many decades the infantilisation of the indigenous people of America has prevented a truthful account of the American Revolutionary War. In *Manituana,* Wu Ming have given the Native Americans, who act as political agents in the process of Independence, an active role and a central place in the narration. As politicians who have to cope with a challenging situation – the war was fought for the conquest of their land – the Native Americans play different roles: they strike agreements, make deals, suffer divisions, fight, and commit massacres.[88] By describing the Revolutionary War from the Native Americans' perspective and

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[86] To mention but a few: *Drums Along the Mohawk* (1939) by John Ford; *The Devil's Disciple* (1959) by Guy Hamilton; *Revolution* (1985) by Hugh Hudson; *April Morning* (1988) by Delbert Mann; *The Patriot* (2000) by Roland Emmerich; *Strong and Brave Fellows* (2003) by Glenn A. Knoblock. In an interview, Wu Ming1 stated that: 'Gli irochesi che combatterono al fianco di Giorgio III contro l'esercito continentale rivoluzionario è cosa nota, ma a chi? Nella vulgata sulla guerra d'indipendenza, nei film come *The Patriot* con Mel Gibson, gli indiani sono assenti. E anche le narrazioni di quella guerra dal punto di vista "lealista" sono molto rare. Quindi, nonostante quegli eventi siano praticamente mappati in scala 1:1, stanno in un cono d'ombra. E noi siamo andati a esplorarlo' (in Amici 2010).

[87] I will keep the term 'Indians' when quoting from original sources, such as texts and interviews.

[88] On this crucial point, in an interview Wu Ming4 explained that: 'There were good and bad people on both sides, the Indians practised politics exactly like everyone else. There were differences of opinion, attempts to deceive, private interests mixed with collective ones. The reality was much more complex than what has been usually represented. And we didn't try to simplify anything; we tried to depict this complexity, even in the psychology of the characters' (in Bertante et al 2007).

beyond the edulcorated view of American mythology, Wu Ming have also overcome the legends of the "good guys" who liberated the colonies from the yoke of the oppressive British Empire.

Wu Ming have narrated the American Revolutionary War through a complex web of relationships between patriots and loyalists, Native Americans and settlers. Violence touched all Americans, old and new: no one was innocent in this war and all sides committed atrocities. Blood is indeed one key element in the novel and its colour reveals the brutal essence of the clashes between those who defend the established power and those who long for freedom.

> C'era sangue dappertutto, tutto il sangue del mondo. [...] Il sangue cambia tutto, c'è un prima e c'è un dopo. [...] Sangue incessante, frenetico, nutre sterminate distese d'uomini, più di quanti sia possibile immaginare, più del più grande stormo di colombi migratori (*M*: 147, 148, 256).

In the American Revolution narrated in *Manituana*, neighbours killed neighbours, indigenous Native Americans slaughtered Patriots, Patriots destroyed Indian villages, British soldiers committed atrocities, loyalists killed colonists on the battlefield and vice versa. Through the novel, Wu Ming have claimed that nothing was simple in this Revolution. On the contrary, it was a complex matter mostly drenched in blood. As highlighted by Saviano:

> *Manituana* isn't in any way a book on the history of the Native Americans; it's not the umpteenth text about the Indians. And it's this fact that is, perhaps, the secret behind the necessity of its existence, behind the word of mouth that's allowed the book to circulate. […] *Manituana* isn't cowboys and Indians, not the evil scalping Indians versus the good settlers, bringers of civilization. And neither is it the good Indians versus the evil Americans. Atrocities occur on every front. (2007)

In this context of extreme violence from each side, power and freedom are intertwined in a complex relationship. On the one hand, the Native Americans saw the rebels who claimed their freedom as the main people responsible for the massacres and also the agents of a new ruthless power. On the other hand, from the settlers' point of view, the war to achieve independence

was a necessary step to found a new country whose roots were grounded in freedom. In the narration of these clashes, Wu Ming have highlighted that the concepts of power and freedom are relative and cannot have clear and neat boundaries.

In order to give readers a clearer view of the historical background to *Manituana*, in the prologue Wu Ming inserted a brief chronology of events, from the settlement of the indigenous tribes in 1142 to the French and Indian War (1754-1763) when the colonies of British America fought against those of New France. The American Independence War started in 1775, when some colonists rebelled against their government (the British Empire) because of its decision to both curtail and tax the colonists' trade. Wu Ming have drawn the readers' attention to the fact that the revolution was led by slave owners who were defending slavery (at that time already abolished in the Empire), and by speculators who perceived the Crown as a power that was trying to abolish the settlers' right to profit from those immense territories.

In the novel, the complex relationship between power and freedom is epitomised by the royal Proclamation of 1763, when a line was drawn down the Appalachians Mountains ('Le Verdi Montagne', *M*: 79), marking the limit of settlement by British colonies in the American continent. With this proclamation, the Empire established a frontier to stop the expansion of colonists. This measure was thought to avoid expansion to the Western territories. In terms of the Empire's pragmatic interests, it would have been easier to control a smaller number of colonies placed on the East cost of the American continent, rather than a higher number of colonies that proliferated far away in an unknown territory.

This measure, however, instead of blocking the settlers' expansion, created the so-called "frontier ideology". This ideology emerged among the settlers, who associated that border to a blind and obtuse power. The proclamation caused dismay among many colonists for several reasons. The most significant one was that limits were being set to the possibility of further settlement and speculation in Western lands. In addition, the control of the West was taken out

of colonial hands. To some colonists, freedom was thus perceived as the ability to go beyond that frontier: new lands, new beginnings, new lives and a new state were waiting for them beyond that border.

Therefore, in *Manituana* – as well as in other Wu Ming's novels – the rebels experienced freedom in actions. On this crucial point, Hanna Arendt's thoughts on freedom provide a helpful theoretical framework for the analysis of *Manituana*. Arendt has argued that freedom is the capacity to act, to begin, to start something new and unexpected. Action as the realisation of freedom is embedded in the fact that each new action represents a new beginning and the introduction of novelty to the world.

> The Greek word ἄρχειν which covers beginning, leading, ruling, that is the outstanding qualities of the free man, bears witness to an experience in which being free and the capacity to begin something new coincided. (2006: 164)

Many new beginnings are present in *Manituana,* as the consequences of violent acts (the rebellion against the established power) triggering a chain of events initiated by a desire to be free. In *Manituana,* freedom is thus experienced by the rebels in the building of a new country to the detriment of the Native Americans.

In addition to being considered as a new beginning, freedom had a dual meaning for the rebellious colonists. In order to be tangible, freedom needed to be achieved in two different ways: first, independence from the British Empire; second, the conquest of the territories beyond the frontier of the Appalachians Mountains. In both cases, the concept of freedom was deeply rooted into something tangible: the indigenous lands, from the East coast (already conquered) to the Western territories. The American colonies, which were economically powerful and culturally distinct from the Old continent, became progressively more independent and ready to expand their new power. The settlers perceived freedom as a journey

that started from the interior (the colonies) and reached the areas beyond the frontier where there was more land than they had ever imagined.

Examining the clashes between power and freedom, I have identified two key aspects (the presence of power and the territories) that distance *Manituana* from other Wu Ming's novels. First, the old power of the British Empire was overseas and distant on the horizon. Felt symbolically extraneous by the rebellious colonists, it was far away, on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. Secondly, the territories for which the war is fought belonged to the Native Americans and not to the settlers. In many passages of the novels, they have emphasised this fundamental aspect.

> Molti dicono che è una faccenda tra inglesi, ma la terra è nostra e i patti li abbiamo siglati con re Giorgio. [...] Il nostro nome rischia di svanire, le fauci del tempo hanno già inghiottito interi lignaggi. La nostra terra viene invasa o rubata, un inverno di stenti cadrà su questa valle. (*M*: 13, 34)

In *Manituana* the rebellious colonists endorsed an idea of freedom with the conquest of territories that belonged to the Native Americans. In order to accomplish it, the dissident settlers, after gaining independence from the old power of the British Empire, proceeded to the conquest of the Western lands, achieved with the annihilation of the indigenous populations. In other words, the longing for freedom that animated the action of the rebels, was fulfilled through the disintegration of the Native Americans' freedom. Not only did the end of the conflict decree the definitive freeing of the rebels from the colonial Empire of George III of England, but most importantly, it also legitimated the birth of a new power, founded on the removal of other people's freedom.

What is palpably discernible in *Manituana* is the extent to which the revolution ended with the emergence of a new power that, in the speculative moment of assimilation, integrated elements from the old power and a desire for freedom. As already demonstrated in the previous chapters for the other novels, in *Manituana* the narration has also followed the same pattern in

relation to the unceasing interplay between power and freedom. At the beginning of the war, a state of oppression was followed by a revolution that destroyed the old power's foundations. Eventually, a new power was generated by the same revolutions that had held the ideals of freedom.

In *Manituana* one of the most significant examples of this interaction (old power / desire for freedom / new power) can be found at the beginning of chapter 39. The chapter starts with an excerpt taken from the order given on the 31st of May 1779 by the commander-in-chief of the Continental Army George Washington to Major General John Sullivan, where a genocidal plan is outlined in order to deal with the Iroquois Confederation.[89]

> ORDINI DI GEORGE WASHINGTON
> AL GENERAL MAGGIORE JOHN SULLIVAN
> 31 maggio 1779
> La spedizione di cui vi è stato affidato il comando deve essere diretta contro le tribù ostili delle sei nazioni, compresi i loro sodali e clienti. L'obiettivo immediato è la distruzione totale dei loro insediamenti e la cattura del maggior numero di prigionieri di entrambi i sessi e di tutte le età. Sarà essenziale devastare i campi impedendo il raccolto in corso e quelli futuri. Consiglio e raccomando di insediarsi al centro del territorio indiano con una scorta sufficiente di vettovaglie e munizioni e da lì far partire le spedizioni contro i villaggi all'intorno, dando istruzioni di farlo nel migliore e più efficace dei modi, così che il paese non venga semplicemente saccheggiato, ma distrutto. Voi non presterete orecchio a nessun tentativo di pacificazione fino alla devastazione totale di tutti gli insediamenti. La nostra sicurezza futura risiede nella loro incapacità di danneggiarci e nel terrore che la severità della nostra punizione saprà instillare nelle loro menti. (*M*: 244)

When considering the profound connotations of the American War of Independence, Wu Ming did not choose this historical document by chance. According to George Washington's plans, American freedom would be obtained only through the total devastation of Native American settlements. It was clear that the future of the burgeoning new country (the United States) depended on the annihilation of the indigenous people. Eventually, "freedom" would replace

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[89] The whole text is available from Lengel, Edward G. (2010). "The Papers of George Washington", in *Revolutionary War Series*, volume 20, 8 April - 31 May 1779. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press.

the old established power (the British Empire and their Native American allies) with a ruthless new power.

As seen in the above-mentioned excerpt, in *Manituana* the war for independence is characterised by pervasive brutality. Many passages in the novel reveal how the violence unleashed by the American rebels spread everywhere, leaving very few communities immune from its effects. Violence, torture, massacres, rapes were at the core of the conquest of Native American territories.

> Il fuoco della Confederazione irochese era spento. [...] Il motto che Sullivan portava sugli stendardi [rivelava]: «Civiltà o morte». I suoi soldati lo gridavano in coro, per brindare alla distruzione. Lo gridavano alle case di pietra e ai campi coltivati, agli abiti di lana e ai fucili. Lo gridavano a un'alleanza di popoli che s'era data una legge di pace, in un tempo remoto. Lo gridavano, per dire che chiunque non fosse uguale a loro meritava lo sterminio. (*M*: 223, 254)

Wu Ming have pushed the readers to face the brutal reality of a conflict too often bathed in the myth of an America that was rooted in the ideals of freedom and justice for all. In relation to the aforementioned excruciating facts about the American War of Independence, in 2017 Professor Holger Hoock published *Scars of Independence, America's Violent Birth* in which he focussed on the brutal side of America's origins. Although Hoock's book was published ten years after *Manituana,* and there is no evidence that its author was familiar with the novel, it is useful to consider how these two different works share many common points on what has been omitted from the historical narrations of the American Revolution for years.

Hoock's book is the latest attempt to make a thought-provoking contribution to American Revolutionary scholarship. According to Hoock, the American Revolution should be considered the first American civil war. Moreover, the United States still show many scars emerging from that conflict. Many critics (Jasanoff, Gopnik, Pinker, O'Shaughnessy and Conway to name a few) have praised this book for shedding light on the violence that, from every side, characterised the conflict.

As highlighted by Kathleen DuVal, 'Holger Hoock's deep research and gripping prose expose the frightening violence of the American Revolution and overturn the sentimental myth of our nation's bloodless birth' (in Hoock 2017). In an interview, Hoock stated that the true nature of America's War of Independence lied on the violence and terror rather than on the honourable principles of freedom.

> American popular memory of the Revolution tends to focus on great white men debating noble ideals. And there are good reasons why Americans narrate their Revolution and war for independence as an uplifting, heroic tale. But what I argue in the book is that to understand the Revolution and the war we must write the violence, in all its forms, back into the story. This really starts with recognizing the Revolution as America's first civil war, between the Patriots and the Loyalists. To defend the Revolution against its internal enemies, the Patriots routinely resorted to violence and terror – to threats and bullying, physical violence, torture, and the occasional lynching. What I show in the book is that this violence was not the regrettable exception to an otherwise orderly and restrained Revolution: it was pervasive, necessary, and indeed a defining characteristic of the American Revolution. (Hoock 2017)

Hoock's attention was drawn to the 'selective remembering and strategic forgetting' (*ibid*) that started soon after the Revolution. The losing side (the Loyalists), as well as the violence they suffered, he has argued, were methodically excluded from public discourse. In so doing, the "brave" Patriots were able to control and manipulate the story (or better, the narration) of the Revolution through monuments, parades, and Fourth-of-July speeches, while the Loyalists could not properly develop a counter-narration of their defeat.

> Over time, even the Revolutionary-era emphasis on the blood that the Patriots shed in defence of their new republic yielded to a strangely bloodless narrative of the war that mirrors the image of a tame and largely nonviolent Revolution. (*Ibid*)

What the traditional narrations of the American Revolutionary War had communicated for many years were not actual facts, Hoock has maintained, but rather distorted memories led by the winners' propaganda through selective memory. To Hoock – as well as to Wu Ming in *Manituana* – what is at stake is the collective imagination of this war. Hoock has stated that,

while propaganda drives historical narrations to precise goals (in this case, the American Patriots fought and died for the freedom of a new country), at the same time distortion and oblivion inevitably leave "dark zones" to be explored. Wu Ming has used the same *modus operandi* to eschew comforting dichotomies (the good patriots versus the innocent Native Americans) in favour of narrating the past in all its complexity and ambiguity. Wu Ming's *Manituana* and Hoock's *Scars of Independence* share the same perspective: history can be narrated from the gaps and shadows left behind by traditional narrations.

The "dark zones" of history are usually inhabited by the losers, by those who were not able to tell what happened from their point of view and from their memories. In the shady areas of history, there are countless hidden and overlooked stories that can offer counter-intuitive or alternative truths.[90] According to Wu Ming, the single or bi-dimensional version of the American Revolution is useless and mind numbing. What did really happen on the "wrong" side? Emanuela Piga has emphasised that *Manituana* is 'Una storia dalla parte sbagliata della storia':

> Nonostante *Manituana*, raccontandoci la genesi dello sterminio di un "mondo possibile," si incentri sul recupero della "storia sbagliata", e dunque della memoria obliata dei vinti, riportando in vita le peculiarità di una civiltà che da lì a poco sarebbe stata annientata, gli scarti del punto di vista ci mostrano, come in un gioco di specchi, altre prospettive. (2009: 33)

Wu Ming have narrated the differences of opinions, betrayals, deceptions and private interests opposed to collective ones in the numerous indigenous tribes. Some of them sided with the overseas government that had treated them with some respect; other tribes supported the

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[90] Leading an uncomfortable narration about the birth of the United States, Wu Ming have concentrated on a crucial and controversial aspect of American identity. It is worth noting that, in the last few decades, some Americans have considered Thanksgiving as a "national day of mourning". Rather than a national day of 'Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens' as proclaimed by President Lincoln on the 3rd of October 1863, it is a "celebration" of the cultural genocide of Native Americans by colonists. For some Native Americans, in fact, Thanksgiving holds a dark meaning as it recalls a holocaust that no one should ever forget. Moreover, some believe that the Thanksgiving holiday should bring a more accurate representation of the ruthless slaughter suffered by Native Americans.

rebellious colonists. Once the war started, however, the Native Americans also committed atrocities and massacres. In Wu Ming's narrations, there is good and bad on both sides and sometimes the boundaries between them are very blurred. In *Manituana*, in fact, Native Americans are not described as innocent people who suffered a slaughter, because they also killed, just like their enemies did.

> Oneida, Mohawk e Seneca avevano sparso sangue di fratelli e cugini. [...] Il mondo che aveva conosciuto si liquefaceva sotto i suoi occhi, neve al sole d'aprile. Uomini e volti viventi divenivano dolorosi ricordi. [...] La guerra non è guerra finché il fratello non ammazza il fratello. Davanti ai suoi occhi, uomini, uomini e uomini andavano a morire in file ordinate. Marciavano finché il mondo non esplodeva, la terra sventrata, arti e teste volavano verso il cielo. La morte mandava odore di sangue, escrementi, terra bagnata. (*M*: 223, 226)

The description of violence is explicit regardless of which side perpetrated it. Some pages of *Manituana* recall their previous novel *Asce di guerra,* where Wu Ming had represented the extreme conditions partisans had lived through during the war: 'Bisognerebbe guadare fiumi di sangue e bile, affondare nelle frattaglie umane fino al ginocchio' (*AdG*: 35). In an interview with Gordon Darroch, Wu Ming argued that:

> There's no glory in *Manituana*, even heroic deeds are impregnated with sorrow, they leave a bitter taste in the characters' (and the readers') mouths. We tried to describe the acts of dying and giving death with utter honesty. Violent death is always disgusting. Sometimes it may be necessary (for self-defence etc.), but that doesn't make it less disgusting. (In Darroch 2009)

The above-mentioned concepts are of the outmost importance when we move our attention to Wu Ming's poetics in a broader sense. In their novels, Wu Ming have constantly challenged stereotypical notions of power and freedom in the framework of crucial historical events.

Todd McEwen (2009) has argued that *Manituana* narrates a relevant story of the violent destruction of the loyalists' and Mohawks' hybrid society by the brutality of the rebels. It is worth considering that the novel begins in 1775, at the outbreak of the war, when the Native

Americans still believed that the British Empire would protect their territories from the rebellious settlers. As the events have been narrated *in fieri*, the characters cannot know the outcome of the conflict. Therefore, an alternative outcome is still possible, although hypothetical.

In relation to the critical engagement with history, Boyd Tonkin has argued that Wu Ming have revised long-established history in order to present the Mohawks, loyal to the Empire and defending the harmony in the Iroquois federation, as victims of insurgent and racist white settlers who, seeking the breakdown in the balance, marched into battle holding banners bearing phrases such as "Civilisation and death to all savages". 'Exploring this already hybrid world, *Manituana* dismantles the delusion of the simple "noble savage" as shrewdly as it debunks the usual patriotic pageantry of 1776' (2009).

In a similar manner, Jacob Silverman has maintained that *Manituana* challenges the popular romantic notions of America's birth, delving deeply into an intricate period of history from which Wu Ming have allowed disgraceful and at the same time surprising historical narrations to emerge: '*Manituana* stands on its own in its wrestling with a difficult period that too often is reduced to myopic patriotic narratives or slogans regarding taxation' (2009). Asked whether *Manituana* could be considered a novel that dealt exclusively with representations of the American Revolution, Wu Ming4 replied that:

> We haven't written a novel on the American Revolution. We were interested in going to the roots of the extreme West, of the rot that lurks at the origin of the category of "West" itself. […] We aim at opening a gap, a passage that allows the reader to descend into an era and a context. It's true we work with history, we use it as a mine where we find stories and bring them to light, but it's only because we're convinced that the past is not behind us, but on our shoulders. The past weighs on the present, it's all still here. (In Bertante et al. 2007)

Fabio Gambaro has highlighted one of the most significant features in Wu Ming's poetics: the narration of events that have been forgotten or misread by official historiography. In *Manituana*

'Wu Ming aime l'histoire des vaincus, et spécialement ses pages les moins connues' (2009). In the same way, Marc-Olivier Bherer has pointed out that 'Leur histoire est oubliée, écrasée par le mythe fondateur américain, et fait figure de tour de chauffe pour la conquête de l'Ouest à venir, au cours de laquelle les Indiens d'Amérique seront massacrés afin que les Etats-Unis réalisent leur destinée manifeste' (2010).

II. The Three Faces of the Old Crumbling Power

In the complex relationship between power and freedom, Wu Ming devoted the central part of their novel, entitled Mohock Club, to represent the power of the British Empire. By doing this, Wu Ming have framed the American War of Independence within a broader geographical perspective. Whilst the first part of *Manituana* was characterised by the clashes between rebels, loyalists and Native Americans in the territories of the East coast of America, in the central chapters the narration is set in 18th-century London, directly at the heart of the British Empire.

This part of the novel centres around an important historical character, the Mohawk war Chief Joseph Brant Thayendanegea (1742-1807), who devoted his entire life to the preservation of the Native American way of life.[91] Brant, facing threats from some tribes in the Iroquois Confederation – in particular the Oneida – that had sided with the rebels against the British Empire, undertook a journey with other Native American warriors from America to London to negotiate the crown's support for his people in return for their help against the insurgents. During his visit to London, Joseph Brant met various politicians, aristocrats and, most importantly, King George III. There Brant restated his intent to ally himself and the other tribes

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[91] In addition to Joseph Brant, other minor and major historical figures also appear in *Manituana*. They include: King George III, General Ethan Allen, Samuel Kirkland, General William Howe, George Washington, John Sullivan and William Johnson.

to the English cause, receiving in return the promise that, after the war, his people would get substantial lands in Quebec and every support the Empire could give them.

However, once they had arrived in London, Brant and the other Native Americans were shocked by the squalor and despair of the capital. The main elements emerging from the depiction of London are characterised by a deep sense of decadence. Acrid smell of burning coal, stench and fog, along with incomprehensible sounds, pitch darkness and poor light characterise the streets of London (*M*: 94-168). This gloomy atmosphere reflects the rotting power of the British Empire, which ideally should have defended the Native Americans against the rebels.

Wu Ming have depicted an old and waning power in three different manifestations: the Crown (King George III), the aristocracy (the decadent nobles) and the Mohocks (a group of street criminals).

The first face of power is the Crown, King George III. In traditional historical accounts, he is mostly remembered as the King who lost the American colonies, but also for his recurrent fits of madness. In *Manituana*, the King appears as the defender of an old power that eventually would fall apart. Nonetheless, at the audience with the Native Americans (*M*: 106-110), the King demonstrated a strong determination to continue to fight against the rebels, so as to prevent copycat protests elsewhere. However, the outcome of the American war and its political aftermath put great strain on the King who, after serious bouts of illness, became permanently deranged in 1810. In the description of George III, Wu Ming have focussed on representing power – embodied both a person (the King) and the territories (the colonies) – in a joint vision: the control of the colonies would crumble together with his mental stability.

> Il re parlava con una strana cantilena che lo faceva sembrare sempre emozionato, sul punto di piangere. Faceva pause sgrammaticate tra una parola e l'altra, lasciava le frasi in sospeso dopo le congiunzioni. La vulgata diceva che era un modo per mascherare la balbuzie, ma i più informati sostenevano che c'era sotto qualcosa. Il re aveva problemi di nervi, era ipersensibile, doveva davvero trattenere i singhiozzi. (*M*: 133)

To show the disintegration of both the King and the Empire in metaphorical terms, Wu Ming have given the reader an evocative image of their downfall. At the outbreak of the insurrection, some rebels melt down a statue of the King in order to make bullets: 'Non per niente allo scoppio dell'insurrezione avevano fuso la statua di re Giorgio per farne proiettili da regalare a Washington' (*M*: 191).

The presentation of the other manifestation of power, the London aristocracy, is, however, much more striking. Wu Ming have characterised it as decadent and depraved: 'Non è Dio ad assegnare i titoli nobiliari, ma la forza. [...] A ben guardare, l'origine della nobiltà inglese non è che lo stupro' (*M*: 125). Inside the magnificent palaces of the nobles, the Native Americans find it hard to attribute human nature to these strange creatures packed into extravagant clothes. To their eyes, the old world appears in disconnected pieces, full of deformed figures who cause unbearable disgust.

> Guardatevi intorno: in teoria, questo salone ospita il meglio dell'alta società del regno. Ebbene, dal momento che vi accingete a trascorrere la serata in questo posto, vi invito ad ascoltare le conversazioni. Vi assicuro che non rinverrete traccia di raziocinio. Io credo che queste strade e dimore siano le terga dell'Impero. Del deretano e del suo orifizio possiedono ogni caratteristica: qui si deietta ogni risorsa che l'Impero manda a noi. Solo che, per un capriccio di natura, tali terga si trovano davanti al corpo anziché dietro. (*M*: 104)

Wu Ming have described the heart of the British Empire as an insane place ruled by an inept and corrupt aristocracy. Ignorance of colonial affairs together with the geographical distance of the overseas territories give the aristocracy a systematic lack of understanding of the whole situation. What the nobles can offer are just ridiculous and revolting spectacles that reflect the decadence of their nature. In the novel, the ignorant parasites of noble lineage perceive the foreign lands and possessions as something that does not belong to them. The war is also very distant, too far from their residences.

> Eppure, l'anno 1775 si chiudeva nella residenza sul Tamigi di un aristocratico nelle grazie di re Giorgio, tra baldracche di illustri casati e parassiti d'alto bordo. Lontano dalle terre e dai possedimenti, con la guerra alle porte. (*M*: 106)

The third element of the old power, the Mohock Club, is the most fascinating. Within the progressive disintegration of the British Empire (in relation to the loss of its American colonies), Wu Ming have narrated the depredations and exploits of the Mohocks, a real group of delinquents disguised as Native Americans who took their name from the Mohawks and prowled the streets of London at the beginning of the 18th century. At that time in England, the most negative stereotypes showed Native Americans killing or capturing white people, especially women. Many images of that period presented ruthless Native Americans who committed unspeakable horrors towards innocent people.

In *The Case of the Mohocks* Daniel Statt has painted a remarkable portrait of this phenomenon, highlighting that in early-18th-century London, criminals paid homage to the Mohawks from America, borrowing from them the above-mentioned stereotypes of brutality and ruthlessness.

> At the beginning of the year 1712 rumours began to circulate in London about a group of men called Mohocks. They were said to have formed a club whose members, taking the name of a tribe of 'savages' in British North America, met at coffee houses and taverns at night, drank copiously and then ventured out into the streets of London, assaulting and beating innocent passers-by, destroying property and terrifying the public. Reportedly drawn from the social elite and committing sensational crimes in the heart of the metropolis, the Mohocks galvanized fears of the sort of street violence that was endemic in early modern London. (1995: 179)

Within the structure of the novel, the Mohock Club is of utter importance. Wu Ming have narrated how, in the heart of the British Empire, a group of thugs did not recognise the established power above them. With Native American haircuts and painted faces, as well as

peculiar clothes, the Mohocks demonstrated their opposition to orderly society through violence and crimes.

> Una grossa mezzaluna turca, tatuata sulla fronte di un energumeno dalla faccia dipinta, con un solo ciuffo di capelli in mezzo alla testa. Gran brutta faccia. [...] 'Mi chiamo Taw Waw Eben Zan Kaladar II, Imperatore dei Mohock di Londra. Dopo il tramonto, questa è la mia riserva di caccia'. [...] Preceduti dal capo, uno alla volta rientrarono nella nebbia, creature d'incubo prima del risveglio. L'ultimo lanciò di nuovo il grido di guerra animalesco, a sfidare la notte di Londra. (*M*: 94, 95)

The Mohock Club began to overrun London at night, in search of passers-by to assault, using extreme cruelty, ferocious aggression and robbery. Significantly, unlike the historical Mohocks, who were in fact aristocrats in search of distractions disguised as Native Americans, Wu Ming's Mohocks seem to be more ordinary, though more dangerous, delinquents who perpetrated rapes and robberies and fought with rival gangs in ways that recall the 'ultra-violence' of Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*. As stated in an interview:

> The chapters of the Mohock Club are written from the point of view of the gang leader. […] We took inspiration from Bruce Alexander who writes crime fiction set in the London of the end of the 18th century. […] And of course we were heavily influenced by the way Floriana Bossi translated into Italian Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*. (In Bertante et al. 2007)

Wu Ming have chosen to relocate the Mohocks from 1712 to 1775, at the time of the American Independent War, to look at the deterioration of the British Empire's power from the inside. The Mohocks of London, "City Indians" of 1775, did not recognise themselves as citizens of the Empire; on the contrary, they claimed to be beleaguered by oppressive forces. That is why, as a protest, they acted against the law. In a letter sent to the Mohawk chief Joseph Brant (*M*: 139), Taw Waw Eben Kaladar II, Emperor of the Mohocks of London and Westminster, expressed the unbearable feeling of anguish and oppression that the so-called "City Indians" are experiencing inside an alienated modern world. Although the Mohocks of London were born in England, they felt that their history was, in many ways, very similar to that of Native

Americans. They remembered their fathers being proud people dedicated to agriculture and eager to live in peace, just as the Native Americans were before the European arrivals. What was happening to the Mohocks of London is in fact comparable to what the Native Americans were experiencing. The so-called "honest men" had started to steal their lands (boroughs in London, territories in America), forcing their ancestors to live in unhealthy boroughs and become the dregs of society.

> Un tempo eravamo anche noi un popolo fiero e coraggioso, dedito alla caccia e all'agricoltura, desideroso di vivere in pace, ma gli onest'uomini ci hanno soffiato la terra, e con essa boschi, alberi, animali e acque, costringendo i nostri nonni ad abitare quartieri malsani e a divenire servi, soldati, mendicanti o ladroni. Un destino che gli Inglesi d'America vorrebbero riservare anche al vostro popolo e da cui vi mettiamo in occhio. (*M*: 139)

In this perspective, in London and in America, the Native Americans and the "City Indians" were fighting against the same occupiers: the English. Weighed down for centuries by deprivation and abuse, the "City Indians" felt the need to warn their brothers on the other side of the ocean.

In this way, through the association between a gang of criminals and the Iroquois of America, Wu Ming have created strong links between the centre (London) and the periphery (the colonies) of the Empire. What emerges from the narration is already a globalised world where distances and differences have been greatly reduced. As Wu Ming have claimed in an interview: 'The American War of Independence was a world war that saw not just the principle powers of the time involved but also the native populations and local cultures' (in Bertante et al. 2007).

III. The Allegorical Expansionist Power of Today

As they had already done in the other novels, in *Manituana* Wu Ming have also transferred the issues of today onto the events of yesterday. Because the story has been seen through the eyes of the Native Americans, from their point of view the old world (London) was actually a new world, full of unexpected experiences and encounters. This is true not only in the setting – the capital of the Empire was a metropolis, while the American landscape was archetypal – but also in the globalised London market as described in the novel.

Through the dystopian vision of one character, the Mohawk warrior Philippe Lacroix Ronaterihonte, taking a stroll through the streets of London, Wu Ming have portrayed a modern-day city characterised by massive sprawls of concrete, steel and buildings under densely polluted skies. In Philippe's vision, London will extend to the entire world, where free-market and capitalism will devour archaic communities. Wu Ming have made a specific choice in this part of the novel to envisage a city continuously growing, where a few rich people would enjoy prosperity, while the majority, the poor, would suffer starvation:

> Philippe ebbe una visione: Londra estesa quanto il mondo. Un'unica enorme escrescenza, fatta di palazzi e torri svettanti, abituri fatiscenti, slarghi scenici, fontane e giardini, intrichi di viuzze dove il sole non giungeva mai. Un mondo edificato, messo in opera, pavimentato, lastricato, puntellato; un mondo in costruzione, stratificato, rovinoso, marcescente; un mondo di luce artificiale e molte tenebre, salvezza per pochi e condanna per la maggioranza: la nobile città di Londra e Westminster. (*M*: 143)

This description has all the signs of what would be the upcoming industrial urbanisation, more specifically of the technological developments that would modify life, behaviour and habits in the future. A previous rural and traditional country would be transformed into a consumer society where the increase in new consumer goods and cultural trends would change the perception of individuals and reality in general. The presence of a huge variety of cheap

consumer goods would create similar behavioural models and homogenous wishes in the population.

> - Nulla di che preoccuparsi, signore. È il mercato. [...] Tolta l'invadenza di chi cerca di venderle, le merci di bassa qualità sono innocue. La moneta buona scaccia quella cattiva, se vi è libertà di scelta, e Londra è la capitale della libertà di scelta. In nessun'altra parte del mondo circolano tante merci. - Maugham allargò le braccia, come per afferrare la maggior quantità possibile di mondo. - In nessun'altra città il mercato si regola con tanto mirabile equilibrio! [...] Assecondando le forze del mercato, contribuisco alla ricchezza della nazione -. (*M*: 99)

The London of *Manituana* is the prototype of every contemporary metropolis. Focussing on some crucial characteristics of modern cities, Wu Ming have invited readers to erase the temporal distance between 1775 and today. The characters and elements emerging from the narration are described as if they were set in our time. As stated by Wu Ming, the past cannot be hidden behind traditional and misleading stories, but, on the contrary, the past should be represented – as an allegory – as close to the present. As a literary device, allegory is defined as an extended metaphor in which characters, actions and scenes are systematically symbolic and hide complex meanings. In other words, an allegory is a story that can be understood in a different manner to reveal another meaning.

> All the second part of the book is set in London and this allowed us to breakthrough into the contemporary. Historical novels deal with the present. We authors live in the present. Writing a historical novel doesn't mean hiding in the past to avoid taking stances today. On the contrary. [...] As a novelist, you choose the historical period looking for features that bring you nearer the present. (In Bertante et al. 2007)

In her allegorical interpretation of *Manituana*, Loredana Lipperini (2006) has highlighted two significant themes: the clash of civilisations and George Bush's actions. The mention of the 43rd President of the United States is rather significant. The novel was in fact published in 2007, during the presidency of George W. Bush (who served from 2001 to 2009). The main point Lipperini has made is what a story set in the 18th century tells about the world we live in today.

Instead of offering a narration from the past, Lipperini has suggested that Wu Ming have dealt with the present and with America as a global and contemporary powerful country. In an allegorical way, she has stated, we can compare the actions of the founding fathers of yesterday with the military expansionism of the present. In both cases, at the root of the conquests of any foreign territory there is the idea of civilisation that could be exported as a model of "legitimate" colonialism. On this last, crucial point, Wu Ming explained in an interview that the impact of the Europeans on the world through conquests, massacres and annihilations is still tangible today.

> If then we consider that the Americans of the last quarter of the 18th century were nothing other than Europeans emigrated across the Atlantic, we quickly arrive at grappling with the foundations of our own civilization, and therefore of our globalized present. The West not only in the geographical sense, but in the political and cultural sense too. It represents, that is, the extreme consequences of the impact of "whites" on the world. (In Lipperini 2006)

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Wu Ming was inspired to write *Manituana* by the war on Terrorism launched by the Americans (and their allies) in response to the terrorist attacks of the 11th September 2001: '*Manituana* is our novel on Iraq and the war on terror' (in Darroch 2009). The war in Iraq in 2003, which followed that in Afghanistan in 2001, was part of a supposedly universal effort to create a global order by spreading democratic ideals and systems around the globe. "Exporting democracy" was in fact the main refrain of that period. This project, however, Wu Ming's *Manituana* has been adamant on that point, can be extremely dangerous. The rhetoric used by the white colonists of both the 18th and the 21st centuries, entails democracy being applicable in a standardised Western form, which can succeed anywhere. In opposition to this concept, Wu Ming have drawn attention to the fact that a crusade to bring peace and democracy through destruction is a mere illusion. It also suggests another goal: the opening of "locked markets". At the time of the American Revolutionary

War, the territories to be conquered lay beyond the Appalachians Mountains' frontier; at the time of the writing of the novel, they were in the Middle East.

Applying this allegorical interpretation, the free traders of the novel – the colonists – could be seen as the equivalent of 21st-century transnational capitalists who use warfare to open protectionist markets. Wu Ming have thus spoken about the expansionist attitude that has characterised American history right from the beginning. *Manituana* narrated at first how the United States were born after a separation from the mother country, the British Empire. This process of independence, of which we see the starting point in the novel, has today reached extreme consequences in American expansionism in many parts of the world.

On this last point, Ron Jacobs has described *Manituana* as 'A Novel of the Fourth World', referring to the various indigenous nations (the Iroquois Confederation) that existed on the American continent before the Europeans' arrival. Jacobs has argued that, in another allegorical perspective, *Manituana* not only talks about the Native Americans, but also about the other populations that have been colonised and destroyed over the course of history.

> [*Manituana*] is the story of India and the British Raj and it is the tale of the Algerian people and the French Republic's colonization of that land. It is also the story of Israel and its ethnic transformation of Palestine into a Western settler state. In short, it is the tale of every people that has seen its land taken over by a European people as intent on making it their own as its original inhabitant are on preventing such an occurrence. This is also the story of America's indigenous people being manipulated by the European colonists for the Europeans' own ends. (2009)

In this analysis, the manipulation exercised by power that reduces the freedom of conquered populations – in the past as well as in our times – is the key concept that emerged in *Manituana*. Indigenous peoples in different parts of the world and at different times have endured the same type of manipulation. However, the old/new project to spread democracy is doomed to fail because it is based on erroneous expectations.

We see a mirror of this situation in today's manipulations of the indigenous

> peoples in the lands the west wants as its own today: the Shia vs. Sunni
> conflict in Iraq and the manipulation of tribal conflicts in Afghanistan are but
> two examples that come immediately to mind. *Manituana* evokes the
> dangerous conceit pride vanity of men who believe it is their destiny to rule
> the world. (*Ibid*)

In a similar manner, Marc-Olivier Bherer has focussed on the meta-historical allegory that characterises the novel. Contrary to the classic meaning of allegory (an extended metaphor that is symbolic and hide complex meanings) a meta-historical allegory is not fixed and its meaning can change across times and with the readers' interpretations. Bherer has correctly suggested that in *Manituana* the allegory cannot be interpreted one-dimensionally, as it evolves across times and events.

> Quand le pouvoir parle d'exporter la démocratie en Irak avec des bombes,
> d'exporter la civilisation américaine, c'est bien des origines que parle le
> pouvoir… Littérairement, l'allégorie ne vieillit pas. (2010)

In conclusion, in *Manituana* power and freedom are strongly interwoven in multifaceted connections. The desire for freedom of the rebellious American colonists has emerged in reality as a new and ruthless power to the detriment of both the British Empire (perceived as an old oppressive power) and the Native Americans' freedom. As already highlighted in the other novels, eventually there is no tangible achievement of any sort of freedom.

Nonetheless, I argue that in *Manituana* freedom could have been experienced as a real possibility if crucial events had got different outcomes. Starting from the attempts to answer the "what if" question, Roberto Saviano has suggested that Wu Ming had wondered what might have happened if the loyalists had defeated the rebellious settlers led by George Washington. Saviano has maintained that Manituana narrates the birth of a new power (the future Unites States of America) at a crucial moment in history when everything was still possible. In this way, Wu Ming aimed at exploring a key historical event that might have had a different outcome from the actual one, with profound changes to the course of history. Perhaps the result

would have been similar to that of Canada, where the indigenous peoples were not targets of extermination like in America: 'It's the telling of the gestation period of the modern world, the historic pregnancy that would give birth to the world we know today' (Saviano 2007).

On this last point – the achievement of freedom – it is worth mentioning that *Manituana* has told the story of the disappearance of the Euro-Indigenous hybrid community that was wiped out during the American Revolutionary War. As Wu Ming have emphasised in many points in the novel, the foundation of the United States did not occur at the expense of the "noble savages", as the traditional narrations of this event have maintained, but on the contrary at the expense of a hybrid culture that was interethnic, politically complex and full of contradictions.

This hybrid community had emerged from the cooperation between Native Americans and the English settlers. The leading proponent of this hybridity was the Superintendent of Indian Affairs Sir William Johnson, the first historical character to appear in the prologue of the novel. William Johnson inspired a period of close cooperation and intermarriage between Native Americans and European settlers (he married the Mohawk Molly Brant Degonwadonti with whom he had eight children). Johnson spent his life pursuing the ideal that there was 'room for everybody' in the magnificent Mohawk Valley, also called *Manituana*, in the local language the 'Thousand Islands of the St Lawrence River'.

> Before the clash of civilizations erupted into the systematic extermination of an entire population, the civilization of the whites and the Indians influenced each other for at least a couple of centuries and had created the embryo of a third culture, a Euro-Indigenous one. (In Bertante et al. 2007)

On this crucial point, Bherer has maintained that there was an 'Utopie brisée au pied des Appalaches', underlining the fact that a hybrid community formed by Mohawks and Europeans was defending a type of utopian society rooted on the respect and defence of the other's values.

> En 1775, l'Iroquirlande voulait croire en ses chances. Sur les berges du fleuve

Mohawk, le peuple du même nom, l'une des six nations iroquoises, faisait l'expérience d'une fusion des cultures avec des Blancs. […] Leur histoire est oubliée, écrasée par le mythe fondateur américain, et fait figure de tour de chauffe pour la conquête de l'Ouest à venir, au cours de laquelle les Indiens d'Amérique seront massacrés afin que les Etats-Unis réalisent leur destinée manifeste. (2010)

Wu Ming consider the violent destruction of this interracial and harmonised society caused by the American Independent War as a fundamental moment in history, determining the fate of the world over the next centuries. Before this war, in that place called *Manituana*, this kind of hybrid freedom was indeed a real possibility.

In conclusion, in this chapter, through a close analysis of the thematic elements of *Manituana*, I have demonstrated how Wu Ming have challenged stereotypical concepts of power and freedom through a thought-provoking narration that contests the popular romantic notions of America's foundation and the standardised images of Native Americans. I have also underlined the moments of fixity (the old power of the British Empire), of instability (the American Revolutionary War), and of assimilation (the new expansionist power) where the relationship between power and freedom has been represented. As I have emphasised, power and freedom, intertwined in a complex relationship, are relative and cannot have a fixed meaning, depending on the perspective from which they are experienced.

In the previous chapters I have shown how the dialectical relationship between power and freedom has played a central role in Wu Ming's (as well as in Luther Blissett's) novels, and how this relationship has emerged from different, and even opposite, perspectives. In the novel under discussion in this chapter, *L'armata dei sonnambuli*, I will show how Wu Ming have focussed on a narration that follows the dialectical process (old power / desire for freedom / new power) in the most violent and turbulent phase of the French Revolution. The narration outlines the events between the 21st of January 1793 and the 21st of January 1795. These dates correspond to two significant historical events (one real, the other fictional) in the French Revolution. On the 21st of January 1793, King Louis XVI was condemned to the guillotine for high treason and crimes against the state (*AdS*: 5-28). On the 21st of January 1795, Louis Charles of France (King Louis XVII), imprisoned at the Temple, was fictionally kidnapped by some royalists who intended to restore the Monarchy (*AdS*: 730-757). At the head of these royalists, the Knight of Yvers aimed at reinstating the old power with an army of sleepwalkers composed by the dregs of society who were subjugated thanks to collective hypnosis.

I. The Utopia of the French Revolution

The novel is centred on the Jacobins' control of the National Convention from June 1793 and the subsequent series of drastic measures during the so-called Terror, a 10-month period when alleged enemies of the revolution were guillotined in large numbers. Contrary to the traditional interpretations of the Jacobins who relied on Terror to enforce their authority, Wu

Ming have provided another version. They claim in fact that Jacobins used the Terror to halt or at least reduce the overwhelming pressure coming from people who wanted to take the Revolution to its extreme. Wu Ming's argument rests on the idea that the Jacobin Terror was an attempt to discipline revolutionary violence with central bureaucratic control. As Wu Ming explained in an interview:

> Noi abbiamo notato che questi politici, in realtà, agivano come elementi di moderazione rispetto alle spinte dal basso, la pressione dei bassi ceti culturali, focalizzata in quegli anni su questioni importantissime che concernevano soprattutto il sostentamento quotidiano e un senso di giustizia verso chi si accolla le responsabilità più gravi nel difendere la rivoluzione, ossia chi manda i propri figli al fronte; la pressione che ha portato al terrore non ha nulla a che fare con la vulgata che vuole dei sanguinari alla guida di una fazione di pazzi. [...] Era chiaro che dovessero essere un'interfaccia che agiva da calmiere rispetto alle istanze vere, il che è stato molto sorprendente da scoprire, nonostante sia la realtà dei fatti. In tutti gli aspetti che concernono una questione di genere o una di classe, dentro il romanzo si nota bene questa funzione di freno, almeno rispetto alle pressioni dal basso. (In Bolzonella 2014)

Many of the killings were carried out by order of Maximilien Robespierre, who led the Committee of Public Safety until his own execution on the 28th of July 1794. His death marked the beginning of the Thermidorian repression, a phase when the Thermidorian regime revolted against the Jacobin Terror's excesses, starting a new period of Terror (the so-called White Terror) with mass executions of Jacobins. In the midst of these clashes, the fictional character of Leonida Modonesi/Léo Madonnet, an Italian actor, participated to the Revolution in his own peculiar way. Wearing the costume of Scaramouche, a character from the *commedia dell'arte*, he fought against the counter-revolutionary forces that were trying to overturn the Republic.[92]

In this novel the dialectical process has been developed through the classic three moments: fixity in the *Ancien Régime*'s oppression; instability during the Revolution and the repression of the Jacobin / Thermidorian Terror; and assimilation with the emergence of

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[92] Scaramouche was originally a variation of the *commedia*'s character of the Capitano, a braggart soldier, and the role was associated with the Italian actor Tiberio Fiorillo (1608-94).

Napoleon's Empire. Consistently with my argument as already stated in the previous chapters, I will suggest that the dialectical relationship between power and freedom, which characterises the French Revolution at the core of *L'armata dei sonnambuli*, does not leave much room for the attainment of freedom (as hoped by the "pure" revolutionaries). On the contrary, the dialectical process allows the emergence of a new power that assimilates elements from the two previous determinations (the *Ancien Régime*'s old power and the Revolution).

In addition to this consideration, I believe that the forms of power and freedom that Wu Ming have tackled in this novel are noticeably extreme and I thus consider *L'armata dei sonnambuli* symptomatic of the writers' constant engagement with the defeated of History. In this case, it is about the starving people of Paris who were pulled back and forth between old and new powers, and between different forms of oppressions, from the *Ancien Régime* to the Terror.

Since its publication, *L'armata dei sonnambuli* has received considerable critical attention, with particular focus on how power needs revolutions in order to develop into another form of power, as Franco "Bifo" Berardi has pointed out that:

> *L'armata dei sonnambuli* è un libro terribilmente amaro, doloroso, disperato forse. L'attesa di una società migliore, la pretesa di un governo razionale sul corso degli eventi si rivelano illusioni. Tagliare la testa al re non ci libera dalla fame, e neppure incarcerare gli accaparratori di farina ci permette di avere quello che ci occorre. E proprio dalle rivoluzioni il potere trae la sua potenza. La potenza che le rivoluzioni esprimono, la potenza del lavoro e del teatro, del sapere e del desiderio si ossifica nelle forme sempre nuove del potere. (2014)

Undoubtedly, the French Revolution uprooted centuries-old institutions such as the absolute monarchy and the feudal system. Like the American Revolution before it, the French Revolution was influenced by Enlightenment ideals, principally the concepts of popular sovereignty and inalienable rights. Nonetheless, the French Revolution failed to achieve many of its goals and degenerated into chaotic bloodbaths and mass executions. Giuseppe Genna has

correctly highlighted this multiple overthrow of power due to the unsuccessful accomplishment

of freedom that eventually culminated in tragedy.

> Dopo un nomadismo tra soggetti letterari rappresentati emblematicamente dalle rivoluzioni nella storia e nella geografia umana, Wu Ming affronta la rivoluzione per antonomasia, cioè quella francese. [...] Il rovesciamento del potere in una festa senza limiti, che è gioia e tragedia, la "volta buona" che libera dalle catene della storia la comunità degli oppressi, il momento vissuto una volta per sempre, senza idealismi. (2014)

In addition to this perspective, the novel has been subject to critical attention mainly for its

metaphorical and allegorical content. Enrico Manera, for instance, has concentrated upon two

significant metaphors, mesmerism and theatre, which intensely characterise the text:

> La metafora principale in cui è racchiuso il libro è quella del mesmerismo, la discussa "scienza", diffusa al tempo, fondata da Franz Anton Mesmer; a suggerire che l'interpretazione dell'Illuminismo, e della filosofia politica in genere, secondo cui l'agire politico si basi su scelte razionali compiute da agenti liberi, sia un'ingenua illusione. [...] L'altra grande metafora del racconto è il teatro. Si è scritto molto su come durante la Rivoluzione si aprì lo spazio pubblico moderno che abbatte la differenza tra spettatore e attore; la politica si teatralizza e si spettacolarizza nei discorsi dei grandi oratori della Convenzione. (2014)

On the contrary, Girolamo De Michele and Franco Berardi have argued that the novel offers a

remarkable allegorical dimension in the description of the army of sleepwalkers, a multitude

of hypnotised common folk without any free will.

> Ed ecco che [...] si fa controllo mentale, sino all'ipnosi collettiva vòlta a creare un'armata di sonnambuli [...] usata per restaurare quel potere che la Rivoluzione aveva abbattuto: allegoria potentissima delle tecniche di controllo sociale a noi presenti. (De Michele 2014)

> Chi sono i sonnambuli mesmerizzati e indotti a subire? L'armata dei sonnambuli sono le folle dei commuters della subway londinese all'ora di punta, sono le folle che si accalcano all'entrata del supermercato il giorno in cui c'è uno sconto. (Berardi 2014)

Alongside these discussions, I would argue that *L'armata dei sonnambuli* centres on the dialectical relationship between power and freedom around two main themes: on the one hand, the utopia of freedom; on the other hand, power and madness. It is precisely these themes, along with other concepts closely related to them, such as "absolute freedom", which I will discuss in this chapter.

II. Power and Freedom at the Time of Terror

L'armata dei sonnambuli is structured as a play in five acts: Zucchero e Libertà; Il Grande Altrove; Terrore; Termidoro; Come va a finire. This particular choice is crucial to the delivery of a specific point of view. In fact, Wu Ming aimed at reproducing, in a literary perspective, one of the most fascinating transformations of that time: during the French Revolution, there was in fact an opening up of political affairs to the public space. Politics was no longer debated behind closed doors but, on the contrary, it became a matter of public domain, like a theatrical representation. Wu Ming have explained their choice to structure their novel as a play:

> Abbiamo compreso che rappresentazione e rappresentanza, in quel momento storico e in Francia, tendevano a coincidere: chi rappresentava il popolo lo faceva dal punto di vista politico ma anche da quello teatrale, fornendo una rappresentazione appunto. La conoscenza dell'arte di proporre il discorso in termini teatrali, scenici era vitale proprio perché si era sviluppata una politica basata sui discorsi pubblici, quando prima di allora era una questione di esclusiva pertinenza degli uomini di potere, la facevano i ministri; nessuno sapeva bene cosa dicessero nelle loro riunioni quelle persone. Con la rivoluzione francese c'è il mondo a guardare ed è un dato di fatto che tutti i suoi protagonisti, i rappresentanti del popolo, molto spesso avevano un attore o un ex attore come *trainer* che insegnava loro come comportarsi davanti alla gente. (In Bolzonella 2014)

But politicians are not the only "actors". Ordinary people would actively participate in the debates that sparked off in every corner of the city. The topics of discussion were multifaceted,

however many of the conversations centred on how to continue the revolution properly. As correctly underlined by Enrico Manera:

> Un teatro che si rovescia nelle strade attraverso la politica anche con la nascita delle street-culture. [...] E poi compare la "voce della strada", la folla, la plebe, il popolo, che, accalcandosi e sciamando in una vita frenetica, reclama la sua comparsa sulla scena pubblica, perennemente in cerca di riscatto, rappresentanza e beniamini, ma anche di vendetta, parafulmini e bersagli. (2014)

The discussions also became theatrical inside the National Convention. Here, politicians started to act and perform as if they were on a stage, mimicking the gestures and voices of the greatest actors of the time in order to involve the public in a more engaging way. However, their performances as "actors" were often ambiguous and misleading.

> La Convenzione, i giacobini, credono di spegnere la sete di giustizia truccando le carte. Io sono un'attrice e ti dico che questi politici si alzano sui banchi per i loro discorsi come un attore calcherebbe le scene. Per loro il popolo è un pubblico, nient'altro. (*AdS*: 403)

In this theatrical framework of the French Revolution, Wu Ming created a fictional character, the Italian actor Leonida Modonesi/Léo Madonnet, who interprets the Revolution in his peculiar and individual way, fighting the counter-revolutionary forces that were trying to overturn the Republic on his own.

After a series of unfortunate circumstances, Léo Modonnet was first forced to leave his theatre company and then found himself homeless. Without a roof over his head, he started living under Pont Neuf, a bridge over the river Seine. There he decides that the streets would become the open stage where to perform his plays. He was soon noticed and became a well-known figure in the Parisian landscape. They called him Scaramouche.

> Qualcheduno l'aveva riconosciuto. Lo aveva riconosciuto, e ne aveva fatto un nuovo eroe. Per uno scherzo del caso, il nuovo eroe portava il nome di un personaggio da commedia dell'arte. Scaramuccia, ex soldato d'imprecisata ventura, scattoso e fanfarone. [...] Leo ebbe la sensazione di aver intuito da

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> tempo quella verità: i parigini non erano più interessati al vecchio teatro. [...]
> I parigini erano sempre interessati al teatro, ma il teatro era diventato grande
> quanto Parigi. [...] Era un teatro più vasto. [...] Un attore come lui doveva
> scendere in strada perché la strada era un teatro più efficace e più
> emozionante. [...] Questo è l'arte: saper interpretare lo spirito del proprio
> tempo. [...] Scaramouche aveva dei doveri. [...] Io sono nato primattore,
> quello che si recitava al chiuso delle sale; primattore nel Nuovo, quello della
> rivoluzione. (*AdS*: 247, 248, 250, 620)

In the "open theatre" that was the French Revolution in the novel, during the day Léo performed as a street acrobat, but at night, wearing a black costume, cloak and mask, he played Scaramouche in order to actively participate in the Revolution.

> Eccolo il Nuovo Teatro della rivoluzione. Come sarebbe stato possibile
> tornare a recitare un vecchio copione al chiuso di una sala, quando il teatro si
> era fatto storia sotto il cielo di Francia? (*AdS*: 323)

His duties were twofold. On the one hand, Léo Modonnet-Scaramouche punished the hoarders who were raising the prices of groceries at the expense of the starving population. On the other hand, he fought for the freedom that (at least in theory) should have been granted in the aftermath of the Revolution. In particular, he tried to halt the counter-revolutionary forces that were trying to overturn the Republic and bring back the Monarchy.

Within a short period of time, the Italian actor, who had been playing Scaramouche in the streets of Paris 'nel teatro vivente della rivoluzione' (*AdS*: 331), becomes the hero of the poor. Asked in an interview about this particular character, Wu Ming have revealed that:

> La nostra era una necessità di carattere narrativo, volevamo avere un
> personaggio che attraversasse la rivoluzione come un potenziale jolly, che ci
> consentisse la massima libertà d'espressione, e un attore con evidenti
> problemi psichici faceva al caso nostro, oltre a essere un veicolo di
> identificazione preciso in certi momenti di scrittura, di profonda
> identificazione. (In Bolzonella 2014)

If we focus on the main characteristics of Léo Modonnet-Scaramouche, we can appreciate that there are many similarities with the young theology student in Luther Blissett's *Q*. As I have

outlined in Chapter One, the student was an eyewitness of the most turbulent years of another revolution, the Reformation, when a new generation of students, teachers, theologians and peasants fought together for a new world free from the corruption of the established powers. As previously mentioned in Chapters One and Five, Luther Blissett projected many of its own features onto this mysterious character, in particular their multiple and fragmented identity. Like Luther Blissett, the young student in *Q* emerged from the underground scene of that time, as a "ghost" through which anyone could speak and subvert the current social and political situation.

In a similar way, Scaramouche emerged as another "ghost". In *L'armata dei sonnambuli* Wu Ming have created a character (Leonida Modonesi was born in Bologna, the home town of some of Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's members) who shares many features with the protagonist of *Q*, and consequently with Luther Blissett. As Luther Blissett was a 'mysterious figure, an identity created not to be shown in public' (Bazzichelli 2008: 25), so Léo Modonnet 'benché consapevole del proprio successo, non si offriva agli applausi e agli evviva, ma piuttosto si sottraeva, evitava di mettersi in mostra'. (*AdS*: 253). In describing the main features of Luther Blissett's protagonist, Luca Muchetti has made a number of interesting points regarding such a "borderline hero":

> Un Robin Hood inafferrabile e misterioso. […] Un eroe popolare dai tratti indecifrabili, venuto da lontano. […] Un imbroglione di professione, un fuggiasco ribelle per natura, un borderline capace di infiltrarsi e affondare a ogni livello della società. […] Fuggevole. (2007: 21, 22, 26)

Similar characteristics also feature in Léo Modonnet-Scaramouche in *L'armata dei sonnambuli*: he is at the same time a mysterious character, a 'vendicatore della plebe' (*AdS*: 642) and a ghost that nobody has seen.

> [Scaramouche] è esistito davvero o l'ha inventato qualcuno? [...] Chi cazzo è 'sto Scaramouche? [...] A volte viene da pensare che non esista, che sia solo una leggenda inventata dal popolo. (*AdS*: 633, 636, 692)

In addition to the above-mentioned similarities with the young student in *Q*, I would also argue that in his main features Léo Modonnet recalls De André's white-collar worker in *Storia di un impiegato* (1973).[93] With the exception of Girolamo De Michele, critics have so far overlooked this similarity.

> I tratti del bolognese Leonida Modonesi-Léo Modonnet rimandano al Gert di *Q*, ma anche all'impiegato di De André, che travisato da Scaramouche viene a restituire al potere un po' del suo terrore. Questo vendicatore un po' maldestro sembra contenere una delle possibili morali non solo di questa Armata, ma di un'intera carriera letteraria svolta sotto l'impegno di "pensare la Rivoluzione" in tutte le sue declinazioni e le sue derive. (2014)

In my opinion, *Storia di un impiegato* is a fundamental intertext where significant elements of the relationship between power and freedom are reflected in both the white-collar worker and Scaramouche, especially in their attitude towards the powers they are fighting against. *Storia di un impiegato* tells the story of a 30-year-old white-collar worker who, in 1973, listens to a song (*Canzone del Maggio*, the first of the album) about the events that took place in France in May 1968 when students and young workers protested against capitalism, consumerism and French traditional institutions, values and order. When he compares his regular life, characterised by common sense, fear and individualism, to that of the students who rebelled against the established political, economic and social powers of their time, the white-collar worker wants to become a rebel. Nonetheless, he is aware that he cannot join the rebellion of 1968 because five years have passed and his life is already regulated by a permanent job and a stable routine.

> E io contavo i denti ai francobolli, / dicevo "Grazie a Dio", "Buon Natale", / mi sentivo normale. / Eppure i miei trent'anni / erano pochi più dei loro, / ma non importa adesso torno al lavoro. (*La bomba in testa*)

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[93] Fabrizio De André's *Storia di un impiegato* (*Story of a white-collar worker*) was released in 1973 by Produttori Associati. The tracks are: Introduzione; Canzone del Maggio; La bomba in testa; Al ballo mascherato; Sogno numero due; La canzone del padre; Il bombarolo; Verranno a chiederti del nostro amore; Nella mia ora di libertà.

In theory, nothing can change his life. He feels trapped in a "cage" designed by a greater power against which any rebellion seems useless. However, it is precisely this certainty of being imprisoned in a life of frustration that will lead him to rebel against the unbearable *status quo*.

Léo Modonnet experienced the same disappointment, as, at the beginning, he lived through the years of the revolution in a passive way. He was an actor with a regular job and no particular interest in the political turmoil of the time. It was only when he lost everything that Léo started thinking of participating in the revolution in a more active way.

To return to De André's white-collar worker, at first he started fantasising about the possibility of dropping bombs on those images and myths that represented bourgeois power.

> Ormai sono in ritardo per gli amici, / per l'odio potrei farcela da solo / illuminando al tritolo / chi ha la faccia e mostra solo il viso / sempre gradevole, sempre più impreciso. (*La bomba in testa*)

In a dream, the white-collar worker found himself invited to a *ballo mascherato* where he killed all the people he had respected – and was afraid of – during his whole life. Eventually, for the first time the white-collar worker felt he was free from the powers that had held him prisoner in a "comfortable" cage. However, it was just a dream.

> E l'esplosivo spacca, taglia, fruga / tra gli ospiti di un ballo mascherato, / io mi sono invitato / a rilevar l'impronta / dietro ogni maschera che salta / e a non aver pietà per la mia prima volta. (*La bomba in testa*)

In another dream (*Sogno numero due*), following the previous one, the white-collar worker was in the dock because of the massacre he had caused with his bomb. The judge, however, reversed the charge of murder in gratitude as he had removed the old representatives of power. In this song, we can find a theme that is at the core of Wu Ming's historical novels. As already examined in this thesis, the old power regenerates itself by exploiting the revolutions and

rebellions that attempted to destroy it. In the moment of instability, in fact, the fixed determination of the first moment (the old power) turns into its opposite (freedom) through a process of 'self-sublation', a word which means 'to cancel' and 'to preserve' at the same time. The old power, due to a state of fragility, is sublated and turns into the later determination (freedom). In so doing, the old power does not tolerate the revolution passively; on the contrary, it makes use of the revolution in order to develop into a new power. In other words, power is truly the force that generates resistance, monitors its place and controls it. Consequently, resistance to power acquires its own means to struggle from the current form of power. The existing powers promote this resistance and individual forms that should hypothetically fight power, but that in reality are used to regenerate the old power into a new one. In so doing, the appearance of other maybe more dangerous and destabilising forms of resistance is prevented.

> Imputato ascolta, / noi ti abbiamo ascoltato. / Tu non sapevi di avere una coscienza al fosforo / piantata tra l'aorta e l'intenzione. / Noi ti abbiamo osservato / dal primo battere del cuore / fino ai ritmi più brevi / dell'ultima emozione / quando uccidevi, / favorendo il potere / i soci vitalizi del potere / ammucchiati in discesa / a difesa della loro celebrazione. / E se tu la credevi vendetta / il fosforo di guardia / segnalava la tua urgenza di potere, / mentre ti emozionavi nel / ruolo più eccitante della legge: / quello che non protegge, / la parte del boia. / Imputato, / il dito più lungo della tua mano / è il medio / quello della mia / è l'indice, / eppure anche tu hai giudicato. / Hai assolto e hai condannato / al di sopra di me, / ma al di sopra di me, / per quello che hai fatto, / per come lo hai rinnovato, / il potere ti è grato. (*Sogno numero due*)

The white-collar worker eventually wakes up, realising that he has no hope for a brighter future. Anguish, loneliness and distrust have characterised his life so far and no changes seem conceivable. At that point, the white-collar worker appreciates that the only way to escape his condition of "slavery" is to transform the dream (of dropping the bomb) into reality. He therefore considers Parliament – one of the places where power is exercised – an emblematic place where to enact his revenge. Disappointed by the world he lives in, he decides to act alone without any help whatsoever.

> Chi va dicendo in giro / che odio il mio lavoro / non sa con quanto amore / mi dedico al tritolo, / è quasi indipendente / ancora poche ore / poi gli darò la voce / il detonatore. / Il mio Pinocchio fragile / parente artigianale / di ordigni costruiti / su scala industriale / di me non farà mai / un cavaliere del lavoro, / io son d'un'altra razza, / son bombarolo. (*Il bombarolo*)

Léo Modonnet experienced a similar *Weltanschauung* in a comprehensive view of his personal condition and of the actual political situation. As the revolution was stuck in endless political disputes between opposite factions that keep fighting while people are starving, Léo developed a peculiar philosophy of life. Because he was homeless, he found in the streets the perfect "theatre" where to perform his independent plays. With Scaramouche's mask and costume, 'L'eroe straccione, […] l'ultimo eroe dei pezzenti' (*AdS*: 642, 643) would kill the enemies of the revolution, the hoarders and the monarchists, in the name of the people.

> "Rappresentare il popolo" significava agire per suo conto, ma significava pure "metterlo in scena". Scaramouche interpretava ciò che il popolo avrebbe fatto ai manipolatori, se solo avesse potuto colpire, lesto e impunito, come un uomo mascherato che ha il favore delle tenebre. Era quella, si disse, una forma di rappresentazione più genuina. (*AdS*: 412)

At a certain point of their lives, both characters find themselves as outlaws participating in the events of the revolutions (1789 and 1968) in their own way. Disappointed by the outcomes of the revolts, they have no confidence in politics or in a collective engagement. De André's white-collar worker becomes a 'bombarolo', a loner terrorist, just like Léo who acts alone to catch and kill the antagonists of the Republic.

> Intellettuali d'oggi / idioti di domani / ridatemi il cervello / che basta alle mie mani, / profeti molto acrobati / della rivoluzione / oggi farò da me / senza lezione. / Vi scoverò i nemici / per voi così distanti / e dopo averli uccisi / sarò fra i latitanti. / Ma finché li cerco io / i latitanti sono loro, / ho scelto un'altra scuola, / son bombarolo. (*Il bombarolo*)

They both live in a period of great transformations with a common denominator: terror. Terror took a variety of different forms during the Revolution. When historians refer to 'the Terror'

they generally mean two periods. The first was during the Jacobins' government (June 1793 – July 1794): 'Mettiamo il Terrore all'ordine del giorno. E così che spariranno in un istante i monarchici, i moderati e la turba controrivoluzionaria che agita la città' (*AdS*: 386). The second was the Thermidorian terror following the overthrow of Robespierre, an episode which led to harsh repression. In the months after Thermidor, the institutional and legal structures of the Jacobin Terror were wound down, and in its place the so-called 'White Terror' began, with the execution of former Jacobins in a war of retributive violence that began in December 1794 and escalated in 1795.

> Il Terrore è finito, viva il Terrore contro il Terrore! [...] La rivoluzione ci ha insegnato che la differenza fra un patriota e un criminale può essere sottile quanto quella fra una guida illuminata e un tiranno. Da una parte Fréron, dall'altra i sanculotti oltranzisti... Chi difende la Repubblica, chi la minaccia? I terroristi che non si rassegnano, perché più della Repubblica amavano il Terrore. Costoro sono un pericolo. [...] Siamo ancora qui, guardate i nostri candidi colli, guardate le nostre testacce ancora bene attaccate, siamo vivi, siamo sopravvissuti al Terrore e adesso il Terrore siamo noi. (*AdS*: 556, 637, 638)

The terror in the novel bears strong resemblance with the terror that emerges in De André's work. De André transferred some elements from the events taking place from May 1968 to the Italian Years of Lead. Violence was one of the primary features in Italy during the 1970s, when assassinations, bombings and massacres were committed. This gloomy atmosphere is present in the album, where the white-collar worker wants to overcome the terror by becoming himself a terrorist.

> Per strada tante facce / non hanno un bel colore, / qui chi non terrorizza / si ammala di terrore, / c'è chi aspetta la pioggia / per non piangere da solo, / io son d'un altro avviso, / son bombarolo. [...] Potere troppe volte / delegato ad altre mani, / sganciato e restituitoci / dai tuoi aeroplani, / io vengo a restituirti / un po' del tuo terrore / del tuo disordine / del tuo rumore. (*Il bombarolo*)

In *L'armata dei sonnambuli*, precisely at the time of repression taking place during the Thermidorian terror, Léo Modonnet, using the same words pronounced by *il bombarolo*, wants

to give back a bit of terror: 'Trema anche tu Fréron, io vengo a restituirti un po' del tuo terrore' (*AdS*: 636). Nonetheless, both Léo and the white-collar worker are clumsy heroes with so many weaknesses that in the end they fail to realise their projects. The bomb built by the white-collar worker does not explode in Parliament but, after it falls down a staircase, blows up in front of a kiosk. He is eventually arrested and then detained in prison. In a similar way, because of his clumsiness, Léo is arrested during a break-in at a hoarder's house.

> C'è chi lo vide ridere / davanti al Parlamento / aspettando l'esplosione / che provasse il suo talento, / c'è chi lo vide piangere / un torrente di vocali / vedendo esplodere / un chiosco di giornali. (*Il bombarolo*)

> - Fermo o sparo! - Léo rivolse in alto lo sguardo e scorse tre sagome in piedi. Nel corridoio alle loro spalle si aprì una porta e ne uscì un uomo che reggeva una lampada. La luce passò di mano e finì a illuminare un viso, un braccio, una pistola. - Treignac? - domandò Léo ad alta voce, ma la domanda era rivolta a sé stesso. - Roland, i ferri - ordinò lo sbirro a uno degli attendenti. Aveva un tono secco, definitivo, appena intaccato dalla stanchezza delle tre di notte. Léo comprese che nessuna scusa gli avrebbe evitato l'arresto. (*AdS*: 216)

At the end of this section, I would to highlight a crucial aspect in the novel (which is also a constant trait in Wu Ming's poetics). Although the rebels are constantly defeated, they keep fighting, even when the revolution is over and another power has replaced the previous one. The main question is: why do they still keep fighting? To answer that, I refer to what Gilles Deleuze has argued in his *Abécédaire* about the concept that in history all revolutions have "failed". Those who start a revolution in order to win, he claims, are either naive or scoundrels.[94] The former have the illusion that their lives can change for the better, while the latter take advantage of the openings in the structures of the new power that is simply replacing the old one. This process leads directly to the failure of any revolution. The focus, Deleuze has also suggested, should be on revolutionaries, not on revolutions: even though revolutions fail, this fact has never prevented people from starting new revolutions. The real problem is how

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[94] https://search.library.brown.edu/catalog/b6286153 with English subtitles. (Accessed 22.10.17)

and why people become revolutionaries. In his analysis of *L'armata dei sonnambuli*, with a clear reference to Deleuze's concept of revolutions and revolutionaries, Franco "Bifo" Berardi has argued that the utopia of freedom is still realised even when a revolution does not succeed.

> Perché ribellarsi? La rivolta serve a sapere che esistiamo, serve a dare un senso alla sofferenza e anche alla sconfitta. Prima non sapevo di esistere e subivo la violenza del potere come se fosse naturale: la rivoluzione mi ha permesso di riconoscermi, ho capito che potevo ribellarmi, ho capito che esisto, che posso rifiutare e quindi cominciare a essere, ho capito che posso incontrare altri che come me si ribellano, ho conosciuto l'amicizia, impensabile prima della rivolta. [...] Ecco l'utopia realizzata, anche se la rivoluzione non vince mai. La rivoluzione ti insegna che è possibile una linea di fuga dall'inferno terrestre. (2014)

In other words, revolution does not teach revolutionaries how to win, but rather how to dream about freedom. Even though freedom may be not experienced as a real situation, the feeling of embracing it pushes revolutionaries to keep fighting.

III. Power, Madness and Absolute Freedom

In narrating the multifaceted and contradictory period that was the French Revolution, Wu Ming have focussed on how power has been exercised in different forms, from the absolutist to the revolutionary, from the Jacobin terror to the Thermidorian repression. At least in theory, revolution means liberation from the chains imposed by an oppressive power. Nonetheless, exactly during revolutions, powers are nourished by the fear of chaos, as well as with the need of reassurance, order and leadership.

In this section, I will analyse how power deals with altered states of consciousness. Firstly, I will focus on how power has separated the mad from society by confining them in institutions with detailed programmes of punishment. Many parts of the novel are in fact set at the Bicêtre Hospital, in the same years of the (other) revolution led by French superintendents Philippe Pinel and Jean-Baptiste Pussin who introduced humane methods in the treatment of

patients suffering from mental illness. Secondly, with reference to the Hegelian concepts of 'lacerated consciousness' and 'consciousness of inversion', and referring to Foucault's *Madness and civilization*, I will show how the mad embody many of the features of Wu Ming's heroes who fight against the established powers. In particular, I will draw attention to Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew*, a character – as analysed by Foucault and Hegel – whose peculiar features will help us to better understand Léo-Scaramouche's behaviour and his relationship with power.

In my examination of power and madness, I refer to Foucault's concepts of reason and non-reason as they emerge from his *Madness and civilization*. I believe that it is particularly significant that many of the themes in this work are also present in *L'armata dei sonnambuli:* for instance, the exclusion of mad people from society by incarcerating them in mental asylums, i.e. in institutions created by power to hide "abnormal" subjects who are perceived as dangerous to the established order.[95]

In his *Madness and civilization* Foucault argued that madness is a cultural, social and philosophical concept. In particular, the French philosopher aimed at analysing madness both inside and outside the contexts – the domains of psychiatry and medical science – where it had been confined since the 17th century. In this regard, Foucault identified in the creation of the Hôpital General, in 1656, the beginning of the 'Great confinement' (1988: 38) of the poor, vagabonds, criminals, and deranged minds.

> From the very start, one thing is clear: the Hôpital General is not a medical establishment. It is rather a sort of semi judicial structure, an administrative entity which, along with the already constituted powers, and outside of the courts, decides, judges, and executes. […] A quasi-absolute sovereignty, jurisdiction without appeal, a writ of execution against which nothing can prevail, the Hôpital General is a strange power that the King establishes between the police and the courts, at the limits of the law. (*ibid*: 40)

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[95] Wu Ming showed great interest in *Madness and civilization* when, in September 2011, they presented a new edition of this text edited by Italian philosopher and epistemologist Mario Galzigna. https://www.wumingfoundation.com/giap/2011/11/cosa-fa-un-filosofo-nella-casa-dei-pazzi-audio-della-%c2%abserata-foucault%c2%bb/ (Accessed 06.04.18)

In its functioning, Foucault argued, the Hôpital General was not built for medical purposes. It was rather conceived by the monarchical and bourgeois power of that time with the intention of confining those people who were at society's margins. By doing this, power was able to physically exclude all deviant people who might violate the social norms and laws with their acts and behaviour.

In the past, on the contrary, Foucault maintained, madness was an undifferentiated experience not concealed behind bars. The Great Confinement is at the origins of that evident breach that established the distance between reason and non-reason. Therefore, when power decided what *reason* and *non-reason* were, the elements of madness were explicitly locked by power in hidden places far from the "normal" world.

> Modern man no longer communicates with the madman... There is no common language: or rather, it no longer exists; the constitution of madness as mental illness, at the end of the eighteenth century, bears witness to a rupture in a dialogue, gives the separation as already enacted, and expels from the memory all those imperfect words, of no fixed syntax, spoken falteringly, in which the exchange between madness and reason was carried out. The language of psychiatry, which is a monologue by reason about madness, could only have come into existence in such a silence. (1988: x)

Fools, Foucault wrote, have been hidden by power in the same places that once confined lepers. Once leprosy has been eradicated, the lazar houses had been empty for years. Nonetheless, the values and images attached to the figure of the leper remain. For that reason, what power considered the dregs of society/humanity (the poor, beggars, criminals, the sick and mad people) were gradually confined to those places. It is worth underlining that this crucial aspect emerges in many points of the novel.

> Leprosy disappeared, the leper vanished, or almost, from memory; these structures remained. Often, in these same places, the formulas of exclusion would be repeated, strangely similar two or three centuries later. Poor vagabonds, criminals, and "deranged minds" would take the part played by the leper, and we shall see what salvation was expected from this exclusion,

for them and for those who excluded them as well. With an altogether new meaning and in a very different culture, the forms would remain essentially that major form of a rigorous division which is social exclusion but spiritual reintegration. (*Ibid*: 7)

Bicêtre serve da ritiro per coloro che la sorte o l'imprevidenza hanno ingannato, e per coloro che debbono mendicare un sostegno per la loro dura e penosa esistenza. Ed è anche una casa di reclusione, o piuttosto: di tormento, dove si ammassano coloro che hanno turbato la società: libertini d'ogni genere, truffatori, spioni, bari, ladri, falsari, pederasti. Si rimane turbati nel vedere negli stessi spazi, a fianco di questi vagabondi, gli epilettici, gli idioti, i folli, i vecchi, i mutilati: li chiamano buoni poveri, ma dovrebbero separarli da questa folla di farabutti che ci ispirano più indignazione che pietà! (*AdS*: 83)

According to Foucault, this broken dialogue has been healed by the liberation of the chained inmates of Bicêtre in 1793. In *L'armata dei sonnambuli*, Wu Ming have drawn the readers' attention to a crucial event that happened in Paris at the same time as the Revolution. At the end of the 18th century, two French hospital superintendents, Pinel and Poussin, were transforming mental asylums in places where people were treated like patients rather than like animals or criminals (as had been the case before): 'Questi miglioramenti mi confermano che il dialogo e la benevolenza non servono soltanto a tenere calmi certi alienati, ma possono condurli alla guarigione' (*AdS*: 281). This approach, together with similar initiatives in other countries, became known as *the moral treatment* of patients.

Fino a pochissimi anni prima, gli alienati di Bicêtre, in catene, arrancavano incrostati di sporcizia nella penombra umida tra i muri, senza mai ricevere sulla pelle i baci e gli schiaffi del vento. Nel loro mondo, i raggi del sole erano pochi e irresoluti spiffeiri di barlume, grevi di polvere e insetti, inadatti a tagliare l'aria delle celle. Le cose stavano cambiando. Jean-Baptiste Pussin stava facendo la sua rivoluzione nella rivoluzione. Applicava idee inusitate, a loro modo coraggiose: trattare gli insensati come esseri umani, mirare a una loro «guarigione». Come se si potesse alterare la volontà di Dio onnipotente a forza di teorie. Aveva tolto i ferri da polsi e caviglie, e si era messo a parlare agli alienati. (*AdS*: 94)

In the novel, the Revolution coincides with this other "revolution". In fact, both the political and medical revolutions aimed at freeing people from the previous powers in the name of universal egalitarianism: 'La Repubblica è nulla senza uguaglianza, e l'uguaglianza è nulla

senza un rimedio universale contro la malattia. Una terapia capace di guarire tutti allo stesso modo, senza distinguere il nobile dal poveraccio' (*AdS*: 473). From the revolution in mental asylum to the revolution in the streets, liberty was the ultimate goal. As Foucault wrote:

> For this was the first time since the Great Confinement that the madman had become a social individual; it was the first time that anyone had entered into conversation with him, and that, once again, he was questioned. Unreason reappeared as a classification, which is not much; but it nonetheless reappeared, and slowly recovered its place in the familiarity of the social landscape. (1988: 200)

Restricted only to the spheres of psychiatry and medical science, Foucault argued that madness remains banned from society by an institutional confiscation with the disappointing consequence that nobody (except doctors or psychiatrists) can interact with it. To overcome this deadlock and in order to analyse madness properly, it is necessary to look at the other fields of human manifestations where madness has been represented, in particular the kingdom of the arts. Out of the various artistic expressions, Foucault maintained, literature offers direct access to some extreme mental conditions and to the forms of fragmented subjectivity that for centuries have been hidden in asylums. A significant section of *Madness and civilization* is dedicated to Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew*, which narrates the conversations on widely disparate themes between Moi (Me), a narrator-like persona, and Lui (Him), Jean-François Rameau.

According to Foucault, in the same years when Enlightenment thought developed, Rameau's eccentric and extravagant nephew represented the perfect fool, whose contradictions, irrationality and immoral vision of reality epitomise the rebellion of the "hero" against the established power.

> The eighteenth century could not exactly understand the meaning expressed in *Le Neveu de Rameau*. Yet something had happened, just when the text was written, which promised a decisive change. A curious thing: the unreason that had been relegated to the distance of confinement reappeared, fraught with new dangers and as if endowed with a new power of interrogation. Yet what the eighteenth century first noticed about it was not the secret interrogation, but only the social effects: the torn clothing, the arrogance in rags, the

tolerated insolence whose disturbing powers were silenced by an amused indulgence. (*Ibid*: 199, 200)

I am convinced that Foucault's interpretation of Rameau's nephew will help us to better understand one aspect of freedom at the core of *L'armata dei sonnambuli* (and more generally of Wu Ming's poetics). Firstly, in the nephew's character the singularity of the "I" is broken, disintegrated in several and opposite identities just like in Léo-Scaramouche and in many of Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's heroes (the theology student in *Q* or Emanuele De Zante/Manuel Cardoso in *Altai* to mention a few). Secondly, the language the nephew uses is decomposed and incoherent. But this is not a negative attribute. On the contrary, this peculiar subjectivity arises against one of the essences of power: the total control on individualities (intended as the combination of body, mind and language) that are homologated, disciplined and incorporated by a power that cannot tolerate unorthodoxy. Correctly, Girolamo De Michele has stressed this concept that is at the core of Wu Ming's historical novels: 'Spacchettare l'Uno nelle sue mille voci è sempre un gesto di rivolta contro quel potere' (2014). Nephew's disintegration of mind allows him to be considered as a spokesperson for all the antagonists of power. In this role, the nephew stands against the power that has tried to dominate him. Léo-Scaramouche, as well as other Wu Ming's heroes, are literary representations of both this exclusion (from power) and rebellion (against power).

A noteworthy interpretation of *Rameau's Nephew* comes from Hegel who has described the main features of this peculiar character with two expressions: 'lacerated consciousness' and 'consciousness of inversion'. With some reference to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, I will show that the above-mentioned two concepts are strongly related to Léo-Scaramouche, in particular to the development of his disintegrated rebellious consciousness. Hegel read Goethe's translation of *Rameau's Nephew* in May 1805. Less than a year later, Hegel began to work on the second part of his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where he inserted three quotations

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from Diderot's text, all in Chapter VI. The first five chapters of the *Phenomenology* are concerned with shapes of consciousness, 'examining relationships between consciousness and the world that range from primitive attempts to designate the *here* and the *now* to reason's attempts to observe the laws of nature and postulate moral laws' (Schmidt 1996: 629).

From Chapter VI, entitled *Geist* (*Spirit*), the *Phenomenology* considers 'real Spirits, actualities in the strict meaning of the word which instead of being shapes merely of consciousness, are shapes of a world' (Hegel 1977: 265). It is worth considering here that the "worlds" Hegel analysed are understood as assemblages of values, conventions and rules that fasten – or on the contrary fail to unite – individuals together into a community. In order to better understand the profound meaning of Hegel's *Spirit*, political theorist Judith Shklar has suggested that it would be useful to follow Montesquieu's concept of general spirit from *L'Esprit des lois*. In this oeuvre, considered by Hegel the keystone of his own philosophy, the *Spirit* is 'the totality of attitudes, rules, institutions, habits and beliefs that make up a political culture' (1976: 142).

Léo-Scaramouche, as well as other Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's heroes, fight against the set of laws, thoughts, morals and conventions that govern the collective consciousness. In the different political domains narrated in the novels, the main characters embody various degrees of the consciousness of rebellion. The young theology student (*Q*), Vitaliano (*Asce di guerra*), Robespierre and Vittorio Capponi (*54*), Emanuele De Zante (*Altai*), are rebels who attempt to overturn the institutions of their society. However, as thoroughly demonstrated, every endeavour to reverse the *status quo*, by revolution, succeeds only in establishing some new mechanism of power. Therefore, the heroes in the novels are always doomed to fail.

Focussing on the development of the defeated characters' consciousness, I refer to Hegel's concept of *Zerrissenheit* (1977: 558), the state of being torn to pieces – in other words, disintegration – that is the basic element in their consciousness. In the light of this,

disintegration is a keyword that has a double meaning: disintegration of the established powers (or at least the attempt to destroy them), and disintegration of themselves (Wu Ming's heroes are fragmented and borderline characters that are continually emarginated from society).

In the short Introduction to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel described 'education' (*Bildung*) generally as a 'pathway of doubt, or more precisely the way of despair which leads to a state of despair about all the so-called natural ideas, thoughts, and opinion' (*ibid*: 72). However, *Bildung* does not simply denote 'education' but rather all of those experiences that give people a coherent identity and a sense of a common destiny, so 'education of consciousness' (*ibid*: 75). In Chapter VI, where Hegel analysed the *Bildung* of Rameau's nephew through his cynical observations and mad pantomimes, the German philosopher claimed that *Bildung*, in general, has no organic or harmonious development. On the contrary, Hegel saw *Bildung* as a process marked by division and dismemberment. Therefore, for Hegel, the nephew's farces, no less than his moral cynicism, clearly convey a lacerated, divided, and perverted consciousness.

Just like Rameau's nephew, I argue that Léo-Scaramouche's character develops through unfortunate and miserable experiences, performing pantomimes on the streets for a living and at the same time playing the role of avenger of the poor in his lonesome revolution. During the entire novel, he is considered a buffoon, a clown at the borders of society, with a lacerated consciousness.

> «T'î prôpi un pajâz», sei proprio un pagliaccio. [...] Tu sei un pagliaccio, - lo gelò Treignac, - un pagliaccio che si è accaparrato il diritto di esercitare la giustizia. [...] L'attore si immaginava la solita sentenza, l'antico verdetto, il giudizio che aveva temuto: Sei proprio un pagliaccio. [...] Buona fortuna, pagliaccio. [...] In realtà fingeva di essere un inetto buffone. [...] Possibile che lo ritenessero davvero un inetto buffone? Di' un po'... sei sempre tu il buffone che spacca le teste di quei bellimbusti? (*AdS*: 642, 655, 723)

In the article *The Fool's Truth: Diderot, Goethe, and Hegel* James Schmidt has focussed on Hegel's interpretation of Rameau's nephew, underlining that, in a world where a noble

consciousness aligns itself with power, only the 'lacerated consciousness' speaks the truth in favour of states of freedom.

> The lacerated consciousness recognizes that neither the actuality of power and wealth nor their specific concepts, good and bad, or the consciousness of good and bad (the noble and the ignoble consciousness), possess truth. The ultimate power in the world of *Bildung* is instead that disintegrative play (*auflösende Spiel*) of discourse and judgment which - like Rameau's rude quip - penetrates all the pretensions of culture and strips the significance from everything it addresses. While the honest consciousness still clings to a faith in the objective reality of those things that are wittily talked about, the lacerated consciousness recognizes that this destructive chatter rules the world of culture. (1996: 639)

For Hegel, the nephew is not simply a 'lacerated consciousness' (*zerrissenes Bewußtsein*); he is also the 'consciousness of inversion' (*Bewußtsein der Vehrkehrung*). The spirit discloses itself in language as 'the inversion of all concepts and realities, the universal deception of itself and others; and the shamelessness which gives utterance to this deception is just for that reason the greatest' (1977: 386-87). In the light of this, Schmidt has stated that:

> In describing the nephew as a *zerrissene Bewußtsein* [lacerated consciousness], Hegel recalls the discussion in the Introduction of how consciousness tears itself to pieces in the course of its *Bildung*, while the phrase *Bewußtsein der Vehrkehr* [consciousness of inversion] invokes the closing chapter of the first section of the *Phenomenology*, in which the 'inverted world' (*verkehrte Welt*) is juxtaposed to a 'tranquil kingdom of laws' (*ruhige Reich der Gesetze*). (1996: 642)

In my opinion, Hegel's concepts of 'lacerated consciousness' and 'consciousness of inversion' certainly provide a useful framework for understanding the essence of Léo-Scaramouche. Moreover, this character, like other Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's heroes, represents the voices of Foucault's unreason speaking against the constituted powers. Because of their foolish deeds and actions, which are however characterised by a strong determination, these heroes are generally considered mad, crazy or simply buffoons. I consider them as heretic characters whose consciousness of inversion always pushes them to be *against* something (power, norms,

laws) in an 'inverted world' where they, as recognised fools, can finally 'tell the truth'. Foucault pointed out that this feature is of the outmost importance: the unreason can open a "menacing" space of absolute freedom against which power can no longer interfere.[96]

> More effectively than any other kind of rationalism, better in any case than our positivism, classical rationalism could watch out for and guard against the subterranean danger of unreason, that threatening space of an absolute freedom. (1988: 84)

IV. The Allegory of the Mesmerised Power

In the previous chapters, I have already noted that in their narration, Wu Ming frequently use meta-historical allegories whose meaning is not fixed and can change with time and through the readers' interpretation. As underlined by Wu Ming in an interview:

> Inevitabilmente il romanzo storico si dimostra sempre metastorico: in qualche modo, qualunque sia l'oggi in cui lo si legge e in qualunque contesto, finisce sempre per parlarci proprio di quell'oggi. Da questo punto di vista, quindi, il romanzo riesce a farlo quanta più libertà di farlo gli concede il lettore, anche diverse da quelle che l'autore aveva in mente. Se lo si rende troppo corrispondente all'oggi in cui si scrive, lo si impoverisce, se invece lo si lascia libero di significare, probabilmente fra dieci anni chi lo leggerà troverà sempre delle corrispondenze. (In Bolzonella 2014)

In their meta-historical narrations, Wu Ming often "play with mirrors", offering allegorical texts that can be interpreted in different ways. In *L'armata dei sonnambuli* the allegory used is mesmerism, invented by the German physician Franz Anton Mesmer, also known as animal magnetism, a hypnotic state induced by a practitioner's imposition of his "will" on that of the patient. I believe that, through an allegorical interpretation, it is possible to identify significant

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[96] Foucault gave a series of lectures on this topic: *Parrēsia*, delivered at the University of Grenoble in 1982, and *Discourse and Truth* at the University of California, Berkeley in 1983 in which he provided thoughtful talks in answering questions such as: Who is able to tell the truth? About what topic is it important to tell the truth? What are the relations between this activity of telling the truth and exercising power?

similarities between the mesmerised army of sleepwalkers in the novel and some behaviour in people nowadays.

Wu Ming have narrated how mesmerism can be practised on the one hand as a technique that can heal patients' ailments, and on the other hand as a method that influences other people's minds for political objectives. In the novel, the former aspect is carried out by Doctor Orphée D'Amblanc, the latter by the Knight of Yvers who, after the fall of the Jacobins, aimed at restoring monarchic power with an "army of sleepwalkers" made up by the mesmerised dregs of society.

In their detailed historical research about the French Revolution (and the pre-revolutionary period), Wu Ming focussed on an important event that happened in February 1778, when Mesmer arrived in Paris and began to promote a particular theory of healing that almost immediately seized the imagination of many people, including doctors. Mesmer believed that all living beings had magnetic fields running through them that could be manipulated for healing or other purposes. He declared that a universal magnetic fluid passed through people's bodies, and that diseases appeared when this fluid was out of balance.

> Io credo che esista un fluido universale, il quale tiene in vita tutta la natura. Io credo che questo fluido, sulla terra, sia in continuo movimento. La sola idea palpabile che noi ne abbiamo è quella che ricaviamo dall'elettricità. [...] Un flusso, simile a quello elettrico o magnetico, che pervade l'universum. Un flusso che attraversa ogni cosa e ogni creatura vivente. Un flusso che lega tutto a tutto. (*AdS*: 65, 81)

Since the practitioner's own body contained the magnetic fluid, Mesmer felt that techniques such as touching or passing the hands over the patient's body could rebalance or transfer the body's magnetic fluid. In this way, the patient would be cured. He initially treated his patients with magnets; whenever a magnet was brought into contact with a patient, the fluid conveyed by the magnet entered the body of the patient and healed him of his ailment.

He treated patients both individually and in groups. With individuals, Mesmer sat in front of his patient with his knees touching the patient's knees, pressing the patient's thumbs in his hands, looking fixedly into the patient's eyes. Mesmer moved his hands from the patient's shoulders down along their arms and then pressed his fingers on the patient's chest and abdomen. In Wu Ming's novel, a mesmeric doctor, Orphée D'Amblanc, tries to apply this method for medical purposes to heal the illness of his patients.[97]

> La mano era posata sul ventre della donna in corrispondenza dell'ombelico, ad appena mezzo palmo dal seno e dal pube. L'altra mano era sulla schiena, nell'avvallamento sopra le terga. D'Amblanc stava attento a tenere il corpo distante da quello della paziente, e nondimeno il suo profumo lo assediava. Cécile Girard era seduta su una sedia senza braccioli le spalle discoste dallo schienale, in modo che la mano del terapista potesse passare nello spazio intermedio. Testimone della magnetizzazione era l'anziana serva, come sempre intenta all'uncinetto vicino alla finestra. D'Amblanc tentava di non pensare alla sua presenza e di concentrarsi sul bene della paziente. La signora Girard aveva le palpebre abbassate, il respiro regolare, le labbra appena dischiuse lasciavano intravedere la dentatura perfetta.
> – Sentite che vi faccio del bene? – chiese D'Amblanc.
> – Sì. Continuate, vi prego.
> – Sta a voi decidere quando interrompere il trattamento. Percepite il calore del fluido?
> – Sì. Mi attraversa da parte a parte.
> (*AdS*: 75)

Mesmer's theories attracted a wide following during the pre-revolutionary period in France (and also in other European countries). Parisians soon divided into those who thought he was an impostor and those who, on the contrary, praised his great discovery. In August 1784, some members of the Faculty of Medicine and of the Royal Academy of Sciences were appointed by the King as commissioners to investigate animal magnetism. The commission conducted a

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[97] In order to give more authenticity to the narration, during the writing of the novel, Wu Ming contacted the Italian illusionist Mariano Tomatis who is an expert on mesmerism. 'Stavamo finendo la stesura de *L'Armata dei Sonnambuli*. Da anni ci occupavamo di mesmerismo e magnetismo animale, quindi di ipnosi, e quindi di suggestione, e quindi di mentalismo. Da tempo sentivamo l'esigenza di far leggere il libro in anteprima a un «esperto», per capire se le scene di mentalismo avessero coerenza narrativa e plausibilità scenica. (In Bolzonella 2014). Tomatis replied: 'È stato *L'armata dei sonnambuli* ad accompagnarmi alle origini storiche di questo strano intreccio; magnetismo animale e politica, suggestioni ipnotiche e storytelling emancipatorio, usi e abusi della manipolazione del linguaggio: il dibattito su questi temi muove i primi passi nel Settecento ed esplode letteralmente all'arrivo di Franz Anton Mesmer a Parigi'.
https://www.wumingfoundation.com/giap/2016/06/mesmer-lezioni-di-mentalismo/ (Accessed 11.09.18)

series of experiments on Mesmer's treatment and eventually concluded that there was no

evidence for such a fluid. Furthermore, the benefits that the treatment produced were only

imaginary. In a page of the novel, Wu Ming have reproduced an excerpt of this investigation:

> I commissari incaricati dal re dell'esame del mesmerismo, hanno riconosciuto
> che le principali cause degli effetti attribuiti al magnetismo animale sono il
> tocco, l'immaginazione e l'imitazione, e hanno osservato che c'erano sempre
> più donne che uomini in crisi. [...] Il trattamento magnetico non può che
> essere pericoloso per la morale. Proponendosi di guarire malattie che
> richiedono lunghe cure, si eccitano emozioni piacevoli e care, emozioni che
> poi si rimpiangono, che si cerca di ritrovare perché esse hanno un fascino
> naturale per noi e contribuiscono fisicamente alla nostra felicità, ma
> moralmente non sono meno condannabili e sono anzi ancor più pericolose,
> perché è più facile prendervi una dolce abitudine. Fatto a Parigi, l'11 agosto
> 1784. (*AdS*: 134, 135)

As already noted, in the novel magnetism is represented in two opposite ways: as a technique

that restores health (the magnetism practised by D'Amblanc) or as a tool used to influence and

manipulate other people against their will (the magnetism endorsed by the Knight of Yvers).

The latter embodies the despair and at the same time the hopes of the collapsed Monarchy to

restore the previous order. The Knight of Yvers is a royalist who first tried to liberate King

Louis XVI without success (*AdS*: 23-25), and then found refuge in the mental asylum in Bicêtre

using the false identity of August Laplace.

> Dal suo punto di osservazione, l'uomo che si faceva chiamare Laplace pensò
> che la follia è materia di studio indispensabile per chi voglia conoscere ed
> esercitare il potere. [...] Bicêtre era la Francia: infermi di mente impegnati in
> discorsi più grandi di loro. [...] Luoghi di segregazione come quello erano più
> aperti al mondo di quanto non si credesse. [...] Bicêtre era ospedale, prigione,
> ospizio e orfanotrofio. (*AdS*: 88, 89)

At Bicêtre, the Knight of Yvers-Auguste Laplace, who was a mesmerist before the Revolution,

once again started practising magnetism on the inmates of the asylum. Through non-verbal acts

and trance-like states, the Knight of Yvers shifted the energy field within the weak minds of

the asylum inmates: 'Le menti semplici si lasciano andare con più facilità, e la fiducia è alla

base della terapia magnetica'. (*AdS*: 282). His aim was to increase the power of suggestion and thus take control of his patients' unseen energy forces. Manipulating this energy through mesmeric techniques, the Knight of Yvers would bring the fools into a trance more quickly and powerfully.

> Il contatto con la follia e la deformità era ben altra cosa. Macchine umane, bestie umane, macchinari bestiali che sbavano e imprecano, e ti fissano, immobili, o percorsi da tremiti, il volto orribile a una spanna dal tuo, tanto da sentirne il fiato, la puzza della carne e delle vesti. Grazie all'orrore, aveva cominciato a fare ciò che doveva, ciò che aveva stabilito fin dall'inizio: usare quel girone di dannati per addestrare la sua peculiare abilità. Abilità lasciata cadere anni prima, imprecisa perché non più addestrata, ma ritemprabile e potenzialmente decisiva. Su di essa contava, per dirigere verso un esito fortunato il disastro che la Francia subiva. (*AdS*: 90)

After the fall of Robespierre and the Jacobins, the Knight of Yvers escaped from the asylum and applied the practices of magnetism on people with weak and malleable minds, such as the inmates of the Asylum, who could be easily manipulated and dominated. He thus created a mesmeric counter-revolutionary army, the army of sleepwalkers, made up by the dregs of society.

> Pile di teste, maschere sogghignanti, e quei muschiatini, eroi adatti ai tempi, gioventù dorata, Ragazzi–gloria, Incredibili, Mervegliosi, teppa sgargiante. Vermi brulicanti entro le proprie stesse ferite. Così era quella l'idea di nobiltà prevalente tra quei figli delusi. Una parodia. (*AdS*: 592)

As highlighted by Manera, the army of sleepwalkers was a military wing composed by an ensemble of "puppets" who led campaigns of terror during which many Jacobins were killed, hundreds were injured, and many others were forced to leave Paris.

> Sono truppe urbane che raccolgono giovani, disertori e refrattari, inquadrati da veterani della politica, che operano per vendetta personale e per spirito di rivalsa sociale. La loro violenza colpisce i club rivoluzionari, chiusi o distrutti, e i sanculotti, i militanti di sezione, che disarmati e isolati cadono vittima delle squadre punitive. [...] Saranno loro, tra la cosiddetta "gioventù dorata", a fare da braccio armato della controrivoluzione antigiacobina, manovrato da politici spregiudicati ("ex-terroristi" pentiti) come Fréron,

Tallien, Merlin de Thionville. (2014)

> Tutti i dettagli rafforzavano l'idea che l'Armata dei Sonnambuli fosse formata di veri sonnambuli. Insensibili al dolore. Capaci, come lo erano i sonnambuli, di prevedere le azioni altrui. Tutti mossi da un'unica volontà, come membra di un solo cervello. Un cervello che era in grado di metterli in quello stato per poi mantenere il contatto a distanza di tempo e di spazio. Come questo fosse possibile, ancora non l'aveva capito. Ma era chiaro che il cavaliere d'Yvers - o il «cittadino Laplace», come s'era fatto chiamare a Bicêtre - praticava magnetizzazioni di gruppo. Altrimenti, per sonnambulizzare uno alla volta decine di uomini, avrebbe impiegato una giornata intera. (*AdS*: 666)

Taking into account this crucial aspect in the novel, the army of sleepwalkers created thanks to collective hypnosis, I think it is worth considering its allegorical interpretation. I am referring to the idea that the human mind can be altered or controlled by certain psychological techniques (i.e. mind control, brainwashing and coercive persuasion) in order to reduce a subject's ability to think critically or independently. In this perspective, the army of sleepwalkers can be interpreted as the victims of techniques of social control, such as the modern media. In their *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer have argued that the modern human condition has been characterised by homogeneity, alienation and normalisation of desire since the 1940s, when there was a radical transformation of Western society because of the industrial and technological reconstruction that has modified the daily life, behaviour and habits of people. Adorno and Horkheimer have theorised that our modern society consists of routinised forms that diminished the complexity of the human experience and serve only the interests of powerful corporations. Within the cultural chaos of technological progress, what has emerged is a system created by capitalism whose main goal is the uniformity of the whole of society through the pervasive use of mass media. The worst aspect of this situation is represented by the fact that these technological-mass societies are entirely controlled and manipulated by a relatively small number of individuals who hold the power.

> The basis on which technology acquires power over society is the power of those whose economic hold over society is greatest. A technological rationale is the rationale of domination itself. It is the coercive nature of society

> alienated from itself. [...] It has made the technology of the culture industry no more than the achievement of standardisation and mass production. [...] The need which might resist central control has already been suppressed by the control of the individual consciousness. [...] Something is provided for all so that none may escape. (Adorno & Horkheimer 2002: 95)

By extending the allegory towards this broader connotation, it is thus evident that the mesmerism as narrated in its negative use facilitates the mental control of a multitude of people who, through collective hypnosis, can lose their free will. As the Knight of Yvers claimed: 'Prima di avere una strategia, però, occorreva la massa di manovra. Indurre i molti ad abdicare alla volontà in modo volontario è un risultato che si può ottenere se si dispone della retorica giusta, ma soprattutto se l'idea che ti muove è vera' (*AdS*: 593). Understanding the role of the army through this meta-historical allegory, Franco "Bifo" Berardi has identified clear parallels with today's people in their daily routine.

> L'armata dei sonnambuli sono [...] i milioni di oppressi che vanno a votare per il loro oppressore, sono l'immenso pubblico della televisione multiforme e uniforme. Grazie all'azione ipnotica di un cospiratore reazionario si forma l'armata dei sonnambuli: un esercito di schiavi che si identificano con il loro padrone e ne eseguono ciecamente i disegni perché la loro coscienza e la loro sensibilità sono state ipnotizzate, anestetizzate. Da questo punto di vista il romanzo racconta (anche) il divenire automa dell'umanità moderna. (2014)

In conclusion, I would argue that the novel under discussion in this chapter could be considered as a perfect model of the dialectical process (old power / desire of freedom / new power) that characterises Wu Ming's narrations. In *L'armata dei sonnambuli*, Wu Ming's focus has embraced what is largely considered a watershed event in modern European history, the French Revolution, during the period when French citizens were redesigning their country's political and social structures. After the fall of institutions such as the absolute monarchy and the feudal system (which represented the old power), the narration centres on the failure of the Revolution that in the moment of instability degenerated into massacres during the periods of Terror and then into the rise of new a power (the Empire).

FROM THE *"WRONG SIDE"* OF HISTORY: *ASCE DI GUERRA AND 54*

Consistently with my thesis that the dialectical relationship between power and freedom is at the core of Wu Ming's novels, I will suggest that a cycle of constant repetition, where a previous state of oppression is followed, after a revolution, by the rise of a new, stronger power, continuously reappears in every novel. What emerges in *Asce di guerra* and *54* is the literary representation of the relationships between power and rebellion that emerges during the Cold War period in Italy (*Asce di guerra*) and Yugoslavia (*54*).

I. Counter-Narrations in Asce di guerra

Asce di guerra was published by Wu Ming and Vitaliano Ravagli in 2000. Many sections of the novel are an autobiographical account, reflecting Ravagli's personal experience during the Italian (1943-1945) and Laotian Resistance movements (1956-1958), as a Partisan boy in the former and as a Vietcong in the latter. These experiences were previously narrated by Ravagli himself in his non-fictional books *I sentieri dell'odio. Dalla linea gotica alla guerra di Indocina* and *Il prato degli uomini spenti*.[98] Some parts of these books have converged into *Asce di guerra*.[99]

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[98] Ravagli, Vitaliano (1997). *I sentieri dell'odio. Dalla linea gotica alla guerra di Indocina*. Turin: Trauben; Ravagli, Vitaliano (1998). *Il prato degli uomini spenti*. Florence: L'Autore Libri.

[99] In an interview, Wu Ming revealed that: 'Stavamo scrivendo un romanzo [*54*], ambientato negli anni Cinquanta. Una sera, durante una cena, Carlo Lucarelli, lo scrittore di *Almost Blue*, ha cominciato a parlare di un tale [Vitaliano Ravagli] che abitava dalle sue parti. E che aveva vissuto quel periodo in maniera davvero originale. Prima Lucarelli ci ha fatto leggere i due libri autobiografici fatti stampare da Ravagli. Poi, affascinati da questa storia incredibile, abbiamo deciso di lasciar perdere il romanzo che stavamo scrivendo per incontrare Vitaliano. Il progetto, poi, si è allargato. Ha formato una serie di cerchi concentrici. Scrivendo la storia di Ravagli ci siamo

Other parts of the novel have as a protagonist Wu Ming's *alter ego*, the fictional character Daniele Zani, a young journalist investigating the aftermath of the Second World War in Italy. Daniele is the nephew of Sergio Zani, a partisan nicknamed Soviet, who fought against the Nazi-Fascists. After his grandfather's death in 2000, Daniele wanted to know more about his past. For this reason, he met his old companions in the Resistance, asking them to recount their daily life at the time of the war and the post-war period in Italy. During his investigation, Daniele eventually ran into the story of an Italian partisan (Vitaliano Ravagli) who left Italy in 1956 to join the Resistance in Laos. After months of studying, searching and comparing, Daniele was able to look at this crucial historical period from a different perspective, far away from the reports that, from the beginning, had been distorted by official historiography in the name of a peaceful reconciliation. Through this fictional character, Wu Ming have shed light on the dark side of the 1950s, a decade that has generally been seen as a prosperous age of thriving economic development, reconstruction and social reconciliation.

In contrast to the other novels, not much critical attention has been paid to *Asce di guerra*. Nonetheless, in their few reviews, some critics (Michele Smargiassi, Alessandro Mezzena Lona and Rudi Ghedini) have focussed on a significant aspect of the novel, which is the political use of literature. Interviewed by Laura Giorgi, Wu Ming declared that there is no distinction between history and politics: 'Scrivere e riscrivere la storia è sempre un atto politico' (in Giorgi 2000).

Within this interpretation, it has been argued that Wu Ming have created discourses of counter-history in order to shed light on events that History has progressively rejected, excluded or distorted. In *Asce di guerra,* these events were some aspects of the Italian

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accorti che andava inserita nella Storia degli anni Cinquanta. E scavando nel passato, cercando di metterlo a fuoco, ci siamo accorti che finiva per collegarsi perfettamente con il presente' (in Mezzena Lona 1999).

Resistance and of the aftermath of the Second World War. Michele Smargiassi has correctly suggested that this novel re-opens:

> Un capitolo intoccabile nell'Italia della "riconciliazione nazionale", già liquidato dieci anni fa con la feroce polemica sui delitti del dopoguerra: quello della Resistenza tradita, della rivoluzione rubata. Un libro pensato come deliberato oltraggio al presente e alle sue rimozioni. La storia e la memoria come "asce di guerra" da disseppellire. (2000)

Similarly, Alessandro Mezzena Lona has pointed out that Wu Ming's counter-historical narration emerged from the "wrong side" of history (from the defeated), inviting the readers to see – and appreciate – History with different eyes.

> La Storia, per loro, è un pozzo senza fondo. Dal quale estrarre storie apparentemente marginali, molto spesso dimenticate, per non dire esorcizzate, che servono a guardare il passato, lontano e vicinissimo, da una prospettiva diversa. Inedita. [...] E insinua uno spiraglio di luce in una zona buia della Storia d'Italia. Wu Ming trasporta il lettore negli anni Cinquanta. E gli fa scoprire una verità mai rivelata. (1999)

On the contrary, Rudi Ghedini has suggested that Wu Ming 'Vuole urlare il suo disgusto per il pensiero debole, per la storia edulcorata, ripulita e imbellita, per una sinistra che pare vergognarsi del suo passato e spreca il tempo a riscriverlo, sempre più esangue, sempre meno appassionante' (2000).

Alongside these discussions, I wish to briefly note that Wu Ming wrote this novel in contrast to what they have called 'mitologia istituzionale' (*AdG*: 3), and in opposition to the "truth" that Power (intended as the winners who tell their version of history) continually spreads. In the prologue to *Asce di guerra*, Wu Ming explained in fact that a writer needs to dig deep into the dark side of forgotten, erased events.

> Le frasi fatte e le formule ripetute dai palchi, come dai pulpiti, coprono la rabbia, lo sporco e la dinamite, consegnando al presente quello che chiede. Scavare nel cuore oscuro di vicende dimenticate o mai raccontate è un oltraggio al presente. Un atto spregiudicato e volontario. Le storie non sono che asce di guerra da disseppellire. (*Ibid*)

Working on the recovery of historical memory, Wu Ming seemed particularly interested in the exploitation of documents in a narrative way. For them, the act of narrating was connected to the formulation of hypothesis, putting the historian and the writer on the same level, as Wu Ming2 explained:

> Ci sono spesso "coni d'ombra", "buchi" di fronte ai quali gli storici accademici devono fermarsi per "insufficienza di prove". Là dove il professionista può solo ipotizzare scenari possibili, il narratore lo affianca, scoprendo che anche raccontare è un modo di fare ipotesi, purché ci si attenga al criterio di James Ellroy: la radicale verosimiglianza. […] Lo storico è sempre un narratore, perché in fondo, con più o meno cautele, ci racconta una storia; vorrei dire che vale anche il contrario: il narratore è anche uno storico, quando inventa, con radicale verosimiglianza, ciò che la Storia non ci ha raccontato. (2000)

II. The Collision between Power and Freedom

In this section, I will analyse the main elements emerging from the moment of instability, when the previous power (Fascism) and the desire for freedom (led by the Resistance) collided in a physical contest where the opponents faced each other on the battlefield. I will highlight the fact that in the narration of the conflict, Wu Ming went against the established myths of the Partisans as ruthless murderers or immaculate heroes. The war has in fact been narrated in ways that go beyond the demonisation or the glorification of the Resistance. Together with the analysis of the text, I will also outline the political and cultural context in which the novel was published, as well as the concept of "historical truth" as related to the Resistance.

Far from the prevailing trend of simple reinterpretations around its glorification and denigration, Wu Ming focussed on the Resistance as a complex, contradictory and multifaceted movement. As declared in an interview, Wu Ming aimed at narrating the Resistance outside the demonic/heroic dualism:

> In *Asce di guerra* combattiamo l'idea che il passato sia un mausoleo da presidiare, una lapide da tenere lucida, abbellita di fiori finti. In questo senso, non ci interessa la "razionalità immanente" di un periodo storico, ma l'uso che una comunità di lotta può fare di certe storie. […] L'approccio è anti-oleografico, revisionistico nel senso del ri-vedere costantemente, sempre con altri occhi, scavalcando il dualismo ortodossia/eterodossia. (In Caronia 2001)

With regard to the last point, it is worth considering the context in which *Asce di guerra* was published. From the 1990s, a number of historians – including Giorgio Pisanò and Gianpaolo Pansa – began to claim that, since the end of Second World War, Italian society had been manipulated by the communist cultural hegemony.[100] In their writings, Pisanò and Pansa suggested that in Italy the left-wing perspective had been accepted as the cultural norm and that, at least until the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, this dominant ideology had strongly influenced the perception of historical, social, political and economic events that had followed the end of the war, including the Resistance.

According to these historians, the whole Resistance movement – along with Fascism itself – needed to be reassessed after years of misrepresentations. To sum up the main points of their views, Pisanò and Pansa ascribed the Italian civil war (1943-45) to the Communist Party's exploitation of the clashes between partisans and Nazi-fascists as a laboratory to turn Italy into a "Soviet Republic". According to this interpretation, during the war and even after the end of hostilities, the communist partisans were allowed by their party to commit massacres, rapes and other heinous crimes. On the other hand, the Nazi-fascists were depicted as only trying to avoid war and restore calm; their harsh reprisals simply followed the communists' senseless attacks.

It is worth pointing out that Pansa's and Pisanò's writings neither contained historiographical references nor referred to original documents, hence they lacked accuracy

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[100] See for instance Pisanò, Giorgio (1992*). Il triangolo della morte. La politica della strage in Emilia durante e dopo la guerra civile*. Milan: Mursia; Pansa, Giampaolo (2003). *Il sangue dei vinti*. Milan: Sperling & Kupfer; Pansa, Giampaolo (2007). *I Gendarmi della memoria*. Milan: Sperling & Kupfer; Pansa, Giampaolo (2010). *I vinti non dimenticano. I crimini ignorati della nostra guerra civile*. Milan: Rizzoli.

and, technically, could not be considered scientific works. Nonetheless – or maybe thanks to this – their books were welcomed with enthusiasm by a large section of the public.[101]

In this context, I would like to reflect on how the concept of "historical truth" has been called into question over the past decades, using Alan B. Spitzer's, Linda Hutcheon's and Hayden White's theories. As Spitzer has argued: 'Each history claims the authority of particular truths and implicitly assumes the validity of the general criteria of truth applied to the particular claim' (1996: 6). In a postmodernist perspective, Hutcheon has suggested that there is not one single truth, but many, and that historical truth has frequently been hidden or altered for political reasons.

> Imaginative reconstruction is the focus of the postmodern rethinking of the problems of how we can and do come to have knowledge of the past. […] Postmodernism returns to confront the problematic nature of the past as an object of knowledge for us in the present. […] The question is: how can we know that past today - and what can we know of it? (1998: 92)

The key-questions 'how' and 'what' do not only refer to the fictionalisation of history, because these questions also call upon the cognitive status of historical knowledge, or rather the ontological nature of historical documents. The "real" past did exist, even before its textualisation, through both history and fiction. According to Hutcheon, the crucial point is to understand who decides which events are worthy of being told. Why have certain events been obliterated and for what reasons? From this viewpoint, history can never be objective, as it is always subject to political bias. Consequently, there is not one single truth but many. This becomes obvious when historians propose various and even conflicting interpretations of one single event. Hutcheon has claimed that the discipline of history, which has been deemed autonomous and radically alien to literature, has changed in the last few decades.

The way in which history is written has come under considerable scrutiny in

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[101] Published in 2003, Pansa's *Il sangue dei vinti* was a best-seller in few weeks.

recent years. History as the politics of the past has been challenged by the rethinking of the frame of reference and the methodological tools of the discipline. The resulting focusing of historiography on previously neglected objects of study has coincided with feminist's reorientation of historical method to highlight the past of formerly excluded ex-centric events. (*Ibid*: 95)

This pluralist view of historiography has led to different constructions of past reality with an evident shift from validation to signification. In his *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Hayden White has claimed that the dominant method used by historians has become writing history in the form of a narrative representation of the past. White has maintained that even if history has been conceived as an objective pursuit of archival facts, it is actually a collection of narratives elaborated by historians; these narratives are structured by specific ideological content manifested through the historians' choice of tropes and narrative techniques. Historians use narration to interpret, understand and explain phenomena; this kind of activity makes history a different discipline from the empirical sciences. Therefore, White has argued, our knowledge of past events is given by the selection of facts operated by historians and by their successive textualisation.[102]

Reflecting on the above-mentioned considerations about multiple historical truths, I would like to consider the political and cultural context in which this new approach towards the Resistance took place. In 1992, Tangentopoli (Bribesville), a corruption scandal that involved government ministers, industrialists and businesspeople, transformed the Italian political landscape. This scandal and subsequent trial put an end to the whole political system (the so-called First Republic that had begun after the 1948 general elections), allowing the emergence of new parties such as Berlusconi's *Forza Italia*. This marked the beginning of the Second Republic, with Berlusconi's victory in the 1994 general elections, in a three-party coalition with the neo-fascists of Alleanza Nazionale and the *leghisti* of the Lega Nord. Two

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[102] See White, Hayden (1973). *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.

of the main objectives in Berlusconi's agenda were: erasing the fascists' negative reputation, and concentrating on the demonisation of communism. Being the owner of popular TV channels, newspapers, periodicals and publishing houses, Berlusconi massively used his extensive personal media power to reach these goals.[103] The theme of the Resistance also fell within this particular context of historical revisionism.

Regarding the divergent interpretations of the Resistance, Wu Ming claimed that, on the one hand, there was a demonisation of the Resistance on behalf of those who depicted the partisans as ruthless murderers; on the other hand, there was a representation of partisans as heroes who singlehandedly liberated Italy from Nazi-fascism.

> Per capire qualcosa occorre sbriciolare il mito come ci è stato tramandato e scavare fuori dalle macerie le storie vive. Quelle che nessuno ha raccontato. Le asce da disseppellire. […] Una storia che si è voluta "ripulire", per renderla inoffensiva. Per ricoprire la rabbia e la frustrazione di tanti, con le medaglie e gli encomi. Scelte schiacciate tra le calunnie di chi è rimasto a guardare, e la prosopopea delle istituzioni che da quel coraggio hanno tratto ragione di essere. Banditi e razziatori per gli uni, eroi senza macchia per gli altri. Purché le contraddizioni reali rimanessero fuori dalla porta. E allora questa è la vicenda di una rimozione collettiva, di un crimine consumato con le fanfare e le corone d'alloro. (*AdG*: 257)

Destroying old myths and creating new ones is a recurrent theme in Wu Ming's novels.[104] The myths that were imposed by political and cultural powers need to be "crumbled" in the name of counter-narration. On this point, Marco Amici has correctly stated that Wu Ming's writing is a 'pratica di opposizione' (2006: 201) against the myths imposed by the established power. In fact, in the pages of *Asce di guerra*, Wu Ming have opposed the myths of Partisans as ruthless murderers or immaculate heroes.

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[103] See for instance Ginsborg, Paul (2005). *Silvio Berlusconi. Television, Power and Patrimony*. London: Verso. Albertazzi, Daniele; Brook, Clodagh; Ross, Charlotte; Rothenberg, Nina (2009). *Resisting the Tide. Culture of Opposition under Berlusconi (2001-06)*. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group.

[104] As mentioned in the Introduction, critics such as Marco Amici, Giuliana Benvenuti, Franco "Bifo" Berardi, Claudia Boscolo and Emanuela Piga have largely considered this an important aspect in Wu Ming's poetics.

Looking for the hidden stories about a crucial moment of Italian history, Wu Ming reported some episodes of the Resistance through Vitaliano Ravagli's autobiographical narration, trying to mix a realistic account with a poetic dimension that emphasised some concealed aspects of the war. When asked about the novel in an interview, Wu Ming maintained that:

> Noi volevamo fare vedere i partigiani nella durezza della guerra e dello scontro, con particolari di lacrime, sudore, fango, dissenteria, freddo, in una chiave non antiretorica perché la retorica non è sbagliata di per sé, ma di certo non trombonesca e tronfia, ma dura, come piace a noi. L'obiettività la chiedano ad altri. (In Giorgi 2000)

Through Ravagli's autobiographical story, Wu Ming used a synecdochical approach to narrate the Resistance from a privileged point of view, that of a boy whose childhood was traumatised by the war. Wu Ming brought attention to minor events in the conflict, where a single individual or detail has come to stand for many or the whole, calibrating the narration of war on a more intimate scale and touching the reader's emotions more deeply. For example, a sentence like "The city was sacked and burnt" merely gives an image, or rather a suggestion of fire, death and destruction. Without details or the description of physical effects, it is difficult to appreciate the impact of a conflict.

Even though Vitaliano did not actively participate in the Resistance because of his young age (he was just a 10-year-old boy in 1943), he however had first-hand experience of the war. Due to the Nazi-fascist rounding-up operations in Emilia-Romagna in 1944, many people had no choice but to leave their homes and find places of safety elsewhere. With his family and other evacuees, Vitaliano found shelter in a small cave near the river Senio (in Romagna) where he spent several months, waiting for the end of the conflict. Vitaliano recalled the inhuman conditions suffered by those children, women and elderly people, who went without food, water, sleep or any assistance, stuck as they were in no-man's land between the Allies aided by

the Resistance fighters and Nazi-Fascists. The only chance of survival was to look for food during the night, when the conflict stopped. Because Vitaliano was the fastest runner in the group, he accomplished this duty every night until he was almost hit by a grenade.

> Il giorno dopo, nella quiete del primo mattino, uscii di nascosto. […] Udii il colpo di partenza, ma non il "soffio", coperto dal rumore dell'acciaio sul legno. Quando ripresi conoscenza, mia sorella stava spostando l'albero che mi era cascato addosso. Avevo tagli e ferite un po' ovunque, ma nessuna grave. La granata mi aveva mancato di pochi metri. Con l'aiuto di Natalia rientrai al rifugio. Fui molto fortunato quel giorno. (*AdG*: 94)

At this and numerous other points in the novel, the experience of war has been presented through the effects it had on the body and the physical injuries suffered by fighters or, in this case, by a boy (Vitaliano) looking for food. In the narration of the conflict, Wu Ming exploited war-related tropes such as sounds, cries, screams, noises, smells, wounds. Injuries were tangible proof that the conflict had taken place on the body of the participants. In her *The Literature of War,* Kate McLoughlin has argued that:

> First-hand experience or autopsy is indeed the crucial ingredient of authority, legitimacy and credibility in war reporting. The eye-witness offers the epistemological guarantee you can believe it because I saw it happen. […] In the war reporter's case, the pact becomes embodied, its signature the various indications of the messenger's presence at war. (2011: 63)

The synecdochical approach, which focusses the attention on minor events, and the first-person narration by a privileged point of view enhance the way in which Wu Ming engendered empathy with their readers. Empathy is the experience of understanding another person's condition from his or her perspective. In *A Theory of Narrative Empathy,* Suzanne Keen has analysed what empathy is, focussing on how narrative empathy works, and in particular on the current research on the effects of specific narrative techniques on readers. Empathy is a spontaneous sharing of affect and:

> Can be provoked by witnessing another's emotional state, by hearing about

another's condition, or even by reading. […] Empathy is thus agreed to be both affective and cognitive by most psychologists. (2006: 208, 209)

In *Asce di guerra,* Wu Ming made empathy a significant feature of their narration. Even if the readers did not experience the same traumatic events narrated in the novels, they feel a sense of closeness with the protagonists. In *Asce di guerra*, empathy helps to appreciate what the characters felt about oppression, dictatorship, torture, trauma. As Keen has highlighted:

> I set aside for the moment the view that emotions and cognition describe different processes of the central nervous system, for empathy itself clearly involves both feeling and thinking. Memory, experience, and the capacity to take another's perspective (all matters traditionally considered cognitive) have roles in empathy. Yet the experience of empathy in the feeling subject involves the emotions, including sensations in the body. In any case, narrative empathy invoked by reading must involve cognition, for reading itself relies upon complex cognitive operations. (*Ibid*: 213)

The main issue for all those who inform others about war events is to deliver a salient and credible account of the conflict. In *Asce di guerra*, the protagonist, the partisan boy Vitaliano Ravagli, has allowed readers to experience the war from his point of view. In choosing non-fictional narration led by a real witness, Wu Ming have given the question "Who tells the war?" a literary response strongly based on the concept of believability. On this concept, Keen has argued that first-person fiction, where the narrator tells his or her own experience and perceptions, is thought to invite an especially close relationship between reader and narrative voice (*ibid*: 220). Similarly, W. van Peer and H. Pander Maat have suggested that first-person narration creates a 'greater illusion of closeness… allowing the reader a greater and better fusion with the world of the character' (2001: 237).

In conclusion, the Resistance – beyond its established myths – has been narrated through the physical elements coming from the depiction of war. Wu Ming have endowed the protagonist (Vitaliano Ravagli) with the ability to recount the violence that he had witnessed through a synecdochical approach. In the next section, I will focus on the Resistance that did

not end after the war. The outcome of the conflict, in fact, generated other forms of resistances, with the emergence of rebels who did not accept the order imposed by the new Italian government.

III. Disciplinary Power

This section will consider the outcome of the dialectical process, with the emergence of a new power represented by the Italian Republic born after the Constitutional Referendum on the 2nd of June 1946. This new power was more complex than the previous one (Fascism) that had been overcome at the end of the Second World War. The collision – that was set on the battlefield – between the old power and the desire for freedom during the Italian Civil War, which led to the fall of Fascism, did not guarantee the complete rejection of the regime. My analysis here will concentrate upon the moment of assimilation, where a new power incorporates some features of both Fascism and the Resistance. In particular, I will focus on the emergence of a disciplinary power (referring to Foucault's theories) that characterises this new power.

Through the fictional character of Daniele Zani, Wu Ming analysed the consequences of the dialectical dynamics of the post-war period, highlighting the social, political and economic transformations that emerged in Italy in the 1950s.

> Gli anni Cinquanta. […] Di quel decennio, l'uso politico della memoria ci ha consegnato un'immagine piatta, lontana, distorta. […] L'Italietta onesta, laboriosa, che si crede alleata delle grandi potenze occidentali mentre ne diviene colonia. Italietta stupida, con un piede ancora nel fascismo (stessi codici, stessi prefetti, stessi questori) e uno a mezz'aria, sul ciglio di nuovi baratri chiamati "modernità". (*AdG*: 32, 35)

It is worth considering that in the 1950s, Italian society was rapidly changing following an industrial and technological reconstruction that modified peoples' daily life, behaviour and

habits. The years that followed the end of the Second World War are known as a crucial turning point for Italy, which changed from a mostly rural and traditional country to a modern, rich and consumerist society. In this period of sustained economic development, known as the "Italian Economic Miracle", the rise of new consumer goods and cultural trends led to great change in the perception of society, individuals and reality. In fact, everyday life was transformed by the presence of a huge variety of cheap consumer goods that created similar behavioural models and homogenous wishes in the population.[105] During the post-war reconstruction, while Italy was reaching agreements with other European countries to build the future European Union, and at the same time was receiving substantial aid from the Marshall Plan,[106] many Italians experienced these transformations in a negative way, because they were excluded from the improvements brought about by the new democratic state.

> Il paese venne percorso e squassato da una febbre cementizia di cui continua a pagare le conseguenze. Il Paese democristiano doveva dare di sé un'immagine positiva, rampante, proiettata verso il boom economico. Ma in tanti abitavano ancora nei tuguri, non avevano il bagno in casa, molti nemmeno l'acqua corrente. Però si costruivano le autostrade. (*AdG*: 34)

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[105] Related to this crucial aspect, it is worth mentioning the analysis on Italian society of that time expressed by Pier Paolo Pasolini who coined the expression 'rivoluzione antropologica': 'Un rovesciamento improvviso e violento del modo di produzione ha distrutto tutti i loro [degli uomini] precedenti valori particolari e reali, cambiando la loro forma e il loro comportamento: e i nuovi valori, puramente pragmatici, esistenziali, del benessere, hanno tolto loro ogni dignità. [...] È cambiato il modo di produzione (enorme quantità, beni superflui, funzione edonistica). Ma la produzione non produce solo merce, produce insieme rapporti sociali, umanità. Il nuovo modo di produzione ha prodotto dunque una nuova umanità, ossia una nuova cultura: modificando antropologicamente l'uomo. [...] Tale nuova cultura ha distrutto cinicamente (genocidio) le culture precedenti: da quella tradizionale borghese, alle varie culture particolaristiche e pluralistiche popolari. Ai modelli e ai valori distrutti essa sostituisce modelli e valori propri (non ancora definiti e nominati): che sono quelli di una nuova specie di borghesia'. (Pasolini 2001a: 132-133)

[106] The Marshall Plan, also known as the European Recovery Program, was a U.S. program providing aid to Western Europe following the devastation of World War II. It was ratified in 1948 and provided more than $15 billion to help finance rebuilding efforts on the continent. The project of U.S. Secretary of State George C. Marshall, for whom it was named, was based on a four-year plan to reconstruct cities, industries and infrastructure heavily damaged during the war. Moreover the plan aimed at removing trade barriers between European neighbours, as well as at fostering commerce between those countries and the United States. In addition to economic redevelopment, one of the stated goals of the Marshall Plan was to halt the spread communism on the European continent.

In many points, the novel has stressed that the end of the war did not accomplish the freedom expected. On the contrary, the new Italian Republic, emerged from the compromise between Communists and Christian democrats, and still with the presence of some Fascist elements, provoked irreconcilable fractures in society.[107]

> Arrivano gli anni Cinquanta, crinale difficile: scioperi e battaglie sociali combattute di strada in strada, da un lato, normalizzazione e sangue freddo imposti dal partito, dall'altro. E il boom economico dietro l'angolo, che avrebbe accomodato le borse e le coscienze. (*AdG*: 255)

Thought their *alter ego* Daniele, Wu Ming have painted a broader picture of Italy in the 1950s in sharp contrast to the 'mitologia istituzionale' (*AdG*: 3) which spread shortly after the end of the war. In *Asce di guerra* not only was the resistance seen in a different perspective, but so were the 1950s, with their contradictions, paradoxes and forgotten events that emerged during the moment of assimilation.

> Riempire i coni d'ombra della Storia è una delle nostre parole d'ordine. In questo caso abbiamo portato alla luce una zona buia dei nostri anni Cinquanta. Che, nell'immaginario collettivo, passano per l'epoca mitica della grande ricostruzione d'Italia. (In Mezzena Lona 1999)

As I have already highlighted in the Introduction, Wu Ming (and previously Luther Blissett) usually took inspiration from controversial events not wholly explained by historians, focussing on those stories that had been hidden or forgotten for social and political reasons.

> Qualcuno avrebbe dovuto scovarne degli altri, tra la massa silenziosa degli sconfitti. Bisognerebbe guadare fiumi di sangue e bile, affondare nelle frattaglie umane fino al ginocchio, per capire cosa ci è stato sottratto, cosa è stato rimosso, cosa ad un certo punto è diventato ineffabile, indicibile ancora e soprattutto oggi. In fondo, hanno vinto i cattivi, cioè "i buoni". (*AdG*: 35)

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[107] On this crucial issue, see Crainz, Guido (2005). *Il paese mancato. Dal miracolo economico agli anni Ottanta*. Rome: Donzelli.

To clarify the issues related to the post-war period, Wu Ming made a significant intertextual reference, mentioning the first four lines of James Ellroy's *American Tabloid* where the writer blamed America for its lack of innocence.[108]

> L'America non è mai stata innocente. Abbiamo perso la verginità sulla nave durante il viaggio di andata e ci siamo guardati indietro senza alcun rimpianto. Non si può ascrivere la nostra caduta dalla grazia ad alcun singolo evento o insieme di circostanze. Non è possibile perdere ciò che non si ha fin dall'inizio. (*AdG*: 111)

To Wu Ming, the lack of innocence emerged immediately at the end of the war, as a result of the political decisions taken by the Communists and the Christian democrats, which built the foundations of the Italian Republic. The secretary of the Communist Party, Palmiro Togliatti proposed the concept of "progressive democracy" in order to create a democratic, multi-party system in Italy, give security to the middle class and ensure that rights would be respected.[109] To accomplish this, it was necessary to lay down the weapons during the post-war reconciliation and therefore put an end to the civil war between Fascists and partisans.

Another important measure was the amnesty that Togliatti, as Minister of Justice, proposed in 1946. It involved a pardon extended by the Italian government to the Fascists who had collaborated with the Nazis during the occupation of Italy (1943-1945). Many partisans took this as more than a pardon, feeling it would also condone the war crimes perpetrated by the Fascists.

> Nel '46 Togliatti era ministro di Grazia e Giustizia e disse che ci voleva un'amnistia per chiudere con la guerra ed evitare il finimondo. Bisognava fare un compromesso, così ci dissero, che in quel modo lì si scontavano i crimini ai fascisti, ma anche le azioni di guerra dei partigiani. Pari e patta, tutti contenti. Invece no, tutti scontenti! Perché le porcherie dei fascisti erano durate vent'anni e la guerra partigiana era stata una guerra di liberazione.

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[108] 'America was never innocent. We popped our cherry on the boat over and looked back with no regrets. You can't ascribe our fall from grace to any single event or set of circumstances. You can't lose what you lacked at conception'. Ellroy, James (1995). *American Tabloid*. London: Random House.

[109] 'L'obiettivo che noi proponiamo al popolo italiano da realizzare finita la guerra, sarà quello di creare in Italia un regime democratico e progressivo' (Palmiro Togliatti, dal discorso pronunciato a Napoli l'11.4.1944).

> Mica potevi metterle sullo stesso piano! Ma Togliatti disse che era meglio così, altrimenti non ci avremmo più cavato i piedi, che il fascismo era stato sconfitto e c'era da fare l'Italia democratica. (*AdG*: 61)

The fact that Togliatti, at the head of the Italian Communist Party, signed this act, forced the partisans to accept it in the name of national reconciliation. Antonio Caronia has correctly suggested that Wu Ming focussed on the compromise between Communists and Christian Democrats in the light of the re-emergence of the Fascists inside the new Italy.

> Wu Ming è andato a scavare nella storia della resistenza e del primo dopoguerra, recuperando la dimensione di rabbia contro il compromesso degasperiano/togliattiano che consentiva il ritorno al potere - neanche tanto silenzioso - del personale politico fascista, e demolendo l'oleografia resistenziale buonista e imbelle della tradizione riformista. (2001)

The 1946 amnesty aimed at forgetting the crimes of the past in order to build a new image of a pacified Italy. Those who won the war had the feeling they had essentially lost it. It was in this context that the concept of "betrayed Resistance" emerged, not only in a political way, but particularly in a social perspective.

> Avevano, anzi, avevamo vinto, e cosa era cambiato? I preti erano peggio di prima, il papa alzava la testa, tanti avevano nascosto la camicia nera per riciclarsi in mille modi, i ricchi erano ancora lì e noi facevamo la fame. (*AdG*: 143)

Not only did the amnesty and the subsequent decrees free many Fascists who were considered former fighters in the Italian Social Republic's army, but they also condemned numerous Communist partisans who were thus accused of civil crimes committed while they were fighting the Nazi-Fascists during the Resistance.

> Il Partito [PCI] presentò l'amnistia come "un atto di forza". In realtà, era tutt'altro. Il decreto metteva sullo stesso piano la collaborazione col nemico e la lotta di liberazione: erano reati, ma vista l'eccezionalità della situazione venivano cancellati, salvo casi particolari, nell'interesse della "concordia nazionale". (*AdG*: 83)

As previously stated, the fact that the Italian Republic emerged from the compromise between the Communist Party and the Christian Democrats led to the development of a society that assimilated some fascist elements.[110] The old power did not dissolve just because Italy lost the war. On the contrary, it firmly re-emerged in the discipline, normality, hierarchy and laws of the new Italian Republic.[111] Fascism is indeed a cultural heritage with very deep roots in Italy. The Italian society of that period – even today, some scholars have argued – was not able to deal with the fascist legacy and its reinterpretation.[112]

In *Asce di guerra* many partisans, in the moment of assimilation, perceive a democratic state (the Italian Republic) as a "replacement" of the old power (Fascism). Some elements coming from Fascism were still alive and materialised in the new Italian society that was characterised, in Foucauldian terms, by a disciplinary power. By proposing such a view from the partisans' perspective, I suggest that Wu Ming were echoing Foucault's theory of submissive individuals from his *Discipline and Punish*. In this work, Foucault argued that, rather than being self-determining agents able to contest the structures of society, individuals seem to be living under the control of an inescapable, though indefinable, disciplinary power.

Foucault used the example of the Panopticon (1977: 201), a circular prison system elaborated by Jeremy Bentham in 1843, where everyone observes and is observed at the same

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[110] The Italian Republic incorporated many laws and decrees issued by the Fascist Regime, such as, for example, the Codice Rocco (criminal law) and Riforma Gentile (educational system).

[111] As an example of this crucial issue, we can look at the creation of the Italian Social Movement (MSI). Even though the post-war Italian constitution and agreements with the Allied forces banned the presence of Fascists in the new parliament, on 26 December 1946 a group of Fascist veterans formed a neo-fascist political party, the Italian Social Movement. The MSI was allowed to participate in the first general election in 1948, returning seven deputies and one senator to parliament. Within few years, the MSI had become the fourth largest party in Italy. Why was a Fascist party legally allowed to run for the election? It could be argued that the presence of the MSI was useful to both the Communist Party and the Christian Democracy for different reasons. For the former, the MSI could absorb votes from the moderate electorate otherwise destined to the Christian Democrats. For the latter, the MSI was an ally in the fight against communism.

[112] About this significant aspect, in 2015 anthropologist Maddalena G. Cammelli wrote *Fascisti del terzo millennio. Per un'antropologia di CasaPound*, where she closely analysed the rise of the neo-fascist party CasaPound, highlighting its continuity with fascist ideas and its wish to apply them to current social problems. After her analysis, Cammelli concluded that it could be very difficult to suppress fascism in Italy.

time, allowing for the constant surveillance of inmates. Through the Panopticon, Foucault explained how citizens become their own prison guards, adhering to societal norms beyond the fear of surveillance by the state. In his words, the Panopticon can:

> Induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things so that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action, so that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary. (*Ibid*)

Extending his theory, Foucault observed that the effects of the Panopticon reverberate beyond the prison walls to other institutions such as schools and hospitals. In this type of "surveillance society", citizens are both subject to, and the holders of, disciplinary power. Discipline, Foucault continued, is a concern for control that is internalised by every individual, in terms of temporal benchmarks, bodily posture, wishes and emotions. All these are effects of the disciplinary pressure, but are also actions that, through pressure initially imposed externally, lead to self-discipline for the individual and eventually to the production of the individual as a subject. As Foucault pointed out, discipline acts firstly through certain spatial disposition of individuals. Subjected to various degrees of discipline, individuals come to "know their place" in the context of the general economy of space associated with the disciplinary power.

Transferring the above-mentioned elements of disciplinary power to the modes of action proposed by the political parties of the new Italy, as highlighted in many chapters of *Asce di guerra* (in particular from 24 to 40), disciplinary power does not refer only to political structures. Rather, it designates the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed. In another seminal work, *Subject and the Power*, Foucault underlined that disciplinary power especially covers modes of action that are destined to act upon the possibilities of action of other people.

> When one defines the exercise of power as a mode of action upon the actions of others, when one characterizes these actions by the government of men by

other men – in the broadest sense of the term – one includes an important element: freedom. Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free. By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments, may be realized. (1982: 790)

Three main mechanisms operate in what Foucault considered disciplinary power: the hierarchical observation, the judgment of normality, and the examination. These mechanisms work together in order to impose standards of normality in all spheres of daily life. In addition, they grant society permission to enact laws in order to reinforce the standards and supervise all citizens in the disciplinary society, so as to prevent a deviation from these laws. Foucault also argued that freedom means the ability to choose from a range of possibilities, in terms of different ways of behaving in relation to the laws imposed. Therefore, disciplinary power is not only destructive: it has a creative role in social life and creates rebellion.

In *Asce di guerra*, to escape from the Panopticon of the new Italy, Vitaliano and other rebels such as Bob and Teo were forced to flee to other countries.

Non c'era pace dentro di me, non poteva esserci perché per me la guerra non era finita. […] Ero pazzo. Per questo mi temevano. Tutti sapevano che non avevo niente da perdere: ero in guerra. In guerra con tutti. […] Teo, lui continuava a combattere, sempre, in ogni modo possibile. […] Rimase povero ed emarginato, ma con grande dignità. Era un lupo solitario che non si era messo l'animo in pace e non sarebbe mai sceso a patti con l'ingiustizia. Era insofferente verso la disciplina imposta dall'alto e consapevole di esserlo, tanto che non entrò nemmeno nel partito dopo la guerra. Rimase per i fatti suoi. (*AdG*: 178, 179, 218, 238)

As I noted at the beginning of this chapter, *Asce di guerra* (just like Luther Blissett's *Q* and other Wu Ming's novels) has followed the dialectical relationship of power and the desire for freedom that develops in a new power integrating the two previous determinations in the moment of assimilation. However, the events narrated did not terminate with the rise of this new power (the Italian Republic). The structure old power / desire for freedom / new power is only a progression that will be transposed, with different features, to other times and places.

The concluding section of this chapter will explore how, at the end of the moment of assimilation, a new cycle begins with the moments of fixity (old power), instability (desire for freedom) and assimilation (new power). The analysis will focus on Vitaliano's decision to start fighting for the freedom of people against the occupying forces in Laos, not accepting the disciplinary power of the new Italy.

IV. Resistance in Laos

What emerges from *Asce di guerra* is History narrated by the "wrong side", but not necessarily by the defeated. Both the partisans in Italy and the Laotians rebels in fact won their liberation wars. Nonetheless, their stories have been hidden, forgotten or idealised. Wu Ming has shed light on these stories, with particular interest on the narration of conflicts that, I argue, ascribe the novel to a war canon. In this section, I will then consider the physical context – this time in Laos – where there is a collision between the old power, represented by the French *Légion Etrangère* and the desire for freedom, represented by Laotian Resistance.

The anarchical rebels Vitaliano, Teo and Bob, unable to adapt to the mechanism of the disciplinary power emerging in Italy after the war, refused to lie down under any system that produced regularity. These rebels, not accepting the discipline, procedures and behaviours of the new Italy, similarly to other Wu Ming's heroes, did not stop fighting when the ideal (the achievement of a condition of anarchical freedom) was not attained. Reflecting the categorical imperative that the action is to be pursued with no other purpose, they decided to escape to other countries in order to keep fighting against the power.

> Bob. Teo. Eroi dimenticati, o piuttosto che hanno scelto di farsi dimenticare. Forse l'una e l'altra cosa insieme. Protagonisti per un momento, un momento cruciale, quando si trattava di vivere o morire, e dopo sempre più fuori ruolo, incapaci di adattarsi. Alle direttive del Partito Nuovo, come al ritorno alla vita "normale". Hanno continuato a combattere, ognuno a modo suo: la fuga oltre cortina e una misteriosa permanenza in Cecoslovacchia per Teo, la testa delle

manifestazioni per Bob. (*AdG*: 255)

Vitaliano, as many other partisans, preferred to fight for the ideals of justice in other countries, instead of remaining in a "pacified" Italy. In so doing, Wu Ming's counter-historical narrations have given the floor to the invisibles who can eventually tell their own hidden stories.

> È una parentesi sporca, gente buttata fuori dalla storia a calci in culo, disadattata, che non sa trovare una collocazione nel mondo nuovo. La parte cattiva di una società che vuole dirsi risorta, in marcia verso l'avvenire. (*AdG*: 88)

About this significant aspect, Sergio Pent has correcty pointed out that: 'chi ha patito continua a bestemmiare dopo aver sputato sangue e rabbia, mentre facce sorridenti promettono nuovi eden e la fame torna a bussare, non con le tessere annonarie ma coi volti di un mondo dalla pelle diversa' (2000).

By linking it to the hidden stories of post-war Italy, in the novel Wu Ming made a significant intertextual reference (*AdG*: 146) to Giuseppe Fiori's work *Uomini ex, ovvero Lo strano destino di un gruppo di comunisti italiani*.[113] This book tells the factual story of 466 communists who were forced to abandon Italy to secretly find shelter in communist countries, especially Czechoslovakia. *Asce di guerra* extended this topic, focussing on a number of former partisans (such as Vitaliano) who did not accept the outcomes of the war and therefore decided, as invisible fighters, to keep on fighting against occupying and dictatorial forces in the Far East. 'Chi ha ripreso le armi lo ha fatto soprattutto per vendetta. Per chiudere i conti che i tribunali non avevano saldato' (*AdG*: 63). Critics such as Camilla Bertoni and Alessandro Mezzena Lona have identified this crucial point:

> Salta fuori una storia italiana sotterranea, fatta di gente qualunque che in nome di un ideale e di una rivoluzione che non riesce a fare entro l'arco alpino, imbraccia le armi e abbraccia altre cause; di ignoti gruppi politici che organizzavano gli espatri clandestini, in uno scenario violento sotto la facciata

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[113] Fiori, Giuseppe (1993). *Uomini ex, ovvero Lo strano destino di un gruppo di comunisti italiani*. Turin: Einaudi.

del benessere che si andava lentamente costruendo. (Bertoni 2001)

La Storia, per loro [Wu Ming], è un pozzo senza fondo. Dal quale estrarre storie apparentemente marginali, molto spesso dimenticate, per non dire esorcizzate, che servono a guardare il passato, lontano e vicinissimo, da una prospettiva diversa. Inedita. (Mezzena Lona 1999)

Considering the concept of counter-historical narrations in *Asce di guerra*, Geraldina Colotti and Stefano Tassinari have noted that Wu Ming dealt with the stories of those invisible partisans (Vitaliano, Teo, Bob) who, from the "wrong side" of History, represented a crucial element in something that had been removed from the memories of the past.

C'è alla base del romanzo, un'esigenza di memoria che vien fatta valere nella forma più plausibile per gli "invisibili" di oggi. Il tema dell'irregolarità, di una contro-storia scevra persino dalle illusioni degli indirizzi culturali alternativi al togliattismo, di un'idea di "perdente" meno nobile e più ruvida di quanto abbia prodotto la vena storiografica dell'"altro" movimento operaio. (Colotti 2001)

La storia "altra", non quella patinata e retorica delle ricostruzioni ufficiali [...] La necessità di fare i conti con tutto ciò che del Novecento è stato colpevolmente rimosso, allo scopo di cancellare sia la memoria che l'attualità del conflitto sociale. (Tassinari 2001)

Similarly, Tommaso De Lorenzis has reflected on the way in which Wu Ming rummaged through the "rubbish bins"[114] of History to find stories that had been overlooked for political reasons. As previously said, in the name of national reconciliation, post-war Italy was built through compromises between Communists and Christian Democrats, with the inclusion of some Fascist elements into the new society. Consequently, dissenting voices expressing disagreement or rejection of the mechanisms of the new power, were perceived as a "disease" that could have negative effects on the organism of the state.

Non è cambiata neppure la rappresentazione dell'inquietudine post-resistenziale che tormentò quanti si opposero alle determinazioni operative della «democrazia progressiva». Ed è ancora efficace la descrizione dell'antifascismo emarginato dalla retorica conciliatoria del PCI, perseguitato in un'Italia che «ritornava a se stessa» e costretto alla fuga. (2005: 23)

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[114] I refer here to Domenichelli's expression 'pattumiere della storia' already mentioned in the Introduction.

In *Asce di guerra* the dialectical process old power (Fascism) / desire for freedom (Resistance) / new power (the Italian Republic) has been followed by another dialectical cycle. Thanks to the autobiographical narration of Vitaliano's life, Wu Ming followed Vitaliano's escape from Italy to join the Resistance in Laos. There, the protagonist – now a young adult – found similar features that could be compared to his previous experience of war. Very far from Italy, in the secluded regions of Laos, Vitaliano eventually could express his hatred towards the Fascists (in this case the French *Légion Etrangère*), by becoming a Vietcong fighter.

In a section of the novel, titled *Storia disinvolta delle guerre d'Indocina*, Wu Ming focussed on some events related to the Indochina wars, claiming that their purpose was to reconstruct a historical "truth" that had been forgotten or transformed to protect Western interests. As in other Wu Ming's novels, in *Asce di guerra* the authors aimed to rewrite the overlooked memory of people that were on the "wrong side" of history.

In *Asce di guerra*, Wu Ming narrated the hidden stories of the Resistance against the French invaders seen from the point of view of the Laotian rebels. The Laotian Resistance has been generally overshadowed by the more famous Vietnam war that, in turn, has been told almost exclusively from the American perspective.[115] In this way, the assumption that 'History is written by the victors' (Winston Churchill), should be reformulated as 'History is written by those who have the power to tell the tale'. From this point of view, even if the US army was defeated, the Americans were the ones who, after the end of the war, reported the events to the Western world from their point of view.

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[115] In particular through film productions. See for instance Peter Davis' *Hearts and Minds* (1974); Hal Ashby's *Coming Home* (1978); Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979); Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (1986); Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987); John Irvin's *Hamburger Hill* (1987); Barry Levinson's *Good Morning, Vietnam* (1987).

Although set in different locations and at different times – Italy 1943-1945, Laos 1956-1958 and Vietnam 1954-1975 – the Resistance wars narrated show significant similarities. For Wu Ming, wars are a complex system of interlocked and parallel events and characters that can be linked to each other. Wu Ming highlighted the existence of enduring features in human behaviour and thoughts during conflicts, on both the individual and the collective levels. There are therefore clusters of war events that repeat themselves throughout history. The three wars narrated in *Asce di guerra* share similar elements such as the upheaval of oppressed people who fight in order to regain independence against the occupying forces (Nazi-Fascists, French and Americans). It is worth noting that these resistance forces were led by clandestine groups and brigades of volunteers; therefore they are not comparable to official armies. For that reason, Vitaliano felt a strong feeling of non-existence after he boarded a plane flying to Laos:

> Ufficialmente non siamo mai saliti su questo aereo, non siamo mai stati addestrati, non esistiamo. Quindi non possiamo morire. Nessuno comunicherà ai familiari la nostra morte: è la regola. […] Ci attende una guerra senza regole né prigionieri, alla quale ufficialmente non partecipa nessuno. Una guerra che non esiste. (*AdG*: 5, 10)

Technically, wars are fought by recognised armies from countries that, in accordance with international treaty laws, begin hostilities after a formal declaration of war or an ultimatum with a fixed deadline. This was not what happened in the conflicts narrated in *Asce di guerra*. The rebellion movements in Italy and Laos began as independent groups led by rebels or politicians from outlawed parties that could not officially declare war. Vitaliano had the same feeling when fighting against Nazi-Fascism, French and American imperialism and for the freedom of oppressed people: 'Decisi che "da grande" avrei fatto parte di quella schiera. La schiera dei ribelli' (*AdG*: 49).

Many pages in the novel resonate with the physical and psychological involvement in conflict experienced by Vitaliano in Laos. Wu Ming have given details about his perceptions

using first-person narration, inviting a close relationship between the reader and the narrative voice. The focus has been centred on the place where the war was fought. In Vitaliano's case, the war zone was a jungle in the Middle-Eastern region of Laos with an exotic name, full of hidden dangers and traps.

> Il chiarore dell'alba ridà forma allo scuro groviglio della giungla. […] Osservo la bellezza selvaggia di questi luoghi. […] Ci troviamo a nord del fiume Mat, nella provincia di Xiang Khuang, o almeno così credo, perché sono immerso nella foresta più folta che abbia mai visto e il senso d'orientamento è la prima cosa che ho perso. (*AdG*: 280)

This charged space, unknown, mysterious and dangerous, represented to Vitaliano a complex situation, partly psycho-physiological and partly geographical. 'Sono stato catapultato a 18.000 chilometri da casa, nel cuore di una foresta vergine, nel bel mezzo di una guerra tra governativi e gruppi comunisti' (*AdG*: 283). Military topography is a fundamental trait in the special relationship between war and space, as wars are fought in a place that would be inevitably altered at the end of the conflicts.

> Le valli erano immerse nella vegetazione tropicale e attraversate da moltissimi fiumi e immensi acquitrini. Non c'erano strade. […] La regione era meravigliosa quanto disabitata, per cui non potevamo contare sulle popolazioni indigene, come nelle regioni più a nord. […] Ma da quel momento entravamo in una zona del tutto estranea. Protetti dalla vegetazione ci addentrammo in una valle incassata tra i dirupi. (*AdG*: 360)

Once again, the passage is indicative of Wu Ming's narration of war, where the protagonist experienced a strong emotional tie with this particular location. Even though it was not his own country, Vitaliano felt a particularly intense attachment to the place in terms of a relationship with the land: a connection that was both cognitive and emotional. In depicting Vitaliano's mood, Wu Ming concentrated on the close association between the soldier and his surroundings, and also on his interaction with the environment. Vitaliano described the land in pastoral terms, highlighting its primitive elements and breath-taking beauty. Without human

presence, nature can be viewed as paradise on earth. Vitaliano idealised this *locus amoenus* as

a remote place with its classical features, such as trees, rivers, lush vegetation.[116] However, in

the novel, the function of this *locus amoenus* has been inverted, becoming a *locus horribilis*.

Instead of offering a safe, idyllic place to live, it turned into the setting of violent clashes.

Pastoral and anti-pastoral elements melt in a rural/martial interaction that characterises the

relationship between peace and war, paradise and hell.

> Una marcia di tre giorni, in un paesaggio primitivo e selvaggio, stupefacente.
> […] Eravamo degli intrusi in quella regione: la scarsa presenza umana aveva
> creato un rapporto di rispetto ed equilibrio tra l'uomo e la natura. Qualcosa
> che la guerra rischiava di spazzare via in ogni momento. […] Ero nella terra
> più bella del mondo. Ed ero lì per combattere. (*AdG*: 388, 389)

Any conflict has special affinity with land, usually what wars are fought over. In fact, the

importance of land is linked to the fact that war transforms the country physically and

politically. The land also becomes a vast map of conquest. Knowing the importance of this

aspect, Wu Ming have usually put maps in their novels. Their accounts of the battles have been

marked by topographical details and an awareness of local settings, so the readers can

appreciate the strategic relevance and the nature of the conflicts.

The war zone where Vitaliano fought was lawless, a state of exception where peacetime

laws and rules had been suspended. The soldiers entering this kind of war zone witnessed war

crimes, rapes, killings, slaughters. Consequently, he has had to acquire new, inhuman skills.

> Il comandante Li ci ha detto anche che dovremo adeguarci al modo di
> combattere del nemico. Non dobbiamo fare prigionieri. In una guerra senza
> regole, senza trattati e senza retrovie, non servono a niente. E dovremo essere
> pronti anche a uccidere i nostri feriti più gravi. In un terreno insidioso e
> selvaggio, soffrirebbero senza alcuna speranza di salvezza. (*AdG*: 285)

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[116] The literary use of this setting, at least in Western literature, was particularly exploited by classic Greek and
Latin poets Homer, Theocritus, Virgil and Horace.

As mentioned, wars change countries, but at the same time irrevocably transforms individuals. Once they join a conflict, people become different from what they were in the past. The events experienced in war do not allow for any innocent return. Vitaliano, for instance, learned how important it is to survive in primitive conditions and how to kill in order not to be killed. After a few months, however, Vitaliano felt that he had been transformed into a killer and eventually decided to go back to Italy.

> Ero rimasto in bilico sull'abisso e là sotto avevo visto l'inferno. Allora mi ero accorto che anche per me la vita umana non aveva più valore. E questo andava contro ogni principio per cui mi ero battuto. Ero un comunista, potevo uccidere i nemici, non essere come loro. Questa consapevolezza mi aveva spaventato a morte. Ero un comunista. Non un assassino. (*AdG*: 324)

Resistance is a theme that, though located in different places and periods, is permeated by features similar to those of the war canon. Through Vitaliano's autobiographical narration, Wu Ming have exploited some narrative techniques (i.e. first-person narration and a synecdochical approach) that increase empathy in the readers. In addition to shedding light on the political and cultural context where the novel has been published, the concept of resistance can be applied not only to the physical context of the battlefield, but also to the so-called "peaceful" periods that follow the end of wars. These periods are characterised, as we have seen, by the emergence of a new form of power (the Italian Republic) that assimilated the concepts of old power (Fascism) and desire for freedom (Resistance) as it preserved them for its own definition.

V. The Cold War Balance in 54

In *54* will focus on the dialectical relationship old power / desire for freedom / new power during the Cold War period when new authoritative powers (of both the Western and Eastern blocs) exploited the terms *peace* and *freedom* in order to export "democracy" to other parts of

the world. In *54*, Fascism (the old power) represents the first moment of the dialectical process in its agonising phase when the regime was on the brink of collapse. The moment of instability occurs during the war of liberation, when partisans – in Italy and Slovenia – fought the Fascist oppressors and then overturned the previous regime. The moment of assimilation will be analysed from two different perspectives. On the one hand, it emerged in Italy with the Christian Democrat government which, as previously narrated in *Asce di guerra*, assimilated many elements from the Fascist regime. Therefore, in the eyes of some former partisans, the new-born Italian Republic was nothing more than the development of a society firmly built on discipline, normality, hierarchy and laws taken from the Fascist heritage. On the other hand, Wu Ming raised similar issues about the ways in which a new power took over in Yugoslavia after the war. The Communist Party of Yugoslavia, ruled by Marshal Tito, represents a dictatorial power that restricted the freedom of the partisans who had fought against the old power. In *54*, two anarchical characters from the "wrong side" of History, Vittorio and Robespierre Capponi, father and son, embody the concept of betrayed Resistances (Vittorio in Yugoslavia and Robespierre in Italy) through disappointment and anger that emerge in the moment of assimilation.

Since its publication in 2002, *54* has received considerable critical attention. The novel has in fact been the subject of significant and sustained analysis, in particular around its character as 'romanzo corale' (Formenti), its epic breadth (De Cataldo, Genna), and the interconnection between history and fiction (De Lorenzis, Caronia, Arosio, Guerri). Marco Amici has productively highlighted the way in which Wu Ming have narrated history, in a novel that blends actual events with fictional micro-stories that continuously cross the frame of official history. In this way, *54* allows the reader to interpret the Cold War conflicts not only as a binary opposition (USA versus USSR, for example), but also with many options that have been cleverly left open and undetermined.

> [I Wu Ming] considerano la Storia con la 'S' maiuscola come una narrazione che tende alla massima veridicità, corroborata dall'ufficialità delle fonti e dalla meticolosità delle ricostruzioni scientifiche, tuttavia pur sempre una narrazione in cui non mancano momenti ambigui, controversi, poco verificabili, e soggetti all'immancabile filtro del presente in cui si è formato e opera lo storico. (2006: 199)

According to Wu Ming, history has a 'fractal' and 'catastrophic' (in Snafu 2002) quintessence in which conflicts produce bifurcations and discontinuities all the time. Wu Ming's narrative tends to explore such discontinuities, getting into the cracks and the disquieting shadow-cones of history. A common element in their historical novels, strongly present in *54*, has been filling with their narration the empty spaces left by official history. In an interview, Wu Ming claimed that they are interested in narrations that 'attingano materia viva dalle zone d'ombra della storia, storie vere narrate come romanzi e/o viceversa, recupero di vicende dimenticate, al centro o ai margini delle quali si sviluppano le nostre trame' (Wu Ming 2003: 207).

Marco Costa has emphasised this significant feature in *54*, focussing on the way in which Wu Ming explored some events on the side-lines of history, weaving distinct narratives separated by time, place and characters:

> *54* è un colossale affresco che, a colpi di microtrame, ci ripropone il gran enigma della Storia: l'obiettivo dei Wu Ming è scandagliare la storia (e i suoi limiti) in luoghi diversi e lontani fra loro, costruendo una mastodontica trama in cui entrano il minuscolo e il gigantesco, il centrale e il marginale, in cui si passa senza stupore dal maresciallo Tito all'anonimo attivista bolognese Robespierre Capponi. (2002)

In fact Wu Ming have used history as a narrative setting where reality and fiction intersect on the same page. In *54*, official history does not have the leading role in the events narrated, but rather works as a "glue" to connect private stories lived by fictional ordinary people who act as witnesses or protagonists of history, interwoven with political plots, the secret services, drug trafficking and impossible loves. As revealed in an interview:

Secondo noi sono "le storie" - le vicende delle moltitudini - il motore della "Storia", e riflettiamo questa convinzione nella - a volte esasperata - coralità dei nostri romanzi. La Storia non la fanno i poteri costituiti. (In Mazzetta 2002)

At first glance, the narration of *54* seems characterised by a complex texture with a large number of characters and storylines. *54* has played with the forms of different literary genres such as spy, adventure, bourgeois novels, gangster thrillers, with elements of noir, epic and non-fictional narration. *54* has sought to transcend these forms with the contamination of genres and styles. Three main narrative lines shape the plot of *54*. The first one includes the adventures of Robespierre (Pierre) Capponi, a barman in Bologna known as the Filuzzi King, who, dissatisfied with his own life, has decided to find his father, Vittorio Capponi, who left the Italian army to join the Communists in Yugoslavia. The second line involves the story of the actor Cary Grant who has been approached by the intelligence service MI6 with the bizarre proposal to play the role of Yugoslav leader Marshal Tito in a propaganda biopic film. Ideally, this project would help Yugoslavia to distance itself from Moscow and get closer to the West. The new-born KGB, led by general Serov, attempts to sabotage this mission. The third line includes the stories of the mobster Lucky Luciano who, after his repatriation to Italy, has settled in Naples, where he supervises international drug trafficking and other illegal activities of the National Crime Syndicate. His right-hand man Stefano Zollo tries to sell a large quantity of heroin stolen from his Boss, in order to change his own life and leave for a far-away country.

From the end of the first section of the novel, some elements from the three storylines start to merge into each other. In the development of the book, the sections keep on melting into one another towards a conjoint ending. During this worldwide permanent conflict, which is the Cold War, Wu Ming have focussed on fictional heretic characters (in particular Vittorio and Robespierre Capponi) who, although in different ways, show their intense disappointment for the outcome of the post-war period.

This 'romanzo corale'[117] (Formenti 2002) has melted history and fiction, historical and fictional characters, reality and imagination, elements of politics and geo-politics in a sprawling epic that is thoughtful and satirical at the same time. As already shown in Luther Blissett's *Q* and *Asce di guerra*, Wu Ming have manipulated literary genres in order to create popular stories that can reflect the readers' desires and produce identification. They have used the term *popular* in its original sense, as in Romance languages for example, where it means 'belonging to the people'. According to Wu Ming, cultural artefacts should lose their aristocratic and elitist essence to allow multitudes of people to get more involved in the re-manipulation of culture. They referred to Walter Benjamin's claims for the democratisation of culture, and the way in which the German critic foresaw DIY culture and P2P culture.[118] When interviewed by De Lorenzis on this topic, Wu Ming asserted that:

> Per quanti omaggi le facciamo [alla cultura popolare], rimane un debito inestinguibile. In *54*, oltre a uno dei personaggi di *Casino totale* di Izzo, compaiono i protagonisti del romanzo *Rififì* di Le Breton, che a loro volta citano il protagonista de *La vita è uno schifo* di Malet e il film *Grisbì* con Jean Gabin. Compare anche (anzi, ha un ruolo fondamentale) il protagonista de *La paga del sabato* di Fenoglio, il suo esperimento noir, pubblicato postumo perché Calvino lo aveva boicottato in quanto troppo simile a un romanzo poliziesco. Allora che dire di *Una questione privata* , un vero e proprio Western? Noi ci siamo formati su quelle letture e su quel cinema. Per quanto ci si muova e si esplorino gli oceani, il "genere" resta la Stella Polare. (In De Lorenzis 2002)

Wu Ming's reference to popular culture is a key point to understand their whole narrative and *54* in particular. In an interview, they stated that '20th-century, Western popular culture (which is now turning into something completely different, and way more complex too boot) was often closer to socialism than 20th-century Eastern "socialist" regimes ever were' (in Snafu 2002). To corroborate this assertion, they argued that Andy Warhol's serial icons of Mao Zedong have

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[117] 'Romanzo corale' is used here in the sense of a novel composed by a variety of voices, points of view and perspectives.

[118] See for instance Benjamin, Walter (2008). *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. London: Penguin.

been more important to the revolution than Mao Zedong's official portraits, waved by Maoists at demonstrations.

> The making of pop culture (we don't draw a clear distinction between the "underground" and the "mainstream" here) was a collective process during which the borders of ever-changing open communities were constantly re-traced, subcultures constantly re-shaped themselves around myths. We'd better understand what "pre-requisites of communism" were at work in that process, instead of believing that millions of people were being brainwashed. (*Ibid*)

VI. Betrayed Resistances in Italy and Yugoslavia

The balance of powers emerged at the beginning of the Cold War period when the terms 'peace', 'freedom' and 'democracy' were purposefully exploited by new authoritative powers in two ways: to spread conflicts around the world, and to limit freedom in the so-called "democratic" countries. In the entire novel Wu Ming rethought the post-war period, focussing on how, in 1954, "democratic" governments (in both Western and Eastern Europe) installed states with "police control", while wars kept breaking out in remote parts of the world (i.e. Indochina). In fact, *54* implies that the Second World War is not over; it has only changed its face and still goes on, moving from the European front towards other places. The balance of powers that had been established at the Yalta Conference[119] showed its main features around the world, when the post-war "order" seemed finally set. It is precisely the term *order* in this context that Wu Ming questioned at the beginning of the novel:

> Non c'è nessun «dopoguerra». Gli stolti chiamavano «pace» il semplice allontanarsi del fronte. Gli stolti difendevano la pace sostenendo il braccio armato del denaro. Oltre la prima duna gli scontri proseguivano. Zanne di animali chimerici affondate nelle carni, il Cielo pieno d'acciaio e fumi, intere

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[119] The Yalta Conference (February 1945), where Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt met face to face, ratified the divisions that already existed on the grounds of military logistics. More than a political agreement, the division of Europe and World into spheres of influences was the result of that perspective.

culture estirpate dalla Terra. Gli stolti combattevano i nemici di oggi foraggiando quelli di domani. Gli stolti gonfiavano il petto, parlavano di «libertà», «democrazia», «qui da noi», mangiando i frutti di razzie e saccheggi. (*54*: 5)

In this historical framework, Wu Ming claimed that the word 'peace' does not mean anything. It is merely a creation of new authoritative powers that have strategically generated "zones of comfort" where people feel safe. Moreover, the terms 'freedom' and 'democracy', overused by both East and West in a permanent conflict, were losing their actual meaning. What really has emerged in *54* is that war – and not peace – has incessantly been transferred from one part of the world to another.[120] As shown by the opening lines of the novel, *54* is concerned with the multifaceted global situation that followed the Second World War throughout the crucial and non-peaceful year of 1954. In relation to the problematic interpretation that the war did not end in 1945, Tommaso De Lorenzis has pointed out that the year 1954 has been cleverly depicted by Wu Ming as deeply marked by both post-war power clashes around the world and the complex balance of powers between authoritative states:

> Anno 1954: nello specchio della storia gli eserciti sono diventati polizie militari, ma l'immagine disgustosa delle divise è sempre la stessa; gli ordigni atomici non esplodono più sulle città, bensì negli angoli più remoti del pianeta, ma la scena di morte non è cambiata, si è solo dislocata nella concreta possibilità di un inverno nucleare. (2002)

Wu Ming's combination of fictional and real features in many of their novels has been used to give a voice to the otherwise silenced protagonists of hidden History. In this thesis, I have already highlighted this feature in *Q*, where the young theology student is a witness of the dialectical process that led to the emergence of a new power in Münster after the Anabaptist Revolution. In *Asce di guerra* Wu Ming narrated episodes of the Italian and Laotian

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[120] This idea was also expressed in Primo Levi's *La tregua*: 'La guerra è finita, e la pensavo finita, come molti in quei mesi di tregua, in un senso molto più universale di quanto si osi pensare oggi. – Guerra è sempre – rispose memorabilmente Mordo Nahum'. (1997: 57)

Resistances through Vitaliano's autobiographical narration, shedding light on some concealed aspects of these conflicts. In *54*, the narration has been centred around two fictional characters, Robespierre and Vittorio Capponi, who, at the end of the Second World War, experienced the disappointment of the betrayed Resistance movements in two different, although similar, countries: Italy and Yugoslavia. Because the ideals of freedom were subdued in the moment of assimilation, this unfavourable condition pushed the heroes to keep fighting for the realisation of freedom, prompted by a categorical imperative. As seen in the previous chapters (*Q* and *Asce di guerra*), the heroes went through several defeats without reaching any positive outcomes from their struggles. As stated in an interview:

> Tutti e tre i romanzi si chiudono con riflessioni sulla lotta che prosegue incessante e ogni volta schiude nuovi scenari. Qualunque "fatalismo" sarebbe totalmente in contrasto con quello che siamo, col marxismo autonomo del nostro background politico-culturale e con la nostra concezione della Storia. (In Mazzetta 2002)

Setting the novel in the year 1954, Wu Ming have narrated the outcomes of a post-war period in Italy and Yugoslavia that shared the same starting point: the fight against Fascism. After the war, however, Italy and Yugoslavia experienced opposite economic, political and social developments. While Italy entered NATO and aligned itself with other Western countries, in 1946 Yugoslavia became a Federal People's Republic under a communist government.

What comes across clearly in *54* is the dialectical relationship (based on the three moments: previous power / desire for freedom / new power) that emerged in Italy and Yugoslavia as a linear development with similar but also divergent features. It is worth considering that because every society is different, the concepts of power and freedom were modulated in different ways. In *54* – but this concept can be extended to other Wu Ming's novels – all societies have their own distinctive way of thinking; however, there always are some common features. Philosophical ideas, religious beliefs, aesthetic forms and political

constitutions are specific products of specific times and places. Nonetheless, any society can incorporate some abstract and general principles from other civilisations into their current point of view. In Wu Ming's narrations, one of these principles is the desire for freedom, which has a permanent unchanging validity, despite being experienced in different ways in relation to the place and time of its appearance.

Focussing on the three moments of the dialectical relationship, in *54* the moment of fixity is characterised by many centrifugal thrusts that attempted to destabilise the established power of the Nazi-Fascist occupiers. During the moment of instability, forces that were opposed to that power emerged along with their ideals of freedom (led by the Resistance). Nonetheless, in the moment of assimilation, these revolutionary forces were assimilated along with elements from the old power in the emergence of new powers.

As mentioned, the representation of the betrayed Resistance has been left to marginal and fictional participants in world history such as Robespierre and Vittorio Capponi.[121] Robespierre, nicknamed Pierre, is the bartender in the (symbolically called) Bar Aurora in Bologna. This Bar is important because it epitomises the crumbling hopes of equality and fraternity through which a generation of Italians had been building after-war society. Old partisans, who have realised the limits of freedom imposed by the new Italian government through laws and regulations that came directly from the Fascist regime, are spending most of their time hanging around the Bar Aurora. They hated, but eventually have accepted, the order imposed by the new power in charge. In so doing, the old partisans have surrendered to what we can consider a "fixed system" where what is good is determined by the laws and customs of a state. Here, all individuals have their own position, even if (and this is the case of the old

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[121] It is worth mentioning that *54* also features a series of important historical figures, as for example the British-American actor Cary Grant, Yugoslav Marshall Josip Broz Tito, mafia boss Salvatore Lucania aka Lucky Luciano, Vietnamese Emperor Bao Dai and film director Alfred Hitchcock.

partisans) they criticise the Italian Republic for not completely accomplishing the ideals of freedom that had emerged during the liberation war.

The Bar Aurora in fact represents a place where the ideals and hopes for the creation of a democratic state in opposition to Fascism collided with an appalling outcome. The old partisans still had a strong sense of community, as well as respect for the Italian Communist Party even if its presence was felt as distant and at the same time oppressive. Eventually they criticised the party that did not accomplish what was planned after the war.[122] Disappointment emerged for two main reasons. On the one hand, there was the concept of "progressive democracy" proposed by the secretary of the Communist Party Palmiro Togliatti (see Chapter Two). On the other hand, the old partisans condemned the embourgeoisement of a revolutionary party that accepted the proliferation of materialistic values perceived as typical of the middle class.

> La patria che volete riunificare è quella della borghesia, dei democristiani e dei padroni, che ieri erano tutti fascisti, poi si sono riverniciati di democrazia. [...] Con 'sto fatto che è tornato Scelba, ci sarà poco da stare allegri. [...] Quello lì, altro che democristiano, è un fascista, uno che i problemi li risolve col manganello! [...] Perché, Fanfani è meglio? Con quei baffettini da Fiúrer? [...] Però Fanfani dicono che è piú di sinistra. [...] No, no, ve lo dico io, [...] altro che sinistra e sinistra, quelli son tutti uguali. (*54*: 14)

The crucial concept of betrayed Resistance emerges from these excerpts. What the former partisans argue is that the state's laws should themselves be recognised as expression of the rational will of the citizens and as guaranteeing the citizens' rights. Without the belief that the laws of the new Italian Republic can secure freedom, the old partisans view the state as an alien power that interferes unnecessarily and negatively in their lives. In the entire novel, this sense

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[122] About the powerful organisation of the Communist Party, the Italian journalist Indro Montanelli suggested that: 'Il vecchio Pci non era un partito; era una Chiesa, e come tutte le Chiese aveva i suoi misteri che i chierici - gente pericolosa, ma seria, e pericolosa appunto perché seria - non tradivano' (Montanelli 2000).

of constant suspicion, through which the former partisans look at the Italian state, is strongly evident.

It is worth mentioning that Italy's rise as an industrial and urbanised country in the 1950s was not without its problems. Rapid growth inevitably brought uneven development and social inequality. Italy began its expansion from a weak position and was still relatively poor in terms of national wealth, compared to most of the other Western European countries. The government was unable to raise taxes effectively for the upper classes and failed to create adequate health and education systems. Moreover, after 1948, the Christian Democrats led by De Gasperi effectively created an anti-communist state, as highlighted by John Young in his *Cold War Europe*:

> The party (DC) combined Catholic and anti-Communist beliefs with an ability to modernise Italy and wield state power, and the longer it remained in office the more bureaucracy, armed forces, judiciary, banks and other institutions became loyal to it. (1991: 136)

54 has stressed the fact that the return to peace was a complicated process for Italy. The country was rapidly coming out of a civil war, while the reconstruction did not succeed in fulfilling the many promises of immediate post-war euphoria. As argued by De Lorenzis, the novel clearly questions a consolidated representation of a country that was experiencing an "economic miracle" without however a positive outcome.

> È proprio la verifica narrativa di un limite storico, la disinvolta messa in crisi di una rappresentazione consolidata, la sottile interrogazione rivolta ad una definizione: quella di "dopoguerra". (2002)

Wu Ming have drawn attention to the ideals of freedom and equality held by the Resistance that should have brought great changes to Italian society, but that on the contrary were suffocated by new established power. For Wu Ming, a crucial element in *54* is indeed the

revision of the myth of post-war Italy as emerged during the reconstruction period (1945-1954). As De Cataldo undelined:

> C'è il senso di una rivoluzione tradita o forse solo fallita che lascia sgomenti i sopravvissuti, incerti fra il letargo, la corsa all'arricchimento individuale o la ricerca disperata di una nuova causa alla quale sacrificare cervelli e coratelle. (2002)

In Italy, the 1950s have generally been considered the years of economic and social reconstruction, and the beginning of what would become an important country within the future EU. In *54*, there is a revision of the so-called "economic miracle" and more generally of the new world order that was defined as "peaceful". Consistent with the notion of the betrayed Resistance, Wu Ming have addressed the issues emerging at the moment of assimilation when many characters in the novel, in particular former partisans, saw Italy as the homeland of the Fascist bourgeoisie. According to many of them, the government led by the Christian Democrats, all fascists in democratic clothes, did not express the will of the people: 'Son di quelli che prima dell'armistizio ci piaceva tanto Benito, poi dopo eran tutti anti, e adesso son di nuovo lì a fare il loro numero' (*54*: 72).

Robespierre, bartender at the Bar Aurora during the day and an unrestrainable Filuzzi[123] dancer at night, was frustrated and unsatisfied with his own life and looking for a change through which he could finally overcome his discontent. His customers were former partisans who spent their time talking about politics, sports, women and health, while playing cards and watching television for the first time.[124] For Robespierre, they represent the losing side of the war. Along with some useless frustrations, their acceptance of the new state was unbearable to him. Robespierre was thus driven by his desire to leave Italy to catch up with his father Vittorio

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[123] Filuzzi is a style originating in Bologna at the end of the 19th century. It includes three dances: Mazurka, Waltz and Polka. It differs from all other forms of ballroom dancing due to the presence of detached figures.

[124] On 3 January 1954, at 2.30pm, the first RAI television programme was broadcast: *Arrivi e partenze*, hosted by Armando Pizzo and Mike Bongiorno.

who had settled in Yugoslavia after the war. The example his father had given him was of a person who had fought for a supreme ideal, the realisation of freedom.

Having identified the main elements that characterise the concept of betrayed Resistance in Italy, I will now consider how the story of Vittorio Capponi symbolises the collapse of the ideals of freedom in Yugoslavia. Vittorio, a war hero during the liberation and a comrade who enthusiastically participated in the construction of a socialist country (Yugoslavia), represents in fact the disillusion of an outcome that did not reflect the ideals of freedom for which the partisans had fought. Considered an enemy by the new regime, the Yugoslavian Communist Party, Vittorio has been forced to live in exile in a remote Dalmatian island. He won during the liberation war, but now has been defeated by the new power.

This is the kernel of the whole narration, which, as mentioned, can also be extended to all Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's novels. In the moment of assimilation, when a new power is replacing the old one, there exist resilient rebels whose passionate beliefs are no longer welcome. These rebels are shaken by the conflict that arises between their wills and the actual social order. They do not attain any calm fulfilment, and their whole life is characterised by trouble, fights, and escapes. Their ideals and emotions always strive for something great, the realisation of freedom, which however cannot be concretely achieved. The more they are defeated, the more they fight for the realisation of their ideals. With these words, Roberspierre praises the courageous actions of his father:

> Così ci hai insegnato che vivere significa credere nella giustizia e costruire il proprio destino, non farselo imporre dagli altri. E per questo, nonostante tutto, sei una persona migliore di tante che vedo al bar, che hanno una casa, un motorino, «l'Unità» in tasca, le chiacchiere con gli amici, e che di scelte non ne vogliono più fare. I loro figli forse oggi sono diplomati e laureati, e hanno un buon lavoro, ma non sapranno mai quello che so io. (*54*: 182)

Vittorio's story is paradigmatic of the disillusions experienced by many former partisans. In an unfortunate way, Vittorio embodies the dialectical relationship between power and freedom on

the other side of the Adriatic Sea, in a country (Yugoslavia) that – contrary to Italy – was building a socialist society where, in theory, people could live in freedom and equality.

Wu Ming have constructed Vittorio's identity through a summary of the main experiences of his life (*54*: 89). He was a worker who participated to the 1919-20 riots, the so-called "Two Red Years", carrying into his soul the signs of a destiny that, similarly to other Wu Ming's heroes, would be characterised by perpetual rebellion against the established authorities. Vittorio called his first son Nicola in honour of the Russian communist revolutionary Vladimir Lenin, and his second son Robespierre, one the heroes of the French Revolution.

The novel narrates how during the Fascist regime, Vittorio had endured the abuses of power for too long and therefore could no longer passively stand and watch the outcomes of the war. In spring 1943, shortly after arriving in Croatia, on the Yugoslav border, Vittorio killed the vice-commander of his unit and then joined the Slovenian Resistance, at the time when local partisans led by Josip Broz, known as Tito, were launching a relentless struggle against the occupying Nazi-Fascist forces (*54*: 90). In Yugoslavia, the partisans were able to liberate the country largely unaided by the Red Army. Tito's followers ruthlessly wiped out their rivals, as well as the pro-Royalist resistance and those who collaborated with Italian and German occupiers.

> Poco dopo l'arrivo in Croazia, Vittorio Capponi aveva ucciso il vicecomandante del suo presidio e si era unito alla Resistenza jugoslava. Dopo l'8 settembre del '43 aveva fatto passare centinaia di militari italiani allo sbando nelle file dell'armata di Tito. Aveva partecipato alla liberazione di Zagabria, ricevendo dal Maresciallo in persona una decorazione al valor militare. (*54*: 90)

Because of this, Vittorio could not go back to Italy or he would have faced charges of treason and homicide. Most importantly, Vittorio was a member of the Communist Party in a country

where the revolution, from his point of view, was achieving a positive outcome with the consolidation of a socialist society outside of the Soviet influence.

It is worth mentioning that Tito actually refused to include Yugoslavia in the Warsaw Pact, under which it would have been a Soviet satellite state, declaring the neutrality of the country in the Non-Aligned Movement. Consequently, in 1948 Yugoslavia was expelled from the Cominform by Stalin, who disliked Tito's autonomy in foreign as well as in economic policy. From that point, as a dissident state, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia pursued a policy of neutrality during the Cold War, precisely when Europe was divided into Western and Eastern blocs. As an important character in the novel, Tito was the first Communist to defy the Soviet hegemony. He has been described as a backer of independent roads to socialism, leading to a "national communism" and promoting the policy of non-alignment between the two hostile blocs in the Cold War (*54*: 133).

In this particular post-war context, Tito introduced some innovative economic reforms, including a reversal of collectivisation in agriculture and the establishment of workers' councils to give employees a share in the management of factories. During the first elections of workers' councils, Vittorio argued that self-management was the only way forward for true socialism (*54*: 133). Therefore, he put his name down on the electoral list for the workers' council in his factory. However, Vittorio's closeness with Milovan Djilas, former president of the Federal People's Assembly who had become a prominent political dissident because of his intensifying criticism of the Communist Party, caused Vittorio some problems. The fact that Vittorio had not aligned himself with the directives of the Communist Party, due to his calls for increased liberalisation of the regime, was understood as an act of insubordination. At that precise historical moment, in fact, Marshal Tito was consolidating his power by purging the government of non-aligned figures.

In a short period, things started going unfavourably for Vittorio and therefore the "Italian comrade" and the "hero of the people" became a faded memory. Djilas and his followers had been dismissed from all their positions, and forced to engage in self-criticism, leaving their jobs and politics. For Vittorio, the enthusiasm of the past suddenly turned into desperation in the present. Forcibly removed from his town and friends, Vittorio was forced into exile on a remote island, always at risk of being deported to Goli Otok, the prison camp used by Tito's regime to detain the enemies of the state.

> Ci tengono sulla graticola. Gira voce che prima o poi, appena la stampa occidentale smette di interessarsi, allora ci portano nei campi di concentramento per cominformisti, oppure ci fanno fuori senza tante storie. [...] Aspetto solo che vengano. Tutti i giorni. Ma non si può vivere così. Sempre sul chi vive. Sempre con ansia. Però, vedi, non posso più fidarmi di nessuno e con gli amici ho dovuto tagliare i ponti, per non mettere nei guai anche a loro. (*54*: 145)

By mentioning Goli Otok, Wu Ming have drawn the reader's attention to a recurring element (the concentration camp) in dictatorial states as an instrument of coercion and violence towards political prisoners and minority groups who have been confined for reasons of "state security".[125] On the Adriatic island of Goli Otok were in fact incarcerated those who maintained links with the Soviet Union or remained Stalin supporters, as well as social democrats, nationalists, fascist insurgents, anti-communist and intellectuals. The prison of Goli Otok institutionalised a system of repression against those who opposed Tito's communist regime. In Goli Otok inmates were forced to do hard labour in a stone quarry and were regularly beaten, tortured and killed.[126]

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[125] Far from being a memory of the past, concentration camps, or political prison camps, are today present in North Korea and China. See https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/11/north-korea-prison-camps-very-much-in-working-order/. And https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/10/china-mass-internment-camps-are-places-of-punishment/ (Accessed 22.11.18)

[126] See for instance Zoretic, Josip (2007). *Goli Otok. Hell in the Adriatic*. Virtualbookworm.com Publishing.

To Vittorio, Yugoslavia was becoming a ruthless police state. In the moment of assimilation, the first two determinations, the previous power (Nazi-Fascist occupation) and the desire for freedom (led by the Resistance), had developed into Tito's dictatorial power. At first, the political power was held by Yugoslav partisans who had fought against Nazi-Fascist occupation and had gained control over the country after the war. Later on, Josip Broz Tito, one of the leading partisans, became the first prime minister of Yugoslavia in 1946. As a result, a new power emerged with the assimilation of the ideals of freedom and the elements coming from the previous power. On page 38 of *54*, we read:

> Fascismo di Tito. [...] Altroché, quello è un nazionalista, tratta l'Unione Sovietica come un qualsiasi altro stato borghese, e in piú è arrogante, ambizioso, presuntuoso, tipico dei trotzkisti controrivoluzionari. [...] Ma davvero Tito è comunista fascista? (*54*: 38)

Comparable to other Wu Ming's characters on the "wrong side" of history, Vittorio did not have a safe place to live and therefore was forced to hide incessantly.[127] Nonetheless, Vittorio showed no regrets for his actions that were necessary to help the Yugoslavian partisans to build a socialist state. During the war, he had actively participated to the revolution and then to the construction of a new country under the banner of socialism. Even when Vittorio was condemned to a painful exile as a political dissident, he claimed that it was right to try, sacrificing himself for an ideal.

Through these unfortunate circumstances, Wu Ming have highlighted to what extent Vittorio represents a heroic and tragic figure who embodies a different consciousness from the new political and social context shaped in Yugoslavia under Tito's dictatorship. Vittorio's dramatic situation began with the acceptance of a conflict between the new power and the desire for freedom that has been betrayed. In fact, the whole of the new power appears to bear

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[127] On this significant point, De Lorenzis (2002) has suggested that: 'La guerra è quella dei tanti eretici che non hanno saputo stare a guardare e quando hanno agito lo hanno fatto dalla parte sbagliata'.

the mark of corruption and moral embitterment, overwhelming the very people who previously fought for freedom. As many other Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's heroes, Vittorio seems to have internalised the categorical imperative to the extent that he cannot accept his actual condition without, at least, another fight.

> Io non sono stato un buon padre per voi. Un buon padre rimaneva coi suoi figli, anche se andava in galera. Tornava in Italia e faceva il processo. Ma cosa devo dire, Robespierre? Ho fatto quello che pensavo era giusto fare. Aiutare questo popolo a costruire il socialismo. È per questo che ho combattuto. [...] Adesso tutto crolla. Sono come esulato. [...] Solo come un cane, senza figli, senza compagna, senza paese e senza socialismo. E sai cosa dispiace di più? - Era una domanda sincera, stupita. - Che non ce la faccio a pentirmi. Non riesco a pensare che era sbagliato. Era giusto provare e se vuoi che sono sincero fino in fondo, dico che non è sbagliato nemmeno adesso che Tito è come Stalin. Forse sbaglio, Robespierre. Lo so che non è stato giusto per te e per Nicola, lo so che meritavate un padre più normale, che si sacrificava per voi. Ma qui [...] c'era un paese da fare, c'era il socialismo, la rivoluzione, capisci? Una società nuova. E in Italia no. Se tornavo, mi sarei dispiaciuto tutta la vita di non aver fatto la mia parte qui. Ecco, te l'ho detto con sincerità e forse adesso mi odi più di Nicola. Ma è la verità e adesso che sei grande puoi capirla. Se tornassi indietro, rifarei la stessa scelta. (*54*: 181)

Focussing on Vittorio's features, I want to underline how he features the combination of two elements that at first glance seem contradictory: reason and passion. I refer here to Hegel's view of these two concepts that are at the core of any crucial historical event. I will thus apply them to the analysis of Vittorio's character. Although regarded as negative, passions are on the contrary the propulsion for the achievement of greater ends, not only for a single individual but also for the community (Hegel 1956: 20, 21). Passions are in fact the driving force that pushes the protagonists of the novels to realise their aim, which is the transformation of society in the light of their views of what a free society might be.

The mediation between passion and reason was conceived by Hegel to be the State in its ideal essence. He argued that the concrete mean and union of idea and passion should be 'liberty under the conditions of morality in a state' (*ibid*: 50). Hegel thought about the state as 'objectified morality' (*ibid*). The ideal state would be that where the private interests of its

citizens are in perfect harmony with the common interest. In other words, perfect harmony is attained when single individuals find their gratification and realisation in the common interests within the state they live in. Unfortunately, every actual state fails to attain this harmonious reconciliation of individual interests, desires and needs with the common good.

This failure of any given state to embody this ideal, however, is experienced in a constructive way by the protagonists of the novel. In fact, if the state were perfect, there would be no legitimate basis for the dissatisfaction felt by the protagonists in relation to their social and political environment. I thus suggest that in *54*, as well as in the other novels, rebellions arise in circumstances when no present is ever adequate to the realisation of ideals such as freedom. The limitation on the exercise of freedom is therefore the starting point that provokes the actions of characters who believe in the possibility of changing the state.

Driven by his pain and sense of betrayal, but also by the awareness that the attainment of freedom is no longer possible under Tito's regime in Yugoslavia nor with the Christian Democrats' governments in Italy, at the end of the novel Vittorio and Robespierre escape to Mexico. Just like the protagonists of *Q* and *Asce di guerra*, Vittorio and Robespierre did not accept the actual conditions of their lives and therefore kept looking for freedom in other parts of the world. In their case, it was Mexico City, where they met a young lawyer: Fidel Castro.

> In quel momento la figura alta e corpulenta dell'avvocato raggiunse il bancone. Ogni tanto anche a lui si seccava la gola.
> - Abogado, qué tal? Deje que le presente a mis amigos.
> Indossava un completo nero, elegante, i capelli corti ondulati, tirati indietro con la brillantina e la faccia gioviale, un po' paffuta, su cui spuntavano i baffi sottili. Non dimostrava più di trent'anni.
> León Mantovani indicò i suoi ospiti: - Le presento a dos companeros italianos. Piense que el padre luchó junto al comandante Tito cantra la dominación nazifascista. Estuvo en las montanas con la guerrilla...
> L'uomo strinse la mano al vecchio partigiano.
> - Muy honorado... abogado Castro Ruz.
> Poi fece lo stesso con il ragazzo, e fu come se gli trasmettesse una strana sensazione. Quella che la vita, come la Storia, non avrebbe smesso di riservare sorprese. (*54*: 370)

It is not by chance that Wu Ming have concluded the novel with the appearance of such a significant character. In fact, former Cuban leader Fidel Castro embodies the dialectical process that leads from the overthrowing of a previous power to the establishment of a new regime. In 1954, Castro was a lawyer who was planning a popular uprising in Cuba against the military dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista. Released after a political amnesty, Castro went to Mexico hoping to continue his campaign. Eventually, in 1959 Castro seized power, ruling over Cuba for nearly five decades. During that period, Castro's regime was widely criticised for stifling political freedom.

If we compare *54* with the texts previously analysed in this thesis, it is clear that all the novels end with an open conclusion. The events narrated focus on a fight that continues, no matter what results have been achieved. At first glance, the protagonists are brave and tenacious rebels who, nonetheless, have lost their battles and thus emerge on the page as defeated characters. But despite being defeated, these anarchical rebels spread the seeds of revolt just like rhizomatic characters (the Anabaptists in Chapter One and Vitaliano in Chapter Two), spreading their revolutionary ideals to other parts of the world. On this topic, which is at the core of all their novels, in an interview Wu Ming claimed that:

> Abbiamo sempre considerato i nostri romanzi storie di vittorie, non di sconfitte. Nell'accezione usata da Marx quando definì vittoriosa la Comune di Parigi, la Guerra dei Contadini si può senz'altro definire una vittoria: indicò la tendenza e sparse i semi di altre rivolte. (In De Lorenzis 2002)

The defeat that actually produces other forms of rebellions is at the centre of *54*. By giving a voice to the defeated in history, Wu Ming have demonstrated the importance of the act of rebellion to start a new beginning, no matter what the final outcome of the rebellion might be. Moreover, through a dialectical process that leads to an evolution from an old to a new form of power, Wu Ming have challenged traditional historical discourse in order to re-examine

events narrating them in a particular perspective where power and freedom are complementary concepts that develop together.

CONCLUSION

The collectives Luther Blissett and Wu Ming are among those writers, artists, and thinkers who are re-evaluating the production, distribution, and consumption of culture and adapting their strategies to fit the increasingly digital world of the 21st century. Luther Blissett first and then Wu Ming demonstrate a multimedial approach towards the act of narrating. Thanks to the various forms of expression (i.e. writing, blog, music, recitals) they link literature and political activism in a thought-provoking way. The elements of their novels expand in different platforms across a range of media. In so doing, Luther Blissett and Wu Ming do not limit themselves to strictly writing historical novels. On the contrary, the written text is a starting point for the creation of multiple and diverse other worlds that offer a variety of perspectives on narration through media.

This thesis has charted Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's historical novels as one of the components of a larger narration that extends through various platforms. I have foregrounded how the dialectical relationship between power and freedom emerges as a prominent feature in the historical events narrated in the novels. As analysed throughout the chapters, these events contain within themselves their own antithesis, conveying to the beginning of a new era, which contains elements from the previous one, in a never-ending process. In every novel a state of oppression is followed by a revolution that destroys the foundations of the existing tyranny. Eventually, however, a new power emerges, assimilating the rebellion that has overcome the previous power.

In *Q* (Chapter Two), the autobiographical protagonist has been placed in the position of witness of the dialectical process that leads to an evolution from a previous state of oppression to a new form of power. I also emphasised the three moments (fixity, instability, assimilation) through which the dialectical process develops in an autobiographical and

allegorical way, showing a parallel between 16th-century Europe in the novel and contemporary Europe. In particular, the focus was on the power of the printing press and the new interactive and reticular forms of communication that facilitated the circulation of knowledge in a horizontal way, without hierarchies or a centre operating as advantaged transmitters. Following this concept of networking, I have shown how, in an allegorical way, the 16th-century printing press is like the 20th-century internet, when everyone can potentially be at the same time transmitter and receiver. In addition, any communication takes place across a stream of data, free from distortions by official mediations. Nonetheless, the libertarian movements that were animated by a strong consciousness of the possibility of changing the world, inevitably turned into tragedy and fanaticism when a new ruthless power arose from the revolution. I have demonstrated that, in this dialectical process, idealism emerges as a key concept throughout the novels. The concept of freedom as felt by the protagonists is charged with the idealistic essence of utopia. Not recognising the attainment of freedom in the societies emerging from revolutions, the rebels do not accept the new forms of government that have included elements of the previous power. Therefore, the characters feel that their ideals have been betrayed within the structures and functions of the new state. Against any hierarchy, they only attain a utopian state of freedom.

Altai (Chapter Two) represents a notable change in style for Wu Ming, prefiguring a new consciousness in how freedom can be achieved, and it is precisely this switch in perception that I will outline in this chapter. The autobiographical elements in the novel have been analysed in the first descriptive section, where I considered the disillusion felt by Wu Ming around two elements: the "comforting" end of *Q* and the riots of 2001. I have subsequently argued that these circumstances have been fundamental to the creation of *Altai*. My focus upon the "unworkable" freedom that characterises *Altai* has been at the core of the chapter, where I concentrated on two main themes: the Hegelian notion of 'unreason' in history, and the utopian

concept of freedom from above. I have also explored how Wu Ming have created an allegorical narration where the dialectical relationship between power and freedom is mirrored through the centuries with strong links to the present time.

In Chapter Three I examined the moment of instability when the American Revolution has been narrated as a violent war fought by rebels, loyalists, Native American tribes and British forces. *Manituana* deals with the reality of the American War of Independence in a complex way through the clashes between the old power (the British Empire) and the American rebels. I explored the moment of fixity represented by three contradictory aspects in the British Empire: the fading political power of King George III; the decadent power of the aristocracy; and the Mohocks, a gang of street criminals disguised as Native Americans who – as a virus inside the old power – tried to overturn it. In the last part of the chapter, I revisited some of the questions surrounding the allegorical interpretation of the novel, examining in depth how *Manituana* relates to all the populations that have suffered as a consequence of European colonisation in different parts of the world (the moment of assimilation).

Chapter Four (*L'armata dei sonnambuli*) begins with an analysis of the main character in the novel, Léo Modonnet-Scaramouche, where it is possible to identify many similarities with Fabrizio De André's white-collar worker in *Storia di un impiegato*. I demonstrated, in fact, that Wu Ming took inspiration from the white-collar worker to create the protagonist of their novel. The particular features of these two characters have been analysed with a focus on their attitudes during the moment of instability when the rebellions were at their peak (the French Revolution for Léo, and the 1968 for the white-collar worker). My analysis of how power deals with altered states of consciousness is at the core of the second part of the chapter. With reference to the Hegelian concepts of 'lacerated consciousness' and 'consciousness of inversion', I will make a comparison between Diderot's Rameau's Nephew and Léo Modonnet-Scaramouche, highlighting how Rameau's nephew, thanks to his eccentricity and foolishness,

can be considered as an "ancestor" of the protagonist of *L'armata dei sonnambuli* in his fights against power. Moreover, following the Foucauldian concept of 'unreason', I demonstrated that in an "inverted world", fools (such as Léo Modonnet-Scaramouche) can ultimately make room for an "absolute" freedom with which no power can interfere. In the final part of the chapter, through an allegorical interpretation of the text, I will show how the army of sleepwalkers in the novel can be compared to ordinary people in our times who, due to a form of collective hypnosis, lose their free will.

In Chapter Five, *Asce di guerra*, I drew attention to the moment of instability that emerged during the Italian civil war, between the armistice (8 September 1943) and the end of the Second World War (25 April 1945). In that moment, the two determinations, the old power (Fascism) and the desire for freedom (Resistance), collided in the physical contest of the war (the battlefields). I also analysed the fact that, despite the victory by the Resistance and the Allies against the Nazi-Fascists, to the eyes of many partisans the post-war reconstruction in Italy was characterised by the rise of a new oppressive power, the Italian Republic, which integrated elements from both Fascism and the Resistance. In the moment of assimilation, the previous power (Fascism) was not completely eradicated. On the contrary, Fascism was preserved in laws and in many aspects of post-war Italian society. My analysis thus concentrated upon the new power that incorporated some features from Fascism, in particular in the light of the emergence of a disciplinary power. Due to its specific focus, my argument will be influenced by Foucauldian theories related to the mechanisms that operate to impose standards of normality in all spheres of daily life. Finally I examined the ways in which the protagonist of the novel, Vitaliano, unable to adapt to the new social and political mechanisms emerging after the war, left Italy to fight for the freedom of the oppressed people in Laos. By concentrating upon the stage that followed the moment of assimilation of the first cycle, I thus explored the beginning of a new dialectical relationship of another cycle, where the moment of

fixity is represented by French and American occupiers (the old power), and the moment of instability by the desire for freedom felt by the Resistance in Laos and Vietnam.

In *54* (Chapter Five) the focus was on the dialectical relationship old power / desire for freedom / new power during the Cold War period when new authoritative countries balanced their strength to impose their power in strategical areas of the world. In *54*, Fascism (the old power) represents the moment of fixity, yet during its final phase. The moment of instability emerges during the war of liberation, when Italian and Slovenian partisans fought the previous power and then overturned the regime. The moment of assimilation has been examined from the partisans' point of view. In both cases, the new-born states (the Italian Republic and Yugoslavia) were perceived as societies built from the Fascist heritage. Two characters from the "wrong side" of History, Vittorio and Robespierre Capponi, embody the concept of betrayed Resistances (Vittorio in Yugoslavia and Robespierre in Italy) through disappointment and anger that emerge in the moment of assimilation.

In the examination of the dialectical process as it emerges in the novels, freedom is experienced as a utopian ideal, while power materialises with both positive and negative features. Power is represented in its multifaceted ideological, political, economic and religious forms. Intended as a system of relationships encompassing the whole of society, in fact power involves leadership, absolutism, colonialism, abuse of control, empowerment. But, at the same time, power is essential in order to attain freedom. As a strategy, rather than a possession, power is defined as action in response to the actions of others. It can take a variety of forms, including constraint or prohibition to act in particular ways, but also inducement or incitement to act in other ways. This implies that the exercise of power involves the freedom of both those exercising power and those over whom power is exercised. In every novel, the exercise of power presupposes that those on whom it is exercised are subjects capable of action and that they are in fact free to act in a number of ways. In order to be free, Luther Blissett's and Wu

Ming's heroes experience freedom through action that is caused by the need to start something new. For that reason, at the culmination of the moment of instability, freedom is experienced in new cities and states with new forms of government and new laws.

The main original contributions that I make in this dissertation are in the field of literary studies (with a particular focus on Italian contemporary historical novels inside the umbrella term New Italian Epic). Through the analysis of the dialectical relationship of power and freedom, I have demonstrated how Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's engaging and politically committed use of literature can be intended as a "strumento di lotta". This form of impegno has the potential to contribute to the creation of a form of participatory culture whose very collaborative nature is to challenge History (as well ouside the written text). I also considered how some important elements of traditional historical novels are reflected in Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's literary project. From the classic form, Luther Blissett and Wu Ming employ the writer's engagement and the awareness that literature can influence the readers' opinions about important historical and political issues. From the Italian tradition, Manzoni in particular, Luther Blissett and Wu Ming re-use not only the important concept of 'vero storico' that is the fictional verisimilitude against a framework of recreated historical scenarios, but also the narration of the "wrong side" of history (the peasants, for examples), as well as the reduction of the scale of observation focusing on social and daily life microhistories.

This thesis has also charted Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's long commitment to rejecting uniformitarianism in their activities as both cultural activists and writers. It has analysed their distrust on institutionalised accounts of History in favour of counter-historical narrations. One of the most significant features of their writing is the view of "history from below" that replaces the traditional history on the actions of "great men". By giving a voice to the defeated of history in their novels, Luther Blissett and Wu Ming have challenged traditional historical narrations in order to re-examine the events from other perspectives.

This thesis has also stimulated further avenues for research, such as the transmedial nature that characterises Luther Blissett's and Wu Ming's novels. My analysis could be therefore expanded and applied to the increasing hypertext of discourses on their works, whose content, as highlighted in the introduction and in the chapters of this thesis, cannot be contained within a single platform, but rather it extends across many media platforms. Indeed their narrations keep moving across different media and absorb in themselves influences and stimuli that emerge from their transmedia journey.

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