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Stefano Giannini

THE PARADOX OF AMNESIA: TONDELLI'S *UN WEEKEND POSTMODERNO*.

J'ai plus de souvenirs que si j'avais mille ans
Baudelaire

Amnesia does not exist alone: it always works in combination with the effort to recall the past. As a matter of fact, retrograde amnesia, the clinical inability to recall the past, does not cause loss of self-identity in the individual. Rather, the contrast between the effort to remember and the loss of one's memories ignites an increased mental activity devoted to the recuperation of the past, that brings the individual to enact such a past on, for example, the written page. This past cannot be the same as the past event as it happened. The time deferment between the event and the memory effort to re-enact it in the mind, affects its mental elaboration because of the new knowledge that has inserted itself in the time continuum. It follows that the narration will reflect a dynamic equilibrium between the object as it is portrayed and its memory, where the thrusts between the two, affected by the fallacy of the latter, are unequal in strength and accuracy. Therefore, as Italo Svevo wrote, readers must be aware that "... il passato è sempre nuovo."¹

In the intense yet too short decade devoted to writing, Pier Vittorio Tondelli (1955-1991) published five volumes of fiction: *Altri libertini* (1980), *Pao Pao* (1982), *Rimini* (1985), *Biglietti agli amici* (1986) and *Camere separate* (1989). In 1990 he published his last book *Un weekend postmoderno. Cronache dagli anni ottanta* (from now on abbreviated with *WPM*), the book that collects and arranges his articles, reviews, and sketches/retelling of events that, in some instances (but retold in the third person and with changes) had already appeared in his novels.² *WPM* can be considered a sort of anthropological encyclopedia of the culture of the Italian Eighties, stunningly precise in its individuation of the new cultural trends, customs, fashion, music tastes and behavior of Italians who were experiencing a new, violently fast onset of modernity. According to Tondelli, the 1980s were years that witnessed unbridled display of individualism and superficiality. At the same time, also the energetic exploration of new spaces (the European cities that extended the limited provincial horizons), the success of more formalized artistic forms: design, architecture, visual arts, literature; and more importantly the rebirth of solidarity that the social emergences triggered in Italy.³

In this article, I do not intend to investigate the medical symptoms of amnesia, nor to launch in a cataloguing of its symptoms in all of Tondelli's writings. Instead, I want to investigate how Tondelli's extended descriptions of the 1980s, as outlined in his ponderous *WPM* (well over 600 page-long⁴), establish his book as an agent against amnesia and, at the same time, also as an agent of dissimulation. In this context, amnesia must be seen as the condition that, consciously and

unconsciously, forgets or hides elements of the past, and select them in the fictional reconstruction of the artistic narration. Such a reconstruction can be understood as Tondelli's subtle warning towards the simple acceptance of the complex, ebullient, energetic, euphoric 1980s as the decade that stimulated individualistic growth – and a more powerful sense of freedom – but also a warning to consider it carefully in order to acknowledge and analyze the soon-to-be-felt sense of emptiness that permeated those years. Tondelli stops short from defining the 1980s as a tragedy, but he maintains that new discourses on the society of images and on the postmodern ended up being a shallow pose that eventually meant to disguise the feeling of emotional emptiness mentioned above.⁵ Dissimulation, the practice of hiding what is visible, is necessary to Tondelli to undermine the readers' superficial temptation to accept *WPM* as a mere archive.

Both energetic individualistic growth and sense of emptiness could be the toxic residue of the over-politicized 1970s whose legacy of political strife reverberated in the Italian social landscape with which Tondelli dealt, for example, in *Altri libertini*, published at the beginning of the 1980s. I argue that the fight against emptiness is the feeling with which Tondelli grappled in his writings, and it denotes the melancholic vicissitudes of his novels' characters. Far from being the ultimate solution to the emptiness, *WPM* still embodies the author's attempts to narrate the novel of his life, to write his self, in a less implicit way that his novels do. Yet, recuperation of past events cannot happen in a systematic way. Memory is a field of ruins, that despite the authors' declared intentions of accuracy, renders a story an accumulation of memories where “an archeological museum of fragments of the past,” outlines a new story.⁶

WPM contains materials, such as identifiable characters and situations, that were written before and during the completion of his short stories and novels. For example: the five mirthful girls who tour their provincial city in the old Citroën Dyane (*WPM* 79), whose irreverent lookalikes readers had already met in “Mimi e istrioni,” the second story of *Altri libertini* (35-65); the acid and amused description of the military draft in “Affari militari,” that echoes the misadventures of the conscripts in *Pao Pao* (Pao is the acronym for Picchetto Armato Ordinario, the picket on duty to guard the perimeter of the barracks); the powerful anthropologic examination of the sociological phenomena that take place in Rimini during the summer in “Rimini come Hollywood,” that appears almost simultaneously in the pages of *Rimini*, with frequent textual interceptions (in *WPM*, it is the Adriatic shoreline that “mi sarebbe apparsa come il bordo luccicante di strass di un vestito da sera,” 113; in *Rimini*, the shoreline “pareva un neon acceso,” 101); the retelling of a trip from Greece back to Italy in the eight section “Viaggi” (*WPM* 354-357) that will appear in *Camere separate* (206-209) enriched by the presence of the emotionally attached storyteller.⁷

However, even accepting Tondelli's openness to see his *zibaldone* considered as a potential closer reading of his life than his novels,⁸ and as an antidote against amnesia, readers should hesitate to accept at face value his *WPM* as the true recollection of the events he had told in his fiction. *WPM* is also, in Tondelli's words, a different way in respect to his previous literary production, of being a writer. Therefore, Tondelli signals us his frankly predictable hesitation in unmasking life in its entirety also in his postmodern archive, an archive that seemingly reproduces everything, but that treats everything as ironical repetition of facts.⁹ Tondelli wrote:

Queste pagine costituiscono un po' il sottotesto dei miei romanzi. Rappresentano realmente il laboratorio. [...] Allora il *Weekend* non è solo il bilancio di dieci anni, un archivio - pur se importantissimo - del passato e della memoria, ma diventa una proposta nuova su qual è il compito o quale potrebbe essere uno dei tanti compiti dello scrittore, una delle sue tante incarnazioni. (Panzeri and Picone 71)

In light of these words, can we trust the “I” of Tondelli as the sincere “I” of *WPM*? Isn't his a suggestion to seriously consider and treat *WPM* also as an attempt at a new idea of writing? After all Tondelli rejects the notion of truth as key to the understanding of his ‘realistic’ writing. Readers should know that in dealing with literature “si tratta di un mascheramento” (Panzeri and Picone, 44). The debate on the “I” in literature is too long and controversial to be recounted here. Ingeborg Bachmann’s reflections are, however, extremely useful in light of Tondelli’s admiration for the writings of the Austrian author. Tondelli wrote about Bachmann in several instances: in an article in *Rockstar*, in *Biglietti agli amici*, in the short story “My sweet car,” in his review of Bachmann’s “Der Fall Franza.”¹⁰ Her figure is again remembered in *WPM* in the eight section “Viaggi,” with the mediation of Bachmann’s friend Uwe Johnson:

[Johnson’s book on Bachmann is an] Accumulo di materiali minimi, di appunti, note, frasi, righe rubate alla cronaca nel tentativo di colmare il vuoto di una morte e di un fallimento [Bachmann tragically died in 1973]. Ossessiva catalogazione di dettagli, ora dopo ora, come per fermare il tempo, per annullarlo nell’insignificanza delle sue scorie, perdersi fra i detriti scrittori di una giornata: ridurre tutto a frammento, anche il dolore e la catastrofe. Libro bellissimo e sacro questo di Johnson. (*WPM* 423)

In her essay “Das schreibende Ich,” Bachmann goes through the notion of the modern conception of the “I” in literature. Bachmann establishes the fracture in the understanding of the relationship I/history that took place with the advent of psychoanalysis. In her essay she argues that until the 19th century the uncorrupted “I” was in the history and therefore it was able to tell it. Modernity brought the disintegration of the “I,” therefore the order I/history is overturned: History is the “I,” that is: the subject no longer guarantees the integrity of history and of itself. Subject and history dissolved into each other: “Neither the reader, nor the author Italo Svevo would stick their necks out for the “I” of Zeno Cosini.” (Bachmann 230)¹¹ How licit is therefore to demand answers from Tondelli under the assumption that we believe he is capable of narrating history?

One’s self narration “can be very largely implicit and unconscious (Strawson 291) but it is important to remember we have to negotiate the recalling of the memories that construct the self narration against the need to select (and forget) what one wants to include in the self-narrative project. Whereas there is more or less a general consensus over this concept, I believe that in Tondelli’s case, implicitness and unconsciousness are strong but not dominant, whereas it is unstressed the preponderance of the concept of hiding in front of the readers. Any authors’ decision to strip themselves of everything results in the weakening of the defense possibilities.

Leo, the writer/protagonist of *Camere separate*, experiences intolerance and embarrassment at the sight of a reader surprised by him reading one of his books:

Un giorno gli capita di scorgere, in metropolitana, uno sconosciuto che legge un suo libro. Deve scendere, rosso di vergogna. Avrebbe voluto strapparglielo dalle mani, picchiarlo con violenza e insultarlo [...] Quando pensa a questo episodio lo colpisce l'idea di essere stato sorpreso, nudo, da uno sconosciuto. Sente insomma quel libro, o altri che ha scritto, come il suo corpo spogliato. [...] Leggere quelle pagine è addentarsi sulla sua pelle e nei suoi nervi, far l'amore con lui, odiarlo, ricordarlo, sognarlo. E questo gli pare intollerabile. (*Camere separate* 95)

In a long interview that spanned over a year (August 1989-November 1990), the interviewer inquires about Tondelli's assertion on the act of writing, an action that was compared by Tondelli himself to a "striptease," in the sense of exposing in full to his readers without defenses. Tondelli's answer reiterates the image of the stripping oneself of any form of protection. The erotic undertone of the process is further stressed when Tondelli states that his idea of writing couples a subtle form of exhibitionism counterbalanced by (but also grafted on) censorship: writing for Tondelli must negotiate its life against censorship, and this process engenders the complex interdependence between pleasure and shame, in which he persists. (Panzeri and Picone 45-46)

In similar cases, in order to keep the guises on, one assumes the practice of dissimulation because it protects writers from what lies around them and, I argue, in Tondelli's case, it also protects him from the internal contradictions and fears. Therefore, I wonder whether the excess of information of *WPM* is, in fact, also an act of dissimulation. The exuberant, overly detailed prose that Tondelli chose to describe the exuberant Italian Eighties might then be a deceiving tool to describe the wealthy and, at the same time, destitute decade with which – torn between admiration and repulsion – Tondelli decided to play his literary game. Needless to say, for Tondelli the literary game is the game of life.

Tondelli opens his *WPM* declaring an intention opposite to the display of amnesia. In the long hyper-detailed table of contents of his book, he writes down everything, in an excruciating, and seemingly nugatory streaming of details, so that the table of content becomes an exhaustive index of names and ideas, to which, with Fulvio Panzeri, he devoted endless care. Yet, hidden in the accumulation of the hundreds of analytical snapshots, one of its characters mentions the importance of dissimulation: "La pratica della dissimulazione è una pratica tipica del soggetto malinconico, del soggetto che 'nasconde' e pratica la finzione proprio per sottrarsi al vuoto catastrofico che si allarga intorno a lui." (*WPM* "Sessione di laurea" 156) Dissimulation hides what is known, to protect the dissimulator and to mask the truth. The link between memory (and forgetfulness) and lying was described in different terms by Montaigne in his essay "On Liars." Although the relationship was cast under a different scenario, what is useful, in the case of my investigation, is the fluctuating mobility that the concept of memory assumes in Montaigne in its relationship with the practice of deceiving or self-deceiving. A weak memory helps to absorb and

forget the offenses, a good memory is necessary for liars because they will be tested on the consistency of their stories.

Amnesia can therefore become a voluntary practice when it is false recollection, so that it can be enacted in order to hide and protect the consistency of what has been told. The “I don’t remember” of the subject suffering from amnesia cannot always be separated by the act of dissimulation. The pair amnesia/dissimulation is not only understood as a means to protect oneself, but now also as the manifestation of the unconscious that reveals the subjects’ relationship with their desires. In Freud, “I don’t remember” becomes the textual spy of the troubled (impossible?) desire to achieve the truth. The difficulty to remember reveals both what the subject (i.e. Freud patient of himself) wanted to forget and wanted to remember. The unconscious – in this context equal to truth – enters in an antagonistic relationship with oblivion, to allow the subject the possibility to counteract its potentially domineering quality.¹² The complete title of Palandri’s novel *Boccalone*, as Tondelli reminds us in *WPM*, is *Storia vera, piena di bugie*, to underline the fluctuating and fleeting border between what is traditionally considered reliable facts and lies. (*WPM* 233-236) The identification of their border becomes a difficult task to achieve, often it cannot be determined. More so, such an act is futile.

According to Tondelli’s character in *WPM* “Sessione di laurea,” dissimulation is typical of the melancholic individual. It is impossible to reduce the possibility of understanding a complex book like *WPM* to one aspect only.¹³ However, it is realistic to suggest and prove that one of these aspects plays a major role. Dissimulation is what I posit as one of the traits of Tondelli’s writing of *WPM*, that is: he hides something in his pages by showing his “I” as Tondelli, but in truth, from his hard-earned privileged position, he can freely discuss the others, “his characters.” Dissimulation is an aspect of self-censorship.

Sometimes the cloak of disguise is torn, for example in the epilogue of the description of his encounter with Bachmann. As recounted in “Viaggi. Vienna” Tondelli visits Klagenfurt, Bachmann’s birthplace. The city, the cemetery, the landscape around the cemetery are for Tondelli powerful tools that bring back fragments of one’s life. Tondelli pushes the overlapping of his poetic reflections with Bachmann’s to state that Klagenfurt is like Correggio, his birthplace:

Klagenfurt, sia detto con il dovuto rispetto, è Correggio. Innanzi alla tomba del poeta, Klagenfurt è una qualsiasi città in cui ognuno di noi è nato e cresciuto con dolore, scoprendo l’inconciliabilità del proprio sentire, e dove ognuno ha imparato [...] a “essere perennemente in fuga” (*WPS* 425).

Sometimes the disguise is only apparent. The initially amused and stereotyped description of two young American men on the deck of the boat full of tourists returning to Mykonos (“Tipo gay internazionale: capelli corti, baffi spioventi, zainetto, scarpe da jogging,” *WPM* 586) abruptly steers away from the *cliché* of carefree attitude, to give way to a somber portrait. One of the two men is very thin, his emaciated body the shadow – Tondelli speculates – of a much stronger body of a recent past. During the navigation, the two men did not exchange words. However, the reason for the mysterious condition is soon revealed. Tondelli tells his readers that AIDS is the culprit of

so much pain and of the tragic deterioration of human relations. While Tondelli never wanted to be known as a gay writer, his eagerness to make homosexuality a visible subject of understanding and discussion and not “merely its object” is strong. (Duncan 128)¹⁴ Although mentioned explicitly only twice in *WPM*, “l’olocausto gay” (*WPM* 590) is not hidden.

The terrain of *WPM* can be treacherous and uneven. More than with the declared overlapping of artistic intentions with Bachmann (and Tondelli’s admiration for Johnson’s obsessive cataloguing in his book for Bachmann, that inevitably reminds to the table of content of *WPM*); or with the deceivingly abated presence of AIDS, it is with “Andrea Pazienza” (*WPM* 229-232) that Tondelli exercises dissimulation in *WPM*.

Andrea Pazienza (1956-1988) – already introduced in the previous piece “Il nuovo fumetto italiano,” (*WPM* 224-228, dated 1985) and remembered, after the publication of *WPM* again in the most affectionate terms in Tondelli’s “Anni ottanta” (*L’Abbandono* 72) – was one year younger than Tondelli, and one of the greatest visual artist of the new Italian scene. Tondelli knew of him thanks to their common presence as collaborators of the monthly magazines *Linus* and *Alterlinus* (then *Alter*). Pazienza published in *Alter* his first major work, the graphic novel *Le straordinarie avventure di Pentothal*. By the author’s admission, Pentothal is Andrea Pazienza himself (Pazienza 33). An hallucinated personal journey in the hopes and miseries of 1970s Bologna, with *Le straordinarie avventure di Pentothal*, Pazienza managed to tell his story and the history of the city at the epicenter of the student movements amidst the political crisis of the Italian republic. The result is the most beautiful and fascinating blend of personal and public moods that portray and imagine the failure and the hopes of his generation captured, put in Oreste del Buono’s words, while history was unfolding and about to be defined as history (Pazienza 7, but selected and quoted by Tondelli).¹⁵ Certain dialogues and atmospheres of *Pentothal* echo in the dialogues of the outcast characters of *Altri libertini*. But it is more important, in my opinion, to stress in Pazienza’s *Pentothal* the autobiographical traits that innerve so much of Tondelli’s prose as well, to the point to indicate in *Camere separate*, Tondelli’s last novel, the lurking presence of Tondelli himself as the key note of the novel (Burns 254). In *WPM*, where the “I” dominates, “Andrea Pazienza” assumes the guises of a reflection on the role of the artist that Tondelli wanted to be and was. “A chi appartiene la vita di un artista?” asks Tondelli. While the superficial behavioral traits of Pazienza are taken and observed in amusement by Tondelli, it is the function of the artist that captures Tondelli’s admiration and, I believe, exemplifies the hidden identification process. When Pazienza is described as the most intelligent and artistically gifted bard of the 1970s, it seems as if Tondelli looks at him and at his tragic death, as a prefiguration of his attempt at being the equally tragic, but more ironic, bard of the 1980s. Notwithstanding the success Pazienza achieved, he – Tondelli warns us (and himself?) – died like many of his friends and youth lost in the empty years that they navigated. Tondelli declares the extraordinary greatness and coherence that marked Pazienza’s life and his artistic achievements. It is the artistic coherence that aims at telling one’s story with humility tempered by the awareness of the importance of the task, that Tondelli wants to underline, as the quality that animates him as well. If this merciless process leaves behind victims, Tondelli realizes that this is the price to pay: “Molti altri, vittime e interpreti di quegli anni, sono scomparsi. C’era qualcosa che non andava

allora, ed era il mito dell'autodistruzione. Qualcuno ne è saltato fuori, qualcun altro no e ha pagato carissimo. 'Ogni vita è quella che doveva essere' scriveva Pavese. Allora sia resa lode a chi ci sta precedendo lassù." (WPM 232) In light of Tondelli's death in 1991, these last lines can be read as an enlightening and horrific awareness of what was impending upon him.

Dissimulation of his fears is thinly veiled by irony. In the short "Postmoderno di mezzo" (WPM 214-215) Tondelli warns readers of the menacing new era that will drive away the weak and short-lived "postmoderno di mezzo," ephemeral time of chaotic whirlwind of fashion trends. Overcoming this confused and unstable period will usher in a new "Hellenism." In keeping with the concept of Hellenism (when tragedy disappeared and comedy lost its bite in favor of bucolic poetry and psychologism), the new time announced by Tondelli (it must be noted with an affected prose that hides his abrasive awareness) will distract us from the current habits to further dull our senses and spread inactivity. This short ironic piece highlights the apocalyptic relativism that Tondelli denounces around him. His antidote against amnesia transits its powers not in the memorial effort to regain the past, but in a re-consideration of the past that forebodes the frightening future he felt it was approaching:

Il corto circuito elettronico che stiamo gustando, fatto di continui riverberi e interferenze, ci porta così, ineluttabilmente, al superamento definitivo del postmoderno, verso un nuovo ellenismo in cui – mentre replicanti galattici bussano minacciosi alle porte del pianeta – la fauna risponderà in sublime *souplesse*: "Arriva la fine e ho tutto da mettermi." (WPM 215).

Always in proximity of the practices of dissimulation, and with a grotesque tone, Tondelli wanted to expose moments of ironic self-assurance, in order to dodge the rooted sense of desperation and melancholy that cuts across the personal and the societal/political spheres. The negative effects of the unwanted attentions were experienced first hand, for example with the legal troubles he had faced with the charged of obscenity for *Altri libertini*, or with the censorship because of the explicit political party membership of one of the characters of *Rimini*.¹⁶

The forceful, inescapable embrace between forgetfulness and memory causes yet another problem. Is it possible to determine how unconscious and unwanted is forgetfulness in front of the mnemonic effort? Often, readers have been reminded that oblivion, not recollection, is the foundation of memory. It follows that selection of past events, conscious or unconscious, is the necessary activity that leads to the attempt to tell a story and describe a past emotion. If selection plays such a role in the recreation of more or less remote events, one must accept that past time – as recalled by Italo Svevo – is always new. The second part of the title of *WPM* recites: *Cronache dagli anni ottanta*. I wish to consider the importance of the preposition *dagli*, that can be translated "from the." Instead of the fairly more common expression "degli anni ottanta" where *degli* translates "of the," Tondelli opts for a word that establishes a distance in time from the moment of his recollection: from the present he looks back at what "from the" 1980s came to us. It is a point to note because it stresses the distance, probably in thought more than in time, from the event and its narration, so that the event – because of the acknowledged distance of the individual

who looks back – opens itself to the possibility of being interpreted as a recalled event, therefore as a new event that strives every time to attract on itself renewed attention.

While Tondelli does not want to be considered an openly *engagé* writer, he recognizes that his work has (or he wishes for his work) a social implication. (Panzeri and Picone 66) In order to convey his emotions and his fears he dissimulates certain traits because dissimulation is a powerful antidote against the more powerful enemy: the insidious moral waste land he was reconnoitering. Behind the shallow glitz of the exuberant Eighties, Tondelli felt the cracking noises of a society that was about to implode in the early 1990s “Mani pulite” scandal, that rocked and tore down the Italian political system and Italian society. The collapse of the political caste in power since the end of WWII ushered in new political forces from both the right and the left of the parliamentary hemisphere. Still today these forces struggle to find a clear path to guide a society that must unshackle itself of old habits to embrace a new societal pact that Tondelli had in part foreseen. An example is his astonishing description of the tragedy of the migrants that, more twenty years before the emergence of the problem we face today, he recounted in *Camere separate*. It is worth quoting the passage in its entirety:

Che cosa sta facendo questo vecchio, decrepito continente al Terzo Mondo? Questo popolo di pirati e di beoni rissosi alle sue ex colonie, ai suoi ex sudditi, a chi ha piegato con la frusta e la violenza dopo averlo depredato e sfruttato? Con quale ipocrisia l' europeo impone regole e comportamenti come se i valori fossero ancora dell'Occidente quando invece tutto dimostra il contrario? Qual è la ragione per cui da ogni angolo del mondo i più disgraziati, i più poveri, i reietti della storia, le valanghe di straccioni, le orde di pezzenti e di mendicanti invadono le città dovendo addirittura scimmiettare, per integrarsi, di essere educati, perbenisti, ipocriti come tutta intera la middle class europea? [...] Il risultato, pensa Leo, è che ci stiamo contendendo le città palmo a palmo con i poveri. E lui può già vedere la vecchia e malata Europa, con tutta la sua grandeur e la sua cultura e la sua boria, il suo tè delle cinque e le sue cerimonie accademiche, abolita, occupata, conquistata dalle masse dei più miseri, dei più affamati, dei più sfruttati. Sarà la loro guerra. I poveri si vendicheranno seminando figli ovunque, riproducendosi a raffica come il crepitio delle mitragliatrici, occupando ogni postazione con i propri cadaveri, usando se stessi come forza di sfondamento. Vinceranno, e di loro, evangelicamente, sarà la terra. (*Camere separate* 83)

The shuttling back and forth of themes and stylistic features between Tondelli's novels and *WPM* is constant. Despite the note of hope that seals the end of *WPM* (“È per questo che, nonostante il sipario di ombre dell'estate, in fondo è possibile intravedere la luce” *WPM* 635), it is the notion of death and despair that prevails in its pages as it does in *Camere separate*, from his admired notes on Johnson's book, to the moving memory of Andrea Pazienza. Even the end of *WPM* is not naively entirely optimistic in its recalling, in the same last page, of the “freak della politica” that are trying to subvert our personal spheres of sanity (635). But this concept is not shouted because Tondelli opts for a sustained reasoning. He wants his message to be heard in perpetuity, as he aims

at reaching readers who can be convinced with solid argumentation. He is not the main actor on the stage of life-changing events. He had soon realized that his role was the – as important – role of the witness who tells his truth with his story. Once the story has been told, it would be presumptuous to continue to retell it. The only event that fits the imminent ending is now the accepted disappearance. And at the end of the journey his yearning would be fulfilled as Leo, the protagonist of *Camere separate*, the fiction in which more than (Tondelli, Pao Pao) (Tondelli, Separate Rooms) anywhere else, probably more than in *WPM*, Tondelli states his “I”: “... forse, tutta la sua vita, il suo essere separato, non è altro [...] che una elaborata messa in scena della propria, inestinguibile, volontà di svanimento” (*Camere separate* 213). Aware of the illness (“... fra qualche ora, fra un giorno, forse fra tre o cinque o vent’anni, lui sentirà una fitta diversa prendergli il petto, o il respiro o l’addome,” *Camere separate* 216), and peacefully accepting the fading away, Leo/Tondelli was ready to say goodbye.

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¹ “... il passato è sempre nuovo: Come la vita procede esso si muta perché risalgono a galla delle parti che parevano sprofondate nell’oblio mentre altre scompaiono perché oramai poco importanti. Il presente dirige il passato come un direttore d’orchestra i suoi suonatori. Gli occorrono questi o quei suoni, non altri. E perciò il passato sembra ora tanto lungo ed ora tanto breve. Risuona o ammutolisce. Nel presente riverbera solo quella parte ch’è richiamata per illuminarlo o per offuscarlo. Poi si ricorderà con intensità piuttosto il ricordo dolce e il rimpianto che il nuovo avvenimento.” Italo Svevo, “La morte,” in *Tutte le opere*, II “Racconti e scritti autobiografici”, Clotilde Bertoni ed., Mondadori, Milano 2004, p. 412.

² *WPM* is included in *Opere. Cronache, saggi conversazioni*, pp. 3-635. *L'abbandono. Racconti dagli anni Ottanta, Dinner Party* and a revised edition of *Biglietti agli amici* were published posthumously, edited by Fulvio Panzeri respectively in 1993, 1994 and 1997. His untiring alacrity is by no means exhausted by these works. Tondelli promoted the artistic growth of new writers, and edited three anthologies that showcased their works: *Giovani Blues (Under 25 I)* (1986), *Belli & perversi Under 25 II*), *Papergang (Under 25 III)* (1990).

³ Cf. Panzeri and Picone, pp. 64-65; *L'abbandono*, pp. 70-72.

⁴ The complex genesis of *WPM* is documented in *Opere*, pp. 1021-1072.

⁵ The Eighties were a “travestimento che ha cercato di celare e di nascondere un grande vuoto,” Panzeri and Picone, p. 66.

⁶ Donato, p. 595.

⁷ Cf. Panzeri, “Introduction” to *Opere*, pp. vii-x for an overview of the common motifs that resonate between *WPM* and Tondelli’s other works.

⁸ Burns writes that Tondelli’s presence, as a semi-autobiographical character, lurks in his texts; J. Burns, p. 254, n. 5.

⁹ “Affrontare [...] tutto quel materiale che ho accumulato nel corso di dieci anni [...] da una parte testimonia il mio essere scrittore e il desiderio di confrontarmi con diverse realtà, [...] da un’altra angolatura rappresenta il materiale di avvicinamento ai miei romanzi. Penso di essere stato una persona che ha lavorato molto in pubblico. I romanzi che ho scritto, le narrazioni si nutrivano molto di reportage, di escursioni nell’attualità, nel presente. Queste pagine costituiscono un po’ il sottotesto dei miei romanzi. Rappresentano realmente il laboratorio. E questa è anche un’occasione per affermare che cosa ha significato fare lo scrittore in questi dieci anni. Ha voluto dire avere una scrittura in grado di comprometersi con la contemporaneità, coi gerghi col parlato, con lo slang giovanile, con il sottofondo del rock e delle sue subculture. Per me fare lo scrittore ha significato questo. Allora il Weekend non è solo il bilancio di dieci anni, un archivio - pur se importantissimo - del passato e della memoria, ma diventa una proposta nuova su qual è il compito o quale potrebbe essere uno dei tanti compiti dello scrittore, una delle sue tante incarnazioni,” Panzeri and Picone, p. 71.

¹⁰ Respectively: “La città delle donne,” *Rockstar* 75 (December 1986); *Biglietti agli amici* #2; “My sweet car,” in *L'abbandono* 143-147; “Delitti sublimi,” *L'espresso*, October 9, 1988 [now “Fenomenologia dell’abbandono,” *L'abbandono* 28-33]. Bachmann’s centrality for Tondelli – especially her *The Thirtieth Year* – is reiterated by F. Panzeri in his “Postfazione” to *L'abbandono*, pp. 291-297.

¹¹ My translation. “Weder der Leser noch der Autor Italo Svevo wären bereit, für dieses Ich des Zeno Cosini die Hand ins Feuer zu legen.”

¹² For fundamental reflections on the memory-oblivion relationship, cf. Ronchi, pp. 90-110.

¹³ *WPM* drew the attention of many readers. For its critical reception cf. *Opere*, pp. 1194-1196.

¹⁴ AIDS is mentioned again in “Vizi criminali,” the next to last piece of *WPM* but only as one among many problems that threat society (631). AIDS is never mentioned explicitly in *Camere separate*, although Thomas’s incurable illness powerfully evokes its presence.

¹⁵ “La Bologna che fa da sfondo a *Le straordinarie avventure di Pentothal* non è una Bologna fantastica, ma una Bologna storica fantasticamente immaginata da Andrea Pazienza prima che la storia accadesse, mentre la storia si avviava a essere,” Oreste del Buono’s introduction to *Le straordinarie avventure di Pentothal*, pp. 5-7.

¹⁶ The charge of obscenity was dropped and *Altri libertini* became available again to the public. In the case of *Rimini*, scheduled to be presented on a TV program but then withdrawn from the channel palimpsest, Tondelli wrote: “[...] all’ultimo momento pare che sia intervenuto il direttore della rete, o chi per lui, per bloccare la presentazione. Motivo ufficiale: come non presentiamo film vietati ai minori, così facciamo per i romanzi. Più probabilmente, si dice, la storia della misteriosa morte del senatore cattolico (la parola democristiano non viene mai fatta nel libro) e alcune sequenze erotiche hanno turbato i dirigenti televisivi così come nell’80 *Altri libertini* turbò l’allora magistrato de L’Aquila Bartolomei, fino a spingerlo al sequestro.” Tondelli, *Rimini. Il romanzo vent’anni dopo*, p. 167.