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studi e testi • *studies and texts*

Paolo Caponi

A novel that didn't sell

An introduction to literary OSINT

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How come I need a codename and you don't?
Condor

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To the reader

A book of this nature encounters the obvious obstacle of dealing with an ever-increasing number of acronyms, initials and "middle-initials" (in Condor's words), abbreviations, anagrams, and even wordplays, which may induce a kind of hermeneutic distance or, conversely, elicit the reader's own act of interpretation. Historically, they are a matrix of the 20th century. Benignly and tolerantly viewed, they contribute in rifting the otherwise opaque materiality of a text. More scientifically, they are to be considered in terms of a 'function' of the secret services, generally considered, or perhaps they may be said to serve as a synecdoche for intelligence itself. For all of them is given an explanation in the course of the book, with the exception of those that have entered our collective imaginary (BBC, FBI, CIA...), and of some of those ending in –INT (i.e. intelligence) whose exploding number cannot be really accounted for.

Introduction

ALHS! ALHS!

It happens this way.

It is the first sunny day of spring, along the Upper East Side on 77th street, NY. The white stucco townhouse has gone through some considerable restyling but it is still perfectly in touch with the architecture of the area.

It is still there.

No fence anymore, but some plants. And the TV camera. On the doorphone a single entry, "Private House". No ALHS. A young man in a kind of a uniform is idling right there, as if he were slowly approaching me in narrowing circles. I ask him if he works in the "Private House". He says he works in the adjacent townhouse and no, he adds rather amused, he didn't know that precisely that "Private House" was the scene of Robert Redford's massacre in *Condor*. Sorry.

Another five minutes and a very tall young woman, wearing a kind of brace I haven't seen in years, comes out of ALHS. Out of it. She is very polite, she smiles, she thinks that the villa has changed owners several times but now, she thinks, it's all in the hands of a single one. Only, I didn't ask about this. And she didn't know about the film, either. Robert Redford, who?

I'm making myself rather noticeable now and I better get going. After all, it is a CIA front. I still have a lot of questions about the place but I better keep them for another time.

For that day.

Among the first great outrages to our rather overloaded concept of home was, perhaps surprisingly, an endogenous act. An act, that is, projected and developed within the very boundaries of the Western world that would for so long suffer from it. It was the 1972 Watergate break-in that suddenly made American citizens – and, with the force of momen-

tum, Western people in general – insecure in their own spaces. Years before the conscious positing of the tenets of our contemporary Postmodern insecurity, aptly subsumed in Homi Bhabha's often quoted reflections on our own unbalanced, ethnic location, it was the clear perception of a vulnerable domesticity that opened the door (literally and figuratively, in this case) to drastic rethinking of our sense of belonging.

In its essence, no less than bourgeois civilization was called into question, a civilization conveniently and symbolically defined by the measurable perimeter of one's own domestic *imperium*. The scenario was that of the Cold War, and of a widely shared Weltanschauung that deemed it salutary to set up an organized activity of micro- and macro-espionage to be pursued, officially, for defensive and preventive purposes, to protect and to serve. As a great deal of Cold War-era literature vividly and repeatedly shows, citizens could – and can – be recorded, photographed, filmed, and intercepted, and the resulting data arbitrarily used. The CIA's systematic opening of citizens' mail came to the fore with the institution of the Church Committee, in 1975, so named after its chairman senator Frank Church. It was a process that worked vertically and individually, from the top to the bottom of the social ladder, as well as horizontally, involving transnational and geographical movements and counter-movements of data fluxes. The resonances of this domestic profanation not only brought about a different perception of intimacy, so easily infringed by external forces, but expanded on to a reformulation of international codes of behavior along two different operational lines. Ostensibly, Cold War governments were engaged in the same old rhetoric of formal diplomacy; privately, but still within a national sphere, they fueled the unparalleled, methodical gathering of sensitive data from enemies and allies alike. Literary and movie genres, and especially the spy-story, went through dramatic transformations to keep pace with times that were no longer imbued with James Bond's Manicheism while new kinds of heroes, less glamorous and more problematic, like John le Carré's or Graham Greene's, began to appear as the new representatives of the general climate as well as the harbingers of the decline and fall of the British empire (Bertinetti 2015: 166 ff.).

This book originated from the intent to define the literary and historical context where Condor, in the quasi-eponymous film and novel, finds himself to work. Remarkably, Condor's routine occupation at the American Literary Historical Society (ALHS) was not the product of

a typically "lunatic" spy-fiction writer's imagination, to quote his own words. In fact, resemblances to real events and/or to real persons, living or dead, are purely *intentional*, as explained in James Grady's sweeping 2011 "Confession" on the genesis of both novel and film (now republished with *Condor: The Short Take*), where his real-life inspiration from the days of his journalistic training on Senator Lee Metcalf's Washington staff is brought to the fore. In the course of my research, however, a series of questions soon began to pullulate. Why was not it possible to write a longer book? Why was O.V.R.A. chosen to name Italian Fascist secret police since, as an acronym, it did not mean anything at all? How come that an obvious pot-boiler may turn into a literary case? What did Shakespeare *really* mean when he referred to his theatre in terms of an "O"? And, most flippant-sounding of all, why is there only a 40-minute walk, and in a remarkable straight line, from Upper East Side 77th Street to 141 East 37th Street, Manhattan?

On the particular scenario generated by the Cold War, the "Condor macrotext" demands to be carefully listened to with all its resonance. This macrotext forms a cultural discourse on the issue of micro- and macro-surveillance that is unique in the coeval range of Western narrative and cinematic artifacts. A discourse highly significant both for what survives unscathed through the stages of cinematic adaptation and for what is altered or drastically reshaped during that same process of rewriting. Because, as it pertains to our iconic domain, Condor the character has turned into a palimpsest alternatively written and re-written by its original deviser as well as by others in a recurrent re-appropriation of, and adaptation to, the changing political climate. First appearing in James Grady's spy-novel *Six Days of the Condor* (1974), then in Sidney Pollack's 1975 feature film and instant box-office success *Three Days of the Condor*, the Condor story-line grew into a macrotext comprising Grady's *Shadow of the Condor* (1975) – direct sequel to *Six Days of the Condor* – then *Last Days of the Condor* (2005), and eventually *Condor: The Short Takes* (2019), a collection of novellas – dedicated to Robert Redford – all featuring Grady's signature character and riding the wave of the AT&T 2018 TV series *Condor*.

As Condor's original vicissitudes showed, the activity of gathering and analyzing sensitive data may extend to areas traditionally considered impermeable to intelligence reports, such as novels, comics, films, poetry, and fiction in general. "I read mystery novels, adventures, journals, every-

thing published all over the world", Condor explains. "We feed the plots – dirty tricks, codes, anything – into a computer, to check against actual CIA Plans and Operations. We look for leaks. Or new ideas" (Sample and Rayfiel 1975: 55).[1] Technically speaking, Condor is an OSINT reader, i.e. an average CIA employee whose task is to gather Open-Source INTelligence. Condor explains his job to the woman he abducts; thanks to Grady's memoir, and to historians of the secret services, we know that OSINT was, and is, a habitual practice of espionage. Weird as it may seem, open sources (now, essentially internet; once, essentially newspapers and newsreels) may host sensitive data from foreign countries that has ended up there by mistake or simply as an average piece of news, capable of revealing interesting truths if properly analyzed. In the words of Allen Dulles, head of the CIA in the early Cold War,

> The collection of foreign intelligence is accomplished in a variety of ways, not all of them either mysterious or secret. This is particularly true of overt intelligence, which is information derived from newspapers, books, learned and technical publications, official reports of government proceedings, radio and television. Even a novel or play may contain useful information about the state of a nation. (Mercado 2004: 54)

When applied to fiction, this kind of reading offers an utterly different interpretation of the literary phenomenon, by no means simplistic in its rationale considering the tools deployed and the relevance attributed to the outcome. In its essence, it implies a dismantling and a rebuilding of the canon, a new approach to fiction that goes far beyond the consolidated disciplinary and geographic boundaries towards the formation of new canons imbued with the principles of data analysis. It is a highly conjunctive process that ranks comics and authorial literature on the same level, now selected and analyzed for the contribution they may provide to the elaboration of a new spectrum and archive of relevant data. A novel may be "primitive" (Moran and Johnson 2010: 14), "poorly imagined and badly written" (Hiley 1996: xiii), "wonderfully bad" (xxx), as William Le Queux's 1909 *Spies of the Kaiser* certainly was, and nonetheless climb

[1] Unless otherwise specified, quotations are taken from Lorenzo Sample and David Rayfiel's screenplay *Three Days of the Condor* (Revised draft, February 3, 1975*;* http://www.mapa.cultura.ce.gov.br/three_days_of_the_condor_dvd.pdf. Last access August 2020).

to the peaks of the British War Office, prompt the foundation of nothing less than MI5 (xxx) and, thanks to the general climate generated by British propaganda, reach the considerable number of six editions in five years (xxiv). And it is a process, according to Condor's evaluation of it, dominated by its own rules, regardless of literary categories and academic classifications – a system that exists both in the macro-area of the humanities and independently from it. Possible contradictions and fissures in the system are to be put down to reasons other than those of literary genres and supremacies – hence Condor's initial puzzlement when faced with a new literary phenomenon: a mystery novel "translated into an odd assortment of languages: Turkish but not French, Arabic but not German and not Russian. Dutch! [. . .] Spanish" (8). Condor's puzzlement results from the mistake of applying traditional literary and critical categories to a phenomenon which, though occurring on the normal, transnational book market, is not merely literary. "Oil", as he realizes, and nothing else, is the *trait d'union* in the geographical occurrences of "A mystery that didn't sell..." (8). The same mystery novel that generated his doubtful enquiry to the CIA headquarters and which provoked, as a copycat reaction, the carnage at the ALHS for the denouement of a CIA top-secret plan.

Naturally enough, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the end of the Cold War, did not impinge on the future of the spy thriller. Rather, it gave rise to variations on the theme which exploited its aftermaths, such as localisms and small-scale nationalisms, arms-smuggling and, of course, a brand-new kind of paranoia generated by the Western uneasiness faced with Islamic radicalism(s), which rapidly took over from Russia as the most eligible enemy. It was Condor's hardcopy archive, however, that paved the way for an entirely new generation of data-seekers.

1. *Acronyms*

This is not a story for people who cannot digest acronyms. Indeed, it is as if the secret services, generally considered, simply could not do without them. If, as many contend, the echo of an oxymoron resonates in the term 'military intelligence', acronyms may undoubtedly reach the practical goal of saving mental and phonetic energy, killing two birds with a single stone. Applied to secret services and intelligence, they fulfil a double function:

they confer an undisputable aura of scientific dignity to what they aim to refer to, and they conceal behind a succession of usually eerie capital letters what they also intend to reveal.

The second aspect propels us towards the heart of the matter, which is a description of the working methods of a peculiar kind of intelligence consisting in gathering and analyzing data deriving from open sources, i.e. from sources theoretically (and practically) made available to human beings by other human beings. OSINT is the name (or, better, the acronym) meaning "open source intelligence", an activity that, believe it or not, forms one of the branches of contemporary secret services alongside HUMINT (human intelligence, read: 007), SIGINT (signal intelligence), TECHINT (technical intelligence), IMINT, COMINT, ELINT, MASINT... In spite of the paucity of official statistics (after all, we are speaking of secret services), it has been generally estimated that as late as 2004 the potential of OSINT was not yet fully exploited (Mercado 2004). Naturally enough, here again OSINT sounds like a contradiction in terms, since espionage is not an activity that we habitually associate with the "open" reading of a newspaper, a novel or, even less, a poem. In reality, the bulk and relevance of secreted information about a foreign country that can be filed after a technical, professional reading of open sources and its proper analysis is astonishing, and so it was even before the advent of those serial killers of privacy – the social networks.

A fellow intelligencer of William Somerset Maugham, and later also writer, Alfred Edward Woodley Mason (1865-1948), once declared to have taken his idea of feigning himself an entomologist while in Mexico during World War II directly from *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (Deacon 1969: 217). Admittedly, this is too scanty a reference for us to outline a theory, if existing, of the early spies' *modus operandi* as derived from fictional books. A proper case-study, one that has survived in its entirety from the subterranean meanders of secreted files and cover-ups and that provides a neat description of how OSINT is supposed to work when applied to media and literary sources, deals with the turbulence in North Korean line of succession in the late seventies. In February 1982, Kim Jong-il acquired the status of heir apparent (i.e. the first and immovable name in a line of succession) in North Korea, a fact that caught many international observers clumsily off guard. Prior to 1980, Kim Jong-il had lived in the shadows and had no public profile. An article published in

Asian Survey as early as 1981, however, demonstrated that from 1974 onwards Korean media and poetry had steadily paved the way to Kim Jong-il's advent (Clippinger 1981). The phrase "Party Center", for instance, so recurrent in Korean newspaper articles, was not to be taken literally but metaphorically (289-291), not as a reference to the political elite but as a coded allusion to the heir apparent, whose lack of a proper revolutionary pedigree, especially in comparison to his predecessor Kim II-Sung, made it essential a karstic shaping and re-shaping of his image for the literate audience (298). Five semantic areas were then associated with him, one of them being the artistic and the literary; in poetry, this extensive *senhal* system of reference, if properly processed, left little doubt as to the Party's propensity for Kim Jong-il. One of the most striking examples of the Kim Jong-il's "mystique" (305), for instance, surrounded his birth. Apparently, the North Korean regime falsified his place of birth as Manchuria to make it more palatable to the public opinion, even though circumstantial evidence suggested that he was born on the Chinese side of Paektu-san, as revealed in a 1977 poem published in the North Korean magazine *Ch'ollima* where the proper decrypting of the symbols makes the open text more than intelligible:

> Oh Party Center!
> Born in the deep roots of Paektu-san.
> Oh Party Center! (305)

A variation on the theme has Kim Jong-il as a guiding star, compared with the General Star and predecessor, Kim Il-Sung. An article on the coeval North Korean press (*Nodong Ch'ongnyon*, January 1977) encodes the message in delicate, literary tropes:

> They say the guiding star which rose on the Paektu ridge uses its power of widening the earth and raising the sky. Its starlight likewise works wonders to heaven and earth. They say that once exposed to its ray, everything on earth will revive, youth will spring up and vigor will pour forth; the dead will rise, the elderly will grow young and the ignorant will awaken. (306)

This allusive, coded discursive practice was meant essentially as linguistic and protective, since no image of Kim Jong-il was circulated in the press, and as a deflector to the Western eye which was therefore hampered in its habitual East-Asian policy of disruptive influence. While Korean

readers could easily decode the symbols and follow Kim's progressive rise to power, Western observers were met with a *fait accompli* after a campaign of image buildup successfully "kept within the North Korean society" and "unseen for the most part by outsiders" (291). And in the light of the country's persisting isolationism, it has recently been contended that "Press analysis is", still today, "the only realistic way for OSINT organizations to acquire detailed information from North Korea" (Wheatley 2017: 4; see also Mercado 2004).

2. *Diachronies*

The spy fiction genre is a largely British phenomenon that emerges during the 1890's and 1900's. Much ink has been spilled to locate the first spy novel of literary merit, whether it was Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1901) or Erskine Childers's *The Riddle of the Sands* (1903), or perhaps, slightly later, Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907) or *Under Western Eyes* (1911). Of less literary merit, but remarkably popular, were William Le Queux's bestsellers, which would run the wave of the spy mania maddening at the beginning of the 20th century. World War I coincided with John Buchan's Richard Hannay novels (the first of them, *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, was published in 1915) while the unstable postwar period generated William Somerset Maugham's *Ashenden: Or the British Agent* (1928). Buchan and Maugham may be said to characterize the two streaks in which spy fiction eventually developed. The first is the adventurous one, culminating via Eric Ambler in Ian Fleming; the second, more deeply involved with moral dilemmas, culminates via Graham Greene in John le Carré. Currently, the spy fiction genre remains a largely British phenomenon though American contributions have reasonably piled up, especially after the Watergate scandal and with the boost given to the genre by the Watergate "plumber" and former CIA operative Howard Hunt (1918-2007), capable of producing nearly twenty spy thrillers alone after his release from prison in 1980.

On the other hand, to outline a history of literary OSINT is more than a difficult task – it is a wishful thinking that falls to pieces on encountering the paucity of data available, the imperatives of concealment that still classify many red-hot files as top secret and, in particular, the official

absence of prescriptive guidelines in this sense. It must be kept in mind that for a long time the secret services' *forma mentis* remained anchored to the kinetic activities of HUMINT, accounting for the initial status of the intelligence of open sources as a kind of "stepchild" (Mercado 2005) or of Cinderella of the Intelligence Community (Giannuli 2012: 120-1). Research must therefore be carried out by piecing together scraps of evidence and archeological case-studies of novels, or of other kinds of fictional artifacts, capable of finding their way through the stratified maze of intelligence reports "in a field notorious for its lack of declassified material" (Moran and Johnson 2010: 2).

Fixing the advent of social networks as an *ante-quem* limit to this essay, it is more difficult is to establish when a history of OSINT can be made to begin. If espionage, as has been contended, is the second oldest profession in the world, the origins of a skillful reading of "open sources" might lose themselves in the meanders of time. Geographically and chronologically distanced as they are, Imperial China and Elizabethan England represent two significant starting-points, far less arbitrary than they might appear at first glance. In both cases, the central governments relied largely on civil, rather than military, advisory boards as well as on academic institutions for the recruitment of the best resources for intelligence, an activity that therefore cannot be understood by reference to the military class alone (van de Ven, 2000: 6). From China comes Sun Tzu's legendary classic *The Art of* War, a commonplace background reading for every work on espionage. Thought to have been written between 400 and 320 B.C. under one Emperor Wu, it devotes many words to the spy and his best employment even though it remains silent about any proper OSINT activity involving texts, unless we are inclined to consider as such the cursing of the officers by which Sun Tzu suggests measuring the soldiers' weariness ("If the officers are angry, it means that the men are weary", 9.33 [p. 37]) or the soldiers' body-language ("When the soldiers stand leaning on their spears, they are faint from want of food", 9.29). It is with the policies of England during the reign of Elizabeth, however, that an early modern intelligence activity was first established, showing a clear "effort by the government to tap into scholarly resources and to use them in providing the historical information and analyses necessary for framing sound policy" (Sherman 1994: 96). In the Elizabethan period the academic community, generally considered, was deeply, and sometimes inextricably connected to the in-

telligence service. Following a *modus operandi* not much dissimilar from the one largely adopted by UK and US policymakers during the interwar period and after, universities were seen as a sort of recruiting ground, especially during the "cold war" between Britain and Spain for much of the 1560s and 1570s. Many Renaissance intellectuals, including the archetypal 007 prototype John Dee, opted for careers outside of the universities in the field of intelligence, out of frustration at their isolation and economic needs even though, as one of them told the Earl of Essex in 1596, it was not easy to accept falling "between a pedagogue and a spy" (Sherman 1994: 103). It was a wide net of scholarly intelligencers that typically prospered in peace-time; with the approach of the Anglo-Spanish showdown in the early 1590s, the role of reflexive, "intellectual" intelligence diminished in favor of more "action-oriented", i.e. HUMINT, activities. The same term "intelligence", meaning "Knowledge concerning events communicated by or obtained from another, information, news; *spec.* information of military value" (OED), after a fleeting, and curious, first appearance in the *Ludus Coventriae* ("The Aungel Garbyel Apperyd hym to; *þ*at hese wyff xulde conseyve, he *ȝ*aff hym intelligence", *OED*), takes hold in Elizabethan times especially in the diplomatic lingo, as well attested, for instance, in Henry Unton's correspondence with Henry IV of France in his role as Queen Elizabeth's ambassador ("Havinge seacret intelligence from the Kinge", Unton 1847, 58. 15.10.1591; "By this inclosed your Lordship maie perceave such intelligences as my purse provideth", 59. 15.10.1591; "the letters of those I employ are as chargeable as their intelligences, and for the moste parte intercepted", 127. 26.12.1591; etc.).

An invaluable ur-text of British matrix, produced during the Elizabethan period and alluding to an embryonic OSINT activity, is Nicholas Faunt's "Discourse Touching the Office of Principal Secretary of Estate, &c. 1592" (see Appendix). The relevance of this document could hardly be exaggerated, since it is "the only formal description extant of what, in the eyes of the secretary's clerk, the organization of a secretary's office should be" (Greir Higham 1923: 152). Faunt was Sir Francis Walsingham's secretary from 1580 to circa 1590, and after his honorable service for the Queen's "spymaster" he wrote this intriguing *vademecum* for the person designated as his successor. In the same period as Shakespeare's "wooden O" was echoing the strain with France – with the enemy "advised by good intelligence" (*Henry V*, [Chorus] 2.12) against the English, and with King Henry who

"hath note of all that they intend, / By interception which they dream not of" (2.2.6-7; very likely, of ciphered messages) – Faunt described the proper keeping of the "office of principall Secretarie" in the entourage of a man like Walsingham, "touchinge the private ordering and distribucion of the Charge committed vnto him" (Faunt 1592: l. 30). In his guidelines, Faunt included the necessity of being well versed in "matters of intelligence Cyfers and secret advertisementes" (l. 116), and, most importantly, of having "sundrie books of paper" to store and classify data. Among them, books "of discoueries and newe invencions, of discripcions most exactly taken of other Countries as well by mappes and Cardes as by discoureinge the present state of their gouerment their alliances dependancs etc. with many other discourses devices plottes, and proiects of sundry natures etc." (ll. 352-5).

Faunt's "Discourse" still shows a balance between "a consideration of the man" and "a consideration of the organization" (Greir Higham 1923: 152). As anticipated, however, the epochal defeat of the Spanish Armada, which signaled the dawn of a new era in sea warfare, determined a progressive enhancement of HUMINT activity at the expense of a traditional, more self-reflective OSINT variety. Indeed, the history of secrete services, very generally considered, may also be read in terms of a recurrent oscillation between the Scylla of HUMINT and the Charybdis of OSINT (or vice versa), with a preponderance of the former. A preponderance, perhaps, not much disjointed from the endurance popularity of the fictional James Bond, inducing even "insiders" to err "in believing intelligence to be identical with covert sources and methods" (Mercado 2004: 51). For the purpose of this study, it must be noted that an affirmation of the literary text as a potentially disruptive vehicle of relevant data is located firmly in the 20th century. The period that goes from the paranoia-ridden years anticipating World War I, through World War II and the inception of the Cold War, is the most rewarding in terms of a "literary" OSINT. Those were the times when Viktor Kamkin, a Russian émigré in the United States, established the first bookstore in Maryland specialized in Russian-language titles, and when academics and analysts "made the pilgrimage" there to browse the shelves of his "unmatched store for Soviet publications" (Mercado 2004: 49). Later, the epistemic change in social communications altered the methods and features of the intelligence work, transforming "literary" OSINT into something romantically obsolete. In this essay, therefore, the study of OSINT will be restricted

to the 20th century and almost exclusively to the Anglo-American world and its literary dimension.[2]

Historically, a fruitful and mutual cooperation, not to say a real osmosis, has always been the rule, rather than the exception, between the realms of fictional literature and espionage, the literary profession aptly functioning as a believable cover for the spy. This osmosis, however, has gone well beyond the routine recruitment of men of letters by the secret services (Marlowe, Aphra Behn, Defoe, Graham Greene being only the tip of the iceberg), just as it has gone beyond the capitalization of one's personal involvement in espionage for literary purposes (Ian Fleming *docet*). My purpose here is to reverse the direction in which narratives are seen as the product by authors of spy stories, and to investigate, instead, the use made by intelligence of pre-existing, purely fictional artifacts (not necessarily of espionage) with the purpose of extracting sensitive data from them. This operation can lead either to the compilation of handbooks for spies instead of formal training (as in the case of the *Ashenden* novel, of which more will be said later), or to the devising of a system of critical reading of literature with a view to the acquisition of information on enemies and allies alike (the proper Open Source Intelligence). This activity, as mentioned, is very controversial in the realm of espionage itself, and produces a wide spectrum of responses ranging from the staunchest skepticism – the same that made a past CIA director give a sarcastic definition of OSINT as the "Encyclopedia Britannica factor" (quoted in Keegan 2003: 3) – to unconditional support, given the relatively low costs of OSINT compared to other intelligence activities and, moreover, given the physiological risks traditionally associated with the habitual employment of 007s. Interestingly, the inner development of a literary genre may induce spies to a proper "close reading", or alternatively keep them at a distance, according to the essentially fictional qualities of the literary artifact. The typical, steady shift towards realism among thriller writers of the late 70's (the so-called "quest for ultra-realism", Mc Cormick 1979: 18), for instance, made cold-war Anglo-American novels replete with details

[2] A potentially fruitful field of analysis would come, for instance, from Napoleon Bonaparte's intelligence service, which relied on more than one occasion on proper OSINT activity. Napoleon's private correspondence attests that he used British newspapers as a source of military information (Wheatley 2017: 3; see also Keegan 2003, ch. 2 and *passim).*

of applied intelligence (as was notoriously the case for Len Deighton), to the point that the CIA and KGB began to read them "for the details of each other's espionage work" (Denning 1987: 27).

What is noteworthy, however, is that the rise of the novel among the most eligible sources of intelligence activity is a fact that is not limited to its historical significance. It tests the presence of fiction in what might seem the least obvious of places and speaks in favor of the irreplaceable nature of the human factor as inextricably connected in the implacable gathering of facts. For the literary scholar, to study the use that OSINT has made of fiction, in general, may be a rewarding experience that calls into question the consciousness of textuality, literary categories and their natures, and the formation of canons and their relativism. And it is an approach that is naturally mediated through the lens of cultural materialism, in the sense that the various fictional artifacts that are evaluated are ranked as the expression of a very peculiar quality of culture, and are relevant not for their intrinsic, artistic value – admitting that this is something that can be easily determined – but for the additional, almost incidental information they provide. Stuart Hall's unassailable paradigm of communication, the encoding/decoding model (Hall 1973; 1993: 92 ff.), offering a theoretical approach of how (media) messages are produced (encoded) and interpreted (decoded), is put to the test here in all its flexibility, because the encoded, encrypted message, when present, demands a precise, univocal decoding by the receiver. Moreover, the precise elucidation of the message cannot be deferred in time being relevant only *hic et nunc*, in that specific historical frame. The range of "decoding positions" argued by Hall, consequent to the fact that "decodings do not follow inevitably from encodings" (Hall 1993: 100), are dramatically restricted to a single one, since in cyphered messages, for instance, the encoding and decoding phases are inextricably connected and no "lack of equivalence" (94) can be part of the system.

The season of "literary" OSINT, which ended with the internet and the social networks, occupies a precise time-span and stands as a unique experience where the apparently conflicting missions of fiction and intelligence cannot be kept apart, nor can the reading make them diverge regardless of how persistent the attempt or how deep the desire to do so. It is in the literary dimension, with its recurrent tropes of spying that impinge on literary techniques, that it is possible to find a matrix for the formation of a paranoid Cold War consciousness.

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