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The fifth issue of *Comunicazioni Sociali on-line* publishes the preprint version of a selection of papers presented by young scholars of the Department of Media, Communication and Performing Arts at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore of Milan to international conferences during the years 2010 and 2011. The essays are sorted by author’s name alphabetical order. However, they can be distinguished into two groups of essays. The first group adopts a historical perspective, both on the history of media and on the history of media theory.

The essay by Luca Barra and Cecilia Penati “Enlarged Families. Developments of a Television Genre: Italian Family Comedy” was presented at the conference *Enjeux culturels et des formes esthétiques télévisuelles: télévision cree-t-elle de nouveaux genres?* at University of Lausanne. The paper analyzes a particular genre of Italian television fiction, the “family comedy”, constituted by series showing the daily life of middle class families. This genre was firstly conceived in the late Sixties, and comes down to our days.

Adriano D’Aloia presented his paper “Rodolfo Arnheim. Rudolf Arnheim’s Italian Writings on Cinema (1932-1939)” at the Second International Colloquium of the Permanent Seminar on the Histories of Film Theories (Montreal, 1-6 November 2011). The paper summarizes an extensive research conducted by the scholar on the Italian period of Rudolf Arnheim’s theoretical production. As emphasized by the author, Arnheim’s contribution about the relationship between film and psychology, which was elaborated during those years, is generally overlooked by the historians of film theory.

With Arianna Frattali’s paper “Entre Théâtre et Salons. Les dispositifs scéniques à Milan au XVIII siècle”, we move toward the history of the theatre. The author suggests that during the Eighteenth Century in Italy there was an osmotic relationship between stage sceneries and domestic spaces, which concerned particularly the setting of the private salons.
The second group of essays focuses on some aspects of contemporary media landscape, which can be variously defined as inter-medial, post-medial or media-diffused.

In their “Check-in Everywhere. Places, People, Narrations, Games”, Giovanni Caruso, Riccardo Fassone, Mauro Salvador and Gabriele Ferri focus their attention on mobile applications intended as locative media. The authors highlight the implications of these devices in terms of narrativization, gamification and socialization of the ordinary experience.

The paper “Lupercyclopedia Moving Images and Living Archive” was presented by Miriam de Rosa at the IX MAGIS - International Film Studies Spring School (Gorizia, April 10, 2011). De Rosa analyzes a video installation by Peter Greenaway. The analysis offers an opportunity to reflect on the relationship between film archives and video art, within the framework of the post-media condition of contemporary cinema.

Elizabeth Locatelli’s “Strong and Weak Ties. Online Relationships from Blogs to Social Networks” combines results from three different qualitative micro-sociological researches, conducted between 2006 and 2010, that focused on new media users and their cultural practices. The author aims to identify different forms of socialization related to the many ways of perceiving and practising digital media platforms.

Silvia Tarassi’s “LiveMi: Reimaging Milan. Popular Music Policies and Urban Regeneration” was presented at the conference “Instruments of change”, organized by the International Association for the Study of Popular Music in Melbourne on 24-26 November 2010. Through the analysis of a case history of live music in the urban context of Milan, the essay poses some key questions about the social, political, aesthetic and economical values of urban territories in their relationship with media and live exhibitions.

The topics of these essays are inevitably heterogeneous. Yet, this miscellaneous variety expresses the research philosophy of the Department of Media, Communication and Performing Arts at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore of Milan. According to this view, media and communication studies are today demanding for a hybrid and flexible approach, which crosses historical, anthropological, sociological, semiotic, philosophical interests, and considers media (from cinema to theatre, from new media to live performance) as a series of apparently different, but actually strongly related, phenomena.
Family comedy represents one of the most popular and important sub-genres of contemporary Italian small-screen fiction, being widely popular in prime time television in both commercial networks (Media-set) and Public Service channels (Rai), and capable of receiving some of the highest ratings among a wide and mainstream audience.

This TV genre, peculiar to Italian television, relies on some fixed and common patterns. First of all, family comedies are normally scheduled in prime time. This determines the length of each episode, which ranges from fifty (with two episodes on air back-to-back) to ninety minutes. Secondly, Italian family comedies are usually long-running series, divided in various episodes and extended over progressive seasons: generally, an inter-episodic running plot is accompanied by an episodic and self-contained anthology plot. A prime-time family comedy would show the daily life of a middle-class family, focusing on minor dilemmas and everyday complications caused by the interplay between the various household members. These complications eventually lead the characters to a learning experience through a process of problem-solving. Several storylines are interwoven, following each character in their life experiences inside and outside of the family circle. Comedy is merged with a number of more serious and dramatic situations, eventually solved through peaceful resolutions of arguments. The kind of humour displayed in this TV genre is character-based, and often combined with morally complex and poignant issues of gender and generational conflicts. Due to this assortment and fusion of themes, tones and registers, the genre un-

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* The essay has been conceived and developed altogether by the authors. Cecilia Penati has written the introduction, paragraph 1 and 3, Luca Barra paragraph 2, 4 and 5. A first version of this paper has been presented at the conference *Enjeux culturels et esthétiques des formes télévisuelles: la télévision crée-elle de nouveaux genres?* at Université de Lausanne: the authors want to thank Maria Tortajada, Nelly Valsangiacomo and François Valloton for the invitation, and John Ellis for the subsequent discussion.

doubtedly presents elements of similarities to domestic melodrama. The model of family that came across through the first examples of this TV genre, during the early stage of Italian television, was a traditional and nuclear one, whereas more recent episodes branch out the concept of “relatives” to include workplace relations and members of enlarged families. The aim of this paper is to investigate the development of this traditional TV genre, from the early stage of Italian television in the Sixties, to the most recent examples of small-screen family comedies. This analysis will suggest how, in the mutable scenery of media convergence, established and strictly genre-specific devices can take new and more modern forms, while maintaining a strong continuity with the conventional patterns of the genre. After a historical overview on the first examples of Italian family comedies, we will discuss two contemporary case studies, in order to conceptualise how the generic category of “family comedy” has progressively renovated itself through its fusion with other elements belonging both to different TV genres and to different cultural products (teen literature, cinema, popular music).

**Raise and development of a genre**

It can be argued that the first example of a family comedy series on Italian TV was produced in 1968, and placed in the prime-time slot of the main public broadcast service channel (Rai). The show, *La famiglia Benvenuti (The Benvenuti’s)*, told the story of the ordinary life of a middle-class family based in Rome, made up of a father (an architect), a mother (a housewife) and their two sons (a child and a teenager). The serial immediately turned into a considerably popular success. *La famiglia Benvenuti* was the first Italian TV fiction to present multiple episodes, running for two consequent seasons (1968-69).

According to Lynn Spigel, American television was founded in the early fifties on the genre of domestic sitcom, which contributed to shape “a new electronic neighbourhood”: “the families that populated the screen extended a hand of friendship across the border between real life and the parallel universe we now call “TV land”». This helped naturalize a strange new technology because it conveyed stories about everyday situations that took place in familiar settings. Conversely, the image of Italian television in its early stages has been deeply shaped by the ideal of public service, underpinned by the policy of broadcast focused on the concepts of education, entertainment and information. Programmes had to be addressed to a middle-class target and to convey the best of Italian highbrow humanistic tradition. As a result, TV fiction was mainly organised around the model of *sceneggiato*, a television adaptation from classic literature.

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2 Italian family comedy can be convincingly associated with some cinematic counterparts, particularly to the subgenre known as “Commedia all’italiana”, established in the Fifties and Sixties with movies such as *Divorzio all’italiana (Divorce – Italian Style)* which often represent similar melodramatic familiar settings, mixed with a comic and humoristic glance. See Brunetta, G. P., 2003. *Guida alla storia del cinema italiano*. Torino: Einaudi.

3 We therefore intend television genres as “discursive practices”, as categories not only running through the programmes, but also constructed by the specific and historical practices of television production and consumption. See Mittell, J., 2004. *Genre and Television: from Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture*. London and New York: Routledge.


It was a drama generally divided into two parts, created by a single author (usually the director) and often transmitted live.

Therefore, *La famiglia Benvenuti* represents an interesting case for two different reasons: first of all, a decade after the beginning of regular television scheduling in Italy, it was the first original long-running TV series. Secondly, it institutionalised the family comedy on the public service schedule. In fact, it can be said that *La famiglia Benvenuti* shaped the principal standards and the main conventional features of Italian domestic comedy, which became long-lasting features of national television. For instance, the vast array of characters, covering a wide set of ages (children, teenagers, parents, grandparents) was included to address the largest possible family audience, which represents the bulk of mainstream consumption. Another peculiarity was the choice of a well-known and reliable pair of actors playing the role of the parents at the core of the story: Enrico Maria Salerno and Valeria Valeri. Finally, the narrative structure of each episode followed a semi-fixed scheme: an everyday complication temporarily troubles the family’s routine, until the situation is resolved with irony and common sense. This generates a feeling of intimacy in the audience, who could empathise with the Benvenuti’s experiences and feel a sense of inclusiveness. It is interesting to notice that the story is often told from the point of view of the youngest son, Andrea, whose thoughts and considerations can be heard through voice-over, with an expressive result typical of this genre.

The pilot of season one establishes some of main stylistic features of this series: the family is portrayed while moving out of their home and resettling in a different Roman neighbourhood. The new location provides the characters with the chance of starting new relationships and to get in touch with different life situations (new school for the children, new colleagues for the father), in a pattern that has also become usual for some of the subsequent family comedies. The comic insight of the story is delegated to only a few characters: the father, whose interaction with the mother is inspired by screwball comedy dialogues,
and the housekeeper, who embodies the lowbrow side of the series. Although *La famiglia Benvenuti* was mainly founded on a strong episodic plot, it constituted one of the first attempts to develop a running plot focused on the sentimental issues of both parents and their teenage son.

For a long period of time, *La famiglia Benvenuti* represented an isolated example of small-screen family comedy on Italian TV, at least until the second half of the Seventies, when the monopoly of the Public Broadcasting Service (PSB) was challenged by the growth of new commercial channels, initially on a local scale and later on a national one.

**Family comedy and commercial TV**

During the Eighties, the original production of Italian long-running fiction entered a long period of crisis, which involved the sub-genre of family comedy as well. The birth and the consequent diffusion of commercial TV networks led to the shift to a television schedule filled by US sitcoms and series, compared to which Italian fiction was not appealing and “modern” enough.

The role of commercial channels as a driving force modifying languages and rhythms of public service programmes is an assumption widely accepted within the field of Italian television history. Domestic comedy is also involved in this re-shaping of languages. The first isolated example is *Casa Cecilia*, presented by Rai1 in 1982 and extended over three seasons. The series represents an attempt to contrast the massive import of American fiction with a local production, shaped on the expressive models of domestic sitcom from the US. Delia Scala, former *soubrette* and *revue* actress, already familiar with mainstream audience, plays Cecilia, a dentist who tries to cope with the complex management of professional and family life, surrounded by her husband Aldo and their three kids. This sitcom represents a form of hybridisation with the newly-born genre of talk show: at the end of each episode of the series Delia Scala deals with a letter involving family matters sent by a member of the audience, turning fiction into factual.

Only at the end of the Eighties, the main commercial broadcaster, Fininvest (now Mediaset) began to create and produce TV fiction. For the first time in the history of Italian TV, “stories” were not told by Rai, but by a competitor not tied to the duties and the constraints peculiar to the public service. Alongside some situation comedies and a teen drama set in a school, the young-oriented network of Fininvest group, Italia 1, also produced its first family comedy. *Chiara e gli altri* (*Chiara and the others*), broadcast on Italia 1 in 1989 – a second season aired two years later –, tells the story of a family with three sons and divorced parents: the first non-nuclear family portrayed by an Italian family comedy mirrored a changing society. Because of the immaturity of the parental figures, a judge paradoxically forces the children to permanently

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live in their house, while the parents have to respect a tight shift regime: each parent gets to spend every second week with the kids. Except for this unusual family situation, inspired by a real journalistic case, this fiction obeys to every standard of this genre: all the episodes have a happy ending; the main focus is on the squabbles and the following pacification between the characters; the plots deal with the relationship between generations; the main actors are well-known (i.e. Ottavia Piccolo and Alessandro Haber).

In the Nineties, firstly with a slow pace, and then with increased confidence (and subsequent monetary investments), Italian fiction, with its local and large appeal, became once again one of the main strategic assets of the TV market, together with football matches, variety shows and then reality shows. Once again, the commercial broadcaster produced a domestic comedy first, while the public service broadcaster, in the early years of a sort of new “fiction Renaissance”, was more interested in other subgenres, such as serious workplace drama and “social” dramedy (Amico mio, Commesse).

One of the first experiments of this new trend, in 1993, was Papà prende moglie (Daddy’s new wife), aired on the largest commercial channel, Canale 5. The comedy tells the story of two divorcées, each with two kids, who meet each other and decide to start a new life together, with all the subsequent difficulties and funny circumstances. Some aspects of this show are particularly worth noticing. The first is the overarching plot, which in some way will become archetypical for subsequent fictions: two families that become one, in order to restore the traditional patriarchal family in a contemporary fashion. This contains more narrative elements and can appeal to a wider audience belonging to different generational layers. The second element is that Papà prende moglie underlines the new connections between this subgenre of fiction and factual TV programming: the theme song is very similar to other television jingles and tunes; furthermore the lead role was played by Marco Columbro, at the time host of several quiz shows and one of the most recognizable faces of commercial television.

A real turning point was then Un medico in famiglia (A doctor in the family), a series with huge success which started in 1998. Produced by Publispei, the show marked the return of family comedy on the PSB10. Once again, the main characteristics of this genre remain the same. The story follows a widower who has to take care of three children – a teenager, a child and a toddler – and is helped in the task by his father, his parents-in-law and a witty maid. The comedy, which tells the story of different generational groups, absorbs some elements of other fictional subgenres, such as medical drama, workplace sitcom, soap opera and teenager school drama. Some television stars (such as Lino Banfi, whose previous career included both cult movies and variety shows) share the stage with theatre performers.

Besides being one of the major hits of the decade – in fact, the series is still being produced, now filming its eight season –, Un medico in famiglia is interesting also because it is one of the first scripted formats ever “localized” in Italy: its model, Medico de familia, was a big Spanish hit, but the roots of Italian popularity lay

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in the quality of the local adaptation, which was able to efficiently portrait national stereotypes, the Italian popular culture and, most of all, the longstanding tradition of national family comedy.

**Family comedy and convergent TV: I Cesaroni**

By the early years of 2000, television fiction had to re-collocate itself in the mutated context of media convergence, characterised by digitalisation, multiple distributive platforms and an increasing difficulty in hitting wide targets. Family comedy faced the challenge to find new possible models of consumption, also based on the strong interactivity made possible by the Internet and new touch-points to engage audiences.

As a result of the economic and popular success of *Un medico in famiglia*, Publispei devoted its mission almost exclusively to the development of small-screen family comedies, acquiring from Spain the rights of a number of new scripted formats and somehow imposing a turning point in the Italian TV market, putting forward a new model of production, partially inspired by the American one. In fact, all its productions are characterised by a highly recognisable style and brand.

![Figure 2. I Cesaroni](image)

In 2003, Publispei created for Canale 5 the first season of *I Cesaroni (The Cesaroni’s)*, a long-running family comedy composed of 24 episodes of 50 minutes each, aired in prime time\(^1\). The serial, with five seasons currently broadcasted, is based on the successful Spanish format *Los Serrano*, property of Globomedia and Telecinco. It shows the daily complications caused by the marriage of Giulio, a widower with three sons of different ages, and Lucia, divorced with two teenage daughters. The story is deeply rooted in the suburban context of a popular neighbourhood in Rome, the Garbatella, and presents a choral cast, with key

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family members surrounded by other characters (friends, relatives…). The system of characters is modelled on a generational stratification, to reflect the various segments of Canale 5’s ideal target.

If we consider it from a merely narrative point of view, *I Cesaroni* can be defined as a very traditional and mainstream serial, which respects many of the conventional features of the genre described above, and presents strong elements of continuity with *La famiglia Benvenuti*, including the use of the child’s voice-over to comment and collocate the incipit of the story in a definite frame. Each episode follows a constant pattern: there is an anthology plot, with the family’s daily routine troubled by some sort of complication, which is eventually resolved by the end of the episode. This is found alongside a running plot mainly based on the sentimental issues between the teenage characters.

A variety of styles and references to various subgenres are mixed in this TV fiction: on one hand, there is a comic dimension, delegated to the leading male actors, expressing a lowbrow and local humour (very different from the surreal humour of the Spanish format). On the other hand, *I Cesaroni* is also built around several plots that concern serious and dramatic situations, on the model of family drama.

The main element that distinguishes *I Cesaroni* from all previous family comedies is the presence of some storylines which stem from the teenage characters, following the pattern of American teen-drama\(^\text{12}\), mixed with traditional family comedy situations. In fact, during the five seasons, the focus of the story progressively shifts from familiar situations to the exploration of love affair between step-siblings Eva and Marco. The hybridisation with some features peculiar to the teen drama also includes the musical dimension of *I Cesaroni*, a real element of innovation and novelty of the series. As established by the Spanish format “bible”, the main teen male character, Marco, is a musician. Several storylines follow his route to success: Marco is shown while composing original songs and performing them in front of an audience, while presenting its album in a real radio programme. Fiction and elements of reality are productively mashed up. Often diegetic music turns in an extra-diegetic comment.

Notwithstanding its traditional structure, this family comedy also represents a successful attempt to turn a mainstream series, addressed to a wide and popular audience, into a cross-medial TV fiction, whose storytelling is developed across multiple platforms and different media\(^\text{13}\). Following John Fiske, it can be said that the primary text, composed by the TV episodes, is expanded by the medial industry through a considerable amount of “secondary extensions”. These top-down products are conceived in order to multiply the access points to the text and to distribute it (even in different, short forms) on several platforms\(^\text{14}\).

Different brands and firms (Publispei, Mediaset, various publishers and industrial groups) co-operate in

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order to pursue this production strategy, in which audience engagement and involvement are pursued to create a brand-loyal community of fans.

This process of brand extension follows two main directions. The first one stems from the teen plots of the series. The main teen characters of the fiction, Marco and Eva, have inspired two novels. Following the patterns of teen literature – an editorial phenomenon which has gained visibility and high relevance in Italy in recent years – these novels are composed in the form of a diary written by the two characters. The content of these diaries acts as a bridge between the fictional events that occur to the couple in the few months separating one season from the following one. The two novels represent an attempt to maintain the attention on the series even when it is not on air: this is a crucial strategy for a multi-season series placed at the heart of an extremely rich and competitive market. The second novel is accompanied by a “digital spin-off”, in the form of an official blog where Marco and Eva post messages and explain to the fandom community their deepest feelings about diegetic events happened on television, thus enriching their interpretations of the series. Fans can therefore establish a personal and intimate relationship with the characters, based on an emphatic feeling: reply posts (on average more than a thousand for every single post) very often contain suggestions and direct invocations. Moreover, the teen plot inspires part of the merchandising: for instance, various copies of some branded objects are produced. Starting from a necklace worn by a female character, a whole collection of jewellery is created and successfully retailed.

The second direction of brand extension is connected to both the musical comment of the series and the teen plot. It develops mostly around the character of Marco Cesaroni and the actor that plays his role (Matteo Branciamore). These two identities, fictional and real, are mixed up and overlapped in all the musical extensions of the TV fiction, including the official profiles of the singer on social networking sites, such as Facebook and MySpace. The music label Cinevox Record, which produces Marco’s albums and
singles, firstly published the soundtrack of the first season of the series, interpreted by Marco/Matteo Branciamore. After this, music gained a more and more crucial role into the series, and Cinevox released Parole nuove (New Words), an album by Matteo Branciamore, which contained all the songs that Marco has composed and played in the episodes of season two and is widely available in stores and on iTunes. The album developed alongside season three, Ovunque andrai (Wherever you go), represents a real case in point to analyse the strategy of brand extension: together with the music album, the homonymous novel is commercialised and the homonymous blog is launched online. Ovunque andrai is also the title of the season finale episode, with Marco performing the main song of the album on the stage of a pretend talent show. Several contests involving fans of Matteo/Marco were organised, as well as concerts and live events, mixing the fictional world with the real one.

Family comedy and convergent TV: Tutti pazzi per amore

In 2009, a new step in Italian family comedy history took place. With an unusually large-scale advertising campaign (including billboards in major cities), public broadcaster Rai launched a new Publispei production, this time not based on a previous format but developed originally, and called Tutti pazzi per amore (literally Everybody is Crazy about Love, while the international official title is There’s Something about Love)\(^\text{15}\). The aim of this series was to refresh the traditional genre with more modern themes and language, in order to attract new and younger audiences. At the same time, Tutti pazzi per amore relies on all the conventional topoi of the genre, not to alienate the traditional mainstream audience.

As part of its promotional strategy, three viral videos were distributed on YouTube and other social media and websites in the weeks preceding the series premiere. The clips were short and funny and employed original footage from the series and “coloured” it in a cartoonish way. Every video developed the themes of the series according to the conventions and stereotypes of a classical movie genre, such as science-fic-

tion, spaghetti-western and horror: therefore, a series intended to “update” a classical genre such as family comedy relied on even more conventional genres, “exploited” in a sarcastic and playful way. These clips introduced the main characters and the secondary ones, but do not give hints about the plot or the relationships depicted in the series. In these aspects, *Tutti pazzi per amore* is similar to the previous family comedies: a widower, Paolo, and a divorced woman, Laura, who lives next door, meet for the first time in the lift, fall in love and soon decide to form a new family, together with her two children and his daughter. A key difference to the previous series is the greater presence of minor characters, including the colleagues of Laura at the editorial office of a magazine called *Io donna*, the water polo team trained by Paolo, the children’s schoolmates, Laura’s sister and her husband, Paolo’s best friend, the parents-in-law and Paolo’s aunts. This leads to the adoption of a choral approach to story-telling, with a multi-layered plot focused on multiple generations and a variety of settings (family, work…).

The real innovation of the series lies in its light and surreal “tone of voice”: for instance, a number of “what-if” and “dream-like” scenes often interrupt the regular flow of narrated events, creating a visualization of the thoughts and the emotions of some characters. While this linguistic device is a common feature of many American TV series (*i.e.* *Ally McBeal* or *Scrubs*), in Italian prime-time fiction this represented a complete (and somewhat strange) break-through.

Another novelty is the constant presence of a clear meta-linguistic device: in every episode there are some fragments of a mock TV talk show, in which two people – a know-it-all expert called Dr. Freiss (played by Giuseppe Battiston) and a stereotypical host – discuss the main problems of the characters, explain what is happening on screen and make sarcastic comments on the episode. This would-be talk show is an apparent parody of contemporary factual television, which allows the viewer to take a break before coming back to the “real” action of the series. It is also a “frame” that gives space to and justifies meta-textual “exterior” (productive) interventions in the story. For instance, at the beginning of the second season, one of the main characters had to be replaced: Stefania Rocca, who played Laura, the female protagonist, could not participate to the shootings of the new episodes for maternity-related reasons; a new actress, Antonia Liskova, took up her role. The meta-linguistic and television-like segment is used as a mean to explain everything to the viewers as well as to include them in the production (and narrative) dynamics and joking about previous indiscretions and gossips on magazines and blogs. All the techniques of live TV (including the direct look into the camera) are used to introduce a change into a fictional world, explaining it and finally switching back to the fictional narrative. Another innovation of *Tutti pazzi per amore* is the fundamental role played by the musical elements of the show. Every episode is titled after a famous Italian pop song. Every dialogue is filled with quotes and references to popular lyrics. In some occasions there are cameos by Italian singers and bands (*such as Mathia Bazar*). Most of all, various musical performances are inserted into the narration, giving strength to particular feelings and attitudes.
The family comedy is hybridized here with musicals and music videos: usually songs, interpreted by some characters, accompany the development of the plot and actions, but sometimes these musical interludes represent a playful impersonation of well-known singers or videos (as Beyoncé’s *Single Ladies*), in a surreal camouflage. The musical element is used differently than in *I Cesaroni*: there is not a direct connection to discography and talent shows, but a strong emotional link with songs taken from the Italian and international repertoire. Songs are often an external element, a meta-linguistic device, while at the same time deeply rooted into the plot. It happens, for instance, with Marylin Monroe’s *Bye Bye Baby*, used to accompany the funeral of Michele, one of the main characters. Death and its sacred ceremony are soon transformed into an explosion of joy and relief, accompanied by a final choreography that unifies all the characters of the series. The lyrics and the music evoke nostalgic feelings, and help connecting fictional characters and real viewers in a common and shared generational memory.

Figure 5. The funeral scene in *Tutti pazzi per amore 2*

The insertion of meta-textual and musical fragments into a family comedy not only contributes to the appeal of the series towards younger demographics, but also helps the expansion of this TV fiction on other media: as for *The Cesaroni*, with *Tutti pazzi per amore* the most popular and mainstream TV form succeeded in creating a “convergent environment”.

On one hand, fans of the series use social media to select and disseminate some aspects of the fiction: music clips and playlists on YouTube, as well as fan groups dedicated to Dr. Freiss on Facebook are only some examples of a media discourse that sometimes transcends the original episodes and concentrates on these new touch-points that involve new viewers.

On the other hand, the production tries to exploit these practices. For example, for the second season of the series, a soundtrack album with a selection of the main music moments of the series was launched in
music stores (both online and offline). A blog on the official website, with all the news and gossips related to the episodes, is assumed to be written by the largely popular character of Dr. Freiss.

Conclusions
As demonstrated by the case histories of *I Cesaroni* and *Tutti pazzi per amore*, Italian family comedy is currently facing the dynamics of media cultural convergence in two distinct ways. Firstly, these series testify the persistence of the traditional main features of the genre, which, in a new television system, became even more emphasized and popular than before, in order to create rituals and appointments “not to be missed”. The national fiction, even in a context of digitalization and cultural convergence of texts and practices, in order to be successful has got to be interpreted as a live event, watched with the family (and maybe discussed somewhere else, in real time, with friends).

Secondly, there are clear contaminations of this long-established genre with other genres and other media: some external elements (such as TV parody, music, teen literature, merchandise, forms of online and offline interaction) are experimented, selected, highlighted and carefully cultivated to develop a fictional franchise. These hybrid components are particularly useful in creating an important fandom base, loyal to the program and eager to know more about the diegetic characters and events; and, most of all, in helping to spread the series through media and public discourse.
In this work we will analyze a corpus of products that are first of all hard to describe. To do so, we will start from the idea of magic circle, an extremely relevant concept among game theorists, and from all those location-based and pervasive practices that these objects generate. Each one of these notions is borrowed from different currents of game studies and media studies and, together, they will be used to better identify our case studies. After setting-up this theoretical introduction, we will proceed presenting three different virtual layers – the game layer, the social layer and the narrative layer – from which we will build a model to test four case studies.

SCVNGR, Foursquare and Broadcastr are mobile applications that, despite their similar appearances involving territorial exploration and user generated contents (texts, photos, audio recording), differ in the ways their users deal with them. The fourth case, Whai Whai is instead both a guidebook and a mobile application by which it is possible to discover the secrets of a city; a rather peculiar interactive guide capable of pushing and motivating its reader to explore the surrounding space.

World Exploration and Location Tracking

What our case studies clearly have in common is their bond with the user’s displacement in the real world. In the case of Foursquare and SCVNGR, the user’s movements are tracked through GPS [Global Positioning System] technologies; in Broadcastr location tracking is optional, while Whai Whai does not employ a positioning system. We will refer to those objects with the broad term of location-based applications, although some of them do not comply with the definition proposed in 2001 by Virrantaus et al.: «LBSs [Location-Based Services] are services accessible with mobile devices through the mobile network and utilizing the ability to make use of the location of the terminals»1. This definition refers mostly to satellite-based systems.
tracking, but in this context we will use it in a broader sense, referring to products that maintain a crucial bond with the geographic position of their user. In short, with location-based we intend both the automatic localization of the device that is running the application and/or the voluntary movements of the user that follows the spatial indications of the application.

Some of our case studies share common properties with other products based on GPS tracking, such as interactive maps developed for mobile devices or augmented reality applications (e.g. Wikitude\(^2\)). Nevertheless, we decided to focus our research on location-based applications that retain a distinct ludic component or can act as platforms for playful practices. In our paper we will explore the interactions between location tracking and games analyzing both the design and the use of those objects.

**Breaking the Magic Circle**

In arguing that our four case studies retain a ludic or playful component, we need to confront the classic models of game studies. In defining the nature of games, most scholars have resorted to space-related metaphors. Notably, Johan Huizinga, referred to the space of play and games as a magic circle. In 1938, Huizinga described it as it follows:

> All play moves and has its being within a play-ground marked off beforehand either materially or ideally, deliberately or as a matter of course. Just as there is no formal difference between play and ritual, so the ‘consecrated spot’ cannot be formally distinguished from the play-ground. The arena, the card-table, the magic circle, the temple, the stage, the screen, the tennis court, the court of justice, etc, are all in form and function play-gounds, i.e. forbidden spots, isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules obtain. All are temporary worlds within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart\(^3\).

From Huizinga’s point of view, the magic circle delimits the real world from ad hoc, non-permanent fictional worlds that are created to play. These worlds exist within a circle, a “consecrated spot” – not unlike that of a ritual – that delimits spatially and temporally the permanence of the make-believe world of a game. Following Huizinga’s path, Goffman claims that games are capable of creating «a locally realized world of roles and events»\(^4\), while for French sociologist Roger Caillois, games imply an activity that is «séparé circonscrites dans le limits d’espace et de temps précises et fixées à l’avance»\(^5\). For most game and play theorists then, games are inscribed in a space (physical or metaphorical) that marks their fundamental difference from the real world and from everyday life. The objects that we chose to analyze in our

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\(^2\) Wikitude is an augmented reality mobile application based on GPS tracking that allows users to identify points of interest in the real world using their phone’s camera.


research seem to conflict with these theoretical stances. Firstly, location-based playful experiences do not take place inside a physical *magic circle*, nor inside an arena designed for such activities. Their very existence depends on using the real world as a potential playground, inevitably sharing it with non-playing subjects. Secondly, while institutionalized, rule-based games require the player to comply with specific rules for the entire time of the match, location-based products offer a less restrictive experience. The ludic component of applications such as *Foursquare* is mingled with and ostensibly depends on banal routines (shopping, driving, eating in a restaurant), while the membrane that separates play and real life remains permeable. According to game designers Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, while games are in the most cases formal, defined, rule-based entities, the act of playing remains inevitably fuzzy:

> The boundary between the act of playing with the doll and not playing with the doll is fuzzy and permeable. Within this scenario, we can identify concrete play behaviors, such as making the doll move like a puppet. But there are just as many ambiguous behaviors, which might or not be play, such as idly kneading its head while watching TV. There may be a frame between playing and not playing, but its boundaries are indistinct.6

Facing these difficulties in defining the limits of both the concept of play and of experience, we chose to analyze objects that use this vagueness to their own good. In a research published in 2009, Markus Montola, Jaakko Stenros and Annika Waern described a corpus of playful practices having in common «one or more salient features that expand the contractual magic circle of play spatially, temporally, or socially»7. So we are talking about something capable of transcending the game limits or, more precisely, the very idea of magic circle, and that is exactly what we were looking for. Again, the three game scholars:

> The contracts of pervasive games are different from the contracts of traditional, nonexpanded games. The magic circle is not an isolating barrier distinguishing the ludic from the ordinary, but a secret agreement marking some actions as separate from the ordinary world. While all human actions are real, those that happen within the contract of a game are given a special social meaning. In conclusion, we can see that there is a twofold dynamic between the playful and the ordinary that provides pervasive games a reason to exist: Both play and ordinary life can benefit from the blurring of the boundary.8

So, location-based ludic applications tend to “blur the boundaries” that separate playful and non-playful practices. As we will try to demonstrate, the products we have chosen generate pervasive practices exploiting this deep indeterminacy of the ludic concept.

Three Virtual Levels – a model of analysis

In the following pages we take into consideration the various ways in which common spatial practices (taking a stroll, going to a restaurant, exploring a new city) have become the object of an intense mediatisation. We will analyze four examples of products that aim at interacting with the user’s experience of space and movement in the real world in order to test a tripartite model of analysis.

The three layers (Fig. 1) considered in the analysis of these hybrid media products allowed us to map – at least partially – the territory of space related applications, placing them within a field of tension that informs both their core design and the user experience they intend to provide.

![Figure 1](image_url). The model through which we have analyzed our case studies

In this perspective, the game layer refers to the presence of game-like features in the objects of our research, following the definition proposed by Salen and Zimmerman: «A game is a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome»⁹. We will try then to identify if an artificial conflict, a set of rules and a quantifiable outcome are clearly recognizable in these applications. Moreover, when considering the concept of gamification¹⁰ and its marketing oriented nature, it is clear that those game features are not there only to let the users play, but also to make them do something. The game layer is not only about fun, it is also about the use of game features in a factitive way with the purpose of exploiting the users’ behaviors.

The social layer deals instead with the power of social networks and social relations to bond people together. The term retains a certain structural and ontological complexity: for Christina Prell, «social

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¹¹ In his semiotics theory about modal verbs, Greimas defines the factitive modality as the object potential skill to communicate their directions of use (communicative function) generating precise actions sequences done by the users (operative function). Greimas, A. J., 1983. Du sens. 2. Paris: Editions du Seuil.
networks [are] composed of a series of levels such as actors (e.g. individuals); relations connecting actors together (e.g. friendship); dyads (e.g. pairs of actors); triads (e.g. structure composed of three actors); subgroups; and entire networks. To dampen this complexity, we posit our analysis in the field of online social networks. Thus, talking about “social layer” means to consider the connections among actors (how people are related each other – the social graph) and actors and interests (as the result of online social activities: what people like, share, follow – the interest graph) typical of a mediated virtual networked ecosystem. Looking at the case studies, the analysis turns into an evaluation of all the social components that allow the users to share their spatial experience within their personal digital network (e.g. comments, friendship).

It is not only about the presence of certain tools in those applications, but also about how important it is to use these tools to fully exploit their location-based ludic exploration (a crucial issue for Foursquare, conceived as a location-based social network tout court instead of a simple mobile application). The narrative layer aims at defining how deeply integrated in the application a narrative component is, a matter that seems to be recurrent in our case studies. Although the products we have analyzed all show some sort of tension towards narrative, in our research we often found ourselves questioning the status and structure of narration within location-based applications. On the one hand, there is a tendency to encourage diverse styles of fruition (as in Foursquare). On the other hand, our understanding of these products as narrative objects is based on two different narrative models: that of an emerging or collaborative narrative, and that of a unidirectional, more “traditional” narrative. Though it is clear that most of the location-based ludic applications retain a narrative potential, the analysis of these peculiar media products within a narrative/narratological frame remains problematic.

In summary, our model is based on a tripartite analysis that aims at testing the ludic, social and narrative potential of the applications we chose as case studies. We argue that the objects of our research can be placed in different spots on the three continua that we propose, on the basis of both their design and the user experience they imply. This three-headed model may be helpful to identify different tendencies and biases in location-based applications.

**SCNVR**

In its official web site, SCNVR is described as «a game about doing challenges at places». In July 2010 Seth Priebatsch, founder and CEO of the game opened his TED-Boston speech claiming that through his company products he was «fairly determined to try and build a game layer on top of the world». Prie-

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batsch’s idea of game layer seems to adhere to the gamification practice of using ludic mechanics to “spice up” non-game products. So, ostensibly based on this idea of game layer, SCVNGR first of all calls itself a game in a traditional way. As we said before, this free mobile application provides various types of challenges through which its users can earn different prizes. The use of points, rewards, badges, levels and – in some cases – more complex game-like dynamics is highly present in our case studies. As we will see, the design of location-based products seems to suggest their adaptability to both “traditional” playing practices (as in the case of Whai Whai, which combines the dynamics of scavenger hunt and choose-your-own-adventure books) and more diffused, non-teleological lusory usages\textsuperscript{15}. In this case, the ludic components are deeply integrated in the application: an artificial conflict defined by rules with a quantifiable outcome, as Salen and Zimmerman pointed out. Anyhow, even in a perfectly clear case like that of SCVNGR, some sort of fuzziness connotes the practices inspired by these applications. The “model user” of SCVNGR will typically be engaged in a pervasive ludic practice, alternating between goal-oriented behaviours (“do this in order to win a free pizza”) and more mundane tasks. Even so, SCVNGR can be put on the right side of the game layer section of our model.

Proceeding with the analysis, we can say that the challenges of SCVNGR are strictly linked with the physical space they are set in, as the application involves geo-localization as a pivotal aspect. The game claim is in fact: «Go places. Do challenges. Earn points»\textsuperscript{16}. The challenges are created by users, by companies using them as marketing tools or by local shops, by institutions that seek to promote their work and initiatives, and can be put together by treks – themed sets of places with dedicated challenges in each one of them – that expand the game experience. Again, from the official website, the game is described as «part awesome location-based mobile game [and] part really powerful mobile gaming platform»\textsuperscript{17}, stimulating the production of brand new experiences after paying some money to the game owners. The narrative part of the game then is deeply collaborative and emergent, putting again SCVNGR on the right side of the narrative layer section of our model.

The analysis of the social layer is a bit more complex. A key feature of the game is the fact that the rewards are both virtual (i.e. badges and points in the game) and real, often provided by the creators of the challenges. This duality reminds of the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic work rewards described by Mottaz\textsuperscript{18}. The intrinsic rewards are connected with the worker’s interest in the task. The extrinsic rewards instead, come from the employer. The commitment to work depends on the proximity of these rewards with the work values (in the form of desires and expectations) the worker gives to his job. It is

\textsuperscript{15} According to Bernard Suits, «To play a game is to attempt to achieve a specific state of affairs (prelusory goal), using only means permitted by rules (lusory means), where the rules prohibit use of more efficient in favour of less efficient means (constitutive rules), and where the rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity (lusory attitude)». Suits, B., 2005. The Grasshopper: Games, Life, Utopia. Peterborough: Broadview Press, pp. 54-55.


\textsuperscript{17}SCVNGR, 2011. Build on SCVNGR. Available at: http://www.scvngr.com/builder [Accessed 10 October 2011].

clear that the values have high profile aims and, even if they are not quickly satisfied, they cannot influence the commitment too much. The rewards are instead pivotal and can deeply change the worker’s involvement in the job. In SCVNGR we face a similar situation with intrinsic – in this case not only the player’s interest in the game but also for the rewards found within the game world – and extrinsic rewards. The former are bound above all to a social desire for contact, status and reputation through virtual prizes (badges and points); the latter are instead the real prizes the users can get. So, it is in the intrinsic rewards, in the social status desire, in the confrontations between users and the bottom-up productions already mentioned, that the social component of the game emerges, putting SCVNGR on the right side also of the social layer section of our model.

Foursquare

Foursquare is another mobile application that implies geolocation and urban exploration. In this case the focus is on the voluntary check-ins by which the users record their passages through places. Points and badges are the prizes for the users that visit the same place more often or that create and post more comments about them. Foursquare also produces a weekly chart – based on algorithm calculations invisible to users – that allows to elect the mayor of every place recorded. The approach is hereby competitive, since it’s possible to lose a mayorship to another user.

Born with the aim to help discovering new places through the gamification scheme composed of check-ins and rewards, Foursquare gains its success also from its participatory nature and its two coexistent souls: the use of the product as a recording device (in the fashion of a travelogue, to share written notes on places, routes, episodes), and its use as a factitive device, similar to the use of a bottom-up guide book, that other users can read and follow, even without contributing themselves.

On the narrative level then, Foursquare changes depending on its use: as we have seen, as a travelogue it builds up a collaborative narrative, as a traditional guide book instead it remains bound to a unidirectional narration that its user choose to follow.

Also considering the social layer this differentiation remains strong. It’s easy to underline that in this case narrative and social components are deeply linked. Where there is collaborative narration the social component is pivotal, in the form of shared comments, pictures, activities, tips and To-Dos that lead other users’ experience. Even badges and mayorship competition, with a dynamic leader board that expresses the domain among a given network of friends, are vital social aspects of Foursquare. Another important feature, common to all social media, is the parasitical gathering of new users (as friends or competitors) from other major social networks through invitations. So, while in the first case the social aspects are vital to the Foursquare experience, where the narration is unidirectional this social layer is thinner and the application becomes a sort of bottom up guide book.
The game layer is a bit peculiar. *Foursquare* incorporates the indeterminacy of the ludic element within its very design. The user can seamlessly move between the playful and the useful: rewards, points and badges are intertwined with tips, suggestions and directions on what to do in a specific place. This duality prevents *Foursquare* from being placed univocally on the right side of the game layer axis. In fact, used as a guide book, *Foursquare* ludic components are very scarce, if not totally absent. That is not true in the travelogue use, in which the gamified system of check-ins and rewards creates a nearly ludic environment. We chose to put this last case in a faded position inside the game layer axis due to the lack of proper ludic challenges as the ones of *SCVNGR*.

*Broadcastr*

*Broadcastr* was launched in December 2010 by Andy Hunter and Scott Lindenbaum, who described it as «an app for iPhone and Android that creates intimate and immersive experiences by unlocking pictures and audio relevant to where you are. It turns your smartphone into a multimedia guide to the world, and everyone can contribute»19. *Broadcastr* is based on the user’s production of micro-narrations that are connected to places found in the real world. Typically, a *Broadcastr* user will record his story about a particular spot in a city through the voice recording plug-in included in the application. This audio fragment is then made available to all *Broadcastr* users who will be able to access it from their mobiles or home computers. Unlike *Foursquare* or *SCVNGR*, *Broadcastr* does not require its users to be physically present in a place in order to be able to browse and contribute to the audio library of the application. *Broadcastr* can be used from home and the audio files are all accessible at once from any location on the planet. Nevertheless, in their statement regarding *Broadcastr*, Hunter and Lindenbaum seem to encourage a geo-localized use of their application. In *Broadcastr*’s web site, the two founders write:

> Go exploring with *Broadcastr* and you’ll find memories, insights, and enriching information about eclectic and everyday places on every continent on Earth. Take a walk while stories about your surroundings stream automatically to your phone. A celebrity chef whispers in your ear as you stroll past his favorite restaurant; a renowned architect guides you through lower Manhattan; a comedian shares a hilarious personal anecdote at her favorite bar. Your movement through the world becomes your search query. Download the app. Take a walk20.

So, while it is possible to browse *Broadcastr* remotely, using it on a smartphone while actually moving in the city will create a playlist of audio fragments that will be played as the user reaches a certain spot. In this case we may find another example of divergent affordances or possible usages of a location-based application. *Broadcastr* can be used both as a random access tour guide from a home computer and as a

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20 *Broadcastr*, 2011.
geo-related playlist creator supplying a flux of micro-narratives to a user traversing a real space. This makes the narrative component of Broadcastr strikingly similar to the one found in Foursquare. In both cases, an emergent location-related narration is built upon a multitude of user-created fragments, but the application allows a less enterprising user to resort to Broadcastr’s flux as one would do with an audio guide.

Of the four case studies we focused on, Broadcastr is the only one that avoids showing clearly definable ludic features. The application does not include badges or rewards system and poses no explicit challenges. Nevertheless, the openness of the system makes it a potential platform for playful practices designed by the users. One could easily imagine a scavenger hunt game where hints are administered through audio fragments that are activated when players reach a certain spot.

Broadcastr’s dynamics of social interaction seem less prominent than those present in Foursquare or SCVNGR. While it is possible to follow friends on Broadcastr (much like what happens on Twitter) and comment on their profiles, the discreteness and diversity of users’ contributions, ranging from journal entries to field recordings, and the absence of any defined competitive structure (e.g. mayorships in Foursquare) make user interaction much looser and rarefied.

*Whai Whai*

*Whai Whai* is a series of games challenging its players to explore the central areas of a small number of specific cities by asking them questions that can be answered only by actually going to a specific place to observe the details of a building or a landmark. Each *Whai Whai* game covers a specific city (Florence, Rome, Milan, Venice, etc.). It aims at making tourism more compelling and engaging by assigning to players a series of quests and riddles to be solved, by tracking their progress throughout the game and by adding a developing narrative unfolding across each session. *Whai Whai* can be played using an iPhone or a specific paper booklet and a common mobile phone and, obviously, each episode must be played in the corresponding city. Users progress through a narrative designed for a specific urban area by exploring it, by examining its landmarks and by answering the questions proposed by the game.

This application is much more closed than the previous examples. Differently from the other cases, *Whai Whai* games are designed from a single team that does not leave to common users the power to alter the game structure and to add new contents. While its branching structure is remarkably wide and makes it possible for subsequent games to be quite different from one another, it is still a finite experience that cannot be expanded.

Also, game-like elements are more evident in *Whai Whai*. Sessions have definite beginnings, developments and endings, there is a rudimentary score system and the game evaluates the players’ progresses. While the system is not designed to allow users to lose a game – the story and the session will progress anyway even if the wrong answers are repeatedly given – it still signals whether players are performing in a good or bad way.
Due to its closed nature and the unidirectional (top-down) nature of both the ludic and narrative components, *Whai Whai* does not allow for social interactions outside those that take place within the party of players involved in the same game.

**Conclusions**

In this tripartite model (Fig. 2) we tried to analyze our four cases basing our assumptions on both their design and the practices they elicit. In two cases (*Foursquare* and *Broadcastr*) this approach led us to the decision of considering two different modes of engagement, that we defined as guide book and travelogue. For this reason, the two applications are not placed univocally on the continua, but are split into two distinct entities (b1 and b2 for *Foursquare*, d1 and d2 for *Broadcastr*) occupying different positions in the scheme. Our distinction is based on the discrete styles of usage that emerged from the analysis of the affordances of each application. It is important to remark the ideal and theoretical nature of the usages that we propose, since the actual user of *Foursquare* or *Broadcastr* is very likely to enact hybrid practices where no clear-cut distinction can be observed.

While the four applications that we decided to analyze seem to rely on common assumptions (turning everyday spatial practice into *something else*), our model shows the complex and varied nature of these products. *SCVNGR* and *Whai Whai* seem to take different approaches to the ludicization of urban exploration. *SCVNGR* is consistently featured on the right side of the model. This means that a strong social component and an emergent approach to narrative complement a clearly defined ludic orientation. Of our four specimens *SCVNGR* is the one that adopts the most pervasive approach, where playful practices are intertwined with social networking and contribute to the construction of a collaborative narration. On the other hand, *Whai Whai* relies on a consistent game apparatus with defined rules and goals but does not allow its players to access to their expanded network nor to engage in an activity of collaborative narrative construction. In this sense, *Whai Whai* can be seen as a ludicization of an older medium such as the guide book or, on the other hand, as a spatialization of hypertextual media such as a choose-your-own-adventures book.

*Foursquare* poses different problems since two distinct possible usages emerged from the analysis. If used as a user-generated guide book (case b2), the application is consistently featured on the left side of the scheme, where less interaction with the user occurs. In the case of what we defined the travelogue usage (case b1), *Foursquare* seems to mimic *SCVNGR*’s behaviour, since it features a strong social component and a predominantly collaborative narrative development. What stands out in this case is *Foursquare*’s lack of distinct ludic component. While *SCVNGR* and *Whai Whai* aim at creating a *gaming situation*21, where

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rules and goals can be observed, *Foursquare’s* use of game-like features (rewards, points and rankings) does not offer proper challenges for the user\(^{22}\), but merely rewards trivial actions such as visiting a museum or dining in a restaurant. For this reason, on the game layer, *Foursquare* is placed in a hybrid position.

![Diagram](image.png)

**Figure 2.** The complete model through which we have analyzed our case studies.

**LEGEND:** a = WhatWhere; b1 = Foursquare (travelogue use); b2 = Foursquare (guide book use); c = SCVNGR; d1 = Broadcastr (travelogue use); d2 = Broadcastr (guide book use)

Broadcastr was mostly used as a sort of contrast medium, since no clear ludic components could be observed. Because of its scarcely factitive nature (it does not propose challenges nor explicitly elicits playful practices), *Broadcastr* stands out as a platform for different modes of expression. It is not surprising then, that it hosts a wide variety of contributions ranging from the autobiographical to the fictional. On the narrative continuum, *Broadcastr* replicates *Foursquare’s* usage based distinction, since it can be used as a guide book, retaining unidirectional narrative dynamics, or as an audio travelogue. Also on the social layer *Broadcastr* reproduces *Foursquare’s* features, but, as we have seen in the application’s analysis, with less prominence of the social networking capabilities.

While our research work on ludic location-based applications is in its initial phase, our aim is to remark the importance of analyzing hybrid and pervasive media objects building heuristic models based both on the applications’ features and on the experience they are designed to provide. At this time no final assumption can be made about the unifying traits of location-based mobile applications, but we argue that starting from what sets apart one case from the other may be a proficuous way of building a complex and multi-layered analysis.

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\(^{22}\) Practices as FAQs, walkthroughs and even cheating are also quite common among *Foursquare* users. It is easy to find web sites and online communities explaining how to unlock special badges or how to exploit the inconsistencies of the software to obtain special outcomes without physically being in the place requested (e.g. Royal Wedding Badge). Even if clearly inscribed in the area of unpredicted uses, all these cases contribute to posit *Foursquare* into a peculiar ludic frame.
Omen of oblivion

February 22, 1937. Today for the second time, air attack simulations. The first time, many people left a light showing at their windows. So this time, the public electricity supply has been cut off, plunging the city into primordial, pre-cosmic darkness – a symbol of human progress – while booming gunshots sounded very realistic, with large searchlights illuminating the horizon. The exercise not only educates the citizens about certain practical details, but also to the belief that an air-raid cannot be all that bad – a mere distraction in the course of everyday life.

It must have seemed to him like the most realistic war film, that night of February 1937 in Rome. The blast of cannon and the glare of searchlights on the horizon ruptured the silence of the city, reduced to darkness – like a cinema where the audience is immersed in the spectacle of a simulated air attack. Rudolf Arnheim (1904-2007) was a German Jew in Rome at the height of the Fascist regime. In this excerpt from his Italian diary, he is still unaware of the disaster that was shortly to befall him. The diary is a cardboard cover notebook of nearly three hundred pages full of illustrations, drawings, postcards, letters, newspaper clippings and, above all, notes and personal reflections, records of everyday events and travel reports, written in an instinctive and sensitive German. It is the inner voice of a man who was always keenly aware of the daily revelations of the world and the beauty of works of art, but also of the impact of history on everyday life. Then, towards the end, the writing style suddenly changes, turning to a drier register, abstaining from any digressions, as if prompted by fear. The last few pages of the diary tell of a man with trepidation, troubled by worries that turn into nightmares at night, but still lucid and indomitably attached to hope in the day – the illusion that preparing for the worst would be enough to escape death, as in a simulation, a movie.
For both linguistic and historical reasons, the Italian period of film theorist Arnheim’s career (1933-1938) has not yet been fully explored on an international scale, even though it represents a pivotal moment in the development of his thought on cinema, media, and art. This article aims to reappraise the effective importance of Arnheim’s contribution in the Italian cultural context of the Thirties and to clarify his theoretical position, with particular regard to the relevance of technological innovations and their impact on both film production and film viewing. It will offer a bio-historiographical perspective on Arnheim’s Italian years: a bibliographical reconstruction combined with an exploration of his personal diary of that period and an analysis of his passport.

Figure 1. Rudolf Arnheim’s personal diary (1934-1938)

Foretastes (1932-1933)

Arnheim’s Italian adventure started in August 1933. Luciano De Feo, director of the International Educational Cinematographic Institute (IECI), appointed Arnheim as an editor of the Encyclopedia of Cinema, the main project on which the Institute was working. His reputation as an international film scholar grew after the publication in 1932 of Film als Kunst, the book containing the complete exposition of his theory on film. Arnheim’s ideas were already beginning to circulate in Italian institutions. In 1933, Emilio Cecchi, Arnheim himself states that ‘The privilege of spending decisive years of my development in the Eternal City gave me standards of what is noble and lasting in Western culture, it created a kind of internal home base that remained with me wherever I went to live thereafter’, Colby, V., ed., 1991, World Authors 1980-1985. New York: Wilson Company, p. 46.


3 Arnheim’s personal diary (October 5, 1938) reveals that the book was written at Badenweiler in 1930.

4 The book was immediately translated and published in English as Arnheim, R., 1933. Film, London: Faber & Faber.

director of Cines asked Umberto Barbaro to translate a substantial extract of the first part of *Film als Kunst* as a course text for the students at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome.  
At least three articles by Arnheim found space in Italian journals before he came to live in the country. The most interesting of these is “Arte riproduttiva”, a short essay that contains the first critical discussion of artistry in film from an aesthetic perspective. In 1933, three years before Walter Benjamin’s famous essay on the technical reproducibility of art, Arnheim proposed an idea of “aura” (albeit without explicitly using this term) as an aesthetic status that art has not lost, but rather that it has to conquer. At issue was not the authenticity of the work of art but rather the artistry of a mechanical process in spite of its technical reproducibility. The art of film, like other “reproductive arts” (such as photography, radio, and sound recording), is a very human work of creation, not a mere mechanical recording. Film is, in fact, a stance on the world; it is not only the recording and re-presentation of reality but also a “subjective relationship” between the viewer and the viewed. Film viewing is an act of creative perception.

It must be noted that Arnheim’s approach to art and media was very innovative for the Italian cultural and philosophical milieu of the time, which was quite suspicious of the aesthetic relevance of technical means. It is no coincidence that the corpus of his Italian writings reveals Arnheim’s strong interest in technology. He simply applied the Gestalt approach he had learned from his mentors in Berlin to the emerging phenomenon that, more than others, seemed to offer psychologists the opportunity to investigate the life of modern man. He understood that there could be no better laboratory than the film-theaters and film-viewers. Cinema was an excellent example of a mass psychological experiment, a public laboratory for testing and developing in aesthetic terms the Gestalt theory of perception.

**Expression: the contribution to *Intercine* (1935)**

Arnheim’s initial impact on joining the IECI involved a profound revamp of its journal, the *Rivista internazionale del cinema educatore*. In 1935, the magazine changed its name to *Intercine* and was launched in five editions (Italian, French, English, Spanish, and German). It offered analysis of films, profiles of filmmakers, and was launched in five editions (Italian, French, English, Spanish, and German). It offered analysis of films, profiles of filmmak-

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10 Arnheim studied at the University of Berlin under Max Wertheimer and Wolfgang Kohler, the founders of Gestalt Psychology. His doctoral dissertation was Arnheim, R., 1928. Experimentelle-psychologische Untersuchungen zum Ausdrucksproblem. *Psychologische Forschung*, 11, pp. 2-132.

ers and critics, essays on aesthetics and technology, yet with an accessible and attractive style and many illustrations.

The bulk of Arnheim’s contribution to *Interione* consists of the notes on *Expression* in the “Syntheses” columns. In these writings, Arnheim drew inspiration from books or articles recently published in Europe or the United States (including the *International Photographer, American Cinematographer, Filmotechnik, Die Kinotechnik, Journal of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers*, and *Sight and Sound*) and discussed the various aspects of the technological innovations used in the art of film and their impact on the perceptual dimensions of film viewing. With clear and sometimes explicit reference to his *Film als Kunst*, he tackled issues related to sound and color, stereoscopy, realism, movement, form, perspective, lighting, editing, etc. His position is summed up in the opening sentence of the first Syntheses:

> The artistic average of the film has depreciated alarmingly. The perfection attained by actors, cameramen and composers of musical comment still gives a certain value to cinematographic productions even today; but a good spectacle, fine pictures and pleasing sounds do not of themselves constitute a film.\(^\text{12}\)

**The invisible signature: the hidden contribution to *Cinema* (1936-1938)**

The project *Interione* lasted only twelve months. At the end of 1935, Italy left the League of Nations and the IECI was moved to Paris. De Feo secretly attempted to save the heritage of the magazine (above all, the draft of the *Encyclopedia of Cinema*) and a few months later founded *Cinema*.\(^\text{13}\) Abandoning any pretense of an international audience, the new magazine had a very informative and popular style, with ample use of photography, essentially following the model of other magazines by the Milan-based publishing house Ulrico Hoepli.

Arnheim published thirty signed articles in two years, many focusing on technological innovations: natural color techniques, polarization, lighting, editing, sound and voice reproduction, proto-cinematic optical devices, representation of movements, film format, etc.\(^\text{14}\) The technical operation of the machinery of cinema is accurately explained through a comparison with the perceptual function of the human senses. Arnheim’s contribution to *Cinema* is not limited to these officially signed articles. Arnheim’s statements in the 1970s and 1980s have led me to identify his hand behind some of the pseudonyms under which many of the journal’s columns were written. It is certain that, from summer 1936 to summer 1938, he was


\(^\text{14}\) For documentation of Arnheim’s contribution to *Cinema*, see the bibliography in the Appendix (years 1936-1938).
Nostromo\textsuperscript{15}, the author of the correspondence with the readers, in a column called “Capo di Buona Speranza”, which was first erroneously attributed to Francesco Pasinetti\textsuperscript{16}.

He also curated the columns on photography dedicated to amateur photographers (“Voi fotografate noi pubblichiamo” and, occasionally, “Fotografia”) in collaboration with his sister Mary Arnheim-Gay\textsuperscript{17}. In fact, they used the pseudonym Marie Onussen, derived from the name of Arnheim’s sister and the inversion of the word “Nessuno” (Nobody)\textsuperscript{18}. There is no doubt, also, that Arnheim was Candido, the pseudonym that appeared together with Arpagone (Gianni Puccini)\textsuperscript{19} in the “Bianco e Nero” double film critic reviews column published from the first issues of 1937. Paradoxically, Arnheim was the “optimistic” critic, and Puccini the “pessimist”\textsuperscript{20}. Because of the lack of references, the attribution of the pseudonym Ciak, under which the columns given over to technical innovations (“Notizie tecniche” and “Scienza e tecnica”) were written, is necessarily uncertain. However, statements by Arnheim\textsuperscript{21} and the style and the subjects of those writings (which are very similar to the Intercine contributions in Expression) make the ascription of those articles to him plausible. These articles explain the operation of technologies involved


\textsuperscript{17} See Arnheim, 1986.

\textsuperscript{18} See Arnheim, 1981.


\textsuperscript{20} On the reasons for the discontinuance of certain columns, see also L’uomo grigio, 1937. Momento grigio. Cinema, 24, p. 509.

in sound, make-up, tricks, editing, camera movement, film preservation, animation, color, and other technical curiosities in which the reader might be interested.

Figure 3. Rudolf Arnheim with Francesco Pasinetti, Domenico Meccoli, and Gino Visentini in Cinema editorial office (Rome, 1938)

The wonders of technique

The article *April Fool. The Wonders of Technique*22, while highly amusing, is also indicative of Arnheim’s perspective on film and technology. Arnheim presented, with a serious tone, a bizarre series of fictitious technical innovations that he had dreamed up. These included: 1) a special camera that filmed scenes in five languages at the same time – the camera was equipped with optical filters to select those elements that were compatible with different countries’ tastes; and the film was developed using developing solutions flavored with tomato sauce for the Italian version, ‘bouillabaisse’ for the French, Bavarian beer for the German, and tea for the English; 2) a technique of recording sound on a thread, for editing by a dressmaker or tailor; 3) the Erotoscope, a telescope that radiated invisible ultraviolet rays, through which a special guardian was able to discover any violations of public morality in the cinema during the projection; the guilty had to pay a fine, according to the gravity of the offense; 4) the discovery of a film bacterium that infected the audience and led to ‘screen-phobia’ – the abhorrence of film screenings – which after a further two weeks of incubation becomes ‘screen-mania’, resulting in a considerable weakening of the patient’s cash resources; in the third stage of this disease, the subject experiences an irresistible desire to become an actor, director or production manager; 5) Arnheim also reported the invention of the close-up, or rather, of the conceptual notion of ‘close-up’. The Italian for close-up is ‘primo piano’, which means

not only ‘foreground’ but also, and literally, ‘first floor’: the ‘primo piano’ was invented by an elderly woman called Emilia Closeupper in her old house.

Beyond the humorous dimension of this enjoyable article, its sarcastic – even sardonic – tone shows a certain resistance to innovations and implies a critique of “talkies” (that is, to the introduction of speech), censorship, star-mania, and formalistic style. At the same time, the article extols the “wonders” of technique and implies a challenge to it: technology must be used to achieve a more artistic result, rather than mechanically reproduce reality.

Figure 4. Rudolf Arnheim during his Italian years

Paradoxically, then as now, the disappearance of an established idea of cinema was the point at issue: silent and “artistic” film in the ’30s, celluloid film or theater-based film experience today. As is known, Arnheim maintained throughout his career that cinema was essentially a pictorial art; «he aligned himself with his German-language contemporaries, such as Hans Richter, Walter Ruttmann, and Béla Balázs, who theorized film as a «primarily visual image-based medium»23. Sound, color, and the stereoscopic screen added very little. Many aspects of the information that is available to our perceptual apparatus are not recorded by the camera. And these failures are precisely what make film possible as an art form. But the Italian writings illuminate that what is central about the notion of “failing” is not so much the result but the process through which that result is achieved. It is not an ontological issue, but rather, a pragmatic one. What really matters is the role played by human intentions in the process of reproduction24. As David Bordwell argues in his obituary of Arnheim, «This ... is Arnheim’s reply to Walter Benjamin’s theory of cinema as

mechanical reproduction. Film is not a medium signaling a break with the canonized arts, by virtue of its abandonment of “auratic value”. For Arnheim, filmmakers continue the mission of the traditional arts. Like painters, film directors use their medium to create meanings, emotions, and engaging perceptual effects. In other words, for Arnheim, it is not that film can be art because it fails to mechanically reproduce reality, but rather, that although the camera is a mechanical recording device, it can still be used for artistic purposes. Art is not incompatible with mechanical recording, as long as the purpose of the recording is not mechanical recording itself. Departing from mechanical recording does not mean rejecting technological innovations, which the Italian articles prove with dozens of examples, allowing us to see past some of the more notorious statements in Film als Kunst.

This significant contribution to the discussion of the technical aspects of cinema and photography, as well as interviews with readers and movie reviews, can be attributed with certainty to Arnheim up to summer 1938. After this date, this attribution has to be considered merely probable. At that time, in fact, the «sort of liberalism that differentiated […] the practices of Fascism from Nazi orthodoxy» turned into an anti-Semitic politics. The racial laws began to purge the Jews from intellectual circles, and Arnheim’s work, along with his idyllic Italian adventure, ground to a halt. Paradoxically enough, an article signed by Arnheim was published in the Fascist journal Il Ventuno in August 1938. At the end of that month, Bianco e Nero published a remarkable essay that gathered a very lively controversial debate, the “New Laocoon”.

In September, the regime decreed the expulsion of Jews within six months. After that, Arnheim’s signature literally disappeared from the Italian journals. The escalation of the racist climate relegated him into effective isolation, both personally and professionally. He had to flee for his family’s safety and find a new job abroad. My research brings to light his actual contribution and enables his role in the Italian cultural context to be evaluated more objectively.

**A passport to memory**

The Italian chapter of Rudolf Arnheim’s career has been partially suppressed and historically forgotten. As a bio-historiographical addendum, I would like to present two extraordinary documents that help to pinpoint how, after the adoption of the racial laws, he spent his last months in Italy, and when exactly he left

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29 Anti-Semitism arose after the visit of Adolf Hitler in Rome, 3-9 May 1938, just days after the invasion and annexation of Austria. On 25 July of that year, the “Manifesto della razza” was published in the Giornale d’Italia (later the first edition of “In difesa della razza”, Aug. 5). On 3 September, the Gazzetta del Popolo announced the first measures against the Jews by the racist regime. And on September 5th, the Royal decree was issued expelling Jews from schools, followed on 7 September by the expulsion of foreign Jews.
the country. If one places the last pages of his Italian diary and those of his passport side by side, an incredible story emerges: we gain an understanding not only of the impact of history on his private concerns and anxieties in those months but also a private and personal perspective on some momentous events in world history

He applied for a German passport at the Embassy of the Reich in Rome on September 24, 1938, on the eve of the Munich conference. Being conscious of having to leave the country soon, he decided to visit his beloved Rome one last time. «In days of terrible tension – he wrote in his diary – it’s nice to spend quiet moments out of time and its atrocities» (September 29, 1938). He shared the Romans’ fears for the fate of Europe, by reading the special editions of newspapers that were published every half hour and listening to the latest radio news broadcasts from street speakers. He hoped for peace, but in the meantime vacillated, debating the opportunity with some confidants of a precautionary trip to Switzerland – which he never made:

**Thursday, September 29, 1938.** Yesterday, world events have taken […] a turn that hopefully can help […] to maintain the peace. I consulted with Nathan and, as we learned from the newspapers that I’d bought on the street that Germany had decided to mobilize, we decided there and then to leave for Switzerland as a precaution. But as we moved around the city, the newspaper, of which new editions were coming out every half an hour, already carried the news of an important mission by Chamberlain to Mussolini. Shortly after, we heard that the heads of government of the

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31 The information in this paragraph derives from Arnheim’s personal diary of his Italian years (1934-1938) and his passport of that time, provided directly by his family.
four great powers would meet in Munich, to find a last-ditch solution to the conflict between Hitler and Czechoslovakia and try to avoid a world conflict. I will not easily forget those ten minutes in Via Frattina. It is a narrow street in the most beautiful Roman rust color, barely illuminated at night. At a first-floor window of a house hung a loudspeaker, which reported the latest news with a full, powerful voice that filled the narrow street. From the windows, men and women leaned toward the source of the sound, which echoed through the street. Above the crowd fluttered a bat; it was the only thing that moved, as if embodying the fearful soul of the rapt crowd. The voice told of the tense London meeting: how old Chamberlain, who was behind all the efforts for peace, announced with no little emotion, that his proposal had been accepted and that the clarifying negotiations in Munich would take place. When the radio report finished, the crowd slowly began to disperse, without anyone saying anything. Although great, the relief was slow to find voice. The people are too stunned and scared to rejoice spontaneously. Only slowly did tongues begin to loosen, as one person said to another, and each to whoever was standing next to them: Speriamo bene.

Arnheim experienced the first week of October 1938 with a sort of detachment from the unfolding of political events. He spent his days locked up at home with his wife and daughters, and to occupy his mind, he worked hard on his novel *Eine verkehrte Welt*32, “The world upside down” – a title of some significance. He described Leni Riefenstahl’s film on the Olympic Games in Berlin as the representation of a very controversial – spectacular and painful – event:

**Wednesday, October 19, 1938.** We watched the German film on the Olympic Games. A great spectacle of flying, vaulting men. Many of the noblest expressions of our species, which is worthy of comparison with the animals and, indeed, superior to them, because it is privileged to have a soul. But compared with the majesty of this event, and the imposing spectacle of all the symbols, the music and fire, the oath, the heads of state, and because this is the only chance for people to meet in such a festive atmosphere of brotherhood, what moves me like a painful contradiction is that this is an event where the soul is at the service of the body and not the other way round, as would be only right and natural. The brotherhood and strength of mind are only focused on the effectiveness of the physical performance! They were supposed to celebrate a great festival of peace, to express a genuine desire for brotherhood between nations – yet here, in fact, we have individuals competing dressed partly in military-like uniforms, who may have to fight on the front line tomorrow. In Greece, the gymnastic competitions were an expression of solidarity between different communities […] – Damn it, they brought the Olympic flame through the whole of Europe, but all that’s left is a smoldering cinder!

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On October 23, 1938, Arnheim went to the U.S. Consulate in Naples, probably supported by some friends, to apply to emigrate to the United States. The consul, however, did not give him much hope. Arnheim felt treated with some suspicion and abandoned the idea. Pensive and alone, he compared his condition to that of the Italians and realized that, for him, there was no place that he could truly call “home”:

_Sunday, October 23, 1938._ I’ve been to Naples to see the American consul about obtaining a special visa as a university professor. The prospects are minimal. We were treated not with hostility but with a rather defensive attitude. They do not trust us; they made it sound very problematic, as if we wanted something wrong, yet all we want is to work. The curse of Adam is reversed so grotesquely: we have been driven from the paradise of employment, and nobody wants either our hands or our brains. With a head full of thoughts, I went up to Vomero, envious of all those people squashed up next to me in the bus: all so unwittingly “at home”, as if it were the most natural thing in the world! We, unfortunately, are not given a place to be at peace.

Despite the chasm that was opening up around him, he never yielded to fatalism, preferring to believe in a «judicious fate», based on «power of personality, which always allows us to choose the best option among those available and protects against misfortune» (October 30, 1938). To obtain an entry visa for the United States, Arnheim moved on several fronts, asking for letters of endorsement of his work from foreign magazines that had published his articles, and trying to restore relations with his old masters in Berlin (who had moved overseas in the early Thirties). On November 14, 1938, he obtained an entry visa to the United Kingdom at the British Passport Control in Rome.

Meanwhile, the grip of racism tightened round him. On the last page of his journal, dated December 13, 1938, surely troubled by political events and worried for his family, he told of a nightmare in which he walked through inexplicably harmless tongues of fire – a symbol of an inverted world that some years earlier had welcomed him as the most promising film theorist and had now turned its back:

_Tuesday, December 13, 1938._ Last night I dreamed of wanting to sit in a workshop to work. However, because there was no table […] I placed my jacket on a chair, but then when I looked, it was gone, and I had to scramble to find it: I climbed a mountain slope; there were holes here and there from which rose the smoke of a volcano. Annette warned me to be careful, but I explained that it did not burn – it was cold fire, on which you could walk barefoot. Then Annette asked me why not come out of the flames, but I did not want to and I told her that even if I was not burning, in the future it could still hurt me. I firmly believed it, even though I could not say why.

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The nightmare was turning into reality, and this final diary entry sounds like a premonition: the climate in Italy was becoming darker, as political events turned for the worse. On January 3, 1939, he went to the German embassy in Rome to extend his passport. That day, a disturbing “J” was printed in red on the front page of the document, an indelible mark of his Jewish origins. In early 1939, still in Rome, Arnheim applied for assistance to the German Jewish Aid Committee. On 25 April, he obtained a visa for the United Kingdom, and on May 3, 1939, he requested a free transit-visa to the Consulate of France in Rome in order to embark for England. Within a few days, he left Italy.

Perhaps because of the tumult of those weeks, no biography or autobiography reports the exact date of Arnheim’s departure from Italy. The passport dissolves this doubt. Near the bottom of the last page, a small circular stamp shows his passage though the railway frontier at Bardonecchia, on Italy’s north-western frontier, on May 9, 1939. Ten days later, he embarked at Boulogne-sur-Mer and reached Folkestone on the Kent coast. His visa was confirmed on May 25, 1939 in London and extended until November 19 of that year.

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34 See the letter by Herbert Read, dated March 3, 1939 (Archives of American Art, Washington DC).
Arnheim would certainly have preferred to avoid that stopover in the United Kingdom, a belligerent country opposed to the Axis powers. Once in London, he worked as a translator for the BBC. With anguished concern, he wrote to his Italian friend Fedele D’Amico asking him to persuade his wife, who was still in Italy, to join him as soon as she could with the rest of the family. Unfortunately, the sudden death of his daughter Anna from an infant disease in Rome in September 1939 and the course of the war delayed the reunification for more than a year. In July 1940, the Battle of Britain began, and London was bombed by the Luftwaffe. Finally, on September 18, 1940, he obtained an immigration visa for the United States at the American General Consulate in London, reaching US soil at the end of that month. His third life awaited him on the other side of the Atlantic.

Legacy of a stranger

Behind the biographical interest of his passport, Arnheim’s perilous final months in Italy are emblematic of his “outsider’s” theoretical position as regards the Italian cultural context of the time. The idealist approach to the arts was philosophical; film had to contend with the mechanical means that, it was claimed, would influence, obstruct, or even prevent the artist’s creative activity, the latter being a pure act of the spirit.

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Arnheim’s training in experimental and Gestalt psychology made him a figure somewhat alien to the Italian theoretical background. Even a cursory review of the aesthetics of the cinema books published in Italy in the early decades of the 20th century shows a certain distance between *Film als Kunst* and the contributions of the main exponents of the Italian school (such as Sebastiano Arturo Luciani, Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, Luigi Chiarini, Francesco Pasinetti, and Anton Giulio Bragaglia). Although he was well integrated in Italy and worked closely with many of those scholars, his “outsider’s” cultural make-up and education were at the root of his “isolation” from idealism while, in a sense, helping him overcome this “conceptual autarchy”.

Thanks to his different theoretical perspective, Arnheim had a humanistic approach that, nevertheless, was not opposed to scientific thought. His profound knowledge of the perceptual implications of the technical innovations adopted in filmmaking allowed him to extend the borders of film aesthetics and to apply theoretical notions to the material side of the film experience. Arnheim was considered by his friends as a “Mitteleuropean guide”36 who helped new generations of critics and directors (especially those destined to become the protagonists of Neorealism)37 to enlarge their horizons and move beyond idealism.

Despite his geographical and cultural isolation, therefore, Arnheim was a decisive figure in the Italian cultural context of the Thirties. History ran its course, forcing him to make a new escape and leading him to abandon his passion for cinema as the main focus of his studies. However, his contribution can now be better evaluated and his merits clearly recognized.

APPENDIX

Bibliography of Rudolf Arnheim’s writings on film in the Italian journals (1932-1939)

This bibliography reconstructs Rudolf Arnheim’s contribution to Italian film journals and magazines from 1932 to 1938. Articles and essays are listed in chronological order. English reprints in the Thirties are also indicated. The list does not include the columns in Cinema between 1936 and summer 1938 that were signed with the pseudonyms Nostromo and Ciak. Unless otherwise indicated, extended signature is meant.


As the most complete and accurate one on the subject, this bibliography remains open to additions. A regularly updated version is published on www.RudolfArnheim.it, a website that collects studies and research contributions on the relationship between Arnheim, Italy and cinema. All the listed articles are reprinted in Arnheim, R., 2009. I baffi di Charlot. Scritti italiani sul cinema 1932-1938. Torino: Kaplan, ed. Adriano D’Aloia.

1932
Soggettista e direttore artistico. L’Italia letteraria, 15 May, p. 5.

1933
Contrappunto sonoro. La Stampa, 20 Jun., p. 5.

1935
Seeing Afar Off. Interine, 2, pp. 71-82.

1936
Rodolfo Arnheim, A proposito del cinema a colori. Cinema, 2, pp. 67-68.
rnh, Danza macabra. Cinema, 8, p. 312.
(rnh), La mano del regista. Cinema, 8, p. 312.

1937
Adriano D’Aloia

RODOLFO ARNHEIM

Rudolf Arnheim’s Italian Writings on Cinema (1932-1939)


Marie Onussen [Rudolf Arnheim and Marie Arnheim-Gay], Pronti in 45 minuti! *Cinema*, 19, p. 263.


RNH, Orizzonte perduto. *Cinema*, 34, p. 34.


1939


Il cifrario del successo. *Cinema*, 38, p. 44.


Il cinema documentario e i popoli. *Il Ventuno*, 3-4, pp. 36-38.


1938


Il cifrario del successo. *Cinema*, 38, p. 44.


"Comunicazioni Sociali" on-line 5 • 2011 | © Vita e Pensiero
On the 17th of June 2005, Peter Greenaway set about his first VJ performance. It was the beginning of a worldwide live cinema tour, but mostly, it was the beginning of what later would have become the *Lupercyclopedia*.

Based on the *Tulse Luper Suitcases*, the project consists of a living encyclopaedia conceived for the information era, characterized by the presence of particular figures, motifs, themes and a peculiar recurring symbology. This conveys the idea of an archive, which works as a database able to support and feed the contemporary “cinematic-scape”. In particular, the main hypothesis I will try to demonstrate is that this last work by Greenaway can be considered as the author’s own archive. Not by chance, *Lupercyclopedia* sounds obviously to be the encyclopaedia of Tulse Luper, who is Peter Greenaway’s alter ego.

We are thus presented a live reinterpretation of Tulse Luper’s story, which is rendered through the combination of 92 characters, 92 settings in place, 92 global events, 92 individual stories, 92 natural elements, 92 symbolic objects and a final sequence, which is the result of the montage of 92 explosions sequences.

* This is a draft paper of the talk given during the IX MAGIS – Gorizia International Film Studies Spring School (Gorizia, Italy – 10 April 2011). The full version of the text will be included in the Conference proceedings (publication expected in 2012).

1 *Tulse Luper Suitcases* is a multifaceted project by Peter Greenaway. It is composed of different parts, including a wide range of media platforms; among these products it is important to mention at least the three feature films devoted to the figure of Tulse Luper (*The Tulse Luper Suitcases, Part 1: The Moab Story, The Tulse Luper Suitcases, Part 2: Vaux to the Sea, The Tulse Luper Suitcases, Part 3: From Sark to the Finish*), a series of travelling exhibitions, a web site [http://www.tulselupernetwork.com/basis.html](http://www.tulselupernetwork.com/basis.html) [accessed 26 June 2011]); moreover, there are a blog [http://blog.tulseluperjourney.com/](http://blog.tulseluperjourney.com/) [accessed 26 June 2011] and an online game [http://www.tulseluperjourney.com/game/](http://www.tulseluperjourney.com/game/) [accessed 26 June 2011], both entitled *Tulse Luper Journey*. This is a meaningful choice by the author, both for the nature of the archive which represents the object of this study, both on a theoretical level, since Greenaway’s use of different media is to be considered and related to the post-medium condition of cinema. As regards, the *équipe* producing the online game has been pointing out that «Greenaway’s statement that ‘cinema is dead’ calls for new ways of communicating ideas. This game is part of the search for a crossover format that breaks the boundaries and rules that have been imposed by film, theatre, books, games and other traditional media» [http://www.tulseluperjourney.com/about.jsp](http://www.tulseluperjourney.com/about.jsp) [accessed 26 June 2011]. As far as the post-medium condition of cinema is concerned, please refer to the last essays by Francesco Casetti, and mainly to Casetti, F., 2011. *Back to the Motherland: the film theatre in the postmedia age*. *Screen*, 52 (1), pp. 1-12; an interpretation and application of the same debated concepts is to be found in De Rosa, M., 2010. *David Rockwell’s Hall of Fragments. Looking for Film’s Genius as a Medium through Audiovisual Geographies*. *Comunicazioni Sociali online*, 3, pp. 40-49. Available at [http://www.comunicazioneisocialionline.it/2010/3/6/loadPDF/](http://www.comunicazioneisocialionline.it/2010/3/6/loadPDF/) [accessed 26 June 2011]. The moving images provided to release the video-performance, which is the subject of this essay are basically taken from these products, as from the whole director’s filmography.
The outcome is a complex multimedia-based project. To make it clearer and easier to contextualize, it could be useful to shortly summarize the narrative linked to this character:

In the last century an extraordinary man called Tulse Luper archived his entire life in 92 suitcases. Although his life is still a mystery, we know that he was present at some key-historical events, spending his life as professional prisoner, he managed to collect a large amount of objects and stored them in suitcases. In a way, the suitcases represent the world according to Tulse Luper.

This is how the opening sequence of an online videogame trailer sketches the figure of Tulse Luper. Besides, according to the contemporary hybridization trends and the current intermedia practices, I think the introduction to this game can be useful to outline the fictional background of the whole project connected to Greenaway’s favourite character, and to emphasize its multifaceted feature. In fact, the game trailer uses the on-line Tulse Luper archive (which is basically a web site), adopts filmic images, and includes cinematographic shots which were not selected to be edited and inserted in the director’s films. But the most important quality to highlight is that it shares the same logic of video performances, since all the media products and the artworks gravitating around our mysterious protagonist nourish the imagery linked to him, and feed one another.

A meaningful element shared by both the online game and the video-performances is the suitcase (i.e. the 92 suitcases abandoned all around the world containing the evidences of the fabulous life of Tulse Luper), which plays a deep symbolic role. If the online videogame is constructed following a kind of “research scheme”, where finding the 92 suitcases is the main challenge, in the VJ performance we already have them on the screens all around. They are definitely the main recurrent element and one of the typical devices of Greenaway’s narrative, because they regularly appear throughout his whole production, becoming one of his objectual marks. Lupercyclopedia does not lie outside this rule – even better, on the one hand it synthesizes the director’s poetics, while on the other hand it thematizes the issue of the archive in an expanded sense.

In order to deal with these points, I will explore two different analytical levels: firstly the one concerning the shape acquired by the archive, that is to say the form it takes and the processes leading to this configuration (I call it the mise en forme level); secondly, that of the real organization and staging, linked to the true and physical performance space, its disposition and its appearance (I identify it as the mise en scène level). We will see how this elaboration works, which particular mechanisms it involves and how the events are

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2 Tulse Luper Journey: the game trailer voice over can be listened to at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZqpsnVTJTw&feature=related [Accessed 2 May 2011].


4 As already mentioned, see http://www.tulselupernetwork.com/basis.html [Accessed 26 June 2011].
able to build a real collection. In fact, as far as this second passage is concerned, *Lupercyclopedia* eventually offers a hybrid form of expression, which expands the cinema precinct and contributes to shape a new dramaturgy of cinematic experience.

The second hypothesis, then, is that the widening of cinematic experience\(^5\) goes hand in hand with a possible broadening of the concept of archive, which has thus to be considered in the same widening way. In this sense, the archive will be intended here at least\(^6\) in a double perspective: source and encyclopaedia.

**Lupercyclopedia *mise en forme***

As anticipated, *Lupercyclopedia* is the most recent result of an expressive research that began some years ago. Since 2005/2006, Peter Greenaway presented a series of VJ performances, which progressively and systematically became centred on Tulse Luper’s story, though they offered a diverse range of elaboration as formal solution. Shows as *Tulse Luper VJ performance* (Guanajuato, 2006, and other different venues, till 2009), *A Life in Suitcases. The History of Tulse Luper* (Moscow 2008, Mantua 2009, among others), or *Tulse Luper Suitcases Project* (Krakov, 2007) took place around Europe, mainly during festivals, happenings or *ad hoc* projections, where they animated city squares or clubs as principal and spectacular attraction. In each end every one of these shows, Greenaway used the same conceptual and composing procedure, which is shared with *Lupercyclopedia* too. The only difference among these first productions and the one on which the following analysis will focus, pertains the organization of the performance space, that is to say what I depicted as *mise en scène*.

On the contrary, it is possible to trace continuity as far as the representational perspective is concerned, because on a content level both the fictional element, the symbolic references and the conceptual process, which guides the assemblage and the compilation of the archive, are to be found in all of these artworks. The director employs in a very severe and precise way his own cinematic and visual repertoire, showing a certain ease and expertise in using the sources. This implies an accustomed archival practice as essential composition tool. Such a feature represents a recurring characteristic in Greenaway’s career, which is self-evident in many productions: films as *Les Morts de la Seine* (1989), *The Falls* (1980) or *Vertical Feature Remake* (1978), but also *The Draughtsman’s Contract* (1982) are emblematic examples. Here we can recognize a categorization and cataloguing tension – an action that from time to time has been rising as central issue of the narrative of the movies itself. It is an action expressed through a deep taxonomy attitude and an attempt to handle the visible in a controlled, structured way. The same *motif* is to be found in the author’s curatorial activity (a couple of exhibition are particularly noteworthy: *100 Objects to Represent the World* held in 1992 at the Hofburg Imperial Palace and at the Academy of Fine Arts of Vienna, and *Some Organizing*.


\(^6\) Many other accepted meanings of the concept of archive are theoretically possible: organizing principles as those typical for thesauruses, atlases, and dictionaries – just to mention some of them – are variants of a similar categorization system, expressing the same collecting and cataloguing tension.
Principles, held the following year at Glynn Vivian Art Gallery in Swansea) or in other artistic fields, such as painting and audiovisual projects for TV programmes (i.e. A TV Dante, 1989). It becomes quite clear, then, that Greenaway is guided by a documentary desire, which drives him to collect, stock, preserve, organize, assemble figures, objects, symbols, formal solutions, etc. In other words, his aesthetic is hinged on what Hal Foster defined in an acclaimed essay as ‘archival impulses’7: what can be thus identified is the attempt to close cinematic fragments of the world in a controllable domain, to make them traces of reality, documents to be filed. And in this sense, the director’s action perfectly fits with the description Foster gives of a kind of “archival art”:

the work in question is archival since it not only draws on informal archives but produces them as well, and does so in a way that underscores the nature of all archival materials as found yet constructed, factual yet fictive, public yet private. Further, it often arranges these materials according to a quasi-archival logic, a matrix of citation and juxtaposition, and presents them in a quasi-archival architecture, a complex of text and objects8.

Here, in the explicit connection to the issue of the archive, lies a deep philosophical question. Because the recording temptation represents a mere illusion – it is nothing but a pure anthropological, epistemic problem, concerning the effective possibility to exercise a global prehension on the whole human knowledge, which is precisely gathered in the encyclopedia just to be managed and curbed.

It is possible to recognize the same essential urge in Greenaway’s work, tracing back his attitude to this complex dynamic. The director seems to be aware of this adherence: he is conscious of the typical features of his style, attempting to answer to a sort of collecting necessity, and thus tries to exploit it. In particular, the solution conceived by the design of the VJ performance to make advantage of such a deep human need, is based on the reference to the semiotic category of encyclopedia.

As Umberto Eco stated, the encyclopedia is to be intended as a «library of libraries – assuming that a /library/ – it is an archive as well, collecting all the nonverbal but somehow recorded information»9. In other words, it is a kind of texts network, able to create and establish the interpretation, which is functionally and automatically activated whenever the subject has to deal with something requiring a specific cultural and meaning resource. Finally, Eco characterizes the encyclopedia as opposed to the dictionary, since in his perspective the latter represents a closed totality of linguistic knowledge, concurring to create meaning, while the former is to be envisioned as general whole, gathering any knowledge regarding the world. For this reason the encyclopedia has a factual, potentially open and illimitate nature – a fact that

8 Foster, 2004, p. 5.
permits to give a shape and depict a dictionary, but makes it difficult to fully represent the concept of encyclopedia.

Following Eco’s suggestion, Lupercyclopedia not only represents a certain typology of archive as the atlas or the thesaurus could be, but also stands for the director’s background knowledge. It is something different from the massive vastness of the archive tout court, for it is referred to a singularity, as it belongs to an individual (who is Peter Greenaway, a.k.a. Tulse Luper). Thanks to this expedient, Lupercyclopedia assumes the form of a subduable encyclopaedia, featuring the presence and the action of a shaping and defining power.

It is interesting to observe how the very concept of archive etymologically includes the idea of a kind of power. It is Jacques Derrida that eventually evokes it, linking it to the category of “consignation” and analyzing the two accepted meanings of this last term: in the ordinary sense of the word, [consignating refers to] the act of assigning residence or of entrusting so as to put into reserve, to deposit in a place and on a substrate\(^\text{10}\), while on a different meaning level it express «the act of consigning through gathering together signs. [In this sense,] consignation aims to coordinate a single corpus, in a system […] in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration\(^\text{11}\).

Through exhibited archive aesthetics, Greenaway expresses his power, which corresponds precisely to this sort of disposition attitude. What is most interesting in Derrida’s formulation is the further definition of this power, identified by the philosopher as “archontic power”, able to «gather the functions of unification, of identification, of classification»\(^\text{12}\). The result of such an attitude is the configuration of a mise en forme, responding to Greenaway’s idea of the cinematic experience, and thus substantiating itself as living archive of moving images. In this sense, we witness a personalistic structuring of the encyclopaedia, created live for the public by the demiurgic power of the director. The role played by Greenaway, in fact, is clearly strategic: he shows himself as auctor – the person invested of an exclusive hermeneutical auctoritas (Fig. 1). He is the one who guards the moving images but also re-employs them to his desire. On the one hand, this expresses the ratification of a strong, emphasized authorial role, while on the other hand both a controlling and a manipulating function are made explicit. Greenaway’s presence does not simply evoke a guardian figure, because the encyclopaedia is not merely guarded: he is the archive animator. Better – he stands for an author demiurge, who works on the moving images in order to compose a new filmic artwork. The performance presents thus a strong biographical/authorial relation between the cinematic archive vivified for the public and the director, which is its main subject and actor. In a new present – the setting of the show – figures and symbols coming directly from the cinematic past of Peter Greenaway are rendered, re-proposed, re-located and reframed in a new mise en forme. In this way, the mechanism triggered by Lupercyclopedia somehow retrieves one of the most common metaphors referred to the idea of


\(^{11}\) Derrida, 1996, p. 3.

\(^{12}\) Derrida, 1996, p. 3.
archive by the dedicated literature, that is to say the theme of archaeology. In fact, the performance appears as a work based on a kind of archaeological action of the director, who assumes this very attitude to rework his own filmic and visual DB. Lev Manovich also expressed the conviction that I just anticipated briefly, pointing out that particular filmic productions, such as the one by Greenaway himself are to be considered as a cinematic «intersection between database and narrative»\(^\text{13}\). It is not a chance, then, if *Lupercyclopedia*, «progress[es] forward by recounting a list of items, a catalogue which does not have any inherent order»\(^\text{14}\), but it is ruled by different systems of order. There are numbers, a series of suitcases are presented, each one disclosing a peculiar element or event, recurrent *motifs* and many others typical instances that are offered to the spectator. In this way, during the VJ-ing, this ensemble works as a catalogue showing samples that belong to an exquisitely Greenawayan visual narrative. I think the most evident result of this intertwining logic is precisely what has been called das System Greenaway\(^\text{15}\), meaning an exclusive, subjective authorial whole.

\[\text{Figure 1. Peter Greenaway performing his VJ-pièce *Lupercyclopedia* at Sani, Greece, summer 2010 [© Photo anti|ima]}\]

This permits to those of the public who do not know the director’s poetics, to approach his work embracing a historical perspective; in other terms, it gives the opportunity to re-present and go through his organized, accurate, archival universe in order to try to reconstruct a system, starting from traces and clues. But here the traces and clues are not something that belongs to the past, as usually happens: they are not residual presences, collected and gathered with preservation aims, but are rather vivid materials. Images, figures, numbers and *motifs* are visualized and circulate on the screens, reflowing again and again; in this way they are constantly enlivened and become part of a living archive. They are pieces of a puzzle, which is continuously changed and remodeled in its formal shape – as in a mosaic, whose tiles are interchangeable. A paradoxical and prolonged montage takes place, where the effort of the editor is not to


\(^{14}\) Manovich, 2001, p. 238.

accomplish a narrative organization of the units, but actually to limit their reflux, avoiding them to colonize the present.

The action of the director becomes the very central practice in order to handle the rough material excess and its almost free and fluid flowing. The encyclopaedia is thus the product of a particular *ars combinatoria*, which makes it able to update and renew itself every time it is put on screen for the performance. From a technical point of view, it consists in a digital editing released thanks to a sophisticated “connection-selection-combination system”. Greenaway uses a big touch-screen as technological device, on which film excerpts and frames are stocked waiting to be resurrected by the director’s gesture, who composes the visual sequences following the music (Fig. 2). These immediate configurations are directly projected on the surrounding screens, giving birth every time to a new visual pattern.

As in montage, the selection excludes from time to time some elements, showing once again the inborn, unavoidable impossibility of covering the completeness of the encyclopaedia, even a personal one.

![Figure 2. Lupercyclopedia close-up of the touch-screen](© Photos ant[|ima](x)

**Lupercyclopedia mise en scène**

Hence, *Lupercyclopedia* attests and confirms the openness of this particular archival form. It is a strong conceptual cornerstone of the whole project, able to influence not only the *mise en forme* but also the *mise en scène*. In fact, the central formal feature that distinguishes *Lupercyclopedia* from the other video performances is the structure of the arrangement; the previous shows basically proposed a frontal articulation, where the screens were located just opposite the public. At least they could adhere the room walls, whenever the performance took place indoor. *Lupercyclopedia* presents instead a more refined space design, for the staging is projected according to a specific organizing principle, in order to reverberate on a spatial level the theoretical approach to archive standing behind it. The shape of the screens, which are disposed along a semicircular line, formally renders its irreparable openness. The result is a full respondence be-
 tween the very idea of encyclopaedia and what seems to be a hemicycle. The archive architecture disposes the space shifting the idea of “consignating” evoked by Derrida on a material and strictly physical range. In fact, this concept depicts an attitude which involves the spatial dimension: explaining that the meaning of the word “archive” derives from the Greek *arkheion*, referencing once again to the archons and in particular to their house16, the attention is drawn to this domiciliation, precisely because it was in this very space that the archive was constituted. Consequently, it was precisely in the place where the documents of these superior magistrates were filed that the archive existed as such.

This tight link between archive and its environmental aspect leads Derrida to state that there is a «dimension of domiciliation […] without which no archive would ever come into play»17. And it is precisely what *Lupercyclopedia* shows: the hemicycle form stands for this place of domiciliation, representing the result of a spatialization mechanism, which transforms the *mise en forme* in *mise en scène*. The screens hemicycle is thus released as specific site of a precise individual encyclopaedic and archival practice (Fig. 3).

But to emphasize the accordance between the “semi-sphere” shape and the visual cinematic rendering of Greenaway’s “bio-sphere”, means to reaffirm that even in a spatialization perspective the encyclopaedia is a catalogue impossible to compile: the hemicycle is meaningfully an incomplete circle, an *alpha* without *omega* and vice versa. The author exorcises the spectre of the archive completeness recurring to a formal choice that is ironic about this same idea. In fact, the moving images end up being disposed without fulfilling his taxonomic mania and his organizing tension. He tries anyway to express the powerfulness of his own effort, taking up the role of archive creator, as I already observed. Once again, this fundamental function is supported on a formal, tangible level, which pertains the stage design. As Greenaway is the source of the archive, his position in the performance space is not by chance the central one. From here he can celebrate his ceremonial resurrection of his own archive without the risk of not being noticed. He presents himself as the nucleus from which the materials composing the encyclopaedic archive stem, the

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16 According to Derrida, «It is thus in this domiciliation, in this house arrest, that archives take place». Derrida, 1996, p. 2.
17 Derrida, 1996, p. 3.
point from which the whole cinematic experience can be developed. This location permits to his archontic power to manage the entire visual scene, recalling in a certain way a panoptic arrangement, which expresses very explicitly the tension to control the world and dominate everything that can possibly be known\textsuperscript{18}. \textit{Lupercyclopedia} becomes thus Greenaway’s “world” as Jean-Luc Nancy would define this term: «an assemblage or something being-together dealing with a form of art – a \textit{técne} – whose sense and exercise are precisely the same things\textsuperscript{19}.

Moreover, the presentation of himself as \textit{deux ex machina} is not the only element that makes Greenaway the hub of the performance: he is also the main actor of the show. His pervasive presence characterizes the real performance context, since he is evidently taking part to it in the flesh, but at the same time he discloses his presence on a representational level: assuming the identity of Tulse Luper, he appears on screen too, as fictional character, who personifies his own alter ego. For these reasons the moving images could be considered Greenaway’s own emanation.

**Conclusions: the Living Archive**

As I just tried to prove, the \textit{mise en scène} coincides with the spatialization of the encyclopaedia, since during the performance the archive is unfolded throughout space, substantiating itself in the set design arranged for the show\textsuperscript{20}. The archive merges with the space becoming a \textit{dispositif} – intended as something that disposes itself in the environment\textsuperscript{21}. This inscription of the moving image in the context underlines in an even more marked way that the Greenawayan archive is configured as an open world: although it is systematically organized according to particular symbologies and recurrent figures, it consists of something which acquires its shape and meaning in the very moment of the live performance. Then, we do not deal with “objectual fantasmatic traces”\textsuperscript{22}, but with vivid materials, which are made organic again exactly by the plastic action of the author on them. In this sense, \textit{Lupercyclopedia} is not simply an archive aiming to systematize past, it doesn’t represent only an attempt to dominate the filed materials, but seems to be a place where the collected elements overflow outwards. The millions of images and traces belonging to Greenaway’s world are both residual and potentially innovative, because they can be transformed and thus can concur in producing a new artwork. In particular, they could organize a new \textit{mise en forme} through a performance that always arranges a renovated \textit{mise en scène} of them. The moving

\textsuperscript{18}This is not the place to deal with a possible analysis of the performance design as a sort of Panopticon, even though the spatial feature of the \textit{dispositif}, the position and role of the author and the sense of control suggest a possible link to a series of interesting considerations about an interpretation of \textit{Lupercyclopedia} based on the categories and frames, which are typical of the classical surveillance model.


\textsuperscript{20}Even Lev Manovich emphasizes the importance of the spatial level in his analysis of Greenaway work as DB: «No longer having to conform to the linear medium of film, the elements of a database are spatialized […] This move can be read as the desire to create a database at its most pure form: the set of elements not ordered in any way. […] the only way to create a pure database is to spatialize it, distributing the elements in space». Manovich, 2001, p. 238.

\textsuperscript{21}The suggestion of \textit{dispositif} as something able to dispose elements in space is to be found in Agamben, G., 2006. \textit{Che cos’è un dispositivo?} Roma: Nottetempo.

image of *Lupercyclopedia*, is part of a cinema that «archives and reintroduces it as it was a new one, relaunching thus the revival possibility of the image itself».

Assuming this, the process triggered by Greenaway in his VJ performance appears as an operation which works on the persistence, the insistence, the prolongation of the value and the validity of the collected elements. In other words, he reactivates his own encyclopaedia, extending what Aby Warburg would have defined its *Nachleben*. This pertains the body of the moving image, which becomes a plastic substance to be mixed, rearranged, reorganized again. The director’s editing creates thus a kind of neo-baroque pastiche, starting from the exceeding and overflowing visual material created for different past productions. His constant post-production nourishes a personal remodelling and re-editing aesthetics, that reveals a kind of *museification* sense, ironically perpetrated through the liveliness of the performance.

The performance becomes thus the place of Tulse Luper’s huge presence, it constitutes itself as a domiciliation for those moving images able to symbolize him and tell his story, standing for the visualization of Greenaway’s encyclopaedia in space. As such, we do not have to do with a closed deposit, but and open, mobile, performed and living archive, which tends to exhibit its materials and to let them overflow in order to make itself fresher and prolific again.

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Arianna Frattali

ENTRE THÉÂTRE ET SALONS

Les dispositifs scéniques à Milan au XVIIIᵉ siècle

Notre intervention portera sur quelques points concernant une recherche beaucoup plus vaste, à propos de la culture de la mise en scène à Milan au cours du XVIIIᵉ siècle: une période par rapport à laquelle on essaiera de mettre en évidence les discontinuités et les permanences de ce phénomène par rapport au siècle précédent. Depuis les résultats (partiels) de cette enquête, on peut déjà remarquer la complexité et la multiformité du théâtre milanais au XVIIIᵉ siècle: d’un côté on tient beaucoup en considération la tradition, de l’autre on s’oriente déjà vers les ferments des Lumières, entre l’influence du pouvoir des Habsbourg et la fascination-répulsion envers la culture française.

Au XVIIIᵉ siècle, l’absolutisme de la Lombardie dominée par les Habsbourg limite la possibilité d’action de l’aristocratie, qui restait liée aux offices de l’administration par des charges que seuls les Secrétaires plénipotentiaires et les Gouverneurs régionaux pouvaient distribuer. La possibilité d’intervention de la classe dirigeante était par conséquent limitée. Avec ces prémisses, nous traiterons des salons et du théâtre qui sont des lieux liés selon le principe des vases communicants et qui marquent la culture de la mise en scène du XVIIIᵉ siècle en Italie.

Même si le gouvernement espagnol, au cours du siècle précédent, avait mené à Milan une politique culturelle fermement anti-française, en contrecarrant la liberté des mœurs issues de France, Paris devint, au cours du XVIIIᵉ siècle, le point de repère incontournable de la mode en Lombardie, notamment dans les domaines de l’art, de la vie en société, de l’aménagement des logements résidentiels. Les modèles de vie s’éloignaient de la tradition, du moins dans les consciences les plus réceptives, et le même changement concernait l’architecture; la diffusion d’un art de vivre voué au bonheur imposait, dans le domaine de l’urbanisme, la recherche des confort et du luxe.


Dès le début du XVIIIᵉ siècle, cette nouvelle orientation ne provoqua pas à Milan de modifications importantes du tissu urbain, mais surtout le renouvellement dans l’aspect et l’aménagement des maisons à leur intérieur. Certains immeubles furent totalement rénovés, et on commença à se concentrer sur la disposition des pièces en suivant les indications des architectes parisiens les plus importants. En particulier le salon retrouva son importance dans l’architecture de la maison, en tant que lieu de réception pour les réunions mondaines, afin de manifester la puissance de la famille aux invités qui entraient dans l’hôtel ou dans l’immeuble. C’est en effet surtout dans les hôtels des faubourgs que l’on peut reconnaître les signes d’une civilisation plus libre; en peu d’années, des dizaines d’immeubles semblables furent bâtis dans les banlieues des grandes villes, avec la forme typique en U, ouverte côté rue, fonctionnelle à une disposition des pièces pour la réception des gens.

Figure 1. Villa Arconati, Castellazzo di Bollate, Milan

L’art de bien vivre devint donc un idéal de vie très répandu: la morale laïque l’emporta, et l’on commença à identifier le bonheur avec les situations matérielles de bien-être; les hôtels particuliers et les “villas de délicespures” manifestaient, tout au long du XVIIIᵉ siècle, l’insertion du bonheur et du bien-être matériel dans la morale de vie de l’aristocratie, en s’élargissant par la suite aussi à la bourgeoisie. Les pièces destinées aux réunions mondaines et à la réception proliféraient, en transformant l’espace domestique en un lieu du rituel social qui pouvait se manifester en dehors de la cour – ce qui s’était déjà passé en France.

Dans cette conjoncture, le salon pouvait devenir, d’un côté, le lieu d’auto-représentation et, de plus en plus souvent, le lieu destiné aux mises en scène; de l’autre, la scène devenait l’appendice du salon, parfois meublé et décoré selon le goût de la famille qui pouvait le louer en saison. Les familles mondaines de

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Milan s’amusait alors dans les salons et au théâtre, mais les rencontres n’étaient pas complètement vaines ou frivoles, parce que les hôtels et les villas de l’aristocratie étaient ouverts aux concitoyens, aux Italiens provenant d’autres régions, aux étrangers; Carlo Antonio Vianello a remarqué que «des réceptions étaient luxueuses aussi bien que les discussions étaient animées»5.

À partir de là, le salon, considéré du point de vue de l’espace physique et idéal, devint, au cours du XVIIIe siècle, un lieu d’une grande importance du point de vue de l’histoire de la culture et des conventions sociales; il se muta en effet en un espace véritablement institutionnel, du lieu destiné à la vie sociale et aux conversations se transformant en un espace d’échange d’idées et de valeurs, où l’histoire politique, les lettres et la culture étaient fortement liées. Si à cela on ajoute la tradition des mises en scène dans les maisons des particuliers, et la pratique des réunions académiques dans les salons de la noblesse, on peut conclure que le salon appartient – à juste titre – au panorama, très complexe et varié, de la culture de la Lombardie du XVIIIe siècle, annonçant donc la grande fortune dont il jouira dans le siècle suivant, le XIXe siècle lombard-vénitien.

Parmi les genres littéraires qui sont diffusés au cours des conversations dans les salons, les pièces de théâtre imprimées étaient les moins appropriées à la lecture personnelle, mais plus convenables à une lecture orale et collective, à l’intérieur des réunions académiques et des salons. Il suffit de penser à un cas célèbre, concernant au juste la ville de Milan: Goldoni dédia *La Péruvienne* à la comtesse Antonia Somaglia, et l’hôtel du comte Antonio Barbian di Belgioioso est indiqué comme le lieu destiné aux répétitions des comédies de Goldoni6. Par conséquent, la scène et le salon, très liés l’un à l’autre, sont les premiers contextes d’accueil du “théâtre en forme de livre”7, c’est-à-dire de l’édition théâtrale qui était, à l’époque, florissante.

Au XVIIIe siècle, le destinataire principal des lectures théâtrales était la femme, qui transforma l’espace domestique et privé de son salon en un règne où elle accueillait des hommes de lettres, des artistes, des académiciens, des savants, et où elle pouvait entretenir des relations à travers des moyens de communication privés – surtout, des lettres et des mémoires – relations conformes aux nouvelles habitudes de la vie sociale. Le salon8: il s’agissait donc d’un cercle d’intellectuels issus de l’aristocratie, qui favorisa la diffusion de nouvelles idées philosophiques, littéraires, artistiques et scientifiques; plus tard, les salons de la bourgeoisie accueillirent les débats politiques et l’échange culturel9.

Par le moyen du modèle français de salon et de la coprésence des deux sexes pour animer le débat, en Italie la femme de lettres, isolée dans les milieux féminins par excellence (comme le couvent, le foyer, ou la cour de la Renaissance), allait bientôt disparaître. Cependant, la fréquentation des deux sexes restait un

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privilège des femmes mariées, à l’exclusion donc des célibataires et des filles les plus jeunes, qui étaient censées rester “pures”, par conséquent renfermées au couvent. Ce trait marquait une situation différente en Italie (ou en France) par rapport à l’Angleterre à la fin du XVIIIe siècle; par contre, dans l’Italie du XIXe siècle, ce seront justement les jeunes filles à être introduites dans la bonne société.

À partir de premières années du XVIIIe siècle, les femmes deviennent les nouvelles protagonistes de la vie culturelle, d’abord dans le royaume lombard-vénitien, après en Italie en général. Elles étaient souvent liées à l’Académie de l’Arcadie, ou à d’autres Académies, et leur rayonnement culturel se fait par l’intermédiaire des salons, suivant une tendance bien connue en France depuis le siècle précédent. En ce qui concerne Milan, nous signalons la comtesse Vittoria Ottoboni Serbelloni, Margherita Litta Calderara, Clelia Borromeo del Grillo10, qui animaient des salons littéraires très fréquentés par les intellectuels les plus importants et des gens de lettres de la période, comme Goldoni, Giuseppe Parini et les frères Pietro et Alessandro Verri. Ce sont des personnages dont les noms reviennent souvent en ce qui concerne la carrière du dramaturge vénitien autour des années Cinquante, parce que certaines de ces dames lui donnèrent la possibilité de séjourner dans leurs propriétés pour les vacances, en promouvant ainsi son activité dramatique. Ce n’est pas par hasard que la comédie-manifeste de sa réforme (théâtrale), Il teatrocomico(Le Théâtre comique, mise en scène à Venise en automne 1750), a été dédiée — dans sa version imprimée — à la marquise Calderara Litta. Sans oublier que Goldoni dédia L’épouse persane à la duchesse Maria Vittoria Serbelloni, qui avait traduit Destouches en italien avec la collaboration de Pietro Verri.

D’un point de vue historique et politique, l’empire des Habsbourg, grâce à l’action de Marie-Thérèse en particulier, favorisa le développement du génie féminin, en le promouvant en accord avec le projet pédagogique des Jésuites. Inspirés par la ratio studiorum, ceux-ci considéraient la pratique de l’art (du théâtre et de la musique en particulier) comme un moyen pour affiner les compétences de communication de l’individu, dans le monde comme au sein de la famille.

Dans les collèges des Jésuites, les héritiers de la classe dirigeante se servaient de la pratique théâtrale en tant que véritable terrain d’essai de leur habilité oratoire, afin de se préparer à la vie publique. En famille, les jeunes filles mettaient à l’épreuve leur compétence musicale et d’expression: elles étaient instruites par des abbés qui les préparaient à la gestion future du foyer et des salons culturels. Il faut se rappeler les efforts de Marie-Thérèse afin de mettre en service un réseau d’enseignement beaucoup plus ramifié, aussi pour les personnes défavorisées; l’impératrice, qui avait eu Pierre Métastase en tant que précepteur, considérait la culture et les connaissances comme le meilleur moyen pour réveiller les vertus des jeunes et faciliter ainsi leur insertion dans le monde.

Par conséquent, la politique scolaire de Marie-Thérèse, la diffusion du livre imprimé, la naissance des salles publiques pour le théâtre (payant), l’influence du salon à la française encouragèrent le développement cultu-

rel et intellectuel de la femme, en tant qu’animatrice des salons pour la conversation. Certaines d’entre elles tentèrent aussi les voies de l’écriture théâtrale, surtout le théâtre en musique. À Milan, parmi les femmes – dramaturges et compositrices – qui se font remarquer il y a Francesca Manzoni et Maria Teresa Agnesi, qui se servirent de l’Académie et de leur salon comme d’un lieu d’apprentissage intellectuel et mondain, avant de s’engager dans l’écriture pour la scène.

Le salon, comme le théâtre, était le lieu où s’assemblaient des personnes plus hétéroclites que dans le passé, et la “femme savante” devint l’un des protagonistes de ce nouvel ordre social. À l’intérieur de son salon, elle réunissait en effet des artistes, des intellectuels, des fonctionnaires et des voyageurs venus de l’étranger, en alimentant une conversation qui allait bien au-delà des potins et des propos galants. Ce faisant, les nouveaux courants d’idées sortaient des académies et le théâtre devint un lieu de rencontre et un objet de discussion, un événement de la vie mondaine et un moment d’échange culturel. Dans les salons on discutait de politique, de science, d’économie, mais on commentait aussi les spectacles, parfois on lisait ou l’on mettait en scène des pièces en avant-première.

Au moyen d’une enquête qui nous a permis de recenser ce phénomène dans le seul royaume lombard-vénitien, nous avons repéré une vingtaine de femmes “savantes” qui incarnent la conjonction (médiation) entre les salles des théâtres et la culture des académies, vu qu’elles recevaient dans leurs salons les intellectuels, les artistes, les dramaturges et que, parfois, elles proposaient des véritables mises en scène pour

un public réduit. Certaines entre ces femmes se lancèrent même dans le métier de l’acteur, tandis que d’autres femmes encore furent tentées par l’écriture dramatique. En reconstituant leurs biographies et en analysant leurs ouvrages, nous avons pu établir une relation étroite entre la pratique de la conversation des salons littéraires et l’écriture pour la scène, au moyen du fil rouge du couple dialectique public-privé.

Considérant la complexité des phénomènes historiques et culturels, le XVIIIe siècle lombard est un siècle ambigu, se balançant mal entre irrégularité et continuité. Du point de vue de l’organisation du spectacle, le théâtre devient de plus en plus une affaire de professionnels, tandis que l’Opéra en musique triomphe. En même temps, on joue des pièces dans les salons des villas et dans les palais de l’aristocratie. Du point de vue de la dramaturgie, c’est le siècle de grandes querelles: on discute de la tragédie, qui fait défaut en Italie; on parle de la réforme de la comédie aussi bien que du rapport entre parole et musique dans le mélo-drame. Le lieu où toutes ces discussions convergent est le salon, un espace physique et idéal pour la conversation: la “femme savante” en est le centre.

Le XVIIIe siècle marque aussi le succès de la femme sur scène. Même si elle avait déjà une place dans le genre “extravagant” de la Commedia dell’Arte, l’interprète féminine devient maintenant protagoniste de la scène à travers la danse, le chant et le jeu. Désormais, il s’agit d’une actrice professionnelle, ou bien, lorsque la femme se place du côté des spectateurs, elle est une habituée de ce rite collectif, destiné à un public payant. Si le théâtre à l’italienne a été justement défini, par Georges Banu, “le théâtre du spectateur”12, la femme, au XVIIIe siècle, en est l’élément principal.

Figure 3. Grand Théâtre de Milan, Marc’Antonio dal Re, Civic Collection d’estampes Achille Bertarelli, Milan

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Au cours du siècle, les deux lieux qui ont été l’objet de notre enquête, le salon et le théâtre, deviennent deux lieux féminins par excellence. C’est là que la femme arrive à se distinguer, en gagnant finalement en Italie son rôle dans la société (tout comme elle avait fait au cours du siècle précédent en France), et en bouleversant en partie l’image même de l’ordre social. Si la salle de théâtre à l’italienne devient le lieu où la communauté d’une ville se reconnaissait (les loges et la structure même de la salle visualisant la hiérarchie de la société), le salon devint le lieu où se reconnaissait l’ensemble des intellectuels, qui n’étaient pas toujours liés aux hiérarchies du siècle précédent.

Le salon et le théâtre devinrent deux lieux de la démocratie et de la culture: en négligeant progressivement la structure sociale de l’Ancien Régime, la société, en Italie comme en France, allait se renouveler. La femme savante, tout comme la femme artiste, est le centre de ces deux lieux: elle servit ainsi d’intermédiaire, d’un ordre social lié au passé à des structures nouvelles.
Blogs and social networks are both spaces for online relationships that can be used for very different purposes. The aim of this paper is to compare the kind of relations that can be developed in these spaces through a corpus of different qualitative micro-sociological researches, conducted between 2006 and 2010, and focused on users and their cultural practices. The paper will provide first a theoretical framework for the analysis, going briefly through the development of internet and blog studies, and then will compare the forms of online relationships, focusing on empirical data and showing the platforms’ similarities and differences.

**Blogs and social networks as spaces of relationship: a theoretical framework**

Since blogs were created in the late Nineties, it appeared clear that they would have changed the internet because they marked a turn towards what later would have been called “Web 2.0”

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being, as spaces for self-publishing, one of the first forms of User Generated Contents (UGC). To date blogs’ fame has been overtaken by Social Networking Sites (SNSs) with their huge number of subscribers. Like blogs, also SNSs brought a change in the way internet was (and still is) lived, focusing once more on UGC and underlining the relevance of the new medium in daily activities.

Before comparing the forms of online relationship developed in blogs it is necessary to clear why a blog can be considered both a space of self-publishing and of social interaction in the same way as a SNS.

The term blog derives from the words “web” and “log” and originally meant “register of online activities”. Conceptually it is formed by three elements: a database, a form for entering contents and a form that is

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able to display them on the web in a chronologically reverse order. Besides self or collective publishing, blogs have also a space for social interaction in the comments area, not present in their early stages (comments were then sent by e-mail or instant messaging). In this way, a circle of readers soon began to meet around each blog, only online or creating also occasions to meet off-line. During time, blogging platforms developed other social tools apart from comments and blogroll (a list of blogs), such as tag boards, lists of visitors (like Live Traffic Feed) or, nowadays, buttons for sharing contents on SNSs and widgets.

SNSs have a similar technical structure to blogs, combining social networking, a list of contacts and a profile. Each SNS then, has proper features that let users customise their page or their profile. At last, SNSs allow users to manage contacts, as in past we used to do with diaries or phone books, but also to show and organise contacts, making the user’s network visible. The features of blogs and social networks changed over time, offering new tools, applications, and instruments.

In this direction, it can be said with Nancy Baym that blogs and SNSs are both computer-mediated communication instruments and artefacts shaped by users. The shaping component is more remarkable for blogs while in social networks is more limited.

Three stages of studies

Internet and blogs can actually be considered both as cultural contexts and artefacts. This is a “heuristic” distinction that helps to study them, though it is not perceived in the users’ experience. Saying that they are a cultural context means looking at the forms of communication, sociality and identity that are produced within this social space, considering them as “a place, cyberspace, where culture is formed and reformed”. Looking at them as a cultural artefact instead, means to see them as “a product of culture: a technology that was produced by particular people with contextually situated goals and priorities”. Researchers looking from the former point of view mainly analyze the ability of internet in creating new cultural forms, studying also the forms of computer-mediated-communication, while the latter try to understand the users’ practices and interpreting the internet as the object of processes of appropriation and

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4 See for example Feedjit (http://feedjit.com/).
10 Slater, 2006, p. 534.
consumption\textsuperscript{11}. This paper will follow the borderline of this distinction, trying to focus on both aspects. Before presenting the analysis it is useful to contextualise it in its theoretical framework within the internet studies.

As Silver\textsuperscript{12} and Wellman\textsuperscript{13} remarked, three stages of internet studies can be identified. Silver calls them \textit{popular cyberculture}, \textit{cyberculture studies} and \textit{critical cyberculture studies}. The term “cyberculture” was influenced by the period in which the author wrote, when online space and its culture were defined as cyberculture. As Gurak\textsuperscript{14} observes, most part of western culture can be now defined as cyberculture suggesting to replace the term with the expression “internet studies” to make it clearer. The three stages can be then renamed as \textit{popular internet studies}, \textit{embedded internet studies} and \textit{contextual internet studies}, that will now be briefly described.

The first stage can be placed at the beginning of Nineties and is defined as “popular” because people who were interested in the internet were mainly early adopters or journalists, and not academics, who produced a wide collection of articles and essays. The nature of this production was descriptive and enthusiastic. As Wellman also remarked: “in their euphoria, many analysts lost their perspective and succumbed to presentism and parochialism. [...] They thought that the world had started anew with the internet\textsuperscript{15}. They were often split into optimists and pessimists, the first putting emphasis on their points of strength and opportunities and the latter focusing mainly on risks and problems. Paradigms were often methodologically frail and fascinated by the upcoming novelty\textsuperscript{16}. Besides its “descriptive nature” and “rhetorical dualism”, this perspective described cyberspace as a frontier to conquer, deeply separated from the offline world:

They insisted on looking at online phenomena in isolation. They assumed that only things that happened on the internet were relevant to understanding the internet. Their initial analyses of the impact of the internet were often unsullied by data and informed only by conjecture and anecdotal evidence: travellers’ tales from internet incognita\textsuperscript{17}.

The stage of \textit{embedded internet studies} began around the middle of Nineties when internet started to become more and more integrated in everyday life, and the researchers’ point of view changed. As Van Dijk\textsuperscript{18} remarked, those years were characterised by the passage from a socio-psychological model to a sociocultural one, called “social information processing model”, where uses and daily practices of media were

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Wellman, 2004, p. 124.
\item Wellman, 2004, p. 124.
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the research’s focus. In the same period, Walther\(^{19}\) presented his relational perspective and Turkle\(^{20}\) her studies on online identity. They are just three examples of the many studies that can be quoted to show the change of the paradigm:

> The internet [...] has become embedded in everyday life. The ethereal light that dazzled from above has become part of everyday life. We have moved form a world of internet wizards to a world of ordinary people routinely using the internet. The internet has become an important thing but not a special thing. [...] The second age of internet studies has been devoted to documenting this proliferation on internet users and uses. [...] These studies have counted the number of internet users, compared demographic differences, and learned what basic things people have been doing on the internet\(^{21}\).

New themes, such as identity and online communities, and new research approaches emerged, with a need of quantitative data\(^{22}\).

At the end of the Twentieth Century, and up to date internet studies transformed again, into *contextual internet studies*:

> As the internet became the domain of many, and as websites covered everything from the news to college courses to home recipes, it was not possible to say that online communication is one thing (cursive of the author) and one thing only. In other words, context is key. [...] Today, saying “the internet” is like saying “the world”\(^{23}\).

Multidisciplinary approaches were often adopted, with the aim to «contextualize, and seek to offer more complex, more problematized findings»\(^{24}\). These researches are «more focused, theoretically driven»\(^{25}\) and use both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The need of updating continuously the research paradigms is connected with internet’s rapid change. As Gauntlett remarked, publishing after only four years an updated edition of his book *Web studies*\(^{26}\), the result is the mainstreaming phenomenon for which

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\(^{22}\) See for example *Pew Internet & American Life Project* [http://www.pewinternet.org/] and *World Internet Project* [http://www.worldinternetproject.net/].

\(^{23}\) Gurak, 2004, p. 28.


\(^{26}\) Gauntlett & Horsley, eds. 2004.
a variety of media technologies, forms, and contents often lumped under the single (and misleadingly homogenizing) rubric of “the internet”, have become a commonplace part of work, education, leisure, culture, and politics. The ubiquity of new media has resulted in their being taken for granted.\(^{27}\)

Blog studies followed a similar path of development. The first stage, circumscribable to the end of Nineties when the first blogs were created, was composed of a huge amount of articles on newspapers, magazines, and posts on websites. One of the main topics, that is recurring nowadays, was the competition between blogger and journalism, especially in USA, where citizen journalism platforms were rapidly diffusing. People divided into optimists and pessimists, the former predicting the end of journalism and the latter exalting the user’s empowerment caused by blogs. Books, instead, focused mainly on the explanation of the new phenomenon, showing how to create a blog, or telling first bloggers’ experience, as Rebecca Blood did.\(^{28}\)

A second stage emerged around 2003, when internet and social researchers began to be interested in the quantitative dimension of the phenomenon, with blog census, like Perseus\(^{29}\) and Technorati did with its annual report “State of the Blogosphere”\(^{30}\). The aim was also to comprehend blog uses and their social, political and economical consequences, avoiding the commonplaces on the topic.

The third stage started after 2005, when researches became more theoretically driven. Sociological research focused on micro-social aspects of blogging, trying to understand practices of use with both quantitative and qualitative methods, like in the studies about blogging and gender.\(^{31}\) Quantitative methodologies of research were supported by qualitative data, as Technorati did adding to its quantitative report a panel of interviews aimed to comprehend the socio-demographic composition of blogosphere.

It must be observed that, especially in Italy, there are many overlaps between the three stages and they are not perfectly distinguishable. Besides newspaper articles (one of the first is dated 4th January 2004), essays appeared reflecting on the relationship between blogging and journalism, but also putting emphasis on bloggers as writers and creating anthologies with their pieces. Field researches and theoretical frames also emerged with this researches on blog as personal diaries, on narrative identity or news making.\(^{32}\) Other researches focused on the kind of social relationships and interactions developed around a blog for marketing purposes.\(^{33}\)

29 Unfortunately the surveys are not anymore available online and Perseus became Vovici, see http://www.vovici.com/index.aspx.
Social network researches followed a similar path but, despite the huge success of social networks, very limited researches have been done in the European Union in this field. One of the reasons can be the extreme novelty of the phenomenon, as Cachia points out in her report\(^{36}\), where a significant number of data and studies are collected, making it a valuable starting point for the present analysis.

The researches briefly illustrated here show on the one hand the desire to study blogging uses and practices, and on the other hand the difficulty to map the continuously changing nature of internet and to find a proper methodology, and the connected ethical implications for researchers\(^{37}\).

The theoretical framework provided for the current analysis, showed the evolutions of internet and blog studies in the attempt to comprehend the complexity of these phenomena, and making clear why blogs can be considered as spaces for online relationships.

**Comparing different online spaces for relationship**

The present paragraph will now go through the comparison between the kind of sociality developed into blogs and SNSs, based on empirical data taken from a corpus of researches done between 2006 and 2010 with a qualitative and multi-situated methodology that integrated multiple instruments\(^{38}\).

The first research was conducted between 2006 and 2010 and was aimed to explore the relation between technological innovation and social uses in Italian personal blogs. After an explorative research through the documents (first blogs, books, essays and articles) a participant observation was carried out during three bloggers’ conferences. Then, to explore the micro-social context of incorporation into the daily activities and the subjective meaning of the use of blog, 26 semi-structured interviews were conducted to bloggers. The data obtained from the interviews was supported by the semiotic analysis of 50 blog\(^{39}\).

The second research was conducted in 2010, and was about the social relations developed online by youngsters. For this research, conducting 50 semi-structured interviews were conducted to 50 Italian youngsters (25 boys and 25 girls) distributed nationwide\(^{40}\). The interviews were supported by an online observation, though not structured, of the interviewees’ online profiles.

A third explorative research was conducted in 2009 and consisted in the ethnographic observation of the online profiles (on Facebook, FriendFeed, and Twitter) of 6 Italian bloggers.

\(^{36}\) Cachia, 2008.


\(^{38}\) Lievrouw & Livingstone, eds. 2006.


Social relations in the blogosphere

A first important note is that in the Italian blogosphere the forms of relationship changed over time, and three phases can be identified. A first stage occurred at the very beginning of Italian blogosphere, when bloggers where few and they were enthusiast of their tool and longed to know other bloggers41:

there were people to whom to refer, like La Pizia. [...] After I met her and other bloggers, a small group of people formed. (m, 2001, text+photo)

This phenomenon is common also in USA:

In 1999, when I started blogging, there really were so few weblogs that you could read them all in one day. As a result, we felt a bit of loyalty to one another. [...] Because we had been reading each others sites online for so long, we felt we already knew each other. We were, at that time, scattered across the United States, so we hadn’t had the opportunity before then. So the feeling then was close, tight-knit.

The fact that we were bloggers gave us something significant in common42.

The bond that linked them was the consciousness to be part of an elite of technology experts and enthusiasts towards the new instrument. The desk analysis showed a very strict connection between their blogs, with comments and links, but also the desire to meet off-line and then to tell online what was happening. That group of bloggers can be defined as a virtual community because there are clear boundaries between whose are in and out of them43 and they have a common memory of that period. Similarity of objectives, use of a common language and a shared experience replaced the features usually attributed to a community (stability, contiguity, and nearness). Blogs seemed to be useful instruments to know new people, but the main objective was to maintain a passion, to share it and to cultivate it. Moreover, with only few exceptions, bloggers did not like close friends to read their blog but rather unknown people, feeling embarrassed when a relative found it.

This strong relationship vanished with the expansion of the blogosphere and it was substituted by different kinds of weak ties44, although instruments for keeping connected increased. After 2003, when the number of blogs in Italy increased, also thanks to the introduction of Splinder (http://www.splinder.com), the first Italian blogging platform, two different phenomena emerged,

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41 Each quotation taken from the interviews is followed by identifying initials. The first letter (m, f) refers to the gender, the second to the year of publication of the first blog, the third to the kind of content published (text, photo, video), the fourth to the age at the moment of the interview. All quotations from the interviews are translated by the author.
sometimes overlapping each other: the creation of a stable circle of readers and the attempt to increase the visitors’ number:

Then frequent readers came, especially the ones who left a comment, and after it you go to read their blog. You knew a lot of people […] and you set up a network of relations. (m, 2003, text)

Comments, a feature that was not present in the first blogs, became an indispensable tool as a way to know each other and to enhance the blogs’ popularity. At the same time blogstars were born, (very famous bloggers with a great authority in the blogosphere), and the importance of crosslinking as a synonym of trust, a criterion then used to rank blog authority in charts, emerged:

If someone linked you, it meant that he liked your post, and it was especially important who linked you. (m, 2003, text+photo, 26)

As the blogosphere grew, it became more difficult to be known. Maybe it is for this reason that the bloggers who opened their space in the third phase, after 2006, showed a deep confidence in using new tools to diffuse their contents, such as charts45, aggregators and ways to engage their audience:

At a certain time I realized that if a blog has no comment it doesn’t work, so I tried to put into posts questions, feedbacks […] I noticed that since my blog has more comments it lives more, it has more accesses […] I created conversations and I noticed that since that moment my blog grew up in charts. (m, 2006, text+photo, 42)

Following this direction, blogging platforms increased the number of social tools, adding, for example, private messages or e-mail boxes to avoid users to switch the tool used to communicate at different levels. With the increased diffusion and popularity of blogs, bloggers became less worried of the composition of their public and accepted also relatives and close friends as their readers. As a counterpart, some bloggers, especially those using the blog as a personal diary, developed strategies in maintaining their privacy, avoiding for example to comment private facts in public or imposing different levels of access to the blog. Several forms of relationship were born, from stronger ones that transformed into a true friendship to weaker ones, such as the simple habit to read daily the blog.

If online relationships increased their value, offline meetings changed their importance, becoming just nice occasions to meet someone new, sometimes after a frequent online meeting:

There was this web site called Quinto Stato that organized a sort of conference, called “BlogAge” and it was maybe the first time when there was the chance to meet a certain number of people […] Through this daily interaction at a certain moment you ask by e-mail to go out for a beer, then you know each other and go to meet them. (m, 2003, text, 41)

45 See for example like Blogbabel (http://it.blogbabel.com).
After a long time of comments you feel to know each other no? You share with that person a moment every day, and so I said “why don’t we chat on Messenger?” and after with someone I discovered that we read the same books and had a lot in common and so […] We met in Milan. (f, 2006, text, 28)

In the third phase, a new phenomenon of social intertwining between online and off-line appeared with creation of the BarCamp network (http://barcamp.org/). BarCamp are highly informal meetings for blogger or internet experts organised by a group of volunteers. Born in USA, they found in Italy a fecund soil to grow up with a strong linking with the territory (for example city BarCarps like RomeCamp or MateraCamp were organised). Thanks to these occasions, bloggers that know each other online can have a chance to meet also off-line in a collective (and sometimes perceived as safer) occasion, but can also create new links that change the online networking between blogs.

It is clear now that the nature of social relationships born around blogs allowed the creation of both strong and weak ties, varying from the creation of a journal with an audience of readers to a diary for keeping in touch with close friends. Clearly everyone decides what to do in relation to the function chosen for ones’ blog, and online and off-line acquaintances are intertwined but not necessarily connected. In both cases there is a bond between the author and his/her reader because of the public nature of the blog in which the contents published are the trigger of the relationships.

Social networking in SNSs
In the last three years, and especially in Italy since 2008, the blogosphere had to face with the new rising phenomenon of SNSs, that are

web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site.46

Both blogs and SNSs have been defined as “social media”, «a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content»47.

A first effect of social network diffusion was the decreased number of blogs opened, but also the chance to expand blogging activities on other spaces, for example spreading news and contents using social networks such as Facebook or Twitter.

FriendFeed (http://friendfeed.com) brought an interesting extension of blogging activities because it is both a social network and a feed aggregator. By subscribing to it, users can collect in a single place all the updates of the people they follow online, with the possibility to comment them and to create autonomous text posts. While contents were still published on blogs (or on other platforms), comments can migrate on FriendFeed thanks to a wider space, and thanks to the opportunity of collecting all the updates together, thus avoiding the users to surf the net to find them. The limited diffusion of this social network in Italy made it a space where early adopters (as regard to internet) and early bloggers meet, avoiding the crowd of other social networks like Facebook. FriendFeed can be labelled as a meta-social network because it allows to follow the digital life of people and to maintain digital relationship through comments and likes on the contents published. The core of the online interaction is, as in blogs, the content published online by users which becomes object of conversation.

Twitter instead, seems very useful for news aggregation and for diffusing quick updates, while it is less suitable for contacts management due to the lack of tools for this purpose.

Finally, Facebook has the objective to recreate off-line relationships online as its (apparently) simple claim says: “Facebook helps you connect and share with the people in your life”. As to date, Facebook counts more than 20 million of users in Italy of which 53.3% are male and 44.8% are female.

As Cachia remarks, Facebook success may be explained through the simplicity of its interface, where it is easy to find contents, but also to the novelty represented by the “wall”, a message board comparable to a micro-blog, where users can post not only texts but also pictures, videos, links and questions. A third feature is the list of friends that, like a blogroll, makes ones contacts visible and allows to customise the privacy options. This feature is very far from the public visibility of blogs, where authors can decide to make contents public or private, protecting the blog with a password (even if some platforms allow to build different levels of privacy). A last point of strength is that Facebook incorporates different instruments of computer-mediated communication, such as status update, comments, likes, private messages, and chat.

By analysing the data taken from the interviews it can be said, first of all, that Facebook is used to organise, improve, monitor, and maintain social relations.

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49 See http://www.vincos.it/osservatorio-facebook/. Data are taken from Facebook Advertising Platform. This source has some methodological problems not examinable here.
50 Cachia, 2008.
51 Recently Facebook introduced also the “Subscription” option letting users to see also updates of users that are not friends.
As regard to the first function, social networks are a tool for organising off-line activities such as mobile phone or MSN Messenger and for keeping updated with events of a local area:

I use Facebook mainly for organizing. (m, 23, w)

Facebook is then used to maintain social relationships, to chat with close friends (as an alternative of MSN Messenger) or to comment the contents published:

The first thing I do <when I enter Facebook> is to check my profile, then home and e-mail. Then I see if there is some friend of mine, if I have new e-mails or if there’s some friend of mine in chat. Otherwise I logout. (f, 24, w)

Some users instead, tend to monitor what is happening, lurking profiles without leaving comments:

I like <Facebook> because I can see a lot of things, what others are doing. (m, 21, w)

Facebook is used also to get to know better people that offline are only acquaintances:

I like to watch what others are doing, of people I know but also of people that are friends on Facebook because I met them once at the discotheque, maybe I can understand better how they are… (f, 19, s)

A last function is to maintain social relations just by keeping “open” the contact (paraphrasing Jakobson it is the fatic function of communication), just greeting friends or using Facebook applications like pokes and likes, that have no meaning other of the intention to keep in touch or to be nice with someone:

<I open Facebook> also if I have just two seconds, just to greet someone or to see something. (m, 23, w)

For some interviewees Facebook is useful just to keep in touch because the relationships that matter are off-line:

Facebook is a good way to start something, but then you must know people offline, otherwise true communication has no sense, Facebook is a virtual relationship. (m, 20, s)

A last distinction can be made in the way new people are “friended”, which can be mediated or unmediated. A mediated extension of the number of friends means that a new friend is added only if there is a common friend:

Each quotation taken from an interview is followed by identifying initials: the first letter (m, f) is referred to the gender, the number to the age of the interviewee and the second letter indicates students (s) or workers (w).
I add only people I know, otherwise it doesn’t make sense. (m, 20, s)

An unmediated extension means instead that everyone is accepted as a new friend, even if there are no common friends:

I accept anyone who sends me a request […] at least to see who he/she is. (m, 24, s)

SNSs like Facebook let users to manage their contacts, making them visible and sharable with others. Strong and weak ties are, consequently, put together and managed on different levels. This contacts overlap create a “social capital bridging”\(^{53}\), it is to say that each weak contact can be activated when needed, like it happens off-line with acquaintances and colleagues. Weak ties are encouraged by SNSs by keeping in contact with old friends that are potential connections that may be reactivated at any time. A second consequence is the attention to the online reputation that the interviewee puts in its profile, cleaning periodically the profile or avoiding to write in public about delicate themes. This is a core issue about the future and about the education of youngsters to SNSs.

At the end of this analysis we can observe that for monitoring and fatic uses of a social network like Facebook, the contents published on the wall are a compulsory point of passage because they are a way to see what friends do, while for maintaining and improving social relations it is necessary to integrate the contents with other tools that help to keep the relation, such as chat or private messages. With its flexibility Facebook replaced other instruments, like MSN Messenger or the e-mail, because it let users manage their social relationships at different levels of privacy and intimacy through a unique platform.

**Conclusions**

Based on the research described above, further conclusions can be drawn. The progressive process of embedment of social media in everyday life and the mainstreaming of social networks and blog use has been confirmed. Digital uses and practices are more and more frequently intertwined with off-line activities, showing that there are very thin boundaries between the them. According to this process, online identities and relationships tend to reproduce what happens in life, finding more tools to manage contacts and to be in touch with already known people.

In blogs, contents seem to be the core of all actions: if a blog is used as a diary for already known friends, they come to read what is published, but the same happens even if readers are not known and the posts are what create the loyalty. Paraphrasing Jankowsky\(^{54}\), it can be said that they form a “community of discourses”, that is to say that the connection is kept alive by what is published. In Facebook instead,

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because the core of the space is the social relationship itself, each user can create different kind of links, strong and weak, focusing on contents or on relationships according to his/her need. Paradoxically, SNSs can be used without publishing anything, but just to collect and monitor contacts.

Although using different instruments, what is considerable is the stability of the network of relationships, which are not liquid but rather structured, often in concentric circles. Already existing offline networks have effects on digital ones, which are reproduced and improved by online activities. Another interesting aspect is that people who tend to have a lot of off-line contacts show the same tendency online, while those who have less off-line friends have a more limited online activity. Weak ties have an important role, because they form, with stronger ties, the “social capital” of users. The forms of interaction then, also depend on the features of each SNS. It would be interesting to analyse the differences of a person’s profile which uses different SNSs, on and the weight of the same contacts in these different SNS.

The researchers conducted also suggest that usage is not entirely determined by the technical features of the platforms but also by what users do. A blog can be defined as a “configurational technology”, that is a technology in which the different elements are defined according to the context of use. Blogs and SNSs are then subject to a process of “interpretive flexibility”, insofar as the author decides to give a peculiar organisation to his/her space according to his/her expressive needs starting form a “script” that offers a series of fixed opportunities to realise and other user-introduced elements. Blogging platforms leave to users wider spaces of action, while SNSs are usually more limited, especially in relation to graphic layout and applications. In this process, both material and symbolic-semantic means have a decisive role. First of all, the users’ material and cognitive resources play an important role as the ensemble of knowledge, abilities, and skills that a user may have. The immaterial resources include all the places and times required for the daily management of the platforms, but also motivations and goals of action. As regard to blogs, a second area of elements is identified in the dynamics of knowledge circulation. The individual resources actually provide only a part of the knowledge required to be progressively integrated by other users in the socialization spaces. Two flows of circulation can be outlined: a horizontal one between peers, and a vertical one that starts from those users who are the “opinion leaders” of the blogosphere. In this way, the process of innovation is not linear but follows a spiral path that can be defined as “innofusion”: innovation doesn’t cease with the design and creation moment of the artefact, but continues during its diffusion process. The shaping of a blog is made by a progressive “infiltration” of elements that do not create a new product, but gradually reform the existing ones. The shared meaning of the artefact is not closed, but rather stabilised.

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starting from a central core and modulated like a variation on a theme. Moreover, during time, the “relevant social groups” involved in this process vary, bringing again attention on the macro social dimensions of the shaping of a technology. This may be a field of further research complementary to the one outlined in this paper. It is clear than that not only blogs and social networks are important for social relationships, but also that social interactions matter in the definition of the configuration of these spaces. To date, the aspect of social networks is still changing. New phenomena are emerging, like geo-social networks, and also new issues, such as the relation between their use and the socio-cultural context. This complexity recalls once again the need to contextualise the users’ practices and without forgetting to keep up to date the research tools, integrating different methodologies with the aim to better fit the researches’ goal.

59 Bijker, Pinch & Hughes, 1989.
The paper will try to discuss the pilot study conducted at the beginning of my PhD research project about live music in Milan; the paper brings together some of the issues outlined in the research report commissioned by the consultant-organizer of the initiative under study, LiveMi.

LiveMi (which stands for live music in Milan) was a publicly funded initiative hosting live acts of emerging artists in the subway stations of the city centre.

The paper will examine how emerging music was used by the city council as a strategic tool to promote an attractive image of the city both externally and internally. This project has been launched with the idea of promoting Milan as the “Italian music city” – including emerging music. Besides, by organizing the initiative the city council tried to answer to the decline of the city centre as a site of cultural entertainment by making its subway stations more sociable and lively places.

The role of this initiative will be discussed and compared to similar initiatives taking place at the international level, aimed at promoting music production and consumption.

Using LiveMi as a case study, the research addressed to the following questions: what are the different perceptions and representations of “Milan as a music city” held by the various subjects involved – such as councilors, consultant and musicians? Which image of the city does LiveMi aim to promote and why? What role does LiveMi play in fostering emerging music in the city and in regenerating the metro stations?

In order to address these questions, the paper will start by reviewing the literature about music-related policy-making strategies, pointing out emphasizing the relevance of the local context generating them and at the same time including policies and regulations not directly formulated for the music sector but still having an impact on it. It will follow an analysis of music situation in Milan to understand how Milan can be differently regarded as a music city. And finally, the relevance of LiveMi, as a policy mechanism aimed to rebrand the city, and to foster emerging music will be discussed.
Methodology

The case study LiveMi was analyzed through a qualitative methodology. Ten events of LiveMi were held on Saturdays from 13 March to 8 May 2010: during this period, 26 semi-structured interviews were conducted to musicians involved.

These interviews were intended to (a) identify musicians experiences and constraints in playing live music in Milan and (b) assess their participation in and evaluation of both the project and the notion of “Milan as a music city”. Moreover, three of the organizers, two councilors and one consultant supporting the initiative were interviewed in order to understand the synergies between LiveMi and this Municipal Administration and also to collect some assessments and proposals regarding the status of emerging music and the notion of “Milan as a music city”.

Furthermore, participant observation was conducted to understand the role of music performances intransforming subway stations into lively and sociable places for music consumption and performance.

Popular music policies as urban regeneration and rebranding strategies

The debate over the contribution of the arts, including music, in promoting renewals of urban environments has been pivotal in the policy agenda of many cities, especially those experiencing deindustrialization crisis. These policies have been led by the principle of “culture-led regeneration”, with culture being both high and popular and related to creative and cultural industries as sources of urban regeneration. These strategies were linked to the optimistic narratives of the “creative city” which have been criticized because they advocate culture as an agent of the physical regeneration and marketing of cities. Later analysis has therefore outlined the negative effects that these policies can entail and have stressed the need to take into account the peculiarities of each context.

As a analysis of the different music policies adopted in several British music cities has pointed out, policies produced significant results, although different in different contexts. Implementation of these strategies appears dependent on the characteristics of the local urban context, and influenced by economic and cultural issues as well as competing political agendas.

Some cities have given priority to the promotion of musical tourism and heritage making music part of the travel experience by exploiting music sites or music events, while others focused on developing services

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to support small businesses, adopting dedicated policies to boost local scenes or to create cultural quarters or to provide infrastructures. Some were funding events as re-imaging strategy. Some policies concentrated upon the high music, and others upon popular music. Some Councils have been actively involved in defining cultural policies, sometimes leading to tensions and resistance by existing organizations, while in other cases the approach has been more laissez-faire.

In this context, initiatives coming from below were found to communicate with the logic and policies from above, through a partnership between public and private investments, as «the discursive opposition of top-down to bottom-up/laissez-faire is increasingly failing to articulate the complex needs of the music industry at local levels».

Therefore, a coordinated approach to the music industry is required with the inclusion of other policies that may not have been made with the intention of affecting the music sector (e.g. relative to training/education, social welfare, tourism and licensing) yet impacting on music production and consumption. The analysis of popular music policy needs a broader approach, not confined to cultural policy, because «each branch of popular music policy is based on a specific conception and is thus articulated to the varied and often contradictory discursive domains (such as considering music as being a problem or a solution to social issues) in which popular music is situated».

For instance Brown, Cohen & O’Connor cite the role of late-opening licenses in promoting the “night-life economy” of Manchester and its reputation as “24 hours’ city”. The promotion of the nightlife economy and of the urban cultural vibrancy has in many cases not been legitimated as an object of cultural policy, but instead has been regulated and contained. These issues are connected to broader processes of inner-city gentrification, which in turn can be linked to real estate investments in the areas were music is hosted. These problems were analyzed in several cities, demonstrating the difficulties municipalities face in mediating the impacts of gentrification and of urban development and in balancing competing interests and needs, together with the desire to promote the music entertainment and the development of the night-life economy.

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Besides, the main factor contributing to the demise of music venues has been that of changes to noise laws and community attitudes to the “noisy” rock/blues/jazz venue, especially those of the newer gentrifies residents of the area. The authors analyzed a policy initiative intervention aimed at responding to the demise of music venues by funding free outdoor live music performances. The authors deem this initiative as only effective in the short term; moreover, its attempt to re-brand and keep the quarter vibrant and attractive to private investments, ended up contributing to gentrification processes. Rebranding strategies employing music events as an instrument to promote the city as a vibrant realm has been used as a way “to put the city on the map”, and to give cities a competitive advantage.

As many authors have pointed out, cities invest in special events as branding strategies in order to re-imagine themselves as “creative” and ‘music cities”. The efficacy of event-based rebranding strategies still needs to be properly assessed as «investing in events can lead to sustainable practices if the process is embedded within a consistent approach to cultural policy» and in the specificity of each context.

Therefore, before looking at the policy mechanism under object, the following analysis will try to outline the local peculiarity of Milan in its relation to the music sector.

Representing Milan as a “music city”

Before discussing about LiveMi, it may be worthwhile to say something about “milan as a music city”, in order to understand which issues this policy mechanism was trying to address.

My interviews with musicians and councilors allowed some degree of insight into the different needs and problems they were considering when looking at Milan as a music city.

Milan appears to present a contradictory situation. Councilors emphasized how Milan can rightfully be considered the Italian music capital, due to the presence of major and independent record labels, radio stations and international-level concert halls and arenas, and especially with respect to classical music, hosting the famous La Scala theatre and a prestigious Conservatoire.

It was interesting to see the ways councilors prioritized music. One of them emphasized his efforts in bringing big names and in organizing big events as a way to attract tourism.

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18 The term “music city” has been used to describe cities renowned internationally because of their music heritage and tradition, traceable to a particular music style (e.g. Grunge as the “Seattle sound”) or to a famous band (e.g. Liverpool for the Beatles), so as to underline the association between specific localities and specific music styles, to a special “Sound City” (Cohen, 2007), and to emphasize the presence of very active music scenes. The term ‘music city” has been adopted by UNESCO to identify those cities that meet certain requirements: being recognized as centers of music production and creativity, hosting festivals, promoting local music industries, having music schools and conservatories, being equipped with infrastructure aiming at promoting local music abroad, and finally having indoor and outdoor venues dedicated to music production and consumption. These are the criteria needed for a city to enter within the “music city” network, joined by Bologna, Ghent, Glasgow and Seville.
As remarked by the event main organizer-(who also acted, as we will see, as a mayor’s consultant), the city council music policy is mostly focused on big events and big names as means to re-imagine the city and increase tourism:

_The concert in San Siro is a white elephant, you turn on the lights for an amazing night and then… the drama is this._

_The council seeks events, but doesn’t go beyond that or try to seek everyday art._ (organizer-mayor consultant)

The “superstar effect”19 of attracting big names is not facilitating new talents and generates in the audience a lack of curiosity towards new music, which is regarded as another cause of the decline of small venues for emerging artists playing unreleased songs20. Indeed, interviewed musicians complained about the possibilities for playing their own music being mostly limited to musical contests. The artists didn’t feel Milan as the capital of Italian music and they instead complained about a lack of space and a significant reduction and initiatives to play live:

_Milan was the capital of music. In Italy everyone will say that Milan is the best to play. But Milan is actually the worst._

_We count on one hand the ones that make you playing... (musician, 7)_

_No, we do not feel absolutely Milan as a city of music. Ok there is La Scala theatre but then there’s nothing there... There would be many more local live music venues to give a chance to those who want to play in a small venue... (musician, 9)_

While Milan features a rich fabric of bars, cafes and clubs, it lacks a “pub rock scene”21 and a circuit of small venues (with the exception of a few social clubs of nonprofit cultural organizations called ARCI) providing local artists the chance to perform live, in a casual and sociable atmosphere.

Many interviewed artists connected the reduction of live music venues and initiatives to severe controls which have been affecting live music and causing venues to either close down or (more often) to disuse music licenses. The law22, which imposes a 80db to noise emission, along with the economical infeasibility of proper noise isolation, forced many previously-active venues live music entertainment they used to have. Noise regulations have forced many live acts to transform into acoustics sets; security reasons have restricted admission and/or dancing permit in many small venues and clubs, decreasing not only live acts but even dj-sets.

The establishment of this new regime of controls and regulations came following residents’ complaints about noise disturbance and was affected by the pressures coming from the powerful residents commit-

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22 The law about noise pollution which fixed the decibel limitation to 80 is the n. 447, 26 October 1995.
tees lobbying against night entertainment. These problems are particularly affecting those residential areas nearby the Arena and the Stadium, both traditionally used as summer outdoor venues, and in the Navigli district, a night entertainment district with an high concentration of residential buildings.

The issue of decible is a cultural problem ... the issue is that of tolerance, even by citizens. Those who live close to San Siro stadium know that the concerts serve the whole community...We have tried to offer them free tickets for the concerts, but the next day they were complaining again ...I have been summoned by this committee because of decibels. If I am condemned because of decibels to “abuse of power”, I lose my job. (councilor)

Councilors and policy-makers interested in fostering music entertainment seem to be powerless against those regulations and are finding many difficulties in being able to mediate the competing interests and needs of different groups – namely of those complaining for night disturbance and of those promoting music entertainment. Besides, as one of the organizers confirmed, Milan has many bureaucratic constraints (such as the needs for multiple permissions and licenses issued by different departments) which don’t facilitate the organization of music events.

Milan is a hard city: here you need a license for the occupation of public space, and license of public entertainment. Even for stupid things they want to issue permissions. In Bologna you don’t have to ask for licenses, you just present the project and in the morning of the event, they come for inspection, they check and they give you the green light. That’s it. Here there’s too much bureaucracy. (organizer)

Interestingly, many of the interviewed artists stressed the need to move outside the city centre in order to play. The local artists rarely mentioned music venues in Milan, but rather placed outside the city boundaries

One thing I noticed is that in Milan there are just only big music venues where we’ll never manage to play while in the province there are some nice clubs, but smaller, but more available. (musician)

The outcome is that the center of Milan is becoming a “dead zone” especially in the night hours. This is probably due to the presence of a Business district and a Shopping district (known as Fashion Quadrilateral) and of luxury residential buildings inhabited by powerful residents who are opposed to the night life entertainment. Besides, even though Milan hasn’t experienced early waves of gentrification in the inner city23 as the city centre has always been inhabited by the upper-middle class24 new waves of gentrification are now taking place as especially fashion firms and boutiques are boosting real estate values – pushing

23 Sharon, 1982.
many cultural activities outside the city centre and replacing them with boutiques, which are making the city centre not lively and vibrant in the late hours, as this councilor nostalgically assesses:

*When I was a kid I went to the cinema in the centre, then there were the open pizzerias, clubs. The centre was lively, now no more ... maybe it’s to try to avoid various problems have always tried to bring out of town all the cultural activities. Yes, the center is dead for a certain time on, no point in having a center so dead.* (councilor)

All those issues are contributing to the loss of cultural vitality of the city centre, to which LiveMi tries to respond by funding free live music performances.

**The case study of LiveMi**

The paper will now examine the ways LiveMi tried to address some of the problems and difficulties Milan faces in relation to live music. From the overview just outlined, LiveMi represents a departure from the initiatives traditionally funded by the city council, which is, as I already mentioned, usually supporting big events with big stars as marketing strategy to attract tourism and money.

LiveMi became a big showcase for emerging Italian talents: it hosted around one hundred live acts of different music genres (with 8 performances of emerging musicians and band plus a final performance of a famous musician each Saturday).

The city council attempted (a) to address the problems faced by emerging artists, (b) to change their perception of Milan as hostile and unfriendly towards their music, and (c) to re-brand and market the city as friendly to emerging music.

The interviews with councilors and organizers enabled to understand the synergies existing between LiveMi and the municipal administration.

*LiveMi comes from the chats I had with the Mayor. I know her from a long time... so she opens her mind to the rock culture, a culture that does not belong to her, because without me the rock culture wouldn’t belong to the Mayor. I’m talking about the Mayor, it is important to understand that there must be these synergies, not just me, the emerging artists... so we also spoke about measures that the Mayor would take... to revitalize the metro and the city centre of Milan... What I was pushing was to create a showcase for emerging groups... So the idea is a combination between me and the Mayor.* (organizer-consultant)

The event was organized by the new mayor web-marketing consultant, a famous music journalist of various television programs and, who had been in the past well known to be the “godfather of Italian emerging music talents”. He was handpicked by the mayor in order to answer to the discontent regarding mayor’s actions and image as being old and detached. This was a rebranding strategy the mayor needed in
view of the 2011 elections and of the 2015 Expo. By using grassroots marketing activities (such as creating a mayor YouTube channel) and by organizing initiatives such as LiveMi, the consultant was trying to re-imagine the city and the mayor as younger and friendly towards live acts. The mayor attended several performances to show her support to the initiative.

Figure 1. The mayor and a councilor interviewed by the organizer at LiveMi

This consultant was actually trying to put emerging music into the policy agenda as a strategic tool to rebrand Milan and the mayor as more attractive and “young”. Moreover, he managed to mediate between two clashing worlds: on the one side the mayor was interested in enacting a re-branding exercise, while emerging artists perceived positively the initiative as organized by someone who had been always involved in supporting new talents. The presence of this figure helped the initiative being legitimized by the musicians:

*The difference here is in the organizer. He is a “manna from heaven” for emerging artists. He is the godfather of emerging music.* (musician, 19)

Subway stations were recognized by interviewed musicians as privileged sites to host emerging artists, as they offered the chance of intercepting new audiences of passers-by not normally used to listen to emerging music, and therefore LiveMi tried to address the issue of the lack of curiosity which was regarded as one of the causes of the decline of live music venues in the city:

*Here it’s better than playing in a square; people passing are forced to listen to you if they want to reach the platform.*  
(musician, 11)

By using participant observation, it was possible to see how the area surrounding the stage became a gathering place for many people who stopped attracted by the music performed. It was interesting to notice
that, at the end of the live acts, the area surrounding the stage returned to be an interstitial crossing point, confirming the role music played in transforming the subway station in a more sociable place. This was also one of the goals LiveMi aimed to achieve, namely the regeneration of the subway into a place for cultural and musical entertainment.

Figure 2. A LiveMi performance

It has to be noticed that the subway setting represented also a way of managing the “noise issue”. While avoiding to tackle the strict noise regulations themselves, the initiative managed to sidestep them by finding a venue not surrounded by residential buildings and therefore without residents. However, LiveMi didn’t succeed in becoming, as in the initial idea of the organizer, a start-up for a new regulation about music performances in subway stations. The positive effects on music entertainment lasted only for the duration of the event. Despite its relative length, LiveMi can be regarded as a short-term policy mechanism. Moreover, the project lasted only for one edition because its organization depended on the personal friendship existing between the mayor and the organizer-advisor, and therefore funding for the advisor contract and the initiative itself were not renewed by the next city council. In the final analysis, LiveMi ended up being only a small part of a broader marketing strategy by the advisor-organizer aimed at re-imagining the city and the mayor in view of the 2011 electoral campaign.

Conclusion
LiveMi can be considered an interesting case study insofar as it demonstrates the need «to look at the intersections existing between political, economic and cultural issues in a local context»25 when dealing with music policy strategies.

Firstly the case study highlights the difficulties faced by local authorities in dealing with the live music sector. The creation of a live music scene depends upon policymakers’ awareness of its cultural and economic relevance, as they can influence it through regulations and financial support. However, this support can often conflict with other interests and needs, which policymakers have to balance between. The city council was addressing the problem of live music in an ambiguous way: on the one hand, enacting strict regulations (especially the severe decibel limitations) which restricted live music events and venues; on the other hand, funding initiatives such as LiveMi to promote music consumption and production.

In LiveMi the only way the council found to address the noise issue was to relocate performances in a public space (the subway station) far from residential buildings. This mechanism merely made politically easier for the council to patronize music events, instead of helping to create an infrastructure or facilitating the already existing grass-roots music initiatives.

Secondly, this case study enabled the identification of key issues to be considered in future research about the dynamics of the live music sector in Milan and its relations to the city council.

In this respect it’s important to remark that musicians are not the only subjects to be considered when dealing with music policy strategies. It is necessary to look beyond the mere provision of facilities for musicians, and to factor in the “soft infrastructures” constituted by the networks of people involved in the music sector26. These “soft infrastructures” are constituted by social networks, connections and human ties encouraging the exchange of ideas between people and institutions. The analysis of the actual interactions and activities existing within this creative subsector is acutely needed before any policy strategy can be applied27.

Besides, there is a need to look at the creative industries sector in a broader sense in order to understand the possible cooperation or competition existing between multiple subsectors (such as the fashion industry in the case of Milan), and even to consider all those people which might have different needs or interests needs (such in the case of Milan, the powerful resident committees).

Moreover, those informal ties can impact on the adoption of policies themselves. Interactions among music makers, cultural intermediaries, advisors and councilors need to be taken into account in order to understand the music policies applied.

As this case study has demonstrated, «the policy has on occasion been the product of close, informal networks»28. LiveMi has been mainly the product of a personal friendship between the mayor and the advisor and by a personal interest of the advisor in pushing the mayor to fund an initiative aimed at fostering emerging music. The practice of choosing personal friends from the music industry as “informal advisors” to overcome a policymaker’s musical has to be taken into account in analyzing policy strategies.

This tendency hinders any long-term approach, since each policy mechanism is limited to the span of a single electoral term and a single city council. This brings to the forefront the need to examine the historical contingency of each initiative, especially in cases where policy strategies are aimed at reimagining the city in view of future elections. During the last political campaign taking place from March to May 2011, live music became one of the key issues in the political agenda of the candidates. This led to the opening of a communication channel between the candidates and several operators in the live music sector of Milan (such as venue managers, promoters, musicians).

Through this channel emerged the clear need of a shift in the city council role: from being a direct organizer of music events (while hindering existing live music events and venues) to being a facilitator to the operations of the live music sector by simplifying bureaucratic constraints. Also horizontal coordination among different departments appears necessary, integrating policies, regulations and licenses directly or indirectly affecting music production and consumption. Until now security measures, public transport management, licensing and regulations about alcohol and smoking, and real estate businesses have influenced live music in Milan much more than any music-supporting policy mechanism.

In this sense, a representative body in support of live music, capable to navigate the sector’s complexities and to enact negotiation and lobbying with the city council could play an important role in the future.