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CREATIVE INDUSTRY AND GENDER:
REFLECTIONS ON A NON-OBVIOUS COMBINATION

The interface between grassroots appropriation and corporate control of digital media and social platforms has become a heated subject of political debate and an important topic of research within new media theory[1]. A large amount of this literature is devoted to the conceptualization and classification of what can be referred to as "creative industries". This special issue of *Comunicazioni sociali - Journal of Media, Performing Arts and Cultural Studies* – as the title suggests – focuses on "engendered" theories and discussions of creative industries, particularly those emerging from within the framework of digital and informational technology. The essays included in this issue contribute to this scholarship, focusing on practices and activities from different disciplines and arts.

1. WOMEN AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION

The purpose of this collection is to illustrate how creative industries may transpose into the concurrently hegemonic and subversive platform of global media and culture what Teresa de Lauretis defines the "en-gendered subject of feminism", that is, to expose dominant technologies of gender through micropolitics of gender formation[2]. The scholar originally coined the expression "technologies of gender" in her eponymous 1987 collection *Technologies of Gender*: *Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*, in which she argues that "gender […] both as representation and self-representation, is the product of various social technologies, such as cinema, as well as institutional discourses, epistemologies, and critical practices"[3]. Paraphrasing de Lauretis, the case studies considered in this special issue the possibility of developing variable micropolitics of gender formation within global media economy and culture.

In his book *Global Creative Industries*, Terry Flew underlines the difficulty of en-

[1] About this, see, among others, J. Hartley, J. Potts, S. Cunningham, T. Flew, M. Keane, J. Banks, *Key Concepts in Creative Industries*, Thousand Oaks, Ca: Sage, 2001; G. Cosenza, *Semiotica dei nuovi media*, Roma: Laterza [2004] 2008; F. Stadler, "Between Democracy and Spectacle: Limitations of the Web 2.0 Discourse", in *The Social Media Reader*, edited by M. Mandberg, New York, NY: New York University Press, 2012, 242-256.

[2] T. de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender. Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*, Bloomington-Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987, IX.

[3] *Ibid*.

compassing the variety of businesses and modes of production within the creative in-dustries[4]. As Flew notes, "the term 'creative industries' coexists with a variety of other broadly cognate terms, including cultural industries, copyright industries, content indus-tries, cultural-product industries, cultural creative industries, cultural economy, creative economy, and even the experience economy"[5]. David Throsby proposes that, while cre-ative industries inspire different definitions depending on their location or disciplinary origins, they all share the following characteristic: 1. they are the result of human cre-ativity; 2. they serve a communicative purpose; 3. they are linked to an intellectual property attributable to an individual or a group[6].

This special issue of *CS* points to the importance of gender for conceptualizing creative industries as viable alternatives to the capitalist logic of artistic production. The expression "creative industry" or "cultural industry" touches upon the complex interface of art and commerce. The term is associated with neo-Marxist philosophy and cultural theory, both originating from, and reacting to the critique of art and cul-ture under capitalism undertaken by the Frankfurt School[7]. Each representative of this group proposed a distinctive approach to culture industry, from Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's opinion that it marked the full integration of the previously autono-mous sphere of culture into capitalism to Hans-Magnus Enzensberger's positive belief in the democratizing potential of mass media[8]. Arjun Appadurai describes "grassroots globalized activities" as social forms of "globalization from below" […] that [….] con-test, interrogate, and reverse these developments [that is, dominant practices within glo-balization] and […] create forms of knowledge transfer and social mobilization that proceed independently of the action of corporate capital and the nation-state system (and its international affiliates and guarantors) […] [and] rely on strategies, visions and horizons for globalization on behalf of the poor"[9]. While the case studies investigated in this special issue may not always speak as marginal or on behalf of the marginal, they represent forms of grassroots globalization because they operate independently from global capitalist media and address gender equity in terms of women's professional advancement, public visibility, and cultural status. From this perspective, (paraphrasing Appadurai) they redeploy gender as a "democratic and autonomous standing in respect to the various forms by which global power further seeks to extend its dominion"[10].

2. THE RE-EMERGENCE OF THE DEBATE ON GENDER IN MEDIA STUDIES

Although the binomial gender and media – or, more broadly, gender and creative indus-try – is obviously crucial under a theoretical, cultural, and political point of view, espe-

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[4] T. Flew, *Global Creative Industries*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013, 3.

[5] *Ibid.*, 2-3.

[6] D. Throsby, *Beyond Price: Value in Culture, Economics, and the Arts*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, 219.

[7] Each representative of this group proposed a distinctive approach to culture industry, from Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's idea that cultural industry is a tool of ideological control on the masses to Hans-Magnus Enzensberger's belief in the democratizing potential of mass media. The literature on this sub-ject is rather vast. See, among others, R. Davies, G. Sigthorsson, *Introducing the Creative Industries: From Theory to Practice*, London: Sage, 2013.

[8] About this see in particular the entry "Creative Industry/Cultural Industries", in Hartley, Potts, Cun-ningham, Flew, Keane, Banks, *Key Concepts in Creative Industries*, 77-79.

[9] A. Appadurai, "Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination", *Public Culture*, 12, 1 (2000): 1-19.

[10] *Ibid.*

cially within media studies, it has been soldered only in relatively recent times. In the Nineties, and in the second part of the decade in particular, the study of the relationship between media and gender entered a phase of aphasia. The reasons for this temporary suspension of the debate on gender and media are to be found in a spectrum of factors mutually fueling each other: the change of the theoretical and learning frameworks within which media studies progress, their expansion and stratification, that tends to reduce the relevance of the single variable, including sexual gender, in the explanation of the medial experience[11]; furthermore, the digitalization of communications technologies, the expansion of the IT network and broadband and, together with them, the dissemination of digital utopianism and the strengthening of the idea that anybody can access new media and capitalize on opportunities, irrespective of their own "identity"[12]; third, the success of post-feminism, which challenged the traditional categories of patriarchy, female and male gender, as a binary thought to be too sharply polarizing and tied to the western social, political, and cultural context[13].

Therefore, it is not surprising that, at the end of the nineties, David Gauntlett and Annette Hill argued against the gendered interpretations of the medial experience introduced in previous years, by targeting in particular the works by David Morley, Ann Gray, Christine Geraghty, and Charlotte Brunsdon and showing how they wrongfully polarized the difference between men and women as to the taste and use of the media[14].

Although gender issues do not completely disappear from media studies[15], they end up taking a marginal role in the field and in research for almost a decade. It is only at the end of the first decade of the new millennium that the topic of gender resurfaces vigorously even outside safeguarded areas (the feminist debate and, as mentioned above, a number of specific research fields) where it had been pursued until that time. Undoubtedly, the main reason for this reintroduction is to be found in the clarification of the notion of creative industry as well as the attention to the key role of the user, a fundamental part of the production chain and more extensively of the process of value generation[16]. John Hartley, as we know, defines creative industries as:

> the conceptual and practical convergence of the creative arts (individual talent) with cultural industries (mass scale), in the context of new media technologies (ITCs) within a new knowledge economy, for the use of newly interactive citizen-consumers[17].

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[11] The characteristics of the so-called "third phase" of media studies were effectively synthesized in P. Alasuutari, *Rethinking the Media Audience*, London: The New Agenda, Sage, 1999. See also: N. Abercrombie, B. Longhurst, *Audiences*, London: Sage, 1998.

[12] Among the contributions that mostly enhanced the demotic utopia of the Internet, see: P. Lévy, *L'intelligence collective: Pour une anthropologie du cyberspace*, Paris: La Découverte, 1997; Italian translation: *L'intelligenza collettiva*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 2002.

[13] A. Brooks, *Post-feminisms: Feminism, Cultural Theory and Cultural Forms*, London: Routledge, 1997; J. Hollows, *Feminism, Femininity and Popular Culture*, New York: Manchester University Press, 2000; R. Gill, *Gender and the Media*, Oxford: Polity Press, 2007; H. Radner, *Neo-Feminist Cinema: Girly Films, Chick Flicks, and Consumer Culture*, London: Routledge, 2010.

[14] D. Gauntlett, A. Hill, *Living Television*, London: Routledge, 1999, 285.

[15] Post-colonial approaches, for example, or research studies on popular culture, or studies on the processes about the building of child or teenage subjectivity represent just as many pockets of resistance, where the topic of sexual gender is still primary and is an elective perspective for the studies (see: M. Fanchi, "Trans-(medial) Gender. Il dibattito sul femminile e sul maschile nei Media Studies", *Imago. Studi di cinema e media*, 6 (2012): 141-152).

[16] As is known, the notion of creative industry is coined at the end of the Nineties to identify the set of production activities originated from individual creativity. See: J. Hartley (ed.), *Creative Industries*, Malden: Blackwell, 2005. See also the already quoted Flew's book, *The Creative Industries Culture and Policy* and Hartley et al. (eds.), *Keys Concepts in Creative Industries*.

[17] Hartley (ed.), *Creative Industries*, 5.

Therefore, in the context of the creative industries the beneficiary or user is neither simply nor mainly conceived as an end (a more or less active one) of initiatives and products generated by the media, but as an integral part of the entire cycle of value generation: from the conception of the product (or service) to its actualization, distribution, and promotion, until its consumption[18]. The indispensable contribution that the user is called upon to give puts the matter of her/his subjectivity into the foreground: the implementable technological and professional skills and, more extensively, the biographical experience and personal profile defining the user, on which depends the quality of her/his action for the co-creation of/support to the media. Thus, gender appears to be a decisive variable again: an essential matrix of the "cultural capital" every subject has available and upon which hinges the generativity of her/his actions as well as the quality, and the consequent solidity, of the rising creative industries[19].

Four branches of study – some more recent, others active a long time, although often quietly – stand out as crucial areas of consideration. The first branch analyzes *the specificity of women's co-creative experiences and contributions*. Mary Celeste Kearney's book, *Girls Make Media*[20], is emblematic in this sense. It has the merit of examining some of the most studied bottom-up and co-creative phenomena such as fandom, highlighting, at one time, the peculiarity of the women's actions and its cruciality for the performance and development of the media. For example, the work of preservation and valorization of fanzines is mainly a female custom that enables capitalizing on fans' activities, preserving them in time, making them available for new uses, even by the media, and there by offering a distinguishing contribution to the creative industry.

A second area of study, not less substantial both from a political and a cognitive standpoint, refers to *the research on the feminization of the communications professions*. It is a line of research that has been active for a long time and that has been carried out specifically into some fields and branches of media communications, starting in the news world[21]. For example, the study on how women become editorial staff members, their appointed professional placement, and the careers they have access to often highlights a systematic process of devaluation of the communications professions since women started occupying them[22], a process that threatens the achievement of a real gender equality and undermines the media system. Once again, the gender perspective

[18] An introduction to the notion of co-creativity and its models can be found in the special issue "Managing Situated Creativity in Cultural Industry", *Industry and Innovation*, 15, 5 (2008).

[19] On the notion of generativity, see the essential contribution by C. Giaccardi, M. Magatti, *Generativi di tutto il mondo unitevi! Manifesto per la società dei liberi*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 2014.

[20] M.C. Kearney, *Girls Make Media*, London: Routledge, 2006.

[21] K. Mills, *A Place of the News. From the Women's Page to the Front Page*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1990; C. Lont, *Women and Media. Content/Careers/Criticism*, Belmont: Wadsworth, 1995; K. Mills, "What Difference Do Women Journalist Make?", in *Women, Media and Politics,* edited by P. Norris, New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, 41-55; Network Women in Media, "Women in Media", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 37, 8 (2002): 804; D. Chambers, L. Steiner, C. Fleming, *Women and Journalism*, New York: Routledge, 2004; P. Poindexter, S. Meraz, A. Schmitz Weiss (eds.), *Women, Men, and the News. Divided and Disconnected in the News Media Landscape*, New York-London: Routledge, 2011. On this point, we can mention the important studies by Milly Buonanno (M. Buonanno, *Visibilità senza potere. Le sorti progressive, ma non magnifiche delle donne giornaliste in Italia*, Napoli: Liguori, 2005). This field of research is crucial also within film studies. It's not possible here to quote the many researches on women's profession within cinema. Though, we would like at least to mention the seminal Women Film Pioneers Project (http://wfpp.cdrs.columbia.edu/) that lists the women presence in the film industry during the silent era.

[22] This process was exemplary described by Pierre Bourdieu within his very influential book *La Distinction* (P. Bourdieu, La *distinction*. *Critique sociale du jugement*, Paris: Éd. de Minuit, 1979).

enables a more in-depth anamnesis of the contemporary media and their criticalities and offers significant support for the definition of actionsaimed at improving them.

The third research topic is that of the *digital environments inhabitability*. In the first half-decade of the new millennium, a number of ground breaking research studies exposed the hostile mood women have to cope with on the Internet[23]. These studies had an important and double outcome: to refute the commonplace description of the Internet (and the Web 2.0 in particular) as a democratic arena that everybody could experience and inhabit, and to re-focus study onto the nature and structure that the medial environment should take to facilitate women's presence and action. A relevant consequence of this line of research is the possibility to move feminist action and critique into the Internet and induce it to consider the opportunities it can offer in terms of networks, exposure and, therefore, social impact[24].

Lastly, the topic of gender is linked to a fourth essential area of research: the studies on media education and, in particular, the policies of *qualification to participation*[25]. This is an extensively reviewed approach to media pedagogy, which entails leveraging even the most heterodox medial experiences as formative models to be exported into traditional educational contexts: for example, collaborative problem solving, which Internet users experienced in wiki environments, becomes an extraordinary stimulus for learning in school environments. It is apparent that the debate on media education and the qualification to participation is deeply intertwined with the topic of gender: in fact, sexual gender is still a significant variable on which depend both the access to digital platforms and devices (available more to men than women, at least in some cultural contexts) and the easy development of participative skills (for which female users seem to have a particular aptitude as they are accustomed to think of themselves and their actions from a collective viewpoint).

Therefore, the monographic issue this essay introduces aims to strengthen these lines of research and to let new ones emerge, with the firm conviction that gender represents, in its various forms, an important source for the development of the creative and media industries as well as a chance to orient their growth in a truly anthropocentric direction.

3. (EN)-GENDERED CREATIVITY: PERSPECTIVES ON GENDERED CREATIVITY AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

By examining the main forms that creative industries assume in the contemporary mediascape, this special issue represents different perspectives on the multiplicity and com-

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[23] See: A. Scott, L. Semmens, L. Willoughby, *Women and the Internet. The Natural History of the Research Project*, in *Critical Readings. Media and Gender*, edited by C. Carter, L. Steiner, Maidenhead: Open University, 2004, 218-239.

[24] L. van Zoonen, *The Rise and Fall of Online Feminism*, in *Online Territories. Globalization, Mediated Practice and Social Space,* edited by M. Christensen, A. Jansson, Ch. Christensen, London: Peter Lang, 2011, 132-146. On women activism on the Internet: W. Stokes, *Women in Contemporary Politics*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005; A. Stevens, *Women, Power and Politics*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007; J. Aragon, "The Lady Revolution in the Age of Technology", *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics*, 4, 1 (2008): 71-85; A. Geniets, "Lost in Translation: Why Civic Online Efforts in Britain Have Failed to Engage Young Women from Low Socioeconomic Backgrounds", *European Journal of Communication*, 25, 4 (2010): 398-412. On the feminine cultural jamming and cultural resistance to gender stereotypes see L. Lucchetti, A. Tota, "Gender Advertisements e Culture Jamming: forme di sabotaggio dei repertori mediali", in *Gender e media. Verso un immaginario sostenibile*, edited by A. Tota, Roma: Meltemi, 2008, 211-240.

[25] See: H. Jenkins, R. Purushotma, M. Weigel, K. Clinton, A. Robinson, *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009; Italian translation *Culture participative e competenze digitali. Media education per il 21mo secolo*, Milano: Guerini, 2010.

plexity of the concept of gendered creativity. The relationship between contemporary media economies and the social discourses on gender has been observed focusing not only on different cultural branches and products, but also at multi- and trans-disciplinary levels. The contributions gathered here illuminate some questions that stand at the core of Media Studies and Gender Studies through a discussion of key concepts, methodological advancements and concerns, and new analytical points of view. In particular, each essay contextualizes the field of research considering the changing trends from the pre-digital age to the globalized and transmedia one.

The first area of consideration we may highlight concerns the strategies of gender differentiation that nowadays are built in creative industries. Hilary Radner explains how cinema industries, namely Hollywood productions, and television systems adopt opposite approaches in engaging female audiences. While, paradoxically, women viewers still have a significant role in determining the financial success of a film, even those mainly addressed to male viewers, Hollywood conglomerates do not treat reaching specific subsets of the female audience (such as the mature one and so on) as a priority. In fact, if women used to watch movies directed at other targets, why should Hollywood satisfy women, changing – in so doing – the commercial imperatives of the domination of young males as the most profitable audience within this sector? The first consequence of such a creative and cultural disinvestment is the decline of "girly films" or "chick flicks," that is to say, the renunciation of the production of romantic comedies, such as the well-known blockbusters *Pretty Woman* (1990) and *Ghost* (1990) in the Nineties. The question of developing strategies of gender differentiation within the contemporary cinema industry is clearly connected with the process of *genrefication*[26]. In the last few decades, the renewal of the *woman's film* is due to the recent developments in delivery systems, which include Internet digital services as well as home video (DVD), cable and satellite television. From the form of franchises targeting young female viewers like *Sex and the City* to the production of high-quality tv serials (e.g., Jane Campion's *Top of the Lake*), not to mention that every year an increasing number of film festivals are delivering American independent cinema to the most lucrative cities in the world, the *woman's film* is subject to an interesting and original phenomenon of hybridized narrative structures and representations of the feminine identity.

Following the same direction, Cecilia Penati and Anna Sfardini look at the contemporary Italian television industry in order to discuss the interrelations between the new digital thematic channels and their audiences, and the ways in which television utilizes the imagination of women to creatively manage the reworked standards of tv content and identities. Although mainstream television has traditionally been acknowledged as female oriented, the recent Italian exemplification of "TV for Women" shows how the multi-channel platforms have promoted multifaceted images of women, alongside different models of the female audience. Taking into account, among many others, the communication strategies of three thematic channels devoted to women viewers – Diva Universal, Fox Life, and Real Time – the essay probes different solutions embraced to balance the ordinary standardization of certain editorial processes with the necessary innovative and creative drive that reinforces a brand. Such a balancing act can be seen in two trends: on the one hand, new formats and new production styles have been developed not only within the fiction domain, but also in the documentary one, as the recent factual genre attests. On the other hand, new segments of the female audience have been conquered, broadening both toward a more mature audience of over 50-year-old

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[26] R. Altman, *Film/Genre*, London: BFI Publishing, 1999.

women and addressing the more "provincial" audience of southern Italy. Finally, more or less intensively, each channel is investing in its extra television offer, that is to say, promoting by means of social networks alternative places for shared consumption and entertainment by female communities interested in specific thematic areas (maternity, cooking, family and so on).

However, in order to understand deeply the transformation recently occurring in the creative industries, it is important not only to focus on the *top-down strategies* of gender differentiation in creative industries, but also to value precisely women's contributions to spreading contexts of media economies and networks. In her essay, Rosanna Maule deals with gendered creativity from the perspective of grassroots globalized activities. By describing the case study of the British Birds Eye View Festival, the article discusses the cultural role of the women's film festival and its engagement with social media, which caused a reorientation of the distribution map for women filmmakers. Are the Web 2.0 platforms really useful to support authentic feminist goals or do they move such objectives toward an ineludible "gender mainstreaming"? In any case, digital technology is used not just to promote film festival events and activities, but also to create and strengthen professional networking among female practitioners (filmmakers, cinematographers, screenwriters, journalists, editors, etc.) in film and media production and distribution.

While women's film festivals are losing their influence as counter-spaces for critical debate about women because of funding cuts and the impact of transmedia culture, some grassroots audiovisual practices, namely "vidding," are still affirming the possibilities of feminist critiques and readings on mainstream film and television productions. By exploring the history and specific features of the vidding community, Lucia Tralli looks at this particular remix practice as a form of gendered counter-memory, because the work of editing, practiced by an almost exclusively female community of remixers, symbolically means deconstructing the hegemonic cultural spaces and mainstream stances. Moreover, such a transformative work is based on a collective and shared experience as it represents one of the most important activities that contribute to women's media fandom.

Introduced by the vidding practice is the second area of consideration within our special issue: the traits assumed by women's "agency" concerned with other forms of creativity. In fact another creative community for women taken into account is the social media platform Pinterest, specifically used by female consumers. Kinga Polynczuk-Alenius explains how the activity of pinning onto a virtual pinboard means, first of all, re-contextualizing the idea of "everyday creativity" as a creative process of providing content instead of an activity of making something proper. Second, it helps to found a sense of community by bringing women together around a shared ideal: the construction of herself as a creative person, devoted to craftwork that engages values closer to authenticity and uniqueness, as well as care of the self and of other people. On the background of the analysis, the author strongly outlines how female users construct the boundaries on Pinterest, adapting themselves to a conventional, neoconservative social model of the woman.

However, electronic art and experimental cinema have been confirmed as the niche cultural contexts to present a conceptualization of "femininity" far from the dualistic formalization[27], which in the past used to confine women to symmetrical and comple-

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[27] See, among others, C. Columpar, S. Mayer (eds.), *There She Goes. Feminist Filmmaking and Beyond,* Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2009.

mentary beings to men. In her essay, Elena Marcheschi suggests the concept of "sweet creativity" as she explores the ways in which female artists use the camera to express themselves and their feelings. Through the analysis of some significant works (*Despertar* directed by Maria Cifuentes Caruncho, *Berlun* by Ezgi Kilinçaslan, and *Coriolis* by Milja Viita), we can also identify some distinctive qualities of "feminine poiesis," based on poetic thought and an affective modulation of the filmic language. Shot both as real bodies and situated subjects, women-artists can investigate themselves restarting from their inner singularity.

As our third area of consideration concerning gendered creativity, we cannot overlook the recent subjective turn (self-representations, autobiographical storytelling, self-portraits, confessions, home movies, etc.) that is increasingly permeating media products. Above all, what seems to characterize these productions is a commitment to the actual, which puts them under the sway of history, social structure and culture. The self-reflexive observation is thus tightly connected to a principle of situatedness and to a deep rootedness of the individual, able to embed and enact the personal in the social.

The staging of female subjectivity is also the gist of Gülbin Özdamar Akarçay's contribution: self-representation as performance and embodied practice is exemplified by the photographic work of two Turkish artists, Canan Şenol and Nezaket Ekici. Moving from the artists' socio-political engagement in feminist stances, their pictures have been shown to a community of women amateur photographers in order to bring the ideological and cultural meanings out. In other terms, it means on the one hand to observe if and how the interviewees connect messages concerning the gender criticisms and body policies to their personal experiences of being a Turkish women; on the other, to consider if the readings of the pictures have any transformative effect on the audience. If any visual image resulting from a self-representation process is shaped by the connection between individuality and body, it is therefore able to activate a personal inquiry into the observer's gendered identity by the means of self-projection in the represented female subject.

Remaining within the autobiographical domain and its media-creative branching, Valerio Coladonato probes the tension between personal and political through an analysis of the use of the "selfie" by politicians and public figures. Even when the pictures are not directly taken by the political leaders themselves, they commonly come to be identified as their own selfies. Thus, the political communication strategies actively contribute to building a discursive regime of authenticity and truthfulness around the celebrity, whose identity is specifically concerned with the public imagination. Assuming an approach that combines media studies and queer studies, celebrities studies and political studies, the analysis of three famous so-perceived selfies – each one of them portraying respectively Hilary Clinton, Barack Obama, and Pope Francis – tries to demonstrate that gender functions as an imaginative tool for the self-representation and the representation of celebrities in contemporary media.

In conclusion, through these various approaches, this special issue provides new perspectives on old dilemmas delineated in the fields of Gender Studies and Media Studies, and advances the fields by posing new questions regarding the interrelations between the shaping of gendered creativity and the operation of the mass media in changing cultural, political, and technological contexts.