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iGENERATION AND CINEMA
Genres, Spectatorship, and Mediascape

1. A NEW GENERATION OF DIGITAL NATIVES

In comparison with the generation of the so-called Millennials, born roughly between 1980 and 2000, the Post-Millennials could be said to be the first "true" digital natives of human history, since they are exposed to computers, electronic tablets and smartphones from the very first days of their lives. Today's children are submerged in a continuous flow of digital moving image consumption. From an early age, they make video calls via Skype with distant relatives. They watch clips on YouTube before they can walk and talk. They are making their own cinema, both as improvised film programmers and as amateur filmmakers, often before their first theatrical film experience takes place. Touchscreen tech-savvy toddlers explore rather intuitively all kinds of apps and functions of smartphones and tablets, not because they are more genius than their parents, but just because they grow up with these devices and learn the digital (mostly touchscreen-based) language often well before they know how to write and read in their own mother tongue or, more generally, before they go to elementary school[1].

Originally, the term "digital native" was coined to indicate children born after 1980, who grew up with the arrival of computers and learned to speak the new digital language without "accent", in contrast to their parents who were at that point, as theorized by education consultant Marc Prensky, the "digital immigrants"[2]. The term "digital native" has been criticized by Henry Jenkins, among others, for masking the digital divide that exists among today's youth in terms of access as well as the different levels of competence and experience that would point to a much less uniform group of young users[3]. Moreover, according to Jenkins, many adults catch up and learn to speak without accent. We believe that the metaphor of the digital language as a native tongue can still be helpful as a conceptual tool, especially in order to distinguish between Mil-

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[1] See the telling anecdote with which Paolo Ferri opens his book *Nativi digitali* (Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 2011). Ferri narrates how, on a summer day, he went for a bike ride and trusted his notebook to his 5-year old son, who was still illiterate at that time but who managed nevertheless to go online and created his own little video game with Ben 10 Game Creator. The boy even tried to put the game online to share it with all his friends in the world. This last step, however, he could not complete on his own, since he needed a valid e-mail address. All the other operations he was able to perform without the help of his parents and without any technical training. Ferri identifies today's children, age 0-12, as "pure" digital natives.

[2] M. Prensky, "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants. Part 1", *On the Horizon*, 9, 5 (2001): 1-6.

[3] H. Jenkins, *Reconsidering Digital Immigrants*, December 2007. http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2007/12/reconsidering_digital_immigran.html.

lennials and Post-Millennials. There are many different opinions and arguments on the starting date of this latter generation, ranging from those born after 1993 to the post-9/11 babies[4]. What matters for this special issue is that Post-Millennials, in contrast to Millennials, have known no life without the Internet. Those born at the beginning of the 21st century have witnessed the introduction of smartphones and tablets in and around their small world – it is good to recall here that the iPhone, launched in 2007, became available in most European countries only in 2008 and the iPad then followed in 2010. But today's children are not only surrounded by these new media devices, they are also truly "connected" thanks to Internet, WiFi, GPS, mobile telephony, etc. Their "inter-media network"[5], to use a term proposed by Gene Youngblood in 1970, is constantly expanding both in time and space.

In the 1970s, when the Generation X was growing up, Youngblood's notion of expanded cinema as "intermedia network" basically referred to the impact of cine-ma and television/video in the changing media ecology or environment. According to Youngblood, expanded cinema is a process of becoming, a process of our conscious-ness expanding, which is closely connected to new "image-making technologies"[6] that help to extend our communication capacities. As a true visionary, Youngblood talked about the beginning of a new era that would be ruled by "image-exchange between man and man"[7]. Expanded cinema is a network between different media, which constitute, in Youngblood's view, our environment: "The cinema isn't just something *inside* the environment; the intermedia network of cinema, television, radio, magazines, books, and newspapers *is* our environment, a service environment that carries the messages of the social organism"[8]. When looking at the "environment" of contemporary children and young adolescents, we notice a significant *expansion* in terms of media screens and interconnectedness. Post-Millennials are not only "native speakers" of the touch-screen-based language, but also multiscreen users, digital content prosumers and fre-quent visitors and active participants of social media platforms.

This special issue aims at analyzing Post-Millennials' cinema experiences and practices. Although the youngest generation does not seem to go too often to the movie any longer, cinema remains a point of reference in their lives. In 2006-2007, Mariagrazia Fanchi and Alberto Bourlot conducted a large-scale research project on child and teen audiences, collecting testimonies of more than 3000 children under the age of 14 across the entire Italian peninsula[9]. The testimonies consisted of questionnaires and drawings, short stories or strips, by which the children "told" their cinema experi-ence. These documents showed the persistence of the "classical" cinema experience at a time when the process of cinema's "relocation" was already in an advanced stage. More recent research conducted on the 0-8 age group suggests that the practices of moving image consumption by today's children are genuinely cross-platform and multimedia[10].

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[4] See for instance A. Fishman, "Who Comes after the Millennials? A Case for 'Ten 9/11'", *American Marketing Association*, August 2015. https://www.ama.org/publications/eNewsletters/MarketingInsights-Newsletter/Pages/whats-after-the-millennials-a-case-for-gen-911.aspx.

[5] G. Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, New York: Dutton & Co, 1970, 41.

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] *Ibid.*, 49.

[8] *Ibid.*, 54.

[9] See M. Fanchi, "Cinema Natives. Il cinema nelle pratiche e nell'immaginario degli spettatori con meno di 14 anni", in L. Cardone, S. Lischi, eds., *Sguardi differenti. Studi di cinema in onore di Lorenzo Cuccu*, Pisa: ETS, 2014, 361-370.

[10] See M. Fanchi, G. Mascheroni, "At the Sunrise of the Digital Revolution. Young Audiences in Italy between Resilience and Changes", paper presented at NECS Conference, Lodz, Poland, June 18-20, 2015.

What is more, youngsters not only consume a lot of films and other moving images on multiple devices, but also produce their own audiovisual objects in a variety of forms and formats. In other words, Post-Millennials are doing what Miriam Hansen predicted in 2009: they are reimagining and reinventing cinema[11]. More specifically, as a new generation of digital natives, they are exploring the richness of digital cinema, its limits and potentialities, its new forms of spectatorships and its new participatory dimensions.

2. (AGAINST) BRAND NAMING GENERATIONS

If we agree upon the definition of Post-Millennials being born roughly between 1995 and today, we are talking – anno 2018 – about an age group that includes young adults turning 23 years old. These older Post-Millennials might have vivid memories of the pre-smartphone age, when going online was not yet a mobile activity and social media were still inexistent. They have experienced, consciously or not, the big changes in media consumption that took place over the last 10 to 15 years, with the digitization of old media (such as newspapers), the emergence of streaming media and the ever-growing presence of touchscreens and mobile media devices in daily life. All this is a simple fact for the youngest Post-Millennials, born after the introduction and the wide spread of the smartphone. Most essays of this special issue concern the age group in-between, the not-yet-adults but also the no-longer-kids, namely today's teenagers.

Already in the 1990s, the term "screenagers" appeared to indicate teenagers "with an aptitude for computers and the internet", or to express, with moralizing undertone, concerns about the amount of time they spend on screens[12]. How to find a right balance between screen time and screen free time is indeed at the center of the documentary *Screenagers* (2016) by Delaney Ruston. It is not the scope of this special issue to delve into the debate about moral values of social media or other (often heated) discussions about prolonged screen time and its possible damages for the child's brain. Instead the general aim is to document current screen practices by Post-Millennials and question in how far these practices are still related to the notion of cinema.

With the coinage of the term "iGen Cinema", we realize that we are reinforcing the Apple brand name inspired term iGeneration, which has become rather popular in the last decade to indicate Post-Millennials. In January 2018 *The New York Times* asked the Post-Millennials (age 22 and under) among their readers what term they would pick to name their own generation. Not surprisingly, many young respondents were against labeling and preferred not to be called anything. On the other hand, an important segment seemed to be comfortable with the "Generation Z" name, which alludes to the lastof three successive generations (X, Y, Z). As a 22-year-old young woman explains: "Gen Z is the final generation of the 1900s, and a generational title using the last letter in the

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[11] At a Berlin conference in 2009, Hansen reflected upon what it means to watch Max Ophüls's films "with a generation of students who do not know a world before computers, cell phones, and videogames". Hansen concluded with an optimistic note, suggesting: "Perhaps we should defer cultural pessimism about the digital transformations of experience and publicness for a while and give the generations growing up with these technologies a chance to incorporate them into cultural memory and, along the way, to rediscover and reinvent cinema", M. Hansen, "Max Ophuls and the Instant Messaging. Reframing Cinema and Publicness", edited by G. Koch, V. Panternburg, S. Rothöhler, *Screen Dymamics. Mapping the Borders of Cinema*, Wien: Synema Publikationen, 2012, 29.

[12] The term was added to the Oxford English Dictionary in March 2003. See: https://public.oed.com/updates/new-words-list-march-2003/.

alphabet seems fitting"[13]. This same woman strongly opposes against the iGeneration label, which she claims never have heard before: "[iGeneration] is really horrendous […] Our whole generation shouldn't be branded by Apple"[14].

The New York Times lists many other terms, suggested and coined by Post-Millennials as their possible alternative names, such as Generation Scapegoat, Generation Fix-It, Generation Snap, Meme Generation or Memennials. However, the winning name is Deltas or the Delta Generation, which, on the one hand, denotes change and uncertainty (like delta in mathematics) and, on the other hand, calls attention to the Post-Millennials' agency. As another 22-year-old clarifies: "We are not passive products of circumstance, but active members of society with agency to affect the course of history, and will to build each other up to make things better"[15].

The labeling issue of today's teen generation returns in more than one of the articles collected for this issue of *Comunicazioni sociali*. Some authors stick to the term iGeneration (or iGen), others instead opt for Generation Z (o Gen Z) or for an alternation of the two. Also other terms are brought into the discussion: from "Generation K" inspired by the fictional character Katniss Everdeen, female protagonist of *The Hunger Games* book trilogy and movie franchise, to "The MilleXZials" as combined demographic group (X, Y, Z). But at least one author entirely avoids the use of labels and talks in more general terms about today's children and teens. As is typical for research on contemporary phenomena, it remains difficult to assess the long-term relevance of these individual studies. Yet the great advantage and beauty of this kind of research is that they capture the present moment, like snapshots, and make the voices of the 21st-century youth resound, either by theoretical reflections or by empirical investigations on the basis of interviews that literally bring the subjects to life.

3. iGEN CINEMA: THREE SECTIONS

The thematic issue is divided into three sections, focusing on three different aspects of iGen Cinema: representation, consumption and production. The first section deals with representational issues in connection with teen genres; the second section collects essays reflecting on new forms of spectatorships, related to the practices of binge-watching, second screen uses and traditional moviegoing; the third section, lastly, proposes to look at active media forms, such as Snapchat and mobile monster-making apps, which lead to the production of new content.

1) *Teen Genres*

In "Catching Katniss: Generation K and the Evolution of the Teen Movie Genre", Stefano Guerini Rocco brings the notion of Generation K into play in order to shed light on the relationship between a specific media culture and its teen spectators. The notion was coined in 2015 by economist Noreena Hertz in relation to Post-Millennials. For media scholars, Generation K is a particularly intriguing notion as the K stands for Katniss Everdeen, the female protagonist of Suzanne Collins' book trilogy *The Hunger Games*

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[13] J. Engel Bromwich, "We Asked Generation Z to Pick a Name. It Wasn't Generation Z", *The New York Times*, 31 January 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/31/style/generation-z-name.html.
[14] *Ibid.*
[15] *Ibid*.

and its homonymous film series, starring Jennifer Lawrence. Stefano Guerini Rocco proposes to understand Katniss as an updated version of what film studies scholar Carol Clover once called the "final girl" of the horror movie genre: the not-yet-sexually active woman who remains the only survivor of the monster's atrocities. The new final girl of contemporary horror fantasy then is Katniss Everdeen, a character that according to Guerini Rocco aligns with Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection as "whatever disturbs identity, system, order; what does not respect borders, positions, rules; the in-between, the ambiguous" (cited in Guerini Rocco).

Although the success of horror and fantasy has evolved in waves throughout film history, the cinematic experiences of teenage audiences of the past two decades have been clearly marked by those two genres. Then it does not come as a surprise that the second article is also dedicated to the fascination of teenagers with the horror genre. Stefania Antonioni and Manolo Farci focus on a specific case study in order to discuss a possible change in cinematic spectatorship. According to the authors, the horror film allows to experience fear in a safe environment, what makes the genre particularly relevant as a site of mediated rite-of-passage for teenage audiences. In their contribution "Post-Millennial Spectatorship and Horror Films: The Case of *It* (2017)", Antonioni and Farci ask whether the horror film still exercises "this fundamental function for Post-Millennials". Based on their in-depth study of *It* and its appearance on different media devices and platforms, they argue that the function is still the same. But then spectatorship itself has changed: On the one hand, the viewing experience of the iGen has very much become a sensory immersion, based on a tactile spectatorship that recreates moments of cinephilia outside the movie theatre. On the other hand, the "polyaesthetic engagement provided by digital media" impedes emotional involvement and identification as conceptualized by classic film theory. In short, the article can be read as a claim for historicizing spectatorship, which brings us to the second section of this special issue.

2) *Spectatorship*

The generational approach calls for an in-depth analysis of spectatorship. The meaning and value that digital natives attribute to film viewing make it possible to highlight the typical traits of this new generation.

The essays belonging to the second section are based on the same main premises. First, the abovementioned definition of generation and its use as a heuristic category leads to the identification of some constants in cinema experience, without reducing or denying the complexity and the physiological heterogeneity of its manifestations. Second, it is stated that the effort goes beyond the mere recording of phenomenological data and description of practices, in the attempt to grasp the value, the motivations, the thickness of experience that these practices underlie. Finally, the essays make the choice to relate the technological dimension – namely the opportunities that the new mediascape with its tools, platforms, contents offer – to its social use and meaning. This perspective makes it possible to highlight the complexity of the contemporary movie experience and, at the same time, to avoid the techno-centric temptation inherent in many definitions of iGeneration mentioned in the opening recognizing the centrality of personal and human aspects.

The first two essays of this section by Edoardo Becattini and Massimiliano Pistonesi focus on Netflix, i.e. the phenomenon that variously epitomizes the new conditions of the viewing experience.

Edoardo Becattini's essay scrutinizes the editorial strategies through which Netflix is conquering the iGeneration world. The essay starts from a systematic review of literature and data related to Netflix's audiences, demonstrating the relevance of this new platform for younger spectators. Then, Becattini examines how it has made its way to the iGeneration audience. First of all, he analyses Netflix's contents, emphasizing the agreements signed with some of the main producers of teenagers' shows – from Dreamworks to Marvel Cinematic Animation – in order to meet the target; Becattini then describes Netflix's original productions as a peculiar mashup of adult-oriented contents, topics, genres, actors, and languages taken from young people's imaginary. Surprisingly, the editorial model that takes shape is the "family" consumption model, fuelled with contents (*Stranger Things* or *13 Reasons Why*, to quote the best known) destined to a potentially intergenerational audience.

In Massimiliano Pistonesi's essay, Netflix is presented as a typical environment where the new viewing practices take shape. The essay focuses on *binge-watching*, the streaming viewing of several contents – especially TV series episodes –, in rapid succession. Binge-watching marks a change from an *event-based logic* where media contents are valorized by limiting their access and consumption opportunities (what Jenkins, Ford and Green define as logic "by appointment'[16]) to an *engagement-based logic*, where, on the contrary, the value of media content is decided by the intensity of consumption (also in terms of time). Pistonesi considers binge-watching as the normalization and institutionalization of a subversive practice or, more precisely, as the transformation of a spectator's tactic into an editorial strategy. By interweaving empirical data with the theoretical debate on the spectator's changes, this essay highlights the peculiar ways in which different generations (in particular Millennials and Post-Millennials) exploit the most innovative forms of cinema and audiovisual consumption as well as the complex mixture of forms and meanings that characterizes the contemporary viewing experience.

Sociality, as a component that strongly characterizes film viewing today even in its expanded and relocated form, is also central to the last two essays.

Alfonso Amendola and Mario Tirino aim at analysing another representative phenomenon of the contemporary viewing experience: second screen. Second screen is the use of PCs, tablets, and – increasingly more often – smart phones as extensions of film viewing. The essay adopts De Francisci Morales and Shekhaw's taxonomy[17], distinguishing between three different practices: Human-Human practices (H-H), when audiences share contents and comments in their social networks; Human-Machine practices (H-M), when audiences co-create and/or participate in the TV show, voting or more generally interacting with it; Machine-Human practices (M-H), when platforms or broadcasters engage their audiences with customer relationship activities. Starting from a pilot survey conducted through two focus groups of 20 high school students in two small towns in Southern Italy, this essay describes the peculiar features that second screen practices take on when people are watching movies: the absence of M-H interactions; the considerable presence of H-H practices; a sort of self-censorship during film viewing, demonstrating the resilience of some elements of classical spectatorship cinema, even when viewing takes place outside the canonical space of a movie theater.

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[16] H. Jenkins, S. Ford, J. Green, *Spreadable Media. Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*, New York-London: New York University Press, 2013 (trad. it. *Spreadable media. I media tra condivisione, circolazione, partecipazione*, Milano: Apogeo, 2015).

[17] G. De Francisci Morales, A. Shekhawat, "The Future of Second Screen Experience", paper presented at CHI'13, Paris, April 27-May 2, 2013, 2-4 (https://melmeric.files.wordpress.com/2010/05/the-future-of-second-screen-experience.pdf).

Socialization as a resilient trait, which still and sharply distinguishes the experience of cinema from other media consumption, is also central to the essay by Alessandra Porcu. This essay focuses on the different types of cinemagoers in a community of young people in Sulcis-Inglesiente, an area of Sardinia affected by a deep economic crisis that is redefining its social structure, lifestyle and consumption habits. Employing ethnographic methods and alternating online and offline interviews, the essay reconstructs the usage and the social significance that cinema takes on among young people born in the late Nineties. As stated in the title "A Little Show, a Little Art Form, a Little Knowledge", there is some evidence of the plurality of meanings that cinema conveys and of the many and different needs it has to satisfy. Therefore, the importance that the movie theater continues to have as a space for meeting and relationship cannot be overlooked especially in a socially impoverished context, such as the one in which the survey was carried out.

3) *Apps and Platforms*

In "Nothing to decode: iGen, Snapchat and Online Communication in the Oral Images Age", Raffaele Pavoni points to the interesting paradox that young users tend to opt for apps with clear limits, such as the ten-seconds time restriction of Snapchat videos, in an age when the production and the spread of moving image contents seems to be limitless and uncontrollable. Pavoni argues that Snapchat is particularly popular among the iGeneration, not only because it offers a humorous alternative to other online communication tools, but also because it is highly constrained (or self-limiting) and seemingly ephemeral (or self-destructive). Historically, the notion of ephemerality is connected to the very beginnings of cinema, with its short attractions and *actualités*, as well as to the oral tradition of non-written or non-recorded messages, such as early video calls. From today's perspective, the ephemeral is both a technological and a political concern, related to issues such as bandwidth, server restrictions, digital archiving and data capitalism. This brings Pavoni to consider the limit as a social construct and to reflect on the fundamental differences between society and software, the latter being limitless or at least not self-limiting.

The notion of limit as creative restriction also returns in the last contribution of this special issue: "Taming Monstrous Play: STEAM Learning, Maker Culture, and Monster-Making Media for Children" by Meredith Bak. Here, the limit is not so much a user's tactic, but rather a matter of legal and commercial boundaries embedded in apps for young children. Bak is exploring to what extent popular monster-making apps meet expectations of science, technology, engineering, arts and math (STEAM) professionals. Although the monster as child-constructed creation seems to respond to the STEAM educational goals to facilitate failure, risk-taking and problem-solving, to push the limits of the child's imagination and to remix with absolute freedom, Bak concludes that in most cases "possibilities are reduced to their most conservative and normative elements", because of the limited inventory of monster's body parts, for instance, or the design of highly gendered templates. Furthermore, practices such as reverse-engineering, hacking and modding are prohibited in the Terms of Use of many platforms, aligning the child's creativity with the logic of mass production and commodification. However, the monster's potential for radical alterity continues to appeal to today's children, not as an embodiment of cultural anxieties (like in classic monster theory), but as a companion in their productive, yet disruptive, rule-breaking play.