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What is This?

Neapolitan songs: A communicative siren from the water of the Gulf to the water of time

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Abstract

Neapolitan songs are known worldwide, but most of them became popular when the radio and record industries did not yet exist. The article hypothesises that this 'unusual' phenomenon can be connected to the many intersected actions of spreading and 'drilling' undertaken by 'passionate' listeners of Neapolitan songs and amateurs, who were engaged in 'permanent creative activity, communication, community building, and content-production'. As is evident, this article refers to some studies about recent trends in media communication to explore better the Neapolitan communication system, between the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In this way, it wishes to overcome the juxtaposition between 'new' and 'old' – the 'dualistic form' of many 'short term investigations' – and proposes to test social science models in different socio-historical contexts, by putting them into 'the water of time', to see if they float, if they can 'keep afloat' or if they 'sink'.

Keywords
Active audience, audience studies, cultural industries, pop music, social communication

Introduction

For a media sociologist, 'Neapolitan songs' is an interesting subject for various reasons. For example, they are known worldwide. We could suppose that this current popularity is due to widespread, appropriate media use. There remains, nevertheless, a 'problem',

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that is, most world-famous Neapolitan songs became popular when the radio and record industries did not yet exist. As a matter of fact, we observe an evergreen song like *'O sole mio* (Capurro and Di Capua, 1898) only in the 20th century (1940s and 1950s) in the United States, where the music market was being run by the converging interests of the Hollywood Studios, the radios and major labels.

This article employs some studies conducted by the author many years ago on historical documents (Stazio 1987, 1991, 1995), and underlines some aspects which could explain the particularities mentioned above – for example, an economic territorial system where different productive sectors (publishing, show business, tourism, trade) had mutually joined forces to create some sort of co-marketing and cross-marketing, and where cultural production branches were able to found interrelationships through social networks, high-society rituals and everyday life, and to exploit billions of ordinary communicative interactions in which the users were engaged in 'permanent creative activity, communication, community building and content production' (Fuchs, 2009: 82).

As clear from the previous citation, this article uses some perspectives proposed by media scholars – such as Jenkins, Bruns, Fuchs and Anderson – that usually study the new media, web communication, social media, convergence culture, participative and cooperative practices.

According to Fernand Braudel (1980 [1958]: 45), in effect, it would be useful to put some social science models into 'the water of time', to see if they float, and to observe, while they are ascending and descending, if they can keep afloat or sink:

> Past and present illuminate each other reciprocally. And in exclusively observing the narrow confines of the present, the attention will irresistibly be drawn toward whatever moves quickly, burns with a true or a false flame, or has just changed, or makes a noise, or is easy to see. […] Social questions are morecunning game than that. (Braudel, 1980 [1958]: 37)

Neapolitan songs: emotional realism and place marketing

'*Neapolitan song*' (an uncountable form, as appropriate for an *essence* that manifests itself in different sensible *appearances*) is one of the 'master myths' of Naples in post-unification Italy. In the late 19th century, for Neapolitans, it marked their *identity* and also *alterity*. The 'others', in this context, were the *Italians*, that is, the natives of Turin, Rome or Milan.

During the *Belle Époque*, Neapolitan songs were usually printed products – sound recording and reproduction, as well as their related industries, did not yet exist – and they were printed in various ways: in newspapers, in magazines or in booklets called *albums*, and also in broadsides, called *copielle*, very cheap and suitable to disseminate songs, especially among the lower classes. In order to promote their products, the publishers would exploit the *Festa di Piedigrotta*,[1] with its blend of sacred and profane, involving popular and commercial initiatives.

The editorial scene was frenzied. Many publishers – such as Bideri, Pierro, Morano – would jostle, trying to get a hand on writers, musicians and successful visual artists, such as Scoppetta, Del Bono and La Bella, but also Irolli, Migliaro and Matania.

In every publication, we can note how the *peritext* – like titles or illustrations – tends to activate an *intertextual* reading. Very often, moreover, Neapolitan newspapers and magazines would publish Neapolitan songs (which had the same promotional function of the *feuilleton*) and also articles 'about Neapolitan song' – its history, its 'poets', its belonging to *genius loci* – so that these originated a sort of 'genre' that became very popular.

The social construction of the subject of 'Neapolitan songs' was founded on the *transmedial* connection of readings, interpretations and performances, through newspapers, *affiches*, postcards, magazines, illustrations, theatrical or *salonnard* performances, critiques, piano-scores, conversations and gossip. In the 20th century, most music consumption (and most profits from its publication) occurred, in fact, in the *salon*.[2] A particular, Neapolitan, version of the *salon* was – for the middle class – the *periodica*, a social occasion where *amateurs* would perform their arts. The *social valorisation* of the songs took place not only in these 'home-made' musical performances, but also in the social interactions that are the 'corollary' to collective, cooperative production/consumption, that is, in chatter and in gossip about singers, authors, theatres, events and back-stage incidents. Thus, the individual readings and public performances of the songs are enhanced by the sense acquired in the social and *transmedial* use of this *paratextual apparatus*.

These observations directly bring to mind Pierre Bourdieu's well-known concept of 'field'. The social construction of 'Neapolitan songs' was indeed effected not only by the direct producers (writers, musicians and visual artists) and music publishers, but also by 'the producers of the meaning and value of the work in its materiality' (e.g. publishers, critics, opinion leaders, etc.) and 'the whole set of agents whose combined efforts produce consumers capable of knowing and recognizing the work of art', such as families, social groups and communities structured by taste differentiation, and structurally attuned with respect to their view of the social world, and their whole 'habitus' (cf. Bourdieu, 1993: 37). Here, we introduce the 'agents of consumption' – situated in their different locations, settings, standpoints and social levels (from the theatre, to the salon, to the street) and divided by their 'tastes' (Bourdieu, 1984 [1979]: 184) – that should be classified among the social agents that 'help to define and produce the value of works of art' (Bourdieu, 1993: 37).

This 'field' – internally fractionated by a very unequal distribution of social, cultural, economic and symbolic capitals (Bourdieu, 1986 [1983]) – worked as a whole to *valorise* the songs not only as an art form, but also as the 'natural', spontaneous and irrepressible expression of Neapolitan 'National character', strictly tied to the 'volcanic' characteristics of territory.

In fact, while we generally believe that the songs describe Neapolitan places and characters, in the lyrics of classical Neapolitan songs, there are no references to specific locations instead.

For example, while *Funiculì Funiculà* (Turco and Denza, 1880) describes the funicular cable car to ascend the volcano, in its lyrics, there are no references to the typical 'commonplace' of iconography: Mount Vesuvius. In the lyrics, only the sun, the sea, the sky, the fragrance and sweetness of the air and silent witnesses of situations and feelings figure. The bonds with the city are usually in titles, in illustrations and in other paratextual elements;

there are some exceptions, however, for example, in *Marechiaro* (Di Giacomo and Tosti, 1885), where the topographical indication is in the title (and this is usual, for example, *Santa Lucia* (Cossovich and Cottrau, 1848) and in two lines, which is remarkable.

The sky, the sea, the moon, the air and the sun, in classical 19th-century Neapolitan songs, always take part in the events at which they are present: the sun kisses, the sun-set saddens, the sea whispers or keeps quiet to avoid disturbing the sailor who has fallen in love. Natural elements and human affairs always intersect and mutually radi-ate their qualities or feelings, such as melancholy, tenderness, gaiety, nostalgia and light-heartedness.

The performers and the listeners – through projection/identification processes – could identify themselves with the human protagonists of the songs because they could recog-nise 'universal' feelings in the protagonists. This supported the acknowledgement of 'the reality' of the natural elements, and of the events that formed the 'plot' of the lyrics.

This process seems to recall what Ien Ang (1985: 45) termed *emotional realism*. The users'/consumers' engagement and their subjective experience of recognition and identi-fication with the psychological reality of the characters and narrative elements of the songs made the situations/emotions 'real' and made the stories plausible, despite much narrative excess.

In the specific case of Neapolitan songs, this process was made easier by the absence of landmarks. Only the language – a particular form belonging to Neapolitan literary tradition – linked the lyrics to the city and to a particular ethnic and territorial unit. Thus, there began a process of identification between the songs and the city, through which Naples became the place where human emotions were echoed by the natural environ-ment. In this way, the songs' consumers shared and participated in a sort of Neapolitan *Arcadia*, where life was delightful, idyllic and totally detached from reality, where shep-herds and other pastoral figures were replaced by *marenarielli*[3] and *luciane*,[4] while time and history faded away into the blue of the sky.

If the experience of recognition and identification made the song a faithful 'descrip-tion' of reality, the latter could be easily interpreted through the lyrics and their words. This is still true today. Anyone in Naples, on a beautiful day, spontaneously sings: *chisto è 'o paese d' 'o sole*.[5] At the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the following century, in Neapolitan paraliterature and in local popular literature, song fragments very often described and 'emphasised' places, feelings, moods and 'atmospheres'. In these cases, in what was highlighted – in a self-powered and self-pleasant manner – there was a perfect correspondence between what was happening and what the lyrics described. Thus, quoting a song, in an appropriate situation, was considered a graceful and pertinent thing to do, showing a high cultural level. But, this was also a self-powered, 'mechani-cal', link because in the songs – in which stereotypical descriptions were common – there was the everyday soundscape, an immersive environment, for all the people, that is, in the streets, in the coffee shops, in the theatres, in private meetings, in the sea baths and in the fairs or in the salons. The lyrics provided a 'pre-packaged' element, and were a shared way to show – in a socially appreciated way – emotions, sensations and moods.

If the songs were *ubiquitous*, their 'literature' was *cumulative* and *consonant* (Noelle-Neuman, 1974, 1982) in themes and modes. So, along a trend that gradually increased and accelerated, reading automatisms were established and *meaning*

production became mostly extra-textual, that is, developed in the contexts in which meaning itself was shaped, in musical performances, in *cooperative readers* (Eco, 1990), in all those occasions in which the 'users' (performers and listeners) *completed* the musical and literary texts by over-interpreting them in a sort of collective shaping of the *surplus meaning* of Neapolitan songs, which is what Lazzarato (1997: 13) called *ethical surplus*. The users were guided by a 'social reading' and cooperative and inter-subjective interpretations that gave voice to wishes and needs related to contradictions and clashes between *local identity* (as Neapolitans) and *national identity* (as Italians). In Neapolitan songs, post-unification Neapolitans were seeking for their *voice*: for a choral, artistic expression of what they identified as their 'National culture'.

In newspaper articles and magazines, in the books and booklets about Neapolitan songs, which as a whole formed the songs' paratextual apparatus, Naples was represented as the place where individuality faded into ethnic belonging, and a city community – as a *Gemeinschaft* (as Tönnies, 2011 [1887], and later Allum (1973), specifically indicated for Naples) – expressed, in the 'songs' and through the songs, their desires, needs, moods, spiritual principles and collective bases.

Obviously, this collective identity, which involved all Neapolitans – regardless of their class or social level – could not exist. This is an evidently bourgeois ideological construct which could be 'hegemonic' because it individuated a 'symbolic space' within which antagonistic practices due to social, cultural and economic differences could/ should be articulated and contained.

All in all, however, it provided a system of common reference – the so-called *napoletanità*[6] – in which contradictions and inequalities could be expressed.

At the end of the 19th century, this identity form could not mirror itself in the myth that enchanted Goethe. Italian unification and the relative repositioning of Naples in the cultural and economic European system, while encouraging integrative impulses, also offered the city a very unflattering 'mirror'. 'Italians' started to describe Naples as an underdeveloped town – not only economically and socially, but also culturally – while theories about the inferiority of the 'southern race' were spreading.

Thus, if the most important function of this paratextual 'literature' of songs was promotional and 'normative' – that is, to encourage and to guide consumption – it would yet be simplistic to consider the *peritextual* and *epitextual* song elements as related to these functions only. This, not only with regard to their intentions, but also in connection to their involvement in the creation of a myth, would stand the test of time and the degradation of the city. And this was clearly functional in making both socially and intellectually sustainable the ambivalence with which the Neapolitan bourgeois people faced their difficult integration into the new national unity and their repositioning in the European 'world-economy' (Wallerstein, 2001).

In effect, in social exchanges and in communicative circulation, songs refined their *Neapolitan* characteristics, precisely because Neapolitans (not without a certain uneasiness) were integrating into, and differentiating themselves within, the new Italian nation, and because they were searching for a new positioning in Europe. The social construction of a 'song mythology' involved – as we have seen – the 'productivity' of the audiences and their 'capabilities'.

But, evidently, this also implied a 'product' through which one could 'create magnets for engagement, drawing viewers into the storyworlds and urging them to drill down to discover more' (Mittell, 2009), and which could invite the audiences to *spread* it, that is to say, according to Jenkins, 'to engage actively in the circulation of media content through social networks and in the process expand its economic value and cultural worth'. It is indeed possible to describe some production/consumption practices in the Neapolitan cultural productive system as oriented to activate a sort of *transmedia storytelling*, specifically referring to practices described by Jenkins (2009). With regard to the aforementioned categories of *spreadability* and *drillability*, we can further note that, according to Mittel (2009),

> Spreadable media encourages horizontal ripples, accumulating eyeballs without necessarily encouraging more long-term engagement. Drillable media typically engage far fewer people, but occupy more of their time and energies in a vertical descent into a text's complexities.

Neapolitan song, furthermore, is surely perceived as 'a "unified experience" which is "systematically" developed across multiple texts'.

This is what Jenkins defined as *Continuity vs. Multiplicity*. In the 'song literature', 'chunks of meaningful and engaging story information have been dispersed not simply across multiple segments within the same medium, but rather across multiple media systems', which was what Jenkins termed *Seriality*. Songs typically express personal or emotional feelings, as in a lyric poem; they provide a sort of 'point of view shot' multiplied by hundreds of songs, which create 'more than one set of eyes' through which to see, and which solicited 'longstanding readers interest in comparing and contrasting multiple subjective experiences'.

Let me now examine the last few points in detail. Jenkins suggested that in *Immersion*, consumers enter into the world of the story, while in *Extractability*, they take aspects of the story away with them as resources they deploy in the spaces of their everyday life. The concept of *World Building* seems closely linked to the former two principles because they both represent ways for consumers 'to engage more directly with the worlds represented' treating them as 'real spaces which intersect in some way with our own lived realities' (Jenkins, 2009). That was what the Neapolitan audiences were doing. The songs were inviting the audiences to *Performance*, because they were *cultural attractors* (a concept that Jenkins borrowed from Pierre Levy) – as they drew together a community of people who shared common interests – and *cultural activators* – as they gave that community 'something to do'.

That was true for singing and playing performances, but also for songs when they were 'dramatised' – in films, theatres or in the *sceneggiata*,[7] and this was furthermore happening also in the interaction between reality and imagination in everyday life.

With regard to this aspect, let us return to *Marechiaro*. In the *Corriere di Napoli*, 6 February 1894,[8] Salvatore di Giacomo wrote about the literary birth of his song (which originated by 'quoting' one of Cerlone's *opere buffe*), but he also narrated of his first boat ride to Marechiaro while accompanying a young English woman, that is, Miss Mary. Through her very presence – she was, of course, a *tourist* – Miss Mary could show us the other side of the process of *Neapolitan identity* construction, namely *image creation*:

– That is the window, and that is the pot of carnations.

The innkeeper raised his huge hand, with its greasy nails shining and indicated.

Miss Mary asked:

– And Carolina?

– She's arriving to serve you – said Vincenzo. And he called: *Carulì*!

–*Scetate, cal'aria è duce*[9] … So, isn't it?

– Do not duce: *dòce*

− *Dòce*. All Right.

– One day the poet arrived here for lunch – continued the innkeeper, stood beside the table – He saw the window, the carnations and Carolina, and he put all in the song.

Miss Mary laughed. But, word of honour, I would gladly embrace that kind comedian. What a *toupet*! That was the first time I saw Marechiaro, and Miss Mary knew it, I told it her. And the little window had been freshly opened in the wall, and on its sill – in a green pot – were a kind of carnations that flourish only on Ladies' hats. […]

− *Ccà sta Carulina!*[10] − Rang a fresh, gentle voice.

A young smiling girl appeared under the kitchen archway and greeted. She was tall, brunette and rosy. She moved forward, presented a sheet to her father, said hello once over with a smile of her great dark eyes, and faded. Now the innkeeper presented us the sheet on a little dish, and bowed.

– The bill, wishing good health …

This apologue not only shows that the combination of natural elements in the songs constituted a composition convention; this imaginary element provided for the *creation of a landscape* that could describe *any real plac*e but also *modify realit*y. In other words, if Neapolitans could live a reality *cooperatively re-invented* through the filter of their songs, they could, in the same way, *re-invent realit*y and transform it to confirm that the imaginary element was in fact the *truth*.

We have assumed that the most important function of the 'literature about songs' should be promotional (to encourage consumption) and 'normative' (to guide consumption). We have also assumed that the social construction of the *myth* of Neapolitan song was an important element in the restoration of Neapolitan post-unification identity. Now we can note how, through this social construction, Neapolitan song was structuring an important segment of *image making*, which, as well-known, is nowadays considered key in structuring *competitive advantage* in international markets, as an element of *differentiation* (Porter, 1985).

Neapolitan song was a product born to be *glocal*, because it originated in the constraints between the valorisation of the local characteristics and the connection with systems of relationships – not only political, but also social and economic – which were new and large. And, it was also born in a town that was a must-see of the *Grand Tour* and that was aspiring to enter the enlarging tourist market.

In brief, we can observe that the Neapolitans, who were engaged in the *productive consumption* of the songs, not only expended their rationed resources (time, money and work of *cooperative interpretation*), but also profited from the consumption of the songs in various ways. They obtained social and existential benefits because the songs contributed to found a sense of belonging and the distributed 'consciousness of a shared culture' (Wolff, 1968: 187). The myth of the songs – constructed in social relationships and created by social ties – enriched the individual identities with *Neapolitan pride*, which consisted in *distinction* and *alterity*. But Neapolitans also had an economic benefit. This *identity/image* was intervening, in fact, in the process of 'Neapolitan differentiation' in the global (tourist and non-tourist) markets. Several Neapolitans – hawkers, receptionists, artisans, merchants, porters, industrialists and businessmen – could profit from the sojourn of tourists; so each and everyone, like Di Giacomo's innkeeper, could (and liked to) profit from the representation/differentiation that the songs' mythological apparatus helped to shape.

Labouring audiences

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the following century, in Naples, in a communicative system in which the communication technologies employed were orality, alphabetic writing and the printing press, it only took a limited investment to enter the local cultural industry. Thus, many small and marginal firms could enter and remain in a market that was 'naturally' segmented by its targets

In addition to this, the production and distribution system of Neapolitan songs was largely based on *colporteurs*, many kinds of popular theatre and *posteggiatori*[11] and *pianini*.[12] Thus, accessing promotion and distribution was, perhaps, easier for small organisations than for big publishers, because the latter had to reconcile different needs in their list of priorities.

In effect, the production of Neapolitan songs was situated in a 'field of forces' in which were performed strategies – whose strength and criteria were correlated to the position of each agent in the relations of power and of production of the 'field' itself – tending, by the continual re-structuring of hierarchies, polarisation and sources of exclusion/inclusion, to transform or preserve a stated 'configuration' (cf. Bourdieu, 1993: 30).

Surrounded by these struggles, in which was incessantly emerging the importance of social structure, the publishers – and generally all those who were involved in the 'song business' – tried to direct and regulate the audiences in their different aggregations or, at least, to follow and exploit the users when they followed the flows of information through different medial and social devices (as well as by interacting between themselves). But it was a very difficult challenge.

In effect, these *audiences* were really *active* and *productive*. But they were also – if we sterilise this definition from the implications related to the 'antagonism' of 'popular culture' – *resistant* in the sense used by Fiske. Indeed, according to Fiske (1987),

> resisting this is the diversity of social groups with their diversity of social interests. Their power is expressed in the resistances to homogenization, it works as a centrifugal rather than a centripetal force […] it proposes multiplicity over singularity. (p. 259)

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the following century, songs were not recorded (or, if they were, recording was not widespread). So, there was nothing that could propose itself as a 'model' for instrumental or vocal performances.

For example, a song that had become popular through the *café chantant* was arranged for the piano (and for the pure ears of girls of a marriageable age) in the *salons*, whereas on the roads and in the bars, the same song was performed with other instruments (vocal and musical), for different ears, purposes and tastes.

Songs grew popular through the performances of musicians, *amateurs* and semi-professionals that had very different musical backgrounds. The composer, who conducted the first interpretation of his new song during *Piedigrotta*; the tenor or the *chanteuse* who performed it during the *audizioni*,[13] or every night on stage; the *posteggiatore* in the restaurant; the dutiful daughter or the hopeful youngster in the *salon* and the itinerant singers on the streets, all used different cultural codes in interpreting and performing these songs. To these diverse performances corresponded different situations and audiences, different social contexts and communicative contracts. In order to understand why this matter involved the dialectics between 'homogeneization and difference' (Fiske, 1987: 259), we have to digress a little.

A music publishing company made profits on two fronts: through consumers (the 'users' that were buying music scores) and the royalties market. In the latter case, the users were theatrical impresarios and professional singers, that is, 'consumers' who – through their performances – created value for the other market, that of the press products.

This is a 'structural' condition of the pop music industry, which while confiding in its autonomous market furnishes contents to other culture industries (advertising, show business, entertainment, films, videos and other audio-visual forms of production, radios, televisions and Internet broadcasting) and largely depends on them for its profits.

In this case, the Neapolitan publishers could spread and sell their products – scores, in various and different editions – to consumers, only if the corresponding songs had already become famous. And a song could only become famous if performed many, many times. The songs' popularity was, obviously, larger than the score consumers, and it could become very large also due to the fact that performances were, as we saw, very different among themselves. Their difference could activate (and be activated by) different social practices that increased popularity and sales.

The publishers' biggest struggle was to control the performances, a form of economic control (because royalties evasion was an endemic problem) and qualitative control. However, whereas publishers were controlling quantity, quality, time of publishing and promotion, and they could perhaps condition some activities of the performers, they did nevertheless very poorly control the spreading and consumption of the songs. Thus, publishers could not make a profit that compared to the popularity of the songs but, at the same time, they profited from a work for which they were not paying.

With regard to these contradictions, we have to devote some attention to the case of *posteggiatori* who were essentially contributing to turn their songs into the 'soundtrack' of Neapolitans' *loisir*. They were creating a varied universe populated by graduate musicians, and performers who played by ear. Their performances took 'place' (Italian translation: 'posto' and its derivative 'posteggia') in *grand hotels*, in sea or thermal baths, at

street corners, in lowly cafés and taverns, but also at the houses of aristocrats (e.g. during a reception offered by the Duchess Doria d'Angri, Wagner met *'o Zingariello*, who usually performed at the *Scoglio di Frisio* restaurant, and brought him to Bayreuth).

The *posteggiatori* were indeed practising dialectics between 'homogenization and difference' (Fiske, 1987: 259). In effect, they depended on publishers for the provision of new songs, and they took advantage of the publishers' struggle for promotion and advertising. At the same time, they were 'free' in interpreting songs in a very different manner from the texts and the intentions of their authors.

As well known, literary works are 'open works' (Eco, 1989 [1962]) offering a multiplicity of possible interpretations, which attribute to the 'empty form' of the text's 'various possible meanings' (Eco, 1976 [1975]) and yet avoid over-interpreting the textual indices that are present (Eco, 1992). In this dialectic, *decoding practices* can occur that can be the opposite of the *preferred readings* (Hall, 1980 [1973]). According to Hebdige (1976), *active consumption* occurs as users appropriate the commodity, redefine its use and value, relocate its meaning into a new context in which emerge new meanings. In *tactical consumption practices* (De Certeau, 1980), a 'rationalized, expansionist, centralized, spectacular and clamorous production is confronted by an entirely different kind of production, called consumption and characterized by its ruses, its fragmentation (the result of the circumstances) its poaching, its clandestine nature'.

All these observations can be applied to the work of *posteggiatori*. These interpreters/ performers were 'translating' the 'industrial product'. During performances, they emphasised, in the Neapolitan repertoire, those characteristics that were more appropriate to the moment, to the place and to their particular public. Products reached 'final consumers' – who were targeted by occasion and place – as almost 'depurated' from *dissonant* elements. In short, a particular kind of *customisation* occurred, where consumers, while taking part in product creation and innovation, contributed to create value.

Another kind of *productive consumption* occurred in home-made musical performances. In those ages of non-mechanical reproduction of sound, consumers were both *listeners* and *performers*. They also were, very often, *writers* and *composers*. In other words, according to Axel Bruns (2007),

> In such models, the production of ideas takes place in a collaborative, participatory environment which breaks down the boundaries between producers and consumers and instead enables all participants to be users as well as producers of information and knowledge – frequently in an inherently and inextricably hybrid role where usage is necessarily also productive: participants are *produsers.*

The individuals who constituted the audiences of Neapolitan songs were involved in 'collaborative and continuous building and extending of existing content in pursuit of further improvement' (Bruns, 2007). The domains of their work can be described by employing the following characteristics. They were collaborating to generate artefacts 'always unfinished, and continually under development', 'development (that was) evolutionary, iterative, and palimpsestic'. Frequently, in this *community of participants* – such individuals would have backgrounds ranging from being a professional to being an amateur –, there were fluid movements between roles, that is, leaders, participants and

users. There was 'a shift from dedicated individuals and teams as producers to a broader-based, distributed generation of content by a wide community of participants' (Bruns, 2007). To sum up, many self-identified volunteers and part-time workers combined their efforts. Each one, on their own initiative, added a small part that combined with the others to reach a greater goal.

'None of them are doing it for the money, but instead for the fun, audience and satisfaction of writing about something they love and getting read by a lot of people'. As Anderson (2009) suggested in one of his articles in 2009, in the publishing industries 'somewhere down the chain, the incentives go from monetary to nonmonetary (attention, reputation, expression, etc.)'. This is a very important suggestion for us because – if this is, as Anderson explained, 'the only way he can think of to scale the economics of media down to the hyperlocal level' – this could also explain how and why Neapolitan song was indeed able to become a 'global' phenomenon.

In short, the apparatus of industrial production represented only a part of the cultural industry. The most substantial part was 'hidden' in collective and individual productive processes performed in communicative fluxes, historically and geographically founded in social life and in social relationships. The *fin de siècle* Neapolitan system can be described as a system 'where old and new media collide' – orality, printing, photography, illustration – 'where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways' (Jenkins, 2006: 260).

All intellectual workers (producers, consumers and produsers) within the culture industries carry out what might be defined *generalised intellectual labour* (Herscovici, 2006). This process takes place beyond the strictly economic productive sphere, that is, in the family, in educational institutions, in the various agencies of socialisation, through everyday interactions, through social networks and exchanges, through different social networks and devices, from the salon to the promenade, from the theatre to the club from the street to the department stores.

The intellectual workers are connected, in short, through a 'mode of production' in which the valorisation processes occur during the communication processes, through the networks of social relations. It follows that, in these processes, the function, allocation and use of the various forms of 'capital' (Bourdieu, 1986 [1983]) are redefined. The intellectual workers on the side of consumption are spending their social capital, cultural capital and symbolic capital in 'ethical productivity' (Arvidsson, 2007: 24), which – in terms of economic value – is exploited by the entrepreneurial categories. Re-using Bourdieu's (1993) notion of field, 'consumption agents' included, this could be defined as 'a vast operation of social alchemy jointly conducted, with equal conviction and very unequal profits, by all the agents involved in the field' (p. 81).

Very recently, these activities were described as a new kind of labour, variously defined as *cognitive labour* (Berardi, 1995; Fumagalli, 2005, 2007), *immaterial labour* (Hardt and Negri, 2000; Lazzarato, 1997) or *free labour* (Terranova, 2000). The individuals perform it – routinely, untiringly, voluntarily – during a *production time* shaped by the 'indissoluble unity of the paid life and the unpaid life, of work and leisure, visible social cooperation and hidden social cooperation' (Virno, 2004 [2001]). In short,

non-working time, the reproduction and consumption area, is a realm of *valorisation* in economics terms.

We can continue to observe and describe a 19th- and 20th-century phenomenon using the framework of current media studies paradigms. And we can note how 'past and present illuminate each other reciprocally', if we think about these practices of 'labouring consumption' which were outside production control but functional to the wide spreading of Neapolitan songs. As Jenkins (2009) wrote,

> The concept of multiplicity paves the way for us to think about fan fiction and other forms of grassroots expression as part of the same transmedia logic – unauthorized extensions of the 'mother ship' which may nevertheless enhance fan engagement and expand our understanding of the original.

This thought could apply to the 'ambivalence' of all those practices that involve *productive consumption*. I said that individuals engaged in Neapolitan song consumption expended their rationed resources (time, money and work of cooperative interpretation), and received economic, social and existential benefits that we could refer to the *identity* of Neapolitans and to the *image of* Naples. The voluntary work of the audiences to cooperate with *meaning production* – in line, or not, with the *producer's intentions* – was not only an indispensable factor 'to scale the economics of media down to the hyperlocal level' but also an indispensable factor to create another valorisation area correlated to consumption, namely the *audience commodity* market (Smythe, 1977, 1981) or – better – a *prosumer/produser commodity* market, because the 'users' were engaged 'in permanent creative activity, communication, community building and content production' (Fuchs, 2009: 82).

Neapolitan songs, in fact, were also, on many occasions, a sort of 'free lunch' for consumers, which they paid for with their *watching activity.*

Songs could attract the attention of consumers on commodities, products and firms. Newspapers, magazines, theatres, *café chantants*, but also hotels, thermal or sea baths, restaurants or department stores usually sponsored or also organised *Piedigrotta* competitions, a sort of festival with prizes for the authors of the 'best songs'.

One case will suffice to show this point. In 1906, the Miccio firm – a department store that was very often financing song publishing and sponsoring *Piedigrotta* activities – announced its own *Piedigrotta* competition. The stage for the *audizione* was located in front of the department store; the contest jury consisted of very famous writers, that is, Ferdinando Russo, Salvatore Di Giacomo and Matilde Serao. The contest winners could obtain their prize directly from the department store checkout desk.

Advertising revenue was also necessary to keep the price of scores, magazines and booklets low. One of the best advertisers was the department store *Magazzini Italiani*. The Mele Brothers, who owned it, were the most important commercial partners of Ferdinando Bideri – the most famous Neapolitan song publisher – and advertised in his magazine *La Tavola Rotonda*, which published almost one song a week, and various dozens a week during the preparations for the *Piedigrotta* (from August to September).

There was, moreover, a great sponsoring activity. Advertising financed *audizioni*, parades, shows and *Piedigrotta floats.*

To conclude, the audiences of Neapolitan songs consisted of individuals who produced *ethical surplus* working on media contents *in autonomous processes of productive interaction* through a net of social relationships. In their interactive, cooperative, interpretive and overinterpretive activity, they used the press media very often but not always. Certainly, in fact, these activities of *meaning production* were more correlated to social relationships and networks (in which also the illiterate people were deeply involved) than to 'reading activities'.

Whenever these users were brought together by whatever media use or by cultural consumption, they could be sold in the advertising marketplace by the subject who owned or managed the means of communication they were using.

Reversing the hourglass

In these pages, I have turned 'the hourglass […] over both ways' (Braudel, 1980 [1958]: 50), as suggested by Armand Mattelart (2006 [2002]) against a 'Manichean way of thinking' based on the antinomy between 'old' and 'new'. By turning the hourglass once again, we can now observe the present time through the 'lights' of the past. We can see, therefore, how a short-term perspective can bring about propositions that – without being incorrect – are at least incomplete. For example, when Jenkins (2006) affirmed,

> If old consumers were assumed to be passive, the new consumers are active. If old consumers were predictable and stayed where you told them to stay, then new consumers are migratory, showing a declining loyalty to networks or media. If old consumers were isolated individuals, the new consumers are more socially connected. If the work of media consumers was once silent and invisible, the new consumers are now noisy and public. (pp. 18–19)

This could be said to be true, but only if we assumed the 'oldest consumers' to be those of the broadcasting media system.

So, to distinguish the 'truth' from 'false novelty', as Mattelart (2006 [2002]: 730) suggested quoting the economist Robert Boyer, we have to go beyond retrospective analysis which looks, at best, at a period of one or two decades. Mattelart (2006 [2002]) has reminded us of the quarrel of *temps court* launched by Fernand Braudel in the 1950s, and recommended the return to 'the plurality of social time' and to the 'dialectic of the long perspective' (p. 730). He also quoted Maurice Merleau-Ponty recalling how the latter was against a view of history that suggests the evolution of societies as partitioned in stages, the last ones setting the 'standard of modernity', and replaced this compact and abstract picture with the notion of 'baroque system':

> The sense of history is … threatened at every step with going astray and constantly needs to be reinterpreted. The main current is never without countercurrents or whirlpools. It is never even given as a fact. It reveals itself only through asymmetries, vestiges, diversions, and regressions. (Merleau-Ponty, 1973: 39)

The question that I would pose now is, is it possible, in this 'baroque system', to distinguish whether, for instance, the shift from 'noisy and public' to 'silent and invisible'

(and vice versa) in media consumers' activity be a 'change in the system' or a 'change of system'? And how?

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Notes

1. The *Festa di Piedigrotta* (*Piedigrotta festival*) was a combination of religious and civic celebrations that included religious processions, profane parades, shows, exhibits, music and spectacular fireworks. Originally, it was a pagan celebration taking place in the internal cave known as *Crypta Neapolitana* or *Grotta di Pozzuoli*, which was a Roman passageway to facilitate travel between Naples and Pozzuoli. The cave is now facing the *Church of St Maria di Piedigrotta* and gives the church its name ('at the foot of the grotto'). The church sheltered a Byzantine sculpture of the Virgin Mary. On 7 and 8 September of each year, the representatives of the Angevin and Aragonian dynasties, upon celebrating the birth of the Virgin Mary, went to the sacred effigy with a procession of dignitaries, nobles from the kingdom and soldiers in high-ranking uniform. The *Festa di Piedigrotta* became widely known after 1734, when the royal court attracted an increasing number of citizens and pilgrims from the remotest corners of the kingdom. Around the *fin de siècle*, the *Piedigrotta festival* was a very important event in the economic and cultural life of the city, and a catalyst for many forms of resources and investments: it concluded the summer festival programmes – *Feste Estive* – in which the entire city was involved; there were prizes for groups, horse races and floats with music, judged based on their decorations, music and musicians; it provided a great chance to increase trade, and it became a huge tourist attraction.
2. From the middle of the 19th century until the 1930s, a lady in European society had to hold her 'day', which meant that her *salon* was opened to visitors in the afternoon once a week, or twice a month. Only people who had already been introduced could enter the *salon*, obviously.
3. Literally, little sailors. *'O marenariello* is a famous song by Salvatore Gambardella published in 'La Tavola Rotonda' (Salvatore Bideri's magazine) in 1893. S. Bideri was the most important Neapolitan song publisher.
4. *Luciana* is a woman and a *Santa Lucia* native. Santa Lucia is, as well known, a very famous Neapolitan district. *'A Luciana* is a classical Neapolitan character.
5. Literally, 'this is the country of the sun'. These are the best-known words in the text of famous lyrics by Libero Bovio, which was published in 1925 by the Santa Lucia publisher.
6. *Napoletanità* could be defined as the 'essence' of 'being Neapolitan'. Many Neapolitan intellectuals have been sincerely and long struggling to formulate this notion (cf. Galasso, 1987: XXXVI).
7. The *sceneggiata* is a musical theatre genre popular in Naples. Its origin is a popular song. Song dramatisation gives actors the opportunity to sing during performance.
8. The novel is now in Salvatore di Giacomo, *Napoli. Figure e Paesi*, in *Il Teatro e le Cronache*, Milan, Mondadori, 1979[10], p. 473.

9. This is a quotation from the song '*Scetate, Carulì, ca l'aria è dòce*' (Wake up, Carolina, because there is a sweet air).
10. Carolina is here!
11. They were musicians who performed Neapolitan songs in coffee shops and restaurants.
12. This was a little street piano with cylinder, on wheels, which operated automatically through perforated music paper rolls. A pitchman (with or without a singer) drove it, sold broadsides and/or begged for money.
13. *Audizioni* were song contests. During the *audizioni*, the juries chose the songs that were to win the *Piedigrotta* competitions.

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