STORIES OF BLOGS, E-BOOKS AND TIME:
SLOWDOWN, PARTICIPATION AND RESISTANCE IN
WU MING'S *GIAP* AND *L'ARCHIVIO E LA STRADA*

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Abstract: This paper analyses the relationship between Wu Ming's blog *Giap* and the e-book *Giap: L'archivio e la strada*, where the writing collective gathered a selection of blog posts published between 2010 and 2012. Focusing on the temporal dimension of on-line and off-line reading practices, this paper demonstrates that the transmedia transfer of content from the blog to the e-book—a hybrid medium available both on-line and off-line—affects the experience of the reader offering an alternative reading rhythm, slowing it down and engendering a more thoughtful and critical approach to its content. The focus on the temporal dimension of reading practices must be framed into Wu Ming's cultural project, primarily aimed at sabotaging and undermining the rhythm of life, production, and consumption imposed by Capitalism. As part of this project, the blog *Giap* promotes practices of resistance to the commodification of cultural products and impulsive forms of content consumption. In particular, the content available on *Giap* is protected by copy-left policies, while the comments to its most thoughtful posts are blocked until seventy-two hours after their publication. The transmedia transfer of posts from the blog to the e-book reorders their sequence, establishes a different relationship between reader and content and encourages the latter to reflect on the texts within a restructured temporal dimension. The publication of the e-book therefore represents a further form of slowdown that brings about the possibility of an alternative to on-line impulsive reading practices, bridges on-line and off-line dimensions, tackles issues of accessibility and preserves its content from on-line dispersive fluxes.

Introduction

Nowadays, the publication of an e-book does not make headlines. As several statistical reports show, the book market is slowly but increasingly moving towards this new electronic text format worldwide, and in Italy too.¹ Consequently, definitions of e-book and studies concerned with it have concentrated on its relationship with books and paper-based interfaces.² Although this binary opposition is interesting and profoundly relevant, it inevitably leaves aside the way in which e-books relate to the on-line flow of content and the processes of media convergence sped up by new digital media and the Web 2.0 (Jenkins, *Convergence* 3; Couldry and Hay 473; Castells 58). The study of this paradigm has raised different points regarding the relationship between individual users and media, and also regarding the effects of this relationship on the collective dimension of living, both on-line and off-line. New digital media, and the Web 2.0 above all others, allow users to take on a more participative role in the creation of knowledge, making audiences an active, and not simply passive, actor in this process. New sets of participatory practices, whose only apparent autonomy and emancipatory effects will be discussed in more detail later, empower users' agency, breaking the barrier between producers and consumers of content (Nightingale and Ross 10). The on-line experience of these new users, also addressed by the neologisms "prosumers" and "produsers," runs at the fast-paced rhythms of digital economy, "which manifests all the signs of an acceleration of the capitalist logic of production" (Terranova 89). Living at these rhythms, users' more or less ephemeral extensions in Social Networking Sites multiply their identities and challenge the idea of a unitary self (Turkle 49), making private and public

¹ According to Statista, the global e-book revenue from 2009 to 2016 increased from 1420 million U.S. dollars to 15870. In Italy, where the amounts are quite different, e-book sales are growing constantly year-by-year. AIE (Associazione Italiana Editori) reports that the number of digital texts published in Italy increased dramatically in 2013 (+43%) and kept growing constantly in 2014 (+26.7%) and in 2015 (+21%).

² Eileen Gardiner and Ronald G. Musto's definition of e-book reads: "an electronic book (also e-book, ebook, digital book) is a text- and image-based publication in digital form produced on, published by, and readable on computers or other digital devices. [...] The e-book is a young medium and its definition is a work in progress, emerging from the history of the print book and evolving technology. In this context it is less useful to consider the book as object - particularly as commercial object—than to view it as cultural practice, with the e-book as one manifestation of this practice" (164).

spheres merge (Papacharissi 69). These selves join newly shaped communities and collective subjects, whose networks are built on shared knowledges of and affective investment in market products or cultural phenomena, like television programs, films, books or video games.

The optimism suggested by some of these considerations must be counter-balanced by the suspicion of those who registered how capitalist power learned to exploit the activity of audiences, which marketing and advertising industries commodify (Arvidsson 281), and co-opt as part of economic processes of production and distribution of commodities (Bird 507; Meehan 77; Terranova 94). Moreover, as several scholars acknowledge, the access to the on-line world is still conditional upon geographic, social and economic factors that in part exemplify how the on-line dimension has not yet overcome gender, class and race inequalities (Couldry and Hay 481–2; Papacharissi 143). Therefore, from a political perspective and taking into consideration the role of these new collective formations in democratic processes of decision-making, the interaction between on-line and off-line extensions of these communities must be analyzed closely and not forgotten. Merely thinking of e-books in editorial terms, as a move from a paper-based interface to a digital one, would mean to miss their role in this new paradigm and their potential effects in bridging the gap between on-line and off-line world.

Focusing on the interaction between the temporal dimension of on-line and off-line practices, this paper argues that the material hybrid status of the e-book, a digital interface also available off-line, can be functional to cultural projects that aim to make the user critically reflect upon the relationship between on-line and off-line experiences. As digital media have revolutionized and radically transformed Italian intellectuals' forms of *impegno*, opening new channels of communication between authors and the public and calling for analysis of the interaction between the former, the latter and their digital extensions, it would be legitimate to wonder which role e-books have in this interaction.³ In order to support my argument, I will take as a case study the relationship between Wu Ming's blog *Giap* and the e-book *Giap: L'archivio e la strada*, published by the writing collective in 2013. Wu Ming, the core of what they call Wu Ming Foundation (WMF),⁴

³ It is not the purpose of this paper to deal with the debate about contemporary Italian writers' different forms of engagement. For more detailed accounts of this debate, see Antonello and Mussnug; Bolongaro, Epstein and Gagliano; Lorenzi and Perrone.

⁴ I quote from the English version of the section "Chi siamo" on *Giap*: "There is Wu Ming... and then there's the Wu Ming Foundation, which is a more vast and multifarious subject.

is the pseudonym of a group of initially five (now three) Italian writers formed in Bologna in 2000.⁵ *Giap*, born as a newsletter, became the blog of the collective in 2010 and, since the beginning, has stood out for its originality. Far from being a traditional literary blog, for both its critical content and approach to readers, *Giap* is a multimedia environment that fosters and promotes alternative cultural initiatives and practices both in the on-line and the off-line dimension.

The relationship between the e-book *L'archivio e la strada*, which collects a selection of blog posts appearing on *Giap* between 2010 and 2012, and the blog represents a meaningful case study because the format of the e-book both preserves and loses several features of the blog posts, making the transmedia interaction between blog and e-book more complex than the initial appearance would suggest. By selecting and ordering the blog posts, the e-book restructures the temporal dimension of both the texts and the act of reading, slowing down the never-ending and fast-paced flux of content that appears on-line. This transmedia operation, moving from the on-line to the off-line world but maintaining the portability of a digital format, influences the experience of the reader towards a more thoughtful and critical approach to its content and the reading experience itself. This operation, as I will show, must be framed within Wu Ming's cultural project, primarily aimed at sabotaging and undermining the rhythm of life, production, and consumption imposed by capitalist digital economy.

My analysis is divided into four sections. I move from a general description of *Giap*, its features, which make it a "hybrid" in comparison with standard definitions of blogs, and its pivotal role in Wu Ming's cultural project, rooted in the Marxist tradition. *Giap*, a "critical medium" in Marisol Sandoval and Christian

Today, what we call the Wu Ming Foundation - we coined the name in 2000 [...] is a grassroots federation of collectives, inquiry groups and laboratories, as well as artistic, cultural and political projects which were all born on or around this blog." The WMF transmedia projects include the blog, the collective's accounts on Twitter, Youtube, Anobii, Pinterest and Tumblr, the podcasts of Radio Giap Rebelde, the Wu Ming Contingent music band, writing labs and other collectives of writers or historians, like Nicoletta Bourbaki or Alpinismo Molotov. It must not be forgotten that the activism of the WMF includes several activities, happenings, book presentations, readings, concerts, conferences and excursions in the off-line world too. See <https://www.wumingfoundation.com/giap/what-is-the-wu-ming-foundation/> (accessed 10 May 2018). —

⁵ In Mandarin Chinese, Wu Ming literally means "no name," "nameless" or "five names," depending on how one pronounces it. The pseudonym has a clear reference to the group's agenda, according to which their words must be expression of a "common utterance" in which multiplicity and subjectivity coexist (Wu Ming, "Intervista").

Fuchs' definition of this term (Sandoval and Fuchs 145), fosters practices of opposition and resistance to the capitalist exploitation of media. On this blog, the collective's works, free from copyright, can be downloaded and shared without commercial purposes. Moreover, these practices of opposition also assume a "temporal" dimension. On *Giap*, comments on the longest and most thoughtful posts are not allowed until seventy-two hours after their publication, to give readers time to think carefully about what they have read and not react impulsively. The spatial circulation of free content and the temporal slowdown are two metaphors that properly synthesize Wu Ming's attempt to undermine capitalist logic and their call for new forms of participation and engagement.

The second section of this paper focuses on these forms of participation, reading critically Henry Jenkins' definition of this term. Jenkins' book *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* will be the main reference for definitions of convergence and participation because of the close relationship between the American media scholar and Wu Ming. On the one hand Jenkins is interested in their forms of activism; on the other, the collective promoted the publication of the Italian translation of his book and wrote its introduction. Yet, although Wu Ming frequently base their analysis of fan culture and contemporary society on Jenkins' theory, this closeness does not necessarily imply a total alignment with the American scholar's thought. Jenkins argues that the circulation of content fostered by contemporary digital forms of communication brings about different forms of interaction that make its participants converge. Convergence is "the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want" (2–3). The flow of content depends on an active, and no longer passive, participation of consumers in the digital environment, a form of participation that, framed into flows, movements and "migratory behaviour," one may metaphorically define as essentially spatial. However, these forms of engagement do not necessarily generate forms of emancipation from the mainstream. For Wu Ming, participation means also keeping a critical approach to content both on-line and off-line, in order to reveal the social relations and forms of exploitations that capitalism imposes on its production and distribution. In this regard, temporal metaphors are more powerful in making people aware of how the capitalist logic commodifies their existence and their time. The "pratiche di rallentamento del flusso" ("Intervista"),

like the temporary stop to comments, aim to break the impulsive rhythm of life imposed by digital economy.

Finally, as I will demonstrate in the third and fourth section, the publication of the e-book *L'archivio e la strada* can be considered a further slowdown compared to the on-line flow of content. The selection and ordering of posts realized in the e-book creates a parenthesis besides their participation in the on-line circulation of content, in which they continuously risk being dispersed. This “pause” focuses readers on the message of the text and makes their engagement with it more reflective rather than impulsive. Wu Ming’s goal is to give their readers a new condition of awareness that would lead them to both see critically and fight against conformist and naturalized representations of the real, controlled by capitalist power.

Giap is not a blog: hybridity, convergence and cultural activism

The writing collective Wu Ming was born in 2000 from a subset of the Luther Blisset Project, a countercultural movement from which Wu Ming’s members inherit their character.⁶ These authors are well-known for historical novels like *Q*, still signed as Luther Blisset, *54* and *Manituana*, whose common feature, among others, is to give accounts of historical periods and events from the perspectives of those who are usually put aside by mainstream culture. Moreover, as they explained to Henry Jenkins in one of their encounters, Wu Ming is also involved in several forms of transmedia activism: “multitudinous authorship, cross-media storytelling, world making, identity games, RPG guerrilla warfare, old/new media collision, copy-left-oriented practices, media hoaxes and so on” (Jenkins, “Slapshot”). Their first website was created in 2000 and remained active until 2015. Since the beginning, one of Wu Ming’s main concerns was to have contact with their readers; therefore they created *Giap*, a free on-line newsletter with over twelve thousand members. In 2010, *Giap* became a blog that Wu Ming defined as “l’epicentro della nostra presenza on-line” (“La Stampa”). The old website was still

⁶ The Luther Blisset Project took place in several European countries between 1994 and 1999. The name Luther Blisset, taken from a Jamaican football player of the Milan team for reasons that remain unclear, “was shared by dozens of activists in Italy and other European countries to dupe the press into reporting nonevents, hijack popular TV programs, sell apocryphal manuscripts to publishers, conduct psychogeographic experiments, fabricate artists and artworks, denounce media witch hunts, and author best-selling novels” (Deseriis 129).

accessible until 2015, but then it fused with the blog. Today, *Giap* is the principal website of the Wu Ming Foundation.

Apparently, *Giap*'s features correspond to standard definitions of blogs (here I am taking Ruth Page's for the *Johns Hopkins Guide to Digital Media* as a model).⁷ However, some patterns do not really fit *Giap*'s identity. For example, *Giap* does not fall into either of the two categories into which Page splits this medium: on the one hand, the blog as "knowledge-management tool" that filters information and, on the other hand, a "personal blog" used to "document and reflect on the blogger's life history" (44). *Giap* is a hybrid which belongs to both of these categories and has some features that Page does not even consider as discriminants. Moreover, even though *Giap*'s posts are published with "fluctuating regularity," the content of each one does not tend to be "self-contained" and in some cases the reader has that sense of "coherent progression" that Page dissociates from blogs. Similarly, the geographical location that, according to Page, "bloggers do not often state" is one of the fundamental components of *Giap*'s posts, especially when they comment on real facts concerned with political or social issues (43–4).

For instance, in the blog post "L'Aquila città chiusa," published in April 2010, the city and small villages heavily hit by an earthquake in 2009 become the sites from which to criticize the power of Guido Bertolaso, director of Italian Civil Protection under Berlusconi's government, and underline the efforts of communities and associations reacting against the deadly slowness of public aid and reconstruction. Moreover, in the post "Saviano libero: appunti sulla contraddizione Mondadori," the discussion between the author of *Gomorra* and its publisher Mondadori, owned by the Berlusconi family, becomes the opportunity to confirm Wu Ming's intention of fighting the capitalist logic of profit and exploitation of media from within the system, creating conflict, debate and discussion, instead of presuming to be outside of it. These posts, among many others, constitute *events, actions* that refer to specific locations and times in order to place Wu Ming's interventions in those specific contexts. These material and political references

⁷ On *Giap*, posts appear in "chronological order" and in a "conventional layout" (Page 43), are about diverse subjects and are written for many different purposes. Moreover, although *Giap* is primarily a written blog, it has visual (pictures and video) and audio content that give it the "multimodal" (43) shape that Page attributes to blogs as a genre. Her definition of blog followers as produsers who collaboratively produce and consume knowledge would be appropriate for *Giap* readers, as would be her description of the "subjective nature" of bloggers' character, for which "authenticity is prized over credibility" (43–4).

underpin Wu Ming's position in Italian society and make *Giap* an instrument that Wu Ming followers could regard as "un perno [...] un posto dove andare, un punto di convergenza" (Wu Ming 1, "La Stampa") from which they can connect to the messages that the group spread on-line.

The hybrid nature of *Giap*, which makes it a sort of unidentified object in the blogosphere,⁸ reflects Wu Ming's attempt to create an alternative form of this medium and aims at embodying the cultural project of the group, embedded in the anti-conformist Marxist tradition of the extra-parliamentary left. In the second post quoted above, the idea of being within the capitalist system of production and consumption, but against it, comes from the factory workers' activism of the 1960s, from "una tradizione di movimento, le occupazioni, le lotte, quel mondo lì, tra movimento politico e contro culturale" (Wu Ming "Basta"). In those years, as Franco Berardi explains, the material dimension of the world fights against its economic reduction to abstract categories controlled by capitalist power (43–6). In order for this reduction to be carried out, "occorre che i corpi sociali vengano piegati alla disciplina oggettivante della riduzione temporale. Il tempo della valorizzazione deve essere imposto sopra le temporalità singolari della natura, dei corpi, delle esperienze, dei vissuti, dei desideri" (45). As the workers of those years fought against these rhythms "sottraendo il ritmo dell'esistenza quotidiana alla temporalità disciplinata che il capitale tenta di imporre" (46), Wu Ming's activism, on *Giap* too, reflects this ethos. The content of the blog, together with a set of practices that Wu Ming programmatically promotes through it, contributes to make the blog fulfill this task.

On *Giap*, a "blog-rivista" (Piga 61), readers may find short essays or stories, interviews, surveys or reports that revise historical, political or social accounts given by mainstream media. Wu Ming, as Jenkins writes about bloggers in general, use information and blog content to unbury narratives that official accounts hide when these accounts "reduce a complex world to one big story." In other words, Wu Ming force "a segment of the public to question dominant representations" of reality given by mainstream culture (*Convergence* 218). The members of

⁸ The experimental hybridization of different styles of blog is resonant with the hybrid literary form of what Wu Ming call UNOs (Unidentified Narrative Objects). UNOs, more and more present in the contemporary literary landscape, mix different fictional genres with non-fictional elements, challenging the traditional definition of the novel. More broadly, *Giap* and UNOs reveal Wu Ming's experimental approach to media and their features, which the collective manages to tinker in unexpected ways.

the collective deal with “la temporalità nella quale [sono] immerse [...] cercando di sabotarla” (Wu Ming 1, “Intervista”), creating, as in Jenkins’ definition of blogs, a “prolonged public conversations” in which “blogging is a form of grassroots convergence,” that is to say, a form of participation in and engagement with reality based on the circulation of content and knowledge (*Convergence* 215).

As Gaia De Pascale notes, Wu Ming’s engagement assumes the form of stories that spread in a transmedia dimension (82–3) and ask their followers to engage with the different media extensions of these narratives. However, although Wu Ming’s use of digital media “seek[s] to connect their followers across times and spaces, thus creating a borderless transnational community” (Masterson 2), the collective and their followers’ approach to these media has been differently described. Emanuela Piga has compared the transmedia dimension of Wu Ming’s activism with the desire of knowledge-sharing of open source initiatives. For her, *Giap* constitutes a networking platform that stands in for the source code from which Wu Ming’s transmedia messages and open source works stem and are available for readers (70; 73). Although Piga’s account clearly points at the final goals of Wu Ming’s activism, it does not describe effectively the actual functioning of the blog, where there are limitations to users’ contributions. For Emanuela Patti, the collective’s need for coherence and accountability and the adherence to firm ideological values limit users’ interaction on *Giap* to participating in a “predetermined narrative design” with a “fixed teleological focus.” As she writes, “readers are empowered, provided that they contribute to the same narrative design” and ideological view of the community (52–3). However, reading these limitations as fixed and deterministic would be excessively reductive. In order to fully understand the function of these boundaries, one must read them through Wu Ming’s fight against the capitalist system of production, distribution and consumption. This fight does not only take the form of promoting a specific ideological standpoint, but, in a more complex direction, pushes Wu Ming’s users to develop a critical approach to the content that they enjoy on *Giap* and, in a broader perspective, on media in general. Wu Ming push their followers to question mainstream narratives, developing a critical approach to it, not only allowing them access to the critical content of the blog, but also fostering a set of practices, combination of limitations and openness, explicitly aimed to undermine the capitalist control of cultural content and experiences.

In this regard, the publication of content free from copyright on *Giap*, where no banners or advertisement appear, can be considered the first of these

practices. The content of the blog, as well as Wu Ming's novels, are protected by a Creative Commons license that allows readers to download and share the material, provided that they do not use it for commercial purposes, that is to say for purposes that would foster capitalist exploitation of and control on those who produced that content. Wu Ming's choice of offering their books on-line and in free digital format is "un atto politico e di militanza culturale" ("La trasparenza") that explicitly wants to offer readers an alternative to the commercial logic and stress the importance of both free and aware circulation of cultural content. Moreover, these practices do not affect users' interaction with content only in spatial terms, but also in temporal ones. On *Giap*, the seventy-two hour block *is* a temporal limitation of readers' agency, but only if one thinks of this agency in terms of commenting, an act that tendencies like machine-generated or human trolls often transform in programmatic disruption (Binns 548). On the contrary, if one thinks of this agency in terms of critical reflection, detachment and research about the topics discussed, one would understand how the seventy-two hour stop transforms the act of commenting in an opportunity to reflect upon the experience and the practices of reading, commenting and participating themselves. An author's note⁹ explains that "i commenti [...] saranno attivati 72 ore dopo la pubblicazione, per consentire una lettura ragionata e — nel caso — interventi meditati (ma soprattutto, pertinenti)." Wu Ming slow down the interaction of readers with content and aim to make them develop a more thoughtful approach to what they are reading. This *break*, as one will see in the next section, has a paramount role in Wu Ming's cultural project. It is a deliberate form of slowdown that wants to *sabotage* the logic of commodification of time operated by consumerist society (Baudrillard 153), and the users' internalization of "the totalizing tendencies of capitalism and of the market logic" (Martineau 162). As Martineau writes, "in an era of ecological breakdown, it seems more and more likely that the blindly presentist—and blatantly suicidal—temporal tendencies of capitalism could sweep humans and their times away with them, if no revolutionary social change does away with the value framework itself" (148). While Nicholas Carr superficially warns against "the style of reading promoted by the Net, a style that puts 'efficiency' and 'immediacy' above all else" (58), Wu Ming ask their readers

⁹ This stop is not applied to all the blog posts, but only those that include this note. Wu Ming activate it for the most thoughtful, meaningful and longest posts. There is no block for blog posts that, for example, promote public events and publications or that contain a link to texts written on different blogs.

to engage with the text in a different way, measurable in the temporal dimension rather than in the spatial one (we will come back to this point later too).

Therefore, Wu Ming's ethos shapes the content and the form of *Giap* as interventions in the real aimed at revealing its capitalist shortcomings and fostering alternative practices of resistance to it. Borrowing some words from Marisol Sandoval and Christian Fuchs' essay, *Giap* works as "critical medium:" its aim is "to contribute to emancipatory societal transformation by providing critical media content" and assuming a "complex form" embodied by a specific set of practices. Content and practices become "politically effective" by offering a "dialectical understanding of the media system" and working "against the capitalist structure" of production, consumption and distribution of knowledge (145). Differently from a standard blog, *Giap* is a networking platform where freedom and limitations are functional to both Wu Ming's followers' critical participation in and engagement with history and reality. This participation, which in Jenkins' theory resides in bloggers' capacity to influence the spatial circulation of content on-line, has, for Wu Ming, a much more critical potential that, as the next section will show, aims to combine the on-line and the off-line world in finding an alternative to capitalist social and economic relations.

Participation does not mean emancipation: a critical reading of convergent culture

In Henry Jenkin's theory of convergence culture, grassroots become both producers and consumers of content by actively participating in its creation and circulation across different media, "learning how to use different media technologies to bring the flow of media more fully under their control" and raising inspiring "expectations of a freer flow of ideas and content" (20). However, embracing this definition of participation and the idea of free flow of content in the new media environment, without critically reflecting upon it, would be too risky. Maurizio Lazzarato warns against the strategy of contemporary consumerism, which "arrange[s] for citizens' exclusion by making them participate" in circulating forms of discourse that "presuppose and produce consensus and conformism" (142). Elizabeth Bird has noted how a superficial celebration of the agency of on-line producers may mask the ever-increasing power of media producers "who while they certainly respond to fan demands, have also learned quickly to co-opt fan activities and viral media". As she writes, "today marketers have simply found creative ways to harness the

enthusiasm of active media audiences in order to sell to them more effectively” their product (507). The product may consist of advertising space, users’ data and information, multimedia content, on-line applications or other commodities. In any case, companies *want to* listen to consumers and have their feedback, because every bit of information acquired through this communication means deeper adherence to grassroots’ preferences and therefore higher probability to see their product purchased. In these terms, “participation can be used as a means of profit accumulation” and does not necessarily imply emancipation or any revision of the ideological content and standardized cultural forms promoted by capitalist mass media (Sandoval and Fuchs 144). This standardization does not simply repress those who deviate from conformism, but promotes “la diffusione pervasiva di automatismi cognitivi” through the creation of “interfacce tecno-sociali,” like social networks, “che precostituiscono i percorsi cognitivi e il comportamento sociale in modo da renderli funzionali” (Berardi 151).

Moreover, while grassroots *participate* in social networks and produce content for them, they *work* for the media (Meehan 77) and generate product in different forms, “non ultimo contenuti affettivi e relazionali” (Wu Ming, *L'archivio*, 91). Digital economy, as Tiziana Terranova has demonstrated, largely relies on this “free labour,” which is “willingly given” but not “financially rewarded,” while late capitalism “nurtures, exploits and exhausts its labour force and its cultural and affective production” (93–4). Grassroots’ enthusiasm and belief that they participate in a free environment on-line, where they can actually express themselves, conceals a complex set of social relations that frequently consists of “un rapporto di sfruttamento” (Wu Ming, *L'archivio*, 87). These rapports are primarily related to the process of production of hardware components that support the digital world: for Fred Turner, the rhetoric of free-information sharing and participation “actively obscures the material and technical infrastructures on which both the Internet and the lives of the digital generation depend” (260). All these technologies depend on “manual laborers” that remain “invisible to those who promote the Internet and the network mode of production as evidence of a new stage in human evolution” (261). Turner and Wu Ming would largely agree on this point. For the latter, the multinationals that exploit this workforce under “condizioni vessatorie, pericolose, umilianti” seek “profitti a scapito di ogni altra considerazione su dignità, equità e sicurezza” (*L'archivio* 86).

Nevertheless, this critique of participation does not want to be a radical condemnation of the liberating forces of the Internet and participatory culture as

a whole. The Web 2.0 provides us with valuable opportunities for interaction and expression that one may use to better understand the off-line dimension (Turkle 269) and undermine the capitalist exploiting system. Models of alternative media relying on accessibility (Couldry 45), participatory communication (Dagron 48) and participatory creative practices (Atton 25) can still base their challenge to the mainstream on participatory culture, provided that a more critical and aware form of participation and engagement in the processes of production, distribution and consumption of content is developed. One participates by not only determining *what* content is, but also knowing *how* it is produced and assembled, that is to say, knowing what hierarchical structure is implied by the process of its production and design. Grassroots should engage with these processes critically, instead of letting the illusion of freedom and its rhetoric make them pay no attention to politics (Turner 262). If this is not done, the new communities of grassroots that stem from fandom and utopic ideals of free-sharing risk to reiterate and foster the capitalist logic of exploitation of which they are fundamental, although deluded, components.

Therefore, since the web is an ensemble of both liberating and subjugating forces, the question is how the critical approach necessary to be aware of these two components can be expressed pragmatically both on-line and off-line. As I showed in the previous section, Wu Ming's project aims to answer this question by fostering critical practices of liberation to be played against the practices of subjugation (*L'archivio*, 88). The members of the collective hold "una presenza critica e informativa nei luoghi dove vive e comunica la maggioranza delle persone, magari sperimentando modi *conflittuali* di usare i network esistenti" (93). The seventy-two hour stop moves their experimental approach to practices on a temporal dimension, where the internalization of life-rhythms imposed by capitalism and the exploitation of users' time may emerge more evidently. If one relates to this dimension uncritically, one will lose perception of how our on-line experience affects "the rhythm of our life cycle [...] even the rhythms of day and night" (Turner 258) and will never realize that the capital is stealing users' time "*di nascosto* (perché tale furto è presentato come natura delle cose)" (Wu Ming, *L'archivio*, 93). On the contrary, if users' conceive of their on-line experience in temporal terms, they can collaborate "per rallentare i ritmi, interrompere lo sfruttamento, riconquistare pezzi di vita" (*L'archivio*, 93). The goal of the seventy-two hour break is to offer readers the opportunity to slow down, to show them the

need to build new temporal relations within the rhythm of their life, before thinking about new *spatial* forms of interaction.

Since both factory workers and on-line prosumers are exploited by the network mode of production that appropriates and commodifies their time, analyzing Wu Ming's focus on time is key to understanding their aim to combine both off-line and on-line communities in the common struggle against the current economic system. If prosumers conceive of this exploitation in terms of time, as time that does not belong to them because it is enslaved to capitalist production processes and profit, then they will see that their condition is not so different from that of the workers that produce hardware components. This association would foster the formation of a collective consciousness that gathers laborers and consumers in the same social and political resistance to capitalist impositions. Once on-line and off-line communities are joined, critical participation, resistance and emancipation would be part of the same act. Wu Ming's cultural project relies on both the spatial circulation of critical content and the new forms of temporality in which they merge their readers. These new rhythms actualize themselves and affect users on *Giap*, that is on-line, but the availability of different digital formats allows Wu Ming to also diffuse their content off-line, through media, like e-books, that do not require an internet connection. The reproduction of on-line content in the off-line world increases its visibility and is functional to the group's goal of joining these two interrelated dimensions.

Story, discourse, user and system time: a description of temporal dynamics from Giap to L'archivio e la strada

The publication of the e-book *L'archivio e la strada*, which collects twenty-seven texts previously published on *Giap*, makes the content of the blog available for off-line reading and spreads this content in a transmedia dimension. The transmedia passage "enables the same content to flow through many different channels and assume many different forms at the point of reception" (Jenkins, *Convergence* 10), both creating new forms of interaction between the content and the materiality of the platform on which the new media relies,¹⁰ and producing new forms of reception that stem from novel situations and contexts in which this content

¹⁰ In studying the effects of new forms of electronic writing and reading on words, Kathrine Hayles claims: "to change the material artifact is to transform the context and circumstances for interacting with the words, which inevitably changes the meanings of the words as well. This

can be enjoyed. Do these transformations affect the temporal dimension of the cultural practices that Wu Ming promote on *Giap*? Do Wu Ming take advantage of transmediality to shape the experience of the reader of the e-book in a specific direction?

In order to answer these questions, I will employ Raine Koskimaa's classification of temporal dynamics in computer-based artworks in four different temporal strata: *story time*, *discourse time*, *user time* and *system time*. Koskimaa defines *story time* as the temporality represented in the work itself (the fictional time frame), whereas *discourse time* is the time that the work itself takes to deliver its content to the user (i.e. the length of a text or the running time of a video). *User time* is defined as the time the individual user spends engaging with the work, and finally, *system time* as "the time of the cybertext system states" (Koskimaa 136), or the manipulation of time operated by the design and the actual structure of the format that supports the text through its effects on the text itself.

The boundaries of *story time* change dramatically from the blog to the e-book. The analysis of this temporal level should be split into two parts that correspond to two different related "stories:" the first, formed by the events actually narrated in the blog posts or e-book posts; the second, where these texts *are* events in themselves that take place on specific dates and in moments of the story of the Wu Ming Foundation. In the first case, if one takes the singular post as minimum unit of analysis, *story time* will go from the first to the last event narrated put in chronological order. For instance, in the opening chapter-post "Spettri di Müntzer all'alba," the events go from the German farmers' rebellion of 1525 to 2001, the year that the G8 was held in Genova. This dimension of *story time* does not differ from blog to e-book, because the minimum narrative unit does not change in itself. However, when one moves from a singular post to many, *story time* takes different shapes. On *Giap*, readers can potentially read an infinite number of posts (or much higher than those present in the e-book) and build narratives whose events and content are not determined. In addition, the sequence in which readers will go through these posts is not pre-figured or contained within limits narrower than the blog itself. Consequently, the time of *this* potential story is undetermined and remains open and ongoing, as a long tale that continues every time the reader accesses the blog and new blog posts appear.

transformation of meaning is especially potent when the words reflexively interact with the inscription technologies that produce them" (23–4).

On the contrary, the story contained in *L'archivio e la strada* is already written and the events can be put in a sequence that has a beginning and an end. The selected posts, each showing its date of publication, are grouped in four thematic sections, where the chronological order is respected only within each section. The order of these texts is determined, and the reader cannot change the fact that, in the linearity designed by the author, some historical and cultural events are close to others. Wu Ming use this trick to make historical and political associations. For example, after the description of two Italian films released in 1975, Mario Monicelli's *Amici miei* and Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma*,¹¹ both somber accounts of the loss of any hope for a better society (in which the memory of Fascism is still present), the reader is asked to reflect upon the effects of *berlusconismo* on Italian consumerist society.¹² The characters of the first chapter-post inevitably influence the interpretation of the figures presented in the second: "la fossa" (33) in which Italian hope fell in the '70s becomes "un vuoto circondato di vuoto, un buco nel grande buco" (34), where Italian contemporary society is lost today. In other words, in *L'archivio e la strada*, *story time* includes all the events narrated in the e-book, a new physical unity within which the reader makes the events *react* with each other. This also occurs on the blog, but the limits of this operation cannot be defined as in the e-book, because the navigation of the reader through different blog posts cannot be controlled.¹³ Therefore, while *story time* on *Giap* depends on the movement of the reader through the website, the e-book stresses the selectivity and the linearity of an operation that wants to put *those* events in *that* sequence.

Furthermore, *story time* should be measured on a different level as well, where the events that compose it are not those narrated in the posts, but the posts

¹¹ "Unire quel che appare diviso: Salò e Amici miei, note per una visione comparata," pp. 28–33.

¹² "Note sul "Potere Pappone" in Italia: Berlusconi non è il padre," pp. 34–9.

¹³ Actually, some features of the blog, like suggested posts with related content or tags, can direct the reader through its content, but these tools are not as stable as the e-book format. In fact, the posts that appear in these suggested lists depend on when the reader accesses the blog and usually refer to the most recent posts that have a similar content, rather than past posts. This difference is particularly meaningful in the case of texts published for the first time between 2010 and 2012, because the sequence of the story reproduced in the e-book would be difficult to recreate on-line, unless the reader started a thorough research using key-words and other references.

themselves. In the e-book, the sequence of these texts, whose dates of publication are reported, constitutes a clearly delimited history of their appearance on *Giap*. If the reader may not pay attention to the date of a blog post on-line when it is read the same day or on the day after its publication, the publication of the same *blog-event* in the e-book calls for more attention to its date, because it transforms the texts and its content in chapters of a chronicle about Wu Ming and their activity. On the blog, the boundaries of this chronicle and its *story time* are indefinite. They may tend to coincide with the history of *Giap* as digital tool and Wu Ming's history as part of the Wu Ming Foundation. On the contrary, the chapter-posts published in *L'archivio e la strada* constitute an alternative and selective history of Wu Ming and *Giap* from March 2009 to September 2012. In these terms, *L'archivio e la strada* represents a compression of *story time* that proposes a selected and condensed version of the chronological evolution of Wu Ming's project.

The transformation of *discourse time* from the blog to the e-book reproduces a similar dynamic. On *Giap*, a singular blog post can include words, pictures and videos. For example, the blog post "Feticismo della merce digitale e sfruttamento nascosto: i casi Amazon e Apple" includes four videos that prolong the time required for the reader to read the blog post. In the text of the e-book, there are no links to the video embedded in the same blog post on-line, but just the link to the whole webpage at its end. In other words, in *L'archivio e la strada* the discourse is uniquely made of words and *discourse time* coincides with the time that readers take to actually read it. Therefore, the e-book shortens *discourse time* by focusing on its linguistic form.

Things do not seem so simple when one moves from the measurement of *discourse time* to *user time*. In fact, "texts in digital media tend to accentuate discrepancies between user and *discourse time*" (Zuern 483) because they include activities that increase readers' engagement with the text. In this regard, *Giap* provides readers with more opportunities of engagement than the e-book. The possibility to comment and follow the discussion after the publication of a post is the most significant. How much time can a reader spend in this form of engagement? One cannot quantify it precisely, because different variables may influence readers' behavior: the seventy-two hour stop, interest in and knowledge about the topic, availability of time to follow the discussion, the discussion itself, with its own rhythm. As comments indirectly prolong the post, the act of reading becomes an act of participation and engagement in an ongoing conversation whose boundaries are not previously determined. For instance, the text of "Pasolini e Foucault:

appunti per un «Vite parallele»” reports some notes about a comparison between Pasolini’s and Foucault’s life on which Wu Ming 1 is working. The author of the blog post acknowledges the limits of that post and asks for contributions from readers that may help to draw a more complete account of the parallelism between the two intellectuals. Readers do not miss this opportunity and many comments report information and references that may enrich the research. One of these comments refers to a very important interview whose source the reader (giacomo87) does not remember in that moment. He asks for more time in order to look it up on-line, although he is sure that he has a paper copy at home and promises that, as soon as he comes back home from school, he will find it and send it to Wu Ming 1. The example shows how, on the blog, *user time* is inevitably connected to the off-line schedule of the user, which may condition other readers’ engagement, author of the blog post included, with the text. Yet, the conversation does not stop and its rhythm remains constant because of other readers’ contributions to the discussion. In other words, on *Giap*, *user time* tends to be a composition of more or less long periods that readers dedicate to reading and discussing. In these moments, readers are not only dealing with the time imposed by the length of the text, but are more actively involved and allowed to add time (by posting a further comment) to the general amount of time required to participate in the discussion. The plurality of comments reduces the relevance of the engagement of the single reader with content and stresses the importance of the comments as a collective form of expression.

In the case of the e-book, these comments do not appear and readers cannot produce texts that will be shared by other readers of the same e-book. Although every chapter-post concludes with a link to its page on *Giap*, readers can only “follow” a discussion that took place in the past and is no longer hot. Readers still have the opportunity to comment and revive it (and, to a certain extent, are invited to do so), but the feeling about this form of engagement is not as strong and shared as before. In *L’archivio e la strada*, *discourse* and *user time* tend to coincide because the chronological distance from the publication of the blog posts on-line and its appearance in the e-book affects the degree of readers’ engagement in leaving comments. Yet, readers of the e-book are still engaged with it, only in a different way, more reminiscent of the relationship between readers and books. This form of engagement is interior, kept in a private dimension, rather than exterior and shared on-line. While on the blog *user time* is the result of a collective

composition of acts of reading, commenting and discussing, the e-book focuses more on its reading component and an interior reflective response to content.

The differences highlighted in the analysis of story, discourse and *user time* are, to some extent, all related to *system time*: the time of the cybertext system condition, as Koskimaa defines it. The Finnish media scholar introduces this temporal dimension to explain how time works in the digital texts that do not have a fixed status and change throughout time. These changes may limit or delay reading time, limit the accessibility to the text, or be a constitutive part of a text that evolves and grows as time goes by (Koskimaa 135). In this regard, the difference between *Giap* and *L'archivio e la strada* is straightforward, because the former may be regarded as what Koskimaa calls “temporally evolving text,” whereas the latter has a fixed status that does not change. *Giap* represents an ongoing conversation where readers cannot recognize the end of a text, because the status of blog implies the temporal extension of an interaction that remains open. In these terms, the singular blog post constitutes a step in a long and not completely defined path, rather than a stop that, somehow, may be considered a conclusion. On *Giap*, *system time* is a flow that runs continuously, where there are no conditions that can be defined absolutely, because they contain their potential evolution and change in the same moment as they appear.

L'archivio e la strada, however, has definite boundaries that can make the reader recognize a beginning and an end. The set of texts are all present at the moment of the publication of the e-book and will not change at the next access to this digital format. Although the reading process is progressive and takes some time, the status of e-book reifies some limitations to the process, so that it actually has an end. In the e-book *system time* is bound to its textual length and permanence and thus tends to coincide with its *discourse time*. As for other temporal levels, the e-book compresses *system time* and canalizes its flow into a more static body recognizable as text. This compression transforms ongoing on-line discussions about political, social and historical events in an enclosed representation of them, from which a more focused and selected message emerges.

Different format, different approach: the archive and the road as metaphors of Wu Ming's activism

The analysis of temporal dynamics in *Giap* and *L'archivio e la strada* revealed the existence of significant discrepancies and two different temporal dynamics. If on

Giap temporality remains indefinite, open and ongoing, in the e-book it results in a more circumscribed and identifiable entity. In comparison with the unstoppable and not easily delimited flow that takes place in the former, the e-book represents a *pause* where words are selected and put in an unchanging order. In a temporal perspective, the transfer of content from *Giap* to *L'archivio e la strada* is an example of “pratiche di rallentamento del flusso,” as Wu Ming metaphorically defines their will to sabotage the capitalist tendency to an impulsive fruition of content (“Intervista”). This practice enriches the experience of reading with a different and more critical approach. The elimination of images and videos, the absence of comments and the relative reduction of users’ engagement are not forms of limitations of their agency, but attempts to make their activity focus on a different relationship with the text. The shift itself from *Giap*, an on-line platform, to the off-line e-book asks readers not only to read the text, but *read it in a different way from how it is read on-line*. As I showed, this difference can be measured in the transmedia transformations of temporal dynamics: selection, compression and slowdown aimed to generating a new experience and giving readers a new *rhythm*. As Wu Ming argue, “ogni conflitto tra poteri e resistenze è una questione di *tempi*: tempi che il capitale impone e che la fantasia dei resistenti deve saper rallentare, interrompere, mettere in crisi” (*L'archivio*, 101). The reader’s imagination is asked to think creatively about the past, a past that the collective narrates differently, in their books as on *Giap* and in the e-book.¹⁴ Wu Ming use these narratives as an instrument to “coltivare la costruzione ipotetica” and “nuove prospettive sul tempo” that may reveal to the audience innovative forms of participation, opposition and resistance to mainstream representations of Italian history and culture (De Lorenzis 7).

Wu Ming’s portrayal of Italian history in *L'archivio e la strada* deals with uncomfortable truths that the most common accounts falsify or tend to bury under

¹⁴ Clearly, *L'archivio e la strada* is not a novel, but this does not mean that the textual combinations created by the e-book cannot be regarded as a text that makes “un uso romanzesco della Storia” as De Lorenzis claims in the introduction to the e-book (9). Moreover, the structure and the temporal dimension of the e-book endows it with a certain degree of narrativity, in Marie-Laure Ryan’s definition of the term: the sequence of chapter-posts and their content foster the perception of a unified causal chain that leads the reader to a closure, chain that becomes meaningful for the audience because of the interaction that it creates between selected and ordered content (29). The e-book situates the story more specifically, makes the transformation and the actions of agents more evident and stresses the presence of a purpose, an identifiable common goal circumscribed by textual limits (30).

stereotypes. De Lorenzis claims that in the third section of the e-book, “Lavoro da acrobata: tra mito e storia,” Wu Ming “demolisce le figure del discorso patriottardo, eurocentrico e pseudo-civilizzante” in a close “corpo a corpo con rappresentazioni cristallizzate e identità posticce” (105). These figures relate to different historical events, from the Italian war of independence and the Risorgimento upheavals to the war crimes committed during the colonialist campaigns in Africa (Cyrenaica, Libya, Ethiopia and Eritrea), animated by a racist and fascist spirit that, for Wu Ming, is still present in contemporary Italian society. These representations are part of a broader discourse that runs throughout the e-book and touches several moments in the country's past: the 1970s, the '80s, 9/11 and the Genova G8 in 2001, the 150th anniversary of Italian Independence in 2011 and the political present, affected by both *berlusconismo* and *grillismo*. It is not the aim of this essay to analyze specifically how Wu Ming criticize and deconstruct the most common representations of these periods. Yet, it is my intention to underline a common feature of these critiques, that is to say the implicit call for a renovated and revolutionary approach to time, meant as past, present and future. For De Lorenzis, the tales of the fourth section, “Rivoluzione,” are examples of how “narrare è sempre e comunque sabotaggio della *time line*, evocazione delle alternative scartate o delle eventualità che ancora possono darsi, sotterranea confutazione del periodizzare storiografico, atto che mette in crisi la realtà come migliore dei mondi possibili” (9).

Wu Ming conceive of revolution as a creative process, aiming to take into account multiple potential stories of the past and to undermine narratives that reduce this multiplicity to a conformist and partial representation. Wu Ming's focus is on this creative *process*, the *how*, rather than the *what*, and wants to give their readers a critical method to deal with not only history, but also reality. Besides the importance of the content in itself, which reveals things that many people do not know (for instance, Italian war crimes), the implicit message of Wu Ming's texts is the necessity to embody a critical standpoint towards content, its origins and circulation. On-line, in the proliferation of links, quotations and comments, these pieces of information and their critical meaning may be dispersed or not caught. As the collective argues, “affinché questa maggiore dispersione non si traduca in superficialità, perdita di coerenza e riferimenti chiave, è necessario puntellare la conoscenza con due sostegni fondamentali: l'archivio e la strada” (*L'archivio*, 69).

Wu Ming's focus on the notion of archive is resonant with the “intellectual and social significance” of this concept in the wake of the digital turn, where the limitless opportunities of data collection have raised both enthusiasm and

concerns about the looseness of these processes (Bradley 117). In this regard, the general slowdown generated by the e-book format aims to establish a determined and parenthetical order in the on-line flux of content whose “liquidità” (*L'archivio*, 70) may make readers lose the focus of Wu Ming’s cultural project. Metaphorically speaking, for Wu Ming, the e-book is the archive where the writers bottle some of the liquid knowledge available on-line, in order to preserve it and save it from the general flow that may deform it (70).

On a different level, the publication of *L'archivio e la strada*, where the concepts of archive and road stand for two different approaches to knowledge, is an operation that both aims at raising critical awareness and tackles issues of accessibility. The archive is not only an instrument of preservation of content, but, being inevitably constructed, “it is that which, at the very root of the statement-event [...] defines at the outset the system of its enunciability,” that is the laws that governed the creation of its content, its mode of occurrence and “the system of its functioning” (Foucault 129). In other words, the metaphor of the archive, embodied by the e-book, asks reader to critically engage with the process of its composition and, more broadly, the capitalist system that controls on-line and off-line discursive practices. Within this system of discursive practices, Wu Ming differentiate themselves by building their own archive, “that which differentiates discourses in their multiple existence and specifies them in their own duration” (Foucault 129). Seeing the archive in these terms, and not as an instrument of conformism and unification, implies thinking of the analysis of any archive, what Foucault calls “archaeology,” in critical terms, as “the general theme of a description that questions the already-said at the level of its existence: of the enunciative function that operates within it, of the discursive formation, and the general archive system to which it belongs” (131).

Furthermore, for Wu Ming, this analysis must not be limited to on-line discursive practices, but it should imply “un maggiore impegno sul campo” (*L'archivio* 70), that is on the road. The hybrid nature of the e-book, a digital format that can be used off-line, makes it also embody the dimension of the road, the off-line world, where the consequences of the cultural work on the Internet should be evident (70) and where the political struggles for accessibility to and control of knowledge are ongoing. As Jacques Derrida argues, “effective democratization,” and I would add social, individual and collective emancipation, “can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation” (11), provided that participation

always be aware and critical. Wu Ming's activism does not end on-line, but wants to spread off-line too and foster the creation of a larger community that would englobe both its on-line and off-line exploited workers. In order to reach this goal, Wu Ming are active in both these dimensions, where their transmedia stories spread, raising consciousness about the existence of alternative rhythms to those imposed by capitalism.

Final slowdown

In concluding this analysis, I would like to remark that the ethical message of Wu Ming's operation and its aim to make users' think critically about their role in processes of production, distribution and consumption of content, both on-line and off-line, is significant beyond its political implications. If users are more aware of how the speed at which they run through their daily interaction with technology does not stem only from their personal needs for self-expression, but is largely imposed by capitalism, then they will be able to make sense of their time more consciously. For this reason, there is no speed or life rhythm that must be privileged over others. As Wu Ming's example shows, the resistance to the rhythms imposed by capitalism requires multiple and diverse forms of acceleration and slowdown. It is in the perception of this difference, a difference to which the publication of the e-book contributes, that the transmedia dimension becomes meaningful and may shed critical light on content, generating consciousness. If people keep moving at the same speed without ever breaking their pace, then they will never have a sense of their pace and how it conditions them. Similarly, but on a different scale, today both on-line and off-line communities need each other. The acknowledgment of this complementarity is the first step towards making their participation more conscious and fighting for a more democratic control of people's time. The circulation of information, knowledge and critical standpoints is fundamental for a social dimension more aware of its plurality and necessity for different rhythms.

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