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Romanzo criminale Transmedia and Beyond

Marta Boni



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7	Introduction. From transmedia storytelling to epic worlds
7	I. Film and media as events
8	II. Convergence
10	III. <i>Romanzo criminale</i>
13	1. Domesticating
13	1.1. Making meaning: «ordinary critiques» in discussion boards
19	1.2. Aesthetic discourses
25	1.3. History and politics
28	1.4. Personal uses
31	1.5. Morality
35	1.6. A participatory knowledge
38	2. Expanding
38	2.1. Creating apocryphal content
40	2.2. Transformative practices
49	2.3. Imitation practices
58	2.4. Hyperartistic practices
63	2.5. Viewers as «poachers»
66	3. Networking
66	3.1 Viewers as amateurs
69	3.2. Blogs
72	3.3. Social networks: presenting the self
81	4. Converging/overflowing
81	4.1. From intertextuality to transmedia
83	4.2 «La Banda della Magliana», a subject told through many texts
85	4.3 The novel

90	4.4 The film
96	4.5. The television series
104	4.6 Official paratexts
112	5. An «epic work»
112	5.1. The limits of intertextuality
113	5.2. Transmediality
118	5.3. Beyond transmedia: an «epic work»
121	5.4. Orality and aurality
121	5.5. Polyphony
123	5.6. Popularity
124	5.7. A ceaselessly expanding world
126	Conclusions
129	Bibliography

Introduction.

From transmedia storytelling to epic worlds

1. Film and media as events

In the contemporary media landscape, we often «know» a movie or a TV show just because people have talked about it, or because we have seen pictures, advertizing or clips spread on the web. Thus, it seems that movies and shows are defined more by the social performances which surround them than simply by their textual nature. In this book, I will seek to uncover the galaxy of texts and performances which contribute to the transformation of an Italian narrative, *Romanzo criminale*, into a complex world or an «epic work». By going beyond the notions of intertextuality and transmediality, I will define a methodology fit for its description, adapted to today's «convergence culture».

In 1934, the anthropologist Marcel Mauss, while staying in a New York clinic, made a discovery. Day after day, from his bed, he kept noticing the nurses' particular gait. He finally understood that their peculiar walk reminded him of something – it was the same walk of emancipated women protagonists seen in Hollywood movies. From films, the nurses had directly imported a way of using their own bodies, a «technique of the body» (MAUSS 2004).

Today, it is even easier than in Mauss' time to notice the existence of the many ways of considering filmic experience as a «technique of the body». Fandom activities, remix culture, mash-up and rewriting practices reveal that a movie or a TV show are elements of a larger reality, in which body, soul and fiction intertwine. Internet users carry out complex sets of actions, from presenting oneself in social networks to fan productions, in order to express their feelings toward the experience and to renew it. This goes far beyond textuality: pictures, videos and sharing activities exceed the sphere of writing culture and are more similar to oral performances. More than ever, two spheres overlap: fiction and everyday life, or «virtual» and real. A viewer's body moves with the

fictional characters and shares their emotions. The body also becomes a territory of experiences and a springboard for all sorts of textual and non-textual performances. Consequently, films (and more broadly, any show) are agents «working with the body» (LEVERATTO 2006).

Filmic experience is a way to use the body, to adapt it to the show and seek enjoyment.

«To have a taste for something», «to love Bach», «to be a rocker», are not labels to be explained, they are performances, a way to turn along with our body into some devices and frames carefully set by a milieu, which writes, step by step, a common history (HENNION 2012, p. 33).

How can we retrieve viewers' performances on the web, knowing that it is extremely hard, indeed impossible, to theorize the body *in absentia*? An essentialist approach is not sufficient for defining this situation, nor can we confine this study to a unique discipline: we need to develop a set of tools which will allow us to explore the uses of fiction. Moreover, «online fandoms cannot merely be viewed as a version or reflection of "offline" fandoms. The mediation of "new media" must be addressed rather than treated as an invisible term within the romanticized "new"» (HILLS 2002, p. 135).

II. Convergence

Researchers in film, media and communication studies are facing an era marked by a pervasive diffusion of new media for audiovisual experience in public and private realms – Internet, telephony and broadband connections have been added to the list of the more traditional environments, like movie theaters, television, video cassette and DVD (KLINGER 2006). The term convergence was used by Ithiel de Sola Pool before the widespread use of the Internet (POOL 1983; cf. JENKINS 2006b) in order to describe the future effects of scientific innovation in an «extended transition period» that was yet to be seen (see JENKINS 2006c). The term was later used systematically in the late 1990s to define the coexistence and co-evolution of new techniques that result in a metamorphosis or «mediamorphosis» (FIDLER 1997) of media forms, as evidenced by Negroponte at MediaLab, who stressed the difference between passive old media and new interactive media (NEGROPONTE 1995).

Any attempt to analyze today's media culture puts the researcher in front of a multitude of works. On the one hand, storytelling becomes a trip through media labyrinths like transmedial experiences:

Transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get *dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels* for the purpose of creating a *unified and coordinated entertainment experience*. Ideally, each medium makes its own *unique contribution* to the unfolding of the story (JENKINS 2007).

On the other hand, various products are created by viewers in different contexts. On the web 2.0, each user is no longer just a consumer, but also a producer of content or at least an actor who shares information (O'REILLY 2005). The Internet works as an instrument to define our relationship to a culture and as a chance to test our own identity (Leveratto, LEONTSINI 2008). Online, we make conscious decisions allowing us to define and enrich our experience of a cultural product. The self is challenged by a precise context in which some rules must be followed and a specific relationship with other users has to be constructed through gestures, actions and more broadly through our social appearance (or «masks» - GOFFMAN 1990).

When analyzing convergence culture, the risk of technological determinism (thinking that new technologies can define new cultural behaviors, for example) has to be considered (see the notion of «intermedial struggle», JOST 2011). Another risk would be to say that everything is new, like viewers' activities, for example. In fact, reworking official texts or taking them as raw material has always existed. New technologies (which make production process more flexible) paired with the Internet (which dramatically reduces the time for distribution) allows user-generated content to flow with a new freedom and, thanks to networks, easily find its audience.

Finally, films and television cannot be considered as objects explorable uniquely by a deterministic pattern, idealizing a set of reactions or effects that the product or technology induces on its audiences. Adorno and Horkheimer's perspective, assigning passivity to the masses and denying any theoretical or critical abilities to the individual («individual disappears before the apparatus which he serves» - ADORNO, HORKHEIMER 1974, p. 135), must be confronted with a perspective able to underline an audience's activity. Following Janet Staiger's materialistic-historical perspective (STAIGER 2000), which focuses on individual cases and avoids watertight categorizations, a set of uses centered on *Romanzo criminale* will be observed. At the same time, the specificities of *Romanzo criminale* as a book, a film, a TV series should not be dismissed since «only if there is a show will there be an audience» (ESQUENAZI 2003, p. 3).

III. *Romanzo criminale*

Romanzo criminale tells the story of a small gang from the impoverished outskirts of Rome, called the «Banda della Magliana», which in the late 1970s decided to become the new «kings» of Rome by controlling the drug trafficking in the capital. Inspired by actual events during the «Years of Lead» in Italy, this story was first published as a book by Giancarlo De Cataldo. *Romanzo criminale* was published in Italy in 2002, then turned into a film by Michele Placido (2005) and followed by two seasons of a television series on the Italian channel Sky Cinema (S. Solima, 2008-2010).

Each version of the story provides new information related to the difference between media, but also about the characters' personalities, the arrangement of the archival and fictional reconstruction of the past and even substantial modifications in the sequence of events. In addition to these three traditional media (book, movie, series), several products offer alternative ways for spectators to access the story: an application for iPhone and iPad, an ephemeral online game (before the release of the first season of the series), an official Facebook page, a concept album (CD of music composed by Italian artists) in homage to the characters.

The experience is plural, a set of spaces that helps dilate the story, through linear and nonlinear strategies. Especially for the series, producers tried to create a brand, using the Web's specificities and the potential for marketing on social networks. As a result, the viewer has access to the story in a traditional way and, simultaneously, can interact in an environment that encourages appropriation. The image of a ceaselessly expanding world (an «expanded universe» like *Star Wars* [JULLIER 2005]) is complemented by the existence of user appropriations on the web. Comments, criticism, parodies, self-expression and mash-ups emerge when exploring forums (Allociné, Internet Movie Database, Mymovies.it), blogs, social networks (Facebook) and video sharing sites (YouTube, Vimeo).

My description of *Romanzo criminale* comes from observing activities on the web over a three-year period (June 2008 to August 2011). Starting with the description of grassroots practices is a deliberate choice which will allow me to take the viewpoint of the user, who discovers the text from the discourses that surround it.

In the first three chapters («Domesticating», «Expanding», «Networking»), representative samples taken from global reactions to *Romanzo criminale* show that not only does the viewers' activity correspond to the public exhibition of personal interpretations of a text or of a series of texts, but also adds meanings and expands the fiction's universe. On

the one hand, these rewriting practices can be interpreted as «cultural poaching» that are studied using Jenkins' research on fandom (JENKINS 1992), as well as drawing on Michel de Certeau's work from the sixties. On the other, the «presentation of the self» (GOFFMAN 1990) in social networks will shape the image of the viewer as a passionate and social subject. These observations allow me to put forward a hypothesis regarding the complex work carried out through grassroots practices - by connecting, sharing, rewriting and remixing, *Romanzo criminale's* fans build a coherent and self-governing fictional world.

In the fourth chapter (*Converging/Overflowing*) *Romanzo criminale* will be studied as a «frame of experience». Intertextuality is used as a tool for understanding the place of various adaptations within this phenomenon, but, if we observe the multiplicity of actors in the interplay, on the social sphere, transmediality proves to be a better adapted notion.

In the last chapter («An epic work»), *Romanzo criminale* is studied through the lens of transmedia storytelling, namely because of its capacity to organize content coming from different media, through a critical analysis of Henry Jenkins' seven principles of transmedia. However, transmedia storytelling must also be compared to other images, such as the overflow of content, since the observed phenomenon is more a superimposition of fictional layers, than an architecture built thanks to pre-made global strategies. Furthermore, *Romanzo criminale's* content raises many questions concerning Italian national identity and the transmission of a local culture on a global scale. The doubt is that the notion of transmedia storytelling is not sufficient for a description of this phenomenon's specificities, especially because of its link to the social sphere.

The last chapter also uses Jenkins' notion of «world building» to develop and discuss the notion of transmediality, comparing it to an «ecosystem» (INNOCENTI, PESCATORE 2012) created by *Romanzo criminale's* world. This space, similar to a playground for consumer activities, is studied as an «epic work», since it becomes the territory for new interpretations of contemporary society and culture. In the hypothesis put forth in this book, activities taking place on the web reveal a give-and-take between fiction and reality, and have to be considered as ways, or tactics (in de Certeau's terms), established by viewers in order to bring the fictional universe into their lives and transform it. Viewers use all the means that they dispose of to enjoy the product, interpreting and activating new meanings. Through their performances, they shape a show's cultural and political dimension. Therefore, epic is understood as the moment in which a society becomes aware of its values by choos-

ing specific moments as models. Epic will be considered as a heuristic tool for understanding the work of a fictional universe and its audiences in synergy, capable of giving new meanings to everyday life, local news and history.

1. Domesticating

Working and reworking a text continue
far beyond the walls of a theater.

(STAIGER 2000, p. 54).

1.1. Making meaning: «ordinary critiques» in discussion boards

Long before the Internet emerged, viewers, after (or even during) a show, would always start conversations and discussions about the show with their watching companions, in order to focus on its main elements, but also to consolidate and enrich the experience. We can describe this process as domestication (SILVERSTONE, HIRSCH 1992), considering that the consumption of a cultural product is a symbolic experience, whose value depends on how this product is used in the intimate sphere. From a Cultural Studies perspective, to have domestication, there needs to be appropriation. A user chooses a product, comments on it, then defines the audiovisual product as an object («objectivation»), always linking it to her or his personal dimension («incorporation»). All these processes are then used in the social sphere («conversion»). As it will be observed, discussion practices create a sociability around audiovisual products, which become social aggregators or even instruments for defining and conserving dominant positions within a group.

In this chapter, I will examine different forms of domestication, operations of dissecting and finding meaning in *Romanzo criminale*, between public and private spheres, in the context of a «participatory culture» (JENKINS 2006b). It is possible to carry out such an analysis by studying discussion boards and weblogs, where a text, referring to another text, gives birth to an intertextual discourse (it is what Genette called metatextuality, GENETTE 1982).

François Truffaut once said that «everyone has two jobs: his own job and that of a film critic» (quoted by JULLIER 2002). Every viewer who comes in contact with a show does indeed make a complex set of «deliberations» about the product he or she is consuming, by comparing the different elements which, within the movie, mean something to him or her and which «constitute the film as a text and as a discourse» (SOULEZ

2011, p. 11). If, for Jean Douchet, being a film critic consisted in sharing one's own enthusiasm for a movie, by adopting a position between author and *amateur*, today everyone can be a critic. Online, finding a space to publish one's opinion poses no problem, and there is the sentiment of being part of a group, in a space with its rules and shared practices. For A. O. Scott, editor of the «New York Times» movie critiques, «the paradox is that the Web has invigorated criticism as an activity while undermining it as a profession» (CIEPLY 2009).

Web 2.0 culture encourages participation. Discussion boards are spaces for active writing communities, in which users share «[a] sense of space, shared practice, shared resources and support, shared identities, and interpersonal relationship» (BAYM 2010, p. 75) and where they embrace multiple identities and different roles. Focusing on audiovisual culture shows that commenting on a movie or a TV show is a common practice, simplified by the fact that the user can choose the space and the moment to write or read it. We can tweet while watching a movie and thus share our feelings with a large group.

Nevertheless, this intimate activity is different from the position of a professional film critic, whose judgment on the movie takes the form of a declaration of truth for an audience. For non-professional critics, at any moment social and cultural attributes interact with the free expression of a judgment on an audiovisual experience (JULLIER 2002). Any voicing of a value judgment raises the problem of intersubjectivity: how can I share my judgment?

Consequently, far from being a matter of writing talent, these «ordinary critiques» as a common activity are, for the most part, a frame for expressing one's opinion on a film, based on rationality or «technical speech» and the desire to inform a community. However, the awareness of limits between personal and universal is not always clear. Some users have the illusion of having complete control over their feelings while they judge and thus think that their comments will correspond to the declaration of a universal and definitive truth, expressed from a rational point of view, which is particularly problematic when ethics or morality are in play. Others seem to be aware of the difficulty regarding this frame for discussion, like Gilliam, 25 years old, on the French discussion board Allociné: «The worst is when you try to justify your personal and, consequently subjective opinion by using technical arguments which are, by definition, objective...». Subjective and objective criteria intertwine in the act of putting forward an idea on a film.

We cannot talk of general behavior on the Web, instead we have to look at the specificities of every forum, underlining the differences and the main actors. Six discussion boards, from three different areas will be ana-

lyzed: IMDb (international), Allociné (French), MyMovies (Italian), plus Sky Cinema's official page, a bookstore discussion board and a forum created by fans of Italian crime movies. Every space has its rules, internal dynamics and individual story, spanning many years and still developing. Discussions mirror the evolving existence of *Romanzo criminale* and reflect discussions produced by «official» media. *Romanzo criminale*'s life is accompanied by grassroots productions which evolve as external political events happen and as the story develops, but that also follow internal dynamics, depending on the users' community and on the flow of different content in the same space. Finally, users want to spread their interpretation, encouraging other users to read and comment their texts.

The Internet Movie Database, «Earth's biggest movie database», as its slogan says, is the main website for movie lovers. The combination of its visitors and page views places it 46th in the global rank.¹ First created as a hobby, then launched in October, 1990 and bought by Amazon in 1998, IMDb is a participatory space, which contains accurate information on films, actors, television and video games and it is mostly visited by users aged 18-24.² Registration is optional, but it allows the user to participate in discussions, to rate and add content. In this vast database, every movie, TV show or actor has its sheet which works like a link on a chain, to the point that IMDb becomes a true digital encyclopedia, encouraging a cognitive model working on hyperlinks, corresponding to the image of audiovisual culture as an intertextual collage (Eco 1985). A complementary space within IMDb allows users to add their «reviews», corresponding to the traditional practice of judging a movie with stars and writing long structured critiques. Even if all the discussions and reviews are in English, some features relating to national identities appear, especially for *Romanzo criminale* which mobilizes a specific Italian culture. Users' contributions take a form which is very similar to that of film magazines' official critiques. On Placido's film's sheet, intense activity was registered between October 3, 2005 (a few days after the Italian release of the movie) and April 11, 2012.³ These contributions portray an intertextual story of *Romanzo criminale*, offering the readers a large number of references to similar movies («Dave» from Ottawa lists *Carlito's Way* [B. De Palma, 1993] and *American Gangster*, R. Scott, 2007)⁴ or to literary sources.

1. Alexa.com (2012/05/15).

2. Ibidem.

3. 40 reviews on May 16, 2012.

4. «Better than expected», <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0418110/reviews?filter=chrono> (2012/09/07).

Users make aesthetic reflections concerning the quality of the product, the acting, the cinematography, examining the question of realism in the representation, but they also raise questions concerning the real events on which the story is based. As time goes by, we observe an increase of references to other movies, especially to *Gomorra* (*Gomorra*, M. Garrone, 2009), but very few to the TV show. The TV series has only two recent reviews.⁵ These kinds of reviews, inherited from a practice of criticism as an isolated act, display personal experiences and points of views, outside the frame of a discussion. In fact, other users cannot post a reply to these critiques, they can only answer the question «was this review helpful to you?» by clicking yes or no.

MyMovies.it is «the first Italian online database for film». Its slogan is «movies from the viewer's side», and it provides, along with the digital version of the most important Italian «movies dictionaries», official reviews and a forum. Users have two possibilities for expressing their opinion on films: they have access to discussions from the database's film sheets and can write critiques in the section called «*Pubblico*» («Public»), or discuss in the «Forum». Both spaces are similar in form, the only difference being content (the Forum section contains more personal commentaries). Every critique can be evaluated by users answering the following question: «do you agree with this?». Like IMDb, users can also rate a film using stars, following the traditional practice imported from the press.

Romanzo criminale has three entries in the database: the film, the first and the second season of the TV series. Comments are stored without being categorized: like short critiques, they express an opinion and they are exposed to comments from other users. The risk is redundancy: the lack of topics makes users talk about the same subject without immediately being able to see other contributions, which leads to the repetition of the same subjects and prevents real discussions from being created.

Allociné is a website that a French movie buff can't ignore. Its slogan is «don't just be a simple viewer» («*ne restez pas simple spectateur*») and a vast amount of services and specialized content is in place in order to fulfill film and television viewers' expectations and, more significantly, in order to create a real community of spectators. Forums are organized by topics, or related to film or TV series sheets, as on IMDb or MyMovies. If the connection through a Facebook account is an option, Allociné also encourages user registration, in order to create a community. There is a bi-partition

5. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1242773/reviews> (2012/09/07).

of users' contributions: on the one hand, we can find discussion boards, moderated and organized as a democratic sharing of opinions, and, on the other, personal critiques, boosted by a rewarding system, «The 300 Club», which groups together experts and bloggers who are regularly invited to premieres and special events. In parallel, a weblog system allows viewers to create personal content within Allociné's network.

Both *Romanzo criminale* the film and TV series are represented in Allociné's database and forums. Many threads have been posted about the movie since its release in France (March 22, 2006) to 2011. The section on the series is more active, and has a large number of very recent commentaries (until May 2012).

Sky Cinema, the cable channel which broadcasts the series, has been working on creating a real brand (see GRASSO, SCAGLIONI 2011), establishing itself in the Italian sphere for its quality and using social networks to maximize its force. Its forum shows how users and fans can become, within a frame produced by the industry, cultural marketers of a product, increasing *Romanzo criminale's* popularity. On Sky Cinema's official page, users can find all sorts of news, disparate content and videos. *Romanzo criminale* was placed in the «Mag: Movies, Arts, Gossip and all sort of entertainment» category. Any Internet user has access to the forum, which is part of the channel's global forum, and registration is required to post a comment. Twenty-six topics are dedicated to the two seasons of the series and one has to do with the rumors regarding a third season. Other important topics involve music and characters, bloopers,⁶ hypotheses around the cliffhanger which closes the first season (Libanese's death) and which remains without an answer until the end of season two. Lastly, other discussions revolve around the actual actions of the «Banda della Magliana».

Some discussion boards are not labeled «official» but created by fan communities and thus marked by a more personal or political approach. «Gente di rispetto» is an Italian forum bringing together experts on gangster movies (especially from the seventies). Some rules of behavior are declared: courtesy between users is encouraged and *spoilers* are to be avoided. Members are part of a strong community, they use nicknames taken from gangster movies, like «Ugo Piazza», from *Caliber 9* (*Milano Calibro Nove*, F. Di Leo, 1972), or even from *Romanzo criminale*; in order to show their belonging to this culture, some use a profile picture or *avatar* taken from that cinematographic genre. «Gente di Rispetto»'s culture is marked by a cultivated language, a large knowledge of both film heritage and recent Italian history. The mastery of technical

6. <http://forum.sky.it/bloopers-t311873.html> (2012/09/07).

vocabulary and the experience described in the posts shows that the community is composed of (male) individuals around the age of forty, coming from a privileged background.⁷

Many forums are dedicated to discussions on Giancarlo De Cataldo's book. An Italian example is an online bookseller, Internet Bookstore Italia (IBS.it), where one can find a large number of commentaries⁸ on *Romanzo criminale*, which have been posted individually over the years. Like MyMovies, IBS is more a cumulative space than it is a contributive one. In fact, users' commentaries are more often unique expressions of an opinion and fail to produce a collective discussion. It is still in the case of domesticating a single work: most commentaries are centered on *Romanzo criminale* as a novel, and just a few add remarks on the movie and series as part of a global universe. Instead, the intertextual approach is at the center, the film and the series are considered adaptations of the novel, to which all the preferences go. One user suggests a transmedial way to consume the product: «After all, I recommend this book, maybe exceptionally it's a book to be read *after* seeing the movie, in order to put a cinematographic face to every character!».⁹

After this short presentation of spaces, chosen for their originality and coherence, the recurrent topics and the most significant readings must be analyzed.

The narrative is deconstructed without distinguishing between discourse relating to the book, the film or the TV series. Aesthetic, political, moral, cultural and personal arguments define an environment corresponding to the impact of *Romanzo criminale* in the international, social and cultural sphere. Two main types of discussions are in play: on the one hand, film-centered discussions, taking place on specialized websites (which also usually have a database and a set of services for consumers, such as a list of showings, information on DVD releases, official film critiques). On the other, there are viewer-centered discussions, showing that audiovisual experience is a specific situation, changing according to context.

Within this typology, some differences will emerge, with regards to the original national culture of each space: Italian, French and other cultures intertwine and each sets in motion some specific content. Before we start, it should be noted that, in quoting user comments, I chose to respect the original syntax and spelling.

7. Alexa.com, <http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/gentedirispetto.com> (2011/08/31).

8. About 119 on July 23, 2012.

9. <http://www.ibs.it/ser/serdsp.asp?isbn=9788806160968&rec=21> (2012/09/07).

1.2. Aesthetic discourses

One main reason for participating in forums is the desire to exchange comments on the experience, starting, in most cases, from an aesthetic perspective. When users read the product as a text, an object that viewers can perceive, a set of aesthetic judgments is produced, as opposed to other forms of judgment, in which political and moral elements prevail. Many elements are combined to make an aesthetic judgment: some comments have features that are similar to those of traditional critiquing practice and interpretation. Viewers take pleasure in recognizing links between the texts and suggesting readings on the originations, the production, and the private life of stars. As Janet Staiger puts it, «narrational source is another category of spectatorial activity. Indeed, contexts which suggest particular originations for a movie can determine interpretations» (STAIGER 2000, p. 5). This material is produced before, during or after the viewing of an audiovisual product and contributes to the construction of the experience. These dialectics between internal and external perspective brings to the fore one of the most interesting issues of this study: interpretation as a practice which involves more than just rationality and technique.

Some users write about the product's form and style, others are more interested in the plot. Those interested in the plot will try above all to understand who does what and why, a cognitive need which is often the first step of analysis, that David Bordwell calls «solving a text's hermeneutics» (BORDWELL 1985). Many posts try to answer questions regarding the novel's plot, as well as those of the film or the TV series. Some contributions to the discussions are simple questions, calling for an answer, concerning for example Freddo's or Libanese's death. A large number of discussions occur after the last episode's cliffhanger: in Sky's official forum, many users try to bring evidence of disparate hypotheses to the fore. They try to rationally justify their ideas by retelling the story in terms of logic and the power struggle between the characters. Other users look for a reason hidden in the image, like the protagonist in Antonioni's *Blow Up* (1966), and try to make the object speak for itself. They try to produce evidence by posting images from the TV series, such as the frame with Libanese's murderer whose face is hidden behind a helmet, leaving room for interpretation.¹⁰

Another aesthetic discourse is filmic analysis, analogous to those done in film classes, schools or academia. It is based on the interpretation of

10. <http://forum.sky.it/chi-ha-ucciso-il-mitico-libanese-t312342.html> (2013/03/21).

a text studying the relationship between the theme and its form. Users pay close attention to detail, within the classic framework of the *ekphrasis* – rendering an absent object by describing it in minute detail. The success of this operation depends on the user’s expertise, and it should be noted that, especially in MyMovies forums, those users who produce accurate descriptions are congratulated by the community. Conversely, bad critiques are condemned and their authors despised: «a shallow and pointless critique. Made by someone who doesn’t understand film very much, in my opinion».¹¹

This comment shows the existence of a hierarchy in values, accompanied by the aspiration of judging in a detached way, far from the distractions of everyday life. Some are even glad to ignore the plot and the context, in order to focus on a pure aesthetic experience: «then again, my unfamiliarity with the director, the actors, the historical background allowed me to be completely objective – I just watched it for the cinematographic experience. And I wasn’t disappointed».¹² This perspective is similar to Kant’s aesthetic contemplation that turns away from contingent human life bonds and sensuality in order to produce a pure judgment.

Nevertheless, this position is questioned from another school of thought, which consists in exhibiting intertextual knowledge. Scorsese, Rosi, Bellocchio and Tornatore’s movies are taken as examples in order to define the heritage in which *Romanzo criminale* comes into being. Quoting movies from the past serves to bolster the user’s status. It reinforces the value of a sentence, lending credibility to it:

Romanza Criminale [sic] on the other hand... straight away you are introduced to the characters and know where you are with them. Much better for the viewer compared to Gomorrah. The translation of *Romanza Criminale* [sic] is «Crime Novel» and this made me think «Pulp Fiction». However, this is more like an Italian version of Goodfellas with a bit of Once Upon a Time in America thrown in – we see the protagonists as kids then grown up, etc.¹³

This approach is a guarantee of traditional and institutional practices in the readings. In fact, critiques are built following norms which define not only the form of the comment, but also the approach on how to evaluate the experience. Users find a way to talk about their enjoyment and to define the rules of the experience they’re having, within a community

11. <http://www.mymovies.it/film/2005/romanzocriminale/forum/> (2013/03/21).

12. <http://www.mymovies.it/film/2005/romanzocriminale/forum/> (2013/03/21).

13. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0418110/reviews?filter=chrono> (2013/03/21).

where everyone is responsible for the good development of discussions. Users seem to look for the right words in order to define precisely what is central to their experience: they look to define the soundness of the show in relationship to their body, their culture, their individuality. As a result, any comment that is too personal is immediately stigmatized as inappropriate. For example, when «Dutch Schultz» writes that *Romanzo criminale* is «bad» because it doesn't give enough background on Roman history, the community's answer is as follows:

You can say that a movie is bad because of bad directing, bad film set and bad cinematography, maybe. But not because of its content, in my opinion. I think [*Romanzo criminale*] is very good and well-argued and, especially since it is adapted from a novel, its content is not very questionable. I also think that Placido made a «different» choice, otherwise he would have produced a movie like *The Godfather*.¹⁴

In general, interpretation is built through a mix of discourse on quality, emotions and some examples which justify the user's intention. Other users position themselves against traditional affectation and encourage viewers to give in to *lowbrow* entertainment: «*bello bello bello...* It is useless to display cinephile snobbery, we are in the presence of a great movie!». ¹⁵ Context, though, plays an important role in defining the frames of reference for posting a comment: it sets the rules for evaluating the pleasure taken in a show (by giving a sort of «grid», JULLIER, LEVERATTO 2011) and, often, it encourages «perverse» (STAIGER 2000) readings which give the text a fair shake, opening it up to divergent perspectives.

1.2.1. Intertextuality

Discussions do not solely concern content or style, but also the multiple dimensions of *Romanzo criminale*, which, for some, must be considered as a phenomenon taking place in more than one media. Judgment is made possible by the user's awareness of the set of experiences within the *Romanzo criminale* universe. As «Meggie 87» writes, «I need to re-watch the movie in order to make a more accurate analysis of the series». ¹⁶ Every link in the chain (book, movie, series) has reciprocal effects: users need to make comparisons between each adaptation. More-

14. <http://www.mymovies.it/forum/> (2012/09/07).

15. Ibidem.

16. Ibidem.

over, a specific meaning, which is different from the sum of the parts, comes from the global experience.

In fact, by accessing the IMDb sheet corresponding to Michele Placido's film, a main discussion thread is titled «Book vs. Movie» (posted on February, 2008, more than two years after the cinematographic release in Italy) and it is centered on the differences between the book and the movie. The post mainly deals with aesthetics, and in this thread, the movie is treated as an audiovisual product, an object which should be analyzed minutely in its formal and narrative elements. According to Roland Barthes (1970), deconstruction is an operation revealing underlying codes of a cultural object. The user makes a list of all the differences found by studying the adaptation:

Book Vs Movie

- 1) Libano and Freddo didn't know each other at child / Libano and Freddo were close-friend since the childhood
- 2) The baron is killed by minor characters / The baron is killed by Libano
- 3) The Buffoni brothers were free at the begin / One of them were in jail
- 4) Freddo doesn't die at the end / Freddo dies
- 5) Freddo's girlfriend doesn't die at the end / She dies
- 6) Freddo's brother dies at the end / He dies at half killed by drug
- 7) The gang is non involved in the case of Bologna Station / The gang is involved in it
- 8) The policeman goes to Bologna to help the victims / Freddo is in Bologna and he is the one who helps the victims
- 9) Nero doesn't die / Nero dies...¹⁷

«Garisan», the author of this post, presents himself as an expert - if we look into his older posts, we can see that he is a connoisseur of Italian cinematography and, by his actions, he shares and expands his knowledge by comparing himself to his peers, similarly to classic cinephilia practices (DE BAECQUE 2002).

The element of surprise is always present, even after reading the book and watching the movie. In a dialogue from the «Gente di rispetto» forum,¹⁸ which took place right after the end of the second season, hypotheses were made about the possibility of a third season:

«Renderman»:

I hope to see a third season, but even though if Bufalo is dead, I'm not sure that this will be possible.

«Erfrangio»:

17. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0418110/board/thread/98888865> (2012/09/07).

18. <http://www.gentedirispetto.com/forum/> (2012/09/07).

There is no reason to make a third season... only Fierolocchio and Ricotta are still alive.

«Renderman»:

In fact, they could start the new season precisely with Bufalo as the gang's leader... the series could tell the story of a new empire outside the boundaries of Rome, ending with his murder in the arcade, anyway, ideas are there for the director, the «saga» works, it's well done and it has a huge audience... I'm sure that there will be a third season, I'd bet my house on it...

«Erfrangio»:

Be careful because I'm ready to bet on the exact opposite.

«Renderman»:

I like to bet. What do you want to bet? Save the date... time will tell... 2011 = *Romanzo criminale* third season, totally.

«Erfrangio»:

Whatever you want :) 2010 = End of *Romanzo criminale*

«Renderman»:

I accept.

A few days later, two other users add comments to the discussion:

«Serglasserrischio»:

I also think that they're going to make a third season, and this wouldn't disappoint me at all.

«PELly 1985»:

The third season is unlikely to be made... but they say that the «Banda della Magliana» is still active... we only know ten or twelve characters, but more than sixty people were part of it...

Gathering knowledge on the story is an operation to be made across media.

1.2.2. Italian identity

In formulating value judgments, one of the issues related to *Romanzo criminale* concerns national identity. Generally, for Italian users, the definition «too Italian» is used to underline the product's flaws and naiveties. French or US viewers use the adjective Italian as a genre label, in order to make cross-references to Italian filmic heritage or Mafia movies, to the point that some even notice that, compared to Hollywood movies, *Romanzo criminale* attains such good results in depicting Italian crime that it should be considered «the original version» of Mafia features. All these readings define Italian identity through stereotypes.

MyMovies' users are particularly interested in the quality of *Romanzo criminale*: people define the movie as well as the television series as

exceptions in contemporary cinematography, praising the acting and its «epic» dimension, and the movie's capacity to mention national heritage and have the same importance of the biggest Hollywood masterpieces. An Italian specificity seems to exist, though, even if it is hard to express. For a MyMovies' user it is defined in opposition to American productions: «What makes me like Italian movies is that weird irony that leaves you with a feeling of bitterness at the end, and a big American feature doesn't give me this feeling». Judgment on the movie's value is subordinate to the role that it plays in the contemporary panorama: «Placido directed a flawed and defective movie, but which has an undeniable merit: it's an important movie. This, in today's Italian cinema, where there is nothing but intimate, boring and irritating works, is a merit that must be recognized».¹⁹

«Diggus Doggus», an IMDb user, reviews the movie and gives it 7 stars out of 10, but he adds that he would have given 10 out of 10 had he wanted to compare it to the common Italian «muck». Also, some Sky Cinema users cry out in admiration for the series: «Excellent! You wouldn't say that it is Italian».

After Aldo Grasso's article (GRASSO 2009), a reading of the series as an example of «quality television» (see FEUER 2007) circulates in the Italian media sphere. *Romanzo criminale* is seen as an exception to Italian television's uniformity, proposing new contents and characters: «you can't tell that it's an Italian production: there are no popes, no saints, no sales people, no carabinieri or doctors». The vast majority of critics applaud the product's originality and authenticity, as the following comment proves: «I saw the two first episodes, I'm enthusiastic. Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful. It's good, from time to time, to get an eyeful of good quality products».²⁰ Language is another element which defines the violent and raw identity of the product, comparing the Roman dialect and coarse manners to the polished language of contemporary television productions. In most Italian forums centered on the TV series, many commentaries refer to the enjoyment (or discontent) in hearing the Roman dialect. *Romanzo criminale* defines the values and characteristics of a community, offering its fans a feeling of belonging to a specific culture. Sharing thoughts in an Italian forum corresponds, for Italian viewers, to the possibility of talking about their culture and the emotional bond they discovered thanks to the movie's atmosphere:

19. <http://www.mymovies.it/forum/> (2012/09/07).

20. <http://www.genteditrispetto.com/forum/showthread.php?17828-Romanzo-Criminale-la-serie/page8&highlight=romanzo+criminale> (2013/03/21).

I'm not exactly a fan of Italian cinema, but this movie is really good, it is not just a fiction, but I could see what really happened in the period in which I was born, the events that my parents used to tell me about and that, thanks to this movie, I got to know better. I really loved the actors, this movie moved me.²¹

The movie gives the young woman the opportunity to tell her personal story and delve deeper into a past that she never experienced first hand. *Romanzo criminale* is not just a fiction, but an experience which evokes a reflection, through its characters, images and depicted events, on both historical and personal past (see also ESQUENAZI 2009). Fiction becomes an opportunity to experience history and to gather new information, to find new meanings for the present. In the same way, another user writes that, for her, «this was like going back in time and reliving, as a grown up, events that I saw and interpreted through a child's eyes».²²

1.3. History and politics

Italian history, filled with references to contemporary politics, is at the center of discussions regarding *Romanzo criminale*. Discussions on the representation of real events are at the core of the product's domestication process. Talking politics in movie-related or television-related discussion boards means, for users, focusing on the reality beyond the fiction and looking for elements reinforcing their political opinions in the audiovisual products. Book, movie and TV series are read as texts that can be used in order to understand contemporary Italian history. Aesthetic judgment is never dissociated from the experience nor from the production or audience context. In some cases, though, a user's comments become tinged with a polemical hue, exceeding the judgment of a text and interpreting *Romanzo criminale* as a societal phenomenon, which can be the starting point or, sometimes, the pretext for larger discussions. When users stress the political value of real events on which the fiction is based, a moral judgment is always engaged. Forums become a space in which hypotheses around the deep mysteries of the «Years of Lead» (a period of social disorder and political agitation in Italy, from the late 1960s to the early 1980s) are analyzed, such as the kidnapping of Emanuela Orlandi, or the implication of the Mafia in politics, shedding light on contemporary political events. For the novel, De Cataldo's writing is described by users as capable of captivating the readers and taking them towards a

21. Ibidem.

22. <http://ilforumdimiamivice.forumcommunity.net/?t=3270357> (2013/03/21).

fascinating and truthful universe. The experience is never sufficient and the reader always needs to know more:

An «epic» novel. Six-hundred pages that you never want to end. In fact, when you're done reading it, you start another book on the «Banda della Magliana», maybe a non-fiction. Since the curiosity about knowing to what extent those characters, loved or hated, really existed, is very strong.²³

On the one hand, some IMDb users stress fidelity to the period from a perspective which seems mainly centered on the narrative's coherence, and thus quality. Discussing how different subjects, music and visual elements are arranged in order to carry the viewer into the seventies and eighties, users show their belief that a film can give an access to the past, through the frames of fiction and, namely, of genre.

Some comments concerning generic labels confirm that this approach doesn't go beyond the limits of internal analysis. On the contrary, for Italian viewers, some forms of political awareness are always present. Just before the release of the movie, in the «Gente di rispetto» forum, «Pollanet» writes about the book:

To me, the book was worth it, I read it with great pleasure. It's about 15-20 years of Italian history, fictionalized and embroidered as you want, but Italian history. Nonetheless, let's say that the ones who are in search of revelations on the «Banda della Magliana» or on the «Years of Lead» would be deceived, because the reconstitution of certain historical facts are very mitigated and the events aren't centered. Politics-fiction alternates reality always discreetly [...].²⁴

This post obtains an answer from «minimalinconico». The user organizes his answer as an argumentation, showing knowledge of Italian history, underlining that the novel is linked to the values of Italians in the time depicted by the book and tries to offer to other users a social context to the fiction:

Forgive me Pollanet, I think that the story is based on the historical context in which it evolves. Freddo's gang, the «Banda della Magliana», was born in that period, and it is the result of unpleasantness, contestation, and heroin destroying youth. It is the product of a middle class detached from reality, going downhill, obsolete and with no hope, giving birth to kids who were more and more different from their parents, and closer to idealism, marxism-leninism, against respectability, sectarianism. This is similar to what happened to the French aristocracy

23. <http://www.ibs.it/ser/serdsp.asp?isbn=9788806160968&rec=81> (2012/09/07).

24. [http://www.gentedirispetto.com/forum/showthread.php?1421-Romanzo-Criminale-\[2005-M-Placido\]](http://www.gentedirispetto.com/forum/showthread.php?1421-Romanzo-Criminale-[2005-M-Placido]) (2012/09/07).

in the years leading to the revolution in 1789. The novel deals with the dark dynamics of the gang's logic, that's true, but it is as important – and essential, I will add – as the fact that the author expresses, using big Italian events, the social malaise of a country in total disarray, where the values of past decades were overcome by consciousness and History.²⁵

Expert users share their knowledge of real events that inspired De Cataldo's novel, seizing discourses still present in mass media (news concerning the burial of boss Renatino De Pedis' in a roman church and the mysterious disappearance of Emanuela Orlandi, for example) and from documentary sources (a report on the «Banda della Magliana» broadcast by Sky History Channel). The use of documentary sources teaches younger generations about a recent, even if sometimes forgotten, past:

Guys, if you follow the episodes of the gang's story broadcast on the History Channel... the truth is very different. Especially the fact that at the end Freddo (in reality Maurizio Abbatino aka Er Crispino) doesn't die... on the contrary, he becomes a renegade and helps arrest many other members of the gang. Incredible! In court, when he is interrogated, he answers with Freddo's typical coolness and says to the public prosecutor: don't touch my family, because something bad could happen... and the prosecutor, laughing, answers: would you do that by yourself or send somebody? And Abbatino answers: I could do it myself.²⁶

Other readers, disappointed by Placido's cinematographic adaptation, not accurate enough in depicting details found in the book, suggest watching the documentary on the «Banda della Magliana», or reading Bianconi's *Ragazzi di malavita* (BIANCONI 1997) in order to understand what is missing in the movie. Precisely, a link to real events.

In the movie, all the big shots are forgotten: Daniele Abbruciati, Marcello Colafigli, Edoardo Toscano, Claudio Sicilia, Nicolino Selis... What a pity. However, I found Favino and Stuart to be excellent actors. The book is very good, even if it is too long and occasionally confused. I read it before watching the movie and, even if at the beginning I was disappointed by the non-conformity of the adaptation, I can't deny that the movie was a gripping experience. Bianconi's book is less wordy, more «real», even if it contains some boring parts... I recommend reading this book, and, for those who have the chance, *Blu Notte's* episode on the «Banda della Magliana».²⁷

25. Ibidem.

26. <http://forum.sky.it/banda-della-magliana-la-vera-storia-t315895.html> (2012/09/07).

27. <http://www.ibs.it/ser/serdsp.asp?isbn=9788806160968&rec=21> (2012/09/07).

Some passages, which in the movie are problematic for non-Italian viewers or for those who don't know the politics of the «Years of Lead», are explained by users who, after researching on the web, can provide documents or explanations, as in the following example:

«ilovetoseethemovie»:

I don't understand Mason. Why is this word related to Dandi and why does Dandi hate them? Thanks.

«jorgddh»:

Probably Dandi is referring to the P2, a freemasonry ring very prominent in Italy those years, which was involved in every dirty spot of the political theatre of operations. But I'm not Italian, so probably someone from there could give us a light here.

«markbc-2»:

You are right he's referring to Freemasons, a brotherhood that operates in many countries ensuring fellow members businesses run smoothly as they pledge allegiance to one another and their God.²⁸

Nevertheless, other users note that *Romanzo criminale* is a film and, consequently, according to its fictional status, any reading of it as a history lesson or as an instrument for establishing the truth about events that are still obscure would be inappropriate. Eventually, some of these discussions lead to a real reframing of contemporary politics, thanks to the collective production of meaning. Discussing history brings some users to ask questions regarding contemporary events, like «Pollanet» says: «Try to go back in time and, if you pay attention, everything has changed since then, and yet the mechanisms of criminal organizations are based on the same hypothesis».²⁹ This remark introduces a main question for our study: how does *Romanzo criminale* build a mythology working for a part of society, interpreting social and political tensions?

1.4. Personal uses

This section deals with the part of audience's activity that Janet Staiger calls «discourse»: readings are still centered on the link between real life and fiction, but a viewer's comments are more personalized. Some comments, especially in Italian spaces, express a very personal point

28. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0418110/board/nest/127575248> (2012/09/07).

29. <http://www.gentedirispetto.com/forum/showthread.php?17828-Romanzo-Criminale-la-serie/page9&highlight=romanzo+criminale> (2012/09/07).

of view, sometimes a real fan's attachment to the product or to the characters, like «Libanese 73» who writes: «I have to admit that this is a wonderful thing and I am a real fan, definitely addicted to *Romanzo criminale*». ³⁰ Many viewers post knee-jerk reactions which convey a specific emotional discourse: «The film gave me a whirlwind of emotions, something that, at the movies, hasn't happen to me since *Life is Beautiful*. How can a simple succession of facts move you to tears? I left the room in a state of upheaval and satisfaction». ³¹

Users stress this connotation through their language: some use Roman dialect in order to show their proximity to the show's atmosphere, others use a text message style or emphasis markers such as an excessive use of exclamation points and emoticons. The language of emotions, love and, sometimes, of «addiction» prevails. «Almayer», in the «Gente di Rispetto» forum, admits that the end of the second season moved him to tears:

I finished the season last night. At the last sequence, with that music, I almost cried and I started to clap my hands, alone in my living room [...] Like Pollanet, I also have a lump in my throat. I immediately started a French series to cheer me up, same historical period, an excellent one [*Carlos*, O. Assayas, 2010]. I will open a new thread on that. ³²

Another example of sharing emotions can be seen in posts which show the desire to get closer to the characters, diving into the fictional world. In some posts, female fans express their love for one of the protagonists, addressing him directly and proposing to marry him. Here, the user takes the fictional character as a possible real-life interactant, playing the game of fiction after the show ends. The situation is not new to fan studies: fans have always sent mail to characters in order to congratulate for fictional achievements, or to ask for advice on personal issues.

The book, the movie and the series bring viewers into a different dimension, far from the concerns of everyday life, but, when users talk about their audiovisual experience, they are actually talking about themselves. Some online spaces encourage this kind of self-expression more than others.

30. <http://www.mymovies.it/film/2005/romanzocriminale/forum/?id=527066> (2012/09/07).

31. <http://www.mymovies.it/forum/> (2012/09/07).

32. <http://www.gentedirispetto.com/forum/showthread.php?17828-Romanzo-Criminale-la-serie/page3&highlight=romanzo+criminale> (2012/09/07).

Some users like to use forums to share what happened to them while experiencing the film or series. These stories demonstrate that an audiovisual product can strengthen bonds between viewers and create a sense of community, or, in other cases, create a gap between them, as the following example shows. A blogger describes the evening he spent watching *Romanzo criminale* with a girl and realized that he didn't pick the right movie:

At every death I felt smaller: I counted them for some time, then I lost count. It looked like *Commando* with Schwarzenegger and I didn't know if I should have turned towards her offering my apologies or run away. Then she started laughing and she whispered to my ear, between two firings, «You know, I never knew that you were so romantic». ³³

The author of this post puts his personal life as an introduction to the movie's critique, relocating the point of view and centering the discovery of the movie on a precise social experience. This kind of post, which focuses on the encounter between the viewer and the show, stresses the role of the body (of the blogger and his unfortunate companion) as an instrument for evaluating a product's value, is not well received:

You could have spared us the introduction (I understand these things too...) since we have no interest in reading about your life. It can happen, when you write critiques, that you add something personal and you're not objective when you read what you've written, but if you start with such a massive introduction, you talk too much and nobody will read your review. ³⁴

As this post shows, the autobiographical position of the «ordinary viewer» is quite simply refused by other readers that criticize its triteness («I understand these things too») and the lack of objectivity (according to the Kantian notion of taste judgment).

Even if personal accounts of filmic experience are numerous in the historiographical tradition of cinephilia (JULLIER, LEVERATTO 2010), they only concern directors, producers, actors or critics, leaving no place for ordinary viewers. As for *Romanzo criminale*, we can observe forms of censure towards the narration of a personal experience of the show, considered trivial and inferior. This censure seems to repeat Bourdieu's paradigm by distinguishing between highbrow and lowbrow culture: illustrious cinephiles, by virtue of their acquaintance with the production

33. http://www.debaser.it/recensionidb/id_32301/Michele_Placido_Romanzo_Criminale.htm (2012/09/07).

34. http://www.debaser.it/recensionidb/id_32301/Michele_Placido_Romanzo_Criminale.htm. (2012/09/07).

of culture, have the right to tell their experiences, which work as models for a practice that simple consumers have to learn. This distinction, consequently, has a normative function by both confirming traditional viewing approaches to the show as a ritual and dismissing all that concerns emotions and true-life stories.

However, this direct self-expression is less frequent in forums than in other online spaces: talking about one's own personal experience has a central place on blogs and social networks, even if some precautions must be applied, about the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate pleasures.

1.5. *Morality*

Along with «personalization of discourse», another form of the overlapping of *Romanzo criminale* and true-life experiences is represented by situations in which users have to break down right from wrong regarding the depicted events. As Laurent Jullier notes in his study of audience attitudes towards scenes of violence (JULLIER 2008), in many cases, a viewer's reactions can be thought of in terms of a «fable», allowing for a generalization, or a «story», seeing the characters and their actions as isolated cases, limited to the show's context. On the one hand, viewers see the danger of a normative example for behaving badly (LINTON 1936) and the celebration of real dramatic events. On the other, viewers enjoy the exaggerated violence of the bad characters, following a second-degree pleasure, in accordance with a postmodern reading. This emphasizes their fictional status, inserts them into the gangster genre following a second-degree pleasure, in accordance with a postmodern reading. *Romanzo criminale* is read as a sort of upside-down guide, or an encyclopedia of immoral behavior, inspiring individuals to look for a way to express their malaise.

Romanzo criminale is a story of a gang of criminals and, moreover, a real-life story which took place in the most dramatic years of recent Italian history. Placido's and Sollima's characters are violent criminals who perform all kinds of bad acts: they sell and take drugs, they lie to their best friends, they kill for vengeance and money. For these reasons, huge controversies were voiced about negative role models conveyed by the film and the series.

According to a reading of this violent masculinity as transgressing the rules of society, the characters of *Romanzo criminale* go against the frame of normal behavior. The characters revolt against society, which makes them fascinating. By sharing a slice of their fictional lives, viewers can vicariously live out their forbidden desires. Freddo doesn't

merely evoke a James Dean style character in wearing a leather jacket, since he's driven by darker and more political intentions. He expresses several times (in the novel, in the film, in the series) his rebelliousness by not lowering his head to figures of power. At the same time, a full set of good values is at the center of *Romanzo criminale's* world: friendship, loyalty, honor, love. Universal values that can be adopted by a large number of viewers, recognizing themselves in a shared dream of happiness of portrayed youth, reinforcing the bond with the characters and complicating more and more the action of breaking from right to wrong.

A sequence from the series in which Libanese, while buying a fur-coat for his mother, expresses his belief that «women shouldn't work so they can stay beautiful» is applauded as an example of learning how to treat women as inferior subjects. Another sequence, in which Libanese and his companions break into a police station and urinate in an office, is read as a way to scorn authority. Even if users condemn these actions, qualified as unacceptable, they still watch them with a grin which, along with other little transgressions, contributes to celebrating a mischievousness that, along with Roman identity, becomes central to connoting *Romanzo criminale's* style. Nevertheless, some users don't consider these sequences as deliberately playing with the norms of civility but as praising real criminals. Big controversies arise, especially when the discussions also touch on the historical events that inspire the story. Some viewers see *Romanzo criminale* as glorifying real criminals and don't accept the spectacular representation of their feats. Notably, the controversy is more heated for the TV series than for the film (the novel is not seen as posing a threat). The reassuring frame of genre, namely of Mafia and gangster films, certifies that all the violence belongs to fiction:

I have something to say about the strong risk of glorifying the crime that some movies or TV series can create. In order to avoid misunderstandings, the producers should have avoided adding that poorly chosen phrase at the end of the trailer, «crime pays», that police officers, Carabinieri and judges will certainly like [...] Advertisers should feel ashamed.³⁵

The forum administrator answers as follows, echoing a debate that was flourishing in the media at the same time: «I understand your concerns, but even films like *Scarface*, *The Godfather* or *Goodfellas* praise crime, but that didn't prevent these movies from being masterpieces, at least from my point of view».³⁶

35. <http://forum.sky.it/romanzo-criminale-t90598-15.html#p1584076> (2013/03/21).

36. Ibidem.

We are reminded, philosophically, that «the charm of evil always hits». Incidentally, it should be noted that «crime, particularly violent crime, has always been a sure-fire topic for the entertainment of the public», as noted by John Cawelti (quoted by BUONANNO 2002, p. 142). A movie critic from a major Italian catholic newspaper with regards to the book writes:

Evil, we know, is seductive. And big baddies, especially in the movies, exert more charm than horror. There is no doubt, then, that *Romanzo criminale* – Giancarlo De Cataldo’s book, freely inspired from dreadful acts perpetrated between 1977 and 1992 by the famous «Banda della Magliana» – is a natural «cinematographic» subject.³⁷

From a more practical point of view, others say that they’re just ready to cancel their Sky subscription, exercising their power over the object, but without giving arguments for continuing the discussion. Controversy surfaced again for the second season, amplified by the success of the first and the merchandizing associated with it.

Within these discussions, we can observe that the production of meaning has some gender distinctions, which go hand in hand with distinctions that users make about genre classification. If users moved by more traditional cinephile values (brought by a male, highbrow community, in a forum like IMDb or Allociné) limit their comments to an aesthetic approach, distinct from moral judgment and would rather underline intertextual links and cinematographic heritage, other male values, such as admiring negative role models are still observable in fan communities (MyMovies).

Other forums, on the contrary, underline the need to be deeply shocked by the criminal behavior on screen. In an Italian discussion board devoted to psychology, with higher women participation, reasons for hostility towards negative models are given: fear of identifying with criminals and morally accepting their actions.

In general, I liked the movie. Actually, I really liked it, to be honest. I only have one worry... it is maybe because of the casting with super attractive actors, beautiful women, maybe because of images of the gang members when they were children... but I felt too much compassion for the murderers and this doesn’t seem very right to me!³⁸

37. «Il Male, si sa, è seduttivo. E i grandi malvagi, soprattutto al cinema, più che orrore esercitano fascino. Non c’è dubbio, dunque, che quello di *Romanzo criminale* – il libro di Giancarlo De Cataldo, liberamente ispirato alle terribili gesta compiute fra il ’77 e il ’92 dalla famigerata Banda della Magliana – fosse un soggetto “naturalmente” cinematografico». G. Vallati, «Avvenire», September 27, 2005 (my translation).

38. <http://www.opsonline.it/forum/psicologia-3d/romanzo-criminale-27822.html> (2012/09/07).

In the same discussion:

In my opinion, it is clear that often the difference between «good» and «bad» characters is not so clear-cut... while I was watching the movie, the words of a mother whose daughter was killed (in the US) come to mind... the murderer has been condemned... They asked her why she wouldn't talk to him... and she answered: «If I get to know him and if we talk, I'll start considering him as a person and understanding him, in a certain way. But I don't want to». That's all. This movie is the story of these criminals. And they have, like everybody, their loves, their deceptions, their hopes... this is telling (maybe embroidering a little bit because it's a fiction)... this is not justifying.

Personal experiences come into the discussion starting from a comment on the fictional product. For example, a user talks about her personal life in order to justify her moral position concerning the representation of criminals. The following conversation was found in the commentaries accompanying a YouTube homage to Libanese:³⁹

«thebeautifulpieppe»:

Guys, what are you saying? «Great Libano», «Great Giuseppucci», «Fantastic»...are you crazy? Notice, if you forgot, that he was a heinous criminal. Are you under his charm? He should make you sick instead. In my opinion, at least.

«molfettagirl»:

ehhh, the charm of evil is everlasting, unfortunately (or luckily)...

«78elite» (responding to molfettagirl):

In my opinion you are a very narrow-minded woman... come on, get engaged with a bandit and you'll see what a life... I don't know what to say when I read what you wrote... you're really ignorant.

«molfettagirl»:

For your information, I dated a criminal for five years, and now he is in jail. And as a matter of fact I couldn't date anybody like him. I was just talking of feelings that a damned soul creates for a woman. You don't have to insult me.

Following this rational approach, some consider that the end of the movie and TV series reveals that the criminals are not role models. They all die horrible deaths, punished for their wickedness.⁴⁰ If comments underlining mythical aspects of the criminals are prominent for the movie, the point of view of the crime/punishment is especially observed for the second season of the TV series, where the gang collapses. The season ends with the death of all the protagonists, who in the last ten episodes become hideous to the viewers.

39. http://www.youtube.com/all_comments?v=hessXjIy8A&page=1 (2012/09/07).

40. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0418110/usercomments?filter=chrono> (2012/09/07).

But how then to explain such a craze for these characters, a craze that lasts long after the end of the second season? How to explain the expressions of helplessness for viewers since their Thursday night appointment with *Romanzo criminale* has to be substituted with another show? The answer may lie in the fact that *Romanzo criminale* has become much more than a skillfully designed show; much more than an experience of forbidden behavior; something other than a reproduction of nostalgic atmospheres.

1.6. A participatory knowledge

A central activity in forums is sharing accounts of an experience, a practice which contributes both to the development of a common knowledge or a participatory culture and to the creation of social bonds. Users talk about *Romanzo criminale* because they want to express their opinion on the product's value, to talk with others, to remember a significant experience in their life, or to solve unanswered questions.

The relationship between fiction and reality emerges as a main issue, especially when politics is the subject of discussion. Many questions concerning the historical events which inspired the fiction are observed, as illustrated in the post titled «Kind of confused»:

«wkabak»:

Who in the world were those guys in the suits?

Was the movie saying that it was the right wingers who blew up the Bologna train station?

Was the head cop the kid who was injured in the opening scene and did not flee the house when the cops arrived?

Plotspoiler alert: Why did the guy blow up Ice's girlfriend?⁴¹

If some users try to give an accurate answer by suggesting a sometimes very personal interpretation, others just give the link to a Wikipedia page which still can be considered as an interpretation but places the answer under the (questionable) authority of the well known web encyclopedia.

These discussions cover just a small portion of the *Romanzo criminale* universe, offer information about the plot, and answer to the need of a context for the complex – especially for non-Italian viewers – textual and extra-textual material at work in Placido's rewriting of historical events. For this purpose, users' contributions are mostly cross-references, point-

41. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0418110/board/nest/44791872> (2012/09/07).

ing to other sources of knowledge, instead of becoming real contradictory spaces.

We can read comments on a forum after watching a movie in order to find other users who share our feelings (immediately or after a long reflection) or to know more about a certain detail, but we can also anticipate the experience. Consequently, comments in forums help us choose the right movie; they provide us with tools to be better equipped for the show. Information posted by other viewers becomes a doorway to the experience, discussions act as «paratexts» (GENETTE 1982) or gatekeepers (see also GRAY 2010) for the show, helping us minimize the risk of the unknown. For example, in an Allociné forum, a self-declared twelve-year-old girl, «gangster movies enthusiast», asks for opinions on Plácido's movie.⁴² The discussion board then becomes a space for a «virtual» test of the product's quality, with minimal engagement on the girl's side. In the answers to her question, aesthetic values are shown as guarantees of quality; the movie is considered a «must see». At the same time, some warn about the violence in the movie, showing concern for the young girl's sensitivity and thresholds, after having measured the experience that went through their own body.

Viewers share information about DVD releases and the chances to get the original version with English subtitles.⁴³ Other topics explore hard-to-find information, such as the titles of songs played in the movie or in the series: the forum works as a community of experts and realizes Jenkins' utopia of participatory culture, where shared information builds a higher level of knowledge, exceeding the individual one. It must be noted that forums are spaces where users can express their hypertextual knowledge exceeding writing and creating a paradoxical «oral culture», magnifying the possibility offered by the networks. A detail can be clarified by watching a video or looking at a picture. A user asks for information on Nero's sunglasses brand: in order to be understood by others, he simply puts a link in the thread to a picture where the detail is visible.⁴⁴ Therefore, the text is replaced by a picture, the communication is made possible by the mastery of the digital environment and its visual structure.

Messages are regrouped visually by topics, which hierarchically organize the information. Thus, the knowledge contained in IMDB is search-

42. http://www.allocine.fr/communaute/forum/message_gen_nofil=418783&cfilm=61263&refpersonne=&c%20article=&refserie=&refmedia=.html (2012/09/07).

43. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1242773/board/nest/148284239> (2012/09/07). The thread has been deleted.

44. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0418110/board/thread/166821391> (2012/09/07).

able thanks to an organization in list form: according to Jack Goody, lists have a major cognitive role, since they «allow things to be presented following a hierarchy (classification list)» (LEVERATTO 2006, p. 151).

Online spaces seem to be identified by a strong heterogeneity of interests. This modality to show taste and develop knowledge is similar to «eclecticism», a philosophical attitude consisting of choosing theoretical elements pertaining to different disciplines in order to build a new synthesis (see the term «eclecticism» by Diderot in the *Encyclopédie*). More recently, Donnat (1994) uses the same term when he describes French cultural habits. Bernard Lahire talks about a «cultural omnivorism» (PETERSON 1992 and LAHIRE 2004a; 2004b), which, against Bourdieu's determinism, blurs the boundaries between «high» and «popular» culture. In the web 2.0, users show a mixed culture, spawning a new definition of expertise. Being an expert viewer today means being able to affect many different environments, while fictional worlds expand on new media as intertextual labyrinths, on an international scale. An expert of *Romanzo criminale* is someone who goes deep into online spaces and gathers hidden information regarding the characters and the plot, as well as every single production secret and its links to real world. But this isn't enough: a real expert must deal with the horizontal dimension of the network and be able to share content.

2. Expanding

2.1. Creating apocryphal content

The YouTube query «*Romanzo criminale*» gives a long list of excerpts. At first glance, they all seem similar. In fact, clips from the original movie or the series appear alongside many videos that have been reworked by users, some of which are even «more tasteful than a deliberately made product» (GENETTE 1982).¹ In his encyclopedic work, *Palimpsestes*, Genette proposes to examine the operations carried out by the hypertext on a hypotext, depending on transformative and imitative practices. This model can be used as a tool to describe how users create and share videos on the Web.

This chapter focuses on practices that Gérard Genette would define as hypertextual, in which the grafting of a new text over the old one is not a commentary, but a derivative text, built through remixing or mashing-up different materials. The transformations and imitations that *Romanzo criminale* undergoes will be studied. This analysis will shed light on the product's capacity to function as a space for all kinds of «poaching» and «bricolage» (DE CERTEAU 1990). Before analyzing original texts (De Cataldo's novel, Placido's movie and Sollima's television series, plus a set of official online spaces and marketing strategies), several «apocryphal» texts will be uncovered.

The use of the term «apocryphal» refers to grassroots productions that are excluded from a canon (apocryphal means «of doubtful authenticity, although widely circulating as being true»)² New and unanticipated texts add to *Romanzo criminale*'s world, filling in the gaps between the three main media and reworking their content. This coexistence

1. My translation.

2. Concise Oxford English Dictionary (Eleventh Edition).

of different readings along with official texts creates dissonance and polyphony. *Romanzo criminale* welcomes diverse forms of grassroots productions which add small details to or modify the whole story, and contribute to the development of a coherent world or an expanding universe. *Romanzo criminale* can also be compared to a palimpsest: «a written document, usually on vellum or parchment, that has been written upon several times, often with remnants of erased writing still visible» (GENETTE 1982, p. 556).

These grassroots productions can be compared to the act of furnishing a rented apartment. They show the art of «making something new out of something old», as described by Claude Lévi-Strauss: the handyman knows how to make do and mend, in a universe of limited instruments (see also GENETTE 1982, p. 555). These appropriations correspond to what Michel de Certeau and later Henry Jenkins described as «cultural poaching» - «raids» or hunts in an unauthorized territory, in a space owned by institutions, made by consumers who take away the original material in order to transform it for their own enjoyment (JENKINS 1988, p. 86). The model of Cultural Studies «oppositional readings» helps describe the capability of users to free themselves from instruments of domination. This territory built by consumers through «trickery and diversion», defines popular culture as a «space from which people can think of themselves instead of being just thought of by others» (MAIGRET 2000, p. 524).

Users perform, according to Janet Staiger, *perverse* readings, indicating «a willful turning away from the norm» and «an inability to do otherwise» (STAIGER 2000, p. 2). Rather, users' activities are something that responds to affective and cognitive processes, making sense of an audiovisual product through its use in real life.

These apocryphal products are found in video sharing spaces and, more broadly, in every fan fiction archive, namely YouTube, which was created in 2005 (Google bought it in 2006) and is currently (2013) the third most visited website in the global Alexa rank. In this space, users can watch all sorts of videos with a search engine, with keywords or similar videos. Every video has some tags chosen by its author, which describe the product, making it accessible. «*Romanzo criminale*» is the title of many fragments, directly relating to the movie or the TV series circulating within YouTube's channels. As a tag, it can also describe other videos, which only share some links to the official product's original culture. Thus, YouTube, the main video sharing space, becomes a territory for analyzing *Romanzo criminale's* folkloric power (FISKE 1987), creating new products within communities. The viewers' practices studied in this section correspond to the construction of a «vertical» intertextuality, of

«third degree» productions. They are material tracks left by users in a space encouraging an oral culture (not subject of Goody's «graphic reason», but following other rules, like the hyperlink, a new dimension of the image), without distinctions between consumption and production (FISKE 1987, p. 79). A large amount of varied discourse surrounding *Romanzo criminale* is not always to be read as reaction to a text, but on the contrary, as the living track of a pervasive discursivity that is built by and in different cultures. These productions have to be studied from their pragmatological potential, exploring individuals and groups motivations and values mobilized in poaching, within a networked structure. We'll see that, in this context, feedback from other users has to be considered as a primary element.

Playfulness seems to be a key element in understanding video sharing specificities. A pleasure for quirky, unwarranted, far-from-real life content is at the center of parodies, pastiches and dubbing. Jenkins compared this culture to *vaudeville*. Using McLean's (1965) term, Jenkins stresses the communitarian element of the show, in which the audience praises their favorite works with enthusiastic comments and the immediate sharing of what surprises them: «The best YouTube content is content that is so unbelievable that it has to be shared» (JENKINS 2006b). Even if some similarities are recognizable, such as feedback, timing, emotional logic, originality, the comparison with a form belonging to the past can be excessive. Instead, appropriations must be studied in the historical and social context to which they belong.

At the same time, many of these products give emotionally-charged information about their authors. Videos become the territory for a representation of the self. If, at its genesis, YouTube was just a «digital video repository», today its slogan is «broadcast yourself». Any Internet user becomes a center for transmitting signals, in a network.

2.2. Transformative practices

The first typology of hypertextual relations is based on transformation practices, commonly described, in fan language, as «vidding». Users take the movie or the TV series as «raw materials» for new creations, exploring and testing the limits of their content and form, making semantic modifications that have different pragmatic effects, which, as a result, generate new readings and meanings. For *Romanzo criminale*, we can identify four main types of video transformations: extracts; summaries; tributes; dubbing.

2.2.1. Extracts

Looking up «*Romanzo criminale*» on YouTube, the first results are mere extracts that have not been tampered with and which correspond to scenes from the feature film and TV series. This practice is a way to pirate the product by streaming its free version, in short pieces (even though recently, entire episodes from the series are available on YouTube).³ It is also an example of relocating (CASETTI 2011) the main product in an alternative space for consumption. According to this pragmatical function, the extracts' titles correspond to those of the movie or the TV series and are numbered to facilitate consultation.

Along with experiencing the film or the TV series as a whole, consuming *Romanzo criminale* is possible in a «snack culture» context:

We now devour our pop culture the same way we enjoy candy and chips - in conveniently packaged bite-size nuggets made to be munched easily with increased frequency and maximum speed. This is snack culture - and boy, is it tasty (not to mention addictive) (MILLER 2007).

YouTube, swarming with «short quotes of content» (see BURGESS, GREEN 2009, p. 49), is the place for sharing loved pieces of media information and surprising videos. Without attempting to pirate the entire product, users share short quotes from the text in order to show to their friends, in social networks, a specific sequence that they like.

The titles of these «snacks» convey an opinion regarding the extract's quality («very nice sequence»), or describe its content. In both cases, when a user chooses a title for an extract, he or she is already suggesting a reading, customizing the product and giving other users a key for interpretation. As a result, extracts contribute to the circulation of *Romanzo criminale* within a network and to its adaptation in different contexts. A frequently shared fragment is comparable to a *meme*, an exchangeable cultural information unit, self-replicating and transmitted from one individual to another (DAWKINS 1972, cf. JENKINS 2009a). Furthermore, users like to compile playlists of favorite moments: «things I like and there are many»,⁴ a real catalog of sequences from the TV series grouped together following the user's idiosyncrasy.

Sharing is one of the core elements of YouTube's logic. Users both

3. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QVz4w4yuYiU> (2012/07/05).

4. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQ8fRa4kJYM&feature=PlayList&p=52F3A671AF48B148&playnext_from=PL&playnext=1&index=34 (2012/09/07). The video has been removed by users.

take content from and reinsert it into the media flow, in order to retrieve the meaning of their viewing experience and show it to others. Sharing is so important that, sometimes, the video is shared even if the image's resolution is poor. As Henry Jenkins puts it: «If it doesn't spread, it's dead» (JENKINS 2009a, and JENKINS, FORD, GREEN 2013). Sometimes a sequence becomes extraordinarily famous, thanks to its circulation: for *Romanzo criminale*, the sequence in which the main characters split the ransom coming from Barone Rosellini's kidnapping,⁵ in both Placido's movie and in Sollima's television series, has become cult, a model sequence which defines the genesis of the *Banda della Magliana*.

2.2.2. Summaries

If uploading a sequence on YouTube already builds meaning, some users transform the original in order to produce a summary, restricted to YouTube's short format of about 10 minutes, which modifies the product's original syntax. This cultural phenomenon can be explained through the notion of remix, a play on various materials coming from disparate cultures: «the aim of these creators is in part to learn. It is in part to show off. It is in part to create works that are strikingly beautiful» (LESSIG 2008, p. 77).

Users share these videos for different purposes. The main reason is to provide information on the product for the benefit of other users. If one missed the last episode, he or she can watch these videos to catch up before the next episode airs. This practice is taken from television, where, namely for TV series, the recap, a condensation of key moments of previous episodes, helps the reading by underlining relationships between characters and evoking specific details.

Although literary texts can be summarized using an inferior number of words while still being loyal to the style and the general organization of the source text, the situation is quite different for film, in which summary is replaced by synecdoche: in order to summarize, YouTube's users have to choose fragments from the original and work with them. Unlike a literary text, cinematographic language cannot be broken down into words: its minimal element is the shot that will be chosen as a part of the whole. Editing, a practice that is becoming easier for all kind of users, thanks to digital technologies, allows viewers to choose, cut and paste together meaningful moments. Even smaller elements that are not

5. <http://youtu.be/r2KRwCPVsN4> (2012/09/07).

moving images, like frames, can be used. Users take both shots and still frames for their summaries, taking a movie or a TV series as a homogeneous unit that can be summarized in another homogeneous unit, all while respecting its main elements.

Some videos are structured as lists (a cinephilic pleasure, also seen in discussion boards), anthologies of favorite moments or cult dialogues, as for *The Best Quotes and Best Moments from Romanzo criminale the Series (episode 2)*.⁶ The same pleasure for listing can be found for characters, for example in *Romanzo criminale - la banda*⁷ in which all the movie's characters are presented in a montage with Queen's song *I Want It All*, where the creator of the video explains the choice of music by translating it into Italian and showing that the text is perfectly in tune with the characters' will of having it all and now. Other videos list the deaths of all the characters⁸, or show the openings of all the episodes (*Twelve Beginnings and Only One End*).⁹

Another video is a «very short summary» of season two, mixing the main events with Duran Duran's *Bad Boys*¹⁰. In the editing of the video, some «mickey-mousing» effects show the user's enjoyment in building an entertaining product, more similar to a video clip than to a summary. The music puts emphasis on the characters as being «bad boys» and pays homage to the eighties.

Even if the main purpose of these videos is to add information for the benefit of a community, many choices reveal the presence of an emotion and the desire to share an attachment to the characters. Moreover, every video is a product that required time and technique, that contains its own value and explores new meanings of the show.

2.2.3. Tributes

Videos showing a strong emotional use of *Romanzo criminale* can be classified as tributes. Similar to summaries, and largely shared on the web as such, these videos are made by fans to celebrate characters, fictional events and atmospheres, highlighting favorite moments and themes. Most

6. <http://youtu.be/6aBjGPSmc7I> (2012/09/07).

7. <http://youtu.be/CehK0U1l1Co> (2012/09/07).

8. http://youtu.be/nKK7_-YkBxi (2012/09/07). The video is no longer available.

9. <http://youtu.be/QJ6BqFD0m2A> (2012/09/07). The video is no longer available due to a Copyright claim.

10. <http://youtu.be/0e2A0nymYmY> (2012/09/07) (1.321 views).

of the time, users choose extracts and edit them with the original score or the movie or series, with an external source, like Pink Floyd's *Wish You Were Here* for the video entitled *Romanzo criminale Trailer Promo*.¹¹ Moreover, users can add personal texts, quotations and comments. The circulation of tributes creates a canon of preferred themes, such as violence and action, but also romance and emotion, all values which consolidate the specific cultural and social connotations related to *Romanzo criminale*; namely, its link to a genre and Italian filmic heritage. The variety of tributes corresponds to the plurality of available readings in terms of genre: action, drama, romance and comedy are only a few of the readings underlined through the use of original sequences. Along with this reading in terms of genre, some elements give information regarding the author's gender: generally, romantic fragments are more likely chosen by women, whereas action and celebrating violence tend to be chosen by men.

The hypotext's syntax is altered by condensation, a strategy used to adapt to YouTube's constraints, and so choosing the main character or the theme becomes very important. Consequently, some videos increase the standing of a secondary character, raising him or her to a new position. That is what Genette calls «transvalorisation», the production of a text in which a secondary point of view takes a central role. We'll see in the following chapters how this aspect contributes uniquely to the growth of *Romanzo criminale* as an original world.

In some cases, text and sound work together and produce an emotional effect, creating a form of «anchorage» (BARTHES 1964), a reciprocal relationship between two elements. This technique stresses *Romanzo criminale*'s link to a specific period in history and, at the same time, gives videos a specific structure resembling that of the video clip, disconnected from the diegesis. Interestingly, the same video clip effects can be seen as an element of style in the original TV series, in some original montage sequences, mostly placed at the end of an episode. Music from the same time period of the events accompanies a set of non-related actions in which all the characters are represented, producing non-narrative sequences evoking a precise atmosphere. With a hint of nostalgia, *Romanzo criminale* seems to celebrate its own mythology. It's worth adding that all these official clips can be consumed as snacks: they circulate individually on YouTube and become exchangeable in the network.

The success of a user's video is based on the quality of the audiovisual remix and on a play with the canons of the clip culture. Images are often retouched using editing software: graphic effects, titles, superposed im-

11. <http://youtu.be/XtmIhpnX0-c> (2012/09/07).

ages encourage readings in terms of nostalgia, celebration, and stress certain aspects of the story: «in this video we tell the story of the most ferocious gang of the seventies», etc... It should also be noted that, in some cases, images undergo a treatment which makes them look «aged», as if they came directly from the seventies: this is a form of «remediation» (Bolter and GRUSIN 1999), creating the link with an older medium or an older technique. Moreover, inserting archival footage, such as pictures of real criminals, stresses the link to Italian history (we'll see how this technique is used in Placido's movie).

Sometimes, the result is the fan-made trailer, or a fake trailer. *Romanzo criminale. Trailer Fan Made - Quotes*,¹² is a montage of shots from the movie, an anthology of the most emotionally-charged moments with the original soundtrack by Paolo Buonvino. Since it centers on Freddo, this trailer reveals a fan's attachment for this character and, at the same time, pays tribute to the original movie.

Other videos are tributes to a particular character, like Libanese, the head of the gang, and driven by the desire to become «the eighth King of Rome». These tributes are made in order to highlight his power and mythical status. One video is called *Romanzo criminale - Libano*¹³ and is accompanied with Aerosmith's *Dream On*. Some shots from the movie are in slow-motion, modified in color (from color to black-and-white) and with various transitions (also showing the fun that the fan had in testing the editing software). This 4'33'' video recaps the character's dramatic downward trajectory, through a choice of shots underlining his powerful look, and ends with the sequence of his death, followed by credits that contain the author's name. The syntax of this last sequence is altered by a few cuts. Instead of having a paratextual function, as for fan made trailers, this video functions as a real independent product: the user considers himself as a real author and signs it as a work of his own.

Another *Tribute to Libanese*¹⁴ is a relatively long (6'53'') montage of different shots showing the character in the first season of the TV series, until his death. Unlike the aforementioned tribute, there is loyalty to the series' strongest points: using the original score from the second season's first episode, *Total Eclipse of the Heart* (Bonnie Tyler, 1982) and a selective use of sound (here the user plays Libanese's scream on the night of his murder, whereas in the previous tribute the sound was completely cut in order to highlight the music). At the same time, some

12. <http://youtu.be/g7k95B2p1NQ> (2012/07/29) (6.896 views).

13. <http://youtu.be/hessXj1Iy8A> (2012/07/29) (128.590 views).

14. <http://youtu.be/AvbGQpJhBFQ> (2012/07/29) (57.193 views).

syntactical modifications are made: the choice of sequences is reduced and some sequences are edited in twice, like the ride to the beach, to condense the emotion. Even the image is modified with an effect giving it a pictorial aspect. Thus, the sequence becomes a self-sufficient product, that no longer summarizes the movie or the TV series but becomes more an artistic work.

Other videos, using still frames, stray even further from the summary, as in the *Tribute to Romanzo criminale*¹⁵, in which images from the movie are edited onto Paolo Buonvino's soundtrack, inviting contemplation of character's facial expressions and of the actors' good-looking appearance.

2.2.4. Dubbing

In this category, the clips are marked by an obvious satiric intention, but at the same time, they show a fan's attachment to the product. Dubbing involves substituting a movie's dialogues with other dialogues, read by non-professional actors who often speak with a regional accent, or use slang, and it is the most common practice for transforming *Romanzo criminale*. Users who decide to dub are extremely familiar with the original text and want to perform it. Dubbing is similar to karaoke, since, in order to appropriate a world, consumers feel the need to reproduce and share its pertinent features (according to *remix* culture). It's a social practice, performed by a group, showing love for a media product within a community of initiates. To make a good dubbing, not only is knowledge needed, but the dubber also needs to possess theatrical skills and technique (users need to know how to synchronize voice and images using a digital device).

There are two main types of dubbing: tribute dubbing and satirical dubbing. On the one hand, video makers have fun reproducing cult sequences and are loyal to the original text. On the other hand, much of the fun comes from betraying the original meaning: regional dialect, slang or vulgarity transform and belittle the sequence.

In tribute dubbing, the imitation of the original dialogue is sometimes so perfect that only an expert could determine whether there is a transformation or not. For example,¹⁶ the gang is grouped in their villa, Libanese tells the others that he has decided to help the *Camorra* (and the Government) in order to find out where Aldo Moro is being hidden

15. <http://youtu.be/qlZMDhGn6uk> (2012/07/29) (121.643 views).

16. <http://youtu.be/l14HLjhV6qQ> (2012/07/29). The video is no longer available.

by the Red Brigades. When Libanese mentions the necessity of standing united in order to follow their dream of taking over Rome, Freddo gets up, answers him curtly and leaves the room. Libanese follows him out of the room and they start to argue, signaling the discord within the gang. Freddo expresses his anger about having always been an underdog in society: «I cannot accept to help those who never take into account my problems, those who force me to starve to death and who, if I rise up, will send me directly to jail!». The 1'13" sequence is selectively dubbed: the author only dubs Freddo's lines, keeping Libanese's lines. His performance is near professional, since it is limited to one character, it respects time, synchrony and the recording is high-quality.

Several comments show that the performance was a hit within the community. Someone, who seems to know the author personally, underlines the similarity between the user and Freddo: «These parts fits you perfectly, you like to win easily, don't you? Ah ah ah. A great and excellent performance!».

Such comments put the notion of fictional pact into question, suggesting that identification can be studied as a play on the text and a source of enjoyment for the viewer. Thanks to dubbing, the user could take Freddo's place, testing his own talent in a theatrical situation, performing for a YouTube public. In performances, the viewer dives into the story, participating a role play. Performance can be defined as a traditional activity, since fans have tested their knowledge of media products by interpreting roles for decades before YouTube (in New York, in 2000, a «movieoke» bar was born, see NICOLACI DA COSTA 2004). Like karaoke, popular culture becomes the basis for a recognizable play within a community which, at the same time, canonizes a version and reinvents meanings. It should be noted that the increasing ease in recording and editing devices, the Internet and, more specifically, YouTube (and other video sharing sites) lead to a simplification of these performances. In the digital realm, production and distribution are quicker, less expensive and every user can easily find a peer community to test the value of his or her productions. Today, people can record their voice over a movie extract from their home computer, as highlighted by a forum discussion, where a user is looking for help in producing his first dubbing («how to create a movie parody»):

«Hello everybody, I would like to know how to easily make a parody of a movie. Because I've been racking my brain over it for days. Thanks in advance».

«Good evening, tell me: What? How? Are you playing yourself? Substituting voices? Etc. etc. see you».

«Both, but especially substituting voices».¹⁷

17. <http://www.sur-la-toile.com/discussion-179025-1-Faire-une-parodie.html>

Dubbing is shaped by the performer's talent, desires and intentions. Sometimes the result is far from being a tribute to the original. When users choose to dub a popular sequence with a regional dialect, the parodic reading creates a contrast, a discordance, a discrepancy between two worlds: the original and the new, coming from a user's actual life or being intentionally caricatured.

*New Year's Eve Criminal Party: Stupid Dubbing*¹⁸ is an off-beat reading of a sequence of the TV series: a call between Freddo and Bufalo about a drug deal is transformed into a conversation about the organization of a New Year's Eve party. The performance takes the situation of the original text and produces a different reading, having some respects of the original's syntax: in the original, Bufalo is taking refuge in an old lady's apartment, here the lady becomes Freddo's grandmother. In the original, the discussion is about when Bufalo would be free to go out again: here the two friends discuss about what drinks to buy for the party. The original text is taken as a pretext for creating nonsense, putting into the heroes' mouths trivial sentences, corresponding to Genette's travesty («*travestissement burlesque*»): «high subject matter dealt with in a low manner» (DYER 2007, p. 37). The «noble» subject of the series is transcribed into the teenager's own culture, while the action and characters are kept.

As another example is a sequence from Placido's movie in which Fredo is interrogated by police chief Scialoja, dubbed in a Sicilian dialect: the lines are changed into a dialogue about women, charged with stereotypes from southern Italy: machismo, jealousy, narrow-mindedness.¹⁹

The sequence from the movie in which Freddo and Dandi are negotiating with a big Mafia boss after Libanese's death, has its lines completely changed in a dialogue, in Naples' dialect, about trivial subjects²⁰. Other users disapprove this operation (the video has 5 likes and 30 dislikes): they criticize it as gratuitous and they say that it discredits the movie: «You spoiled a movie on such a scale!!! How could you do that?» «Come on!!! You could find other movies to make fun of, but not this one, this is a masterpiece, what have you done!!!!».²¹ Some comments go far as to insult the authors of the video, asserting that Roman dialect is superior to Neapolitan: the discussion turns into a racist stream of abuse.

(2012/09/07).

18. http://youtu.be/NJBt6yt-_R4 (2012/07/29) (2.669 views).

19. <http://youtu.be/b102D2FGK7U> (2012/07/29) (2.002 views).

20. <http://youtu.be/cWpPYwxhXJA> (2012/07/29) (17.739 views).

21. http://www.youtube.com/all_comments?v=cWpPYwxhXJA (2012/01/03).

The comical effect comes from the recontextualization of the original into a culturally and socially different situation. Like Fielding's *Shamela*, it is a demystification. «Vanesso 2000», an author of many videos, answers the question «What part do you like most in producing of a parody?»: «[...] the way in which the characters lose all their self-assurance when I make them say trivial things».²²

Some sequences encourage parody because of their openness and their link to a shared culture. Many parodies are made from a sequence in which Libanese, Freddo and Dandi are in Dandi's car waiting for a cocaine delivery. This is a sequence that lets each character's nature come out, with a touch of humor, lightening the episode's suspense.²³ Dandi, a fan of the burgeoning disco music, is listening to the radio and thoroughly enjoying *You Make Me Feel* (Sylvester, 1978). Libanese, more provincial, criticizes his friend for listening to a song in English, a language that he doesn't understand. Moreover, the song is getting on his nerves because of the gender ambiguous falsetto voice. This fragment is one of the clip sequences from the series which contributes to the building of a specific atmosphere and which circulates in different forms on YouTube. The many parodies, imitations and dubbing videos, along with the number of views, prove the clip's success (509.843).

Users transpose it to a different context, like for example a dubbing which transforms the dialogue into a discussion about heavy metal music.²⁴ Ironic intention takes two directions: it touches both the show and users' musical taste, following the «dominant» reading of the original text (i.e. making fun of the characters' cultural tastes), by making fun of both heavy metal and Italian pop music fans. The comical effects also come from what Borges calls «the plebeian pleasure» of anachronism: *Romanzo criminale* becomes the territory to play on symbols that come from the past and from present.

2.3. Imitation practices

In this section we study all the operations of creating of a new text that imitates the movie the TV series are studied. On YouTube, many videos are entitled *Banda della Magliana* or even *Romanzo criminale*. Imitation practices mobilize a flow of intertextual discourses. In order to imitate,

22. Personal conversation on Microsoft Messenger.

23. <http://youtu.be/iHbRp6KtaTc> (2012/07/29) (484.177 views).

24. <http://youtu.be/3heUZpIxo-U> (2012/07/29) (12.726 views).

users need to frame the hypotext according to a set of criteria. *Romanzo criminale* is inserted into a shared corpus of oeuvres having the same themes, structures, and offering similar ways of consumption. Thus, imitation can be compared to metaphor, since «[...] both require that the readers construct a second meaning through inferences about surface statements and supplement the foreground with acknowledgement and knowledge of a backgrounded context» (HUTCHEON 2006, p. 34).

The relationship between the hypotext and the hypertext is based on the preliminary insertion of *Romanzo criminale* in a genre. Genre, considered from a non-essentialist approach, is not a set of motives and functions, but is a «communication pact» (HAMON 1997, p. 58), related to uses in a context. Consequently, it is a category for interpretation (ALTMAN 1999; MOINE 2002). Following this perspective, genre plays the role of the agent which transforms the text into something else. For the researcher, *Romanzo criminale* and the discourses surrounding it are not just visible information and details. Their background needs to be studied: individual and communitarian culture and experience enter the text and shape it.

2.3.1. Forgerie

The first example of imitations is based on the pleasure of remaking the original, respecting its syntax and meaning, as long as the technical performance allows it. These «serious imitations» (see also HENRY 2003, p. 241) imitate a work without wounding it. Ideally, a forgery should be perfect and convincing so that the reader doesn't recognize it as an imitation (see DYER 2007, p. 29). In most cases, these videos are similar to exercises in style, made collectively by a group of fans.

The famous sequence in Dandi's car, mentioned in the section on dubbing practices, is rewritten and played by groups of friends: in *Dandi and the Music Homemade*,²⁵ characters and their lines are imitated by the authors, with respect to their voices and lines; in *Romanzo criminale Made in Tuscania - Dandi and the Music*,²⁶ there are attempts to imitate the protagonists' gestures. Even if the result is not a success, as some ironical comments show («You can tell that you're not from Rome» or «You can really tell that you are true actors...»), the original meaning is maintained. Fans put themselves in front of a camera and remake their

25. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rSpk7oHLIP4&feature=youtu.be> (2012/09/07).

26. <http://youtu.be/kw13yMwACLY> (2012/09/07).

favorite scenes, without feeling embarrassed and using all the (even limited) technical means that they have at their disposal. The intention is to imitate without wounding. Nevertheless, characters, scenery, costumes, voices and accents (a specific feature of *Romanzo criminale*) are imitated with or without success, sometimes exaggerating characteristics, caricaturing (like dubbing, outrageousness is a key element for ironic effects). Like the *sweded* films in Michel Gondry's *Be Kind, Rewind* (2008), these videos are based on the display of the patched up, incongruous, gratuitous and eccentric nature of the work, similarly to Carnival situations in which the importance of «bad taste» and expressivity without a goal or a strategy are at the center (BAKHTIN 1984, see also DYER 2007, p. 21). The same features characterize popular cultures opposing cultural hegemonies (FISKE 1987).

*Terribile's Death in piazza Moro*²⁷ is a short video (1'19'') made with a cellphone by a group of teenagers. It is a remake of the sequence from the TV series in which Terribile, Libanese's main adversary, is killed by Freddo and Dandi, following Libanese's orders. The original sequence is one of the most popular clips - using strong emotionally-charged music, *Tutto il resto è noia* (Califano, 1976): many versions of it are circulating on YouTube and all have a large number of views.²⁸ The original sequence is a cross-cutting sequence, showing shots of Scrocciazepi's wedding (in which Libanese dances with the bride and applauds the singer) and of the homicide, in Terribile's hideout. The remake made by «Sirio 2306» is shot at night, in a roman square, by a group of kids listening to Califano's music being played on a cellphone. The goal of the video is to redo the entire sequence and the actions of the four characters, with a single shot taken from the cellphone.

The sequence opens on a mid-shot framing two of the kids playing Libanese and Freddo. Libanese tells Freddo how to stick his knife in Terribile's heart, then takes off, just before coming back into the frame, in order to announce the singer's arrival. The camera follows the actors' movements. A third character enters the frame, dressed in white (he's wearing a sweater stamped with Libanese's portrait). The camera gets closer to the character, who is pretending to hold a microphone: he starts lip synching. After a few moments, the actor playing Freddo enters the frame, the singer exits, the camera follows Freddo's movement towards a fourth person sitting on a park bench, mimics a shooting, says his line («from Libanese with love»), mimics the gesture of sticking

27. <http://youtu.be/9BoSeRXKM9M> (2012/09/07).

28. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLXBBMrck6Y> (2012/08/29) (96.469 views).

a knife in his heart and goes away. The camera turns toward the ground and the video ends.

This clip, in which the music plays a central role, is a performance and in several points it is similar to karaoke: if the original sequence was celebrated by viewers for its rhythm typically found in video clips, the same intention can be seen in this fan remake. The authors aren't worried about technical details – they even have fun in signaling in the description that they used a branch for the knife: the most important element seems to be the synchrony with the music. The importance of a pragmatic reading emerges here. From an approach that looks for fidelity to the original, the sequence would certainly be unconvincing or even incomprehensible for someone who hasn't seen the original. Instead, considered as a clip sequence, it would work and even contribute to the consecration of *Romanzo criminale* as a cult series.

When videos don't pay tribute to the original atmosphere and, on the contrary, seem to take pleasure only in the gratuity of their actions in front of the camera, commentators are not clement with the authors. For example, a sequence which was once again filmed with a cellphone and played by a group of friends in a kitchen,²⁹ is criticized for its lack of accuracy and thus respect for the original: «You don't have the sense of the sacred... this video is basically blasphemy, only one word for you, you are blasphemous... touch whatever you want but not *Romanzo criminale*».

The following interview on Microsoft Messenger with an Italian user, who considers himself as a «true fan» of *Romanzo criminale*, offers some very personal insight into these teenagers' productions:

«Unfortunately, these are pathetic parodies made by teens who attempt to imitate actors and films and then put themselves on YouTube»

«;))»

«After all, YouTube is only useful for re-watching some classic sequences, and there are many videos missing from Sky's website»

«Do these parodies offend your love for *Romanzo criminale*?»

«No, it's just painful to watch them».³⁰

Other productions are real exercises in style, produced in a French school of cinema, ESEC.³¹ Here, students take Michele Placido's *Romanzo criminale* as a model to imitate by respecting some norms concerning both its style and narrative. For example, the cult sequence in which the

29. <http://youtu.be/cUgkMM-duVo> (2012/09/07).

30. Personal conversation.

31. <http://youtu.be/EoJONpWj9NU> (2012/09/07).

gang divvies up the loot, broadly identified as the moment in which the *Banda della Magliana* comes together, is acted out with respect for the original lines (which have been translated into French, except for one sentence left in Italian: «Roma è grande»), and reproduces the cinematography. The tracking shot around the table reveals the whole situation. However, some innovative elements are to be found, like the adding of a hostage who is eventually killed; and the fact that the short film is in black-and-white, while Placido's movie is in color. Some elements underline the cultural switch, showing the importance of a pragmatic reading. For example, using a music recalling Sergio Leone's movies contributes to connoting the atmosphere as Italian, for a French viewer. Nevertheless, for an expert viewer, more attentive to the generic connotation resulting from the music, the effect would be one of a discrepancy (the spaghetti western genre opposed to the crime genre). These examples of adaptation are limited to the frame of school exercises: the weight of institutional norms is apparent and influences the lack of success regarding YouTube users' opinion (they do not have more than 2000 views). These authors aren't looking for feedback. Moreover, these videos are only a project made by teachers, they are not made for YouTube's environment (see also LABORDE 2012).

2.3.2. Parody

Many videos are entitled «parody»: it seems that, for Internet users, parody indicates any operation aiming to change the original's meaning through the production of a personal video. As Linda Hutcheon states, referring to Gilles Deleuze (DELEUZE 1995), parody can be studied as a «repetition with a difference» whose intentions can be varied: «what is remarkable in modern parody is its range of intent - from the ironic and playful to the scornful and ridiculing» (HUTCHEON 2000, p. 6).

What all the *Romanzo criminale*'s parodies have in common is an ironical intention. We can define parody as «any cultural practice which provides a relatively polemical allusive imitation of another cultural production or practice» (DENTITH 2009, p. 9, quoted by DYER 2007, p. 40). By adding innovations regarding the content, parody generates a comical effect, which stems from belittling the hypotext or transposing it into new situations (as sometimes happens in dubbing). That being said, Michel Butor (1968) considers that every form of quoting is a parody, since it is a relocation of the original into a new context, or a transcontextualization.

Studying ironic distance (HUTCHEON 2000, p. XI) means analyzing a video's pragmatic power by also studying the feedback with an audience

able to recognize the cultural references and therefore enjoy the irony. Parody never frees itself from the source text's meaning. On the contrary, it builds from the original, intensifying it. The etymology of «parody» indicates the action of placing another text (*odos*) beside (*para*) the original: in Greek, Latin or Christian traditions the satyr play, the *attelanes* and the *parodia sacra* were the «official» counterpoints to tragedies or ritual celebrations. The prefix *para-* means contrast, inversion of characters and situations, or exaggeration (see GENETTE 1982). Bakhtin recounts the constant presence of dialogism in the perception and representation of the world: «a second world and a second life outside officialdom, a world in which all medieval people participate more or less» (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 6). Jesters parodied every part of a serious ceremony. Laughing has always been a part of ceremonies and civil rituals of everyday life. Like the jester, any parody deconstructs, without erasing the original, and criticizes social codes, even if, as Hutcheon underlines,

[t]his ironical reversal of Bakhtin's confident perspective should act as a warning to us in our discussion or applications of Bakhtin's theories to contemporary culture, especially if we remind ourselves that his own concepts - including dialogism - were always rooted in history, in the specificity of time and place (HUTCHEON 2000, p. 74).

Parodies are usually short. Shorter than pastiches and tributes. Everything depends on emotional effect: irony has to come from an incongruous detail or from the exactness of the rhythm, in lines or in gestures. Therefore, some users exploit the short structure of the trailer, creating comical trailers, like *Romanzo criminale Parody: Preview*,³² that the author describes as a preview of the short series he'll produce some day in the future, or *Avanzo criminale*.³³ Both are rewritings or imitations with microscopic variations that mock Sollima's series: imaginary sequences, inspired by *Romanzo criminale*'s atmospheres, present ironical changes in character's names and caricature physical appearances (Dandi is wearing a wig which emphasizes his love for fashion). All these elements fall under Genette's category of travesty. Parody is the result of the exaggeration and desacralization of criminal roles: incongruous details and clichés correspond to axiological operations, targeting a character's behavior and moral value. However, these activities can also be read as the canonization of the hypertext's values, and possibly even their celebration.

32. <http://youtu.be/2NwnGFVN8SI> (2012/09/07).

33. <http://youtu.be/Gkft4xHA5jw> (2012/09/07).

Manzi criminali («criminal beef»)³⁴ is a parodic mini-series³⁵ which goes on for three episodes. The title plays off the official Sky Cinema parody, *Manzo criminale*, aired at the same time the TV show was broadcast (see below chapter 4.6.2). It aims at imitating *Romanzo criminale*'s style with an abundance of material (costumes, props, image quality used), since its authors are adult fans and not teenagers and have more means and technique. In fact, the videos of this parodic series don't loyally imitate precise sequences, but instead, a whole universe: there are many references to Italian crime movies from the seventies, especially in the use of cars, music and costumes. Some ironic elements contrast with the dark tone of the original: excess of situations, gestures, a wig (again!), and modifying nicknames give the impression of a caricature of criminals unable to carry out their missions. The parodic intention, though, is disrupted by the presence of some technical issues and acting missteps (for example, the actors do not speak Roman dialect).

*Romanzo demenziale la serie - piamose Roma (Demential Novel the Series - Let's Take Rome)*³⁶ mixes imitation and transformation practices: the video is a cross-cut of takes from the series (the famous sequence of the first banding together of the gang), and shots taken in an apartment by a group of friends, and a Homer Simpson doll. The parodic effect comes from bringing together textual sources which, in origin, are completely unrelated. Thus, the teenagers lip synch the original lines, and even the movements of the Homer doll seem to be in synch with the lines of one of the characters. In this case, *Romanzo criminale*'s world expands thanks to the insertion of unfamiliar elements; distant from the original, but part of the users' culture. The parody is the result of a fan's personal desire of putting himself into the fictional universe through performance. Here, parody, defined by Genette as a familiarization practice, contributes to domesticating *Romanzo criminale*, shaping it for personal use.

Imitations of style always have a tendency to canonize certain models and forms, and, sometimes, to celebrate them: this is the paradox of parody. Sometimes, involuntary caricatures are exposed in photo and video sharing spaces, without a parodic intention. Videos of friends representing themselves as the series' main characters, accompanied by a nickname, are edited with the original score from the movies or

34. <http://youtu.be/9DbJhjlfsCs> (2012/09/07).

35. <http://youtu.be/T4Wq8ZfMQ0s> (2012/09/07).

36. <http://youtu.be/8zn1ufyJvbM> (2012/09/07).

the series.³⁷ Generic clichés, like machismo, are pushed to an extreme degree, which justifies the fact that the video is named «parody».³⁸

The original text can be used as a hypotext, but, in most cases, it can also be absent: as François Jost puts it, this case would correspond to an *in absentia* parody, based on shared cultural contents between the author and the reader.³⁹ «Pure» parody taking from the content of one hypotext is more and more rare: instead, we can find products which imitate style rather than content. The term parody has been used here for videos imitating and distorting popular sequences with an avowed ironical intention. When modifications concern style, the term pastiche will be used, according to Dominique Chateau. If parody offers an image of the original from a distance, because «the genre itself, the style, the language are put in quotation marks giving to it a mocking tone» (BAKHTIN 1978, p. 414), on the contrary, pastiche looks for proximity, similarity, correspondence. The following category shows the difference between imitations that are loyal to a precise sequence and imitations which reproduce more the product's style rather than the details of a sequence.

2.3.3. Pastiche

According to Richard Dyer, pastiche is «an imitation that you are meant to know that is an imitation» (DYER 2007, p. 1). Pastiche is a way to imitate the form of a work, through the selection of specific features, with the fun of adding one's personal touch. This is made possible by a context where making fun of something is a way of showing admiration and irony is a «circumlocution for tenderness»⁴⁰ (GENETTE 1982, p. 160). Users have to be experts in order to produce a successful pastiche, which requires a mastery of various techniques. Describing his experience as a writer, Proust talked about his temptation to talk like the characters, using their rhythm, and praised the «exorcizing» virtues of pastiche (PROUST 1971). Similarly, some *Romanzo criminale*'s fans recall how they enjoyed imitating characters and situations at any moment of their life, not only reproducing a precise sequence, but in some way innervating true-life situations with a hint of *Romanzo criminale*. For these

37. <http://youtu.be/WZ1-eUnVPc0> (2012/09/07); <http://youtu.be/2mwXv4BTHsQ> (2012/09/07).

38. <http://youtu.be/7YSzNVEuoxI> (2012/09/07).

39. «Pour le parodiste, au fond, le bénéfice réside dans la complicité qu'il introduit avec son lecteur ou son spectateur» (Jost 1989, p. 325).

40. My translation.

reasons, pastiche is useful for research, since it identifies a universe's core elements: «[...] imitating precisely, in its contingent singularity, a singular text, means primarily constituting a text's idiolect, that is to say constituting it as a matrix for imitation, or as a network of unconscious imitations, that can be used indefinitely» (GENETTE 1982, p. 90). Moreover, pastiche is a way to feel our place in history, setting in play our relationship to our past and culture: «pastiche can help us understand the circumstances through feeling them» (DYER 2007, p. 133).

Many fan-made pastiches can be found on YouTube, which are made to be shared and are presented as the result of a structured and accurate project. *Anni spietati (Harsh Years)*⁴¹ is a fan series in multiple episodes, whose protagonists are copied from the movie, but with different names. The project is ambitious, for its length, its accuracy in imitating the original atmospheres and the collective labor, as a comment proves: «Fantastic! Well done! That's what I dream about doing, but I'm alone... I learned the "criminal" role by heart and I acted it out by myself».⁴² Apart from the enthusiastic praise, the product received many harsh critiques: the producers, all adults, are described as ridiculous because of their lack of Roman accent and dramatic technique. Their physical appearance is also criticized and they are accused of being megalomaniacs.

It is interesting to note that, in this case, the hypotext is both the television series and the film. Consequently, the pastiche targets less one single text than a generic encyclopedia. For its fans, *Romanzo criminale* is conceived as a world instead of a conglomeration of texts.

Another video can be classified as a pastiche since, in the same way, it attempts to reproduce the style of *Romanzo criminale* as a whole, without making reference to any specific media. *Criminal 2nd episode: Banda della Magliana*⁴³ shows how far a play on the elements coming from generic material can go. Reproducing the mechanism of an interview, the author of the video answers a series of questions about his «criminal» life style. He's wearing sunglasses, smoking a cigarette, a bottle is sitting at his side. The camera, steady, centers him on a mid shot, dramatic lights build an atmosphere similar to that of the film or television series or taken from Mafia and gangster genre. The comical elements materialize since the character, perfectly conforming to the role, answers questions regarding the supposed «real-life» of the criminal: retirement, man-woman relationships, love for luxury cars, politics. *Romanzo criminale* becomes raw mate-

41. <http://youtu.be/Zd0iv0ZgMyI> (2012/09/07).

42. Ibidem.

43. <http://youtu.be/k8yeNXPEiFE> (2012/09/07).

rial capable of generating answers about the real world, self-governing and independent from the media which convey it. The fan shows his ability to master the style so well that he can produce autonomous content.

On the axiological side, a particular reading is put forward by these paradoxical activities. The «Banda della Magliana» is not considered a group of cruel bandits, but as a bunch of friends, whose virtues and values are praised and celebrated by certain male communities. For some teenage users who are in search of role models and lack social power, Freddo, Libanese, Dandi and Bufalo become heroic figures whose authority, strength and honor are admired, and help overcome their masculine insecurity (see FISKE 1987, p. 211).

2.4. *Hyperartistic practices*

In this section the practices carried out by fans and viewers will be used to qualify *Romanzo criminale* as a world, or as an «expanded universe». According to Genette, these activities, employing different methods and techniques, can be called «hyperartistic practices» (GENETTE 1982). Playing on similarities and correspondences, these appropriations underline the transartistic nature of derivative practices, signaling the irreducible specificity of each art. At the same time, every practice denotes its belonging to a specific community with its own rules and values. The result is different interpretations, mapping out various directions for the universe's growth.

2.4.1. *Fan fiction*

Fan fictions are a prime example of *Romanzo criminale* being used as a raw material. In this literary practice users give characters a new life, put them in new situations and offer alternatives to the official story line. Characters and situations are supplanted by fans who follow personal imagination and desire. Although these texts are shared without economic goals, they convey a private pleasure, the urge to add one's own personal interpretation to the fictional universe. Fan fiction is a superimposition of a personal contribution to an industrial work:

It was like giving something of mine to a situation that touched me. We can call it an urge, coming from within: you watch a certain sequence and you say to yourself, «I have to write about it» because there is a feeling of unfulfilled beauty left by the sequence».44

44. Personal conversation with a fan.

Typically written by women,⁴⁵ fan fictions follow a set of rules established by the community and have easily recognizable indicators for members. For example, every text has to mention the original story (or stories), the characters involved, the genre and, if need be, the rating (based on MPAA movie ratings: G through NC -17) and spoilers. Users often succinctly present their work, explaining what motivated them to write it and the expectations they have for it. Sometimes they give more detail on the process. An author says: «to be frank, this story exists because I'm completely incapable of coming to terms with the fact that people die in the series I'm fan of».⁴⁶ In order to analyze fan fictions, personal motivation and psychology should be taken into account along with narrative structure and character building.

As to the form of these texts, most *Romanzo criminale* fan fictions are one chapter long, called «one shot». Texts are evaluated by other members of the community, following specific criteria. Fan fiction quality includes grammar and vocabulary, originality, style, IC (conformity of behaviors to original behaviors in canonical stories), use of quotation, personal judgment. These frames (in Goffman's terms) show the will to create a mixture of quality and original contributions, expanding a community's experience, all of which allow individuals to express their emotions and enjoy themselves. Users are nevertheless always vigilant in signaling any infraction of the canon. Fan fiction communities produce specific cultural practices. These develop into internal hierarchies and strategies for creating original genres, thus constituting an original canon, a specific fan canon, often called *fanon*. The existence of these multiple readings, many of which go against the grain, show how explorable and expandable a universe is.

All kinds of creativity are permitted in fan fiction due to the fact that it is so easy to create content. Writing is not expensive, and there is no board of censors. Thus, special effects and, often, erotic situations are described. For example, a story about an encounter between police chief Scialoja and the prostitute Patrizia is very rich in detail. At this point, it is interesting to note that most of the writers are women and they often choose to write from a male character's viewpoint. The contribution of the fan (or of ordinary viewers, because paradoxically not all the fan fiction writers describe themselves as fans) explores elements of a character's psychology.

Writing a fan fiction allows the author to fully describe a character's

45. See also Esquenazi 2009b, p. 66: «girls are a better audience than boys».

46. <http://poly.our-cross.net/fic/ghost> (2012/09/07).

feelings and thoughts: for example, there is a fan fiction which details Libanese's thoughts at the moment of his death, by choosing to focalize on the character internally (internal focalization). The author of this text is a woman, who chooses a man's perspective for several reasons that she explains (let's note that she doesn't consider the term «identification» as pertinent):

So, I didn't choose to write about this character because I personally identify with him, but more because of the «criminal» fascination as well as the harsh and heartwrenching nature of Libanese. I chose him because he's a complex character, multi-faceted, hard, tormented, arrogant; he thinks he has everything but when his certainties collapse, he's just a man, alone with his death.

His fragility (if we can say that for a criminal), touched me deeply. The sequence I rewrote is taken from Placido's movie, in which, compared to the TV series (beautiful and rough) and to De Cataldo's novel, the moment is more poetic and moving. Thus, in general, the Libanese I picture has Pierfrancesco Favino's face. As for *Romanzo criminale*, no female character inspired me: in general, I write about a character who fascinates or inspires me because of his or her nature, without ignoring gender. In this case, it was Libanese who inspired and fascinated me. I think that, after all, it is only fateful inspiration that pushes someone to write. Man or woman, it's not important.⁴⁷

The choice of a character for rewriting a sequence depends thus on «inspiration»: a notion linked to emotion and idiosyncrasy at the moment of the filmic experience: psychological and even psychoanalytic tools could help study the reasons for choosing a male or female perspective.

Anyway, when reading the story closely, it's easy to understand, both from the narrative elements and the roles played, that female characters have no depth compared to male characters. Viewers are naturally driven to share emotions with the most complex and defined characters: Libanese or Freddo. «You don't want to be her, you don't want to enjoy the emotions she feels. The male hero is easier to "feel" the adventure with [...]. And if you are the daydreaming kind, you will 'borrow' him, to make him feel some more interesting things» (Cat Anestopoulo, quoted by JENKINS 2006b, p. 67).

The pleasure of writing about a character like Libanese also emerges in situations which divert from the original story. Multiple readings push the story's limits, especially when they start from points in the narration that are deemed as «put on hold» in the original. For example, the

47. Personal conversation.

relationship between Libanese and Freddo; more than one comment in forums suggests hypotheses on their homosexual relationship. In one fan fiction, the central role of Libanese is preserved even after his murder through his ghost, being present in a post-mortem narrative time.

Internet users appreciate fan fictions containing «slash» elements, such as the first homosexual experience between the two most loved characters. Freddo and Libanese are the protagonists of a very explicit Italian fan fiction⁴⁸ detailing the discovery of their reciprocal feelings and sexual intercourse. Time and space are condensed to the sexual act, a very small amount of information on the story is given, even if the general nature of the characters and their motivations are respected. The fan fiction takes place during a specific moment in the diegesis, Freddo's Moroccan stay, and recounts the made-up situation of Freddo's attempt to find a new lover after Libanese's death. The long story describes a series of homosexual encounters, alternating visions of Libanese's ghost with memories of moments depicted by Sollima's series, and concludes by going back to the diegesis, with Freddo's decision to return to Rome. Therefore, the story is not interrupted nor is it modified. Instead, a space opens within its gaps. A digression is introduced, drawing on Freddo's feelings as imagined by the fan. This extension of the fictional world forges a space for creating possible situations – to be specific, the protagonist's sexual activities during his exile.

If, on the one side, a female author enjoys being in control of a male's body, she also says that she's unwilling to compete with female characters about the relationship with her hero: «the writer describing a heterosexual sequence would be in competition with the feminine partner, who, in some way, has a privileged relationship with the male».⁴⁹

In order to use Gérard Genette's classification, we are now in the category of «supplement» (*supplément*), an «extrapolation dressed as an interpolation, a transposition in the form of a continuation» (GENETTE 1982, p. 526). Fan fictions show that a coherent world of fiction can contain many different grafts, created by different authors, but still maintains its own character.

48. <http://poly.our-cross.net/fic/underneath-your-close> (2012/09/07).

49. Personal conversation on Facebook.

2.4.2. Fan art

The category of «supplement» encompasses other various forms of grassroots artistic creation. For example, a comic created by a user is directly inspired from the *Romanzo criminale* TV series and, through a set of strips, reproduces the sequence from the first season in which the gang and their enemy, Terrible, are face to face.⁵⁰ Even if the work is accurate and loyal to the original, elements of «customization» can be found in some of the sequences, which make it possible to analyze this grassroots creation as a real autonomous product. The author draws the main characters, freely interpreting their physical features, without portraying the actors from the series or the movie, but conserving similarities in clothing style. The fun in reproducing the style of the seventies is also found in the reproduction of details coming from real life: advertisement for an orange juice brand, the title of the newspaper that Bufalo is reading in the car. The grassroots version is thus praised by other users because of its accuracy in recalling the past. Its quality comes from its loyalty to a precise moment in history, preexisting the process of representing it in the book, movie or TV series. The comic is autonomous and, at the same time, pays homage to the world of *Romanzo criminale*.

If the production of a comic is a matter of artistic creation, made from scratch, some YouTube works exceed the categories of imitation and transformation and can be studied as fan art. Distinguishable because of more playful approach, they represent an interesting example of rewriting *Romanzo criminale* through popular culture, and through the use of different materials. So are *machinimas*: musical or narrative video clips made by editing sequences from video games. In *Romanzo criminale the Game Barone Rosellini + Casino Patrizia Dandi HD*,⁵¹ images from the video game *Grand Theft Auto San Andreas* were used to create a work inspired by the TV series. An unidentified character drove his car all around a suburban area, evoking *Romanzo criminale*'s Roman neighborhood. The author of this video wanted to give the impression of being in an official *Romanzo criminale* game, playing on the similarities between the game and the television series. During his drive, the character interacted with others in Roman dialect and eventually entered a night bar. His violence and harsh language recalled little criminals' body

50. <http://comicus.forumfree.org/index.php?&showtopic=58314&st=0&#entry1930278> (2012/09/07).

51. This 6'56" video has been removed for Copyright infringement.

language, as in *Romanzo criminale* and in the game, where the player takes the place of a crook. It must be added that the product is unfinished, a draft, a test of the user's ability to create a *machinima* and to show his fan culture. *Romanzo criminale* becomes a space for creation where different cultures, namely game culture and television culture, collide and interact.

Many «apocryphal» productions are musically based. The music in the TV series plays an important role in defining a specific time in the past and becomes a symbol, or maybe a cultural myth, and fans, taking inspiration from *Romanzo criminale*'s world, create new types of music. Some productions have to be recognized as the personal work of an author, a fan who presents him/herself with a nickname, often coming from *Romanzo criminale*'s universe, as for «Er Dandi»⁵² who uses social networks to develop his popularity. In the clip, spread on YouTube, several shots from the movie are reworked in order to make them similar to found footage.⁵³

2.5. Viewers as «poachers»

Within transformation, imitation and hyperartistic practices, I underlined some rhetorical strategies that the authors used. All these various practices have in common the desire to create a relationship between two texts: the hypotext and the hypertext. For *Romanzo criminale*'s viewers, forgerie, parody and pastiche become tools used in order to assimilate the original product, to «naturalize it» (Genette). Cultural, historical and psychological reasons define the multiple and different modalities of using the media. Some phenomena are short-lived, related to viral flow, and depending on network dynamics.

Appropriations have to be defined using a pragmatic approach. If every consumer is a producer of content (see also STAIGER 2005 about Victorian readers), today, we consume the official text and are exposed to apocryphal texts and paratexts circulating in digital spaces. The distinctions between official and grassroots distribution channels tend to blur (even if institutional and commercial hierarchies are still strong). Every consumer is also a tester of a product's validity, within a community which enriches itself from others' comments, appropriations. Consuming is becoming more and more a co-creation process.

52. <http://youtu.be/CnRu1HKZfHA> (2012/09/07).

53. Noyz Narcos - Zoo de Roma - Guilty 2010, http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xc2kv7_noyz-narcos-zoo-de-roma-guilty-2010_music (2012/09/07).

For these reasons, interpreting appropriation phenomena as «poaching», as defined by Michel de Certeau (1990) and Jenkins (1992), is correct since it underlines the fact that personal activities, such as video creation, fan fiction and fan art give meaning to the act of consuming. Thus, this approach also stresses that being a viewer is a way of expressing one's own identity, through «raids» on institutional fields. «Poached» videos, comics and literary texts show that industrial media can be conceived as raw material for reorganization within a *remix culture* (LESSIG 2008). An experience like *Romanzo criminale* offers a large space for such uses, to encourage appropriation and co-creation (both of official and grassroots actors) as part of its multiple and open nature.

A phenomenon like *Romanzo criminale* affects the standardization of industrial products that Benjamin critically examined (BENJAMIN 2010), since it involves not only media which still have a feeling of illegitimacy such as television, but also iPhone applications and merchandizing. Contemporary convergence, in which transmedia storytelling finds its place, has serialization as a main feature. For Baudrillard, following Benjamin, products were not to be conceived as autonomous works, but from their reproducibility (BAUDRILLARD 1976): the possibility to reiterate the story is necessary in a technological context characterized by media relocation (CASETTI 2011) and the growth of big conglomerates.

A user's enjoyment comes from the adaptation of the media content to the individual's need, similarly to what Michel de Certeau calls tactics, which are opposed to industrial strategies. Nevertheless, the dominant culture doesn't seem to lose its power (proven by the system of rights that, on YouTube, blocks the distribution of illegal content), neither do fans seem to create content only with an «oppositional» intent. When considering *Romanzo criminale's* appropriations, even «hegemonic» or «negotiated» readings show the creative power of audiences. Readings which alter the hypotext (parodies, fan fictions fantasizing about Libanese's homosexuality, for example) are not the only interesting documents, but there are also products that are loyal to a canon, such as playlists of favorite moments or comments on a Facebook fan page, that display an emotional bond and require intense devotion from fans.

Viewers appropriate *Romanzo criminale* by conserving, celebrating and, at the same time, deconstructing and demystifying it. They fuse *Romanzo criminale* with other products, to have access to all kinds of gratifications, in conformity with the values of their group. Placido's movie and Sollima's TV series, along with De Cataldo's book and all the «paratexts» become the instruments for identity building and interpretation.

In order to grasp the complexity of the observed appropriations, it is necessary to focus on the creative and performative power of users,

instead of defining «oppositional readings», and to consider fan practices as ways to build customized doorways to the world of *Romanzo criminale*.

When studying *Romanzo criminale*'s world, it is sometimes just not possible to observe syntactical and lexical modifications of the hypotext. Like the pastiche, represented situations cannot be identified as belonging to one single text. We are facing what Genette calls the «transcendence» of a work (GENETTE 1994). A narrative takes on many different forms, and filiation relationships are no longer recognizable. Instead of talking of a text, Eco's idea of intertextual encyclopedia will be used. The source of parodies and pastiches is not a text, but a world.

Every video becomes part of the experience for any consumer who wants to know more about the universe by searching on the web, where official and grassroots products are found side by side. The overlapping of canonical and apocryphal content creates a sense of redundancy in which different meanings intersect and ceaselessly expand, therefore creating polyphony.

3. Networking

The analysis of a set of narrative uses for *Romanzo criminale* underlines the fact that a show is never a solitary experience, but instead, an event that requires viewers to verify their personal tastes, emotions and values (LEVERATTO 2006). Our focus must now turn to the subjects. The relationship to a cultural product helps the viewer express their feelings, memories and moral and political opinions, allowing them to discover their own personal identity. The need to build an identity through storytelling has existed since the beginning of the modern era (TAYLOR 1992) and seems to be confirmed with new technologies, which are easy to access, and result in a global «expressivism». «Extimity» is a psychoanalytical term that was first used at the end of the sixties (LACAN 2006), then adopted for analyzing the Internet (TISSERON 2001) and is appropriate for describing this phenomenon. Weblogs and social networks allow users to build their personal showcase, through which self expression becomes public.

3.1. Viewers as amateurs

What term can account for these appropriations of media products which fall under the category of «extimity»? Enjoying a movie can be considered as a foundation for the relationship between the viewer and the story and determines the need to distinguish between two types of activities. For some viewers, enjoying the experience means watching *Romanzo criminale* the series, without necessarily adding anything to the viewing. For others, it is essential to undertake a journey through Facebook and YouTube channels, in a fun cumulation of knowledge.

This study shows that even in the limited field of online spaces, spectatorial approaches are very different from each other. Some seem to repeat operations traditionally implemented by passionate spectators (collect-

ing, scrapbooking), by «movie buffs» (scholarship, activism, clubs), or by amateur filmmakers (parodies or forgeries). Others invent practices adapted to the network, centered on sharing, the immediacy of reactions and transformation. Internet users engage with audiovisual products in both traditional and new ways. As Barbara Klinger states, the Internet produces a «connoisseurship» of specific practices (Klinger, 2006, p. 55).

The following viewer defines himself as a fan:

I wanted to subscribe to a *Romanzo criminale* page for the simple reason that I consider myself one of the most hardcore fans, along with my friends, I am listed on several pages of *Romanzo criminale* because I am always drawn in by its logo or one of its characters.¹

The term fan is used to describe a commitment as well as an interest that goes beyond the fictional dimension of the product. Another fan says:

I've always defined myself as a fan of *Romanzo criminale* and I do not think that the story is over the top. I was always attentive to every detail of the story, in order to be informed about what actually occurred in my city, in my neighborhood.²

In networking spaces, shared information builds the identity of the person who produced it. Performative data, such as the number of posts or comments on a blog, or videos shared define a user's profile, thereby shaping his or her online identity. For the researcher, a prolific Internet user will be easily identified as a potential fan. Along with elements pertaining to the nature of involvement, as underlined by Jenkins (rules, interpretation, activism, and the existence of a real «art world», the pleasure in testing a knowledge), being a fan is related to how users construct their identity online. Being a fan means occupying a specialized position of reception:

A person is a fan not being a regular viewer of a particular program but by translating that viewing into some type of cultural activity, by sharing feelings and thoughts about the program content with friends, by joining a community of other fans who share common interests (JENKINS 1988, p. 88).

There are also a number of spectators who have a non-fan attitude. For example, those who enjoy the series without feeling the need to make it an exclusive item: «I do not consider myself a hardcore fan, I think that notion implies a kind of exclusivity to the object of admiration».³

1. Personal conversation.

2. Personal conversation.

3. Personal conversation.

The criteria for distinguishing between an ordinary spectator and a fan don't only lie in a user's prolificacy. Being a fan can also be intended as a set of rules on social behavior, linked to a community. Fans will recognize themselves by the choice of subject, but also by how they talk. In most cases, the attachment to values within a counter-culture seems to stand out as a major trend in appropriating *Romanzo criminale*.

The term amateur offers some alternatives for describing spectatorial practices. Roger Odin (1999) used this term to define private film and video production practices in the domestic sphere - home videos. Today, the term amateur is often used for analyzing online practices. The web's personal and, at the same time, public spaces, designed for customized and expressive use (a «modern aesthetics», see ALLARD 1999), make the emergence of these new authors of the web possible. Consequently, the pragmatic interpretation proposed by sociologist Antoine Hennion seems the most relevant for our observations. Fans build their judgment on the quality of an object after experiencing the show through their body:

Amateurs do not «believe» in having a taste for things. Instead, they must feel things. They continue to develop procedures to put their taste to the test and determine what stimulates it, relying not only on the properties of objects that, far from being given, must be laid out to be perceived, but also on the skills and sensitivities that have to be developed in order to collect them; on individual and collective determinism pertaining to attachment, as well as on techniques and devices that are needed, in each situation, to feel something (HENNION 2009, p. 1).⁴

The viewer's relationship to cultural industries does not seem definable exclusively in terms of distinction between passivity and activity, or in terms of opposition to a producer's strategies. To write, shoot or remix videos, declaring one's preference, or producing artistic objects stemming from an «official» product are all manifestations of a commitment to a world of fiction, fragmented like a «box of Lego™» (JULLIER 2005) that consumers can shape at will, using personal «tactics» (DE CERTEAU 1990).

It should be noted that, in some cases, the networked nature of media practices is more important than an individual's abilities. Video sharing is a socialized practice, and simply opposing professional and amateur

4. «Les amateurs ne “croient” pas au goût des choses. Au contraire, ils doivent se les faire sentir. Ils ne cessent d'élaborer des procédures pour mettre leur goût à l'épreuve et déterminer ce à quoi il répond, en s'appuyant aussi bien sur les propriétés d'objets qui, loin d'être données, doivent être déployées pour être perçues, que sur les compétences et les sensibilités à former pour les percevoir; sur les déterminismes individuels et collectifs des attachements, aussi bien que sur les techniques et dispositifs nécessaires, en situation, pour ressentir quelque chose» (my translation).

users is insufficient: «in order to operate effectively as a participant in the YouTube community, it is not possible simply to import learned conventions for creative practice, and the cultural competencies required to enact them, from elsewhere» (BURGESS, GREEN 2009, p. 69).

3.2. Blogs

Blogs differ from discussion boards: in these spaces, knowledge, instead of being a product of collective work, is specialized, customized and centered on personal storytellings. Blog practices teeter on the brink of private and public; centered on their authors, their content circulates autonomously. A blog's life is built across time, but a single post can be shared as an independent element. When a user decides to create a blog and to post something, he or she decides to display authorial posture, proposing to his or her readers a certain style and vision, filled with personal emotions. Blogs are marked, more than other spaces, by an overlapping of intimate and social life. When the topic concerns the audiovisual experience, fiction touches the frame of true-life. A blog is successful when, because of its legibility and style, visitors are encouraged to read the posts, leave comments and share the content.

The type of knowledge produced in a blog corresponds to the transmission of culture not just through texts, but through graphics and hyperlinks. Bloggers can edit their presentations using a variety of materials, leaving a wider space for comments that can be organized into different categories. Sometimes, personalizing spaces gives bloggers the chance to load their texts with emotionally-charged elements and «orality» that divert the «graphic reason», highlighting the creativity of the individual and the networking nature of communication. Blogs become personal showcases, built around a desire to be an author. The raid of the irreverent poacher is now accompanied by an increasingly evident attitude of amateur.

When examining *Romanzo criminale*, which is the topic of many Italian, French and Anglophone blogs, a distinction can be made between blogs functioning as archives of official movie critics and political blogs or personal diaries. In the first category, blogs have a cinephile approach, and the author's goal is to provide other users with advice on must-see movies. Even if the distinction between film and television is usually a primary choice for bloggers, sometimes, Sollima's series appears in a movie-buffs blog because of its «quality» or its importance in the media sphere.

In most cases, a blog consists of a few paragraphs and high-quality pictures. Texts are not always written by the blog's author. Instead, espe-

cially for the network of blogs surrounding the French website and database Allociné, *Romanzo criminale*'s synopsis is always the same, copied from the database: in these cases, the blogger's contribution consists in creating a template and personalizing it with pictures. Sometimes, blogs hide a pirate link to illegally download the movie. Some blogs use still frames from the film or the TV series, others rework these pictures in order to expose a very personal view of the characters and atmospheres, which adds emotion. This is the main connection between blogging and fan art. Not only pictures are vectors of emotion, but they also provide important information on narrative and backstage secrets: a culinary blogger, for example, suggests to comment on pictures in which the characters are eating in restaurants.⁵

In other blogs, the movie is described as an event transforming the blogger's personal life. Comparisons are made between the life of the character and the blogger. Memories of Italian past emerge:

I lived my teenage years exactly in the Roman quarter of Pietralata, and I met these bad boys on school benches, and in the streets. I was the product of the proletariat that aspires to the values and the role of the bourgeoisie, meanwhile, they were the younger brothers of the «ragazzi di vita» which, as Pasolini prophesied, would be spewed by the consumer society.⁶

Sometimes, recalling national past is followed by an indictment of today's politics and society: «we are faced with the representation of a selfish, poor, false, decapitated, Italy, obese on an overdose of abstract pragmatism, where there is only domination through moral and immoral murder».⁷ Some blogs are based on the facts of *Romanzo criminale* in order to analyze events of Italian politics and therefore perform a reading of the book and film as a pretext for drafting pamphlets on Italy's current situation. The blog becomes a space for contributing to a participative culture from one's personal knowledge and opinions, based on solid research or reflection on a moral argument.

The difference between Italian blogs and French blogs show that *Romanzo criminale* has a transnational dimension. In the former case, users comment the airing of the series and its national success, expanding their remarks to the political debate and moral issues related to

5. <http://www.lucianopignataro.it/a/in-qualre-ristorante-mangiano-i-criminali-di-romanzo-criminale/18548/> (2012/09/07).

6. <http://www.gliatrlionline.it/home/2010/11/17/io-di-sinistra-ossessionato-da-romanzo-criminale/> (2012/09/07).

7. Ibidem.

the question of «models of misconduct» (LINTON 1936). French blogs, instead, place more emphasis on formal details and produce critiques from a neo-cinephile approach. They are also very attentive to the product's «Italian features»: «in short, this is a stroke of heart, a movie you should see if like me you like gangster movies that end badly, or for those who love modern Italian cinema. But beware! Watch it in the original version! It's much better that way!»⁸ Comparisons have been made with the legacy of the great Italian political cinema of the 1970s: «between the fascists and communists, there are the little bandits, a reminiscence of the duality in Bolognini's *Libera, amore mio*»⁹. The value judgment on the film's quality often emerges from the comparison with North American productions: «a great movie! Seems like a Hollywood movie, but it's Italian!».¹⁰

Bloggers create categories in order to organize content. The movie and the series are ranked in order of preference or favorite subjects, as the following case suggests. The blog «Le point critique» from Allociné puts a *Romanzo criminale* film sheet in the category of «admirable»;¹¹ another blog from the same site classifies Placido's film in the «Oldies» category.¹²

For French bloggers, a widespread position is close to the conventional tendency to introduce readers to the product through a personal reflection that is derived from passion or idiosyncrasy. Intentions are directed towards the user and encourage feedback, as the following case shows:

Here, in all modesty, I will try to share my passion for cinema. I'll punctuate this blog with many personal critiques on film and TV series, recently released or not. I will try and persuade those who do not know them yet, while debating with critics and fans, and that with the greatest ease! Leave your comments!¹³

8. http://chroniquedewaltrius.blogs.allocine.fr/chroniquedewaltrius-158321-romanzo_criminale_le_nouveau_cinema_italien_a_du_bon.htm (2012/09/07). Content is no longer available.

9. http://cinecitta.blogs.allocine.fr/cinecitta-68380-chronique_d%C2%92une_violence_de_plombs.htm (2012/09/07). Content is no longer available.

10. http://sabostix.blogs.allocine.fr/sabostix-44214-romanzo_criminale.htm (2012/09/07). Content is no longer available.

11. http://blog-seb.blogs.allocine.fr/blog-seb-250759-romanzo_criminale.htm (2013/03/21).

12. http://chroniquedewaltrius.blogs.allocine.fr/chroniquedewaltrius-158321-romanzo_criminale_le_nouveau_cinema_italien_a_du_bon.htm (2012/09/07). Content is no longer available.

13. Ibidem.

In the Italian blogosphere, although film sheets are organized following the model of the press or academic journal article, blogs become a territory where individual freedom is manifested through various forms, mobilizing fields other than criticism. Unlike French bloggers, Italian bloggers are more interested in the TV series, because of the product's role in their personal culture. Mentioning Sollima's series means having to deal with all the controversies and discourses in the Italian public sphere that were analyzed in the forums. The question of models of misconduct is treated extensively through long comments and accurate analyses of the reasons for which the film and the series become «dangerous» or «unnecessary». For example, a blog which defines the TV series as «moralistic» is the starting point for a discussion of the effects of these models in real life: «can you tell me about truly verifiable cases, of people who have chosen to pursue careers in professional crime because of the ideas received by Libanese or Freddo? Go on, get serious»¹⁴.

Some blogs dedicate their posts to the analysis of *Romanzo criminale* and consider it as a societal phenomenon: «Chickenbroccoli. Amare odiare il cinema» (love and hate cinema), writes about how the success of *Romanzo criminale* is blown out of proportion. Other bloggers comment on pictures of t-shirts sold on the street: «Do the kids really know who “those of the Banda della Magliana” were? »¹⁵. They also tease users by posting pictures representing T-shirts with the real criminals who inspired the story.

3.3. Social networks: presenting the self

If blogs are based on the production of structured texts, in which users speak for themselves, but develop critiques that are similar to the official press or political pamphlets, social networks are individual-centered. Virtual spaces, social networks are built synchronically to daily life and the relations that are encouraged are similar to those taking place in real life. Each user has a personal page, a space that allows him or her to publish several types of information, links, photos, video clips, and to manage the visibility of this content for other people. This device embodies the spirit of the «Web 2.0», since it focuses on

14. <http://cletus19.blogspot.com/2011/01/romanzo-de-che.html> (2012/09/07).

15. <http://chickenbroccoli.blogspot.com/2010/12/meglio-della-magliana.html> (2012/09/07).

producing and sharing content (O'REILLY 2005). The audiovisual product and the individual's identity are in constant motion, following the development of strategies for narrating the self (GOFFMAN 1990) within a context. Traditional practices (the pleasure of creating lists, or canons of favorite movies, collections, annotation as a form of criticism, typical of French cinephilia, see DE BAECQUE 2003) are accompanied by the specific culture of networks.

3.3.1. Facebook

Exploring *Romanzo criminale's* appropriations in a territory like Facebook, a social network that was chosen because of its strong aggregate power (more than 900 million users as of April 2012), means focusing on relations created by individuals using cultural products. This device does not require users to possess literary skills, or to have an infinite amount of free time to explore content. Instead, the narration of the self is realized through short pieces of content, like on YouTube, or gestures: a sentence, a picture or a clip are used to communicate emotions and moods to others.

Facebook gives users the opportunity to create their own social facade by expressing their preferences (and dislikes) in different fields. Individuals gather around a topic, according to a logic of fandom, but lighter (we should note that the action «become fan» has recently been transformed into «like», possibly due to the need for a less involved form of membership). The web 2.0 develops, among other things, an «active» identity, linked to the production and publication of content (GEORGES 2009). We build our identity by appropriating products of our culture. A viewers' body is an apparatus, shaped by the filmic experience. Used as flag in the social scene, like the masks of Goffman's social actors, film and cultural products become something that others can take ownership of in different ways.

Importance is given to comments that users leave as traces of their visit to the page. It can often be reduced to a mere expression of approval of any content through the thumbnail «Like». Content, and consequently users who have published it, are evaluated by the community from the number of approvals they have obtained.

The observations presented here were made through Facebook's search engine, with the query «*Romanzo criminale*». The research was conducted over approximately three years (from the beginning of October, 2008 to the end of August, 2011), in order to compare the results and report how the site transformed. The variety of results can be cat-

egorized into two main types: on the one side, users take *Romanzo criminale* as a flag to enrich their virtual look; on the other, fans gather in spaces devoted specifically to *Romanzo criminale*, film series, book or characters (or actors) and they signal their belonging to a group. On Facebook, any activity implemented by the user is dynamic, since it's made public and visible to «friends». Each user is therefore both watched by his or her friends and can see all the activities of others, a form of monitoring which imposes the need to build a self image suitable for the entire network.

Any digital identity is constructed through information that does not necessarily come from a user's physical identity. With Facebook, the rule of social rituals studied by Erving Goffman is actualized, which involves forcing each individual to organize the way he or she presents himself of herself to others through masks. The knowledge of the environment teaches users to adapt their masks to social practices (the choice of a nickname or a real name, rules for the choice of a profile picture, see also CARDON 2008). The first step is choosing a nickname: most of the times, Facebook users choose their own first name and last name, in conformity with the origins of the device (it takes its name from a book given by some universities to their students at the beginning of the academic year). Sometimes, though, fans add to their name the name of a fictional character. *Romanzo criminale*'s protagonists are the strongest link between fiction and everyday life. They are considered myths or more likely «companions», and users often take them as a disguise for social interaction. For example, a fan used to call himself «Gianluca Libanese». Some fans say that, within their group of friends, in «real life», they have fun together using the pseudonyms of characters in the series. Much of the fun comes from the superposition of the framework of fiction and everyday life. In other cases, users choose an image of the character from the movie or from the TV series for their profile picture.

More traditionally, *Romanzo criminale* appears among users' preferences (categorized by Facebook: movies, books, music, television...). Users display their tastes and have fun creating lists. This form of celebration, far from being a passive contemplation, shows how a fictional work becomes an object of social use and a connector of communities. The film and television show appear on the social network with their title, with a poster or an actor's photo. An accompanying text conveys other information, like elements of the content or the style. Text and image, both central elements in new generations of websites, work together in rendering the essence of the product and favor the presentation of a user's taste in a quickly identifiable structure.

To expose on a profile a list of favorite films and television series is today one of the most common methods to summarize a set of an individual's characteristics. Identifying one's favorite films and television programs using a list first responds to the need of organizing a user's enjoyment, by making it intelligible to ourselves and others, facilitating immediate recognition. According to a fundamentally postmodern conception of knowledge (see the role of relationships between fragments of knowledge for Lyotard; or the proliferation of signs in the absence of an author for Derrida), lists also help define the individual's identity through an accumulation of information. The centrality of fragments goes with the diffusion of a form of eclecticism displaying taste: if some users are exclusive fans of *Romanzo criminale*, others fancy entertainment genres of very different natures. Generally, there is less (e.g. in relation to «anthologies» in blogs) discrimination between legitimate objects and illegitimate objects, just to cite a few: film, television and sports meet. Viewers who declare their commitment to a certain genre always situates themselves socially and culturally. Adding *Romanzo criminale* to a list of favorite movies, sharing an excerpt from the series accompanied by a commentary or displaying the image of Libanese as a profile photo give other users different information in different contexts.

The significance of each of these masks varies according to the reading context. For some users, it corresponds to declaring one's belonging to a community of fans. For others, it expresses an appreciation for «quality» TV (an attribute which, for many, refers to Sollima's serial); for others, finally, it would be a second degree gesture, playing with an illegitimate taste and behavior that society condemns, thus signaling one's membership to an elite group that, for cultural reasons, is allowed to ridicule contemporary Italian television productions.

In these uses of social networking, films and television series should not be considered as «texts» or objects which consumers deconstruct in order to find meaningful elements for hermeneutic purposes, but rather as opportunities for social exchange. The specificities of each audiovisual product play a central role in social networks: extracts displayed on personal pages energize the lists. Users are encouraged to share any content they like: what is not shared does not exist in a network («if it does not spread, it's dead», JENKINS 2009a). Thus, the sharing of extracts is a common action which promotes the circulation of videos and exposes it to community feedback. Often released with an offbeat spirit, these videos tell us about the user's tastes. Over time, they are used to build the contours of the individual's identity, through stratification; users' actions are persistent, they don't expire over time. When users identify the source of the quote they confirm their belonging to a group by sharing their knowledge.

Another common practice is the creation of pages and groups. Creating or joining a community on a small or global scale (you can join a group of fans of any type of cultural product) deserves special attention because it follows a series of specific features related to the potential of a narrative to act as a universe. Over the three years I observed *Romanzo criminale* on Facebook, there has been a steady increase in the number of «Groups» and «Pages» devoted to (or even opposed to) the film, the TV series, specific characters and actors who play them. 103 «Pages» and more than 500 «Groups» were counted as of April 2011 (in recent months, «Groups» and «Pages» have changed: since August 2011, «Groups» share information with fewer contacts; see BOUTIN 2011). In addition, there are fun quizzes, created by users about the characters and «Events» associated with *Romanzo criminale*, for private use or for a larger number of users (invitations to attend a viewing of the film or series, evenings in night clubs in honor of one of the actors, etc.).

There are several un-official groups, from pages with only one fan to pages with hundreds of fans. Creating a page is fun in and of itself, part of the Facebook experience. It is also an action that corresponds to testing one's capabilities to group friends (or one's potential as an opinion leader). It is a declarative experience, since a user who creates a page displays at the same time his or her taste and the performative power of this taste to friends.

Some pages are devoted to the characters and other pages have all of *Romanzo criminale* the object of fandom; perceived as a cult phenomenon, it exceeds the different media which depict it. In most cases, «Pages» contain a simple description of psychological features and main events concerning the characters, quotes from of the film or series or, albeit less frequent, discussions about the content, which are closer to forum discussions.

Although it is not easy to define the formula for success on Facebook, it must be noted that some pages work better than others. Their success depends on the title, which must be effective, provocative, and rich and accurate in content (photos, information). Coolness, which involves detachment (POUNTAIN, ROBINS, 2000), seems to characterize these areas. The characteristics of the cultural object that is involved in this study play a role in shaping new features of the «cool attitude», since *Romanzo criminale's* gangsters become models who carry out hard and risky operations with an incredible easiness, holding back pain and emotion. Fans like to share their idols' «cool attitude». In fact, a fan never totally exposes him or herself. Sometimes, a hint of humor shows that attachment is never first degree: some exceptions apply, illustrated by the following examples.

After the end of the second season, many fans expressed their desire to continue the experience. Like in forums, many contributions propose the making of a third season, demonstrating resistance towards the producers who never mentioned a new season. Other discussions are linked to Roman identity: *Romanzo criminale* becomes the vehicle of a culture that defines itself through language (the Roman working-class dialect) and in opposition to bourgeois culture. At the same time, the awareness of the product's quality makes some fans say that they are proud to be Italian. Any page, if it has a large number of registrants, or even if it is a refuge for a small group of friends, can become a real community, in which a number of users return daily.

Although comments on most of the pages are produced by male users, the protagonists of some very animated discussions are women. Two fans enliven the page «Romanzo criminale - TV Show» on a daily basis, and manifest through several signs how passionate they are about the product. They are women who are about forty years old. They talk about their passion for Libanese (they would like to attend the football match on the beach depicted in episode 2, and one admits to having her picture taken in «Libanese's apartment», that is to say on the locations of the series) and their hatred for Dandi, who they describe as vile. They also develop a new reading on Dandi's sexual preferences, in order to belittle him, speculating on his possible attraction for Police Chief Nicola Scialoja - «his love for Patrizia is an excuse [...] in order to hide or to deny fantasies he has, when nobody sees him, on an N.S. (do you see who I mean?) [...] I'm kidding, of course, but not excessively».¹⁶

The same fan page also becomes a space for producing fan art. For example, one of the fans published photos that she photoshopped, showing what she would have wanted to see in the second season.¹⁷ In the first image, the three protagonists and two other gang members are shown on the same beach where, in the second episode of the first season, a pact of friendship between the characters is sealed by a football match. In the second picture, the fan inserts an image of herself into a frame showing all the gang members seated around a few bottles, bread and cheese, for a convivial dinner. The fan offers her own personal reading of the series, highlighting one of the reasons for her commitment: conviviality and the proximity to everyday life. She inhabits a fictional world shaped the way she wants it to be, following a very personal reading that

16. <https://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=358738296674#!/photo.php?fbid=2013342286117&set=o.37545544019&type=1&theater> (2012/09/07). The page is no longer available.

17. *Ibidem*.

ignores the most brutal aspects, including the death of Libanese. Other users applauded the fan's gesture and creativity.

The attachment to the product emerges from titles where emotion is brought to the fore: «for those who cried during the last episode of *Romanzo criminale*».¹⁸ In other cases, the page has the simple function of expressing provocative statements, directed against other fan groups: «who cares about *Twilight*, we are waiting for the second season of *Romanzo criminale*».¹⁹ «Pages» also become spaces where users fight for a political cause, playing between fiction and reality. For example, one group proposed to demonstrate for the release of Bufalo, who is imprisoned (in the series) while Dandi is free.

On the series fan page, created by Sky Cinema, a series of activities offer a key to understanding these spaces as «playgrounds». Although the space is controlled by the producers, there are different ways to appropriate the product. Emotional responses and various discussions appear. It should be noted that posts increase in the fieriest moments of the product's life: the end of the first season, which leaves the audience in suspense. For the second season, many fan photos were posted, along with news from behind the scenes.

Given all these spaces created by fans for fans, groups such as «For all those who are tired of *Romanzo criminale* fans» can be observed, along with those who claim to hate the series. They are anti-fans, or individuals who invest in the development of practices based on an aversion to a cultural product. Therefore, anti-fans especially oppose groups of fans of a product. Any fandom involves an anti-fandom since, for example, the same galaxy can not contain at the same time *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* (GRAY 2003) – even if the study of *cosplay* (people dressing up like characters and gathering together in conventions) proves the opposite (see also JENKINS 1992; HILLS 2002). Consequently, a considerable number of groups oppose the culture of celebrating criminals. They do that by trying to examine the relationship between truth and fiction. On the Page «Retarded teens who worship *Romanzo criminale*», there are several attacks against fans of Libanese which parody the typical praise for the character: «go Libanese, honor to you, you're a thief and an assassin who makes deals with the Mafia and the State!».²⁰

18. <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Aver-pianto-allultima-puntata-di-Romanzo-criminale/150329431683638?sk=info> (2012/09/07).

19. <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Ma-ke-Twilight-n0i-stIamo-Aspettand0-la-se-c0nda-seriE-di-r0manz0-cRiminalE/252065664542#!/pages/Ma-ke-TwiliGht-n0i-stIamo-Aspettand0-la-seC0nda-seriE-di-r0manz0-cRiminalE/252065664542?sk=info> (2012/09/07).

20. <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Adolescenti-ritardati-che-venerano-Romanzo->

In an ironic tone, there is a Page that aims to list all the «Uncool and unromantic lines from *Romanzo criminale*», quoting two sentences from the series which, decontextualized, have no meaning. The user highlights the banality and show the ridiculous nature of the characters (and their fans).

Social networks are also spaces for displaying a preference for models of misconduct. Interpretations of the product as an anthology of unauthorized behavior by society emerge, in a game where the boundaries between play and reality are sometimes unclear. The protagonists are admired for their disdain of the law, their desire for fame and their excess of wealth. Their actions convey a pleasure for the forbidden, like a speeding motorcycle ride. As criminals, they become role models, as shown on the pages entitled «For those who like to feel a part of *Romanzo criminale*»²¹ or «After getting out of the movie theater I felt a criminal» or «*Romanzo criminale* [...] a movie? No, a lifestyle».²²

Posting of these comments is a form of self-presentation. What is at stake in this practice is the pleasure to show their belonging to a culture that opposes behavior models accepted by society. *Romanzo criminale* becomes a sign that is exposed to disclose one's belonging to the impoverished neighborhoods of Rome, or in a broader sense (many fans are not Roman), to a subculture that shares values such as loyalty, honor, and which revolts against any form of decency.

In other cases, locations become protagonists. Fans love to visit locations of the film or series and take pictures «on the same beach as in the series» or «at Libanese's place». A fan relates that she almost caught a cold trying to find the filming location where Bufalo was ambushed.

Facebook responds to a need to unite friends in affective communities and often around an event taking place in real life. Users can create «events» and invite their friends. Watching the series becomes a ceremony that has to be shared: here, Facebook only amplifies an already existing viewing practice. For example, many groups were created just before the second season was broadcast, in November 2010. Through the group, users organized collective television sessions, «*Romanzo*

Criminale/152727338112126#!/pages/Adolescenti-ritardati-che-venerano-Romanzo-Criminale/152727338112126?sk=wall&filter=1 (2012/09/07).

21. <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Adolescenti-che-dopo-aver-visto-romanzo-criminale-si-credono-dei-veri-boss/100809109996700> (2012/09/07).

March 21, 2013

criminale evenings», or «*Romanzo criminale* dinners», open to all with paying access²³ or as private events.²⁴

Starting August 2010, Facebook offers a location-based tool called «Places», which allows users to indicate where they are on a map and to share a message on his or her profile. Users can signal their presence in one environment, while describing their activity: *Romanzo criminale* is thus used as a key to give meaning to a place for a community of fans. Many results from the query «*Romanzo criminale*» correspond to places in which users have accessed («check-in», according to the terminology used by the tool) while pointing out an activity related to the audiovisual product. For example: «Bed & *Romanzo criminale*» indicates a street in the city of Ostia where a user is consuming the product, lying in bed, at a specific time, or, «Involved with *Romanzo criminale*» in the city of Cosenza, indicates that the user has decided to cut himself off from the rest of the world in order to devote himself to the film or series. Although the application is designed to point out the geographic location of the user, it seems that in these cases the experience is defined more by the content than by the place: *Romanzo criminale* is considered as an autonomous activity, more than just a story, able to shape the experience of the city.

Concerning the national origin of these social networking practices, to display a preference for *Romanzo criminale* corresponds to highlighting a link to the culture of Rome and to Italian political culture. However, observed uses of Facebook are not limited to the Italian context. Even in France or other European countries, the product is used as a flag by people who want to playfully declare their outlaw status. French Internet users join groups founded by Italian fans in order to get closer to the original culture of the product, sharing their commitment with more sophisticated viewers (due to the knowledge of the language and the expectations they have, especially about the second season, which, at present, has not been broadcast in France yet).

Lastly, games that regularly appear in user profiles (personality quizzes, tests) allow fans and film buffs to test their knowledge related to the story world.²⁵ Eventually, the result is comparable to that of «friends», becoming a sign of taste affinity.

23. <http://www.facebook.com/event.php?eid=163803110325942> (2012/09/07).

24. <http://www.facebook.com/event.php?eid=107385015996436> (2012/09/07).

25. <http://apps.facebook.com/quiz-romanzo-bchcjb/?installed=1> (2012/09/07).

4. Converging/overflowing

4.1. From intertextuality to transmedia

To fully appreciate the work, you have to read the book, watch the film and, perhaps, wait for the television series which is made prepared for Sky, given the complexity and particularity of what is said.¹

As stated before, *Romanzo criminale*'s narrative unfolds through a set of media: a book, a film, a television series and some digital media such as websites, an online game and an official Facebook page. A multiplicity of customized portals invite consumers to enter this fictional world. On the one hand, the phenomenon could be considered as a set of stories and information which converge and create a big, autonomous and coherent world, encompassing different narrative fragments and media. That's the hypothesis of convergence (see JENKINS 2006). On the other, the same phenomenon could be studied as an overflowing of content spreading from a matrix story, so full of meaning and able to interpret contemporary culture in such a way that it expands spilling over into various media and devices. Both these perspectives help to understand *Romanzo criminale*'s place in the cultural and social sphere. Let's see how.

If we considered *Romanzo criminale* using a structural approach, and studied it as a collection of texts through which the same work reoccurs, the focus of this section would be on a translating phenomenon, an «interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems», according to the notion of intersemiotic translation established by Roman Jakobson (VENUTI 2000, pp. 113-119). This notion implies that there is a correspondence between the target and source text. To look for equivalence within the difference always refers to the fidelity to an

1. [http://www.bol.it/libri/Romanzo-criminale/Giancarlo-De-Cataldo/ea978880616096/\(2012/09/07\)](http://www.bol.it/libri/Romanzo-criminale/Giancarlo-De-Cataldo/ea978880616096/(2012/09/07)).

original, to a work producing meaning autonomously. In the theory of moving images, this issue has long been studied, as Dudley Andrew suggests using terms like «transforming», «intersecting», «borrowing» (ANDREW 1984, pp. 98-104).

In the frame of my research, the notion of fidelity has to be challenged, especially since it reveals an approach that considers film as a medium which produces its own meaning, independent from a social space of discourse. Yet, *Romanzo criminale* is a network of cross-references to pre-existing texts, to historical events and personalities which turn it into a repetition device. Talking of equivalence in jakobsonian terms would be too simplistic for the present case, since the diversity of languages serving as a vehicle for the narrative depends on the contexts of production and reception. So values other than fidelity to the original must be taken into account when considering *Romanzo criminale*. A media product should be studied in its own technological, economic and societal context (STAIGER 2005), instead of in a determinist manner (the text would impose some reactions on consumers). At the same time, Stuart Hall's «encoding»/«decoding» model (Hall, 1980), building on Jakobson's model, underlines the importance of codes and social contexts while communicating. No text has a definite meaning (see the concept of «unlimited semiosis», ECO 1994). Given this paradigm, it is necessary to study intertextual contributions as parts of a space where meaning circulates. Thus, the approach chosen for this case study considers literature, film and television as «sites of production and circulation of social discourses» (CASETTI 2008, p. 191). Employing this perspective, adaptation has to be understood not just as the same work being repeated, but as the reproduction of textual elements or content in other situations. In the contemporary era, new technologies contribute to a convergence of media: every product can be conceived as a link in a network. «Read the book and a half hour later you'll find yourself on the Internet trying to find out more about the «Banda della Magliana», to better understand a bunch of obscure pages of national history that no one has yet had the courage to explain».²

Romanzo criminale is not just an «open» work, fundamentally intertextual, but, most of all, it gives its consumers an experience that is comparable to a journey, the exploration of an environment that is often similar to a labyrinth. A series of non-identical fragments, which, when followed, reject the notion of original and create a continuous shift in meaning. In order to explore migrations and borrowings that constitute

2. <http://www.ibs.it/ser/serdsp.asp?isbn=9788806160968&rec=61> (2012/09/07).

this phenomenon, we first need to value its presence in different networks and different systems of representation.

Words in the text can be directed to an antecedent or synchronic literary corpus: «any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another» (KRISTEVA 1978, p. 66). According to Kristeva's structural position, a text has to be conceived as a crossroads in which many textual paths intersect, and which brings together the writer's and receptor's voices and contexts. Working with intertextuality means establishing the modalities through which a text rewrites other texts, transforming and assimilating them (see GUAGNELINI, RE 2007).

4.2. «*La Banda della Magliana*», a subject told through many texts

At the beginning of the new millennium, cinematic, literary and televisual storytellings which rewrite crucial events of Italian history have emerged. These «social tales» dramatized the society and its structures, creating an image by which society represents itself (see also BUONANNO 2008). These representations challenged, established or strengthened their link to a national identity, by depicting «epoch-making» events (RICOEUR 1985, p. 339).

Recent Italian cinema can be characterized by a «return to the past» (see also BUONANNO 2012), paying particular attention to political events taking place between the late 1960s and the late 1980s, otherwise known as the «Years of Lead». These dark pages in Italian history are still shrouded in «mystery», marked by acts of violence that spread pain and terror among the Italian population, and eventually became an integral part of an institutional instability marked by a conflict of heavy ideological machinery. It's the epoch of terrorism and the «strategy of tension», destined to lastingly mark the people's conscience. Some examples are films that depict family sagas (*The Best of Youth*, *La meglio gioventù*, M.T. Giordana, 2003), reconstructions of events that have shaped the collective imagination (*Good Morning, Night*, *Buongiorno, notte*, M. Bellocchio, 2003), «immortal» political figures (*Il divo*, P. Sorrentino, 2008), and the national wound represented by Mafia (*Gomorra*). It should be noted that, as Milly Buonanno recently recalled, «there has never been a television season from 1998 to 2008 in which at least one, but normally more than one, homegrown Mafia story has not made an appearance on the Italian screens» (BUONANNO 2008, p. 145). The authors of these works have often been trained in the art of documentary. As a result, Italian film production has been marked in recent years by a superposition of documentary and fiction with effects on aesthetics and rhetoric. On the one hand, documentary lends fiction

feature films its slight movements, jerky editing, «dirty» texture. On the other hand, fiction film influences documentary's length providing its time dilation. The resulting hybrid productions often rework archives and found footage. Thus, «the fictional narrative would constitute a tool that can be used in order to understand our own universe» (ESQUENAZI 2009a, p. 17). Fictional time is punctuated with past images that mark unforgettable historical moments. Representing the past is therefore not limited to mimesis. Instead, its link to events is packed with nostalgia, which is typical of postmodern style. This also happens when «remediation» (BOLTER, GRUSIN 1999) is employed, reproducing a technique imported from an old media, such as imitating 1970s televisual image texture in a movie produced today. Watching TV is a collective ritual for Italian people. Many films celebrate television's folkloric function by using both archive footage and creating new, remediated images. An interesting operation is observable in *Buongiorno, notte*, where a metadiscursive mechanism invites viewers to re-read history and personal memories. Bellocchio's editing explores how the dramatic images of the Moro case are rooted in Italian culture and consciousness. Archival images are inserted directly into the narrative fabric and, alternating with fictional images, they construct alternatives to real events. Notably, the final scene of Chiara's dream, in which Moro walks, finally free, in the EUR district in Rome, gives a new perspective to history. The images of Moro's funeral ceremony, presided over by the Pope and other prominent political officials, show the official reading of the event but unsettle it, as they are edited in counterpoint to Pink Floyd's *Shine on You Crazy Diamond* (1974), in «ironic fulfillment of a national fantasy» (O'LEARY 2010, p. 252). In Bellocchio's film not only archives are involved, but also excerpts from feature films (Rossellini's *Paisà* [1946] and Stalinist propaganda films) that emphasize this intertwining of images to other images, in a context where meaning is made through the representations of facts more than through direct access to the facts themselves.

Romanzo criminale tells the story of the «Banda della Magliana», the name that the press gave to a criminal organization which, in Roman working class suburbs, became powerful, creating links to the political world and the Mafia for over a twenty-year period. *Romanzo criminale* recounts one of the most tension-filled moments in Italian history. The «Banda della Magliana» is almost felt everywhere in contemporary Italian history and because of that, telling its story within a single medium would not be possible. Thus, a galaxy of texts, fictions and documentaries draws on the gang's actions and creates, along with *Romanzo criminale*, the book, film and television series, multiple interpretations of the same historical events. Some novels and a comic book have the name that journalism gave to the gang in their title. A film (*Fatti della banda della*

Magliana, D. Costantini, 2007), a television mini-series produced by Rai (*Vite a perdere*, P. Bianchini, 2004), a television report, *La banda della Magliana, il potere del crimine* (2006) were produced. *Romanzo criminale* is a network of social discourses. It is necessary to analyze this stratified territory, which is comparable to a complex world. In the next sections, I will go through all the types of official media, analyzing them as bricks in a complex structure, and interpreting them through the lens of the reception practices examined in the previous chapter. The observed features will bring to light the role of each text for individuals and communities, along with the intertextual links between the different media artifacts.

4.3. *The novel*

The title indicates that the book is a novel. From a pragmatic perspective, the title is an indicator of a communicative pact and creates specific expectations: the reader has the role of «validating» it as fiction (ESQUENAZI 2009a, p. 51).

The book addresses a large audience, a «popular» audience in some way, and expresses a will of being entrenched in a specific culture:

In privileging the generic label by raising it to the position of *capo-testo*, De Cataldo invites us to become literary historians, recalling the birth of the *romanzo* as a vernacular form, whose linguistic descent from the language of classical Rome is embedded in its very name» (MARCUS 2008, p. 394).

The novel as a genre defines a territory marked by heterogeneity. The intertwining of different levels of language, according to Bakhtin's theory, creates a polyphony, able to faithfully render a reproduction of our world's complexity. A first remark, though, adds some precautions in using the notion of novel as Bakhtin intended it: *Romanzo criminale* was classified by a group of Italian critics, Wu Ming (meaning «nobody» in Chinese), as a «New Italian Epic», along with an array of other works produced between 2003 and 2008, creating a complex relationship with the fictional writing of history. In Wu Ming's «manifesto», the New Italian Epic is described as a shared feeling, a way of interpreting recent events in Italian history. The style of New Italian Epic is characterized by realism and, at the same time, postmodern nostalgia. The New Italian Epic plays on pop culture and gives a particular role to consumer appropriations (Wu Ming explicitly quotes Henry Jenkins).

The fictional status of a work depends more on convention than on textual, semantic or syntactic properties; «there is no general theory

of the mechanisms by which such serious illocutionary intentions are conveyed by pretended illocutions» (SEARLE 1991, see also GENETTE 1991, pp. 67-68). *Romanzo criminale* juggles allusions to historical facts and explicit fiction. Without ever citing sources or using any actual names of political figures, De Cataldo examines a social milieu and its tensions. Moreover, as a magistrate he has direct and professional knowledge of the events that he chooses to tell through fiction. The back cover of the Italian version is as follows: «in a very near past, a gang of street criminals is trying to seize Rome. Did this actually happen?» (DE CATALDO 2002). Ambiguity between historiography and crime novel characterizes this story from the beginning. The back cover of the French edition emphasizes the hybrid status: «this is the true story of the “Banda della Magliana” [...]. All the underground history of Italy from recent years (P2, black terrorism, assassination of Aldo Moro, politicians and corrupt police, secret service...) scrolls before our eyes, and De Cataldo never loses his literary style» (DE CATALDO 2006).³ Readers are led both to believe and doubt the veracity of the story they are about to read. In order to enter a fictional pact, is it not necessary to waive the question of the reality status of the related events, like Coleridge’s «willing suspension of disbelief»? «The identification of a narrative as fictional implies that the person addressed adheres to the rules of a particular game, which is abandoning his or her usual real world and getting inside a fictional world» (ESQUENAZI 2009a, p. 51; see also SCHAEFFER 1999).

For Henry James,

It is still expected, though perhaps people are ashamed to say it, that a production which is after all only a «make-believe» (for what else is a «story»?) shall be in some degree apologetic – shall renounce the pretension of attempting really to represent life (JAMES 1986, p. 166).

Romanzo criminale immediately exposes the mechanism of make-believe by performing a metadiscursive operation with a distancing effect that is not any less enjoyable. It is as if the text says: this is fiction, but... careful about what I will tell you about reality.

The originality of De Cataldo’s novel is to merge real, plausible, fictional narrative, weaving a plot capable of putting an entire era into perspective and rebuilding it, from the bottom of the «road», the dark core of fifteen years of events and episodes that have forever changed Rome, Italy, and all of us.⁴

3. My translation.

4. http://www.anobii.com/books/Romanzo_criminale/9788806160968/01e0d4582ef23c8513/# (2012/09/07).

For the reader, the intertwining of the individual dimension of characters and Italy's collective history is the main element for creating emotion, attachment and a feeling of being part of an «epic event». In the novel, a character's discovery of big events depicts the glance that individuals are allowed to take towards collective history. Personal stories are thus building a parallel micro-history, closer to the reader's experience and memories. Like Aldo Moro's kidnapping and killing, one of the major events that scarred the conscience of Italians in 1978, the individual dimension substitutes the collective one:

Waving his card, Scialoja made his way in the midst of trouble, rage, pain. [...] The thin and bony face, like a fledgling, the gray and not shaved beard recalled him his father in the coffin. The old man who died invoking his son far away. The old ill man he had not had time to hug for the last time (DE CATALDO 2002, p. 106).

History also becomes apparent through characters from show business, television, or through popular songs which, at some point, interact with the protagonists and mark the passing of time, emphasizing connotations related to Italian national identity. As Jean-Marie Schaeffer notes, «the image can convey new information only if it is otherwise partially redundant with the memory, with the receiver's knowledge» (SCHAEFFER 1987, pp. 89-90). A «lateral» body of knowledge is required in order to enjoy the reading, filling in gaps with personal stories. The term intertwining best describes the relationship between fiction and reality, indicating a «mutual encirclement», a divergence and a convergence and the «correlative nature of their causes and effects» (RICOEUR 1985, p. 329).

Constructing the fictional pact is supported by the creation of a generic frame, a series of instructions given to the viewers that allows them to foresee certain situations from thematic elements and frequent contact with other texts that contain similar situations (what Eco calls «intertextual encyclopedias»). The relationship between reader and fictional world depends on the relationship between the text and other texts (ESQUENAZI 2009a, p. 67). Thriller and detective story genres collide: *Romanzo criminale* keeps together instances of historiography, the collective sharing of dramatic events and nostalgia, or the bitter enjoyment coming from realizing that past is lost. According to a reader, we have a hybrid product:

It's hard to define it as a novel: it does not have the definition, the rhythm, the charm, the message and the evocative power, or «merely» the linguistic-sociological study of Pasolini's *Ragazzi di vita*. It is also difficult to define it as a topical book for its lack of journalistic or legal rigor, for its lack of clear refer-

ences to the documentation used and for the way facts are fictionalized. So what is it? It is a literary fiction.⁵

Various generic authorities meet in the work, starting from the title, where crime and novel meet. If, on the one hand, «novel» encourages a reading in terms of fiction, on the other, «crime» refers to the anglo-saxon tradition of hard-boiled or even «marginal literature». The title also contains parallels with the Italian tradition of «pulp» literature and film, characterized by strong violence, and an omnipresence of blood, similarly to Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994).⁶ Recognizing the generic codes is an essential cognitive capacity required for enjoying this kind of production and identifying the fictional part of the story (BLETON 1999). Generic frames help the cognitive process, especially because they evoke emotional patterns that the reader has previously experienced (ECO 1986). *Romanzo criminale's* characters are shaped according to traditional frames: women, for example, are prostitutes (Patrizia), or the gangster's girls (Roberta), while men are tough guys and are the only protagonists. This over-simplification of gender roles defines a world of heteronormativity in which men and women are read as two opposites, joining only in moments of sexual intercourse, a mother and son relationship, or romantic love. Considered as an obstacle to the protagonists' main goal, power, women also have a less defined psyche than the male characters.

He liked women, and how much. But how to explain it to Dandi? It's a military problem, he would have told him. This is a war. And when you're in a war you can not afford distractions. Not that having sex would not hurt, but ... entanglements, no. You had to remain clean... what is the word? Chaste, that's it, somehow chaste. Like priests (DE CATALDO 2002, p. 50).

The presence of external elements adds complexity to the characters, which come from other media sources, like films. Films are often used by De Cataldo to create intertextual and intermedial references, overt or covert, to define a character's psychological features.

In the via Benaco film club they showed *Touch of Evil*. He would have gladly watched it again, for the eleventh, no, twelfth time. Each time the story got him all worked up. Charlton Heston was a democratic policeman guaranteeing civil

5. <http://www.ibs.it/ser/serdsp.asp?isbn=9788806160968&rec=1> (2012/09/07).

6. A few titles: *Fango* (N. Ammaniti, 1996), *Fonderia Italghisa* (G. Caliceti, 1996), *Bastogne* (E. Brizzi, 1997), *Occhi sulla graticola* (T. Scarpa, 1997), *Destroy* (I. Santacroce, 1997), *Superwoobinda* (A. Nove, 1998).

liberties, as he aspired to be. Orson Welles was a gangster in uniform, dirty, greedy, corrupt. A fascist, like most of his colleagues. But Heston was also a jerk capable of being led by the nose by a bomber's tears. And Welles an investigative genius able to smell the stench of guilty when the corpse was still warm. How could he not admire him? (DE CATALDO 2002, pp. 102-103).

Touch of Evil (O. Welles, 1958), watched one evening after work, functions as a device to deepen the police chief Scialoja's emotions, examining his own nature and motives, comparing himself to Orson Welles and Charlton Heston (Scialoja uses the actor's names instead of the characters', creating a bond with the readers and viewers who are always more likely to be attentive to stars than to fictive characters, especially when mentioning screen giants).

External elements to the text are also markers of the product's meta-discourse, to use a postmodern perspective. Not only is historical discourse rewritten by fiction; the concreteness of the past comes, paradoxically, from references to other fictions, such as films. As a user writes in his blog, sometimes genre is the best way to recreate an epoch's atmosphere:

Why does *poliziottesco* fascinate us? Maybe for something different from trashy mass snobbery, the kind of vertigo that consists in showing plebeian tastes in order to not look serious and boring, an attitude that has now become a standard of good taste. The *poliziottesco*: improbable scenarios, reactionary behaviors, clumsy actors. All this is undeniable, but there are also points of view, a unique cinematography made of faded light, the body's pale color. A sample of images that you won't find anywhere else, a inventory of the seventies composed of cars, shirts, suburban cafes, wallpaper, serial trinkets, pillows ontologically soaked in dust. Objects and houses rapidly aging, signs of a modernity that has lasted but a moment. And then there is the bad, the rejects, wild masks of perfidy impossible to redeem, products of absolute post-pasolinian impoverished neighborhoods, or of a route around a still closed Mediterranean: Marseille-Genoa-Naples. This is where to look for the 1970s, beyond the official and hyper-politicized narratives, which confused a happy few with the whole, beyond the ideological structures of the «Italian-style comedy».⁷

Film is also often used by readers, even before the release of Placido's *Romanzo criminale*, to create comparisons: De Cataldo's style is characterized, as many users say, by a «cinematographic writing». Instead of having a goal to reach, like film scripts (see PASOLINI 1966), the movie becomes an instrument to measure the novel's quality:

7. http://www.ilcaffeuilustrato.it/numero_27_guareschi_romanzo.html (2012/09/07). The page is no longer available.

The greatness of the novel lies in the fact that the editing is already cinematographic (even before the excellent work done by G. De Cataldo for the screenplay of Michele Placido's great film), the rhythm that is both slow and fast like in the most successful Greek tragedies (or Shakespeare, since Shakespeare is a modern Aeschylus).⁸

In the same discussion board: «great. It is a screenplay. It's ready for the screen. Read it and then read it again».⁹ According to the Frankfurt School scholars, for whom «light» art is «the social bad conscience of serious art» (ADORNO, HORKHEIMER 1974, p. 135), television would be used by detractors of the culture industry in order to lessen the novel: «it's a TV soap (don't censure me)!».¹⁰ Others celebrate the novel by expressing their desire to see it adapted for the big screen. This phenomenon shows both the bonds with the productions of the past and *Romanzo criminale's* capacity to function as a universe transcending different perspectives and media.

Recalling his experience as a film student, Giancarlo De Cataldo himself admits there is proximity between the two media: «some means of expression, the characterization of my main characters, dialogue, plenty of action scenes... all this comes from film. And I am glad that this is all going back to film, to which, ultimately, I never ceased to belong».¹¹

4.4. *The film*

No title was more explicit and well chosen, perhaps. *Romanzo criminale* is not actually the classic Italian investigation movie that aims to shed light on one of the many dark periods of its history, but it is primarily a «popular fiction», with an almost spectacular taste for the «American» detective movie (like Scorsese's *Goodfellas*).¹²

Pointing out the link to the original novel, the viewer who wrote this comment highlighted elements regarding the poetics and rhetoric of

8. <http://www.ibs.it/ser/serrec.asp?em=195210> (2013/03/21).

9. Ibidem. Comment dated October 28, 2003, forum Ibs.it (2013/03/21).

10. «È uno sceneggiato televisivo (non mi censurate!)» (my translation). <http://www.ibs.it/ser/serdsp.asp?isbn=9788806160968&rec=101>. Comment posted November 20, 2003 (2013/03/20).

11. <http://wws.warnerbros.fr/romanzo/#> (2013/03/21).

12. <http://www.mymovies.it/film/2005/romanzocriminale/pubblico/>. Comment dated November 13, 2005 (2013/03/21).

this story: its fictional status and the way Italian history is treated, as well as its spectacular nature. The user also notes the intertextual links to Hollywood film production and Italian films of the 1970s that the product evokes. The intertextual status of *Romanzo criminale* is part of a complex adaptation. The film requires the screenplay writer to make choices, cuts, and transformations to the material from the book, including condensing the narrative and reducing the number of characters.

Romanzo criminale is mainly interpreted as an action movie, whose intertextual links to popular Italian productions of the 1970s, as seen with De Cataldo's novel, are highlighted. If the main genre seems to be the thriller or detective movie, other readings are possible:

In Italian cinema there is a clear tendency to try to tell new stories. There are genres that have been forgotten for many years, both in literature and in film. This «thriller» does nothing more than be, in its intentions, an accurate summary of Italian «civilian» movies (with an analysis of the Moro affair and the Bologna massacre) and crime/detective movies.¹³

Being aware of intertextual references, for viewers, is a sign of belonging to a community. Intertextual references become «catalyzers of collective memories» (ECO 1986, p. 198). The novel often refers to the Italian genre of *poliziottesco*, overflowing with violence. The genre is hallowed by, between others, Quentin Tarantino, who bought the rights to several Italian products from that era (Castellari's *Quel maledetto treno blindato*, 1978, which inspired him for *Inglorious Basterds*, 2009). In *Romanzo criminale*, links to the *poliziottesco* genre, such as vengeful policemen, depraved criminals, drugs, car chases and gunfire, are the elements which define the movie's atmosphere. One direct quote can be seen in the sequence of the attack on Terribile's villa, which recalls a sequence from *Caliber 9*. In turn, thanks to *Romanzo criminale*, younger generations discover movies from the 1970s, seeing them from a different perspective. In fact, if the *poliziottesco* was generally read, in the seventies/eighties, as a right-wing genre, its new blossoming through a postmodern reading of «detachment» makes it accessible, retro and «cool» (POUNTAIN, ROBINS 2000) to a larger audience of people used to Tarantino's movies.¹⁴

Romanzo criminale develops what Laurent Jullier would call a «fireworks rhetoric» (JULLIER 1997). Represented content seems to serve as

13. <http://www.mymovies.it/film/2005/romanzocriminale/pubblico/?id=42542> (2013/03/21).

14. <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=58542330182#!/group.php?gid=58542330182&v=info> (2012/09/07).

a pretext for a superficial experience of postmodern enjoyment, based on a «direct, visceral communication with the spectator» (JULLIER 1997, p. 37). New technological effects are indeed a reason for enjoying the film. Nevertheless, this doesn't mean that a more sophisticated form of «expertise» isn't at work for the viewers.

Criminals are thought of as heroes, and this image is reinforced by the prologue (a Placido innovation) in which the three main characters, Libanese, Dandi and Freddo, are seen in their childhood, when they choose their nicknames and their path. After they steal a car, one of them dies and the others are arrested by the police. Running on the beach (the same Ostia beach where Pasolini was beaten to death) to escape the police officers, very similar to the final sequence of Truffaut's *The 400 Blows*, becomes a mythical image, recurring throughout the movie until the end, when an alternative ending is suggested.

The movie can be broken down in three parts, following the rise and fall of each of the characters, confirming their mythical status. Gender roles are not better depicted than in the book. On the contrary, male/female relationship are even more simplified. Male protagonists take center stage and female bodies are seen as physical objects to be desired (MULVEY 1975). Patrizia, the prostitute, lover of Dandi and Scialoja, Roberta, Freddo's young girlfriend; Sandra, an activist. The secondary figures of friendly members of the *Banda* who, in the book, constituted grounds for reflection or irony and contributed to the plurality of narrative voices, are here deleted for the screenplay.

In contrast to the novel, the movie describes the characters through the actors' physical appearance. Viewers thus praise the exactitude of each actor's look, measuring it according to a certain image of gangsters built through the reading of De Cataldo's novel or an intertextual and extra-textual network of films, novels or television images and the real world experience. Even language plays an important role, staging the criminals' world (Roman accent or dialect, along with a coarse way of speaking) against the law (Scialoja's northern accent and bourgeois language).

The viewers' involvement with the characters is created through a strong characterization: following them in private moments opens up the dimension of memory, childhood and intimacy. In some cases, thanks to internal focalization (see BRANIGAN 1984) an exploration of the psychological dimension adds to the viewer's mastery of the diegetic world. For example, in the sequence where Libanese dies, spectators share his vision of the surrounding space collapsing, and the street lights begin a waltz around his head. The character's memory comes into play at this point: images from the prologue, the race on the beach, alternate with the representation of the protagonist's last moments. Sound also plays a part: the voices of chil-

dren calling for help resonate in Libanese's head. The impression is that of sharing an intimate dimension from which, until that point, the viewer has been excluded. In this intimate space created through the character's sensitivity, viewers' productions easily find their place. Filling in gaps, viewers and fans weave new content marked by emotions, building from the film's suggestions. This is the case of the a story written by a girl, who describes - using a technique similar to free indirect speech - past perceptions and thoughts that go through the mind of the dying «king».¹⁵

The presence of such a rewriting brings the notion of identification into question. Identification would require viewers to understand fiction as a space where they temporarily leave their body, emotions and cognitive functions, to dive into another identity. If the notion of «diving» can describe the entrance into a fictional world, we must not forget that this movement demands accepting a fictional pact, in which viewers need to use their cognitive functions and emotions in order to enjoy the show. Thus, the relationship with the characters, which is central to the establishment of a fictional pact, has a dual role. The characters become, for the viewers, the starting point for a game with fiction. In some cases, the result is a standalone product such as fan fiction.

Nevertheless, *Romanzo criminale*'s popularity never strays from the controversy that the film conveys negative role models, contrary to the norms of society: the protagonists are gangsters and spectators are never spared from seeing their violent acts. One reason viewers like gangster movies is that they vicariously become acquainted with bandits, who allow us to experience emotions that, for the most part, we don't have the opportunity to experience in the real world. Viewers accept to live, for a limited time and in a limited space, with and as bandits, hoping to reap all the benefits: head-spinning action and emotion without taking any risks.

If, on the one hand, many fans praise the pleasure of sharing gangster's actions (those who read the film within the frames of genre, for example), on the other, *Romanzo criminale* is read as a «hazardous» product that is able to suggest socially unacceptable behavior to viewers. The spectacular staging of sinful deeds offers a free celebration of violence. This is especially true since the movie, like the novel, presents itself as fiction, strongly marked by features reminiscent in «gangster tales» or «thrillers», with scattered fragments coming from Italian history. Viewers who accept the fictional pact are challenged on both the emotional and the cognitive level by the presence of images that are

15. <http://www.efpfanfic.net/viewstory.php?sid=484073&i=1> (2012/09/07).

recognized as real. In some cases, the «Banda della Magliana»'s actions are directly affected by history. Then, archival images from television depicting «the Years of Lead» surface in the narrative. As director Michele Placido recalls: «where I felt that reconstruction would not be purely filmic, I chose to entrust historical memory to television images from those years».¹⁶

Television images are inserted into the narrative through re-use; they are shown as filmic images, not leaving their original medium (we shall see that in the series the same images are subject to a reverse operation: they are re-presented as TV images). Similarly to Bellocchio's *Good Morning, Night*, in *Romanzo criminale*, archival images undergo an operation that amplifies history's ambiguity, through the use of spectacular techniques and action sequences. For example, in counterpoint to the images of the party organized by the gang in the nightclub they just bought, along with their consecration as «the kings of Rome», through fragments a newscast appears describing Aldo Moro's kidnapping and the murder of five of his body-guards. The sequence is edited with a track song from that time period, *Lady Marmalade* (1974), which contributes to creating the superposition of festive and carnivalesque to a tragic context (while making an intertextual reference to the scene where Al Pacino's character is celebrating his success in *Carlito's Way*, a film which, like *Romanzo criminale*, draws the trajectory of criminals who, starting from the street, come to power).

Comparing this method to the «anempathetic» music, a music which «shows its indifference by continuing its course as if nothing were there» (CHION 1985, p. 229), adds an ideological role to these images, and music would report a sort of indifference of the world towards the depicted facts and characters (an interesting analysis was made by O'Rawe 2009). The music style is consistent with the whereabouts of the protagonists, the nightclub: when they are superimposed on archive footage, the songs take a new shape and are recontextualized. They rewrite the images through the filter of (postmodern) enjoyment. Archival images are taken out of context and placed in a euphoric montage, the style of which resembles a music video. They become part of the fiction and lose their status as a source of information they would otherwise have. Therefore, these images are ready to be taken by spectators for a variety of uses. Thus, if we study the role of music in contemporary Italian productions, such as *One Hundred Steps (I cento passi)*, M.T. Giordana, 2000) and *My Brother Is an Only Child (Mio fratello è figlio unico)*, D. Luchetti, 2007)

16. http://www.sentieriselvaggi.it/289/12023/Romanzo_criminale_e_un_film_politico_pieno_di_inguaribile_romanticismo_-_intervista_a_Michele_Placido.htm (2012/09/07).

we can see that, in most cases, music functions as a cultural link to a community, as part of generational identity that shows the continuity between individuals who were young at different times.

A blogger says that a few days after the release of the second season of *Romanzo criminale*, he was in a taxi singing a song from the 1970s, used in the show, and the taxi driver took the song as a pretext to start recalling that he was young then and had grown up in the Magliana suburbs. Music, as an emotional agent, builds the way in which new generations produce an image of the society of the time (see DE NORA 2001, p. 167).

The representation of the Bologna train station bombing, August 2, 1980, offers another example in which archival images are subject to a particular operation. This dramatic event, in which some members of the gang were partially involved, is seen through the eyes of Freddo, who was in Bologna without being aware of what would happen. The protagonist shares the dramatic event with the Italian people. The explosion of the station is a special effect produced with a scale model; the film depicts the journey of Freddo by placing the character in the foreground, in front of a green screen: archival images literally become the background of his actions, he walks through «real» debris. The result is an intersection of the individual and collective dimension, of fiction and reality. The viewer takes part in the collective event which, forcibly or incidentally, comes into the characters' daily lives through well-known television images. The passage of time is rendered by using archival footage, viewed and reviewed. The information conveyed is confined to the characters' individual lives, but, at the same time, it belongs to a collective history, creating an effect of detachment and, at the same time, of nostalgia.

Instead of creating a realistic representation, these operations of re-writing the past through postmodern pastiche seem to establish a «mythical» image of the past through nostalgia, in which the past remains elusive (JAMESON 1991). The authenticity of the 1970s is achieved primarily through the choice of decor and accessories that build an idealized past. History remains a shallow referent, «colonized» by the present:

And like the conspiracy film *Piazza delle Cinque Lune*, *Romanzo criminale* is a kind of heritage or tourist film: the 'real' historical events are embedded in a context of Italian art, fashion, design and glamorous characters that adduces these events as aspects of a haptically delectable and exportable past (O'LEARY 2010, p. 253).

The most interesting feature of rewriting the past is that it functions in convergence, and has to be read through intertextuality. Re-using images related to historical events celebrates the memory of historical facts. Moreover, it is mostly a quote from movies that makes it possible

to build a common ground of references. A multiplicity of converging stories takes the place of the «Grand Narratives». History is expandable, open. Reality is constructed through language.

4.5. *The television series*

Although we are in a film blog, we can not avoid talking about *Romanzo criminale* the series, and it is not hard to explain why. For, behind this brilliant series, perhaps the best ever produced in Italy's history and produced entirely by satellite TV (the highly anticipated season two will air on Sky November 18), an aesthetic ambition and narrative perfection predominate, making us think of pure cinema translated on the small screen.¹⁷

Romanzo criminale the series, broadcast in Italy on November 10, 2008, is presented as a pioneering television product. In terms of content as well as in terms of form, the series breaks with the traditional stereotypes of Italian seriality (hagiographic reproduction of saints' or popes' lives, or in the staging of reassuring family comedies and medical dramas) (GRASSO 2009). The product's success is confirmed by the fact that the rights to the series were acquired by the American cable channel HBO in 2010¹⁸ and aired in the UK in October 2011.¹⁹

This Italian series can be qualified as a «quality soap», characterized by a new relationship between innovative and traditional drama (CREEBER 2004). This term will be used as a heuristic device to describe the object using Jane Feuer's warning: the judgment of taste inevitably driven by the word «quality» (FEUER 2007) can not be universalized, but it depends on the choice of one or more communities of interpretation.

If Michele Placido used intertextual gimmicks as a starting point to construct a complex work, sometimes defined as epic, devoted to the world of crime in «the Years of Lead», he could not, however, trigger uniform reactions about its quality. Critics, who accused Placido of ransacking Scorsese's and Coppola's works to try an impossible operation in an Italian context, oppose those who congratulated his work. A fan remarks: «[...] Placido's homonym movie is not even worthy of being

17. <http://www.cinemamagazine.it> (2013/03/21). The site is no longer available.

18. <http://www.radiotimes.com/news/2011-10-04/romanzo-criminale-the-italian-killing> (2012/09/07).

19. http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/robin-jarossi/romanzo-criminale-italian_b_962343.html (2013/01/04).

compared to the series». ²⁰ Image quality, an attention to detail and accurate reconstructions of the time (cars, clothes), the actors' physical appearance and speech are praised by viewers as elements which transform *Romanzo criminale* the TV series into an authentic world.

The first series of *Romanzo criminale* is a standard twelve episodes, numbered and not titled, and covers the first part of De Cataldo's novel, from the creation of the gang to Libanese's death. Twelve episodes of equal length (55 minutes) follow a narrative progression that incorporates a unique temporality, developing the main story. Within this flow, forms belonging to a serial iterative mechanism produce a relative independence of each narrative brick, depicting secondary events.

In this convergent polyphony, Libanese is, through the episodes, at the core of the narrative. Each episode's atmosphere seems influenced by his emotional condition and the centrality of his role becomes a key to understanding the series' structure. His murder, which closes the first season, is seen as a big event for spectators who not only wonder about the culprits, but also (especially female bloggers, writing to the actor, Francesco Montanari) hope that, even though his character is dead, he returns, or that his death is a dream: «Hi Francesco, congratulations on your part... I hope with all my heart that "Libano"'s death in the series is just a dream, so I can see you again in the second season!» ²¹. The shocking death of «the King» brilliantly ends the first season with a cliffhanger, the conventional method of serial narrative of leaving a situation unsolved that prolongs the viewer's suspense. Thus, many web users, until November 2010, asked «who killed Libanese?», like in the summer of 1985: «Who shot J.R.?» ²².

At this point, a legitimate question emerges: what is the meaning of a cliffhanger in the case of a series taking shape beside a book and a film that, overall, depict the same events? For the viewer, the transfer of knowledge acquired through the other media is always possible: the hiatus between the two seasons should not be a mechanism creating suspense. Instead, the observation of comments in online spaces suggests that viewers' need to know more is limited to the series, not to *Romanzo criminale*'s world. Viewers are able to use a fragment (the series) without considering it from its original relationship with a whole. The series sur-

20. <http://www.mymovies.it/forum/?id=57500> (2012/09/07).

21. <http://filmblog.girlpower.it/protagonisti/francesco-montanari-libanese-romanzo-criminale-la-serie/> (2012/09/07).

22. <http://it.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20090131073430AA5bngN> (2012/09/07).

prises its viewers by introducing unpredictable variations. Nevertheless, following classical television standards, it also has a consolatory virtue, comforting viewers through invariants which build the experience of the series as a ritual, such as scenes of male friendship or music sequences.

Regarding the notion of «quality soap», *Romanzo criminale* also alters temporality: the first season covers three years (1977-1980), but flash-backs trace a path to the past, sewing cognitive tracks for later use.

Let's take the example of reactions to the prologue in the first episode, set in present day («Rome Magliana today»). The protagonist of this sequence is a man in his fifties, whose identity is not revealed. It is when he desperately shouts: «I was with Libanese!» that the narrative transfers to the primary temporality, through a cut and the appearance of a close-up on Libanese. This sequence created a first question destined to run throughout the season, as evidenced by many comments and even the existence of a Facebook group entitled «Who is the old man at the beginning of the series *Romanzo criminale*?» (users suggest answers, but they also recognize producer strategies, as when they say «it's done on purpose so that we talk about it»²³).

This mechanism, typically found in soap operas, is similar to a police investigation, reflecting police chief Scialoja's personal research. The cop's progressive discoveries alternate with the criminals' actions in an increasingly effective convergence. Thus, in discussion boards, we often find comments that clarify certain details, build forecasts for the short and long term and underline links with the real facts that inspired *Romanzo criminale*.

The structure, as well as the atmosphere, place the series in the genre of gangster tale. B-movies, Italian *poliziottesco* and the large «marginal literature» vein are visible from the opening credits which show a series of iconographic references (packages of cocaine, wads of cash, pistols, red lipstick, edited with music which reminds the viewer of the 1970s thrillers), a heterogeneous network of intertextual references (including the casting of actors from the 1970s for secondary roles), which also determines consequences on the representation of gender relations.

The actors were cast for their physical appearance, in order to create a realistic representation, similar to a quality soap. Stars are replaced by young actors who have little or no experience; for the viewers, the interference with the persona of the actors, typical of fans' readings, is reduced. Nevertheless, it should be noted that, on the web, a cult emerges for these young actors who, according to many spectators, are better than the stars in Placido's movie: dozens of Facebook pages are

23. Personal conversation with a fan.

dedicated to Libanese interpreted by Francesco Montanari, the biggest having 34.924 fans (September 7, 2012).²⁴

Compared to Placido's movie, *Romanzo criminale* the series, having a long format, can deeply develop its characters. Reiteration of everyday situations boosts character transformation into familiar figures for spectators (that's what Milly Buonanno defines as «cultural proximity», which has a main role in Italian contemporary seriality, see BUONANNO 2012, p. 228). Libanese, Freddo, Dandi and Bufalo become individuals with memories and a personal life, whose behavior makes us reflect on our own existence, on love, politics and sex. Each episode adds more dimension to secondary figures, developing annexed subplots, turning them into full-fledged teammates of the main characters, often comical (Bufalo's outbursts of anger, brother Buffoni's naive and recurrent mistakes, Scrocchiazeppi's love troubles which offer opportunities for a commedia dell'arte-style humor). These are characters with whom the audience can identify. Deep friendship, crises in filial relations, romantic idylls; the humanness of these criminals creates an immediate proximity to any group of teenagers. We love these characters because they resemble us. When Libanese, Dandi and Freddo agree to play a game of soccer on the beach at the end of the second episode, they definitely conquer us with their youth. A viewer says: «criminals who look human because of their closeness. Dressed like my parents when they were young, Romans like me, and who grew up and lived not far from me». ²⁵ Cultural proximity to the audience increases the sense of transparency of these fictional figures, through the «death of objective distance» (PAVEL 1988; see also JOUVE 1992, p. 69).

This mechanism of familiarity is the basis of the viewers' attachment to the series. The series has an advantage over the film; since watching a TV series means being able to modify the choice of our favorite character over the episodes, since the series develops several characters who perform an «imaginary mediation» (ESQUENAZI 2009a, p. 127). Thus, a perspective on the viewers' relationship to the characters in terms of «companions» (GLEVAREC, PINET 2007) seems satisfactory for the series, instead of speaking of identification. The bandits eventually become part of our surroundings, they become our «friends» (see ESQUENAZI 2009a, p. 184). We want to know the details of their lives. For example, when Dandi gave Scrocchiazeppi advice on a tuxedo for his wedding, or when Libanese watched out frantically for his mother who refused to talk to him.

24. <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Francesco-Montanari-Il-Libanese/45006097055> (2013/03/21).

25. <http://www.mymovies.it/pubblico/articolo/?id=432124> (2013/03/21).

If part of the audience recognizes the humanness in characters and can not avoid succumbing to their charm, praising the quality of the series, others are unable to accept the «models of misconduct» that this product offers. Many viewers warn against the «dangers» of a series representing characters inspired by bloody historical events, showing a superposition of different analytical frameworks in the act of viewing: aesthetics and moral judgment intertwine. For the novel and the movie, there wasn't the same interest in discussing the dangers *Romanzo criminale*. The real controversy broke out in social networks or media from the airing of the series in 2008.

The phenomenon of negative role models – which is not new to cinema – seems more problematic with television products, since they are viewable by a larger and less protected number of spectators. A national specificity in viewer reaction has to be underlined: in France the series is read as a good Italian product, comparable to the American series *The Sopranos*; in Italy the staging of the history of the «Banda della Magliana» is primarily a social and political issue.

If it was just a fantasy novel about a gang of criminals, most readers would have sided with the criminals, like loving a Tarantino movie or *Natural Born Killers* does not mean approving morally what the characters do in the film. But this is neither a film nor a fantasy novel.²⁶

On the one hand, the attempt to boycott the series and a poll organized by the mayor of Rome indicate a willingness to exploit prejudices rooted in common opinion, namely the idea that *Romanzo criminale* encourages young people to do violent acts. On the other hand, the series is seen as an enveloping experience, in which viewers are willing to dive in in order to enjoy the story and experience an unfamiliar atmosphere, glamour and prohibited situations. As seen on Facebook pages, the pleasure of imitating a criminal's «technique of the body» (MAUSS 2004) is one of the primary elements used to show one's love for the television product, with greater intensity than the film. Imitation seems more frequent for male fans and for less cultivated communities of individuals. On the contrary, women, while not being excluded from this type of discourse, are more characterized by their commitment to cast members.

A fan's enthusiasm is rewarded by some sequences which characterize the series as «epic», through a particular use of music from the 1970s and 1980s. Music contributes to developing controversies in the public

26. http://www.ciao.it/Romanzo_criminale_Giancarlo_De_Cataldo__Opinione_464867/SortOrder/2 (2013/03/21).

sphere, since the soundtrack assumes - more than in the movie - its role as a pop element and contributes to a postmodern celebration of the protagonists' violence, evident in this blog comment:

Among the many strengths of a well-written, well-directed and well-played product, the soundtrack is cleverly used and becomes a real character like Buffalo, Dandi and Scialoja. The more a scene becomes burdensome, more, on the contrary, the music eases up. There is a risk of glamorizing violence. Everything becomes vintage and fashionable, even the lead, the blood, the savage cruelty of these stories. But this is always a risk when established criminals become protagonists. The harm done was not interred with their bones, to paraphrase the noble bard, but it continues after them. This happens today.²⁷

A stylistic device called a *clip* is both one of the series' innovative characteristics and a nod to tradition television, and contributes to the construction of the series as a cult object. These montage sequences last about four minutes, they are edited on a hit single of the time period and placed at the beginning or end of an episode. Their function is to bring together all the characters, who are located in different spaces, whether they have a common goal or not. Although we could read this combination of pop music and acts of violence in terms of defamiliarization, in terms of irony, or of anempathetic function (CHION 1985, p. 229), the interpretation of YouTube's users seems more appropriate, in particular the one who reads this type of sequences as a moment of pure enjoyment: «brilliant ending. I think the best ending, along with the end of the fifth [episode] when Libanese, Freddo and Dandi are arrested with *Pazza idea* playing».²⁸ Popular songs from Italian history ignite the Italian collective memory. These intertextual references activate a nostalgic pleasure, the charm of retro (see O'RAWE 2009, p. 217). The music is emotionally charged and already connoted as a mythical object. Providing emotion and activating an intertextual network, clip sequences, characteristic of postmodern style, enter the story as an «exhilarating» element, which represents an «attempt to convey strong and unverbilized sensations» (JULLIER 1997, p. 27).

One also notices the absence of dialogue in these clip sequences: the short formats are designed to be a «fetichisation of pure sensation» (JULLIER 1997, p. 135). The spectators enjoy the presence of these «short forms» that are a little kitsch, within the series, which distinguish *Ro-*

27. <http://sonostorie.wordpress.com/2010/11/22/la-mia-banda-suona-il-rock-e-pure-il-mitra-alloccorrenza/> (2012/09/07).

28. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_vSDTeR06PM&feature=relatedThe (2012/09/07). The video is no longer available.

manzo criminale from the canons of contemporary drama (but having learned the lesson from MTV). It causes an «epic» emotional effect, giving the represented events a mythical status. Indeed, these sequences are similar to tribute videos found on YouTube. They are central to the structure of the series, and insert rhythm into the sequence of episodes, and are a break from action scenes. This form therefore has a «playful» function, especially in the first season, and was the primary vector of cultural elements, as noted by Stefano Sollima: «I love the gap between love songs and the violence of this world, it gives the series a very Roman appearance».²⁹

As for the film, there are some limits to historiographical use of the series, as Milly Buonanno states:

TV drama and television in general militate as it were, in the field of popular historiography and popular memory; in such a role, they are more concerned with simplification than with accuracy, more committed to creating the conditions for emotional involvement than to pursuing the objective of analytical knowledge» (BUONANNO 2012, p. 213).

The second season came out two years after the huge success of the first and attempted to repeat it. On the one hand, «the first episode [of the first season] had 373.753 viewers, the second 326.221 viewers with a permanence of 64% and 62%: the results are comparable to the final match of the Champions League in 2010», ANSA news agency reported. On the other, 431.608 viewers and 451.805 viewers are reported for the first and the second episode of the second season.³⁰ The series had new significant features incorporated into it, which made it an original television phenomenon and confirmed the product's independence from the novel and film. Despite the success of the first season, for the second producers were eager to prove through public statements that the celebration of criminals was lessened and that the final message of series is «crime does not pay», which was confirmed in an interview by the actress who plays Patrizia: «the message of *Romanzo criminale* is that crime does not pay, the protagonists end badly».³¹

Innovations from the first season concern mainly the characters. In some cases, greater emphasis is placed on certain characters (including

29. *Romanzo criminale: entretien avec S. Sollima*, by F. Foubert, generiques-mag.net/authors/25-frederic-foubert.htm (2012/09/07). The content is no longer available.

30. <http://www.esclusivista.it/2010/11/ascolti-record-romanzo-criminale-2-fa-il-boom/1601> (2012/09/07).

31. <http://www.style.it/vanitypeople/show/tv/2010/11/17/intervista-a-daniela-virgilio.aspx> (2012/09/07).

Bufalo and Scialoja). Those who have read the book or seen the movie watch the series and find similarities with what they already know, but the experience will necessarily be different. Dandi undergoes serious changes from the first season. He becomes the «bad guy» (even in the transformation of his body, directly proportional to the disproportionate increase his wealth, shows his transformation into a formidable boss more and more similar to an ogre); the viewer also discovers that from his youth, Dandi's brotherly friendship with Libanese has been tinged with an element of betrayal. Thus, Dandi embodies the inversion of values that characterizes the entire second season. In the first season, the values were those of friendship, youth, love and fidelity. The second is marked by hatred, revenge, betrayal and decadence. In the first season, crime «paid». In the second, the exact opposite. This corresponds to changes in certain elements of style. Music montages are less frequent and leave place for darker atmospheres: instead of celebrating the rise of an enthusiastic young group (even if their behavior is condemned), the entire second season seems to show the pettiest features of a criminal.

Another novelty is the introduction of Donatella, a female protagonist who is a dealer. She actually works for the secret service and her job is to destabilize the group from the inside. She infiltrates the group after gaining Freddo's trust. Donatella's character brings freshness to the story since she embodies the independent woman who is not subject to the stereotyped gender roles of prostitute or nice girl. She shows her femininity in a way that is closer to that of the «femme fatale», who stresses her desire to succeed and proves she is capable of using the male protagonists for that purpose, without being subject to them. Donatella is universally hated by viewers: a video was posted on YouTube where a user created the assassination of her character.³²

The primary reason for such hatred is the fans' disappointment with respect to their expectations: the series breaks away from the book, Donatella kills Freddo, who in the novel does not die (in actual events Maurizio Abbattino, whose story was used by Giancarlo De Cataldo for designing Freddo, is not killed. Instead, he chose to turn informer). Many Internet users point at this discordant element as a defect of the series. In fact, Donatella's character is used to shed light on an intelligence operation that would have otherwise remained very obscure.

The viewer modeled by the series – from a semio-pragmatic perspective (ODIN 1983) – needs an immediate response, embodied in recognizable characters. Thus, as in a drama or a thriller, we know that the

32. <http://aftereffects.forumfree.it/?t=53074682> (2012/09/07). The video is no longer available.

culprit will appear at one time or another, while the film and the book leave open questions which authorizes more room for ambiguity and thus for interpretation.

4.6. Official paratexts

Romanzo criminale is at the center of a broad marketing strategy that develops in many media, confirming that the experience of a work is not reduced to a single autonomous artifact. A «guerrilla marketing» campaign was created to promote the television series. A video circulated online: in the middle of an October night, a truck stops near a park in Rome, men come out and quickly place four statues on platforms.³³ They are the statues of Libanese, Freddo, Dandi and Bufalo. The producers' aim was to create a buzz, explained by a video found on Vimeo: *Romanzo criminale* the series must become a «national case». The goal was achieved: the next day the national media talked of the scandal. Rome's mayor, Gianni Alemanno, wasted no time attacking this event by accusing it of encouraging acts of violence by celebrating criminals. According to producers, instead of praising actual criminals, «the reference to the book and the series was evident, by using actors' faces».³⁴ This operation of guerrilla marketing underlines a fundamental aspect of the *Romanzo criminale* phenomenon: the superposition of everyday life and fiction and the hybrid status of celebrating (even fictional) criminals. And it shows that an audiovisual product needs to colonize alternative spaces in order to make itself known.

In a context «saturated» by media, the meaning and the value of a product are also built outside what is traditionally considered the text (Gray, 2010). Next to a movie or series, «hype» is more and more important. It creates a number of different online and offline spaces that provide many opportunities for people to acknowledge the existence of a work and to interact with it. A «paratext» cannot be defined as a story, but is traditionally seen as ancillary to texts (Gérard Genette extensively described their role, GENETTE 1987), such as communication tools. Today these tools have become fundamental bricks in an entire audiovisual experience and are a source for reflection on the negotiations between text and spectator.

The world of *Romanzo criminale* is made of various forms of advertis-

33. <http://vimeo.com/groups/transmediarguerrilla/videos/6414785> (2013/03/21).

34. Ibidem.

ing, a website and an official website dedicated to the series, an online game, an iPhone application and the mobilization of artists who produced a music album. Therefore, *Romanzo criminale* could be read as a series of unidentical fragments through which the notion of original is lost, and which consists of a continuous sliding of signifiers, or as Derrida would put it, an «endlessly deferred hyperdiegesis» (HILLS 2002, p. 104, see also GRAY 2010, p. 43).

Generic readings, sometimes contradictory, are encouraged by paratexts that shape the rich and plural world of *Romanzo criminale*. The product becomes even more similar to a set of symbolic products and information organized within a label (or a brand), meticulously controlled by industrial players (the strategy was amplified with the series). Perceived as new areas for evaluating the product, to celebrate a commitment and to play, these paratexts create a new life for the series, the film and the novel. They offer spaces for consumers to create multiple meanings. Subscribing to Gray's pragmatic use of this term, paratexts enrich the tradition of film studies since the term designates any material created to accompany the release of a film (the poster, the trailer, DVD bonus material). «Paratexts are the greeters, gatekeepers, and cheerleaders for and of the media, filters through which we must pass on our way to the text itself» (GRAY 2010, p. 17) and they are directed toward different audiences, differing in culture and gender: «[...] some will only greet certain audiences» (GRAY 2010, p. 17).

Spectators perform interpretative operations at every moment of the experience: paratexts can be thought of as invitations to construct precise meaning, offering differentiated contexts for a cognitive and emotional work. For someone who is not yet a spectator, bumping into a group of teenagers wearing t-shirts with the portrait of Libanese and the slogan «Crime Pays» is a discovery of *Romanzo criminale* as popular culture. The series can possibly be interpreted by this spectator-to-be as a «dangerous» product, certainly very different from what would have been if the same viewer discovered it through rave reviews in the press. A series of contextual negotiation is still going on; historicized paratexts are situated or relocated in a time and in a particular context that determines the meaning of the experience.

In order to understand how different texts proliferate in a context of convergence, a distinction can be made between paratexts involved before the viewer encounters the text and those that operate during or after the experience (see GRAY 2010). We can also make a distinction between what consumers can purchase (T-shirt, CD, DVD with bonus) and the paratexts which require an exploration of new and traditional areas in search of content (such as producers' and television networks'

websites, Facebook pages, «official» parodies, free iPhone application). Rooted in socio-historical contexts, paratexts do not all have the same weight, since they depend on a variety of consuming experiences.

4.6.1. Trailers and recaps

Paratexts that a consumer meets before the show and hence concern the «would-be viewers» (GRAY 2012, p. 118) are trailers and recaps. These keep the TV series alive during the break between the two seasons, so as to create big expectations. A few months before the airing of the second season, a video circulated, summarizing the events of the first, recalling the centrality of Libanese and the lyrical moment of his death. An official trailer was released later. This art of «(coming) attractions», according to L. Kernan, who borrowed from Tom Gunning's well-known notion (GRAY 2010, p. 50), plays with audience's expectations, a promise of what is to come, and contains both the known and the unknown.

The fans appreciate these videos, which confirm, before the release of the new season, that the world they loved is not finished, it is still there, ready to receive them. They expect to find the same characters who became familiar figures. Viewers want to be surprised by spectacular images (see for example a sequence of a car explosion forecast for the second season) still disconnected from the narrative context, allowing them to make assumptions about the diegesis to come, and to share them in networks.

Two notions of fidelity are at stake in trailers. There is fidelity to the series as a «quality soap», and fidelity to the diegetic world of *Romanzo criminale*. Therefore, while waiting to get caught in the development of the story, and wanting to know the «truth» about the plot, spectators will be ready to react to unexpected events which will reveal unknown aspects about the characters' past, sometimes even inverting the values (including Dandi, who raises many hateful reactions when at the end of the second season, he is identified as the traitor responsible for Libanese's death). Trailers may emphasize some elements or characters to the point of excessively encouraging an expectation which doesn't correspond to the actual plot. This is the case of the second season, in which Libanese's role is reduced to a few appearances as a ghost, but the trailer seems to indicate that, even dead, he would still play a central role. The trailer accentuates the character's mythical status, nourishing fans' expectations.

Recaps, summarizing the key-moments of the series, help viewers remember facts which are pertinent to the current episode. In this case, paratexts reframe the text according to the upcoming show.

4.6.2. Online spaces

Some online spaces function as entry doors to *Romanzo criminale* and contribute to its multiplicity by encouraging users to participate and share content. The product is still «official», but open to discussion, and it faces bottom up appropriations (coming from the audience and not necessarily foreseen by creators).

Sky Cinema's official website contains information, video and news, building a fan's expertise. We can also find little treasures for fans, such as a video wishing «Happy Holidays» released in December 2009 in which Libanese, Freddo and Bufalo are shown in a topical moment (interrogating another crook), interrupted by the arrival of Scrocchiazepi and Dandi who take them to a Christmas Eve party.³⁵ For the 2010 Holiday season, other videos were released, in which the actors greet the fans.³⁶

Sky also produced a parody of the series, which aired in 2009 on the show *Assenza di segnale*, produced by Sky Uno. The title, *Manzo criminale*, is a play on words which truncates the word «Novel» («ro-manzo») and is homonymous with «manzo» («beef»). It is a series of clips whose protagonists are cows with a strong Roman accent. These excerpts were published on the official YouTube page and aired on Sky.

Producers use the Facebook page skillfully to provide news and collect feedback from viewers. In turn, users have the opportunity to discuss in a space that becomes an «affective community», enriched by the exchange of information based on subjectivity and personal taste. In the first season, the series did not take full advantage of convergence. This use of Facebook shows an increased awareness of the web's potential as a space to strengthen the brand image and *Romanzo criminale's* emotional power. The TV series' fan page, on November 16, just before the release of the second season, hosted an online dialogue with the protagonists. Users were encouraged to attend a video interview administered by a journalist and to participate in an online conversation, sending their questions to the actors. The Facebook page became a forum to inform fans on the secrets of filming, following a marketing strategy that aimed at building a «mythology» of the product.

The producers know how to build *Romanzo criminale's* world, using the increasing porosity of barriers between production and reception. To believe producers' claims, Donatella's character, for example, was

35. http://mag.sky.it/mag/cinema/romanzo_criminale/home.html?ref=hpmag (2012/09/07).

36. http://sport.sky.it/sport/speciali_sport/natale_talent_sky.html?t=marchioni (2012/09/07). The page is no longer available.

created for the second season in order to introduce a dynamic element. Although the audience continually notices the weakness of female roles (some comments indicate the excess of sentimentality of Roberta's character and Alessandra Mastronardi's inability to act), we have no evidence that allows us to say whether this need for a strong female figure is a result of an analysis of viewers' reactions.

4.6.3. *The game*

If audience participation involves much more than simply watching a show, as our analysis of appropriations proves, some extensions of *Romanzo criminale*'s fictional world create a real game-play experience. A key element for user participation is irony, emerging in reading criminal behavior in terms of enjoyment and celebration. In correspondence to the launch of the first season, an online game was created, in which players had to sell and buy drugs and weapons throughout the Italian peninsula. *RC The Game*, a Flash game, was based on the better known *Mafia Wars*, an MMORPG (Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game, where users have missions to complete in order to progress, in a network of players). The graphics come directly from the series' graphics, marked by a vintage style. By replicating the characters' activities, the game's features warrant a second degree reading: fans don't express their attachment to the product but rather they play with it, since being a naïve or first-degree fan would be socially unacceptable (BARRA, SCAGLIONI 2010, p. 46).

Some users make fun of the popularity that the criminal life style is getting. They read the game as an opportunity to join a model of misconduct and not in exclusively playful terms.³⁷ For others, it is simply a marketing strategy that spoils the spirit of the series (or the film): «in order to increase the product's activity the producers are making adaptations that are diminishing its beauty».³⁸

37. <http://www.vivamafarka.com/forum/index.php?topic=47345.0> (2012/09/07).

38. <http://forum.giovani.it/recensioni-videogiochi/113942-romanzo-criminale-tv-pc.html> (2012/09/07).

4.6.4. iPhone app

With the launch of the second season, Sky Italia developed an iPhone application, downloadable for free on iTunes, which served as a gateway into the world of the series³⁹. The experience is especially reserved for Italian fans since the only language is Italian. More than *RC The Game*, the iPhone app builds a particular media experience that shows how different media can be used in order to create a global experience in «convergence», in which each media brings its specific contribution. This kind of process can be called transmedial, having elements characterized by an opening which can potentially lead to diverse outcomes (such as the use in social networks, like the pictures and quiz results, the sharing of knowledge).

The software, which requires an Internet connection, offers a variety of content in a format that is similar to the graphic model of the series and is divided into four sections: «News», «Extra», «Games», «Record». The first two sections allow users to see a preview, read about the episodes and consult mini biographies of each character, view images in high definition as well as listen to famous quotes from Libanese, Dandi and Freddo. However, the application also acts as an aid for watching full episodes: Sky subscribers can record the episodes in high definition. Finally, in the «Games» section, users can challenge the characters to a pool game, test their knowledge of the series with a quiz. Fans can also edit their picture which appears superimposed with digital accessories imitating the style of the characters in the series (1970s style haircut, shirt, sunglasses...). The official Facebook page has a space dedicated to listing all the fans' photos with a «criminal style». These tools encourage the development of a specialized knowledge, according to a typical formula of cult phenomena, as pointed out by Umberto Eco in his study of *Casablanca* (Eco 1986). The universe of *Romanzo criminale*, broken down into details that only «experts» know, may be quoted by its fans as an encyclopedia.

However, a problem arises and this is related to the risk of raising the protagonists to a mythical status: «excellent! Although [...] be careful not to consider them as myths in reality».⁴⁰ Indeed, the risk is recognized by the producers. Reading the product description on the Apple website page, we learn that because of the frequent references to the use of nar-

39. <http://www.iphoner.it/romanzo-criminale-lapplicazione-ufficiale-arriva-in-app-store> (2013/03/21).

40. Such a comment could be found on the application's web page. The content is no longer available.

cotics, to «themes suitable for mature audiences» in a realistic setting of violence and simulation of gambling, this software is prohibited for people under 17, as stated in the regulations of the «App Store Review Guidelines» issued in September 2010 by Apple.⁴¹ If the series wasn't subjected to censure, in the case of an interactive product the viewer is a visitor of a virtual space that is proposed as a more realistic experience. The world of *Romanzo criminale* now seems more haunting and, for that, dangerous.

4.6.5. Merchandising

T-shirts, CDs, and other forms of licensed merchandising, represent the traditional link between textuality and commercial products, confirming the symbolic power of the product in the Italian context, especially for Roman audiences. A T-shirt with the portrait of Libanese printed on it encourages the mythicization of the character which is already common among certain fans. Nevertheless, we are facing the passage from a known form of marketing to a narrative that relies mainly on extra-textual material. *Romanzo criminale* is now conceived as a brand, linked to a picture of the city of Rome, centered on the suburbs and far from the touristic postcard. The image also refers, in general, to the values of loyalty, friendship, respect, always flirting with the «models of misconduct» (LINTON 1936).

October 19, 2010, exactly one month before the release of the second season, a «concept album» was sold in stores, dedicated to *Romanzo criminale*. The product is an anthology of tributes to the characters in the series, which tells the saga of the «Banda della Magliana» through music. Each track is dedicated to one of the characters. A single video clip was broadcast on the Internet, dedicated to Libanese. The operation helps build the characters' mythology, through the same narrative world, highlighting the values of honor, friendship and courage, which attract different audiences.

Some T-shirts signed by a graphic artist were also sold through Sky's Facebook page – some users noticed a similarity to the graphics of Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* (1992). Given as gifts for contests or sold as exclusive items, they are distinguished from simple T-shirts marked with cult phrases and figures of the «Banda» and become desiderata for many users who hope to reach a status of real fan through a major investment of time and money. At the same time, these very expensive

41. <https://developer.apple.com/appstore/guidelines.html> (2012/09/07).

T-shirts immediately triggered users' reactions that encouraged fans to adopt the philosophy of handyman, the «do it yourself» attitude typical in an anti-consumerism culture.⁴² Nevertheless, the slogan «do it yourself» evokes expressive individualism more than participation in a collective activity, as Jenkins recalls. Jenkins speaks of «do[ing] it together», more consistent with the collaborative arrangements of participatory culture.⁴³

Many of these products don't provide a significant contribution to the world growth, but, as Mark J.P. Wolf notes, «they can change the way that a world and its assets are experienced» (WOLF 2012, p. 278). They reinforce the perception of the characters' personalities, for example. In convergent consumption (see also BARRA, SCAGLIONI 2010, p. 69), a merchandising object becomes a «transitional object» (D. Winnicott): loyal to the show, they are also elements of identification, allowing users to give concrete expression to the affective bond. The context of convergence allows fans to share such affective responses and «techniques of the body» in a public space, in territories that encourage the staging of the self. The series' producers, having understood this mechanism, offer experiences that invite users to make their own commitment public, in defined areas. Contests, for example, such as the «hangman» game, taking place within the devices described above.

It should be noted that, in November 2011, a book was released, *Dossier Romanzo criminale* (PISONI 2011) which gives details of the making of the television series, pictures and original features. Moreover, at the end of the summer 2012, the Facebook page of the series started advertising for a new page: *Romanzo Criminale The Gang Is Back Home*,⁴⁴ a timeline, similar to the ones that Facebook uses now, in which all the main steps of the saga are grouped as a unique storyline. Additionally, the new book by Giancarlo De Cataldo was introduced, *Io sono il Libanese* (DE CATALDO 2012).

In conclusion, paratexts perform operations which reframe the experience of the fictional universe, adapted to the times and contexts in which they appear. Within a convergent system, can paratexts still rightly be considered as such? Do all these works have a role in building a new experience, or rather does the sophistication of this narrative depend only on a particular «efficiency» of the story?

42. <http://www.facebook.com/SkyCinema.RomanzoCriminaleLaSerie?ref=ts#!/album.php?aid=24269&id=126491090733420&comments> (2012/09/07).

43. http://henryjenkins.org/2010/05/why_participatory_culture_is_n.html (2012/09/07).

44. https://www.facebook.com/Sky.SkyCinema/app_277320399034574 (2013/01/05). The page is no longer available.

5. An «epic work»

5.1. *The limits of intertextuality*

In the previous chapters, *Romanzo criminale*'s universe has been described through the analysis of the texts and various media artifacts that constitute it. *Romanzo criminale* is the starting point for many different stories and versions of the same story, similarly to «high concept movies» (WYATT 1994) or multilinear narratives. Considering the novel, film and series along with the various appropriations, the global result is similar to what Rick Altman defines as a «multiple-focus narrative»: «signification works like a mosaic and its tesserae: the separate following-units of multiple-focus narrative eventually signify as a whole something quite different from what they represent individually» (ALTMAN 2007, p. 293). Each media makes its distinctive contribution. At the same time, the whole set of discourses creates a universe, characterized by autonomy and authenticity.

On the one hand, we analyzed the specificities of each media and, on the other, we outlined the basis of the «lateral knowledge» (SCHAEFFER 1987, p. 56) that viewers must have in order to grasp textual and intertextual references. After observing internal mechanisms, it is now necessary to understand the meaning of *Romanzo criminale* as a large architecture, adapted to the contemporary context of convergence. The notion of intertextuality will be challenged through the analysis of the notion of transmediality.

Intertextuality is a notion which can define the profound changes and significant additions that the novel undergoes when adapted for the screen. The story fits into a different context, determined by the situation of production and reception. Intertextuality can be defined, from Genette's perspective, as the coexistence of several texts in a same text. Different forms of intertextuality can be observed in *Romanzo criminale*. For example, indirect citations of a Hollywood thriller or Italian detective stories from the 1970s can be found in *Romanzo criminale* (the

novel, film and series). Readers and viewers who know the sources will interpret some scenes as more or less explicit citations: recognizing the source is a part of their enjoyment. A text also shapes another text when movies are used as diegetic elements in the novel (i.e. when *Touch of Evil* is used to describe Scialoja's feelings). Thus, intertextuality is a «ghost textuality», derived from the existence of texts «living beyond their time, always with unfinished business to perform» (FISKE 1989, p. 125). Intertextual citations, such as the use of archival footage in the movie, have specific effects: in some cases, similar to Sklovskij's *ostranenie*. For example, as seen in the previous chapter, an historical moment that the reader (or the viewer) already knows is treated in a particular way that gives a different meaning to history, making it unfamiliar. Therefore, the role of cultural memory is central for reading intertextuality, allowing viewers to find their bearings in a labyrinth of references related to generic frames, recurring situations, which help them anticipate depicted events (and create surprises when expectations are frustrated).

It should be noted that when links and innuendoes are made through various media we can also speak of intermediality: the viewer needs to be familiar with several media fields (literature, film, television) in order to grasp the meaning of a work.

In a context of convergence, intertextuality is broadly used and, at the same time, it seems to be insufficient to describe the modifications in film production and reception. Not only official texts, but also various forms of media discourse and information conveyed through communication devices become part of a story world: is intertextuality still a valid notion? Casetti talks of «relocation» of the experience, and of the impossibility of understanding the world through the «eye» that cinema had traditionally framed (CASSETTI 2008). The media, intended as the set of social values related to cinema, seems to survive the transformations that the medium or the film as a technique and a text undergoes.

5.2. Transmediality

Romanzo criminale can be described as a puzzle that makes sense only when viewed as a whole. The multiplicity of fragments which compose *Romanzo criminale* corresponds to many photos of the same place taken from different perspectives: different genres, a variety of focalizations, alternative readings in diverging contexts (the image is taken from ALTMAN 1999, p. 135). The feeling is that there is something more than a juxtaposition of fragments. The phenomenon can be compared to a «*pluralité opérable*» (GENETTE 1994).

Another notion, transmediality, can be used to better understand this multi-version and cross-media narrative, structured like a mosaic. This principle is not new: the Bible offers narratives that can be consumed in differentiated contexts and through multiple visual organizations of characters and situations, for example stained glass, paintings, frescos, miniatures... As seen in the introduction, Henry Jenkins defines trans-media storytelling as

a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story (JENKINS 2007).

Even though it should be noted that *Romanzo criminale* is a particular type of transmedia, since it wasn't designed from the beginning as a «coordinated entertainment experience» (JENKINS 2007), some of the terms that Jenkins uses to define transmedia can be employed to analyze *Romanzo criminale*.

Within transmedia storytelling, the idea is no longer «what to see?» but more «how do I get there?» and various types of involvement are required by viewers. The viewer can choose to lean back or to lean forward, to drill into the information regarding the fictional world or to share it. Some actions are carried out through a complex involvement, while other practices consist in sharing content with a simple click. Transmedia storytelling is based on the principle of «seriality» since it is a sum of many narrative bricks, similar to the episodes of a traditional serial text (feuilleton or TV series). Through recurrence, repetition and dilated time, *Romanzo criminale* allows its fans to become acquainted with its characters and spaces, becoming a persistent world. Moreover, social networks create new opportunities for *Romanzo criminale* to have persistence, such as official page updates and online games.

A transmedial world can be thought of as a «treasure hunt». The principles of «spreadability» and «drillability» refer to a consumer's enjoyment when searching for details, analyzing and comparing sources. The user knows that his or her involvement produces a good that is shareable among peers: the greater enjoyment comes from comparing experiences, ideas and findings («spreadability»), instead of keeping them to him or herself (JENKINS 2006a, p. 97). Thus, a «vertical» movement (the search for accurate information about a specific point in the story) works together with «horizontal» practices (looking for links, similarity and intertextual connections, based on collaboration). Storytelling becomes a trip, requiring time and offering many organized distractions and charms, like the «Paradis des Dames» described by

Benjamin: department stores are made in the image of the town and the town, as far as it is concerned, is made in the image of the world. Every exploration is a performance which passes emotions on to affective communities: when I say that I «like» a page, I leave an «affective» trace of my journey. Consumers, as poachers, seize elements which catch their attention. But they are also amateurs: the link to their intimate sphere is important and they like to share it. Viewers both identify with situations and characters and take elements (imitating gestures and «techniques of the body», for example) which can be used in everyday life and in social networks («immersion» and «extractability»).

When we look at the specific elements brought by each media, some readings will be valued over others (the «subjectivity» principle). The book, film, series and paratexts offer divergent viewpoints, which determine, for the viewer, very diverse modalities for entering the fictional world. In the case of the series, for example, the point of view of some secondary characters (such as Scrocchiazepi) is highlighted when compared to the movie and the novel, giving the narrative some comical openings, deviating from the primary narrative. This can be seen on the macroscopic level (within every media) as well as the microscopic (within each episode of the series, for example).

The principle of «performance» also characterizes transmedia storytelling and concerns consumers' activities and the different uses of the fiction that they produce. As viewers and consumers of media products, we are performers: we perform before, during and after the show. Performance is a corporal matter: through my body, I know if I enjoyed the show. Through my body, I can tell other people about my likes and dislikes. Watching a show together, I know if my partner shared the same enjoyment. Performance is a social activity and a cultural practice, requiring shared rhetoric and producing a specific knowledge. In today's remix culture everything is a raw material for crafts. Use, distortion, individual will, values and culture shape a media product, bringing it into real life and bringing real life into it. You Tube's aesthetics, for example, are based on performances in which the audience's reactions play an important role in defining the popularity of a video.

Finally, transmedia storytelling is the art of «world building». An experienced writer, quoted by Jenkins, explains:

When I first started, you would pitch a story because without a good story, you didn't really have a film. Later, once sequels started to take off, you pitched a character because a good character could support multiple stories. And now, you pitch a world because a world can support multiple characters and multiple stories across multiple media (JENKINS 2006b, p. 114).

Each work composing a transmedial narrative can be thought of as a window through which a world can be observed. The product is the starting point for a consumer's action to rebuild a whole. A world, at the same time, is a complex and growing structure, a territory in which different stories take place. A world can be mapped. A world can be used as an encyclopedia. Jonathan Gray's study on *The Simpsons* (GRAY 2005) shows that the encyclopedic power of this series, which represents parodically every element of Western society, has consequences on the viewers' reading of their own world. A fictional world, similar to our true world, allows us to test the validity of our values, ideas and behaviors, to anticipate situations to come and organize our knowledge. That is why *Romanzo criminale* is not merely intertextual.

Nevertheless, the notion of transmedia storytelling is also insufficient to describe the important role of an audiovisual product to function as a territory for reworking a society's values. Transmedia storytelling doesn't have to be considered as a revolution: instead, it's more interesting to note that it recycles, sometimes in a very refined way, traditional modalities of consumption, by mastering network strategies. If something has to be kept from this notion, we shall say that transmediality's specificity lies in its ability to organize a series of various and heterogeneous practices.

Transmediality describes a cross-platform path in which the viewer naturally has more «choices» when compared to a single film or book, but it is not necessarily a more interactive phenomenon than a traditional text. Social networks are tools for smart marketing strategies based on affectivity and «strong» bonds, as the series shows. Facebook pages invite fans to share their enthusiasm, to comment on and create new content. An «official» space can be used for the expression of affection and personal emotion. Audiences interact within Facebook pages, websites, and express creativity within the frame. On a more participatory level, fans are invited to send their creations to be included in official spaces, as we have seen for iPhone pictures doctored in *Romanzo criminale*'s style. Fidelity and creativity are rewarded, along with accurate fan knowledge of plot and characters: the hangman game is publicized on the website as well as on the Facebook page, and pictures of the winners, having dinner with the cast, are posted. *RC The Game* takes users to a deeper level of involvement, by recreating the series' atmosphere, without offering an exploration of a different plot.

If these experiences prove that all kinds of activities are encouraged by producers, it should be noted that audience activities create a real polyphony. YouTube, discussion boards, personal blogs, Facebook profiles and pages provide a veritable playground for spectators. These are

spaces where all the possibilities of the «long tail» of *Romanzo criminale* are explored. When compared to the main information (official videos being the most sought in search engines), the substantial accumulation of information in these spaces represents a large proportion of the activities that enhance the brand image of *Romanzo criminale*.

A mechanical correspondence between producer's strategies and viewers' reaction is not observable: a behaviorist approach is simply not possible. The background noise becomes more and more important. The most interesting part of transmedia happens outside the frames of official products. Moreover, transmediality can even develop in the absence of a deployment of media and devices from producers. Fandom plays an important role in helping a transmedia storytelling to develop through crafts, following Michel de Certeau's concept of poaching (DE CERTEAU 1990). Viewers produce fan fictions and apocryphal products which dilate the initial universe, following their personal desire to expand a beloved fictional world. This is the case of *Romanzo criminale*, which was not designed as a transmedia storytelling. For some viewers, the film or television series add to the experience of the novel. Yet for those who discovered the series first, *Romanzo criminale* is represented only by the series, and the other texts are seen as more or less successful ways to continue the experience.

Romanzo criminale's intertextuality is built over time, from snippets of tales and general news that strongly moved Italian citizens. Furthermore, it is built using the big repository of genre movies. *Romanzo criminale*'s transmediality comes from its power to generate a myth. We can consider *Romanzo criminale* less a text or a set of texts enclosed in an intertextual device than a practice of watching, and thus «an enigma» that could not be solved by textual analysis alone», such as *Dallas* studied by Ien Ang (quoted by GRAY, LOTZ 2011, p. 63). Its world becomes a space in which individuals and groups create new meanings and perform disparate activities. In conclusion, it is not appropriate to talk of a difference between «official» and «apocryphal». Instead, the hypothesis of a living environment, marked by consistency and heterogeneity seems to better correspond to *Romanzo criminale*'s phenomenon. Adapted to the contemporary media situation, not only is *Romanzo criminale* an object intervening between viewers and reality, but it also functions as a territory in which miscellaneous practices take place. An «ecosystem», in the language of information technologies and marketing: a complex environment that integrates flows of content produced by users (for the use of the term ecosystem, see INNOCENTI, PESCATORE 2012).

5.3. *Beyond transmedia: an «epic work»*

In the case of *Romanzo criminale*, the notion of transmediality is insufficient, since the narrative is more a superimposition of texts, an overflow, than a transmedia storytelling as defined by Jenkins. Instead, *Romanzo criminale* seems to correspond to a different kind of phenomenon: its specificity lies in being an elastic narrative space, welcoming diverse appropriations. The notion of «world building» helps go beyond transmediality and allows us to focus on *Romanzo criminale* as an autonomous environment, welcoming grassroots and official products. The stratification of a product over time shows its ability to generate a world.

Placido's film and Sollima's TV series were produced a few years after De Cataldo's novel. The series remained in the public sphere and in media discourses for several months after its broadcasting. Today *Romanzo criminale* is still strongly rooted in Italian culture. The media reported that a police operation named «Romanzo criminale» was carried out by the Carabinieri in the Italian town of Gallarate on March 8, 2011. The operation targeted a group of teenage drug dealers who identified with *Romanzo criminale*'s characters.¹ In a more playful way, cigarette lighters with the picture of Libanese, Freddo and Dandi were sold in Rome and online.² How did it happen? What are the most interesting features of this phenomenon?

The answer lies in the hypothesis of an «epic work». Franco Moretti uses the term «epic» to define his analysis of narratives universes, replacing the notion of modernism, which has become unusable since it contains «too much» (MORETTI 1995, pp. 4-5). Henry Jenkins also uses the term epic when defining the origins of transmedia storytelling: «Homer was able to create an oral epic by building on 'bits and pieces of information' from preexisting myths, counting on a knowledgeable audience to ride over any potential points of confusion» (JENKINS 2006, p. 122).

The term «epic» gives a particular status to a work. It inserts it into a discourse which exceeds the dimension of a single media and corresponds to the founding of a culture. Like television in Cultural Studies, an epic narrative has a «bardic» function: it has the capacity to tell a community's story by involving members in the dominant value system. Together the members celebrate events, reassert their shared values and culture, demonstrate their unique practices and identity; and, ultimately, provide a sense of cultural belonging (FISKE, HARTLEY 1978).

1. <http://nottecriminale.wordpress.com/2011/03/09/quando-il-crimine-diventa-mito-da-gomorra-a-romanzo-criminale-piccoli-criminali-crescono/> (2012/09/07).

2. <http://www.caprishop.it/it/accendini-romanzo-criminale-p-6667.html?osCsid=8491a8850db9b41d1da03d0204bd3209> (2012/09/07).

Hegel affirms in his *Lectures on Aesthetics* that every event connected to a world and a nation has to be considered epic (GUIBET, LAFAYE 2003, p. 238). Some essential features of epic as a genre are its historicity, the presence of two opposing sides and a hero. The author and the first consumers of an epic belong to the same culture. The text has a specific function in representing a society's values and tensions and parodies confirm the vitality of this genre, allowing it to adapt over time to the changes in society (see LIMENTANI, INFURNA 1986). For these reasons, for *Romanzo criminale*, the notion of epic is pertinent because of the product's national dimension, even if truthfulness is secondary when compared to the circulation of the shared symbolic values of a society. Thus, a true-fictional event adds narrative elements to the story, hinting at a community that shares the same interests. The story represents crucial national events which deeply touched Italian people. Events like Aldo Moro's kidnapping and murder and the bombing at Bologna train station are connected to the story and create a particular effect, somewhere between realism (some talk of «neo-neorealism») and postmodern enjoyment, in which a bit of truth and a bit of fiction is needed. «Images can pass original information provided that they are otherwise partially redundant with the receptor's memory and knowledge» (SCHAEFFER 1987, pp. 89-90).³ Therefore, a viewer's «lateral knowledge» builds the experience of fiction and consequently creates an effect of proximity, but also of uncertainty for determining the boundaries between historiography and myth.

Here, the term myth indicates the superimposition of layers in the representation of the past. After Homer, the notion of myth (which means «word», «discourse») is enriched with the meaning of fable and, with Plato, of tale, a non-historical but plausible account. When poets add made up elements to history, or cut long events in order to tell partial or incident stories, they create «fragmented discourses linking up with a society's heterogeneous practices and articulating them in a symbolic manner» (DE CERTEAU 1990, p. 298).⁴ Individuals from different origins and countries create a collective knowledge of *Romanzo criminale*. The notion of myth proposed here wouldn't be complete if it were limited to the description of an object. A myth functions as an explicatory grid. Users' appropriations give myths their capacity of reading the contemporary world. In this perspective, epic is also a form of celebrating a

3. «L'image ne peut transmettre des informations inédites qu'à condition qu'elle soit par ailleurs partiellement redondante avec la mémoire, avec les savoirs du récepteur» (Schaeffer 1987, pp. 89-90) (my translation).

4. See also Verdrager 2011.

culture: formal elements (special effects, the simplification of gender roles and the omnipresent intertextual links to gangster movie heritage) work as a generic frame to help viewers situate their experience. Music and archival images create a feeling of belonging to the same (television) culture, contribute to writing history and stress the importance of emotion and «bottom-up» reactions, like in postmodern style (JULLIER 1997). In turn, users share these moments, they put fragments online or make personal tributes, confirming the use of music as a creator of social and cultural bonds.

It should be noted that the adjective «epic» is also used in contemporary Italian literary criticism to indicate a tendency of breaking the system of the novel, often by the use of transmediality, secondary perspectives and alternative stories or uchronies (see Chapter 4). This tendency, which the Wu Ming Foundation called «New Italian Epic» (WU MING 2008) is characterized by forms that twist History and introduce a hybridity between fiction and real events, through allegory and the reuse of various archive materials. New Italian Epic is a particular form of historical novel, deeply rooted in the Italian context, between homage and nostalgia, alternating realism and postmodernity - but adding to the postmodern attitude of detachment (LYOTARD 1979; HUTCHEON 1988) an ideological and ethical approach. Thus, the term epic creates a continuity with the Italian tradition of literary epic (from Torquato Tasso to Alessandro Manzoni), marked by strong political and ideological intentions. Epic should be understood here in the Hegelian tradition as «the song of a collectivity looking for its coherence» (HEGEL 1997, pp. 309-310) but, at the same time, it indicates the will of playing with the vulgate of the term, as a synonym of large and ambitious. As for traditional literary epic since Homer and Virgil, every epic has a hero: an individual's destiny confronts the collective dimension. At the same time, forms of polyphony valorize a background noise and give place to other voices, which are alternatives to the main narrative. Up to this point, epic, «the most fleeting element of the literary field» (GOYET 2009), covers rhetorical elements and indicates a particular relationship to a national past.

Epic as a rhetorical element, then. Something more has to be said about epic, starting from a pragmatic approach. For *Romanzo criminale*, a divided Italy, between charm for transgression and love for solid values of friendship and honor, finds its image in a mirror. In this mirror, Italian users also find elements for playing with their culture and for rewriting their history. Along with Italian fans, though, several communities of users coming from different countries enter the game, and contribute to the growth of *Romanzo criminale's* world. Not only a mirror, then, but also transnational realm, addressing universal questions and expanding

through contradiction and paradox. In the hypothesis of this book, epic is a space for conserving models but also a playground for innovations and re-routings.

5.4. *Orality and aurality*

Audiences are accustomed to a «snack» culture, a consuming of bits of content, often presented in a non-linear manner. Sometimes users are just looking for new content. In other cases they gather information concerning a well-known narrative universe. Oral mode is dynamic and concrete, rooted in the social sphere, even if short-lived. Notably, oral mode is dialectic, in opposition to literary mode (see FISKE, HARTLEY 1978, p. 105). This transmission of content is linked to a notion of secularity. Content is spread through different centers and audiences' reactions contribute to giving it new forms. Thanks to a «participative» culture, epic shows how to interpret political situations that seem fixed (see MAIGRET 2000). Thus, epic freedom depends on a consumer's ability to master a fictional universe, to play with it, and produce original meanings or contradictory readings.

For *Romanzo criminale*, Italian history becomes the raw material for a series of grassroots operations: *Romanzo criminale* is transformed into an epic not only by a single movie or a global narrative, but rather by a galaxy of pictures, messages, Facebook statuses, discussions and objects creating a complex system, thereby exceeding the dimension of textuality. The oral nature of performance has an important role (see also DUPONT 1994) linked to the body that opposes the writing culture.

Oral knowledge has to be considered as a moveable material, always changing through adaptations and variations. In today's web 2.0, marked by the absence of a hierarchy of scribes, myth has to be understood as the product of a society's contributive labor. Internet plays a particular role in shaping myths today: if every user is a producer of content, not only is orality a distinctive feature of the flow of information, but communicational situations are also characterized by «aurality»: the audience's power to interact and, thus, define the characteristics of every work.

5.5. *Polyphony*

For Bakhtin, epic values are stable, fixed and used to establish the basis for setting a national mythical past, set in a distant time. Moreover, for Bakhtin, an epic is a totally achieved work (BAKHTIN 1978, p. 453). My use

of the notion of «epic work» challenges Bakhtin's concept, since we are faced with an open territory marked by extreme fragmentation and, sometimes, an inversion of values. When considering fan fiction, for example, we can no longer speak of canon (official products are no longer the only texts that circulate). We must speak of a living mythology based on fan appropriations: in fan fiction sites, the notion of «fanon» circulates, indicating a range of accepted transgressions to the original canon. This leads to the establishment of new standards. More than one truth is at work in viewers' reactions: an historical one and a fictional one (see also ESQUENAZI 2009). As a result, there is no fixed meaning. The narrative is seen as a «world» due to the coexistence of a richness of detail and an internal consistency.

Therefore, the presence of different voices contributes to building a space that is rich in discourse and where users must find their own path. According to Franco Moretti, «in the expanding universe of modernity, many things are still unclear, and we must learn to live within the sound: to represent - and, perhaps, to listen - without too much embellishments» (MORETTI 1995, p. 59). Users discover, through an assortment of superimposing media experiences offering sometimes contradictory meanings, that history doesn't have one voice, but rather, through discrepancy, redundancy, adaptations, it constitutes of a polyphony that has to be measured with anachronism and synchrony with the contemporary world. The result is a galaxy of media being enriched by reciprocal contributions (in a postmodern reality characterized by the disappearance of Grand narratives).

Within *Romanzo criminale*'s transmedial environment, many voices formulate the different aspects of its universe. Even for a single user, many dimensions overlap. Identities are off-center, multiplied, comparable to a pastiche or collage (JAMESON 1991), and depend on an eclecticism of taste. Nevertheless, there is a difference between the observed phenomena and the detached nature of the postmodern mind. For *Romanzo criminale*, we observed strong ethical involvement, the production of moral judgment and even political discussions. For example, a fan explains the reasons for his love for the series on moral grounds:

The real source of interest is their desire [the characters'] not to submit to authority, to go against the grain and even create new rules... in a society like ours, where people are revolting against oppression from their couch and talking with their friends on mobile phones, see people like you and I, poor guys, tired of being jostled around, this makes us consider them as myths.⁵

5. Personal conversation.

The coexistence of diverse approaches and their capacity to define a complex space of discourses prove to be the epic's main features. Rick Altman puts epic in the «dual-focus narrative» category, in which the narrator alternates between two groups whose conflict creates the plot and which «normally concludes with the elimination or containment of the side condemned by the text's rhetoric» (ALTMAN 2007, p. 55). What I define as an epic work, following Florence Goyet (GOYET 2006 and 2009), doesn't perforce elicit the reader's sympathy for one of the two groups. Even the *Iliad* never sides with one of the two opposing sides, but it rather recreates both the Achaean and Trojan viewpoints and sets of values. As Florence Goyet underlines:

Not only dialogism, but also the presence of «equally valid voices», clash of contradictory truths where neither one or another is privileged [...] The epic solution would thus be «trying» the different possibilities, taking them seriously. Following their logic without establishing in advance their respective values. In a word, instituting a real polyphony (GOYET 2009).

It is exactly this «similarly charged magnets laying equivalent claims on the same space» (ALTMAN 2007, p. 57) that we find in *Romanzo criminale*, the novel, film and TV show. The social phenomenon represented by *Romanzo criminale* and the whole series of reactions in the public space corresponds to this epic structure. Consequently, the «epic work» becomes an intellectual tool which enables the members of a community to give a representation of their time and provides them with a hold on their own world. Appropriations, often contradictory, as observed in this study, create an environment made by an overlapping of different readings.

5.6. Popularity

An epic work is rooted in popular culture. Over the years, *Romanzo criminale* has become a widespread, well-known phenomenon thanks to the producers' strategies and fan appropriations. «Mass art or entertainment is probably the most common form of aesthetic experience for the largest number of people » (CARROLL 1998, p. 172): its accessibility (at least in Western culture, for Carroll), enhanced by digital media technologies, contributes to making it omnipresent in contemporary social discourses, as the spreading of *Romanzo criminale* proves.

Romanzo criminale was often accused of being successful. Controversies in the media (see the case of the survey organized by the mayor of Rome) surface every time a new «narrative brick» appears, and they are frequently revived on the Web. These controversies confirm that when

a product becomes popular, even though it has been recognized as a «quality» product by critics, it is still looked at with a certain degree of suspicion (see RIESMAN 1960).

When reading De Cataldo's novel, we can observe that its sources come from pop culture: the detective story (the so-called *giallo*, in Italy, has always had less legitimacy than thrillers in the anglo-saxon sphere) and the *poliziottesco* (derived from the Italian spaghetti western) are popular genres. Placido's movie and Sollima's TV series are filled with video clip montages and 1970s pop music which are typical elements of contemporary pop culture.

If Adorno and Horkheimer (1974, pp. 165-166) thought that mass art denied its autonomy and kept individuals from developing their rational faculties, another possible perspective comes from Michel de Certeau's «make do» approach (DE CERTEAU 1990). Kant advocated detachment in order to appreciate aesthetic experiences. Pop culture, on the contrary, has to be used. Popular art helps us to understand the world in which we live (JULLIER, LEVERATTO 2008). Fans learn behaviors from films and television and, through remix practices, they live them (see also STAIGER 2005, p. 65). «Popular culture is not consumption, it is culture. The active process of generating and circulating meanings and pleasures within a social system» (FISKE 1989, p. 23). Pop culture has the potential to spread across multiple channels and reach a large number of users; at the same time, grassroots practices show that pop-culture values are rewritten and spread again. In its various forms, consumption keeps pushing the limits of a universe.

Therefore, popular art is the territory for a society to transform (HALL 1981). For *Romanzo criminale*, models of Italian identity are played «from inside»: old meanings are confirmed or transgressed by new readings and performances. Users take «the pleasure and the power of making meaning, of participating in the mode of representation, of playing with the semiotic process – these are some of the most significant and empowering pleasures that television has to offer» (FISKE 1987, p. 239).

5.7. A ceaselessly expanding world

In conclusion, positing the hypothesis that *Romanzo criminale* is an «epic work» allows us to define both its rhetorical and pragmatic features. *Romanzo criminale's* extent makes possible the existence of a plurality of information concerning it. Orality, aurality, polyphony and popularity contribute to the growth of a world and transform it into an experimental realm, useful and even indispensable for affective and

cognitive needs (see GEFEN 2010, p. 293). The more the world is open to readings, the more it will be able to answer questions people are asking themselves, because it will encourage consumer use and creation. The surplus of meaning that fans insert into the work becomes the essential element that has to be studied.

Romanzo criminale as a filter for reading Italian culture and past becomes a catalyst for discourses and performances and a connector of communities. These phenomena, in turn, shape it and contribute to its development as a world, through viewers' desires, like in the final sequence of *The Neverending Story* (W. Petersen, 1984):

«Fantasia can arise in you»

«How?»

«Open your mind ... And the more wishes you make, the more magnificent Fantasia will become».

Conclusions

The film keeps talking to us, in a coherent way, enlightening us on social, moral, and political issues, which will always concern us
(BURCH 2007, p. 59).¹

The approach that I employed in my research does not deal with the ontology of the text («what is a text?») but with its phenomenology («what does a text become for someone who activates certain meanings through a specific use?»). Some epistemological conclusions concerning the process of constructing meaning from the observation of fan practices need to be drawn.

This work began when social networks started to impact society on a large scale. As my research progressed, social networks, showing the interconnected nature of media images and social discourses surrounding audiovisual products on the web, have become increasingly present in everyday life, for viewers and researchers alike. At the same time, the development of online fan practices was interpreted through hypotheses concerning the rise of a new cultural paradigm (JENKINS 2006a) in which audiences were able to participate in a new form of democracy, or a collective intelligence.

In this context of digital connections, «disembodiment» and «relocation» of the audiovisual experience, viewers can assume several identities and perform multiple roles simultaneously. Being a consumer *and* a producer of video and media artifacts are, for most viewers, two facets of the same experience. Ideally, an apocryphal work can become just as popular as an official one (even if, in fact, for economic and institutional reasons, traditional hierarchies still apply). The result is that, from an online ethnographic research, both textual (or official) and what can be broadly considered «oral» discourse (critiques, parody and grassroots art, presentation of the self, various performances) overlap. As a result, *Romanzo criminale* can no longer be considered only a film, a novel or a series, but a world, comparable to an «epic work». *Romanzo crimi-*

1. «Le film continue à nous parler, de façon cohérente, illuminante, d'enjeux sociaux, moraux, politiques, qui nous concernerons toujours» (my translation).

nale has the capacity to «proliferate through rhizomes» (see Deleuze's notion of rhizome, and also its use in the study of popular literature, VAREILLE 1989), establishing connections in all directions. Trying to define its extent corresponds to describing a flow of social discourses (debates and controversies in the social sphere, self-expression) which create an imaginary realm. Consumers participate in the expansion of the narrative world: this is not new, but the Internet makes the essential feature – sharing – easier. Attendance leaves its place to performance.

In this context, we found an abundance of material: this does not mean that the scientific study of this material now moves faster or with greater ease than before (or offline). On the contrary, every piece of material has to be considered cautiously and examined case by case. In this research, I had to organize the various Internet spaces through categories in order to make coherent assertions on the phenomenon represented by *Romanzo criminale*. I checked the data at different moments: when I observed redundancy, I considered the online space as exhausted. Nevertheless, as information on the web is constantly increasing and transforming, I never considered the experience of a space as completely ended (even up until the last revision of this book). It should also be noted that every corpus constituted by Internet links is always fragile. Often, after verification, I discovered that consulting a source was impossible because the link no longer existed or the video had been removed because of copyright infringement.

The Internet is a space where written culture and oral culture intertwine: information is dynamic. Collaborative spaces like Wikipedia show that shared knowledge is reworked every day, adapted to the context and accessible at any moment. Media content is relocated, as described by Francesco Casetti (2011), creating a circulation of images and discourses. This situation determines a particular mode of observation. As a researcher I had to make observations in different online spaces synchronically. Data are stratified over time: the persistence of information allows the researcher to retrieve old discussions fairly easily. Textual information is always present and searchable. Audiovisual content is less retrievable: we can find it using search engines only if it has been tagged. Social bookmarking devices allow users to share links of their favorite websites using tags which, at the same time, describe a content and declare a personal interest. From an epistemological perspective, this personal collection of public data corresponds to a knowledge built through mash-up: fragments of information are put together by each user and considered as elements of a larger experience and need to be shared in order to exist.

In order to better describe this profusion of roles and situations, staying close to the viewer's true-life experience, I had to analyze the ac-

tivities, the rules and the infractions to the rules, by paying «clinical attention to the nuances of everyday life» (as we can read in Passeron's introduction to HOGGART 1970). In this attempt to define a territory for viewers' activities, the researcher is always connected, the observer and the object cannot be separated. I tried to analyze the cultures that are in play in *Romanzo criminale's* world. It was necessary, in this attempt, to include my own culture: «the observer is part of the observation» (LÉVI-STRAUSS 1980, pp. xxvii-xxviii). Ethnographic research builds the relationship between the observer and the situation, or the show and the subjects, with their beliefs and real-life experiences. Had I employed a «modern» perspective (LATOURE 1991) which separates the observer and the viewer, I would not have been able to construct my study. I would have denied my role of mediation between different cultures. Matt Hills underlines:

This is the dark side to Jenkins' enthusiasm: far from revealing the cultural processes which academics have been positing, the proliferation of interpretations might in fact threaten to destroy the conceptual space or distance required for the formulation of academic meta-readings, leaving no viable cultural «outside» for the academic deconstruction and hierarchical reconceptualisation of contemporary social life. (HILLS 2002, p. 137).

Finally, this pragmatic study of an «epic work», a work that encourages viewers to create new products, allowed me to shed some light on the contemporary audiovisual culture and find a way to define an epistemology of spectators, through tradition and innovation. When analyzing viewers' practices related to *Romanzo criminale*, I worked as a translator, confronting discourses as well as the modalities for transmitting these discourses: my aim was to find a representation of these living elements, through description and classification. Instead of drawing general conclusions on fan behavior, I looked at the viewers' activities taking place in the spheres of private and public life, and portrayed a set of situated practices and their contextual factors.

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