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The Italian Digital Classroom

Editors:
Tania Convertini
Dartmouth College
Simona Wright
The College of New Jersey
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Introduction

How often have we wondered how much better our life would be without technology? At the dinner table, when our children seem to receive an uninterrupted stream of notifications; at a restaurant, when annoying ring tones steal the peace of our dinner; in the streets, where walking is simultaneous with texting. At the coffee shop, where, standing in line, one often overhears bits of conversations with Siri. And finally, in our classrooms, where despite our no-technology policy, students can barely disconnect from the digital world for a mere fifty minutes. Irritated and frustrated, we wonder why technology is dividing us instead of connecting us to the world. Considering all this, why, then, a special issue on technology? And, more to the point, why technology in the classroom?

The answer is simple: because technology has dramatically changed our lives and our relation to reality, and it will continue to modify the way we learn, communicate, and perceive the world. Technology, in sum, is here to stay. Social media, social reading, blogging, and augmented and virtual reality are the future that is already here. Sharing with our students Italy's literary and cultural tradition, the significance of our national cinema, the basics of Italian grammar, and the complexities of medieval poems, we ought to be aware of when and how to use technology and which pedagogical role we want digital tools to have in our classrooms. Shifting our perspective and empowering students to use digital tools effectively is the key to unlocking the pedagogical potential of the digital classroom. As tempting as it is, a nostalgic return to traditional approaches that exclude technology from the classroom will prove disastrous, because our students live and breathe through technology, which has become central in their understanding of the world. To that end, this volume includes examples of intentional and productive integration of technology in the Italian classroom.

Much evidence points to the benefits of using technology in the classroom. Technological tools empower learners to construct personal learning environments for the purpose of independent inquiry and promote inquiry-based learning (Drexlet). It can also provide students with opportunities for greater motivation and a sense of ownership of their learning (Terrell), as well as tools that allow students to develop their foreign language speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills (blogs, wikis, video sharing sites); user-generated content is what makes

authentic communication tools an opportunity for active learning in the classroom and outside of it (Sykes et al.).

While we want to embrace technology, it is also important to be aware of the challenges it might present, from learning how to use new media to the treatment of sensitive data, to the choice of having (or not having) a social media presence. It also should be noted that technology is a tool, and for it to aid in student learning we must follow pedagogical guiding principles. There are a few simple guidelines to keep in mind when rethinking the classroom as a digital learning space. The first is that technology is useful only when it empowers us to do something we could not do otherwise. If students can make a poster with paper, glue, and markers, it is perhaps not necessary for them to learn complicated software to construct a digital version. It is possible, however, that they might want to take a picture of their poster, share it online and comment on it. In that case, technology would empower learning, communication, and reflection. The second guideline is moderation. It may not be necessary to use more than one technological platform at a time in a given course, for example. The last guideline is purposefulness. Students need to know why they are using technology and what they will learn from it; digital tools become intrinsically more meaningful if they are part of a shared strategy for learning.

This special issue, in the variety of different pedagogical experiences presented in the essays, addresses the fundamental value of pedagogy when considering the use of technology in the classroom. Our increased access to technology and our increased interest in it must be paired with the effort to prioritize learning. In this issue we have been careful to present a broad range of practice and research, from blogging to mind mapping, from Twitter and micro-input to digital archives, providing useful examples of how technology can be successfully integrated into the Italian classroom. Through a variety of approaches and objectives, the essays we have included in volume XXXIX, The Italian Digital Classroom, share the same goals: to increase student engagement and to encourage the understanding of technology as an enabling tool for students to actively construct meaning.

Stemming from a series of experimental practices in the classroom, Lisa Sarti and Carmela Scala's contribution, *Blogging Pinocchio: Reworking Culture in the Italian Classroom*, explores the intersection of virtual learning tools, such as blogs and discussion boards, with the study of classic Italian fairy tales. Paradigmatic of the modern Italian tale, Carlo Collodi's Pinocchio was used by the authors as a primary source to engage students in aural, oral, and written

activities focused on the acquisition of language and the development of cultural competence. Reading and blogging on Pinocchio encouraged students to analyze both the structure of the narrative as well as its historical context, challenging them to understand the past through the lens of present-day technology. The study is organized around data collected initially at Hunter College of The City University of New York and St. John's University in the spring semester of 2014, with beginning and intermediate learners of Italian. A careful examination of the experience and comparison with traditional writing assignments gives evidence of significant improvement in the students' writing skills. Blogging activities facilitated open and immediate sharing of thoughts, quick response through non-threatening peer feedback, and significant reduction of syntax and spelling mistakes, while allowing the acquisition and retention of sophisticated vocabulary.

Fabrizio Fornara's contribution, *Micro-Input: Effects of an Instructor Model on Foreign Language Student Production on Twitter*, examines the effectiveness of the instructor-centered model in the teaching of foreign languages, specifically with online written production. The experiment involved almost one hundred students of Italian who used Twitter, a popular micro-blogging service, to post daily micro-blogging messages for a period of twelve weeks. The objective was twofold: to examine the usefulness of the traditional model, based on a teacher-centered class, in an educational context that is confronted daily with the ever-increasing role of digital technology, and the effectiveness of teaching methodologies that blend digital tools with foreign language instruction as a primary space of intervention. The study reveals that the blending of the instructor-centered model and digital technologies can improve students' written production, particularly in the case of recently introduced verbal forms and previously learned vocabulary but fails at convincing the learners of its overall impact. However, the general positive attitude students express toward this experience serves both as an encouragement but also as a warning that new methodological practices need to be developed that decenter the role of the instructor in the acquisition and retention activities, promoting a student-centered environment that favors self-learning.

As coordinator of the Italian Studies Program at Saint Louis University, Simone Bregni is aware of the importance of a multi-media approach in the teaching of foreign languages and believes that the thriving enrollments in Italian at his university are the result of the introduction of innovative teaching technologies in the traditional

curriculum. In his article, *Using Video Games to Teach Italian Language and Culture: Useful, Effective, Feasible?* Bregni explores the full potential of gaming with interactive multi-media narratives in the language classroom. His competence in and passion for the world of video games, together with a sound theoretical and methodological framework, produced a series of lab and classroom activities that involved video gaming (specifically the Assassin's Creed series) that engaged students both at the language and cultural level. While learning Italian, in fact, students also familiarized themselves with the history and everyday life in the Middle Ages and Renaissance Italy. In his study, Bregni discusses the many applications of video gaming in the classroom but extends its applicability also to online courses, where preparatory and follow-up activities are developed to further student retention and interaction, while class discussion and face-to-face activities can take place via video recording and group conferencing software.

In the essay *The Digital Archive and the Italian American Classroom*, Johanna Rossi Wagner looks at how the creation of digital archives in an Italian American course can engage and motivate students to conduct rigorous self-directed research. Here too, as in Scala and Sarti's experience, the objective is to empower students to become protagonists of the learning process, to guide the course narrative and to produce primary source material for dissemination among an audience of peers and researchers. Rossi-Wagner is aware that current theory and methodology in higher education reject the traditional lecture-based model for instruction in language and cultural studies using new technology, but she is also mindful of the difficult task of implementing new strategies in teaching and learning. To avoid the pitfalls that scholars have identified in the student-centered paradigm—impoverished content and diminished academic rigor—Rossi-Wagner invested time in the careful design of an oral history/digital archive project with emphasis on three main objectives: increased student autonomy in deciding the content and scope of the project, a new relationship between students, research materials, and primary sources, and improved use of available technologies.

Digital technologies find an ideal application in the humanities at the intersection of disciplines such as history, cultural, and media studies, as Massimo Riva and Valeria Federici argue in their essay, *The Garibaldi Panorama & the Risorgimento Archive at Brown University: Current Developments in Visualization Techniques and Methodologies for Teaching and Research*. Developed in 2007, the Garibaldi & the Risorgimento digital archive at Brown University offers a

comprehensive deposit of materials for the interdisciplinary study of Giuseppe Garibaldi's life. What makes this archive particularly interesting is the opportunity to visualize the Garibaldi moving panorama, a popular form of 19th-century public art, and to access digitized and searchable materials from various library collections, such as portraits from the Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection, extensive selections from the 19th Century Illustrated Press, and dozens of digitized pamphlets from the Harvard Risorgimento Preservation Collection. Scholarly essays and conference proceedings engage students in researching Garibaldi from a multiplicity of perspectives. In addition, the Touch Art Gallery enables interaction with a high definition version of the panorama on haptic screens. The archive is a work in progress, enriched continuously by the contributions of undergraduate and graduate students, whose projects are the focus of the second part of the article.

The evidence of the multi-applicability of the digital component to the Humanities is confirmed by Massimo Lollini's project, *Reading, Rewriting, and Encoding Petrarch's* Rerum vulgarium fragmenta *as Hypertext*, which reflects on the results of a seminar offered at the University of Oregon in 2014. Dedicated to re-reading Petrarch through the Oregon Petrarch Open Book, a database-driven hypertext of Francesco Petrarca's *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, the experiment developed from the challenge of transforming the passive reading of a single text into a rich and textured literary experience. Driven by Stanley Fish's critical questions on the digital humanities, the course objectives focused on how digital tools challenge learners to understand the humanities in an entirely different way while promoting empowering and agency-driven practices. The study articulates how the various activities (transcribing manuscripts, incunabula, and commentaries, studying different translations and modern re-writings, analyzing intersemiotic transpositions, even creating tweets) transformed students into discussants and contributors to the ongoing research on Petrarch's masterpiece. In addition to a general introduction to the Oregon Petrarch Open Book database, in his article Lollini discusses the significance, applications, and assessment of an experiment that aimed, successfully, at finding new and meaningful philological tools to approach and interpret Petrarch's work in original and captivating ways.

In *Mind Maps: New Perspectives*, Metello Mugnai explores the effectiveness of the application of mind maps, initially conceived by Tony Buzan as a note-taking method, in the digital classroom. Their structure as image-centered radial diagrams was fashioned to visually

present information arranged hierarchically around a central idea, from which propagates a large number of minor concepts. Mugnai argues that this model can be applied successfully in various learning activities, for it is useful in approaching the new material or in reviewing or expanding on previously internalized knowledge. The popularity of mind maps is well-known: its use is quite prevalent among students as new software becomes accessible online and can be used in individual or collaborative digital assignments. Mugnai's focus in this article is on the use of Mind Map Maker, an application that is part of the Google Drive software suite, which is free and easily accessible. Mind Map Maker allows the creation and the modification of mind maps online, and this gives Mugnai the opportunity to present practical examples of its use inside and outside the classroom, in an analogical or digital setting, as well as in small groups or individual projects.

The last article of this volume is dedicated to the exploration of online, blended learning in the teaching of Italian. Rosario Pollicino's *Tra sincrono e asincrono: L'insegnamento Online-Blended della lingua italiana*'s primary objective is to propose a methodology that combines both synchronous and asynchronous modalities, blending face-to-face and online activities to overcome the shortcomings and weaknesses of these methodologies as they are employed singularly. Integrating both learning modalities, Pollicino argues, has several advantages, primarily in maintaining the central role of the instructor, who provides general guidance throughout the learning process, but also in recognizing the increasingly meaningful role of students as agents of their own learning. While in the blended learning mode the instructor remains the primary provider of linguistic input, much more freedom is given to the learners to efficiently manage the time dedicated to designated activities. The asynchronous model is quite suitable, in fact, when learners are not traditional students, who need to manage learning practices in more flexible ways, maintaining the rigor expected in an academic pursuit. Furthermore, Pollicino sees the blended learning model as attractive to both traditional and non-traditional students, who could find the flexible schedule more attractive than the conventional in-class model, encouraging them to become empowered and thus more committed learners of foreign languages.

Carol Chiodo concludes the volume with a brief, but critical contribution on the role of the Digital Humanities in Italian studies. To better understand the present, Carol Chiodo invoke the help of Giambattista Vico, whose philosophical question about "current study methods" can still guide the Digital Humanities and any liberal arts

education, for that matter. Carol Chiodo's reflection is a perfect conclusion for this special issue on the Italian digital classroom. We hope you will find the reading of the essays thought provoking and will make you want to explore new ways of using technology in the classroom.

Tania Convertini DARTMOUTH COLLEGE

Simona Wright THE COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY

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Blogging Pinocchio: Reworking Culture in the Italian Classroom

> Be still when you have nothing to say;
> when genuine passion moves you, say
> what you've got to say, and say it hot.
> D. H. Lawrence

Who knows if D.H. Lawrence would have really found it "hot" to entrust his writings to the fluctuating memory of the blogosphere. What is sure now is that Wikipedia reports that in 2017 there were over 440 million blogs in existence.[1] It is difficult, however, to know the exact number of bloggers active today in cyberspace, as statistics have proven that "a new blog is being created every second of every minute of every hour of everyday" (Keen 3). But the increasing success of platforms, such as Tumblr and WordPress, corroborates that millions of technologically semi-literate people efficiently use blogs everyday either to enhance their business endeavors or for personal reasons.[2]

This prolific blogging trend has now also made its way into second language acquisition. Recent scholarship has enhanced the use of blogs in the classroom as a trusted and effective way to foster students' autonomy and empowerment in communication and writing (Bloch; Carney; Ozkan). At the core of this article is the same faith in the integration of virtual learning tools with face-to-face instructional methods. What we aim to highlight are mostly the benefits of intermingling modern technology with traditional fairytales and what these benefits can bring to foreign language teaching. We focus specifically on Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio* (1883) as it is contextualized in the Italian classroom as a meaningful text to boost students' communicative competence, while also helping them gain intercultural literacy without losing sight of the challenges triggered by the digital revolution now running our personal and academic lives.[3]

Blogging has turned out to be an essential tool for this learning process. It is both a charming and familiar means for younger generations, who find themselves at ease when using the "language" they know best—that of technology. By taking into account the work on Collodi's *Pinocchio* done at Hunter College of The City University of New York and St. John's University with beginning and intermediate learners of Italian, this article will prove that blogging is surprisingly effective both in strengthening intercultural competency and in reducing

grammar mistakes along with sloppy writing styles in posts, particularly when compared to traditional handwritten homework. What emerges as significant from this study is the power of peer pressure that cannot be rivaled by the safe, private feedback that instructors provide when they return graded assignments. The fear of being exposed, judged, or even scorned by one's fellow classmates reveals, indisputably, that blogging is conducive in the fight against sloppy work.

Pinocchio was chosen over other canonical literary works because it represents a true iconic cultural text—a sort of inescapable rite of passage for generations of Italian readers. For us, *Pinocchio* was a must-read during our childhoods. A life lesson in print, teaching through the punishments and mishaps the puppet endured. It is not a surprise, in fact, that foreign authors often marvel at the exceptional popularity Collodi's work enjoys in Italy and its long-lasting educational role, which has no counterpart in any other country.[4]

As a matter of fact, Collodi's *Pinocchio* not only spurred an abiding intellectual discussion that involved major authors—from Moravia, Manganelli, and Calvino to Rodari and Tabucchi[5]—it also contributed to the shaping of modern readership. Its concise action and dialogues, its irony set against the author's deep respect for local culture, the character's refusal of authority, and his childhood-like rebellions play(ed) on the *fin-de-siècle* and modern reader with the same intensity.

Pinocchio's uniqueness stands in its very ability to teach with a direct, colloquial language and timeless examples that speak to the young reader with incomparable effectiveness. Collodi's talent for characterization and humoristic details, for crafting dialogues that are erratically comic or tragic is what brings forth Pinocchio's true ambivalent essence in the most sympathetic way. Torn between the shivers of mischief as a puppet and his fervent desire to become a decent boy, Pinocchio weaves his behavioral tension into the narrative so emotionally that it is impossible for the reader not to identify with him.

It is this charismatic spirit of Collodi's book, which is so deeply rooted in Italy's regional culture, that we wanted to transmit to our students. Pinocchio is an everyman, curious and flawed, disrespectful but eventually willing to swing around, who candidly speaks to our inner self regardless of the date of its composition and the plot's occasional darkness. In cultural terms, it was important that we acknowledge Collodi's modernity and the strength of his pedagogical message in the Italian collective imagination—which stands in direct contrast to Walt Disney's purged and sugarcoated version of the wooden puppet known to most Americans.

Since *Pinocchio* was taken as the model text to integrate language learning with cultural knowledge, the chart below offers an overview of the courses, the materials, and the time that were devoted to discussing Pinocchio in class, as a way to verbally reinforce the topics, points of view, and cultural differences brought forth by the students' blogs and homework:

Course	**Class Size**	**Meetings**	**Duration of Class**	**Chapters read from *Pinocchio*[6]**	**Class time dedicated to *Pinocchio***
Ital. 106 (second semester)	19 students	Twice a week	75 minutes	8 chapters	15 minutes
Ital. 201 (third semester)	20 students	Twice a week	75 minutes	10 chapters	15 minutes
Ital. 202 (fourth semester)	14 students	Twice a week	75 minutes	12 chapters	20 minutes

When pairing a traditional fairytale such as Pinocchio—which was originally composed to educate 19th-century audiences on lessons of moral and civic responsibility—with the crisp, concise writing style of the blog, the result is a new learning environment in which students are encouraged to re-interpret the past and its canon through the lens of their technological present. Before discussing the use of *Pinocchio* in class, the students' reactions to it, and the advantages of combining tradition and modernity, however, it may be fruitful to address a most urgent question: why use fairytales in second language acquisition at all?

Storytelling is one of the oldest pastimes in existence.[7] Fairytales have been around for as long as humanity can remember. Since antiquity, stories were passed down from one generation to the next, orally at first and then through the written word, giving birth to the long literary tradition of folktales, myths, and legends that still intrigue us today. In fact, it does not come as a surprise that, since the beginning of civilization, folktales have been the safe-keeper of all that past generations wanted to pass on to their youth.

In a way, fairytales are a sort of cultural and folkloristic encyclopedia; a sort of journal that ancient generations kept to detail their lived experience and precious knowledge. They are the ancient version of our modern social media platforms, from Facebook to Instagram, to

Twitter and open access blogs. In fact, just as the old generations were eager to share their experiences, beliefs, ideas, and ideologies by telling stories or recalling ancient folktales, our generation does the same today via social media. Pointing out these similarities to our students before introducing fairytales is rather important because it helps them connect more to the stories and engages them more in the reading.

Furthermore, despite what one might think, fairytales are not stagnant "stories." Fairytales evolve with time; they are constantly revised and adapted to the needs of our ever-changing society—which is what makes them virtually immortal. However, their "social" role seems to have remained the same. Indeed, in ancient times, fairytales were thought to explain the unexplainable, as they provided the emotional support fragile human beings needed in order to cope with the perils of the unknown and dispel the fear of death.[8] And it is remarkable how throughout the centuries fairytales have continued to serve this purpose, powerfully encompassing time and social/cultural changes.[9] It was this very adaptability that, according to Jack Zipes, made storytelling an irresistible genre capable of promoting new customs and social mores by altering "tiny tales" until they grew into the "whale like" narratives that have reached us today:

> Think of a gigantic whale soaring through the ocean, swallowing each and every fish that comes across its path. The marvelous, majestic whale had once lived on land fifty-four million years ago and had been tiny. Part of a group of marine mammals now known as cetaceans, the land whale eventually came to depend on other fish for its subsistence and thrive on the bountiful richness of the ocean. To grow and to survive, it constantly adapted to its changing environment. The fairy tale is no different (Zipes, "The Meaning" 221).

Even in this aspect (helping people cope with the unexplainable or with their fears) fairytales resemble our contemporary social media platforms. One only needs to think about all the flash-mobs organized via social media or the plethora of posts and comments on these sites any time a tragedy (personal or universal) strikes.

Another good reason to use fairytales in the language classroom is due to their universality and adaptability across cultures. The universality of the tales makes them familiar to students, and their adaptability makes them "unique" to each and every culture. It is for this particular reason that fairytales represent a way to fill the gap between

language instruction and cultural enrichment. What Paul Hazard said for England works for every nation: if you want to know what a nation was in the past and will be in the future, you need to take into consideration children's literature. The idea is that the old tales can tell us what the old generations valued as important, while the new ones can tell us what the modern values (the ones the children are reading about now and will act out in the future) are. By looking at those values, we can understand if and how a nation is changing or has changed. This makes children's tales a cultural repository of unparalleled worth that we should share with our students: "It is therefore logical that we specifically steer out students toward the fairy tales of a particular country at one point or another, if we expect them to learn about that country's deep-seated values" (Obergfell 441). Possibly, just as it is true for Perrault's stories in France,[10] some of the values that were important in Collodi's *Pinocchio*, might not be relevant anymore. But it is undeniable that by discussing them students will learn about cultural differences and how some of the fairytale's allegedly "old" morals might still be respected in contemporary Italy. But to this we will return later.

In spite of their long history and cultural importance, fairytales have been often misinterpreted and misunderstood, especially in their educational message. In *Spells of Enchantment*, Jack Zipes questions the general assumption that "fairy tales were first created for children and are largely the domain of children," since "nothing could be further from the truth" (Zipes, *Spells* xi). The evidence that Western civilization has grounded fairytales in history through fantasy and metaphors somewhat exorcises such bias. Children love tales as much as grownups do, mainly due to the genre's capability to give the illusion of change and independence. With no age restrictions, fairytales liberate and empower the imagination.[11]

Even in the case of *Pinocchio*, looking at its plot as mere entertainment for children would be sadly disappointing—a lesson that our students learned after the first few classes. Before starting to read the novel, they were asked to write a paragraph on what they already knew about Pinocchio. Interestingly, all the three classes involved in this project answered this question by referring to their knowledge of Disney's cartoon, including those students with Italian heritage.[12] Very few of them (only 10%) specified in their responses that they knew about an Italian character named Pinocchio because they had heard of him from their grandparents, but they all naively admitted that they thought he was the European version of the Disney protagonist. In other words, they were expecting a childish and entertaining plot.

After reading the very first chapters of the novel, however, the students promptly concluded that Collodi's *Pinocchio* was anything but a children's book due to its dramatic tone, dark episodes, and the misfortunes experienced by the wooden puppet (who is actually a "child" of poverty, gaining his education on the road while the country around him struggles with post-Unification hardships).

As a matter of fact, it does not take long to notice that Disney's version of the story removed poverty and famished characters in exchange for a sugarcoated adventure—one where Geppetto did not have to sell his only jacket to buy Pinocchio the book he needed for school.[13] As Richard Wunderlich and Thomas Morrissey note, the film industry's imperative was to offer "soothing imagery" during the Great Depression, which could make viewers forget about the problems they were facing due to unemployment and the comforts they lost in everyday life (96). This would explain why Collodi's cold and unfurnished little room is visually transformed into the cozy, colorful cottage where Disney's Pinocchio could live his cheerful adventures.

Pre-testing the students' knowledge was a useful means for us to assess the course objective: learning about the customs and traditions of Italy while practicing and reinforcing the language through the context of a canonical text. In order to promote a true communication-oriented proficiency, activities on *Pinocchio* were driven by a cultural, rather than a grammatical, goal. Students were asked to analyze the leading character and the events involving him by isolating the most interesting moments in the chapters and explaining why they found them important. Students were expected to chart events as a draft to interview someone in the class and eventually come up with a series of contrastive and comparative statements. By creating sub-goals (the focus here was on actions and events) in the lesson plan, students successfully managed to express their feelings about Pinocchio as well as their likes and dislikes about his pranks.

Observing students prepare a draft to conduct the interview/survey gave us an excellent idea of the vocabulary they actually needed to complete the task. With this goal in mind, we designed matching activities (both with pictures and bilingual options) and multiple-choice questions in order to contextualize the vocabulary; these activities were then reworked in at-home assignments in the form of visual slides, drills, and fill-in-the-blanks as a meaningful extension of the class outside of school.

The blog was the final step of this process, with the virtual board serving as the space to share personal thoughts and comment on their

peers' posts. Significantly, blogging liberated the imagination. Over 40% of the students put themselves in Pinocchio's shoes, writing about how they would feel in a similar situation, while 60% offered possible alternatives to Pinocchio's misdeeds and the consequent punishments. All in all, the students excelled at capturing the cause and effect logic of the book and Collodi's educative goal in using it. However, the most rewarding result of this activity was seeing the students recycle in-class vocabulary in their posts while successfully employing key words and grammar (especially *passato prossimo* and *imperfetto*).

Mistakes (both in spelling and syntax) diminished significantly. When comparing the first posts with those written in the last three weeks of class, we noticed a striking 90% improvement in style and punctuation, as well as in the ability to make a point through a more articulated sentence structure. Also, adjective-noun agreement was drastically ameliorated, in addition to the awareness that in Italian, unlike in English, it is not necessary to always express the subject. Students spontaneously stopped writing "noi siamo" ("we are"), exchanging it for the more colloquial "siamo" ("[we] are"), thereby demonstrating a mastered ability to grasp the linguistic nuances between the two languages. We noticed that in their traditionally handwritten assignments the subject "noi" ("we") continued to be used in sentences. The blog, thus, turned out significantly useful both for enhancing fluency in the target language as well as for the recycling of colloquial expressions.

In their recent research, Amy Benjamin and John Crow (2013) stress the importance for minds to revisit and review words as the best strategy to "keep them alive." They argue, in fact, that only the vocabulary stored in the brain "for retrieval" is productive, as opposed to words that are used "only to study for tests" (58). Catherine Doughty (1991) even stretched this rationale to learning grammar, claiming that meaning-oriented strategies are productive in mastering both non-communicative structures (i.e. grammar) and the full comprehension of the input (431ff). Our study certainly goes hand in hand with this scholarly logic. More so than computer-based, lexical activities, in fact, the blog engaged our students in practically processing and mastering vocabulary, especially those words with multiple meanings in different contexts. Of particular note is the rewarding experience both for the students and the instructors to see the quality of writing dramatically improve over the course of the semester.

In the case of *Pinocchio*, the real bridge between mere memorization and grammar was culture. When given the task to re-write new chapter endings (intermediate) or describe a character by listing

his/her peculiarities using examples from the text (beginners), all students relied on their curiosity for cultural markers to complete the assignment. Although initially amused by Pinocchio's picaresque wrongdoing and naiveté, students easily picked up the serious side of Collodi's story, which they approached through their multicultural lens. It is no accident that the liveliest class discussions triggered by the blog posts involved differences between Italy and America, in particular the way parents educate their children. Students were clearly puzzled by the brutality of Collodi's punishments for his rascal Pinocchio. "Sono i bambini punito così in Italia?" ("Are children punished this way in Italy?"), writes GN in her post.[14]

As a matter of fact, throughout the book the poor puppet is pursued by assassins, rabbit undertakers threaten him with death for not taking his medicine, he is almost fried in a pan as a fish, hanged, drowned, and devoured by a shark, not to mention the trauma he experiences by ending up in jail, being forced to serve as watchdog, and being turned into a donkey. If disobedience and misdeeds put Pinocchio in trouble, however, students could not help noticing the difference between Collodi's message and the simplistic, watered-down Disney version that essentially screened the puppet's incapability to distinguish between good and evil.

Interestingly, class time was used to share thoughts on Collodi's pedagogical approach thanks to the wave of the comments posted on the blog. Was the book's darker tone more effective in conveying the teaching message? According to 90% of the students, yes. The narrative realism was evocative and crude at the same time, but it better taught the lesson of the perils of laziness, intolerance, and repentance as an end in and of itself. They were stunned by Pinocchio killing the annoying cricket, a more tragic destiny for the poor, savvy insect than Disney's Jiminy singing the iconic "When You Wish Upon a Star."

Blog posts also commented on the "creepiness" of the little girl when announcing that all in a house were dead. The exchange reported below is visually and culturally powerful in proving how the students in the foreign classroom re-elaborated the *fin-de-siècle* narrative from their "technological" perspective:

> AL: Pinocchio è un libro per i bambini e c'è una bambina morta?!?! 
>
> TA: Si, era molto strano!

AD: Anche io pensavo che era strano una bambina morta nel libro!
KR: Boh!

The insertion of an emoticon in the above post to emphasize the student's puzzlement and the colloquial Italian expression "Boh!" attest to a powerful combination of traditional, informal, and more descriptive written language that certainly legitimizes a new way to communicate, eradicating the barrier between grammar, slang, and new socio-cultural trends. As a matter of fact, the major challenge for students and instructors in these classes was understanding Collodi's work from its 19th-century context and not reading it from a biased contemporary perspective. The result was the birth of a new and inspiring modern cultural community capable of sharing thoughts and ideas on the importance of valuing and preserving national identities and costumes rather than discarding or judging them within their historical shell.

To help our students better grasp the importance of Pinocchio, we asked them to isolate those values and lessons strictly linked to the 19th-century cultural climate from those that are still considered "core values" of Italian national culture. For example, we pointed out how Italians generally prefer narrative realism over the embellished narrative typical of American children's literature. We also explained how the Fata Turchina, the loving and yet very strict mother figure, is a character who still resonates with Italian children today—virtually every Italian child has heard at least once in his/her life time the admonition "if you lie, your nose will grow long!"

As language instructors, one of our most difficult battles is to successfully introduce culture in our elementary and intermediate classes.[15] Fairytales provide a fun and effective way to accomplish this task, while also offering a chance to put grammar in context and reinforce vocabulary. In the last few years, much progress has been made in the integration of culture in our language classroom as it is now clear that studying culture enhances the interest in the target language, giving our students another reason to "want" to learn by making the process more meaningful. As a result, almost all textbooks on the market today have a section (as small as it may be) dedicated to culture. The problem is that, for the elementary and intermediate classes, culture is introduced in "bits and pieces" and is presented mostly via "stereotypes," concepts widely known and accepted but not necessarily true. There is indeed a tendency to leave more serious and realistic cultural elements for upper-level classes. But what if our students only take elementary courses and

do not pursue a degree in the language we are teaching (i.e. Italian)? In this case, the risk is for them to walk away with little to no knowledge (or even worse with the "wrong" knowledge) of what Italians and Italy really are today. Hence, the need to talk about real cultural values and patterns from the very beginning is strong. By including fairytales in syllabi, this lack of culture competency can truly be addressed.

Further Outcomes on Implementing Fairytales in the Curriculum Core

Because of their structure, fairytales naturally work well in the classroom: they are relatively short, present an authentic use of language, and provide a good base for grammar and vocabulary review/expansion. More importantly, they put students in touch with a familiar setting, stimulating their attention and engaging them in the reading. The short length of the narrative, then, has two major advantages. First, it grants the instructor the possibility to complete the lesson plan in one class period, which should be welcomed as a significant benefit, considering the limited amount of time teachers usually have at their disposal. Second, it grants the student the satisfaction of reading *a complete text* as opposed to selected excerpts from a book.[16]

In our study, the latter proved pivotal. Empowered by their ability to master the story from beginning to end, the students showed a significant rise in motivation. Indeed, our work with *Pinocchio* proved that when students are able to read a complete text in a foreign tongue, they feel more accomplished. This achievement feeds self-esteem while simultaneously increasing interest in the target language. At the end of the semester, for instance, JW wrote, "Io non posso credere che ho letto il libro di Pinocchio in Italiano!" ("I can't believe I read Pinocchio in Italian!"), to whom GA responded, "Anche voglio raccontare questa storia alla mia nonna" ("I want to tell my grandma about this story!"). Evidence shows that students won't be able to understand every single word of the text (and we are not recommending translation). But the context and the unfolding of the plot will be inductively clear to them thanks to the fairytale's predictable structure.

Major considerations also involve the language employed in the tales and the way it facilitates the students' understanding. The lexicon consists of pre-fabricated patterns and recurrent series of words, with repetitions and formulas that experts have collected under the umbrella term of "formulaic language."[17] Indeed, simple sentences and fixed linguistic structures facilitate the learning and cognitive process. For

example, at the beginning of a fairytale we all expect to find expressions like: "Once upon a time…" or "There was a time when…," in the same way that we all assume the stories to be populated with princes, princesses, ogres, witches, and villains. We know there will be a protagonist opposed by an antagonist, and that the hero will have to face many trials in order to conquer or rescue his beloved.[18] All of this adds familiarity to the text and lowers the affective filter of the students, hence engaging them in the reading, which, in turn, becomes fun and informative at the same time.

Another positive aspect of fairytales is that they foster the students' thinking processes and creativity. It is easy to spark a conversation in class based on the moral of the story and consequently, compare and contrast opinions. As we have seen, another possibility is to shift the conversation to cultural differences (i.e. Italian vs. American culture) or ask the students to rework the ending of the tale as well as write their own original fairytale. In this respect, blogging is a valuable tool for the instructor, as it makes the students feel more involved and learning becomes almost effortless.

This is also the moment when creativity is at its peak. For example, while on the topic of the eccentric events that Pinocchio has to deal with, we asked our students to talk about something "weird" that happened to them using *passato prossimo* and *imperfetto*. The results were posts that offered the most hilarious comments. GT recounted the memory of a stray cat that entered from an opened window and jumped on her while she was watching TV, while JF amused the class community with the funny argument he had with his friend, who had apparently stolen his "action figure." Comments on this post flooded the virtual board, attesting to how our students' minds think in real-life ways and naturally engage in context switching. Fast (and somewhat expected) was their mental association of the double-jointed wooden puppet with a modern fancy collectible. Again, Pinocchio's 19th-century reality was extrapolated from its historical context and reworked with the experiences of the present.

Ultimately, the funny comments triggered by JF's post were a cause for reflection on the importance of amusement both in teaching and learning. We could not but agree more with Zac Zambor that "laughing leads to learning" (62ff). Recent research, in fact, shows how humor in class, regardless of the discipline, can help students ingrain information and pique their interest even outside of the classroom, provided that hilarity serves as a complement to and not a distraction from course material.[19]

In our case, Pinocchio went perfectly with this logic and proved a valuable source of collective inspiration for jokes and shared amusement. The puppet's adventures—despite being incredible and brutal—almost became an encouragement to daydream, a sort of virtual excursion into that *Pleasure Island* that so powerfully captivated Pinocchio. In other words, we fell under the spell of the narrative and the power of the unconscious, which, for Bruno Bettelheim, takes us back to the irrational enchantment typical of imaginative stories. In Bettelheim's words, "the fairy tale, from its mundane and simple beginning, launches into fantastic events" (63).

And so it was for us. We started commenting on the first steps that Collodi's whimsical puppet took within the harsh reality that was *fin-de-siècle* Italy—a reality evident from the very beginning with the marionette's paper clothing and bread cap. And we ended up laughing at posts commenting on the hilarious episodes from another *Pinocchio*: the popular eponymous Korean TV drama. In this drama, Collodi's plot suffers from a wholly new and extravagant ailment: lies cause the characters to hiccup until they confess the truth.[20] HK and KC, two Korean students in the intermediate class, shared funny posts with video clips dubbed in English from *Youtube*, which triggered hilarious comments in Italian, especially those on false reports in the news and the fake celebrity world.

Blogging once again led us to walk along unexpected trails, such as practicing the *condizionale* while we imagined how our lives would be affected by the incapability to lie due to the "Pinocchio syndrome" as in the Korean TV show. This fictional "illness" was a funny and out-of-the blue way to end our class, which taught us the most important lesson we could learn from fairytales: they made our teaching experiences enjoyable and productive, and in turn, made our students' learning experiences pleasurable and fruitful. As the old adage says, *docere* truly meant *delectare* in our case.

Major Reflections on the Importance of Blogging in the Italian Classroom

This study proved that blogs are, for the new generation, the modern version of the old-fashioned hand-written journal; a virtual space where writing becomes instantly public and sharable, translating the fast pace of the modern thinking process. Blogs give the instructor the true pulse of the mind—and consequently the learning—of our students. Information is fast and short, as young learners favor, and more

importantly, it is conveyed through comparisons and connections rather than dull memorization. A considerable body of scholarship in psycholinguistics has by now demonstrated how, in second language acquisition, memory has to be taken into account for its function beyond the mere acquisition of new words and inputs. This is the case because the retrieval and the storage of information is important in order to retain what has been learned over time.[21] Our experience with blogging confirms this trend. Posts fostered word recycling and consequently consolidation, as well as retention of vocabulary and grammar. The recurrence of some words strictly related to Pinocchio's storyline, such as *povertà*, *bugie*, *punizione*, *perdonare* (poverty, lies, punishment, to forgive) were used in the right context and confirmed significant improvement in producing a more complex sentence structure in comparison with the weak statements in the posts at the beginning of the semester.

Throughout the course, the comments posted offered a chance for us to reflect on how blogging facilitated creative learning rather than the mere drilling of information into the brain. As we have seen, the population in our three classes mastered new content through analogies—or by relating Pinocchio's adventures to their personal, everyday lives. The result was a compelling conversation triggered by arguments that in turn generated counterarguments. Students did not always agree with each other. One of the most recurrent expressions in posts was the very "Non sono d'accordo" ("I disagree")—but they were not afraid to say it. In the end, we acknowledged the evidence that even the shyest students were able to express their points with a self-confidence they surely did not show in class debate.

What the blog offered the class was independence in learning, a quite surprising achievement that went beyond the academic understanding of the topic. When blogging, students appeared to be moved by their own initiative and motivation, which fostered the challenge for us to implement new teaching strategies, tackling instruction from the learner's perspective. This was a significant accomplishment, if we consider that experts speak of "self-regulated learning" as one of the most important goals students hope to achieve, which also has a serious impact on the way teachers need to interact with their classes (Zimmerman and Schunk). The autonomy we praised in our students—mostly triggered by their more active approach to the task at hand—is what Susan Sheerin (1997) labeled as "independent learning." It highlighted the learners' willingness to communicate in the target

language at all costs and to pay attention to accuracy as well as appropriateness.

Blogging also worked particularly well in the Italian language classroom due to its ability to recreate what we might call "a comfort zone" for our students. They appeared very familiar with communication via the web. Posting on social media and *talking* via text are, by now, integrated activities in their daily routine. It is likely for this reason that the blog represented for them a pressure free environment, an unrestricted space in which they could write and share their thoughts without worrying about the hovering presence of the instructor as happens in the classroom. What was more striking to us, however, was to acknowledge the evidence that the freedom innately presented by the blogging platform did not manifest itself in students' production of sloppy and nonsensical phrases. Instead, quite the contrary happened. Even though the students were able to bypass the stress ensuing from the presence of the instructor, there was, nonetheless, another "influence" that pushed them to perform at their best: peer pressure.

If what our experiences have taught us is true, today's students are very competitive, and one of the unavoidable consequences of this competitiveness is to "never want to look bad" in front of peers. Well, the blog—as a public space—makes the students aware that what they post will be read not just by the instructor but by the rest of the class as well. We noticed that knowing that others could see their writing stimulated our students to produce the best work possible. They tried to write better, or, at least, they paid more attention to their use of grammar and vocabulary.

It was obvious, for instance, that some expressions used in the posts were computer-proofed, even though the use of mechanic translators was forbidden. For their part, students predictably denied having sought the help of word processing systems and spell-checkers. But that the ban had been bypassed was especially evident in terms of noun and adjective agreement, which was flawless even for those who systematically made mistakes in in-class written assignments. Clearly, students were aiming at accuracy for the community's sake so as to avoid the risk of being singled out for weak grammar skills.

This was eventually the motivation that pushed us to opt for lenience rather than punishment for the very few students who did not respect the ban. After all, by double-checking their writing and taking into consideration their potential mistakes, the students still experienced remarkable gains in both accuracy and awareness. Theirs was a

constructive activity that gave us the chance to address the "risks" of relying too much on artificial intelligence.

Indeed, what students had not taken into consideration was the computer's inability to be aware of context. Some posts, in fact, resulted in unintentional hilarity because of mistranslation. One student, for instance, who intended to write "Anche la mia" ("Mine, too!") to a post saying, "Questa è la mia opinione" ("This is my opinion") resulted in the extravagant Italian sentence "La miniera, anche!" ("The [coal]mine, too!"). Clearly, the misunderstanding was caused by the computer's incapability to apply context, despite the enormous dictionary built into it. In this case, the machine was not able to make a distinction between the possessive pronoun and the noun and use it appropriately. But, more importantly, the student did not realize this. If the student had attempted his own translation without worrying about possible mistakes being made in front of the class, he would have done a better job than the computer.

This case apart—which actually caused more hilarity than concern due to its blatant conflict with the claim that the student had not infringed the ban—our study recorded encouraging data that underscores the difference between traditional handwritten assignments and the writing in the blog entries: ultimately there were considerably fewer mistakes on the virtual posts. A questionnaire at the end of the course confirmed that students experienced a substantial reduction in anxiety while blogging when compared to participating in in-class debate. Seventy percent of our students said they felt less confident speaking in front of their peers than writing a blog post. Class conversation, however, should not be demonized because of this percentage. Many students, in fact, admitted that group discussions were stressful but very effective as they gave them an opportunity to independently assess their performance. This, in turn, allowed them to gain a real understanding of their strengths and weaknesses.

Blogging was also welcomed for its easy accessibility. Students appreciated being given the chance to post their comments when, where, and how they wanted. Answers in the end-of-the-semester questionnaire showed that for some, blogging gave them the impression of being more independent and in charge of their own education; for others, it was a sign of the instructors' respect for the busy lives of students who are also full-time workers or young parents.

These answers certainly offer food for thought. The relationship between instructor and students is intertwined more than we think, regardless of the subject we teach. More importantly, however, the

relationship is mutual and goes beyond the evaluation of learners through homework assignments and quizzes. By privileging blogging over other, more traditional testing practices, we discovered that students appreciated being asked their opinion and treated as adults, receiving respect for their dislikes and encouragement for their mistakes. In the end, even their initial skepticism of a fairytale they thought to be too out of fashion or childish was dismantled. Keeping our minds open let us learn important lessons, both from Pinocchio and from each other. This experience not only proved that tradition and modern technology can be a successful pair in pedagogical terms but also that instructors' professional growth is always fostered by the students' direct involvement and feedback.

Lisa Sarti — BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE - CUNY

Carmela B. Scala — RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

ENDNOTES

[1] See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blog. Information retrieved on May 30, 2015.

[2] As of June 2018, Tumblr alone hosts 421.0 million blogs, with 161.8 billion posts (See "About," tumblr.com/about, accessed 20 June 2018).

[3] Carlo Collodi was the pen name of Carlo Lorenzini (1826-1890), a journalist from Florence, who became interested in children's literature after translating Perrault's fairytales. Originally, he published *Pinocchio* as a serial in 1881 in *Il giornale dei bambini* directed by Ferdinando Martini. *Pinocchio* was compiled into a book in 1883 with the definitive title and the greatly-admired illustrations by Enrico Mazzanti.

[4] German Scholar Dieter Richter speaks of Collodi's *Pinocchio* as a "national monument" for Italians who attribute an exceptional respect to the educational messages the book brings forth. Interestingly, Richter discusses the difficulty for German audiences to relate to such enthusiasm for the wooden puppet's adventures. He does not see a possible comparison to the extent of *Pinocchio*'s influence on a national readership in any other European literary work. See Dieter Richter, 2002, in particular pp. 123-47.

[5] On this topic, see Bertacchini.

[6] Summaries for the missing chapters were given to students, so that by the end of the course they could have the sense of the whole story without feeling they had only read a selection.

[7] Scholarship on this topic is rich and wide ranging. See Bottigheimer; Tatar, *Hard Facts*; Ziolkowski; Zipes, *Spells* and *Fairy Tales*.

[8] The comfort that fairytales offer(ed) to people and society is a topic touched upon by several scholars. See Bettelheim; Zipes, *Why Fairy Tales* and "The Meaning."

[9] In her *Once Upon a Time: A Short History of Fairy Tale*, Marina Warner looks at fairytales as a phenomenon capable of crossing borders and cultures through the sanitization and bowdlerization the genre underwent.

[10] "Certainly, it is true that reading a Perrault fairy tale will not instruct our students about contemporary socio-economic conditions in France. But reading these fairytales with proper direction and guidance may lead to an understanding of some facets of the French national character that are constant and have not greatly changed since the seventeenth century" (Obergfell 441).

[11] On this issue and the creative and cognitive benefits of storytelling both for adults and children see Maria Tatar's *Enchanted Hunters: The Power of Stories in Childhood*.

[12] In 1940, Walt Disney produced *Pinocchio*, a film based on *Le avventure di Pinocchio* by Carlo Collodi. Its screenplay was the result of multiple collaborations, which involved the work of an impressive numbers of artists. After WWII, Pinocchio became a box office hit that has stirred the public's imagination with the wooden puppet's mischiefs ever since. With this film, Walt Disney was acknowledged to have revolutionized the animation industry. See Neal Gabler's *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination* and Michael Barrier's *Hollywood Cartoons: American Animation in Its Golden Age*.

[13] Walt Disney's cinematic rendition of Collodi's *Pinocchio* has been the object of scholarly curiosity for its loosely adapted plot, giving birth to a pool of contrasting interpretations arguing the superiority of the adaptation over the literary source and vice versa for several decades. Critics such as Christopher Finch (1975) and Leonard Maltin (1984), for instance, praised the film as the triumph of animated cartoons for its ability to teach a moral lesson bypassing the book's scary episodes thanks to the technical magic of images on screen (Wunderlich and Morrissey 95). Maurice Sendak attacked the world Collodi described as a "ruthless, joyless place, filled with hypocrites, liars, and cheats" which certainly contributed to Pinocchio being "born bad," whereas he favored Disney's ability to focus on the puppet's desire to grow-up (Sendak 40). Zipes, on the other hand, preferred the book to the adaptation, as in his opinion Walt Disney deformed Collodi's values and Pinocchio's misbehavior, which he treated as mere corporate constructs (Zipes, *Happily*).

[14] Posts in Italian are reported with the grammar mistakes that appeared in the original. The blogger's names will be initialized to maintain privacy.

[15] *A wide range of scholars have generated an extensive literature on the topic. For instance,* Genc *and* Bada; *Kramsc,* Context *and* Language*; Moran;* Putnam.

[16] As stated previously, students who were given selected chapters from the text were also provided with chapter summaries so that they had a sense of the whole story.

[17] On how formulaic sequence in the narrative can facilitate fluency in speech, see Byram and Feng; Wray; Ellis, Simpson-Vlach, and Maynard. See also Chinghwa Lee on how fairy tales can help to facilitate primary language education. Although Chinghwa focuses primarily on English, her work is nonetheless a very informative reading.

[18] An extensive body of scholarship has been produced on the traditional fairytale pattern. See among the others, Luthi; Propp.

[19] On this prolific topic, see Garner; Shatz and LoSchiavo.

[20] On November 2014, the Seoul Broadcasting System (SBS) released the TV drama *Pinocchio*. According to Asian Wiki, this show holds the record of being the most expensive Korean drama ever sold (in China the rights were paid $280,000 per episode). Besides the intriguing plot and the actors' performances, *Pinocchio* became a hit also for successfully combining different genres, from fantasy and comedy to family and romance. See www.asianwiki.com, retrieved on June 30, 2015.

[21] The cognitive interaction between language and memory has been extensively discussed in a number of different fields, from neurology and behavioral studies, to linguistics and L2 pedagogy. Significantly, at the core of these studies stands the belief that the process of foreign language acquisition deeply involves both "working memory" and the brain's storage function. On this topic, see Nation; Pienemann; Cook; and Wen.

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Micro-Input: Effects of an Instructor Model on Foreign Language Student Production on Twitter

1. Introduction

Since its inception, microblogging has been of interest to educators (Junco, Heiberger, and Loken; Rinaldo, Tapp, and Laverie; Veletsianos). Foreign language educators are particularly interested in Twitter, the most popular microblogging tool among American online users (Duggan, et al.). Twitter is a microblogging service that supports personal publishing of short text messages (280 characters) that integrate hyperlinks, images, animations, and videos. Although microblogging tools were created to quickly share personal reflections and experiences, before long they became important also for knowledge sharing and community building. Interpersonal communication is fundamental for microblogging, as it helps consolidate and deepen offline connections and form relations between like-minded people who share a personal or professional interest. Microblogging connections can be reciprocal or unidirectional; in both cases, users can freely reply to a post, mention another user, and engage in hashtag-based chats.

Twitter communication and networking features make it a valuable tool for education. Twitter has been implemented inside and outside of the classroom to contribute to the large-lecture course dynamics, to integrate face-to-face instruction, and to allow students to communicate with each other and with instructor. Twitter has been used to impact college student engagement and grades (Junco, Heiberger, and Loken 128), to promote student learning and self-reflection (Kassens-Noor 19), to support informal learning (Ebner et al. 97), and to facilitate online discussions (Bledsoe, Harmeyer, and Wu 79).

For this study, Twitter was implemented in six sections of an undergraduate Italian language course to examine whether the presence of an instructor model affects students' written production. The findings of the study will help foreign language instructors to design online learning activities that encourage students to use specific target language items for authentic communication.

1.1 Twitter and Language Learning

Twitter can be used in foreign and second language education to increase student exposure to input and to provide them with an opportunity to produce and to reformulate output for an authentic audience. Having a

real audience, students may be encouraged to use the target language for authentic communication rather than only for practice only (Chapelle 28). By interacting within a speech community that may also include participants from the target culture, students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning process and to build their identities as speakers of the target language (Lafford 680). The nature of Twitter, indeed, allows students to practice a foreign language according to their own communicative preferences. Within a limit of 280 characters (140 at the time of the study), they can engage in interactions that lie between the asynchronicity of the blog post and the synchronicity of the chat in a flexible semi-synchronous online communication environment (Lomicka and Lord, "A Tale" 49). On Twitter students can model formal writing, everyday speaking, and everything in between, and they can access and share authentic and contextualized online resources in the target language. These features, along with its widespread popularity (Duggan), makes Twitter an interesting tool that is used increasingly in foreign and second education.

Since the first studies were published in 2009, the body of scholarship on Twitter in language instruction settings has steadily grown. Enza Antenos-Conforti had her intermediate level Italian language students tweet for 14 weeks without topic restriction. Students showed a positive attitude towards the activity, which helped increase their exposure to the Italian language and culture and their sense of community. Kerstin Borau et al. found similar positive results for sense of community and communicative and cultural competence for their Chinese students. The same positive results for sense of community and student attitude can be found in Lara Lomicka and Gillian Lord's "A Tale of Tweets," in which they also observed their American students develop a degree of social presence while interacting with a group of French students on Twitter.

Maria Perifanou had her Italian language students complete micro-gaming language activities on Edmodo, an educational microblogging tool; she observed increased levels of student participation, collaboration, and learning outcomes. David Hattem ("Microblogging Activities") observed instances of language play and risk taking during a structured activity that required his advanced English students to use specific grammar structures. Similarly, he encouraged students to practice recently learned English grammar forms during a structured grammar task, observing that Twitter helps student notice target language features while they are exposed to input, produce output, or interact ("The Practice" 56). More recently, Geraldine Blattner,

Amanda Dalola, and Lara Lomicka invited students to analyze authentic French tweets produced by famous native speakers and found positive effects on students' cultural development and linguistic intercultural capabilities. Finally, José Antonio Mompean and Jonás Fouz-González used Twitter to focus their adult Spanish students' attention on specific pronunciation issues and observed beneficial effects on English pronunciation and participation.

1.2 Rationale

From the foregoing review, it is possible to see that Twitter can be used to meet several pedagogical goals in language education. On Twitter, students have the opportunity to interact in the target language and to develop their autonomy as learners while they are exposed to and produce a varied and creative language in a low-stress environment (Egbert, Chao, and Hanson-Smith, quoted in Stockwell and Tanaka-Ellis 87). However, "the use of technology should not be seen as a panacea, or a goal in and of itself" (Chun, Smith, and Kern 77), but as an instrument to meet learners' abilities and interests and reach specific learning goals. One of the goals that Twitter may help reach is reinforcing learners' acquisition. Rod Ellis (*Learning*) defines acquisition either as "the internalisation of some previously unlearned item or rule" or as "an increase in control over the use of previously acquired items" (234). Focusing on this second aspect, a repeated practice in a meaningful context can help learners proceduralize and automatize forms that have already been taught explicitly (DeKeyser 57; Hattem, "The Practice" 51). When asked to engage in actual acts of communication outside the classroom, students are stimulated to create pragmatic meaning while using familiar linguistic forms in context. This practice is intrinsically motivating for learners as it helps them increase in control over previously acquired material and develop true fluency in the target language (Ellis, "Principles" 212).

This study examines an activity on Twitter that encourages foreign language students to engage in written acts of communication in which they are in control of the discourse. Students do not have any specific content requirement or restriction and they are free to create pragmatic meaning using previously acquired language items or even experimenting with new forms. However, without a specific topic to cover, beginning students may be tempted to overemphasize form at the expense of meaning and engage in a drill-and-practice type of activity (Meskill and Anthony 81). It is important, then, to balance the focus of

the activity in order to avoid overemphasis either on form, with the risk of having students complete yet another drill exercise, or on meaning, with students neglecting proper form while focusing on communication. Carla Meskill and Natasha Anthony list a few strategies that the instructor can interweave into the online conversation to call students' attention to specific forms without disrupting or threatening the conversational flow. Among them, they suggest saturating the input with specific linguistic forms to engage students in incidental modeling (Ellis, "Frequency" 176).

The activity and the study presented here were designed with this suggestion in mind. For the activity, a native foreign language instructor posted microblogging messages along with students in order to model common target language use in a conversational setting. The purpose of the study is to observe whether the instructor model encourages students to use specific language items. The research question is: Does the presence of an instructor model affect foreign language student production on Twitter? Specifically, the study aims to explore whether students who follow an instructor who models language items recently covered in class (experimental condition) use these items more than students who follow an instructor who models items that are already familiar to students (control condition). Further, this study examines student reaction to the activity in order to understand what is behind and beyond the messages that they post.

2. Methods

2.1 Participants

Participants are 93 students enrolled in six sections of a second level Italian language course at a large research university in the United States. Although a few more students participated in the activity, for this study only the tweets and questionnaires of the students who signed the consent form were analyzed. The sample is a nonprobability, convenience sample. To meet the purpose of the research and to not disrupt the normal dynamics of a class, all the students of a section were assigned as a group to the experimental or control condition. Four groups were assigned to the experimental condition, for a total of 52 students, while the two remaining groups were assigned to the control condition (N=41). Students of both treatments had equal opportunities to learn and practice the language; all the course sections had the same syllabus, used the same instructional material, and were taught by graduate student teaching

assistants (TAs) with similar educational backgrounds and teaching experiences.

Students were encouraged to create a Twitter account, to select a recognizable username, and to post a profile picture so other students could easily identify them (Domizi 46). They were also required to follow on Twitter all their classmates and the researcher, who was part of the team of Italian TAs but did not teach any of the second-level courses under investigation. In his role as co-tweeting instructor, the researcher posted messages from two different accounts—one for each research condition. By connecting with classmates and the researcher, students had a chance to access the input and information that they posted and to communicate with each other (Lomicka and Lord, "A Tale" 59). For the sake of simplicity, from now on we will refer to the researcher, in his role as co-tweeting instructor, simply as the "instructor."

2.2 Activity

Joanna Dunlap and Patrick Lowenthal propose a set of guidelines for using Twitter in education. They suggest establishing a clear purpose for the activity, defining clear expectations for participation, and modeling effective Twitter use. Further, they suggest including the activity in more conventional assessment and encouraging student participation even after the end of the course. The activity was designed and implemented with these guidelines in mind.

At the beginning of the semester, the researcher went to each class to introduce the activity, to present the logistics of the tool, and to explain how to use it (Hubbard 48). He revisited this information two more times during the semester, when he went back to the classes to touch base with students and to troubleshoot any problem that they may have experienced (Rinaldo, Tapp, and Laverie 202). For this activity, students were required to post at least one microblogging message a day, a minimum of five days a week. The activity lasted 12 weeks and had no content requirement or restriction; students were free to use any language item they deemed appropriate for communication. For the experimental condition, the instructor modeled language items recently covered in class. For the control condition, he modeled items that had been covered in the first Italian level and were already familiar to students. No item covered during the course was consistently modeled for the control condition.

Most of the students who participated in the experiment (87%) had taken the first-level Italian course the previous semester, which

ended only a few weeks before the new semester started. All the second-level students had already been exposed to the basic vocabulary items and verbal forms covered in the first level. For example, they were already familiar with gender and number agreement between articles, nouns, and adjectives, the present tense, and the present perfect tense. In the first-level course, students also learned Italian vocabulary for personal information, home, school, family, and weather, and more. The second-level course introduced for the first time such tenses as the imperfect, the future, the conditional, the imperative, and the present subjunctive; during the course, students also learned vocabulary related to food, sport, leisure activities, and clothes, and used this vocabulary to complete different kinds of activities, in class and at home.

Usually, the instructor posted simultaneously on the two Twitter accounts. For the experimental condition, he posted tweets that included verbs and vocabulary that students had learned recently in class. For example, he could talk about something that he would like to do (*"Che sonno! Dovrei dormire di più di notte,*" "I'm so sleepy! I should get more sleep at night") or he could talk about sports (*"Oggi ho giocato a calcio con i miei amici, è stata una bella partita,*" "Today I played soccer with my friends, it was a good game"). Although the majority of these tweets for the experimental condition included one or more new language items, some tweets did not. They were composed simply to keep the conversation going to avoid giving the activity a feeling of drill-and-practice. These tweets did not include any new items. Usually they were comments on students' tweets, replies to their questions, or spontaneous updates (*"Sono al concerto di Marcus Roberts,*" "I'm at the Marcus Roberts concert"). For the control condition, instead, the instructor consistently avoided modeling new language items, posting messages that only included forms that had been covered in the previous course.

There was no timing preference for posting the tweets. The instructor usually posted one or more messages during the busiest time of the day (from 9 am to 5 pm) (Kennedy and Levy 327) and some more messages in the evening or at night—typically, replies and comments to students' tweets. Students were graded on the frequency of their postings—one point for every day that they tweeted—not the quality of their writing, so they could freely experiment with the language in a low-stress environment (Krashen 11). Every four weeks the researcher manually counted the number of updates and assigned scores following the grading scheme included in the syllabus of the course (Ullrich, Borau, and Stepanyan 434). The activity was mandatory for every

student, independent from their participation in the study, and contributed to 5% of the final grade of the course.

2.3 Data Collection

The primary data source for this study is the student tweets. Tweets were collected using Twitonomy, a Twitter analytics paid tool. Twitonomy offers the possibility of downloading the last few thousand tweets sent by each selected user, along with their date and timestamp. Once all the tweets that were not written in Italian were erased, the researcher organized the data into six different spreadsheets, one for each group. Each spreadsheet included all the tweets sent by the students of that class along with the tweets sent by the instructor, either from the account of the experimental condition or the account of the control condition, organized according to the chronological progression of the Twitter timeline.

The secondary data source for the study is the pre-activity and post-activity online surveys. During the first week, the researcher sent several reminders to encourage students to take the pre-activity survey, which was completed by 94 students. This survey helped to collect information on the students' experience of using Twitter for non-educational and educational purposes and their expectations for the Twitter activity (Stockwell 3). At the end of the activity, 92 students completed the post-activity survey, which included Likert-scale and open-ended questions on student perception of the activity.

2.4 Data Analysis

For the experimental condition, the researcher did not analyze all the students' tweets but only the tweets that students posted after one of his relevant messages, within the same day. For this study, relevant messages included one or more language items recently covered in class (i.e. the conditional tense *"Stasera mi piacerebbe uscire ma devo studiare,*" "I would like to go out tonight but I have to study"). For the control condition, the researcher analyzed the tweets that students posted during the same time slots selected for the experimental condition. This way, it was possible to compare students' production under conditions that differed only for the instructor model. Table 1 (Appendix) presents a list of the verbal forms and vocabulary items that the instructor modeled for the experimental condition.

The dataset includes 577 student tweets and 161 instructor

tweets for the experimental condition and 515 student tweets and 88 instructor tweets for the control condition. After a preliminary review of the data, the researcher developed emergent coding categories for the student tweets (N=1092) and proceeded to content analysis. The codes fall into two main categories: instructor-related and syllabus-related tweets (Table 2). For each of these categories, the researcher looked at the content, verbal forms, and vocabulary of the student tweets to observe whether they were modeled on the instructor's previous tweet and/or whether they included language items and topics covered in class.

Tweets were coded as instructor-related when their content and linguistic features were modeled on an instructor tweet; they were coded as syllabus-related when their content and linguistic features related to the information covered during the course. Therefore, if a student described her meal, the tweet was coded as syllabus-related for content and vocabulary (the first unit of the course covers vocabulary and expression related to food). If the same tweet was sent after an instructor tweet about food, the tweet was also coded as instructor-related for content. If it included vocabulary that the instructor used in a tweet (i.e. "*pasta*," "*pizza*"), it was coded as instructor-related for verbal forms. The only exception was made for tweets that included the present tense. Those tweets were not coded as instructor-related, even if the instructor just used the same tense—for example, "Every day I go for a run at 6 pm" probably does not influence the tense selection in "I'm tired."

When the content analysis was completed, the researcher ran a one-tailed independent t-test for each coding category and examined whether incidental modeling and use of recently acquired forms significantly differed across the two conditions. Finally, the responses to the surveys were analyzed using content analysis and descriptive statistics to observe trends in the students' reactions to the activity.

3. Results

3.1 Tweets

The researcher manually counted the number of tweets for each group and coding category and converted numbers to percentages to better compare and contrast the two conditions (Table 2). Results are mixed for what concerns instructor-related tweets. The percentage of students who tweeted about the same topic as the instructor is similar for both conditions—respectively, 18.2% for the experimental condition and 18% for the control condition. However, the students in the experimental

condition tended to use the verbal forms modeled by the instructor (11.4%) more than the students in the other condition (8.9%). This result is reversed for vocabulary: the students in the experimental groups (7.3%) used vocabulary items modeled by the instructor less than students in the control condition (10.1%).

The second main coding category is syllabus related tweets. When the instructor included in his tweets content, verbal forms, and vocabulary covered in the course, the students in the experimental condition used them in their tweets more frequently than the students in the control condition. While for content and vocabulary the difference between the two conditions is minimal, the results for grammar are worth special attention. The students in the experimental condition, indeed, used the newly covered verbal forms almost twice as much (16.0%) as their colleagues in the control condition (8.5%).

The researcher ran a one-tailed independent t-test for each coding category to observe whether these differences were statistically significant. For what concerns the verbal forms, there is no significant difference between the students in the experimental condition ($M=1.33$, $SD=1.57$) and the students in the control condition ($M=1.12$, $SD=1.55$; $t(91)=.62$, $p=.266$). This result suggests that the presence of an instructor model does not affect student production of recently covered verbal forms. However, there is a significant difference between the two conditions ($Mexp=1.88$, $SDexp=2.01$; $Mcon=1.07$, $SDcon=1.93$) for what concerns the verbal forms covered in the course ($t(91)=1.96$, $p=.026$). This finding suggests that throughout the whole semester students in the experimental condition used recently learned verbal forms more than the students in the control condition.

The results for vocabulary items are also worth noting. There is a negative significant difference in the use of vocabulary modeled by the instructor for students in the experimental condition ($M=.87$, $SD=.86$) and control condition ($M=1.27$, $SD=1.41$) but this difference is barely detectable ($t(91)=-1.69$, $p=.047$). This result suggests that students may be more prone to notice and reproduce vocabulary that they have already automatized than vocabulary that they are still in the process of noticing and fine-tuning. On the other hand, there is no statistically significant difference for what concerns student use of recently learned vocabulary ($t(91)=-.14$, $p=.443$). Non-significant results can also be found for the content modeled by the instructor and the content of the course in general. The presence of an instructor model does not influence student production of the topics covered in his tweets ($t(91)=-.33$, $p=.371$) and of the topics covered in class; $t(91)=-.02$, $p=.491$.

3.2 Surveys

The surveys help to shed light on how students approached and reacted to the activity. Almost half of the 94 students who completed the first survey already had a Twitter account (44.7%). However, only 36.6% used it often or very often, while the majority declared using it only occasionally (34.1%) or never (29.3%). It is noteworthy that only one student had already used Twitter for academic purposes. Despite these low percentages, the majority of students considered Twitter a potentially useful tool to practice a foreign language (58.5%). When asked about the potential benefits of Twitter for language learning on a set of five-point Likert scale questions, students agreed that the activity could help them practice and internalize new language items (75.5%) as well as improve their writing (64.9%) and reading skills (75.5%).

After 12 weeks, students' perception of the usefulness of Twitter in an educational setting barely changed. The majority of students still considered Twitter a useful tool for language learning (53.3%). When asked if they liked to use Twitter to practice Italian, half of the students agreed (50.0%), while one-third expressed their discontent with the tool (35.9%). In general, however, the activity was well received. Students valued the opportunity to practice new language items in a conversational setting (66.3%), especially because they perceived that the activity helped them to improve their writing (49.0%) and reading skills (57.6%). Although other studies registered learner discontent for the reduced number of characters on Twitter (Bista 94; Lomicka and Lord, "A Tale" 54), students did not perceive it as a constraint on their practice (80.4%).

Following Lomicka and Lord ("A tale"), the survey included some open-ended questions that addressed what students liked most and least about the activity. Among the positive aspects that they highlighted, students valued the opportunity to practice Italian outside the classroom, as the activity helped them to integrate the target language into their daily lives ("I started to think in Italian") and to use it in everyday phrases for authentic communication ("I like how Twitter let me have a conversation with my classmates in Italian that was not prompted by a textbook"). Students also valued that they got to learn and use colloquial Italian words and expressions ("I got to practice using slang") and expressed satisfaction for being able to practice vocabulary and learn new words ("The activity broadened my Italian vocabulary"). The activity also helped students to practice verbal forms ("The activity helped me practice different verb tenses") and to get in contact with the Italian

culture, although the cultural aspect was not the main focus of the activity ("I followed Italian cultural Twitter accounts which made me learn even more").

Students also pointed out the drawbacks of the activity. Two students out of three (66.3%) found it easy to forget the daily requirement and to miss the daily participation point. Half of the students (48.9%) expressed discontent for some aspects of the activity ("It's extra work," "I didn't like doing it daily," "I don't think it should be a grade"). Moreover, students sometimes did not know what to write and were bored by the sameness of the messages ("Everyone posted the same kinds of things over and over"). Finally, a few participants showed a negative attitude toward Twitter and, in general, toward social media for education (Bista 85): "I don't like Twitter," "I do not think social media and school should combine."

4. Conclusions

4.1 Discussion

The study provided students with an opportunity to practice Italian in a communicative online setting in which they were in control over the content and the language of their texts. Following the literature, the activity did not to drive student production by explicitly calling their attention to specific forms, thus interfering with the conversational flow. Instead, the instructor's tweets followed the course syllabus and exposed students to forms they were learning in class. The findings of the study reveal that the instructor model does not have an immediate influence on student production of recently learned verbal forms. Students did not consistently use the present continuous, future, conditional, or *imperfetto* to mimic the instructor input. However, students in the experimental condition used these tenses significantly more than other students throughout the semester. A possible explanation is that students did notice the instructor input of new verbal forms but did not always reproduce it immediately after him. Instead, they preferred to wait to use these forms until a communication need arises. In an activity that gives students plenty of opportunities to communicate in the target language, students may want to produce new verbal forms to create pragmatic meaning instead of just reproducing the mechanics of a drilling exercise (Meskill and Anthony 81). These findings have interesting pedagogical implications. Twitter can be used both to engage students in spontaneous acts of communication in the target language and to call their attention

to specific verbal forms. To do so, the instructor should consistently model these forms over a prolonged period of time without losing the spontaneity of the production.

We also observed the influence that the instructor has on student production of recently learned vocabulary items. Although it is barely detectable, there is a negative significant difference between the two conditions. The students in the control condition used the vocabulary items modeled by the instructor significantly more than the students in the experimental condition. If we extend the observation to the use of new vocabulary throughout the semester, we cannot find any significant difference between the two conditions. It is worth recalling that, while for the experimental condition, the instructor mostly modeled new vocabulary, for the control condition he modeled vocabulary learned in the previous course, a first-level Italian class. A possible explanation for this result is that learners get access to and proceduralize individual content words at an earlier stage than they assemble them into phrases and put the phrases together within the sentence (Cook 30). Thus, second-level language students may have already automatized the vocabulary learned in the previous course and feel comfortable using it, especially when they notice it in the instructor's input, while they are still in the process of automatizing the verbal forms recently learned. An interesting pedagogical implication is that an unstructured conversational practice on Twitter helps students increase in control over previously acquired vocabulary items when they are consistently modeled by the instructor.

These results confirm the potential of Twitter for language learning. Previous studies have shown that Twitter increases student exposure to input and gives them the opportunity to practice the target language for a real audience. The body of scholarship has primarily analyzed loosely structured or unstructured activities, focusing on such factors as sense of community, social presence, and intercultural competence, while some studies also examined student production during structured grammar tasks. The findings of this study contribute to expanding the literature by showing that Twitter can be used to influence student production also during an activity in which they are in control of the discourse and the language used.

4.2 Limitations and Future Research

Fei Gao, Tian Luo, and Ke Zhang analyzed a corpus of 21 studies on microblogging in education and observed that only one study was

experimental in nature, while the rest were descriptive. According to Lomicka and Lord ("Introduction"), studies on educational uses of an emerging technology in the field of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) usually begin by describing its use for language learning and by examining student reactions to and attitudes toward the technology. Only after this first phase do researchers start to investigate the pedagogical uses of the technology and the effects that it has on second language acquisition. The body of research on Twitter for language learning follows this path. This experimental study informs the second phase indicated by Lomicka and Lord as it was designed to expand our understanding of the pedagogical potential of microblogging for language learning.

However, the study has a few limitations. The first limitation is that the content analysis only focused on student messages and its results were not triangulated with other data sources. The risk is to miss important information on the actual influence of the instructor model on student production. Future studies should try to capture this information through interviews or survey questions. A second limitation is that only the messages of the instructor were considered to have a potential influence on student production. While it is impossible to control for variables external to the microblogging environment, future studies should focus on the influence that students have on each other while tweeting. Another limitation regards the instructor's posting frequency, which was limited to one or two relevant messages per day. The rationale for this low frequency was to not disrupt the conversational flow of the activity and to avoid that students perceive it as a mere practice of the language. However, more messages from the instructor could result in better results for what concerns student use of new verbal forms and vocabulary items. Future research should give indications on the optimal posting frequency for the instructor.

Students had mixed reactions to the activity but, in general, they showed a positive attitude towards it; they especially appreciated the opportunity to practice Italian outside the classroom in a conversational setting. However, students lamented the length and repetitiveness of the activity and found it, at times, rather unappealing, especially towards the end of the semester. The author recommends shortening the activity and limit it to a few weeks in order to keep student interest high. We also recommend inviting students to create a new Twitter account specifically for the activity so as to expose peers only to input in the target language and not to irrelevant tweets.

Besides its limitations, this study offers important insights into

foreign language students' production on Twitter. It suggests that Twitter can be used to foster student use of specific language items in a conversational setting and it provides directions that may be useful to foreign language instructors interested in implementing microblogging activities in their courses.

Fabrizio Fornara FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

Verbal forms	Tweet
Impersonal verbs	Qual è il ristorante dove si mangia meglio a […]?
Present continuous	Oggi sto studiando così... http://t.co/…
Imperfetto	Quando ero piccolo i Litfiba erano il mio gruppo preferito http://t.co/…
Future	Quest'estate finalmente andrò in Italia per un mese.
Conditional	Sabato sera vorrei andare al Bradfordville Blues Club.
Present subjunctive	Speriamo che questo semestre finisca presto, sono troppo stanco!
Vocabulary	**Tweet**
Food – Eating out	Ieri sera ho cucinato melanzane alla parmigiana, erano buonissime! http://t.co/…
Leisure activities	Cosa fai nel tempo libero? A me piace correre, suonare e cucinare.
Sport	Conosci qualche squadra italiana di calcio? La mia squadra è la Sampdoria, è di Genova http://t.co/…
School	In bocca al lupo per l'esame d'italiano!
Clothes	Mi metto la giacca o non mi metto la giacca? Prendo l'ombrello o non prendo l'ombrello?

Table 1
Verbal forms and vocabulary categories that the instructor modeled for the experimental condition with examples of tweets

	Experimental condition		Control condition	
Number of tweets analyzed	577		515	
	Tweets	%	Tweets	%
Instructor-related: Verbs	69	11.4	46	8.9
Instructor-related: Vocabulary	44	7.3	52	10.1
Instructor-related: Content	108	18.2	93	18.0
Syllabus-related: Verbs	99	16.0	44	8.5
Syllabus-related: Vocabulary	93	16.2	77	15.0
Syllabus-related: Content	99	17.1	80	15.5

Table 2
Number and proportion of tweets per each coding category

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The Italian Digital Classroom: Italian Culture and Literature through Digital Tools and Social Media

1. Using Video Games to Teach Italian Language and Culture: Useful, Effective, Feasible?

Video games are a highly relevant part of life for our student population. According to the Pew Research Center (PRC, 2015), half of American adults play videogames, and 70% of college students play video games "at least once in a while" (Weaver).[1]

Some of the current commercial console and PC video games (some of which are also available on Mac, Android, and iOS) are digital, multi-media *realia* that can be used to enhance language acquisition both in and outside the classroom. The advantages of *realia* as a whole have already been extensively explored from a theoretical standpoint (Spurr; Dlaska). The advantages include development of specific personal interests in exploring, and therefore acquiring the foreign or second (F/L2) language and culture within a context. The ultimate goal of using *realia* is to turn students into life-long learners of the target language and culture.

According to CALL research, digital *realia*, given their nature as multimedia, easily-accessible, persistent cultural artifacts, are particularly advantageous in reaching that goal (Smith). Compared to other digital *realia*, some specific video games add additional opportunities for language exploration. All such games, while similar in nature to movies (providing exposure to listening comprehension in the spoken dialogues and reading comprehension in the subtitles) also involve important additional features such as: writing and even speaking with other online users in the target language; direct interaction and agency, which improve learning skills (Deters et al.; Mitchell and Savill-Smith; Gee, *What Video Games* and "Good Video Games"); and critical thinking and problem-solving, which can be applied to physical group interaction in the classroom. For some games, interaction can also take place virtually, through online communication with other users around the world. As research has shown, group interaction centered on problem solving is highly conducive to learning (Wenger) and language acquisition in particular (Nunan).

In recent years the potential of digital gaming as a learning device has been explored in a variety of fields (Craton), including language acquisition (Purushotma, Thorne, and Wheatley). Scholars

however have so far placed emphasis on so-called "serious gaming," that is to say games that were specifically designed for learning purposes (Abt; Reinhardt, Warner, and Lange; Neville; Blake). A few other scholars have explored the learning potential of some specific areas of online gaming (including language acquisition), namely Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs) such as *World of Warcraft* (Ramaa et al.; Benassi et al.; Jang and Ryu), or virtual persistent online worlds such as *Second Life* (Wang, Burton, and Falls). Research on the role of commercially-available games for computers and consoles in education/learning, on the other hand, is currently limited, and none, at present, focuses on language acquisition. Only one of the articles in the publications of the Digital Game Research Association (DiGRA),[2] deals with language acquisition in terms of serious gaming (Sørensen and Meyer), while many other articles focus on the general subject of learning. Exploring the advantages of commercially-available, mass-produced video games is a new field. The most interesting contributions in this new field, so far, explore the general topic of game-based learning (Farber) and has informed much of my pedagogical approach.

While I have researched gamification, I favor game-based learning (GBL). I believe that gamification (teachers turning lessons into a game they designed) is merely a revamped reward system. Even a rich reward system is not an actual teaching method, rather it is a motivational tool. Motivation is important to encourage learning, but it does not actually do the teaching. GBL, on the other hand, is pedagogy, closely connected to play theory. In GBL learners apply critical thinking. I believe that some current commercially-available cinematic video games, commonly sold in stores can serve as excellent *realia* in GBL and enhance language acquisition in and outside the classroom. Besides critical thinking applied to interaction, task-based learning and agency, cinematic games also have an important additional learning component of a detailed narrative. This is a common trait to cinematic games. They all have a fairly complex, engaging story line, and a mystery/quest that unfolds as the player interacts with gameplay. Scholars have underlined the importance and the advantages afforded by such narratives in F/L2 (Polkinghorne; Bruner; Pomerantz; Kramsch). Narrative approaches to F/L2 language acquisition research stem from the premise that human beings are storytellers (Polkinghorne). Jerome Bruner notes that people apprehend reality and organize knowledge by means of narrative structures and, furthermore, that these structures are the primary mode of communication underlying all human interaction. Narratives in F/L2

have the benefit of engaging the learner by adding an additional layer of context that challenges the reader to follow characters and events as they unfold thorough the story. In cinematic video games, such challenges are heightened, in a way, by the interactive nature of the narrative as it is presented. This concept of game player agency in connection with narratives has been explored in "serious games" research focused on game design, involving the creation of specific games aimed at fostering language learning (Sykes and Reinhardt; Neville). There is currently no relevant research on the use of narratives for language acquisition in commercially-available video games.[3]

Rather than being another theoretical contribution in the area of language pedagogy, this article aims instead at presenting a *practicum*. In this essay I will provide evidence that utilizing some current video games that have an emphasis on communication can be conducive to F/L2 acquisition. In fact, I have successfully utilized particular video games in my teaching since 1997, and, as a learner of foreign languages myself since the early 1980s, with games that were much more primitive and limited than the ones available today. More specifically, I will provide examples of how for the past three years I have successfully incorporated two cinematic games, Ubisoft's *Assassin's Creed II* and Quantic Dream's *Heavy Rain* into my teaching practice in the language classroom.[4] Based on my teaching experience, the use of video games and other related *realia* (gaming websites and magazines, YouTube videos, Facebook groups) has been an effective didactic tool for reinforcing linguistic skills and exposing students to Italian culture. I will then share technical advice and best practices related to pedagogical applications of gaming in F/L2 and culture acquisition. Finally, I will discuss the development of a gaming-centered intensive language and culture learning course that I have created, aimed at attracting self-identified gamers.

While gaming in the language classroom is, by its nature, an experience that is limited in terms of time that could be dedicated to it, cinematic games are a medium that has the potential to turn our students' living space (and, possibly, through handheld or portable gaming devices, virtually any place) into a potentially persistent, easily and always accessible language lab (very much fitting the concept of the "ubiquitous language lab." This is an aspect that I find particularly relevant nowadays, given the current pervasive presence of internet-connected portable multimedia devices (Bregni, "Using"; Chinnery; Bo-Kristensen and Meyer). Compared to other *realia*, I believe that

cinematic games can better assist instructors in the goal of transforming students into life-long learners of (a) F/L2 language(s) (Smith).[5]

2. Using Video Games in the Italian Language Classroom

At present, video games have been one of the many digital *realia* to which I expose my students in our weekly language lab meetings. Since I began my experimentations with video games in the language classroom in 1997, I observed that video game-based activities seemed to engage students well, and that the games had the advantage of fostering group cooperation and active participation better than simpler web-based activities. Compared to other lab activities, agency and problem-solving seemed the two keys that enhance student cooperation. Over the last three years, thanks to more communicative-oriented games becoming available, I decided to further my experimentations with game-based learning and verify the results by performing outcomes assessment on the game-based activities I created. My language-classroom experiences over the last three years with Ubisoft's *Assassin's Creed* (*AC*) *II*, *AC Brotherhood*, and *AC Revelations* (the so-called "Ezio Collection," three games set in Renaissance Italy with the protagonist Ezio Auditore), and Quantic Dream's *Heavy Rain* have produced excellent results. I organized lab activities[6] that worked well when combined with preliminary work-sheets focusing on new vocabulary and reinforcing verbal forms and follow-up activities on the e-learning platform Blackboard, all aimed at reinforcing/fostering effective language learning and practice.

Shortly after its release in fall 2009, I realized that any US copy of *AC II* for Sony PlayStation 3 contained full content in Italian: voice-acting, subtitles, menus, even the in-game database function which provides accurate historical information on people and places. While *AC II is* a complex game, which takes 20+ hours to complete, it is also a fairly accessible game, in that given the nature of its gameplay even non-gamers can easily pick up the controller and start playing. It is a game intended for mature audiences (Mature – 17+ ESBR: www.esbr.org in the US; PEGI 18: www.pegi.info in Europe) due to content and language. It is therefore not recommended for high-school students; although, if deemed appropriate, depending upon the learning environment and student population, I would probably consider it for a senior high-school class. After researching its content, I selected the first twenty or so minutes of gameplay and created worksheets for utilization in two 50-minute lab sessions in my third-semester Italian class. The first

ten or so minutes of the game serve as introduction to the background scenario. The story is told through video cut-scenes: two secret societies have been fighting each other for centuries. One of them, the Templars (not the historical religious order), aims to enslave humanity, while the other, the Assassins (not the historical Muslim sect) has been fighting to defend them. The main character, Desmond, thanks to some futuristic machinery called *Animus* can access his ancestors' memories, encoded in his own DNA, and learn the special abilities they possessed as highly-trained members of the Assassins society.[7] The material included in this section of the game would allow me to reinforce and expand recently-learned vocabulary (war and conflict; verbs related to sports and physical activities (*correre, saltare, cadere, etc.*); to review some recently-covered grammar content in context (present tense, *passato prossimo*, and imperfect of regular and irregular verbs); and to introduce the Italian Renaissance as a cultural component (by virtually exploring Florence under the Medici in 1476). I treated *AC II* as any other *realia* I have used in my teaching since I began as a graduate instructor in 1994. I believe that digital *realia* should not replace "regular" teaching, but could be used to reinforce grammatical, as well as cultural points (Bregni, "In Praise" and "Enhancing"). So, I created task-based worksheets informed by the principle of scaffolding (building upon what students already know, moving from simple to more complex elements and then expanding to include new materials) and task-based learning. For this lab activity, I bring a PlayStation (PS) 3 console to class,[8] which is the Super Slim model that is lightweight and reasonably easy to carry around, connect, and begin running. I use the provided HDMI cable (one simple, small connector that carries both video and audio signals in high-definition) to connect to the classroom video projector. As class begins, I instruct students to access the online learning platform Blackboard and retrieve an activity work-sheet I created. The first section introduces basic video game vocabulary in Italian (*il videogioco, il disco, il disco rigido, il joypad/il controller, etc.*), and has a brief overview of the game in Italian. New vocabulary is highlighted. I then add a fill-in-the-gaps exercise that uses context to elicit expressions of support (*Bravo/a! Perfetto!*); of concern (*Attenzione! Attento/a!*) and of disappointment (*Accidenti! Che peccato!*). Many of the words are cognates, or already familiar to students. I included images for the less-common words to foster comprehension. For example, I used an image of a controller juxtaposed to the fill-in-the-blank exercise to set vocabulary related to directions (*avanti, indietro, destra, sinistra*) and actions (*corri, salta, apri*) within the specific context of gaming. Since the first, immediate

goal was to encourage students' participation in the target language during lab, I set up a process in which I would elicit volunteers to do the actual gaming. I explain that one student will physically hold the game pad while other students will "guide" him/her through a series of commands (*Salta! Gira a destra! Apri il cassetto a sinistra! Chiudi la porta!* ...and so on) and offer comments. Not all students in the classroom would be video game fans and/or familiar with gameplay on a video game console. Each volunteer gamer will hold the pad for approximately five minutes, and then pass the pad to another student. The rest of the class would participate by encouraging the player, providing hints, offering suggestions, expressing satisfaction and support, or relating disappointment and disagreement.

As *AC II* begins, we meet Desmond, a 21st-century 25-year-old man who wakes up in a Templar research facility. He learns he is being kept captive by a secret society, the Templars, and that they have nefarious intentions. He learns that he has a secret the Templars want to steal, his ancestors' valuable memories that are encoded in his DNA. Desmond's escape is being aided by a young woman who, as we learn, is on his side. She instructs him to follow her. From this point on, she will be issuing a series of commands, an excellent opportunity to reinforce imperatives. The game can be paused at any time, and students, through a series of exercises such as fill-in-the-blanks, group repetition, and role-play, can practice vocabulary and verb forms, with additional expansion and follow-up exercises that will further reinforce acquisition, partially done in class and partially assigned as homework. To that purpose, I add another set of activities to the worksheet I created that would engage students in all major areas of language acquisition:

1. Listening comprehension: I created a fill-in-the-gaps exercise based on the text of the protagonist's initial monologue in the game's opening, which presents the story's premise and the protagonists' role. I added YouTube links to users' play-through videos of that specific section of the game, so that students could watch the video cut-scenes again for follow-up exercises. I then created a series of true/false questions based on the monologue.
2. Vocabulary expansion: the initial monologue offered the opportunity to reinforce war/conflict-related vocabulary. My fill-in-the-gaps and association-based exercises presented cognates first (*guerra*, *combattere*, *fazioni*), then images juxtaposed to the text would introduce new, more complex vocabulary (words such as *schiavizzare* and *lottare*)

3. Reading comprehension: I created a text which summarizes the premise and plot of the game, then added a series of open questions based on the text, which students had to respond to using full sentences.
4. Grammar: Using the protagonist's narrative as a model, I created a series of short (5 sentences each) exercises (complete the sentence using the correct form of the verb in the infinitive; or change the subject and modify the verb accordingly) aimed at reinforcing the conjugation of action/sports-related verbs (*correre, saltare, cadere, colpire...*), and the difference between *passato prossimo* and imperfect.
5. Speaking: I asked my students to discuss in groups the possible outcome of the conflict as presented in the game and share their conversation with the class. Since students at this level (and at this point in the semester) would not have learned the future tense or the "if" clause as yet, I offered the model of "*Secondo me, vincono... perchè...*."
6. Writing: the premise of the game is that two factions fight over control of magical artifacts. I asked students to provide an example of magical artifact they could imagine useful within the game context, and to describe its powers (would it win the conflict, would it destroy the enemy, or would it create peace?)

Sections 1 through 3 would require approximately 30 minutes total and were divided between the two 50-minutes lab periods I reserved for this activity. The rest of the time in day one would be devoted to gaming. On day two, the last ten minutes of class were devoted to section 5. Section 6 was assigned as homework. To the six sections above, meant for linguistic competence, I added an extra cultural component exercise: an in-class discussion of the Italian Renaissance as it emerges in the game. The discussion was preceded by a brief pre-activity multiple-choice questionnaire. More recently, I have used the free online platform Kahoot! (https://kahoot.com/) as an easy way to make my questionnaires accessible to students, who can easily and efficiently respond using their mobile phones, tablets, or pc. Kahoot! is also a useful tool in performing assessment, as it records statistics related to students' answers. Questions were aimed at gauging what my students already knew about the Italian Renaissance and to assist them in focusing on relevant elements of the game narrative they were about to experience. The key questions were:

1. What was life expectancy in Renaissance Italy?
2. Why did the Arts thrive in Florence under the Medici?

3. Could women hold positions of relevance in Renaissance Italian culture?

A brief analysis of the storyline and gameplay of *AC II* would reveal why I selected those questions as key to cultural acquisition. By playing the game, we learn that Desmond, through a machine called Animus, can re-live the life of his fifteenth-century ancestor Ezio Auditore. Students engage in the life of Ezio, a 20-something male from an affluent family, wandering around a historically accurate rendition of Florence in 1476 under the Medici rule. They meet and interact with its citizens. The game is then paused in order to take a closer look at the non-playable characters, the citizens of Florence. While the storyline is fictional, the cultural reconstruction is accurate, from the reconstruction of the cityscape and its monuments, to the relevant events and characters, down to clothing and details of everyday life at the time. My students have the opportunity to observe that many people wandering about Florence are clearly over 40 years old. Again, the game is paused, and students are invited to reflect on what they have observed in the environment that could contribute to a longer life expectancy. I guide my students to observe a cityscape that is visibly thriving thanks to an era of relative peace, successful commerce, and a healthy lifestyle; the ancient Roman infrastructures that provided clean water and sanitation; and the mild Italian climate that provided plentiful crops. Then my students take part in the vivid cultural and political Florentine life, observing first-hand that Italian cities are built around the *piazza*, hence the plentiful opportunities for exchange of ideas. They encounter Lorenzo and are guided to observe that for enlightened rulers like him, fostering the Arts meant visibly expressing nobility and power through sophistication, education and refined taste. Finally, my students are given the opportunity to reflect on the role of women in Italian Renaissance society by encountering women in positions of power (Maria, Ezio's mother) interacting with cultural icons of the time (young Leonardo da Vinci, who in 1476 was just starting to explore fields other than the visual arts). An invaluable aid to students' cultural learning is offered by the in-game database feature that is accessible by pausing the game at any point. The database offers accurate historical information on people and places encountered as the game progresses, so students can learn more about the Medici family, for example, and their feud with the Pazzi, and monumental landmarks such as Ponte Vecchio, its architecture and history.

I also used *AC* II in my fifth semester language course during two 50-minute lab sessions. Given the heightened knowledge of the language, we were able to cover more of the game (approximately the

first 40 minutes of gameplay). Activities in the specific worksheet I created were centered on reinforcing "if" clauses and hypotheses (Why was Desmond involved? How could he recall his ancestor's memories? If you could, which side would you choose, and why? etc.). Finally, in my English-language Renaissance Italian literature course I used the first part of the Ezio storyline (in English, with English subtitles) as a general introductory session on the Italian Renaissance.

Quantic Dream's *Heavy Rain* (*HR*) is another cinematic game was also effective in my class experimentations over the last three years.[9] The first thirty or so minutes of this engaging interactive drama/action-adventure video game, provide an excellent opportunity to review vocabulary related to parts of the house, furniture, family, and related activities. I used it towards the end of my third-semester Italian course, shortly after students would have learned the future tense and its use to express probability. As the game begins, the player takes control of the first of four protagonists, Ethan Mars, a 40-something architect with a wife and two kids. We find ourselves in Ethan's bedroom. He lives in a house with a garden. Ethan is sleeping in his bedroom on the second floor. At this point, on-screen prompts encourage the player to wake up Ethan through a series of controller key inputs; then to get him showered, dressed and go down to the kitchen to have breakfast. As Ethan, the player can explore all parts of the house; open closets and drawers; look outside windows, open doors and go outside to the garden; even go to Ethan's studio where we are given the option to have him work on a design project at his drawing table. As his wife and kids return home, Ethan then engages in conversations with his family through a series of multiple-choice dialogue options. He is asked to perform some chores around the house and then goes out to play with his kids. Like in the previous example, a worksheet with preliminary exercises can familiarize students with the new vocabulary and verbal forms, and follow-up exercises can test for listening comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. So, I used this section as the basis for the following activities on the worksheet I created and then shared with my students on the online learning platform Blackboard:

1. Listening comprehension: I created a fill-in-the-gaps exercise based on the text of the protagonists' initial monologue in the game's opening, in which he reads a letter left by his wife, and then talks to himself as he begins his day. As with *AC*, I included YouTube links to users' play-through videos of that specific section of the game, where students can watch the video cut-

scenes again, for follow-up exercises. Then, I created a series of true/false questions based on the monologue.

2. Vocabulary expansion: the initial sequence offered the opportunity to reinforce vocabulary related to relationship, family, morning routines and work. As usual, my fill-in-the-gap and association-based exercises presented cognates first, then I inserted images in the text to introduce new, more complex vocabulary in context.
3. Reading comprehension: I created a text which summarizes the premise and plot of the game, then added a series of open questions based on the text, to which students had to respond using full sentences.
4. Grammar: Using the protagonist's monologue and his dialogue with his wife and children as models, I created a series of short (5 sentences each) exercises (complete the sentence using the correct form of the verb in the infinitive; or answer the question and modify accordingly) aimed at reinforcing the conjugation of morning routine verbs (including reflexive verbs: *alzarsi, vestirsi, farsi la doccia, preparare la colazione, aiutare in cucina, etc.*); house chores and spare-time related verbs; and the difference between reflexive verbs (*prepararsi*) and reciprocal verbs (*aiutarsi*).
5. Speaking: I asked my students to discuss in groups what would happen next in Ethan's and his family's day (the eldest child's birthday party, going out for dinner, etc.), and share their conversation with the class. Since students at this level and at this point in the semester would have learned the future tense (but not the "if" clause yet), I offered the model: "*E poi, cosa faranno? Secondo me, la festa... perchè...; e poi per cena....*" This section was covered at the end of the second 50-minute lab, after approximately 20-25 minutes of gaming.
6. Writing: the premise of the game is that something terrible is about to happen to Ethan and his family. I asked students to provide an educated guess of what could happen, but also provide an alternative happy outcome, using the future of probability, which students would have already learned at this point (for example, "*Succederà qualcosa al figlio Sean. Sean si perderà. Ma Ethan lo troverà e tutto finirà bene*".)

These are just a few examples of possible activities. Other video games that I will mention shortly (and many similar video games that are coming out every year) contain plenty of opportunities to reinforce a

variety of grammatical forms and explore new vocabulary. They can be used at all levels, in one form or another, and as a lab or classroom activity in a regular or hybrid/blended course (part online, part regular instruction). Exercises and activities can be based on any of the features of cinematic games, interactive multimedia (video, audio, text) experiences involving adventure and exploration, which, in summary, offer opportunities for listening comprehension, reading comprehension (text and subtitles), vocabulary expansion and problem solving/multiple choice.

After each game-based activity, I performed assessment in the form of testing (a written test that included materials that were previously covered in class through traditional methods and reinforced by the gaming activity as direct measure), as well as both a preliminary and exit survey (as indirect measures). The preliminary survey asked students about their interest in video games, or lack thereof, and also about other types of digital *realia* they may be using: music videos, online newspapers and magazines, Facebook groups, etc.; the exit survey asked them how they felt about the game-based lab activities in relation to their learning. All of the students who responded to the post-activity survey over the last three years stated that they greatly enjoyed the video game-centered lab activities (approximately 95% thought it was excellent) and approximately 93% of them felt that they had learned very much from the activity. Even students who, in the short pre-activity survey, declared that they did not like (or hated) video games, expressed appreciation for the activity and selection of material. Post-activity test performance showed a 9 percentage point increase in the median score for the class. Outcomes assessment in my Renaissance Italian literature course, taught in English, showed similar positive results. Students demonstrated a similar median score increase on the "Intro to the Italian Renaissance" test; and in the exit survey they all declared that they very much appreciated the activity, which shed light on cultural elements they would not otherwise be able to learn from a textbook or a documentary. I asked students to provide examples of such occurrences ("In which way does Florence in 1476, as it is presented in the game, differ from your experience of city life in present-day America?"). Many of my American students would not have had the opportunity to visit Europe yet at that point. Several comments mentioned that they observed the heightened social interaction afforded by the nature of Italian cities (built around the "piazza"); others spoke about differences in everyday life (merchants' shops at every street corner and the types of goods they sold; the very visible presence of clergy around town); but some (namely, students who

had already studied abroad) also mentioned culturally-authentic instances of social interaction, such as friends expressing their familiarity by greeting each other by kissing on both cheeks. The class discussion that followed survey results was very lively, with students who had studied abroad sharing that they noticed how in-game characters greeted each other by kissing, in the same manner that their Italian friends and people they saw in the streets would do.

3. Other Suitable Cinematic and Non-Cinematic Games

I have selected a number of other games, currently on the market, that feature appealing, complex narratives, possess a task-based, problem-solving orientation, and present full voice-acted conversations between characters, all features that are key in stimulating learning and meaningful interactions in the language classroom setting.

All the main games in the *AC* series lend themselves very well to game-based activities in F/L2 and culture courses. The first game in the series, *AC: Altair's Chronicles (2008)*, took full advantage of technical advancements afforded by the new, at the time, generation of consoles (PlayStation 3, Xbox 360) and more powerful Windows PCs, presented players with a historical fiction that unfolded in an action-adventure, open world video game. The success was such that the game turned into a series, which at presents counts nine episodes plus a number of supporting "side stories," each set in different eras and areas of the world. Other recent incarnations of game series that started in the late 1990s such as *Tomb Raider* have also recently evolved into full voice-acted, complex narratives. Among the current or recent games, those that represent the best fully interactive, multi-media, digital narrative cinematic games for Italian language and culture courses are:

- Sony's (developed by Quantic Dream) *Heavy Rain* and *Beyond: Two Souls* (known in Italy as *Beyond: Due anime*) (respectively, 2010 and 2013 for the PlayStation (PS) 3, and 2016 for the PS4 version).
- Ubisoft's *Assassin's Creed II*, for PS3, PS4, Xbox 360, Xbox One Microsoft Windows and Mac OS (2009-2016), and its direct sequels, *Assassin's Creed Brotherhood*, for PS3, PS4, Xbox 360, Xbox One, Microsoft Windows, and Mac OS (2010-2016), and *Assassin's Creed Revelations* (for PS3, PS4, Xbox 360, Xbox One, Microsoft Windows, and Mac OS (2011-2016).
- Square Enix's *Tomb Raider*, for PS3, Xbox 360 and Microsoft Windows (2013), and its direct sequel, *Rise of the Tomb Raider*,

initially an Xbox One exclusive (2015), and now available also for PS4 and PC.

For the language teacher interested in teaching ESL, I highly recommend the outstanding *Life is Strange* by Square Enix, an exciting, highly playable, complex and challenging tale of an 18-year-old girl who discovers she has the ability to rewind time, thus changing destinies and lives. Unfortunately, Italian is only available for optional subtitles, not as an in-game spoken language.[10] These are all games that I have or will use in my class instruction. They, in my view, present the best scenario for F/L2 acquisition. The games I select, besides having engaging narratives (with *Assassin's Creed II* and *Revelations* and *Brotherhood* even offering outstanding overviews of Italian Renaissance history and culture), also conform to my own personal rules on teaching through video games, which is no war games nor any horror games. While there is some graphic violence in all games, they are still suitable for the average college student population, with ratings ranging from Teen through Mature (18+).[11]

Some of the games I have mentioned date back as far as 2008. Keeping up to date with the latest video game offerings is not a requirement. In the gaming world, "retro" is cool. Also, we should bear in mind that given the Teen/Mature ratings of those games (or other similar games); many of our present-day students would not have been of suitable age to have experienced those games when they were first available. An additional advantage in using older games is that many of them are available at a much cheaper price than current releases, and often via convenient digital delivery.

The primary reason I chose and recommend the above-mentioned games, however, is because they all have a higher emphasis on storytelling/narrative, animated scenes and voice acting, and more "casual gamer" oriented gameplay that does not require much in terms of previous experience with gaming. Any student can potentially take the controller and proceed through a section of the game. This is even more likely for students with some gaming experience, which at this point in time is the most likely scenario with our students.

I have not had the chance to explore online communication capabilities in the language classroom yet, but some of the games I mentioned even offer real-time online interaction with other players in the form of writing and even online chat with gamers in other areas of the world, including Italian speakers. I encouraged my students to explore this on their own. *Assassin's Creed Brotherhood*, for example, allows in-game chat in online multiplayer mode. Most of the games that

allow in-game chat (audio, sometimes even video) tend to be MMORPGs like *World of Warcraft* or Multiplayer Online Battle Arenas (MOBAs) such as the very popular *League of Legends*; but other type of games, such as driving games like *Forza Motorsports 6* on Xbox One and *DriveClub* on PS4, or the multi-platform fighting game *Street Fighter IV* also allow for global in-game chat. Sometimes players engage in real-time, camera-enabled chats via Skype or similar platforms, such as Mumble, Vent, and TeamSpeak.

While I am not presently convinced that online gaming chat would be beneficial in a regular classroom environment (activities could be organized to include in-game chats in an online course or in a course specifically aimed at video gamers, as I will later discuss), I have encouraged my students who play such games to explore in-game chats with fellow Italian-speaking gamers. After all, shared interests foster communication in the target language.

There are hundreds of other games and franchises that, while not possessing all the language-immersive features of cinematic games, still present animated, spoken cut scenes and/or in-game text in the target language. For the pre-college student population, superhero-based video games such as the excellent *Batman: Arkham* series (Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment 2009-2016), the ever-popular *Spider-man* series, and the fun and engaging Disney-based adventures of Square-Enix's *Kingdom Hearts* series are attractive to many gamers of all ages. For K-12 students, I highly recommend the *Lego* video game series (including the recent excellent toy-to-life *Lego Dimensions* game; all multi-platform). I have personally used, and would recommend, recent entries in these franchises to independent language learners and, possibly, at least in some form, for classroom use. *Lego Dimensions*, in particular, has very attractive features and the added toy-to-life interactivity (in which real, physical Lego toys are used to interact with the video game) that could work very well with children of all ages!

4. "But is it Feasible?" Technical Advice and Best Practices

The short answer today is yes, it is feasible to use video games in the language classroom. Recent advances have simplified things for the language teacher (or the adventurous student) willing to explore F/L2 language acquisition through video games. The advent of HDMI audio/video connections (one simple, small cable capable of delivering high-definition audio and video) has made it possible to purchase a video game console in any part of the world and have it work in any of the four

main regions (US, Europe, Asia, Australia).[12] This advancement also produced the result of eliminating differences in TV signals (NTSC, Pal, Secam), and including more streamlined content in games (i.e. multiple languages available, regardless of the area in the world where games are purchased). So, it is no longer necessary to purchase a video game console in a foreign standard in order to enjoy games in that foreign language, as was often the case in the past. With gaming becoming the massive, world-wide phenomenon that it has, more languages have been encoded in video games as a default option. In many cases, just setting a US game console's language to Italian will have the result of having the inserted game disc play in Italian (either all of it, such as game options, videos, subtitles, multiple-choice questions, etc., or selected sub-portions, generally subtitles and menus).

However, there are some issues and limitations. The first limitation is that there are technical problems that can arise, such as lack of language-specific content in the locally-sold version of the game (i.e. a US-bought copy of the game that lacks content in Italian language, which may be available in the version sold in Italy), or region compatibility (i.e. a game purchased in Italy that would not work on a US console). Until recently, games bought in Italy, featuring Italian dialogue and voice acting not available in the US version, would not work on US systems; that is generally no longer the case, as we will see. Second, not all gaming content can be suitable for our students. Third, one can quickly come across as "flaky" and ill-prepared if one does not have a clearly-defined lesson plan that connects the game to the specific language acquisition goals. Fourth, in my experience, video games are not a medium that can "speak" to an entire class all of the time.

Let us examine the above issues more in detail.

1. If I set my US PS3 console system's language to Italian (which can be easily done from the main on-screen menu), it will play *AC II* entirely in Italian when a US copy of the game is inserted and Italian is selected as the in-game language. But that will not be the case with *AC* on PS4, which will require an Italian-bought copy of the game in order to play content in Italian. With some other games also, such as PS4 *Heavy Rain* and *Beyond: Two Souls/Due anime*, an Italian copy of the game disc is needed in order to play the game in Italian.[13] The game will play fine on a US NTSC console because the PS4 is region-free, meaning it can play game discs from any area of the world. Of the current video game consoles, all of the Nintendo Wii U games and most of the games for the Xbox 360 are region-encoded, meaning that,

for example, Italian games will not play on a US console; while PS3, PS4, Xbox 360 and Xbox One are all region-free, meaning that a game from any region will work fine on a system from any other region. Only digital downloads (extra levels and optional add-ons) are region-specific.[14]

In my opinion, the region-free abilities and the wider selection of current (or updated in high-definition) cinematic games of the PlayStation 4 system make it the best option currently available on the market for playing the games I mentioned. Relatively inexpensive (currently around $349 for the standard model), the PS4 is reliable and easy to set up and play.

The cinematic games I recommended above will all play fully in Italian. Some, however, require the purchase of an Italian copy of the game:

- *AC II*, *Brotherhood* and *Revelations* on PS3: a US copy of the game will play in Italian on a US console. Set the console language to Italian. Select Italian language and subtitles from the game's Options menu. On PS4: an Italian copy is needed.
- *Heavy Rain*, *Beyond: Two Souls*,[15] *Rise of the Tomb Rider*, *Tomb Rider (2013)*: an Italian copy of the game is needed. It will play fine on a US console (or a console from any other region). Set the console language to Italian. If need be, select Italian as language from the in-game option screen.

Most of the cinematic games I have mentioned were created with English as the main in-game language. As a result, lip-syncing in voice acting through those games was designed for the English language. As any language instructor knows, observation of lip movements assists in listening comprehension (Kellerman; Gullberg; Bregni, "Enhancing"). This is an important limitation until more games are created specifically for the Italian market. That said, Italian voice-over artists are renowned worldwide for their superior technical expertise, and this shines through in cinematic games. Ubisoft, Sony and all major publishers clearly have done an excellent job with their Italian voice-overs. That said, in all the cinematic games I have recommended, co-speech gestures, another essential component of communication and F/L2 acquisition (Kelly, Manning, and Rodak) is excellent, and it definitely is a visual aid that enhances

overall student comprehension. In terms of potential acquisition of cultural elements specific to Italian culture, besides the excellent cultural components of *AC II*, *Brotherhood* and *Revelations*,[16] there are very few games that are set in Italy, and even fewer that include accurate, relevant elements of Italian culture. From 2000 to the present, only *Tomb Raider 5: Chronicles* (PS1, Sega Dreamcast, PC; adventure/exploration game), *The Italian Job* (PS1, PC; a racing game), *Casanova: Il duello della rosa nera* (a 2001 PC adventure game set in 18th century Venice), *Hitman 2* (PS2, Xbox, Nintendo GameCube, PC; a war game) and *Sniper Elite 4* (PS4, Xbox One, PC, 2016; a war game) are set in Italy and provide some elements of Italian history and culture. Given that most video games are currently produced with English, or, in some cases, Japanese as the main in-game language, while cinematic games (including the outstanding *Life is Strange* by Square Enix, for PS4, Xbox One, PC), are, in my view, still very usable and beneficial for the acquisition of Italian and languages other than English, they become an outstanding tool for ESL and Japanese language instruction.[17]

2. As a general piece of advice to teachers exploring video games as an instructional tool, I recommend doing some extensive preliminary research on any selected video game. First of all, I would suggest that you follow the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB; www.esrb.com) ratings for objectionable language and other possible sensitive content. Another good resource is the excellent www.ign.com, one of the leading websites devoted to video games. It is available in multiple languages and regional incarnations, such as www.it.ign.com. Finally, play through videos, uploaded by individual game players on YouTube, are an excellent way to preview materials. Some gamers also include their commentaries, which can also be an interesting way to expose students to authentic spoken language in context.
3. There must be solid preliminary work done involving the creation of vocabulary worksheets, listening and reading comprehension exercises, and follow-up activities that should take place before each video game-based class activity. Reinforcing materials that have been recently learned through traditional methods is the most effective use of digital *realia* (Smith). The cinematic games I recommended contain materials

diverse enough to contribute to reinforcing most fundamental aspects of grammar and vocabulary. There are currently no textbooks (or other scholarly articles, for that matter) that could provide a "data bank" of suitable games and exercises for F/L2 acquisition. In future efforts, I hope to produce such a textbook that would include game recommendations and specific exercises/tests for elementary through intermediate language courses.

4. Some students are bound to be either unfamiliar with or just not care much about video games and playing them could be a complex task for some of them. The solution I envisioned, as I mentioned, is to elicit volunteers to do the actual gaming and encourage the rest of the class to participate by encouraging the players. That said, realize that both the student population and the games are rapidly evolving and that gaming continues to become a more pervasive part of the lives of our students. Also, many of the games I described fall in the so-called "casual gamer" category, a grouping that has been targeted by game designers for about the last ten years. The "casual gamer" is a person, regardless of age and gender, who would not self-identify as a gamer, and is a user who, regardless of previous gaming experience, could basically pick up a controller and start playing the game in question within minutes.

   The language teacher willing to explore video games as an F/L2 acquisition medium, but who feels that s/he does not possess enough know-how, should bear in mind that technical help is available at each of our learning institutions. I confess that even I, who have been playing video games since they first became available in the early 70's, do not know everything about video games. However, there is institutional help available:

   - There are structures in place to assist the teacher willing to explore new media: Information Technology Services (ITS) at any institution of higher learning will most likely have personnel that could serve as a resource, and/or be willing to become one, having the specific know-how to research the topic and share knowledge.
   - Yes, there is an age gap between us (the teachers) and them (our students), but it can be used to our advantage as language instructors because students can be used as resources. We instructors can learn from them about

what games could be good or beneficial, and what games they are interested in.

- We can use gaming-related online resources such as websites as a primary source for our preliminary research.[18]

5. Intensive Italian for Gamers—A Work-in-Progress

My experiments in introducing video games as a learning device in the Italian as a foreign language classroom have led me to explore the option of teaching a full course specifically designed to attract a population of self-professed video gamers. In the fall of 2016, as the recipient of a Saint Louis University Reinert Center for Transformative Teaching and Learning Fellowship Award, I worked with the Center personnel to further develop second-language acquisition strategies using commercially-available video games and related media, including social media. The course, the very first of its kind, was taught in the spring of 2017. I used the SLU state-of-the-art multimedia Learning Studio at the Reinert Center to teach *Intensive Italian for Gamers*. The course, which provided two semesters of language requirement in one semester, was re-designed to specifically attract and respond to the interests of video game players willing to satisfy their language requirement, which at my institution is typically comprised of three semesters for the College of Arts and Sciences, and two semesters for other Colleges and Schools. Such a course was created to increase enrollments in Italian by attracting a specific student population. By completing two semesters in one, students enrolled in the course "merge" with students coming from the regular track, thus helping us address lower enrollments in third-semester Italian at our institution. *Intensive Italian for Gamers* combines traditional intensive language instruction with video game-based classroom and online interaction that will integrate the "five C's" principles of the National Standards for Foreign Language Education (Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, Communities) as applied to the four basic skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing), plus Intercultural Competence as the fifth skill. This is based on the pedagogical premise that language acquisition is a process that involves, and benefits from, daily interactions outside the classroom, the course targets students who already spend a portion of their free time playing video games.

The course has a blended/hybrid format. I selected and test-piloted a newly-adopted textbook with a connected online learning

system (Pearson's *Percorsi* and *MyItalianLab*). The course met three times a week for 50-minutes, with an extra 50-minute lab period. During regular class meetings, students were exposed to traditional language instruction for the first 30 minutes, while the last 20 minutes were devoted to game-based activities aimed at reinforcing and expanding upon what had just been learned. Game-based activities were not limited to gaming only, but also included analysis of related digital *realia*, such as YouTube videos and online gaming magazines. During lab meetings, students conducted online-based, individual and small-group activities through related *realia* (such as videos, online gaming magazines, and game-creator apps) and that further expanded upon what had been recently learned. Working with the Reinert Center, I developed weekly class gaming worksheets and separate sets of bi-weekly lab activity worksheets. Worksheets followed the content of vocabulary and grammar as it is presented in *Percorsi* and *MyItalianLab*. I used scaffolding and task-based learning to organize the exercises included in my worksheets. Here are two examples:

- The first game-based activity is scheduled for week three of the semester. Students, at that point in this intensive course will have learned how to greet and introduce themselves; genders and numbers; definite and indefinite articles; *avere*, *essere,* and *–are* verbs; and some common descriptive adjectives. Weekly gaming activities will be based on *AC: The Ezio Trilogy*. Students will be guided to understand Desmond's and Ezio's monologues in which they introduce themselves and their mission. Relying on cognates first, then context and visual aids (images), students will be guided to reinforce vocabulary related to self-introduction, and acquire new vocabulary related to war and conflict. Exercises will ask students to provide definite articles, then masculine/feminine/singular/plural of the nouns and adjectives they just learned, with the purpose of reinforcing both the recently-acquired grammar and the newly-acquired vocabulary. Other exercises will reinforce *avere*, *essere,* and *–are* verbs as they are presented in the gaming narrative. In the connected lab activity, worksheets will guide students to create, working individually, their own avatar using one of the free Italian-language online avatar-creator services provided. After building their own character (human, alien, elf, robot, etc.), following the model of Ezio's presentation, students are guided to introduce their alter-ego avatar to the rest of the class.

- After five weeks of classes, students will have learned all three present-tense conjugations and idioms with *fare* and *avere*. Weekly gaming activities will be based on the first section of *Rise of the Tomb Raider*. Students will be guided to understand Lara Croft's monologue as she introduces herself and her mission, and her dialogues with her teammates. Relying on cognates first, then context and visual aids (images), students will be guided to acquire vocabulary related to traveling, exploration and outdoor activities (mountain climbing, hiking, skiing, etc.). Exercises that ask them to provide conjugations of verbs they recently learned will have the purpose of reinforcing both the newly-acquired vocabulary and the related grammar in context. Other exercises will reinforce idioms with *avere* and *essere* as they are presented in the gaming narrative. In the connected lab activity, worksheets will guide students to create a quiz game on Kahoot.com. Following the model of Lara Croft's presentation and dialogues, students are guided to create, working in small groups, a short Kahoot quiz in Italian that presents Lara in the process of performing one of her activities as an explorer (*scalare*, *sciare*, *saltare*, *esplorare*), with four multiple-choice possible answers, of which only one is correct. The other students must guess. The individual student and group with the highest score win.

Thanks to the support of the Reinert Center and my department's, students had access to a PS4 system and games in Italian both in their classroom and in the Language Resource Center in the Department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures. A special section of the Center was reserved to function as a gaming lab. The cinematic games I recommended for purchase also include content in Spanish, French and German; some also offer Chinese, Portuguese, and Russian. Students from both my course and the department were to access gaming in the Center from 8am through 8pm weekdays.

I believed that targeting a specific student population that self-identifies as "gamers" through a video game-based language course would stimulate and enhance their learning process, hence the intensive nature of the course. After all, as language learning research confirms, we all become more excited and communicate more easily and effectively when in the company of people who share our same interests and passions (Dörnyei; Thorne, Black and Sykes).

The course could serve as a model for a mixed (traditional classroom; classroom "flipping"; media classroom; online instruction

through the e-learning platform Blackboard) learning model that could be applied to other languages and even other fields. After all, video games lend themselves to some interesting potential multidisciplinary developments in, among other subjects, anthropology, history, art, and architecture; just like how my students learn about fifteenth-century Florence, its architecture and art, the Medici, Leonardo da Vinci, etc. through *AC II*.

Could a video game-based course specifically targeting the gamer population be offered online? I believe so, with some caveats. I personally believe that classroom education is more beneficial than online, thanks to the face-to-face interaction. If I were to teach an online course, I would personally add a substantial component of real-life visual interaction through platforms such as the online platform Tegrity, which allows video recording and sharing, and Fuze, which allows online video conferencing.

6. Videogames are Here to Stay

I clearly recall how circa 1978 journalists in mainstream media across nations lamented the rise of the video game phenomenon, labeling it as a "fad." Well, they were wrong. For decades now, video games have been a pervasive part of our culture. The popularity of smartphones and internet-connected handheld devices, and even "casual gaming" on social platforms (such as the ubiquitous *Candy Crush Saga* on Facebook and mobile platforms, which apparently is played by vast number of middle-aged/senior mothers and even grandmothers), all have contributed to making video games an integral part of our lives. Currently, the virtual reality (VR) revolution is about to take over the video gaming world. VR headset and related gear have been introduced for PC and new generation consoles are hitting the markets (PlayStation VR for PlayStation 4 was launched in Fall 2016). Accessible virtual reality is bound to open new frontiers for language learning. The experience of learning with video games can prepare students to interact with a fast-changing world in which digital *realia* become more and more pervasive and opportunities for F/L2 interactions more accessible. For example, soon it will be possible to virtually meet, and interact with, other player/users from other regions of the world and communicate with them in a virtual environment.

Video games can offer many advantages to language learners. I believe that including them in some form or another in our curriculum may help our students improve their F/L2 acquisition skills. Even one

video game-based activity per semester, in my experience, can turn what in some cases is a substantial part of our students' extra-curricular activities into an out-of-classroom/continuing learning experience.

Simone Bregni SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY

ENDNOTES

[1] According to the PEW Research Center, there are no substantial differences between male and female players. Only about 10% of adult Americans, however, consider themselves "gamers" Data are confirmed by the Entertainment Software Association (ESA), which in its 2015 *Essential Facts about the Computer & Video Game Industry* added the following information: the average gamer is 30 years old; s/he has been playing for 13 years; 68% of gamers are 18 or older; 45% of all players are women; adult women represent a greater portion of the game-playing population (31%) than boys age 17 or younger (19%); 62% of gamers play games with others, either in-person or online; 77% of these gamers play with others at least one hour per week (ESA). Over 35% of college students play at least one hour per week (Craton).

[2] The first and foremost association for academics and professionals who research digital games and associated phenomena, founded in 2005, whose mission is to encourage "high-quality research on games, and promote collaboration and dissemination of work by its members" (www.digra.org).

[3] See for example the publications of DiGRA, the Digital Game Research Association (http://www.digra.org). Juul focuses on early arcade video games such as *Space Invaders*. So does Gee, *What Video Games* and "Good Video Games." Early arcade games were too limited in nature to have actual narratives, especially compared to present cinematic games.

[4] This article presents my classroom experimentations with GBL and video games conducted in the academic years 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016.

[5] Personal experience has certainly proven fruitful in understanding the importance of video games on language acquisition. Playing narrative-oriented quests in video games, I was reading in a foreign language and applying my reading comprehension to problem solving, using writing to attain goals and solutions. My interest for video games also pushed me to explore other related *realia*, such as magazines and, later on, gaming websites for reviews, guides, tips and tricks. The personal interest I had for the topic bolstered language comprehension and new vocabulary acquisition in broader, related contexts (Bregni, "In Praise," "Enhancing," and "Using"). Spelling, grammar, and syntax did matter, and thus they improved.

[6] In the Department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures at Saint Louis University core/language requirement courses and 300-level courses are taught 4 hours a week, one of which is language laboratory. 400-Level language courses typically meet 3 hours a week. Since 2000, all of the language laboratory hours in the Italian division include multimedia, digital *realia*-based activities that expand above and beyond regular class instruction.

[7] Gameplay in Italian can be accessed at this link: https://youtu.be/p1He0fkv3fk ("Assassin's Creed 2 (ITA) - 1 - Fuga dall'Abstergo").

[8] The game is currently available also on PS4, as part of the remastered "Ezio Collection," along with *AC Brotherhood* and *Revelations*, all set in Renaissance Italy.

[9] Available on Sony's PlayStation 3 and PlayStation 4 only. Official website: https://www.playstation.com/en-gb/games/heavy-rain-ps3/. Web. 17 May 2016.

[10] Hopefully a dialogue can be started with companies producing cinematic games that would encourage them to include more languages and better localization of their games (for example, to include language-specific, accurate lip-syncing). Other recent (2010-2016) cinematic games for the current systems that are suitable for language learning, but which contain horror or war themes (and as such do not fit my personal teaching style) are Naughty Dog's *The Last of Us* (2013-2014) for PS3 and PS4; Supermassive Games' *Until Dawn* (2015) for PS4; Remedy Entertainment's *Alan Wake* (2010-2012) for Xbox 360 and PC. Telltale Games offers three multi-platform games: *The Walking Dead* (2012-2014); *The Wolf Among Us* (2013-2014) and *Tales from the Borderlands* (2014). These horror games follow an episodic format, and, like in other cinematic games such as *Life is Strange*, player choices and actions have significant effects on later story elements. Bend Studios' *Days Gone*, which was just presented at E3 2016 on June 16, 2016, a PlayStation 4 exclusive, shows similar gameplay to *The Walking Dead*. Also, at E3 2016 Dontnod Entertainment, the creators of *Life is Strange*, presented *Vampyr* (PS4, Xbox One and PC), a horror-themed interactive adventure produced by Focus Home Interactive. A remastered version of Quantic Dream's 2005 *Fahrenheit* (known as *Indigo Prophecy* in North America) has also been announced at E3 2016 for PS4.

[11] I suggest following the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB; www.esrb.com) ratings. See also below, in the section on technical advice.

[12] Only the addition of a simple, inexpensive electric converter (step up or step down) would be needed in case of country-specific differences in voltage.

[13] While the two games are sold together on disc in Italy, they are only available as a digital download in the US, and Italian is not one of the languages available.

[14] Until the PS2/original Xbox era, most games were region-encoded, and the only way to overcome the encoding was to modify the console with a specific chip (which, incidentally, would void warranty and it would be considered illegal in some areas). Regarding the Xbox 360, a simple internet search will reveal whether the game is region-free or not. The cinematic game *Alan Wake*, for example, is region-free: http://gaming.wikia.com/wiki/Region_Free_Xbox_360_Games.

[15] Italian is not included as one of the available languages in the digital download versions of *Heavy Rain* and *Beyond: Two Souls*. Disc versions are not available in North America.

[16] Historians specializing in Renaissance Italy were involved in their creation as consultants.

[17] The upcoming remake of Sega's *Shenmue* (originally available on the Sega Dreamcast, 2000) currently scheduled for release on PS4, for example, would be an outstanding learning tool for Japanese language and culture.

[18] For Italian, I recommend the excellent multiplayer.it, spaziogames.it, gamesvillage.it, and gamesurf.tiscali.it.

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The Digital Archive and the Italian American Classroom

I walk the night city, looking up at lit windows,
and there is no table set for me, nowhere

I can go to be filled. This is the city
of grandparents, immigrants, arrivals,

where I've come too late with my name,
an empty plate. This is the place.
Kim Addonizio "Generations"[1]

As I scan the roster before the first day of each semester in my Italian American culture course, I can usually tell how many students will have a personal stake in the material. Generally, the majority self-identify as Italian American. In this very first class I ask them to make a list of things that come to mind when they hear the term *Italian American*. Often their responses oscillate between examples from popular culture (organized crime and *guido* culture) and generalizations (family, food, church). When pressed for details about how they exhibit their own Italian Americanness, they often struggle to express it. I can sense a spreading unease when we finish this discussion as if the students feel, like Addonizio, that they too, have "come, too late" with only their names. Many of them feel distant from an Italian immigrant past as second or third generation Italian Americans.

Italian American Culture is a general education course that satisfies the American Cultures requirement at my university. As such, there are a set of core objectives focusing on the American experience. One of these charges serves as the keystone to my approach to the course: "Increase student knowledge of United States social identities not in isolation, but in relation to one another" ("General Education Requirement Descriptions"). Though meant to be taken broadly, the built-in personal motivation of the majority of the students in this course requires an understanding of their own ethnic identity in relation to the *past* as well. Thus, in addition to comparing the migration trajectories of Italians and other ethnic communities in America (German, Irish and African American for example), I give students a context within which to include their own personal narratives.[2] To achieve this, I ask my students to become the curators of a digital archive dedicated to Italian American oral history.

The oral history project is not new to Italian American curricula. There are a wide variety of Italian American culture courses that contain an oral history component aimed at collecting local narratives, including the exemplary model from Montclair State University. This place-specific archive "uncovers the stories that make up the collective experience of the Italian American community of Montclair, New Jersey, while also encouraging students to investigate and share their ethnic experiences" (Trubiano 169). Even at my own university, there exists a material archive of Italian American oral histories related to this course dating back to 2000 (Perry). These examples successfully address the paratactic aim of historical relevance and personal engagement, but neither explore the pedagogical value of using new technologies in the process.

In this course, I wanted to strike a balance between student agency and adequate depth of engagement, while at the same time tapping into student digital intelligence. I also endeavored to introduce a project that would, by design, extend beyond the classroom and guarantee an audience through involving participants in an evolving intellectual process. The oral history project works in this way most effectively as a digital entity widely accessible to students and their successors. Allowing students to be the architects of a project that is quickly made available for use in the classroom and beyond offers them a chance to "identify their own rhetorical power as critically literate users of and potential contributors to digital archives" as scholars Jessica Enoch and Pamela VanHaitsma suggest (235). Not only does the digital archive provide a timely exchange, it also makes student participation in the historiography visible.

Introducing Oral Histories in the Classroom

I designed the project with three objectives in mind: 1) To give students some autonomy in deciding the content and scope of the project, 2) To create a relationship between primary texts and authors, allowing students to become the researchers producing materials for future classes and 3) To use available technologies (i.e. Box and Omeka) to construct a historically relevant digital archive for a public beyond the course. These goals are enfolded into the student learning objectives, for which the creation of a digital oral history serves as the culminating assessment.[3]

Before implementing any of these goals, I make sure to introduce oral histories into the classroom during the second week.[4] This

give examples of how the project will be used in the future while also offering models from professional sources—in this case from the Senator John Heinz History Center in Pittsburgh—to help the class begin to think about how oral histories are created and what makes them digital artifacts. Focusing on the process is important as this is what ultimately allows the students to see themselves as participants and not just observers.

The first oral histories that I introduce typically deal with descriptions of Italian life at the beginning of the 20th century. This activity is paired with a discussion of the Italian *Risorgimento* and the cultural differences between Northern and Southern Italian societies that remained after unification. Focusing on reasons for which Italians might migrate, I assign two oral histories from the Heinz History Center followed by a short list of questions.

The first account is from an Italian immigrant who worked as a teenage *giornaliero* (day-worker) in Calabria. The interviewer asks questions about birthplace and daily life and a description of hardship emerges. From the age of twelve he worked as a farm hand eating only once a day, sleeping outside in the summer and with the animals in the winter. When things were particularly bad, he ate grass (Galati). I pair this account with one from an immigrant who migrated from Udine, in Northern Italy. In this narrative, the family had a farm and though they were not wealthy, they lacked for nothing. This story also includes multiple migrations across generations from Italy to Romania to South America to Canada and finally to the United States all in search of work (Dozzi).

Through comparing these excerpts from different oral histories my students are able to deduce the different motivations that lead to migration. On one hand, there is extreme poverty and starvation, while the other shows only some economic hardship and more opportunity. There are also clear disparities between access to education and language. This contrast also opens up a discussion about sources. For instance, is it better to have a first-hand account or second-hand family narrative? When I assign these oral histories, I do not include the typed transcripts at first. On a practical level asking students to *listen* underscores the importance of the audio quality, location and the role of the interviewer in repeating difficult phrases or synthesizing moments for later clarity. This also preserves the dignity of the personal experience being described.

After this initial exposure to oral narratives, I assign a series of them throughout the semester from various sources, including the final

projects from previous classes. For instance, one student interview I use highlights post-war immigration and the experience of living in an Irish Catholic diocese as one of the few Italian Catholic families in rural Pennsylvania. This interview invites comparisons to previous generations' stories of the Great Migration and introduces elements leading up to the ethnic revival of the 1960s and 1970s. Such discussions, rooted in personal narrative, serve as preparation for the final critical analysis where students will analyze the historical relevance of the oral history that they themselves have conducted. By mid-semester my students have seen about five of these activities and are comfortable with analyzing the content of the oral testimonies and the process by which they are created, archived, and digitized, giving them what Enoch and VanHaitsma call "an archival literacy" that encourages "a deep sense of what a site does and, crucially, what it asks users to do" (219).

Goal #1: Student Autonomy

While current pedagogical trends in higher education overwhelmingly reject the traditional lecture-based model for student-driven approaches relying on new technology, the successful implementation of these models is not a simple task. A learner-centered paradigm is meant to motivate students who, "are deeply disengaged from the academic life of their institution" (Mintz). Thus, many new models aim to hook into student interests to weave subjective experience into the process of learning (Cooke; Lang). Yet adopting this strategy risks diminishing content and rigor for fleeting student interest and changing technologies. This risk becomes even greater in a large general education course where individual attention is at a premium.[5]

One way that I have found to immediately implicate students in the success of the oral history project is to ask them to organize and design the guidelines.[6] This is not a ploy to appease the desire for later due dates, instead, I am asking them to use their budding "archival literacy" to think about what elements need to go into a digital archive to make it successful. The course is typically fifty-students and I break them into committees of around eight to ten members. Each committee has about two weeks to come up with guidelines for conducting oral histories that include the following elements: subject (who may or may not be interviewed), location (where an interview may take place, including acceptable digital formats for interviews), technology required, length, acceptable questions, due date, and grade breakdown (percentage for each element involved). Once I assign this to each

committee, they can access an electronic folder of valuable information from the university archives and other national oral history sites that include best practices information for collecting and sharing oral history.

At the end of a two-week period, each committee presents recommendations and we agree on the details for the final project together in class. Relinquishing control of the process is central in shifting student perception from one of absorbing information to actually participating in the collection and dissemination of knowledge. By stepping out of the way, I allow them to become historians and not simply students. Drafting what is essentially our archive's constitution, my students are forced into thinking about how their work will be showcased and in what ways it will be accessed by others. The committee also represents an important sub-group that will serve as the initial readers/proofers for all completed oral histories.

Adopting this democratic process does pose some problems. For instance, each semester will yield different criteria and so the final archive lacks cohesion in some respects. Some of the interviews are only thirty minutes, while others go beyond an hour. There have been semesters where committees preferred subjects within a certain age-range and others that requested specific technical requirements and applications. Even with these disparities, the central elements tend to remain the same, and thus such flexibility does not undermine the integrity of the archive itself.

Goal #2: The Relationship Between Primary Texts and Authors

Discussing the use of archives in the classroom, Wendy Hayden admits that, "teachers at all levels find that incorporating archival projects leads to a level of student engagement not often observed in traditional research projects," (406). The digital archive is not only a way to involve students in the past, but it also becomes a site of research and discovery. In the interviews themselves, students are retrieving lost narratives and thus re-contextualizing their understanding of the past while at the same time perceiving their own relationship to it.

As I mentioned in the opening, most of my students come to this class with a personal investment in the material, even though they may be removed from the migration experience by a generation or more. The oral history project allows these students to research their own family trees in a way that pushes them to probe deeper than just ancestral lore. Even before conducting the interviews students need to amass a good bit of knowledge about Italian American culture in order to draft appropriate

questions. Some students are interviewing grandparents who remember family stories about early 20th century Italian American enclaves, while others are speaking to a younger generation whose parents came to the United States in the post-war period. Knowing the details of these moments of American history are essential in contextualizing and crafting the interview question set and understanding their subjects and the circumstances that surround the events being narrated.

Students are typically surprised at how much of this historical knowledge comes out during the interviews. When asked about how she felt about the project student Jamie Manecky said, "it opened up the opportunity for me to ask my grandma questions that I probably wouldn't have ever thought of. It was so insightful to hear about her past and that of my family as well." Jamie went on to say that, "the fact that her [grandmother's] stories aligned with what we learned in class throughout the semester really surprised me for some reason. I feel like everything we learned in class was just a fictional story, but it really came to life and a lot of value was added once I heard it first hand out of my grandma's mouth." Another student, Caroline Marino admits that the project was, "an amazing way to dig deeper into my own Italian American background." Like the previous student, she was surprised to see how the interview connected to the larger social and historical contexts that we discussed in class.

Before adopting this project into the curriculum, I would often struggle to find ways to allow students to share personal anecdote and family history within the structure of in-class discussions. While I generally welcomed personal stories, they often took students far afield of the topic. Channeling those stories into the oral history project now results in researched, contextualized narratives and invites students to be analytical about their own histories. Identifying these experiences as relevant historical artifacts also changes the way that students see and even *hear* them. Even for those who do not have a personal relation to the course content, creating primary texts instead of merely consulting them, forces them to think about how individual, lived experience comes to be represented within the larger historical record.

The culminating assignment for the semester asks students to re-examine their oral histories and evaluate them critically. In five pages, each student makes a case for why the oral history is significant to discussions of Italian American culture as a whole. Using both outside sources and knowledge learned throughout the semester, student-historians situate these personal narratives within a scholarly landscape, of which now they, too, are part. In general, these essays pull out a more

contemporary look at Italian American culture from the 1950s to today and require students to search for connections to and breaks from the past, while the at the same time recognizing elements that continue to define Italian American culture.

Goal #3: Using Available Technologies

The digital aspect of this project infuses it with an urgency that would otherwise not exist. The knowledge that their work (and their names) will be on the oral histories included in the digital archive allows my students to see how their efforts are part of a larger academic endeavor. The relative ease in working with course blogs and websites makes the dissemination and collection of an archive manageable. In this project, I used two key technologies to facilitate the collection and presentation of the oral histories: Box and Omeka.

In a class of fifty students, I needed to have the capacity to collect high-quality audio-files of interviews (some longer than an hour) as well as transcripts. In addition to collecting the files, I wanted a way to easily and quickly share them so that the oral histories could immediately be used for the analytical paper at the close of the semester. Box, a secure platform for storing and sharing data, is ideal for such an application. I created a shared folder for the oral histories so that students could upload their audio files and transcripts. Shared access also allowed them to read and listen to their peers' interviews. Box also gave me the opportunity to block access to those interviews not receiving permissions for academic or public dissemination without removing them from the rest of the archive's material.

For archival quality, audio files are ideally recorded in .wav format, but due to the large volume (at times up to 100 per semester) and the myriad devices used to record these interviews, I accepted the .mp3 format. Working with digital collections and non-professional oral historians necessitates some flexibility in collection. Most of my students used smartphones or tablets to record interviews. While I do spend some class time discussing settings, converting file formats and applications for recording, I end up receiving a wide variety in audio quality and file formats. This causes some headaches at the end, but the ease with which my students can go out and record stories is more important than these minor backend issues.

The last step in the process of creating the digital archive, is placing them on the course archive page. I use Omeka to organize and display the archive. Built as a free template for use by historical societies,

archives, and other professional entities, Omeka streamlines and professionalizes this process immensely. Not all of the oral histories make it to this final phase, which is only currently available to students and members of the university community. Permissions, interview content, and other factors dictate which interviews make it to the shared digital archive. This is essentially my task to create narrative threads that organize the archive, although I do consult students at the end of each semester to ask which narratives emerged most prominently throughout the interviews. Example themes that the students identified were WWII narratives, post-WWII migration stories, labor (mines, railroad, lumber), the cities of Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, and other key experiences.

Ultimately, I add about twenty to thirty oral histories to the digital archive each year. This archive is available to my students and I often use it as a source for in-class oral history activities, which allows student work to inform and inspire future participants. The most significant drawback of using these applications springs less from student use and more from instructor-based tasks such as editing and publishing. It can become a time-consuming process to filter through all of the interviews to identify those to include in the final Omeka version.[7] One solution to this that I have recently adopted is to offer a former course student a digital publishing internship to assist with this last step. In the future, this class digital archive will be transferred to the university archives where it will have a larger public beyond the course. In the meantime, using both Box and Omeka has allowed me to store a significant amount of source material to keep as a record.

Conclusions

Luisa Del Giudice, a scholar of Italian folklore, suggests that, "It is through personal and collective acts of cultural recovery—field collection, recollection, or actual reclamation of cultural practices, commonly initiated through explorations of family life—that many Italian Americans encounter oral history and oral culture for the first time" (163). For most of my students, particularly those who self-identify as Italian American, becoming agents of the academic apparatus that shapes the digital archive affords them an experience that they never expected. Most if not all of the interviews are rich in historical value, particularly for communities in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York, where many of the students have grown up. More recently, students have been including photographs and images of other material

artifacts to include with the audio file and transcript. I am continually impressed with the quality of these projects.

While the lasting benefits of this project are difficult to quantify, students significantly perform better on the final critical analysis of the semester when it is linked to the oral histories.[8] The oral history project also figures prominently in final semester evaluations. The most prevalent comments typically relate to the opportunity to "experience" history first hand and to "connect" what we learned in class to the community, and often to a student's own family.

On a practical level, Box and Omeka are user-friendly tools that enhance the learning environment by allowing instantaneous collaboration between students and serving as a robust repository for instructional material and primary sources. Beyond this, Omeka, as a platform and interface for digital archives, becomes the catalyst for discussions about history and how culture disseminates and maintains it over time. Last, as a final product the Omeka archive showcases the collective intellectual work of students across semesters, forcing them to think about how they, too, shape Italian American history.

Johanna Rossi Wagner PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY

ENDNOTES

[1] Kim Addonizio, "Generations," *Tell Me: Poems*, BOA Editions, 2000, p 37.

[2] This course covers early relationships between Italian culture and what will be the United States from the 15th century through the present day through an investigation of historical, literary, and cinematic sources. This article limits itself to the use and creation of archives in and outside of class as only one thread of discovery throughout the semester.

[3] Student learning objectives taken directly from the syllabus are as follows: 1) Increase student knowledge of Italian American cultural identities not in isolation, but in relation to personal and historical narratives. 2) Cultivate an archival literacy to identify key elements of successful oral history production, processing, publication, and dissemination. 3) Draw upon knowledge of Italian American cultural history, to situate an Italian American oral history within the larger cultural and social currents of American history. The oral history project is designed to measure each of these.

[4] The semester runs on a fifteen-week schedule.

[5] There is recent evidence that suggests that if an active-learning approach is not undertaken with a sound understanding of *how* and *why* it serves pedagogical goals, it makes little difference. See David Goodblar's discussion of the active learning

approach in "Learning More About Active Learning," *Vitae, the Online Career Hub for Higher Ed*, The Chronical of Higher Education, 29 June 2016.

[6] Committee questions taken directly from the syllabus: 1) What is the goal of the oral history project? 2) Who will be considered an Italian American subject? Will there be age, region, topic or other restrictions? 3) How long should the interview be? Will there be a minimum or maximum duration? 4) What formats should be acceptable (media, applications, technology, word processing applications, etc.) for the final draft? 5) When should the interview take place? Does it have to be in person? 6) What specifications should there be on the transcript? What would a general template look like? 7) What kinds of questions would be appropriate in this kind of interview? 8) When should the final version be due and how should it be handed in? In stages? All at once? 9) How should the project be graded? It is 30% of the final grade. Should it be divided between a few assignments (i.e. question sets, audio, transcript) or not? What will you earn/lose points for? What elements make an excellent, good, average and inadequate oral history?

[7] The most common reason for not making it to this final phase are: poor audio quality, permissions denied for use beyond the assignment and inappropriate content.

[8] Since implementing the oral history project into the class, students have performed better on the final assessment where the average grade for the analytical essay tends to be an entire grade level higher than for similar assessments unlinked to the oral history. There is also a higher percentage (65-70%) of students earning above average (B and above) marks. Quality of the essays also span more varied topics including racial tension in the 1980s and 1990s, the role of mutual aid societies in immigrant communities, philosophical discussions of contemporary ethnic identity, and I even received a paper discussing the role of Italian American culture courses as a means to rediscover ethnicity. Anecdotally, I see many more students in my office before the final assessment since implementing the oral histories as many students are excited about the project and have multiple ideas for the final assessment. They are also clearly personally engaged with the material having conducted the interview.

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The Garibaldi Panorama & the Risorgimento Archive at Brown University

Part One: The Project

1. Introduction

The Garibaldi Panorama & the Risorgimento digital archive seeks to provide a comprehensive resource for the interdisciplinary study and teaching of the life and deeds of one of the protagonists of the Italian unification process, Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807-1882). The project began in 2007, in collaboration with the Center for Digital Scholarship at the Brown University Library, in Providence, Rhode Island, and thanks to the generous support of the Office of the Vice President for Research at Brown, and Microsoft Research.[1] Set against the historical backdrop of 19th-century Europe and reconstructed with the help of materials from special collections at the Brown University libraries, the project devotes particular attention to the way the image of Garibaldi as a military leader and popular figure, his actions and the Italian Risorgimento as a whole were portrayed in nineteenth-century European and North American media. At the heart of this archive is a dynamic visualization of the *Garibaldi Panorama*, a unique survival of a popular form of nineteenth-century public art. The panorama, acquired by the Brown University Library in 2005, was produced and exhibited in Derby, England, in December 1860 and in Nottingham in February 1861. Its author is John James Story, a minor landscape and panorama painter and impresario native to Nottingham. Measuring approximately 4.75 feet tall and 260 feet wide, painted on paper on each side, this moving panorama is an extraordinary multimedia hybrid: part graphic novel, part illustrated history, part forerunner of cinema, it is a sort of archeological specimen in which, embedded in a now-vanished form of popular culture, are the traces of a dawning information society, an example of how news and entertainment were already mixed together in the nineteenth century, as they are in our "infotainment" society today. Through its visual narrative, the panorama transports us back to the summer and fall of 1860, when British *Garibaldimania* was at its height and a popular hero was "imagined" and "invented" in the media of his times.[2]

2. Preservation and Research

The panorama's dimensions make it impossible for scholars to study and explore it with ease and without fear of damage. Thus, in 2007, the Brown University Library had the Panorama photographed, in order to make a digital reproduction available on its website. Over the past two years, the project has significantly evolved: thanks to HTML 5, users can now view the Panorama as a scrolling image and listen to a voiceover narration in both English and Italian, transcribed and adapted from a rare manuscript acquired with the artifact. Users can also zoom in and out on specific scenes and read from a facsimile copy as well as a diplomatic transcription of the manuscript, scene by scene. The panorama is also a window into the Brown Digital Repository: accompanying the animation is a series of digital resources, including a collection of some 400 prints from illustrated newspapers that feature either Garibaldi or significant moments in the movement for Italian Unification. Additionally, relevant materials from the Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection, at Brown University, including portraits and music scores, have been digitized for study and also for pedagogical use (as explained in detail below). An international team of senior as well as junior scholars and students from a variety of fields, ranging from history and art history to literary and media studies, has been at work to augment this digital archive.[3] These scholars have contributed and will continue to contribute essays about the history of the Risorgimento and about the panorama as an artifact, its historical context, the history of its exhibitions, as well as general information about panoramas and dioramas as "optical devices" and popular representational media in nineteenth-century Europe. The proceedings of an international symposium held at Brown in 2011 (*Mediating the Risorgimento*) were also published on the project's site, including extended abstracts of all presentations and visual materials that were impossible to include in the printed version.[4] In short, this website is also a platform for collaborative research, teaching and publication.

3. Development

Thanks to a grant from the American Council of Learned Societies and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, in 2011-2012, multi-media materials digitized from various Brown library collections (books, pamphlets, illustrated newspapers, prints, and other images, musical recordings of Risorgimento songs, historical maps of Italy, Latin America, and Europe) were made available with the goal of building a prototype for a

thematic digital collection, based on the collaborative effort of scholars in the process of conducting their individual research. In particular, a strategic goal of the project has been all along to make selected materials from the Harvard Risorgimento Preservation Collection (HRPC), available in a richly annotated, searchable format on the project's website. A total of 5,902 titles from the Harvard College Library, all documenting the Risorgimento, were preserved during the first three years of Harvard's first major microfilming project, funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities Division of Preservation and Access in 1990-1992. This project was completed in 1993-1995, by microfilming an additional 8,683 pamphlets published between 1814 and 1950. The Brown University library acquired a copy of the complete sets of microfilms shortly afterwards. Over the past few years, a good portion of these materials have become available through the Google Books Library Project, in collaboration with the Harvard Library, giving scholars worldwide unprecedented access to a trove of primary and secondary sources documenting the political, economic, and religious aspects of the unification movement in Italy, from the First War of Independence in 1848 through its unification in 1870. However, a consistent number of pamphlets, broadsides and ephemeral publications was not included in the Google-Harvard digitization effort: thus, the Brown University Library has supplemented the available resources with a targeted digitization of these materials. A specific interface for the exploration of this vast repository of Risorgimento sources, wherever they reside, was then produced, as explained in detail in the second part of this article. Moreover, a largely unexplored print collection of primary and secondary sources on the history of the Risorgimento exists at the University of Connecticut at Storrs, comprising 2,672 titles. In collaboration with Professor John Davis at the University of Connecticut, we have compiled a list of titles present in only one of the two collections (Harvard/Brown and Storrs) and not already available in digital format through Google-Harvard, or other such initiatives as the HathiTrust Research Center, NINES, the Open Content Alliance or the Internet Archive, thus eliminating the risk of duplication. We also have been discussing further collaboration with another major library resource for the study of Garibaldi and his time: the Anthony P. Campanella Collection at the University of South Carolina, directed by Professor Don Doyle. From many points of view, the Brown University digital collection, the Campanella Collection, the H. Nelson Gay-Harvard Risorgimento Collection, and the collection at the University of Connecticut complete each other as the most important Risorgimento

library collections in United States libraries, and it would be a great achievement if interoperational capabilities among them could be implemented. To give just an example of the possibilities: of great interest is the planned digitization of the Garibaldini memoirs in the Campanella collection, as well as that of periodicals such as *Don Pirlone* (1848-1850), one of the most important Italian satirical publications of the Risorgimento age, a resource which nicely dovetails with our digitization of another prominent illustrated journal of the time, *Lo Spirito Folletto* (1861-1885), already integrated into the Brown University digital repository and soon to be available online on our website.

The possibility of making these and other resources widely accessible and cross-searchable through systematic sharing of metadata is indeed an exciting prospect for us and could be envisioned as the first step toward other forms of active collaboration that could be focused, for example, on sharing open annotation modules and other types of innovative interface design aimed to further promote scholarly collaborative research on the Risorgimento and related topics over the internet. Moreover, a synergy could be created among these U.S. library resources and the massive collections of materials related to Garibaldi and Risorgimento history held in the archives of the Istituto Nazionale per la Storia del Risorgimento Italiano in Rome, and other Italian archives such as the Museum of the Risorgimento in Turin, Bologna, Mantua, and other Italian cities.

4. New Applications for Collaborative Scholarship

The digital reproduction of these materials, according to the best standards and practices is, thus, only the first step in a more ambitious plan. One crucial aspect of the Brown University project has to do with envisioning and facilitating the emergent forms of collaborative scholarship that can accompany and drive the evolution of the so-called semantic web, taking advantage of the extraordinary capabilities offered by such recent developments as open data and social media practices: namely, the capability of building sharable resources for research while pursuing collaborative research and teaching. Preserving the integrity and quality control necessary to the production of solid and innovative research is an equally essential goal, one that can be accomplished through new forms of peer reviewing, adapted to digital media. These two principles guide the construction of the thematic collection based on the Garibaldi Panorama Archive.

The compilation of rich metadata is an essential part of the research process within the digital environment. It is our conviction that such a compilation should not be assigned entirely to library staff, but should instead include scholars in an active role: by taking advantage of emerging tools, beyond the annotation capabilities already provided by the Virtual Humanities Lab at Brown University, scholars and doctoral students participating in the Garibaldi project will be able to actively contribute to the production of enriched, formal metadata (in the form of MODS fields) as well as discursive annotations as they conduct their research; for example, by tagging and annotating archival documents as they are digitized and linked to each other. The fine-grained annotation of these documents (books, pamphlets, newspapers, etc.) by scholars working from different disciplinary perspectives (Risorgimento history, military history, art history, media studies, etc.) will allow these documents in their entirety and/or specific sections or segments of them to be interlinked and searched according to a rich array of thematic or semantic paths or categories. A first step in this direction is an advanced search tool which allows the filtering of the available resources, as illustrated in the second half of this article.

The Brown University project also has a fundamental pedagogical component. Since Spring 2011, in collaboration with Peter Harrington, the curator of the Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection, Prof. Riva has taught an experimental seminar on the *Garibaldi Panorama* within the context of nineteenth-century visual culture. Open to a selected group of doctoral candidates and majors in Italian studies, media studies, museum studies, and history, the course includes experimentation with various tools and applications including haptic interfaces. In addition to researching the visual culture and the media context of the Risorgimento, students are thus initiated into methodologies and practices in the digital humanities. More specifically, part of this experimental, lab-oriented course was the development of an application designed for handling large visual objects such as the *Panorama* in interactive formats. With the support of the Brown University Librarian, Harriette Hemmasi, in collaboration with the Center of Digital Scholarship and Microsoft Research, using the *Garibaldi Panorama* as a case study, a team of computer scientists led by UI (User Interface) pioneer, Andries van Dam, has developed an application, TAG (Touch Art Gallery) designed for the Microsoft Surface, in both its large table and small tablet formats.[5]

Touch-sensitive devices have become a common tool in our classrooms. In the recently inaugurated Digital Scholarship Lab at

Brown, these devices are connected to a wall display, an extraordinary tool for the in-depth study—thanks to Microsoft Deep Zoom—of such a large digital object as the panorama (see Images 1 and 2). The display also allows the simultaneous sharing of this large screen by several (up to twelve) collaborators. This application has allowed the digital version of the *Garibaldi Panorama* to be installed and exhibited in various venues around the world: at the British Library in London, in 2010; at the Biblioteca Salaborsa in Bologna and the Sala del Risorgimento in the Palazzo Pubblico of Siena in 2011 (part of the celebrations of the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Italian unification); and in the Italian pavilion at the 2013 Convention of the International Council of Museums, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.[6]

Image 2 Garibaldi sits upon his horse wearing a broad-brimmed hat with an ostrich feather in it and an American poncho; his servant who came with him from America rides behind him. J. J. Story, *The Garibaldi Panorama*, detail (1860). Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library.

Image 2 A full view of The Garibaldi Panorama Explorer (GPE) showing all the available resources, facets, and filters that allow to sort the information in the GPE database. https://library.brown.edu/cds/garibaldi/resources/fullexplorer.php

Scholars and students participating in this experimental seminar have been working also with WorkTop, a non-proprietary application developed by Andries van Dam's group, which allows the annotation of individual scenes of the panorama and links them to digital sources on the Risorgimento and related multimedia documents residing in the Brown digital repository. Both the website and the interactive display/tablet application allow users to either view the panorama in the scrolling mode with a voice-over narration, somewhat simulating the original way in which it was displayed as part of a public performance, or to explore it scene by scene. This dual mode of fruition mirrors the dual nature of this "pre-cinematic" artifact, a continuous narrative made of separate, discrete tableaux or scenes. Each scene, in turn, provides a path into the archive and the exploration of resources, as illustrated again in the second part of the article.

Concluding this section, the implementation of these tools will enable the Garibaldi archive to grow and further evolve into a platform for collaborative research, teaching, and publication—three functions increasingly interconnected on the digital platform. Scholars participating in the project will be able to publish the results of their research, both in traditional forms, as hyperlinked essays in the Contributed Scholarship section of the web site, which will effectively work as a sort of peer-reviewed e-journal, and in more innovative ways, based on their annotations to the textual and visual materials accessible through the project's website, across a full range of platforms, from desktops and laptops to tablets and pads. Each scene of the *Panorama* will provide a window into the repository, enabling scholars to access not only the English and Italian voice-over narrations, along with images and a transcription of the manuscript, and a detailed commentary on the scene, including information about the places, people, and events depicted, but also to link directly to fully searchable primary and secondary sources and other relevant materials in the digital repository (for example, issues of the Illustrated London News and other newspapers and magazines, pamphlets and books related to the scene, prints, maps, etc.). The Garibaldi Archive, as part of the digital collections of the Brown University Library, will thus evolve toward an environment where the process of research, including individual contributions, will be fully open and documented, exemplifying the way in which similar digital collections could be built and sustained through the contribution of scholars actively engaged in teaching and research. From such a collaborative and interactive process, involving teams of scholars and librarians as well as digital humanists specialized in

programming and encoding, new kinds of enriched digital objects and collections will emerge which will increasingly incorporate aspects of the research process directly into the primary sources without altering their preservation in their original physical (or digital) formats. This will allow us to re-conceive the knowledge workflow, or digital scholarly cycle, in a more integrated way, dynamically linking the production and storage of digital assets to research and publishing, and also exploring new, native forms of peer-reviewed digital publication in the process. The collaborative construction of the Garibaldi Archive, within the framework of the Virtual Humanities Lab at Brown University, offers a great opportunity to experiment with such emerging forms of digital culture applied to a major figure of modern Italian history.

Part Two: The Garibaldi Panorama & the Risorgimento Resource Explorer

In the second part of this article, we discuss The Garibaldi Panorama & the Risorgimento Resource Explorer (GPE). GPE is a visual interface aimed to provide a better understanding of the relationships between the *Garibaldi Panorama* and the visual and textual materials collected in the Harvard Risorgimento Preservation Collection (HRPC), as well as other library resources available at Brown University and elsewhere. The HRPC has always been part of the Garibaldi Panorama & the Risorgimento website project. Over 4,000 items from this collection were selected to build the GPE, which enables the user to access these resources by interlacing data about topics, language, year, and location of publications with the scenes of the *Panorama* and makes this data searchable through filters (facets). The GPE allows for rarely accessed sources from the HRPC, contemporary to the *Panorama*, to be browsed. Once selected, each facet updates the others in order to refine the list of publications that appears on the right side of the screen. If a publication is available online, the GPE will link to the digital scan. If a publication is not available online, the GPE will link to the Brown University Library catalog entry in order to provide information on how to find the item.

The GPE database derives from the Brown University Library catalog. After acquiring the full record of HRPC, which includes approximately 15,000 items, over 4,000 items were selected according to their relevance to the Risorgimento episodes described in the *Garibaldi Panorama*'s scenes. Searchable categories were assigned to each item whose publication date span from 1800 to 1862, the year the

Garibaldi Panorama story ends. Although mainly concentrated on publications issued in Europe, the GPE also includes publications from the Americas, reflecting the attention paid to the figure of Garibaldi across the Atlantic Ocean. The final GPE database, however, does not include HRCP items whose place or year of publication is not available (approximately 600 items). By offering a point of access to a collection that, for the most part, existed in microfilm format, the GPE ultimately aims to make HRPC items more accessible to students and scholars alike, allowing them to discover connections through visualizations.

Some of the over 4,000 items available for exploration are associated with one or more scenes of the *Garibaldi Panorama*. This association was established taking into consideration the episode depicted and the content of the original source. The relationship highlighted by this association helps investigate questions, such as: How did different parts of Italy react to Garibaldi's military campaign? How did other nations in Europe respond to Italian political and military events and when? Which were the main centers of publication for anonymous political propaganda as represented in pamphlets or broadsides? Which events spurred the highest number of publications?

However, a large number of items from the HRPC do not directly relate to a specific scene of the *Panorama*. Why did we include them? These sources speak to episodes, places, and characters of the Risorgimento that provide a larger context and backdrop to the events depicted in the *Panorama*. In particular, the GPE sheds light on a variety of anonymous sources, especially publications issued by, or in response to, the Catholic Church (the main focus of the HRPC), as well as popular songs, documents from freemason or women's associations, memorials, obituaries or commemorative discourses. These aspects are relevant for the contextualization of the *Panorama* and the resonance that events narrated through it had within and outside of Italy. In addition, these resources are about the Risorgimento even though they are not about Garibaldi himself. To include such sources means to contribute to the contextualization of each scene of the *Panorama*.

A fundamental step of the project is to understand how to read the results of a search in the GPE. Resources can be explored through the facets by selecting one or more scenes, one or more locations on the map, one or more years of publications, and one or more languages. A list of publications will automatically update according to the filters or facets selected. Publications are divided into primary and secondary sources. The label of primary sources is used to mark materials allegedly used by J. J. Story, the *Panorama*'s author, to depict some of the scenes,

as well as material that refers to the story of the *Panorama* before or after its making. These sources mainly, but not exclusively, date between 1860, the initial year of composition of the *Panorama*, and 1862, the year of the last episode from Garibaldi's life it depicts, are for the most part pulled from the Digital Repository at Brown University (BDR), Google Books, and other online archives, such as the HathiTrust. Items include articles and prints from illustrated magazines of the time, such as *The Illustrated London News, Illustrated Times, Illustrirte Zeitung, L'Illustration: Journal Universel,* and *Univers illustré*, among others. A total of 125 primary sources are available through the GPE.

When the GPE was built, some of the primary sources were already available on the website that currently hosts the GPE, thanks to the work done by scholars participating in the larger digital archive titled The Garibaldi Panorama & the Risorgimento. The GPE provides access to these sources as well as, more broadly, to a wealth of secondary sources (currently 4,167). As mentioned, secondary sources date exclusively from 1800 to 1862. They include pamphlets, prints, paper clips, flyers, ephemeral publications, songs, papal bulls, national government records, local legislation records, free press, anonymous political propaganda items, writings on and by political leaders and popular figures, and more. The GPE allows for this vast collection to be sorted out according to the criteria outlined above.

Additional digitized items from the HRPC published after 1862 can be found on the Garibaldi Panorama & the Risorgimento website project although were not the focus of the GPE. This resource exploration tool stems mainly from the desire to entice an investigation of the relationships between information material as available at the time the *Panorama* was made (textual and visual) and the panorama painting itself. Methodologically, the GPE revolves around the scenes of the *Panorama* through which it is possible to access a vast quantity of archival material. The link between the archival material and its fruition is the *Panorama* painting and its scenes. Further, the history of the *Panorama* is a geographical history. The borders around which the landscapes depicted by J. J. Story are defined changed as a consequence of the history narrated by the painter throughout his canvas. Therefore, we consider crucial to highlight the territorial relationship between visual objects and archival material. A map indicating the location of publications is an entryway into this relationship.

The GPE has been developed through a process-driven approach. It was clear from the beginning that the project was about the *Garibaldi Panorama* painting and had to revolve around the artifact. The

first step of this process was then to formulate questions about both the scenes of the *Panorama* and their relationship to available sources that the painter might have had access to. Second, we focused on selecting those items from HPRC that could relate to the history narrated in the painting. Narrowing down 15,000 items to approximately 4,000 items was not an easy task. The selection was done manually, by selecting items through their content and their affinities to the painting's history. Due to the relevance of geography, and the importance of the map in the making of the GPE, items lacking any location reference had to be excluded. The amount of items excluded is approximately 8% of the total. Following these preliminary steps, we started to think about possible tools that could serve our purposes and help us to formulate research questions. Some of the existing tools that can help scholars to make maps, tables, scatter plotters, and other possible visualizations, did not seem to respond to our needs because of a lack of fluidity or a shortage of selecting filters. The collaboration with the Center for Digital Scholarship at Brown University was crucial to creating a new tool that allows for easy access to items selected from the HRPC. In addition, the GPE is built around the purpose of anchoring these items to the panorama scenes in order to maintain the connection with the visual object, i.e. the painting that constitutes the focal point of the whole website project.

Based on this process-driven approach, some larger questions about this research and its methodology arose: Did we find an answer to the original questions about the *Garibaldi Panorama* through the GPE? Did the GPE answer new and unexpected research questions? How much planning and how much re-elaboration of the original tool-making plan went into the making of the GPE? We did find answers to the original questions about the *Garibaldi Panorama*. For instance, through the facets, it is possible to know how many primary and secondary sources relate to a specific scene and whether these sources might have been available to the artist during the making of the painting. Further, by indicating places of publication and language, the GPE brings attention to whether an event was recorded in a particular geographical area. All these observations could be further explored, and certainly have contributed to new questions about what cause an event to generate a certain amount of publications in different languages or the role of the army involved in a particular fight. In geo-political terms, this research encouraged us to further consider the degree of influence of a certain nation or a state over a particular region (Austria and Milan for instance) and its resonance throughout Europe.

Regarding the original planning and its re-elaboration, it is relevant to note that without ever losing the connection with the scenes of the *Garibaldi Panorama*, the process of making the tool did go through a mechanism of re-thinking. Some of the preliminary questions found an answer during the sorting out of HRPC items. For instance, it is understandable that the majority of publications in the Harvard Risorgimento Preservation Collection emerged during the years 1860-1861. This data is now available without further research by clicking on the year of publication in the "Full Explorer" visualization mode. Moreover, by filtering 1860-1861 as the years of publication the following results emerge: out of 4,292 resources, 1,275 were published between these two years (approximately 29%), while publication locations spanned from Spain to Poland, from Ireland to Russia. After Italian, the second most common language of these publications was French, followed by English, then German. Sixty-eight of these resources are categorized as primary. These are important details to sense how much the events happening in Italy in those years, and narrated in the *Garibaldi Panorama*, spurred interest in Europe, and how many of these resources could have served J. J. Story's narrative directly.

The GPE has two modes of exploration. The first mode of exploration is a partial view accessible from the section "Research the Panorama" on The Garibaldi & the Risorgimento website.[7] In this visualization mode, users are pointed towards the resources that refer to a single scene. The second mode of exploration is a "Full Explorer" view accessible from the section "Resources" of the website.[8] In this second visualization mode, users are pointed towards the entire body of available resources. It is possible to jump from one mode of exploration to the other. Research possibilities are therefore open and numerous, and adapt not only to the specific questions of each users, but also to a different modality of exploration as typical of current interaction. By favoring an open investigation, the GPE aims to serve as a versatile tool that engages the user on different levels of research. Ultimately, the GPE can offer the opportunity to find a source rapidly as well as the possibility to engage in a more complex exploration of how scenes and sources intertwine and how this correlation refers to a bigger historical context about the Risorgimento.

Finally, although a significant amount of material is available online, not all items from the HRPC have been digitized yet. Google Books, HathiTrust, archive.org, and other entities continue the digitization process, which will contribute to further expanding the investigation of the multiple facets of the *Panorama*'s historical context.

We hope that in future the GPE will include links to digital scans of all of the remaining sources now displayed as library entries. The GPE is not, and does not pretend to be, a comprehensive tool to analyze the figure of Garibaldi within the context of the Italian Risorgimento and its reception abroad. Rather, our project stands as a proof of the vastness and variety of sources and materials increasingly available in digital format for the study of the Risorgimento. Visualizing the geographic and temporal distribution of these bibliographical sources contributes to a mapping of the growing historical archive and helps generate questions for further research. Like many digital humanities projects, GPE is the result of a team effort. The project benefitted from the technical and institutional support of the Center for Digital Scholarship at Brown University, and research funding from Italian Studies department at that same institution.

Massimo Riva BROWN UNIVERSITY

Valeria Federici BROWN UNIVERSITY

ENDNOTES

[1] "Advancing Digital Scholarship with Touch-Surfaces and Large-Format Interactive Display Walls," primary investigators Gabriel Taubin, Andy van Dam, Harriette Hemmasi and Massimo Riva, 2010-2011, http://research.brown.edu/ovpr/awards_seed_10.php.

[2] Lucy Riall, *Garibaldi: The Invention of a Hero*, Yale University Press, 2007

[3] Contributing scholars are listed on the project's page, at: https://library.brown.edu/cds/garibaldi/behindthescenes.php

[4] Selected papers were published as a special issue of the *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, edited by Massimo Riva and John Davis, volume 18, issue 2, 2013.

[5] This application has been adopted in three pilot courses at Brown: one in the history of art, one in museum studies and in our course on the *Garibaldi Panorama* (which, in its latest versions, also included two other moving panoramas from two New England Museums, the *Grand Panorama of a Whaling Voyage 'Round the World*, at the Whaling Museum, New Bedford, Mass., and the panorama of the *Pilgrim's Progress* at the Saco, Maine museum, also available in digital format). A web version of this application is now available on the website of our project.

[6] *Growing Knowledge. The Evolution of Research*, British Library, 12 October 2010 - 16 July 2011

[7] http://library.brown.edu/cds/garibaldi/latest-scene/#/scene/1.

[8] http://library.brown.edu/cds/garibaldi/resources/fullexplorer.php.

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Reading, Rewriting, and Encoding Petrarch's *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* as Hypertext

Francesco Petrarca's *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* (henceforth *Rvf*), as any other masterpiece of world literature, "cannot be inherited" from the past: every new generation must obtain it "by great labour" (Eliot). The resources of the Oregon Petrarch Open Book (henceforth OPOB), a working database-driven hypertext in and around Francesco Petrarca's *magnum opus* allow the digital reader to approach the text in an unprecedented hypertextual configuration. Digital and hypertext technology create the condition necessary to appreciate the importance of each configuration of the *Rvf* in relation to the others conceived by Petrarch and/or the Petrarchan tradition. The philology and reception of Petrarch's *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* is almost seven centuries old; to keep the interest in philology alive in the digital era we must reject the ideology of the absolute, definite text, while remaining aware of the alterity of the past and appreciative of the conflict of interpretations. The OPOB invites the reader to question the assumption that critical editing is opposed to and incommensurable with diplomatic editing and to take advantage of the "Compare assets and poems" tool as an editorial machine capable of generating on demand multiple textual formations.

The idea that authors do not write books but texts, incarnated in different written objects including manuscripts, printed books, and electronic texts, is becoming more and more familiar in our digital time. The familiarity with manuscripts and incunabula long ago led scholars to point out the necessity of distinguishing between physical materials and their supporting structure, such as the book, that are unique and singular, as well as the "abstraction" that we refer to under the name "text," which is ideal and reproducible. As Joseph Dane writes in his *The Myth of Print Culture*, "In the earliest printed books we have […] there is not a single question in bibliographical or literary history that could not be considered a variant" (Dane 9). For this reason, we should be concerned above all with texts but at the same time take into appropriate consideration their supporting structure as well. Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier in their Introduction to *A History of Reading in the West* emphasize that "reading is not already inscribed in the text" (1); "meanings of texts depend on the forms and circumstances through which they are received and appropriated by their readers" (2). In other words, the crucial role of the reader in giving texts a meaning depends on the forms of writing and supporting structures through which the text

is transmitted. Cavallo and Chartier go so far as to say that forms produce meaning, new ways of looking at a text, and every change in support produces new meaning. In the following pages I will introduce the new forms and circumstances of reading made possible by the hypertextual configuration of the OPOB.

1. Reading Petrarca's Rvf as Hypertext

The ideal reader of the OPOB may read and study the evolution of Petrarch's masterpiece from manuscript to digital culture. The *Rvf* were a lifelong endeavor and took different configurations throughout the years. Petrarch was still operating on the partially holograph MS Vat. Lat. 3195—that includes the supposedly last one of these configurations– until the last days of his life, when he was rearranging the numbering of poems 336-66. The digital copy of Ettore Modigliani's diplomatic edition of Petrarca's last manuscript published in 1904 can be a good point of departure for our reader. Next, he or she may read the text in the manuscript tradition represented by the Cod. Queriniano D II 21, one of the most precious witnesses of the history of the *Rvf* that represents the pre-definitive form. Thanks to a 2012 ACLS digital innovation grant, we digitized and transcribed this manuscript, and now in the OPOB it is possible to read the digital copy along with transcriptions of the poems.

The Queriniano D II 21 is a parchment manuscript, discovered and first described by Arnaldo Foresti (440-45). Other scholars studied and described it, including Renato Gaffuri, Valentina Grohovaz, Michele Feo, and Carlo Pulsoni. It dates back to the end of the fourteenth century. It is appreciated by scholars for being one of the closest to the last version of the *Rvf* transcribed by Petrarch in the Vat. Lat. 3195. It is one of the four witnesses used by Giuseppe Savoca to prepare his recent critical edition of the *Rvf*. Savoca holds that punctuation in this manuscript—even though not always present—can be illuminating while reading the Vat. Lat. 3195; and that the use of majuscules is another area that is particularly precise (103). For Ernest Hatch Wilkins the first part of this manuscript represents the "eighth form" of the *Rvf*. In a different perspective, for Feo the Queriniano D II 21 represents the "third edition" of the *Rvf* immediately preceding the last configuration prepared by Petrarch in the Vat. Lat. 3195. Other scholars, like Carlo Pulsoni, prefer not to speak of the Queriniano D II 21 in terms of a special "form" or "edition" of the *Rvf*.

After this exposure to the manuscript tradition, our readers may approach the earliest printed edition of the *Rvf*, published in Venice in

1470 by Vindelin de Spira (Inc. Queriniano G V 15), which we digitized and transcribed as well. It is a unique and marvelous edition of the *Rvf* including extensive illustrations that serve as elaborate visual glosses of fundamental natural and psychological motifs in the poems. The handwritten marginalia glosses are another unique feature of this edition. The glosses and the illustrations are integrated and provide a remarkable and exceptional interpretation of the *Rvf*. In the OPOB these readings may be complemented with and compared to Renaissance and modern commentaries such as Vellutello's; also, recent critical editions of Petrarch's *Rvf* such as Contini's and Savoca's, the Spanish and French translations by Enrique Garcés and Vasquin Philieul (16th century), a contemporary English translation (A. S. Kline), and partial translations in Russian, Chinese, Japanese, and German.

Furthermore, the reader may decide to experience the text along with intersemiotic transpositions, including artworks and musical renderings utilizing the archives of the OPOB. Finally, the users may read the entire *Rvf* in tweet format: in the Apparatus menu they may find 366 tweets, one for each poem. As will become apparent in the next section of this essay, readers and students in the context of seminars and specific reading projects created these apparatuses. In this perspective, the OPOB introduces new hopes for the possible positive effects of digital innovation in the humanities by documenting inventive academic reading strategies in which the typical hyper attention required by the digital environment is conveniently combined with cognitive approaches oriented toward deep reading. The ideal reader that the OPOB has in mind is for sure a hyper reader that has to come to terms with multiple layers of meaning in the text as prompted by the hypertext and the intertextual setting in which the reading takes place.

Despite all possible similarities with previous revolutions of textual forms, the third revolution we are experiencing is introducing unprecedented changes in the ways we read texts.[1] First of all, the new and most important role that computation plays in research is as an "enabler of access" to an audience potentially far larger than the one retrieving books from libraries. The availability of texts in digital format does not in itself make the difference, though. What is really important is the organization of the texts available in searchable databases, "with well-defined schema describing that organization and well-defined access protocols for searching the data" (Foster 18). This new organization and architecture of texts based on hypertextual orientation creates a new situation for the reader, one in which the books are not on the shelves and not conducive to topographical memory.

The *lector in rete*, as we may call the new reader protagonist of the third revolution, is first of all seated before a monitor screen; he or she scrolls through a computerized file in a way that apparently resembles the ancient readers of a *volumen* or roll. In reality, the likeness is deceptive, since the now vertical scroll contains all the logical arrangements of text introduced by the codex, including quite often the pagination and different kinds of indexing. At first sight reading on the screen introduces a relationship with the text that combines two forms of reading that were the result of the two different textual logics and writing supports, the manuscript and the printed text. Upon deeper scrutiny, one has to realize that the written text becomes an ephemeral entity on the screen: it lasts for the time of its representation. It loses its perennial relationship with its supporting materiality.

This is why, notwithstanding the qualities inherited from the previous revolutions in reading, it is not possible to speak of a "page-screen." The electronic page is the result of a series of various visual configurations and platforms that may include the visualizations of documents in a mosaic of small windows that the reader can now choose. Anne Zali speaks in this regard of a "*texte nomade*" (46- 47). Terje Hillesund invites us not to confuse the electronic text in general as described above with the e-book in which the text is related to and integrated with a specific device based on electronic paper, such as the "Amazon Kindle"; she identifies different typologies of reading. She argues that deep and continuous immersive reading is possible with books and to a certain degree with e-books. On the contrary, the digital environment provided by web browsers and hypertext favors a multimodal and discontinuous kind of reading.

While I agree on the need to not confuse e-books with projects that are explicitly conceived as hypertexts, I argue that deep reading may be possible also within a hypertext approach to reading. Moreover, recent technological changes have radically modified the relationship between reading and writing to the point that the reader may now be considered a co-author. In fact, whereas from the appearance of the first incunabula the room for reader intervention was limited to the blank spaces on a page, in the new era opened by digital texts the reader may now intervene at any moment in the production of the text not only by annotating, copying, and indexing, but also by recomposing the texts in new ways different from the original (Cavallo and Chartier 26-28). As we will see in the next section, the OPOB encourages the use of the resources available in the hypertext to rewrite Petrarch's poem for example in a tweet format. Before describing such a utilization of the

OPOB, I will now introduce some possible paths of reading the text for study or research goals.

The OPOB's user may consult the individual asset separately or may choose a number of assets to combine through the link "Compare poems and assets." The OPOB supports and inspires active reading by allowing the reader to select different platforms of critical attention and to realize multiple tasks including the following:

- Compare manuscripts and transcriptions; compare manuscripts with printed versions of the text or with rewritings.
- Compare multiple versions of the original text in Italian: the Modigliani diplomatic edition, the Contini edition, and the recent critical edition prepared by Giuseppe Savoca.
- Compare different translations in relation to specific editions of the *Rvf*.
- Combine selected elements of the Apparatus with the base text to facilitate basic comprehension of the poems: paraphrases, summaries, tweets, and commentaries.
- Combine selected elements of the archives (visual, music, and essays) included in the Apparatus with the base text, to enrich the comprehension of the poems.
- Produce a new rewriting of one or more poems of the *Rvf* in tweet format.

Some of these features are of interest especially to translators and scholars of translation, others are particularly useful to students and scholars of Romance languages, comparative Literature, and general audience as well. From a methodological and pedagogical point of view, the philology developed in the OPOB does not neglect the text of *Rvf* in favor of a plurality of indistinct textualities; rather, its specific aim is to put the reader in the position of being able to appreciate both the importance of the material support and the evolution of the text, as well as their metamorphoses moving from manuscript culture to print and digital culture. Philology is the master key of the OPOB; we appreciate the new preservative and interpretative opportunities that humanist philology is developing in conjunction with the digital encoding of classical texts. Nevertheless, our hypertext construction puts substantial new emphasis on making sense of the poems through an intertwined reading of different textualities and different intersemiotic renderings of Petrarch's text; a reading that we tend to combine with different forms of writing.

To better illustrate this important point, I will now introduce two reading projects that I have elaborated in two seminars on re-reading

Petrarch's *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* that I taught at the University of Oregon in 2011 and 2014. In true Web 2.0 fashion, students in selected reading and writing projects became active discussants and contributors to the ongoing dialogue with Petrarch's masterpiece and among its readers.

2. Rewriting Petrarch's Rvf in the OPOB

In recent years the curators of the Oregon Petrarch Open Book (OPOB) debated the pedagogical usefulness of introducing in the *Rvf* hypertext as an educational apparatus that would facilitate the reading of the original poems written by Petrarca in the Italian of the fourteenth century, encouraging at the same time an original interpretive attitude. Our plan included paraphrases, summaries, and key words for each poem. In our vision, the writing of such apparatuses had to follow a philological strategy that would have students and contributors to the site read the text in the original and eventually in translation, and then produce in sequence the paraphrase, the summary, and the key words. In this perspective it became natural to add to the list of our apparatuses a Twitter edition of Petrarch's *Rvf*.

The idea of translating Petrarch's *Rvf* into Twitterature was developed and implemented for the first time during a seminar, Re-reading Petrarch's Canzoniere in the Digital Era (Ital 407/507), taught at the University of Oregon in Winter 2011. This class created the first Twitter edition of Petrarch's *Rvf* in Italian and focused mostly on the Italian text; students of another seminar on the same topic, taught three years later, re-elaborated the original tweets written in Italian and provided an English translation of them. Both versions are now available in the OPOB. In this essay I limit my analysis to the first creative effort; the reader who wants to know more about the equally innovative translation of the Italian tweets may consult the article, "E-Philology and Twitterature," which I wrote with Rebecca Rosenberg, a student in the 2014 seminar.

The most important challenge that the 2011 seminar had to face was the production of pedagogical apparatuses that would facilitate the comprehension of the *Rvf* and the creation of the tweets that in our vision had to have primarily a hermeneutic function. The six undergraduate and the four graduate students that made up this seminar were motivated to perform this important task for three important reasons: first, as advanced students of Italian, they felt that by creating paraphrases, summaries, key words, and tweets for each poem they were improving immensely their knowledge of the language; second, they sought to

progressively develop a comprehensive grasp of the individual poems and of the collection as a whole; finally, by actively engaging with the *Rvf*, they intended to incarnate the figure of the *wreader* popularized by George Landow, becoming active readers and contributors to the creation of the hypertext around Petrarch's *Rvf* (Landow, *Hypertext* 4-5; *Hyper/Text/Theory* 14). The instructor provided the general introduction to the *Rvf* and presented in each class a narrative account of the sequence of poems assigned. He divided the class into three groups and coordinated their work performed both in and outside the class; his assistant, Cinzia Capon, helped the students to write the paraphrases and the instructor to provide an edited version of them for each poem.[2]

The students had to read all the poems but concentrated their weekly work as *wreaders* on the poems assigned to their group. After reading the original text and the paraphrases, the different groups had to provide the summaries, keywords, and tweets for the poems assigned. It was clear from the start that the sequence of philological and writing activities represented an exceptional tool for reading and comprehending the text. One could argue that this way of "reading" somehow regenerated a reading practice that originated in the early Middle Ages, when people started to read in order to write, and to write in order to be read, as it happened in the *compilatio*, the method of composition of scholasticism.

As for the early medieval readers described by Cavallo and Chartier, for us reading was not exclusively aimed at a simple comprehension of the literal meaning (*littera*) of writing (Cavallo and Chartier 18). This first stage consisted of a movement from the original text to the paraphrase. This initial comprehension was followed by the composition of the summary of the general meaning (*sensus*) of the poem. Finally, the individuation of the keywords and the writing of the tweet allowed the students to arrive at a proposition that more nearly captured the profundity of the poem (*sententia*).

Each group shared the work done in class so that all the students were learning from each other and participating in a collective endeavor that may be seen as a form of flipped teaching/learning. Differently from the traditional model of instruction, whereby the teacher is typically the central focus for disseminating information, flipped teaching intentionally changes instruction to a learner-centered model in which class time creates meaningful learning opportunities. Moreover, whereas the traditional pattern of teaching is mostly centered on giving students the task of reading from a textbook, flipped teaching taking advantage of educational technologies such as hypertexts aims at producing new

textualities as a result of a collaborative effort by which information assimilation takes place in the classroom not through lectures but by participating in consequential activities. In other words, flipped learning provides students with different ways to learn content and demonstrate mastery; the instructor in flipped teaching is involved in creating and/or curating relevant content for students and with students.[3]

We discussed at the beginning of the seminar the general tone of the tweets. After a few experiments of various kinds, we decided to use in our tweets the first person, to favor an emphatic engagement with the meaning that the author presumably had in mind and to avoid ironic and sarcastic rendering of his voice. In other words, we used the tweet as a creative interpretive tool, something different from the summary and the collection of keywords; ultimately, in our view the tweet had to extrapolate the quintessential element of each poem allowing an immediate and insightful grasp of it. At the end of the course during one memorable session in the Yamada Language Center at the University of Oregon, the students alternately read all the 366 tweets edited by the instructor.

It was impressive to witness the lively and active reading of the long sequence of tweets that translated one of the masterpieces of Western literature into a format and a language attuned to our contemporary ears. In the general discussion that followed the reading, most students appreciated the sense of continuity from one tweet to the other and the comprehensiveness of our interpretative reading that allowed a complete review of the entire *Rvf* in just three hours. The consecutive reading of all the 366 tweets gave them a sense of the entire *Rvf* better than the one possible through an anthology of poems selected by the instructor.

Elena Cull, a graduate student in the course and a writer herself embraced with passion her role of *wreader* and the interactive learning that the class prompted. She was particularly enthusiastic about her first tweet from poem 1 of the *Rvf*. When she first read the poem, "Voi ch'ascoltate in rime sparse il suono/di quei sospiri ond'io nudriva 'l core…" she was deeply touched; she felt that a door was opening and that she was about to meet a real human being with his dreams, hopes and sorrows. This first meeting with the poet induced Elena to conceive the tweet to give expression to his voice and to update his language so that contemporary ears could still hear his message:

Ehi! Voi ricordate com'era essere giovani e innamorati? Abbiate pietà di me! Ora mi vergogno e capisco che il mondo è transitorio.

In the final discussion of the class she emphasized the benefits of rewriting the text in different formats, the discipline of the mind necessary to learn a language while interacting with a great work of literature. Other members of the seminar, Antonio Schiavulli and Michael Lukomski, noted this point as well, underlining the importance of removing the separation between the pedagogical-linguistic elements and the literary dimension of the course. The language, in this way, they added, had not been an ancillary foundation of the literary work: from the start and for the entire duration of the course both the linguistic and literary dimensions interacted in an interdependent relationship, based on a mechanism of understanding and creating, reading and re-writing. Schiavulli was particularly fond of the creative dimension of the new text, the tweet, as different from the original text in form and content. His tweet from poem 1 was slightly different from Elena's:

La giovanile ingenuità con cui ho affrontato l'amore ha prodotto questi versi. Ora, da uomo maturo, comprendo il valore profondo delle cose.

Gail Gould, a graduate student in the class, further elaborated these ideas by stating that the sequence of philological activities required to read a poem allowed entering the linguistic process at the origin of the poem itself, revealing some of its deep and hidden strata. In the final discussion of the class she presented on the difficulties and rewards of writing a tweet out of a very long poem of 157 verses such as Canzone 360. In this song the poet summons the sweet and cruel Love in front of the court of Reason. Petrarch presents himself as an innocent victim, persecuted for a long time by the passion of Love, and describes his unhappy life under this merciless master. He accuses Love of having turned him away from God because of a woman and considers it responsible for his suffering. Love responds by reversing the charges. Petrarch is guilty of failing to take a great opportunity that had been given to him: to imitate the perfection of Laura and rise to heaven with his poetry. At the moment of the verdict the personified Reason takes time: the issue is too complicated and cannot be easily resolved. Certainly, such a paraphrastic summary of the poem does not do justice to the rhythm and many beautiful poetic nuances of Petrarch's marvelous poem. However, the tweet that Gail helped to write captures the poetic truth, the *sententia* that is at the core of the poem:

Nel processo contro Amore, io ero il testimone di tante sofferenze. Amore si è difeso e la Ragione non ha saputo giudicare.

Nicolò Potesio, an undergraduate student majoring in science, took the course on Petrarch's *Rvf* because he wanted to experience at least one literature course during his college years. In his comments on the class he wrote that composing a tweet was for him fundamental in approaching the world of poetry, which for him was an unknown territory up to that point. He perceived a greater understanding of the poems for which he wrote a summary and a tweet. He admitted consulting not only the original text and paraphrases but also translations before writing the summary and the actual tweet. His choice of which aspect of the poem to include in the tweet was related in many cases to the structure of the sonnet that is divided in a "*fronte*" in which the poet introduces the theme of the poem, and in a "*sirma*" where the poet draws his conclusion or final reflection on the proposed theme. Quite often the clue for the tweet for him was located precisely in the *sirma* as he wanted to achieve an emphatic interpretation, writing in the first person and giving voice directly to the poet.

He found particularly useful the tweet he wrote for poem 19 where the poet compares himself to a moth drawn to the fire that burns. For Petrarch it is impossible to escape the love for Laura in spite of its having a negative effect. Like the moths the poet cannot withdraw; he is bound to be drawn to his flame forever, even when it burns. Compared to the original poem much is absent in the summary and in the tweet. Nicolò decided to omit the discussion in the first quatrain of the different types of animals, focusing on the butterfly for the well-known tendency of these insects to be attracted to the light; he also omitted any part of the first tercet because it was redundant. He included in the tweet the problem (the fire is attractive, but it burns) and resolution announced in the final tercet of the *sirma* (it is his destiny to be burned). This tweet is therefore Nicolò's interpretation of the proposition and of the tone presented by the poet in this poem:

Sono una farfalla attratta dalla sua fiamma, incapace di allontanarmi anche quando mi brucia. È mio destino andare dietro a ciò che mi arde.

Robert Belmonte, an undergraduate student of Renaissance literature, wrote that in the classes he took in the past while studying the texts of the Italian Renaissance he felt disconnected from the poetic work. For him to go through the same creative process as the author has done to write his poems helped him to develop his literary skills as a whole. One of his favorite tweets is the one from the poem 358 where the poet associates the death of Laura to that of Christ. Petrarch is now

waiting for death and invokes its arrival because his life has already ended with the death of Laura.

Morte, la tua venuta è dolce, devo superare questa tristezza e l'unica cura sei tu.

The tweet helped Robert not only to understand the poem but also to contextualize it in relation to the others in the sequence and grasp the crucial importance of the death theme for the second part of the *Rvf*.

Emily Anger derived the shortest tweet from poem 138, an invective against the Pope of Avignon, a city deemed by the poet to be false and evil in opposition to virtuous Rome. The church for Petrarch has become a brazen harlot who rebels against Christ and the Apostles. The tweet gives a very succinct and clear idea of the invective:

Ah! Inferno babilonese!

The class discussion elaborated and enriched the tweet that now reads like this on the OPOB web site:

O inferno Babilonese! La sede papale è una meretrice sfacciata che genera il male. Perché Costantino non torna a revocare la sua donazione?

For Cameron Butler it was very important to read Petrarch's *Letters* and his philosophical work, *On his ignorance*, to understand the poems of the *Rvf*. Moreover, the philological activity performed in the class helped him to appreciate the great value of Petrarch's poetry and above all, what Cameron considered his unsurpassed ability to express emotions. To learn how to understand and select the data necessary to write a tweet was one of the most satisfactory parts of the course for Cameron; he learned to distinguish between the most important rhetorical elements of poetry and prose, and synthesize them into one unified idea. His favorite tweet was based on poem 313 where the poet laments the death of Laura and cries. He states that she took his heart and brought it with her to heaven. Finally, the poet adds that he would like to be dead, in order to be near her. Cameron's tweet captures in three brief sentences the core idea of the poem:

La morte di Laura mi fa piangere. Ha portato con sé il mio cuore e la mia anima. Vorrei essere morto.

Cameron was very proud of the work done in this course. In the final reflection on the class he wrote that the rewriting of Petrarch's poems in tweet format makes it possible for them to continue living, evolving, and remaining relevant to modern and classical poetry. He was convinced that the kind of work done in class and now available in the OPOB helps the reader not only to understand poetry in the *Rvf*, but also to acquire an insightful method to approach poetry in general, the poetry of the world.

Andrea DeKonig, in her comments, wrote that reading the 366 tweets helped her to understand that there is a dramatic force in the *Rvf* showing a journey of discovery and transformation through the love for Laura. Petrarch's daily feelings and desires are very relevant and the long sequence of tweets helps to provide a continuous and unique perception of Petrarch's masterpiece. Andrea's favorite tweet responds to poem 133, in which Petrarch feels dominated by the passion of love from which he cannot escape.

Love dazzles him and destroys his life, which flees away before Laura's angelic song and breath:

Non ho alcuna difesa contro le armi di Laura che conquista la mia vita. Io sono un bersaglio per amore e ho bisogno di misericordia.

Andrea's tweet has been slightly modified in the actual version in the OPOB, which includes direct quotes from the original in the attempt at capturing Petrarch's poetic style:

Amore mi ha trasformato in un bersaglio, come neve al sole, come cera al fuoco. La mia vita fugge senza scampo alla tua dolce aura.

Finally, Brandy Freeman's favorite tweet took inspiration from poem 15. This was the first poem by Petrarch that really struck her. The poet is traveling away from his beloved and reflects on the impossibility of the physical body to live separated from the spirit represented by Laura, who has remained in her hometown. Love reminds the poet that lovers are exempt from physical rules that usually govern human beings and so the body and spirit can exist in separate states. The resultant suffering is described very vividly and dramatically by Petrarch, who feels he is leaving behind a piece of his soul. Here is Brandy's rendering of the poet's drama:

Mi domando come sia possibile sopravvivere senza lo spirito che mi anima, ma è un dolore che ogni uomo innamorato deve provare.

In the final discussion and in their written comments all the students in the class were convinced that the reading of a tweet cannot substitute for a reading of the actual poem; they would recommend the reader of the OPOB to read the tweet after having read the poem itself. Conversely, the reading of the tweet should trigger an engagement with the original text. Also, they suggest that occasional readers of poetry use the tweets as a reference tool to acquire a basic knowledge of the *Rvf*. Nevertheless, the instructor's basic criterion for editing the tweets created in this course suggests a greater role for a tweet, beyond its use as a hermeneutic and reference tool. This criterion is illustrated by the above-mentioned tweet from poem 133: including direct or indirect quotes from the original in the attempt at capturing Petrarch's poetic style. In this perspective the tweet incorporates a poetic flavor in what otherwise would remain a pure prose rendering of Petrarch's *Rvf*.

The work done by the class is propedeutic for and interconnected with a complex and articulated reading of Petrarch's masterpiece in hypertext format, which is now possible to perform through the Compare poems and assets tool included in the OPOB. The readers and students of Petrarch's *Rvf* may now retrieve the philological experience of the class, opening in different coordinated small windows on the same web page the original text, the paraphrase, the summary and the tweet of each poem. Taking advantage of these apparatuses and other resources and tools our readers may become *wreaders* themselves and produce new tweets out of Petrarch's poems as a synthesis of an interpretation different from ours. Then, they may submit the new tweets to the hypertext of the OPOB, adding a new contribution to the hypertext.

If we consider this important interactive dimension of reading in a digital environment we may conclude that digital humanities are providing new and more comprehensive ways to realize traditional humanities goals. One may argue that the OPOB hypertext reproduces the kind of extensive reading made possible by the reading wheel that was already known to the medieval and renaissance humanist (Cavallo and Chartier 29; Lollini, "Circles"). We are convinced that in this wheel the tweet becomes just a component that acquires sense and value in relation to the others. The experience of the students in the seminar proved that the tweet may not be just a tool to avoid the burden of reading Petrarch's poems but on the contrary a way to deepen their comprehension and better interpret them.

3. Encoding Petrarca's Rvf

In the 2014 seminar, Re-reading Petrarch's Canzoniere in the Digital Era, I designed with my collaborators an encoding activity that would allow students to develop a new thematic approach to Petrarch's poems. In the first section of the course the class discussed some crucial theoretical and methodological premises of digital humanism. While our specific goal was to elaborate a digital close reading of Petrarch's *Rvf* based on the encoding of a thematic network of selected poems, we did at the same time contemplate the elaboration of a quantitative approach to the *Rvf* as a whole. The main activity of the class was focused on reading, encoding, and interpreting poems based on critical inferences rather than on numbers and quantitative data about a text or a series of texts. In this respect, we shared Stanley Fish's concerns about reducing the reading activity to numbers ("Mind Your P's and B's: The Digital Humanities and Interpretation").

However, in the end we did find it useful to parallel the critical and qualitative approach to the text with a quantitative one. On the one hand, the possibility of reading the text of the *Rvf* in more than one version, in different media and formats belonging to different historical contexts proved to be extremely useful in triggering an informed and at the same time creative interpretation of the text. On the other hand, once we had elaborated the results of the digital close reading and encoding of selected poems we found it worthwhile to approach a digital distant reading of the *Rvf* based on the thematic keywords collected through the close reading. The experience of our class proved that data mining, looking for word frequencies or patterns in texts, and comparing and analyzing different texts, can be a meaningful research tool if associated with what remains the basis of humanism: close reading.

The point of departure of our reading was the contingency of the individual poem. In the ten-week seminar, students divided into groups read the entire *Rvf* and followed Petrarch's narration from the beginning to the end; however, they performed their interpretative activity by encoding a selection of specific poems every week. The thematic network of the *Rvf* was not a series of abstract and general themes imposed from the outside; it was elaborated as a work in progress through the encoding process and conceived as an organic inner part of the poems. On the one hand, the teacher was interested in particular in exploring the presence and importance of nature in Petrarch's poems; on the other hand, after students started encoding and interpreting the poems, a new, more complex, and articulated thematic network emerged. This network of themes extracted from within the poems themselves

included the poet, Laura, metaphysics, nature, metamorphosis, and urban life. Each group of students paid attention to all these themes in their encoding. Nonetheless, they chose from the weekly assigned sequences of the *Rvf* the poems to encode and interpret based on their special interest in and sensitivity to one of the themes.

We considered the themes as interrelated and interdependent. The poet is the site at which all the topics emerge and converge in their specific connotations. Nevertheless, his sphere is related to, dependent on, and intersected by other four spheres—Laura, metaphysics, nature, urban life. The encoding was meant to study the different manifestations, levels, and meanings of the intersecting relationships. Some students decided to learn the basic TEI encoding and worked towards this goal with Karen Estlund, quondam Director of the University of Oregon Digital Scholarship, who introduced them to the idea of digital close reading and encoding and followed their weekly encoding of Petrarch's poems. Yet, most of the students preferred to use a color-code system that was intuitive and, in the end, proved to be a very effective interpretative tool to complement the reading of the poems. I described thoroughly every stage of this experience in an article, "Re-Reading Petrarca in the Digital Era," I wrote with Pierpaolo Spagnolo, a student who participated to the seminar. In the pages that follow I will offer some reflections on the value of encoding as a way of close-reading a literary text, taking advantage of the hypertextual context.

In looking for a deep digital reading that would utilize the copiousness and the structure of the textualities available in the OPOB, our class rejected both the monographic and encyclopedic ideas of collecting data and developed a reading strategy based on the five circumscribed themes, organic inner parts of the *Rvf* and central enough to be a point of departure for an oriented encoding and close reading of selected individual poems. The close reading and encoding activities were then conceived as a premise for a distant, synthetizing reading of the *Rvf* as a whole. If it is true that in order to achieve a major work of synthesis, "it is imperative to locate a point of departure (*Ansatzpunkt*), a handle, as it were, by which the subject can be sized" (Auerbach 14); it is also true that a philological and historical synthesis cannot end in "the complacent exultation of the particular" and must remain "stirred by the movement of the whole."

Yet, as Auerbach concludes in his essay on "Philology and Weltliteratur," the movement from the particular to the whole can be "discovered in its purity only when all the particulars that make it up are grasped as essences" (16). In other words, the relational nature of the part

is reinforced through the distance/difference existing among different particulars. In this perspective the relativization of the parts transforms each of them as separate units in a mirror in which all the others reflect themselves. The reciprocal relation among all the units creates the comprehensive whole in which all of them partake in different ways. Ultimately, these units work as Leibniz' monads: each of them is unique and has at the same time the power of representation, by which it reflects all other monads in such a way that a seeing eye could, by looking into one monad, observe the whole mirrored therein (*Monadology* 56).

The following scaled visualization of the thematic network based on the occurrences of theme-related words elaborated by our class allows such a simultaneous and comprehensive synthesis. The different themes are represented as intersecting spheres:

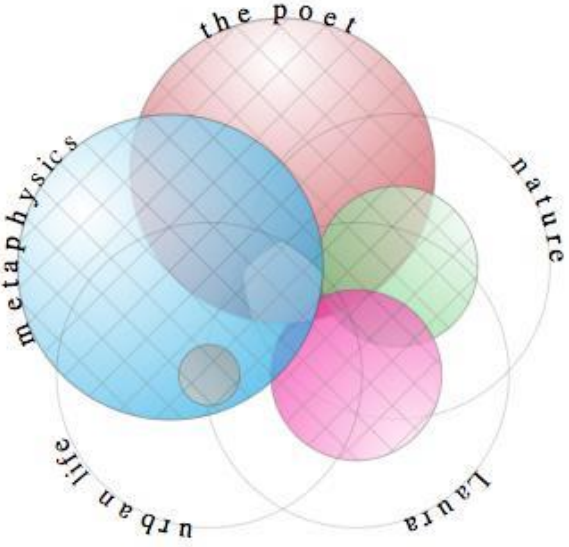

Fig. 1 Thematic network of Petrarch *Rvf*

Our point of departure was found by considering the independence and autonomy of the individual poems. Digital close reading and encoding led us to identify their provisional discrete grouping in five major themes; these themes became the point of departure of an articulated reading strategy that privileged the active forces in the poems, the protagonists, the natural and historical settings, along with the metaphysical culture of Petrarch. As suggested by Kate Singer, in her article "Digital Close Reading: TEI for Teaching Poetic

Vocabularies," digital encoding was used in the classroom both as a method of teaching close reading and as a technology that helped to reconsider and challenge the terminology used in literary reading. By color-coding our readings, we learned to develop interpretative language beyond the discursive and rhetorical terminology that somehow has become unable to register the synthesizing, visualizing, and outlining needs of reading in our digital time.

Encoding keywords and terms of selected poems revealed the qualitative and quantitative relation among the different protagonists of the *Rvf*, that is at the base of the visualization introduced in Fig. 1. The following is the numerical representation of the initial encoding of selected poems that was elaborated using Excel:

	Nature	Mphys	Poet	Laura	Urban
Frequencies	127	243	242	135	47
Percentages	*15.9%*	*30.6%*	*30.4%*	*17%*	*5.9%*

Fig. 2 Thematic word frequencies of selected poems

From this point of departure, we were able to conceive a distant reading that provided us with a comprehensive view of the *Rvf* based on the quantitative data of the thematic keywords extrapolated from all the poems in the collection, adding this time "metamorphosis" as a special theme to the list.[4] Here are the numerical results of the distant reading:

	Nature	Mphys	Poet	Mphos	Laura	Urban
Total word count	848	1502	2433	1361	2253	42

Fig. 3 Thematic word frequencies for the entire *Rvf*

On the one hand, the outcome of our digital close reading had Metaphysics as a prominent theme and the Poet and Laura as second and third, followed by Nature and Urban life; on the other hand, the result of the distant reading had the Poet as the principal theme immediately followed by Laura, and then, at a farther remove, metaphysics, metamorphosis, nature, and finally urban life. Thus, the thematic picture suggested by the distant reading is coincident with traditional readings of the *Rvf* as a love story that has two main protagonists and a prevalent metaphysical orientation. In this reading, nature does not deserve the role of protagonist and metamorphosis is just one theme among others.

On the other hand, the digital close reading based on an attentive semantic encoding of Petrarch's poems tells a different story. In this case, poet and metaphysics have a prominent role but the distance between them and Laura and nature is not so large as to rule out the interpretation that they play a role of co-protagonists in the *Rvf*. In other words, the close reading via encoding triggered an interpretation of the *Rvf* conceived not as a static and finished reality around the subjectivities of the poet and Laura but rather as a relational structure in which all the parts are mirroring each other in multiple perspectives.

Our experience suggests that new methodologies and strategies made possible by the digital humanities, such as digital encoding and structurally prepared intertextual readings, may well help change our understanding of classic texts and offer new ways of reaching traditional goals in the humanities. The parallel reading of historical documents and editions of the poems along with the miniatures of the Incunabulum Queriniano enriched the students' reading and encoding of the texts in question. Finally, considering the historical and quantitative synthesis created through the encoding, the class elaborated an esthetic interpretation of the *Rvf*, a drawing that visualized the importance of the different themes while at the same time attesting to their interdependence in a projected symbolic whole. The *Ansatzpunkt* of this synthesis was the result of personal intuition triggered by exposure to different textualities and nurtured by close and distant reading along with digital encoding, a mixture of art and science.[5]

The digital reading produced by our class was the result of intense work, dialogues and discussions in which each individual and each group was a protagonist. The teacher had his own story to tell based on his ongoing research on the role of nature in Petrarch's poems. He was open to listening to all the other stories the students were inspired to tell through their interaction with the material to tell. How many stories and readings of the *Rvf* were there in the class? At least five, one for each of the themes we considered; this approach triggered students' interests in finding new relations among the different topics. On the one hand, some students were interested in studying the authorial voice of Petrarch and the role of Laura in the *Rvf*. On the other hand, some students were interested in studying how Petrarch's metaphysical culture inspired his poems. Other students developed an interest in studying Petrarch's relation to cities, urban and historical culture more generally.

The class took in all these stories as they unfolded in our weekly meetings, in which each group had to present its close reading and encoding. In this way we rejected the idea that meaning is embedded solely in the text and avoided what is called textualism in favor of

openness to reader response and to different textualities and intersemiotic renderings available in the hypertext OPOB. Reading in our class was conceived as an activity that combined individual and group work. The semantic encoding of the poems allowed us to ponder that the meaning of the poems rather than being simply imbedded in formal features is the result of the reader's interpretive strategy. To work in groups allowed the class to maximize the value of interpretive communities in looking for some agreement on the different meanings of texts. Thus, the most innovative results are related precisely to the group and collective dimension of our experiment, the close reading and encoding of selected poems.

Our digital reading and interpretation does not pretend or want to be "exemplary," since we believe that each act of reading is in some way always singular, original, and *sui generis*. In this perspective our encoding is not meant to introduce a fixed and stable layer to the text. As Buzzetti and McGann write, "to approach textuality in this way [that is, as susceptible to a definitive reading] is to approach it in illusion." They go on the say that "markup should be conceived, instead, as the expression of a highly reflexive act, a mapping of text back onto itself"; and that "as soon as a (marked) text is (re) marked, the meta-markings open themselves to indeterminacy" (Buzzetti and McGann, par. 49). It is clear that in this perspective, quantitative reading can only be a tool of a digital reading of literary texts.

Our reading and encoding may be considered as a groundwork for other layers of encoding that will be introduced in the near future in the OPOB. All acts of interpretation occur in some context or other; our context is the late print time or digital era in Western capitalist society in which there is an unprecedented abundance of textualities and images that we need to learn to master in order to preserve the cultural memory of the past while pursuing at the same time the humanist project in original ways. To this goal, digital close reading, encoding, and visualization may become fundamental tools available to an ethical reader aware that reading is not simply a cognitive and epistemological matter and that the new nature of reading in the digital era is characterized not only by hyper and pervasive attention but also by a deep involvement with the text.

Critics like J. Hillis Miller have promoted the notion of an ethics of reading books and the importance of prosopoeias. Some of his ideas were reflected in our experience. He writes, "You can never be sure what is going to happen when someone in a particular situation reads a particular book," and that "reading is always the disconfirmation or

modification of presupposed literary theory rather than its confirmation." (21) Reading in a digital context can be even more intricate, especially when you read with someone else and have to listen not only to the story supposedly told in the book but also to the stories told by other readers and editors of the text, even including the story told by the machine via a distant reading. To conclude, from a theoretical point of view, our approach to reading, re-writing, and encoding the poems of the *Rvf* resisted both the quantitative and doxographic reduction of theory based on statistics and taxonomy of methodologies and schools of thinking in favor of a theoretical inquiry based on wonder in which there are still opportunities for the individual to tell his/her own story in relation to others.

Massimo Lollini UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

APPENDIX 1
Example of TEI encoding: poem 21, completed by Adrian Leon.

```
</lg></div2>
<div2 type="poem">
<head>21</head>

<lg type="sonnet"><lg type="quatrain">
<l>Mille fiate, o <rs type="Laura">dolce mia guerrera</rs></l>
<l>per aver co' <rs type="Laura">begli occhi </rs> vostri <seg
    ana="metaphysics">pace</seg> </l>
<l>V' aggio proferto il <rs type="Laura">cor</rs>. M'a voi non
    piace</l>
<l>Mirar sí basso colla mente <rs type="Laura">altera</rs>.</l>

</lg><lg type="quatrain"><l>Et se <rs type="poet">di lui</rs> fors'
    altra donna spera,</l>
<l>Vive in <seg ana="metaphysics">speranza</seg>  debile et
    fallace.</l>
<l><rs type="poet">Mio perché sdegno</rs> ciò ch' a voi dispiace</l>
<l>Esser non può già mai <rs type="poet">cosí com' era</rs>.</l>

</lg><lg type="tercet"><l><rs type="poet">Or s' io lo scaccio</rs>, et
    e' non trova in voi</l>
<l>Ne l' exilio infelice alcun soccorso,</l>
<l><rs type="poet">Né sa star sol, né gire ov' altri il chiama</rs>,</l>

</lg><lg type="tercet"><l>Poria smarrire il suo <seg
    an="metaphysics">natural corso</seg>.</l>
<l>Che grave colpa fia <rs type="Laura">d' ambeduo noi</rs>,</l>
<l><rs type="Laura">Et tanto piú de voi</rs>, <rs type="poet">quanto
    piú v' ama</rs>.</l> </lg>
```

ENDNOTES

[1] For a definition of the first and second revolution that brought the reader first from *volumen* to codex and then to the networks of printing see Cavallo and Chartier 24-25.

[2] As a biographical introduction to Petrarch, students read a selection of the *Rerum familiarium libri* (Letters on Familiar Matters); and as a philosophical introduction to the *Rvf*, Petrarch's *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia* (On his own ignorance). For the general pedagogical concerns of the course see my article, "Petrarch and the Ethics of Writing and Reading." The instructor could afford having a teaching assistant thanks to a 2010 NEH Digital Humanities Award.

[3] For a review of the basic concepts and practices of flipped learning see Aaron Sams, et al., *Flipped Learning Network (FLN). The Four Pillars of F-L-I-P™*.

[4] Art Farley, a colleague from the University of Oregon Computer Science Department, developed a computer program in the programming language Python that first removed insignificant stop words, i.e., conjunctions, pronouns, articles, and prepositions, from the entire *Rvf*, leaving only meaningful words in the poems. Then, the remaining words were matched against the words in each thematic set of words, with a count being maintained regarding each thematic set for each poem. Thus, each poem had a profile in terms of the number of words it contained for each theme.

[5] I recounted the entire process of the creation of the drawing in the above mentioned article I wrote with Pierpaolo Spagnolo. This article includes a digital copy of the drawing (80, 97).

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Mind Maps: New Perspectives

1. Introduction

This article will describe the use of mind maps to promote an active learning mean that both language and culture professors can employ in their classes. More specifically, it will examine some applications and benefits of mind maps, both analogically and digitally, as well as the combination of Mind Mapping online and on paper, through a hybrid approach. This approach should compensate for the downsides of these two methods, while implementing the perks of both, thus enabling a richer learning experience. Furthermore, it will illustrate some examples and ideas of how mind maps can be adapted in the teaching of foreign languages and cultures. To different extents, theoretic foundations of these graphic diagrams can be found in the work of David Ausubel (1963), Rudolf Arnheim (1969), Howard Gardner (1983), Joseph Novak (1998) creator of concept maps, and Tony Buzan (1996) creator of mind maps. To date, there are also various academic articles that focus on the use of these graphic diagrams, and which compare them for different uses. However, none of these articles investigate their use in the foreign language and culture context, nor do they propose a hybrid approach that includes the digital component.

2. Mind Maps

Mind maps are graphic diagrams organized around a central image or key word. They can be used to take and make notes, to develop concepts, to organize pre-existing knowledge, and also to motivate and improve learning. Mind maps can also be used to learn materials *ex novo*, to review or to expand an already familiar topic. Because of all these reasons, both the student and the professor can use them, at home, in class, or both.

Mind maps are a specific form of organizing and representing knowledge graphically, similar to other tools, like concept maps, conceptual diagrams, spider-grams, or visual metaphors, but with their own rules and goals. These terms are often used synonymously, however, they differ significantly for composition and purpose. In particular, mind maps are very often mistaken for concept maps, not surprisingly since concept maps also represent ideas with nodes and lines that connect and establish relationships between these nodes.

However, these two types of graphic diagrams are profoundly different from each other. Rigorous concept maps have a structure that highlights relationships, as well as causality connections. Their aim is to answer to a specific key question, which will define precisely the theme and the limits of the map. Concept maps display a starting concept, positioned in the top center of a paper, from which all related concepts will be connected in a top-down fashion, from more general to more specific. Concepts are enclosed inside nodes, circles or boxes of some type, and linked to other concepts through a connecting line that also displays a word, which relates logically one concept to another. All nodes and connecting lines share the same look, without differences in color, size, or font. Concept maps work well to represent information in a rational and highly organized system. The driving principle of concept maps is based on connectivity and causality (e.g. see fig. 1).

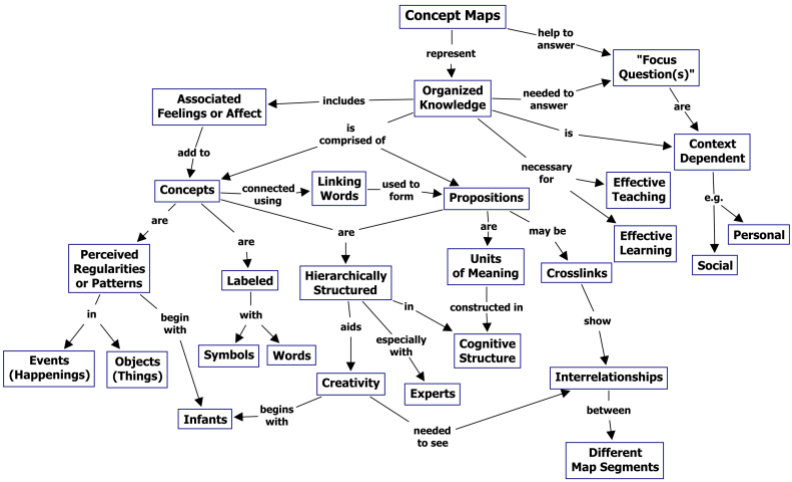

Fig. 4 Example of a concept map. Reproduced from Joseph Novak and Alberto J. Cañas, "Technical Report IHMC CmapTools 2006-01 Rev 2008-01," *The Theory Underlying Concept Maps and How to Construct and Use Them*, Institute for Human and Machine Cognition. http://cmap.ihmc.us/docs/theory-of-concept-maps.

Mind maps, on the other hand, are image centered radial diagrams that visualize information arranged around a central concept or theme, represented by an image or a keyword. Further ideas and concepts radiate from this central topic, arranged around it as annotated branches represented on thick lines. These branches may fork further into subordinated ideas and be portrayed on thinner lines. While central lines are thicker, as lines and words are drawn further from the center, they become thinner. Mind maps are keyword focused, hence they can be drawn quickly and easily and promote synthesis. The words that go on the map should be chosen carefully and written in capital letters, thus allowing the mind map to be viewed as a whole. According to Buzan, key words can and should be replaced or completed by a key image or a symbol whenever possible, in order to enhance memorization (Buzan 96).

Compared to concept maps, mind maps allow more freedom, since a concept does not need to be represented as a consequence of another already on the map. Their flow is not strictly causal, but driven by mind associations, and does not need a specific order to follow. The aim of mind maps is not to create a tight, logical network of concepts, but rather an image, a network that can represent knowledge in an intuitive way. Because of this, mind maps can be drawn easily and instinctively, and can be easily adopted to introduce new topics, to review previous subjects, to encourage creativity, unexpected connections, participation and discussion among students. It can also be a simple and easy way to gather students' knowledge in a specific moment of the semester, as a classroom assessment technique (e.g. see fig. 2).

Fig. 5 Example of a mind map. Reproduced from John Budd, "Mind Maps as Classroom Exercises," *The Journal of Economic Education*, vol. 35, no.1, Winter 2004, p. 38.

Supported by the research conducted by Margaret Matlin (1989), when Buzan created and popularized mind mapping, he insisted on the importance of emphasis, "considered one of the major factors in improving memory and creativity" (Buzan 97). Because of this, it is crucial that these maps always use a central image, along with symbols and images throughout the diagram, as well as the use of three or more colors. However, as previously noted, "The Mind Map is based on the *logic of association*" (Buzan 87). Consequently, association plays a major role in mind mapping, because it is considered a crucial factor in improving memory and creativity. Because of this, and through the interconnection of colors, codes, and images, synesthesia is also strongly promoted by mind maps.

Mind mapping allows knowledge to be processed through a powerful subjective filter, which re-elaborates information together with the experiences and the associations of the learner. Furthermore, mind maps become an image themselves, graphically captivating and ideal for those students with a predominantly visual learning style. It is worth pointing out that mind maps' radial structure promotes a concept hierarchy and the association between different ideas, all while keeping all the information on only one page. The use of key words and images makes mind maps synthetic, easily and quickly accessible, while facilitating review. Because of these features, Mind maps allow the

learner to immediately distinguish with a glance the general points from the more specific ones, as well as the most important from the secondary ones, especially when compared with linear notes or bullet points.

3. Digital Mind Mapping: Possible Class Activities

Due to their popularity, the use of mind maps has fostered the creation of many programs that allow designing these diagrams online, either individually or collaboratively, even if mind mapping had been conceived to be performed on paper, as previously noted. While some features of rigorous mind mapping on paper are lost, when mind maps are transferred online, other perks can be achieved. Also, digital mind mapping does not necessarily exclude entirely the analogic approach on paper, but can instead promote a hybrid approach, well suited for a combined use in class and at home by the student. Among the many online programs available, this article will focus on the web application Mind Map Maker,[1] a software offered through Google drive that is not only free, but also readily accessible by any individual with a Gmail account. Furthermore, being a web application Mind Map Maker is not designed for a specific platform like Mac OS or Windows, but will work flawlessly with any operating system.

Mind Map Maker offers most of the features needed in a rigorous analogic mind map, such as different colors, sizes, and fonts, as well as the option to embed images, clips, and Internet links. Maps created with this software are highly customizable and resemble very closely those created on paper by hand. Mind Map Maker allows the user to create a neat, easy to read, and organized map, in which the smaller branches can be expanded or collapsed as needed.

When in class, with the use of an LCD projector or a smart board, the instructor can draw a map that is quick and easy to create, but also convenient to read by all the students, who can participate actively in the creation process and follow it live. Furthermore, Mind Map Maker allows the creation of a volley of radiant branches, which can be efficiently and quickly collapsed or expanded as needed, in order to keep the view of the whole easy and organized. The map created can be saved as a graphic file, for example as a PDF, or can be made accessible to all the students through an online link. In this latter case, the instructor can decide if the map can be enabled for edits or not.

Digital mind maps and analogic mind maps can be used and combined in many different ways. A possible course of action would be to present and introduce students to the use of mind maps and purpose of them, both on paper and digitally, and to train them to their use. This

first stage can be performed and demonstrated by the instructor in class: an easy option to do this is by asking students to recall all the words related to a topic, for example "verbs," "food," "on vacation," or "Italian holidays." This can be done to review previously acquired knowledge, to practice recently learned words, or a combination of the two, in which the new vocabulary items are connected to prior knowledge. In both cases, the mind mapping associative nature stimulates students to link concepts and ideas to their memories and experiences, thus activating the schemata and lowering their affective filter. This context is ideal, because the main actor in the activity is the student, while the instructor can simply act as a facilitator and a motivator, by helping students to keep on track, or showing different connections, without taking away their responsibility from learning. As a matter of fact, the instructor in this context scaffolds knowledge as well as the learner's prior knowledge, thus promoting learning.[2]

After this first stage in class, similar to a brainstorming activity, students will start to develop their own personal style, and should feel more familiar when asked to mind map on their own as an assignment. As homework, this first stage can be performed again individually, on paper or digitally, or by editing a map initially designed in class. As previously mentioned, maps developed with Mind Map Maker can be saved and edited multiple times, giving the students the option to review, modify, and add new materials, for example after having studied a new grammar point or vocabulary theme. Also, digital maps can be saved in a folder, thus giving the students the option to access them later in the term to review their notes. All the steps taken so far can be easily adapted for an online course, especially since Mind Map Maker offers the option to work collaboratively, thus representing an additional tool for the instructor of this type of class.

For the traditional classroom, it is possible to build further on this first brainstorming stage, by using a hybrid approach that mixes together digital and analogic mind mapping. The instructor, in fact, can give the students a printed handout of the mind map that was previously created digitally, but only with its major branches, that is to say, stripped of all the minor connections. The students will be asked to complete the map individually, following their memory and their mind associations. After this step has been completed, it is possible to ask students to switch their maps: each student will face a mind map that is similar to the one she created, but not exactly the same. This potentially allows students to see words they did not know or did not recall, as well as associations within and outside major branches they had not thought of, thus offering

different perspectives on the same topic. At this point students are encouraged to work further on the map of their peer, adding new words, and creating more connections, and more associations, before handing back the map to the owner (e.g. see fig. 3).

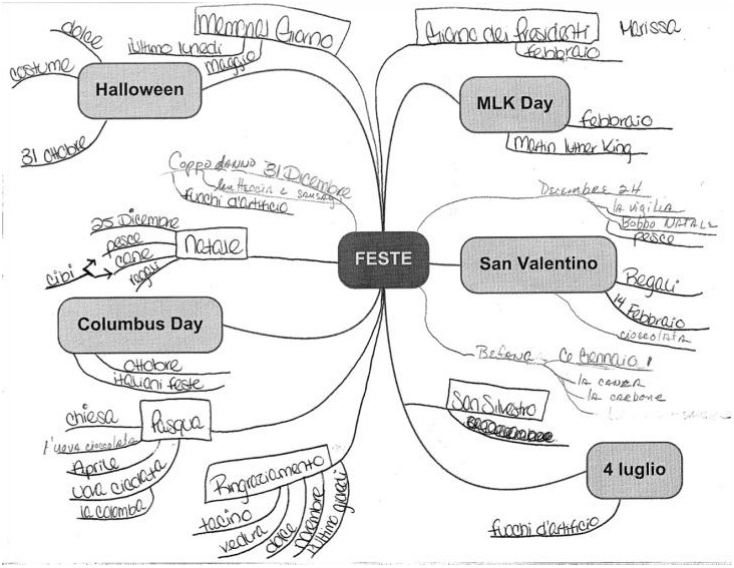

Fig. 3 A mind map created with Mind Map Maker first, and then completed by two different students.

This additional step, which can also be conducted in small groups instead of pairs, not only proves useful to stimulate the student to review and recall her prior knowledge, but also to activate the recognition process, in a playful and self-managed context. The whole activity, while extremely simple and straightforward, can be very beneficial for students because of its active and collaborative nature, based on the active learning exercise "think-pair-share," popularized by Millis and Cottell (72-78), and readapted by John Budd in "think-rap-map" (Budd 44). Figure 3 shows an example of this activity, which was performed by community college students enrolled in their second semester of Italian (ITAL 1020), aimed at revising the vocabulary of the holidays, which were previously introduced through the class textbook. Students worked individually first, and then collaboratively on a mind map created with Mind Map Maker. Students were already familiar with both the topic and the map, and could collaborate together to recreate the

diagram of their own learning, taking advantage of each other's mental associations.

While brainstorming is the most intuitive activity that can take advantage of both analogic and digital mind mapping, it is certainly not the only one. Mind maps allow students to organize, prioritize, and integrate different materials offered in a course; because of this, they can be used for vocabulary acquisition, but also to lead a listening comprehension or a reading comprehension exercise. Furthermore, they can be used to review pronunciation rules but also to organize the structure of an essay, proving to be a very flexible tool.

In the case of a listening comprehension exercise, the instructor can ask the students to prepare collaboratively a digital mind map at home, on the same theme as the listening activity that will be performed in class, for example "shopping in Italy," as is the case in figure 4. Once in class, the instructor can review the map created at home to introduce the activity and give a printed handout of the same map that was created at home, stripped of the subordinate branches but completed with some connections added by the instructor, which are related to the listening comprehension. The students, already familiar with the map on the handout that has been given to them, will be asked to complete the map with all the information they can grasp from the audio played in class. The map will help with listening comprehension for the students, thanks to the prior knowledge built at home and reactivated in class before the practice (see fig. 4). In figure 4 it is possible to see the map resulting from this activity, which was performed in the third semester of Italian course (ITAL 2010) by community college students. While the class had already been introduced to this area of vocabulary through the textbook, they had not yet been engaged in a listening exercise related to it. Through the listening activity and mind mapping, it was possible to involve students in a collaborative activity that included different skills, such as listening, comprehension, vocabulary recognition, and vocabulary recall.

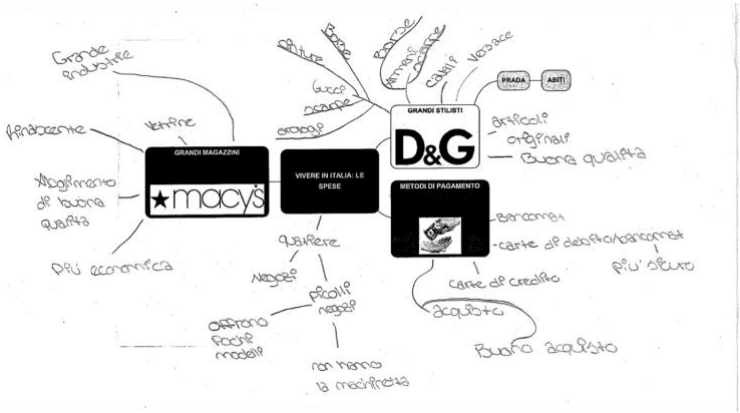

Fig. 4 An example of a mind map to guide a listening comprehension exercise.

Additionally, the instructor can add branches to the map that are specific to the listening activity, in order to help further the comprehension of specific information and scaffold learning. Alternatively, for any of the activities proposed up to this point, the instructor can provide the students with a word bank of suggested vocabulary items or concepts that the learner can consider adding to the existing map, resulting in something similar to what Novak defines as an "expert skeleton map" (Novak, "Learning" 27). According to Novak these kinds of maps "help learners begin the process of meaningful learning in a given domain, and they can also serve […] as organizers to facilitate integration of new concepts and ideas with the learner's existing relevant knowledge" (Novak, "Learning" 27).[3]

Naturally, this can also be done individually at first, and then collaboratively in pairs or in small groups. Regardless of the chosen format, the instructor offers a content-based activity, in which students activate their prior knowledge, built with the digital mind map, but at the same time they acquire new knowledge thanks to the listening activity, which is processed with a cooperative and active learning task. Furthermore, the map provides students with a structure that can reduce their affective filter while listening. A further step to this activity can be made by providing the students with the script of the audio, thus transitioning to reading comprehension, and asking them to add more details to the map, with the information that they had not been able to gather from the listening activity. This provides the students with a global view of all the information that they have already gathered, which acts as an aid to further understanding. Moreover, the work of this activity can be used to create the layout for a written composition or for a speech.

As a matter of fact, in this context the hybrid approach of digital and paper mind mapping provides the instructor with the chance to scaffold the learner's listening and reading comprehension, but also her speaking and written production, as pointed out by Judit Kormos and Anne Smith, who state: "The use of mind mapping techniques is particularly useful […] so that they can plan out an entire essay or even a project quite quickly, and use the mind maps as a framework, working on the parts they feel most comfortable with" (Kormos and Smith 112).

Another option to use mind mapping, and this hybrid approach that combines digital and analogical mind maps, is to help students recognize and review Italian pronunciation patterns. For example, a map can be created to display the different pronunciation of the consonants c and g, when combined with the vowels A, E, I, O, U, and with the consonant H, and link each of these sounds to a specific word, giving the student an overview of the system at a glance (see fig. 5). Figure 5 shows the map that resulted from performing this activity with a community college class of absolute beginners who were taking the first semester of Italian (ITAL 1010). As expected, some students struggled to learn and remember the basic rules of Italian pronunciation, so mind mapping offered them not only a different approach to recognize and revise pronunciation patters, but also a collaborative approach.

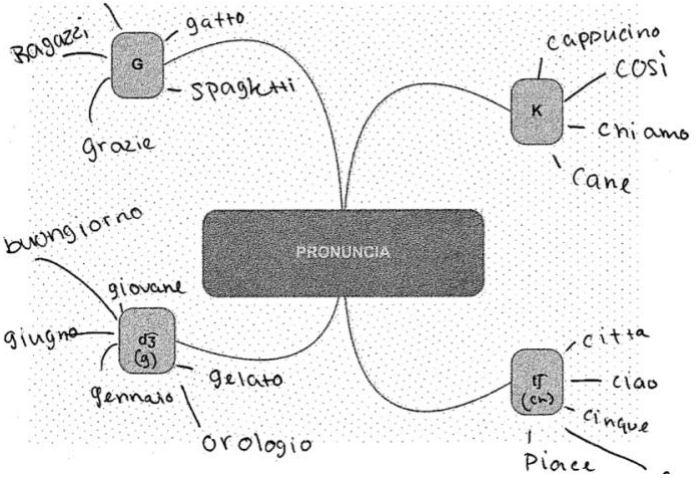

Fig. 5 Example of a mind map of different sounds in Italian

Mind maps enable the organization and prioritization of knowledge and information, but at the same time facilitate association and memorization, therefore, their use can prove to be successful in order to match graphemes with their corresponding phonemes. A digital map can be created in class, to help the students visualize, compare and contrast the different sounds. Regularly, the instructor can ask the students to review the map to recall the phonic rules, or can hand out mind maps with phonic categories, with a list of written or spoken words to be inserted in the right space. Alternatively, or in addition, students can make their own mind maps, either digitally or analogically, completing them with words related to each phoneme-grapheme. This way, learners not only recall and review the rules, but also update their own vocabulary map with the new items learned. Digital mind maps created with Mind Map Maker can be updated regularly, and students can continue to add words and categorize them for phonic rules. Mind maps can also be created *ex novo* during or after reading texts, or during vocabulary lessons, and can be easily kept in an online folder.

4. Pedagogical Benefits

The benefits of traditional mind mapping have already been proven, as demonstrated by a study entitled "The Efficacy of the 'Mind Map' Study Technique" by Paul Farrand, Fearzana Hussain, and Enid Hennessy (2002). Specifically, the authors tested the recall of factual material at the London School of Medicine and Dentistry on a pool of fifty students, divided in two groups. One group could use the study technique of preference, while the other group was given a thirty minutes lesson in the mind map technique. Some important conclusions that the scholars drew were:

> Analysis of the data indicates that, as a strategy to improve memory for written information, the mind map technique has the potential for an in important improvement in efficacy. With the mind map technique there is an estimated increase of 10% […] the mind map technique resulted in correct recall of a statistically significantly higher number of items than the self-selected study technique […] Importantly, the recall advantage with the mind map technique was robust over a week, resulting in a 24% proportional increase in correct recall when compared with baseline score […] it is likely that mind maps encourage a deeper level of processing than that obtained with the other, more conventional study technique adopted in the self-selected study technique. (429-30)

In addition, Farrand et al. state that "the increased use of mind maps, and the emergence of educational materials supporting the use of mind maps […] should be cautiously welcomed" (Farrand 430). Mind maps, both analogic and digital, are not necessarily a tool superior to others for taking or making notes, nor to other class activities. However, they can be an additional tool for the foreign language and culture teacher, as well as of other disciplines, like literature and cinema. The reasons for this are many. To begin with, both analogic and digital mind maps are very versatile, they can be used in both forms separately or in combination, individually or paired, at home or in class. Mind maps can be used to brainstorm, to introduce and to review vocabulary, to scaffold pronunciation rules, or to lead a listening or a reading comprehension activity. Outside of the second language context, for example in a culture, cinema, or literature class, they can be used to review concepts, themes, or historic periods and their characteristics, and to keep all the information on one single page, quickly and easily readable, thus promoting review. According to Jeanne McCarten, "organizing vocabulary in meaningful ways makes it easier to learn," (21) and mind maps can fulfill perfectly the purpose of organization.

Moreover, mind maps promote active and collaborative learning, when created *in plenum* with the whole classroom, with the aid of a smart board or a projector, as well as in pairs or in small groups, as outlined by Budd (42). Additionally, digital mind maps provide easy online access to the students that want to review at home the maps created in class, giving the option to tailor them further according to their specific needs, maybe before a test or a presentation.

For these very same reasons, mind maps have recently been underscored to aid and promote learning in students with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD), such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, etc. In this respect, according to Joanna Nijakowska, mind maps prove to be helpful not only because they provide conditions to improve memorization, but also because they can help SpLD students to review the vocabulary (Nijakowska 149). Furthermore, digital mind maps not only provide the chance to study collaboratively in class, but also to review and edit before and after class, thus helping the instructor to emphasize the importance of repetition, as well as to promote a healthy habit of daily study, as pointed out by Cecil Mercer. Both these elements, important for any type of student, are crucial to SpLD students.

Similarly, Kormos and Smith emphasize how mind maps can be helpful, because "just like other language learners, students with an

SpLD also learn vocabulary better if words are presented in a context and not in isolation, because this aids anchoring words to the mental image of the situation in which they were encountered" (Kormos and Smith 133). In this respect mind maps can also be helpful by providing a context, such as "national holidays," "vacation," or "free time." This not only helps to activate the schemata, but also offers the possibility to anchor it to a specific and subjective image. Furthermore, because of their multi-sensory approach, both digital and traditional mind maps help to connect with learners with diverse learning styles, especially because of their use of branches and colors, important aspects known to boost learning and recall (Driscoll 200). In fact, because of their nature, and thanks to a hybrid, customizable and combinable approach, both analogic and digital, mind maps offer a strong multi-sensory context: tactile with paper and pen, visual and aural through the use of colors, movie and audio clips, photographs, and drawings.[4] This context, which helps in presenting and eliciting information and concepts with a multi-sensory approach, while useful to any kind of student, is paramount for students with SpLD. Additionally, the use of digital mind maps can help further the learning of SpLD students, because thanks to the use of a computer it can offer them a better and clearer organization of the information, along with the possibility to check the orthography of the words included in the map. Specifically, Gilroy and Miles suggest that the use of a basic word processor eliminates preoccupation regarding the neatness of handwriting, and enables easier organization of ideas; concurrently, the correct spelling leads to higher self-esteem and greater confidence (quoted in Kormos and Smith 108). According to Chris Singleton, "these positive effects of using a computer improve motivation and determination in students who may previously have had negative experiences in the language classroom" (quoted in Kormos and Smith 108). Moreover, in Cecil Mercer's opinion, it proves helpful to provide students a graphic organizer, like a mind map, because it "helps students listen for key information and see the relationships among concepts and related information" (Mercer). Additionally, digital mind maps can double up to simultaneously combine verbal and visual information, where verbal information can be provided with visual displays, like on a smart board (Mercer).

5. Conclusions

Mind maps, both analogic and digital, allow introducing, visualizing, and reviewing a variety of topics related to vocabulary, culture, and history, among others. Moreover, they can also guide the comprehension of

reading or listening activities, as well as facilitate revision of notes previously taken. More specifically, the use of digital mind maps, and of the software Mind Map Maker, provides instructors and students with a tool even more flexible, which grants an intuitive software environment to use, as well as a clean and easy-to-read map.

The activities outlined in this article were tested in a community college context, with students who were in their first (ITAL 1010), second (ITAL 1020), or third (ITAL 2010) semester of Italian. Students' reactions to the use of mind maps were always positive, not only because they broke the daily routine, but also because they provided the class the opportunity to realize what they knew and what they still had to work on in a ludic way. Students could participate *in plenum*, thus feeling they were collaborating to the knowledge of the whole class, but they could also participate individually and in pairs, accommodating different personalities and levels of confidence. It was not possible to conduct an exhaustive, rigorous experiment on quizzes or exams, however, anecdotal data showed that the use of these activities did increase the students' proficiency in targeted areas of vocabulary. Similarly, on an anecdotal level, it is possible to say that students who used mind maps at home, in class, on paper, and online through Mind Map Maker felt that these activities helped them to learn and memorize vocabulary.

The maps created with Mind Map Maker will benefit its users by offering not only a quick organization, but also the possibility to add clips, pictures, and web links, as well as the opportunity to create a folder of maps that can be accessed again in the future. While mind mapping is not per se a communicative activity, its use can constitute an important grounding point to prepare for a more complex communicative activity that will follow, for example by introducing a topic, strengthening the vocabulary of the target language, or re-activating previously acquired knowledge. In particular, it is possible to say that mind maps encourage and develop a "related" type of knowledge, rather than an "isolated" type of knowledge. As suggested by Christine Hogan, and by Joy Jacobs-Lawson and Douglas Hershey, mind maps and concept maps can also be used as an alternative assessment tool in college courses.[5] In particular, Hogan explains how the students were introduced to the method and told that a mind map would appear on the exam. The grading rubric created to evaluate it takes into consideration the contents of the map by looking at the breadth and depth of its associations, as well as mind mapping strategies, such as colors, symbols, and arrows. Hogan adds: "we believe that Mind Mapping is a strategy that can be used to encourage 'deep' rather than 'surface' learning" (quoted in Buzan 228).

While mind maps are not a tool superior to others, they have their own place in the Italian language and culture-teaching context for various reasons. To begin with, they help the instructor to scaffold knowledge, following the aforementioned Wood, Bruner, and Ross' metaphor and, in so doing, they enhance the instructor as a motivator, a mediator, a model, and a facilitator.

Additionally, mind maps can be helpful to boost vocabulary retention with any student, as proved by Farrand et al. This could be particularly true for SpLD students, as pointed out by Kormos, who states: "special visual organizers called mind maps, which combine visual and verbal elements and represent information in a holistic way, also facilitate vocabulary acquisition for dyslexics" (Kormos and Smith 111). Furthermore, it is important to point out that mind maps allow the instructor to move beyond the typical professor-centered classroom, while promoting a more student-centered approach, thus also avoiding the old-school "chalk-and-talk" teaching style. It is also worth repeating that digital and analogic mind maps promote not only an active learning environment, but also a collaborative learning context, in which students work together through the process of "rap-map-share."

Overall, it is possible to say that mind maps provide the instructor with a range of options and activities with many benefits. It is worth adding that through analogic mind maps on paper, as well as through digital mind maps with Mind Map Maker, mind mapping covers at least five of Arthur Chickering and Zelda Gamson's "Seven Principles of Good Teaching Practices."[6] In particular, these activities "develop reciprocity and cooperation among students," "encourages active learning," "give prompt feedback," "emphasize time on task," and "respect diverse talents and ways of learning" (Chickering and Gamson 1). When both analogic and digital mind maps were used as an assignment or in a class-activity, students always suggested appreciating their use, as well as displayed a positive attitude to this technique. Future research could analyze empirically the outcomes of mind mapping activities on memory retention, with specific regard to the foreign language and culture classroom context. However, regardless of their effect on memory, mind maps and Mind Map Maker represent an additional tool for the foreign language teacher, because not only do they promote active and collaborative learning, but they also help connecting with students with diverse learning styles.

Metello Mugnai WEST CHESTER UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

ENDNOTES

[1] Mind Map Maker can be accessed directly from the website http://www.mindmapmaker.org/ or through Google drive (http://drive.google.com) which is supported natively by Mind Map Maker.

[2] Scaffolding is a term promoted by David Wood, Jerome S. Bruner, and Gail Ross, and described as a "process that enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts. This scaffolding consists essentially of the adult 'controlling' those elements of the task that are initially beyond the learner's capacity, thus permitting him to concentrate upon and complete only those elements that are within his range of competence" (90).

[3] When Novak talks about "expert skeleton maps," he is referring to concept maps "prepared by an expert in the knowledge domain to guide and 'scaffold' learning," created to serve as a starting point to the learner (Novak, "Learning" 27). While concept maps are different from mind maps, the same theory can be applied to the activities proposed in this article.

[4] In specific regards to drawing, a recent article written by Jeffrey Wammes et al., the authors conducted seven free-recall experiments to determine if drawing could be considered an effective strategy for enhancing retention and memory. Their conclusion is that "together these experiments indicate that drawing enhances memory relative to writing, across settings, instructions, and alternate encoding strategies, both within—and between—participants […] We propose that drawing improves memory by encouraging a seamless integration of semantic, visual, and motor aspects of a memory trace" (1752).

[5] Jacobs-Lawson and Hershey's research refers to concept maps, however, the same principles and findings could also be applied to mind maps. In particular, they state: "We evaluated the usefulness of concept maps at the beginning (pretest) and end (posttest) of the semester […] A comparison of the two maps reveals appreciably more nodes in the posttest map, a pretest-posttest increase in the number of psychological terms used, and an increase in the proportion of valid psychological concepts […] the pretest-posttest evaluation of this technique provides empirical support for the notion that concept maps are a valid means of assessing change in introductory psychology students' course related knowledge" (27-28).

[6] According to Chickering and Gamson, "Good practice in Undergraduate education: 1. Encourages contact between students and faculty; 2. Develops reciprocity and cooperation among students; 3. encourages active learning; 4. Gives prompt feedback; 5. Emphasizes time on task; 6. Communicates high expectations; 7. respects diverse talents and ways of learning" (1).

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Tra sincrono e asincrono: L'insegnamento Online-Blended della lingua italiana

I risultati del sondaggio del 2016 effettuato negli Stati Uniti dall'Online Learning Consortium in riferimento al 2015, evidenziano la richiesta crescente di corsi online: "More than one in four students (28%) now take at least one distance course (a total of 5,828,826 students, a year-to-year increase of 217,275). Public institutions command the largest portion of distance education students, with 72.7% of all undergraduate and 38.7% of all graduate-level distance students" (Allen and Seaman). In considerazione del continuo aumento di richiesta d'istruzione online negli Stati Uniti e dei progressi oggi raggiunti, l'articolo ha l'intento di contribuire al campo dell'insegnamento dell'italiano online. Si propone una nuova metodologia di insegnamento online della lingua italiana, l'insegnamento *online-blended,* attraverso l'uso di una classe virtuale con la presenza in sincrono del docente e attività in asincrono, organizzate dal docente stesso, ma non presente in collegamento simultaneo.

Il presente lavoro è diviso in tre parti principali e comprende sottosezioni specifiche. Nella prima parte si esplicita chi è il docente online, che opera in sincrono, nonché le differenze tra la didattica in presenza e quella online in sincrono. Nella seconda parte si presenta un'indagine sull'utilizzo di attività online asincrone in corsi di italiano elementare presso quattro università negli Stati Uniti. Inoltre, si considera l'esperienza di insegnamento online in sincrono su piattaforme online per aziende private in Europa discutendo il metodo e l'approccio didattico proposto in questo lavoro per l'insegnamento dell'italiano: l'"*online-blended.*"[1] La terza, e ultima parte, di natura prettamente didattico-pratica, presenta il primo modello operativo: l'Unità di Lavoro Online Blended (UdLOB) da seguire per organizzare corsi di lingua italiana *online-blended* all'interno di università al fine di offrire un ulteriore modalità di apprendimento della lingua italiana (e di altre lingue).

1. Dal docente in presenza al docente online

I corsi di didattica della lingua straniera, basati sulle teorie di acquisizione della seconda lingua, sono fondamentali per svolgere la professione di docente in presenza, ma risultano spesso insufficienti nell'insegnamento di corsi di lingua straniera impartiti parzialmente o

esclusivamente online. L'obiettivo di questa sezione è chiarire chi sia il docente online, quale percorso di formazione debba seguire, ma ancora più importante cosa significhi esattamente insegnare le lingue straniere online. In America settentrionale esiste solo un percorso formativo a livello accademico che si occupa di preparare docenti di lingua straniera online (per lo più da un punto di vista teorico) impartito da Weber State University, corso accreditato anche dall'American Council on Teaching of Foreign Languages, ma tale tipologia di corso non è prevista nella formazione richiesta alla maggior parte degli studenti di dottorato dei dipartimenti di lingua americani.[2] A tal proposito Robert Blake afferma: "If any graduate candidate goes to an MLA interview and is asked 'Do you use technology in your teaching?' no one would be so outdated as to reply with a flat 'no'…but the reasons why it should be integrated in the curriculum are not immediately obvious" (11).

Lo stesso Blake osserva che dopo il successo dei social media e dei giochi virtuali il tipo di apprendente che oggi frequenta le classi di lingua è diverso rispetto a quello comunemente considerato nei corsi tradizionali di didattica della lingua straniera. L'apprendente preferisce, infatti, imparare anche attraverso l'uso della tecnologia, che è entrata a far parte dell'uso quotidiano (11). Il docente di lingua straniera, che utilizza strumenti tecnologici durante la lezione in presenza, ha già fatto sicuramente dei passi avanti nel campo perché ha riflettuto, per esempio, su come didattizzare un video di *Youtube* o creare un gioco di *jeopardy* per animare e raggiungere specifici obiettivi dell'unità didattica di riferimento. Per il docente online non si tratta, tuttavia, solo il saper utilizzare degli strumenti tecnologici associati a specifici obiettivi didattici (che non corrispondono necessariamente alla didattica in presenza), ma è necessaria la consapevolezza che l'insegnamento online di una lingua straniera implica il trovarsi in un ambiente di insegnamento e apprendimento diverso. Nian-Shing Chen et al. mettono in evidenza i diversi livelli di distrazione dell'ambiente online in sincrono: "If people are situated in their own environment, then they participate within the conditions imposed by the environment, such as distractions due to family at home, or distractions due to phone calls and knocks-on-the-door at the office" (184) pertanto se il discente è esposto a distrazioni durante la lezione online, visto che si trova in un ambiente non controllato dal docente, questa potrebbe non raggiungere gli obiettivi didattici preposti.

La consapevolezza dello spazio virtuale che si viene a creare con una classe online diventa quindi vitale non solo dal punto di vista tecnico, ma soprattutto didattico. La mancanza di questa presa di coscienza da

parte del docente potrebbe contribuire a determinare un giudizio negativo da parte dello studente verso il docente o verso la modalità di insegnamento online. Lo studente potrebbe non apprezzare (o comprendere i benefici) della modalità di apprendimento online perché ritenuta poco convolgente a causa di distrazioni o "lunghe attese." Il giudizio dello studente determina e/o condiziona quindi l'adozione di un progetto pilota che motiva un dipartimento di lingue moderne ad inserire i corsi online tra le modalità di istruzione offerte. Nella didattica online l'assenza di un'adeguata formazione del docente *ad hoc* potrebbe inficiare il buon risultato della lezione, nonostante le qualità e abilità didattiche di un insegnante. L'adeguata formazione del docente online è legata principalmente alla ricerca di risorse informatiche (per l'ovvio utilizzo di strumenti tecnologici) e, di conseguenza, è caratterizzata da costanti cambiamenti e aggiornamenti, nonché dalla creatività del docente stesso. Stare al passo con l'informatica preposta alla didattica non è sempre semplice, ma diventa essenziale per migliorare l'esperienza degli studenti e i loro risultati di apprendimento. A tal proposito Carol Chapelle indica: "most people would probably readily agree that technology alone is not an answer but that a real solution will draw on technology in a manner that is informed by professional and scientific knowledge about SLA [Second Language Acquisition]" (750). La didattica della lingua, basata sulle teorie di apprendimento, deve infatti essere adattata all'utilizzo della tecnologia piuttosto che il contrario. Questo però non deve indurre a pensare che la tecnologia sia più importante della didattica perché tale adattamento si rende possibile solo quando permangono gli obiettivi pedagogici e la volontà di presentare al discente i contenuti preposti in maniera che vengano appresi. Per il docente online la tecnologia è il primo assistente, ma se non utilizzata correttamente questa potrebbe risultare controproducente ed essere causa d'insuccesso del progetto formativo.

L'adattamento della tecnologia alla didattica presuppone conoscenze informatiche che vanno oltre a quelle richieste al docente di lingua, cultura e letteratura. La creazione o adattamento di strumenti informatici è appannaggio della linguistica computazionale cui però, come ha evidenziato Chapelle (750), va sempre affiancato un esperto di didattica della lingua straniera oggetto di apprendimento se si mira alla creazione di un prodotto informatico nuovo, inerente alla didattica. Nella realtà però, i costi per la creazione di un prodotto nuovo sono eccessivi, specialmente nelle ristrettezze economiche a cui tutte le discipline umanistiche sono soggette in America del Nord e in altre zone

geografiche. Da qui si rafforza, quindi, l'importanza della formazione del docente di lingua anche da un punto di vista didattico-informatico.

1.1 Le differenze principali tra la didattica in presenza e quella online.

In linea generale le differenze fra i due tipi di insegnamento, in presenza e online, riguardano quattro aspetti principali: il materiale didattico, la tecnologia, la flessibilità e il differente ambiente di insegnamento/apprendimento.

Per quanto riguarda il materiale didattico, un docente online molto spesso, crea il proprio materiale di insegnamento e struttura il proprio corso senza alcun materiale di riferimento, vista l'inesistenza di un percorso formativo che preveda l'insegnamento della lingua italiana esclusivamente online e che sviluppi almeno le quattro competenze linguistiche di base. È compito del docente, quindi, individuare e programmare i contenuti pedagogici, che avranno un ritmo di presentazione diverso che nella lezione in presenza (come è indicato nell'ultima sezione di questo saggio), e adattare il materiale che si presenta all'interno della classe virtuale in base agli scopi didattici. Sebbene insegnare online non richieda necessariamente la capacità di creare nuovo materiale didattico, il docente deve essere in grado di destinare i materiali a vari usi e renderli facilmente fruibili dallo studente online. Le caratteristiche del docente online comprendono quindi maggiore flessibilità e versatilità nell'uso del materiale che utilizza, nonché l'abilità di didattizzare qualunque tipo di materiale per lo scopo specifico di un'unità didattica e di ogni singolo incontro-lezione. Resta inteso che nell'insegnamento online, così come in quello in presenza, il materiale proposto dovrà essere incentrato sullo studente, come suggeriscono sia l'American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) sia il Quadro Comune Europeo di Riferimento per la conoscenza delle lingue (QCER). Il materiale didattico per lezioni online in sincrono non include i manuali d'italiano come lingua straniera o come seconda lingua (LS o L2) e i loro relativi supporti online, pubblicati sia in America settentrionale sia nel resto del mondo, così come non include i percorsi di autoapprendimento online (come per esempio *Rosetta Stone*). Sia questi ultimi sia i supporti online dei testi, solitamente usati nelle lezioni in presenza, sono strumenti utili per l'apprendimento della lingua straniera e vanno utilizzati per aiutare l'apprendente, ma non possono sostituire un completo processo di apprendimento in quanto mancano della guida fondamentale a tale processo: il docente. Ciò è corroborato dal fatto che i manuali di lingua

italiana offrono il materiale online come attività da svolgere al di fuori della classe con lo scopo, per la gran parte, di riflessione secondo l'unità didattica di Giovanni Freddi del 1999 (Diadori et al. 214).

Per quanto riguarda l'uso della tecnologia il docente online deve avere la capacità di scegliere con molta accuratezza gli strumenti tecnologici perché fungano da complemento al processo di apprendimento che ha creato. Anche *Rosetta Stone*, un software tra i più conosciuti in tutto il mondo che propone un'autonomia di apprendimento maggiore rispetto ai supporti online dei manuali d'italiano come lingua straniera o seconda lingua (LS/L2), utilizza tutors umani per ogni corso di lingua disponibile sul mercato. *Rosetta Stone* in effetti include un contatto mensile di trenta minuti con un tutor/docente della lingua del pacchetto di corso acquistato. Se anche *Rosetta Stone* prevede un tutor umano, per almeno trenta minuti mensili, questo significa che il ruolo del docente viene riconosciuto come imprescindibile.[3] È bene chiarire che Il tutor di *Rosetta Stone* non contribuisce a una lezione online, ma si presta come semplice consulente su un percorso che è essenzialmente di autoapprendimento e, come tale, diverso da ciò che si sta trattando in questo saggio. A tal proposito Terri Anderson et al. hanno evidenziato in merito alla presenza del docente: "We define teaching presence as the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes" (5). Da questa definizione si evince che il ruolo di guida permane continuamente e soprattutto nelle attività in asincrono in quanto progettate dall'insegnante con uno scopo didattico preciso. La riflessione sugli strumenti online esistenti permette di affermare che nessun programma di autoapprendimento di lingue straniere (come *Rosetta Stone*) attualmente presente in commercio possa sostituire la lezione *online-blended* proposta nella prossima sezione. In questa modalità di insegnamento, che avviene esclusivamente online tra sincrono ed asincrono, il ruolo del docente come guida del processo di apprendimento non cambia vista la contemporaneità di comunicazione durante le lezioni in sincrono simili a quelle in presenza (previo lo spazio virtuale in cui avviene l'insegnamento e l'apprendimento). Nelle lezioni online in asincrono, invece, il docente online non si collega in internet nello stesso momento degli studenti, ma ne segue comunque l'organizzazione del processo di apprendimento attraverso la creazione di apposite attività che lo studente potrà svolgere da solo, a coppia o in gruppo per lo sviluppo di funzioni linguistiche oggetto di apprendimento di quella lezione. Un docente di lingua online dovrebbe essere interessato a individuare e sperimentare continuamente nuovi programmi con

l'obiettivo di creare una didattica online di qualità al fine di insegnare la lingua in modo proficuo agli studenti, con maggior libertà sia in termini di luogo in cui si trovano (apprendimento online sincrono) sia in termini di tempo (apprendimento online asincrono).

Per quanto riguarda la flessibilità, il docente online ha l'opportunità di insegnare su scala mondiale quindi con apprendenti potenzialmente dislocati nei diversi paesi di tutti e cinque i continenti. Non dimentichiamo infatti, che nonostante il presente articolo tratti dell'insegnamento online negli Stati Uniti, le potenzialità della metodologia *online-blended* è estesa a studenti sia statunitensi che si trovano temporaneamente all'estero o coloro che trascorrono il periodo estivo nella loro città di provenienza (sia negli Stati Uniti che all'estero) che in molti casi è diversa da quella dove studiano. Inoltre, la modalità di insegnamento *online-blended* si adatta bene anche a studenti stranieri che desiderano frequentare un corso universitario. Il docente online deve, nel caso di studenti che si trovino all'estero, organizzare le proprie lezioni in sincrono ad un orario che sia conveniente per tutti i partecipanti del corso. Il docente online viene facilitato quando insegna attraverso piattaforme che prevedono la regolazione automatica del proprio fuso orario con quello della città o paese estero in cui si trovano gli apprendenti. Dare la disponibilità a studenti che vivono in una città diversa rispetto al luogo in cui l'insegnante e/o l'università si trova risulta essere una scelta di *marketing* per l'università promotrice del corso di lingua online, ma anche una possibilità per lo studente che può avere accesso all'istruzione comodamente dal proprio luogo di residenza senza per questo compromettere la qualità del suo apprendimento rispetto al corso in presenza.

L'ultimo aspetto in analisi, ovvero il differente ambiente di insegnamento/apprendimento durante le lezioni online in sincrono, è determinato dal fatto che il docente online interagisce in maniera costante attraverso lo schermo di un computer. I rischi vanno dalla stanchezza mentale, a causa della costante attenzione richiesta durante una lezione online, a quella fisica degli occhi e di tutto il corpo che rimane in una posizione seduta per molte ore. A tal proposito non si può ignorare che il *Department of Labor* evidenzia che il National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) "recommends a 10-minute rest break after 2 hours of continuous VDT work for operators under moderate visual demands; and a 15-minute rest break after 1 hour of continuous VDT work where there is a high visual demand or repetitive work task" (*Working Safely with Video Display Terminals* 4). Visto che la lezione in sincrono richiede un impegno continuo dei discenti e del docente

attraverso un computer si evince che la continua attenzione richiesta agli studenti di una lezione online in sincrono pone come tempo massimo continuativo della lezione un'ora o 50 minuti come nella maggior parte delle lezioni in presenza.[4]

2. Nuove prospettive dell'insegnamento online della lingua italiana

"Our students love to do things using the desktop or laptop computer, the iPad or the iPhone. Not only do students enjoy using technology to accomplish mostly any task, but they are also willing to spend significant amount of their time outside of class working on language homework if technology is added to the mix" (Blake 11). L'affermazione di Blake è condivisibile non solo per gli strumenti a cui lui fa riferimento come i computer o i tablet, ma soprattutto in riferimento agli smartphone che presentano uno schermo sempre più grande e che gli studenti americani utilizzano per svolgere anche attività online relative ai corsi di lingua. La portabilità di questi strumenti e quindi la sua accessibilità attrae gli studenti nell'utilizzare gli smartphone e/o altri strumenti elettronici e predispone lo studente verso un apprendimento che non sia necessariamente in presenza. Fra le esperienze di insegnamento online acquisite si propone di seguito un'indagine in ambito accademico fra lezioni in presenza e attività online in asincrono, a cui seguono osservazioni riguardanti l'insegnamento online in sincrono, derivate dall'insegnamento in piattaforme private. Da entrambe le esperienze in queste modalità di insegnamento deriva la proposta di un corso *online-blended*.

2.1 Indagine: Insegnamento blended della lingua italiana—tra presenza e online in asincrono.

Durante la mia esperienza di insegnamento in due delle istituzioni in cui ho lavorato, Fordham University e Wagner College, in due classi di livello elementare I, ho sperimentato attività online in asincrono. I testi adottati dal dipartimento erano *Prego* a Fordham University e *Avanti* a Wagner College. Nonostante avessi permesso agli studenti di ripetere gli esercizi online assegnati a casa fino a quando ottenevano il 100% nell'esecuzione, gli studenti delle classi di livello elementare I spesso non li completavano o li svolgevano in maniera saltuaria. Un breve questionario anonimo somministrato a metà corso (appendice A) con domande specifiche sul corso e su materiali utilizzati (es. Are you completing the online homework? What do you think of the contribution

to your learning process?) evidenziò che l'84,21% degli studenti delle due classi (32 su 38) si annoiava perché gli esercizi proposti erano semplici, poco chiari o ripetitivi. Sebbene gli studenti riconoscessero il valore e l'aiuto degli esercizi nel memorizzare le strutture della lingua, non completavano i compiti assegnati. Inoltre, molti studenti lamentavano la difficoltà di non riuscire a mettere in pratica la lingua orale al di fuori della classe. Facendo un'accurata ricerca per aiutare i miei studenti a praticare la capacità di produzione orale in italiano, anche al di fuori degli orari di lezione, trovai diversi software interessanti e utili allo scopo. Per esempio, *www.fotobabble.com* permette agli studenti di caricare sul sito una fotografia e poi registrare la descrizione secondo funzioni linguistiche appropriate al livello. Questo software è particolarmente idoneo per l'inizio del primo semestre di lingua in quanto il tempo di registrazione è solo di un minuto. Questo permette agli studenti di concentrare la loro descrizione in poche informazioni ma scorrevoli perché obbligati dal tempo a disposizione.[5] Trattandosi di un corso di livello elementare I chiesi ai miei studenti di entrambe le istituzioni di sospendere per una settimana i compiti online e sostituirli con la registrazione di una descrizione orale di una fotografia a loro scelta, che dovevano caricare sul sito *www.fotobabble.com*, utilizzando il contenuto comunicativo dei primi tre capitoli studiati durante il corso. Chiesi poi che il link generato da queste registrazioni mi venisse inviato via e-mail in modo da poter offrire un *feedback* su come migliorare la descrizione della fotografia da loro scelta. Gli studenti avevano potuto concentrarsi su un'attività comunicativa come la descrizione fisica e della personalità dei soggetti nella foto. Essendo un'attività orale registrata, avevano anche avuto l'opportunità di lavorare in autonomia, non solo sulla struttura della lingua e nell'acquisizione del vocabolario specifico ma anche sulla pronuncia e la chiarezza, riascoltandosi fino a quando non erano soddisfatti del risultato finale da inviare al docente. Per inviare il *feedback* sull'attività agli studenti inerente la loro pronuncia, avevo fatto uso del software *www.forvo.com*, che permette l'invio (tramite link) della registrazione delle parole in cui la pronuncia va corretta. Il *feedback* offerto agli studenti (positivo per l'impegno dimostrato e i risultati raggiunti, ma allo stesso tempo mirato a migliorare la loro prestazione linguistica) li ha motivati a inviare una versione migliore della descrizione della foto. Attraverso l'attività in asincrono proposta, gli studenti non solo sono riusciti a praticare l'espressione orale al di fuori della classe, ma hanno sperimentato concrete opportunità di lavoro in autonomia. Le attività in asincrono, parte della metodologia *online-blended*, includono "il parlato" nelle

competenze su cui concentrarsi nei compiti a casa. Attraverso le sole attività online previste dai testi sopra menzionati non sarebbe, tuttavia, stato possibile raggiungere tale obiettivo. Gli studenti, nelle valutazioni di fine corso, hanno riferito di aver apprezzato l'uso della lingua in un contesto diverso dagli abituali esercizi strutturati. A conferma dei loro commenti ho potuto notare la crescente partecipazione e interesse con cui durante il corso hanno svolto le attività che richiedevano produzione orale in asincrono. Il risultato finale è stato molto incoraggiante sia da un punto di vista pedagogico (grazie ai *feedback* dettagliati ai miei studenti, dato che le loro produzioni orali erano registrate) sia da un punto di vista psicolinguistico. Gli studenti che, prima di proporre queste attività in asincrono, non partecipavano in classe in maniera attiva attraverso l'interazione in italiano (l'unica lingua che utilizzo nel corso) erano più motivati con questa tipologia di esercizi. Dopo diverse esecuzioni di attività comunicative in asincrono, anche i più timidi si sono fatti coraggio e hanno iniziato a produrre lingua con più facilità sviluppando una loro interlingua e diventando così parte attiva del processo di acquisizione della lingua citato da Stephen Krashen (10), ma anche partecipando sempre più attivamente alla produzione orale in classe attraverso il dialogo.

Al fine di appurare i risultati positivi del primo studio ho ripetuto lo stesso breve sondaggio e l'indagine a metà del semestre successivo, Spring 2014, in due corsi di livello elementare I presso St. Johns University e presso Borough of Manhattan Community College - CUNY e il risultato positivo è stato confermato. In questa seconda indagine ho lavorato su un campione di tre classi di Italiano elementare I per un totale di 72 studenti e ben l'87.5% (63 studenti su 72) ha risposto nuovamente di non trovare interessanti la tipologia di esercizi proposti dai supporti online dei manuali apprezzando però la possibilità di svolgere compiti online.

In tutte e quattro le istituzioni in cui ho svolto questo studio, su un totale di 110 studenti, ho riscontrato un campione molto vario per *background* culturale (italo-americani, afro-americani, ispano-americani, asiatici-americani) e sociale (età dai diciotto ai quaranta anni, studenti lavoratori, studenti atleti, studenti single e conviventi/sposati con e senza figli, studenti full-time e part-time). Questo è stato determinante perché ho sperimentato come la differenza tra i compiti a casa online (che per lo più sono di carattere grammaticale) e attività che invece spingono lo studente verso il "saper fare qualcosa con la lingua" (come la descrizione registrata di una foto) abbia motivato le diverse tipologie di studenti presenti nelle varie istituzioni. Gli studenti in

oggetto si avvicinano all'apprendimento dell'italiano con motivazioni diverse, dalla semplice curiosità, al completamento del requisito dello studio di una lingua straniera o a motivi di lavoro. La possibilità di usare la lingua per ragioni personali o lavorative, attraeva tuttavia il profilo eterogeneo dell'apprendente di italiano nell'area metropolitana di New York.

Attività come la presentazione o la descrizione di una foto, sono esercizi a volte inclusi nei manuali normalmente adottati, ma la differenza con l'approccio online in asincrono adottato nell'indagine riguarda la modalità e il processo dell'attività, che inizia come compito per casa, con apposite indicazioni da seguire, e solo successivamente come attività in classe. Il discente, pertanto, ha maggior tempo a disposizione per sviluppare la funzione comunicativa relativa al compito da svolgere e migliorarla con ulteriore esercizio in classe. Le valutazioni di fine corso hanno confermato che il coinvolgimento dello studente nello svolgere i compiti online era stato influenzato dall'utilizzo di supporti digitali (Blake 11), ma anche dall'utilizzo di un metodo nozionale-funzionale della lingua, per esempio, il sapersi presentare e saper descrivere una fotografia nonché dall'aver avuto tempo di riflettere sulle attività da compiere.

Nelle attività in asincrono, lo studente si concentra sulla funzione comunicativa della lingua e quindi mira alla comprensione/espressione del messaggio (sia scritto che orale). Nelle attività che lo studente svolge successivamente in classe migliorerà il risultato di ogni funzione comunicativa sviluppata prima in ambito asincrono mettendola in pratica con gli altri compagni di corso. Nelle classi successive si procede ad espandere la funzione linguistica secondo il livello di riferimento. In altre parole, dopo aver messo in evidenza la grammatica, fase di riflessione nel modello operativo di Freddi (Diadori, *Insegnare* 209), ci si aspetta che la presa di coscienza dell'aspetto grammaticale guidi gli studenti ad una consapevolezza metalinguistica. Quest'ultima nasce applicando la grammatica alla funzione comunicativa di riferimento nelle attività in asincrono ottenendo, così, il risultato di una lingua sempre più corretta sia dal punto di vista comunicativo, sia grammaticale.[6] L'altro dato riscontrato che spiega perché un'attività in asincrono di questo tipo abbia avuto una maggiore efficacia pedagogica rispetto ai compiti offerti dai manuali online ci viene suggerita da Fernando Rubio e Joshua J. Thomas, che riferendosi ad un corso offerto in parte in presenza e in parte online, affermano: "One of the safest approaches is to make sure that there is a seamless connection between what students do online and what happens in the

classroom so that even though the medium may change, the overall objectives remain the same" (4). Considerando le affermazioni di Rubio e Thomas, quindi, la sostituzione dei compiti online dei manuali con le attività in asincrono di approccio comunicativo con metodo nozionale-funzionale sono strettamente legate alle attività comunicative funzionali del libro di testo, ma come tali non sono "compiti per casa," ma un *continuum* dell'apprendimento. Si evidenzia quindi una netta differenza tra il ruolo pedagogico dei compiti online classici (per lo più esercizi grammaticali e/o strutturali) e quello delle attività in asincrono che ho proposto agli studenti in sostituzione. È necessario sottolineare che, anche se talvolta i compiti online classici hanno scopi funzionali, questa tipologia di attività non rappresenta il fulcro né delle attività in classe proposte dal testo né dei compiti online. Le attività in asincrono, invece, non erano fine a se stesse o ad una fase particolare dell'apprendimento, ma facevano riferimento ad una funzione che gli studenti dovevano pian piano continuare a sviluppare o perfezionare durante tutto il processo di apprendimento del corso. Le funzioni, quindi, non i compiti, erano il centro delle lezioni comunicative prese come riferimento in questa indagine.

2.2 Osservazioni ed esperienza di insegnamento online in sincrono.

Il docente online è una figura che esiste nelle lezioni online in sincrono, nel caso di lezioni esclusivamente in asincrono si parla invece di tutor. Benché utilizzate a volte in maniera intercambiabile (al di fuori dell'ambiente accademico) le due figure si differenziano, in modo sostanziale, perché il docente insegna la lingua e ne crea il processo di apprendimento (specialmente nel caso di lezioni online), mentre il tutor segue gli studenti, li guida nel percorso creato dall'insegnante titolare del corso. Il tutor si avvicina alla figura del *teaching assistant* in molti dipartimenti di lingue moderne negli Stati Uniti e si differenzia dal docente perché non è colui che conduce le lezioni (intese come incontri anche virtuali in sincrono) della lingua oggetto di apprendimento, ma lascia che i discenti studino i materiali didattici previsti fornendo per lo più chiarimenti e stimolando discussioni di approfondimento.[7] In sintesi, se il docente insegna, il tutor guida nell'apprendimento dei materiali didattici selezionati e preposti dal docente. Un bravo docente sarà, di solito, anche un bravo tutor online, mentre un bravo tutor online potrebbe non essere un bravo docente.

La mia esperienza di insegnamento online in sincrono in due piattaforme *www.myngle.com* e *www.atraduire.com*, (attraverso cui ho

insegnato a discenti dipendenti di aziende in Europa), mi ha permesso di osservare il funzionamento della modalità di insegnamento online attraverso l'uso di una classe virtuale. Ho insegnato corsi per discenti di livello sia elementare sia intermedio di italiano con un numero massimo di 25 studenti per classe, provenienti da diversi background, il cui interesse era dettato per lo più da motivazioni lavorative o di carattere personale. L'insegnamento online in sincrono prevede alcune caratteristiche di una lezione in presenza in quanto il contatto diretto con il docente avviene mediante la webcam, parte essenziale della classe virtuale, con cui il discente riesce a stabilire un contatto (anche visivo) con l'insegnante. La webcam svolge anche un ruolo pedagogico rilevante nel supportare il discente, attraverso il linguaggio non verbale, nella comprensione del docente che utilizza quasi esclusivamente la L2 oggetto di apprendimento (nel mio caso l'italiano). Inoltre, come vedremo nell'ultima sezione, assume un ruolo fondamentale in sede di valutazione del processo formativo. L'utilizzo della classe virtuale, offre inoltre il vantaggio di poter partecipare alla lezione da qualunque luogo, sia esso la propria abitazione o il luogo di lavoro. La dimensione spaziale non rappresenta dunque più un ostacolo per la frequenza del corso. La modalità di insegnamento in sincrono, anche se online, presenta l'obbligo per il discente di essere virtualmente presente a un orario fisso in cui incontrare i compagni e il docente per la lezione.

Nelle lezioni online in sincrono è possibile svolgere attività in plenaria, a coppia o gruppi. La lezione non è statica, e non si limita al caricamento di immagini o presentazioni in powerpoint, ma piuttosto coinvolge gli studenti attivamente attraverso una serie di strategie ed attività come per esempio l'associazione tra immagini e significati, come mostra una delle attività presentate nel piano di classe in appendice (B) relativo al vocabolario per descrivere il tempo (durante la lezione in sincrono). In quest'attività lo studente è invitato a comprendere quale sia il giusto vocabolario da associare all'immagine e scegliere il percorso per individuare la risposta corretta. I percorsi aperti allo studente sono svariati e dipendono dalle modalità che lo studente ritiene più idonei per apprendere meglio la lingua come, per esempio, il ricorrere alla traduzione nella sua prima lingua che non sempre è (solo) l'inglese, usare l'intuito con pregresse conoscenze provenienti da altre lingue, o seguire i suggerimenti del partner dell'attività (se si tratta di un'attività in coppia) e dopo appurare secondo il proprio metodo. In questo modo si lascia lo studente libero di scegliere la modalità di apprendimento della lingua straniera che è più efficiente nel suo caso. Con la modalità *online-blended* si ha l'obiettivo di "sviluppare nell'utente la capacità di attivare

strategie autonome di apprendimento" (Diadori et al., 129). In quest'ottica va letto il piano della lezione in appendice con la successione delle diverse attività non solo tra sincrono e asincrono, ma anche all'interno della lezione in sincrono stessa. Le attività previste dal docente sono varie quanto più varia è la sua creatività applicata agli obiettivi didattici preposti, nonché alla tipologia e ai bisogni degli apprendenti. La regola fondamentale è quella che sta alla base del QCER (*Quadro Comune Europeo di Riferimento per la conoscenza delle lingue*) ovvero della centralità dell'apprendente all'interno del processo formativo.

2.3 Tra sincrono e asincrono: l'insegnamento online-blended della lingua italiana.

Nell'intento di trovare metodologie di insegnamento innovative che possano raggiungere una fascia di studenti bisognosi di maggiore libertà nell'apprendimento nasce la mia proposta di insegnamento di corsi *online-blended*. L'intento è quello di superare il limite dell'insegnamento online in sincrono (presenza di docente e discenti in una classe virtuale ad una data ora e un dato giorno), e in asincrono (mancanza del legame con il docente che aiuti e motivi l'apprendimento). L'approccio teorico di riferimento nell'insegnamento *online-blended* è di base quello comunicativo con metodo, principalmente, nozionale-funzionale. I principi didattici, quali la centralità dell'apprendente, l'importanza del docente come guida e facilitatore dell'apprendimento, l'imprescindibilità della cultura nell'insegnare la lingua, l'insegnamento della lingua come strumento di comunicazione sono condivisi sia *dall'American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages* (ACTFL) sia dal *Quadro Comune Europeo di Riferimento per la conoscenza delle lingue* (QCER). Il metodo naturale di Krashen è per certi aspetti teorici il più importante, fra questi in particolar modo si considera l'input linguistico. Visto il ruolo della ricerca nella didattica delle lingue, sarebbe impossibile applicare approcci e metodi antecedenti a quello comunicativo, incentrato "sul saper fare" (o logisticamente inapplicabili in un contesto universitario, come i metodi umanistico-affettivi), dato che è stato scientificamente provato un apprendimento più efficace con questo tipo di approccio (QCER 11). Nell'insegnamento delle lingue straniere all'approccio comunicativo è necessario accostare la tecnologia in modo da raggiungere il più alto numero di studenti e per tutte le ragioni già descritte nelle pagine precedenti. A questo proposito Blake ha distinto il

percorso di apprendimento con l'ausilio della tecnologia in: "blended (using technology as a supplement to classroom instruction), hybrid (providing instruction both in class and online), and completely online language learning" (13). Nella mia esperienza di insegnamento del corso di italiano elementare I in tutte le istituzioni in cui ho svolto l'indagine con attività in asincrono, facendo riferimento alla definizione di Blake, il corso si era trasformato in *blended* invece che *hybrid* perché non essendo diminuite le ore di contatto tali attività erano un "supplemento," ovvero, non necessarie parte attiva del processo di apprendimento. Al contrario, però, le attività in asincrono si differenziano dai compiti online proprio perché fungono da ponte tra lo sviluppo di funzioni linguistiche da una lezione all'altra, considerando come lezione non solo quelle in presenza ma anche le attività in asincrono poiché entrambe permettono un utilizzo reale della funzione di riferimento. A questo proposito Blake, in riferimento al sondaggio dell'Online Learning Consortium del 2010 (allora conosciuto come Sloan Consortium), evidenzia come: "Allen and Seaman have characterized the hybrid learning format as representing the best of both worlds in the sense that it provides learners with all the conveniences of online learning while still maintaining the traditional F2F [face to face] link found in the classroom experience" (13). Se un corso ibrido offre, secondo Allen e Seaman, migliori possibilità di apprendere una lingua straniera perché lo studente mantiene il contatto con il docente, un corso esclusivamente online tra sincrono ed asincrono, qui denominato *online-blended,* offre almeno lo stesso vantaggio da un punto di vista pedagogico dato che il contatto con il docente rimane con gli incontri online in sincrono. Offre, invece, un vantaggio maggiore nell'accessibilità al corso perché non prevede limiti di spazio.

Utilizzando le definizioni date da Blake, Allen e Seaman ho denominato questa nuova modalità di insegnamento *online-blended* o *online-hybrid.* In questo caso la dimensione di insegnamento è sempre online e gli aggettivi *blended* e *hybrid* vengono utilizzati come sinonimi e riferiti all'alternante contatto in sincrono e asincrono del docente. Si sposta quindi la prospettiva di categorizzazione non più solo dal mezzo attraverso cui la lezione viene effettuata ma anche, se non soprattutto, alla presenza e ruolo dell'insegnante nei diversi momenti dell'insegnamento del corso. Questa modalità di insegnamento della lingua italiana vuole agevolare lo studente che preferisce una maggiore autonomia di apprendimento (per esigenza o per scelta) quindi uno studente adulto che frequenta un'università, studenti lavoratori, studenti professionisti, studenti atleti, part time, amanti della digitalizzazione o chiunque abbia una personalità che si adatti meglio a una maggiore

libertà di apprendimento, senza ridurre gli obiettivi rispetto alla didattica tradizionale in presenza. La modalità proposta prevede un numero di studenti massimo di 25 considerandolo come numero indicativo proporzionato al numero di studenti in lezioni in presenza. La modalità di insegnamento qui proposta rimane legata alla realtà economica della maggior parte delle università che richiedono classi numerose per poter rientrare nel bilancio.

3. Il modello operativo—Unità di Lavoro Online Blended (UdLOB)

Sulla base di quanto discusso si propone una guida didattico-pratica su come organizzare un corso di lingua *online-blended* (tra sincrono e asincrono) basato sull'Unità di Lavoro (UdL) elaborata da Diadori ("Quali modelli"), che ha inspirato questa modalità di insegnamento sebbene l'Unità di lavoro debba, necessariamente, essere modificata nella sua essenza, tenendo conto delle esigenze particolari dell'apprendente online.

Il modello operativo della Diadori rappresenta il superamento del modello sequenziale dell'unità didattica elaborato da Freddi nella metà degli anni settanta (Diadori, *Insegnare*). La caratteristica peculiare dell'Unità di Lavoro (UdL) è la sua sequenzialità non rigida che permette un maggiore adattamento ai vari profili di apprendente, ma anche ai diversi scopi didattici che un'UdL può avere. Inoltre, come rileva Diadori, tale modello operativo: "Richiama l'idea di un 'lavoro condiviso' che mette in evidenza come un'operazione di questo tipo non può essere portata avanti se non da entrambi i principali soggetti interessati (l'apprendente e il docente) […] che sfrutti sia il contesto classe sia altri contesti di apprendimento informale" (*Insegnare* 217-18). Vista l'importanza che l'approccio collaborativo ha nella didattica online, e nel metodo operativo *Online-Blended*, il rapporto tra i vari discenti è parte essenziale sia nelle attività in sincrono sia in asincrono. Nell'insegnamento online l'approccio collaborativo acquisisce un'importanza rilevante ma non solo dal punto di vista didattico, ma anche psicologico per lo studente che si sente parte di un gruppo, anche se non ha mai incontrato i membri del gruppo in presenza. Tale senso di appartenenza, promossa dal docente, che si instaura con l'interazione tra i membri stessi, ha l'obiettivo di motivarli a continuare il percorso formativo intrapreso. Inoltre Diadori, con il concetto di "apprendimento informale," fa riferimento a Paolo Ernesto Balboni che vede l'Unità Didattica come una rete di Unità di Apprendimento dove non esiste un modello sequenziale ma più libertà proprio come l'UdL (Diadori,

Insegare 214). Diadori include, anche in questo procedimento, l'apprendimento online per *Learning Object* e diverse modalità didattiche delle lingue straniere dai *project work* al *task-based language teaching*, dal *collaborative learning* al *knowledge building communities*. Il motivo per cui l'UdL non può essere applicata all'insegnamento Online-Blended e, quindi, risulta necessaria la creazione dell'Unità di Lavoro Online-Blended (UdLOB), è il costante riferimento a contesti online in auto-apprendimento come i *learning objects* e la non necessaria focalizzazione sulla funzione linguistica che cambia il tradizionale compito a casa in un'attività comunicativa, che non è obbligatoriamente un'attività attraverso l'approccio *task-based*. Quest'ultimo sarà opportunamente applicato secondo il livello e i bisogni degli apprendenti, ma le attività comunicative in asincrono variano in approcci e metodi. Altra differenza fondamentale nell'approccio teorico tra l'UdL e l'UdLOB è il riferirsi all'apprendimento online solo attraverso i *learning objects*: "Un LO [*learning object*] può essere utilizzato come dimostrazione per lo svolgimento di un'attività (in classe) come attività da svolgere a casa, come lavoro aggiuntivo, come attività per il laboratorio multimediale, come parte di un corso completo online" (*Insegnare* 226). L'UdL vede le parti di apprendimento online come componente facoltativa della rete di apprendimento essendo il Learning Object stesso una risorsa online disponibile per essere consultata al bisogno perché legata ad un concetto di piena autonomia del discente. Nell'UdLOB, invece, le attività in asincrono sono parte integrante dell'apprendimento, dove una parte del percorso è sempre legata all'altra, indipendentemente che questa sia in sincrono o asincrono. L'UdLOB, per questa sua caratteristica, non può avere la stessa suddivisione del modello operativo delle lezioni in presenza perché in un incontro/lezione (termine giustamente usato nell'UdL) non necessariamente copre la stessa quantità di funzioni-linguistiche che verranno coperte in un'Unità Minima di Apprendimento *Online-Blended* (UMAOB) la quale prevede a sua volta un numero flessibile tra incontri in sincrono e attività in asincrono. Le attività in asincrono infatti, prevedono non solo l'esecuzione di un'attività nozionale-funzionale da parte degli studenti, ma anche la preparazione, che consiste nella ricerca di materiale inerente, opportunamente suggerito dal docente, e quindi, anche l'apprendimento di materiale nuovo. L'UdLOB rappresenta, come l'UdL per le lezioni in presenza, un iperonimo dei corsi *Online-Blended*. Un insieme di unità minime di apprendimento Online-Blended UMAOB (fig. 1 appendice C) crea un'Unità di Apprendimento Online-Blended (UAOB, fig. 2, appendice C) e più UAOB creano un Modulo Online-

Blended (MOB, fig. 3, appendice C). In sintesi, la differenza fra l'UdLOB qui proposta e l'UdL di Diadori è la struttura su cui è fondata che non è più flessibile solo da un punto di vista teorico, ma anche pragmatico nell'organizzazione di un corso online-blended, secondo le esigenze dell'istituzione che decide di adottare questo nuovo modo di insegnamento delle lingue.

L'Unità di Lavoro Online-Blended (UdLOB) è divisa in tre fasi: *Introduzione*, *svolgimento* e *conclusione*. La fase di introduzione quindi si presenta così divisa:

Introduzione—prima lezione: Il docente dà il benvenuto ai discenti all'interno della nuova modalità di apprendimento online in sincrono spiegando gli strumenti principali d'interazione: uso del microfono tecnico (e virtuale di alcune classi virtuali), modalità di richiesta del turno di parola all'interno della classe virtuale, modalità di utilizzo della chat (o messaggeria istantanea). A quel punto segue la presentazione del gruppo di apprendenti passando alla fase di "rottura del ghiaccio." L'obiettivo è far interagire i discenti tra loro al fine di iniziare un processo di conoscenza che li porterà a superare l'imbarazzo nell'iniziare il cammino di apprendimento della lingua in questo nuovo contesto. Durante quest'attività d'interazione il docente cercherà anche di indirizzare gli studenti all'utilizzo della lavagna virtuale, spiegando loro le funzioni inerenti come per esempio scrivere, evidenziare, sottolineare e disegnare all'interno della classe virtuale. In questa prima fase lo scopo è proprio familiarizzare sia con l'uso della classe virtuale sia con i compagni di apprendimento attraverso attività che combinino entrambi gli scopi.

Introduzione—lezioni successive: Dalla seconda lezione in poi il discente sarà ormai in grado di utilizzare i principali strumenti della classe virtuale quindi il docente si concentrerà maggiormente su varie attività di "riscaldamento" invece che di "rottura del ghiaccio." Queste attività di riscaldamento mirano a riprendere il contenuto della lezione effettuata in precedenza, introdurre il nuovo argomento e organizzare le attività successive.

La fase di introduzione rappresenta una delle differenze maggiori con l'UdL di Diadori che si suddivide anche in *Introduzione*, *Svolgimento* e *Conclusione* però nella quale è presente solo l'Introduzione all'Incontro Lezione (I/L), mentre nell'UdLOB la fase di introduzione, come mostrato, è divisa in: *introduzione—prima lezione* e

introduzione—lezioni successive. Tale suddivisione dipende dalla differenza dell'ambiente di insegnamento stesso. Infatti, la prima lezione online in sincrono serve proprio a "rompere il ghiaccio" sia per l'uso delle strumentazioni tecnologiche, che possono essere poco note agli apprendenti, sia perché prevede un coinvolgimento dal punto di vista umano riguardante l'interazione con gli altri componenti del gruppo attraverso la tecnologia e, in particolare, attraverso la classe virtuale scelta dal docente. Dopo la prima lezione non si parlerà più di fase iniziale di ambientamento, ma piuttosto di ulteriore sostegno della familiarità con un ambiente già conosciuto. Nell'UdLOB l'effetto dell'introduzione—prima lezione si protrae ancora durante le lezioni successive visto che alcuni studenti potrebbero trovare difficoltà nell'utilizzo degli strumenti della classe virtuale dopo solo una lezione. Questo tempo non è quantificabile in quanto cambia in base alla predisposizione dei diversi apprendenti. Si deduce che queste due fasi sul tempo didattico inizino separatamente, quindi, prima l'introduzione—prima lezione e poi quella inerente alla introduzione—lezioni successive, per continuare insieme per un numero n di lezioni. Il docente continuerà a fornire delle spiegazioni tecniche fino a quando i discenti saranno tecnicamente autosufficienti; da quel momento in poi si svolgerà solo la fase introduzione—lezioni successive. Il numero n di lezioni, in cui i due tipi di introduzione sono presenti allo stesso momento diventa uno spazio di socializzazione tra gli studenti, ma anche di promozione da parte del docente dell'approccio collaborativo che verrà ben presto esteso all'insegnamento della lingua stessa. Inoltre in queste due fasi di introduzione (come nelle fasi successive) non è necessario un ordine sequenziale dei compiti da svolgere. Ogni situazione dipende dall'analisi dei bisogni degli apprendenti online. Per esempio, la presentazione dei compagni di corso può avvenire prima della spiegazione dei mezzi di interazione della classe virtuale (o viceversa), richiamando l'esperienza reale che vede sempre un primo contatto tramite la posta elettronica, prima di iniziare il processo di apprendimento organizzato in più lezioni. Il primo contatto di posta elettronica viene, quindi, individuato come la prima attività in asincrono in cui inizia l'UdLOB.

Svolgimento: Inizia con l'incontro con il testo input per la sua comprensione globale (scritto, orale, audio-video) nel quale si presentano, attraverso materiale autentico, le strutture linguistiche, e/o il lessico e la parte culturale, che saranno oggetto della lezione, da cui parte il processo di sviluppo delle competenze linguistiche. L'incontro con il

testo input può avvenire sia in sincrono sia in asincrono, in base al livello dei discenti e alla loro capacità di avvicinarsi al testo input in maniera autonoma.

La fase di svolgimento presenta in genere diverse sotto-fasi, proprio come l'UDL di Diadori (218, 224), adattate secondo i livelli di lingua del corso:

1. La comprensione globale e/o la differenziazione dei temi
2. L'analisi e/o la differenziazione delle strutture
3. La sintesi e/o l'ampliamento/espansione
4. L'integrazione/riflessione.

Durante la fase di svolgimento la comprensione globale e/o differenziazione dei temi ha lo scopo di allargare gli orizzonti della lezione. È basata sulla scoperta di nuove tematiche da parte dei discenti e si presta all'attività autonoma in asincrono in cui gli studenti possono reperire informazioni. La ricerca di nuove tematiche avviene principalmente attraverso la rete, ma anche mediante altre fonti. In questa dimensione euristica gli studenti vengono motivati a navigare in rete e a ricercare altro materiale in lingua italiana. L'attività di navigare in rete, su siti internet specifici, è uno dei mezzi utilizzati dalla didattica online-blended per adattare maggiormente i discenti a questo nuovo metodo di apprendimento visto che il navigare sul web rientra nelle loro attività quotidiane e risulta di alta accettabilità. Gli studenti avranno come aiuto la rete stessa per tradurre qualsiasi parola che non comprendono (altro strumento che gli studenti utilizzano continuamente) e per incontrare testi autentici rappresentativi della cultura in apprendimento. La comprensione globale e/o *differenziazione dei temi* può sempre essere proposta anche in modalità sincrona.

L'analisi e/o la differenziazione delle strutture necessita della guida del docente che, attraverso il testo input, avrà già introdotto le strutture da approfondire. In questa parte dello svolgimento è consigliabile la modalità sincrona perché il docente, dopo aver fatto individuare ai discenti la struttura presente nel testo input incontrato, completerà l'argomento con altri esempi e coinvolgerà gli studenti in attività cooperative con il fine di fissare gli aspetti di tipo grammaticale, lessicale o culturale. La libertà del docente consiste nell'adattare l'argomento, scegliendo in piena autonomia quale aspetto della lingua mettere in rilievo in base ai parametri dell'organizzazione dell' Unità di Apprendimento Online-Blended (UAOB) e delle motivazioni degli apprendenti.

La sintesi e/o l'ampliamento/espansione riguarda le attività con le quali i discenti, a coppie o a piccoli gruppi, mettono in pratica quello

che hanno appreso precedentemente. Questa sotto-fase serve agli studenti a reimpiegare le strutture grammaticali, lessicali o gli aspetti culturali esaminati nonché ad arricchirsi reciprocamente dei risultati dei compagni. Può essere svolta in modalità sincrona o in modalità asincrona.

L'integrazione/riflessione richiede ai discenti l'utilizzo delle conoscenze acquisite in nuovi contesti. Questa è la sotto-fase in cui il docente verifica che i contenuti siano stati assimilati e può essere proposta in modalità sincrona quando si vogliono sviluppare le abilità orali integrate (per esempio, dialogo o dibattito) ed in modalità asincrona per lo sviluppo di abilità scritte. La verifica offre l'opportunità di organizzare eventuali sessioni di recupero prima di passare alla valutazione. La verifica serve anche al docente per misurare la sua didattica online ed è consigliata, specialmente ai docenti online meno esperti, in maniera informale e frequente.

Delle cinque sotto-fasi dello svolgimento soltanto quella dell'analisi e/o differenziazione delle strutture è particolarmente adatta per lo svolgimento in modalità sincrona visto il ruolo del docente come facilitatore e guida all'apprendimento. Tutte le altre possono essere indistintamente presentate o in modalità sincrona o asincrona a dimostrazione di quanto varia possa essere la programmazione di una UdLOB (Unità di Lavoro Online Blended). Ogni sotto-fase dello svolgimento è organizzata dal docente online secondo gli obiettivi dell'UAOB (Unità di Apprendimento Online-Blended), basata sui bisogni degli apprendenti, e quindi, mantenendo un'ottima gestione del tempo, si possono anche avere più UMAOB (Unità Minima di Apprendimento Online-Blended) all'interno di una sotto-fase, oltre che probabilmente all'interno della fase di svolgimento. Il risultato è che alcune sotto-fasi possono essere presentate sia in sincrono sia in asincrono, sebbene sia necessario equilibrare bene la distribuzione tra sincrono e asincrono secondo le aspettative degli apprendenti e i risultati preposti.

La fase di svolgimento dell'UdLOB è la fase in cui si affianca l'attività di insegnamento in asincrono lasciando maggiore libertà al discente di poter gestire, entro certi limiti, il proprio processo di apprendimento. Tale libertà prevede sia il tempo per le attività in asincrono sia la personalizzazione dei materiali di studio per le fasi che il docente avrà deciso. Tali scelte saranno rappresentate dal sillabo, che specificherà quali lezioni avverranno attraverso la classe virtuale in sincrono, a che ora e secondo quale orario di riferimento. Nel sillabo verranno indicate anche le attività in asincrono con date precise in cui

verranno effettuate o dovranno essere sottoposte al docente via e-mail o pronte come parte dell'incontro in sincrono successivo. Tali attività in asincrono sono di tipo nozionale-funzionale basate sul binomio "ricerca ed esecuzione" piuttosto che solo sull'esecuzione tipica anche di attività online di corsi *blended* classici (ovvero con compiti a casa online). Le attività in asincrono sono di varia natura perché mirano allo sviluppo di tutte e quattro le competenze linguistiche di base e integrate, secondo i bisogni degli apprendenti, e possono essere svolte da singoli studenti o in gruppo. Attività in asincrono legate ai social network più usati come *Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest*, di scrittura collaborativa come *wiki*, di *blogging* ne fanno certamente parte. Già molto è stato scritto sugli usi didattici dei *social network* e altri strumenti, e in questo lavoro sono considerati nelle attività in asincrono che vanno programmate sempre secondo i bisogni dell'apprendente e il livello di partenza e di arrivo della lingua oggetto di apprendimento.[8] Le attività in asincrono devono essere varie non solo per lo sviluppo di diverse abilità linguistiche, ma anche per non annoiare i discenti.

L'ultima fase dell'UdLOB (Unità di Lavoro Online-Blended) quella della *Conclusione* può avvenire in sincrono o asincrono. Lo scopo di questa fase è verificare e valutare le competenze raggiunte dai discenti in maniera informale o formale attraverso esami o quiz. Nella fase di *assessment* bisogna considerare in quale livello didattico si vuole effettuare la verifica o valutazione e se si tratta di una fase UAOB (Unità di Apprendimento Online-Blended) o MOB (Modulo Online-Blended). Per quanto riguarda l'UMAOB (Unità Minima di Apprendimento Online-Blended), invece, si procede con verifiche informali continue, dettate dalla struttura del corso composto da elementi concatenati tra loro, quindi, si può parlare di controllo o monitoraggio continuato.

La verifica informale in itinere serve anche come feedback per la didattica del docente, che avrà indicazioni utili non solo sulla metodologia didattica utilizzata, ma anche sugli aspetti tecnologici e progettuali, nonché sull'efficacia delle attività svolte in sincrono e in asincrono.

Per quanto riguarda le valutazioni formali il giorno dell'esame ogni studente verrà separato in una *breakout room* (già usato nel piano di classe in appendice B) all'interno della classe virtuale, dove lo studente svolgerà il quiz o l'esame sotto l'osservazione della webcam. Il docente potrà così visionare lo svolgimento degli esami per ogni studente contemporaneamente. Non appena terminato l'esame verrà inviato via

email al docente prima che il collegamento con la webcam sia interrotto. Gli esami o quiz saranno sempre di tipo nozionale funzionale sia allo scritto sia all'orale. L'esame o il quiz concorrerà all'assegnazione del voto finale dello studente attraverso lettera, percentuale o giudizio. Quest'ultima ha lo scopo medesimo della verifica informale (che si usa in itinere), cioè appurare le conoscenze acquisite dai discenti e per il docente prendere decisioni didattiche per un corso successivo.

4. Conclusioni

Il presente studio si è proposto l'obiettivo di rinnovare l'interesse nell'ambito dell'*e-learning* e funge da ulteriore approfondimento con riferimento alla didattica dell'Italiano L2/LS. L'insegnamento *online-blended*, con il rispettivo modello operativo dell'Unità di Lavoro Online Blended (UdLOB), è il risultato della sinergia di due diverse esperienze di insegnamento di italiano LS/L2 *blended* (tra presenza e online in asincrono) in ambito accademico ed insegnamento online in sincrono attraverso classi virtuali per dipendenti di aziende in Europa. Intende, pertanto, essere una nuova modalità, affinacandosi a quelle già esistenti, di insegnare la lingua italiana come lingua straniera in tutto il mondo e soprattutto all'interno di college o università in America del Nord.

Il metodo *online-blended* mette in evidenza e prende ispirazione dalla similarità tra la lezione online in sincrono e la lezione in presenza classica, offrendo però maggiore libertà di spazio e di tempo al discente. Molti dipartimenti di lingue straniere sono scettici nel riconoscere l'efficacia delle lezioni online in sincrono e hanno il timore che l'insegnamento online riduca ulteriormente il bisogno di insegnanti ed aumenti il numero di studenti per classe (Blake 18). Nel modello presentato le ore in cui l'insegnante è coinvolto "direttamente" (cioè l'insegnamento in sincrono) apparentemente diminuiscono, in paragone alle tre ore a settimana di un corso in presenza in un livello elementare semestrale (vedi alternanza nel piano di classe in appendice tra incontro in sincrono e in asincrono), ma è un timore infondato perché si sottovalutano il numero delle ore di coinvolgimento diretto del docente nella progettazione accurata delle attività in asincrono fondamentali per l'efficace applicazione di questa metodologia. Tutte le attività online (sincrono e asincrono) prevedono, inoltre, dettagliato *feedback* da parte del docente e la continua interazione con lo studente. Il docente di lingua che insegna attraverso la modalità *online-blended* è in grado di calibrare e modellare il processo di apprendimento, e modificarlo secondo i bisogni dei discenti attraverso una progettazione accurata delle lezioni

(specialmente all'inizio della realizzazione di tali corsi, dove i materiali vanno creati ex-novo). La preparazione e progettazione del materiale (e la pianificazione delle risorse e della formazione insegnamento dei corsi in modalità *online-blended*) sono quindi i passi necessari per poter mettere in pratica questa metodologia, in qualunque dipartimento interessato ad ampliare l'insegnamento dell'italiano e delle lingue straniere ed essere pioniere in quest'ambito di ricerca. Aumentando l'offerta attraverso diverse modalità di insegnamento, e raggiungendo così tipologie diverse di studenti, con bisogni diversi, si potrà forse incrementare il numero di coloro interessati a studiare l'italiano.

Rosario Pollicino WESTERN UNIVERSITY - ONTARIO

Legenda delle abbreviazioni (in ordine di apparizione nel testo)

ACFTL: American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages
QCER: Quadro Comune di Riferimento Europeo per la conoscenza delle lingue
UDL: Unità di Lavoro
UdLOB: Unità di Lavoro Online-Blended
UMAOB: Unità Minima di Apprendimento Online-Blended
UAOB: Unità di Apprendimento Online-Blended
MOB: Modulo Online-Blended

APPENDICE A

Survey of Mid-Course

Please note this is an anonymous survey I kindly ask you to complete it in your own words to improve the efficiency of the course for your learning process.

1) State three reasons why you are enjoying this course and three why you are not.

_____
_____
_____
_____

2) Are you completing the online homework? What do you think of the contribution to your learning process?"

_____
_____
_____
_____

3) Would you suggest to your friends to choose Italian to fulfill the language requirement? Why?

_____
_____
_____
_____

4) Would you consider majoring, double-majoring (state the other discipline) or even minoring in Italian (state your major)? State the reasons why you would go for one of the three options or you would not.

_____
_____
_____
_____

APPENDICE B

Piano di classe (commentato)

Questo piano di classe rappresenta l'applicazione pratica del modello operativo *online-blended* appena presentato in un corso a metà semestre. Numero studenti ipotizzati 20-25 per classe, utilizzo di una qualunque classe virtuale idonea ad ospitare il numero di studenti previsto.[9]

Livello Elementare I

Lezione in asincrono

Scopi didattici dell'incontro in asincrono:

Funzione comunicativa: Descrizione di persone all'interno di una foto
Grammatica: Uso degli aggettivi per la descrizione
Vocabolario: A discrezione dello studente perché si riferisce alla foto scelta da lui ma coinvolge unità di vocabolario studiato.

Lo studente possiede strumenti di base per potersi esprimere ma deve scoprire adesso l'uso degli aggettivi. La funzione comunicativa spinge lo studente a "usare la lingua" nel contesto comunicativo reale. Ovviamente nella consegna era stato specificato di usare foto con persone perché il compito era di descrivere persone fisiche. La durata della descrizione era massima di un minuto.

Lezione in sincrono attraverso – classe virtuale Durata: 60 minuti

Questa lezione segue la lezione in asincrono descritta sopra e di cui si è parlato a pagina 10 di questo saggio

Scopi didattici dell'incontro in sincrono:

- Grammatica: Sistematizzazione degli aggettivi per descrivere le persone (alto, basso etc.) e la personalità (simpatico, allegro etc.) questi sono già stati parzialmente assimilati induttivamente per completare le attività in asincrono precedente a questo incontro. In questa lezione oltre ad essere sistematizzati saranno aggiunti gli aggettivi per la descrizione del tempo
- Vocabolario: i vestiti e i colori

- Cultura: stereotipi fisici italiani
- Funzione Comunicativa: Descrizione del tempo, espressione "di che colore è…"
- Indicazioni attività in asincrono per la lezione successiva in fase di sintesi e reimpiego delle strutture apprese

Fase di Introduzione lezioni successive:

Il docente esprime un giudizio generale sulle descrizioni delle foto inviate attraverso *www.fotobabble.com* e chiede che un volontario carichi nella classe virtuale la foto e faccia la descrizione dal vivo. [5 minuti]

Fase di Svolgimento:

- Comprensione globale:
  Il docente carica nella classe virtuale la lista degli aggettivi utilizzati dagli studenti nelle descrizioni delle foto inviategli durante la lezione in asincrono, insieme a due fotografie da descrivere di un uomo (scuro, basso con i baffi che vive ad Agrigento) e di una donna (alta, bionda, occhi chiari che vive a Varese).
  Attività in gruppo: Si dividono gli studenti in almeno quattro gruppi di quattro o cinque studenti ciascuno. Ogni gruppo sarà denominato da un colore che sarà evidenziato di conseguenza nella classe virtuale: giallo, azzurro, verde e rosso. I gruppi giallo e azzurro descriveranno l'uomo e i gruppi verde e rosso descriveranno la donna. Ogni gruppo lavora contemporaneamente nelle *breakout rooms* ovvero in "stanze indipendenti" dalla stanza centrale ma sempre appartenenti alla classe virtuale. [10 minuti] (Il docente visita e guida i vari gruppi durante lo svolgimento del compito)

- Analisi:
  Si procede a far leggere prima le descrizioni dell'uomo al gruppo giallo il gruppo azzurro farà eventuali correzioni di accordo di aggettivo o di significato dell'aggettivo utilizzato. Altrimenti sarà il docente che chiederà agli studenti possibili soluzioni per risolvere l'errore. Gli studenti possono usare la rete per rispondere al docente e il docente usa la rete (stimoli audio visivi) per elicitare risposte se queste non arrivano

spontaneamente. Lo stesso si farà per i gruppi che descrivono la donna. (15 minuti)

Il docente completa le regole sull'accordo degli aggettivi elicitando altre risposte per esempio attraverso una griglia di completamento. (5 minuti)

- Mini-presentazione culturale del docente sugli stereotipi fisici degli italiani [5 minuti] attività visiva divertente con lo scopo di rilassare la classe.

- Differenziazione dei temi
  Il docente mostra ora descrizioni di paesaggi con un diverso clima; si fornisce anche una lista delle espressioni per descrivere il tempo in queste foto (fa freddo, fa caldo eccetera…) si procede ad attività in coppie (sempre nelle *breakout rooms*) per accoppiare le figure alle espressioni giuste. (5 minuti)

  Nella correzione in plenaria si utilizzano gli elementi naturali per riprendere i colori. Il docente funge da input linguistico "Di che colore è il sole? Il sole è giallo—Di che colore è il cielo? Il cielo è azzurro" eccettera… (10 minuti)

Conclusione:
Lezione in sincrono con riepilogo finale e istruzioni per la lezione in asincrono (5 minuti)

Lezione in asincrono successiva

Scopi didattici dell'incontro in asincrono:

Funzione comunicativa: Descrizione di una foto includendo sia persone fisiche sia il tempo
Vocabolario: Integrazione di aggettivi per la descrizione
Cultura: conoscenza di località in Italia attraverso le foto selezionate dagli studenti
Verifica informale: delle competenze raggiunte per la funzione di descrizione di una foto con persone fisiche e descrizione del tempo.

- Fase di sintesi:
  Gli studenti lavoreranno per descrivere una foto scelta da internet su un luogo in Italia includendo la descrizione delle persone presenti nella foto e il tempo. Questa descrizione sarà scritta e inviata al docente entro la data prestabilita. Questa fase di sintesi che prevede il reimpiego delle competenze linguistiche acquisite in questa unità minima di apprendimento online-blended (UMAOB) serve anche come verifica informale cioè vedere quali competenze lo studente abbia acquisito e a che livello, inerente alla funzione comunicativa di descrivere una foto (descrizione fisica e del tempo con i vocaboli inerente al vestiario e ai colori) Una verifica formale in un altro momento del processo formativo potrà avvenire in sincrono se orale, o in entrambe le forme, se avverrà in forma scritta o attraverso filmato registrato e in qualunque altra forma il docente decida.
  Da questo piano di lezione online-blended è importante capire l'elasticità di come questo processo formativo può essere organizzato tra incontri online in sincrono e in asincrono. Questa fase stessa di sintesi potrebbe essere anche scelta come attività di rafforzo per essere sicuri che tutti gli studenti abbiano sviluppato gli obiettivi didattici previsti. In questo caso l'attività sarebbe organizzata a coppie invece che come attività singola e le coppie sarebbero organizzate dal docente in modo che gli studenti che abbiano raggiunto gli obiettivi possano aiutare coloro che faticano di più. Queste sono scelte del docente mentre si svolge il corso.

Lezione in Sincrono successiva

Scopi didattici dell'incontro in sincrono:

- Grammatica: Sistematizzazione del verbo essere e del verbo avere
- Vocabolario: cibo e bevande.
- Funzione Comunicativa: espressioni con il verbo essere e il verbo avere
- Cultura: ripasso località italiane e cucine regionali.
- Introduzione attività in asincrono: preparare una ricetta di un piatto italiano e filmarla.

APPENDICE C

Modello Operativo Online-Blended

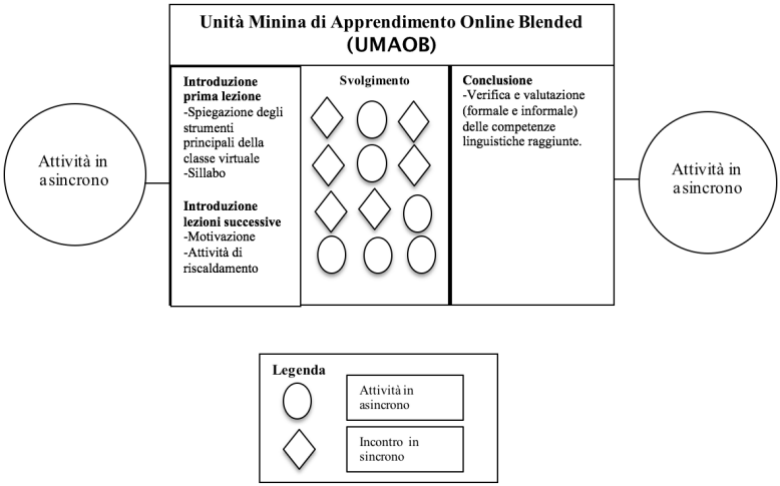

Fig. 1 Unità Minima di Apprendimento Online

Il percorso di apprendimento inizia con un'attività asincrona che riguarda la tecnologia di base e presentazioni, presentazione del sillabo, primi tentativi di connessione e/o registrazione all'interno della classe virtuale. Dopo l'introduzione prima lezione in sincrono e l'inizio della fase di svolgimento le altre sotto fasi possono essere organizzate sia in sincrono che asincrono secondo le scelte didattiche del docente e dell'analisi dei bisogni dell'apprendente. Si noti l'ordine sparso delle attività in sincrono e asincrono.

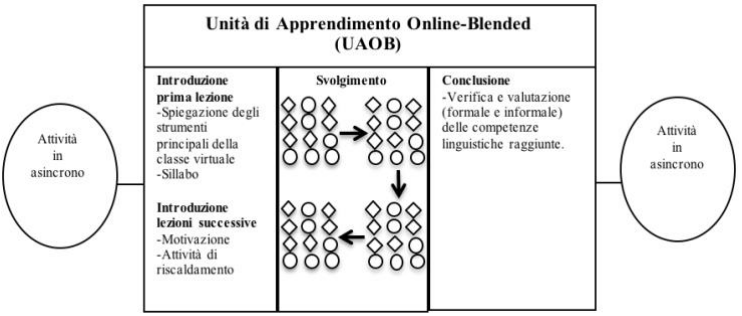

Fig. 2 Mette in evidenza come diverse Unità Minime di Apprendimento Online-Blended (UMAOB) formano un' Unità di Apprendimento Online-Blended (UAOB).

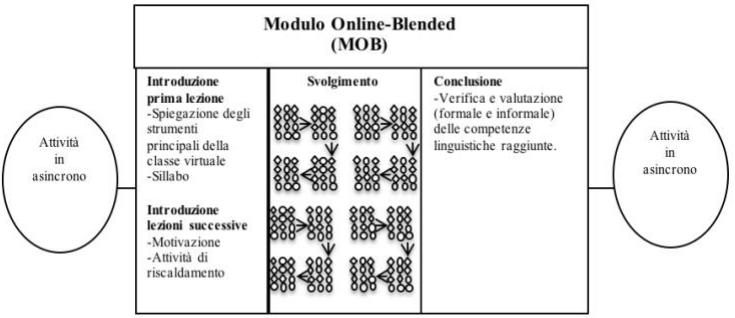

Fig. 3 Mette in evidenza come diverse Unità di Apprendimento Online-Blended (UAOB) formano un Modulo Online-Blended (MOB).

ENDNOTES

[1] Si considerano le quattro istituzioni in cui l'autore ha insegnato italiano e ha potuto sperimentare l'insegnamento online in asincrono come sostituto dei compiti online. Queste sono Fordham University, St. Johns University, Wagner College e Borough of Manhattan Community College - CUNY

[2] Sito indicante il corso proposto da Weber State University (Foreign Languages Online Methods Course – FRLANG 4500 or 6500). http://www.weber.edu/ForeignLanguages/Onlinemethods.html. Inoltre, la mancanza di formazione specifica è estesa anche per gli insegnanti a livello K-12, ma in questo lavoro ci si occupa primariamente di insegnamento e apprendimento della lingua italiana a livello universitario.

[3] Trenta minuti mensili non sono sufficienti, per tale ragione *Rosetta Stone* stessa propone l'acquisto di altri incontri aggiuntivi con il tutor. Ovviamente, si entra in un ambito di marketing ben diverso dallo scopo di questo saggio.

[4] Nel caso dell'Italia questo limite risulta ancora più importante se si considera che il decreto legislativo 626/94 in materia prevede un massimo di due ore consecutive di lavoro al terminale prima di una pausa obbligatoria di quindici minuti.

[5] Con l'aumentare del livello di lingua è possibile adottare altri modi di registrazione come per esempio *Photobooth* utilizzabile nei computer prodotti dalla Apple.

[6] Agli studenti era stato spiegato che l'attività serviva per imparare a fare descrizioni in italiano. Lo studente universitario deve essere motivato all'apprendimento pertanto deve capire quale sia la funzione linguistica che si vuole sviluppare attraverso un'attività.

[7] Bisogna precisare che nei corsi di lingua impartiti da università americane spesso il *teaching assistant* è il docente del corso e quindi ha piena responsabilità del corso che insegna.

[8] Si segnala tra i più recenti lavori sugli usi didattici dei *social networks* riguardante l'italiano: *Guida alla Formazione del Docente di Lingue all'Uso delle TIC* a cura di Ivana Fratter e Isabella Jafrancesco.

[9] Le classi virtuali attualmente disponibili sono varie. Molte sono simili tra loro ma si distinguono per essere gratuite o a pagamento. Alcune hanno bisogno di scaricare un software per avere accesso mentre altre sono accessibili online. In questo articolo per motivi di spazio non ci si può soffermare sull'analisi di queste classi virtuali però possiamo elencare gli strumenti necessari che una classe virtuale per insegnare una lingua straniera online deve avere: Webcam, whiteboard, capacità di caricare file, navigare in rete, e *breakout rooms*.

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FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

De nostri temporis studiorum ratione and the Digital Humanities

How might Italian Studies scholars view their work differently in light of the digital turn? On a practical level, the examples explored here illustrate a variety of approaches in response to this question. Increasingly framed at the intersection of histories of race, gender, language, access, method, and scholarly practice, the digital humanities continues to make unique demands on scholars. It forces us to think through the media-specific practices of the humanities present and past and the assumptions which sustain them. It forces us to ask, what is the goal of our studies? And what are the advantages that we derive from said goal?

A similar question was posed by eighteenth-century philosopher Giambattista Vico's in his work *De nostri temporis studiorum ratione* (1709). Translated as "On the Study Methods of Our Time,"[1] this was Vico's first foray into philosophy and was the seventh in a series of inaugural lectures given at the University of Naples in his position as professor of rhetoric. Vico took aim at the inadequacy of the critical and pedagogical methods of his contemporaries while weighing the comparative merits of classical and modern culture. This reminds us of 21st-century debates about the value, both economic and cultural, of a liberal arts education. In order to discern just how current "study methods" might be superior or inferior to those of the Ancients, Vico set up a distinction between the new arts, sciences and inventions—the constituent material of learning—and the new instruments and aids to knowledge—the ways and means of learning. Vico's critique of the Moderns took issue with the logicians of Port-Royal, and their Cartesian method of compartmentalizing knowledge. For Vico, this reductive method of study precludes the human, and is inferior to that of the Ancients: "We devote all our efforts to the investigation of physical phenomena, because their nature seems unambiguous; but we fail to inquire into human nature which, because of the freedom of man's will, is difficult to determine" (33). The result, Vico warns, is that students "because of their training, which is focused on these studies, are unable to engage in the life of the community, to conduct themselves with sufficient wisdom and prudence" (33).

For Vico, the methods of logicians such as Antoine Arnaud and Pierre Nicole and their followers established the constituent material of

learning through a process of narrowing the domain of knowledge. While Francis Bacon took issue with the syllogisms of the scholastics to argue that knowledge of the world should be grounded in empirically verifiable facts, Vico doesn't simply propose a new method to achieve ancient knowledge. He redefines what it means to know. And, since the instruments (including logic) used by his contemporaries—the very ways and means to knowledge—were antecedent to the task of learning, the knowledge they yielded was determined by their premises for their creation. In the technology they harnessed, and in the aims they fulfilled, these instruments were restricted by the discourses which produced them. In reducing knowledge to the unambiguous, the logicians of Port Royal limited knowledge to what their minds, and their technology, permitted them to master. This narrowing allowed them to accelerate the production of knowledge, leading Vico to a mixed assessment. While he marveled at the abundance of books available "not only to Ptolemaic kings, but also to any private individual, and at a moderate cost" (72), he worried that such an abundance might result in a decline in intellectual industry. He compared his contemporaries to guests at a banquet who, having indulged in "gorgeous and sumptuous dinners, wave away ordinary and nourishing food and prefer to stuff themselves with elaborately prepared but less healthy repasts" (72). Elsewhere he underscores the importance of grappling with difficult ancient texts and being aware of the shortcomings of ancient methods of study, in order to better endure the "unavoidable inconveniences" of current methods (5).

Yet, in a digital environment, we are only beginning to see how the stuff of learning is radically transformed by the ways and means in which it is transmitted. Once again, we are faced with an imposing flood of data that is tied to the specific methods and tools used to obtain them. This time, technology has allowed us to expand knowledge into a vast domain, one whose complexity trumps our current theories and whose scale defies our individual and physiological capacity to grasp it. The digital humanities contends with this conundrum: by transforming what it means to know something, particularly in a boundless domain of culture, we grapple with ever-expanding multitudes, millions of pieces of human culture, past and present, digital and analog, while continuing to critically reflect on the very nature of human knowledge itself. Effective teaching in this environment is a daunting task. Digital pedagogy is not simply the use of these technologies for teaching, but approaching these technologies with both the critical awareness that they demand and a heightened attention on their impact on learning. Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, when presented to students as a hypertextual

interface via the Oregon Petrarch Open Book, foregrounds not only the scholarly debates in textual criticism, but also prompts broader reflections on the nature of authority in scribal, print, and digital contexts. In a world where social platforms and editorial machines are used to generate both knowledge and noise—B.A.s and bots—a classroom introduction to the aims of projects like the OPOB is not simply good pedagogy, it acquires civic importance for an explicit engagement with methods and techniques of textual transmission.

Our current conception of the humanities is predicated on a certain historical iteration of the discipline, but as any intellectual historian will tell you, categories of knowledge, their hierarchies, even their "permanence" are bound into our society in contingent and distinct ways. Whether our technologies of knowledge consist in painting on the walls of a cave, or inscribing voices on wax cylinder phonograph records, we inevitably reduce knowledge to what our technological horizons enable us to deal with. If knowledge becomes "too big to know" in the words of David Weinberger, we should, like Vico, make use of a method that will allow us to better understand and endure its "unavoidable inconveniences" while still allowing us to ask, what is the goal of our studies and what are the advantages derived from that goal.

Carol Chiodo PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

ENDNOTES

[1] See Elio GianTurco's translation, *On the Study Methods of Our Time*, Cornell Unviersity Press, 1990.

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REVIEWS

Leonardo Campus. *Non solo canzonette. L'Italia della ricostruzione e del Miracolo attraverso il Festival di Sanremo*. Le Monnier, 2015, pp. 304.

Con questo interessante studio di interesse musicologico e sociologico oltre che storico, Leonardo Campus traccia il mutamento della società italiana dal dopoguerra ad oggi attraverso "musica leggera come fonte della ricerca storica" (3), rifacendosi all'approccio delle *Annales* francesi, che poneva l'attenzione "alla mentalità, ai costumi, alla cultura, alle caratteristiche di quella società" (3-4). La prefazione di Stefano Bollani impreziosisce il volume.

I primi due capitoli consistono in una rassegna delle edizioni del festival anno per anno (con una certa corrività dopo gli anni '60), che documentano non solo il ruolo storico, musicologico e sociologico che le canzoni di Sanremo ebbero in Italia, ma anche lo sviluppo della musica internazionale, che dal 1962 iniziava la rivoluzione pop e rock, con Beatles, Rolling Stones e Dylan.

Il terzo capitolo, "Sanremo nel paese delle meraviglie (1951-1957)," contiene un'analisi—più dettagliata sia per i testi che per le musiche—delle canzoni sanremesi del periodo 1951-1957 e mette in evidenza il carattere di facile evasione e astrazione dalla realtà (donde il titolo del capitolo) che distingueva il repertorio di Sanremo, a fronte degli enormi sforzi del paese per ricostruirsi dopo la guerra. Campus sostiene, attraverso una meticolosa ricerca sui giornali dell'epoca e sulle fonti storiche, che l'establishment politico democristiano ha avuto un ruolo chiave nell'assecondare il gusto piccolo-borghese e reazionario nella promozione musicale di talenti come Claudio Villa, Luciano Tajoli, Nilla Pizzi ecc.

Campus raggruppa in sedici categorie tematiche i titoli delle canzoni di questo periodo e ne considera, non senza una vena di divertita ironia, la stucchevole e monotona retorica reazionaria (100-01). Ma l'autore mostra anche che la persistenza di certe formule ha influito su canzoni, posteriori e di genere diverso, di Battiato, Minghi, De Gregori (106) e segue le reazioni della stampa e degli intellettuali di diverse appartenenze politiche (Montanelli, Moravia, Pasolini, Maraini, Eco) di fronte al fenomeno delle "canzonette", che pervadeva inesorabilmente anche i ranghi della sinistra, pur impegnata a denunciare la vacuità del fenomeno mediatico e culturale. Campus utilizza opportunamente una considerazione di Stephen Gundle (66) che attribuisce alla destra e alla

Democrazia Cristiana la capacità di aver saputo pervadere la cultura popolare—anzi dovremmo dire pop—, sottraendola all'influenza della sinistra, tutta protesa verso la cultura 'alta' e la zona intellettuale.

Fra le letture che Campus offre, quella di "Vola, colomba" (118-19) vincitrice del primo Festival nell'interpretazione di Nilla Pizzi risulta particolarmente riuscita perché svela i riferimenti alla questione di Trieste che si celano nel testo della canzone, che pur con il suo stile convenzionale incentrato sulla consueta triade Dio-patria-famiglia, dice forse qualcosa di più di quel che generalmente si conosce. Prima di alcune pagine che riproducono le copertine degli spartiti dei pezzi vincitori dal 195 al 1957, il capitolo avrebbe potuto concludersi con la presentazione della novità introdotta da *Cantacronache*, il gruppo formatosi a Torino appunto nel 1957—termine indicato nel titolo—mentre si spinge ad anticipare gli anni sessanta con una breve disamina di canzoni di Celentano e Tenco.

Il quarto capitolo, "E l'Italia cominciò a volare (1958)," spiega il successo della canzone di Domenico Modugno in relazione ai mutamenti profondi che proprio nel 1958 caratterizzarono il nostro Paese. L'analisi della canzone e dell'Italia dei tempi è condotta con rigore, tuttavia a tratti la consueta chiarezza dell'autore subisce qui qualche offuscamento: per esempio non è chiaro dove si debba vedere un accenno alla sessualità in "Nel blu, dipinto di blu" ("in *Volare* l'amore e la sessualità sono presentati in modo libero e felice," 148). Inoltre quando Campus mette a confronto statistiche riguardanti il reddito medio, le spese e le aspettative degli italiani in due sondaggi realizzati nel 1958 e nel 2004 (141), la fonte, citata alla nota 12, appare essere una puntata di *Porta a porta*, ma sarebbe stato più corretto citare anche la fonte alla quale fonte attingeva il programma di Bruno Vespa. Nel resto del capitolo si descrive "la ricezione attutita, ripulita, edulcorata" e soprattutto "tardiva" (161) che la musica italiana ebbe del rock 'n roll, nella dialettica culturale che vedeva l'America come mito e come bersaglio di protesta a un tempo.

Nel conclusivo "Il tuo bacio è come un Boom (1959-1964)" Campus mette a confronto il successo degli "urlatori" ispirati ai modelli americani con i competitori e tradizionalisti in Italia. Si scopre così che Mina riscuoteva tanto successo quante critiche a causa della fisicità del suo stile canoro, che la televisione degli anni '50 si scandalizzava di come cantasse "con tutto il corpo," e che la mimica scatenata di Adriano Celentano inquietava il parlamentare missino Clemente Manco al punto di presentare un'interrogazione parlamentare per bandirne i "movimenti contorsionistici a fondo epilettoide" (180). Malgrado la persistenza del

tradizionalismo melodico alla Tajoli, Villa e Cinquetti, il rock e i suoi derivati—mai separati dal messaggio visivo portato dalla televisione—vengono progressivamente introiettati da strati sempre più ampi della popolazione. Campus traccia il mutamento culturale che accompagnò gli anni del boom attraverso i nuovi temi che permeavano le canzoni di Sanremo e non (la motorizzazione di massa in "Andavo a cento allora" di Gianni Morandi e "La ballata del pedone" di Ennio Sangiusto; la villeggiatura estiva in "L'ombrellone" di Johnny Dorelli e "Pinne, fucile ed occhiali" di Edoardo Vianello). Campus giustamente nota che fra le righe della celebrazione del nuovo benessere, queste canzoni in realtà mostrano anche i mutati costumi sessuali degli italiani "raccontando storielle d'amore nate sulla spiaggia… allontanavano ulteriormente il cliché dell'amore 'epico' stile 'Vola, colomba'" (189). Il mutamento tematico dai primi anni del festival agli anni del miracolo economico—un periodo di appena dieci anni—fu notevole, e Campus nota acutamente il confronto con la stasi tematica dei nostri giorni: i temi che vinsero nel 1995 o nel 2005 potrebbero ancora vincere nel 2015 (anno di pubblicazione di *Non solo canzonette*).

Le ultime pagine concludono questo interessante studio con una disamina dei maggiori cambiamenti che, dal tragico suicidio di Tenco del 1967, hanno introdotto la rivoluzione culturale degli anni '70. Lo sdoganamento del discorso sessuale consente ora di parlare di amori cinici, di tradimenti, persino di femminismo, e prendono parte alla gara cantautori come Sergio Endrigo, Giorgio Gaber, Gino Paoli. Campus arriva ad accennare agli anni '80 con un'analisi del brano secondo classificato del 1986: "Il clarinetto" di Renzo Arbore), ma sostanzialmente interrompe la sua storia della canzone di Sanremo al 1964, lasciando il lettore con la speranza di una futura indagine sul periodo seguente.

Francesco Ciabattoni GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

Francesco Ciabattoni. *La citazione è sintomo d'amore. Cantautori italiani e memoria letteraria*. Carocci, 2016, pp. 164.

In questo saggio saggio Ciabattoni analizza la presenza di testi di canzone "logogenici"—ossia i testi che, in base alla sua definizione, sono nati "dallo stimolo di un altro testo verbale" (11)—in sei cantautori italiani: Vecchioni, Guccini, Branduardi, De André, De Gregori e Baglioni. L'attenzione è rivolta in particolare ai riferimenti a testi letterari e subito appare chiara l'impostazione del libro: Ciabattoni indaga "qualunque strategia di citazione o di imitazione," ma nel contempo interpreta i rimandi individuati come "citazioni" in senso lato, ossia come segni di un deliberato legame intertestuale con l'opera da cui derivano, anche quando la citazione non è palese e l'autore preleva elementi di difficile individuazione: "Quando le citazioni o i prelievi testuali consistono nell'importare un frammento non famoso, l'arte allusiva si fa ancora più sottile e complessa perché prevede un riconoscimento basato su una conoscenza approfondita del testo d'origine, senza la quale non si coglie pienamente il significato della canzone" (12).

È sempre così? Non è un problema da poco: i cantautori esaminati sono diversi fra loro e talvolta cambiano strategia a seconda dei brani o del periodo. Inoltre, se si ipotizza una funzione sempre allusiva delle citazioni individuate—cioè si suppone che le canzoni si rivolgano, per essere comprese appieno, a qualcuno che conosce il testo d'origine—il primo problema è la definizione del pubblico. Come nota Ciabattoni, queste canzoni hanno come pubblico primario "milioni di ascoltatori completamente ignari delle allusioni in esse contenute" (13); tuttavia, aggiunge, "forse [i cantautori] comunicano con una porzione privilegiata di pubblico, con cui entrano in gara attraverso un gioco di riconoscimenti." L'allusione diviene così il "sintomo d'amore" a cui si riferisce il titolo.

Come è inevitabile in operazioni del genere, a seconda della sensibilità di ciascun lettore i richiami individuati possono a volte destare il sospetto di una possibile poligenesi, o del rimando a una fonte comune rimasta ignota. Ma a chi scrive è accaduto di rado: nel complesso il lavoro di ricerca delle citazioni appare acuto e accurato, così come l'analisi dei legami e delle differenze fra il contesto d'arrivo e quello di partenza. Difficile resistere alla tentazione di integrare con un paio di ulteriori possibili legami. Ad esempio, la canzone *Poeti per l'estate* di

Francesco De Gregori, esaminata alle pp. 21-2, inizia "Vanno a due a due i poeti verso chissà che luna" e poco dopo dice che "pugnalano alle spalle gli amici più cari". Con ogni probabilità, è un'allusione alla seconda e ultima strofa di *Poeti in via Brera: due età* di Vittorio Sereni, dove appunto c'è una sfilata di poeti d'oggi: "(Frattanto / sul marciapiede di fronte / a due a due sotto braccio tenendosi / a due a due odiandosi in gorgheggi / di reciproco amore / sei ne sfilavano. Sei.)"

Oppure, nella canzone di Angelo Branduardi esaminata alle pp. 51-2, *Sotto il tiglio*, tratta da Walther von del Vogelweide, la terza strofa introduce un elemento nuovo: sul giaciglio dei due amanti "la radica si abbraccia al giglio, / voi che passate potete vedere / come son cresciuti insieme." È la ripresa di un'immagine frequente nelle conclusioni delle antiche ballate scozzesi (ad esempio, in molte versioni di *Barbara Allen*) dove, sulla tomba dei due amanti, si annodano insieme una *briar* e una *rose*.

I riscontri più impressionanti del volume riguardano Claudio Baglioni. In un primo momento, quando Ciabattoni prende alcuni versi di una canzone de *La vita è adesso* e fa notare che dipendono da un brano del romanzo *Una vita violenta* di Pasolini, perché ricorrono le "cartelle," i riferimenti alla "scuola" e ai "giochi" e la parola "montarozzo" (che in Pasolini è però "montarozzetto"), il lettore può pensare che sia solo una curiosa coincidenza. Ma subito si affollano altri riscontri in serie e i dubbi spariscono. Ritornano uguali le ambientazioni, ma soprattutto ricorrono precise tessere: ad esempio, "i carosielli con tanta luce e poca gente" in *Una vita violenta* riappaiono in Baglioni come "piccole giostre con tanta luce e poca gente"; e "l'aria era tesa come la pelle d'un tamburo" ritorna come "notte tesa come pelle di tamburo." Allo stesso modo, due personaggi "tutti ingobbiti, con quelle schienucce d'uccelletti" generano il verso "tu in quella schienuccia d'uccellino"; oppure "questo che parlava come un grammofono scassato" di Pasolini riappare come "tuo fratello è un grammofono scassato"; e poi "una crosticina di fango nuovo, di cioccolata" ritorna in "un fango di cioccolata"; poi c'è la "gomma americana" che ritorna uguale e la "schicchera" al "mozzone" che diventa "una schicchera alla cicca"; e poi "un giovanotto largo e chiaro come un mazzo di scarola" che ritorna nelle "ragazze […] fresche come mazzi d'insalata" (114-34). Ancora più netti sono i rimandi al *Pianto della scavatrice*, sempre di Pasolini (121): "Povero come un gatto del colosseo / vivevo in una *borgata calce / e polverone*, lontano dalla città // e dalla *campagna. //* […] *bucato da mille file uguali / di finestre* sbarrate, il Penitenziario / tra vecchi campi e sopiti casali." Il confronto con due versi di un'altra canzone de *La vita è adesso*

non lascia dubbi: "vorrei un biglietto per un posto senza le *borgate calce e polverone, / bucate da mille finestre uguali* che si mangiano la *campagna*."

Riscontri analoghi vengono trovati in Baglioni anche per Luzi, Morante, García Márquez e vari altri. Ciabattoni analizza con cura il contesto sia nei testi d'arrivo, sia in quelli di partenza, notando come il prestito possa anche venire riutilizzato in modo molto diverso, ma comunque rechi traccia del suo contesto originale e quindi ne ricavi una sorta di connotazione.

Infine, Ciabattoni nota che "è solo attraverso il riconoscimento del rapporto con i sottotesti di Márquez, Pasolini, Morante e Luzi che si può collocare correttamente *La vita è adesso*," perché "il genere canzone in questo caso rinuncia alla propria autosufficienza estetica" (136).

È questo, appunto, il nodo fondamentale su cui egli torna nelle conclusioni dell'intero volume: "Il risultato è—in ciascun caso qui considerato—quello di una canzone il cui significato è nuovo ma non del tutto indipendente da quello del testo d'origine" (144). Quindi "la scrittura di certi cantautori" è "una rete nella quale spesso accade che un singolo testo sia meglio comprensibile se posto in relazione con altri": per comprenderlo appieno, "le antenne dell'ascoltatore debbono affinarsi e allenarsi a riconoscere i possibili richiami nascosti" (146).

Difficile prendere una posizione netta rispetto ad affermazioni del genere. De André una volta definì sé stesso un "mosaicista" (71) più che un poeta, proprio in base a questa tecnica del *collage* di testi e musiche altrui, scritte da collaboratori o da artisti del passato. A parere di chi scrive, è improbabile che considerasse i suoi testi come non autosufficienti: il suo obiettivo, di solito, era proprio quello di creare, con l'aiuto della realtà come di opere altrui, un testo valido in sé e usufruibile a prescindere dai suoi precedenti. In altri casi, invece, l'allusione per iniziati è probabile o persino esplicita. Su tutto questo si potrebbe discutere a lungo. Di sicuro, invece, questo volume svela una rete di contatti e riprese di un'ampiezza sorprendente: la letteratura e la canzone appaiono molto più vicine di quanto di solito si pensi.

Luca Zuliani UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI PADOVA

Mark Epstein, Fulvio Orsitto, and Andrea Righi, editors.
TOTalitarian ARTs: The Visual Fascism(s) and Mass-Society.
Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2017, pp. 445.

The aim of *TOTalitarian ARTs* is to explore the connection between visual arts, mass-culture, and totalitarian societies. The book displays a rich and wide range of perspectives on the topic of totalitarianism in architecture, arts, cinema, performances, and new technologies. A very positive aspect of this book is that it addresses totalitarianism in an international context that includes not only Italy but also other European countries and South America. Given the amount of information contained in this book, this review may look at times too quick and schematic, but it is intended to give at least a sample of the different perspectives exposed.

TOTalitarian ARTs is divided into six parts. Part I is entitled Totalitarian Environment: Spaces and Images. In the first essay, "The Use and the Abuse of the Classical Fragment: The Case of Genoa and Sculptor Eugenio Baroni," Silvia Boero examines the Italian Fascist regime's tendency to "appropriate" Roman figurative arts for propaganda. Boero shows how the reconstruction of Piazza della Vittoria in Genoa, the Arc of Triumph and the adjacent buildings projected an image of power of Fascist Italy. Boero also explores how it was possible to transmit anti-regime content through sculptures, as is the case of Eugenio Baroni's monument to the mutilated soldier. Maria D'Annibale, in "Fascist Ideology, Mass Media, and the Built Environment: A Case Study," deals with the restoration of the Palazzo del Podestà in Verona; the removal of its Neo-classical façade, substituted by a fictitious recreation of the Medieval style, is an example of how the present constantly constructs and reinvents the past "according to the interests and visions of the current players" (37). Amanda Minervini, "Face to Face: Iconic Representations and Juxtapositions of St. Francis of Assisi and Mussolini During Italian Fascism," focuses on the attempt made by Italian Fascist propaganda to transform Fascism into a "political religion." In particular, Minervini analyzes the case of two biographies of Saint Francis published in 1926 which established a parallel between Francis and Mussolini, "even claiming that Francis's life anticipated that of Mussolini" (49). Pierluigi Erbaggio, "Mussolini in American Newsreels: *Il Duce* as Modern Celebrity," deals with the popularity of Mussolini outside of Italy in the 1920s thanks to two American newsreel companies, Fox and Hearst, that praised Mussolini's charismatic

leadership and engagement with modernity. According to Erbaggio "creating a sort of American popular consensus of opinion regarding the Italian dictator" (77) was functional to the interests of financial institutions, like J.P. Morgan, which having invested substantial amounts of money in Italy were interested in giving a positive image to Fascist Italy.

Part II is dedicated to Totalitarianism and Italian Cinema. In his essay, "Pasolini's Reflections on Fascism(s): Classic and Contemporary," Mark Epstein examines Pasolini's movie *Salò*, where sexuality metaphorically represents "the exploitation of human beings by other human beings" (84). Unlike other critics, who label Pasolini as a Romantic or a Rousseauian, Epstein sees this author as a materialist, in a line of thought that goes from Leopardi to Timpanaro; therefore, Epstein considers Pasolini's interest in myth "tied to the retrospective examination and explication of the genesis of (non-economic) values (and ethics)" (95). Angelo Fàvaro's contribution, "From Moravia to Bertolucci: The Monism of *The Conformist*—the Farce After the Tragedy" is divided into two parts. In "Part I: from Tragedy to Myth," the writer compares Moravia's novel *The Conformist* to its cinematic version by Bertolucci. According to Fàvaro, Moravia's representation follows the typical structure of 19th century novels, while in Bertolucci's movie the protagonist "follows a troubled itinerary towards confused incomprehension of himself, the world, his being in the world" (109). In the second part of his contribution, "From Treatment to Farcical Finale," Fàvaro examines the original treatment of *The Conformist*, probably written by Moravia himself. The result of the analysis shows the differences between Moravia's and Bertolucci's concepts of conformism. If Moravia sees the story of Marcello as a tragedy, Bertolucci interprets it in a farcical key: at the end of the movie the spectator is left with a profound unease, mixed with the nauseating conviction that conformism "is a chameleon-like, insuperable, existential condition" (130). In "Nazi-Fascist Echoes in Films from WWII to the Present," Fulvio Orsitto examines the transition of the Nazi-fascist imaginary in cinema after World War II in three stages: the mocking attitude, typical of the 1940s, the "rehabilitated look" of the 1950s (during the Cold War the enemy was Communism), and the "perverting approach," where the Nazis are depicted as sexually fetishistic perverts, the premise for the *Nazisploitation* genre in the 1970s.

In Part III: Totalitarian Aesthetics and Politics, Ana Rodriguez Granell, "The Other Modernity: Fascist Aesthetics and the Imprint of the

Community Myth against the Failure of Liberalism," analyzes the aestheticization of politics in fascist regimes showing how they are often based on the fascination for non-rational elements like affection and emotions. Granell also explores the fascist myth of "original community" viewed as "instinctive, animal pre-consciousness" (174). The aim is to present fascism not as an anomaly but as an integral part of the contradiction of modernity (176). In the essay "Thought vs. Action: Golden Age Aesthetics in French Proto-Fascist and Fascist Discourses," Gaetano DeLeonibus examines the ideological positions of two French writers, Maurras e Drieu La Rochelle. Both these writers found a model of the perfect society in the past, but Maurras was inspired by the monarchic absolutism of the *Ancien Régime*, Drieu instead by the mystical dimension of the Middle Ages. After a close textual analysis, DeLeonibus concludes that Maurras' and Drieu's fascist ideas were not fully formed ideologies but aesthetic positions, inspired by a Nietzschian spiritual opposition to a time considered vulgar and decadent (197). Sean P. Connelly, "Envisioning Vichy: Fascist Visual Culture in France 1940-44," focuses on the Republic of Vichy and how fascist propaganda substituted the revolutionary motto "Liberty, Equality, Brotherhood" with the more reactionary "Work, Family, Country." Connelly also discusses how the regime used the figure of Joan D'Arc as a symbol of the republic: "the fascist fusion of national tradition with youthful vitality" (204). In her contribution, "Salvador Dalì: The Fascist Genius," Anna Vives explores Salvador Dali's relationship with fascism, mainly his fascination with Hitler and his collaboration with Franco. According to Vives, who also analyzes some of Dalì's most controversial paintings, his main concern was essentially non-political; in fact, the painter mocked every form of orthodoxy regardless of its political nature. According to Vives, "Dalì's link with Fascism is a consequence of his "self-representation as a genius" (230).

Part IV of this book is entitled Totalitarian Geography. Daniel Arroyo-Rodriguez, in his essay, "The Impossible Reconciliation: Pedro Lazaga's *Torrepartida* (1956)," examines the strategy of reconciliation of the Spanish fascist regime two decades after the Civil War exposed in the movie *Torrepartida* by Pedro Lazaga. According to Arroyo-Rodriguez, the movie humanizes the enemy, but criminalizes the political opposition movement. The aim of *Torrepartida*, and its value, for Franco's propaganda, is "to reconcile the humanization of the enemy with the need to eliminate it" (270). In fact, even though the protagonist eventually acknowledges his errors, this realization does not eliminate the necessity of the punishment. Redemption is impossible. The essay by

Isabel Macedo, Rita Bastos, and Rosa Cabecinhas, "Representations of Dictatorship in Portuguese Cinema," starts with a panorama of the historical events that led to the dictatorship and offers a rather broad overview of Portuguese cinema from the 1930s to the present days (impossible to summarize here). Finally, the authors analyze two documentaries, *Lusitan Illusions* and *48* that deal respectively with the self-representation of the regime and with the reality of the political persecution of the dissidents. In a similar way, Claudia Peralta, "Looking Forward, Looking Backwards: Notes on the Dictatorship in Uruguay," starts with a synopsis of the events that followed the military coup in Uruguay in 1972 and points out that after the end of the regime in 1983, the new political leaders decided to "look forward," that is, not to prosecute those who tortured and killed many dissidents during the regime. Peralta mentions several documentaries that shed some light on the crimes perpetrated by the dictatorship and underlines the importance of these documentaries for the healing process of the nation because "without truth, justice is not possible" (286).

In Part V: Contemporary Forms of Totalitarian Representation, Arina Rotaru's essay, "Totality and Destruction in Contemporary German Culture: Playing on Fascism in the Total Art of Serdar Somuncu," discusses the work of the Turkish-German artist Serdar Somuncu and in particular his performance *Hitler Kebab*, claiming that Somuncu exposes German fascism "as an infamous and intangible property of German history" (304), and also shows how Hitler's discourse is still perpetuated nowadays in a society "infused with paranoia against Islam and against other visible minorities such as the Turks." (313) Maria Stopfner's essay, "*Seit heut früh wird zurückgesschriben*: Intertextuality and Interdiscursivity in Political Comics of the Far and Extreme Right," shows how German neo-Nazi groups use comics for Anti-semitic, xenophobic, propaganda. Stopfner analyzes a German comic book, a remake of a 1996 English booklet entitled *The Fable of Ducks & Hens*, where hens (Jews) trick a multitude of hard-working ducks (the general population) until they are defeated and banished by a group of geese (the Nazis). Stopfner focuses on intertextual references—both in words and images—that show disturbing parallels with Third Reich language and rhetoric. According to Stopfner, this comic book, in its calculated ambivalence, can be a dangerous form of propaganda even for children who are not able to catch all the hidden political references, because they still can get the ideological message: do not trust foreign "birds." Mattias Ekman, "YouTube Fascism: Visual Activism of the Extreme Right," takes into

consideration the strategy of dissemination of political propaganda on the internet made by Swedish far right-wing movements. Ekman conducts a quantitative analysis of 223 videos published by Swedish neo-Nazi groups divided into categories: political right-wing demonstrations, martial art performances, and humor, that is, mockery of the police or political opponents. Ekman shows how marginal groups, using platforms like YouTube, obtain a large public visibility, and make available online anti-democratic, anti-Jewish, anti-feminist content.

Part VI of the book is entitled Comparative Reflections on Totalitarian Worldviews. In his wide and well-researched essay, "Totalitarian Trends Today," Mark Epstein starts with Pasolini and his analysis on consumerism to show how the contemporary consumer society is more totalitarian than "classic" fascist regimes. According to Epstein, the elites play on the fear of terrorism to expand the repressive apparatus of the state and, at the same time, "monopolistically concentrate the sector of finance capital." (379) New totalitarianism, in his analysis, "by voiding institutions simply removes citizen access to any tools and means to redress any participation," (397) and only by "a new foundation for social, political, economic, ethical and interspecies relations" (404) could it counter the dominant thought. A second essay by Ekman "Theories of Video Activism and Fascism," examines how far right-wing movements, instead of addressing the rational level, play on the fear of global terrorism, adopting a strategy based on a "cultural politics of emotions" (411) that plays on vulnerability and "the basic desires of belonging" (413); the result is a sort of group cohesion based on masculinity, violence, and youth. In the last essay of the volume, "Deleuze's and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* as a Theory of Fascism," Andrea Righi starts from an analysis of popular movies like *The Hunger Games* and *The Bling Ring* to conduct an exploration of fascism that is based not only on violence and oppression, but also on a wide popular consensus. How is it possible that people could desire to be oppressed? To answer this question, Righi analyzes Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* and its focus on desire, interpreted not as a dynamic based on lack, but on desiring fluxes (ensembles of machines). Instead of viewing fascism as an imposition coming from the outside, Deleuze and Guattari claim that the masses, under a certain set of conditions, "wanted" fascism. The author discusses the "pleasure-libidinal dimension" (437) of fascism, and the fact that desire in neoliberal society is no more based on sex or passion but on life itself, in its pure senseless continuum. Righi claims that we are now witnessing "a mutation of the social complex that

is deeply *ingrained* in the dynamics of a desire that is now emptied of any passion," (438) the nightmare sensed by Deleuze and Guattari.

Given the wide range of its analytical perspectives, *Tot-Art* is certainly recommended as an essential tool for the study of old and new totalitarianism, not only in the form of "classical" dictatorships but also in more recent and insidious resurgences through the Web.

Daniele Fioretti MIAMI UNIVERSITY

Roberta Ricci, and Simona Wright, editors. *NeMLA Italian Studies. The Renaissance Dialogue*. Vol. 38, 2016, pp. 245.

This monographic issue of *NeMLA Italian Studies* celebrates the 500th anniversary of the first publication of *Orlando Furioso* (1516) by drawing attention to Ariosto's modernity. The title of the collection reflects the philosophical and organizational principle the two editors brilliantly derive from fragmentation and digression as narrative techniques in *Orlando Furioso*. Such practices, and the instability they promote, testify to an essential Renaissance feature—the dialogue among the various artistic expressions and the fields of knowledge. In the essays of this volume literature, language, philosophy, medicine, and the arts engage in a conversation that offers a more comprehensive understanding of Renaissance culture and might drive, Ricci and Wright anticipate, additional investigation into disciplinary cross-pollination.

The essays are organized in three sections. In the opening one, Ricci, "Umanesimo letterario, riforma grafica: Poggio Bracciolini editore, filologo e copista," and Lorenzo Sacchini, "Tra latino e volgare nei *Dialoghi piacevoli* di Stefano Guazzo," examine Poggio Bracciolini's and Stefano Guazzo's standpoints on the linguistic and cultural individuality of vernacular Italian in relation to Latin. Sacchini demonstrates the effects of community ethics on poetry and language in two dialogues from the *Dialoghi piacevoli* (1586)—the seventh, revolving around which language is more suitable for poetry, and the eighth, in which two new interlocutors, yet still members of an intellectual academy, like Guazzo himself, argue the spelling of the word *fedeltà* versus *fideltà* proposed by supporters of Latin. Usage among writers is offered as resolution to be complemented with knowledge of

language theories, foremost Bembo's. The verdict is in Latin's favor, however Guazzo points out the bilinguism of Italian culture, and how veering off tradition needs restraint to secure support from one's peers in order to legitimize membership in the literary society and, in Guazzo's case, the *Accademia degli Illustrati*. In his conclusion, Sacchini evokes literature's contribution to the development of a sense of community, especially in Italian culture.

In the second section, involving theater ("L'operazione e il repertorio. Due categorie barocche tra retorica e commedia dell'arte" by Andrea Gazzoni) and the arts in the interdisciplinary colloquy of this essay collection, Antonella Ansani in, "Questioning Poetry in Ariosto's 'Negromante,'" revisits the themes of magic and rhetoric as staged in Ariosto's comedy through the character of the magician Iachelino. Beyond this character, her insightful analysis addresses the roles of magic and rhetoric in Ariosto's oeuvre, particularly in *Orlando Furioso*. In her investigation, Ansani includes how Humanism and Neoplatonism conceived of magic and rhetoric in relation to poetry. Since magic and rhetoric challenge the poet's power to impose order on the world—as means of deception and illusion—Ariosto feels compelled to question his own poetic endeavor.

In his essay, On Maniera, Moral Choice, and Truth," David Cast inquires into the idea of *maniera* across the centuries. By discussing later comments, he goes beyond some of the meanings attributed to the term by Vasari in *Le vite*—a diachronic approach that currently applies also to art criticism, as testified by Clement Greenberg's interpretation of artist Joseph Cornell's style included in this study. Vasari claims that artists' individual manners originate from imitation of nature and selection of masters, following personal identities and aspirations. In light of William Gilpin's 1782 remarks on the topic, a moral dilemma follows. While *maniera* can result in repetition, it reflects truthfulness to one's self. In 1836, artist John Constable accused some painters of falsehood because they betrayed the main purpose of painting—the investigation of and truthfulness to nature. Cast notes that such a notion, stemming from the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century scientific revolution, conflicts with the idea of artistic truth as expressed by Vasari, who favored the study of antiquities in order to look at the world through the guidance of traditional *maniere*.

Alison Fleming leads us through the fourteenth-century wall decorations in the chapterhouse of the Benedictine abbey (built five centuries before) in Pomposa, Italy. Her study highlights the originality of the painted figures—vis a vis the artistic conventions applied within

the order's religious objective—investigating for instance the illusionistic architectural settings in which the apostles Paul and Peter, the saints Benedict of Nursia (founder of the order, ca. 529) and Guido (one of Pomposa's abbots in the eleventh century), as well as twelve prophets are placed to the sides of the Crucifixion. Fleming contextualizes her interpretation of the pictorial techniques by reviewing the significance of each painted category within Christianity and, more specifically, within the Benedictine order. These figures seem to break the architectural boundaries between representation and reality, and therefore engage the viewer in a personal and effective dialogue in pursuit of *imitatio Christi* as advocated in the *Rule of Saint Benedict*. Fleming offers a well-grounded interpretation of illusionistic pictorial techniques when she points to the relevance of fourteenth century rhetoric and dramatic performances for the chapterhouse at Pomposa.

In the last section of *The Renaissance Dialogue*, the contributions by Stephanie Jed ("Renaissance Dialogue: Humanities and Science"), Sara Miglietti, and Grace Allen open to science. In "Wholesome or Pestilential? Giovanni Battista Doni (1594-1647) and the Dispute on Roman Air," Miglietti shows the evolution of environmental discourse in the Early Modern era. Notwithstanding the ongoing dialogue with the classics (Cicero, Livy, Strabo, Columella) on the insalubrity of Roman air, some late Renaissance intellectuals valued personal experience and first-hand knowledge of the natural world. Such an empirical approach is most evident in Giovanni Battista Doni's *De restituenda salubritate agri Romani* (1667). Like some of his contemporaries (Alessandro Traiano Petronio, Marsilio Cagnati) Doni engaged with the *auctoritates* but, unlike his peers, only with those who corroborated his own view, that environmental deterioration was imputable to people, and that human manipulation of the environment could fix Rome's unwholesome conditions. In her essay Miglietti emphasizes the multidisciplinarity of environmental inquiry, connecting literature, natural philosophy, medicine, diplomacy, and urban planning from antiquity.

Allen discusses the types of readers whom Ludovico Dolce envisioned taking an interest in his *Somma della filosofia d'Aristotele* (ca. 1565), a treatise making classical philosophy accessible to a non-scholarly audience (a common goal among authors, editors, and publishers in Renaissance Venice). Allen's investigation focuses on the use of paratexts (like frontispieces) to persuade readers into buying books and, more loftily, to educate them. To such ends, these paratexts would offer explanatory remarks in dedications and addresses to the

reader, in order to facilitate comprehension and point out the value of the books, as Dolce does in "Ai Lettori" in his *Somma*. Unfortunately, the popularizing intent and the commercial drive of the *Somma* prevent a coherent and faithful rendition of Aristotle's philosophy. Dolce is aware of such shortcoming, which will be manifest, he fears, also to the learned readers. Criticism is likely to come also from opponents of the dissemination of classical philosophy in vernacular Italian. However, in conformity to the changed cultural and religious environment of previously liberal Venice, in his *Somma* Dolce defends himself and his work against accusations of unorthodoxy by avoiding theological controversy and iterating the tenets of the Catholic doctrine.

Paolo Pucci UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT