

Writing Together in Italy.
An Analysis of Community-Collectives

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Preliminary Statement

Before going in depth with the dissertation, I would like to make a brief premise about the reasons why I have developed an interest in group writing. Five years ago, I, along with some friends of mine, got involved in volunteer projects aimed at raising awareness about the scarcity of cultural activities in our provincial hometown in the center of Italy. Although we were students without many resources, we were able to organize several events and to expand our activities by working as a group. Thus, the subject of collaboration has become increasingly interesting to me. Undermined by a society which is becoming more and more individualistic, for me it is one of the most powerful and revolutionary tools we have. Due to my personal interest in literature and my positive experiences with communitarian projects, the subject of writing in a group has become fascinating to me. Luther Blissett's novel *Q* was the starting point which allowed me to discover the broad world of collective writing.

I would like to thank all of the people who helped me through my two years experience in Utrecht: my family, my girlfriend, my friends, and in particular professors Monica Jansen and Ann Rigney for their understanding and support.

This work is dedicated to my mother Tiziana, she passed away too soon.

Introduction

Collaboration in literary practices is a phenomenon rooted in human history from the dawn of time. Starting with the epic narrations handed down for thousands of years, there has always been a pragmatical difficulty for modern and contemporary scholars in attributing authorship to a singular individual. That being due to the effective multi-authoriality that texts have always had, since every text is produced throughout several stages and through the collaboration of several people (from the act of writing, copyediting, printing etc.). Such a diffused notion of the actual collaboration of the production of a text has been overshadowed by the strong myth of the divinely inspired single author; which developed in the Romantic period and is still widely shared.

However, it seems that today the myth of it being considered impossible for an artwork to be produced by more than one author is finally being problematized. Now, more and more people are organizing themselves in groups and collective texts are being published more frequently. On July 26, 2013, The British journal *The Guardian* published on its website an article entitled “Writing a Collective Novel: Why Many Minds Are Better Than One.” In the article, author John Simmons talks about his collective named Dark Angels and its novels which involved fifteen authors. According to Simmons, such a literary collaboration “challenges the idea of literary solo-flying.” Although a sharp increase in collective artistic production started around the year 2000, this notion has been present in the Italian cultural landscape for decades. Vanni Santoni, who is the founder of the collective writing method *Scrittura Industriale Collettiva* (Collective Industrial Writing), considers the phenomenon as an Italian affair. In the article “115 autori per un romanzo” published in 2013 in the daily newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, Vanni Santoni defined Italy as collective writing homeland (Santoni 12).¹ Indeed Italy presented probably the most famous ‘historical’ instances of collectively written texts — such as the anti-novel *Lo Zar Non è Morto* (1929) (*The Zar Is Not Dead*) by the futurist collective I Dieci, or the collective open letter *Lettera a una Professoressa*

¹ “[L]’Italia, sia storicamente che per quanto riguarda lo scenario presente, può essere definita a buon diritto la patria della scrittura collettiva” (Santoni 12). Unless specified, in this thesis all of the translations from Italian are mine.

(1976) (*Letter To A Teacher*) by Don Milani and the students from Scuola di Barbiana. Moreover Italo Calvino, who was one of the most prominent figures in the Italian cultural scenario of the nineteenth century, collaborated actively with the experimental group *Oulipo*. Such a group of artists indeed — which included Raymond Queneau, François Le Lionnais, Georges Perec, and many others — fostered the collaborations between authors, with the shared purpose of analyzing the unexplored potential of literature (See Monfort- Wardrip-Fruin (Eds) ch. 12). Besides these historical examples, several heterogeneous collaborative works have appeared recently in the Italian cultural landscape; which appears to be the most prolific in the Western world for group writing. Though these collaborations have as common denominators the production of written texts and the involvement of more than one person, it is difficult to find a single definition which could embrace all of them. Indeed, the apparently logical label of ‘collective writing’ does not encompass all of the different productions emerging in the Italian cultural landscape. The difficulty in naming different kinds of collective production originates from the scarce attention the scholars have paid so far to producing literary artworks together. Thus, this thesis aims firstly to face some theoretical issues which appear not to be taken fully into account by the critics. Secondly this thesis aims to highlight and analyze a particular phenomenon that is named here as *community-collectives*, which does not seem to have counterparts outside of the Italian cultural landscape.

The first chapter confronts several theoretical issues and tries to answer the two basic questions: *How do we distinguish and name different practices of group writing?* and *Is there any particularly interesting practice of collective writing in Italy?* Thus, the analysis begins firstly by addressing the terminological confusion about writing together and tries to provide a working taxonomy for the phenomenon. Secondly, the investigation employs the theoretical tools provided by the few scholars who already explored the issue of collective writing. Throughout the chapter, several instances of collective writing in Italy are analyzed in order to detect if there is any dominant or particular trend. The investigation leads to focus on four groups of writers — Wu

Ming, Kai Zen, Paolo Agaraff, and Pelagio D'Afro — which are defined by this thesis *community-collectives*. These collectives seem to represent the most interesting and experimental part of Italian collective writing. Therefore, the rest of the dissertation focuses on community-collectives and the particular features of such a category.

The second chapter tries to answer the question of whether community-collectives have a unique poetics. In particular, this chapter focuses on stylistic features and answers the questions that should help to determine whether such a category is validated by any aesthetic element that would allow one to discern the veracity of a true community-collectives poetics. The chapter proceeds with a close-reading of four novels, one for each of the collectives highlighted in the first chapter. Thus, the investigation refers to Wu Ming's *54*, Kai Zen's *La Strategia Dell'Ariete (The Ram's Strategy)*, Paolo Agaraff's *Il Quinto Cilindro (The Fifth Cylinder)*, and Pelagio D'Afro's *L'Acqua Tace (The Water is Silent)* and takes into account some narratological concepts; in particular, some considerations developed by Gérard Genette in his essay *Narrative Discourse. An Essay in Method*.²

Finally, the third chapter completes the second in its attempt to again answer the question of whether community-collectives have a shared poetics; however, this time they are analyzed from a political point of view. It seems that the four community-collectives which were detected share a strong political drive, both implicitly and explicitly. This chapter aims to determine how these groups of writers act and foster a politically democratic — and somehow revolutionary — tendency towards their readers, who are critically activated by the authors. First of all the issue of authorship — which was put aside for a while — is faced, in order to show that community-collectives enact a different form of authorship than the romantic one. Such a form of authorship is oriented towards a sense of democracy which community-collectives tend to foster beyond their boundaries. Thus, it is

² *An Essay in Method* is the English translation of “Discours du Recit”, a portion of the third volume of Genette's wider essay *Figure* (1966-1972).

argued that community-collectives' communitarian literary practices are able to convey e-democratic and revolutionary impulses, despite some structural limitations.

Chapter 1. Writing in Group. Theoretical Implications

1.1 Defining a Basic Terminology: Collaborative Writing, Collective Writing, & Team Writing

Though several instances of artworks have as common denominators the production of written texts and the involvement of more than one person, it is difficult to find a single definition which could embrace all of them. Indeed the apparently logical labels of collaborative or collective writing are not sufficient to encompass all of the different productions which have been emerging in the Italian cultural landscape. Moreover, scholars have not yet come to an agreement “on a common term for C[ollaborative] W[riting]” (Lowry et al. 71), therefore the theoretical ground concerning the phenomenon of writing together appears quite confused. Hence, this section discusses the different terminological solutions proposed so far by those scholars who engaged themselves more or less directly in the issue of writing together. In the end, three main definitions will be extrapolated — namely collaborative writing, collective writing, and team writing. Therefore any further analysis concerning this phenomenon in this thesis will benefit from a clearer theoretical base. In fact, this terminology will distinguish the actual and general practice of writing together (Team Writing) from its enactment for different purposes, i.e. for business and academic use (Collaborative Writing) and for literary texts (Collective Writing).

In order to overcome the lack of a shared notion of collaborative writing, P. B. Lowry, A. Curtis and M. R. Lowry collectively tried to synthesize the previous literature on the topic through attempting to elaborate a shared nomenclature and taxonomy of the phenomenon. Despite the several different definitions produced by previous scholars, Lowry et al. believe that “CW has an underlying structure that can be defined universally and presented in an interdisciplinary taxonomy” (Lowry et al. 72). Thus the authors, in order to build a basis for their definition of collaborative writing, propose some axioms which summarize the previous academic literature’s focus on collaborative writing and on group dynamics. Indeed, the scholars start from the basic consideration

that “C[ollaborative] W[riting] extends on single-author writing by involving multiple parties and the minimum activities of planning, drafting, and revising” (Lowry et al 72). They continue, stating that “C[ollaborative] W[riting] becomes a group and social act” which requires activities such as “building consensus [...], communicating, negotiating, coordinating, group researching, monitoring, rewarding, punishing, recording, socializing, and so forth writing” (Lowry et al. 72). Moreover the authors state that “any optimally performed group task should include pre-task activities to set up for the task (e.g., group formation) and post-task activities to finalize the task delivery” and that “writing tasks cannot be separated from key group activities without negative repercussions”(Lowry et al. 72). At this point Lowry et al. are able to delineate their definition of collaborative writing:

C[ollaborative] W[riting] is an iterative and social process that involves a team focused on a common objective that negotiates, coordinates, and communicates during the creation of a common document. The potential scope of CW goes beyond the more basic act of joint composition to include the likelihood of pre- and post-task activities, team formation, and planning. (Lowry et al. 73)

Such a definition is completed by adding a precise taxonomy of the writing activity, which includes “the possibility of many different writing strategies, activities, document control approaches, team roles, and work modes” (Lowry et al. 74), and which will be reconsidered hereafter to classify the collective artworks that have appeared in the last twenty years within the Italian cultural landscape.

Though this definition seems sufficiently detailed regarding the working modalities of such collaborative writing practices — and could be accepted as a technical definition of the phenomenon — scholars’ attention appears to be oriented only towards collaborative writing as an activity performed in “industry, academia, and government” (Lowry et al. 66-67), disregarding any kind of fictional and narrative production. This objection to Lowry et al.’s incomplete definition has

also been expressed by Gregorio Magini, who is the founder, together with Vanni Santoni, of the writing method called “Scrittura Industriale Collettiva” (i.e. “Industrial Collective Writing”), or simply S. I. C. In the thesis essay “La Scrittura Industriale Collettiva,” Magini indeed notices that Lowry et al.’s definition always takes into consideration only the term ‘collaborative writing’ rather than ‘collective writing.’ Thus, Magini considers Lowry et al.’s tendency of employing ‘collaborative writing’ rather than ‘collective writing’ as a significative fact,³ and proposes himself a distinction between ‘collaborative writing’ and ‘collective writing.’ The former is intended as “a *technology* which most of the time is provided with technological instruments of facilitation and which is oriented towards values of use [...] and to critical values” (Magini 19), — thus implying a pragmatical approach. The latter is conceived as “a *practice* which is not useful per se but which is oriented towards entertainment or to assertion of a shared message” (Magini 19),⁴ — implying conversely an ideological, or at least an ethical approach. Beniamino Sidoti, in his thesis essay “Scrivere insieme. Semiotica delle scritture collettive,” prefers as well the expression ‘collective writing.’ However, the functional element of this kind of writing, implicit in Sidoti's definition, recognizes that along with “mythical values (or basic values) which concern directly the possibility of expanding the subject and of creating collective identities marked by the purpose of collaboration and reciprocity”⁵ (Sidoti 24) — consistent with Magini’s sense of collective writing as an ethical

³ “Il fatto che “*collective writing*” non appaia neanche nella lunga lista di sinonimi di *collaborative writing* proposta da Lowry è un ulteriore indizio a favore dell’ipotesi che la differenza non sia un caso, ma un sintomo di due diversi modi di nominare, e persino di intendere, la scrittura “a più mani” (Magini 19). [The fact that “collective writing does not appear neither in Lowry’s wide list of synonyms of the term “collaborative writing”, is significative. It is a further clue that the difference [between the two terms] is not fortuitous, but it is a symptom of two different ways of labelling and of understanding writing together” (Magini 19)]-

⁴ “[D]a un lato si intend[e] scrittura collaborativa come *tecnologia* dotata il più delle volte di strumenti informatici di facilitazione, improntata al valore d’uso (ricordiamo l’enfasi sul *brainstorming* di Lowry) e al valore critico: dall’altro una scrittura collettiva come *prassi* non utile in sé per sé ma finalizzata al divertimento o all’affermazione di un messaggio condiviso” (Magini 19).

⁵ “Valori mitici (o di base) che riguardano direttamente la possibilità di espansione del soggetto e di creazione di identità collettive improntate alla collaborazione e alla reciprocità” (Sidoti 24).

and political activity — there are “practical values [...] [such as] career and social advantage”⁶ (Sidoti 24), which are more akin to Magini’s sense of collaborative writing. Also Francesca Medaglia deals with this terminological issue in her dissertation essay “La Scrittura a Quattro Mani.” In the essay, Medaglia agrees with Magini’s idea that “the employment of the term ‘collaborative writing’ is related to a technical and technological setting of writing, and each author keeps himself detached from the other within each group[,] that is composed of four people at least”⁷ (Medaglia 17). Moreover Medaglia continues by saying that “as for the employment of the term ‘collective writing’ [...] [it] implies — as in the previous case — the presence of a writers group (four at least as well), but the literary and artistic sphere is preferred, rather than the technological one”⁸ (Medaglia 17). However, things are made more complicated by Medaglia’s terminological proposal of a separate category, which should define more precisely collective writing in a literary sense. Medaglia proposes the label “scrittura a quattro (o più) mani” (i.e. Writing by four (or more) hands), which is defined as “a collaboration in which the author arises as the result of the agreement between two writers” (Medaglia 19). Medaglia’s objective is to stress, with this term, two different aspects from Magini’s idea of collective writing, namely the minimum number of people involved in such an activity and the sense of strong friendship which has to exist between members. Medaglia argues that “writing by four (or more) hands can exist thanks to the collaboration of only two authors”⁹ (Medaglia 18) and that it requires kinship or at least friendship,

⁶ “Valori pratici [...] [come] la carriera e il vantaggio sociale” (Sidoti 24).

⁷ “Si comprende come l’uso di ‘scrittura collaborativa’ sia legato ad un ambito tecnico e tecnologico di scrittura, in cui all’interno di ogni gruppo di scrittori (gruppo costituito da almeno quattro persone) ogni autore si mantenga separato dagli altri” (Medaglia 17).

⁸ “Per quanto riguarda l’uso di ‘scrittura collettiva’ credo che questo implichi, come anche nel caso precedente, la presenza di un gruppo di scrittori (sempre come minimo quattro), ma che l’ambito privilegiato sia quello artistico e letterario e non più quello tecnologico” (Medaglia 17).

⁹ “La scrittura a quattro mani può esistere grazie alla collaborazione anche solo di due autori” (Medaglia 18). Medaglia states that at least four people are needed to perform collective writing, according to Magini’s definition, though it is not clear where this information come from, as Magini’s text lacks any reference to it. Magini indeed states that four people are the minimum amount needed just for the S. I. C. method he elaborated along with Vanni Santoni, and not for every collective writing projects.

which Magini's definition of collective writing does not specify.¹⁰ Furthermore, Medaglia employs the concept of 'scrittura a quattro (o più) mani' in order to create a more inclusive category for collective writing artworks, while at the same time excluding those projects which lack an intimate friendship or kinship, an element considered as a fundamental prerequisite. Wikipedia offers a further definition for collective writing, namely "collaborative fiction", that is a "form of writing by a group of authors who share creative control of a story" (Wikipedia). This term seemingly combines the technological aspect of collaborative writing proposed so far with the literariness demanded by Magini and Medaglia. Although this term is not widespread among scholars, it can be found in the writers James and Nikoo McGoldrick's essay *Marriage of Minds. Collaborative Fiction Writing* (McGoldrick - McGoldrick iii); however, it is used mainly in a technological sense to name the practice of writing novels with other people and it is often interchangeable with 'collaborative writing.' Moreover, the use of the term 'fiction' today would be problematic; since, even in novelist production, the borders between fiction and non-fiction products are becoming more and more blurred. Thus, Wu Ming proposed the concept of "U.N.O." [i. e. Unidentified Narrative Objects] (Wu Ming 2009 b 41) to define those works which do not fit traditional categories.

Due to such terminological confusion, there is a wider split between a kind of multi-authorial writing practice dedicated to business and academic texts, and one concerning literary and narrative works, that seems desirable and necessary to avoid any further confusion. Among the several definitions listed so far, Magini's distinction between collaborative writing, — intended as a technological approach to face a shared production of a document within industrial and academic environments, — and collective writing — intended as a practice whose aims are both entertainment and conveying a shared message — appears as the most functional, and will be the one this work refers to from here onwards. However, in order to avoid misunderstandings, a further terminological clarification is required. Magini seems to refer to collaborative writing both as a

¹⁰ As Medaglia notes, posing an intimate relationship between members as a fundamental element for defining collective writing would have prevented Magini and Santoni's technique of industrial writing to be included.

technical definition of the process of writing with other people and as a practice oriented to the production of non-literary texts. Though that is perfectly fine, it should have been made more explicit in order to prevent a misinterpretation of the term ‘collective writing,’ which should represent at the same time — according to Magini’s idea — both a technology of writing and a category which should be opposed to collective writing. Thus, it seems clearer and more functional to use Lowry’s definition of collective writing and its taxonomy as a basic definition for a writing practice which involves more than one person. However, such a definition will be indicated with the term “team writing” (Lowry et al. 75); which Lowry et al. list as a common synonym. Hence, the term ‘collaborative writing’ would designate a particular practice of team writing oriented to the production of texts for scholar or utilitarian purposes in general. Conversely, the term ‘collective writing’ will be used in this thesis to indicate the practice of team writing which aims to create literary works.

1.2 Analyzing the Phenomenon of Collective Writing.

The definition of collective writing which has been proposed, namely the practice of team writing which aims to create literary works, is fairly broad and can encompass several kinds of literary enterprises which have appeared in the European and Italian cultural landscape since the eighteenth century. However, from the empirical analysis of collective works produced, some differences are likely to be detected between different forms of collective writing practices, as this analysis will try to illustrate. According to Medaglia’s survey (See Table 1),¹¹ the amount of collective artworks produced in Europe over the last twenty years is twice the number of works published in the period from 1900 to 1999. Moreover, such a collective production of artworks has

¹¹ Medaglia attributes these artworks to the category ‘letteratura a quattro mani.’ However, Medaglia’s category can be held as equivalent to Magini’s definition of collective writing employed in this essay. Indeed both scholars’ definitions take into account in the same way literary artworks, though Medaglia considers her definition more detailed.

begun with a preponderance of poetry, which was later definitively overtaken by the number of

Ripartizione per periodo storico (prosa e poesia)							
Division according to historical period (prose and poetry)			1700-1799	1800-1899	1900-1999	2000-2009	2010-2011
Genere	<i>Prosa</i>	Prose	1	25	49	47	69
Genre	<i>Poesia</i>	Poetry	8	9	6	2	0
Lingua	<i>Italiano</i>	Italian	5	4	40	32	42
Language	<i>Inglese</i>	English	4	0	0	6	18
	<i>Francese</i>	French	0	28	11	3	2
	<i>Portoghese</i>	Portuguese	0	1	1	1	0
	<i>Tedesco</i>	German	0	1	1	0	0
	<i>Spagnolo</i>	Spanish	0	0	1	1	1
	<i>Svedese</i>	Swedish	0	0	0	6	5
	<i>Danese</i>	Danish	0	0	0	0	1
	<i>Mista</i>	Mixed	0	0	1	0	0
Totale	Total		9	34	55	49	69

Created by Paint X

Table 1. Multi-authorial texts published between 1700 – 2011. Source: Medaglia, Francesca.

prose texts (see. Medaglia 26-32).¹²

Furthermore, among this production it can be clearly recognized, according again to Medaglia's quantitative analysis, how collective writing is closely connected to the Italian cultural background. Indeed, the majority of collective artworks has been produced in Italian. According to the data, the total production of collective writing artworks (both prose and poetry) from 1700 to 2011 has reached the amount of 216 pieces. Italy has the most prolific production of these works, since 123 artworks were written in Italian, and 74 in the period between 2000 to 2011 alone. Due to the number of artworks published, the year 2000 could be considered as the beginning of a new period for collective writing in Italy. Such an increase can be undoubtedly connected to an increased diffusion of the Internet, which has acted since then as a powerful tool to connect people and involve them in artistic enterprises. According to the advertising expert Giancarlo Livraghi's

¹² According to Medaglia's analysis, collective poetry was predominant during the period 1700-1799. Indeed in this period eight collective poems were produced, while only one prose text was written. Conversely, since 1800 onwards the amount of prose texts have always been bigger than poems (See. Medaglia 26-32 and 290-298).

analysis of worldwide Internet activity, it seems plausible to affirm that the growth of Italian collective artworks can be linked to a wider diffusion of Internet host in Italy. Livraghi means the term Internet Host as “an active and permanent IP number. i.e. a functioning service directly connected to the Internet” (Livraghi),¹³ which can be considered strictly connected to the actual diffusion of the Internet. As shown in Fig. 1, the years 1999-2000 represent a change in the growing trend of hosts’ diffusion in Italy compared with the rest of the world.

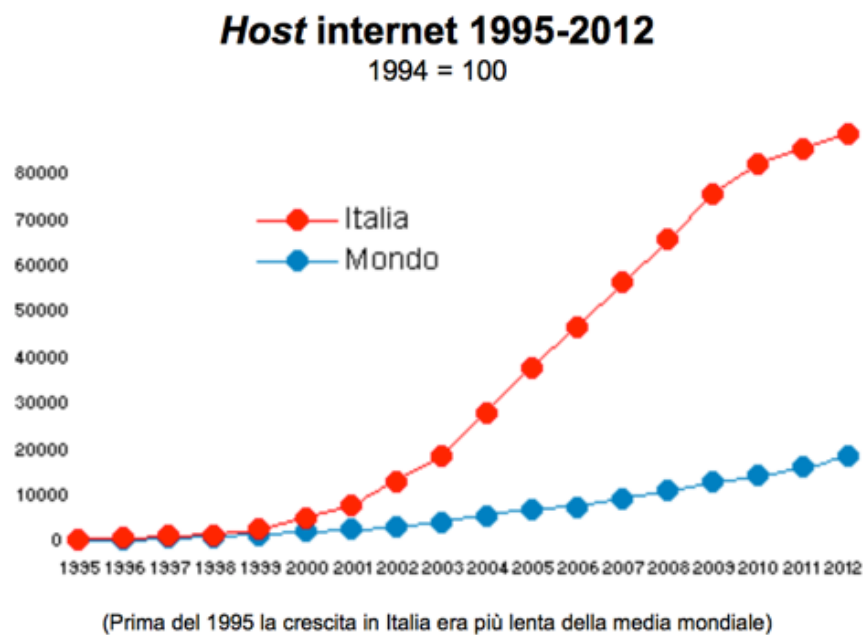


Figure 1. Growth of hostcount – Comparison between Italy and the world average.

Source: Livraghi, Gianfranco. “Dati Sull’Internet nel Mondo” [gandalf.it](http://www.gandalf.it) Giancarlo

Livraghi. 29 August 2013. Web. 05 June 2015. <<http://www.gandalf.it/dati/>

The Italian production appears significantly greater than that in the rest of the world, and it has increased incredibly more than anywhere else. Moreover as it will be discussed later, Italian collective writing seems pretty interesting also for the uniqueness of some of its artworks and artists, so it will be the main focus of this dissertation.

¹³ Due to web format, some quotations lack any references to page number.

Among this wide production, however, it would be convenient to attempt to detect at least some differences. Though Medaglia's analysis appears valid and significant for the amount of quantitative research done, the further division of such artworks according to literary genres does seem reductive and insufficient at detecting the differences between different types of collective literary enterprises produced in the last twenty years. Medaglia proceeds to divide Italian collective literature according to different genres such as 1) detective and noir novels, 2) investigative and report novels, 3) historical novels, 4) young-adults novels (in particular from the period 2010-2011) and 5) others. Although it is undeniable that most of the collective novels produced in the last twenty years may be included in the genres, Medaglia proposes — and according to Medaglia the definition of “letteratura a quattro mani” (Medaglia 26) should be broad enough to encompass the whole collective literary production —, that it is difficult to detect actual differences existing in the practice of collective writing. Conversely Magini's brief analysis of some instances of collective writing employs Lowry et al's taxonomy and adds to those categories an additional one he labels “predominant valorization” (Magini 24). This category refers to the main purpose underlying the production of a text and was extrapolated by Magini from Sidoti's semiotic analysis of team writing. Since such an analytical grid was applied by Magini only to some instances of collective writing, the scheme will be applied to a wider sample of collective writing enterprises, to see if it is apt at detecting any significant differences among them. Thus in the next section, Lowry's taxonomy and Sidoti's concept of “valorization” in relation to writing activities (See Sidoti 63-84), will be explained. Both Lowry et al. taxonomy and Sidoti's concept of values are the main theoretical tools which have been applied so far to analyze collective writing instances. Therefore they represent a first theoretical approach for the next analysis, which can not be neglected. Hence these tools will be explained and summarized in order to investigate some examples of collective artworks in the further sections.

1.2.1 Lowry et al.'s Taxonomy of Team Writing¹⁴

As it was already stated, Lowry et al.'s. taxonomy pays attention to several aspects of writing together, namely writing strategies, activities, document control approaches, team roles, and work modes.

Team writing strategy is defined as “a team’s overall approach for coordinating the writing of a collaborative document” (Lowry et al. 74), and five different possibilities can be detected: 1) “Group single-author writing”, i.e. where one person writes for an entire group; “Sequential single writing”, “where one person writes at a given time”(Lowry et al. 76), involving every member singularly as an individual writer; “Parallel writing”, which “occurs when a team divides [team writing] work into discrete units and works in parallel” (Lowry et al. 77) and can be divided in a) “Horizontal-division writing”, in which each member has the responsibility for a particular section and b) “Stratified-division writing”, namely a form of writing in which each member play a particular role according to his ability (writer, copyeditor, etc.; “Reactive writing”, i.e. “a strategy that occurs when writers create a document in real time, reacting and adjusting to each other’s changes and additions” (Lowry et al. 78) without significant preplanning and explicit coordination; 5) “Mixed mode writing”, which consists in a combination of the previous strategies.

Furthermore six main activities “involved during the actual production of a group’s document” (Lowry et al. 79) are detected, namely: 1) “Brainstorming”, i.e. founding many ideas for a preliminary draft; 2) “Outlining”, “Creating a high-level direction in which the document will be going, including major sections and subsections (Lowry et al. 82); 3) “Drafting”, writing a first proof; 4) “Reviewing”, i.e. “having a participant or an editor read and annotate document draft sections for content, grammar, and style improvements (Lowry et al. 82); 5) “Revising”, namely

¹⁴ Lowry et al. conceive this taxonomy through the synthesis of several works produced about the issue of team writing. Thus many definitions concerning writing strategies, activities, document control approaches, team roles, and work modes are drawn from several authors. For the sake of readability this taxonomy will be considered just as produced by Lowry et al., without mentioning each of the scholars mentioned by the authors of the essay.

modifying the text according to review comments 6) “Copyediting”, i.e. “The process of making final changes that are universally administered to a document to make a document more consistent (such as copy edits, grammar, logic), usually made by one person charged with this responsibility” (Lowry et al. 82).

Moreover “Document control approaches” are intended as “who has the key responsibility for the document” (Lowry et al. 83), and detect four modes: 1) “Centralized”, namely when just one person controls the text throughout the writing activity; 2) “Relay”, occurring “when one person at a time is in control but controls changes within the group similar to a baton being passed from one runner to another in a relay race” (Lowry et al. 83); 3) “Independent”, i.e. when each member is responsible exclusively for the section he produced; 4) “Shared”, i.e. “when all team members have simultaneous and equal access and writing privileges throughout the writing activity” (Lowry et al. 85).

There are several roles, and they may change over time depending on the nature of the team writing practice at issue. Here is the list of roles synthesized: 1) “Writer”; 2) “Consultant” (external to the group); 3) “Editor”; 4) “Reviewer”; 5) “Team leader”; 6) “Facilitator” (“who is external to the collaborative writing team who leads a team through appropriate processes and does not give content-related feedback” Lowry et al. 88).

Finally four work modes are catalogued. They can be identified in the intersection “between the degree of proximity (how physically close a group is) and the degree of synchronicity (when a group writes)” (Lowry et al. 87). Hence these modes are: 1) “Face to face” (same location, same time); 2) “Asynchronous-same-place” (same location, different time); 3) “Synchronous-distributed” (different location, same time); 4) “Asynchronous-distributed” (different location, different time). Such a taxonomy will be used in the further sections to investigate several instances of collective writing. In particular, it will be employed in order to detect whether some collective projects present unique features according structural differences regarding writing strategies, activities, document control approaches, team roles, and work modes.

1.2.2 Sidoti's Values System

Sidoti's semiotic approach offers very useful perspective to analyze underlying the reasons to write collectively. Sidoti indeed detects four main phases¹⁵ in the act of team writing,¹⁶ namely: 1) 'Research of ideas'; 2) 'Planning'; 3) 'Drafting'; 4) 'Review'. According to Sidoti, those main phases entail each a different predominant significance. Thus, starting from Floch's distinction in advertising values between "values of use"— which are "instrumental and utilitarian by definition" (Sidoti 66) — and "basic values"— which are "existential" (See Sidoti 63) —, four valorizations are detected, namely: 1) Practical; 2) Critical; 3) Ludic; 4) Utopian. The "practical valorization" represents the perfect embodiment of the materialist purpose entailed in the 'values of use' pole, whereas the "utopian" one fits perfectly the opposite side of 'basic values.' The "ludic valorization," then, will be complementary to "utopian valorization," since it is opposed to the "practical valorization" and based on non-utilitarian values such as 'gratuitousness' and 'refinement' (See Sidoti 66). Conversely, the "critical valorization" will be complementary to the "practical" one, and it is based on non-existential values.

At this point Sidoti relates these values to writing, thus defining different purposes to each practice in which a particular sense prevails. Hence, when there is a predominance of "practical valorization" the writing will aim to collect multiple ideas or to have the opportunity to list several signatures (See Sidoti 68); when "critical valorization" is preponderant, the writing aims to get concrete advantages and a personal social economic enrichment (See Sidoti 68); when the main

¹⁵ "La corrispondenza tra queste fasi e le attività descritte da Lowry è la seguente: Raccolta delle idee: brainstorming, rielaborazione; Pianificazione: scaletta; Stesura: bozza; Revisione: revisione, correzione, editing" (Magini 17). ["The correspondence between these phases and the activities described by Lowry is the following: brainstorming; Planning: outlining; Draft: drafting; Review: reviewing, revising, copyediting" (Magini 17)].

¹⁶ "Le quattro fasi sono caratterizzate da fenomeni di ricorsività e ellissi: mentre si scrive, cioè, si possono ripetere alcune fasi più volte, o (al contrario) non esplicitarle affatto" (Sidoti 25) ["The four phases are characterized by recursiveness and ellipsis: i.e. you can wether repeat them many times in the writing process or (conversely) not make them explicit" (Sidoti 25)].

value is “utopian” the writing will be characterized by “the possibility of creating a collective subject (in a didactic, social, political sense)” and “allows the community to be strengthened by enlarging it or by providing it new reasons of cohesion” (Sidoti 68);¹⁷ finally, when the predominance is accorded to the “ludic valorization,” the writing aims to foster the pleasant situation of stick together (See Sidoti 69).

Furthermore Sidoti links these values and writing practices to the four phases into which, according to him, the process of team writing can be divided. Indeed in team writing practices in which there is a main focus in the phase of ‘research of ideas,’ the notion of working together would aim to increase ideas, consensus, and competences so that ‘practical valorization’ would prevail. On the other hand, team writing based on ‘planning’ would make the ‘critical valorization’ predominant, since it makes explicit values as ‘efficiency’ and “time/results ratio.” Moreover, team writing focuses on ‘draft’ that aim is mainly internal to the group, anti-utilitarian and has a predominance of ‘ludic valorization,’ so that the practice of writing creates a space oriented to the pleasure of the encounter (See Sidoti 70). Finally, when the ‘review’ represents the phase in which members put most of the effort required the resulting main value would be ‘utopian,’ since “writing together and agreeing on every word respond to an *existential value*” (Sidoti 70)¹⁸ and are oriented toward a political sense of democracy. Sidoti’s values system related to different phases of writing will be employed in the next paragraph — along with Lowry et al.’s taxonomy — in order to investigate several instances of collective writing, to detect whether any difference can be highlighted according to the main value underlying the production of a text.

¹⁷ “[È] un *valore di base* dello scrivere insieme la possibilità di formare un soggetto collettivo (in modo didattico, sociale, politico): la scrittura è in questa prospettiva una azione identitaria, *formatrice di identità*” (Sidoti 68).

¹⁸ “Scrivere insieme mettendosi d’accordo su ogni parola risponde a un *valore esistenziale*” (Sidoti 70).

1.2.3 Investigation of Collective Texts Through Lowry et al.'s and Sidoti's Theoretical Tools

The analytical grid just defined can be used to make an empirical analysis of some collective writing projects initiated in Italy so far, in order to investigate if any substantial differences between them can be detected. To do so, some instances of similar literary enterprises listed in Magini's and Medaglia's¹⁹ essays will be used as a reference. The chart in Figure 2 lists an empirical selection of Italian collaborative projects, which have been chosen mainly according to three aspects, namely: 1) the fact that these projects have produced an instance of collective writing, 2) the popularity of the authors, 3) the presence or not of a pseudonym which is employed by the artists to sign their works. Since it would be impossible to face such an extensive analysis in this essay, the chart presents a selection of the whole range of collective writing projects which have been published so far. Nevertheless, this excerpt should provide a fairly exhaustive overview of the main collective literature that serves as a valid sample on which to project the theoretical concepts illustrated above. Therefore, the goal is to verify if the theoretical tools developed so far are valid to formulate any normative conclusions about these collective enterprises and to detect any Italian peculiarity in such a production. Hence, the name of artists is mentioned in the first column, and it is possible to see how each writing group refers to the categories highlighted by Lowry et al. and Sidoti's taxonomies.

¹⁹ Medaglia presents a quite large instances of team writing texts in her bibliography, referring both to Italian and International works (See Medaglia 299-374).

Collective Projects	Writing Strategy	Activities	Document Control Approaches	Team Roles	Work Modes	Value
Wu Ming	Mixed	Brainstorming Outlining Drafting Reviewing Revising Copyediting	Shared	Writer Editor Reviewer	Face-to-face/ Asynchronous- Distributed	Utopian
Kai Zen	Parallel Writing	Brainstorming Outlining Drafting Reviewing Revising, Copyediting	Shared	Writer Editor Reviewer	Asynchronous- distributed	Utopian / Ludic
I Dieci	Parallel Writing	Unclear	Shared	Writer Editor Reviewer	Not Available	Utopian
Camilleri & Lucarelli	Parallel Writing	Brainstorming Outlining Drafting	Shared / Independent	Writer	Asynchronous- distributed	Ludic
Casati Modignani	Mixed	Brainstorming Outlining Drafting Reviewing Revising Copyediting	Shared	Writer Editor Reviewer	Not Available	Ludic / Utopian
Elias Mandreu	Parallel Writing	Brainstorming Outlining Drafting Reviewing Revising Copyediting	Shared	Writer Editor Reviewer	Asynchronous- distributed	Ludic / Utopian
Collettivo Sabot	Not Available	Brainstorming Outlining Drafting Reviewing Revising Copyediting	Shared	Writer Editor Reviewer Consultant Facilitator	Face-to-face / Asynchronous- distributed	Utopian
Romanzo Totale	Parallel Writing (horizontal- division)	Drafting (Copyediting)	Independent / Shared	Writer (Editor)	Asynchronous- distributed	Ludic

Collective Projects	Writing Strategy	Activities	Document Control Approaches	Team Roles	Work Modes	Value
Pelagio D'Afro	Sequential single writing / Reactive writing	Brainstorming Outlining Drafting Reviewing Revising Copyediting	Shared	Writer Editor Reviewer	Face-to-face / Asynchronous-distributed	Utopian / Ludic
S.I.C. (Scrittura Industriale Collettiva)	Parallel Writing (Stratified-Division)	Brainstorming Outlining Drafting Reviewing Revising Copyediting	Shared / Centralized	Writer Artistic Director (also Editor and Team Leader)	Asynchronous-distributed	Practical / Critical
Paolo Agaraff	Sequential single writing / Reactive writing	Brainstorming Outlining Drafting Reviewing Revising Copyediting	Shared	Writer Editor Reviewer	Face-to-face / Asynchronous-distributed	Ludic / Utopian

Figure 2. Analysis of several instances of collective-writing. Source: Own Elaboration

Thanks to the previous chart, it is possible to make some reflections about the practice of collective writing. Starting from the writing strategies column, it appears that the modality of parallel writing recurs quite often. This is understandable since it represents one of the most “efficient” (Lowry et al. 81) and prolific ways to produce a collective text; though, it could cause some redundancy and requires several further reviews if the authors’ aim to create a shared style. Conversely, a combination of sequential-single writing and reactive writing is the easiest way to produce that shared style that Medaglia defines as “authorial creolization”²⁰ (Medaglia 7), since it entails a continuous reviewing and rewriting process.

²⁰ Medaglia combines Lo Bianco’s theory of the “Third Space” and Glissant’s concept of “creolization” to say that collaborative writing could foster “the combination of many authors [which] creates a new author, who is different from the several authors who constitute him” (Medaglia 96).

These activities conducted by groups of writers are basically the same in almost all cases except for the case of the collective I Dieci, which is unclear since it is a group that worked in the late 1920s. Another interesting difference is represented by the case of the “Romanzo Totale” project, which entails just the activity of drafting and copyediting. Indeed, “Romanzo Totale” is not an author but an online collective writing project in which everyone is free to participate. The organizers of the project usually just write a starting chapter, which the users develop freely; or they provide a more rigid narrative grid, which users cannot ignore.

Furthermore, it could be useful to reflect on the Document Control Approaches category and especially on the “Shared control” label, which results the most frequently in the chart. It seems that authors who publish using a shared pseudonym tend to fully partake in the responsibility of a text. Though it is clear that even authors who overtly keep their names separated and collaborate are considered accountable in the same way for an artwork, it is more likely that a reader would try to make some distinctions, especially when a clear stylistic difference is noticeable.²¹ Conversely Romanzo Totale’s method provides both an “independent” control approach of the text, since each member writes a particular section without anyone’s intervention, and a “shared” one, especially for the process of selection and editing which occurs when artworks are published and the organizers of the project hold a stronger control on the initiative. S. I. C. (Scrittura Industriale Collettiva) as well presents an apparently conflicting control approach, that can be explained again by the fact that S. I. C. is a structural method which can be employed to produce literary texts and not a physical ensemble of writers. In this project, according to S. I. C. founders Magini and Santoni’s motto, “Everyone writes everything” (Magini 36, note 7),²² and afterwards the Artistic Directors of each project combine the best parts produced by the writers. Thus the control approach appears shared between the writers since the Artistic Directors just assemble the text, but this situation at the same time gives the organizers a great power that turns the control approach from shared to “centralized.”

²¹ See Camilleri and Lucarelli’s detective novel *Acqua In Bocca*, in which the plot is carried out through an epistolary exchange between the two famous characters created by the two writers.

²² “Tutti scrivono tutto” (Magini 36, note 7).

Moreover, team roles appear pretty often the same, especially with a predominance of the combination “writer-editor-reviewer,” which shows the fact that a group is able to coordinate within its members those activities which are necessary to publish a text. Once again, *Romanzo Totale* differs from the others, since only writers (and eventually editors) are needed for the project. S. I. C. as well presents some differences due to the existence of the role of Artistic Directors, which, as just explained, just have assembling duties.

Concerning working modes, the asynchronous-distributed one seems the most common, along with the face-to-face modality. Therefore, it is possible from this data to understand the importance of technological development, since it allows several groups of people to collaborate regardless of physical distances. Unfortunately, data about *I Dieci* is not available, but it is quite obvious that asynchronous work modes — and collective writing in general — have notably been fostered by the advent of internet in particular. As Medaglia’s analysis (Medaglia 290) shows, 118 collective texts were produced (both prose and poetry) in the period between 1999 to 2011, while just 59 were produced between 1900 and 1999.

As far as the last column labelled “Value” is concerned, it is noteworthy that almost every time the result is “Ludic” or “Utopian” (or both). It can be argued that Sidoti’s values systems is useful especially in a previous phase of analysis, namely to distinguish between collaborative and collective writing texts. Since this chart refers to literary artworks composed by the artists listed, the value outcome would always be shifting between “ludic” and “utopian,” as literature — contrary to non-fiction — would always escape the pragmatism implied by the categories “practical” and “critical.” The only collective writing practice which can be designated by both “Practical” and “Critical” values is S. I. C. *Scrittura Industriale Collettiva*. Here it represents just a structural method of writing and thus it is seen mainly from the technical perspective of its working principles; however, there is no doubt that people employing it are able to create artworks characterized by ludic and utopian values.

This analysis proved to be partially useful in detecting differences among collective writing practices. Indeed, projects like *Romanzo Totale* and *Scrittura Industriale Collettiva* have emerged among the others listed as being inherently different. They represent in the first instance a structural collective writing approach, which only in a final phase takes into consideration the actual group of people who undertakes a literary enterprise. Thus, it would be justifiable to draw a fundamental distinction between structural collective writing approaches, which at first disregards the people who are involved in the practice and groups of artists that conversely aggregate primarily due to the personal relationship they establish among each other. Nevertheless, the distinction of the previous list of collective writing experiences in two opposed categories — technically based approach against immediately personal relation — does not appear neither thorough nor able to detect any Italian peculiarity in collective literary enterprises. Besides *Scrittura Industriale Collettiva*, which actually represents a successful approach and was able to “channel” 115 authors in the production in 2013 of the novel entitled *In Territorio Nemico* — and that basically is an Italian peculiarity, but has not been able yet to generate a trend — there are several projects such as *Romanzo Totale* which are comparable to similar projects worldwide.²³

The other category which has provisionally been indicated as based on an immediate personal relation — namely which could still use the Internet or other means of communication to put in relation its members, but does not require a structural writing approach — seems too variegated and does not highlight any Italian specificity according to the analytical grid proposed.

Besides splitting in two distinct categories the authors who state overtly on the book cover their names and artists who prefer to employ a single pseudonym for the entire group, it seems difficult to state something more. Such a division, moreover, does not entail necessarily any stylistic feature, such as the “authorial creolization” mentioned earlier. Although this feature is impossible to find in texts such as *Acqua in Bocca* by Camilleri and Lucarelli, who programmatically keep their

²³ See projects as *Ficlets*, and *Story Smash* (in English), *Escribeme*, *Literativa* (in Spanish), *20lines*, *Officine Wort*. The latter one and *Ficlets* seem the only projects which are still active, while the others just mentioned appear as not active anymore (or facing a decline).

signatures and their contributions separated, it can be observed in works as *La Donna della Domenica*, composed and endorsed plainly by the writer couple Franco Lucentini and Carlo Fruttero. Furthermore, as far as international cultural landscape is concerned, it is possible to find several instances of authors who have published under the same pseudonym since the twentieth century and who could be included among those who were able to reach a shared style.

1.3 Collective Writing and the New Concept of “Community-Collectives”

Since it seems difficult to come to any satisfying and normative conclusion, it is necessary to investigate the list of collective authors above through a further empirical analysis, which could be useful to extrapolate and adjust some further theoretical concepts.

The first step would be to observe the number of members of which each group is composed. Primarily, this parameter appears useful in distinguishing the groups; although, it could be seen as exclusively empirical. Notably, the practice of collective writing is carried out most of the time by groups of two individuals rather than by larger groups. Just taking Medaglia’s list of texts into account, it is clear that groups made of three or more authors, whether they publish by employing a common pseudonym or not, are less frequent than collective writing projects which involve two persons. Thus, it would be logical to argue that collective writing projects could be split into two categories, namely groups which entail the collaboration of two people and ensembles which conversely are composed by three or more elements.²⁴ Considering the dynamics experienced daily if you are dealing with couples or larger groups, this may seem obvious. Furthermore, some artists would agree as well. According to Wu Ming 4, there is a clear difference in writing with another partner and doing the same with more companions. This phenomenon, according to Wu Ming 4, “[of working] between two people is not collective work, it is conjugal

²⁴ The empirical analysis shows that groups of writers do not exceed five members, except for the recent case of Dark Angels Collective (fifteen members involved in the production of the novel *Keeping Mum*), and of Scrittura Industriale Collettiva and Romanzo Totale (which, however have been defined as methods and not as groups in the first instance).

harmony”, and “conversely four authors cannot understand each other affectively, they have to interact concretely” (Wu Ming Interview).²⁵ Wu Ming 4, thus, suggests there is a substantial difference between what he defines a couple of writers and an actual collective, due to the kind of interactions that occur between its members. However, the hypothesis of an inherent diversity between couples and three or more members ensembles — nevertheless small groups — cannot be proved according to social psychology. Indeed, one of the main definitions of group, provided by social psychologist John Turner, states that a group exists when “two or more individuals [...] perceive themselves as members of the same social category” (Turner 1982, quoted in Brown 16).²⁶In other words, no difference can be highlighted from a psychological point of view between two members collectives and small ensembles with more participants.

Shifting the interest from the concept of group towards the concept of community, it is possible to verify whether this concept is useful or not in classifying several collective writing projects that have appeared in Italy. Furthermore, it is helpful to use the concept of “community of practice,” recently developed by sociologist Etienne Wenger. According to Wenger, the term community of practice “may be new, [but] the experience is not” (Wenger 1998 7). This is due to the fact that it designates “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger-Trayner 1). Likewise, it is characterized by “dynamic boundaries” (Wenger 2010 179). However, Wenger and Trayner specify that “not everything called a community is a community of practice” (Wenger-Trayner 2). Only those groups which present the three main characteristics, namely “domain,” “community,” and “practice,” may be classified as such. The term “domain” refers to the fact that a community of practice “has an identity defined by a shared domain of interest” and that it is not “merely a club of friends or a network of connections between people” (Wenger-Trayner 2). The feature “community”

²⁵ “Prima cosa, scrivere un romanzo in quattro (o perfino in cinque, come *Manituana*) non è come scriverlo in coppia, tipo Fruttero & Lucentini o Ellery Queen: «In due non è lavoro collettivo, è intesa coniugale». Quattro autori invece non possono intuirsi affettivamente, devono interagire concretamente” (Wu Ming Interview).

²⁶ “Due o più individui [...] percepiscono se stessi come membri della medesima categoria sociale” (Turner 1982, quoted in Brown 16).

indicates that “in pursuing their interest in their domain, members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information” in order to “build relationships that enable them to learn from each other” so that “they care about their standing with each other” (Wenger-Trayner 2). Finally, the term practice implies that “members of a community of practice are practitioners” (Wenger-Trayner 2) and not just ideally interested in a particular activity. Thus, they “develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short a shared practice” (Wenger-Trayner 2).

Such an idea of communities of practices, which considers as a fundamental feature the production and transmission of knowledge — and which was elaborated primarily by Wenger as a “social theory of learning” (Wenger 1998 4) — shows similarities with Pierre Levy’s theory of “collective intelligence.” In fact, the French philosopher Levy designates with the term collective intelligence “a form of *universally distributed intelligence*, constantly enhanced, coordinated in real time, and resulting in the effective mobilization of skills” (Levy 13), which should be reached through the technological development that has implemented the opportunities of communication and collaboration. Levy’s idea of collective intelligence should pursue the more general aim of fostering the birth of a new era for humankind through “the mutual recognition and enrichment of individuals” (Levy 13). The concept of community of practice, though does not entail necessarily as much a noble scope as Levy’s collective intelligence, in the same way community of practice foster share the basic feature of involving people and their abilities to reach a shared purpose as a community.

Besides the sociological aspect, the concept of community can also be analyzed from a philosophical point of view. Indeed, Jean Luc Nancy’s idea of community is quite useful in this case. The French philosopher considers community not “as project of fusion, or in some general way a productive or operative project” (Nancy 15), but rather as an “experience of finitude” (Nancy 31). That means basically two things: that community is something ‘inoperative’ which cannot be created through an active effort, such as myth production and political will (Nancy 41), and that it

rejects any kind of 'ecstatic' sublimation of its members in a "communitarian essence" (Nancy 22). Therefore, community exists as something which "is given to us" (Nancy 35) and in which singularities (and not individuals) partake by communicating by their "compearance" (Nancy 29), namely by sharing their finitude as beings. Hence, community would appear as a "being-in-common" (Nancy 29) which is not, however, "a common being" (Nancy 29). In which case, the "exposing-sharing" of its members gives rise to "a mutual interpellation of singularities" (Nancy 29). Although Nancy's idea of community could appear as antithetic to the concept of community of practice due to the insistence of the French philosopher on the feature of "inoperativeness," it will be useful here for the way in which the relationship between subjects is conceptualized. Indeed, Nancy stresses that it is necessary for a community to be the expression of a "being-in-common," namely it has to provide a sense of unity of the singular individual without imposing an "ecstatic" fusion into a mind-less communitarian essence, which is defined as "common-being" (Nancy 29). Thus, the singularity of each one participating in the community is a fundamental point for Nancy, who sees conversely a concrete risk in people devoting uncritically to a communitarian idea. Furthermore, it could lead to dangerous forms of totalitarianism, since subjects are annihilated and just one kind of mentality would prevail among the totality. Thus, the idea of a dynamic balance between subjects' singularity and a communitarian project implied by Nancy's concept of community would integrate the concept of communities of practice, which seems more focused on the common purpose which their members should achieve through their collaboration.

Among the collective writing projects which have been listed and analyzed so far, only a few of them can be related to the idea of community which has just been presented, both in its sociological and philosophical meaning. Starting with the sociological sense of community of practice, at first sight all of the groups listed seem eligible to be included in the basic definition. Indeed, it could be said that every group of writers who decides to undertake a collective enterprise experiences: 1) "a shared domain of interest" (Wenger-Trayner) — which would be *writing* —; 2) relationships of mutual learning with the other members; 3) a constant practice. However, only few

of them appear interested in enlarging the mutual learning which is characteristic of such communities of practices outside the boundaries of the group, thus, appearing characterized by “dynamic boundaries” (Wenger 2010 179) and enacting a way to promote collective intelligence. Most of the collectives carry out their literary enterprise exclusively and do not foster any further kind of contact and collaboration with artists and readers. Thus, only four of the writers’ ensembles listed above could be said to have dynamic boundaries — i.e. Wu Ming, Kai Zen, Paolo Agaraff, and Pelagio D’Afro —; since, they expand a kind of collaborative pattern, oriented towards collective writing. Furthermore, they may distend to people external to the original core of artists by exploiting fully the potentiality of the new technological era.

These four groups of writers, besides the traditional literary activity of publishing, enlarge the boundaries of their ensembles for several artistic projects by collaborating in artworks with other artists and with their readers, often thanks to the Internet. It must be said that these collaborations do not modify the core formation of the original group; yet, it is innovative that writers foster such a collaborative approach to writing beyond their collective.

Moreover, these four collectives are able to enact the dynamic balance which is implied in Nancy’s philosophical idea of community. Indeed, it could be argued that the enhancement of each member’s singularity within a communitarian project, which is defined as “being-in-common,” is carried out by these writers’ groups by the fact that every participant has no restraints in pursuing his own artistic path. In fact, almost every member of these four collectives has published independently from the whole group, and often such artworks are written in collaboration with other people.

Thus, it is necessary to define the tendency of these collectives of acting as a community of practice which fosters collective intelligence and patterns of collaboration beyond its boundaries as “commonality.” Such a characteristic enables a valid distinction between several instances of collective writing and, at the same time, to detect the most peculiar ones. All those collectives which present this feature of commonality are Italian, and no other writers group in the international

cultural landscape seems comparable to them. Thus, in order to highlight these collectives among the others and their resemblances to the idea of community, they could be defined as “community-collectives.” Hence, since these writers ensembles result particularly innovative and unique they are going to be the main focus of the further sections. In the next chapter, “community-collectives” will be analysed from a stylistic point of view, in order to see if such innovation from a structural point of view is mirrored in the aesthetic aspect of their artworks.

1.4 Brief Introduction to Four “Community-Collectives”: Wu Ming, Kai Zen, Paolo Agaraff, and Pelagio D’Afro

As Wu Ming, Kai Zen, Paolo Agaraff, and Pelagio D’Afro are the main focus of the following analysis, a brief presentation is given of each one of them in order to detect why the feature of “commonality” can be ascribed to them.

1.4.1 Wu Ming

Wu Ming is the first of these writers collectives which appeared in Italy in 2000, after the conclusion of the Luther Blisset Project. The collective name in Chinese means “‘anonymous’ (無名)”, but it could signify also “five names” (伍名) (Wu Ming 2009 a),²⁷ depending on how the first syllable is pronounced. The collective is constituted of four irreducible “singularities,” namely Roberto Bui (Wu Ming 1), Giovanni Cattabriga (Wu Ming 2), Federico Guglielmi (Wu Ming 4), and Riccardo Pedrini (Wu Ming 5). All of the members conduct simultaneously also a ‘singular’

²⁷ Luther Blisset movement was an “‘open reputation’ informally adopted and shared by hundreds of artists and social activists all over Europe since Summer 1994” (Wikipedia, quoted in Wu Ming 1 & Wu Ming 2 Interview), meaning that “the different participants in the “Multiple Name” game were not shreds of a schizophrenic conflict of personalities, they were all facets of one identity” (Wu Ming 1 & Wu Ming 2 Interview).

paths producing individual works. Since the publication of the first novel, *Asce di Guerra* (*War Axes*),²⁸ Wu Ming has “enlarged” its boundaries. For example, Vitaliano Ravagli is credited on the cover as an author along with Wu Ming. Moreover, Wu Ming promoted the interaction with its readers from the beginning by employing the potentiality of the Internet. At first the collective created a newsletter called *Giap!*, which then turned into a blog and on which several collaborative writing projects have been proposed to the Internet users. One of the first is the e-book *La Prima Volta Che Ho Visto I Fascisti* (*The First Time I Saw the Fascists*), which was edited by Wu Ming and which gathers testimonies of readers about their first encounters with fascist violence. Another communitarian project was *Il Sorriso del Presidente* (*The President’s Smile*), which was edited by Wu Ming 2 along with two other famous writers, i.e. Carlo Lucarelli and Enrico Brizzi. The three authors wrote some chapters, while the rest of the novel was written by Internet users who sent proposals which were then voted on by the community. The next project was *Ti Chiamerò Russell* (*I’ll Call You Russell*), written as a “Romanzo Totale” with the collaboration of the Internet portal xaiel.it, and which fostered interaction with the members of the Kai Zen collective.

Another instance of a communitarian literary project is represented by the open source story *La Ballata del Corazza* (*Corazza’s Ballad*). Wu Ming members published collective texts individually as well, some of which are written in collaboration with writers external to the core group. Beginning with Wu Ming 1, he has published two novels — *New Thing* and *Point Lenana* with Roberto Santachiara —, along with several essays, articles and short stories. Wu Ming 2 published as well *Guerra agli Umani* (*War on Humans*) and *Timira* in collaboration with Antar Mohamed. Again Wu Ming 3 wrote in collaboration with Wu Ming 5 - and under the supervision of the whole collective — the novel *Previsioni del Tempo*. Meanwhile, Wu Ming 4 published *Stella del Mattino* (*Morning Star*). Finally, Wu Ming 5 published two novels individually, i.e. *Free Karma* and *Havana Glam*.

²⁸ *Asce di Guerra* indeed is the first novel published by the group under the Wu Ming pseudonym, although the authors’ very first and most successful work was *Q*, which was published with the name Luther Blisset.

1.4.2 Kai Zen

As it was already mentioned, the Kai Zen collective was born thanks to Wu Ming's communitarian project *Ti Chiamerò Russell (I'll Call You Russell)* in 2003, since three of the four members participated in it and had the chance to get to know each other. It is formed of Jadel Andreetto, Bruno Fiorini, Gabriele Pispisa, and Aldo Soliani. Along with their publishing activity as a group, Kai Zen participated and promoted communitarian projects which involved the readers on the net. *La Potenza di Eymerich (Eymerich's Power)* was composed as a Romanzo Totale in collaboration with Valerio Evangelisti, Emerson Krott, Wu Ming 5, and the contributions of the users. *Spauracchi (Bugbears)* as well was an example of Romanzo Totale in which the authors wrote some chapters alternatively with the readers.

Some members from Kai Zen also published novels individually. Guglielmo Pispisa was the most prolific with four novels, namely *Multiplo (Multiple)*, *Città Perfetta (Perfect Town)*, *L'Altra Metà (The Other Half)*, *Il Cristo Ricaricabile (Rechargeable Christ)*, and *Voi Non Siete Qui (You Are Not Here)*. Jadeel Andreetto as well published a work without the group, namely an investigative report entitled *Bologna Operaia (Working-Class Bologna)*.

1.4.3 Paolo Agaraff.

Paolo Agaraff is a three person writing group composed by Gabriele Falcioni, Roberto Fogliardi, and Alessandro Papini. The official birth of the collective, as considered by its members, was in 2003 with the publication of the novel *Le Rane di Koh Samui (The Frogs of Koh Samui)*. However, the members of the group have collaborated since the end of the nineties due to their passion for role-game playing. In 2003 Paolo Agaraff founded a mailing list called Carboneria Letteraria, which evolved into a writing lab. This online community created by Paolo Agaraff, besides several collaborations, also lead to the publication of a collective novel entitled *Maiden*

Voyage in 2014. Gabriele Falcioni participated to the novel as single writer, while his colleagues Papini and Fogliardi participated both as individuals and as members of another collective, Pelagio D'Afro.

1.4.4 Pelagio D'Afro

Pelagio D'Afro is another collective, formed in 2007 by Roberto Fogliardi and Alessandro Papini, along with Arturo Fabra and Giuseppe D'Emilio. It is proof of the dynamic boundaries of such community-collectives, since it is a further space in which the authors can develop their preferred themes. Indeed, as Pelagio D'Afro overtly affirms, its artworks are more akin to the genre of noir, while Agaraff's to science-fiction.²⁹ Pelagio D'Afro partakes actively in the community Carboneria Letteraria, and single members of the collective have participated to the novel *Maiden Voyage* both as individuals and as part of the group.

²⁹ "Le opere pelagiche [tendono] più al noir, mentre quelle agaraffiane al fantascientifico" (Paolo Agaraff Interview 1). [Pelagio D'Afro's artworks are more oriented towards the genre of noir, while Agaraff's ones to science-fiction (Paolo Agaraff Interview 1)].

Chapter 2. Looking for Community-Collectives' Poetics Throughout Stylistic Features

2.1 Introduction

As it has been discussed in the previous chapter, four writers' ensembles appear as particularly relevant within the Italian cultural landscape. The collectives Wu Ming, Kai Zen, Paolo Agaraff and Pelagio D'Afro present the feature defined as "communality," namely that tendency of acting as a community of practice which fosters collective intelligence and patterns of collaboration beyond its boundaries. Beside such a structural characteristic, it is useful to investigate as well if these writers collectives' artworks present any similarities which could delineate a shared poetics. With this term Umberto Eco means "the working program the artist intends each time, the project of the artwork the artists intends overtly or implicitly" (Eco 18). Such a programme cannot leave the texts' aesthetic out of consideration, and this chapter is going to analyze whether or not it is possible to detect a shared style and aesthetic for community-collectives. The term "aesthetic" is employed here with the more general meaning of "a set of principles underlying the work of a particular artist or artistic movement" (Oxford Dictionaries) and does not refer to the philosophical connotations which have been related to it since the 18th century. This chapter, thus, aims to examine if it is possible to detect any narrative and stylistic affinities between four novels written by the aforementioned collectives, namely *54* by Wu Ming (2002), *The Ram's Strategy (La Strategia dell'Ariete)* (2007) by Kai Zen, *The Fifth Cylinder (Il Quinto Cilindro)* (2010) by Paolo Agaraff, and *The Water is Silent (L'Acqua Tace)* (2013) by Pelagio D'Afro. Such novels represent just a selection among a wide production of the artists at stake; nevertheless, each novel has been selected in order to represent in the best way the predominant characteristics of each collective. In particular, *54* has been chosen since it is the first novel written exclusively by Wu Ming;³⁰ *The Ram's Strategy*

³⁰ *54* was published in 2002. It could be considered as the first Wu Ming novel since *Q* — the first work written by Wu Ming members — was published under the label Luther Blissett, and it was still related to the broader Luther Blissett Project philosophy.

is the first novel produced by Kai Zen and published by a major publishing house, Mondadori; Paolo Agaraff's *The Fifth Cylinder* is its third work, but it is more akin to the complexity of the other collectives' novel;³¹ and *The Water is Silent* is the second novel by Pelagio D'Afro, and it is the first which presents the distinctive mark of the author.³²

The close reading of several novels produced by the four collectives— and of the four novels just mentioned in particular — detects two main narrative features which are particularly important and which will be deepened in this chapter. Therefore, the analysis will pay attention, at first, to the structural fragmentation of the narration, considered in terms of plot complexity, multiple narratorial voices and unusual points of view. Then, a further characteristic will be considered, namely the presence of several references to pop culture. Narratological considerations from several scholars will be taken into account in this chapter. In particular, Gerard Genette's reflections, along with the contributions of further scholars, which are going to clarify the French scholar's thought will guide this close reading. Genette's considerations about narratorial voices and focalizers, which were expressed in the essay *Narrative Discourse. An Essay in Method* will serve to shed light on the community-collectives' complicated shift of narrative perspective.

2.2 Fragmented Narration Through Plots Complexity

From the analysis of the selected novels published by the collectives at stake, it seems that the fragmented narration is a quasi constitutive feature of community-collectives' writing. The expression fragmented narration refers to the systematic tendency of such artworks to complicate

³¹ Paolo Agaraff's previous novels, namely *The Frogs of Koh Samui (Le Rane di Ko Samui)* and *Blood Will Out (Il Sangue non è Acqua)* could be probably considered as long stories. Conversely *Il Quinto Cilindro* presents a more complex inner structure which makes it more similar to most of the novels produced by the rest of the aforementioned collectives.

³² Indeed as previously said in the first chapter two-thirds of Paolo Agaraff participate to Pelagio D'Afro's project. That provoked some narrative crossovers in some novels. *The Water is Silent* is exempt from such narrative entanglements, and therefore it has been chosen in order to avoid any ambiguity.

the storyline through an intricate plot, multiple points of view and narratorial voices from which the events are told. Although plots complexity and multiple points of view are strictly linked, the focus will be at first on detecting the complicated structure of such novels. Secondly, the focus will be on the issue of the multiple points of view which emerge from these narrations.

2.2.1 Wu Ming — 54

Wu Ming's novel appears immediately as structured according to a complex entanglement of several space and time levels. The novel intertwines several stories of a wide range of characters – both fictitious and real— from the former partisan Vittorio Capponi and his sons Nicola and Robespierre, to the gangster Lucky Luciano and his henchman Steve “Concrete” Zollo, or to Cary Grant who is represented as an English spy, and many more. The narration begins with a brief section entitled “The Background,” set on the Yugoslavian frontline in 1943. At the end of the first section of the “The Background” chapters, the set is changed on both time and the space levels. Through what Genette calls an ellipsis, namely a leap forward without return (Genette 43) — or more clearly a narrative movement which “marks an infinite acceleration of the narrative” (Guerlac 1416), — the timeline proceeds until November 1953, and the setting is Trieste. Moreover, in the last subdivision of the “Antefatti” section a further ellipsis moves the timeline to the 25th December 1953, and the setting is an unknown “Around the World” (See. Wu Ming 2002 7-26). Such a continuous zigzag narrative movement from one spatiotemporal dimension to another shows already the complex structure of the plot of the novel. Furthermore, this kind of shifting of setting and time is a constitutive structural feature of *54*, since the narration continuously moves from Bologna to Naples, and again to Moscow, Palm Springs, Dalmatia and so on. Although the novel progresses through a spatial placement of the stories composing the main events, the primary timeline of the story follows a chronological order, starting from 1943 and ending approximately in December 1954 — the year in which most of the events unfold. However, besides such a main

chronological progression of the narrative, the spatial placement just mentioned and several “anachronies”³³ — mainly analepses — contribute to make the plot particularly complicated. Such a complexity is further implemented by a plethora of (not only human) characters who populate the novel and carry a multitude of unexpected points of views, which will be analyzed hereafter.

2.2.2 Kai Zen — *The Ram’s Strategy*

Kai Zen’s *The Ram’s Strategy* (*La Strategia Dell’Ariete*) similarly presents a particularly complex plot, which is even more elaborated than in Wu Ming’s *54* and Paolo Agaraff’s and Pelagio D’Afro’s novels. The novel follows the events related to the ‘Seth’s Breath’, i.e. a lethal compound that was synthesized in ancient Egypt and that is guarded by a secret society — the Ram’s Society —, which looks after it for the unclear reason of preserving the status quo.³⁴ Indeed, the intricacy of the plot is clear from the beginning. The first scene of the book is set in a non specified place and time, which later will result in being in the woods around Baltimore in 1957. Then, the first chapter is set in Shanghai in 1920 as seen through the point of view of Shanfeng, who is one of the few fictional characters emerging from the multitude of figures populating the novel. The second chapter moves back to Germany in 1911, through the notes written in Dr. Einrich T. Hofstadter’s diary. Then again a temporal and spatial leap in the third chapter takes the reader to Paraguay in 1944. Such an alternation of time and space of the narrated events goes on for the whole novel and is certainly more extreme than in Wu Ming’s case, especially since the narration unfolds in a wider timeframe from 3000 B.C. to present, and touches basically the whole globe. Moreover, conversely

³³ According to Genette, anachronies are “the various types of discordance between the two orderings of story and narrative” (Genette 36). Anachronies are divided in two main categories, namely “analepsis” — “any evocation after the fact of an event that took place earlier than the point in the story where we are at any given moment” (Genette 40) — and “prolepsis” — prolepsis any narrative maneuver that consists of narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place later” (Genette 40).

³⁴ “Noi esistiamo solo per portare a termine la missione affidataci millenni fa, null’altro. Con la consapevolezza della Storia, in nome della sicurezza della razza umana, per conservare lo stato delle cose” (Kai Zen 2007 199) [“We exist only to carry out the mission we were given millenniums ago. With consciousness of History, in the name of the human race, to preserve the status quo” (Kai Zen 199)].

to 54, the chronological order of the events is never respected. Therefore, the narration turns out to be highly ‘anachronistic’ (in Genette’s sense). Furthermore, the high number of characters animating the novel entails again a multiplication of the points of view, and the plot results inevitably in having a complex structure.

2.2.3 Paolo Agaraff — *The Fifth Cylinder*

Paolo Agaraff’s *The Fifth Cylinder* presents a less complex plot structure than the novels discussed previously; although, its narration as well is placed on different spatiotemporal levels. The novel presents the events related mainly to three characters who are almost always protagonists of the author’s artworks, namely the three retired old men Giacinto, Filippo, and Alessio. The three men, who already had to face the sea monsters of Lovecraft’s mythology in the novel *The Frogs of Koh Samui (Le Rane di Ko Samui)*, get involved again in incredible and hilarious situations; for example, they end up in a subterranean settlement created by aliens inside the Swiss Alps, in which the people live as if they were still in the Imperial Rome. The structure of the plot is not linear even in this case, since the events unfold in different spacial and temporal layers. In particular, the narration seems to shift between three settings and time frames: the first an unknown place hidden in the Alps in the first century B. C., the second which is set in present day Switzerland — where the three protagonists act —, and finally a non-specified alien galaxy living in its own space and time dimension. Contrary to Wu Ming’s and Kai Zen’s novels, such an alternation is not clearly stated, except for the alien dimension, which is always signaled by the acronym AC, and by different series of numbers, which probably specify a temporal information. Moreover, the first two levels converge at a certain point in the narration, since it turns out that the ancient setting is just the story reported through the reading of a monument by a further character living in a hidden Roman settlement. As these confusing brief notes probably show, the plot structure appears as presenting a

moderate degree of complexity, which is moreover increased by the usual multiplication of points of view.

2.2.4 Pelagio D'Afro — *The Water is Silent*

Pelagio D'Afro's novel *The Water is Silent* (*L'Acqua Tace*) appears at first sight as a simple noir novel, which starts with a (probable) murder and ends without any satisfactory solution of the criminal enigma. Set in Portonovo, a small town on the Adriatic coast in the beginning of the 20th century, Maria Rosaria, the lady in waiting of countess Lavinia Silvi — the actual owner of the noble estate in which the events mainly unfold — is found dead in the small lake nearby. Then the novel narrates the attempt to reveal the identity of the killer. Furthermore, all the people gravitating around the villa are under investigation by two policemen (a smart official, Ciro, and his incompetent boss). The plot structure, thus, follows generally the chronological order of the events. Although, some anachronies occur, such as the analepsis in the last part of the book which reveals that Renato, who was unjustly accused by Mrs. Lavinia of the murder and who committed suicide, was actually the countess' step-brother. Even though the novel would not appear to have a particularly complex structure, a certain degree of intricacy may be noted in the attention paid to the multiple points of view from which the story is told and its unclear narrators; that will be taken into account in the following paragraph.

Such a plot complexity, which can be noticed in the novels just listed, definitely seems to be a recurring structural feature of community-collectives writing strategy. According to the three main conceptualizations of plot in the critical tradition — which Kukkonen summarizes for the *Living Handbook of Narratology* — that one considering the plot as part of the authorial design seems the

most appropriate in this case.³⁵ Such a way of structuring the narrative is seen as an attempt to create the immersive experiences which Brook and Patti consider typical of transmedial narration (See Brook – Patti 8). The fragmentation of the contents of several types of media is considered to have the capacity to increase the kind of immersion a reader or user experiences facing a transmedial artwork. It could be argued consequently that fragmentation of the plot may implement in a homologous way the possibility of the reader to be ‘seized’ by the narrative world. Moreover, such attention to structuring the plot and in trying to capture the attention of the reader is rooted in the tradition of the literary genre in which these artworks can be included. *54* is a historical novel, *The Ram’s Strategy* is a crossover between a historical novel and a thriller, while *The Fifth Cylinder* is a sci-fi artwork and *The Water is Silent* is definitely a noir. Thus all of these artworks belong, at least concerning the macro-category of literary genres, to the category defined as genre fiction or popular fiction.

2.3 Fragmented Narration Through Unusual Points of View and Multiple Narratorial Shifts.

The question of multiple points of view, which are systematically numerous in the novels at issue, needs to be discussed briefly before proceeding.

In particular, Wu Ming 1 talks about the multiplicity of estranged points of view, which he defines as “sguardo obliquo” and explains as a way to free yourself from the “normal points of view

³⁵ Karin Kukkonen summarizes the “three basic ways of conceptualizing plot” (Kukkonen 1) as follows:

- 1) Plot as a fixed, global structure- The configuration of the arrangement of all story events, from beginning, middle to end.
- 2a) Plot as progressive structuration. The connections between story events, motivations and consequences as readers perceive them.
- 2b) Plot as part of the authorial design. The author’s way of structuring the narrative to achieve particular effects.

[...] focalized for us by the dominators' ideology" (Wu Ming 2009 b 81).³⁶ Such a tendency of adopting the points of view of several characters — both human and not — during the development of the story can be detected in the selected novels. However, the analysis could be expanded towards a wider theoretical consideration. Besides detecting unusual perspectives, the actual narratorial issue of these novels will be analyzed through some narratological concepts. In particular, the French scholar Genette developed an analytical method that has been widely influential in the narratological field. Genette theorized a category he labels "voice," in which he analyses the "narrating instance." As outlined by scholars Lucie Guillemette and Cynthia Lévesque, Genette's "voice" category can be considered as composed of "the conjunction between (1) narrative voice (who is speaking?), (2) time of the narration (when does the telling occur, relative to the story?) and (3) narrative perspective (through whom are we perceiving?)" (Guillemett - Lévesque). Besides the category of time of the narration, the issues of narrative voice and narrative perspective appear as particularly relevant in this case. Genette highlights three main categories in the narrative voice, namely: 1) Heterodiegetic, "when the narrator does not figure as a character in the story he is telling (Guerlac 1416); 2) Homodiegetic, when the narrator actually figures in the story; 3) Autodiegetic, namely a particular kind of homodiegetic narration in which the narrator figures as the hero of the story.

On the other hand, focalization can be defined as "a selection or restriction of narrative information in relation to the experience and knowledge of the narrator, the characters or other, more hypothetical entities in the storyworld [sic]" (Niederhoff 1). As Genette remarks, the concept of focalization allows one "to avoid the too specifically visual connotations of the terms vision, field, and point of view" (Genette 189), and he detects three main kinds of focalization. Thus,

³⁶ "L'adozione di punti di vista 'inusitati', se motivata e non ridotta a mero giochino, è una presa di posizione *etica* ineludibile. Noi siamo intossicati dall'adozione di punti di vista 'normali', prescritti, messi a fuoco per noi dall'ideologia dei dominanti. È imperativo depurarsi, cercare di vedere il mondo in altri modi, sorprendendo noi stessi. (Wu Ming 2009 b 81). ["The adoption of unusual points of view, when motivated and not just mere play, is an unavoidable ethical stance. We are intoxicated by the adoption of 'normal', prescribed, point of view, which were focalized for us by the dominators' ideology. It is an imperative to purify yourself, trying to see the world in different ways, surprising ourselves" (Wu Ming 2009 b 81)].

Genette distinguishes three degrees of focalization, namely “zero focalization”, i.e. “narrative with omniscient narrator [...] and which Todorov symbolizes by the formula Narrator > Character (where the narrator knows more than the character, or more exactly says more than any of the characters knows)” (Genette 189); “internal focalization” (Narrator = Character), in which the narrator says only what a given character knows” (Genette 189);³⁷ “External focalization” (Narrator < Character), when “the narrator says less than the character knows” (Genette 189).

Although Genette’s concept of focalization has often been called into question, it still “serves a useful purpose that the vaguer and more disputed term point of view cannot” (Porter Abbott 66) and has been so influential that scholars still take it as a model and argue about how to improve it.³⁸ Thus the analysis of community-collectives’ artworks will be studied with the help of Genette’s theoretical grid, and the term point of view will be used mainly to highlight the multiplicity of characters whose way of thinking is reported during the narration.

2.3.1 Wu Ming — 54

Wu Ming’s *54*, as has already been mentioned, presents structurally a continuous shift of narrative voices and focalizers. The aforementioned section, “The Background,” starts without a recognizable narrative voice, since the first words the reader faces are most likely an excerpt from a bulletin by the Slovenian Communist Party addressing the Italian soldiers occupying the area:

ITALIAN SOLDIERS! The Slovenian people have launched an inexorable struggle against the occupying forces. Many of your comrades have already fallen in that struggle. And you

³⁷ In particular internal focalization can be further divided in: a) fixed, when we never leave the point of view of the narrator; b) variable, when there is a shift between several focal characters; c) multiple, “as in epistolary novels, where the same event may be evoked several times according to the point of view of several letter-writing characters” (Genette 190).

³⁸ See *Point of View, Perspective, and Focalization. Modeling Mediation in Narrative*. edited in 2009 by Hühn, Schmid and Schönert, in which the group of articles aims “to re-define, re-specify, or re-model perspective, especially Genette’s concept of focalization” (Hühn 1).

will go on falling day after day, night after night, for as long as you remain tools in the hands of our oppressors, and until Slovenia is liberated. (Wu Ming 2002 7, translated by Shaun Whiteside)³⁹

Moreover, in the same first subdivision of the section “The Background,” a narrative voice manifests, employing a third person grammar structure. Since this particular narratorial voice does not belong to a specified character, it can be described as a heterodiegetic voice. Furthermore, it provides an external focalization, as the narrator can penetrate both the minds of the victims and of the perpetrators.

Someone had written ‘SMRT FAS ISMU’ in red paint on the peeling wall.

The men had been lined up in front of it.

Their faces were blank. Closed, absent. Like the windows of the village.

The captain yelled orders at the unit. The Italian soldiers assumed their positions, rifles shouldered. Almost all of them reservists. The officer was the youngest, with a well-trimmed moustache and a grey garrison cap tilted on his forehead. The condemned men raised their eyes to look their butchers in the face. To be certain that they were men like themselves.

They were used to death, even their own, they had grown accustomed to it over thousands of generations. (Wu Ming 2002, translated by Shaun Whiteside)⁴⁰

³⁹ “SOLDATI ITALIANI! Il popolo sloveno ha cominciato una lotta inesorabile contro gli occupatori. Molti dei vostri camerati sono già caduti in questa lotta. E cadrete sempre giorno per giorno, notte per notte, finché sarete strumenti nelle mani dei nostri oppressori. finché l'ultimo pezzo della terra slovena non sarà liberato” (Wu Ming 2002 7).

⁴⁰ “Sul muro scrostato qualcuno aveva scritto SMRT FAŠIZMU con la vernice rossa. Li avevano messi in fila lí davanti. Dalle facce non trapelava niente. Chiuse, assenti. Come le finestre del villaggio. Il capitano strillò l'ordine alla compagnia. I militari italiani si schierarono, fucili in spalla. Quasi tutti riservisti. L'ufficiale era il piú giovane, baffi ben curati e bustina di stoffa grigia inclinata sulla fronte. I condannati alzarono gli occhi per guardare in faccia i carnefici. Essere certi che fossero uomini come loro. Erano abituati alla morte, anche alla propria, assuefatti da migliaia di generazioni trascorse” (Wu Ming 2002 7).

Furthermore, this kind of traditional narratorial voice is substituted in the novel by several unexpected and untraditional focalizers. For instance, in Chapter 2 it is possible to notice a – apparently - homodiegetic voice, providing a certain internal focalization. The narratorial voice employs first person plural speaking, representing the choral voice of customers of bar Aurora, a crucial place in the story:

Cold whose like only the oldest residents can remember, a long time before the war when so many of us had just been born. In all the bars in Bologna, the thermometer is the focus of everyone's conversation. Long discussions, not to say arguments, about the coldest winter of the century, as though talking about it around the stove would keep shivers and flu [sic] away.

In the Bar Aurora, until just a few days ago, most of us maintained that in spite of everything the first few days of February '32 had been the coldest in living memory. (Wu Ming 2002 31, translated by Shaun Whiteside).⁴¹

A further untraditional focalization is the one provided by the voice of McGuffin, a broken television endowed with human-like conscience. The narratorial voice is heterodiegetic and is able to penetrate the “mind” of McGuffin, whose human feelings are often reported through free indirect speech, as in the following case:

⁴¹ “Un freddo così solo i più vecchi lo ricordano, roba di molto prima della guerra, quando tanti di noi erano appena nati. In tutti i bar di Bologna è il termometro a tenere banco. Discussioni lunghe, per non dir litigi, sull'inverno più freddo del secolo, come se parlarne intorno alla stufa tenesse lontani i brividi e l'influenza. Al bar Aurora, fino all'altro giorno, la maggior parte di noi sosteneva che, nonostante tutto, i primi di febbraio del '32 erano stati i più freddi a memoria d'uomo” (Wu Ming 2002 22).

What a situation! The inactivity was really exhausting. Doubts and hypochondria racked his self-belief. Will I still be able to do my work properly? Will they be able to get me to work so far away from home? Will I still make people laugh, keep them interested with the news, move them? McGuffin had no answers. He consoled himself by thinking about past glories, and every now and again, to keep hope alive, he peeped out of the door, hoping that someone might pay him a little attention. (Wu Ming 2002 35, translated by Shaun Whiteside).⁴²

2.3.2 Kai Zen — *The Ram's Strategy*

Kai Zen's *The Ram's Strategy*'s complexity is due to the multiplicity of the narratorial voice. The very first page of the novel presents a heterodiegetic narratorial voice, providing the thoughts and the feelings of the character through an external focalization:

The Chinese man started to cover in snow the naked skin. He wanted to accelerate the cooling of the blood. That matter had to be concluded through a ritual, the Ram was right about that. He just hoped his ritual to be less ridiculous than the Ram's. I do not know where I brought you, I do not think it is not important anymore, but the reason is clear to me: no one has to obtain anything from this damned story. Nor power, nor money, nor release. Nor life. Let alone, life. (Kai Zen 2007 12)⁴³

⁴² “Che razza di situazione! L'inattività era davvero snervante. Dubbi e ipocondrie assalivano la fiducia in se stessi. Sarò ancora capace di fare bene il mio lavoro? Riusciranno a farmi funzionare anche qui, così lontano da casa? Tornerò a far ridere la gente, a interessarla con le notizie, a commuoverla? McGuffin non aveva risposte. Si consolava ripensando alle glorie passate e ogni tanto, per non lasciar morire la speranza, sbirciava fuori dalla porta in attesa che qualcuno si prendesse cura di lui” (Wu Ming 25).

⁴³ “Il cinese cominciò a ricoprire di neve la pelle nuda. Voleva accelerare il raffreddamento del sangue. La faccenda andava chiusa con un rituale, in questo l'Ariete aveva ragione. Sperò solo che il suo rito fosse meno ridicolo del loro. Non so dove ti ho portato, non credo abbia più importanza, ma il perché mi è ben chiaro: nessuno deve ricavare niente da questa storia maledetta. Non il potere, non il denaro, non la salvezza. Non la vita. Meno che mai, la vita” (Kai Zen12).

Then several further shifts in the narratorial voice occur. For instance, there are examples of homodiegetic narration providing internal focalization, as in the case of the diary of Dr. Hofstadter:

We finally deciphered the first papyrus found in Palestine. Since we had not found what we looked for, we lost the hope of finding the object of our research. However thanks to the work of some ‘friends’ a more complete context is taking shape. (Kai Zen 2007 17)⁴⁴

Moreover, an untraditional shift occurs when the narration takes on a sort of theatrical form. Indeed no recognizable narrative voice is present, and the novel becomes briefly a three scene comedy, in which it is difficult even to detect which kind of focalization is finally provided:

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

“Norman Kirchner, alias Albino and Michael Glendy, alias Eudoros, brothers of the Ancient Segret Ram’s Society. They are both standing, wearing expensive clothes. They are motionless in a tormented expression. They have a decision to make, due to the Baltimora events, and they cannot enjoy the plan for the night: blackjack, bourbon, and the relished visit of some particular ‘partners’.

SINGLE ACT, SCENE II

Scene: a gaming room. A dark glass chandelier casts a feeble light upon a table covered in a green carpet. There is an embellished crystal bottle full of excellent bourbon. A brand new card deck. There are comfortable dark wooden chairs around.

EUDORUS: «Norm, I am afraid we have to postpone our special night...».

⁴⁴ “Finalmente siamo riusciti a decifrare il primo papiro recuperato in Palestina. Non avendo trovato quello che speravamo, avevamo perduto la speranza di poter rintracciare l’oggetto della nostra ricerca. Ma grazie al lavoro di alcuni preziosi “amici” comincia a delinearsi un quadro più completo” (Kai Zen 17).

ALBINO: «I think it is inevitable. Just let me tell Miss Sweetcorn not to let the girls come, I'll be right back». (Kai Zen 194)⁴⁵

2.3.3 Paolo Agaraff — *The Fifth Cylinder*

Paolo Agaraff's *The Fifth Cylinder* too presents structural shifts in the narratorial voices and focalizations during the novel. As already mentioned, the initial threefold subdivision of the plot structure corresponds to different perspectives in the narration. The first narrative line — which only later will reveal itself as a narration provided by the protagonists' friend previously imprisoned in the subterranean alien colony — is expressed through a first-person homodiegetic narratorial voice, providing an internal focalization:

Our worst enemy is the fear instilled by the unknown

Cesar used to repeat that while his legions passed through the Matrona Mons passage. I was a simple centurion commanded by Lucius Vorenius at that time and I marched among his soldiers to conquest Gaul, violating the calm of the ancient oak, black locusts and chestnuts

⁴⁵ "DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Norman Kirchner, alias Albino e Michael Glendy, alias Eudoro, confratelli dell' Antica Segreta Società dell' Ariete. Entrambi in piedi, vestiti di abiti costosi. Sono immobili nella stessa tormentata espressione. Hanno una decisione da prendere, dopo gli sviluppi di Baltimora, e non possono godersi il programma della nottata: blackjack, bourbon, gradita visita di certe accompagnatrici.

ATTO UNICO, SCENA II

Scena: una sala da gioco. Un lampadario di vetro scuro proietta una luce flebile su un tavolo coperto da un tappeto verde. Al centro una bottiglia di cristallo lavorato piena fino all'orlo di ottimo bourbon. Un mazzo di carte nuovo. Attorno, sedie confortevoli di legno scuro imbottite. EUDORO: «Norm, ho paura che dovremo rimandare la nostra serata speciale...».

ALBINO: «Credo sia inevitabile. Fammi solo avvisare Miss Sweetcorn di non far venire le ragazze, torno subito» (Kai Zen 194).

forests. [...] We felt just and invincible; no dangers, both visible and invisible, could really worry us. (Paolo Agaraff 10)⁴⁶

Then the main narrative lines, namely the adventures of the three old men and their extraterrestrial counterparts, are expressed through a further narratorial voice. Indeed, the narrator appears as a traditional heterodiegetic, providing an external focalization and expressing the perspective of the different characters, including the aliens:

Hey, when do we arrive? Alessio's voice arrived with a smart alecky tone from the backseat. The retired lawyer turns himself: that ridiculous and haughty former retailer, with his manias and his intolerance towards others', appeared particularly hateful to him that day, not to say about that vile smell coming from Alessio's clothes dirty with vomit. (Paolo Agaraff 21)⁴⁷

[These sentences refer to man from the colony] He just realized that his father wanted to embrace him, when he had thrown himself against his spear. It was just a stupid incident. He didn't have anything against that man, and the fact that he was his father or not did not make any difference. Men kill other men or are killed, that is all. (Paolo Agaraff 213)⁴⁸

⁴⁶ *“Il nostro peggior nemico è il timore che incute l'ignoto.*

Questo era solito ripetere Cesare mentre le sue legioni attraversavano il passo di Matriona Mons. A quei tempi ero un semplice centurione ai comandi di Lucio Voreno e marciavo tra i suoi uomini alla conquista della Gallia, violando la quiete delle antiche foreste di querce, robinie e castagni. [...] Ci sentivamo giusti e invincibili; nessun pericolo, visibile o invisibile, poteva veramente impensierirci” (Paolo Agaraff 10).

⁴⁷ *“Insomma, ma quando si arriva?” giunse con tono petulante la voce di Alessio, dal sedile posteriore. L'avvocato in pensione si girò: quel ridicolo e altezzoso ex commerciante, con tutte le sue manie e l'intolleranza per quelle altrui, quel giorno gli riusciva particolarmente odioso, per non parlare dell'odore nauseabondo dei vestiti schizzati di vomito” (Paolo Agaraff 21).*

⁴⁸ *“Ora capiva che suo padre aveva voluto abbracciarlo, quando si era gettato contro la lancia. Si era trattato solo di uno stupido incidente. Non aveva nulla contro quell'individuo, e comunque che egli fosse suo padre o no non faceva alcuna differenza, perché gli uomini uccidono altri uomini o da essi vengono uccisi, e questo è tutto” (Paolo Agaraff 213).*

Alessio felt on himself the burden of that intrigue of moods: the indistinct contempt of the multitude of prisoners was like the mud in which he felt he was always more sinking. (Paolo Agaraff 290)⁴⁹

[These sentences refer to an alien] The meticulous and omniscient conscience of the Beehive allocated him to the protection of *Kyokkjit* but there is no satisfaction in his peduncle bodies. The long and technic training he was subjected to before he was sent to the asteroid seemed wasted to him due to the trivial activities he has to do. His genetic forces him to obedience, but his instinct, no matter how domesticated, causes sometimes glimmers of autonomous thoughts. (Paolo Agaraff 24)⁵⁰

2.3.4 Pelagio D'Afro — *The Water is Silent*

Finally, Pelagio D'Afro's novel *The Water is Silent*, at first sight a traditional noir novel, presents some interesting shifts in the narratorial voices and in the focalizations. The prologue starts with a first-person narration, provided by an indefinite narrator — since it seems impossible to detect whether he/she is a character involved in the story and what the information he/she possesses in relation to the facts are.

⁴⁹ “Alessio sentiva su di sé tutto il peso di quella trama di umori; l'indistinto disprezzo della folla dei prigionieri era come fango in cui gli pareva di affondare sempre di più” (Paolo Agaraff 290).

⁵⁰ “La puntigliosa e onnisciente coscienza dell'Alveare lo ha destinato al presidio di *Kyokkjit* ma nei suoi corpi peduncolati non c'è soddisfazione. Il lungo addestramento tecnico a cui è stato sottoposto prima di essere inviato sull'asteroide gli sembra sprecato per le banali attività che deve svolgere. La sua genetica non può che costringerlo all'obbedienza, ma il suo istinto, per quanto addomesticato, genera talvolta barlumi di pensieri autonomi” (Paolo Agaraff 24).

I've already seen it a lot of times, the sea. But it is not like in here. It is a long light blue stripe, shining as silver. A man emerges from there, he is my father. He has got a sea urchin and a knife that reflects the sun. I feel in my mouth the strong and uneven taste of the sea urchin, and I like it. Someone laughs behind me, it's probably my mother. (Pelagio D'Afro 9)⁵¹

Then the narration changes, so that a third-person heterodiegetic narratorial voice prevails, providing an external focalization. However, this kind of narration is structurally divided between the perspective of four main characters — Renato, Leda, Ciro, and Lavinia — , which act each as a focal point to narrate the story from.

Renato Corinaldi was as motionless and woody as the log he sat on, while he was smoking a cigarette. In other occasions, watching those same waters, he would have wondered about overseas lands, boat journeys and abundant hauls. (Pelagio D'Afro 10)⁵²

[Leda] had the impulse to break something, and the china teapot on the table looked like placed there for that scope. She was almost going to touch lightly its handle when she was stopped by the sense of stupidity implied in that action. As she was there alone, what would it help to break something if no one had seen her? (Pelagio D'Afro 19)⁵³

⁵¹ "L'ho già visto tante volte, il mare. Ma non è come qui. È una lunga striscia azzurra, scintillante d'argento. Ne emerge un uomo, mio padre. Ha tra le mani un riccio e un coltello che riflette il sole. Sento in bocca il sapore forte e ruvido del riccio, e mi piace. Qualcuno dietro di me ride, forse mia madre" (Pelagio D'Afro 9).

⁵² "Seduto sul tronco se ne stava, altrettanto immobile e legnoso, Renato Corinaldi, intento a fumare una sigaretta. In altri momenti, guardando quelle stesse acque, avrebbe fantasticato di terre d'oltremare, di viaggi in barca e di abbondanti pesche" (Pelagio D'Afro 10).

⁵³ "[Leda] Ebbe l'impulso di rompere qualcosa, e la teiera di porcellana sul tavolo sembrava messa lì per lo scopo. Stava quasi per sfiorare il manico quando fu frenata dal senso di stupidità di quel gesto. Lì, sola, a che sarebbe servito rompere qualcosa se nessuno l'avesse vista?" (Pelagio D'Afro 19).

Moreover the narratorial voice, besides providing the perspectives of the aforementioned characters, does not hesitate to come into the foreground. Indeed, in the following excerpt he/she freezes the story and offers through a prolepsis a disenchanting image of the places in which the events are set:

Let's observe those two men, at that moment in their hearts, unconsciously, a seed of worried nostalgia for those places was forming, as if they were prefiguring what could have happened in future times. A future time in which a crowd of holiday-makers will have ruined forever the aspect and the life cadence of those places. (Pelagio D'Afro 79)⁵⁴

A final narratorial shift is noticeable again in the Epilogue section, in which the undermined first-person voice returns. In this occasion, the voice relates itself to the events and proves to be a homodiegetic narrator, providing an internal focalization. However, it still remains unclear who the voice belongs to; the reader may suspect it is the ghost of Renato speaking, who was unjustly accused of Maria Rosaria's murder — proving to be thus definitely an unusual focalizer.

I remember everything: alas, memory does not vanish as you die; thus I know with absolute certainty that the hair of that soul fluttering restlessly in the house, and that will continue to do so even when the billows will have consumed the last cursed stone, is Lavinia's blonde hair. (Pelagio D'Afro 184)⁵⁵

Concluding the close reading, it appears clearly that community-collective's narrative really pays attention to increasing the plot complexity through the multiplication of points of view and of

⁵⁴ "Osserviamoli, quei due, in quel momento in cui nei cuori di entrambi, in maniera inconsapevole, si formava un seme di preoccupata nostalgia per quei luoghi, quasi presagendo ciò che nel futuro sarebbe potuto accadere. Un futuro in cui turbe di vacanzieri ne avranno per sempre deturpato per sempre l'aspetto e il ritmo di vita" (Pelagio D'Afro 79).

⁵⁵ "Tutto ricordo: la memoria, ahimè, non svanisce con la vita; so quindi con incancellabile certezza che i capelli di quell'anima che si aggira senza requie nella dimora, e che continuerà a farlo anche quando i marosi avranno consumato l'ultima pietra maledetta, sono i biondi capelli di Lavinia" (Pelagio D'Afro 184).

narratorial voices and focalizations. As shown, along with untraditional and unexpected perspectives from which the narration is carried out, there is also a considerable multiplication in the narratorial voices and focalizations. Such a tendency contributes to making the narrative universe created by each novel more and more complex. That again fosters an immersive experience (Brook – Patti 14) for the reader, who has to face an intricate narration which obliges him to react with an increased cognitive response.

2.4 References to Popular Culture

The final feature that can be considered as a stylistic common denominator is the presence in these novels of several references to popular culture. Popular culture implies here a positive acceptance of the phrase, which is definitely distant from negative considerations such as Adorno's, who held popular culture as "a deadly serious business, as something that is ultimately toxic in its effects on the social process" (Witkin 1). Community-collectives' authors seem to take popular culture as deadly serious, especially considering Wu Ming's opinion that popular culture is increasingly more complex and requires for its users a greater cognitive effort.⁵⁶ Community-collectives' conception of the meaning of popular culture — overtly shared by Wu Ming and Kai Zen —⁵⁷ can be considered akin to sociologist Tim Delaney's definition, i.e. "the products and forms of expression and identity that are frequently encountered or widely accepted, commonly liked or approved, and characteristic of a particular society at a given time" (Delaney 6). In other words, it is "the culture of the people" (Browne in Delaney 6). Henry Jenkins as well considers

⁵⁶ "In realtà è tutta la cultura pop a essere sempre più complessa e articolata, e a richiedere a chi la fruisce un maggiore lavoro cognitivo" (Wu Ming 1 2006 26). [Actually the whole popular culture has become more and more complex and articulate, and its users are asked to do a greater cognitive effort" (Wu Ming 1 2006 26)].

⁵⁷ Both Wu Ming and Kai Zen participated actively to a critical debate about a reformulation of the idea of popular culture. Wu Ming 1 and Jadel Andreetto contributed to the volume *Pop Filosofia* edited by Simone Regazzoni, in which philosophy is practiced through a pop attitude and in which there is a "rethinking and a pop transformation of Deleuzian idea of the war machine" (Regazzoni) [Ripensamento e trasformazione pop dell'idea deleuziana di macchina da guerra (Regazzoni)].

popular culture as “what happens to the materials of mass culture when they get into the hands of consumers, when a song played on the radio becomes so associated with a particularly romantic evening that two young lovers decide to call it ‘our song,’ or [...] in other words, popular culture is what happens as mass culture gets pulled back into folk culture” (Jenkins 136).

Such an idea does not exclude the fact that these elements are widely diffused by mass culture, but rather concerns the positive sides related mainly to the reception of popular culture by the people — rather than focusing only on the negative aspects highlighted by Adorno such as “the interests of the producers and the exigencies of the market, both of which demanded the domination and manipulation of mass consciousness” (Witkin 2). The dissemination of pop elements throughout the narration could be seen as a stylistic feature that enhances the creation of an immersive experience for the reader in relation to the complexity of the narrative plot and the multiple shifts in the narratorial practice. Wu Ming 1, in particular, talks about the employment of popular elements as a programmatic feature of the New Italian Epic. Indeed, Wu Ming 1 affirms that the tendency of New Italian Epic texts is to obtain an immediate efficacy,⁵⁸ so that the author and the reader can establish a relationship, which leads to a further phase in which attention will be focused on the details of the narration. According again to Tim Delaney, people are surrounded daily by instances of popular culture because they “come from a wide array of genres, including popular music, print, cyber culture, sports, entertainment, leisure, fads, advertising and television” (Delaney 6). Consequently, their sources are the mass media in general, and the novels analyzed so far present several examples of such references.

⁵⁸ “I romanzi [...] [N. I. E.] hanno (o almeno cercano) un’efficacia di primo acchito, sono leggibili e godibili anche senza decrittare ogni aspetto, riconoscerne ogni citazione, rilevarne ogni arditezza stilistica o tematica” (Wu Ming 2009 b 97). [“[N. I. E.] novels have (or at least try to obtain) an immediate efficacy. They are readable and enjoyable even without decrypting every aspect, quotation, stylistic or thematic audacities” (Wu Ming 2009 b 97)].

2.4.1 Wu Ming — 54

Starting with *54*, the first element with a strong popular reference is noticeable in the selection of the protagonists. The author's decision to choose extremely popular figures such as Cary Grant and gangster Salvatore Lucania — a.k.a. Lucky Luciano — as part of the 'cast' can be considered a striking case. Both of them have been highly present in the mainstream mass media. In fact, Cary Grant holds the second position in the "50 Great American Screen Legends" listed by the American Film Institute, has acted in more than seventy movies,⁵⁹ and was the object of several non-fiction works.⁶⁰ Lucky Luciano as well played a central role because his character was staged in several movies and TV series, along with the fact that his criminal acts — which included also the illegal supplies of alcohol during prohibitionism — were discussed by newspapers and critical essays.⁶¹ However, the introduction of elements from popular culture is not a neutral action, and these popular figures are used in a specious way according to Wu Ming's literary project, in which particular historical moments and their well known protagonists are seen from an unexpected perspective and as important for the development of historical events as lived by normal people. Indeed, Cary Grant is depicted in *54* as an English spy who worked against Nazi Germany under cover in Hollywood during WWII and who is hired again by the British Secret Services to act in a strategic political movie about the Yugoslav general Tito. The popular figure of Cary Grant is thus employed to perform that "What If?" feature Wu Ming considers fundamental for the latest Italian narrative trend. According to Wu Ming's narrative hypothesis, Grant's pro-communist cinematographic contribution could have modified the destiny of the Cold War. Lucky Luciano too

⁵⁹ See Imdb page dedicated to Cary Grant <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000026/>.

⁶⁰ See WorldCat page dedicated to Cary Grant <http://worldcat.org/identities/lccn-n50-31212/>.

⁶¹ See WorldCat page dedicated to Lucky Luciano <http://www.worldcat.org/identities/lccn-n79-049596/>.

is partially acting according to a “What If?”⁶² tendency, especially when he reveals that his release from prison and his deportation to Italy were due to his dangerous information about the next Republican president candidate Thomas Dewey rather than to his help as an informer during the Normandy landings in 1944.

2.4.2 Kai Zen — *The Ram’s Strategy*

Kai Zen’s *The Ram’s Strategy* also entails several elements drawn from popular culture. However, compared to Wu Ming’s employment and re-transformation of pop icons; Kai Zen’s popular attitude seems more general. Indeed, the novel’s continuous and incessant journey through different times and places, chasing the mysterious Seth’s breath, sounds very akin to various movies and TV series which have appeared in the western media. Such a combination of adventures, history, and exoticism characterizing the novel makes the reader immediately think of movies such as Indiana Jones or James Bond 007. Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade is an evident pop reference, since a clear parallelism exists between the Nazis looking for the Holy Grail in Spielberg’s movie and the Nazis being involved too in the search of the arcane Seth’s Breath in Kai Zen’s text. The involvement of CIA and secret agencies in the novel’s events, likewise recalls thousands of movies, tv series, and books referring to covert activities.

Besides this popular combination of esotericism and history, further explicit references are made, for example, to the Golden Dawn society, which was present in Sherlock Holmes stories such as “The Maestro of Mysteries” or even in recent movies such as *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows*.

⁶² In the essay *New Italian Epic*, Wu Ming 1 talks about the tendency of Italian writers of choosing particular historical moment — i.e. “What If?” moments — in which the actual historical development is questioned. Indeed these moments are chosen to make the reader wonder about the other possible advancement of the events, so that a specific historic event can be seen as the conjunction of several contingencies rather than an inevitable and predestined fact (See Wu Ming 2009 b 34-37).

2.4.3 Paolo Agaraff — *The Fifth Cylinder*

Popular culture elements in Paolo Agaraff's *The Fifth Cylinder* are often used, as in Wu Ming's case, with a non neutral acceptance. Indeed, the authors often employ pop references in the novel and twist them, according to their ironic and humoristic style. For example, Sherlock Holmes' stories are employed again as a reference in the very beginning of the novel. The protagonists are driving not far from Reichenbach Falls — where Conan Doyle's hero apparently dies in the short story "The Final Problem" — and one of the protagonists throws up due to the curvy road. Further references to popular cultural elements are really numerous and always employed to create a comic short-circuit, such as when a cow is immobile in the middle of the street and Giacinto refers to her as the Mucca Carolina, which was an extremely well-known animal mascotte of the brand Invernizzi in their tv advertisements in Carosello in the 1960s. Also, several songs by The Beatles are employed, again in line with the same humorous attitude. For instance, *The Long and Winding Road* is implemented when the protagonists and Georg are driving further on an uneven street; likewise, the verse "the man with the foolish grin is keeping perfectly still" is used — from the song "*The Fool on the Hill*" — when the man they encountered in a mountain hut, who had insulted and had mocked Giacinto, is lying on the floor due to the protagonist's punch; and finally the verse "Please don't wake me up, no don't shake me" — from "*I'm Only Sleeping*" — when the protagonists wake up again ungraciously after their great adventures.

2.4.4 Pelagio D'Afro — *The Water is Silent*

Pelagio D'Afro's novel *The Water is Silent* is set in the beginning of the 20th century in a quite rural part of Italy, so it is not so easy to employ many elements of mass culture that are interiorized by people. The popular notion can be primarily recognized — such as in *The Ram's Strategy* — in some structural and general elements of the novel. Indeed, as Marco Amici affirms, an important feature of the noir novel is that it depicts an unfair world, in which "l'ingiustizia

sociale è un dato di fatto” (Amici 143). That is exactly what occurs in *The Water is Silent*, in which Renato is accused and incarcerated mainly due to his low class origins. This is known since no evidence was found by the investigators. Moreover, Amici affirms that “the driving force of noir narration is the worsening of the situation” (Amici 142), and that is indeed how the events in the narration unfold, since neither a disclosure of the initial murder nor any sense of justice occur. Besides the pop attitude of this novel, which is deployed through its relevance to the general structure of noir narrative, it can be argued that the presence of poet Gabriele D’Annunzio as one of the characters has a popular culture appeal. Indeed, during the novel some well-known poems written by D’Annunzio, especially *La Pioggia Nel Pineto*, are quoted and the authors overtly relate these poetic compositions to the narrative events. Such a narrative device represents certainly a way to attract readers’ attention, due D’Annunzio’s popularity. Therefore, the scene presents the unfolding of a highly positive considered poetic piece, which is presented in a way which debases the solemnity and the bombast generally related to D’Annunzio. Such a tendency confirms a similar way of treating popular culture elements as done by Paolo Agaraff.

2.5 Final Remarks

The analysis provided in the previous paragraphs shows that the community-collectives identified actually share some stylistic features. Features such as narrative fragmentation - both concerning plots and narratorial voices and focalizations — along with a pop tendency are effectively present in most of the novels produced by the writers ensemble at issue.

However, it seems difficult to affirm that these aesthetic elements are sufficient to declare that a community-collectives poetics can be clearly detected. Moreover, it is important to recognize that the characteristics which have been analyzed in depth so far correspond to a specific point Wu Ming 1 considers to belong to the literary trend he calls New Italian Epic.

Indeed, Wu Ming 1, talking about the more experimental Italian artworks, affirms that one of their main features is that they combine at the same time complexity and popular attitude.⁶³ First of all, this fact may raise the question of whether community-collectives' stylistic feature, although it does not create a poetics of its own, could be included in the New Italian Epic trend. Since Wu Ming 1 considers New Italian Epic as constituted mainly by artworks rather than by writers and that a NIE text should entail at least three of the eight characteristics, he highlights in this literary tendency that it seems difficult to include the category of community-collectives automatically. Indeed, not every feature Wu Ming identified is evident in community-collectives artworks; therefore, it seems more appropriate to affirm that these collectives share some stylistic features such as some other experimental artists.

Moreover, the fact that this stylistic feature has been detected by Wu Ming may arise a further question about the actual influence Wu Ming exercised on the other collectives at stake. Such an issue has to be postponed until the conclusion, when some considerations will be attempted about the reasons why several writers ensembles — and community-collectives in particular — were created in Italy and not elsewhere.

However, it seems that a community-collective poetics could not be detected focusing exclusively on stylistic features because it results in these collectives sharing aesthetic characteristics which are shared as well by authors who do not fit the category. Thus, the analysis of community-collectives should be deepened, in order to investigate whether or not they present any peculiar feature which define a shared poetics. The next chapter will focus on the political attitude of these collectives. This aspect may appear as that peculiar element this analysis is trying to highlight.

⁶³ “Il New Italian Epic è complesso e popolare allo stesso tempo, o almeno è alla ricerca di tale connubio” (Wu Ming 2009 b 32). [New Italian Epic is complex and popular at the same time, or is trying at least to reach such a union” (Wu Ming 2009 b 32)]

Chapter 3. Community-Collectives' Poetics and the Political Element.

3.1 Introduction

Community-collectives' political attitude will be analyzed in this final chapter, in order to determine if community-collectives' political tendency could be considered as a specific element in defining their poetics. Such an investigation of a political tendency of such groups of writers will go beyond an analysis of the narrative contents of the collectives at stake. I will try to focus on more structural issues, such as the political effects of community-collectives' form of authorship and their projects with readers' involvement. In order to understand what the adjective political means in this context, it is useful to address Aristotle, one of the first western philosophers who attempted to theorize the issue of politics in its entirety. The first book of Aristotle's work considers that communities — and afterwards states — gather together to reach the 'good,' as expressed in the following excerpt:

Every state is a community of some kind, and every community is established with a view to some good; for mankind always acts in order to obtain that which they think good. But, if all communities aim at some good, the state or political community, which is the highest of all, and which embraces all the rest, aims, and in a greater degree than any other, at the highest good. (Aristotle 25)

The term politics originates from the Greek word "polis," meaning "town". Hence, politics is implicitly intended by Aristotle as a drive towards the good of polis, which can be carried out through different forms of government. Besides the various types of government mentioned by Aristotle, community-collectives seem to undertake themselves politically — namely working toward the common good — according to a democratic vision. When it is as direct as possible, democracy implies the active participation and involvement of the people to act politically and to

reach a shared, communitarian equality and sense of good. Therefore, on the basis of what just said, a democratic political stance can be recognized in several aspects of community-collectives activity.

The first section will consider this democratic political attitude by paying attention to the issue of authorship enacted by the four collectives at stake. First of all, the notion of the ‘Death of the Author’ proposed by Roland Barthes in the popular homonym essay — and which has been so influential among critics — is questioned. Indeed the author does not disappear — as the Irish scholar Sean Burké affirms in several essays — but what is more, the author multiplies itself, as is the case of community-collectives and collective writing groups in general. Such a multiplication of the author — who nevertheless refuses that status Carla Benedetti names “author-image” —⁶⁴ can be said to enact a particular form of authorship, since it fosters a sense of democratic collaboration within the members. Community-collectives’ form of authorship allows for a democratic reformulation of the notion of the author and, consequently, of its role with the readers. Moreover, a further element which is certainly aligned with a democratic form of authorship is community-collectives’ tendency to circulate their works for free in a digital format. Hence, community-collectives tend to publish their artworks using mainly creative commons licenses. That means that their works can be freely downloaded and distributed, thus promoting both a resistance to the overwhelming capitalistic logic dominating the cultural industry and a democratization of art.

Furthermore, in the second section the analysis of such a democratic political attitude is deepened by showing (mainly) its positive potentiality and some structural limitations. First of all, community-collectives’ literary activity can be said to further convey a political sense of democracy. This is particularly visible looking at the working involvement of the readers in communitarian projects on the web, as it was already mentioned in the first chapter. Indeed, the present society can be seen, according to the German philosophers Adorno and Horkheimer, as

⁶⁴ See Carla Benedetti’s essay *L’Ombra Lunga Dell’Autore. Indagine su Una Figura Cancellata*, in which the Italian scholar investigates widely the concept of authorship.

massified and then characterized by a sense of “atomization,” which “is mainly related to the progressive fragmentation of intermediate socio-aggregative institutions such as groups and social classes” (Rosito 28).⁶⁵ Involving the audience through the web in a process of “participation” — according to Ann Macintosh’s sense of the term, that will be further explained — can therefore be seen strongly as a political act. Moreover, this kind of participation can be seen as a working way to promote democracy — though in the virtual form of e-democracy — since readers have the opportunity to participate, discuss, and see the recognition of their intervention.

Moreover, such an active involvement — beyond fostering a wider democratic participation of the readers in creative and decisional enterprises — may also have revolutionary results. Community-collectives’ activity seems as deeply homologue to Fredric Jameson’s concept of “cognitive mapping,” which the American scholar develops in his seminal text *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991). Both community-collectives’ activity and Jameson’s concept share some structural features, so that it may be argued that communitarian literary projects could be an actualization of cognitive mapping. According to Tanner Mirrless’s essay “Cognitive Mapping or, the Resistant Element in the Work of Fredric Jameson: A Response to Jason Berger” — i.e. a reading of Jameson’s cognitive mapping as a resistant concept — it may be argued that community-collectives foster a democratic and revolutionary tendency as well.

On the other hand, there are some limitations in the positive political opportunities of promoting democracy and a revolutionary project towards a common good. Indeed, since most of the readers’ participation and involvement are basically dependent on the employment of the Internet, it has to be said that inner structural limitations are implied in this medium. Moreover, some structural limitations to the realization of a democratic project is inherent to community-collectives as well.

⁶⁵ “Nella teoria sociale adorniana l’atomizzazione, in quanto aspetto della massificazione, è legata principalmente alla progressiva frammentazione delle istituzioni socio-aggregative intermedie quali i gruppi e le classi” (Rosito 28).

3.1 Democratic Authorship: From Author to author(s).

In order to consider the issue of authorship in relation to community-collectives, it is imperative to step back and to start with one of the most prominent positions in the academic debate in the last four decades. According to Roland Barthes's seminal essay *The Death of the Author* (1967), in texts "it is language which speaks, not the author" (Barthes, in Burke 126). Barthes affirms that:

As soon as a fact is *narrated* no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively, that is to say, finally outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself, this disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins. (Barthes, in Burke 125)

Barthes's idea, which promoted the total dismissal of a real human authority and agency about the written word, was proposed for years by structuralist and post-structuralist critics, such as Derrida and Foucault. However, such "anti-authorial discourses" (Burke 2008 8) have never really succeeded in destroying the notion of the author, which remains an "unquiet presence which theory can neither explain nor exorcise" (Burke 2008 184). In fact, Sean Burke claims that much of the debate arose due to the post structural intention of bridging the "hiatus" between "the death of the author" as an "experimental approach to discourse" and as "the truth of writing itself" (Burke 2008 168). The Irish scholar considers any anti-authorialist conception as tautological, since its explanations follow the schematic path "subjectivity is put to one side, therefore subjectivity does not exist" (Burke 169) and also as an "intra-critical statement" (Burke 2008 169), regarding "a certain way of reading rather than any 'truth of reading'" (Burke 2008 169). Scholar Carla Benedetti as well sustains that the 'Death of the Author' represents an absurd myth of our times, since "according to the theories in which it is absorbed, the myth favors — rather than the author —

either language, or writing, else reading — anyway text and texts”(Benedetti 13-14).⁶⁶ However, Benedetti continues saying that: “It occurs a shift, since the *artwork* —i.e. a notion which implies an author, as it is created by someone — is replaced by the *text* —a connective tissue, lacking organs and muscle, lacking a superior nerve center”- (Benedetti 13-14). Such an idea is unrealistic for the Italian scholar, who conversely sees actually an authorial hypertrophy ongoing. That is due to the inner dynamic of the experience of art in general according to Carla Benedetti, since unless authorialism is present —⁶⁷ i.e. a clear and detectable artistic intention and signature — , there is not recognition of any artistic status of the artwork. Carla Benedetti affirms that the author has not died at all, but he is definitely present and ineradicable from the current (Western) idea of art. Burke as well, besides criticizing anti-authorial discourses, declares that the author is still definitely there. However, Burke clearly suggests to “reposition authorship as a situated activity present not so much to itself as to culture, ideology, language, difference, influence, biography” (Burke xxvii). That means basically “a view of subjectivity [...] which is neither a limit nor a limiting concept, but one which enables reading to pass beyond the constraining play of [authorial] transcendence and disappearance” (Burke xxvii). Another scholar such as Howard Love in his essay *Attributing Authorship. An Introduction* (2002), although he considers it impossible to repudiate totally such influential de-authorial theories, shares “a belief in the reality of individuality” (Love 10), which somehow sidelines post-structuralist claims regarding the absence of a concrete author and which somehow returns to several human agents benefits and obligations of writing.

Such a reconsideration of authorship, as inherently related, to the subject leads back to the issue of community-collectives. The form of authorship Wu Ming, Kai Zen, Paolo Agaraff, and

⁶⁶ “A seconda delle teorie in cui viene inglobato, il mito porta in primo piano, in opposizione all’autore, ora il linguaggio, ora la scrittura, ora la lettura e, in ogni caso, il testo e i testi” (Benedetti 13-14). However Carla Benedetti does not reject in toto as Burke Barthes. Derrida. and Foucault. Michel Foucault’s idea of the author-function is marinated by Carla Benedetti, and all of her essay *L’Ombra Lunga Dell’Autore* takes Foucault’s concept as a starting point.

⁶⁷ “L’autorialismo è un particolare investimento sulla funzione-autore che fa sì che un’opera d’arte non possa esistere se non in quanto prodotto di un autore” (Benedetti 17). [“Authorialism is a particular investment on the authorial-function which ensures that an artwork exists only as a product created by an author” (Benedetti 17)].

Pelagio D'Afro enact can be considered as definitely converging on the issue of the subject. First of all, Occam's razor logic should be enough to deter those who would still claim the effectiveness of anti-authorial discourses such as Barthes's Death of the author, due to the actual multiplication of subjects-authors — although behind a pseudonym. Although some of the community-collectives employ a pseudonym referring to anonymous entities — since Wu Ming means “anonymous”⁶⁸ and Kai Zen “continuous improvement” —, such a strategy can be seen more akin to an attempt to avoid a consumeristic exploitation carried out by the cultural industry of the author as a brand.

At this point, it is possible to paraphrase Izabela Napiórkowska's idea about Wu Ming in her essay “Da Luther Blissett a Wu Ming: La poetica della letteratura rivoluzionata” about the collective's form of authorship. The Polish scholar sustains that there is a shift from an “Author” with the capital letter to an “author”, as the role of the author is problematized due to a refusal of any literary star-worship (See Napiórkowska 223). Hence, this concept can be extended to the category of community-collectives and to the use of the expression “from Author to authors,” so that a twofold democratic political sense becomes observable — i.e. a democratic reconsideration of the role of the author and a democratic relationship between writer-writer and writer-reader. First of all, most of the community-collectives tend to reject the Romantic idea of the writer chosen by a divine genius, by adopting different strategies of debasing the traditional authority implied in the figure of the author. This can be clearly seen as a political and democratic act, since there is a refusal of an aristocratic and elitist vision of literature. Such a role debasement, from Author to authors implies that the writer regains a position which is no more fostering to a cultural superiority than towards the readers. In its “Appunti per una dichiarazione dei diritti (e dei doveri) dei narratori” (“Notes for a declaration of rights (and duties) of narrators”), Wu Ming exerts that it is the collective which has programmatically and overtly developed such a political and democratic stance. In this kind of manifesto, Wu Ming states that “the narrator is not an artist, but a craftsman of literature” (Wu Ming

⁶⁸ It is important to remember that Wu Ming could mean also “five people”, as the number composing Wu Ming's first unit.

2000).⁶⁹ Wu Ming, moreover, affirms in the same text that it is a narratorial duty “not to confuse story-making [...] with an excessive tendency to autobiography and narcissistic ostentation” (Wu Ming 2000).⁷⁰ Furthermore, according to Wu Ming, it is also a narrator’s right “not to appear in the media,” “not to become a trained beast for parlours and literary gossip,” and “not to answer to questions he does not consider pertinent (i.e. about his private life, sexual orientation, culinary tastes, daily habits etc)” (Wu Ming 2000).⁷¹ Such a strategy, Wu Ming defines as “transparency to readers, opacity against media” (De Lorenzis – Wu Ming 246).⁷² The strategy assumes a political stance, against what Carla Benedetti defines ‘author-image’, created by that cultural industry which foster the creatuin of an authorial image for marketing purposes.⁷³ In accordance to such a programmatic idea of the narrator as a craftsman refusing idolatry, Wu Ming, thus, also refuses the broadcasting of any of the members’ photographies and asks the participants of conferences in which they partake not to take pictures. Kai Zen’s democratic political stance is aligned with Wu Ming’s idea of a reformulation of the role of the author, since it considers that writing collectively entails “an exorcism of the author with respect to his role, which is meant no more with that sacrality and inviolability which often made him sclerotized”(Kai Zen, Paolo Agaraff et al. 14). Kai Zen sustanins that the author has to ‘get off the pedestal,’ since “writing to glorify yourself is the

⁶⁹ “In altre parole, il narratore non è un artista, ma un *artigiano* della letteratura” (Wu Ming 2000).

⁷⁰ “Il narratore ha il dovere di non confondere l'*affabulazione*, sua missione principale, con un eccesso di autobiografismo ossessivo e di ostentazione narcisistica” (Wu Ming 2000).

⁷¹ “Il narratore ha diritto a non apparire nei media. [...] Il narratore ha diritto a non diventare una bestia ammaestrata da salotto o da *gossip* letterario. Il narratore ha diritto a non rispondere a domande che non giudica pertinenti (sulla propria vita privata, preferenze sessuali, gusti culinari, abitudini quotidiane etc.)” (Wu Ming 2000).

⁷² “Come nei mesi che seguirono l'uscita di *Q*, la nostra linea di condotta sarà: «Essere presenti, ma non apparire: trasparenza di fronte ai lettori, opacità verso i media»” (De Lorenzis – Wu Ming 246). [As we did after the publication of *Q*, our policy will be: «To be present, but not showing off: transparency to readers, opacity against media” (De Lorenzis – Wu Ming 246)].

⁷³ “Sono [...] [i] fitti rimandi all’autore, e dall’autore ad altri autori, che fanno esistere il testo per lettori e acquirenti. Come sa bene l’industria editoriale, dove la costruzione dell’immagine dell’autore ha acquistato un’importanza decisiva ai fini della promozione” (Carla Benedetti 11). [The text exists for its readers and purchasers due to the several references to the author, and to further authors. Cultural industry knows it well, since in such an industry the creation of the author-image has acquired a decisive importance for marketing” (Carla Benedetti 11)].

most common fault” (Kai Zen — Wu Ming Interview).⁷⁴ That does not involve — according again to Kai Zen — the Death of the Author, but a new phase for the author that “accepts again the responsibility of providing his own reading of the world, and regains in this way a central role within his own community” (Kai Zen, Paolo Agaraff et al. 14).⁷⁵ Although Kai Zen’s democratic idea of the role of the author is very similar to Wu Ming’s, it does not share the latter’s collective rigid offensive against media exploitation of the authorial image — Kai Zen even having each members’ photo on the *The Ram’s Strategy* back cover. Paolo Agaraff — and consequently at least two-fourths of Pelagio D’Afro — considers itself mainly as a “storyteller” (Kai Zen, Paolo Agaraff et al. 10). Both the collectives from the Marche region — although they do not refuse to broadcast members’s images — appear as sharing a disinterest similar to the other community-collectives towards the kind of authorial status promoted by the cultural industry originating in the Romantic idea of the literary ‘genius’. First of all, they debase any Romantic narcissism by providing ironic and non-sensical biographies. For instance, Paolo Agaraff defines itself as an author composed by “three (more or less) sentient bipeds” (Kai Zen, Paolo Agaraff et al. 8),⁷⁶ and declares itself as ‘happily schizophrenic’.⁷⁷ Pelagio D’Afro’s biography sounds as ironic and desecrating as Paolo Agaraff’s — of whom he declares he is the unrecognized son —, due to his schizophrenia and his dedication to literary-alcoholic rituals. Moreover, both Paolo Agaraff and Pelagio D’Afro promote a

⁷⁴ “[Innovazione nella scrittura è] scendere dal piedistallo, scrivere senza pensare di apporre la propria firma sotto il titolo dell’opera. e non per tentazioni “vetero-comuniste”, ma perché scrivere per glorificarsi è il difetto più comune” (Kai Zen — Wu Ming Interview) [[An innovation in writing is] getting off the pedestal, writing not to sign the artwork. That is not due to old-fashioned communist temptations, but it is due to the fact that writing to glorify yourself is the most common fault Kai Zen — Wu Ming Interview)].

⁷⁵ “Non si vuole però decretare la morte dell’autore in favore dell’autonomia del testo e della centralità della figura del lettore [...] L’autore al contrario accetta di nuovo la responsabilità di fornire una propria lettura del mondo e recupera così un ruolo centrale nella sua stessa comunità” (Kai Zen, Paolo Agaraff et al. 14).

⁷⁶ “La nascita di un simile mostro [cioè Paolo Agaraff] risale a una calda notte dell’estate del 2001, quando tre bipedi (più o meno) senzienti capirono che una fusione delle loro anomalie poteva produrre un abbozzo di autore” (Kai Zen, Paolo Agaraff et al. 8). [Such a monster [i.e. Paolo Agaraff] was born on a warm summer night in 2001, when three (more or less) sentient bipeds understood that the combination of their anomalies could produce a pseudo-author (Kai Zen, Paolo Agaraff et al. 8)].

⁷⁷ See the whole humorous biography section on Paolo Agaraff’s website paoloagaraff.com.

further ironic debasement of the authorial image by the “official” pictures which they created.

Indeed both the collectives ironically combine the faces of their members– to represent the multiple identities of each collective,⁷⁸ and they reach the grotesque result shown in Figure 3.

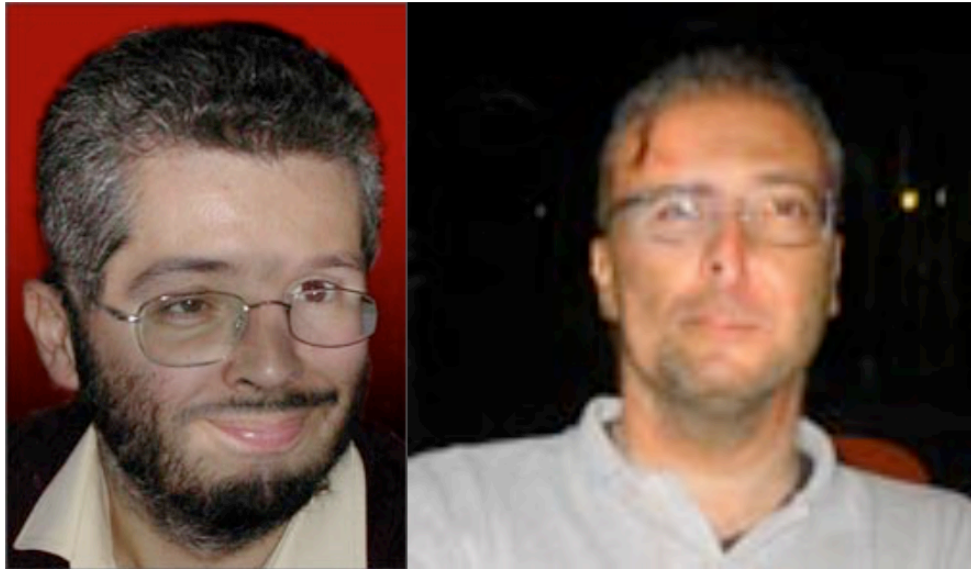


Figure 3. On the left Paolo Agaraff's, on the right Pelagio D'Afro. Source: Paolo Agaraff. "La Galleria dei Ritratti." paoloagaraff.com n.d., n.p. Web. 03 March 2015. <<http://>

The form of authorship enacted by community-collectives thus entails an inherent politically democratic stance, due to an anti-romantic — and sometimes ironic — reconsideration of the role of the author. Moreover, a strong political sense of democracy regulates first of all the inner logic of every writing ensemble, and then the relationship between the collectives and the readers. Such a democratic relationship between the collective's writers is noticeable in the fluid balance in the collective writing process. Indeed, what occurs is basically the recognition of the singular subject participating and, at the same time, the exaltation of the communitarian aim rather than the praise of the single member. As it was mentioned in the first chapter, Beniamino Sidoti affirms it is

⁷⁸ Paolo Agaraff's website has a further specific section named "La galleria dei ritratti" ("Portraits Gallery") which hold some parodic pictures which combines the writer's appearances. Wu Ming as well, at the time in which it was still part of the Luther Blissett Project, provided a fake picture which was used by the whole movement. It was realized by Andrea Alberti and Edi Bianco combining Wu Ming 1's relatives photographs (See Wu Ming <http://www.wumingfoundation.com/italiano/biografia.htm>).

the shared “review” process of collective writing that assures a relevance of the utopian value of the text, along with a political sense of democracy. Each community-collective has developed its own method to guarantee a democratic review of the final version of any artwork. From several interviews, in which community-collectives speak about their own way to create a collective-writing text, emerges that a democratic discussion regulates the internal relationship and review of the communitarian activity. Wu Ming 4 affirms that every chapter of the collective’s novel is read aloud and all members have to be non submissive in order to obtain a decent product.⁷⁹ Kai Zen talks as well of a continuous process of feedback and commentary occurring between the members, since everyone intervenes actively in the other’s writing in order to reach “an amalgam based on objectivity” (Kai Zen - Lombardo 7).⁸⁰ Paolo Agaraff and Pelagio D’Afro, whose method is exactly the same (See. Paolo Agaraff Interview 1), consider “the discussion with the members of the group” as an activity which “enriches writing and allows to eliminate the flaws of the text” (Kai Zen, Paolo Agaraff et al. 9).⁸¹ Their method, based on a mix of sequential single-writing and reactive writing, implies the obligation to motivate the most important changes (See. Kai Zen, Paolo Agaraff et al. 9). This means that through a democratic discussion and an iterative process of continuous reviewing, it is possible to reach a common style and to fix the defects of the initial drafts.

The political democratic process, which underlies community-collectives writing procedures, reveals the importance of each individual in the communitarian creative process. Moreover, as was mentioned in the first chapter, it can be argued that community-collectives are able to perform the kind of status of ‘being-in-common’ that Nancy considered a basic feature of his concept of community. Indeed Nancy’s idea was related to the fact that community-collectives are based on a particular form of collaboration which does not prevent their members from pursuing their singular

⁷⁹ “Il patto: non essere concilianti. Litighiamo creativamente. La chiamiamo ‘mediazione al rialzo’ (Wu Ming Interview). [Our agreement is not having a conciliatory attitude. We argue creatively. We call it ‘average up’” (Wu Ming Interview)].

⁸⁰ “Lo stile K[ai] Z[en] nasce così. Un amalgama basata sull’obiettività” (Kai Zen - Lombardo 7).

⁸¹ “Il confronto con gli altri componenti del gruppo arricchisce la scrittura e aiuta a eliminare le perfezioni del testo” (Kai Zen, Paolo Agaraff et al. 9).

artistic path. This attitude can be seen as implied in the democracy-based relationship underlying community-collectives. In fact, that gives members the opportunity to not force themselves to partake to a totalitarian project which may erase their singularity, shifting thus from a positive status of ‘being-in-common’ to a negative condition of ‘common-being’.

A democratic form of authorship is thus what emerges from the analysis of community-collectives’ position on the role of the author and from a further consideration of the democratic relationship provided by the internal writing processes and relationships between members. Such an idea of the author should be related further to the way community-collectives act towards a real democratic encounter with their readers, i.e. the free diffusion of most of their artworks in a digital format. All of the collectives at stake made at least one of their novels freely downloadable, so that it seems that they are all fostering actively a democratic way to have access to literature. In particular all of these free artworks are published online under a Creative Commons License, namely free copyright licenses which “provide a simple, standardized way to give the public permission to share” anyone’s work (Creative Commons). Actually Wu Ming started publishing artworks which could be freely shared and downloaded before creative commons license was developed; at the time, the collective was still part of Luther Blissett project. As journalist Antonella Beccaria remarks, “*Q* was the first novel published with a copyright note which was enough to frighten. That was valued by the people nourishing Italian publishing industry as a further oddity by a group of unconventional intellectuals [...]” (Beccaria 24).⁸² Thus, Wu Ming represents a forerunner for such a way of publishing, which has never stopped since 1999. The collective published all of its artworks as freely downloadable on its website, and all the rest of the community-collectives followed Wu Ming’s example, although some of them just partially. Kai Zen published under creative commons licenses the novels *La Strategia dell’Ariete* (*The Ram’s Strategy*) and *Delta Blues*. These novels represent its whole novelistic production. Paolo Agaraff as well

⁸² “[Q] è stato il primo romanzo a uscire con una nota di copyright che ha fatto impallidire, valutata dal volgo che nutre le fila dell’editoria italiana come l’ennesima bizzarria di un gruppo di intellettuali fuori dalle righe [...]” (Beccaria 24).

published under Creative Commons License two novels, *Le Rane di Koh Samui* (*The Frogs of Koh Samui*), *Il Quinto Cilindo* (*The Fifth Cylinder*) and *La Classe non è Acqua* (*Blood Will Out*). Pelagio D'Afro published only one novel with such a license, namely *I Ciccioni Esplosivi* (*The Explosive Fatties*), a prequel for Agaraff's *The Frogs of Koh Samui*. Among community-collectives, it seems that only Wu Ming and Kai Zen decided to make their whole bibliography freely available on the Internet, while Paolo Agaraff and Pelagio D'Afro agreed to publish only some of their novels this way. However, although some more than others, it seems undeniable that community-collectives' way of employing Creative Commons Licenses works towards the creation of a free access to culture and is strictly related to the form of authorship these collectives enact. By refusing the Romantic idea of the author on which the cultural industry has built a system of economic exploitation, using creative commons licenses is a way to destabilize and exploit the market – since the employment of these forms of copyleft do not decrease the sales. Likewise, it makes the culture more democratic, which is in line with Levy's idea of fostering collective intelligence.

3.2 Community-Collectives' Communitarian Activity: E-democratic and Revolutionary Potentialities.

Community-collectives' political stance can be further analyzed in relation to their activity, especially in those practices which allow them to create a particular close connection to the readers. It can be argued that the four collectives at issue promote a form of democracy through an active involvement of the readers. Moreover, community-collectives' literary activity can be said to convey not only democracy, but even revolutionary instances aiming for 'common good' — as the chosen definition of politics affirms.

According to official data provided by the government, the rate of abstention in the last two elections — i.e. European elections in 2014 and regional elections in 2015 — has increased

dramatically.⁸³ Thus the ‘abstention party’ — as several newspapers defined such a tremendous amount of not-voting people — has arithmetically reached the majority, in such a clear and alarming scenario regarding people’s low active interest in politics is already paramount.

Since it seems so difficult today to engage people in politics, it can be argued that community-collectives’s attempt to involve people actively in a creative process is a political act. These participatory activities, in which people can share with the artists the act of literary production, can be seen as politically oriented towards the diffusion of a general sense of democracy, or better e-democracy. Such a comparison between a participative literary enterprise and a strictly political and governmental issue of e-democracy can be proposed to be due to a strong homology between these practices. In particular, professor Ann Macintosh’s essay “Characterizing E-Participation in Policy-Making” — which considers the issue of citizens’ online engagement in governmental projects — provides an interesting definition of e-democracy and a further theoretical framework of web-participation, which can be put in relation with community-collectives’ media focused attitude towards their readers. According to Macintosh, e-democracy can be defined as follows:

[E]-democracy is concerned with the use of information and communication technologies to engage citizens, support the democratic decision-making processes and strengthen representative democracy. The principal ICT mechanism is the Internet accessed through an increasing variety of channels, including PCs, both in the home and in public locations, mobile phones, and interactive digital TV. The democratic decision making processes can be divided into two main categories: one addressing the electoral process, including e-voting, and the other addressing citizen e-participation in democratic decision-making. (Macintosh 2)

⁸³ See Studio Post-Elettorale 2014. ELEZIONI EUROPEE 2014. Sintesi Analitica <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/eurobarometre/2014/post/post_2014_survey_analitica_overview_it.pdf>

Elezioni 2015. Comunali del 31 Maggio 2015 - Ballottaggio <<http://elezioni.interno.it/comunali/votanti/20150531/>

[Gvotanti.htm](#)>

Thus, it is possible to detect a structural homology between the issue of e-democracy and community-collectives' democratic approach towards the issue of a shared creative process. In particular, the e-democracy category, which fits most the characteristics of the writers ensembles at issue, is one interested in fostering e-participation in decision-making processes. Indeed, asking readers to contribute to the actual writing of an artwork is definitely an activity which entails a decision-making process involving the community of readers who decides to participate. Starting from the aforementioned working definition of e-democracy, Ann Macintosh detects ten key dimensions which constitute a theoretical framework to analyze the way e-democracy is fostered by government activities. The key dimensions highlighted in the essay are the following: 1) Level of participation; 2) Stage in decision making; 3) Actors; 4) Technologies used; 5) Rules of engagement; 6) Duration and sustainability; 7) Accessibility; 8) Resources and promotion; 9) Evaluation and outcomes; 10) Critical success factors. (cf. Macintosh 2-6).

The first dimension of "Level of participation," which considers "to what level, or how far, citizens are engaged" (Macintosh 2), appears as one of the most interesting in relation to community-collectives. Three fundamental working terms concerning democratic political participation are previously highlighted, namely "Information", i.e. "a one-way relationship in which government produces and delivers information for use by citizens" (Macintosh 2); "Consultation," i.e. "a two-way relationship in which citizens provide feedback to government" (Macintosh 2); "Active participation," i.e. "a relationship based on partnership with government in which citizens actively engage in defining the process and content of policy-making," and in which nevertheless "the responsibility for the final decision rests with government" (Macintosh 2). On this basis, Macintosh develops thus three levels "to characterize e-democracy initiatives" (Macintosh 2). The first is "e-enabling," which is "about supporting those who would not typically access the Internet and take advantage of the large amount of information available" (Macintosh 2). The second one is "e-engaging," which "is concerned with consulting a

wider audience to enable deeper contributions and support deliberative debate on policy issues” (Macintosh 2). Finally, the third is “e-empowering,” which “is concerned with supporting active participation and facilitating bottom-up ideas to influence the political agenda.” In particular, this level of participation entails that “there is recognition that there is a need to allow citizens to influence and participate in policy formulation” (Macintosh 2).

The active participation level feature is definitely dominant, so that the level of participation which appears as suitable for community-collectives’ activity is that of e-empowering. Indeed, community-collectives communitarian projects could be seen as projection of the same ideological drive underlying the level of “e-empowering” participation, since the authors at issue are concerned with supporting readers’ involvement and facilitating bottom-up ideas to influence the “artistic” agenda. Thus, community-collectives appear to recognizing the need to allow readers to influence and participate in “artistic” formation. Starting from Wu Ming, the communitarian project entitled *Corazza’s Ballad (La Ballata del Corazza)* can be taken as an example. This project was structured as an open source text, in which every reader had the opportunity to modify by sending his/her comments to the collective. Wu Ming 2 presented the project as following on the collective’s website:

The main idea was to write a short story, to make it available on the website, and to ask anybody to read it and to give back to us any kind of feedback: comments, possible re-writing, final changes, dialogues modifications. Anyone could have created his own version, and then give it back to us somehow. We would welcome every proposal, then we

would make the most convincing changes, and produce the new ‘official’ version of the story. (Wu Ming 2)⁸⁴

Given that the readers able to comment, to modify the story, and to distribute it by a creative-common license, it seems clear that such a project worked according to an e-democratic principle. In fact, the story was open to any sort of modification, but the final decision was still a Wu Ming’s prerogative — as implied by Macintosh’s notion of active participation, which underlies e-empowering level. However, due to some readers’ complaints about the scarce degree of democracy regarding the fact that author still had the final decision on any further rewriting, Wu Ming also provided a wiki-edition of the story. This version did not involve Wu Ming’s control, but proceeded as a reactive-writing process, in which everyone could freely intervene.⁸⁵

Kai Zen’s novel *Spauracchi* can be considered an example of a communitarian literary project. The novel is structured as a *Romanzo Totale*, in which Kai Zen wrote three chapters while the remaining seven — and three alternative conclusions — were composed by users and selected by the ensemble. The e-democratic process guaranteed that readers have the opportunity to write, and Kai Zen have the final selection of the most apt chapters. *Spauracchi* appears, moreover, as related to government politics, since Assessorato Cultura italiana of Trentino Alto Adige actively participated to facilitate the project. As the Bolzano province cultural assessor states, such a collective project is aligned with the cultural department’s aims, i.e. “promoting the territory and fostering the analysis of events involving the local community”(Cigolla 7).⁸⁶ Thus, Kai Zen’s

⁸⁴ “L’idea era quella di scrivere un racconto, di renderlo disponibile sul sito, di chiedere a chiunque lo volesse di leggerlo e poi di restituirci qualsiasi tipo di feedback: commenti, riscritture possibili, modifiche del finale, variazioni nei dialoghi. Chiunque avrebbe potuto creare la sua versione del racconto, per poi restituircela in qualche modo. Da parte nostra avremmo raccolto tutte le proposte, apportato le modifiche più convincenti, prodotto una nuova versione ‘ufficiale’ della storia” (Wu Ming 2).

⁸⁵ However it is difficult to estimate today the results produced by such an operation, since the website hosting Wu Ming’s wiki version of the novel is offline now.

⁸⁶ [Obiettivi] [...] che l’Assessorato persegue da tempo [sono]: da una parte quello di far conoscere il territorio e dall’altra quello di favorire le capacità di analisi degli avvenimenti che coinvolgono la comunità locale” (Cigolla 7).

communitarian project, besides acting politically through readers active engagement in an e-democratic creative process, succeeded in involving also the local government. This can be taken as a successful case in which a convergence between artists, readers, and institutions produced an interested involvement centered on a democratic process, since all of the participants had a decisive role in the actualization of the project.

Proceeding with the remaining collectives, Paolo Agaraff and Pelagio D'Afro appear as well to foster a sense of e-democratic participation, although in a less radical way than Wu Ming and Kai Zen. Indeed both the collectives from the Marche region partake to a communitarian project named 'Carboneria Letteraria,' in which members participate in several narrative projects both as single and collective authors.⁸⁷ However, Roberto Fogliardi — members of both Paolo Agaraff and Pelagio D'Afro — confirmed that the actual structure of Carboneria Letteraria was born basically as a creative laboratory, thus the project was not open to anyone to contribute as was the case in Wu Ming and Kai Zen's communitarian project. Fogliardi indeed affirms that:

As any respectable secret congregation [Carboneria was a secret mason society founded in Italy in the nineteenth century], Carboneria Letteraria started by a group of friends, with shared interests and aims, and every inclusion of members were sponsored at first by core members and then by new associates. Every new member has to be approved unanimously. This is necessary to keep a cohesive and harmonious group. (Paolo Agaraff and Pelagio D'Afro Interview)⁸⁸

⁸⁷ See Carboneria Letteraria's "Chi Siamo" section on the website carbonerialetteraria.com for further information.

⁸⁸ "Come ogni congrega carbonara o stregonessa che si rispetti, la Carboneria Letteraria è nata da un gruppo di amici, con interessi e obiettivi comune, e le aggiunte sono nate da candidature portate dai membri del nucleo iniziale e poi dai nuovi affiliati. Tutti i nuovi membri devono essere approvati all'unanimità. Questo al fine di mantenere il gruppo coeso e in armonia" (Paolo Agaraff and Pelagio D'Afro Interview).

Thus, both collectives appear to not promote on a wide level an e-democratic creative process such as promoted by Wu Ming and Kai Zen. Although Carboneria Letteraria seems to foster a sense of democratic creative collaboration, such a process remains closed within the limits of the writers' community, preventing a real exchange with the audience. However, Paolo Agaraff's readers can be actively involved in creative and narrative processes as well. Just as Wu Ming and Kai Zen's communitarian projects allow the readers to intervene actively, Paolo Agaraff created a free-download section of role-playing setting referred to its novels, as *Le Rane di Koh Samui (The Frogs of Koh Samui)*, *Il Quinto Cilindro (The Fifth Cylinder)* and *Il Sangue non è Acqua (Blood Will Come Out)*. Paolo Agaraff was born as a project among members deeply interested in role-playing, i.e. "a game where participants pretend to be the characters of a story they invent move by move, under the eyes of a Master (or Narrator)" (GdR 2).⁸⁹ Macintosh's definition of active participation entailed a fluid balance between people's engagement and an ultimate control of the government. In the case of role-playing, the process is homologue because Agaraff's readers can actively participate in the re-writing and the re-experiencing of their stories. However, the boundaries of the story remain those primarily established by the collective.

Community-collectives' web communitarian projects, although in different and sometimes incomplete ways, appear to foster a form of democracy or e-democracy by fostering a form of active participation among the community of readers. As Lee Komito affirms in the essay "Community and inclusion: the impact of new communications technologies," active participation is guaranteed only if citizens' participation has "the capacity to alter policy outcomes" and if they see it "to have that capacity" (Komito 90). Moreover, it has to be acknowledged that Macintosh's definition of e-empowering has to entail fundamentally the psychological acceptance of the concept of empowering. Empowering is defined by the scholar Rappaport as "a construct that links individual strengths and competencies, natural helping systems, and proactive behaviors to social

⁸⁹ "Gioco in cui i partecipanti fingono di essere i personaggi di una storia che essi stessi inventano mossa dopo mossa, sotto la guida di un Master (o Narratore)" (GdR2).

policy and social change” (Rappaport, 1981, 1984, in Perkins-Zimmerman 569). According to Perkins-Zimmerman, the construct of empowerment entails basic elements such as “participation with others to achieve goals, efforts to gain access to resources, and some critical understandings of the sociopolitical environment” (Perkins-Zimmerman 571). In particular, the feature Perkins and Zimmerman define as critical understanding of the sociopolitical environment is important. In light of Macintosh’s idea on e-empowering people throughout active participation in decision-making projects and on the implementation of criticism implied in the idea of empowerment, it could be affirmed that community-collectives’s communitarian project entails a political sense.

Indeed, community-collectives’ activities, besides fostering a democratic sense of authorship and relationship, can be seen as a way to promote a new sense of resistant politics. Due to the opportunity to develop the readers’ critical activity through their active participation in decisional and creative activity, community-collectives’ activity can be related to Jameson’s interesting — though in part nebulous — concept of “cognitive mapping,” which proposes a cognitive and political re-activation of the subject. The concept of “cognitive mapping” was considered by Jameson for the first time in his *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. The author argues that the postmodern era, which is characterized by a dominant form of late capitalism, has fostered a great break with the previous periods in terms of perception of temporality and spatiality. Jameson affirms that in the postmodern era “we have gone through a transformation of the life world which is somehow decisive but incomparable with the older convulsions of modernization and industrialization, less perceptible and dramatic, somehow, but more permanent precisely because more thoroughgoing and all- pervasive” (Jameson XXI). The modernist notions of time and space have undergone great changes towards a schizophrenic present in which the individual is unable to orient himself and to engage himself actively to generate any modification of the situation. Thus, Jameson claims for the need of a new aesthetic of representation, i.e. an aesthetics of “cognitive mapping,” which the author defines as basically “a pedagogical political culture which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in

the global system” (Jameson 54). Moreover, cognitive mapping is also defined in the end of Jameson’s work simply as “a code word for ‘class consciousness’” (Jameson 418). Thus, Jameson’s concept of cognitive mapping can be related here to community-collectives’ activity particularly due to scholar Robert T. Tally Jr’s suggestion about possible actualizations of cognitive mapping. Indeed in his essay “Jameson’s Project of Cognitive Mapping. A Critical Engagement,” the American scholar tries to clarify Jameson’s concept of cognitive mapping by claiming that “one might say that literary writing is already a form of cognitive mapping” (Tally 403). Such an affirmation, although it is proposed by the scholar as a possible actualization of cognitive mapping, seems particularly akin to the case of community-collectives’ activity. Hence, it may be literally argued that the communitarian activities fostered by community-collectives could be an actualization of Jameson’s concept of cognitive mapping. Therefore, it may be argued that both cognitive mapping and community-collectives’s activity aim to reach a concrete activation of the subject, which should acquire awareness of himself and of the potential of his actions. As Jameson’s concept of cognitive mapping entails, the subject becomes able to regain a modernist sense of orientation in the present — thus, against the postmodern paralysis — community-collectives’ communitarian activity is able to foster audience’s active participation and empowerment. The previous definition of empowerment provided, due to its implication with communitarian practice and critical understanding, can be related to Jameson’s definition of cognitive mapping as a form of “class consciousness.” Hence, the empowerment element underlying community-collectives’ practice can be found as well in Jameson’s idea of cognitive mapping; therefore, it can be argued that both share a glimpse of resistant and revolutionary intent. According to the American scholar Tanner Mirrlees, in the essay “Cognitive Mapping or, the Resistant Element in the Work of Fredric Jameson: A Response to Jason Berger,” Jameson’s concept is considered to have a strong revolutionary potential. Mirrlees affirms that Jameson offers “a narrative of political agency, hope, and resistance” (Mirrlees 2). In particular, cognitive mapping “functions as the potentially resistant

element to the postmodern cultural logic of late-capitalism” (Mirrlees 5). Mirrlees affirms as follows that:

First, in response to postmodernism's de-centering subject-effects (the consumerist dis-orientation generated by global hyperspace, for example), cognitive mapping seeks to re-center a political subject capable of resisting capitalism. Second, in response to (and as an attempt to resist) the anti-systemic and anti-totalizing claims of anti-Marxist post-structuralist theories, cognitive mapping attempts to legitimize the Marxian effort to totalize capitalism as a global system. Third, in response to the problem of global class fragmentation, cognitive mapping potentially functions as a socialist political strategy that facilitates the formation of a global class-consciousness (Mirrlees 6).

Among the three resistance and revolutionary aspects considered by Mirrlees as potential outcomes of Jameson's idea, the first and the third point could be aligned with the results that may be produced by the communitarian literary practice fostered by community-collectives. The first revolutionary end of cognitive mapping, i.e. re-centering a political subject, is comparable to the empowering effect community-collectives activity may enact among the readers. This is due to the fact that every person regains that self-recognition that is fundamental to enable his or her active participation, which in this case is declined in an artistic sense. Moreover, when Mirrlees affirms that cognitive mapping works towards the re-creation of a global class-consciousness, some affinities with these collectives can be noted. The reason for this is strictly entangled with the first one. The former is concerned with the subject basically as an individual; meanwhile, the formation of a global class-consciousness concerns the relation the subject can create with others. Indeed, once the subject has got that self-recognition due to his artistic participation as a single person, he or she often interacts with other people participating in these community projects. Kai Zen's ensemble, for instance, was born this way, since its members got to know each other during Wu Ming's project

Ti Chiamerò Russell. Wu Ming's web activity in 2002 fostered as well the birth of iQuindici, a collective of readers who became editors and whose aim is "counseling and helping writers, and promoting a different concept of access to culture, which is mainly enacted by the employment and the fostering of copyleft, which allows for a horizontal diffusion" (iQuindici).⁹⁰ Likewise, Paolo Agaraff's activity as well can be considered as generating further collective artistic experiences. For instance, Pelagio D'Afro was born as a collective, including some core members of Paolo Agaraff with the addition of new participants. Paolo Agaraff and Pelagio D'Afro then generated another collective project, since they fostered the creation of Carboneria Letteraria, which involved more than twenty authors from the beginning. Kai Zen too could be considered able to generate collective literary experiences, such as the group Nucleo Salute Mentale. This group is defined in the article "La Potenza Di Eymerich e altri Romanzi Totali" as Kai Zen's "filiation" (Kai Zen 2006) and participated to the creation of *Spauracchi*. However, conversely to the rest of the projects originated from community-collectives, Nucleo Salute Mentale apparently disappeared, since almost no traces can be found on the Internet.

Although generating new artistic-like groups and collaborations is not enough to say that a class-consciousness is being raised, it seems that the generative drive towards the formation of a new class implied in Mirrlees's view of cognitive mapping is homologous to that entailed in community-collectives's artistic activity. Indeed it seems that from community-collectives communitarian artistic practice — both online and not — similar or akin projects have developed; therefore, it may be argued that these collectives' activity entails a generative drive that is able to foster aggregation, like the aggregation that is implied in the re-composition of a social class.

3.3 Community-Collectives: Some Structural Limitations.

⁹⁰ "Il progetto de iQuindici ha lo scopo di dare consigli e aiuto a chi scrive, e di promuovere un diverso concetto di accesso alla cultura, che si attua in buona parte con l'utilizzo e la promozione del copyleft che ne consente una diffusione orizzontale" (iQuindici).

Since the Internet is an essential element for community-collectives, it can be considered as a “mediator”. Such a term was coined by Bruno Latour in relation to his new sociological system called Actor-Network Theory, in which an actor, contrary to the traditional sociological account, has not an identity limited to the human race. Moreover its agency is composed by several heterogenous elements. Since the Internet plays such an important role within community-collective’s activity it can be argued that it works in part as a mediator, namely as an element that is able to “transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry” (Latour 39). Although Latour holds inorganic elements as endowed with an agency equivalent to that of humans, Internet remains here as an important tool for collaboration — which may actually condition collaboration — but which cannot be equated with the human factor. But as a tool on which much of the communitarian projects are based, it is important to recognize that it should possibly be available in order to enact the political element of these practices — both democratic and revolutionary.

However, according again to Livraghi’s data about the diffusion of the Internet around the world, it is easy to notice that such online based literary and political activities are not yet possible in every country (See Figure 4).

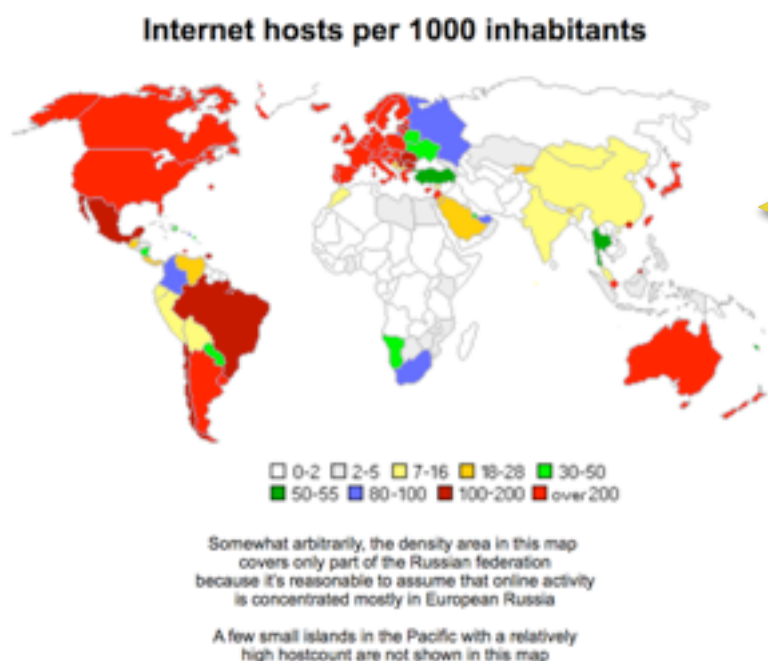


Figure 4. Internet Hosts per 1000 inhabitants. Source: Livraghi, Gianfranco. “Data on Internet activity worldwide (hostcount)” [gandalf.it](http://www.gandalf.it/dati/dati1.htm) Giancarlo Livraghi. 29 February 2012. Web. 05 June 2015. <<http://www.gandalf.it/dati/dati1.htm>>

Livraghi himself comments on this map as follows:

The 'globality' of the Internet is limited to part of the globe. Extended use of the net is still concentrated on the two sides of the North Atlantic – and in a few countries in East Asia, the Middle East and the Pacific. There is fast evolution in Latin America, but it's still behind the northern end of the American continent and most of Europe. Large parts of the world still have minimal (if any) access to communication networks. (Livraghi)

The map above is explicatory of the unequal distribution of the Internet and, hence, of the difficulties faced by communitarian artistic projects to collaborate with parts of the world facing this digital gap. Moreover, this digital gap represents a limit for new community-collectives to appear in those technologically undeveloped countries. Such an impossibility to access the Internet is often defined by scholars as 'digital divide' and is fundamentally considered the material problem that invalidates and reappraises any web based initiative which aims to foster people's active participation. Scholar Lee Komito, in the aforementioned essay "Community and inclusion: the impact of new communications technologies," affirms that the digital divide is one of the reasons for "lack of participation" (Komito 82) even in western countries, although it seems that "such barriers are diminishing over time" (Komito 82). The democratic and somehow revolutionary drive community-collective's communitarian practices foster, thus appears as being strictly dependent on the basic opportunity for people to have access to the net. Therefore, it must be remembered that community-collectives' activity was and still is directed to an Italian audience, so that what has to be highlighted in talking here about the digital divide is that such a politically democratic drive would be difficult to replicate worldwide by other possible collectives unless the basic technological gap is filled.

However, Italian community-collectives' activity could be invalidated by what Komito again considers an important reason for scarce participation to online projects, i.e. civil apathy. Such an indifference is generally caused by people not feeling fully considered involved governmental and in general top-bottom projects. Although it was already said that community-collectives tend to foster readers' active participation, the document-control approach Lowry et al. defined as a basic category of writing in common is most of the time not shared totally with the reader. From Wu Ming's projects, to Kai Zen's initiatives of *Romanzo Totale*, to Paolo Agaraff's novel-based game-playing scenarios, these artists still have the last word. Thus, notwithstanding the fact that community-collectives still are ultimately the ones who control communitarian projects, they are akin to the definition of e-democracy that was provided earlier. This fact remains as an internal limitation that decreases the democratic and somehow revolutionary drive such shared artistic practices have.

Conclusion: Recap and Further Considerations

Before proceeding to some further reflections, it is the right moment to summarize briefly the issues which were discussed so far and to highlight some basic results the analysis reached in the previous chapters.

The first chapter tried at first to clarify some fundamental theoretical terms in order to simplify and to make more fruitful any further analysis about texts which are composed through the collaboration of two or more people. Drawing from the seminal essay by Lowry, Curtis and Lowry, along with the reflections provided by Magini, Medaglia, and Sidoti, three main concepts were highlighted — i.e. team writing, collaborative writing, and collective writing, which are the basic themes facing any analysis on the issue of writing together. In particular, the definition of team writing in Lowry et al.'s words as “an iterative and social process that involves a team focused on a common objective that negotiates, coordinates, and communicates during the creation of a common document, [whose] scope goes beyond the more basic act of joint composition to include the likelihood of pre- and post-task activities, team formation, and planning” (Lowry et al. 73). Thus, team writing becomes a basic definition for a writing practice which involves more than one person, disregarding which kind of texts are produced. Hence, the term “collaborative writing” designates a particular practice of team writing oriented towards the production of texts for “industry, academia, and government” (Lowry et al. 66-67). Conversely, the term “collective writing” is used to indicate the practice of team writing which aims to create literary works, and such a category has been the main focus of this essay.

In the first chapter, the investigation proceeded and a particular category of artists producing collective texts was detected. Such a category emerged after a theoretical and empirical analysis that was previously justified, and it was defined as community-collectives. With this term the analysis refers to four Italian collectives which enact the feature that was named “communality” and that was built mainly by mixing the sociological notion of “community of practice” by Etienne

Wenger and Pierre Levy's concept of 'collective intelligence.' The feature of "communality" entails that such groups of writers act as a community of practice — i.e. "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (Wenger - Trayner 1). Moreover such communities of practice enacted by groups of writers are characterized by "dynamic boundaries" (Wenger 2010 2), and therefore foster collective intelligence — a form of *universally distributed intelligence*, constantly enhanced, coordinated in real time, and resulting in the effective mobilization of skills" (Levy 13) — and patterns of collaboration beyond their boundaries. Among the multitude of literary collective enterprises which can be found in the Italian cultural scenario, the four collectives which emerged as responding positively to the feature of communality are Wu Ming, Kai Zen, Paolo Agaraff, and Pelagio D'Afro, who became the central focus of the next chapters.

The second chapter proceeded by analyzing the aforementioned community-collectives from a stylistic point of view, in order to verify the possible existence of a community-collectives aesthetic. From the close reading, which was inspired mainly by Gerard Genette's narratological theoretical tools and which considered four novels — i.e. Wu Ming's *54*, Kai Zen's *The Ram's Strategy*, Paolo Agaraff's *The Fifth Cylinder*, and Pelagio D'Afro's *The Water Is Silent* — some features appeared as especially recurring. Such stylistic features are mainly two, namely *narrative fragmentation* — which was analyzed as it concerns to first plots and then to narratorial voices and focalizations — and a prominent *pop tendency*. Narratorial fragmentation of the plot refers to a structural complexity of the narration that unfolds through a continuous shift of temporal and spatial layers. A further level of community-collectives novels' complexity is found by paying attention to the continuous shift of narratorial voices and focalizers. The focalizations vary continuously from heterodiegetic to homodiegetic during the narration, and often the role of the narrator is given to unusual and unexpected figures — even to electrical appliance, as in Wu Ming's *54* — so that reader's estrangement is very likely to happen. Moreover, community-collective's pop-tendency is pretty evident, since all of the novels that were analyzed present many references to popular culture, from

cinema to television to music. Such an employment of pop-culture references, along with narrative complexity, might be seen as an attempt to provide the reader with a totalizing reading experience, which resembles those immersive experiences Brooks and Patti consider as generated by transmedial artworks. This combination of popular appeal and novelistic complexity, clearly verifiable in the novels which were taken as a case study, is not however a community-collective's exclusive characteristic. Such a tendency has been detected by Wu Ming 1 in the essay *New Italian Epic. Letteratura, Sguardo obliquo, Ritorno al Futuro* is the most experimental Italian literary production. Thus, since it does not seem possible to affirm that community-collectives possess a unique literary style, the investigation proceeded further to analyze the political element implied in community-collective's practices.

Therefore, in the third chapter the political tendency entailed in Wu Ming's, Kai Zen's, Paolo Agaraff's, and Pelagio D'Afro's works and projects was analyzed. Starting from Aristotle's definition of politics as an activity directed to the common good, such an aim was detected as inherently proper of community-collectives, especially in a democratic — and somehow revolutionary — sense. First of all, community-collectives' politically democratic drive can be noticed in the kind of authorship that is enacted by the four groups of writers. Far from Barthes' claim of the death of the author, it seems rather that community-collectives enact a shift from the Romantic idea of the "Author" to the more democratic idea of "author(s)". This democratic drive starts from the internal organization of each collective, in which every member works toward a communitarian aim, but as a subject who is free also to pursue his personal realization beyond the group. Moreover, such a new idea of authorship contrasts with the Romantic idea of the divinely inspired genius since community-collectives claim a return to the role of the storyteller. That means that the authors refuse the exploitation the cultural industry tries to impose on them, so that most of the community-collectives adopt some strategies to hide or debase their image. A further political feature, which is verifiable in community-collectives, involves the online projects which foster the active participation of the readers. Through different ways, three or four community-collectives

— except for Pelagio D' Afro — make the readers interact actively in literary projects (Paolo Agaraff in role-game projects, which foster as well readers' creative effort). Such an activation of the readers serves as a vehicle for an e-democratic tendency, which may foster a kind of e-empowerment of the people involved. Since it can be argued that community-collective's communitarian activity foster people's empowerment, and thus a sort of critical awareness, it can be argued further that those practices act as an instance of Jameson's concept of cognitive mapping. Indeed, the critical awareness of such practices may foster seems homologue to the revolutionary aims cognitive mapping implies according to Tanner Mirrlees; therefore, community-collective's communitarian practices may be seen both as fostering democracy and, somehow, as a revolutionary tendency. However, there are some structural limitations that may reduce the democratic and revolutionary drive implied in community-collectives' communitarian practices. Internet free access indeed is a fundamental and basic requirement in order to foster the form of e-democracy that was ascribed to those activities. Although the community-collectives that were analyzed are Italian and work almost exclusively for the Italian audience, and Italy is one of the Western countries whose host count is over 200 per 1000 inhabitants (See Livraghi's chart in the previous chapter), such a limitation occurs if community-collectives also operate in those areas of the world which are still affected by a strong digital divide. Moreover, community-collectives' communitarian projects, although they foster an active involvement of the readers in the creative effort, still end up having community-collective's ultimate control. This fact is not in opposition to the definition of e-democracy provided, which confers the ultimate decision to authority — to the state and to the authors in this case — and it has to be said that the democratic authorship enacted by community-collectives does not erase the difference between authors and readers. However, these characteristics represent a structural limit to a total democratic — and hence revolutionary — drive which community-collectives' communitarian literary projects may foster.

At this point it seems fit to make some further considerations in order to mention those issues which may have been partially overlooked.

First of all the issue of the centrality of Italy for collective writing has to be faced. In particular it attempt to answer why today — i.e. from 2000 onwards — such literary practices have developed within the vanguard literary phenomenon of community- collectives. As the data provided by Francesca Medaglia’s quantitative analysis that was mentioned in the first chapter prove, Italy has been strictly affiliated with collective writing activities, particularly from the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards. It seems pretty much impossible to determine the effective causes of such a successful connection between Italy and collective writing, but it might be argued that the presence of some historical factors represent a consistent literary and sociological background for contemporary collectives. In particular, the literary background is particularly remarkable and avant-gardist, due to the the examples of the Futurist collective I Dieci, of the students of Scuola Di Barbiana and of Italo Calvino’s work, as it was mentioned in the Introduction. Moreover, it can be argued that such a avant-gardist literary tradition was supported by a sociological aspect such as associationism, which was strongly fostered by the most influential social Italian institutions in the last century. Starting with the Catholic Church, associationism was diffused also during the Fascist regime as in the form of corporatism. Moreover, from the end of World War II, associationism was strongly related to the Italian Communist party too.⁹¹ Thus, contemporary collective writing benefits from such a literary and sociological tradition, but it seems that Wu Ming’s role as the forerunner of the digital era had a very significant impact as well.

Although collective authors such as Sveva Casati Modignani or Fruttero & Lucentini have published many novels since the 1980s, it seems that Wu Ming’s literary activity — which started with the clamorous success of the novel *Q* written under Luther Blissett’s pseudonym — has

⁹¹ Wu Ming 1 defined Italian Communist Party as “The most important Communist party in the Western world” (Wu Ming 2009 18-19).

brought back critics', authors', and cultural industry's interest for collective writing.^{92 93} Almost every literary collective that was born later than 2000, quotes Wu Ming as a primary reference for its activity; furthermore, it is clear that Wu Ming represented a model both for the innovative community-collectives and for the rest of the contemporary collectives. Wu Ming understood earlier than others the potentiality implied in the Internet, and has been able to use it for its literary projects. Thus the community-collectives that followed, can be considered as having fully understood Wu Ming's example, and proposed a homologue and yet personal literary product, having a strong political democratic and revolutionary feature as a structural element of their poetics.

Secondly one could wonder what the future of community-collectives and collective writing in general, along with the research opportunity on this topic could be. Medaglia's data referring to Italy and to the period 2000-2011 seem to communicate that collective writing constantly increased, and had a sharp growth in the biennium 2009-2011, since the production of collective texts was bigger than the nine years before (See Medaglia 290). It is of course difficult to make any numerical estimate for community-collectives in particular, since they represents an innovative and avant-garde handful of authors who work according to a unitarian manifesto. However, considering community-collectives' ability to intercept the most innovative literary tendencies — as the stylistic combination of complexity and pop-references employed by further Italian experimental artworks — and for their attitude to involve positively the readers more and more actively in their creative efforts, it seems likely that community-collectives have the structural characteristics to adapt to the contemporary cultural world and to prosper in it.

⁹² Medaglia names those texts pretty much interested in being best sellers — and thus attractive for the cultural industry — as *scrittura industriale* (which does not have to be confused by Magini' and Santoni's *Scrittura Industriale Collective*). Such a tendency according to Medaglia was already present also in the twentieth century, but it can be argued that this has been important also for contemporary market (See The fact that Kai Zen's first novel published by Mondadori or that Fefè Editore publishing house registered as a trademark the writing method *Scrittura Collettiva®*).

⁹³ The technological factor mentioned in the first chapter can be addressed too. Indeed Livraghi's chart about hosts count in Italy presented an increase in the biennium 1999-2000, so that it might be argued that contemporary collective writing benefitted also from the favorable technological scenario.

Moreover, it is definitely desirable to expand this analysis of collective writing in Italy and of community-collectives, since it seems that scholarly attention has been scarcely devoted to deepen these issues as a global phenomenon so far, except for some recent concern for Wu Ming. In particular, it would be interesting to investigate contemporary collective writing and community-collectives thoroughly from a sociological point of view, in order to be able to detect the real existence of a working network among authors who decide to write in groups. Also, it would be particularly interesting to make an analysis of Italian collective writing scenario from the perspective of Social Network Analysis (SNA). Social Network Analysis is “a large research field in sociology and ethnology [...] [whose] major objective is to characterise [sic] the group’s structure and, in particular, the influence of each of the members on that group, reasoning on the relationships that can be observed in that group” (Reffay - Chanier 34). In particular, such a kind of analysis would determine more specifically how members interact and work within a group of writers, and it could clarify more in depth how community-collectives’ inner dynamics differ from other collectives. Moreover, if every collective is taken as an element in the wider scenario of collective writing, it would be possible to determine if there is or not a collective which could be defined as the leader of contemporary collective writing scenario. One of the best way to carry out a SNA investigation is to involve actively collectives themselves, in order to obtain information from the most direct source. Indeed, through empirical tools as surveys which researchers can conduct among groups of writers, it is feasible to trace maps regarding the actual situation of collective writing universe. Collectives would thus answer to questions elaborated in order to determine which are the inner dynamics between members of each group or which are the relationships each collective as a whole has with further collectives. The latter investigation in particular would allow to determine accurately wether any specific collective has acted as an inspirational pole for the rest of groups of writers. That would thus confirm or not the suggestion provided here about the leading role Wu Ming has performed since its appearance on the Italian scene. Finally a SNA investigation could be way the ultimate empirical way to confirm the theoretical proposal of community-

collectives. Indeed such an extensive analysis which asks directly to collectives about their mutual relationships among each other could verify whether community-collectives have created a particular network among them, which would confirm further the theoretical hypothesis about their structural peculiarity.

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