CURRENT PERSPECTIVES ON COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA RESEARCH

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Controlled disconnections: A practice-centred approach to media activities in women's solo travelling

Simone Tosoni and Valentina Turrini

Abstract

Drawing on the preliminary findings of an ongoing case study of female solo travelling in Italy, the present chapter intends to propose some methodological considerations about addressing media activities in social practices. In this way, it intends to contribute to the attempt to decentre media studies advocated by authors like David Morley, Shaun Moores or Nick Couldry. With this aim, it focuses in particular on the practice's 'media territories' and on the temporality of media activities that participate in articulation of the practice. An analysis of what Theodore Schatzki defines as 'objective' and 'subjective' time reveals how solo travelling in Italy contrasts with the ongoing tendencies of transformation related to the pervasive mediation of tourism.

Keywords: non-media-centric media studies; solo travelling; social practices; media territories; temporality

In the present phase of ubiquitous diffusion, ICTs permeate every domain of human activity: they participate in our daily routines, and in the specialized practices we may take part in, in our work or leisure time. Far from simply providing representations of our activities, media contribute to enable, organize, extend, monitor and coordinate their enactment, ultimately informing the way we act.

An exemplification of the scholarship on the mediation (Livingstone, 2009) of social practices would necessarily appear as heterogeneous and dispersed as the possible fields of our practical engagements. In sport, for example, several authors have illustrated how the 'body-equipment-media assemblage' (Thorpe, 2017, p.12) informs how embodied performances are planned, executed and monitored. Writing about the use of wearable cameras in surfing, Clifton Evers points out how the 'the camera's material technical architecture is woven through perception, techniques, choices, ideas, space, etc.' (2015: 153). Similarly, Jeff Ferrell, Dragan Milovanovic and Stephen Lyng (2001) drawn on an ethnographic research to describe the constitutive role of media activities in the illicit practice of base-jumping, which involves illegally parachuting from public buildings. The authors point out how 'BASE jumping activities do not take shape in one realm, then to be simply recorded or reported in some other, mediated realm. Rather, mediated dynamics saturate the BASE-jumping process, from planning and execution to aftermath and audience' (p.195). Along the same lines, but addressing completely different practical fields like music production and judicial decision-making, Giovan Francesco Lanzara (2010) shows how the adoption of a new medium in an established practice implicates the general re-articulation and re-organization of the activities that compose it: a process that he defines as the 'remediation' of the practice. Another case of remediation is presented in Rhonda N. McEwen's study (2011) on the transformation of drug-dealing – and its enforcement – in Canada, now heavily relying on the use of mobile phones. Other practices require instead, for symbolic or practical reasons, a temporary disengagement from a specific medium or from media in general (yet, on using social media while driving, see Licoppe and Figeac, 2015; on new forms of gameplay allowing video-gaming while engaged in other practices, see Keogh and Richardson, 2018): it is what Alex Leavitt defines as 'situational non-use' (Leavitt, 2014), that he opposes to the far more studied topic of resistance to the adoption of a medium.

Investigating these forms of entanglements, where media and non-media activities are articulated together to constitute social practices that are not primarily or exclusively media-oriented, is of pivotal relevance to understand the present forms of pervasive mediation. Nick Couldry, advocating a renewed attention to practices as 'a new paradigm of media research', underlines how 'we should open our lens even wider to take in the whole range of practices in which media consumption and media-related talk is embedded' (Couldry, 2004, 2010). Therefore,

'one possibility we need to be ready for (…) is that, in many cases, "media con-
sumption" or "audiencing" can only be understood as part of a practice which is
not itself "about" media' (p.45). Yet, this sort of 'decentring of media research'
has not so far been systematically practised: while scholars have actually widened
their perspectives once centred on media effects, texts or production structures,
their analytical attention has remained by and large focused on practices that are
primarily 'media related'. Even when addressing non-media-oriented practices
(like, for example, commuting), media scholars tend to concentrate their attention
mainly on media activities, extrapolating and abstracting them from the overall
practice they are an integral part of (Tosoni and Ridell, 2016). On the other hand,
while acknowledging the key relevance of media activities in social practices, the
second generation of practice theorists (including authors like Theodore Schatzki,
Elizabeth Shove or Andrew Reckwitz, who have inspired the practice turn in media
research) have not so far dedicated systematic attention to media, and to how to
methodologically investigate their involvement in social practices.

As a contribution to the attempt to decentre media studies a little more, in this
paper we intend to advance some methodological observations about researching
media activities in practices that are not primarily media-oriented. In particular,
we will draw on the preliminary findings of an ongoing research project on female
solo travelling in Italy, as enacted by Italian practitioners, to address the tempo-
ral regimes that organize the activities (media-related and not) that constitute the
practice, including forms of 'situational non-use', or controlled disconnection from
media. In what follows, we will proceed in three steps. In the next paragraph, we
will briefly clarify the main tenets of the practice approach we are adopting, fo-
cusing in particular on media' and practices' spatial and temporal arrangements. In
the second paragraph, we will introduce the preliminary findings of our ongoing
research project on female solo travelling in Italy, discussing them in light of the
present remediation of tourism. In our final remarks, we will summarize some of
our main findings.

1.   Researching media activities in social practices

As pointed out by John Postill, 'social theorists agree that there is no such thing as
a coherent, unified "practice theory"' (2010: 6). Yet, all practice theorists 'uphold
(…) that practices consist in organised sets of actions, that practices link to form
complexes and constellations – a nexus – and that this nexus forms the "basic do-
main of study of the social sciences" (Giddens, 1984: 2)' (Hui, Schatzki and Shove,
2017: 1). What is relevant for us here is that from this perspective an action – or,
with Schatzki (2012), an activity, as in this paper we address the 'bodily doings

and sayings' (Schatzki, 1996: 22) that compose a practice – 'is the action it is as part of a practice' (Schatzki, 1996: 97). In our view, in fact, this simple statement implies 'a more radical adjustment to our research agendas than might at first appear' (Couldry, 2010).

This adjustment is indeed 'radical' not only because, with Couldry, it leads researchers to decentre their main analytical focus from media texts and effects. From a practice perspective, in fact, the 'identity' of the (media or non-media) activities that compose a practice do not 'derive solely from features of the individual [enacting them, as in] (...) his or her understanding or motives' (Schatzki, 1996). The practice therefore has an ontological precedence over its activities: activities' 'identity' derives from 'features' of the practice they belong to, and that organize and articulate them with one another. In Schatzki's approach, for example, this organization depends on four 'types of items': '(1) action understandings, which are abilities to carry out, recognize and respond to particular actions; (2) rules, which are formulated instructions, directives, admonishments, and the like; (3) teleoaffective structures, which contain enjoined and acceptable ends, enjoined and acceptable projects and actions to carry out for those ends, and enjoined and acceptable emotions; and (4) general understandings – of matters germane to the practice' (Schatzki, 2009: 39). A practice can be therefore conceived as a double articulation:[1] of activities as tasks with a function in an overall teleological architecture; and of activities as bodily performances, coordinated in their enactment in complex choreographies. Each activity makes sense only in the light of this double articulation, and of the symbolic meanings 'germane to the practice'.

Moving the analytical focus from media texts to the media activities of an audience (or of a group of users) risks therefore being methodologically insufficient for a fully fledged practice approach. As research objects, in fact, audiences and users are methodologically constructed on the basis of people's engagement with media devices, platforms, services or contents, and not of their participation in the same practice. The issue here is, of course, if and when audiencing or using media devices can be regarded as practices in their own right. Yet, with Shove, Pantzar and Watson, who suggest taking as a practice 'anything that practitioners themselves take to be such' (2012, p. 121), this seems to us more an empirical than a theoretical question: watching our favourite series on our Netflix night, after ordering a food delivery and silencing our mobile phones so as not to be disturbed, can easily count as a practice. On the other hand, consulting online information to find in real time our way to the place we are heading to should instead more properly be acknowledged as a form of 'secondary audiencing', or an 'audience

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1   A third form of articulation, that we are not addressing here, is represented by the expressive nature of activities as spectacles performed in front of an audience (see, of course, Goffman, 1959).

activit[y] that [is] functional to or a subservient part of other practices' (Tosoni and Tarantino, 2013: 575). A large part of our experience of engagement with media consists exactly of these forms of mediation. Yet, these forms of mediation cannot be adequately tackled with a focus narrowed down to media activities alone. From a methodological point of view, addressing these forms of mediation requires a further decentring of media studies: the overall articulation of social practices must be assumed as the main criterion of construction and demarcation of media scholars' research objects. The technicalities of this operation depend on the research methods employed: they could for example consist of the construction of a multi-sited ethnographic field (Marcus, 1995) encompassing all the sites where the practices actually unfold (instead of focusing only on sites of media engagement); or they could consist of selecting a group of practitioners – base-jumpers, musicians, lawyers or drug-dealers – as informants for in-depth qualitative interviews (instead of sampling an audience or a group of users).

To regain a specific focus on media after this operation of methodological decentring in favour of social practices, we have elsewhere introduced the concept of 'media territories' (Tosoni and Ciancia, 2017). While there's disagreement on conceiving 'materials' as a basic constituent of social practices (e.g. Shove et al., 2012, pro; Schatzki, 2002, contra), all theorists agree on the relevance of material 'objects, infrastructures, tools, hardware and the body itself' (Shove et al., 2012: 23) for the structuration and unfolding of a practice. Some of these 'tools' are 'media devices, platforms and services: (…) we refer to these ensembles of specific material elements (…) as 'media territories', carved out by practitioners from the general mediascape to be employed in a stable way within a particular practice' (Tosoni & Ciancia, 2017: 44). Being firmly centred on a social practice, 'media territories' differ from similar concepts like 'media diets' (Pozzali and Ferri, 2012) and 'media repertoires' (Hasebrink and Hepp, 2017) – as 'the entirety of media that a person regularly uses' (p. 6) – or 'media ensembles' – that focus 'on entire collectivities and organizations and the media which are used within them' (p. 10).

Media territories also concur to define the spatial arrangement of a practice: 'using the spatial metaphor of 'territories' we intend, [in fact,] to underline how these media assemblages represent also the mediated sites in which practices unfold, contributing to define their overall spatial arrangement' (Tosoni & Ciancia, 2017: 44). In line with Paddy Scannell's concept of the 'doubling of space' (Scannell, 1996), extended by Shaun Moores (2004a) to digital media, media activities are in fact to be regarded as operations performed on virtual sites (e.g. sharing a post on Facebook) and, at the same time, as performances enacted by embodied actors engaged with media devices in spatially dispersed physical sites (in a room, interacting with a keyboard, a mouse and a screen to share a post on Facebook, for example). This double nature of media – as virtual sites and material tools – must

be taken into account to clarify the 'identity' of media activities within a practice. Mapping a practice's media territory is therefore a methodological precondition to understand the 'identity' that media activities acquire within a practice, and to understand how media 'remediate' the overall practice itself.

In this paper, we also intend to extend our focus to time, and in particular to the relationship between media activities and the temporality of social practices. Actually, from a methodological perspective, for Schatzki time and space can be addressed separately only when 'conceived of as features of reality that persist independently of human activity and understanding' (Schatzki, 2009: 35), or as 'objective' time and space. Among the objective temporal and spatial properties of a practice, the author enlists 'the rhythms, sequences and periodicities of its constituent actions as well as the geometric distribution of the locations where these actions are performed' (p. 41). Tackling the role of media activities in weaving the 'rhythms, sequences and periodicities' of a practice, and in turn understanding how media activities' temporality is shaped by the overall organization of a practice, is of key relevance to grasping its mediation. Yet, objective time is not the only feature of the temporality of a practice and its activities (Schatzki, 2006). As there is a '"phenomenological", "existential" [or] "lived' space"' (Schatzki, 2009: 36) – or space as it is experienced while acting, when for example some locales are constituted as places, while others as paths connecting them – Schatzki remarks that there is also an 'activity time', a concept that for the author resonates with 'experiential time, lived time, existential time and the time of consciousness' (p. 38). In this case, 'temporal and spatial dimensions are connected inherently – and not contingently as with objective space-times. Indeed, the two dimensions are coordinately instituted together' (p. 38) and inextricably intertwined in what is defined as 'timespace'. Drawing on Bergson and on Heidegger (Schatzki, 2006), Schatzki describes activity time as teleological and non-sequential:

> Projection, thrownness and being-amid are, respectively, the future, past and present dimensions of human activity. Projection is acting for the sake of a way of being or state of affairs. (…) Thrownness, meanwhile, is being situated. When a person acts, she almost always responds to or acts in the light of particular states of affairs. These states of affairs are that given which she does whatever she does. This departing, or coming, from particular states of affairs in acting is the past dimension of activity. Being-amid, finally, is having to do with entities: acting amid, towards and at (…) them. It is the present dimension of activity, activity itself. (Schatzki, 2009: 37)

In this sense, 'the three dimensions of temporality occur simultaneously, "at one stroke" (…). If activity ceases, the three disappear together' (p. 37). In Schatzki's approach to practices, timespace play a relevant and complex role, and its clar-

ification exceeds the limits of the present chapter. What we want to reiterate here is that a practice's objective time and space features 'derive from the timespaces of actions and from the practices that actions compose' (Schatzki, 2009: 49).

In the following section, we will probe this methodological framework, aiming to shed light on how media activities enacted by Italian practitioners of female solo travelling are shaped by, and in turn contribute to shape, this social practice.

2.   Remediation of tourism and female solo travelling

In the last decade, tourism has undergone a radical transformation, along with changes to people's lifestyles and technologies (Uriely, 2005). The touristic experience was once defined by its distinctiveness from everyday life and by the suspension of norms and values of our daily activities (Turner and Ash, 1975; Smith, 1977). According to Philip Pearce and Ulrike Grezel (2012), this traditional view of tourism resonates deeply with Van Gennep's concept of rites of passage (1977), with travellers crossing a threshold which disconnects them from their home and plunges them into a usually rewarding and, although sometimes challenging, different environment. Since the early 1990s, as Wang, Xiang and Fesenmaier (2016) point out, many scholars have challenged this dualistic notion, arguing that there is a mutual penetration of experiences between the travel context and everyday life (Urry, 1990; Lash and Urry, 1994; Munt, 1994). Nowadays, in fact, tourists tend to 'extend' daily life into travel (Inversini, Xiang and Fesenmaier, 2015), using various forms of mobile technology to stay in touch with family and friends (White and White, 2007). The fact that people use the same media applications in both travel and daily lives (Inversini et al., 2015) results in a sort of 'spillover' effect, whereby people carry their everyday routines into travel (e.g. reading news and participating in social networks) (D. Wang et al., 2016), sometimes performing them with their family and friends (Moores, 2004b).

Hence, mobile technologies change the nature of travel by 'decapsulating' (Jansson, 2007) or 'de-exoticizing' (Larsen, Urry and Axhausen, 2007) the touristic experience, since the sense of adventure and escape diminishes because of better information about a place and better connection with the everyday environment (D. Wang and Fesenmaier, 2013). The pervasive connectivity of the Internet fades some peculiar dichotomies that were used to characterize the travel experience, including home/away, authentic/inauthentic, leisure/work, extraordinary/mundane and present/absent (Hannam, Sheller and Urry, 2006). For other scholars, it leads to a more general blurring of space and time, which Pearce calls 'digital elasticity' (Pearce, 2011: 27). In particular, several authors have underlined how the touristic experience is progressively losing its linear articulation in clear-cut phases, as

described by Craig-Smith and French (1995). In their classic study, the authors distinguish an anticipatory phase, involving activities like planning and reservations; an experiential phase, when the travel actually takes place; and a final reflective phase, which includes telling others about the experience. Yet, in the last decade, it has been pointed out how the widespread diffusion of portable media has blurred such a clear demarcation. For example, decision-making (typical of the first phase) and receiving/giving feedback from and to friends and family (typical of the third phase) can occur on-site thanks to the support of mobile phones (Mascheroni, 2007; Wang and Fesenmaier, 2013).

Within this general context, solo travellers, or tourists without companions, represent a fast-growing segment of the international tourism market (Mill and Morrison, 2009; Dempsey, 2015). While this trend is influenced by an increasing number of single-person households, delayed marriages and childless couples (Laesser, Beritelli and Bieger, 2009), several studies have pointed out how travelling alone is not necessarily the result of circumstances, but also a lifestyle decision: Mehmetoglu, Dann and Larsen (2001), for example, differentiate solo travellers 'by default' from solo travellers 'by choice', and they enumerate different socio-psychological motivations for travelling alone by choice, including searching for freedom, exploration,and solitude. Laesser, Beritelli and Bieger (2009) add curiosity and looking for new social contacts to these motivating factors. Specific motivations characterize female solo travelling, recently the object of a growing number of studies that bring together tourism and gender studies (Wilson and Little, 2005; McNamara and Prideaux, 2010; Wilson and Little, 2008).

As noted by Jordan and Aitchison (2008), there is continuous growth in women travelling independently. Research has shown that female solo travellers are interested in life-changing experiences, in 'meaningful travel' (Wilson & Harris, 2006) that pushes them to reconsider their perspectives on life and reassess their interpersonal relationships (McNamara and Prideaux, 2010). Yearning to challenge oneself (Jordan and Gibson, 2005; Wilson and Little, 2005), moving beyond personal comfort zones, developing a sense of autonomy and independence (Butler, 1995; Wilson and Little, 2008) and having an adventurous experience (Chiang and Jogaratnam, 2006), but also escapism (Butler, 1995; Wilson and Harris, 2006; Gibson, Berdychevsky and Bell, 2012), have been identified as other key motivations for the practice. Other scholars have in turn investigated deterrent factors, as risks and fears, as a way to highlight the social and cultural barriers women face. In line with some classic literature about women's leisure and outdoor activities (Henderson, 1989; Shaw, 1994), some authors have for example shown how national parks and forests are often described as dangerous for women (Curson & Kitts, 2000). The same level of perceived danger has been documented for women travelling alone in big cities, e.g. London (Carr, 2001). Wilson and Little (2008) argue that

female solo travellers are more likely to feel inhibited to travel independently, and they identified deterrent factors including others' perceptions and opinions, vulnerability – especially at night – and a sense of restricted access. In particular, negative attitudes and apprehensive comments from social networks can affect their level of participation in this practice (Chung, Baik and Lee, 2017) even if travellers can find, in the same virtual environment, positive emotional support and encouragement during their trip (Kim, Fesenmaier and Johnson, 2013). As we will see, both these motivations and deterrent factors are of key relevance to Italian female solo travellers.

2.1 Female solo travelling in Italy and the circuit of experience

What makes the Italian case particularly interesting is that, in Italy, female solo travelling is invested with specific gendered meanings, which are negotiated and socialized mostly online, on Facebook and in the blogosphere. As we will see (2.2), solo travelling is depicted as deeply related to women's identity: as a form of empowerment, as a challenge, and as a form of care of the self, especially after existential turning points such as the end of a relationship. Our interviewees refer the first two of these meanings to Mediterranean culture: in their opinion, while for northern-European and Anglo-Saxon women travelling alone could be considered common, for Italian women it still represents a form of rebellion and emancipation. Data gathered in 2015 by TripAdvisor in nine countries show how in Italy only the 23 per cent of travelling women have travelled alone, against an overall average of 55 per cent.[2] It is therefore particularly relevant to clarify how media engagement contributes to shaping these meanings for practitioners and, more generally, how media activities participate in the articulation of the practice. Since the beginning of 2017, we have been ethnographically observing online interactions in the main Italian virtual spaces dedicated to female solo travelling, with a more intense phase of observation from January 2017 to March 2017, a cyclical follow-up in subsequent months, and an analysis of previously published online content. The multi-sited online ethnographic field was initially assembled to map the main solo travelling sites through search engines, and later integrated with resources mentioned in spaces already mapped or quoted in interviews. A survey (of 80 respondents) distributed in these online spaces – and in particular in the most active female solo travellers' community, the Facebook group 'Viaggio da sola perché' ('I travel alone because') – aimed at ascertaining practitioners' general media usage. Among these respondents, we finally selected a first group of nine informants as 'informal

2   Survey conducted in 2015 on a sample of 15,958 respondents from Australia, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, Spain, South East Asia, the UK and the US.

experts' (Line et al., 2011) for in-depth interviews to investigate media activities related to the practice.

As we will show, our preliminary investigation indicates that female solo travelling in Italy presents relevant differences if compared to the current tendencies of mediatized tourism reported in the reviewed literature. In particular, while itself pervasively mediatized, female solo travelling does not present that 'de-exoticization' (Larsen, Urry and Axhausen, 2007), and that 'blurring of phases' that, as we have seen, scholars attribute to the pervasive adoption of portable media in touristic travels. The point we want to make is that a practice-centred analytical focus can show how these differences are related to the way the understandings of solo travelling as a specialized practice (distinct from general tourism), and its overall organization, inform the 'identity' of its media activities.

In female solo travelling, in fact, travel is still understood as an experience comparable to a rite of passage, and it must therefore be lived as 'exotically' as possible in order to be perceived as authentic. This understanding of the practice depends on, and informs, a strict discipline of its media activities, which also includes forms of controlled disconnection from media in order to keep daily life and travel separate. As we will show, each of the phases in which the practice is articulated – a pre-, a during and a post-travelling phase – is in fact characterized by different media activities, by different rules disciplining their temporality, and by the activation of different portions of the practice's media territories. It may therefore be true that in solo travelling, as in general tourism, activities like planning or discussing the experience are no longer strictly relegated in distinct phases. Yet, this does not imply any form of blurring in the articulation of phases of the practice's objective time.

This clear-cut distinction of phases also characterizes practitioners' subjective time. The symbolic relevance of this articulation in shaping solo travellers' experience is in fact discursively addressed, socialized and institutionalized in online interaction, in particular in the community 'Viaggio da sola perché', where the practice is imbued with symbolic meanings and its activities organized. In these spaces, users share the same discursive temporal frame but are engaged in different phases of the practice, contributing therefore via different roles to its elaboration: notably, interviewees report how practitioners interacting online are perceived as (and attributed the status of) future travellers, travellers, and returned from travel, and distinguished from members not yet actively engaged in the practice.

In sum, each of the practice's phases is discursively addressed online with practitioners engaged in the same or in different phases. From this perspective, all of them are therefore actually 'experiential' and 'reflective' – as for Craig-Smith and French's definition (1995): we have thus called the second and third phases, phases of 'travelling' and 'active sharing', and the overall organization of the practice a 'circuit of experience'.

2.2 Circuit of experience: anticipatory phase

Our informants have underlined the key relevance of the anticipatory phase, which involves activities such as deciding on a destination, planning and psychologically preparing for the trip. The perceived challenges and potential dangers of travelling alone for women imply in fact thorough preparation for the experience. This does not imply overscheduling or the exclusion of serendipity during travel; yet, travellers learn, mainly from other female solo travels, what to expect from a specific destination, what risks could and/or should be avoided, and up to what point on-site improvisation is possible. Online resources, and social media in particular (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014), play a key role in this case.

The practice's media territories are in fact organized in some sort of concentric circles, that have at their very centre – as anticipated – the Facebook group 'Viaggio da sola perché', opened in August 2015, expanded in 2017 to a Facebook page and a website (when the project acquired a professional and commercial vocation), and counting in July 2017 around 12,000 members.[3] The group is explicitly gendered (only women can participate) and owes its success to the fact that a potential trip is not 'anticipated' by economic players such as hotels or travel agencies, but by peers, who often tell in a reflective way of their own experiences, thus permeating solo travelling with specific symbolic interpretations. In this circuit of experience, in fact, what for some is the anticipatory phase of the trip, for others is the final elaboration of the experience (see 2.4). It is mainly in this online space that symbolic meanings of the practice are generated, negotiated and socialized. Solo travelling is mainly framed according to three distinct, yet interrelated, narratives: travelling as empowerment, according to which solo travelling women become conscious of their full potential and independence; travelling as a challenge to the practitioner's own limits and fears, and at the same time to the prejudices that stigmatize a woman travelling alone; and travelling as a cure and care of the self, where the experience of solitude is depicted as a reflexive one, granting access to the inner and real self, and to its desires, ambitions and fears. The acceptance of these narratives, that make solitary travel 'meaningful travel' (Wilson & Harris, 2006), and the ideal of woman that they imply, foster a strong sense of belonging to the community. Online relationships are sometimes transferred offline: occasionally, gatherings are organized around Italy. Moreover, solo travellers can plan to meet while travelling alone – a possibility that is not held in contradiction with the practice.

Together with the aforementioned narratives, and with the descriptions of the trips and emotional inner landscapes to which they grant access, group members

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3   https://www.viaggiodasolaperche.com/it/media-kit/.

also share practical information regarding the planning and organization of travel. The practical suggestions gathered in this centre are in fact highly trusted and valued by female solo travellers, who in this space acquire a status depending on their competence and contribution. The most visible members sometimes have personal blogs that are linked to the community through various forms of collaboration and constitute a sort of webring surrounding it: practitioners follow one or more of these blogs on the basis of a blogger's competence and perspective on the travel experience, often ascertained in the community.

Finally, this network is part of a wider portion of the Web dedicated to (not gendered) solo travelling, and to travelling in general, that constitutes the periphery of media territories. What is interesting to note is that the community itself often mediates the access to these resources, selecting more women-friendly ones as a sort of compass that direct members across the entire media territory. In this sense, the community is of key relevance to gaining competence to travel, but at the same time also for finding orientation within the Internet and assembling the 'proper' media territory. The community is therefore assimilable to communities of practice, described by Wenger et al. as a group of people 'who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis' (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder, 2002: 4).

2.3   Circuit of experience: the travelling phase

In the travelling phase, the practice's media territories are rearranged for mobility. Once again, hints and suggestions are provided within the Facebook group: mobile phones, power banks, e-readers (or books, often in the language of, or talking about, the country visited, to better 'get in touch' with the place) and MP3 players; and more sporadically, digital cameras and laptop computers are mentioned as necessary in our online survey and in-depth interviews. Mobile services like BlaBlaCar are used to deal with the matter of travel, while specific applications are used to get temporarily in contact with locals (Tinder, Couchsurfing, Meetup) or with other travellers (Couchsurfing, Couchsurfing Hangout). As a peculiarity of the practice's media territories, interviewees mention the relevance attributed to tools that allow memorization in written form: journaling, both in short notes and more extended forms (which, in light of the inconvenience of mobile phones' keyboards, generally requires a laptop or an audio recording device for future transcription), is in fact held as an integral part of the practice, and interpreted as a form of reflexive care of the self (Demetrio, 1996). In several cases, practitioners pointed out how they prefer a paper diary and pen over digital technology, not only for the intimate

nature attributed to handwriting, but also as a better way to temporarily disconnect from media (the same applies to paper books).

While in fact in the first phase the practice does not ascribe any specific rule to the temporality of its media activities – they must simply find their place within the temporality of practitioners' everyday lives – in this second phase they are carefully disciplined. In particular, the management of media engagement aims to strike a compromise between the feeling of safety granted by connectivity, the need for social interaction, and the desire for 'authenticity' in the travel experience. In this regard, Wang and Alasuutari discuss the concept of 'authentication, which refers to the social process through which authenticity is produced' (2017, p. 4), and they distinguish 'object-related authenticity' and 'existential authenticity': 'the former is oriented towards engagement with markers signifying the worthiness and authenticity of an alien culture, such as touristic sights and destinations, whereas the latter concerns the tourist's self and sentiments instead of tour objects' (p.6). While the competencies and the right attitude for both forms of authentication are learned online, controlled disconnection from media is a pivotal part of the latter. The absence of familiar sensory inputs from digital devices is framed as a rewarding experience (Germann Molz and Paris, 2015), able to give relief from the rhythms and responsibilities of daily life, and access to the 'authentic' sense of a place visited– and of solo travelling. When not representing a danger, solo travellers tend therefore to avoid all the media activities that are not strictly related to the practice itself, and sometimes those too –for example using Google maps or currency converters. Once again, interviewees report how this is as a way to experience the journey in a more 'authentic' and immediate manner, but also a way to gain competences (like wayfinding) and confidence to be used later in everyday life.

In what Tanti and Buhalis (2017) define as 'selective unplugging', and distinguish from 'active connection' and 'self-imposed total disconnection', solo travellers tend to confine their media activities, practice related or not, to what they perceive as downtime, when they temporarily retreat from a visited place – for example before sleeping. Among the activities related to the practice, together with journaling, connecting to the community is also seen as crucial. In this case, the temporality of engagement with the Facebook group differs from the anticipatory phase: while technically remaining an asynchronous communication environment, practitioners use the platform as a sort of chatroom, for real-time communication with people online. Travellers, in fact, know that they can count anytime on the support of the community, which has enough members to have someone always online: when needed, members who are perceived to be in their travelling phase receive advice, encouragement for forthcoming challenges, and company when they feel lonely.

Thanks to this sort of controlled disconnection, solo travellers 're-exoticize' their journey, once again in contrast with the aforementioned tendencies in con-

temporary tourism. Actually, the practice's overall articulation organizes the temporality of its media activities, but also their avoidance: in this last case, to put it in Derridean terms, media are an 'absent presence' in the organization of the practice.

2.4 Circuit of experience: phase of active sharing

While posting in the community is a media activity that can also be performed in the journey's downtime, 'active sharing' is pursued once the travel has ended, and subjects engage in storytelling about their experience. In this way, for members not yet engaged in the practice, or in the anticipatory phase, the journey is already imbued with symbolic meanings end emotional expectations: in what we have called the circuit of experience, many respondents realized how the posts written by others motivated them to enter the practice, or to select their destination on the basis of the kind of experience the travel was reported to grant.

On many occasions, practitioners extended their storytelling beyond the Facebook group starting personal blogs, the most successful of which are largely followed by the community. In this way, meanings constructed within the group migrate from the community to the blogosphere, and vice versa. Affinity and adherence to the same values ensure an ongoing collaboration with the network. Yet, this phenomenon is not uncontested and unproblematic. Some interviewees have, for example, underlined how the network of blogs that stem from the community may create the perception of a sort of 'travellers-guru lobby', who represent travelling almost like a job: the individualistic nuances that characterize these blogs seem to be in contradiction with the communitarian approach of the group from which they derive. Moreover, to bloggers themselves, the media activities required by running a blog are seen in potential contrast with the practice of solo travelling: a former blogger, for example, pointed out how documenting the trip, with the intention to publish quality content once back, prevented her from grasping the moment, giving her the feeling of living in the future and not in the present.

Also, the emotional landscape of re-entering daily life at the end of the journey is widely addressed and discussed. The community acknowledges a common sense of post-travel alienation, where a dichotomous view of one's lifestyle emerges (immobility and conformism vs dynamism, freedom and empowerment), often associated with the perception of a conflict between a newly discovered sense of self, and the expectations of gender in daily life (related, for example, to the role of mother). On these occasions, gender expectations and roles are reflexively addressed and – at least discursively – contested.

Sharing one's experience, and return advice and support, is also perceived as a form of restitution to the community. Our interviewees reported that the more

feedback they received, the more they were led to share after the journey. As we have seen, this form of sharing contributes to defining the practice's competences, which are therefore acquired not only during travel. Moreover, this form of restitution may condition not only *what* and *how much* to publish, but also *where*, actually pushing practitioners to change their media territory. Practitioners have in fact often reported that they stopped publishing about their travels on their Facebook wall, to avoid sarcasm and criticism, in favour of the protected context of the Facebook group. At other times, they reported how they posted the same photos and materials in both virtual spaces, but with different meanings: sharing on a personal wall responded to a desire for self-exposure and connection with friends, while in the group the dimension of introspection and encouragement of others prevailed.

3.   Conclusion

While still preliminary, these results allow us to sketch two different orders of consideration.

Regarding solo travelling, we have shown how, while strongly remediated, the practice contrasts with and resists present tendencies in the contemporary tourism experience (section 2), that scholars attribute to the widespread diffusion of social and portable media. Actually, a practice-centred analytical focus can clarify how specific media activities – and a specific organization of their temporality – contribute to the re-exoticization of travelling, to the centrality of crossing a symbolic threshold for travellers' experience and to the overall organization of the practice in phases, typical of Italian solo travelling.

This leads us to the second order of consideration: in the present paper we have aimed to tackle the role of media activities in social practices, integrating the analysis of media territories and media activities' temporality. Together with contributing to the overall organization of practices, we have seen how. in solo travelling. media activities' temporality may be subordinated to the temporality of activities not belonging to the same practice (in the anticipatory phase), or to the temporality of activities belonging to the same practice (in the travelling phase), that can also require controlled disconnection. We think that exploring these forms of coordination is of key relevance for both media studies and practice theory. Yet, more investigations – on Italian solo travelling, but also in general on the remediation of social practices – are needed before proposing a systematic typology of media and non-media activities' articulation within social practices.

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