

**ITALY BEYOND GOMORRAH: ROBERTO SAVIANO AND TRANSMEDIA
DISRUPTION, FLORIANA BERNARDI (2017)**

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Italy Beyond Gomorrah: Roberto Saviano and Transmedia Disruption declares its thesis starting from the title: when Roberto Saviano burst on the scene in 2006 he produced a disruption not only in the field of literature but also in the Italian culture as a whole. The epochal impact of *Gomorrah* in the Italian mediasphere is both a product and a cause of the political and social changes that Italy faced in the (let us call it) post-Berlusconi era, when Italians became familiar with the recurring presence of Saviano, capable of moving from his original milieu, that is, literature, to all the other media. Floriana Bernardi tells this story from the very beginning, making a strong and dense analysis of the complex field wherein Saviano moves.

The book follows four thematic: the body, the agency of literature, the notions of transmediality and 'micropolitics of affects'. The relevance of the first issue relates to the idea of the 'charismatic body', which helps redefine the figure as well as the tasks of the modern intellectual. The peculiarity of Saviano's case roots in two factors: his youth (he was only 26 when he published *Gomorrah*), in a country, Italy, which is often associated with gerontocracy; and the extreme mediability of his body, at ease as TV host, interviewee, public speaker, social media persona or even simply as photographic subject. The physical perception of Saviano's body is influenced, of course, by his being under police protection and by the reclusive condition he is forced to live in due to the notorious threats he received from the Camorra. The relationship between media visibility and physical invisibility produces a peculiar tension, which pushes his body towards digitization.

One of *Gomorrah's* strategic narrative points was indeed the transformation of Saviano into a witness, a substitute for the reader. His body represented a synonym of truthfulness, it acquired 'veracity and specificity because it is the signifier of the presence in the world of the author-narrator' (36). This connotation, which was earned within the literary-ethnographic field, translates into the different media where Saviano appears. This happens almost effortlessly because transmediality was already present in the same nature of his witness: researching and writing imply the ability to collect information from real life, interviews, newspapers, police reports, trials. 'Transversity', coherent with this method, becomes the highest form of engagement. As Bernardi writes,

Saviano's body as a transmedia intellectual is thus *both* a means of knowledge and perception of the visible, *and* the warranty of the truthfulness of his narration, which will be credible until the author of the narration itself will remain credible.

(22)

Saviano wants to speak to everyone, everywhere, showing and modelling a renewed conception of engagement in the digital and post-ideological age. The intellectual is constantly committed, on-line and off-line, to a permanent

dialogue with his readers, with whom he establishes a 'micropolitics of affects', as Bernardi calls it. The embodied presence of the author also influences the idea of the 'agency of literature', its capability to generate social change – a strong belief and possibly the main motivation that pushes Saviano to write. This aspect is strictly tied to his will to create an online network of subjectivities, to establish a 'passional communication' between the writer and his audience.

From 'affects' to 'effects' is one changed letter. Saviano has numerous detractors, including many politicians who accuse him of overexposing the topic of the Camorra and in so doing creating a negative international perception of the Italian region of Campania. But Saviano is also accused of producing a positive hype towards the Camorra, in particular following the broadcast of the popular television show *Gomorra – The Series* (2014–present). Bernardi briefly analyses, among varied web sources, the comical web series on YouTube by The Jackal, 'Gli effetti di *Gomorra* sulla gente' ('*Gomorra*'s effects on people') (2014–16). The (theory of the) effects produced by the 'Gomorra franchise' is indeed a controversial and stimulating, though not necessarily new, topic. Where does gangster affect comes from? Does the younger generation of Neapolitan gangsters imitate the television characters of *Gomorra*? We cannot answer this question, but it is interesting to locate in Bernardi's book the many occasions in which Saviano advocates for the capacity of his work to give to his audience a sense of agency, and the courage to act culturally and politically. Agency, for Saviano, is directed towards civil engagement. However, we must add that, by definition, agency stands with the reader/viewer, who can do whatever he/she wants with the media text. In Saviano's book we read that Neapolitan Camorristi have been inspired in their clothing, furniture, house design and even tastes and criminal technicalities (for instance, how to hold a gun) by films such as *Scarface* (De Palma, 1983), *Donnie Brasco* (Newell, 1997), *Il camorrista* (Tornatore, 1986), *Kill Bill* (Tarantino, 2003) or *Nikita* (Besson, 1990):

Cinema is a treasure trove to be sacked in order to build a proper criminal image and appearance. [...] The young inhabitants of Naples' slums spectacularize their life turning to the classic imaginary of gangster films to build their identities and roles within the interpersonal relationship they build in their territory. Hence in *Gomorra*, book and film, the linguistic and cultural conscience of the most represented social group is essentially grounded in filmic representations

(80)

It is consequently quite natural to also think that *Gomorra – The Series* can be part of this packet of sources and produce the same agency on its viewers. It is impossible, to put it simply, to negate the 'social effects' of *Gomorra – The Series* if in *Gomorra* (the book) we read that the vision of gangster movies had an impact on Camorristi's behaviour. We can in fact observe a sort of chain reaction: gangster movies influence the reality of the Camorristi's criminal style, described in *Gomorra* (the book), which inspires the TV series, which, in turn, will inspire new styles or behaviours, which will certainly be included in new audiovisual narratives in the future. If these 'effects' are undeniable, so, too, is their complexity.

We can say in conclusion that the figure of Saviano is torn between different 'powers' – the cultural industry, mainstream and niche media, editorial and

television marketing, etc., manifesting the 'complex network of processes of signification and relations constituting the *branding* of a new discursive formation for Italy' (5, original emphasis). Roberto Saviano has become a brand, but Floriana Bernardi's book has the merit to show how, behind or beyond the even too familiar figure of the writer, there is an echo chamber capable of piecing together intricate issues regarding the Italian social, cultural and political debate and the most puzzling changes in the relation between intellectuals and their audience. *Italy Beyond Gomorrah: Roberto Saviano and Transmedia Disruption* is a compelling book, which puts in perspective the cultural role of Roberto Saviano, even if his presence, luckily enough, is far from being historical, but remains vital and necessary in today's Italian struggles.

MEDIA CONVERGENCE AND DECONVERGENCE, GLOBAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION RESEARCH, SERGIO SPARVIERO, CORINNA PEIL AND GABRIELE BALBI (EDS) (2017)

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Media convergence because of its vagueness has been described as a 'dangerous word' (32), but from the point of view of the protection of the media ecosystem it has also been presented as potentially the 'killer bug' (255). What is possibly wrong with the concept of media convergence and how can it be turned into a useful strategical and heuristic tool? The introduction (Part I) of *Media Convergence and Deconvergence* consists of two chapters by the editors that contextualize the different uses and abuses of media convergence and 'deconstruct' 'media convergence', reconstructing this buzzword's genealogy. The perspective of deconvergence is introduced here to 'help shed light on the ambivalent nature of media convergence' and to 'provide alternative viewpoints' (7).

The first chapter, 'Media convergence meets deconvergence' by editors Corinna Peil and Sergio Sparviero, offers the reader a clear introduction to the concepts of media convergence and deconvergence and of the book's aims and scope. Convergence, which has become an umbrella concept and a key issue in academic texts around the 2000s, has nevertheless lost its consistency. Under the generic concept of media convergence, which can be understood as 'an overarching transition process and one of the major implications of digitization' (3), Peil and Sparviero distinguish technological convergence – the increasing interchangeability of media through digitization – as its underlying feature. Taking therefore technological convergence as a starting point, Peil and Sparviero distinguish three levels of change processes: the macro level