

Oral poetry in traditional and new media The case of Campidanese poetry competitions

Daniela Mereu

University of Bergamo (PhD Student)

d.mereu@studenti.unibg.it

L'obiettivo del presente contributo è di proporre alcune riflessioni riguardanti il rapporto tra la poesia improvvisata e i mass media. In particolare, la ricerca si focalizza sia sulle manifestazioni di poesia improvvisata che si svolgono nei 'palchi' dei mass media tradizionali (radio e televisione) sia sulle nuove forme di poesia improvvisata sorte con i nuovi media. Il caso specifico a cui si fa riferimento in questa sede è rappresentato dalla poesia orale campidanese, una forma di poesia improvvisata cantata diffusa nel sud della Sardegna. La prima parte di questo lavoro prende in esame l'interazione tra la poesia orale e i mass media in termini generali. Nella seconda parte vengono illustrati alcuni esempi di performance trasmesse nelle radio e nelle televisioni locali, allo scopo di analizzare le modificazioni che la gara poetica subisce a causa dei nuovi contesti in cui viene svolta. Infine, l'ultima sezione del contributo è incentrata sui nuovi luoghi di incontro virtuali per gli appassionati e i poeti della tradizione orale campidanese: YouTube, Facebook e un sito web creato per le gare poetiche on line.

The aim of this paper is to illustrate some points of interest concerning the relationship between improvised poetry and mass media. In particular, this study focuses on the oral poetry competitions that take place on the 'stages' of traditional mass media (radio and television) and on the new forms of improvised poetry connected with the new media. The case study presented in this paper is Campidanese oral poetry, a form of improvised-sung poetry spread throughout the south of Sardinia. The first part of this paper analyses the interaction between oral poetry and mass media, in general terms. In the second part, some examples of Campidanese oral performances transmitted on local television and radio stations are described, in order to analyse the modifications to poetry competitions produced by the new contexts. The last section of this study presents the new virtual meeting places for Campidanese oral tradition enthusiasts and poets: YouTube, Facebook and a website designed for online poetry competitions.

Introduction

For many years mass media were seen as almost a taboo topic for anthropology, too redolent of Western modernity for a field identified with tradition, the non-Western, and the vitality of the local [...] it was not until the late 1980s that anthropologists began to turn systematic attention to media as social practice.

(GINSBURG – ABU-LUGHOD – LARKIN 2002, p. 3)

ACADEMIC research on mass media focusing on the impact that the mass media has in socio-cultural terms, on the one hand, and, on the other, on the study of the new technological tools as fieldwork contexts. «Academic inquiry into the social consequences of media technology formed the basis of the relatively new disciplines of Communication Studies, Media Studies, Cultural Studies, Film Studies, Media Sociology, Visual Anthropology, and [...] Media Anthropology» (ASKEW 2007, p. 3). Among these new disciplines, media anthropology has confirmed a methodology of contextual research in ethnographic practice (FAGIOLI – ZAMBOTTI 2005, p. 11). Even the field of ethnomusicology, which deals with the reality of mass media, has primarily focused its interest on new performance contexts. Indeed, thanks to the interconnection of musical and discursive practices in a globalised and mediatized world, the object of study of post-modern ethnomusicology shows a complexity that resides in the social context rather than in the sounds (PELINSKI 2002, p. 700). In the sphere of oral poetry, the mass media have for decades played an important role that cannot, and should not, be underestimated, as noted by Ruth Finnegan (1977, pp. 168-169): «the purist is tempted to try to exclude them from his study of transmission, but this is unrealistic. In this century, they form one of the main means of distribution of oral poetry – and not just in industrial countries».

In this research, we shall focus on the relationship between Campidanese oral poetry and the mass media. With the aim of offering the reader a general survey of this issue, we shall first analyze the relationship with the radio-television media and then focus on the presence of oral poetry on the Web. We shall illustrate how every medium transforms a performance in a particular way, depending on its specific features. Indeed, the mass media world is characterized by a strong heterogeneous nature, as outlined by Spitulnik (1993, p. 293): «mass media [...] are at once artifacts, experiences, practices and processes. Given these various modalities and spheres of operation, there are numerous angles for approaching mass media anthropologically: as institutions, as workplaces, as communicative practices, as cultural products, as social activities, as aesthetic forms, and as historical developments».

Oral poetry and the mass media

Although the importance of mass media in the study of oral poetry is clear, the contrast between their respective characters is strong. In particular, field

research, involving a group of Campidanese poetry experts from Sinnai¹ and focusing on the relationship between improvised poetry and the mass media, revealed the idea of incompatibility between the two spheres: on the one hand, that of oral poetry in the square, consisting of ritualized gestures and a long and slow execution, which is not immediately understandable, and requires commitment, attention and participation; and, on the other, the world of mass media, undemanding and elusive, the herald and mirror of hectic times and increasingly numerous and diversified events that require little attention and concentration. As Lutz (2012, p. 61) noted: the feast is one of the last bulwarks where certain modes of fruition of music save themselves, in which there is a different idea of time to devote to music and poetry, different to the model now imposed in Western culture, where frenzy has become the engine of everything.

Despite the deep contrast existing between the two contexts, today's media offer new virtual spaces for the circulation of improvised poetry. And *de facto*, in the past there had been, and still is, a theatre of oral performance determining these hybrid conditions, because it lacked the basic direct interaction between poet/audience that compromises the stability of a performance which cannot be replaced by the studio as an audience surrogate (MACCHIARELLA 2010, pp. 528-529). The nature of a performance conveyed by means of communication is necessarily transformed, first of all by the fact that the event is not live but mediated.

A tradition of extemporaneous poetry that offers an example of interaction with the mass media is Basque improvised poetry, which presents an audio-visual subgenre of radio and television programmes (SARASUA 2007, p. 37, FOLEY 2007). The decision to present the poetry via television is dictated by the fact that «the spirit of bertsoaritzia is not one of 'preservation' with an attitude of fear when faced with change or danger» (SARASUA 2007, p. 40). Nevertheless, it is significant that an Association (called Bertsozale Elkarte), whose aim is to defend the values of poetic improvisation, was created at the same time; a symbol of an awareness of the serious dangers that the logic of the media market would cause to the complexity and spontaneity of improvised practice.

¹ As for the description of Campidanese oral poetry see BRAVI 2010, ZEDDA 2009, ZEDDA - LUTZU 2012. Very briefly, with respect to its structure we can say that the Campidanese poetry competition, called *sa cantada*, is characterized by two sections: the first is called the *mutetada* from the name of the main stanza used, *su mutetu longu*, which is characterized by a very difficult system of rhymes. This section lasts about two and a half hours. In the *mutetada*, the poets are accompanied by a polyphonic chorus called *sa contra*, composed of two male voices (*su bàsciu* and *sa contra*) who intone a guttural humming sound. In the second section, called the *versada*, the poets sing *versus*, a poetic form that is easier than the *mutetu longu* and accompanied by a guitar. This latter section lasts for about an hour. Sinnai is one of the centres in the Campidano (a region in the south of Sardinia), where Campidanese oral poetry is active and dynamic.

In actual fact, the natural aim of a television channel is to achieve media success and large audiences, but Bertsozale Elkarteak is keen to preserve verse for the long term and knows that television successes can 'burn up' anything very quickly. The *bertsolaritza* movement sees verse as 'fragile' with respect to the market logic of mass media. (SARASUA 2007, p. 40)

For this reason, the Association strives to maintain the essence of spontaneity and the authenticity of improvisation (SARASUA 2007, p. 42). In general terms, we can affirm that every musical performance broadcast through a medium is modified in some aspects. One of the elements that create these changes is the voice-over (an additional element in respect to direct performer-audience interaction), which comments on the performance and inevitably influences the listeners. The risk is that the comments, which often are as much to do with subjective interpretations as technical aspects, influence the audience towards a very different idea compared to the nature of the musical genre transmitted.

This power of mass media is related to the fact that, as Cook (1998, p. 14) noted: «words do work because they do not simply reflect how things are. We do work with words by using them to change things, to *make* things the way they are. Or to put it more abstractly, language constructs reality rather than merely reflecting it». In this sense, the study carried out by Washabaugh (1994) on the TV documentary *Rito* about flamenco, created and produced by the Spanish National Television, seems meaningful. The author shows how the comments of the voice-over do not give prominence to body centrality in flamenco and he affirms that without an appreciation of the body, there cannot be any real appreciation of the *cante*. The comments and interviews in *Rito* lead viewers to think of the *cante* as a contemplative activity, giving prominence to the importance of the sincerity and purity of the *cante* itself. This idea clashes strongly with the bodily energy and strength of the performers. The marginalization of the body is illustrated by the fact that the commentators follow Western established concepts of music (WASHABAUGH 1994).

This is an example of how the comments accompanying television performances sometimes offer the audience a falsified concept of reality, leaving out a very important component for evaluating the performance. Therefore, when factors of improvised poetic practice change (given that television and radio not only alter the space-time context but, among other things, the fundamental relationship between poet and audience), we can no longer apply the reasoning of oral poetic performance on stage to this new type of performance, because with the mass media it has created a new poetic and musical genre or, if you prefer, subgenre. As noted by Schechner (1999, p. 31), there is only one quantity of change that a genre can absorb before it becomes another thing. Media technologies are not neutral. Each new medium imposes to society new relations to the body and to perception, time, and space, as theorists from McLuhan (1964) to Goody (1977), Ong (1991), Baudrillard

(1984), and Kittler (1999) have argued (GINSBURG – ABU-LUGHOD – LARKIN 2002, p. 19).

The transformation of the event, stripped of the basic direct interaction between poets and audience, is too high a price to pay to adapt this poetic expression to the new opportunities offered by a mass media society. The spoken word puts one person in live contact with another, but this result is not achieved with mass media. There is no person-to-person contact (ONG 1967, p. 290). Although radio and television are mass media involving an audience (especially television), there is no way that they can replace face-to-face interaction.

Television

It is necessary to emphasize that, as far as Sardinian television is concerned, talk of poetry competitions always refers to the genre of *versadas*, since *mutetas* have never been adopted by radio and television because their duration exceeds the time the medium has available. In particular, we shall refer to a television broadcast transmitted in the late 1990s on the local network Tele Setar, entitled *Tradizionis e Cantadas* and conducted in Sardinian-Campidanese by Agostino Valdès, who is a *contra* and a *versadori* (poet who sings in the *versadas*). Neither of the major television networks, *Sardegna1* and *Videolina*, has ever broadcasted improvised poetry competitions, but only some parts of a duel, some *mutetu* or some *otada* between the poets of Logudoro.² This is due to advertising constraints that prevent a television programme from broadcasting an entire competition, which is usually very long. Although such constraints are the main problem with the transmission of poetry competitions on television, we should not neglect the problem of the television studio itself. With all its lights, operations and instrumentation, it does not offer an ideal setting for poetic execution.

The stage

The stage set for an evening of *cantadoris* generates important expectations for both poets and the attending spectators. In contrast, the television stage has a different value and is only apparently a scene for a *cantada*: indeed, it is a television studio and, as such, unable to elicit the order of expectations that is typical of a poetic duel. Moreover, the television scenario is set up for a transmission, not for a feast, which is where *cantadas* usually take place. This is not just a spatial modification, but also the creation of a new and unusual environment for the competition. In addition, it should be emphasized that these new spatial coordinates are shared by only a small part of the audience to whom the performance is addressed, namely, the studio audience. The majority of viewers, who are enjoying the event at home in front of a TV

² We refer here to another oral poetic tradition that is widespread in Logudoro, in the north of Sardinia.

screen, totally lack any sense of sharing the space, which is essential for any direct poet-audience interaction.

Time

The different concepts of time appear irreconcilable if we compare the top-level expression of Campidanese poetry, the *cantada*, with the TV and radio medium. Considering that the *cantada* is an oral improvised performance that lasts about three hours, it is completely impossible to broadcast an entire poetry competition. The media are strongly constrained by advertising needs and subject to the logic of the market: no broadcaster or radio can afford to occupy such a large space without commercials. The consequence is that a whole *cantada* has never been aired live without commercial interruptions in the entire history of broadcast media. The only poetic duels that have been broadcast live are those *a versus* (or *versadas*), *a mutetu froriu*³ and *a otavas*, which took place in the studios of the *Tradizionis e Cantadas* television programme. Although they are not *mutetus longus* duels, we can still consider them a very interesting and unique example in Sardinian local television.

Most poetry competitions are performed during the patron saint's festivals, with a ritualized manner and duration. Time in a poetry competition is conceived of in a very different way to the general ideas of time and the way it is quantified in the field of the mass media.

The *cantada* has no predetermined time, so it is clear that it would be unthinkable for a television schedule to propose such an event – which in any case rarely lasts less than three hours. In summary, for poetry on stage there is validity to the idea that «its length is made to adhere to a culturally motivated rule of probability» (ZUMTHOR 1990, p. 119).

Referring to Schechner's categories of performative time (SCHECHNER 1999, p. 63), we can conclude that the poetry competition on stage is characterized by the way the duration is generated by the event itself, since the activity consists of a defined sequence and all the steps must be completed irrespective of the time. In contrast, competitions mediated by radio or television have a definite time since the event is subordinated to an arbitrary duration. Citing the only case of the transmission of *versadas* on television, the recordings of the episodes allow us to see that the *versada* was fully performed, but it had to last forty minutes. Therefore, the poetry competition had a time limit. But this is normal for television, where time is highly quantified.

The performers

The artistic performance of the theatrical interpreter is presented to the audience by himself alone; on the other hand, the artistic performance of the

³ *Su mutetu froriu* or *a frori* is another kind of poetic form. A description of its structure is given in ZEDDA 2008, pp. XXX-XXXI.

movie actor is presented through a device (BENJAMIN 1955, p. 31). Transposing the words of Benjamin into the sphere of poetic improvisation, we could compare the theatrical performer to the poet who sings on stage and the movie actor to the poet who performs on television. In a duel in the square, the poet's performance passes to the audience in a direct way, without the filtering effect of the camera, while the whole competition on television is offered to the spectators that follow it from home via technology. The camera, controlled by the operator, takes a stand in relation to the performance itself (BENJAMIN 1955, p. 31).

In summary, the viewer is forced to watch the performance through the operator's eyes. This addressing of the view is completely absent in the square: the viewers can turn their gaze anywhere and at any time, deciding to pay more attention to certain poets, aspects or sequences of the competition. Again referring to Benjamin (1955, p. 31), the second consequence of the presence of the machinery is that the poet on television cannot adapt his performance to the audience during the duel. Aside from the studio audience, the poet cannot see the spectators watching the competition and therefore has no idea if the audience is pleased with the performance or not. In the square, the poet knows whether the spectators are appreciating the competition, thanks to facial expressions, laughter and comments, the so-called non-verbal signals of feedback (ARGYLE 1975).

The audience

In an improvised poetic performance, the audience is not just a spectator but a performer in the competition, primarily because without it the performance would have no reason for being: a necessary condition for a performer is the presence of someone who listens. Secondly, the expert audience is an active participant, which expresses its satisfaction by evaluating the performance of each *cantadori*, not only through applause – mostly stereotyped in the *cantada* (BRAVI 2010, p. 73) – but mainly through facial expressions, yawns, comments and laughter.

We also know that the audience at poetry competitions is not homogeneous in its composition. In general, we can distinguish the experts in Campidanese poetry – who generally follow the duel from the front and move around southern Sardinia to attend as many competitions as possible – from the occasional spectators, the locals who go to the feast.⁴ This composition is not reflected in the audience of a television studio. In addition to the enthusiasts of the genre, there is a section of the audience, who are not necessarily passionate about Campidanese poetry, and who have simply gone to watch a TV programme. First of all, many of the people who want to be part of the audience are attracted by the novelty of the event, or by the fact that «they are

⁴ As for the audience of the Campidanese poetry competitions, see LUTZU 2005; LUTZU 2012, LUTZU – MANCONI 2004, MACCHIARELLA 2005, BRAVI 2010.

going on television», and if they are lucky and are filmed, they may be recognized by someone watching the transmission from home.

At this point, we can elaborate a new compositional scheme of the studio audience of a televised duel: 1) competent enthusiasts that record performances, 2) people attracted by the opportunity to participate in a TV show rather than a poetic duel, and 3) relatives or acquaintances of the guests of the programme who are, in principle, little interested in oral poetry. Nevertheless, the audience of televised competitions does not only consist of people in the studio. On the contrary, these are just a small part, because every television show is designed to reach a very wide audience of viewers, who watch the show from home. The audience in the squares is participatory and very different from an audience of viewers who do not live the duel, but observe its course through a television set. This reality determines at least three different consequences.

First of all, there is no sharing of the *hic et nunc*: if the performance is live, the viewer shares the moment with the performers of the poetic duel, but the absence of sharing changes the nature of oral execution. Secondly, the viewer becomes anonymous, invisible to the poet and, as such, no longer an active part of the competition – a passive spectator at best. Finally – and this can be considered the third consequence – there is no sharing of a common passion between the enthusiasts. The poetry on stage pushes the enthusiasts of the genre to come out of their homes and take part in a live performance, while as stated by Sarasua (2007, p. 38) «in today's mass society a large portion of culture is consumed individually in the privacy of one's own home».

Radio

«Electronic transmission is no abnormal or odd context for oral poetry; indeed radio is becoming extremely important both in industrial and (perhaps even more) in developing countries as a vehicle for oral poetry» (Finnegan 1977, p. 156). In Campidanese oral poetry, the radio context has played an important role for the success of many poets and players. In particular, as Bravi (2010, p. 136) notes, the free radios were a springboard and a stepping-stone to a professional career in the past, not only for *cantadoris* but also for guitarists.

The first competitions on the radio date back to the late seventies, while the period of greatest fervour for the radio poetic genre were the eighties, when there were a number of appreciated and very capable *versadoris*. There is currently only one station offering a programme in which *versadas* are performed in a radio studio, Radio Sant'Elena.⁵ This programme, entitled *Tradizionis e Cantadas*, is conducted by Agostino Valdès.

⁵ The radio has its headquarters in Quartu Sant'Elena (CA).

Poets who usually perform on stage for *cantadas* do not participate in radio *versadas*. It is well known that the protagonists are amateurs and *versadoris* who consider the radio as a place to share their passion for poetry which is much more visible than their homes (BRAVI 2010, p. 136). During my research, I noticed how, in a period characterized by the hybridity of forms and genres, the most interesting aspect that emerges from a careful analysis of the radio duels – both those dating back to the eighties and the current ones – concerns not so much the linguistic-audio content, but the socio-contextual one (PELINSKI 2002, p. 700). Indeed, «the ‘ethnography of media’, as a category of media studies, involved decentering the textual content of media technologies in favor of analyzing the social context of their reception» (GINSBURG – ABU-LUGHOD – LARKIN 2002, p. 19).

It is necessary to remember that an oral event is characterized as situational rather than abstract (ONG 1982, p. 48); for this reason, it cannot be decontextualized from the situation where it is produced. In its real context, that is, in the square, the competition is enjoyed by a limited audience of participants who share the common passion of listening to the *cantadas*, and the exchange of tape cassettes or *libureddus*.⁶ In a poetry contest on the radio, all these elements are absent. Only a few people (typically a few friends of the *versadoris* who are singing) usually come to the studio to watch the *versada*: the real radio audience are those people tuned to the frequency of the broadcasting station, which is not done by a group of people, but by individuals who follow the competition through private listening, without leaving home. A virtual audience, which does not participate in the event and does not see the poets, can only experience the duel through the sound of the improvisers’ voices. This factor inevitably influences the development of the poetry competition: on the one hand, the poets sing for an anonymous audience who can only imagine, and, on the other, the radio-users only employ the sense of hearing in order to receive an event that, given its nature as a highly participatory oral performance, requires the help of all the senses to appreciate all its components, which are interconnected and inseparable from each other.

A private mass medium

A necessary condition for the development of an oral poetry competition in the square is the presence of a concrete audience. In improvised poetic practice, the message of the poets is not only transmitted by the voice but also by the body: behaviour, posture, gaze and gestures. All these elements are bearers of meaning and they are missing in the radio competition. «Orality cannot be reduced to vocal action. As an expansion of the body, vocality does not exhaust orality. Indeed, it implies everything in us that is addressed to the other, be it a mute gesture, a look» (ZUMTHOR 1990, p. 153). The lack of a physical component causes significant consequences in the performance. The

⁶ The *libureddus* are little books containing the texts of *cantadas*.

radio performance is aimed at a listening audience and poets who sing on the radio know that only their voice will reach the listeners: this particular fruition sees that the context of the radio performance is very informal and unusual. This informality, determined by the lack of an audience and the visual component in the studio, concerns both the behaviour of the poets and their clothing. This fact is typical of the radio context and is very different from a competition on television or in the square. The lack of vision is connected to the low consideration conferred on the radio. Though the radio can reach a very high number of listeners, it seems that this potentiality is underestimated by the *cantadoras* because of the nature of the medium, and the radio studio is seen as a very homely context. The *versadoras* consider the radio a simple meeting place where they can sing and share their passion. For these reasons, it seems suitable to define the radio as a 'private mass medium'.

The Internet

As noted by L'Écuyer (2005, p. 235), with the Internet we can glimpse a strong transformation of our relationship with music, such as the abolition of every geographic barrier and of the consideration of the place where music is produced and listened to. In general, the implications produced by the Internet are very difficult to evaluate. As far as oral poetry is concerned, the relationship between the oral performances and the Internet is particularly interesting.

Indeed, we can profit substantially by recognizing the uncanny similarity between much oral poetry and the Internet. Although they may seem media-generations divorced from one another, forever separated by the great bulk of books and journals that fill our libraries, the truth is that both depend on links rather than items, on connections rather than spatialized, warehousable objects.

(FOLEY 2002, p. 220)

But, although the similarities identified by Foley make the Internet a suitable medium for oral poetic executions, also thanks to the multimedia possibilities, it is essential to emphasize how the oral genre undergoes changes and adaptations on the Internet. In this sense, Cocq's research (2013) on Sami storytelling in digital environments is significant, even though it concerns the narrative genre.

Cocq (2013) highlights how, thanks to the Internet, Sami narratives have been preserved but also modified. «Interactivity enables interplay and interaction between storyteller, audience, and story to a greater extent than a written and printed text» (COCQ 2013, p. 132). Despite the advantages of the web, there are many differences between the traditional narratives and the digital instances on the websites: the main difference is their intended audience. In older narratives

all generations used to be involved in such narrative events. But in their newer digital media forms, the Sami legends and tales are intended especially for children. Traditional narratives have been adjusted to employ a more accessible register, and Sami storytelling has been somewhat redefined as a genre with a shift in focus. Side effects of the shift that can be observed today include the disappearances of details and a narrowing of variations in order to adjust legends and tales to young readers. (COCQ 2013, p. 134)

The abolition of cruel details is also related with the different consumption of the storytelling. Whereas narration would traditionally occur in a collective way, today children listen to stories on their own, in front of the computer, and so, cruel details are not appropriate (COCQ 2013, p. 135). Therefore, the narrow audience connected with the different fruition of these kinds of narrative practices determines a series of adaptations of this oral genre to the Internet, with the risk of the loss of variation in the Sami storytelling tradition.

In this research, we shall try to illustrate how the web settings for oral poetry have modified the relationship between enthusiasts, what type of content is shown, and what new forms developed after the encounter between oral poetry and the Internet. In the contemporary context, which is characterized by a great variety of media and channels, the Internet is a virtual space where many of these dimensions are connected with varying contents and genres. Therefore, it is not easy to distinguish them clearly since different channels intersect and are used in new spaces. At the same time, in order to do any kind of virtual fieldwork, we have to isolate some environments to analyze how the potential of the different digital means relates to oral practices. I shall focus on three different but interconnected dimensions: the YouTube channel, the social network Facebook and the website *Ilsardo.it*. Before analyzing these contexts, it is worth noting that «for us, virtual fieldwork is a means of studying real people; the goal is not the study of the virtual ‘text’, just as for ethnomusicologists (generally) the subject of study is people making music rather than the music object exclusively» (COOLEY – MEIZEL – SYED 2008, p. 91).

YouTube

Sound recording devices have deeply transformed the relationship with music, in terms of both production and fruition.⁷ The consequences of these aspects concern the concept of music, the relationship between teacher and scholar, the methods of music distribution, copyright, and so on. Thanks to recording instruments, the music is captured and can be listened to at any time and everywhere.

⁷ For an in-depth analysis about these features see MOLINO 2005.

Oral traditional performances are *collected*, that is, caught and imprisoned in the anthropologist's or folklorist's game-bag via inscription on paper, acoustic media, or video media. Lest they wriggle away, these performances are in effect euthanized, stripped of the dynamism that characterizes their living identity in preparation for mounting on the game-hunter's game. (FOLEY 2005, p. 233)

One way to collect video recordings of oral performances is YouTube, the most popular video site, created in 2005, where web-users can upload videos for free. Among the many different kinds of genre, it is possible to find videos of oral poetry performances in this enormous digital library. Before the launch of YouTube, the only way to spread and store a poetry competition among enthusiasts was on an audiotape. Apart from the function of preservation (we know that in Campidano there are some enthusiasts who have compiled large personal archives of recordings of poetry competitions), the cassette tape was also useful to present new *cantadoris* to the committees of the religious festivals, which had (and still have) the task of choosing the poets for the poetry competition in the square. Although the cassette tape is still used, because nowadays the enthusiasts «who attend performances tend to be middle-aged or older, in general over forty or fifty» (ZEDDA 2009, p. 11), and most of them use a tape recorder, some poets or enthusiasts record *cantadas* with digital recording devices and then upload the resulting audio/video files to YouTube.



Figure 1 – Results on You Tube when we search for *gara poetica campidanese* (Campidanese poetic duel).

It is easily deducible that a video of Campidanese oral poetry will not achieve a large number of viewings, because of its nature as a niche. The level of popularity is not important; for a video to be present on YouTube, it is enough for somebody to upload it. Moreover, as Ferroni (1996, p. 134) emphasizes, every communicative entity is exposed to memorization, cata-

logging, registration, archiving, to the extent that they are perceived as ‘closed’, as textual corpora distinct from others. When we watch a video recording of a poetry competition, it seems a closed event, memorized and stored, which can be rewound or stopped at any moment. We are not involved in a process but an outcome: what we are watching is only the fixation of an event. The learning, memorization and execution of performances are physical events, actions that are being created, rather than the foundation of archives and storage of written materials (DERIU 1999, pp. XXVII-XXVIII).

Furthermore, the event can be watched an unlimited number of times and this possibility contrasts with the distinctiveness of improvisation: the recording always lacks the *hic et nunc* of the work of art (BENJAMIN 1955, p. 23). A video recording is characterized by an asynchrony and the lack of sharing the space. Indeed, as Macchiarella (2010, p. 532) argues, oral poetry proposes a representation of the immediacy and temporary nature of the performance, which clashes with the desire, or maybe the illusion, of fixing time with instruments for the recording and reproduction of sounds. Above all, it contrasts with the interpretation of poetic/musical execution as reproducing something that has already been done, prematurely created and placed ‘out of time’.

In addition to this kind of consequence concerning the performance, YouTube has also determined an innovation in the relationship between the poet and the performance. The service allows the authors of a performance to distribute the recordings of a performance themselves. Where Campidanese oral poetry is concerned, we can find many recordings of oral poetry competitions and most of them are posted by poets or enthusiasts. Anybody can upload a video of a performance and everybody has the possibility of being seen. We can watch different kinds of informal and ‘official’ poetry competitions, in different places, such as houses and squares, and from different periods (both present and past competitions), with professional and non-professional poets.

An important feature of YouTube is the ability to comment and express an opinion on the videos. In this sense, there is a kind of feedback, although it is very different from that of the poetry competitions in the squares. Thanks to YouTube, it is possible to share the videos on other webspaces as well, for example on the social network Facebook, and we can affirm that it is especially through social networks that a video is known and distributed.

From *magasinus*⁸ to Facebook

The web has created a new virtual meeting place: mass media offer the possibility of a continuous relationship between oral poetry enthusiasts (the poets, but mainly the fans) through which they exchange information, news,

⁸ In the past, *magasinus* were wine shops, where *cantadoris* met and sang.

audio and video files of performances, they have discussions and so on (MACCHIARELLA 2010, p. 530).

One of the web environments that allow this new kind of relationship is the famous social network Facebook, where there are many pages about Sardinian oral poetry. The most popular one relating to Campidanese poetry is *Su Mutetu*. This page was created in 2008 by Francesco Capuzzi, a young *versadori*, under the name of *A sa moda campidanese* and, since 2011, under the present name *Su mutetu*. There are at least two other groups about Campidanese oral poetry, *S'arrenconi de sa musa* (The corner of the muse'), created by the poet Antonio Pani, and *Poesia improvvisata campidanese* (Campidanese improvised poetry), founded by the poet Severino Monni. *Su Mutetu* is a virtual group composed of enthusiasts, poets and scholars of Campidanese oral poetry, in which the users (at the moment around 500) post news, pictures, audio and video files and poems, which all the users can see, listen to and express their appreciation with a click (the 'like' button) or a comment.

I was able to identify at least three fundamental purposes of this page:

1. a meeting place for enthusiasts of oral poetry and for sharing materials about Campidanese oral poetry;
2. a bulletin board to communicate dates and places of poetry competitions: this is very important because it allows you to find full information on planned oral poetry competitions.
3. Space reserved for the publication of *mutetus*.

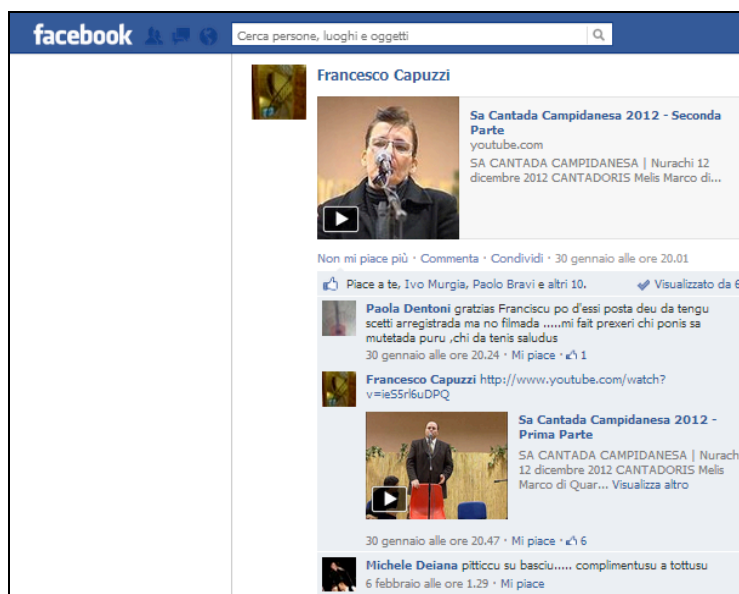


Figure 2 – Some videos of a *cantada* posted on the page *Su mutetu*.

As far as the first purpose of the page is concerned, we can define *Su mutetu* in Macchiarella's words (2010, p. 530) as an amplification of the elaboration/reinforcement procedures of competences inherent to the reserved expression of improvised poetry: before the spread of the mass media, the discussion between enthusiasts required them to physically meet. Nowadays, the mass media allow the enthusiasts to continually keep in touch without meeting. Discussion is based on events repeatable to infinity (audio/video files) and on reasoning conveyed by the new modalities of the reorganization of thinking due to computer writing (MACCHIARELLA 2010, p. 530). Therefore, beside the exchange of cassettes and *libureddus*, today digital materials can also be shared through the new media, in particular via the social networks. Facebook allows a high level of participation from the users, who can comment on a poetry competition, song, picture or poem, creating interesting discussions.

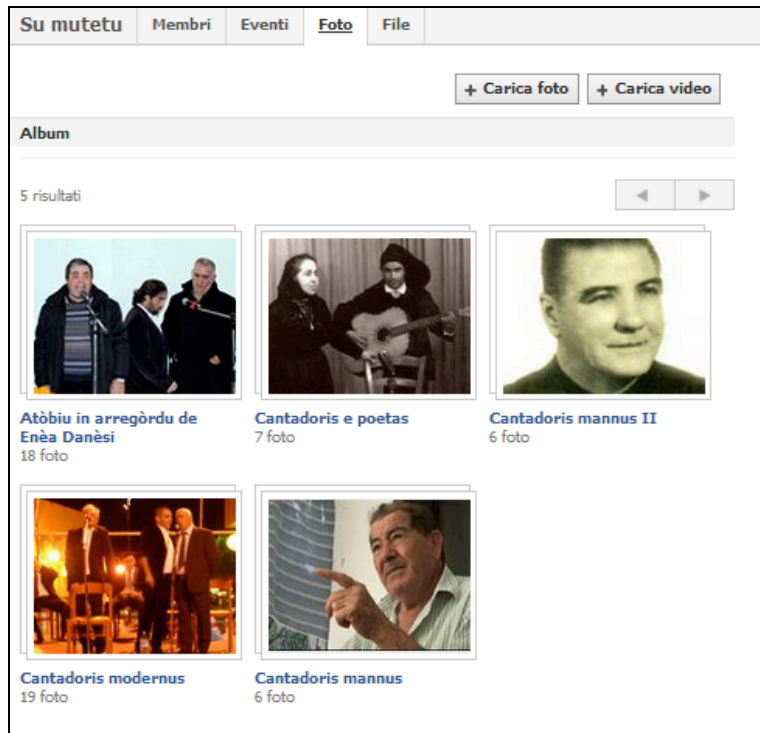


Figure 3 – The section of the *Su mutetu* page dedicated to the pictures.

The majority of news posted on *Su mutetu* is information about poetry competitions, including the date, place and the names of the poets and musicians (*bàsciu* and *contra* and guitarist). Thus, people who want to participate in a poetry competition can find all the necessary information in a very easy way. Generally, before the birth of Facebook, the manner of finding

out the dates of the *cantadas* was to ask other poets or enthusiasts. These events are announced by poets or fans. The truthfulness of the information is guaranteed by the presence of many poets and enthusiasts who can confirm or correct what another user writes.

The third purpose of the Facebook page is to represent a space where people can publish and share poems; anybody can start a virtual poetry competition – not only well-known poets but also amateurs. Everybody on *Su mutetu* is a potential author and all the poems and addresses receive the same importance thanks to the system. This is a feature of the whole web, there are no access barriers, anybody can participate in the activities in the public space (GRANIERI 2009, p. 114).



Figure 4 – A poem posted by the poet Antonio Pani.

The social network environment attracts a lot of people from different regions of Sardinia or enthusiasts who live abroad. The user base of Facebook is potentially enormous; however, Campidanese oral poetry continues to be a niche practice on this social network, as well, since the number of people registered with the group is currently around 500 members.

Poetry competitions online

On the web there are settings designed for poetry competitions. Where Campidanese oral poetry is concerned, the best-known of these is the *Il-sardo.it* website.



Figure 5 – The section of the *ilsardo.it* website dedicated to poetry competitions.

This is a personal website, conceived and founded by Gianni Mura, an enthusiast of Campidanese oral poetry, as well as an author of Sardinian written poetry. A section of the site is dedicated to oral poetry and since May 2007 has hosted a system for poetic improvisation online⁹; however in this case it would be better to refer to it as a ‘dialogue *a muttetu*’, as the creator of the site defines it. The operation is easy. All one needs to do is to enter one’s own name or nickname in the specific space and to write the *muttetu* in the window called *Muttettu*: anyone can start a new competition or participate in a *cantada*. All *cantadas* are archived on the site and can be read or downloaded.

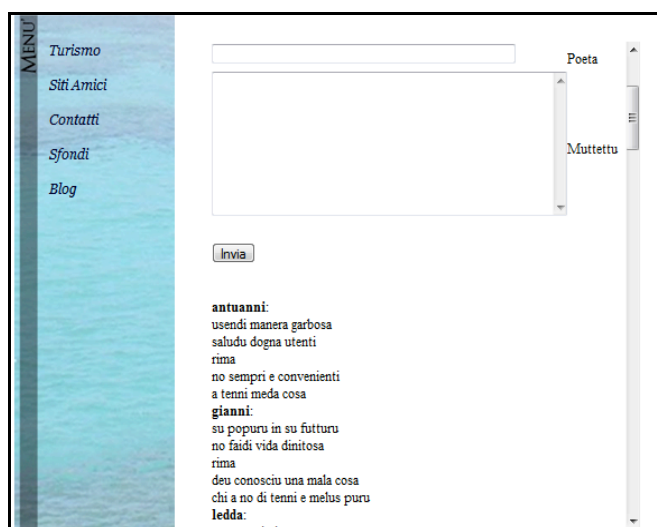


Figure 6 – Some versus from an ongoing poetic competition.

⁹ On Facebook there are other pages where users write poems, such as *Sa gala de poesia sarda* (for Logudorese poetry) (PILOSU 2012, p. 81) and, as we have seen, *Su muttetu*.

The website has achieved a resounding success among enthusiasts of Campidanese oral poetry: there are many participants in the competitions and the website entries are numerous. As for the type of users, it is necessary to emphasize that the participants in these competitions are amateur poets, not experts. It is interesting to highlight how the website represents an adjustment of poetic improvisation for the web, an asynchronous dialogue *a mutetus* between poetry enthusiasts.

For a *cantadori*, any time is a good time to sing and give vent to your own inventiveness, by sharing your own passion with other people. It is notable that the Internet has provided people with an efficient instrument to give life to poetic performances, which, although they are written and characterized by asynchronous communication, have found success and considerable participation. It represents a valiant instrument for attracting young people – those who have grown up far from the *magasinus* but very close to the web – to the Campidanese poetic tradition. This type of dialogue represents a form *sui generis* of an asynchronous communication mediated by the computer (Computer-Mediated Communication or CMC):¹⁰ it can be considered an atypical form of CMC since it is a poetic genre and as such cannot be assimilated to speech.

Thanks to technological development, the written word has reconquered an important space (ANTONELLI 2009), after its obfuscation due to the prevalence of audiovisual media. We can also affirm that thanks to the Internet, writing in the Campidanese poetic field has developed a great significance, even though the improvised poetry competition is only an oral performance.¹¹ In the past, however, the practice of the *cantadas a taulinu* (*cantadas* in the table), was attested through the composition of written *mutetus* in notes. It was a private, not public practice that happened between neighbours. Broadly speaking, Sardinian oral poetry is different from written poetry, known as *poesia a taulinu*, not only in its means of communication. The difference also concerns the character of the two types of composition. Sardinian written poetry is connected with an individual practice, not with competitions between poets. With the Internet and, in particular, thanks to the online systems for poetic dialogue created by enthusiasts, writing has entered the Sardinian poetic field with a form of written dialogue through the use of the computer.

The convergence between traditional and new media

The arrival of a new medium does not lead to the demise of the pre-existing media. Instead, it reorganizes the total view, not with replacement, but with

¹⁰ The label CMC, strengthened in the Anglo-Saxon area, concerns both the talk among users via computers connected to the Internet and the field of research dedicated to this form of communication (PISTOLESI 2004, p. 10). Cf. BARON 1984, HERRING 1996, HERRING 2001.

¹¹As for poetry competitions, the most important function of writing was the transcript of the *cantadas* in the famous *libureddus*.

compresence. Thus, new media are not a substitute for traditional media but they define new convergence forms, made possible thanks to the processes of digitalization and compression (BONI 2004, p. 124). These procedures allowed the launch of new forms of traditional media: for example the press (with online daily newspapers), the radio (with web-radio), and television (thanks to streaming technology) (BONI 2004, p. 125). In the field of Campidanese oral poetry, streaming technology applied to the radio produced an interesting case of mixture between new and traditional media. Since November 2012, the *versadas* transmitted on Radio Sant'Elena have also been streamed at <<http://www.livestream.com/radiosantelenalive/>>.

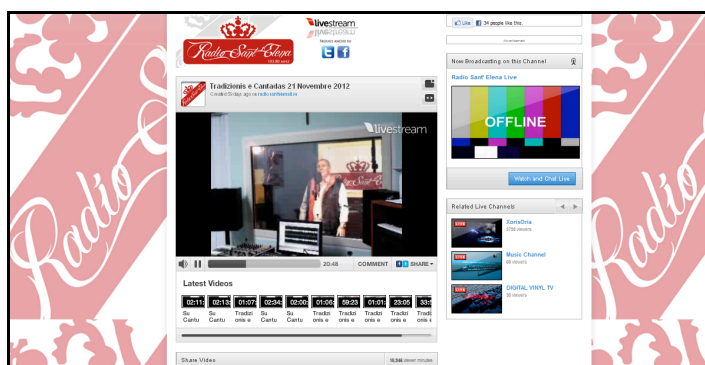


Figure 7 – A frame extracted from a video of a *versada* broadcast from Radio Sant'Elena (the *versadori* in the picture is Agostino Valdès). From: <<http://www.livestream.com/radiosantelenalive/>>.

In this way, the radio studio, which is a private context, is completed with the bodies of the poets thanks to live recording and streaming. This media synergy allows a visualization of the performance beyond the sound: the interesting feature is that the *versada* is not performed to be seen but also to be listened to. A means conceived as a transmitter of sound receives a new manner of fruition with the arrival of Internet, so that streaming technology created a new hybrid form. Thus, the setting is very unusual: a radio room that poets enter to sing. The context is both technical and informal: the technicality is generated by the presence of the equipment, while the informal feature is due to the poets' clothes, which are the symbol of a private situation, although in this case the privacy is not only on air but also online!

Conclusions

After this brief analysis, we can present some considerations. At first, this research appears to show that the differences observed between transmitted poetry competitions and oral poetry in its natural context, are determined by the decontextualization of the performances. As for the first dimension, television, among the relevant aspects, we should first of all recall the contrast

between the management of prearranged and arbitrary television times, and the conception of time in the *cantadas* performed in the squares, independent of chronometric time.

An essential component of the radio-television poetic environment is the absence of the spatio-temporal sharing of the event, and therefore the lack of interaction between poets and audience, an element that alters the nature of the performance. Another interesting fact is the different composition of the audience in the television studio compared to that of poetry competitions in squares. However, the production of poetry competitions on television is aimed at an audience of viewers watching the performance from home. In consequence, this kind of audience has a very different role from that of the audience in the squares. On the radio, these aspects are marked by the fact that the poetry competition is only designed for listening. The main features of radio-transmitted competitions are the lack of the physical component and the absence of the audience. These factors induce *versadoris* to ascribe less importance to their behaviour or clothing because the radio is considered a private experience by the poets. The absence of professional poets in this particular context is explained by the informality that nowadays characterizes the radio.

Where the web is concerned, the research has emphasized the potentialities of channels and social networks, like YouTube and Facebook, and the peculiarities of the online poetry competitions on the *Ilsardo.it* website. In spite of the potentialities of social networks, in terms of user base, the analysis shows that Campidanese oral poetry remains a niche even on Facebook and that the users are mainly enthusiasts, poets and scholars. In this context, differently from the case studied by Cocq (2013), the audience of the new media platforms is the same as the one that participates in the oral performances.

The *Ilsardo.it* website is the most interesting dimension because it creates a new way to produce verses. It determines the transformation of the performance into writing, which we defined as a *sui generis* form of asynchronous communication mediated by the computer (Computer-Mediated Communication o CMC). The Campidanese poetry competition, which is exclusively an oral practice, meets writing here, thanks to the Internet, with all the consequences that an encounter of this kind can determine. Above all, the mass media field also creates new hybrid forms, such as media convergence between the radio and the Internet, which we have elaborated on here. Thanks to this phenomenon, the radio – typically private – is completed with the bodily component through streaming technology. Finally, it is clear that the central idea that connects the performances of the different realities analyzed is constituted by both the absence of the *cantadas* on radio-television and the fact that they are only an expression of non-professional poets (we have seen that the website is only frequented by amateur poets). The absence of professional poets can be explained by the lower prestige bestowed on the competitions realized in a media context rather than in a square. After all, as we have established, the limits of the different mass media are real and undeniable.

Bibliography

- A campu. Archivi e ricerche di poesia orale a Villasimius* (2012), ed. by P. Bravi – D. Mereu – I. Murgia, Alfa Editrice, Quartu S. Elena.
- ANTONELLI, G. (2009), *Scrivere e digitare*, in *XXI Secolo. Comunicare e rappresentare*, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, Roma, pp. 243-252.
- Antropologia e media. Tecnologie, etnografie e critica culturale* (2005), ed. by M. Fagioli – S. Zambotti, Ibis, Como-Pavia.
- ARGYLE, M. (1975), *Bodily Communication*, Methuen, London.
- ASKEW, K. (2007), *Introduction*, in *The anthropology of media*, ed. by K. Askew – R. Wilk, Blackwell Publishing, Malden, pp. 1-13.
- BARON, N. S. (1984), *Computer Mediated Communication as a Force in Language Change*, «Visible Language», 18/2, pp. 118-141.
- BARZ, G. – COOLEY, T. J., (2008), *Shadows in the field. New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*, Oxford University Press, Oxford-New York.
- BAUDRILLARD, J. (1984), *The Precession of the Simulacra*, in *Art after Modernism. Rethinking Representation*, ed. by W. Brian, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, pp. 253-81.
- BENJAMIN, W. (1955), *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main.
- BONI, F. (2004), *Etnografia dei media*, Laterza, Roma-Bari.
- BRAVI, P. (2005), *Gli attori e il modo del discorso nella cantada campidanese*, «NAE», 10, pp. 25-31.
- (2010), *A sa moda campidanese. Pratiche, poetiche e voci degli improvvisatori nella Sardegna meridionale*, Isre, Nuoro.
- BRIGGS, A. – BURKE P., (2005) *A Social History of the Media. From Gutenberg to the Internet*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- COCQ, C. (2013), *From the Árran to the Internet: Sami Storytelling in Digital Environments*, «Oral Tradition», 28/1, pp. 125-142.
- Computer-Mediated Communication: Linguistic, Social and Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (1996) ed. by S. Herring, John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam-Philadelphia.
- COOK, N. (1998). *Music. A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- COOLEY, T. J. – MEIZEL K. – SYED N., (2008), *Virtual Fieldwork. Three case studies*, in *Shadows in the field. New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*, ed. by G. Barz – T. J. Cooley, Oxford University Press, Oxford-New York, pp. 90-107.

- DERIU, F., (1999), *Lo «spettro ampio» delle attività performative*, in Schechner R., *Magnitudini della performance*, Bulzoni, Roma, pp. I-XXXII.
- FAGIOLI M. – ZAMBOTTI S. (2005), *Antropologia e media*, in *Antropologia e media. Tecnologie, etnografie e critica culturale*, ed. by M. Fagioli – S. Zambotti, Ibis, Como-Pavia, pp. 11-35.
- FERRONI, G. (1996), *Dopo la fine. Sulla condizione postuma della letteratura*, Einaudi, Torino.
- FINNEGAN, R. (1977), *Oral poetry. Its nature, significance and social context*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- FOLEY, J. M., (2002), *How to Read an Oral Poem*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana.
- _____ (2005), *From Oral Performance to Paper-Text to Cyber-Edition*, «Oral Tradition», 20/2, pp. 233-263.
- _____ (2007), *Basque Oral Poetry Championship* «Oral Tradition», 22/2, pp. 3-11.
- GOODY, J. (1977) *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- GINSBURG F. – ABU-LUGHOD L. – LARKIN B., (2002), *Introduction*, in *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrains*, ed. by F. Ginsburg – L. Abu-Lughod – B. Larkin, University of California Press, Berkeley.
- GRANIERI, G. (2009), *Blog generation*, Laterza, Bari.
- HAVELOCK, E. A. (1986), *The Muse Learns to write. Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present*, Yale University Press, New Haven-London.
- HERRING, S. C. (2001), *Computer-Mediated Discourse*, in *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, ed by D. Schiffrin – D. Tannen – H. E. Hamilton, Blackwell, Malden-Oxford, pp. 612-634.
- KAPLAN, D. (2009), *The songs of the siren. Engineering National Time on Israeli Radio* «Cultural Anthropology», 24/2, pp. 313-345.
- KITTLER, F. A. (1999), *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, Standford University Press, Standford.
- L'ÉCUYER, S. (2005), *Musica classica, musica leggera e world music su Internet*, in *Enciclopedia della musica, vol. 5*, Einaudi, Torino, pp. 223-241.
- LUTZU, M. (2012). *La passione era più grande dei sacrifici. Il ruolo degli appassionati nella poesia improvvisata campidanese*, in *A campu. Archivi e ricerche di poesia orale a Villasimius*, ed by. P. Bravi – D. Mereu – I. Murgia, Alfa Editrice, Quartu S. Elena, pp.55-67.
- _____ (2005), *Poesia e musica, performance e fruizione. La poesia improvvisata in area campidanese*, «NAE», 10, pp. 21-24.

- LUTZU, M. – MANCONI V., (2004) *In viaggio per la musica*. Film (dur. 22'), Isre, Nuoro.
- MACCHIARELLA, I. (2005), *Passione e competenza: gli esperti della musica*, «Portales», 6/7, pp. 177-184.
- (2010), *La forza del suono Postfazione*, in BRAVI P., *A sa moda campidanese. Pratiche, poetiche e voci degli improvvisatori nella Sardegna meridionale*, Nuoro, Isre, pp. 525-536.
- MCLUHAN, M. (1964), *Understanding Media*, Mc Graw-Hill, New York.
- Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrains* (2002), ed. by F. Ginsburg – L. Abu-Lughod – B. Larkin, University of California Press, Berkeley.
- MEREU, D. (2011), *La gara poetica campidanese tra promozione massmediatica e locale (con particolare riferimento al ruolo di pubblico-promotore degli appassionati di Sinnai)*, in *Progetto Incontro. Materiali di ricerca e analisi*, ed. by D. Caocci – I. Macchiarella, Isre, Nuoro, pp. 252-265.
- MOLINO, J. (2005), *Che cos'è l'oralità musicale*, in *Enciclopedia della musica*, vol. 5, Einaudi, Torino, pp. 367-413.
- MOSSA, M. - TRENTINI, M. (2009), *Il canto scaltro*. Film (dur. 63'), Isre, Nuoro.
- ONG, W.J. (1967) *The Presence of the Word. Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History*, Yale University Press, New Haven.
- (1982), *Orality and Literacy. The Technologizing of the Word*, Methuen, London-New York.
- PELINSKI, R. (2002), *Etnomusicologia nell'epoca postmoderna*, in *Enciclopedia della musica*, vol.2, Einaudi, Torino, pp. 694-717.
- PILOSU, S. (2012), *Poesia improvvisata*, in *Enciclopedia della musica sarda*. Vol. 13, ed by F. Casu – M. Lutz, L'Unione Sarda, Cagliari
- PISTOLESI, E. (2004) *Il parlar spedito. L'italiano di chat, e-mail ed SMS*, Esedra, Padova.
- Progetto Incontro. Materiali di ricerca e analisi* (2011), ed. by D. Caocci D. – I. Macchiarella, Isre, Nuoro.
- SARASUA, J. (2007), *Social Features Of Bertsolaritza*, «Oral Tradition», 22/2, pp. 33-46.
- SCHECHNER, R. (1999), *Magnitudini della performance*, Bulzoni, Roma.
- SPITULNIK, D. (1993), *Anthropology and mass media*, «Annual Review of Anthropology», 22, pp. 293-315.
- The anthropology of media* (2007), ed. by K. Askew – R. Wilk, Blackwell Publishing, Malden.
- The Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (2001), ed. by D. Schiffrin – D. Tannen – H. Hamilton, Blackwell, Malden-Oxford.

- WALKER F.R. – KUYKENDALL V., (2005), *Manifestations of Nommo in «Def Poetry, Journal of Black Studies»*, 36/2, pp. 229-247.
- WALLIS, B. (1984), *Art after Modernism. Rethinking Representation*, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York
- WASHABAUGH, W. (1994), *The flamenco body*, «Popular Music», 13/1, pp. 75-90.
- ZEDDA, P. (2008), *L'arte de is mutetus*, Gorée, Siena.
- _____ (2009), *The Southern Sardinian Tradition of the Mutetu Longu: A Functional Analysis*. «Oral Tradition», 24, pp. 3-40.
- _____ (2011), *La tradizione sarda meridionale de su mutetu longu*, in *Progetto Incontro. Materiali di ricerca e analisi*, ed by D. Caocci – I. Macchiarella, Isre, Nuoro, pp. 164-173.
- ZEDDA, P. – LUTZU M., (2012), *Poesia improvvisata II Enciclopedia della musica sarda, vol. 14*. L'Unione Sarda, Cagliari.
- ZUMTHOR, P. (1990), *Oral poetry. An introduction*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

Daniela Mereu ha conseguito la sua laurea magistrale in Filologie e Letterature Classiche e Moderne all'Università di Cagliari, con una tesi sulla poesia improvvisata campidanese. Attualmente è dottoranda in Scienze Linguistiche all'Università di Bergamo e sta svolgendo uno studio sociofonetico sul dialetto di Cagliari

Daniela Mereu is a PhD student in Linguistics at the University of Bergamo. Her research focuses on the dialect of Cagliari, from a sociophonetic point of view. She received her Master's degree in Philologies and Classic and Moderne Literature from the University of Cagliari with a thesis on the Campidanese oral poetry.