

FROM SCENEGGIATA TO YOUTUBE THE CONTEMPORARY FORM OF PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION OF NEAPOLITAN NEOMELODIC MUSIC

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My research concerns the contemporary Neapolitan Neomelodic music market and imaginary. It focuses on the analysis of a sample of Neomelodic music videos played by some actual local singers and uploaded on YouTube from 2005 to 2013.

Neapolitan Neomelodic music is a subgenre of local popular music especially addressed to teenagers and played in the slums of Naples and its hinterland. The market not only reaches a vast area of Southern Italy but also the suburbs around some great cities like Milan, Turin, Rome and their provinces.

My dissertation attempts to answer to the following questions: are Neapolitan Neomelodic music videos a form of local young generations' self-representation? Are they able to describe the needs and the desires of that particular kind of young people?

In the first chapter – after a theoretical introduction about the role that popular songs play in Italian cinema and the place they have in our national imaginary – I examine the history of Neapolitan popular music.

Neomelodic music combines two different traditions: *Canzone classica napoletana* and *Sceneggiata*. The first one, originating at end of 19th century in the Neapolitan bourgeois salons, is an admixture of popular farmer songs, opera and romance; it is able to speak to all urban social classes. In the 1920s, running parallel to *Canzone classica napoletana*, a new form of theatrical representation begins to consolidate: *Sceneggiata*. Grounded on existing songs, it addresses popular audiences, especially those who have recently moved from the country. The main song of *Sceneggiata* is called *canzone di giacca* (“jacket’s song”) because the performer doesn’t wear the traditional tailcoat. *Sceneggiata*’s singers make deep use of *canto a fronna*, a typical modulate Mediterranean singing, used as a form of communication between the underworld’s criminal bands.

Sceneggiata has a melodramatic repertoire. Its structure is made up of three acts. In the last act the main character sings the title track addressing his rival or his lover. For instance, one of the most successful *Sceneggiata*, *Zappatore* (L. Bovio, F. Albano, 1929), tells the story of a farmer’s son who goes to the city and denies his origins. In the final scene, *o’ zappatore* (the farmer) bursts into the bourgeois party to tell his son that his mother is gravely ill. After the song the moved and regretful son kisses his father’s hand.

During the final period of *Sceneggiata*, between the end of the 1970s and the early 1980s, Mario Merola was the most important performer. In those days themes became more centred on crime and there were many screen adaptations played by the same theatrical performers.

Cinematic *Sceneggiata* was influenced by Italian B movies like *Poliziottesco* or *Spaghetti Westerns*, while theatrical *Sceneggiata* fell into crisis because its popular audience was changing (it was indeed adapting to the city life). Again, in these movies the criminal protagonist wishes to achieve a middle class life so Merola's son is often a student who wants to become an honest worker and to cut himself off from his father's illegal life.

In *Giuramento* and *Tradimento*, both directed by Alfonso Brescia in 1982, Merola's character is flanked by Nino D'Angelo. He was a young *Sceneggiata*'s actor and also a lively vocalist. He is considered the first Neomelodic singer. Neomelodic music, in fact, directs its attention to a popular audience who doesn't wish to be depicted as it was in the past. For instance, in *Pop corn e patatine* (one of the songs of the album *Nu jeans e 'na maglietta*, 1983), Nino D'Angelo remembers his gone by romance describing how together with his girlfriend he ate popcorn and chips and drank Coca Cola...

In the second chapter I analyse the semantic and syntactic features of Neomelodic music and describe its media landscape.

Pezzotto is one of the most distinguishing elements of the Neomelodic musical universe. It is the imitation of national and international pop music styles and rhythms. Neomelodic songs are often written in a mix of vernacular and Italian. Unlike *Canzone di giacca*, in fact, they have some lines in Italian, whose function is to emphasize some passages. The balance between Italian and vernacular in Neomelodic songs is useful to understand the relation between this subculture and the external world. For example, in *Fotomodelle un po' povere* (from the album *Passo dopo passo*, 1995), Gigi D'Alessio uses Italian to scorn his upper-class former girlfriend.

Just like other musical subcultures around the world – such as Mexican *narcocorrido* or Argentinian *cumbia villera* – and despite its apparent cultural autarchy, Neomelodic music grounds its success on the ability to rework commercial music culture. The Neomelodic market rests on a star system where, for the faithful fans, singers have to look like a local version of most important national and international pop stars.

The Neomelodic industry adapted itself to the changing media landscape: radio and popular cinema in the 1980s, television in the 1990s, internet and social networks like YouTube in the 2000s. In the end of the 1970s Nino D'Angelo became popular thanks to the self promotion he did through hundreds of local radio stations; and then, in 1980s, he reinforced his fame through popular cinema.

From 1990s, following the example of Gigi D'Alessio, Neomelodic industry grew thanks to weddings, First Communions or 18th birthdays. In these special occasions singers are hired to perform. Neomelodic aspiring artists are initially supported by their families while local labels deal with the recording process and the promotion of the singer. In this media landscape most of the local televisions' shows host Neomelodic singers' performances to profit through fans' phone calls. In the 1990s music videos broadcast by local televisions became one of the most important form of promotion for labels and singers.

In the third chapter I propose a theoretical overview about the journey development “from 20th century video/film to early 21st century social video,”² next I focus on YouTube architecture and social experience and then illustrate nowadays the Neomelodic subculture's use of this popular video sharing platform.

YouTube for the Neomelodic market is not only an archive for previous contents, like music

videos or live performances aired on television, but it is also a space where Neomelodic Pro-Am culture tries to make its contents professional.³ Thus, many local video production companies mark their works with company's logo and they often have a YouTube channel where other contents, including wedding videos, are showed. Wedding videos are a very sought after product for their female fans.

As for singers, we can look at a new generation of performers born in the 1990s and digitally inclined who increases their one-to-one relationship with fans through social networks. Furthermore, this new generation of singers is more than ever influenced by mass culture: they try to follow the height of fashion; their songs are written mostly in Italian – with some lyrics in Spanish or English too – and, sometimes, their music videos emulate the ones of famous international artists ones.

The fourth chapter analyzes some music videos performed by actual Neomelodic singers. I compiled a sample composed of music videos performed by five local stars: Alessio, Raffaello, Nancy, Emiliana Cantone and Rosario Miraggio. All of them were born in the 1990s. Their music videos have been uploaded on YouTube from 2005 to 2013. I also chose to include some other artists, indulging in *flânerie* during my website⁴ surfing on the Neomelodic subculture.

According to *Sceneggiata* tradition Neomelodic songs and videos tell stories. In these melodramatic love songs, men are rarely punished for their infidelity, while young girls play the following three main roles: the femme fatale, usually condemned for her behaviour; the young lady suffering or rejoicing for her man; the elder sister who comforts her relative's love pains.

Neomelodic music videos are often set on a domestic space, where female teenagers cry or phone up their lovers or their unfaithful men. Neapolitan urban space is shown only when the lovers walk together: a girl without boyfriend doesn't go through the streets of the city. Consequently, cars can be considered as an extension of domestic spaces. Within cars lovers can hide away from prying eyes and unfaithful men can preserve their integrity.

From the analysis carried out it emerged that music videos are a distorting mirror of private everyday life. Their stereotypical love stories provide a self-perceptive overview of the young slum's inhabitants and they represent a snapshot of the social relationship between male and female. Music videos can be seen as a melodramatic or romantic photography book of the potential young girl's life, with all her pain and her delight. Music videos, in fact, are connected with (future) wedding videos, not only because video production companies produce both, but also because young female teenagers look at them dreaming and waiting for *their* show: the wedding day. On that day female spectators succeed in being protagonists like local pop stars.

- 1 Ph.D. dissertation on 18th March 2013. Thesis supervisors: prof. Gianni Canova and prof. Massimo Locatelli.
- 2 Lev Manovich, *The Practice of Everyday (Media) Life*, in Geert Lovink, Sabine Niederer (eds.), *Video Vortex Reader: Responses to YouTube*, Institute of Network Cultures, Amsterdam 2008, p. 33.
- 3 I use the Pro-Am definition from Charles Leadbeater, Paul Miller, *The Pro-Am Revolution: How Enthusiasts Are Changing Our Economy and Society*, Demos, London 2004.
- 4 It's a methodological approach adopted from Thomas Elsaesser, *Tales of Epiphany and Entropy: Around the Worlds in Eighty Clicks*, in Pelle Vonderau, Patrick Snickars (eds.), *The Youtube Reader*, Institute of Network Cultures, Amsterdam 2008, pp. 166-186.