# (IN)TANGIBLE HERITAGE(S)

A conference on design, culture and technology
- past, present and future

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(IN)TANGIBLE HERITAGE(S): Design, culture and technology – past, present, and future

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INTRODUCTION

(IN)TANGIBLE HERITAGE(S): Design, culture and technology – past, present, and future

The buildings, towns and cities we inhabit are physical entities created in the past, experienced in the present, and projected to inform the future. The same can be said of the artefacts we use daily: designed furniture in the home, the mobile devices in our hands, the vehicles we see on our streets. However, each of these places, buildings and products had, at their inception, social and cultural roles beyond their 'object' status. They continue to have them today. What we understand a designed object to be then, is a complex question of material and social import, and an intricate play of the tangible and intangible identities. Increasingly, it is also a question of hybrid experiences and overlaid histories. This conference addresses the range of issues connected to this scenario.

The complexity described above is even more pronounced in the case of digital artefacts and experiences such as computational design, VR simulations of ancient buildings, mobile apps, digital photography or virtual exhibitions. Intangible at the very moment of their inception, such designed artifacts not only blur the difference between the object and the experience, but, increasingly, the past and the present. Computer generated imagery creates 'life like' reconstructions of historic sites. Laser scanning gives archeologists glimpses of pasts erased long ago. Computational design gives designers instant recordings of their work in progress. Coupled with digital cataloguing, it gives us the instant asynchronous design archive.

Considered in this context it is not surprising that recently questions about the nature of heritage and design have opened up to redefinitions of the tangible and the intangible. In responding to this scenario the work of the authors collected in this publication present a diverse range of perspectives from various fields including art, architecture, design and cultural studies, to name but a few. They present reconsiderations of 'heritage' as both a tangible and an intangible concept and overlay our notions of the digital, on ideas of heritage and concepts of physicality and the present.

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LONG-FORM MULTIMEDIA STORYTELLING FOR THE COMMUNICATION OF SUBCULTURAL HERITAGE: A CASE STUDY FOR A DOCUMENT-BASED PORTRAYAL OF SUBCULTURES AND YOUTH CULTURES

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INTRODUCTION

The idea of subculture inherently assumes that of culture. As with the latter term, there is no agreement on the definition of the former; however, there is widespread consensus on its usefulness as a tool for attempting to understand particular behaviors that take shape within our societies.

Like cultures, subcultures provide belief systems, customs, practices and codes of social interaction, and lifestyles. Compared to the former, however, subcultures stand in an asymmetrical relationship to the dominant culture in which they are included. Subcultures feed on symbolic materials, rules, paradigms and patterns of conduct that originate from the incumbent system and reformulate them into new, more or less deviant configurations, placing themselves in competition or conflict with the hegemonic culture.[1] The degree of autonomy a subculture can achieve with respect to the culture from which it originates is variable, as variable are the factors that contribute to the expansion or reduction in this separation. A subculture may exacerbate the rigidity of the models it receives from the culture, or it may differentiate itself from it to the point of producing opposing patterns, without escaping this relationship of inclusion. Subcultures are a significantly distinct – but not autonomous – sector of extended culture.[2]

Cultural production in subcultures

In this pursuit of distinctiveness of a specific group of social actors with respect to a more complex cultural system, the group defines a set of behaviors, develops styles, and defines relationships with the world capable of distinguishing them and placing them in opposition to the hegemonic system of values. They elaborate customs, practices, artistic expressions and values which become part of the group's identity and the heritage of its members. They develop, in other words, a cultural or rather a *subcultural heritage* that allows for a self-representation of the group and its recognition in the broader context. In this context, cultural production is not a secondary effect of a way of life but an essential mode of expression of the subculture that finds an alternative dimension within the society in which it is located.

The emergence of subculture – whether politically motivated by the condition of oppression of certain subaltern classes, by the emergence of a cultural distance between young workers and the previous generation,[3] or by a temporary collective sharing of tastes and lifestyles[4] – gives rise nevertheless to a

cultural production that appropriates elements of the hegemonic culture, and reinterprets them by subverting their meanings in a manifestation of resistance against the dominant social structure.[5] Mass products, commodities, and fashion are appropriated and consumed in different cultural contexts, thereby re-imagining practices and meanings in opposition to prevalent cultural references.[6]

Subcultural heritage

In recent years, a growing body of research has examined the relationship between the cultural production of so-called subcultures, youth cultures, and alternative cultures and the field of cultural heritage. The topic of graffiti and writing, for example, initially mentioned exclusively in terms of the risk of damage to existing heritage sites, is now more frequently embraced in the context of cultural heritage, recognizing a historical and artistic value to at least *some* of the artworks in *some* of the contexts.[7] Likewise, a substantial body of research examined the relationship between popular music and cultural heritage, aiming to define the field of inquiry[8] and investigate its relations to cultural memory, local identity, and geography.[9]

Nonetheless, the tendency to integrate subcultural production into the context of traditional cultural goods is not without its problems: elements of opposition to the institutionalized culture, such as copyright infringement, anti-commercialism, and anti-conformism, challenge the possibilities of this integration into formal heritage frameworks and introduce elements of complexity concerning the preservation, documentation, and communication of such cultures through the traditional instruments of cultural heritage.[10]

Representing subcultures

In this context of opposition to hegemonic culture, alternative and youth cultures exhibit a complex relationship with mainstream culture. Even in the context of communication processes, the relationship with the dominant culture is multifaceted and gives rise to a multiplicity of forms of representation. Firstly, although mass media and society are inherently critical of cultural movements that find their definition in opposition to the hegemonic culture,[11] this unsympathetic relationship plays a crucial role in determining the existence of a given subculture. It helps to shape its identity and to spread its ideas, styles, and values beyond a strictly local context. Concurrently, subcultures develop their own media that give rise to distinct types of languages and codes. Examples include independent publishing (with particular reference to fanzines), pirate and free radio stations, forums, websites, and social networks.[12] Finally, once a specific subculture is absorbed within mainstream culture, it enters the collective memory as a particular moment in history: it is historicized, critically interpreted, and musealized.[13]

Designing a choral narrative

Because of the conflicting nature of subcultures, it follows that different accounts of subcultures propose conflicting points of view, which tend to highlight different aspects. While mass media tend to present a picture that is often superficial and caricatured, highlighting the most spectacular and sensationalistic elements, on the other hand, media developed by the subculture often propose self-referential and celebratory narratives that are difficult for non-adepts to interpret since they are expressed through subcultures' own language: a vocabulary and aesthetic which, by definition, deviates from the dominant culture. Moreover, while mass media are easily accessible by anyone, subcultural media are accessible almost exclusively by subculture members. They are not promoted to the general public, and their distribution is not widespread, so they are enjoyed almost exclusively by those who frequent subcultural circles.

In this contribution, through the tools of Communication Design, we want to share an experiment in the construction of a storytelling format that aims to knit together the diverse voices that describe and portray subcultures to reconstruct some "histories" of complex subcultures, chronicling their exponents, places, events, and ideas. Presenting the point of view of both mass media and subcultural media, we aim to create a dialogue between irreconcilable perspectives. The objective is to overcome the stereotypes and superficiality that often characterize the former and the self-referentiality typical of the latter in an attempt to give a choral vision of a complex phenomenon. The proposal is thus to create a cultural journey between communication artifacts and historical documents produced by a subculture, recordings, and excerpts from mass media reports of the time, integrating cultural materials produced by the societal context and referencing interviews of some of its exponents. The goal is to seek integrity in the narrative, not so much through the identification of an "official story" gathered through interviews with the protagonists of the cultural movement, who inevitably become the bearers of their own "historicized" interpretation of past events, but, on the contrary, through the juxtaposition of partial and "biased" narratives that can give a polyphonic account of the context and the subculture.

The medium chosen to convey the narrative is the web, which allows for maximum dissemination and accessibility and allows for the integration of different types of artifacts and media, such as images, music, and video.

From the point of view of communication formats, the starting points are *long-form articles* heralded by "slow journalism"[14] and so-called *archival documentaries*, i.e., documentaries constructed through the montage of archival materials, whether footage, photographs, documents, or other visual materials. These communicative types, although belonging to different worlds, share both the stylistic attention and the use of the documents as the backbone of the narrative, creating an immersive experience through the careful use of period images, music, and video.

METHOD

In order to experiment with this type of document-based storytelling, a suitable case study in the area of subcultural heritage was selected, namely, the Pordenone punk scene that developed in Italy beginning in the late 1970s, also known as "The Great Complotto". This artistic movement constitutes one of the first Italian subcultures that, although inspired by British and American punk, developed autonomously and eventually succeeded in establishing one of the few Italian punk subcultures that managed to emancipate itself from a position of geographic marginality. It gave rise to movements that still remain apparent in the Italian independent music scene, whether through musical projects, record labels, or artists.

In addition to the authors' familiarity with the characteristics of this subculture, several factors led to the choice of this subcultural context as a case study: the circumscribed temporal and geographic extent of the subculture; the unexpected relevance in terms of impact (both nationally and internationally) in the context of music and youth cultures; the wealth of documentation available in terms of period sources and materials; and finally the willingness of some historical figures to share clarifying accounts related to the less understood aspects of the period.

From a subcultural point of view, the Pordenone punk scene was born from an aggregation of young people with shared mentalities, tastes, goals, references, and languages who gradually organized themselves into a movement.[15] As with most subcultures, media plays a central role in *The Great Complotto*. Free radios, acting both as a channel of cultural dissemination and as a recruitment platform, play a significant role in the development of the movement: those who join *The Great Complotto* also begin to participate in radio broadcasts run by subculture exponents and become part of the communication system. Likewise, *fanzines* chronicle the state of affairs of young Pordenone

punks through a collage of self-referential and allusive articles describing artistic initiatives, concert reviews, organizational and operational issues, and self-celebration.

Main sources

In telling the story of this subculture with the aim of exposing the different viewpoints that examined it, the matter of source gathering has been a core concern. The research aimed at delineating the history and characteristics of the punk subculture in Pordenone relied mainly on two monographs focused on *The Great Complotto*: "The Great Complotto Pordenone", by Mauro Mazzocut,[16] provides a detailed historical reconstruction of the life of the Pordenone movement by thoroughly describing the cultural and social context in which it was embedded; "The Great complotto. L'antologia definitiva della straordinaria scena punk di Pordenone", by Oderso Rubini,[17] provides a collection of testimonies from members of the main bands that shaped the scene. Starting with these two primary sources, collecting a valuable bibliography of period materials was also possible, going back to articles in music-related magazines such as Frigidaire[18] and Bassa Fedeltà.

In a second step, interviews were conducted with some of the movement's leading figures to shed light on some historical facts not fully explored within the books. Thanks to the meetings with the protagonists of the Pordenone scene, it was also possible to identify many other books and magazines containing accounts of the said movement and interviews with its members. Examples of this are the in-depth studies on Italian punk produced by Luca Frazzi[19] and distributed as a supplement to the music magazine Rumore; books that focus on punk in Italy, such as those written by Stefano and Fabrizio Gilardino,[20] and books written for a more generalist audience dedicated to the world punk scene, with brief insights related to the Italian scene.

Documents and audiovisual materials

In addition to the sources mentioned above, an effort to collect materials that could be useful in illustrating the story and documenting its unfolding through original materials was also undertaken. Such documents can be divided into four main categories:

- The first category includes the direct testimonies of the members of *The Great Complotto* and those who, although not part of it, came into contact with it. These testimonies were collected through period documents that surfaced during the historical research phase.[21]
- The second category includes visual artifacts, photographs, and fanzines. The collection of this type of material was carried out in parallel with the historical research, making it possible to build a substantial archive that proved valuable in telling the story of *The Great Complotto* through period images and artifacts. More of such material was collected by contacting people involved in the Pordenone and through online forums focused on Italian punk.
- Next, in the third category, are the music-type documents. Once the movement's discography was tracked down from the book "The Great Complotto Pordenone"[22], the tracks were retrieved from music streaming services such as YouTube and Spotify. In some cases, vinyl reissues were also found.
- Finally, the last category refers to video documents. Unfortunately, in the case of the Pordenone scene, these are quite rare. They were mainly made by RAI (Italian national public broadcasting company) on the occasion of television reports for programs such as "Mister Fantasy" and "Mixer". In the case of the former, it was possible to find the material online, either on the broadcaster's online archive or thanks to YouTube uploads.

RESULTS

Once the main narrative was reconstructed, and the supporting materials were collected, they were then categorized in terms of people, places, events, artifacts, and ideas. Quotes, images and videos were indexed within the various categories according to their relevance, and a storyboard was created in preparation for the production of the actual digital narrative. As a first step, major events were identified, and elements belonging to the different categories were identified in order to create a narrative based on period documents. The storyboard was divided into chapters so as to mark the main moments in the history of the artistic movement.

The narrative unfolds through a mostly chronological progression, except for the two in-depth sections that momentarily interrupt this flow to highlight some of the key aspects of the story. In terms of story elements, the storyboard refers to the categories previously presented (characters, places, events, artifacts, and ideas). For each category, the most significant elements are presented without excessive detail. In this context, the storyboard proves to be a very useful tool: not only it gives structure to the narrative, but it also helps maintain a level of depth suitable for such an agile medium as digital storytelling, which favors narratives built around main topics, enriched by anecdotes capable of maintaining a degree of playfulness and freshness, in line with the ironic vein that characterizes the Pordenone scene.
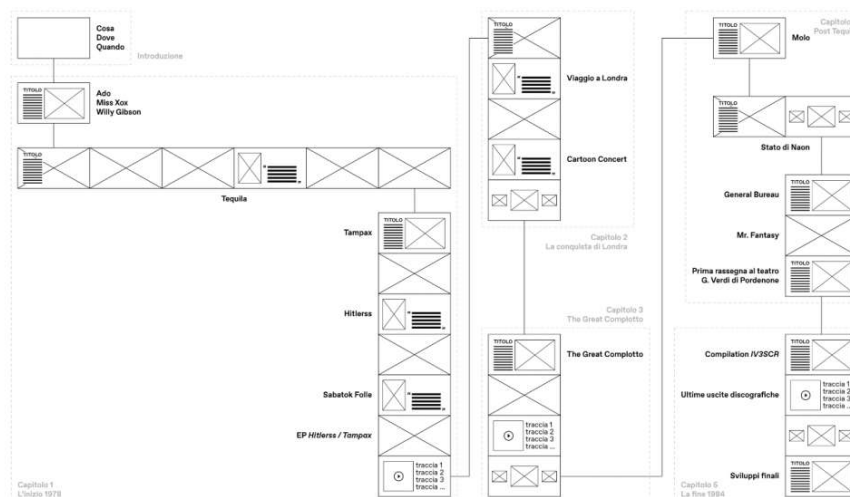
Figure 1. High-level diagram of the narrative structure, identifying main topics and modules

Once the storyboard was finished, content modules were designed in order to compose the final digital product. The module system is useful to give visual consistency to the narrative and to ensure adequate presentation structures for the various types of content.

Among the main modules of the project:

• Cover modules introduce the theme of the narrative, illustrating it with images or optionally with a map of the location referenced in the narrative, together with a brief introductory text.

Figure 2. Cover modules with images and with map

• Descriptive modules present more extensive text, always paired with photographic or video materials, highlighting period documents.

Figure 3. Examples of descriptive modules

• Modules meant for the fruition of music include images of the front and back of album covers to accompany the audio content, thus giving space to the visual artifacts produced by the subculture besides the musical ones.

Figure 4. Examples of audio modules

• Modules designed for collections of images propose different carousels and layouts, with the possibility to allow for audio to be added whenever beneficial (e.g., in case a concert was photographed and recorded but not filmed).
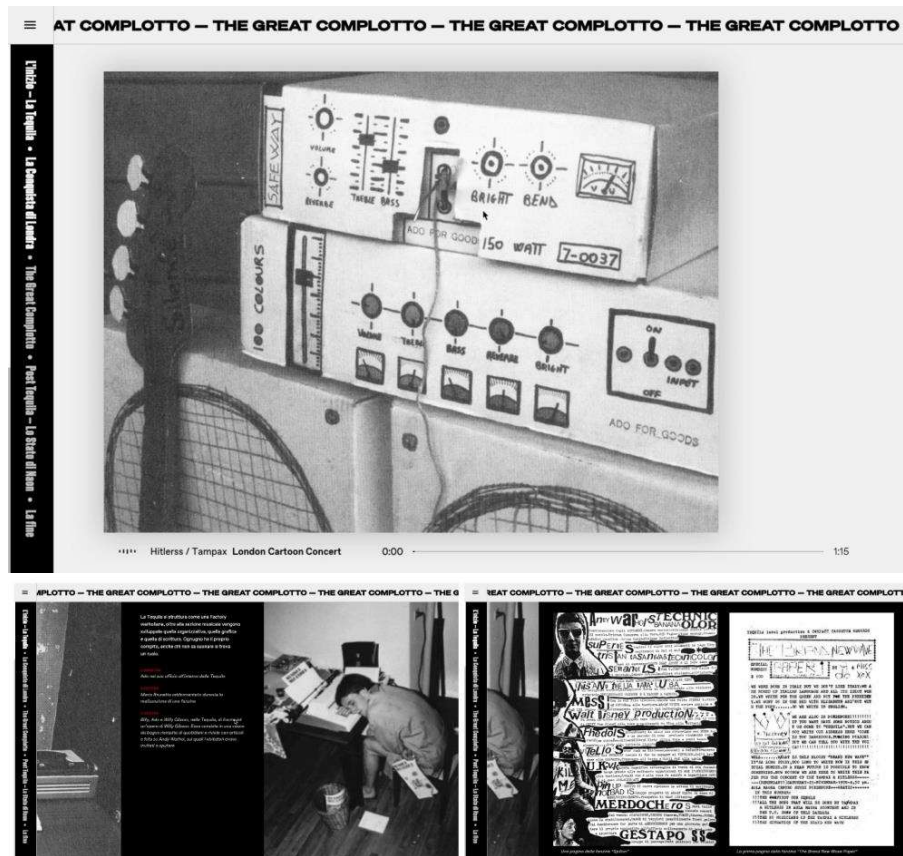
Figure 5. Examples of gallery modules, with images, captions, and documents

- Modules for the display of quotes use an italicized version of the main font to emphasize this type of text more than editorial descriptions, and they include references of the author and the source of the quotation.

Beyond the modules listed, the storytelling format allows for the introduction of different contents when needed. The structure is not intended to be rigid and unchanging, but to serve as a guideline, allowing for a certain degree of fluidity in order to quickly adapt to different types of content.

The progression through the entire narrative is distributed within a single scrollable page, with the events arranged in chronological order. The user has the ability to control the speed at which they scroll through the narrative and on which content to dwell.

To support this storytelling approach, the online platform also offers an archive section dedicated to the documents that the user can browse freely. In this section, the user can choose to enjoy the material geographically, discovering the images in the place where they were made, chronologically, through a timeline divided by years, or visually through a continuous stream of images. By interacting with the pictures, it is possible to discover their details and the history they conceal.

Figure 6. Archive views

CONCLUSIONS

Objective of this research was to experiment with digital storytelling formats, in order to propose a narrative framework for valorization of the cultural heritage produced by subcultures and youth cultures, through the creation of a dialogue between mass media sources, subculture-internal sources and historical records, presenting them in a single narrative that takes advantage of the possibilities of digital media. The method used is applicable to similar contexts: the modular structure encourages the possible reuse of such a framework in order to tell the story of different subcultures, with appropriate adjustments in terms of modules and visual languages.

NOTES

[1] Pier Giorgio Solinas, "Subcultura," in *Enciclopedia Delle Scienze Sociali* (Roma, 1998).

[2] P. B Hammond, *Introduction to cultural and social anthropology* (Macmillan, 1978).

[3] Phil Cohen, "Subcultural Conflict and Working-Class Community," in *Rethinking the Youth Question: Education, Labour and Cultural Studies*, ed. Phil Cohen (London: Macmillan Education UK, 1997), 48–63; Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, eds., *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* (London; New York: Routledge, 2011).

[4] Michel Maffesoli, *Le Temps Des Tribus. Le Déclin de l'individualisme Dans Les Sociétés Postmodernes* (Éditions de la table ronde, 2019).

[5] Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (Routledge, 2012); Hall and Jefferson, *Resistance through Rituals*.

[6] Paul E Willis, *Profane culture* (Princeton: NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014),

[7] Lachlan MacDowall, "In Praise of 70K: Cultural Heritage and Graffiti Style," *Continuum* 20, no. 4 (December 1, 2006): 471–84.

[8] Amanda Brandellero and Susanne Janssen, "Popular Music as Cultural Heritage: Scoping out the Field of Practice," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 20, no. 3 (April 3, 2014): 224–40.

[9] Sara Cohen et al., *Sites of Popular Music Heritage: Memories, Histories, Places*, 1° edizione (New York: Routledge, 2014).

[10] Samuel Merrill, "Keeping It Real? Subcultural Graffiti, Street Art, Heritage and Authenticity," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 21, no. 4 (April 21, 2015): 369–89.

[11] Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*, 2015, 2.

[12] Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital*, 1st edition (Cambridge: Polity, 1995).

[13] As an example of such process, cfr the Museum of Youth Culture (MOYC) in which the photographic archives of one of the most fashionable club culture magazines of the 1990s, Sleazenation, is first transformed into the Youth Club Archive, a nonprofit organization founded to preserve, share, educate, and celebrate the history of youth culture, and then gives rise to a series of exhibitions and calls for materials that lead to the collection of more than 150,000 documents, photographs, and objects with the goal of opening a museum that tells the story of the world of youth cultures.

[14] Multimedia "long-form" articles are online articles that create immersive journeys through documents, places and testimonies using a careful combination of text and audiovisual elements.

[15] While presenting points of contact with other international punk scenes, the movement concurrently develops a distinctive identity in terms of music, artistic expression, political and socioeconomic heterogeneity, rejection of drugs, and in general around the rejection of provincial Italian bourgeois culture, which in turn becomes the object of provocations and challenges.

[16] Mauro Mazzocut, *The Great Complotto Pordenone* (Pordenone: Biblioteca civica, 2005).

[17] O. Rubini, *The Great complotto. L'antologia definitiva della straordinaria scena punk di Pordenone.* (ShaKe Edizioni, 2009).

[18] Giacomo Mazzone, "The Great Complotto," *Frigidaire*, 1981.

[19] Luca Frazzi, *Punk Italiano, Parte Prima. Mamma Dammi La Benza - Le Radici (1977-1982)* (Edizioni Apache, 2003); Luca Frazzi, *Punk Italiano, Parte Seconda. Hardcore: Gli Anni Furiosi (1982-1990)* (Edizioni Apache, 2003).

[20] Stefano Gilardino, *La storia del punk* (Hoepli, 2017); Fabrizio Gilardino and Stefano Gilardino, *Il quaderno punk. 1979-1981. La nascita del nuovo rock italiano.* (Firenze: Goodfellas, 2018).

[21] The aim has been to refer to period testimonies as much as possible, using newer interviews only as a tool to fill in any gaps that may have emerged in relation to the historical account. This is done in an attempt to restore a historical perspective on the subculture, avoiding the integration of successive opinions of the protagonists who may inevitably historicize and reinterpret events.

[22] Mazzocut, *The Great Complotto Pordenone*.

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