Chapter 13
The Years of 883: Italian Popular Music at the Time of Commercial Broadcasting

Jacopo Tomatis

Abstract The article aims to outline some key features of Italian popular music in the context of the national commercial broadcasting system, which had developed in Italy since the 1980s, and was fully established by the early 1990s. Issues regarding both music production and consumption will be considered. Also, some methodological concerns in the study of popular music history will be raised. The case study presented here (the pop band 883) offers a valuable illustration of new trends in Italian music and media, in addition to some related methodological questions.

13.1 Introduction: What Is "Normal"?

In his paper at the 17th IASPM International Conference, in Gijòn (Spain), Franco Fabbri argued against the "dumb empiricism that has infiltrated humanities" (Fabbri 2013: 6). Fabbri approached several issues related to the history of popular music and its methodology of research, the latter being an aspect too often overlooked by popular music scholars. The "distance" between the scholar and his/her object of study emerged as a key point in Fabbri's paper:

> It is no surprise that, with few exceptions, early popular music scholars belonged to the same generation(s) and subcultures as the musicians whose work they studied, or were even music practitioners themselves. […] So, whoever studies popular music now, has to face historiographical issues that could really never be dispensed of, but which were to some

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J. Tomatis (✉)
University of Turin, Turin, Italy
e-mail: jtomatis@unito.it

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> respect overcome in early studies by the scholar's personal involvement with the subject (Fabbri 2013: 2–3).

However, Fabbri admitted, reliable sources can be hard or even impossible to find, especially for documenting those everyday musical practices which are fundamental to the understanding of popular music cultures. As an example, Fabbri talked about his difficulties in finding pictures of "youths in the 1960s and 1970s listening collectively to records". As he personally recalls:

> I knew that practice existed, because I was myself a practitioner: I still have vivid images of listening to The Shadows on a portable Philips record player, and the Beatles on a Geloso reel-to-reel tape recorder, during my summer holidays in 1963 with my friends Aldo and Betta and Nicoletta; of the first time I listened to the *White Album* with my friends Toto and Luca and Cristiana, playing it on the expensive hi-fi system of one of my friends' father […] (Fabbri 2013: 5).

Still, Fabbri concluded, "[d]ocuments on normality are rare".

As scholars of a younger generation, these kinds of epistemological issues must be considered especially when we approach the study of music from periods we have lived, the risk being that to "recreate the original 'familiarity' of the first generation of popular music scholars by simply proclaiming that empirical data are being collected" (Fabbri 2013: 6). Even for ethnographies in social sciences, Andy Bennett states, "insider knowledge" must not be uncritically considered "as an end in itself" (Bennett 2002: 461). Its "social scientific value […] crucially depends […] upon a critical evaluation of its use as a method of research", instead (Bennett 2002: 463). Accordingly, while investigating the "normality" of specific music practices, personal memories (as well as "empirical data") are neither to be discarded for the purposes of (an alleged) objectivity, nor to be trusted as meaningful per se. They can provide a promising research ground when contextualized in a wider discourse, and critically evaluated. In its "strong sense" (D'Orsi 2002), a historical method must entail critical reflection on the method itself.

This article addresses some of these methodological issues, proposing an account of Italian popular music in the early 1990s, and trying to make sense of it in the context of the 1980s and 1990s Italian new media soundscape (and mediascape). Both an autoethnographic account (Ellis et al. 2011), and a (cultural) historiographical method are employed (Bloch 2004; D'Orsi 2002; De Luna 2004; see also, on media history, Ortoleva 1995).

Post-*Annaliste* approaches to media history (see, for instance, Altman 2004) must engage critically with "the everyday", or the "everydayness" (on this concept: Lefebvre 1958, 1987; Berger and Del Negro 2004)—that is, with what is "normal" for people in a society in a given moment. Music practices and tastes change with time, and so does "normality". Then, the challenge becomes to understand what "normality" is, and to unveil its social, cultural, and political implications at a given time.

At least since the "popular music revolution" in the 19th century, and the "incorporation of music into a system of capitalist enterprise" (Scott 2009: 3), "normality" in music practices has been tied to cultural and media industry. As suggested by Keith Negus with the expression "culture produces an industry"

(Negus 1999: 19), music production does not simply take place within a "corporate environment structured according to the requirements of capitalist production […]". Rather, "[t]he activities of those within record companies should be thought of as part a 'whole way of life'" (Ibid.). "Normality"—that is: everyday practices with, or about, music, *including* those by musicians and recording industry and media corporations personnel[1]—can be understood only if tied to the broader cultural context. Our purpose, as popular music scholars, should be to investigate how a "normality" in the media soundscape was established, and how it affected the people's relation with music.

A higher order of critical reflection should also consider how "normal" practices around music affect anyone's understanding of the music itself, including the researcher's. We can hence assume that Fabbri's memories of (non-documentable) "collective listenings" must have influenced his account of the music of the 1960s (see, as an example, Fabbri 2005). During that decade, other music scholars—namely, most of the "founding fathers" of popular music studies, including Fabbri himself—must have gone through similar experiences. Yet, scholars of a different generation, and from different places, would probably provide different accounts—different "autoetnographies"—of "their" normal music practices, and should attempt to comprehend how these could have affected their way of making sense of music. Understanding "normality" is thus a methodological tool to understand, and rationalize, popular music of the past.

13.2 1980s and 1990s Italian Popular Music (and Popular Music Studies)

Both Italian popular music studies and music journalism have always favored certain artists or scenes instead of others. For many reasons, including their generational significance, the 1960s and 1970s were canonized as a "golden age", and "serious" genres of those decades—like the *canzone d'autore* (*auteur* song)—have gained an artistic status (Tomatis 2014b; Fabbri and Plastino 2013). The 1980s and 1990s, instead, have been less considered, and often treated—in the common sense—as decades of "decadence" and "bad music".

Radical shifts in music production, diffusion, and consumption characterized the last twenty years of the 20th century: new technologies—affordable user friendly synthesizers, MIDI devices, the Walkman, the CD, the personal computer, and so on—deeply changed the people's relation to music (Toynbee 2000). In Italy, several changes reshaped the organization of the music industry. As stated by De Luigi (2008), Italian music became tied up to music majors' international strategies more than ever before, and a generational turnover of music professionals occurred. Also, a revolution occurred in the media system. Fledgling commercial TVs and radio

[1]This idea of "normality" in music practices should be thought of also in connection to Christopher Small's idea of "musicking" (Small 1998).

stations started challenging the state monopoly on broadcasting, striving for reaching a national diffusion. This process came to an end in the early 1990s, when a duopolistic opposition between national medias, controlled by the government, and a powerful media corporation (Mediaset, previously Fininvest) owned by tycoon Silvio Berlusconi (later to be Italian prime minister) eventually set up (Bolla and Cardini 1997). This system still affects the Italian mediascape in very typical ways.

Changes in the music industry and the media system surely had an impact on the way Italian popular music was produced and consumed, and need to be taken into account by scholars approaching the music of these decades. And yet, Italian music critics seem to be biased against the decade that gave us synthesizers, Berlusconi and cheap Japanese cartoons. In the common sense, the "ill-famed" 1980s and 1990s are usually downgraded as the decades of cheesy trash pop. In spite of a considerable amount of literature on Italian media and politics between the 1980s and 1990s, the impact of such a media revolution on music has been hardly considered, with very little exceptions (Martinelli 2007; Prato 1998; see also Bolla and Cardini 1997). Several music critics have interpreted Italian "pop" of these years through mainly in two ways. On the one hand, it was seen as a product (or, sometimes, a by-product) of music globalization. This would have affected the nature of Italian songs, which were said to have become "international and modern pop songs" (Liperi 1999: 471).

On the other hand, leftist critics and intellectuals who were part of the 1968 generation tended to interpret the "leap" from the 1970s to the 1980s as a political and generational failure. According to this perspective, popular music of the 1980s and 1990s must involve individualism, careerism, and the crisis of political ideologies. Indeed, between the late 1970s and the early 1980s, several key changes occurred in the Italian music economy, including the collapse of the powerful alternative music network established by Italian left-wing forces (Balestrini and Moroni 1998; Bermani 1997). The crisis of the so-called "Movimento", that constellation of associations, collectives, and extra-parliamentary groups, which had emerged after 1968 (De Luna 2009) also triggered the crisis of a political way of interpreting pop music. In 1985, Gianni Borgna concluded his influential *Storia della canzone italiana* with a statement that today might sound like a withdrawal. As previous categories appeared to have lost their meaning, Borgna pointed out the apparent "fragmentation" of the Italian *canzone* field, where a "plurality of codes, messages (and audiences)" mirrored "the disintegration of our age" (Borgna 1985: 222).

Certainly, these ways of understanding 1980s pop music implied a bias against it, grounded on an idea of "decadence"; also, these narratives identify the "spirit" of the Italian 1980s in the music mainstream, excluding the "margins": in the 1980s, Italian punk and "alternative" music also developed *against* the pop mainstream (Bottà 2014; De Sario 2009). Ideological interpretations of this kind are still common nowadays: the goal of this article is to start making sense of these repertoires within their different and specific context, instead.

Recently, the music of the 1980s and 1990s has started being re-evaluated and re-thought through nostalgia, as part of a late-20th century revival. This new perspective provides further evidences of how values and interpretations of popular music change through time, and need to be investigated accordingly.

13.3 Listening to the Music of the 1990s in the 1990s: The Case of 883

In 1992 I was 6 years old. People of my age mostly listened to music on cassettes, TVs, and radios. Like Fabbri and his friends, my friends and I did listen to music collectively, in our own way: for example, the most vivid memory of my second grade year is of my schoolmates singing a song called *Hanno ucciso l'uomo ragno* [They Have Killed Spiderman], by a band called—as I had to discover later—883. As far as I can remember, that song came out of the blue. One day, everybody in my class was singing *Hanno ucciso l'uomo ragno*. Our teacher, after few days of brave resistance, surrendered, and let us sing the song during the music hour. Knowing that song was part of being "normal" for an early 1990s child, or teenager.

883 had debuted one year earlier: they were a pop duo from Pavia (a city close to Milan), composed by singer and songwriter Max Pezzali and songwriter Mauro Repetto (who performed live on stage as "dancer", too). Also thanks to their producer, the popular DJ and entrepreneur Claudio Cecchetto, and to the endorsement of commercial radios and TVs, the band rose to success quickly, especially among teenagers. A few months after their successful debut single *Non me la menare* [Don't Be a Pain in the Ass]—whose lyrics, quite graphic and innovative, were a verbal outburst against an annoying girlfriend—they hit the Italian chart with *Hanno ucciso l'uomo ragno*. The song, thanks to its catchy tune and arrangement, and despite of its unusual subject (essentially, the lyrics described in an ironic "hard-boiled" style the people's reactions to the death of Spider Man), became the music craze of that year.

Solita notte da lupi nel Bronx
nel locale stan suonando un blues degli Stones
loschi individui al bancone del bar
pieni di whisky e margaritas
Tutto ad un tratto la porta fa SLAM
il guercio entra di corsa con una novità
dritta sicura si mormora che I cannoni hanno fatto BANG
Hanno ucciso l'uomo ragno
chi sia stato non si sa
forse quelli della mala forse la pubblicità
Hanno ucciso l'uomo ragno
non si sa neanche il perché
avrà fatto qualche sgarro a qualche industria di caffè

[Same old dark and stormy night in the Bronx
In the club, a Stone's blues is playing
Some shady guys at the bar counter
Full of whisky and margarita
Suddenly, the door goes SLAM
The one-eyed man runs into with something new
It's a sure tip-off, rumours say that
The cannons have gone BANG!
They've killed Spider Man
No one knows who did it
Maybe some mafia guys
Maybe TV commercials
They've killed Spider Man
No one knows who did it
He must have gone wrong to some coffee industry]

Both *Non me la menare* and *Hanno ucciso l'uomo ragno* were included in 883's first album, *Hanno ucciso l'uomo ragno* (FRI Records 1992). In spite of a poor commercial campaign and no videoclips, the album entered the Italian chart in May 1992, hit the top in August, and sold over 600,000 copies in few months (Pezzali 2013: 90; Spinetoli 1997). 883's second album, *Nord sud ovest est* (FRI Records 1993), released in 1993, obtained an even greater success, spending 40 weeks in the chart and ten at the top, and selling over 1 million 300 thousand copies. Considering the period 1990 to 1996, *Nord sud ovest est* features at number 3 among the best selling albums in Italy. In 1994, after an album of remixes for dance clubs (FRI Records 1994), Repetto left the band. Max Pezzali released four more studio albums (FRI Records 1995, 1997; S4 1999; Warner Music Italy 2001), and a number of greatest hits under the name 883 (FRI Records 1998; Warner Music Italy 2002). Since 2002, he has switched to a solo career, yet without consistently changing his style of songwriting.

883's songs sounded as an Italian version of some international pop hits of the 1980s and early 1990s. They included samples, synthesizers, stadium rock guitars, and were built on repetitive beat structures, which helped their success as dance music, too. Most of 883's lyrics dealt with friendship, girls and girlfriends, and wondered of escaping the routine of everyday life in a narrow-minded, provincial environment, with both irony and seriousness. Others involved nostalgic recollections of teenage years, and faced the disillusionment of adulthood. Common myths in popular culture were employed as well—myths such as superheroes, soccer, America, and motorbikes.

The band's lyrics also featured an original mix of Anglicisms, youth slang and swear words, which certainly had a role in 883's success among children and teenagers. As noticed by De Rosa and Simonetti, the language used by 883 was a notable feature of their style, and a significant innovation in Italian popular music. Yet, despite of a large use of slang terms and English words, 883's language must not be considered as "expressionist" (De Rosa and Simonetti 2003: 118). Rather, it was intended to imitate everyday speech, and particularly that type of language

used "by teenagers and young people in the industrial district around Milan [where also Pavia is], a metropolitan area which has been, since long time, the cradle for the linguistic model of contemporary spoken Italian" (Ibid.). This area has achieved a primacy in Italian media since the 1980s, as most of the newly born commercial radios and TV networks were broadcasting from there. Therefore, 883's lyrics were good examples of a "new" language mainly imposed by media, the so-called "neostandard" Italian (D'Achille 2003).

Accordingly, 883's multilingualism should be considered as a "realistic formula, which strengthens the choice of a collective point of view" (De Rosa and Simonetti 2003: 127). This idea of "collective" appears to be decisive in 883's reception. A big number of their lyrics encompassed a collective perspective—that is, was sung by, or appealed to, a collective "we". Notably, many of these songs are now among those considered as classics by 883's fans. 883's "we" usually coincided with the *dramatis persona*'s group of friends, thus helping the listener in feeling involved in the narration as a part of the same micro-community. Undoubtedly, listeners were supposed to recognize the protagonist of the song as the "real" Max Pezzali, especially after his break-up with Repetto. Autobiographical references, recurring characters, as well as other analogous strategies were common, too.

This kind of collective perspective was a true innovation. 883's "we" did not suggest any type of generational commitment, meaning "we" the people, or "we" the youth. Songs performing such a type of collective point of view were quite common in Italian popular music,[2] but 883's songs differed from that model. In many of their songs, the singing *persona* performed as the spokesperson of a small community of friends, or at least addressed them directly. Apparently, this helped conveying an innovative worldview, which some critics have connected to the changes of the Italian society during that decade (De Rosa and Simonetti 2003; Berselli 2007).[3]

Songs "diataxis"[4] also helped in supporting a "collective" interpretation of 883's songs. Almost all of them featured a verse-refrain structure, with the hook line in the refrain. In this "discursive, embracing, additive, finalistic" type of song construction (Fabbri 2012b: 99) the verse (or verses) serves a climactic introduction to a "singalong" refrain. The singalong—"a tune or a passage to which, when performed, it's easy for members of an audience to sing along" (Tagg 2012: 601)—suggests an idea of listening and singing together. Several of 883's songs are remembered for their "lighter waving" singalong. In this sense, 883's songs employed several strategies for expressing a collective perspective. These included the contents of lyrics, their rhetorical and linguistic innovations, and how song structures were organized.

[2]For a study on 1960s "we" rhetoric, see Tomatis (2014a)

[3]Also, other popular songs of these years—as an example, some iconic songs by famous rocker Luciano Ligabue—seem to use similar strategies, and to share this kind of worldview.

[4]That is: song structure, the "disposition […] of musical episodes in terms of chronological placement" (Tagg 2012: 586).

13.4 "Normal" Production and Diffusion Processes

Back in 1992, when the teacher let my class sing *Hanno ucciso l'uomo ragno*, I must admit I faked: I didn't know the lyrics, so I had to improvise and learn the song from my friends' renditions, including several mistakes due the fact that—as six years old kids—they misinterpreted most of the words. To my schoolmates' eyes, I was not that "normal", since I did not know that song. The "normal" way my friends had discovered *Hanno ucciso l'uomo ragno* was through TV, and especially commercial TVs, which broadcasted cartoons, and through format radios. At my home, my parents listened to cassettes, and I was not allowed to watch TV without control. So, simply, I was an exception. And yet, I was forced to learn that song, as everybody was singing it.

But, how "normal" was Italian media system at the beginning of the 1990s? Private radio stations had appeared in Italy since the late 1970s. As stated by media historian Monteleone (1994: 195), during the second half of the 1980s "the most relevant phenomenon in Italian radio" was the growing interest, by an increasing number of radio entrepreneurs, in opening up their broadcasts to a national audience. Most of these radios were format radios, broadcasting music (especially, English and American music, and international dance hits) and targeting young people, in order to differentiate their offer from public radio. According to Monteleone (1992), in the early Nineties, of twelve national private radio stations and networks, nine were format radios of this kind. Yet the most interesting tendency of Italian radio in the early 1990s was the audience's increasing interest in Italian music. Radio Italia Solo Musica Italiana, an "all-Italian-music" radio (as its name suggests), slowly increased its audience and became, between 1991 and 1992, the most listened to Italian radio station, thus forcing its competitors to change their programming and to open more spaces for Italian artists. In the same years, as explained by D'Amato (2009: 156), power relations between the Italian recording industry and media, and especially radio, overturned to the advantage of the latter. Such a process was accomplished in the mid-1990s, with the final success and consolidation of commercial radios. Therefore, radio networks strategies must have influenced the recording industry agenda in a decisive way, especially in the early 1990s.

A key figure to understand the pioneering ages of Italian commercial broadcasting is Claudio Cecchetto: DJ, VJ, producer (with the big dance hit *Gioca Jouer*), TV shows host, entertainer, and entrepreneur (Cordoni 2003; Cecchetto 2014). In 1982, Cecchetto founded Radio Deejay, the Italian most popular private radio, and pioneered the link between commercial radios and TVs hosting the TV Show *Dee Jay Television*, on commercial channel Italia 1 (owned by Silvio Berlusconi's Fininvest), which was simultaneously broadcasted as a radio show on Radio Deejay. On the Rai—Italian public television—he hosted three editions of the Sanremo Festival, thus contributing in the "corporatization", both economic and

cultural, of public media in Italy, a theme that has been at the core of Italian political debate since the 1990s. As a talent scout, Cecchetto launched several Italian pop artists and entertainers, including 883.

As recalled by both Pezzali and Cecchetto himself (Pezzali 2013; Cecchetto 2014), Cecchetto listened to a home tape, and invited 883 to join his independent label FRI (Free Records Independent) straightaway. The recording and mixing process took place between 883's home studio, a studio in Turin, and Radio Deejay studio in Milan, also taking benefit from the radio staff's assistance. Chief of programming Pier Paolo Peroni had a key role in the recording process, and features as producer in the album credits. Several dance remixes, produced by Radio Deejay's DJs, were released: DJs also performed in dance clubs on a regular basis, and played their remixes, thus helping in marketing the new recordings to clubgoers. Unsurprisingly, 883's first tour took place in dance clubs, instead of conventional live music venues. Pezzali describes Radio Deejay at that time as an "incredible place, a factory [in Warhol's sense] where everybody […], if skilled, could show off and get a career advancement" (Pezzali 2013: 83). Many accounts on commercial radios and TVs during the 1980s convey such an enthusiastic sense of venture entrepreneurship and friendship between professionals (Baroni 2005; Cecchetto 2014).

Italian television, too, had been going through great changes since the early 1980s (Bolla and Cardini 1997). At the beginning of the 1990s, a duopolistic media system, opposing the public broadcasting company (Rai) to the Fininvest group—owned by tycoon Silvio Berlusconi—was established. At that time, private radios and televisions were pursuing the same interests: to set up as national networks, in order to access a national advertisement market, and cooperated to succeed. Popular music played an important role in this process. For example, the publishing rights of the songs of 883 were shared between Warner Music (which had a deal with the band before they signed for Cecchetto, as clarified by Pezzali 2013: 68). Cecchetto himself (through his company Dj's Gang srl) and the Fininvest Group (through its label Canale 5 music srl, or the subsidiary RTI Music). As stated by De Luigi (2008: 55), sharing a percentage of the royalties to obtain "free" ads has been a common practice since the 1980s "for those labels connected with TV networks". Such "barter deals" consisted of a swap between royalties on selling rights, and TV commercials or appearances. Therefore, it's no surprise that 883—as other artists discovered by Cecchetto—balanced a poor commercial campaign with numerous appearances on commercial TV channels—and, needless to say, a heavy rotation on Radio Deejay and its fellow stations.

A further example is provided by *Karaoke*, one of the most successful TV shows in the early 1990s. *Karaoke*, inspired by the international hype of Japanese singing machines, was transmitted between 1992 and 1994 by Fininvest channel Italia 1. The Italian *Karaoke* TV show was actually a travelling talent contest, broadcasted every evening for half an hour from a different Italian town, with local competitors. The competition was entirely decided by the crowd's cheering. The show was

hosted by teenage idol Fiorello, himself a singer (and DJ on Radio Deejay), who had been launched by Cecchetto a few years before.[5] As stated by Paolo Prato:

> *Karaoke* has caught on especially in the provinces, where life is more subject to routine than in the big cities and the seductive aura of being a TV hero is more appealing (Prato 1998: 102).

So, *Karaoke* virtually appealed the same target of 883. Indeed, 883's song *Nord sud ovest est*, from their second album (FRI Records 1993), was the second most performed song in the *Karaoke* 1993 edition (the one analyzed by Prato). Yet, Prato affirms, it is not a mere question of similar targets:

> *Karaoke* must have acted in tune with the record business (Prato 1998: 110).

Therefore, both influencing and being influenced by music market.

13.5 Listening to the Music of the 1990s, Today

At the present day, 883's songs are evergreens of Italian pop. They are part of a widely shared generational repertoire, at a point that only some TV show themes and cartoon songs can compete in popularity.[6] Almost anyone between 25 and 45 years of age, with no gender distinction, is supposed to be able to sing these songs.

After having being considered as cheesy trash pop for years, 883 are nowadays re-evaluated in the context of a late-20th century revival, and provide a valuable case study on how aesthetic values are renegotiated through time, and what is the role of nostalgia in such processes.

In the 1990s music critics discarded 883's music as the prototypical mass-cult teen "trash" pop. Their vulgarity and juvenile attitude—along with up-to-the-date dance-pop arrangements and catchy tunes—were seen as the epitome of the "depraved" music by "the *yoof* of today" ("a cultural by-product", as put by Perugini 1993). Yet in recent years, Pezzali has been increasingly praised by critics as the forerunner to many tendencies of Italian popular music, and the ideal exponent of a 1990s' music *Zeitgeist* (Berselli 2007; for an ironic account of this "cultural switch", see Bottà 2012). Several musicians, who were born or raised during the 1980s and 1990s, are now referring to 883 as a major influence in their music. In 2012 two records came out celebrating the 20th anniversary of *Hanno ucciso l'uomo ragno*: a compilation promoted by the popular website Rockit (2012), with 21 Italian indie bands covering their favorite 883's songs; and a remake of *Hanno ucciso l'uomo ragno* (titled *Hanno ucciso l'uomo ragno 2012*; Atlantic 2012) by

[5]Fiorello also took part in a Sanremo Festival performing a song written by 883, *Finalmente tu* (Finally, You, in 1995).

[6]Unsurprisingly, cartoon themes exploited similar strategies than 883's songs.

Max Pezzali, featuring nine top Italian hip-hop artists. This album reached number 1 in the Italian chart, and so did—a year later—883's greatest hits *Max 20* (Wea 2013), featuring Pezzali's duets with fourteen Italian top artists, including some respected singer-songwriters. Recently, a well-known "indie" publishing house published Max Pezzali's autobiography (Pezzali 2013), strengthening his status as a true artist and *auteur*.

On the other hand, Pezzali and the 883 are part of a general re-evaluation of 1980s and 1990s music through an aesthetic of "trash". As stated by Emiliano Morreale, such process involves those "guilty pleasures" which, at present days, people can no longer "use" in the same way as they did in the past (Morreale 2009: 10). The media past is re-evaluated in terms of personal memories; commodities from the past are then "iper-subjectived" by users (Ibid.). According to sociologist Fred Davis, extensively quoted by Morreale, "[t]he very objects of collective nostalgia are in themselves media creation" (Davis 1979: 122).

"Collective nostalgia" also allows the existence of a "generation", as a community of people with a shared collective past. 883's songs are entangled with nostalgia on at least two different levels. Since 883's first album, an increasing number of Pezzali's lyrics have dealt with a sentiment of nostalgia for his teenage and youth years (the 1980s), exploiting a number of clichés and pop-culture icons of that decade. In today's reception of such songs, this triggers a meaningful semantic short-circuit. People in their thirties or twenties can now sing—or listen to—883 with a nostalgic attitude, which encompasses both their private feeling about a particular song (that is: a private nostalgia for *their* childhood/teenage years), and the lyrics' content (several songs are about feeling nostalgic). As it happens in the prototypical 883's song, also one of the most loved by fans, *Gli anni* [The Years].

Gli anni d'oro del grande Real
gli anni di Happy Days e di Ralph Malph
gli anni delle immense compagnie
gli anni in motorino sempre in due
gli anni di "che belli erano i film"
gli anni dei Roy Rogers come jeans
gli anni di "qualsiasi cosa fai" gli anni del "tranquillo siam qui noi"

[The golden years of the Great Real
The years of Happy Days and Ralph Malph
The years of great friends' companies
The years "always riding in two on a moped"
The years of "movies were so good"
The years of Roy Roger's jeans
The years of "whatever you do"
The years of "easy, we're here"]

In *Gli anni*, Pezzali (the singing persona) regrets about his past both through personal recalls—yet very vaguely: hanging out with friends, riding mopeds, and

watching movies could be part of the experience of any Italian 1980s teenagers—and using direct references to media products and commodities: the 1980s are thus the "years of *Happy Days*" (a TV series which is also the symbol of the 1980s "obsession" for the 1950s and 1960s), of Real Madrid, and of a jeans brand. A contemporary interpretation of 883's *Gli anni* will then deal with a double-layered nostalgia, as the song itself is a "media creation", in Davis's terms. As suggested by Morreale (2009: 8), nostalgia involves the "individualization of a collective past", in other words, the individualization of a shared "normality".

13.6 Conclusions

The recurring presence of 883's (and similar artists') songs in the Italian soundscape of the early 1990s can be understood only within the new media system established by private TV and radio networks. Yet it is not just a mere question of "following the money" and blame capitalism, TV alienation, or Berlusconi. As in Fabbri's example, a "collective listening" was involved; a type of "collective listening" which became decisive for 1980s and 1990s children and teenagers (at least), and was founded on the pervasiveness of the new private media system. Young people watched the same channels, and were exposed to the same radio programs, or were forced to learn a song by their peers, rather than gather together in a room around a record player. Yet the main point was the awareness of being part of the same "community"[7] of listeners, a community with "no sense of place" (as put by Meyrowitz 1985); a "constellated community" in Altman's terms (Altman 1998).[8] Communities as such became, a posteriori, a "generation" (according to Davis 1979).

The rise of a new corporate media system in Italy in the 1980s and 1990s established a virtual space for a new type of collective audience, especially for young people—to whom commercial medias dedicated many hours of transmission. Many songs of this period—including those by 883—seemed to appeal to a community of this kind, both through lyrical and musical strategies. Popular music contributed in establishing the "everydayness" of the brand new media system, as a "normal" space to be in. The recent rethinking of the 1980s and 1980s in the context of a "pop culture's addiction to its own past" (as pointed out by Reynolds 2011), rather than be thought of as a fleeting trend, should be put into perspective, instead. At least for the case here presented, the current rethinking of 1980s and 1990s music is closely related to the context in which that music was produced, diffused, and consumed, and can be explained only within the specificities of the Italian media system.

[7]On the concept of *community*, see: (Fabbri 2012a; Altman 2004; Anderson 1983; Kaufman Shelemay 2011).

[8]Altman himself suggests the image of people watching the same TV show at the same time.

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