Mediating Travel Writing, Mediated China:

The Middle Kingdom in Travel Books and Blogs

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

This thesis looks at travel writing about China crossing three main research axes. The main one is represented by the comparison between Western-authored contemporary travel books and travel blogs. The majority of studies on Western travel writing about China focuses on pre-modern and modern texts, while much less attention has been dedicated to contemporary travelogues. At the same time, by projecting the genre onto the web, this study offers a mapping of the blogosphere and questions the literary and epistemological status of travel writing. Through a close reading analysis, the aim is to outline medial and rhetorical differences and similarities between travel books and blogs, particularly in terms of how China is represented, as well as the way in which travel writers perceive themselves. In this latter respect, interviews with travel authors and bloggers are also included. The second research axis explores the diachronic evolution of Western-authored travel books about the Middle Kingdom. Building on the findings of the first part of the thesis, the analysis looks at texts from the end of the 19^{th} century throughout the 20^{th} century, complementing the attention to pre-modern and modern travel accounts of earlier studies on travel writing about China. The goal is to understand if and how the genre and the representation of China have changed over the last century. The third axis is cross-cultural: in the last chapter a number of contemporary Chinese-authored travel accounts are analyzed. Referring to existing literature about Chinese travel writing, to be highlighted are the rhetorical and medial differences between "classic" and contemporary texts, as well as between books and blogs.

Concerning the first research axis, findings suggest that Western travel books are more diversified generically speaking than travel blogs. Moreover, while the former provide a rather composite representation of the country, the latter are mainly devoted to deliver objectified touristic information. As for the second research axis, no substantial shifts were detected in the genre's features, or in the way in which China has been represented in Western travel writing during the 20^{th} century. Lastly, it is advanced that Chinese travel books are deeply politicized, while travel blogs tend to convey a contemplative representation of the country, more in the spirit of "classic" Chinese travel writing. However, differently from Western writers, both Chinese authors and bloggers manage to portray China from a variety of points of view.

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Introduction

You conduct […] a meeting in which the object participates, so that, together, object and methods can become a new, not firmly delineated, field.

Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts*

To make your fortune, as the genre of the picaresque has long shown us, you have to leave home and, often, to travel a long way...

Jonathan Culler, *Philosophy and Literature: The Fortune of the Performative*

This research is primarily concerned with establishing relations among its varied objects of study: travel writing and China, printed and online travelogues, Western and Chinese-authored texts, contemporary oeuvres as well as older ones. This work makes travel books and travel blogs about China its centre of interest and the lenses through which addressing wider issues, such as the current status of the travel writing genre, the kind of knowledge that travelogues in different medial formats[1] may produce, and the confrontation between authors from diverse literary and cultural backgrounds. Due to the intrinsic cross-disciplinarity of the work, concepts – such as "paratext", "hypertextuality", "chronotope" – are sometimes used outside of their native theoretical milieu (Mieke Bal's quote in excerpt echoes) and other voices – i.e. those of travel writers[2] – accompany the analysis in order to move from within the text *per se* towards an exteriority that helps to think of travel books and blogs not merely as documents, but as artifacts. In doing so, the research is also led to interrogate its own analytical conduct and, with it, the (supposed) theoretical divide between printed and digital texts, verbal and visual modes, the West[3] and China,

[1] The "book" and the "blog" are referred to here as "medial formats". While books and blogs are more than mere "supports" – such as a piece of paper – they cannot straightforwardly be regarded as media (e.g.: the radio, TV and cinema). "Medial format", then, is a label that aims at finding a terminological compromise to this in-between condition.

[2] In this work, the term "writers" encompasses both the authors of printed travel books and travel bloggers.

[3] According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the "West" chiefly refers to Europe and North America. Such definition is valid for the present work (with the sole exception of travel author Nathan Gray, who is from New Zealand). However, as will emerge during the analysis of the interviews in Chapter 3, today the term is more and more disjoined from a precise geographical frame and is increasingly charged with a political connotation which comes to include all those areas of the globe that have entered the later stage of industrialization.

contemporary and "classic"[4] travel writing. Method and objects, then, interpenetrate, collaborate, challenge each other, up to the point where the present work becomes a *mise en abyme* of (and about) travel writing, insofar as it tests its own findings by reflecting upon the outcomes of the three-month fieldwork in Hong Kong and China in which I was involved as both a scholar and a travel blogger (it is in this respect that Jonathan Culler's statement unfolds its full significance). All these issues will be hopefully expounded here, in the Introduction, whose function, more than elsewhere, is not so much to inform the reader about what s/he will find in the following pages, but to clarify the unifying principle for the upcoming analysis.

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Travel writing is currently one of the most appealing genres in literature from both a commercial and an academic point of view. It is evident, even from a cursory survey of bookstores' shelves, that travel writing enjoys a popularity which is at odds with all the Cassandras announcing the imminent death of "real" travel and testifies, instead, to the genre's resilience and flexibility. On the other hand, to mention travel writing within an academic environment cannot but trigger a whole series of cultural, political and epistemological[5] issues which have fuelled the debate on this genre since what Grzegorz Moroz and Jolanta Sztachelska (2010: ix) have called "'the turn to theory' in Anglophone literary criticism." From an object of study, travel writing has gradually evolved into a field of enquiry of its own attracting interventions from a variety of approaches and disciplines (see Hooper and Youngs 2004). The present work owes much to these studies – postcolonial studies *in primis* – as well as to the critical milieu – post-structuralism – from which they derive. Indeed, these investigations have drawn attention to a genre that was canonically considered "minor literature" and have done so by dislocating travel writing outside of stringently literary circles and unpacking its political and cultural implications variously bound to issues of privilege, mobility and ideology (among others: Said 1978; Hulme 1986; Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1989; Pratt 1992; Spurr 1993; Lisle 2006; Douglas 2009; Huggan 2009).

At the same time, this thesis moves beyond the critical framework provided by these studies in that it also looks at travel writing on the Web. According to Technorati's (2011) report on the state of the blogosphere, "travel" is permanently in the top 10 of the

[4] The term "classic" refers here to late 19th century – early 20th century texts.
[5] "Epistemology" is used in its broad (Anglo-Saxon) meaning of knowledge, thus transcending its narrower reference to "scientific knowledge" usually adopted in continental philosophy.

most popular blogs – seventh position – and the correspondent tag is ranked among the 30 most popular. Since the first decade of the new millennium, academic literature on blogs has witnessed an exponential blossoming. Methodologies adopted to study blogs include, among others, content analysis (Herring, Scheidt, Kouper, and Wright 2007; Papacharissi 2007; Bonsagit, McCabe, and Hibbert 2009), rhetorical analysis (Miller and Shepherd 2004), and ethnographic analysis (Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, and Swartz 2004). These studies are significant insofar as they provide valuable data about features of blogs and blogging strategies. For instance, they show, contrary to commonly held assumptions, that blogs are mainly composed of written language and present a low frequency of links and comments (Herring, Scheidt, Kouper, and Wright 2007). Findings also reveal that blogs are mainly conceived as single-authored, personal diaries (Herring, Scheidt, Kouper, and Wright 2007; Papacharissi 2007). The major limit of these studies is that they all define blogs exclusively as a new kind of communicative genre: a conception that leads to blogs being considered in isolation from the medial, cultural and literary background that informs them. In doing so, these studies overlook the complex interrelation of rhetorical[6] and medial features of blogs, as well as their ideological charge. Furthermore, these studies are transversal in scope – i.e. they do not focus on any specific themes – and are by now almost a decade old, which is a significant time span when it comes to the exploration of the Web. Hence, it becomes interesting to understand the extent to which these findings may also apply to the specific case of more recent travel blogs.

Despite the consistency of literature on blogs, studies that concentrate on travel blogs are still limited (Pan, MacLaurin, and Crotts 2007; Carson and Schmallegger 2008; Pühringer and Taylor 2008; Wenger 2008). Carson and Schmallegger (2008: 101) define travel blogs as "personal webpages from travellers who publish their personal stories and recommendations." This definition is formally correct, but is incomplete with respect to all those rhetorical and medial aspects which characterise travel blogs. Nonetheless, its deficiency is at least indicative of the functional purposes underpinning much research on travel blogs: indeed, all the above-mentioned studies adopt a quantitative approach in the attempt to extract marketing information about tourists' behavior rather than addressing travel blogs as texts (exceptions are Angé and Deseilligny 2009; Tang and Chao 2010). In this respect, Banyai and Grover (2012: 268) write that "although travel blogs offer destination marketers a window into tourists' travel experiences, research analysing the content of online travel diaries is still in its infancy." It is this statement that represents the starting point of the present study.

[6] See further below for a definition of "rhetorical".

Between Books and Blogs: Travel Writing and Transmediality

While placing travel writing at the centre of the analysis, this thesis travels in its turn. In order to avoid the risks of techno-determinism that a focus solely on travel blogs (or travel books) may imply, the analysis is grounded on a comparative approach: more precisely, a transmedial comparative approach. The underlying assumption of this work is that travel books and travel blogs represent two "intermedial transpositions" (Wolf 2008) that realize the same generic matrix: travel writing. "Intermedial transposition" is a phrase whose conceptual validity must be assessed in relation to two related terms: "transmediality" and "remediation". The former, coined by Henry Jenkins (2006: 6), acknowledges "the flow of content through multiple media platforms"; in other words, transmediality accounts for, and investigates, the redistribution of texts (broadly defined) on various media. The latter term was introduced by David Bolter and Richard Grusin (1998) in order to define how a given text is affected when passing from one medium to another. While Jenkins largely considers transmediality as one consequence of the hybridization among media and sees the Web as the medium that promotes this hybridization the most, Bolter and Grusin focus more on the effects that the process of medial transposition has on a given text, passing from a rendition of "immediacy" – when the re-mediated text is as faithful as possible to the source – to "hypermediacy" – when the text is deeply modified, according to the features of the new medium. The shared premise that links these terms is that all processes of transposition affect how a text is conceived, produced and received. Here, however, the departing point is slightly different from that of Jenkins and Bolter and Grusin, insofar as it concentrates on the various realizations that a whole genre – travel writing – can take. So, the notion of "intermedial transposition" is best suited as it fosters the idea of different occurrences on different medial formats that refer to the same generic matrix.[7] At this point, then, it is necessary to provide an operative definition of travel writing.

Despite the increasing attention to travel writing within academia since 1970s, the elaboration of a commonly accepted definition of this object of study leaves scholars quite far from agreement. Problems are of a semantic, formalistic, and medial nature. According to Paul Fussell's (1980: 203) seminal definition, travel books are "a sub-species of memoir in which the autobiographical narrative arises from the speaker's encounter with distant or unfamiliar data, and in which the narrative – unlike that in a novel or a romance – claims literal validity by constant reference to actuality." Notwithstanding the hierarchization of

[7] The terms "transmediality" and "remediation" will be used interchangeably whenever the process of transposition from one medial format to the other will be discussed.

"memoir" and "biography", which is left unexplained, from a transmedial point of view the main problem with Fussell's definition is to be found in the conflation between travel writing (as a genre) and the travel book (as a medial format). Carl Thompson (2011: 19) writes that "difficulties arise with any suggestion that we can equate travel writing in its entirety with the form Fussell calls the travel book." More broadly, the travel writing genre seems refractory to any definition that does not also take into account the format which "carries" the text, as the labels "travel + book" and "travel + blog" attest.[8] Therefore, the transmedial comparison advanced here results particularly fruitful in linking what is written in the texts to the analysis of the medial formats' features. Conceptually speaking, this is no novelty, after all, if only one thinks of Marshall McLuhan's ([1964] 1996) widely acknowledged idea that "the medium is the message". In fact, the present work is grounded on the assumption not only that the medium plays a role in the definition of genres, but more radically that the medium is consubstantial to genre. Put differently, any text can be defined as the coalescence of generic and medial features, that is, what could be named a "*genium*" (genre + medium). Since no intermedial transposition is a neutral process, the book and the blog do have a significant influence on how the travel narrative is conceived and the genre eventually "interpreted" by and within these medial formats (Calzati 2013b). Based on this premise, to conduct a transmedial comparison between travel books and travel blogs (and also among them) means to acknowledge the specific "affordances" (Gibson 1977) of a given medial format and understand how these affect what is told in the texts. This is particularly pertinent when realizing that travel books and travel blogs are often enriched by a variety of visual elements – pictures, drawings, maps – which make of them multimodal texts (and, in the case of blogs, interactive ones). To consider all these elements as complementary to the written text – or to overlook them altogether – would be both reductive and misleading. Hence, this work aims to organically include them into the analysis by thinking of each text as a medially, generically and culturally shaped artifact.

Concerning the formal aspect of travel writing, Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan (1998: 14) overcome Fussell's hierarchization between autobiography and memoir by arguing that travel writing is a mix of the two: "like other autobiographies," they contend, "[travel writing] seeks to make retrospective sense out of discrete experiences"; however, in contradistinction to autobiographies, "travel narratives are less concerned with recuperating, or reinventing, a single self, than with following the trajectory of a series of

[8] This also happens in French and Italian: "récit de voyage", "blog de voyage"; "libro di viaggio, "blog di viaggio".

selves in transit. […] In this sense, travel writing is more closely affiliated with memoir." On this same issue, Jonathan Raban (1988: 253-4) is even more inclusive when he famously claims that "as a literary form, travel writing is a notoriously raffish open house. […] It freely mixes narrative and discursive writing." Pushing this reasoning to the extreme, the most radical position is that of Jan Borm (2004: 13), according to whom "the point to determine is whether travel writing is really a genre at all. I shall argue here that it is not a genre, but a collective term for a variety of texts both predominantly fictional and non-fictional, whose main theme is travel." Eventually, the point is not so much to broaden or restrict the field that travel writing embraces, but to look at it from a different perspective. More specifically, the difficulty of elaborating a commonly accepted definition of travel writing can be disentangled by recalling Carolyn Miller's (1984: 151) words on genre: "an understanding of genre," she notes, "can help us account for the way we encounter, interpret, react to, and create particular texts." Put differently, according to Miller the notion of genre can (and should) tell us something about *how* texts work. Starting from here, it is contended that travel writing can be best understood when regarding it as a *rhetorical praxis*. The adjective "rhetorical" encompasses, in Miller's spirit, the ensemble of semantic, formal and pragmatic features of the texts.[9] The first term – semantic – refers to what travellers recount – places visited, people encountered, historical and biographical anecdotes, etc. – as well as the strategies they resort to in order to represent and convey their experiences, such as figures of speech, stereotypes, visual elements, etc. In terms of form, this work is primarily concerned with first-person (either singular or plural) narratives. The stress on the presence in the texts of a clear narrating subject has one main motive: all those texts that keep at their core the "theme of travel" – as noted by Borm – but are predominantly informative, non-narrative texts – such as travel guides – will not be taken into account. As Stacy Burton (2014: 17) points out in her study *Travel Narrative and the End of Modernity*, the notion of narrative "puts into the foreground a crucial aspect of travel texts that has become more pronounced as they present themselves not as documentary studies but as stories, as narrator's accounts of their own subjective experiences." Great attention is then devoted to how travel writers decide to personally shape their stories and how they inscribe themselves in the text, what they decide to tell and, presumably, what they overlook. It must also be noted that, far from being congenital to the genre, the emergence in travel writing of an overt narrator mainly characterises late-modern and contemporary texts. In early modern British travelogues, for instance, it was

[9] In the present work, "rhetorical" comes closer to the notion of "genre". However, while the former stresses the various (semantic, formal and pragmatic) characteristics of the text, the latter points to the relation between these characteristics – as a whole – and a given medial format.

the rule for travellers – rather than the exception – to mask their observation behind a constructed neutrality which had to convey a sense of objectivity and reliability.

A further issue concerning the form of travel writing has to do with the distinction between factual and fictional modes of narration. Holland and Huggan (1998) advance a valid argument when they state that any neat separation between these two modes is theoretically preposterous, since all accounts are, to a degree, fictitious; as a consequence, they talk of travel writings (quoting Hayden White) as "fictions of factual representation" (10). Although this position can be shared from a formalistic point of view, it is still inadequate as it remains silent on one crucial point about travel writing, namely the relation to truth that these texts (pretend to) construct (Thompson 2011). This is strictly bound, on the one hand, to the way in which a given culture shapes its own concepts of truth, reliability and accuracy, and, on the other hand, to what kind of information is expected by travel writing. Chapter 2 will be dedicated to this issue; here, it suffices to suggest that travel accounts, independently from their degree of fictionality, have to be plausible, thus describing experiences that really happened or are likely to have happened (on this point see also Hulme and Youngs 2007). The criterion of "plausibility" is propaedeutic to the exclusion from the realm of travel writing of more or less imaginary texts.

The last point to address is the extent to which travel writing can be considered as a pragmatic genre. In this respect it is illuminating to remind ourselves of the opening words of Casey Blanton's (2002: 3) *Travel Writing: The Self and the World* in which the author states that travelogues are texts "whose main purpose is to introduce us to the other and that typically demonstrate an engagement between the Self and the world." Travel writing constitutes a *mise en abyme* – through words, illustrations, interactive elements – of an experience that approaches and conflates different individual and collective cultural universes. This means that travel writing not only (as a literary genre) is historically determined in that it "changes, evolves, and decays" (Miller 1984: 13); but, as a praxis, it is synchronically shaped by the dynamic interplay between travelling and writing, between discovering and reflecting, between present and past; a dynamic, then, that has to be intended as socially and culturally-dependent. Michel Butor's words ([1974] 2001: 70) can be revealing: "I travel in order to write […] because to travel, or at least to travel in a certain way, is to write (first of all because to travel is to read) and to write is to travel." It is from this sentence that one needs to start for looking at travel writing – and, more precisely, at travelling and writing – from a different point of view. A bare definition of "travel" is that of a displacement through space (or, more imaginatively, time). However, from the outset, "travelling" means something more. It signifies to introduce oneself to the

Other, by dramatizing the engagement between oneself and the world. When it comes to Butor's statement in parenthesis, in which the French philosopher specifies that "to travel is to read", two interpretations are possible. The first one relates to the literal meaning of the act of reading. In this sense, by arguing that "to travel is to read", Butor points to the accumulation of knowledge, through various acts of reading, that the traveller acquires (about the visited country) not only before but also during and after the journey. In this sense, then, reading is a concrete act that enriches and transcends the travel experience *per se*. At the same time, reading can have a more metaphorical meaning: insofar as a journey puts the traveller in contact with an alterity, s/he is asked to "negotiate" such encounter (i.e. make sense of it). To do so means to (be able to) "read" the Other, that is, recognize and understand it. However one decides to interpret the statement, it is evident that according to Butor reading becomes the *conditio sine qua non* of travelling and writing (or at least to do it "in a certain way"). If the traveller is unable to read the encounter with difference, then travelling and writing lose their force as practices; they lack that "transforming power" Butor mentions later on. Travelling, writing and reading all embed a transforming power which is dependent firstly upon the kind of journey the traveller accomplishes – the places s/he visits, but also his/her attitude towards the experience – and consequently on how s/he writes about it (Butor specifies that the form of the account is strictly related to the kind of journey accomplished). Eventually, Butor's claim tells us something about travelling and writing, namely that they are two symmetrical practices of knowledge.[10] On the one hand, any journey fuels (and is triggered by) what Pierre Bourdieu (1990: 35) defines as the desire of "escaping one's inattentive familiarity". Put differently, travelling kindles an attentive (pre)disposition towards the encounter with (and recognition of) otherness (which can occur at all latitudes, although the contact between Western travellers and China is cross-culturally charged). On the other hand, writing is a gesture of unavoidable inscription in the text of the writer's self. More precisely, writing reveals the presence of the self to itself by marking a spatial (on the page) and temporal (in the sequentiality of writing) distance from it. It is, then, possible to contend that while travelling helps to get in contact with what is perceived as different, writing entails a form of (gnoseological) mirroring of the self onto the page.

Writing China: The Political Relevance of Literature and New Media

At this point it seems both useful and necessary to explain the choice of China as the thematic focus of the texts. The first reason is purely operative. As the present work is

[10] See also Calzati 2014, 2015a, 2015b.

largely founded on a transmedial comparison between two different kinds of genium, there was the need to find a common thread that could delimit the scope of the analysis and make it more incisive. Hence, the choice of China responds to a unifying principle that projects an overall coherence over the selected texts.

There are, however, other more poignant motives that make China a privileged object of interest. In the introduction to *Sinographies: Writing China*, Eric Hayot, Haun Saussy and Steven Yao (2007: x) contend that "set as far as possible from the interfering West, China stands in not simply for an authentic otherness but for the very possibility of authenticity itself." In other words, China has represented over the centuries the ultimate emblem of otherness for Western travellers. Yet, this is, at least to an extent, an ideologically inflated vision, whose main effect is to deny to China any historical and cultural contingency. The point is that, while it is certainly important to "acknowledge[s] the fact that China is written" (Hayot, Saussy, and Yao: xi) because any representation not only draws on reality but contributes to its shaping, it is also necessary to remember that there is a "real" China out there from which travel writers draw inspiration. This entails, in Nicholas Clifford's (2001: 14-15) words, that one must "get behind any notion that there has been a single 'essentialized' Orient or China in the mind of the West and must be concerned with heterogeneity, with the interplay between the subjective and the objective." What Clifford does is to warn against the risk of an excessive discursivization of China, which would negate any possibility of "knowing" the Middle Kingdom[11] through the eyes and the words of travel writers. Clifford's argument is also a reaction against an all-encompassing interpretation of Edward Said's (1978) *Orientalism*, which has deeply influenced studies on travel writing. On this point, Dennis Porter (1991: 4) wisely notes that if the Orientalization of the East is a totalitarian discursive project, then "a knowledge – as opposed to an ideology – of the Other is impossible." The hypothesis here is that one *can* get to know China through travel books and travel blogs, but, in order to weigh and assess such knowledge, texts must be contextualized through the study of their genesis, as well as of the cultural ethos that informs them.

An additional reason for China to be a relevant object of study is that, despite its gradual overture to the world since the late 1970s, it seems to remain variously incomprehensible for Westerners. By retracing the genealogy of the encounter between the West and the East – in particular, China and India – John Clarke (1997: 4) notes that "even where there was respect for the East, often to the point of elevating it to a position high

[11] The term "Middle Kingdom" is used here as a synonym of China. It refers to the linguistic translation of the term "Zhōngguó" (中国), which means "China" in Chinese and can be literally translated as "middle territory" (we also find "Empire du Milieu" in French and "Regno di Mezzo" in Italian).

above the 'decadent' West, the otherness, even the strangeness, of the East has been emphasised." As the analysis will show, this trope is still widespread today: China is often perceived and represented in contradictory ways which crystallize around the (sublimated) idea of mysteriousness. By collating travel texts from different cultural contexts and of different medial nature, this study probes the possibility of deconstructing China's often-elusive representation. In so doing, the research aims at also pondering the potential of the Web as a channel where to find up-to-date information about the country, in comparison with mainstream media.

This latter point leads to explore the role of the Internet in relation to (and within) China. According to some scholars (see Herold 2013; MacKinnon 2013; Hockx 2015) the West has usually an overemphasized perception of the press's and the Web's censorship in China. However, it is undeniably true that Chinese people can still face difficulties when it comes to delivering messages which differ from the line tolerated by authorities. To support this is the bare fact that some of the Chinese travel writers interviewed for this research had their books and blogs banned in Mainland China (they were only available in Hong Kong or Taiwan). Although – or maybe because – China has now more than 560 million active Internet users (CNNIC 2012), constituting the greatest net population in the world, "to maintain the CCP's legitimacy and to protect national interests, the Chinese government continues its efforts to build a national 'e-border', also known by some in the West as 'The Great Firewall of China'" (Yuan 2010: 493). The efficacy of the Chinese government in controlling the Web is debated; yet, as Wenli Yuan (2010: 493) notes, "even foreign Internet companies, such as Yahoo! and Microsoft, have cooperated with the Chinese government in monitoring and reporting inappropriate online activities." This means that, however weak the control of the Chinese government may be, when it comes to obtaining news about China foreign audiences are usually confronted with filtered information.

To be sure, this filtering also concerns Western media because news about China largely responds to a restricted agenda that revolves around political or economic issues. Michel Hockx (2015) draws attention to a similar bias by recollecting his experience when researching on the Internet literature in China: "many times over the course of my research," he notes, "audiences [in the West] asked very political questions about Chinese literature, of the kind that they would never ask about, for instance, English literature" (9). The hypothesis (and the hope) to be tested here is that contemporary travel books and travel blogs, written by either Western or Chinese writers, could represent a valid alternative to this dominating perspective. As Clifford (2001: 8) makes clear, "above all, there is about the travel account a directness, even a physicality, that is lacking in the work of the expert or the journalist. For the experts are bound by their academic sources, which are alien to us […] while the journalists are trained to see tomorrow's story, which too quickly becomes yesterday's." Differently from other figures, then, travel writers tend to be more flexible and open in their writing, mixing registers and styles, anecdotes and descriptions, personal reflections and historical facts. This seems to be particularly fitting in the case of blogs which, as seen above, are commonly conceived as channels where it is possible for bloggers to express their own opinions with immediacy and informality. The idea, then, is that readers of contemporary travel writing may get a representation of China that deviates from other authoritative but restricted discourse(s) and, in the specific case of blogs, one which can be constantly updated.

Overall, the relevance of the present work for scholars of travel writing and/or China lies in the reading of contemporary texts (with the exception of Chapter 4). While much research on travel writing focuses on travelogues spanning usually from the Middle Ages to the first decades of the 20th century, at present, as Burton (2014: 11) points out, "scholars have yet to examine thoroughly exactly how the genre of the travel narrative changed in the twentieth century, or to theorize why these changes occurred." In this respect, the specific case of China is no exception. Existing research has widely explored Western-authored travel accounts from the past (see: Clifford 2001; Kerr and Kuehn 2007; Clark and Smethurst 2008; Kerr 2008).[12] These studies are often inter-disciplinary in nature – from anthropology and ethnography to cultural, gender and literary studies – and politically concerned (at least in a broad sense of the term). In this sense, they are a valuable resource, as they represent both a procedural guide and a critical frame for the present work. Nonetheless, stopping often at the first half of the 20th century, these studies need to be complemented with an analysis of contemporary texts that have been largely overlooked. Similarly, some research has been conducted on pre-modern and modern Chinese-authored travel writing (Strassberg 1994; Tian 2012), but to the best of my knowledge there is no study in English that concentrates on the most recent decades. Therefore, at present contemporary travel writing about China – Western- or Chinese-authored; in print or online – remains a largely unexplored terrain.

Chapters and Methodology

The thesis is divided into three parts. Chapters 1 to 3 – the bulk of the thesis – constitute the first part, which revolves around the transmedial comparison between contemporary

[12] For a comprehensive survey of the literature on this subject, please refer to Chapter 4.

Western-authored travel books and travel blogs. As the analysis urges to investigate generic and medial features of the texts in a mutual relation, the research necessitated a holistic approach to the texts which, while building upon existing literature on travel writing and media studies, could trace its own methodological path in the making of the analysis. Although Chapters 1 to 3 aim at addressing individually a precise feature of travel writing (semantic, formal and pragmatic), in each chapter rhetorical and medial issues find themselves inevitably interconnected. Hence, if a degree of overlap across the chapters is to be remarked, it will hopefully strengthen the analysis by offering different perspectives on the common transmedial ground, rather than representing a mere repetition.

After a brief introduction that permits one to elaborate some preliminary insights about where contemporary travel writers go in China and how they write about it, Chapters 1 and 2 propose a bridging approach (and methodology) between print and online travel accounts. Chapter 1 realizes a double theoretical gesture, on the one hand, through the application of Gérard Genette's (1997) concept of "paratext" – coined in relation to written books – to travel blogs, and on the other hand, by resorting to the notion of "hypertext" – largely used in relation to online documents – for the study of printed travelogues. Using these two concepts outside of their theoretical milieu permits one to move beyond the self-evident differences between analogue and digital realms and highlight their commonalities. Thus, to be discussed are the ways in which the various rhetorical and multimodal features of the texts work relationally to produce a precise narrative. Inspired by Genette (1980) and Bal's (2002) work on narrative discourse, it is explored the spectrum of literary forms that travel writing can take, as well as the ideological underpinnings (and their consequences on the representation of China and the travellers) of the discursive strategies that authors and bloggers decide to adopt. Particular attention is dedicated to the "narrative" and "ideological" functions taken on by the narrator – which, according to Genette, signal shifts in the "mood" of the account – and to the reporting of dialogues, regarded as the textual terrain where the encounter between the traveller and the Chinese occurs.

Chapter 2 calls upon Mikhail Bakhtin's ([1937] 1981) work on the chronotope and it questions how each genium remodels the basic chronotope of the travel writing genre as "a route covered in a certain amount of time during a specific trip" (Korte 2008: 29). In the conclusion to his work Bakhtin opens up to the possibility of extending the concept of "chronotope" to the medium that "carries" the text. Elaborating on that, the chronotopicity of the "represented world" – China – is related to the temporal and topological coordinates that each medial format builds and promotes. In fact, it is contended that the book and the blog have their own unique medial chronotope, which also dictates how the travel narrative is shaped. Moreover, since texts are often enriched with pictures, the possibility of applying the concept of chronotope to photography will be also discussed. Eventually, when it comes to consider travel books and travel blogs as texts that can convey information about China, it is necessary to ask, in the first place, what kind of information is at stake – i.e. its epistemological horizon – and what are the generic and medial conditions that frame such information. In other words, to compare travel books and blogs means to understand what happens to the practices of travelling and writing when they "land" on the book and the blog formats.

This last issue is at the centre of Chapter 3, which looks at travelling and writing as practices and investigates the conditions that make contemporary travel (in China) and writing (about China) possible. Moving beyond a mere taxonomic definition of travel and tourism, the chapter identifies the variety of journeys and writings accomplished by the travel writers, as well as the composite self-representations that they provide of themselves. In order to do that, a number of interviews with authors and bloggers were conducted and they will be referred.[13] In this way, a triangulation between the analysis, the texts, and the writers' own voices is built. To be sure, the interviews are not regarded as the site where a supposed truth about the text or the author may be found, but are too considered as documents and, as such, subjected to a close reading. The goal is to highlight points of fracture between what the writers say and what is included in the travel accounts.[14]

For this study, interviews were accomplished in various ways: in person, via Skype or emails (whenever it was not possible to arrange a meeting with the writer). Resorting to different modalities to conduct the interviews made the corpus potentially heterogeneous. Being aware of that does not represent, *per se*, a legitimation that frees these testimonies from methodological critique. Nonetheless, this work pleads for a degree of flexibility in that it does not pretend to be an ethnography in the first place, but rather a literary study

[13] With the exception of author Rob Gifford and bloggers BitByTheTravelBug, Viagra8868 and Yǒu Gè A, all contemporary travel writers mentioned in the thesis were interviewed. The interviews revolved around three main themes: (self)perception of the writer and motives of travel; writing and editorial processes and differences between travel books and travel blogs; representation of China. Departing from these three themes, each interview then followed a flexible path, depending on the writer's work and responses.

[14] At the same time, implementing a close reading of the texts with interviews helps to overcome one of the main criticisms that is usually directed towards text analysis and, in particular, discourse analysis, namely the lack of attention to the sphere of production of the text. For instance, in his review of three books dedicated to critical discourse analysis (Hodge and Kress 1993; Fairclough 1995; Caldas-Coulthard and Coulthard 1996), Henry Widdowson (1998: 138) argues that what is provided in these works "is not the systematic application of a theoretical model, but a rather less rigorous operation" and that "without such theoretical support, the particular analyses (no matter how ingenious and well-intentioned) reduce to random comment of an impressionistic kind." Similarly, John Bateman, Judy Delin, and Renate Henschel (2004: 66), starting from a socio-linguistic standpoint, call for "a much more rigorous empirical basis" when it comes to analysing texts. Taking the interviews into account is one way to transcend the text and possibly validating (or problematizing) the findings of the analysis.

which identifies in the interviews a useful source for establishing a dialectics with the texts and the analysis.

The second part of the thesis is constituted by Chapter 4. Taking the findings of the first part of the thesis as its starting point, the chapter takes a diachronic look at Western-authored travelogues from the end of the 19^{th} century towards the 1980s. In this way, the thesis reflects upon itself and analyses older texts from a renewed standpoint: one from which an eventual understanding of whether the representation of China and the modes of representation adopted have really changed over time may be gained. Specifically, the analysis builds on Clifford's *A Truthful Impression of the Country* (2001), which surveys Western travel writing about China from the late 19^{th} century to 1949, and tests the findings of this study in light of the discussion about contemporary travel books.

The last chapter – part three – returns to adopt a transmedial approach. This time, however, under analysis are a few Chinese-authored travel books and blogs. The corpus of texts is smaller than that of Western-authored travel accounts: the chapter, in this respect, does not aim to constitute an equal balance to the previous analysis. Yet, by exploring how the "represented others" – at least for the present work – look at themselves, the hope is to soften the potential allegation of ethnocentrism with which the study may be charged. Indirectly, also at stake are the features of the travel writing genre and the figure of the travel writer as they are conceived in today's China (and how these differ from pre-modern and modern Chinese travel writing). This chapter is the outcome of three months of fieldwork conducted first in Hong Kong – where I was a visiting scholar at the Chinese University of Hong Kong – and later in Mainland China. The fieldwork was vital to get acquainted with a number of Chinese-authored contemporary travel books and blogs, as well as with scholars in the field. Moreover, it was thanks to this experience that I was personally able to meet with authors and bloggers and interview them, as I did with Westerners.

In the Afterword I shift the focus from the texts and their authors to myself. During my fieldwork I kept a blog – www.stefanocalzati.com – on which I regularly updated posts about my stay at the Chinese University of Hong Kong; my encounters with scholars, writers, photographers and artists; my reflections about China, as well as my wanderings around the country. One could say that this thesis, after having travelled so much on paper – among concepts, disciplines and histories – has become a performative piece of work itself. Briefly said, I attempted to make theory work (while travelling); the extent to which I managed to do so is not my duty to assess. The most important thing, I would argue, is that research has kept in motion constantly re-enacting the dialogue between theory and practice, methods and concepts.

Lastly, in the Appendix I have provided a brief synopsis of each contemporary travel book and travel blog analyzed. Far from representing a mere reference list, this section includes significant information concerning the historical and cultural context of each work and writer, and it is referred to various times throughout the thesis.

The Archive

To conclude the Introduction it is useful to explain the criteria followed for the selection of the texts. After a preliminary survey, travel books and travel blogs have been distinguished according to two major axes. With regard to travel books, the distinction concerns monomodal texts (composed only of words) and multimodal texts (composed of words and illustrations). As for travel blogs, the major difference is between those blogs that are hosted on platforms and those that have been built independently by the bloggers.

The Western travel books and travel blogs examined here are in three different languages: English (written either by British, US-American, or New Zealand authors), French and Italian. As a general pattern, each chapter refers to books and blogs in all three languages. This linguistic choice brought with itself a set of issues: 1) it indirectly questioned the homogeneity of the concept of "West"; 2) it greatly enlarged the potential archive of texts; 3) it required translations into English whenever no English-language edition of the text was available. Concerning the first point, the thesis does not advance any *a priori* assumption about possible cultural similarities and differences among the texts surveyed, nor does it pretend to delve into the complex articulations of the countries' colonial past. The decision to look at texts beyond the English language is mainly an attempt to destabilize the English-centredness that affects the majority of studies on travel writing (either contemporary or classic) and on blogging. In fact, as Tim Youngs and Charles Forsdick (2012: 12) remark, "the development of the genuinely internationalized critical approach that travel writing merits remains more of an aspiration." At the same time, *a posteriori* one could infer fairly stable patterns in the way in which Western travel writers represent China. However, such a claim would certainly need to rely on a greater corpus of texts to be verified. Concerning the second point, in order to make the corpus of case studies as homogeneous as possible, those texts that recount a proper journey in China were favoured. Accounts that derive from residential experiences, or those in which

China only represents one among many destinations of a broader journey were excluded.[15] With regard to the third point, I personally translated all the quoted passages in French and Italian whenever the referred text was not available in English; the original versions of the quotations have been provided in footnotes. At the same time, because the medium does play a crucial role in how travel accounts are shaped, it must also be noted that, whenever possible, the first edition of each text was made the object of study. Surely, a comparative reading among the various editions and reprints of each text would have been of interest for understanding how certain editorial choices affect the *mise en forme* of the genium. However, extending the research towards this kind of textual criticism would have exceeded the scope of this work and its core enquiry.

The term "contemporaneity" refers to a period that spans from the mid-1980s – when the effects of opening China's frontiers to foreign people and capital started to be felt around the country – to the present. This frame pertains to travel books only because blogs were inexistent back in the 1980s. On this point it must be remarked that it is difficult to date with precision the origin of blogs, but many scholars converge on the suggestion that the term "weblog" was firstly coined by the writer Jorn Barger in 1997 (Walker-Rettberg 2008). Yet, despite the existence of earlier examples, the blogs I surveyed cover a shorter period, namely from 2005 to the present. This reduction corresponds with an understanding of the history of the World Wide Web which is by now widely accepted. It distinguishes two phases: from the origins of the World Wide Web (early 1990s) to roughly 2004, we witness the development of static pages; from 2005 onwards the so-called Web 2.0 emerges, characterised by the spreading of dynamic pages and User-Generated Content (UGC). These developments, as the analysis will show, have consequences for both the kind of online writing produced and the difficulty of retrieving and preserving Web documents. All travel blogs mentioned in this work were accessible until October 2015, the only exception being the older version of Becki's blog (www.backpackerbecki.com, which is still retrievable from <http://archive.org>). Lastly, due to the fact that the analysis is, first and foremost, a textual one, those travel blogs which showed consistency in terms of content (i.e. length of the posts) and regularity of the updates (i.e. at least a dozen of posts) were privileged.

As for older travelogues, the temporal frame covered here stretches back to the end of the 19th century and identifies in Isabelle Bird's *The Yangtze River and Beyond* (1899) its oldest reference. Bird was by no means the sole Western woman to travel in China at that

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[15] The only two exceptions are Colin Thubron's *Shadow of the Silk Road* (2006) and Oliver Germain-Thomas's *Le Bénarès-Kyôto* (2007). See Chapter 2.

time, nor the only one to have published an account of her wanderings in the Middle Kingdom (see, for instance, Constance Gordon Cumming's *Wanderings in China*, dated 1886). However, the great popularity enjoyed by Bird's text makes it a good – if not seminal – starting point for the present analysis. Moreover, the last decade of the 19th century is important for another reason: it turns China – at least in the eyes of travellers from the West – into an increasingly alluring land to visit, to the point that Julia Kuehn (2008) speaks of those years as the time in which China becomes a tourist destination.

The selection of Chinese-authored travel books and blogs followed by and large the same criteria used for Western ones. The focus remained exclusively on contemporary texts because to project the analysis onto the past would have extended the research too far. In this regard, Xiaofei Tian's (2012) *Visionary Journeys: Travel Writings from Early Medieval to Nineteenth-Century China* and Richard Strassberg's (1994) *Inscribed Landscapes: Travel Writing from Imperial China* are two scholarly works that already provide useful insights. Tian's study on Imperial China shows that also Chinese elites, differently from what is commonly argued, widely travelled to the West and reported their impressions to entertain readers at home; Strassberg retraces the genesis and evolution of Chinese travel writing from the 4th century towards the first half of the 19th century. Strassberg's findings about the rhetorical features of the genre are brought into dialogue with readings of contemporary texts and the interviews with Chinese writers (Chapter 5).

The word "Chinese" comes to encompass people who were born either in Mainland China or in Hong Kong and who have lived in the country for most of their lives. Excluded were, instead, writers from Taiwan and Macau. By no means do these choices want to deny the different histories of the people from Hong Kong and Mainland China, or to erase the complex relations that endure between Mainland China, Taiwan, Macau and Hong Kong. In fact, these issues will emerge in the last chapter, through the interviews with writers. The reason behind the decision to focus on Hong Kong and Mainland China was primarily practical, as it is where I conducted the fieldwork.

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This thesis has travelled a long way, in both a literal and a metaphorical sense. Bal's quotation reported in excerpt about the encounter between object and methods continues as follows: "This is where travel becomes the unstable ground of cultural analysis." I believe this sentence represents the *trait d'union* linking Bal's and Culler's perspectives, and I hope, indeed, that by travelling – as Culler suggests – this work has made its fortune. The truth is: “travel” – either as a concept or as an object of study; either as a practice or as an imagined endeavour – is always an unstable ground, as it bears in itself the uncertainty of motion; that same uncertainty that springs out from the writing of both the wanderer and the scholar, whose positions, identities and knowledge are similar in that they are challenged at all times. At every step. By every word.

PART ONE

TRAVEL WRITING ACROSS MEDIA

Chapter 1

Travel Narratives Re-Mediated

Accounts narrating the vicissitudes of Westerners who travelled eastward towards China date back, at least, to the Middle Ages. Venetian merchant Marco Polo (1254-1324) was the first European to leave a detailed account of his peregrinations in Asia and China. Together with his father, Niccolò, and his uncle, Maffeo, they set off from Constantinople in 1271, travelling for two decades in Asia – then ruled by the Mongols – and China, and returning to Venice only in 1294. Jailed during the war between Venice and Genoa, Polo dictated his travel memories to his fellow inmate Rustichello da Pisa. The manuscript *Book of the Marvels of the World*, also known as *The Travels of Marco Polo*, soon spread across Europe and enticed both a great interest in the Far Orient and new journeys.

If Polo's purposes were chiefly commercial, Italian priest Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) reached China at the end of the 16th century with the main goal to establish a permanent Jesuit mission in the Middle Kingdom. In fact, Ricci remained in China until his death, regularly reporting on China's culture, customs and discoveries and spreading within the country not only Catholicism, but also scientific knowledge from Europe, which eventually strengthened the mutual influences between China and the West. Since the Renaissance (and later with the Enlightenment) China has exerted an enduring fascination over the West. Journeys multiplied in forms and scope: religious, commercial, political, geographical, scientific: "the reports of the Jesuits," writes James Clarke (1997: 41) in his *Oriental Enlightenment*, "were soon followed by those of other travellers, and by the middle of the eighteen century a considerable body of literature on the great civilization of Asia had been built up." The increasing number of accounts opened the doors to Western readers to the long and complex Chinese civilization and generated both positive and negative responses. Philosophers such as Montaigne, Leibniz, and Voltaire "were fascinated by its philosophy, by the conduct of the state, and by its education system, and in all kinds of ways sought to hold it up as a mirror in which to examine the philosophical and institutional inadequacies of Europe" (Clarke 1997: 42). At the same time, other thinkers openly opposed China: "in 1776 Friedrich Grimm pronounced China-worship to be excessive and in bad taste, insisting too that China was an unenlightened despotism, a view which was encouraged by Montesquieu. […] The most powerful anti-Chinese voice, however, was undoubtedly that of Rousseau" (1997: 52). These polarized perceptions run through the centuries continuously enhancing (rather than diminishing) the interest of the West towards the country: "for the foreigner," Douglas Kerr and Julia Kuehn (2007: 2) write, "there was always more of China than could be travelled, sketched, subjugated, dealt or traded with, inventoried, lectured or marvelled at; China was a *mise-en-abîme*." It is for this same reason that China has represented an object of interest and an alluring travel destination for Westerners up to the present. By the end of the 19th century, with the peak of Europe's expansionist projects, China became the political target of a number of Western powers. In particular, the two Opium Wars against the British Empire (1839-43 and 1856-60)[16] led to the signing of treaties which forced the Middle Kingdom to open itself to trade with Western powers, establishing, mainly along the east coast and the Yangtze River, a number of ports and possessions.[17] Among other causes, the signing of these treaties and the development of increasingly faster long distance means of transport turned late-19th century China into a tourist destination, marking the beginning of what Julia Kuehn (2008) has defined as the "China Grand Tour". Specifically, according to Kuehn (2008: 115), it is the travel guidebook by American journalist Eliza Scidmore, *Westward to the Far East* (1900), which underwent several reprints over the last decade of the 19th century, that "marks a shift of emphasis from independent self-directed travel to and in China […] to a more systematic and prescriptive travel itinerary as part of a Chinese Grand Tour." In other words, at the dawn of the 20th century the Middle Kingdom enters officially the map of Western tourism. At that time, the itineraries chiefly followed China's east coast where many of the British, American, French and German possessions where located. From the already booming city of Shanghai, Scidmore suggests, for instance, to reach Hangzhou and then either to go south to Hong Kong, visiting Ningbo, Wenzhou, Fuzhou and Xiamen, or to go north up to Tianjin and Beijing. In fact, what she proposes are the paths that writers Constance Gordon Cummings (1837-1924) and Isabella Bird (1831-1904) followed in those years and described in their travelogues: *Wanderings in China* (1886) and *The Yangtze River and Beyond* (1899).[18]

[16] For a comprehensive account of China's history, see John Roberts's *A History of China* (2011).

[17] More broadly, the power relations between the West and China, as they emerge from the texts that Westerners wrote, indicate the atypical uniqueness of China: while not being systematically colonized by Western powers, China had been forced to accept the presence of Western possessions on its soil. Hence, although China remained fundamentally independent during the expansion of Western colonial enterprises (which reached its peak at the end of 19th century), this does not mean that China was not the target of imperialistic projects and discourses. Rather, the analysis will reveal the extent to which China was considered a commercial objective and, as such, supposedly in need of foreign guidance.

[18] Bird's travelogue will represent the starting point of the analysis of 20th century travel books, which will be conducted in Chapter 4.

Still today, many of these cities – Shanghai, Beijing, Hong Kong, Hangzhou, Tianjin, Xiamen – represent unavoidable stops on a journey to China. When in Beijing for the fieldwork, I interviewed Zhang Mei, the founder and manager of the travel company *Wild China*. Zhang is not a travel writer *stricto sensu*; however, her words are illuminating for a discussion that aims at understanding where contemporary Western travellers go in China. She described as follows the idea at the base of her company:

> I come from Dali, in Yunnan. When I founded *Wild China* 15 years ago my goal was to sustainably promote cities like Dali as a tourist destination, because I felt that China could not be reduced to the classic itinerary Guilin-Hangzhou-Shanghai-Xian-Beijing. China is much more than that; it is much more composite and contradictory, although these destinations still remain on the list.[19]

Having in mind the imaginary that the tourism industry has built of China over – at least – the last four decades, Zhang's goal is to allow people to travel differently. This means, then, to offer alternative experiences and *régards* to be juxtaposed to the "well-known" China. She elaborated on this point in the interview when she pointed to the consolidated representation that some travellers have of China: "many tourists think of China in terms of its imperial past; my goal is to show them that besides this legacy, China is something else nowadays."

By referring to the Appendix, where a brief summary of each surveyed text is provided, it is possible to deduce where Western travel authors and bloggers go in China. The former accomplish rather long journeys, usually from one to several months. The only exceptions, in this respect, are Ramazzotti, who stayed in China for a couple of weeks, and those writers who travelled during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, when the itineraries where strictly dictated by the Chinese authorities (the experiences and works of these authors will be discussed in Chapter 4). Moreover, while many of them visit the most celebrated cities and historical sites, authors tend to travel beyond the east coast and to move towards the western regions of the country, in particular the Tibetan plateau. Arnaud, de Slizewicz, Gray, Legerton and Rawson, Richard and Thubron all delved into the less inhabited (by the Chinese) and frequented (by other travellers) regions of the Middle Kingdom. This means that today's itineraries comply to an extent with those of early 20th century travellers, although the attempt is more and more to explore China's inland. The ways of travelling of contemporary authors are also diversified: by air travel (e.g. Gifford, Hirst), public

[19] Mei Zhang, interview by Stefano Calzati, 11 June 2015, in person.

transport (e.g. Germain-Thomas, Legerton and Rawson, Thubron), private vehicles (e.g. Bettinelli, de Slizewicz, Richard), on horseback or on foot (e.g. Arnaud and Gray). Overall, contemporary authors seek an individualization of the experience which can bring a different perspective from which to look at China. Zhang's words clarify this idea well: "There are intrinsic human needs to cover the very basic famous sites. […] This part will never change. What you can change is the way you conceive your travel."[20]

By contrast, travel bloggers usually have less time at their disposal: their journeys last from a couple of weeks to roughly a month (Becki is the main exception). In terms of itineraries a distinction can be identified: those bloggers who post their blogs on platforms usually recount experiences that were limited to the most touristic places: Supermary58, BitByTheTravelBug, Flavia, Mathieu, Millycat all visited only the most popular attractions. The bloggers who set up their own online spaces do go to touristic places, but they also tend to visit less known areas: the main exception, in this regard, is Emil who, on his own blog, describes a fully-arranged touristic trip. Bloggers Becki, Gattosandro Viaggiatore and Curieuse Voyageuse, instead, customized their own experience, reaching also less-known destinations.

The way of travelling and the itineraries followed by the travel writers constitute markers of difference among the texts. Yet, if it is true, as Michel Butor ([1974] 2001: 84) famously notes, that "the very form of the described trip cannot be completely separated from the form of its description or the effects it produces," it is necessary to investigate how each travel writer decides to recount the experience. This is even more important for an analysis that aims at comparing different kinds of geniums (i.e. travel books and travel blogs). In this first chapter the emphasis lies on the discursive and hypertextual features of the narrative, in order to highlight the ideological underpinnings of the writers' textual choices and their uses of the medial formats.

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By proposing the analysis of six contemporary travel books and six travel blogs, here the analysis aims chiefly at exploring the formal features of these texts. A comparison between travel books and blogs, as "intemedial transpositions" of the same genre, requires addressing both how these geniums are modelled as artefacts, and how such modelling affects their affiliation to the "raffish open house" that travel writing represents. The analysis, then, focuses on two interconnected aspects. The first one investigates the way in which the specific affordances of each medial format stir the coming into being of the

[20] Mei Zhang, interview by Stefano Calzati, 11 June 2015, in person.

travelogues (e.g. how the texts "appear" and the editorial choices underpinning them). The second aspect has mainly to do with how the narrative discourse is shaped and, consequently, the literary form each text takes. To a certain extent these two aspects overlap because matters of technology and rhetoric can never be fully separated. In this respect, the chapter covers the whole spectrum of the different kinds of texts considered in the thesis – travel blogs on platform and individual ones, as well as multimodal and monomodal books – in order to provide a mapping of the whole archive. Moreover, insofar as the intent is to propose a bridging approach between these geniums, the analysis will move back and forth between the print and online realm, starting from travel blogs, going towards travel books and eventually returning to travel blogs.

Concerning the study of online texts, much of the research in recent years has taken as its starting point printed texts (Shepherd and Watters 1998; Landow 2003; Bateman, Delin, and Henschel 2004; Askehave and Nielsen 2005). In doing so, online texts have been considered as emanating from the realm of print, thus leading to consolidate a one-way approach (Walker-Rettberg 2008) which inevitably highlights the differences between print and online texts and the uniqueness of the latter. Here it is advanced to reverse the perspective and, in order to do that, a double symmetrical gesture is proposed. On the one hand, the notion of "paratext", coined by French scholar Gérard Genette (1997) exclusively in relation to written books, is applied to travel blogs. On the other hand, the concept of "hypertext", widely adopted in relation to online texts, is used for studying travel books. At this stage the analysis focuses on travel books and blogs as a specific set of texts, but the discussion can be easily extended to other online and print texts.

Secondarily, in order to investigate the literary form of travel books and travel blogs a narratological approach, inspired by Genette's (1980) work on the narrative discourse, is favoured. This is motivated by the nature itself of the texts under analysis, which are, in fact, first-person narratives. To study how the texts are shaped means to acknowledge how the writers decided to articulate the narrative, i.e. the presence (or absence) of descriptions, personal reflections, dialogues with locals or other travellers, as well as pictures and other visual elements. Elaborating on Mieke Bal's (2002) critique of orthodox narratology, according to which we can never think of a narrative as fully a-ideological, the conviction is that to assess the form of the narrative also leads to highlight the way in which Self and Other – the traveller and China – are represented and, consequently, the ideological charge of the texts.

Travel Books and Blogs as Geniums

Gérard Genette (1997: 41) notes in *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* that "the genre contract is constituted by the whole of the paratext and, more broadly, by the relation between text and paratext." Hence, he suggests that any genre is the result of a negotiation between the text *per se* and the variety of heterogeneous messages – the paratext – that "surround [the text] and extend it, precisely in order to *present* it" (1997: 1). To be precise, all those elements that are included within the book as a medial format – such as the publisher's typesetting choices, title(s) and subtitles, prefaces, introductions, afterwords and dedications – are called "peritext", while those elements that accompany the book "at a more respectful (or prudent) distance" (1997: 4) – such as interviews with the author, commercials that promote the work, etc. – are defined as "epitext".

The concept of paratext and the theory that Genette built around it are extremely useful to the aims of the present chapter because they provide a formal framework for the comparison of print and online travel writings. However, it is also important to remember that the French original of Genette's work, *Seuils*, dates back to a time – 1981 – when the Web was non-existent and analogue modes of writing, despite the increasing popularity of personal computers, were still dominant. This is possibly one of the reasons that guided Genette's attention to the paratext solely in relation to the book format and as a verbal realization. However, Genette himself acknowledges in his work the possibility of "other types of manifestation" (1997: 14) of the paratext, beyond the written language. In this sense, the comparison between travel books and travel blogs represents a fruitful case study to extend Genette's work to multimodality, as well as to test his findings within a transmedial context.

Multimodal online texts have been studied from a variety of perspectives. Semiotics and socio-linguistics are certainly the most prolific ones (Yates, Orlikowski, and Okamura 1999; Bateman, Delin, and Henschel 2004; Askehave and Nielsen 2005; Knox 2007; Bateman 2008). Günther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (1996) elaborate a model for the analysis of multimodal texts that directly draws on Michael Halliday's (1978) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). From here, they define a grammar of the possible visual choices that can be made when conceiving a multimodal text and the consequent meanings that these choices carry. In this chapter, it is the "textual" meta-function that is of greatest interest.

Kress and van Leeuwen define three main areas of meaning-making within this meta-function: "salience", "framing", and "information value". Concerning the latter, which is the most important and debated one, Kress and van Leeuwen argue that the organization of written language and visual elements follows three main oppositions: "top-bottom", "left-right", "centre-margin". The top-bottom opposition realizes a distinction between "ideal" and "real": what is found at the top represents "the idealized or generalized essence of information" (Kress and van Leeuwen: 193), while what is found at the bottom signifies factual information. The opposition left-right produces a distinction between "given" and "new": the former "is something the reader already knows" (Kress and van Leeuwen: 189), whereas the latter "is something which is not yet known to the reader" (Kress and van Leeuwen: 189). The opposition centre-margin represents a value distinction between what is "the nucleus of information" (Kress and van Leeuwen: 196) and those other elements that "are in some sense subservient" (Kress and van Leeuwen: 196).

John Knox (2007) has developed Kress and van Leeuwen's study in order to apply it to webpages, in particular newspaper homepages. Knox identifies the dichotomy "head-tail" along the vertical axis, where content on the top part of a webpage is deemed more relevant than that in the bottom part. As for the horizontal axis, Knox argues that content in the central column of the page is of primary importance, while that at the sides is secondary. Because Knox's model dates back to the beginning of Web 2.0, it becomes interesting to test its validity also on today's webpages and, possibly, to extend it to texts other than online newspapers, namely travel blogs.

The analysis focuses first on those travel blogs that are hosted on platforms. The three main platforms discussed here are the Italian Turistipercaso.it,[21] the French Top-depart.com,[22] and the English Travelpod.com.[23] According to Google Rankings, when the analysis was conducted (2012-2014), these were the three most popular travel blog platforms in each of the three languages surveyed. Turistipercaso.it (Figure 1) is a platform founded in 1998 on the wave of the popularity enjoyed in Italy by the homonymous TV show (the titled can be translated as "Tourists by Chance"). On the platform, which is free of charge, travellers and bloggers can find and exchange information about potentially any destination in the world. This is also why the homepage presents a very composite layout which establishes from the outset the richness of the content provided (Figure 1). Travel blogs, of which there are now more than 28 thousand,[24] have certainly a core role within the platform, attested by the fact that the link "Travel Dairies" found on the main navigational bar on the homepage is the second one from the left, just after "Home"

21 http://www.turistipercaso.it.
22 http://www.top-depart.com.
23 http://www.travelpod.com.
24 Data were found on the "About" section of the website.

(Figure 2). Nonetheless, the platform goes well beyond its function of travel blogs' aggregator. Indeed, it includes a variety of other services and links, such as "Magazine", "Forum", "Photos" and "Videos". Therefore, the platform is conceived as a multi-service portal that inflects the theme of travel in many ways and interprets it as a leisure activity in a broad sense.

Figure 1. Image removed for copyright reasons

Figure 2. Image removed for copyright reasons

Top-depart.com (Figure 3) is a French free of charge travel blog platform founded in 1997. Currently it hosts more than 140,000 blogs.[25] The platform presents a simple layout: the logo "Top-Depart" occupies the top-left corner of the page, a navigation bar is shown just below and users can find the most recent updates by scrolling down the page. The big link "Create My Free Blog", which is found on the right side of the homepage, reasserts the importance of the blogging community as one of the core aspects of the website. Yet, the links of the navigation bar on the homepage interpret the idea of travel according to various trajectories: "Travel Blogs", "Organize the Journey", "Travel Guide" and "Travel Forum". Hence, also this platform is meant to be a multi-functional portal in which travel blogs constitute only one of its many sections.

Figure 3. Image removed for copyright reasons

Travelpod.com is an English free platform founded in 1997. It is the one that most stringently focuses on blogging in relation to travel, as the heading on the homepage – "Blogging Built for Travellers" – suggests (Figure 4). By scrolling down the page, users get a sense of how the platform works and the services it provides (Figure 5). For instance, bloggers have the chance to visualize their trips on a map, count the miles travelled, or, notably, turn their blogs into a book. In the second half of the homepage one also gets a glimpse of the platform's outreach, in terms of partners' companies, number of travel blogs shared per week, and the most popular accounts.

[25] Data found on the platform's homepage: http://www.top-depart.com.

Figure 4. The homepage of Travelpod.com (reproduced with permission)

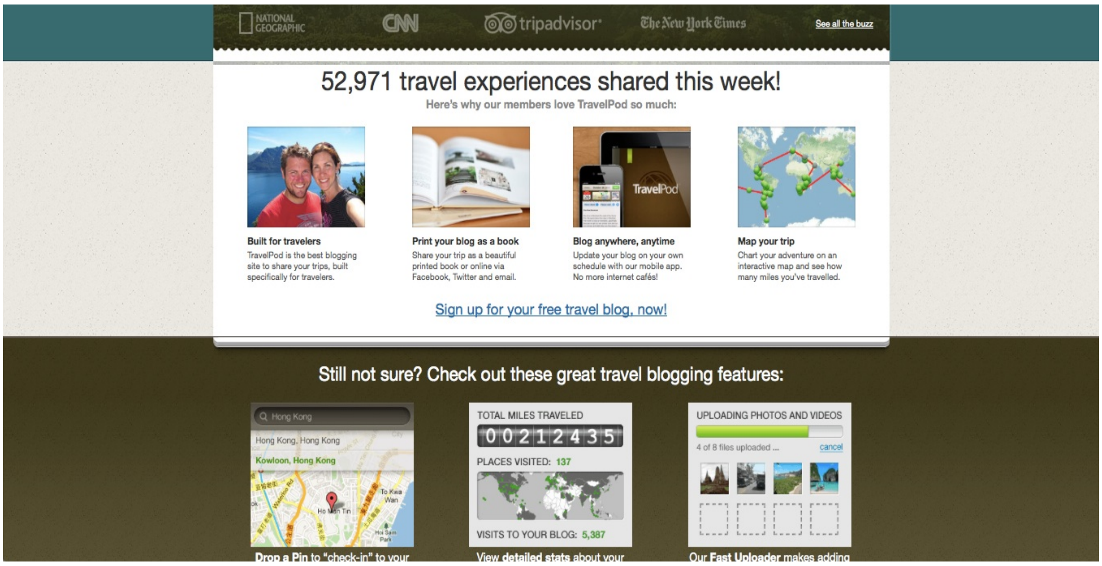

Figure 5. Services and outreach of the platform Travelpod.com (reproduced with permission)

In order to assess the applicability of Knox's model to travel books, three cases studies from these platforms are discussed: *Cina, nel regno di mezzo* (2012) by Supermary58, *Un peu partout en Chine* (2007) by Mathieu and *All o'er China during Spring Festival Holiday* (2006) by Ataritouchme. Below are the screenshots of these travel blogs' homepages:

Figure 6. The homepage of Supermary58's blog (reproduced with permission)

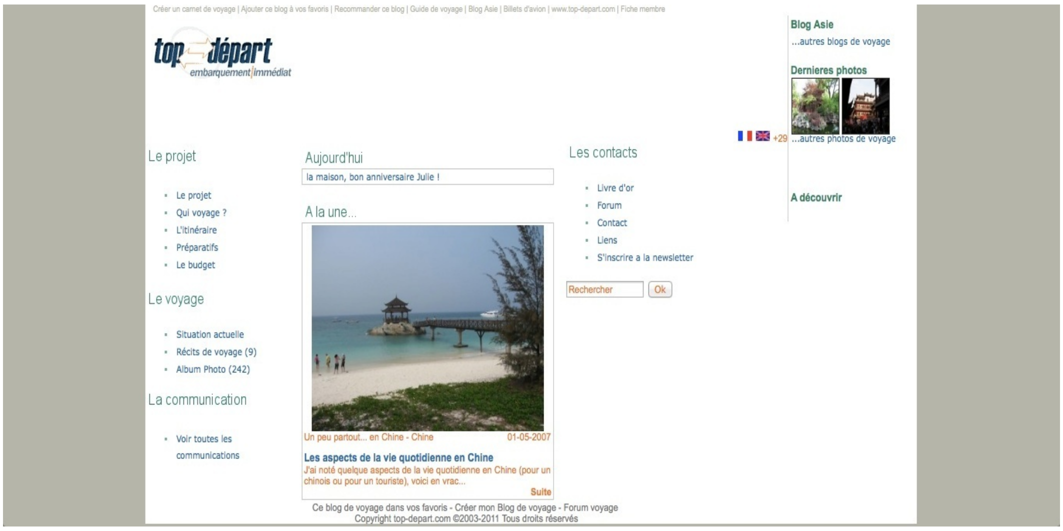

Figure 7. The homepage of Mathieu's blog (reproduced with permission)

Figure 8. The homepage of Ataritouchme's blog (reproduced with permission)

Figure 6 shows to Supermary58's blog, hosted on Turistipercaso.it. As one can see both the horizontal axis and the vertical axis identified by Knox are of problematic applicability. Indeed, the top part of the screenshot is heavily occupied by the platform's agency (i.e. the logo and all the partner companies that support it). Then below the platform's logo, one finds the heading of the blog, a sub-heading and a small link to the blogger's personal page. In fact, it is only by scrolling the page down that one finds the blog's posts: according to Knox's model, then, the travel account *per se* occupies a secondary position with respect to the whole page.

Figure 7 refers to the French travel blog *Un peu partout en Chine*, written by blogger Mathieu and hosted on Top-depart.com. The reader is confronted with a plain layout. The blog's homepage is composed of a wide central column with a picture and two narrower columns at the sides: on the left one is a list of links which revolve around the journey – among which: "Project", "Who is travelling?", "Itinerary", "Preparations", "Budget" – on the right one, links allow readers to contact the blogger. Again, the layout of Mathieu's blog is of difficult framing within Knox's model. The top part of the screen is occupied by the platform's logo. However, it is on the left that one gets the most relevant information about the blog. Similarly, the chance to establish a contact with the blogger is possible only by browsing the links that are on the right side of the page. From the point of view of the travel account, this information is at least as important as the platform's logo, or the central picture that introduces the blog.

Lastly, Figure 8 is taken from Ataritouchme's blog *All o'er China during Spring Festival Holidays* hosted on the platform Travelpod.com. The layout of Ataritouchme's blog is the most coherent within Knox's model. Travelpod.com's agency occupies the very top of the screen. Then the central part of the page is filled with the blog's heading, a blog summary and a map of the trip. At the same time, however, what is found on the right – namely the blogger's profile – is again very much constitutive of the travel blog as a first-person account and it would be misleading to characterize it as a secondary piece of information. Moreover, it is only by scrolling down the page that one gest a sense of all the stages of the journey.

The situation is more ambivalent when it comes to individual travel blogs. Below are the screenshots of three homepages of individual travel blogs, written, respectively, by Italian Gattosandro Viaggiatore (Figure 9), French Curieuse Voyageuse (Figure 10) and British Becki (both the old version of her blog [Figure 11] and the new one [Figure 12]).

Figure 9. The homepage of Gattosandro Viaggiatore's blog (reproduced with permission)

Figure 10. The homepage of Curieuse Voyageuse's blog (reproduced with permission)

Figure 11. The homepage of Backpackerbecki.com (reproduced with permission)

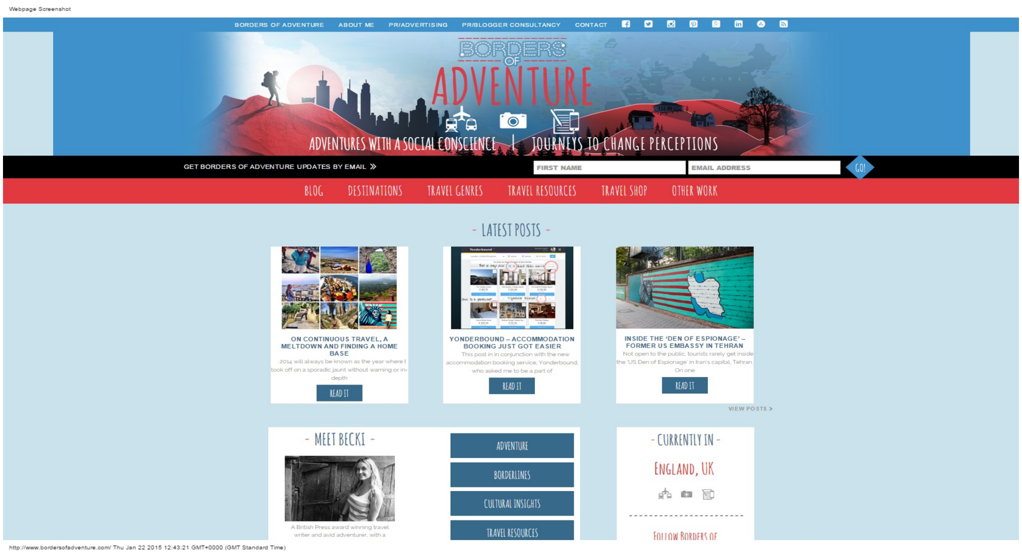

Figure 12. The homepage of Bordersofadventure.com (reproduced with permission)

The three travel blogs comply with the conventional structure of blogs, described as "frequently updated websites consisting of dated entries arranged in reverse chronological order so the most recent post appears first" (Walker-Rettberg 2008: 19). In this respect, individual travel blogs tend to approximate Knox's axes; yet, some of their layouts' features remain of controversial framing into his model.

Gattosandro Viaggiatore is an Italian blogger who decided to set up her own blog (active since 2010) using the Content Management System (CMS) Blogger.com. The blog opens with the heading in the top central part of the screen; then, just below, a navigational bar includes a few links: "About Me", "Travel Diaries", "My Drawings", "Contacts". Further below, it is possible to access at least the most recent posts, without the need to scroll the page down. The major issue in light of Knox's model concerns all those elements found on the right column of Gattosandro Viaggiatore's blog, namely the icons of social networks and the author's profile. These elements bear a strategic relevance for the conception of the travel blog as an online personal account and by no means can they be considered as secondary.

Curieuse Voyageuse's blog is a French blog active since 2009. Its layout is very similar to that of Gattosandro Viaggiatore. The greatest section of the screen is occupied by the heading of the blog. Above it, a narrow navigational bar contains the links to various destinations: "China", "Asia", "Africa", "Europe". In fact, the order of the links reasserts the centrality of the blogger's experiences in China, where she travelled and lived for a couple of years. One also finds the links "Art", "About" and "Press" which hint at the blogger's interests and personal contacts. Below the main heading, users can usually read a few lines of the latest post, after which they are required to scroll the page down. Then, on the right column one finds the icons of the major social networks, as well as a short biographic profile.

The case of British travel blogger Becki is very interesting because, having kept her blog *Backpackerbeki.com* since 2012, in 2014 she opted for a radical restyling of the blog, whose URL is now *Bordersofadventure.com*. Such a change can represent a very fruitful case study within the present discussion, because it sheds a light on how (fast) the appearance of blogs can change. From the screenshots of the two homepages, the first thing to note is that the latest version has lost, at least partially, the prototypical vertical blog structure, which characterizes the older version of Becki's blog. Indeed, the layout of *Bordersofadventure.com* follows a horizontal axis, which radically differs from the model elaborated by Knox. More specifically, the main heading is followed and anticipated by two navigation bars: the one above is dedicated to the promotion of the site – "About Me", "PR/Advertising", "PR/Blogger Consultancy" and "Contact" – while the one below classifies the content under various labels: "Blog", "Destinations", "Travel Genres", "Travel Resources", "Travel Shop" and "Other Work". Also the distribution of the posts below the main bar follows a horizontal layout and the reader is confronted with the latest updates without the need to scroll the page down. While in the previous version of the site the navigation bar mixed links about content and social promotion, the present version neatly distinguishes between the two. As a consequence, the reader is given the option of two different paths: one that leads to direct contact with the blogger and another that allows the exploration of Becki's work. Hence, the page turns out to be no longer solely a travel blog but a portal where readers can get diversified information on travels and destinations, as well as on the blogger's activities and experience. It is not by chance that Becki defined her website "more of a storyboard"[26] than a simple travel blog.

More generally, the difficulty of using Knox's model for analysing today's travel blogs (both on platforms and individual) can be attributed to a number of reasons, from the consolidation of the Web 2.0 and the evolution of CMSs, to the emergence of increasingly rich and dynamic pages and the changes in online reading practices. However, from a broader perspective it is possible to suggest that such difficulty is symptomatic of the fact that understanding how online texts are built and "make sense" is not so much a matter of dissecting them into layers or axes but of investigating how their various elements work relationally.

[26] Becki, interview by Stefano Calzati, April 28, 2014, email.

A possible methodological alternative in the study of today's travel blogs is represented by Genette's work on the paratext. In an article dedicated to *Paratext and Digitalized Narrative*, Dorothee Birke and Birte Christ (2013) discuss the possibility of applying such concept to online pages, but remain sceptical of the effective feasibility of the project. They note that "as long as a text is available in the form of a distinct physical object and is, as such, limited in its expanse, the concept of paratext can be applied productively" (80); however, once a text loses its physicality, this "leaves scholars at the impasse that Genette himself warned of, namely that of 'rashly proclaiming that all is paratext'. At that point, the concept loses its force of distinction." (80) Differently from Birke and Christ, it is contended here that the absence of physicality does not preclude looking at blogs through the lens of paratextuality. However it is necessary to preliminarily assess where the boundaries of a travel blog are to be traced.

In this regard, the distinction between travel blogs on platforms and individual travel blogs requires further elaboration. If such distinction seems easily discernable at first sight, it turns out to be more problematic once one looks at how websites are built and organized. In other words, the broader questions become: What is an online text? What are its boundaries? In the present context, an online text is a document that works through a "page metaphor" (Bateman 2008: 9). The page represents the lowest common principle of organization of any online text. Michalis Vafopoulos (2012: 413) technically speaks of online pages as "Web beings": "each Web being," he notes, "occupies a specific locus on the Web. The identification in Web space is given by the URI namespace." Problems arise when it comes to identifying the highest inclusive principle of a blog or website. Indeed, while in a book the pages are gathered together according to the principle of sequentiality (you can go back and forth or skip pages, but this does not affect the organization of the book), each page of a website is potentially linked to a galaxy of other pages. So what are the outer boundaries of a travel blog? From the point of view of the medium, they coincide with the Web as a whole. However, once one adopts a rhetorical perspective, these boundaries can be narrowed. In the case of a travel blog, for instance, they can be represented by the blogosphere or by the blog platform – if this is the case – that hosts it. Ultimately, a travel blog can be considered a website whose pages are denoted by a "rhetorically homogeneous" text and are imputable to a "single authorship".

"Rhetorical homogeneity" is a concept inspired by Karen Schriver's (1997: 343) "rhetorical cluster," which is defined as "a group of text elements designed to work together. They are comprised of visual and/or verbal elements that need to be grouped (or put in proximal relation) because, together, they help the reader interpret the content." In this spirit, the notion of rhetorical homogeneity applied to the travel blogs under exam aims at identifying the presence of a travel account that pertains specifically to a journey in China. It can happen, indeed, that either such an account is only one of many others written by the same blogger or that within each page a variety of visual and written elements that do not directly relate to the journey can be found (such as pictures of friends/readers, off-topic comments, etc.). As will be shown, such heterogeneity affects how the blog's appearance and the narrative discourse are shaped. At the same time, it is often the case that bloggers are only directly responsible for some content on their blogs because a variety of other elements (such as commercial advertisements) are beyond their control. It is in this latter regard that the notion of single authorship is introduced, elaborating on that of "authorization" proposed by Genette (1997). Birke and Christ (2013) are right when they note that, in itself, the notion of authorization is problematic in Genette because he uses it quite ambiguously, sometimes in order to refer to the choices of the (real) author, sometimes to indicate a more general and abstract legitimation over the text. Within the present discussion, single authorship stands for the writer's projected agency into the text and refers to all those features of the text that are at his/her discretion. To a degree, the notion of single authorship is not easily discernible, since travel blogs (and books) are always the result of collective (and sometimes conflicting) cooperation among various actors. However, the stress here is placed on the use that bloggers make of the affordances of the medial format.

Through the notions of rhetorical homogeneity and single authorship it becomes possible to apply the notion of paratext to travel blogs. For the sake of simplicity, the analysis focuses on the two travel blogs that represent the extreme examples under examination: Supermary58's blog on platform (Figure 13) and Gattosandro Viaggiatore's individual blog (Figure 14).

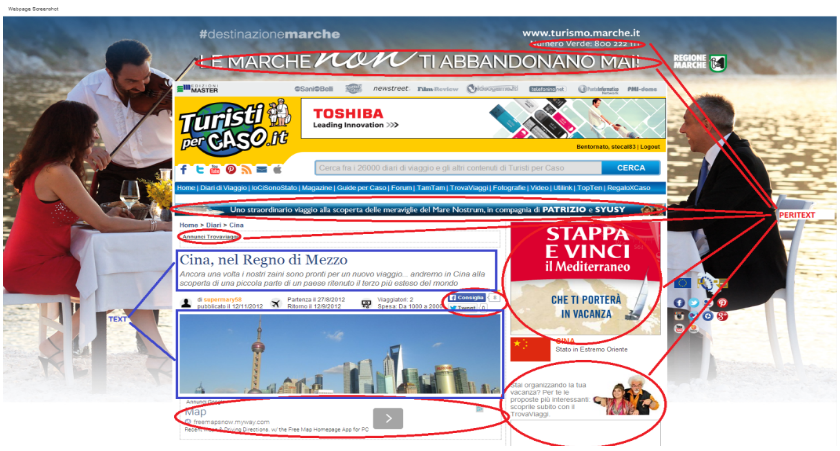

Figure 13. Peritextual elements on Supermary58's blog (reproduced with permission)

Figure 14. Peritextual elements on Gattosandro Viaggiatore's blog (reproduced with permission)

Looking at the homepages as a whole, a radical difference in the way in which these blogs appear and how the content is organized is noticeable. Supermary58's page hosts a variety of elements: banners, companies' links, social networks' icons, promotional services. Even the background is filled with an advertisement. This variety of elements can be considered peritextual in two respects: 1) they do not depend upon the blogger's decision but on the Web agency that manages the platform (namely: the agency Master Advertising, to which we find a link at the very bottom of the homepage), and 2) they enrich the page with elements that are rhetorically heterogeneous to the blogger's travel account because these elements do not specifically relate to China or even travel. On Gattosandro Viaggiatore's page we still find some of these peritexts – namely, the icons of social networks – but all other elements are excluded. Moreover, the peritextual elements that appear on the page, which fall in this case under the blogger's own control, tend to be arranged around the text – more in the spirit of books' peritexts – while on Supermary58's they are scattered around the whole page. It is then possible to argue that the peritextual elements on the blogs on platforms are more invasive than those on individual blogs. Indeed, in the former the peritext is not centrifugal to the travel account – as Genette suggests with regard to books, which is also what happens on Gattosandro Viaggiatore's blog – but centripetal[27] and, in being so, it brings into the space of the travel account a multiplicity of messages that threaten its recognisability as well as the blogger's authorship. Hence, while classic

[27] Ellen McCracken (2013) uses the same concept of "centripetality" in order to discuss the different pathways that readers follow when engaging with texts on digital devices. Here, the term "centripetal" acknowledges the collapsing into the (space of the) text of those peritextual elements that usually surround it in books.

publishers' intervention on a book's peritext is mainly denotative (i.e. it strives to conceal itself), the agencies behind the construction of Web platforms tend to make their intervention evident. As William Vesterman (2002: 444) notes, "the multiplying demand for credit is producing inflation in the medium of exchange – authorship – which is thereby diluted as a measure and store of value." The sole amendment to this argument is that credit, online, is not "demanded", but simply taken by those agencies that make the online space available to users. This implies not so much the "death of the author" (Barthes 1977), but the manifest proliferation of authorial simulacra on the page, which goes hand in hand with a hybridization of the overall formal features of online documents, insofar as the text *per se* tends to mix with a variety of other messages. To use the notion of paratext in relation to online texts allows precisely to highlight these tendencies without the necessity to identify layers or axes of analysis. The advantage is that the analysis remains disjoined by the fast evolving conditions of the Web and it thus constitutes a valid approach for the study of these texts also in the future.

Now, a reversal methodological move is expounded and travel books are analysed through the lens of "hypertextuality". Again, such a reversal represents the attempt to avoid the techno-deterministic bias that affects the majority of studies that aim at comparing online and print texts.

Hypertextuality in Print

By investigating the specificities of electronic texts, Michael Shepherd and Carolyn Watters (1998: 97) argue that these texts differ from analogue ones in that they are characterized by "functionality", that is, by the "capabilities afforded by [the] new medium." From here, the two scholars coin the term "cybergenre" for defining all electronic texts that have such specific functionality. There are two main problems with this claim: the first one is that the notion of "functionality" is fundamentally tautological, insofar as it is said to be a prerogative of online texts only; the second one is that this term is not elaborated enough and encompasses too wide a series of aspects, from the dynamic content of online documents to their hypertextual characteristics.

Reversing Shepherd and Watters' perspective, one could ask: do print texts lack functionality? There are three possibilities. If functionality refers to the interfacing affordances supported by analogue and/or digital medial formats, then the answer is no. Indeed, each medial format possesses its own specificities: i.e. one interfaces with books by holding them in our hands, turning pages, etc., while in order to interface with online texts one needs to click, type addresses, etc. If, however, by functionality one means to address dynamic and interactive content such as links, then this is a feature unique to online texts. Lastly, if functionality points to hypertextuality in the sense of the interconnectedness of a given document to others, then the specificity of online texts is contentious; or, rather, it is a matter of perspective. “Hypertext,” writes Marie-Laure Ryan (2005: 290), “is a genre if we view it as a type of text, but it is a (sub)medium [that is, dependent upon the medium of the Web] if we regard it as an electronic tool for the organization of text.” Hence, if one takes on a medial point of view and stresses the fact that online texts are connected to others via links, thus “making the entire field of interconnections obvious and easy to navigate” (Landow 2003: 4), then hypertextuality is applicable to online texts only. By contrast, if we adopt a rhetorical point of view, remarking that a given text is “caught up in a system of references to other books, to other texts, to other sentences: it is a node within a network” (Foucault 1972: 23), then both offline and online texts are hypertexts. Here, a rhetorical perspective is favoured, a position that helps to bridge the divide between analogue and digital realms, revealing the extent to which online texts and print ones do share a degree of hypertextuality. Hence hypertextual texts are all those texts that overtly manifest the system of (cross)references that supports it. In this sense, the notion of hypertextuality comes close to that of intertextuality as defined by Roland Barthes (1977). The major difference is that while Barthes considers intertextuality as the underpinning discursive network in which the text is embedded, so that “the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original” (146), hypertextuality is regarded here as the effective surfacing in the text of such a network of references. In particular, this analysis looks at the presence in travel books and travel blogs of: 1) quotations; 2) illustrations (as a cross-reference to words); 3) links; and 4) notes (either as footnotes or endnotes).

Curieuse Voyageuse’s (2009) blog represents a fruitful case study to begin with because it underwent a “remediation process” that led it to be also released as a book, *La Chine à fleur de peau* (2011). Blogger Curieuse Voyageuse started to keep her eponymous blog in 2009, when she moved to China. In 2011, she went back to France but, since then, has continued to write about her trips around the world. When Curieuse Voyageuse started blogging in 2009, she decided to begin narrating the trips she had previously taken to China, either for work or leisure, before her decision to effectively move there. The remediation process to which Curieuse Voyageuse’s blog was subjected is one of “immediacy” (Bolter and Grusin 1998), that is, one that strives to remain as adherent as possible to the source text, trying to reduce the effects of the new medial format on the remediated text. The book contains a variety of pictures taken from the blog. These are not interpolated into the text as it happens online, but inserted into the middle of the book. In this sense, the relation text–image is affected in favour of a stronger division between the two modes and a greater hegemony of words over pictures. The written text, however, is unaltered in that it keeps the subdivision of the posts. This also means that any time the blogger quoted a passage from a different text or source, this same quotation also appears in the book. In this respect, as links could not be included, the writer compensated for this deficiency by expanding the corresponding text in the book with some of the information reachable online via the link. See the following example:

> *Blog:* We passed the nights in the Miao villages we visited. Miao are the fifth minority in terms of number of people, counting nine million members in 2000. This striking number and the extension of their geographic spreading can explain the diversity of costumes and idioms from one region to the other. This site gives plenty of information on this minority. In the villages we visited, some days are really busy and people try to catch the tourists' attention so that villagers can get some money out of their presence. I despised these dances accomplished with no enthusiasm, and I didn't see any entirely. Only the beauty of the costumes – here, the traditional Miao costume – was really worth it…[28] (Curieuse Voyageuse 2009; author's translation)

> *Book*: For three days I wandered around rice fields and villages inhabited by the Guizhou ethnic minority. These peoples have completely different ways of life, traditions and idioms from the Han, the Chinese majority. There are officially 56 ethnic minorities in China. Before today, I visited four villages: Matang, Ching'an, Langde and Xijiang, inhabited by Miao and Gejia. These two ethnic minorities count several million people, being minorities on a Chinese scale! These cultures are recognized by the Chinese government, which grants them some more space and political power. However, these minorities are often folklorized, and it is not rare for celebrations and traditions usually devoted to crucial moments of life to be commercialized in favour of tourists. And whenever curiosity compels you to take a break, it is possible to discover a bit better such different ways of life. For example, how women carry their babies: here, they are kept on the back, in the African way.

[28] "Nous avons passé quelques nuits dans les villages Miao que nous avons visités. Les Miao sont la cinquième minorité en nombre de personnes, 9 millions de Miao ont été recensés en 2000. Ce nombre important et l'étendue de leur répartition géographique expliquent la diversité des coutumes voire des langues d'une région à l'autre. Ce site donne de nombreuses informations sur cette minorité. Dans les villages visités, certaines journées sont très animées, pour plaire aux touristes de passage, ce qui permet aussi aux villageois de s'enrichir un peu. Ces danses faites sans enthousiasme m'ont guère plu, je n'en ai vu aucune dans son ensemble. Seule la beauté des costumes – ici costume traditionnel Miao, vaut vraiment le coût…"

> Idioms are very different too, but if you dedicate some time to people, you can exchange several smiles and a bunch of words. We passed several nights in the Miao villages we visited. Miao are the fifth minority in China, in terms of number of people, insofar as nine million were counted in 2000. This striking number and the extension of their geographic spreading can explain the diversity of their costumes and idioms from one region to the other. In the villages we visited, some days are mainly dedicated to entertaining activities in order to appeal to passing tourists so that villagers can get a small source of revenue. I despised these dances accomplished with no enthusiasm, and I didn't see any entirely. Only the beauty of the costumes – such as the traditional Miao costumes with a headdress, chest protection and silver shin guards – was really worth it…[29] (Croiziers 2011: 41; author's translation)

It is evident that the longer version published in the book is enriched with details that online are reachable only by clicking on the link. Drawing on Genette's (1997) terminology, it can be said that the online source represents a peritextual element with respect to the blog, as it is connected to it, while remaining at a certain distance (signalled by the access to another URL). By contrast, in print Croiziers co-opted the online source into the narrative, taking care to rephrase the information found on the Web and making it her own. The major difference between the book and the blog has to do with the fact that the former only refers to Curieuse Voyageuse's journeys and stay in the Middle Kingdom, without taking into account those posts that do not relate directly to China (such as the one in which she mentions to have been nominated for an annual blog award). In other words, from the book are excised all those episodes that are considered as rhetorically

[29] "Depuis trois jours je me balade entre rizières et villages des minorités ethniques du Guizhou. Ces sont des groups de populations ayant de modes de vie, des traditions, des langues qui diffèrent totalement de ceux des Han, chinois majoritaires. Il existe cinquante-six minorités ethniques reconnues en Chine. J'ai visité à ce jour quatre villages: Matang, Ching'an, Langde, et Xijiang, des ethnies Miao et Gejia. Il s'agit de deux groupes ethniques de plusieurs millions de personnes, les minorités étant ici à l'échelle chinoise! Ces cultures sont reconnues par l'Etat chinois, ce qui leur permet d'avoir un peu plus de place et de pouvoir dans les représentations politiques. Cependant ces minorités sont souvent folklorisées et il n'est pas rare de voir fêtes et traditions autrefois réservées aux grands moments de la vie, commercialisées pour les touristes de passage. N'empêche, si la curiosité pousse à prendre le temps, on peut découvrir un peu mieux ces manières de vivre si différentes. Ne serait-ce que par la façon de porter les bébés: ils sont ici 'attaches' dans le dos, à la manière africaine. Les langues diffèrent aussi, mais si on consacre un peu de temps aux gens, de nombreux sourires et quelques mots sont toujours échanges. Nous passons plusieurs nuits dans les villages Miao que nous visitons. Les Miao sont la cinquième minorité de Chine en nombre, neuf millions d'entre eux ayant été recensés en 2000. Ce nombre important et l'étendue de leur répartition géographique expliquent la diversité des coutumes voir des langues d'une région à l'autre. Dans les villages visites, certaines journées sont principalement occupées par des animations, pour plaire aux touristes de passage, ce qui permet aux villageois d'avoir une petite source de revenu. Les danses faites sans enthousiasme ne me plaisent guère, je n'en vois aucune dans son ensemble. Seule la beauté des costumes – comme par exemple le costume traditionnel; Miao avec la coiffe, la protection de poitrine et leurs jambières en argent – vaut vraiment le coup…"

heterogeneous to the travel narrative, and that, as such, become epitextual to the travel book. In general, it is possible to contend that *La Chine à Fleur de peau* is a book that presents a variety of hypertextual features – pictures, quotations – that try to mimic the online text as faithfully as possible. However, the book required also reshaping the travel account according to more rigid formal criteria that could present the text as a coherent narrative. The book tends to narrativize the travel experiences, leading to suggest that it is the book's physicality to project onto Curieuse Voyageuse's experience a teleology that is completely absent from the blog. In the book, the knowledge of China is presented as a gradual, incessant discovery: it is a progressive scratching of layers from absolute ignorance to full appreciation, a scratching that on the blog appears more disarticulated and, at best, deductible *a posteriori* when comparing all of the blogger's journeys. [30]

Moving from a case of remediation of a French blog into a book, the analysis now concentrates on two multimodal travelogues – one in English and one in Italian – that have only appeared in a book format: *Invisible China: A Journey through Ethnic Borderlands* (2009) by US-American Colin Legerton and Jacob Rawson and *La Cina in Vespa* (2008) by Italian Giorgio Bettinelli. Later on the case of three monomodal travel books (in English French and Italian) will also be taken into account. With this transition the analysis also begins to focus more closely on the shaping of the narrative discourse and the literary forms of the texts. In the last part of the chapter, this same attention will be paid to travel blogs: the aim is to assess the extent to which travel blogs also present the same formal hybridity usually credited to travel books.

The Literary Form of Travel Books

According to Genette (1980) all narratives are a form of telling (diegesis): this means that they necessarily imply a narrator and ultimately they can only provide the illusion of mimesis (i.e. the "showing" of the event compared to its telling). So, mimesis and diegesis are not two mutually exclusive modes; rather, the narrative presents variations in its "mood", that is, the distance of the diegesis to the (mimesis of the) event. Here particular attention is devoted to descriptions, personal reflections, and dialogues (as the textual terrain where the encountered between Self and Other is best displayed). Genette argues that the ways in which dialogues are embedded in the narrative provides varying illusions of mimesis. For instance, "reported speech" creates a sense of mimesis and proximity to

[30] Drawing on Bakhtin's ([1937] 1981) distinction between the chronotope of the novel and that of the epic, in the next chapter I will discuss the extent to which blogs' narrative tends to be "epicized", which means that its temporal and spatial coordinates are abstracted and lose their internal dynamicity, so that posts on a blog appear as stand-alone pieces which do not respond to an overreaching (chronotopic) narrative structure.

the event, because people's words are transcribed verbatim; on the contrary, "transposed speech" is embedded in the flux of the narration, thus keeping a greater distance to the episode recounted (171-3). The mood of the narrative is also influenced by the functions that the narrator can take (255-6). When the author maintains a basic "narrative function", for example through the descriptions of places or events, s/he tends to "disappear" from the text; by contrast, whenever s/he assumes an "ideological function", interrupting the narrative in order to provide comments, his stance fully manifests itself. The point is that, as Mieke Bal (2002) reminds us:

> Any description is modelled by an ideological vision. We need to question the idea of non-focalized, or zero-focalization description, theorized and defended by narratologists such as Genette. […] It can be either the plot […] or the description itself […] it does not make any difference from the point of view of the ideological partiality that is embedded.[31] (Bal: 200-1; author's translation)

This means that all narratives are ideological and, according to Bal, there can only be varying degrees of effacement of the (ideological) function assumed by the narrator (who, in the case of travel narratives, is also – via a narratively constructed persona – the author). Bal limits her analysis to the use of language (adjectives, modal verbs, etc.). However, in the case of first-person travel narratives the discussion can be extended to the shifting of the narrator's "I" between narrative and ideological functions, as well as to the way in which s/he decides to report dialogues. All these changes in the mood of the narrative have direct consequences on the literary form that the travel account takes and also on how Self and Other are represented.

The first travel book under examination is *Invisible China* (2009) by Colin Legerton and Jacob Rawson. Legerton and Rawson are two US-Americans who spent about five years in China completing their Master's degrees there while studying Mandarin. They undertook their travel at the end of their stay in China with the explicit intention to get in contact with ethnic minority "people in towns and villages all around the borderlands of China" (14). The book opens with a map of China in which all the ethnic minorities encountered by the authors are localized (Figure 15):

[31] "Qualsiasi descrizione è modellata da una visione ideologica. Occorre diffidare perciò dall'idea di una descrizione non focalizzata o a focalizzazione zero, teorizzata e difesa da narratologi come Genette. […] Che sia la trama […] o che sia invece proprio la descrizione […] non fa differenza dal punto di vista della parzialità ideologica che sta dietro."

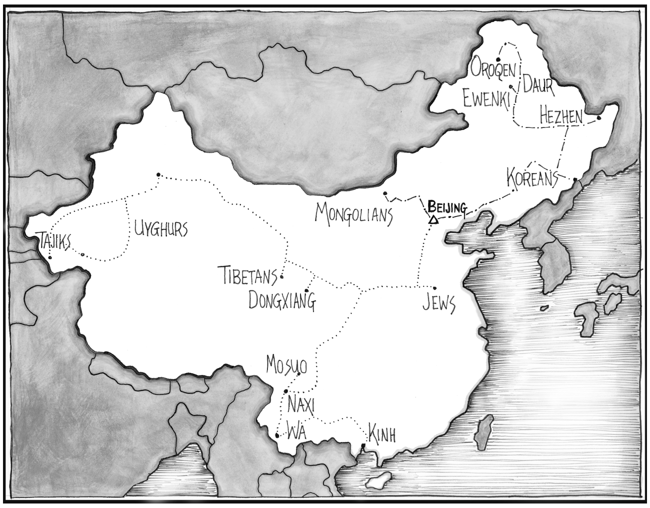

Figure 15. The whole map of China at the beginning of Invisible China *(reproduced with permission. Authors: Polly Fossey and Jamie Northrup)*

What is notable is that the illustration is not a "proper" map but a drawing in which space and distances are distorted and no precise point of reference is given (except for Beijing). This drawing is responsible for creating a "subjective" spatial representation that is dependent, in the first place, on the ethnic minorities who inhabit it. Hence, the spatial dimension of the journey becomes functional to the localization of the peoples encountered by the travellers. This impression of space-through-ethnicity is reinforced throughout the text in two ways: on the one hand, the book is organized according to four regionally defined chapters – the Northeast, the Southwest, the Northwest and the East – which follow the development of the journey; on the other hand, all chapters are introduced by maps in the same style as the first one, which show each region together with the names of the minorities, the main cities or towns, and the foreign bordering countries (Figure 16).

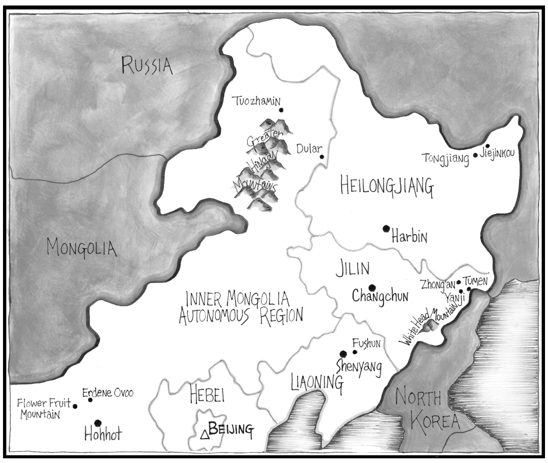

Figure 16. Example of a map introducing a chapter in Invisible China *(reproduced with permission. Authors: Polly Fossey and Jamie Northrup)*

Maps are not the sole visual elements present in the book. The authors also inserted 50 pictures – Figures 17 and 18 are two examples – which are arranged following the development of the journey.

Figure 17. Colin Legerton among Uygur people playing with children (reproduced with permission)

Figure 18. The authors of Invisible China *(reproduced with permission. Author: Matt P. Jager)*

Being gathered together in the middle of the book the photographs of *Invisible China* help to create the impression of a visual account that is autonomous, rather than merely supportive, of the written text. The majority of the pictures (34 out of 50) portray only local people in their milieu, while in others (9 out of 50) the authors also appear in the pictures and they are usually engaged *intra pares* with locals. These photographs then reassert Legerton and Rawson's purpose, stated in the opening of the book, to "learn directly from the minority people" (13), and they shape the text in the spirit of an ethnographic study of China's ethnic groups.

This same approach finds also proof in the way in which the narrative is modelled. To begin with, in terms of hypertextual features we find many quotations from other texts. Examples are the aphorisms and poems that are found either at the beginning of each chapter (as excerpts) or within the text:

> "*It takes a great people to build a great wall. But it takes an even greater people to make the Chinese build a great wall*" Mongolian saying. (Legerton and Rawson: 61)

> A popular Chinese children's encyclopaedia defines ethnicity: "*Our great motherland is a unified country of many ethnic groups. The fifty-six ethnic groups that dwell in this vast and*

> *prosperous territory collectively created our long-standing history and glorious culture. In this large multi-ethnic family, the Han race occupies the majority, at more than 90 percent of the total population*." (Legerton and Rawson: 4)

> "This is one of our most important songs." Clearing his throat he began to read the metric lyrics: "*Let us sit and speak of ancient days / Our fathers lived in Do Son, Vietnam / In the third year of King Hong Thuan's reign / Our kinsmen washed up on Chinese Fu'an / They lost their bearings on the tree-clad isle / A lonely home surrounded by blue seas / Quickly they began their exploration / And saw the White Dragon lurking in the east*." (Legerton and Rawson: 84)

By introducing other voices through direct quotations, the authors foreground local knowledge and (Western) readers are put in contact with it in a mimetic way (i.e. with a minimal degree of filtering by the authors). These references, then, contribute to counterbalance the "We" of the authors upon which the narrative depends. Beyond that, Legerton and Rawson adopt two other narrative strategies to further soften their presence into the text. On the one hand, they completely omit biographical information and personal comments on what they witness. In fact, the authors' "We" maintains a narrative function which rarely transcends the flow of the diegesis. Moreover, the writing of dialogues follows a fixed pattern: these are in the form of reported speech when it is the autochthons who speak, while they are transposed speech when it is the authors' turn:

> We approached an older woman, like us an idle bystander, to find out if all these jellyfish were for local consumption. "Goodness no! They are far too expensive for us to eat. These are all for export." [...] Now in conversation with the older woman, we determined to take advantage of the situation to learn how she felt the land reclamation of the 1960s that attached the three islands to the mainland had affected their fishing industry. "Land reclamation was great for our people. When Mao brought more land between our islands, we were all able to plough and grow our own food." (Legerton and Rawson: 88)

Through these strategies Legerton and Rawson put minority people even more to the foreground, while their writers' simulacra fade into the background. For these reasons, it is possible to suggest that both the written narrative and the pictures conjure up to shape the travelogue in the form of an ethnography, in which what is most relevant is the representation of the Other, rather than of the travellers; it is more about letting readers know how China's ethnic minorities live than recounting Legerton and Rawson's impressions along the road. The authors' words are a confirmation of this: "we felt it was important to take ourselves out of the frame to focus more on what we were actually seeing, so that us and the readers could gain even more from the experience."[32]

Moving now to a second multimodal book, the case of *La Cina in Vespa* (2008) by Giorgio Bettinelli is taken into account. Giorgio Bettinelli (1955-2008) was a notorious Italian travel writer, whose peculiarity was to travel to the remotest regions of earth riding his Vespa. His wanderings are recounted in a number of travel books, among which: *In Vespa da Roma a Saigon* (1997; trans. *Riding a Vespa from Rome to Saigon*) and *Brum Brum. 254.000 chilometri in Vespa* (2002; trans. *Brum Brum: 254.000 kilometers on a Vespa*). In the travelogue *La Cina in Vespa* Bettinelli recounts his journey around the Middle Kingdom, which, in his later years, had become his country of residence. In the author's own words, the goal of the journey is "to realize a trip on a Vespa that touches all the 34 geographic areas [of China]" (48). Far from simply detailing the stages of the journey, in this travelogue Bettinelli pours all sorts of reflections, from personal episodes to political critiques, passing through a variety of opinions on music, cinema and literature. As a consequence the thematic boundaries of the book transcend the travel *per se*[33] to encompass the author's whole vision of life, with respect to which his narrating persona keeps an overtly ideological stance.

Beyond the heterogeneity of the themes treated, even when Bettinelli writes specifically about the journey, he usually links it to the many other adventures he accomplished. Hence *La Cina in Vespa* is inscribed into a long series of achievements as both a traveller and a writer:

> Needless to say, having decided to live in China for the next one or two years, while completing the travelogue about the 144,000 kilometres driven between 1997 and 2001, traversing 90 countries, from Ushuaia to Hobart, the idea that I cannot ride a Vespa in my 'elected country' is much more annoying than a little stone in my shoe.[34] (Bettinelli: 39; author's translation)

[32] Colin Legerton and Jacob Rawson, interview by Stefano Calzati, September 18, 2013, email.
[33] Emblematic is the fact that the "real" departure only occurs at page 60, being anticipated by a series of events (such as the death of Bettinelli's father) whose very function is to create the dramatic preconditions for the journey.
[34] "Inutile dire che, avendo deciso di vivere in Cina per un anno o due in attesa di completare il racconto dei 144.000 km percorsi tra il '97 e il 2001 attraverso novanta paesi, da Ushuaia a Hobart, l'idea di non poter essere in sella e dare un colpo di acceleratore nel mio 'paese di elezione' mi dava fastidio più di un sassolino nella scarpa."

To the extent to which *La Cina in Vespa* overtly focuses on Bettinelli's persona and his opinions on a variety of topics, the form of the text is best thought of as an autobiographic diary. At the same time, China and the Chinese tend to retreat to the background. This erasure is achieved in particular through two strategies. The first one concerns dialogues: these are reduced to a minimum throughout the text, despite the fact that, during a great part of the journey, Bettinelli is accompanied either by Ya Pei or by his Chinese lover, Manuelle, that is, two insiders who could easily negotiate between the author and the people they meet. This leads to a silencing of the Chinese and a representation of China as merely a space to be traversed in order to accomplish the endeavour. However, it is when looking at the pictures inserted in the book that the travelogue's egocentric connotation emerges more vividly. There are 16 photographs in total, inserted in the middle of the book, and in 12 of them the author is photographed alone, directly looking at the camera.

Figure 19. Image removed for copyright reasons

Figure 20. Image removed for copyright reason

Figures 19 and 20 disclose very little of the places visited, or the people encountered by the author. Rather, they reinforce the image of Bettinelli as a solitary traveller (and one that stereotypically adheres to the idea of Italianness, as a mix of masculinity and latin lover's attitude). In fact, the sole "relation" that the author entertains in these photographs is that with his beloved Vespa. The function of these pictures is eminently to testify the author's accomplishment to ride a Vespa in China and visit all its 34 geographic areas. Only in two photographs a woman (very likely Ya Pei) appears, but the captions, which simply mention the place or the date – "Kashgar, old town" and "Yunnan, south of China, 2008" – are not helpful in clarifying who she is, thus requiring the reader to collate the text and the photographs in order to disentangle the dilemma. Overall, readers are confronted with a text that shows a good degree of hypertextualiy, presenting pictures as well as cross-references to Betinelli's other travelogues and his own travel diary. Differently from *Invisible*

China, however, here these elements are self-centred, thus stressing the autobiographical nature of the account and overlooking an effective engagement with (and representation of) the Chinese.

To conclude the discussion concerning the hypertextuality of travel books and their formal features, the analysis focuses on three monomodal travelogues. The examples provided are: *Ivre de Chine: Voyages au coeur de l'Empire* (2010) by French author Constantin de Slizewicz, *La birra di Shaoshan* by Italian Sergio Ramazotti and *China Road* (2007) by British Rob Gifford. Being monomodal texts, it means that none of these texts are illustrated (*China Road* only presents a map of China at the very beginning). In this respect, they lack *a priori* one of the elements that make the accounts hypertextual. Nonetheless, also these texts present some degrees of hypertextuality.

The travelogue by Constantin de Slizewicz is the most hypertextual of the three. At the age of 20 de Slizewicz left his studies and moved to Beijing. Since then he has been living, working and travelling in China, contributing with reportages to both French magazines and Chinese newspapers. He traversed the whole Middle Kingdom many times: from Beijing to Kashgar, from Harbin to Lhasa. *Ivre de Chine* recounts the 2002 journey that de Slizewicz accomplished together with his friend Alexandre driving a sidecar from Beijing to Kunming. While narrating their vicissitudes on the road, de Slizewicz recollects in the book also his past years in the country: the beginning in Beijing and the gradual shift towards the south-western remote regions of the country, allured by the traditions of Tibetan minorities. Given de Slizewicz's (and Alexandre's) deep acquaintance with China, the narrative presents a variety of encounters that the two have with Chinese friends, as well as a number of dialogues with local peoples, such as the following one with a policeman who patrols the road:

> [Policeman]: "Comrades, where are you from?" [De Slizewicz]: "Beijing"; [Policeman]: "You speak very good Chinese, where are you originally from?" [De Slizewicz]: "France." [Policeman]: "Where are you heading with your motorbike?" [De Slizewicz]: "Yunnan." A short silence, then he tells us with his thumb up: "*Niubi*! *Niubi*! Super! Super!"[35] (De Slizewicz: 59; author's translation)

This dialogue reveals that de Slizewicz thinks of himself, in the first place, as a Beijing dweller, while the policeman seems more interested in knowing his country of origin. The

[35] "'Camarades, vous venez d'où?'; 'Pékin'; 'Tu parles bien chinois! Tu viens de quel pays?'; 'France'; 'Avec votre moto, vous allez où?'; 'Au Yunnan.' Un bref silence, puis il dit en nous montrant son pouce: '*Niubi! Niubi!* Super! Super!"

author's insider position is also reasserted by his knowledge of Mandarin, which is transcribed in italics in many occurrences throughout the text. Concerning references and notes the author fills the text with both direct quotations from other texts (including his own) and with endnotes, adding to his travelogue features that are proper to a scholarly text. These are a few examples:

> "As long as we continue to think of pre-1950 Tibet as a utopia, XXI century Tibet will not exist."[1] Donald Lopez, *Fascination Tibétaine*, Autrement, 2003.[36] (De Slizewicz: 74; author's translation)
>
> Despite the departure of missionaries and the persecutions during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, there still is a community of several thousand Tibetans, who pray every week in their stone-made churches. [1] I have recounted this first trip to Catholic Tibetan communities, as well as the epic journeys of French and Swiss missionaries to Tibet in my book *Les Peuples Oubliés du Tibet*, Perrin, 2007.[37] (De Slizewicz: 140; author's translation)
>
> "The legs of women will dance in the air, run into the desert, rest beside the rivulets left by streams. And the world will be peaceful."[1] Some of these notes are taken from the introduction to Luo Xu's work, edited by the Xin Dong Cheng Space for Contemporary Art Gallery: www.chengxindong.com.[38] (De Slizewicz: 222; author's translation)

The widespread use of footnotes enriches the travel narrative with a multiplicity of (textual) voices that eventually corroborate de Slizewicz's personal reflections made on the road. In this way, not only does the author demonstrate being by now an insider in China, but of having acquired a profound understanding of the Tibetan region, due also to his years of research on the region's history and the publication of an essay to which he makes

[36] "'Aussi longtemps que nous continuerons de faire du Tibet d'avant 1950 une utopie, le Tibet du XXI siècle ne pourrait exister.' [1] Donald Lopez, *Fascination tibétaine,* Autrement, 2003."

[37] "Malgré le départ des missionnaires et le persécutions subies durant le Grand Bond en Avant et la Révolution Culturelle subsiste toujours une communauté de plusieurs milliers de Tibétains, qui chaque semaine prient dans leurs églises en pierre. [1] Ce premier voyage chez les Tibétains catholiques et l'épopée des missionnaires français et suisses au Tibet, je les ai racontés dans mon livre *Les peuples oubliés du Tibet*, Perrin, 2007."

[38] "'Les jambes des femmes danseront dans l'air, courront dans le désert, se reposeront au bord des rigoles laissés par les ruisseaux, qu'il sera calme ce monde.' [1] Certaines de ces notes sont extraites de l'ouvrage de présentation de Luo Xu édité par la galerie *Xin Ding Cheng Space for Contemporary Art*, www.chengxindong.com"

reference in the second quote. Hence the narrative of *Ivre di Chine*, albeit being fundamentally an autobiographic travel narrative, gets closer to the essay. In fact, while de Slizewicz opts for elevating the accuracy and objectivity of his account by resorting to other sources, at the same time his "I" is free to assume an overt ideological stance throughout the text. The last quotation deserves particular attention as it also presents a link within the footnote. What is at stake is not so much the obvious fact that this link lacks interactivity but rather that de Slizewicz decided to add such a piece of information into the book *despite* the impossibility of directly reaching the website. Hence, by creating a connection that ties the book to the Web, the print format forces – without crossing it – the medial boundary that separates online and offline texts.

The second monomodal travelogue to be examined is *La birra di Shaoshan* (2002) by Italian freelance journalist Ramazzotti. The book recounts Ramazzotti's ten-day stay in the city of Shaoshan, which is Mao Zedong's birthplace. Instead of wandering up and down the Middle Kingdom, Ramazzotti's goal is to dig into the Chinese culture by settling down in a specific place (i.e. a symbolic place in light of China's recent history). From the outset, the development of any spatial and temporal trajectories is annihilated. Time represents an ephemeral framework that does not connect places or displacements, but only articulates the passing of the author's writing. The following dialogue between the author and Celia, his Chinese interpreter, frames well Ramazzotti's stay and purpose in Shaoshan:

> [Ramazzotti]: "Actually, I'm also here to work," I said. She stared at me in bewilderment. [Celia]: "What kind of job?" [Ramazotti]: "I tell stories. At least, I try." [Celia]: "For whom?" [Ramazzotti]: "For the people in my country." [Celia]: "And do they listen to them?" [Ramazzotti]: "Somebody does. Somebody."[39] (Ramazzotti: 20; author's translation)

This passage reveals the extent to which Ramazzotti thinks of his journey to Shaoshan as mainly related to his profession. Consequently, his goal is to provide (Italian) readers with an account of this experience that can shed some light on contemporary China. A few dialogues between Ramazzotti and Celia reveal, indeed, the author's struggle to understand China: "[Celia]: 'Do you really think that China is so contradictory?' [Ramazzotti]: '"I only think it is a crazy country […] But I want to stop thinking and take it for how it is, without

[39] [Ramazzotti]: "'A dire il vero io sono anche qui per lavorare' dissi. Lei sgranò gli occhi: [Celia]: 'Che tipo di lavoro?' [Ramazzotti]: 'Racconto storie. Almeno ci provo.' [Celia]: 'A chi?' [Ramazzotti]: 'Alla gente del mio paese.' [Celia]: 'E loro ascoltano?' [Ramazzotti]: 'Qualcuno sì. Qualcuno.'"

objections.'"[40] (132; author's translation) Although (or maybe because) Ramazotti has difficulty understanding China, he does not seek an overt confrontation with it, but tends to centre the narrative on his own persona. In other words, the narrator maintains a self-centred focus and assumes an ideological function. This is done in two ways: in terms of hypertextuality, the author fills *La birra di Shaoshan* with references to his past travel experiences, thus strengthening his self-representation as a navigated traveller and reporter. In the following passage, for instance, he recounts to Celia why he keeps a diary in which he pastes beer labels from each country he has visited:

> "Beer labels are my travelling souvenirs. […] I paste them into a diary, a bit like a photo-book. Each beer label represents a meeting. I turn the pages of my album and I think: 'I drank this beer with Magdalena Gutierrez at the hotel Carrasco in Montevideo' and then: 'this one was the last one of a great drinking night with Luis Quintanal, the night that we missed our flight to Santiago by ten minutes and the plane crashed into a mountain just after take-off' and again: 'we drank this beer in Faya-Largeau, me and Jean-Marie Mamadou, who was 14 and told me he was tired of fighting a war that had already killed eight of his brothers and a sister.'"[41] (Ramazzotti: 59-60; author's translation)

By pouring into the text his past adventures, the author's persona gets close to the idea of "total traveller" as represented also by Bettinelli. Moreover, in doing so Ramazzotti surreptitiously ties *La birra di Shaoshan* to his previous works in which these same adventures are recounted, such as *Vado verso il Capo* (1996) and *Carne verde* (1999). Because of the dominant position that Ramazzotti occupies in the narrative, the relation between Ramazzotti and Celia is not built on a plane of equality. This unevenness is best witnessed in the reporting of dialogues (second strategy). It often happens that the author's turns are very long, while the replies of Celia are usually very short. This creates the impression of Ramazzotti keeping a position of superiority with respect to his guide, even though he needs to rely on her in all circumstances:

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[40] [Celia] "Pensi davvero che la Cina sia così contradditoria?" [Ramazzotti]: "Penso solo che sia una pazzia […] Ma voglio smettere di pensare e prendere ciò che viene, senza obiezioni."

[41] "Le etichette di birra sono i miei ricordi di viaggio. […] le incollo in un libro, come in un album di fotografie. Ogni etichetta è un incontro. Scorro le pagine e penso: 'Questa l'ho bevuta con Magdalena Gutierrez all'hotel Carrasco a Montevideo', e poi: 'Quest'altra è stata una sbronza colossale con Luís Quintanal la sera che avevamo perso per dieci minuti l'aereo di Santiago e l'aereo era esploso contro la montagna dopo il decollò e ancora: 'Questa la scolammo a Faya-Largeau io e Jean-Marie Mamadou che aveva quattordici anni e mi disse che era stanco di combattere una guerra che gli aveva portato via otto fratelli e una sorella.'"

> [Celia]: "You have been to Shanghai. You have seen the skyscrapers." [Ramazzotti]: "Celia, I slept in the Jin Mao. The hotel begins on the 54th floor; the previous 53 are all empty." [Celia]: "The television didn't mention that." [Ramazzotti]: "No, but that's the truth. It is an empty crystal tower only good to shout to the world: guys, look at us, we too are able to build skyscrapers. Why don't you invest money in our country? And it also says to the Chinese: see? We were right. In Tiananmen Square, when we shot at your sons, we defended communism, and these are the results." [Celia]: "But...' she tried to reply."[42] (Ramazzotti: 170; author's translation)

The almost pedagogic function that the author occupies in this and other dialogues betrays the extent to which his approach to China is deeply influenced by what he already knows, or believes to know, about the country. Ramazzotti, in fact, rejects the very possibility of learning from Celia about China. It is as if his brief journey to Shaoshan is functional to reassert his already formed impressions. The following is an emblematic example of the author's projection over Celia of a stereotypical image that pertains more to his own ideas of how the Chinese are than to how she effectively is:

> A pair of jeans was enough to make you become detestable because it revealed to me your desire, maybe concealed even to yourself, to be part of that same world that you condemned in words. I preferred when you were wearing a skirt to the calf – that length that's so silly, so *Chinese*.[43] (Ramazzotti: 50-1; author's translation)

In Ramazzotti's eyes Celia does not conform to the idea of "Chineseness": an idea, of course, shaped by the distance that culturally and geographically separates China from Italy. Ultimately, more than with China, Ramazzotti is silently dialoguing with Italian readers, with whom he shares similar assumptions about the Middle Kingdom. The largely ideological function of the narrator and the fact that the few hypertextual features of the texts are self-directed tend, similarly to Bettinelli's text, to obfuscate China, which becomes

[42] " [Celia]: 'Sei stato a Shanghai. Avrai visto i grattacieli.' [Ramazzotti]: 'Celia, ho dormito nel Jin Mao. L'albergo cominciava al cinquantaquattresimo piano. I primi cinquantatré erano tutti vuoti.' [Celia]: 'Questo la televisione non lo ha detto.' [Ramazzotti]: 'No, ma è così. Una torre di cristallo vuota giusto per poter dire al mondo: Ehy, guarda qui, anche noi siamo capaci di costruire grattacieli. Perché non vieni a investire un po' di soldi da noi? Inoltre serve anche a dire ai cinesi: Avete visto? Avevamo ragione noi. Sulla piazza Tian'An'Men, quando sparavamo addosso ai vostri figli, stavamo difendendo il comunismo, ed eccone qui i risultati' [Celia]. 'Ma…' tentò di dire Celia."

[43] "Un paio di jeans bastavano a renderti detestabile, perché mi rivelavano il tuo desiderio, nascosto forse anche a te stessa, di essere parte di quel mondo che a parole condannavi. Ti preferivo con la gonna a metà polpaccio – quella lunghezza così insulsa, così *cinese*."

an object of interest only insofar as it frames the author's writing. Differently from Bettinelli, however, Ramazzotti does not expand the theme of the text beyond the journey; rather he sticks to his goal to provide Italian readers with an inside story about China. Hence, the text could be said to follow the journalistic reportage with influences coming from the diary, due to the intromission of the author's "I" into the narrative. Many of these formal features are also detectable in *China Road*, the last travelogue analysed in this chapter.

China Road (2007) was written by British journalist Rob Gifford, who "first came to China as a twenty-year-old student in 1987, to spend a year studying the Chinese language in Beijing" (xxii). After that, he was hired as a correspondent from China for National Public Radio. In 2006, he was asked to leave China for a new job, and he decided to undertake a journey along Route 312 – sometimes described as the Chinese equivalent to Route 66 – before leaving the country. From this initial self-representation, it is possible to suggest that Gifford bears an insider position in China insofar as, having spent several years in the country, he has acquired a fair understanding of it. Gifford confesses his desire, along the way, to meet and talk with as many people as possible: "truckers and hookers, yuppies and artists, the famer and the mobile-phone salesmen" (xxi). The stories of these "ordinary Chinese people caught up in an extraordinary moment in time" (xix) are then inscribed within the broader narrative of the Chinese people. It is in this way that Western readers are directly connected to China as a whole:

> I think the West needs to pay more attention to China's problems because I think there could well be a crunch coming in China. There is one big question in my own mind: which is it going to be for China, greatness or implosion? (Gifford: xix)

Despite Gifford's declared intention to engage with Chinese people from all over the country, the narrative is largely subservient to his goal to deliver, from an eminently Western point of view, his opinions about China:

> By the time I'd finished the journey I was wondering whether it would be better just to let the readers draw their own conclusions. However, my editor pointed out that if you, dear reader, have schlepped with me right across China, the least I owe you is a few suggestions as to how things might develop there in the future. (Gifford: 322)

In this passage what is remarkable are both the author's willingness to provide personal notations about China, as well as the informality of his writing, which tightens the connections to his readers, with whom he share the same cultural background. More broadly, the mirroring between the West and China constitutes the leitmotif of the whole book. Interestingly, such mirroring is projected not only onto the future, but also the past:

> If you want to trace the origins of the human rights eventually enjoyed in the West, the origins of the jury system and the idea that a monarch could be bound by law, it is no exaggeration to say that all roads lead through Runnymede. So the question that has always troubled me is this: If China was so developed and so civilised and so advanced before its time, why was there no Chinese Runnymede? (Gifford: 105)

Gifford applies to China a whole series of concepts – such as "jury system", "individual freedom", "human rights", "monarch", etc. – which are drawn from the history of the West. The path itself that Gifford envision for China is co-opted from a Western conception of progress:

> This for me is really the big question facing China now, at the start of the twenty-first century and perhaps the one that will decide whether the country goes on to greatness. Will it just follow the same cycle as every dynasty in Chinese history, or will it, *can* it, break the cycle and take a different path? […] There are several very important ways in which today's China is different from the past and which suggest that it *may*, just *may*, be able to avoid going the way of former dynasties and perhaps for the first time form an ongoing, progressive linear narrative to Chinese history. (Gifford: 323)

Gifford is aware of the risk of providing readers with a Manichean representation of China and he stresses that is not his intention to "criticize or condemn Chinese tradition, or to ask arrogantly why other cultures can't be like ours" (105). Yet, at the very moment in which he recognizes the risk, he reasserts the binary clash us/them, which is at the core of the whole narrative. His call for an engagement of the West with China's future is (already) made from a predominant position of the former over the latter. The uneven opposition West-China is reinforced by the fact that the text, which bears, indeed, a low degree of hypertextuality, does not present any references to other texts that may relativize Gifford's point of view.

Moreover, the dualism West-China is reflected in dialogues. It is true that the book is rich in conversations, made possible by Gifford's fluency in Mandarin. Nonetheless it is often the case that these conversations, in the form of the direct speech, are overtly built on the dualism we/you:

> "I know, you Westerners think that after capitalism, there will still be capitalism. We Chinese think that after this stage of capitalism, there might eventually be communism." I open my eyes wide. "Really? You really believe that?" She nods. (Gifford: 27)

This dialogue is built in such a way that the speakers are on a plane of equality. However, such equality is subservient to re-establish the diversity and distance between Self and Other, that is, between the traveller and the readers on the one hand, and the Chinese, on the other. More broadly, this dialogue shows the extent to which all narrative strategies are ideological (Legerton and Rawson resorted to direct speech to foreground local people). Hence, it is not possible to attach to any of them a univocal ideological function, but rather it is necessary to assess this latter case by case, by contextualizing the form and meaning of what is recounted. Formally speaking, it could be said that all these features bring *China Road* to the travel reportage and personal journal. In fact, Gifford conceives of his account not only as the tale of a personal journey, but also as a text that delivers an up-to-date representation of China, filtered through a precise, ideological vision.

To conclude this chapter, the analysis refocuses on travel blogs, by specifically taking into account the posts that bloggers dedicate to China, in order to assess their degree of hypertextuality, as well as the generic form with which they comply.

Hypertextuality in Travel Blogs and the Form of the Narrative

While travel blogs' pages – both those on platforms and individual ones – present a high degree of hypertextuality largely due to the insertion of a variety of peritextual elements – links, banners, pictures, social network icons, when it comes to delimit the analysis to the travel accounts *per se,* the situation is more controversial. The analysis addresses first the travel blogs on platforms. Even from a cursory overview it is clear that the texts of all three of the travel blogs on platforms introduced beforehand manifest a very low degree of hypertextuality.

Figure 21. A post of Supermary58's blog on Turistipercaso.it (reproduced with permission)

Figure 22. A post of Mathieu's blog on Top-depart.com (reproduced with permission)

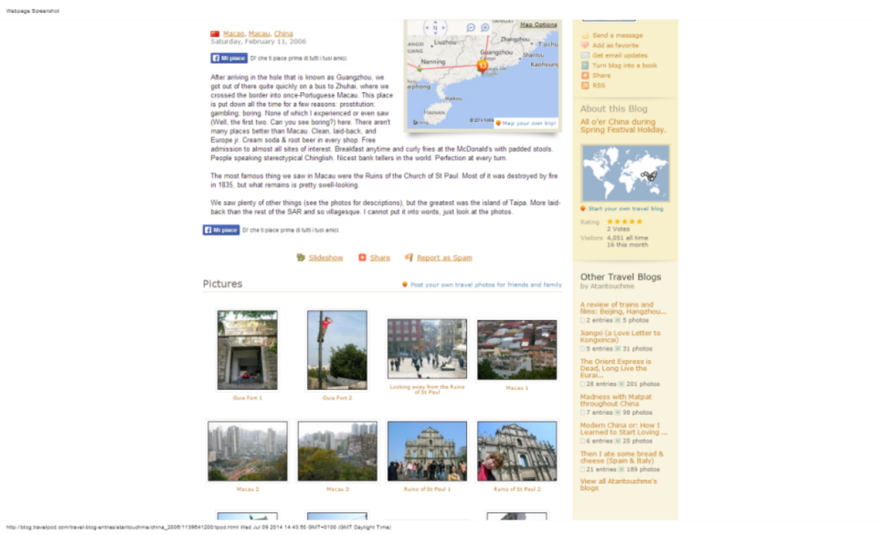

Figure 23. A post of Ataritouchme's blog on Travelpod.com (reproduced with permission)

Supermary58 (Figure 21) went to China in 2012 for 17 days. She wrote ten posts about this experience: in none of them do we find links to other sources or references to other texts. Moreover, there are no pictures included in the posts because Turistipercaso.it urges bloggers to publish their photographs and videos in another dedicated section of the platform. Therefore, Supermary58's account is exclusively verbal, requiring users to browse the whole website if they want to get a visual representation of the places visited by the blogger. The main consequence of this policy of the platform is to strengthen the overall sense of community, while homogenizing the bloggers' contribution with that of other users. Hence, Supermary58's persona loses its singularity and appears as just one blogger among many.

In narrative terms, in the posts we never find conversations, either with Chinese people, or with the companion with whom Supermary58 travels. The monologicity of the account is further enhanced by the fact that the blogger maintains an integrally narrative function throughout the text. The extract below attests to the extent to which the blogger adopts a "distanced" position from what she experiences by keeping a purely diegetic stance:

> Tiananmen square is at the heart of Beijing and we reach it very early in the day in order to avoid the crowd of tourists that visit it everyday. […] You can access it only through check-in points which are under surveillance by armed and attentive policemen. […] The square is surrounded by buildings and monuments, among which are the Monument to the People's Heroes, Mao's Mausoleum, the Great Hall of the People, and the National Museum of China.[44] (Supermary58 2012; author's translation)

Supermary58's "I" never assumes an ideological function – either commenting or "filtering" her description through a subjective point of view – which, in turn, leaves readers at a certain distance from China, the Chinese and the events recounted. Rather, what the blogger does is to provide tips and information to would-be-travellers by largely complying with the writing that can be found in travel guides, and in line with the blogger's

[44] "Il cuore di Pechino è Piazza Tiananmen e noi ci arriviamo molto presto per cercare di evitare le folle di visitatori che ogni giorno la frequentano. E' immensa! E' capace di accogliere più di un milione di persone! Si accede solo attraverso metal-detector sorvegliati da poliziotti molto attenti. E' circondata da edifici e monumenti tra i quali il Monumento agli Eroi del Popolo con il Mausoleo di Mao, il Palazzo dell'Assemblea Nazionale del Popolo e il Museo di Storia Cinese."

own intents: "I have decided to keep an online travel diary in order to help those travellers who were planning a trip I had already made."[45]

A very similar case is constituted by Mathieu's blog (Figure 22). In 2007 Mathieu went to China with his wife for four weeks. The whole blog, which counts 10 posts, reads as a one-voiced account:

> Already a week since our departure, and still I haven't had the chance to update the blog… Indeed, we had a busy week going from a 48-hour visit to Beijing to rushing to Wuhan, in order to arrange our departure to Sanya, and then a visit to the dentist, a reunion with my love's family, etc. Beyond that, Internet access is not available everywhere, and often the connection runs very slowly (between 10 and 20 kb/s). So, this is a short summary of the events (sorry for the lack of historical and touristic details, but I do not have the guide with me at the moment).[46] (Mathieu 2007; author's translation)

The text consists of a homogeneous chain of notations composed of verbs and facts. Not only does the blogger avoid providing comments, that would lead him to assume an ideological function, but the travelling personae never enter into dialogue with the Other, nor with each other. This is so despite the fact that Mathieu is travelling with a Chinese companion who knows the country and the language and likely did engage with locals. In fact, the diegesis does not manifest substantial changes in mood. This is also strengthened by the fact that in none of the posts does Mathieu insert links or references to other sources, which would have opened the text to different points of views. Lastly, even though the platform gives the option to the blogger to include pictures within the account, there are none in the whole blog. Hence, what emerges is a writing that functions chiefly as a way to remember and to connect the blogger with those readers at home – likely relatives[47] – who are following his experience, without however acquiring any depth as far as the representation of China is concerned.

Ataritouchme's blog *All o'er China during Spring Festival Holiday* (Figure 23) has 16 posts over a period of one and a half month. The main difference from the previous two blogs is that Ataritouchme included a great number of pictures in the blog. As the blogger

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[45] Supermary58, interview by Stefano Calzati, July 4, 2014, email.

[46] "Déjà une semaine qu'on est partis, et toujours pas de mise à jour du blog… En fait on a eu une semaine très chargée, entre Pékin à visiter en 48 h et les courses à Wuhan pour préparer le départ à Sanya, passer chez le dentiste, voir la belle famille etc. De plus, l'accès à Internet n'est pas présent dans tous les hôtels, et souvent pour un débit médiocre (entre 10 et 20 ko/s). Voici donc un petit résumé des évènements (désolé pour les détails historiques et touristiques, j'ai pas le guide du routard sous la main)."

[47] See also Chapter 3.

writes at the beginning, however, these were not taken by him, but by his friend Hannah. In terms of narrative, the whole account is composed of brief descriptions of the places visited and the things done. Posts are usually very short, bare in syntax, and sometimes filled with jargon:

> No flying allowed or desired. Travels through China, Spring Festival Holiday 2006. I mainly created this blog for myself, to remember what I did, and for the people who asked to see pictures (none of which I took, by the way---Hannah took all of them). (Ataritouchme 2006)

Similarly to the other two bloggers, Ataritouchme's "I" chiefly maintains a narrative function that does not transcend into an overtly ideological role. Besides, he opts for not reporting dialogues, nor other links to outer sources, thus simply creating an account in which the notations run uninterrupted and unaffected in their mood. Again, the text has the goal of keeping memory of the events and sharing them with those who are willing to read; in doing so, however, the blog flattens out all that pertains to China and the blogger's encounter with the Other.

Overall, all three blogs are characterized by a low degree of hypertextuality and shaped as informal personal journals. "Personal", however, does not mean subjective: indeed, while the "Is" of the bloggers never abdicate their narrative function, both the (self)representation of bloggers and of China are abstracted, neutralized. These findings confirm the validity of previous studies on blogs, which concluded that blogs are mainly single-authored diaries composed of written language and with a low frequency of links (Herring, Scheidt, Kouper, and Wright 2007).

The scenario appears more articulated in relation to individual travel blogs. Travel blogs by British Becki, French Curieuse Voyageuse and Italian Gattosandro Viaggiatore all present a high degree of hypertextuality.

Becki (2012) wrote 11 posts on China over a period of roughly two months. In each post there are usually a couple of links, for example to the Web sources that are dedicated to the landmarks visited by the blogger (Figure 24, with a link to the Great Panda Breeding Base website). There are also plenty of pictures and these are included within the account, revealing the purpose to balance visual elements and words and to organize them in a mutual relation (Figure 24). At the end of each post a note in bold usually sums up the whole post, in the form of an off-the-record commentary (Figure 25).

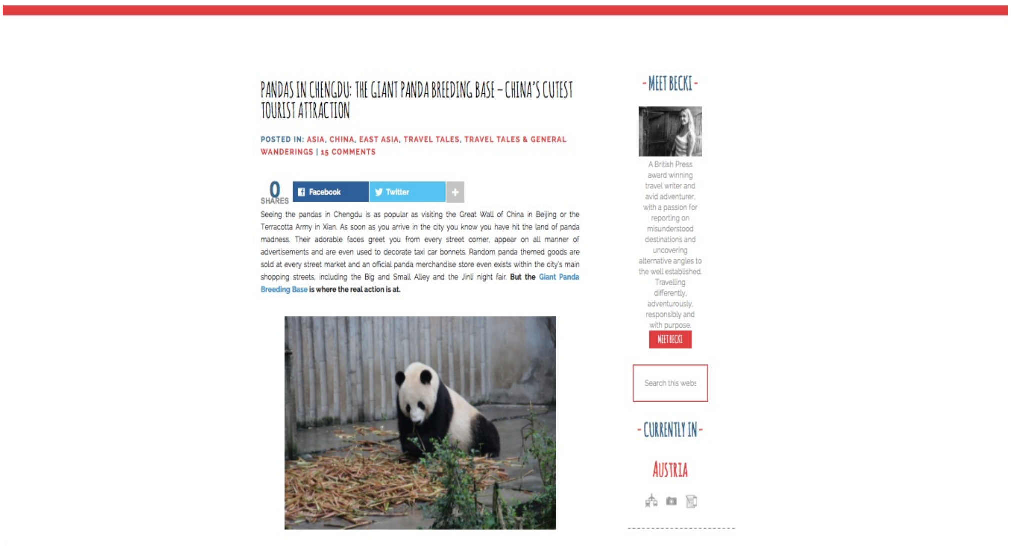

Figure 24. A post on Becki's blog dedicated to Chengdu. Pictures and links are included (reproduced with permission)

Extreme cultural difference is what makes travel invigorating, to stop and see just how different we are and how we go about things. You just always have to stop and remember that we are just a strange and fascinating to others as we are in awe of them and, for me, that's what makes travel special. Fascination is education.

Have you been to China? What shocked you the most?

Figure 25. A footnote in a post dedicated to Beijing on Becki's blog (reproduced with permission)

Concerning the narrative, the alternation between the descriptions of places, personal anecdotes, and reflections continuously rearticulates the mood of the discourse. Sometimes, the blogger assumes a chiefly narrative function, as in the following passage:

> Seeing pandas in Chengdu is as popular as visiting the Great Wall of China in Beijing or the Terracotta Army in Xian. As soon as you arrive in the city you known you hit the land of pandas madness. Their adorable faces greets you from every street corner appear on all manner of advertisement and are even used to decorate taxi car bonnets. (Becki 2012)

It is remarkable that even in such a descriptive paragraph the blogger opens her writing to the "you" of the reader marking the intention of overtly addressing, with her advice, a precise group of followers. At other times, Becki focuses on personal stories in line with her passion for "uncovering alternative angles to the well-established [destinations]" (Becki

2012). In so doing, the blogger's "I" also takes on an ideological function. Below, for instance, Becki recounts a humorous episode that occurred in a Chinese massage centre:

> *As my friend's face turned a little white when I entered the room, she simply screamed at me: "OH MY GOD, what HAVE they done to your back?" Looking over my shoulder I couldn't see a thing, until I ran to the toilet and lifted up my top. I'd been tortured* […] After six hours of cycling, our arses hurt from the crappy bike seats and we were tired, dishevelled, sweaty and ready to wind down. The grand idea at this point was to spend the last hour or so of the day relaxing with some spa-like indulgence […] Lying down, my back was cracked and the deep tissue massage took my breath away. It hurt like hell but it wasn't too different from what I've had at home, only harder […] Except that, alongside the pressure of his knuckles, there was a slight scratching sensation. How and why was he scratching? […] When the ordeal was over I knew I'd just laugh about it over a few beers. In China, we had a funny story to tell almost every day and today would be mine. Except it wasn't funny at all. It turns out the scratching wasn't his fingers, but a plastic card used to bring blood to the surface of my skin in order to help release toxins, and this was the result. (Becki 2012)

Here the blogger mixes the tale of an episode in which she was directly involved with comments on her whole experience in China. The first few lines of the passage are also significant because Becki includes a dialogue with a friend in it, in the form of reported speech. Therefore, Becki's posts do present many variations in the narrative mood and these help to draw readers closer to the events.

In Curieuse Voyageuse's (2009) posts on China the written text is often mixed with pictures (Figure 26). Sometimes, it can also happen that pictures are posted alone, thus representing the sole mode of narration. Moreover, it is common to find in each post links to other sources, which are either internal to the blog or directing to external sources (Figure 26). Then, at the end of each post, as a form of footnote, users always find a bunch of links that point to similar posts (Figure 27).

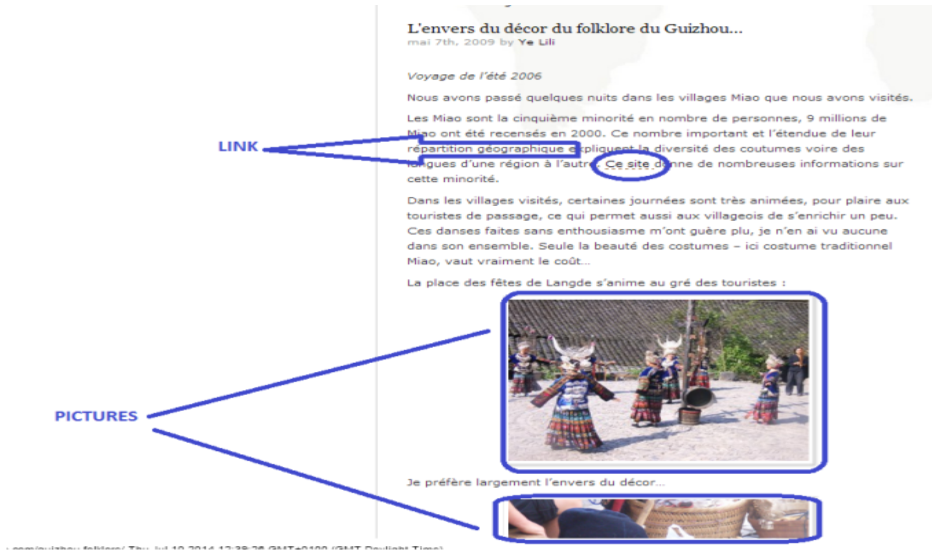

Figure 26. A post by Curieuse Voyageuse with pictures and links inside the text (reproduced with permission)

Figure 27. Links a the end of a post on Curieuse Voyageuse's blog (reproduced with permission)

Quotations from other texts are also included: the following is an example taken from the post dedicated to Datong's caves, in which the blogger refers to the official UNESCO document about this ancient archaeological site:

> The caves are rightly described by UNESCO as "masterpieces of early Chinese Buddhist cave art", and they represent "the successful fusion of Buddhist religious symbolic art from south and central Asia with Chinese cultural traditions." Statues are well-preserved and the whole site is really amazing! (Curieuse Voyageuse 2009; author's translation)

The blogger also demonstrates her willingness to engage with locals. For instance, in a post dedicated to her visit to the Sky Temple in Beijing, she does not linger on a detailed description of the place; rather she recounts the encounter with an old lady who is practising Tai Chi:

> We had a great time: she taught me some Tai Chi notions and positions. I made

quite a few people laugh… I thought she was a really beautiful old lady. She told me she is there every day of the year. Indeed, I came back one year later and she was there, exactly on the same spot![48] (Curieuse Voyageuse 2009; author's translation)

In this passage the conversation between Curieuse Voyageuse and the old lady is embedded into the narrative. Yet, readers can easily get a glimpse of a very intimate encounter. Similarly to Becki, Curieuse Voyageuse strives to find alternative ways of looking at China, dwelling on usually overlooked details or on the telling of personal anecdotes. The narrative, hence, is filled as much with descriptions as with subjective impressions and opinions, which reflect the blogger's passage from a narrative to an ideological function.

Gattosandro Viaggiatore (2012) wrote 24 posts about her second journey to China, which lasted approximately a month. Each post contains a variety of pictures interspersed in the text (Figure 28). There are also various links both within each post and at its end (Figure 28), where the blogger meticulously details all the places she visited, the means of transport used, the hostels booked, the costs sustained, etc. Then, it is not rare for the posts to be concluded by a note – usually in italics – that gives some extra information or provides a comment on the experience narrated (Figure 28).

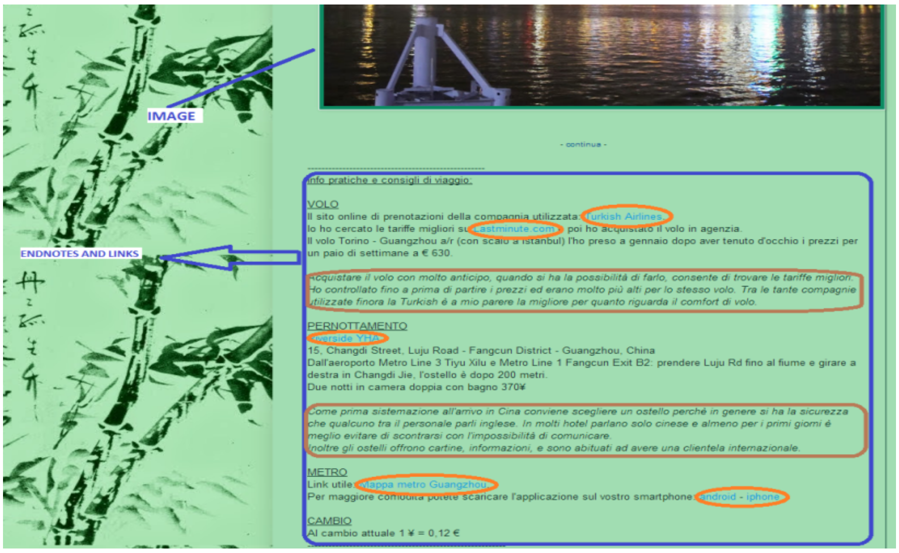

Figure 28. A picture, various links and two endnotes in one of Gattosandro Viaggiatore's posts (reproduced with permission)

[48] "Nous avons partagé un bon moment: elle a voulu m'en apprendre plus et elle m'a appris quelques pas de Tai Chi. J'ai fait rire un bon nombre de passants… Je l'ai trouvée vraiment belle dans son grand âge. Elle m'a dit être là tous les jours de l'année. J'y suis revenue un an plus tard, elle était exactement au même endroit!"

In terms of narrative discourse, it is illuminating to compare how Supermary58 and Gattosandro Viaggiatore recount the "same" episode, namely the arrival in Beijing:

> The Aeroflot flight lands on time in Beijing. It's roughly 10 am; we collect our baggage, we exchange some euros for yuan and we take the tube to DongSi stop, which is ten minutes away from our hostel. We check in and, because in our hostel there is a ticket office, we decide to book our next train transfers. For moving around the city, we will use a rechargeable card, which is sold in all metro stations. The first visit is to the Sky Temple… (Supermary58 2012; author's translation)

> After a roughly 20-hour journey (considering both the flight and the waiting for the transfers), we are finally in Beijing. We set the clock six hours ahead and, after a few minutes, we realize how big the airport is. Having attended to the bureaucracy at the Immigration Office, we go to collect our baggage. We follow the signs that tell us to go down the stairs and… we find ourselves at a train station! It's amazing that in order to reach the baggage claim, we have to take a train, and it does take quite long to get there! Our baggage is already there when we arrive, so we pick it up and take a train to the city centre. Outside of the window, the sky is blue. I am tired, but emotions keep me awake. We get off at Dongzhimen Station and take the metro to Jishuitan. When we get out of the metro, we realize that the hot weather is unbearable. I stop for a second to check my notes and congratulate myself, as everything has run smoothly so far. The first impression is harsh: the walking path is ruined, in some places there is not even pavement and in others we have to walk along the street because the walking path is obstructed by piles of gravel. Motorbikes and bicycles take the right of way over pedestrians, and everything here is dusty and shabby. On the road, the traffic is heavy: in the following days, we will get used to horns, which are used continuously and randomly. Completely sweaty, we reach the hutong where our hostel should be. The narrow street is filled with restaurants that have an unhygienic look, but nonetheless they spread a good smell of barbecued meat; low houses with small rooms hosting seven or eight people seated around a table; and some vendors of fruits and vegetables showing off cages in which a few cocks are segregated and about to be cooked. The hostel gives me a strange impression. Being hosted in a typical Chinese house with an internal court, the architecture is precious, but the roof that covers the whole area and all the decorations that hang from it make the ambient a bit oppressive. The rooms of the

main hostel are divided across two floors, in which we meet a bunch of Western people. The lady at the reception desk speaks English and, having photocopied our passports, accompanies us to "our" hostel, which is located on a quiet street. What a joy! Our room is in a wonderful building at the centre of which there is a garden with plants, trees and a fountain. I like it straight away. We rest for a while and then decide to go out to get acquainted with the area, which appears as an intricate set of streets but in which we ultimately orientate ourselves easily.[49] (Gattosandro Viaggiatore 2012; author's translation)

Two considerations can be made here. To a certain degree, the routines that Supermary58 and Gattosandro Viaggiatore account for are rather similar: the landing, the luggage collection, the metro and the arrival at the hostel. It could be said that both texts reflect the point to which the preliminary stages of (almost) any travel have been commoditized. On the other hand, it is possible to note that Gattosandro Viaggiatore's text is much richer and tries to give an account of the arrival that goes beyond a mere descriptive plane. This means that Gattosandro Viaggiatore's "I" does not remain attached to its basic narrative function, but assumes in many circumstances an ideological role ("the hostel gives me a strange impression"; "What a joy"; "I like it straight away"). Moreover, Gattosandro Viaggiatore tries to deliver an original and personal account which derives from continuous attempts to engage with locals, as the quotation below exemplifies:

[49] Dopo un viaggio durato una ventina di ore (tra volo e attese in aeroporto per lo scalo) siamo finalmente a Pechino! Mettiamo l'orologio 6 ore avanti e dopo pochi passi ci rendiamo conto di quanto è enorme questo aeroporto. Dopo le pratiche di immigrazione ci dirigiamo al ritiro bagagli. Seguiamo la freccia che ci dice di scendere le scale e... ci troviamo alla stazione di un treno. Pazzesco! Al ritiro bagagli ci si arriva col treno, che non ci mette neanche poco! Le nostre valigie sono già lì che ci aspettano, così andiamo a prendere il treno che ci porterà in città. Dai finestrini Pechino ci saluta con un bel cielo azzurro, io sono stanca ma l'emozione mi tiene sveglia. Scendiamo alla stazione Dongzhimen e prendiamo la metropolitana per Jishuitan. Usciamo dalla metro e il caldo ci stende. Mi fermo un momento a controllare i miei appunti e a esultare un pochino per essere riusciti a fare tutto bene, almeno fino qui. L'impatto è un po' forte: il marciapiede per l'ostello è sconnesso, in alcuni punti non c'è la pavimentazione, in altri bisogna passare sulla strada perchè ci sono cumuli di terra. Motorini e biciclette (entrambi elettrici) si prendono la precedenza sui pedoni e in generale tutto quanto intorno a noi ha l'aspetto polveroso e trasandato. Sulla strada il traffico si fa sentire: nei prossimi giorni ci abitueremo ai clacson, suonati in continuazione anche senza motivo. Decisamente sudati arriviamo all'incrocio con l'hutong dell'ostello. Una via stretta, con ristoranti che hanno l'aspetto poco igienico ma che mandano un buon profumino di carne grigliata. Case basse, con stanze minuscole al cui interno si intravedono 7 o 8 persone attorno al tavolo. Qualche venditore ambulante di frutta e verdura, e una gabbia con qualche gallina viva pronta per essere spennata. L'ostello mi fa una strana impressione. L'architettura è carina, essendo una tipica casa cinese col cortile interno, ma il tetto che chiude tutta l'area che dovrebbe essere all'aperto e l'accozzaglia di decorazioni che pendono dal soffitto rendono l'ambiente un po' opprimente. Qui, su due piani, ci sono le stanze e le camerate dell'ostello principale, e ci sono una decina di ragazzi occidentali. La signorina della reception parla inglese, e dopo essersi fatta le fotocopie dei nostri passaporti ci fa accompagnare al "nostro" ostello, che si trova poco più avanti, in una via interna. Che meraviglia! Una bellissima costruzione bassa che gira intorno a un cortile delizioso con piante, alberi e una fontana. Mi piace all'istante. Ci riposiamo un po' e poi usciamo per prendere un po' di confidenza con la zona, che subito mi sembra un complicato intrico di vie ma ci orientiamo abbastanza facilmente."

> When we return to the hotel, a half-empty bottle of vodka on the reception desk tells us that there's a party going on organized by Mr Shi and his friends. When he sees us he makes two euphoric comments: he tells me that I'm *beautiful* while to Lore he tells something we cannot quite guess, but which provokes many laughs. We discreetly move away from them before finding ourselves involved in an all-night-long party with a glass in hand. We fix our meeting with Mr Shi tomorrow at 7am, let's say 7.30am, he specifies. What a character![50] (Gattosandro Viaggiatore 2013; author's translation)

The extract is taken from the post that Gattosandro Viaggiatore wrote about the city of Zhanjiajie. The title itself of the post – "It's only you who can do such a troublesome journey and call it a holiday!" – comes from a phone call that the blogger had with her mother. The title has the function to set the ironic tone of the whole post, while providing a preliminary interpretation of the experience through not the blogger's own voice, but her mother's. Similarly, in the passage above Gattosandro Viaggiatore recounts the tentative dialogue – half in English half in Chinese – that she had with the owner of the hotel, thus including his own voice into the narrative. Overall, the blogger's posts present an articulated narrative in which shifts in the mood, signalled by the passage from a narrative to an ideological stance and by rich descriptions, help the reader to get close to the scene.

Lastly, a note is required on the presence of comments in the blogs. Comments can be considered as a form of dialogue between the bloggers and readers. These exchanges are extra-diegetic because they are not an integral part of the account, but remain external to it. Hence they have to be regarded as peritextual elements. Interestingly, in none of the travel blogs on the platforms analyzed do we find comments to the posts, a feature that strengthens the monologicity of these texts (and hints also to the limited readership of the blogs). By contrast, on individual blogs comments are quite numerous. The majority of the conversations between the blogger and the blogs' visitors are subservient to appraise what the blogger has written. Beyond these complimentary comments, there are, however, some exceptions, such as the following one from Becki's blog:

> [Rob Hornby]: "Two tips for the park. 1. Buy a panda card from one of the local shops, which gets you cheaper entry and also allows for other local discounts. This

[50] "Al nostro rientro in hotel la bottiglia mezza vuota di vodka sul bancone della reception ci suggerisce che è in corso un festino tra Mr Shi e i suoi amici. In preda all'euforia fa due commenti nei nostri confronti, a me dice che sono *beautiful*, a Lore una parola che non riusciamo a capire ma che provoca grasse risate da cui ci defiliamo prima di trovarci con un bicchiere in mano a brindare con loro tutta la notte. Ci diamo appuntamento per domani mattina verso le sette, lui rilancia, facciamo sette e mezza. Che personaggio!"

> helps with…. 2. Not openly advertised but on a tour we found a door through which you could meet a real panda face to face and will pose for a photo while sat on your lap. Sounds a bit odd but this is similar to holding a koala. Very expensive but does go towards the park. It's not advertised so keep your eye out." (Becki 2012)
>
> [Backpacker Becki]: "Thanks Rob… I did mention the 'hold a panda' moment. Although I don't totally agree with it!" (Becki 2012)

This exchange, taken from the post that Becki dedicated to the Panda Reservoir in Chengdu, exemplifies the extent to which comments can also constructively become a means for completing or clarifying what the blogger has written. In this specific case, because Becki feels that her reliability as a traveller and writer has been questioned, she is not afraid to correct what the reader mentions in his comment.

The complex articulation of the narrative of individual blogs, together with the presence of comments, differs substantially from what is witnessed in blogs on platform and, consequently, with the findings of previous studies on blogs. In this respect, although individual travel blogs can be said to approach the form of the personal journal, the way in which the narrative is shaped and the presence of hypertextual elements open the accounts to a hybridization of their form, mixing features from the travel guide, the multi-service portal, the tourism website, and the diary.

Conclusion

The aim of the first chapter was to provide a formal characterization of contemporary travel books and blogs. Being inscribed in the realm of transmediality, the analysis required addressing the form of the texts in relation to the medial formats that "carry" them. Eventually, this also led to some insights into how China and the Chinese are represented by authors and bloggers.

As a brief introduction, by drawing back onto early 20th century texts and on the interview with Chinese travel curator Zhang Mei, it was shown that the itineraries of today's travel writers partially overlap with those of "classic" travellers, while other areas have entered the tourism circuit later.

Subsequently, Genette's (1997) work on the paratext was applied to contemporary travel blogs. The choice to adopt this concept, coined initially in relation to written books, was fruitful to reverse the one-directedness of many studies that compare print and online texts. At the same time, it also evaluated the inefficacy of those models for the study of online pages, such as Knox's (2007), which identify axes or layers within each document and attempt a compositional analysis of the text. By using the notion of paratext it was possible to maintain a holistic perspective over travel blogs and understand how they are built and "appear". While individual travel blogs present peritextual elements which are usually organized around the text similarly to printed books, on travel blogs on platforms these elements tend to invade the space of the text. Hence, particularly on platforms, the recognisability of the text is jeopardised by the inclusion of a multiplicity of peritexts that depend on the agencies behind the construction of the platforms. This, in turn, leads to a fragmentation of the authorial stances in charge of what appear on the screen.

In the second part of the chapter, the concept of hypertextuality, used mainly in connection with online texts, was extended to the study of contemporary travel books. Such reversal led to assess that travel books bear a higher degree of hypertextuality than travel blogs on platforms do, and a lower degree when compared to individual travel blogs. The kinds of hypertextual webs that offline and online texts weave are different. In books, references mention sources that are not physically there (apart from references internal to the text itself). This suggests that hypertextuality in books is mainly epitextual in the sense that references, although inscribed in the text, open the book to an exteriority that transcends its own physicality. In the case of blogs, instead, links allow the reader to retrieve sources while remaining within the same online environment. Hence, hypertextuality on the Web is coalescent: what happens is that on the Web the peritext tends simultaneously to occupy the space of the text and to extend to the epitext's realm, eventually merging into it. At the same time, however, it would be hazardous to deny any applicability of his study to online texts. On the Web, indeed, not all is paratext: there still remains a valid epitextual distinction to be made, namely between online and offline content, whenever online texts mention sources that can be accessed in their printed form only. The guiding principle of such a paratextual difference is no longer that of distance, as Genette (1997) suggests when discerning between peritext and epitext. Rather, it is a medial principle that is at stake, insofar as the analogue and digital realms are (still) incommensurable.

Thirdly, by combining the concept of hypertextuality with Genette's (1980) study on the mood of the narrative and the narrator's functions, the formal features of print and online travel accounts were characterised. The analysis confirmed the formal heterogeneity of travel books. Ethnography, diary, reportage, essay: all these forms have been found among the texts surveyed and some of them also coexist in the same text. Concerning travel blogs, a major distinction was detected. The accounts hosted on platforms chiefly comply with the diary form. Online, such form is characterised – due also to a low degree of hypertextuality – by a monologic narrative that rarely presents shifts in the mood. Hence, readers are confronted with texts that maintain a certain constant distance towards the events recounted; a distance that tends to flatten the representations of both the blogger and China. On the other hand, the accounts of individual travel blogs manifest – also in reason of their high degree of hypertextuality – a formal hybridization. Features that belong to the diary, the anecdotic account, the travel guide, the tourism portal all inform the accounts. While the findings concerning travel blogs on platforms confirmed those of previous studies on blogs, which were characterised as single-authored journals with usually a paucity of links and comments, individual travel blogs differ quite radically from these conclusions. This can be due to a number of reasons – e.g. consolidation of the Web 2.0, emergence of customizable CMSs, changes in reading practices – for sure, however, this change is the sign that contemporary blogging has evolved (compared to ten years ago) and diversified (compared to platforms).

The emphasis on the formal features of the accounts will be further developed in the next chapter drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of "chronotope". Particularly, the point to assess in more detail is the kind of information (and knowledge) about China that each genium (and writer) can deliver.

Chapter 2

Medial Chronotopes and Mediatized Representations of Travels in China

Mikhail Bakhtin's ([1937] 1981) concept of "chronotope" is very useful for the present transmedial comparison between travel books and blogs because it allows looking at each genium as a site of negotiation between the "represented world" and its "modes of representation", so that it will be possible to shed some light on what we, as readers, can get to know about China when opting for one genium or the other.

Bakhtin defines the chronotope as "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature […] The chronotope in literature has an intrinsic generic significance. It can even be said that it is precisely the chronotope that defines genre and generic distinctions" (1981: 258). Travel writing, in this regard, is a particularly fruitful object of analysis for at least two reasons. First, the unfolding of time and space is a crucial aspect of the genre, insofar as travel accounts are presupposed by a displacement in space and time, which is both physical – the journey *per se* – and metaphorical – the writing process.[51] As Barbara Korte (2008: 26) notes, "every piece of travel writing constructs a specific world and thus implies a 'chronotope' or 'time-space'." Elaborating this idea further on, Korte suggests that the concept of chronotope can find a reflection at both the thematic level of the text – if and how the space and time of the journey are thematized in the travelogue – and at the discursive level, that is, how the narrative creates its own temporal and spatial framework. Korte connects this latter level to the characteristics of the narrative discourse as identified by Genette (1980) and as they were discussed in Chapter 1. Here, to be taken into account will be primarily the thematization of the space and time of the travel, keeping in mind the brief contextualization for each text provided in Appendix. The second reason that makes the relation between travel writing and chronotope highly productive is that, as discussed in the Introduction, we witness the tendency to identify travel writing in tight relation to the medial format that carries the text. On this point, Bakhtin argues that "there exists a special group of genres that play an especially significant role in structuring novels, sometimes by

[51] This, of course, could also lead to the broader discussion about writing as an act, at once, of unavoidable inscription of the "I" on the page (see Benveniste's argument about the language's subjectivity [1971]) and of constant deferral of this same "I" to itself (Derrida 1976). However, the point stressed here is simpler, namely the parallelism between travelling and writing as two practices that make the writing/travelling subject move.

themselves even directly determining the structure of a novel as a whole […] Examples of such genres would be confession, the diary, travel notes, biography…" (1981: 321) The purpose here is to move from the text towards the medium in order to extend the notion of chronotope also to the medial formats. Illuminating, in this sense, are Bakhtin's "concluding remarks" to his work. Here, the Russian intellectual pushes his reflection about the chronotope of the novel towards a broader horizon, arguing that "out of the actual chronotopes of our world (which serve as the source of representation) emerge the reflected and created chronotopes of the world represented in the work (in the text)" (1981: 255). In other words, Bakhtin seems to hint at the idea that the book, as a textual artefact binding together the representational and the represented world, is also chronotopic. In the same spirit, Asif Agha (2007: 321) affirms that "the novelistic chronotope connects the world of the author to the 'chronotopic situation' of diverse listeners-readers due to the physical materiality of its textual form." In this respect, the notion of genium, far from being only a descriptive term, comes to define a conceptual field of generic and medial negotiations, which, at once, internally dictate the chronotope of the text and externally guide its chronotopic interpretation. Bakhtin only refers to the book because this was (and still is) the most widely spread medium for literary novels. However, once we apply his argument to the comparison between travel books and travel blogs, we can attempt an investigation of the chronotopic features of the book and the blog as medial formats and consequently the different representations of the journey, as well as of the traveller and the China, which travel books and blogs promote. The idea that the book, as a medial format, has its own chronotopic principles has been tested – indirectly – by Polish writer Zenon Fajfer (2010), who coined the term "liberature" to define those literary works that expressly exploit the physicality of the book to make sense of the whole text.[52] Here, this idea is broadened, insofar as it is assumed that any medium has precise chronotopic principles and, as such, they inevitably affect the text, independently from the author's willingness to exploit them.

The chapter proposes first an intra-medial comparison between three pairs of travel books, moving from monomodal to multimodal ones. Secondly, the transition from the realm of print to the online space is constituted by the analysis of the pictorial book *Carnet di viaggio: Cina* (2005) by travel artist Stefano Faravelli. Thirdly, the intra-medial comparison will concern four travel blogs, two of which are hosted on platforms, while the others are independently built. In the conclusion, some considerations are drawn on the different

52 A clarification of the concept and some examples of "liberature" can be found at: http://www.liberatura.pl/liberatura.html (site in Polish).

kinds of chronotopes that each genium promotes and, consequently, the different kinds of information that readers are likely to find when reading them. Insofar as travel books and travel blogs are (often) multimodal texts (and in Faravelli's case a "transmodal" one, see below), the chapter also contemplates the extent to which visual modes (i.e. photography and pictorial illustrations) can be read chronotopically, thus extending Bakhtin's concept beyond written language.

Behind the Wall and *Shadow of the Silk Road*

The first pair of monomodal books under analysis is constituted by two travelogues authored by the renowned British travel writer Colin Thubron.

In 1987, Thubron published *Behind the Wall*, a text that recounts his journey across China at a time in which entering the country and moving around was still subjected to many restrictions. Mao had died only a decade before, the physical and psychological consequences of the Cultural Revolution were still painfully perceived, and China's opening towards the West was still in its infancy. Then, two decades later, Thubron went back to China in order to travel the whole length of the Silk Road, from Xian up to the Turkish coast. *Shadow of the Silk Road* (2006) came out from this experience: here China only constitutes the point of departure, while the majority of the chapters are dedicated to Middle Eastern countries such as Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey. While, 20 years later, entering and travelling in China became easier, the whole journey across Asia still presented difficulties and dangers, insofar as some of the regions Thubron went through were in a state of war (often against Western powers). These partially specular situations – history never moves, after all! – compel the author to specify in two notes at the beginning of each book, that "the identity of several people has been disguised, in case harsher times return" (Thubron 1987: ix) and "in the midst of political uncertainty, the identity of several people described in the narrative has been disguised" (Thubron 2006: introduction).[53] In both cases the historical time plays a major role in dictating how the experience is represented and, in particular, it requires Thubron to fictionalize the identities of the people encountered.

From the point of view of the present work, the comparison between these two texts is worthwhile in that China firstly represents the geographical frame of the whole travel experience, while two decades later its account is inscribed within a broader

[53] From here, the path of the discussion could also lead to address the stringent political relevance of travel writing, but such an issue is beyond the scope of the present chapter. On this point, please, refer to Calzati 2015a.

narrative. The aim, then, is to understand the extent to which the passing of time and the different organization of the narrative in the two books have affected the representation of China (and of the traveller). At the beginning of his first book, Thubron lets transpire a sense of alienation with respect to the Middle Kingdom and its people. The following passage is an example:

> I tried to talk to three old men who had set up a counter piled with second-hand books, but they stared back at me dumbly. When I joined a queue outside a milk-stall, the women I addressed only simpered and covered their mouths with their little blue residency permits. A suspicion that these people would remain forever inaccessible was filling me with suppressed alarm. Like an insecure child, I began to crave for any kind of contact, even abuse. (Thubron 1987: 6)

The very fact of being confronted with something new and incomprehensible, which leaks from this quotation, is what compels Thubron to travel in the first place, as he mentioned in the interview: "for me, travelling is the satisfaction of curiosity. All my travel books start with ignorance, with my not knowing or understanding a culture."[54] The preliminary impossibility of approaching locals occurs despite Thubron's pre-departure effort to learn Mandarin and acquire as much information as possible about China. To an extent, however, the feeling of alienation is gradually diluted with the passing of time. Meaningful, in this regard, is the author's encounter, towards the end of the journey, with a Sino-American couple: on this occasion, Thubron is more inclined to speak with the Chinese woman than with her American husband:

> In one shrine I came upon a young American and a Chinese girl whose fingers rested tentatively on his arm. She was statuesque, with proud Mongolian cheekbones. They had been married the year before, she said – he a teacher, she a Beijing student. The man clambered to a temple higher up, exclaiming at its beauty. But the girl stayed behind. "My family were appalled by our marriage," she said. "They told me I'd be bought and sold in the market as a prostitute. Literally." […] "Even my own friends thought he just wanted me as an oriental slave in the house." […] "Actually, I've always got my way. I am used to it." I laughed. "I thought you were." (Thubron 1987: 255)

[54] Colin Thubron, interview by Stefano Calzati, May 27, 2013, in person.

Although Thubron manages to reduce the cultural distance that separates him from China, he remains dissatisfied with his experience to the point that in the interview he claimed that: "the Chinese have always been hard for me to understand; they have required of me a real effort in terms of adaptation, and then the language is very difficult." While this acknowledgement exceeds the boundary of the travelogue arriving at a much later time (the interview was conducted in 2013), also in the text it is possible to retrace the enduring presence of a divide between the author and China. Despite having travelled around the country for months and having traversed it from north to south and from west to east, Thubron's approach to China remains at a superficial level. This is why both the representation of China and the author's are anchored to well distinct worlds. On the one hand, in many occurrences Thubron appears as a Westerner of whom Chinese people can barely understand the provenance:

> At supper I was regaled by workers from a plastic factory. They talked in bursts of boyish jokes which they translated for me into the school-taught Mandarin of the Cantonese south. […] They were in holiday mood, and plied me with questions. Only occasionally – when I told them that in Britain most people received a month's holiday (they received a week) and that we worked five days a week (they worked six) – did they lapse into perplexed or ruminative silence; and when I mentioned that Western governments were full of contending political parties instead of a single authority, the illusion of our togetherness was temporarily shattered, and the girls stared at me with big uncomprehending eyes, and the men murmured. Finally, when they heard I was travelling alone, I saw that I slid altogether out of their comprehension. All foreigners go everywhere in groups, they said. Always. And they go top class. (Thubron 1987: 173)

On the other hand, China, despite all Thubron's efforts, remains a world apart in which it is difficult to delve. Hence, if Thubron is led to think of himself as a typical Westerner, China chiefly functions as a term of comparison; a mirror against which the author can reflect himself. In taking up this role, then, China rarely comes into focus in all its diversity. Sure, Thubron does encounter and talk with many Chinese, but these soon lose their individuality and become representative of a greater mass. So, for instance, readers come to know that Westerners and Chinese people are treated differently in 1980s China:

> Even in our obscure hotel, the barriers were not all down. […] I sat in a banqueting-hall sterilised by table-cloths and kitsch paintings, and settled to a meal which cost an extravagant 5 kwai – while he [Thubron's guide] vanished into another room and ate one for a twelfth as much […] No, said the waitress, I could not eat in the common part of the restaurant. It was unorthodox. (Thubron 1987: 112)

Above all, the travelogue is revealing of the advantageous position that a Westerner, willingly or not, occupied in China still at the end of the 20th century. Meanwhile, the very possibility to approach the Chinese beyond the curtain of formality is hindered. The historical time of the journey – and the forms of privilege it embeds – structures the whole experience and it is according to such structure that the traveller's background and China come to belong to two separated realities, enticing that sense of frustration that permeates Thubron's experience.

In *Shadow of the Silk Road* readers are confronted with a less polarized representation of the experience. Quintessential, in this respect, is Thubron's deconstruction of the space of the journey: he reasserts in many passages that the Silk Road is not a single path but many:

> Trying to comprehend the medley of voices and features around me, I was slipping into a river where nations lost their meaning. This, after all, was the road whose Chinese silk lay in the graves of Iron Age Germany. It had spread variousness, and a rich impurity. (Thubron 2006: 116)

The questioning of the linearity of the whole itinerary triggers, in turn, a more composite representation of China. The idea itself of China as a homogenous country is challenged:

> In the crowds, at either pole of life, went little girls in iridescent caps, like old-fashioned dolls, and widows under coarse brown veils. The air reeked of resin and coal dust, and filled with the quavering music of Arabia. No Chinese was in sight. Central Asia was suddenly close and palpable. […] Among the sheepskin hats and skull-caps of the Uighur went Kyrgyz herdsmen in white felt trilbies, and here and there were lean Tajiks from the Pakistan border, their women walking under high pillbox hats dripping with silver pendants. (Thubron 2006: 140)

In this passage, which narrates the author's stay in Kashgar, it is above all the varied ethnic composition of the whole "Chinese" population that makes Thubron realize that he is traversing a country whose geopolitical unity does not go hand in hand with cultural homogeneity. At the same time, China appears fragmented not only ethnically, but also by being dislocated on different temporal planes. In fact, the China of the past periodically comes to attend at the present time of the journey. Differently from *Behind the Wall*, which was very focused on the historical time of the journey (references to the past were mainly directed towards the recent Cultural Revolution), *Shadow of the Silk Road* manifests the constant alternation of temporalities, as the following passage attests:

> It was from Khotan, perhaps, or from the Chinese heartland, that the jealously guarded secrets of sericulture spread. Old legends tell of their betrayal. A spoilt Chinese princess, it is said – betrothed to the King of Khotan – smuggled the mulberry seeds and silkworms over the frontier in her headdresses, and the convent where she established them was still there in Xuanzang's time. More than a century after her, in about AD 552, silkworm eggs reached Constantinople concealed in the staffs of two Nestorian monks, travelling, it seems, from Kothan. And China's age-old monopoly was broken. For more than half a year the sky above the town was opaque muslin, dense with unseen sand, and the sun was only a white coin discarded there. (Thubron 2006: 126)

All this contributes to building a more articulated chronotope of the experience, that is, one that constantly redefines its own space-time frame. On the one hand, the space of the journey is decomposed and comes to encompass a whole continent; on the other, the time of the narrative shifts back and forth, intertwining past and present. These chronotopic variations go hand in hand with the fictionalization of the journey: stories become legends, encounters become phantoms (or shadows, as the title suggests). It is quite telling, for example, that the author inserts throughout the book – in italics – an imaginary dialogue he entertains with an old merchant of the Silk Road:

> *Why do you travel this way?* It is the Sogdian merchant again. *Will your book tell how many days' journey between trading towns and what markets are to be found there?*
> *No, my markets are not yours. People create their own countries.*

> *So it is. When I took to trading copper and indigo, all cities turned to copper and indigo.*
> [Waits] *Only when you become old, and no longer move, the countries do not change. They sit in your head like artefacts...*
> [Irritably] *It may not be like that.*
> … *Then, looking back, you will see the cities become a long procession leading to nothing. This is beautiful in its way, and was once enough to make you travel. Would you want this forever?*
> … *I want to sleep*… (Thubron 2006: 242)

Insofar as Thubron can no longer reflect himself against a single mirroring otherness (which was represented by China in the previous text) he creates the fictional character of the Sogdian merchant with whom to establish an interior dialogue (indeed, a monologue). Within the varied chronotopic articulation of the narrative the boundary between fact and fiction is questioned and in such interrogation it is the author's subjectivity to play a major role. Thubron explained this point well in the interview, claiming that travel writing is "a sort of postmodern collage, of which the sole consistent thread is the personality of the travel writer."[55] What is significant to remark is that the closer Thubron gets to the end of the journey, the more he feels at ease and among people who share with him a similar background (despite the fact that Thubron cannot speak any Arabic, nor is he an expert of Middle-Eastern countries). In doing so, it seems that the traversing of Central Asia, while allowing the author to provide a more kaleidoscopic image of China, distances the Middle Kingdom even more from the author's roots. Here is Thubron's own opinion:

> When I came to China to start my journey along the Silk Road, I did feel I knew China better, although I was in a region of China – that of Xian, in the northwest – that is not typically Chinese but is inhabited by Uygur people, who are Muslims, and from that point of view I have to admit that, in a way, I felt it was easier to understand them than the Chinese. Then, as I told you, the closer I got to the Mediterranean, the more I had the impression that I knew people better. I knew we shared more similarities, and these people, too, had a more specific perception of the West than the Chinese did.

The recognition of the various paths that compose the Silk Road mirrors the problematic homogeneous perception that the West has often (had) of China and the East. In the

[55] Thubron, interview by Stefano Calzati, May 27, 2013, in person.

making of the experience, then, China and Asia's complexity is challenged. Yet, eventually this is done only for reasserting the effective cultural distance that keeps the author (and Europe) away from China.

La traversée de la Chine à la vitesse du printemps and *Le Bénarès-Kyôto*

The second pair of monomodal travel books discussed are *La traversée de la Chine à la vitesse du printemps* (2003) and *Le Bénarès-Kyôto* (2007) by French author Olivier Germain-Thomas. The first book is a brief recollection of the author's journey through China before reaching Japan (his final destination), and after having already visited India, Thailand and Vietnam. In fact, what Germain-Thomas recounts in *La traversée* is only one leg of the broader journey – from Varanasi to Kyoto – which he later narrates in *Le Bénarès-Kyôto*. While Thubron wrote two travelogues which dealt with China over a span of two decades, Germain-Thomas recounts in two different ways – in the short span of four years – the same journey. Hence, it becomes interesting to investigate how the representation of his experience in China has changed when being transposed from one book to the other. Germain-Thomas spoke of this during the interview:

> I have to confess to you that nobody had really noticed that what I wrote in the two books refers to the same journey. […] As far as China is concerned, I wanted to write a book immediately after the end of the journey, when the memories were still fresh in my mind. So I wrote *La traversée* very quickly. Then, I devoted myself to the writing of *Le Bénarès-Kyôto* and when it came to writing the chapter on China, I […] tried, for every episode, to describe it from a different perspective: a lightened perspective.[56]

The aim here is to understand, in terms of the chronotope of the narrative, what such a different perspective consists of and to connect it to a discussion of the book as a medial format. To begin with, it is possible to note that *La traversée* is filled, mainly in the first chapters, with a number of comparisons between India – which the author knows well – and China, a country completely unknown to him. Here is one example:

> I reach the 1,000 caves where I find, carved in the stone, the Greek face of Guatama, which came directly from Gandhara following the Silk Road. Nobody bows. Everyone is attracted by souvenir shops. Have these people lost their sense

[56] Olivier Germain-Thomas, interview by Stefano Calzati, January 22, 2015, Skype.

of holiness, or has this always been a matter of appearance? In Lourdes, there are also plenty of souvenirs. Am I biased by India?[57] (Germain-Thomas 2003: 37-8; author's translation)

This quotation is emblematic of Germain-Thomas's need to represent China through India. As Anthony Pagden (1993) notes, travellers tend inevitably to frame the unknown in terms of the known, according to a "principle of attachment" that helps them to make sense of reality. As a matter of fact, Germain-Thomas confesses at the very beginning of the book that "I do not know China, although I am fairly acquainted with Asia"[58] (13; author's translation). More generally, the travelogue is configured as a personal research on China and, in particular, on its arts and spiritualism:

> While preparing this crossing, I tried, with the help of books and meetings, to approach Chinese thought. I was astonished to realize how much it resonated with the evolution of my quest to find a spiritual path that is not constrained by dogmas.[59] (Germain-Thomas 2003: 13; author's translation)

From this passage, the two most important threads of the book can be extrapolated. On the one hand, the author manifestly acknowledges that, because he did not know anything about China he collected a lot of information before the departure. This effort finds proof in the book's many quotations from various sources – religious, philosophical and historical – which, as seen in Chapter 1, strengthen the travelogue's hypertextuality. On the other hand, the above passage shows that the author's journey is largely conceived as an interior quest. The narrative, then, unfolds two complementary chronotopic trajectories: vertical and horizontal; internal (the traveller's personal quest) and external (the crossing of China). The title of the book helps to support this same idea: the journey, indeed, is presented as a movement through China, from south to north, but the time of travel, its duration, is not objectified, but a relative one, namely the spring blossom season. The title, then, configures from the outset a chronotopic frame which is a negotiation between the external world (China) and the internal self-discovery of the author; or better: the author

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57 "Je me dirige vers la grotte des Mille Bouddhas où je retrouve, sculpté dans la pierre, le visage grec de Gautama venu du Gandhara à travers la Route de la soie. Personne ne s'incline. On s'affaire devant les vendeurs des souvenirs. Ce peuple a-t-il perdu le sens du sacré ou ne l'a-t-il jamais eu qu'en surface? Les souvenirs aussi pullulent à Lourdes. Suis-je déformée par l'Inde?"

58 "Je ne connais pas la Chine, alors que je connais assez bien l'Asie."

59 "Préparant cette traversée, j'ai cherché, avec livres et rencontres, à aborder la pensée chinoise. J'ai été étonnée de constater qu'elle était en résonance avec l'état de mon évolution à la recherche d'une voie spirituelle qui ne fut pas embrigadée par des dogmes."

looks at China from an intrinsically subjective temporal perspective. The important aspect to stress is that these two movements – vertical and horizontal – are not given or linear; rather, their development is constantly interrogated. The author's possibilities to understand something more about China as well as himself are repeatedly challenged. For example, at times, Germain-Thomas admits a certain uneasiness when in the Middle Kingdom because he feels fully disoriented:

> Differently from all the similar situations I went through since Varanasi […] here, in this place, I feel transparent, but my spirit, unfortunately, is unable to derive from it a glimpse of that reality that the thickness of my self obstructs.[60] (Germain-Thomas 2003: 15; author's translation)

At other times, instead, he manifests a more positive attitude:

> I guess that a part of me (where is pride in the flavour of the unknown?) is definitely not unhappy to cross China without the possibility of communicating. I enjoy the fall into a state of *wuwei*. Marrying the movement of the train and the minutes listed following its rhythm.[61] (Germain-Thomas 2003: 78; author's translation)

Eventually, the conclusion of the book offers to the reader a sort of pagan agnosticism. Indeed, the author's interior quest and China's understanding reach a suspended state:

> I feel *at home* within India's foreignness, while here I cannot feel free, as if the ideograms and the hieratic statues of sanctuaries have sealed themselves and erected a barrier.[62] (Germain-Thomas 2003: 86; author's translation)

> I've tried my best to seize certain aspects of Chinese thought; I have found in it something to work on […] Evidence: China changed me, but I wouldn't be able to say how.[63] (Germain-Thomas 2003: 122; author's translation)

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60 "Contrairement à toutes les situations semblables vécues depuis Bénarès […] là, sur cette place, je me sens d'une transparence dont mon esprit, hélas, n'a pas su profiter pour saisir cette réalité que l'épaisseur de moi obstrue."

61 "Je divine qu'un part de moi (où est l'orgueil dans ce goût de l'inconnu?) n'est point trop mécontente de traverser la Chine sans pouvoir communiquer. Je m'amuse à me mettre dans un état de *wuwei*. Epouser le mouvement du train et des minutes égrenées à son rythme."

62 "Je me sens chez moi au sein de l'étrangeté de l'Inde alors qu'ici je ne puis me laisser aller, comme si les idéogrammes et les statues hiératiques des sanctuaires refermées sur eux-mêmes dressaient un barrage."

More broadly, in what appears as a typical postmodern gesture, it is the possibility of knowing in itself that is contested by Germain-Thomas. Any form of understanding of oneself and the Other can only be temporary and subjective; travelling and writing, as practices, can only trace potential paths of knowledge, or hint at viable interpretations, but never provide the traveller or the readers with certainties. This was Germain-Thomas's opinion in this respect:

> I could say that the journey is a mirror that tells me where I am in my life's evolution and also where my heart is. […] The interesting thing, however, would be to ask: is there anything that the journey has revealed to me about myself that I ignored? Well… I don't know, *non lo so*…

Four years later Germain-Thomas publishes *Le Bénarès-Kyôto* in which he narrates the whole journey accomplished through Asia. The author pointed out in the interview that, as far as the organization of the journey is concerned, "I had simply bought a flight ticket Paris-India, then another one from Japan to Paris. Then, I improvised." Overall, then, the journey was spatially and temporally pre-defined, but all that lay in-between was left to chance, the only criterion being to always remain on the ground. Even from a cursory reading, it is easy to realize that the chapter dedicated to the Middle Kingdom contains the same episodes recounted in *La traversée*. Yet, the way in which they are narrated is very different. Let's take the two following passages about Suzhou as an example:

> The bike, a small café where to warm up with a soup, a grimace in front of a dish of duck skins, the birth of the night by the Wumen bridge that crosses the circular canal, the desert alleys of the hotel, a dream of the Kingdom of the dead, characterised by a several abstracts shapes. […] On the packed train an old man with a Cistercian smile cuddles for several hours a fifteen months baby who is likely his nephew. He makes jokes, sings a song and repeatedly kisses his hand. In the carriage inspectors, sweepers, and sellers of socks or biscuits succeed one another.[64] (Germain-Thomas 2003: 91-2; author's translation)

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[63] "J'ai essayé d'attraper le mieux que je pouvais certains aspects de la pensée de la Chine; j'y ai trouvé de quoi avancer. […] Une évidence: la Chine m'a changé, mais je ne saurais dire en quoi."

[64] "Bicyclette, estaminet où se réchauffer avec une soupe, grimace devant un plat de peaux de canard, naissance de la nuit au-dessus du pont Wumen qui enjambe le canal circulaire, l'hôtel aux couloirs déserts, rêve du Royaume des morts habité d'une multitude de construction abstraites. […] Dans le train bondé, pendant plusieurs heures, un home âgé, avec un souris cistercien, câline un enfant d'une quinzaine de mois

> Leaving Suzhou, I realized that, despite the rain, I was happy to ride my bike along the canals, to see the peonies blossoming, to be welcomed by tufts of bamboos, to follow a ray of light on the water until the stinky mud. The morning train is packed, the seats are uncomfortable, the landscape is flat. Where to get off? At what time? […] Wuxi, Changzhou, Nanjing (at 13h 42); the train remains empty.[65] (Germain-Thomas 2007: 149; author's translation)

The first passage is characterised by a more subjective and possibly poetic representation of the visit to Suzhou; one in which dream and reality intermingle and both space and people acquire a fairy connotation. In his second travelogue, Germain-Thomas opts for a more factual recounting of the journey in terms of the places visited, the things done and the passing of time. The point to stress here is that such a change is due, at least to an extent, to the fact that the chapter on China is part of a greater travel experience (and narrativization): an experience, indeed, that is no longer solely evoked but is textually included within the book. The author explained this as follows in the interview:

> Overall, I believe it is a matter of the literary organization of what I wanted to say. I usually start with an idea in mind and try to find the best way to organize what I want to say. It is a matter of literary balance.

The balance of which Germain-Thomas talks is reflected, for instance, in the fact that the various comparisons between India and China which characterised *La traversée* are reduced to a few in *Le Bénarès-Kyôto*. Insofar as India is effectively described in the book, the author is no longer compelled to anchor his impressions about China to this more familiar country:

> In *La traversée*, which I wrote immediately after the end of the journey, I felt the need to insert some quotes, possibly because I also had more space at my disposal: you see, it is always a matter of balance. In *Le Bénarès-Kyoto*, instead, I tried to look at the time spent in China from a different perspective, as I said before. So I

qui doit être son petit-fils. Il lui fait de farces, lui chante une chanson et sans cesse prend sa petite main pour l'embrasser. Dans la voiture se succèdent de contrôleurs, des balayeurs et des vendeurs de chaussettes ou de galettes dans des uniformes impeccables."

[65] "Quittant Suzhou, je me souviens que, malgré la pluie, j'ai été heureux de pédaler le long des canaux, de voir des pivoines éclore, d'être accueilli par des touffes de bambous, de suivre dans l'eau un rayon de lumière jusqu'à la boue nauséabonde. Le train matinal est bondé, les banquettes inconfortables, les paysages plats. Où descendre? A quelle heure? […] Wuxi, Changzhou, Nankin (à 13h 42), le train se vide."

effaced many quotes because I felt that they had lost their meaning, their literary function.

At the same time, as the narration of the crossing of China is anticipated and followed by the tale of the other legs of the journey, both the internal quest and the subjective chronotope that framed *La traversée* lose much of their strength. For example, many of the quotations from religious and spiritual texts that enriched the first travelogue are eliminated. In *Le Bénarès-Kyoto* the journey is presented as a sequential, linear experience. This means that the reconfiguration of the temporal axis triggers a different representation of space. Firstly, in *Le Bénarès-Kyoto* the recounting of the crossing of China is no longer connected with the arrival of spring; rather it is punctuated by a south-north geographical trajectory. Hence, China is reconceived as the stage of the whole travel that stretches between Vietnam and Japan. Secondly, descriptions of the physical traversing become more prominent due to the erasure of those personal reflections which, in the former book, were mainly related to the interior quest of the author. Overall, then, *Le Bénarès-Kyoto* dispels the subjective/interiorized chronotopic frame of *La traversée* in favour of a more factual representation of the experience, triggered, as the example above the train schedule suggests, by an objectification of the time of travel. This, as the words by Germain-Thomas corroborate, is due at least in part to the re-inscription of the bit dedicated to China into a broader narrative that clearly defines its point of departure and arrival in terms of both space and time.

Il mondo oltre il fiume dei peschi in fiore and *Cartoline da Pechino*

The third comparison involves two Italian travelogues, written by Sino-Italian author Bamboo Hirst. The first one is *Il mondo oltre il fiume dei peschi in fiore*, it was published in 1989 and it contains several pictures; the second one is *Cartoline da Pechino*, it was published in 1998 and it is only composed of written text. Through this comparison the chapter starts addressing the possibility and consequences of extending the notion of chronotope to visual elements such as photographs. In order to do that, a brief theoretical excursus, which departs from Roland Barthes's (1981) *Camera Lucida* and moves towards Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) *Reading Images*, is demanded.

In his famous *Camera Lucida* Barthes argues that the "unicity" of photography lies in the fact that the referent (what is represented) comes to adhere to the reference (the form of photography). In other words, Barthes confers upon the technological apparatus of photography such a power (indeed, a power of transparency), whose force – its "punctum of intensity" (1981: 90) – is to eternally testify "that-has-been" (1981: 77). The main problem with such an argument is that Barthes seems to imply the uncontested presence of a referent to which photography smoothly applies: a referent that is there to be photographed and immortalized. However, as Baudrillard (1994: 2), among others, has thoughtfully noted, photography can only give back a modelling of the grasped instant, not solely because there is no ur-referent to which photography may refer, but precisely because photography is a medium and, as such, cannot return but a mediated representation. It is in this spirit that Jacques Rancière (2009: 15) affirms that "in order to preserve for photography the purity of an affect, Barthes erases the very genealogy of the *that was*." By hypostatizing the transparency of photography, Barthes turns the instant into an absolute, but in so doing, he overlooks that "that-has-been" always conceals a history of its own. Put differently, each photograph bears in itself the chronotopic conditions that "created" the referent for the camera and for the act of photographing. Barthes, then, is right when he states that each photograph has an "adventure" (1981: 19), noting, in regard to the picture of a schoolboy, that "it is possible that Ernest is still alive today (but where? How? What a novel!)" (1980: 84). Indeed, what a novel! Unfortunately, however, Barthes does not develop this argument any further, as if "scared" by the depth and breath that may open beyond the punctum.[66]

In *The Work of Mourning* (2001: 57), Jacques Derrida develops Barthes's argument, eventually acknowledging the fact that, because photography has a "*dynamis*", its punctum is "drawn into metonymy." Put differently, what Derrida suggests is that Barthes's punctum – which represents the unicity of each photograph – always stands for something else: it is a window opened onto a time-space that unfolds beyond itself. Derrida also argues that "remaining as attentive as possible to all the differences, one must be able to speak of a punctum in all signs, any discourse, whether literary or not" (2001: 53). Despite such a claim, it is remarkable that Derrida subsequently considers these differences between words and images to be incommensurable. Indeed, he claims that photography as a technological apparatus attests to "the failure, or at any rate the limit, of all that which, in language, literature and other arts seemed to permit grandiose theories on the general suspension of the Referent" (2001: 53). So, in photography, the referent cannot – out of necessity – be suspended but always shown and manifested. As seen, however, what photography performs is the illusion of presenting us with the referent. So, as soon as one acknowledges its deceptive effect and stresses, by contrast, its work of mediation between

[66] To be sure, at stake it is not much the writing of Ernest's novel, but the recognition of the punctum's depth, that is, the multiple possible novels that the picture can entice (see further below in the chapter).

the eye and the world, then also the incommensurability of photography and literature fades away. The differences, if any, lie rather in the (different) logics that literature and photography follow in order to "create" their own referents. Literature – here, semiotics can help to elucidate the point – relies on a syntagmatic logic: that is, on a progressive accumulation of the words. In fact, it is this accumulation that makes the referent appear as constantly deferred (i.e. "suspended" according to Derrida). As Maurice Blanchot (1983: 9) magnificently contends, "the literary experience is an ordeal in which what we are able to do (for example, see) becomes our powerlessness; becomes, for instance, that terribly strange form of blindness which is the phantom, or the image, of the clear gaze – an incapacity to stop seeing what is not there to be seen." So, literature creates a referent that is not there; or, rather, it is metonymically there but constantly postponed. Words do have a visual potential (i.e. they can be read paradigmatically, such as Chinese characters or futurist poetry), but its salience has often been standardized by the publishing apparatus, so that the referent can only be imagined (i.e. inferred through the endless accumulation of words). On the other hand, images work paradigmatically, in the sense that they display their signs spatially; they (superficially and apparently) spread the referent before our eyes. However, this does not mean that the referent is *already* there; rather, as Derrida (2001: 53) himself notes, "by the time – at the instant – that the punctum rends space, the reference and death are in it together." In other words, the (paradigmatic) visual spatialization of the referent sanctions its very disappearance. It is for this reason that it becomes crucial to recognize the chronotopicity of photography, as photography discloses the value of "that-has-been" only in relation to its chronotopic frame (of both the apparatus and the represented world). On this same line, Henri van Lier (2007: 18) warns that "the photograph is made up of indices. Therefore, its unity of construction and reading is not the decision of the *trait*, which is characteristic of signs [i.e. painting], but of the *littoral*." What van Lier suggests is that, similarly to written texts, photographs are also a "lazy machine" (Eco 1979: 24) that necessitates not only an observer but also an interpreter, in order to be decoded. Photographs should not only be looked at but also "scrutinized", as Barthes (1981: 105) himself suggests (i.e. read syntagmatically). This latter idea is intended to be a visual close reading aimed at revealing the chronotope of the instant: a chronotope that relates to both what is represented and its mode of representation. "Photography," Rancière (2009: 11) argues, "exploits a double poetics: it refers to the legible testimony of a history written on faces and objects, and pure blocs of visibility, impervious to any narrativization." It is, then, the paradigmatic organization of the referent in photography that pushes its chronotope out of focus. In this respect, Gunther Kress and Theo van

Leeuwen's (1996) *Grammar* for the analysis of multimodal texts is strategic here for investigating the syntagmaticity of photography. Specifically, it is the discussion on visual modality, intended as the representation of "people, places, and things as though they are real, as though they actually exist in this way, or as though they do not – as though they are imaginings, fantasies, caricatures, etc." (156), that will be followed as a guiding paradigm.

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Hirst was born to a Chinese woman and an Italian diplomat in Shanghai and lived in China until the age of 13, when she was obliged to leave the country due to political insecurity. She then moved to Italy, where she still lives and works. In 1988, after many years of absence from her native country, Hirst decided to take a journey around China: "Now that I am about to land [in China]," she notes in the preface to the first book, "many good and bad memories come back to my mind."[67] From the outset, then, the travelogue is configured as a journey *à rebours* on the track of the author's own memories. In fact, the presence throughout the text of a discourse of nostalgia, defined by Debbie Lisle (2006: 214) as the failing quest for (lost) authenticity, signals the difficulty of the author to recompose the fracture between the old China of her youth and the present China of her journey. The following passage, which recounts Hirst's hopeless search for the old Saint Joseph Convent in which she grew up, is emblematic:

> "This was your courtyard; there in the middle stood the Virgin Mary with Bernadette," said Father Jong. […] Despite these explanations, I cannot orient myself; everything seems displaced. I cannot locate with precision where classrooms or the chapel were. […] I simply take some photos, hoping these and others will help me to rebuild the puzzle of my memories.[68] (Hirst 1989: 137; author's translation)

This extract is also worthwhile in another respect: Hirst mentions that she took pictures of the places supposedly to trigger her memories. As a matter of fact, several pictures enrich the whole book; however, these are not the ones actually taken by Hirst but rather by the

[67] "Ora che mancano solo pochi minuti al nostro appuntamento mi ritornano in mente, incalzanti, ricordi belli e brutti."

[68] "'Questo era il vostro cortile, nel mezzo c'era la Madonna con Bernadette', dice padre Jiang. […] Nonostante queste spiegazioni non riesco comunque a orientarmi bene; adesso tutto mi sembra spostato, non riesco a localizzare con precisione le aule, la cappella. […] Mi rasssegno allora a prendere delle foto, sperando che forse mi aiuteranno in seguito a ricostruire insieme alle altre il puzzle dei miei ricordi."

well-known Italian photojournalist Giorgio Lotti, whose name appears on the book cover. Interestingly, Hirst never refers to Lotti's presence during the journey or him working alongside her, so that readers do not know if Hirst and Lotti travelled together. In the interview, Lotti clarified the point, revealing that the photographs were taken on different occasions over a period of 16 years: "As a reporter for *Epoca* and *Panorama* [two popular Italian magazines] I went to China 12 times between 1974 and 1990."[69] This means that, although these photographs are roughly contemporary to the journey accomplished by Hirst, they nonetheless refer to another China; they recount another story and presuppose another chronotope. In this respect, it is possible to suggest it is precisely the chronotopic discrepancy between Lotti's photographs and Hirst's journey that helps, among other visual choices (discussed below), to close the gap between the old China remembered by Hirst and the present China in which she travels. Indeed, as Lotti noted, "even if we had worked together, this would not have made any difference because Bamboo was writing about her journey to China, binding this experience to the memories of her childhood. My photos are more recent than the time of her childhood and older than the time of her journey. To be sure, I have been working in China at a time when progress had not transfigured cities yet, and this helps find a consonance with Bamboo's journey; however, the China I photographed during the 1980s is different from that of Bamboo's childhood." Such a chronotopic discrepancy is even more crucial in relation to China, which, as Lotti remarks, underwent radical socio-political and urban changes during the last three decades of the 20th century. Indeed, while Hirst recounts a journey that took place after the reopening of Chinese borders to visitors, Lotti's photographs relate to a China that was still inherently isolated from the rest of the world. From this point of view, if one considers the conditions that presupposed Lotti's activity, all his photographs acquire an even deeper documentary relevance insofar as the historical time that frames them is that of an enforced limitation to access to, and mobility in, China. Thus, it can be suggested that besides (and even beyond) Barthes's "that-has-been", these photographs testify above all the very *possibility* for the photographer to be *there*.

Lotti also revealed that he let Hirst decide which photographs to insert in the book: "Although I am the author of all the photos, the decision about which ones to include could not be mine because I did not know what Bamboo wanted to write. As a consequence, I preferred to leave to her the choice of the photos. What I did was simply to make available to her a certain number of pictures. On that occasion, choosing good photos was not the only criterion; they also had to be appropriate." The notion of

[69] Giorgio Lotti, interview by Stefano Calzati, February 17, 2014, Skype.

"aptness" is central here for a number of reasons. First of all, it hints at the idea that although the book takes *de facto* the form of a collaboration between Lotti and Hirst, the photographs are, to a certain degree, functional to the writing. As a consequence, Hirst is considered as the sole person who could (try to) give a visual representation to both her travel experience and her memories. This, however, holds true only based on a theoretical plan. Indeed, when asked to provide some elucidations on the rationale that guided the selection of the photographs, Hirst noted: "It wasn't actually me who selected the pictures but the publisher and, to be frank, I was quite angry when I discovered that many scenes of which I write were not represented visually."[70] From such a declaration, the extent to which the photographs only indirectly refer to what Hirst wrote emerges more clearly (as well as the fact that a book is already the result of a cooperation between author and publisher).

From here, two lines of inquiry open. The first one interrogates the potential level of distortion, if not falsification, that photographs bear with respect to the text, in particular when their inclusion transcends the will of the author. The second one, which is deeply intertwined with the former, investigates how photographs and text relate and negotiate the chronotopic discrepancy discussed above. In regard to the first line of inquiry, it is useful to remember that contemporary travel writing is a genre intrinsically bound to the necessity to be accurate towards actuality and to the pretention to be trusted. Far from depending on universal parameters, the texts' reliability is determined by cultural values which can change over time and in space. In his *A Social History of Truth* (1994) Steven Shapin contends that each culture builds its own concepts of accuracy, credibility and reliability based on "the expectation that knowledge will be evaluated according to its appropriate place in practical, cultural and social action" (xxix). Here it is argued that the discussion about travel writing's reliability requires being not only socio-historically contextualized but also connected to the use that the authors make of the medium and its supported modes. As seen above, pictures convey the illusion of an intrinsic veridicity: the irreplaceable witnesses of that-has-been. When it comes to travel writing, while it is true that pictures can be regarded as documentary proof of the accomplishment of the journey – here Bettinelli's case discussed in Chapter 1 is exemplary – they can also represent, in Jan Baetens's words (2005: 237), "a real menace to the ontological specificity of fiction", that is, to the syntagmatic construction of the referent performed through written language. In this sense, photographs seem less subjected to the control of the author, insofar as "in a single blow, that which is presented to us is so immediate, so non-mediated, that within the shock itself there is a *loss of mastery* [emphasis added]" (van Lier 2007: 29). This line of

[70] Bamboo Hirst, interview by Stefano Calzati, April 28, 2014, in person.

reasoning, however, holds true only if one considers the visual and the verbal as two incommensurable systems. By contrast, once one acknowledges the permeability of the paradigmatic and syntagmatic logics in the construction of the referent, thus advancing a more profound reading of visual elements (and language), then what photographs and words do is simply disclose different horizons of reliability. These horizons can diverge, but also be consonant, so that words and photographs cooperate in filling their respective gaps and voids (what Eco [1979] calls "white spaces").

So, the questions in relation to *Il mondo oltre il fiume del peschi in fiore* become: how do photographs and text relate? How do they negotiate the chronotopic discrepancy that affects them? First of all, it is notable that the pictures are quite numerous (49 out of 248 pages) and are interspersed throughout the whole book. In this sense, illustrations and words entertain a balanced relationship within the book in that neither of the two modes dominates the other. Moreover, the very decision to alternate words and pictures creates a strong relation between them and blurs any neat authorial distinction, *as if* the work were accomplished organically from the outset. In particular, this (deceptive) effect of (chronotopic) concordance is pursued in three ways. Firstly, captions are quotations taken from the text, so that what is described with words by Hirst is simultaneously immortalized in pictures by Lotti. Secondly, Hirst rarely thematizes the time of travel. As Werner Wolf (2005: 433) reminds us, the visual options available to an image for rendering the passing of time are rather limited: "the reasons for the narrative 'deficiencies' of single pictures derive […] from the limitations of the pictorial medium as a whole. For instance, […] principles of causality and teleology can be only inferred." Hirst's vague notations on her movements around the country, in favour of a static representation of the journey, help the words and pictures to find deeper assonance. For example, each chapter is dedicated to a city – Beijing, Suzhou, Qufu, Shanghai, etc. – while the narrative transitions from one chapter to the other – that is, the author's progression from one place to the other – are rather elliptical, and it is only at the very end that Hirst informs us that the journey lasted six weeks. One could say that the episodes recounted constitute still frames connected by the binding of the pages and onto which it is primarily the book (as a medial format) to impress an overarching coherence. Thirdly, the chronotopic concordance between words and images has to do with both what is represented in pictures and their mode of representation. To start with, all the pictures are in black and white. The effects that this choice has on what is portrayed are worth discussing. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996: 253) contend that "black and white" kindles a neutralization of affection, indicating "'what might be' rather than reality" (Kress and van Leeuwen: 159). While their analysis is certainly defendable, another – although complementary – interpretation is possible. The black and white works here as a blurring of the chronotopic coordinates of what is represented, so that scenes are "epicized", so to speak: they are secured within a visual desaturation, which annihilates any temporal (and historical) precise anchorage. The notion of "epicization" is derived from Bakhtin ([1937] 1981). In his work Bakhtin argues that the epic is a genre in which, differently from the novel, the chronotopic coordinates are fixed. Hence, the chronotopic world of the epic is immutable and its characters, who bear a highly symbolic meaning, are disjoined from any concrete evolution; they can only fulfill a destiny which is transcendent and beyond their will. On the contrary, in the novel the characters "take flesh", they are in control of their lives and through their actions they can evolve. This makes the chronotopic world they lived in very specific and concrete.[71] From these premises, in the present context the term "epicization" refers to the rarefaction and freezing of the chronotopic coordinates internal to the "represented world" (be it verbally or visually represented). Put differently, scenes are "epicized" when they lack precise space-time coordinates, thus turning the scenes into bi-dimensional, static frames (Calzati 2013b). In Lotti's pictures, the recourse to the black and white contributes to the sense of space-time suspension which is typical of the epic. This acquires an even stronger relevance when thinking that, for Lotti, "it is through colours that we can recreate movements and evolution in photography." In order to better exemplify this point, it is fruitful to look at two examples. The first one is the following picture (Figure 29) found on pages 120-1 of Hirst's book:

Figure 29. A peasant (reproduced with permission)

[71] On this issue, refer also to Georg Lukács's *The Theory of the Novel* (1971).

A standing young woman is immortalized while seeding a ploughed field by hand. She wears humble clothes. The figure of the woman and the earth under her feet are in focus, although it is not possible to identify her physiognomic traits due to her bent position. The rest of the field, both in the foreground and in the background (which takes up the majority of the photo's space), is out of focus. As Kress and van Leeuwen (1996: 161) affirm, "by being 'decontextualized', shown in a void, represented participants become generic, a 'typical' example'." In this sense, the impossibility of recognizing the woman's traits and surroundings confers upon the whole picture a highly symbolic (i.e. epic) connotation. The woman comes metonymically to stand for all Chinese who are and have been peasants. However, because she is portrayed alone, the picture could also bear a counter-message, one that relates to China's recent history. Namely, the photograph could point to the progressive abandonment of the countryside, which happened in particular after 1978, when Prime Minister Deng Xiaoping opened China to "the socialist way to capitalism" (which also led to those deep architectonic changes in the cities mentioned by Lotti). Thirdly, if one relates the photograph to the text next to it, a further interpretation can be proposed. In the book the picture is juxtaposed to Hirst's encounter with a woman called Blu Cielo ("Blue Sky"), who recounts to the traveller her hard times in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution when many people were "re-educated" through work in the countryside. The photo, then, comes to refer to a much more precise and traumatic event: the migration to the countryside that a whole generation of Chinese people was forced to experience around the whole country in the 1960s. The point to stress is that independently from the interpretation one decides to favour, all of them are *possible*, insofar as they are presupposed by the chronotopic horizon embedded either in what is represented, in its (epic) mode of representation, or in the relation between text and image.

A second example is useful to show how also other visual and compositional strategies – beyond the black and white – can be read chronotopically. The selected picture (Figure 30) is found on page 70:

Figure 30. The mosquee in Xian (reproduced with permission)

This picture is taken from an angled perspective and shows the close-up of an elderly man who is seated by the doorstep of an old mosque. In the foreground are four pairs of shoes, while in the back, past the figure of the man, is a second entrance to the mosque, in front of which nobody stands. The caption tells readers that the mosque is the one in Xian, thus providing a precise spatial settling. Concerning perspective, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996: 135) suggest that when a scene is framed from an oblique angle, it usually conveys a lack of participation of the photographer to the scene. In the present case, although it could be said that the perspective works as a form of respectful distance from the scene, another interpretation of its effect is advanced. Again, the difficulty with identifying the traits of the old man confers upon him a symbolic connotation: he stands not only for all Chinese Muslims but also for the millenarian history of Islam in China. This is, indeed, supported by the caption, which states: "the Great Mosque was built 1200 years ago" (Hirst 1989: 71). At this point, depending on whether one dwells upon what is represented *per se* or upon China's history, the photograph can convey two diverging messages. On the one hand, by focusing on the man's age, one could think that Islam, in China, is now followed by old people only and, at any rate, by a restricted number, because in the foreground only four pairs of shoes can be seen. On the other hand, if one contextualizes this image historically – when it was taken: mid-1970s – it could also come to testify a fresh wave of Islam, at least in comparison to the years of the Cultural Revolution, during which all forms of religious belief were persecuted and many places of worship were destroyed. It is according to this latter interpretation that the use of the perspective acquires a specific chronotopic function. The photo's oblique angle drags the viewer's gaze from the old man down to the pairs of shoes in the foreground. Certainly, there are "only" four pairs of shoes, but more striking than the number is the absence that looms over them – the absence of the people who wear them. The *presence* of these shoes brings with itself the phantasmagorical *absence* of their owners, whose stories, it is suggested, come to stand for the history of Islam in China. In fact, the oblique angle works as a *mise en abyme* of Islam's vicissitudes in the country: in the background, the absence of believers in front of the second door stands for China's forceful secularism during the Cultural Revolution; the old man in full shot witnesses today's rebirth of religious worshipping; and the shoes in the foreground attest to the strengthening of this renewal, leading to believe, from the point in time of the interpretant, that Islam has continued to grow. The caption corroborates this interpretation by stating that "The Great Mosque is currently under renovation but functions are being celebrated. An old Muslim tells us that devotees are a few hundred and during the Cultural

Revolution the mosque was reconverted by the Red Guards into a farm."[72] More generally, what this second example reasserts is that each photograph, far from being a transparent impression of the instant, always embeds a chronotope that equally pertains to the subject represented and to its mode of representation. Photography, then, cannot help but mediate between the eye and the world, thus opening up a hermeneutical space that can be investigated following diverse chronotopic interpretations.

Now the analysis moves on to the second travelogue by Hirst. *Cartoline da Pechino* (1998) was published a decade later than *Il mondo oltre il fiume del peschi in fiore* and released by Feltrinelli publisher instead of Mondadori. According to these data, one might expect to read a different story, a different journey; yet it is possible to attest that the great majority of the episodes recounted in the two books are the same, though Hirst claimed to have undertaken a second journey to China.[73] So, where do the differences between the two travelogues lie? First of all, *Cartoline da Pechino* breaks with the representation of the journey as a quest to retrieve the author's childhood. The main example, in this respect, is that no mention of the old Convent Saint-Joseph Convent is provided. The discourse of nostalgia disappears and references to old China work as vague historical background whose investigation does not constitute the personal stimulus for travelling.

Secondly, passing on the visual mode, *Cartoline da Pechino* does not present any photographs. When compared with the previous book, this exclusion has consequences for both the chronotope of the narrated experience and the structure of the whole book. In particular, the tendency in the previous book to avoid references to the passing of time and to present the journey as a collection of frames is here radicalized. Chapters are not only shorter, but are also titled after a theme, rather than to a specific city: "The House of Tea", "The Trees' Doctor", "The Art of Living", "Around the Temple", etc. In this way, the space-time frame of the journey is further dissolved and readers are confronted with an even more abstracted representation of Hirst's experience: a representation that is chiefly a sequence of aperçu – indeed, "postcards", as the title suggests – rather than the recounting of a "proper" travel. This interpretation is also supported by Hirst, who claimed in the interview that she wanted to describe "scenes rather than the unfolding of a journey." The narrative, then, takes on much of the epicization of the pictures: the overall experience is parcelled into small episodes which are disconnected not only among them in space, but also from any precise time, either personal (Hirst's memories) or collective. More than in *Il*

[72] "La Grande Muraglia è attualmente in fase di restauro, ma può già accogliere i suoi fedeli. Un vecchio di fede musulmana ci racconta che i fedeli attualmente sono alcune centinaia e durante la Rivoluzione Culturale la moschea fu impiegata dalle Guardie Rosse come una fattoria."
[73] Hirst, interview.

mond oltre il fiume del peschi in fiore, it is the book, as a medial format, to provide the structuring coherence of the whole work. The point is that, by keeping in mind the previous book, one cannot help but feel (i.e. see) the absence of Lotti's contribution among the pages that comprise *Cartoline da Pechino*. The pictures, indeed, not only offered the reader the chance to undertake a visual journey around China (and among the rubbles of Hirst's memories), but they connected the stories recounted and they filled the gaps of the narrative, by providing a visualization of the "represented world" that often worked as an allegory.

At this point, one could also wonder about the extent to which *Cartoline da Pechino* can be considered a travelogue. The answer is in the affirmative for two reasons. First of all, although the unfolding of the travel is rather ethereal, the reader can infer its development in various occurrences. In the following passage, for instance, Hirst condenses into a few lines her move from Suzhou to Shanghai:

> The first houses of Suzhou appear close to the railway; soon the train slows down and passengers begin to gather in the hallways, pressing up against the doors. I know that Blue Sky will stay in the "Venice of China" only for a few days. […] I tell her that I would like to meet her again in Shanghai when she gets back. We organise our meeting at Cathay Hotel, at tea time […] This time at Cathay, our roles seem reversed…[74] (Hirst 1998: 36; author's translation)

The second reason comes from Hirst herself. When asked how she would define these books, she straightforwardly responded: "no doubt these are travelogues – they derive from two trips I took in China; the only difference is the way in which I have shaped the material at my disposal." To deny such generic affiliation, then, would be misleading. However, it remains controversial why the recounting of two different journeys coalesced into the same narrative and on this point Hirst did not provide further comments. From the point of view of the present work, however, what is striking is the impact that the conception of the book as either a monomodal or multimodal work can have on the chronotopic frame of the "represented world".

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[74] "Le prime case di Suzhou sfilano ai lati della ferrovia; ben presto il treno rallenta e i passeggeri cominciano a raccogliersi nei corridoi, ad ammassarsi attorno agli sportelli. So che Blu Cielo si fermerà solo pochi giorni nella 'Venezia della Cina' […] Le dico che mi farebbe piacere incontrarla di nuovo al suo rientro a Shanghai. Ci diamo appuntamento al Cathay Hotel per il tè, la domenica successiva. […] Questa volta al Cathay i ruoli mi sembrano invertiti."

The first part of this chapter discussed how the chronotopes of travelogues change according to what is included into the books (Germain-Thomas), the passing of time and the spatial extension of the journey (Thubron) and the decision of including (or not) pictures (Hirst). In all three cases, it was the physicality of the book that eventually dictated the organization of the narrative and constituted its outer boundary. This means that the book, as a medial format, embeds a specific chronotope and this is projected over the narrative, usually modelled as a linear, teleological work "with a beginning and an end" (Bakhtin: 255). Now the analysis moves towards travel blogs to investigate what the chronotope of this medial format is and how it shapes the (chronotope of the) travel narrative. However, as a form of transition between the two realms, attention is directed first to the peculiar case of *Carnet di viaggio: Cina* (2005) by Italian traveller and artist Stefano Faravelli.

As the title of the book suggests, readers are presented here with a typical *carnet de voyage*: the format is that of a book, but printed on its pages are a number of paintings – watercolours, to be precise – that have been transposed – reprinted – from the author's sketch book. Therefore, the book itself is already the outcome of a remediation process. The paintings inserted in *Carnet di viaggio: Cina* are the result of a creative process in which the hand of the artist not only copied the scene but also recreated it through an artistic effort that is different from the mechanical system of reproduction at the base of photography. The extent to which these two realms are incommensurable is explained well by van Lier (2007: 18), who notes that "it is the minimal unit of the works they give birth to that is different: paintings are constituted by traits susceptible of being interpreted as signs, while photography is made of indices, that is, mere signifiers." In this sense, Faravelli's work is certainly closer to the artistic book than the literary travel book. However, his pictorial illustrations are also accompanied by handwritten words that either describe them or recount episodes of the journey not represented visually (Figure 31).

Figure 31. A watercolour taken from Faravelli's carnet (reproduced with permission)

In this respect, the carnet offers the chance not only to explore the chronotope of an artistic travel book, but also to discuss, *a priori*, the distinction between monomodal and multimodal books. In the previous chapter it was shown that the distinction between blogs on platform and individual ones is more contested than one could expect from a cursory browsing of the Web, due to the interconnectedness of webpages. The same criticality also concerns monomodal and multimodal books. Indeed, as soon as we get closer to the text, we are confronted with the need to characterize more neatly where the border between one mode and the other is traced. Bateman (2008: 104) argues, for instance, that "just as accounts of language, its graphological form, and punctuation can consider visual elements to function paralinguistically, we can also consider certain textual elements and formatting options to be paravisual." Pushing this reasoning further, it could be said that any written text is always, at the same time, verbal *and* visual, as writing is in itself a visually based act (see Mitchell 1994). The point is that, nowadays, the process of production for books has been highly standardized and the salience of paravisual elements has been brought, so to speak, to the margins of signification. This means that in printed books the visual appearance of letters and words does not carry any meaning. Yet, when one faces a book such as Faravelli's the border – or better, the threshold – separating verbal and visual modes is blurred. The figure above shows how in Faravelli's work the writing, which bears the subjective mark of the author's calligraphy, is at the same time an intelligibly discernible form of written language *and* a pictorial gesture.[75] Approaching (again) the writing to its

[75] It is in this respect that the book could be categorized – more than multimodal – as transmodal.

graphological form, in which the composition of the signifier can be susceptible of being interpreted, Faravelli's work represents a reminder of the fact that the line between monomodality and multimodality has not always been that clear. This, as will be discussed shortly, also has consequences for the chronotopic frame built by the whole book and within each page.

To begin with, Faravelli's work is not an unicum, but as he pointed out "it follows the tradition of the 'carnet' in which, on the one hand, words and images intertwine, overlap, blur; while, on the other hand, there is, in each plate, a co-presence of objects and personal experiences."[76] Hence, here too there is the canonization of a series of rhetorical features and practices that, in a way, make of the carnet a subgenre in itself. The pages have lost their typographic standardization; yet, they cannot be fully considered as paintings either, insofar as the writing (and the reader's effort to decipher it) plays a major role in them. In a way, the carnet mimics Chinese books because Faravelli's handwritten words have a meaning not only as signifieds, but also as signifiers. At the same time, because in each plate the author mixes calligraphy and drawings, the pages' meaning can no longer be derived from a paradigmatic reading and a collation between words and images. Rather it requires a more organic – syntagmatic – approach. The merging of these two modes produces what could be called a "synaesthetic work", in which the pleasures of the visual contemplation and the reading can never be fully separated. Calligraphy regains its aura of uniqueness, and the watercolours find in the words that accompany them not only anchorage but also, more radically, fuel for their internal narrativity (thus bypassing the images' congenital limitedness in rendering the passing of time as discussed above, see Wolf 2005). From these premises, it is already possible to foresee different levels of reading of Faravelli's plates: at the macro level, there is the linear reading dictated by the succession of the book's pages. At the level of the single page, each plate "tells" an autonomous story that is rather independent from those that precede and follow it. It is as if readers were faced with endogenous and exogenous narratives – one that pertains to the medial format and one that pertains to the content of the single plate – and each one of them creates its own chronotopic coordinates.

Remaining on the level of the single page, the reader/viewer is confronted with a "thickness of meaning" that is due to the mode of representation – watercolours – as well as to what is represented. First of all, Faravelli overtly acknowledged that his decision to paint watercolours was due to the fact that "I favour aestheticism over historicism and from here the choice of watercolour derives, a technique that tends to blur boundaries, so

[76] Stefano Faravelli, interview by Stefano Calzati, April 15, 2014, in person.

that the eye has no anchor bolts." Faravelli escapes from visual realism (which characterises the greatest majority of travel photographs) and, in so doing, he obliges the reader to pause over each plate, to delve into it and to traverse the variety of symbols and signs that are presented. At the same time, the author made clear that such technique disjoins the scenes from precise space-time coordinates with the overt intention "to frame the plates in a mythical space-time dimension". In other words, watercolours contribute to "epicize" the represented world, insofar as its chronotopic axes become ephemeral. This effect is further strengthened by the lack of (verbal) notations regarding the time of travel and by the difficulty to retrace the whole itinerary that Faravelli followed in China. In fact, it is only the chapters' subdivision of the book that gives a general sense of the main places visited: "Beijing", "Urumqui", "Chengdu", "Yunnan", "Hong Kong". Even the map that opens the book (Figure 32) is a cartographic stylization of China that only conveys a general sense of the itineraries (emblematic is the use of the plural in the heading: "My Journeys in China"), without however providing a detailed temporal articulation of its stages:

Figure 32. The opening map in Faravelli's carnet (reproduced with permission)

In line with Faravelli's passion for medieval *mappae mundi*, China is not a space but it returns to be a place; symbolism dominates over (geographic) objectivism. Hence, all along the carnet readers are presented with self-standing scenes (i.e. disconnected among them) which are crammed with symbolic signs, indeed "almost archetypes."[77] The problem, as the author himself acknowledged in the interview, is that by saturating the carnet with symbols

[77] Faravelli, interview.

– which are more easily recognizable by the readers but tend to provide a generalized image of China (e.g. the Great Wall, the Gobi Desert and Hong Kong's skyline) – he risked reproducing a stereotyped vision of the country. It is in this respect that Faravelli specified that his plates, although painted while travelling, are nonetheless reworked during the journey and after its conclusion, by drawing upon a series of objects and other texts that go beyond the travel experience: "it is in the assemblage, that is, in the gaze that I project onto the work as a whole, that lies, I believe, originality." In fact, it is such assemblage that the reader is required to disentangle. Often, visual elements are distributed randomly on the page: they follow convoluted, non-linear paths and the calligraphic writing that blends with them functions only partially as a guide – a reading principle – for their comprehension. So, not only is the calligraphy rather obscure to decipher but the whole page demands to be dwelled upon, investigated, explored. The reader is left to wander with the eyes and the mind around each page, performing a multi-trajectory, syntagmatic reading that builds connections among elements that are sometimes distant in space and time (i.e. the frame of the single page, the whole book, the time of the reading and the internal time of the narrative). Without doing this, the reader would be "simply" staring at a painting, without understanding its internal story.

In order to provide an example, the analysis now dwells on the plate represented above (Figure 31). The painting was done in Baishitai, near the city of Zhongdian in the province of Yunnan (south-west of China). All these pieces of information have to be retrieved by going back in the book to the page that introduces the section dedicated to Yunnan. The page, indeed, does not provide geographic coordinates, so that the painting under examination is suspended in a sort of spatial void. The written text that contours the main central image helps to interpret what is depicted: "Baishiai means 'source of white water' and the source is really there! A magic corral, like the one of medieval fairy-tales, protects it. Trees are decorated with ashy scarfs and red ribbons that fluctuates in the wind" (Faravelli: 67). The central image, in fact, represents the water source. Although the painting is rather detailed, its purposely unfinished contours – which intermingle and overlap with the writing – reinforces the sense of spatial and temporal suspension of the scene, enticing the connection with the remote Middle Ages mentioned in the writing. This sense of chronotopic eradication is also stressed by the fact that all the other details – such as the face of the man on the left-top corner – are depicted over a white background, which, as Kress and van Leeuwen (1996: 166) remark, is symptomatic of a minimal degree of contextualization. The most interesting and paradoxical thing, however, occurs when one realizes that certain details within the page remain, so to speak, unexplained. Their visual presence already fulfils a creative function, but not one of which readers can trivially understand the meaning. Faravelli explained this in the interview: "Sometimes, I also like to let the people I encountered along the journey impress their own mark upon the text, be it in the form of a signature, a seal, a drawing or a few words." This passage projects a new light on Faravelli's work. Beyond the fact that his work questions, in each page, the border between verbal and visual, through the interview it became clear that his carnets also carry additional layers of meaning as material artefacts: "There is, in each plate, a co-presence of objects and personal experiences; in other words, the [watercolour] technique mixes together with some of the objects I have found during this and other journeys." This means that the creative assemblage does not only pertain to each plate, but it also involves the materiality of the carnet as a whole. This process, however, cannot be easily sensed by reading/enjoying the carnets, but requires the ultimate intervention of the artist's voice. In the plate represented above, for instance, one can see that the bottom-right corner is occupied by a square within which some symbols are depicted. The writing surrounding the square explains that this is a poem donated to the author by an old shaman whom the author met (depicted in the top-left corner). The point is that the writing on the page does not fully explain how to decode the symbols of the poem. Indeed, it was only when speaking with Faravelli that its meaning was fully explicated: it is a blessing to the author himself and his family (the stylized man on the left projects his power on the two figures on the right), as well as an auspice for wealth (the fish) and professional satisfaction (the symbols that surround the single figure at the centre). Ultimately, it appears that Faravelli is not afraid to reach the point in which the idea of reading his carnets becomes an always precarious practice; "understanding" his work, then, means to transcend the chronotopic horizon of each page and the whole carnet to get in contact – metaphorically and literally – with him. Through the conversation between the author and the reader the journey continues to actualize itself beyond the physicality of the book, so that each travel experience projects its spell onto the real world and coincides, more generally, with a global vision on the practices of travelling and the artistic gesture of "writing" about it: from the reading of the text to the reading of the world, Bakhtin's concluding remark about the possibility to think of the whole society in chronotopic terms finds here a realization.

The Chronotope of Travel Blogs

The analysis passes now to discuss the chronotopic features of travel blogs. Even before addressing a number of specific case studies, some preliminary considerations can be advanced concerning how the medial format affects the construction of the texts' space-time horizon. When it comes to investigate online travel narratives it is necessary to acknowledge a double articulation. From a textual perspective, all the accounts analysed in this thesis recount journeys that have been already concluded. Hence, both the experience and its narrativization are finished. Nonetheless, from a medial perspective, the conditions of the narrative's existence are, so to speak, always temporary. This is so because the possibility to update or change the blogs' content continues to loom over them even once the travel experience is over. One could say, then, that the chronotopic coordinates of the blog format are always open-ended (at least *in potentia*, Calzati 2013a). Furthermore, because a blog can be updated, either by adding new entries or by modifying/erasing old ones, its chronotope is unstable at the level of both the single entry and the whole website. More precisely, blogs are not (and cannot be) conceived as fully accomplished works, precisely because their *raison d'être* is that of being temporary and constantly updatable. While the book's physical finitude frames the chronotopicity of the work as something comprehensive and coherent, blogs do not have physical outer boundaries, only nominal ones (i.e. the URL). This, as we will see, also requires readers to accomplish an extra (reading) effort in order to recompose the text beyond the way in which it is presented on the screen. Walker-Rettberg (2008: 115) explains this well when she notes that "each post makes sense in itself, but read together the posts tell a larger story. That story is usually partial and incomplete and does not form a narrative whole." In other words, what is narrated in blogs responds mainly, if not exclusively, to the chronotopic rhythm imposed by the medial format upon the writing process, rather than to an overarching (preliminary) conception of the work.

Some of these considerations find proof in the first travel blog under analysis, *China 2014* (2014) written by American blogger BitByTheTravelBug, and found on the popular platform Travelblog.org. In itself, the title of the blog already provides a chronotopic frame, however general it may be. Once we access the blog such frame is further articulated: the blogger wrote seven posts about her two-week journey to China and each post reports the date and the place. So, we come to know that BitByTheTravelBug stayed in China from the 18th of May to the 1st of June and she dwelled the whole time in Beijing where she took some Mandarin classes (indeed, the main goal of the journey).

Before delving into the blog, it is useful to provide a brief analysis of the whole platform. Travelblog.org is currently one of the biggest travel blog platforms on the Web.[78] As such, if one wants to read BitByTheTravelBug's blog, s/he must either browse the

[78] From the "About" page it emerges that the platform counts more than 200.000 members and 700.000 blogs entries. According to Alexa Web analytics (www.alexa.com), the platform is among the 50.000 most visited sites on the web, making it one of the most popular travel-related portals.

whole platform or use the search box. In this sense, the platform – similarly to the others encountered – requires one to navigate through the variety of content provided and trace one's own reading path accordingly. As soon as one accesses the blogger's personal page (Figure 33), the platform provides a whole accountability of her activity. In the case of BitByTheTravelBug, the blogger only uploaded a picture of herself, while she left the space of the text blank. Then, on the right side of the page it is the platform that gives a set of data which concern, among others, the number of blogs written, the date in which the blogger joined the platform, her last access, her followers, and her forum points.

Figure 33. Image removed for copyright reasons

Here, as elsewhere, by publishing her own blog on a platform, BitByTheTravelBug agrees to partially delegate her self-representation to the platform. The way in which Travelblog.org does this is symptomatic of the "datafication" of the online experience as characterised by Morrison (2014), namely, as a shift from a "single-authored narrative understanding" of online writing towards "algorithmically-generated new items". In fact, Travelblog.org provides a chiefly quantitative characterization of BitByTheTravelBug's activity and, in doing so, it conceives of her persona as chiefly a platform user. This means that as far as travelling as a practice is concerned, very little on the personal page is disclosed about the "quality" of the journeys she accomplished. For instance, we do not know either where she went, or for how long. In other words, the chronotopic specificity of the blogger's travel experience remains unexplained.

When focusing on the blog it is possible to witness that the account complies with the typical (online) journal in that posts are organized according to a precise chronological sequentiality. At the same time, the basic chronotopic conception of the travel narrative, as a route covered in a certain amount of time (see Korte at the beginning of this chapter), is questioned. First of all, the account lacks an internal spatial trajectory, insofar as the experience is largely sedentary. Secondly, any thematization of the duration of the experience is lacking. Hence, the temporal framing is delegated to the posts' dates only. Each post recounts a specific episode that occurred in Beijing or in its close surroundings: the first day of class, the exploration of the capital's main landmarks, and a tour to the Great Wall. These episodes characterise the experience of BitByTheTravelBug as a touristic and educational one. More than that, however, the singling out of episodes as self-enclosed, independent events (one to the other) strengthens the idea of an account-per-snapshot. Such an account does not present an overall narrative cohesion among its parts; rather, it is the arrangement of the posts according to the objective time-date of the journal to dictate the chronotopic horizon of the experience. Emblematic, in this regard, is the fact that the blog opens and closes in a rather trenchant way:

> I made it to Beijing without any major hiccups. I did get a shoelace stuck in the people mover while my hands were full with coffee and an egg McMuffin. (BitByTheTravelBug 2014)

> The men tried to give us their noodles and baiju (strong Chinese liquor). We politely declined and waited for our own noodles. None of us got sick, but we found out the next day that 2 other students went there the day before and were sick for 2 days… guess we got lucky that time. (BitByTheTravelBug 2014)

The first few lines mention the blogger's arrival in Beijing, while the second quote constitutes the end of the blog. Both the beginning and conclusion of the blog are *in media res*. The blogger is not compelled to provide an introduction to the account, nor any concluding remarks, which could have helped the reader to contextualize the whole experience. The epicization of the narrative witnessed, in particular, in Hirst's second travelogue, is here strengthened. As a consequence the episodes recounted can be enjoyed as stand-alone pieces and it is the readers who are asked to recompose, *a posteriori*, the overreaching narrative frame. This latter aspect, which is connected to the reading practice and depends on how blogs are built, is even more evident in the following blog analysed.

Conoscere Pechino tra dinastie e imperatori (2013) is the heading of the first post dedicated to China by Italian blogger Flavia. The blogger has written a total of five posts about her trip to China – which according to the dates of the posts lasted roughly one and a half months, from 21st September to 5th November 2013 – and she published these posts on the platform Blogdiviaggi.com. As soon as one accesses the homepage, it is notable that the platform stresses the individuality of bloggers, urging them to provide a picture of themselves and a biographical note on the "About" page that gathers all contributors: "the beauty of this platform is that it is not a classical site or a travel guide", it is affirmed, "but it is OUR blog […] It is made *by travellers for travellers*…"[79] To support this statement, the platform offers two complementary reading paths to users: on the one hand, on the homepage it is possible to browse a world map and read all the posts about a given country. On the other hand, on the "About" page, one finds the profiles of all bloggers with a link that redirects to their travel experiences. Following this (latter) way, then, the browsing of the platform leads one to explore the website depending on the posts written by each individual blogger. What is most notable is that the posts published by each blogger – in this case Flavia – are not regrouped according to the travel destinations but following merely a reversal chronological order (Figure 34). It could be said, then, that the "topos" of the posts is in function of the chronos of the journey(s) and this comes to coincide with the whole (online) blogger's activity, thus transcending a specific space-time frame. On Flavia's page, for instance (Figure 34), the first post dedicated to China is preceded by an entry about Valley d'Itria in Italy, where she went roughly three months before, while China's last post is followed by a piece dedicated to Bavaria.

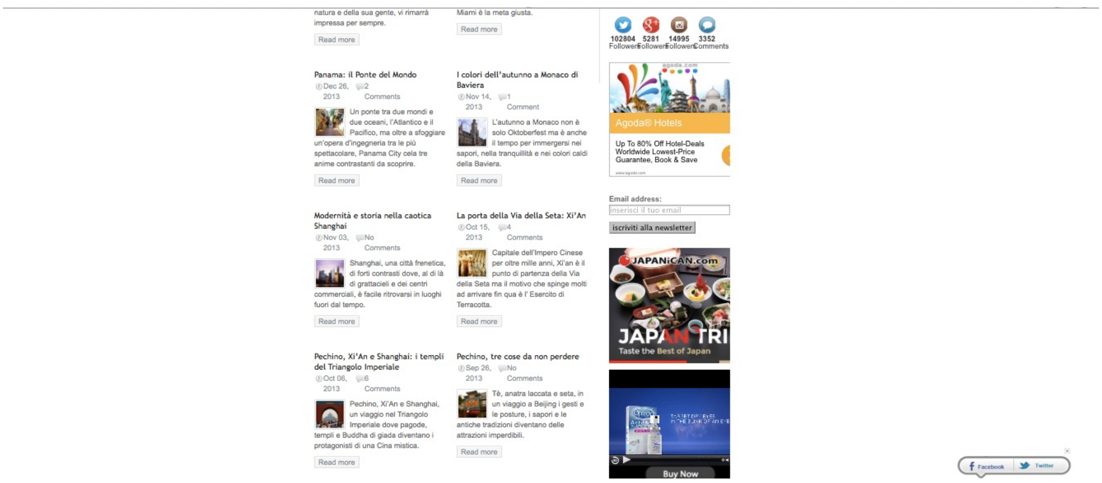

Figure 34. All the posts written by Flavia (reproduced with permission)

The fact that Blogdiviaggi.com is dominated by the diachronic, objective flow of time strengthens the authorial role of the blogger and reduces the importance of the destination; to count, above all, is the very principle of travelling and writing.

[79] "Il bello di questo blog è che non è il classico sito o la guida di viaggi […] è il NOSTRO blog è […] un blog *per noi viaggiatori da noi viaggiatori…*"

By reading Flavia's posts dedicated to China it can be highlighted that these constitute brief apercus about the places visited and are connoted by concise information in the spirit of travel guides. The following are two quotations taken from Flavia's post dedicated to Beijing:

> The capital is home to 20 million people and 5 million cars. Our first visit is to **Tiananmen Square which, being 44 hectares wide, is the largest in the world**. In the middle are a war memorial and the flag of the CPR…[80] (Flavia 2013; author's translation)

> The Sky Temple in Beijing is surrounded by 276 hectares of vegetation. The buildings have round shapes to symbolize the sky; in turn, these are inscribed in squared shapes, which symbolize the earth, according to Taoism. Prevailing is the blue of ceramics – also known as blue China – which connotes many buildings; but the number nine is also very important, which is recurrent in the buildings around all China. The number nine, indeed, stands for the emperor, so that, for instance, the number of steps to reach the building's entrance is nine; similarly, the number of tiles that compose the rounded floor is nine, and there are also nine ornaments surrounding the entrance and the exit.[81] (Flavia 2013; author's translation)

It is quite evident that these posts are largely composed of a series of objective information, or what Korte (2008: 35) calls "pauses": "In a pause," she notes, "we are presented with discourse, but not story; the most usual case is the descriptive pause." On Flavia's blog the descriptiveness of the pause is characterised by factuality. In this regard it is worth recalling Jan Blommaert and Jef Verschueren's (1998: 17-18) words concerning the construed discourse of "diversity" in the West: "the Other, always different and strange, exists timelessly and undisturbed, with their roots set firmly in one place, once and for all." Similarly, Edward Bruner (1991) contends that in tourism promotional materials travel destinations are usually presented as static. In fact, not only does Flavia's persona is

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80 "La capitale ospita 20 milioni di abitanti e 5 milioni di automobili. Prima tappa della nostra visita alla città la *Piazza Tian' An Men*: con i suoi ***44 ettari di estensione è la piazza più grande al mondo***."

81 "Il Tempio del Cielo di Pechino si trova all'interno di 276 ettari di verde. La zona monumentale è caratterizzata da strutture rotonde, che simboleggiano il cielo, inserite in strutture quadrate, che simboleggiano la terra, secondo quanto sostenuto dalla religione taoista. Ciò che prevale in questo Palazzo è il colore blu, detto poi anche blu Cina, delle ceramiche che ne rivestono alcuni tratti importanti, e il numero 9 che si trova ricorrente nei monumenti dell'intero paese. Il numero 9 infatti simboleggia l'Imperatore, ed ecco che il numero di gradini per raggiungere i palazzi è 9, il numero di pezzi di marmo utilizzati nel pavimento a cerchio è 9 e anche i paramenti posizionati sulle porte di entrata ed uscita dei templi sono 9."

abstracted, but also the datafication of the online experience witnessed on the platform Travelblog.org is projected here onto the account *per se*. This implies a further draining of the diegetic development of the account. This produces, again, an epicization of the narrative which results in a fragmented patchwork of pieces related to an array of "visits". More than on BitByTheTravelBug's blog, however, in Flavia's the epicization of the narrative is subservient to deliver touristic tips that objectify what is recounted, by making the blogger's subjectivity recede to the background of the text. Here, Theodor Adorno's (1991) warning about the kind of information delivered by classic mass media finds an apocalyptic actualization:

> The curiosity which transforms the world into objects is not objective: it is not concerned with what is known but with the fact of knowing it, with having, with knowledge as a possession. This is precisely how the objects of information are organized today. Their indifferent character predestines their being and they are incapable of transcending the abstract fact through any immanent quality of their own. As facts they are arranged in such a way that they can be grasped as quickly and easily as possible. (Adorno: 85)

The kind of knowledge conveyed by Flavia's blog is chiefly abstract and emptied of any internal development. As such, it is detached from its author and it acquires the force of a given. This idea will be further elaborated through the analysis of the next travel blog, written by US-American Emil.

Emil's Trip to China (2006) is an individual travel blog created with the CMS Blogger.co.uk. Emil went to China in 2006 with a group of colleagues: they journeyed around the country for a couple of weeks – from the 4th to the 20th of October – visiting the main touristic destinations. By scrolling the blog's homepage to the bottom, we come to know that the blog is built using the "dynamic views" template. It is this choice that makes it possible to permute the appearance of the blog according to various layouts, which are listed on the black bar just below the blog's heading: "Classic", "Flipcard" (default), "Magazine", "Mosaic", "Sidebar", "Snapshot" and "timeline" (Figure 35).

Figure 35. Image removed for copyright reasons

Then, further down, four more links – "Recent", "Date", "Label" and "Author" – allows one to perform other arrangements of the content (although these do not really produce sensible changes because Emil has written only one blog and has not labelled its posts). The possibility to change the layout of the blog is relevant within the present discussion because each one of them not only constitutes a stylistic choice, but impresses a precise chronotope upon the experience. Apart from the "Classic" design – which configures the typical central column filled with posts listed in reversal chronological order – it is notable that none of the other layouts displays the verbal and visual content of the entries. For example, the "Flipcard" design, which is the default one, shows 30 cards turned upside down and when the cursor passes over them, they reveal the date of the entry. However, nothing is disclosed about the content of the experience. Hence, the "Flipcard" layout disjoins space from time – we know the date of the entry but not the place – but, most importantly, its flipping features are more telling of the medial potentialities of the template to permute the appearance of the blog, rather than being subservient to the chronotopic framing of the travel narrative. In turn, these permutations also have consequences for the way in which the travel blog can be read. By presenting all the entries/cards in one screenshot, the Flipcard layout gives the possibility to the reader to choose how to "assemble" Emil's narrative, that is, the spatial and temporal order of the reading. Put differently: it is the (chronotope of the) reading that "creates" the (chronotope of the) genium. In this regard, the homepage of Emil's blog represents an exemplary case of what Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson and Eleanor Rosch (1991) mean by "enaction", namely that cognition and knowledge are prompted by action, rather than by predetermined configurations of the world. To see an object does not mean to recognise it, but rather to visually guide the action towards a goal. It is this kind of effort that makes online reading more serendipitous and fragmented, that is, directed not much towards a classic linear apprehension of the content, but rather to identify and isolate precise bits of text. Katherine Hayles (2012) speaks in this respect of "hyper-reading", intended as a reading whose logic is not paradigmatic and linear, but guided by a constantly changing time-space frame (which can be the page, a window, a section of a website, etc.). In other words, the platform exposes its own medial potentialities to such an extent to multiply the possible reading paths and to demand a syntagmatic reading to the reader.

For the sake of the analysis, the focus remains here on the Flipcard layout. By clicking on each card, a new window opens and presents readers with the text, pictures and comments. As each post is displayed within a different space, it is visually isolated from the rest of the blog. In the top-left corner of the new window, one finds two arrows that give the possibility of going back and forth between the entries, but one also simultaneously has the chance to change the design or to browse randomly the other posts that remain in the background (Figure 36).

Figure 36. Image removed for copyright reasons

Hence, the blog offers the possibility to perform *both* a paradigmatic reading – the post – and a syntagmatic reading – the browsing of the platform. This reasserts the idea, already discussed in Chapter 1, that the whole blog is nothing but a heterogeneous collection of pages that 1) are opened to a galaxy of other pages; and 2) exist only when they are actually reached. Consequently, the chronotope of the blog format is spatially inhomogeneous (a web, indeed) and temporally durative (pages exist only at the time of the visit). Now, if we focus on the posts of Emil's blog we can better understand how these features affect also what is told and shown. Here is the first post:

> Day 1 – An uneventful flight. We flew from JFK to Beijing on Air China on a Boeing 747. The plane was the smallest 747 we'd ever seen, as it only had 37 rows. About half the plane was walled off to use for cargo. Here's our entire alumni group in Tiananmen Square, looking at Tiananmen Gate [see picture below]. Our guides advised us against holding up our UNC banner, as police are more vigilant against perceived group protests with the presence of the Falun Gong... maybe at the Great Wall... (Emil 2006)

This post is significant in two respects. On the one hand, it has the function of introducing the whole blog and yet it does in a very peculiar way, that is, by plunging the readers directly into the story. Time references are missing (apart from the mentioning of "Day 1"), while space – the route – is condensed into a few words that dictate the trajectory of the flight, from New York to Beijing. Emil tends to epicize the narration and marginalize its time and space coordinates – both thematically and discursively – in favour of a purely documentary account. This becomes even more prominent when considering that this and also other posts are filled with everyday details that are considered, in Emil's own words, "uneventful". It is in this second respect that the quoted passage is also remarkable: by accounting for an "uneventful flight", the post overtly reveals the extent to which the chronotopic rhythm of the blog – its necessity of being constantly updated – affects the narrative, eventually turning "uneventfullness" into something relevant.

The pictures (and their chronotopic reading) also support these considerations. To start with, Emil's pictures betray an amateur approach to photography: the pictures are often displayed without any rigorous logic on the page, so their relation with the text appears to be arbitrary. Here, Susan Sontag's (1977: 9) claim that "travel becomes a strategy for accumulating photographs" fully resonates. Besides, both what is represented and the mode of representation convey the conventional use of the camera by Emil and the commoditization of the medium. Sometimes, the subject represented is not correctly framed; other times, a whole set of photographs reproduce the same scene from very similar angles, thus suggesting a tendency to favour quantity over quality. Moreover, many pictures reproduce touristic landmarks (e.g. Tiananmen Square, the Potala, Shanghai's Bund). In fact, not only the reproduction of these landmarks reasserts their having become touristic places, but the way in which they have been photographed is telling of the objectification to which these places have been subjected. Emil usually photographs them from a frontal perspective, one that, by zeroing the possibility of a *mise en abyme* of the *régard*, presents the scene in a plain, bi-dimensional form. This mode of photographing conforms to what could be called a "touristic chronotope" of the image in that the internal space and time of the "represented world" tend to be erased, in order to show things "as they are", or better, in order to show touristic places as everybody knows them. In his famous work on the *Tourist Gaze* ([1990] 2002) John Urry notes that photography has "constructed what is worth going to 'sightsee' and what images and memories should be brought back" (129). In Emil's blog the goal of photographs is not to "release the body from tiring and daunting travelling", as Jonas Larsen (2006: 245) suggests in relation to tourism and photography, but rather to entice travels by showing precisely those places that "everybody" can reach. More generally, all these aspects are indicative of the fact that the pictures bear here a predominantly repository function: they do not manifest a precise subjective gaze – the attempt to provide a personal rendering of what was experienced – but rather they are there to testify the accomplishment of the experience. The first picture (Figure 37) is particularly relevant in this sense because it shows from a frontal perspective the group of people with whom Emil travelled. Everyone is staring at the camera, an occurrence that Kress and van Leeuwen (1996: 118) label "demanding gaze" because it seems that the subjects ask the observer something.

Figure 37. Image removed for copyright reasons

So, what do they ask? One could say that this photograph (and the others portraying Emil and his colleagues) bear a strong self-referentiality: the time frame of what is shown is reduced to a single point in space, that is, China as a touristic place to be visited. The historical time of the pictures is zeroed in favour of a time that is exclusively the time of Emil's experience in China. Such a chronotope is, indeed, typical of tourism, intended as a practice that entails visiting places in series: "In one ride," writes Emil (2006) towards the end, "we were able to experience tourist China, urban China, and rural china [sic]. I will never forget it." From this statement, it is not hazardous to infer that, first and foremost, what the photographs on the blog implicitly ask the observer is: "See who we are! See *where* we are!" but also: "See what *you* could enjoy one day!" If according to Barthes photography testifies "that-has-been", here we are in the presence of a sub-case which attests to the "having-been-there" of these people (who are normal short-term travellers). As a consequence, the whole experience is turned into a touristic performance: pictures portray landmarks; the contrast between urban and rural places such as Shanghai's skyline and Guilin's inland, which by now have entered into the circuit of tourism, are the centre of the attention; even ethnic minorities are considered as people to be gazed at rather than to be engaged with. Exemplary is the fact that in the pictures that portray, for instance, Tibetan people Emil never appears together with them, suggesting the retention of a distance between observer and observed. China and the Chinese, hence, become objects of representation: they are presented through a precise touristic imaginary that annihilates any internal chronotopic trajectory – time is a fixed one and space is bi-dimensional – thus favouring a conception of the whole journey as a leisure experience that does not demand a plunging into the country, but only an external look at it. Here, the meaning of Kylie Cardell and Kate Douglas's (2016) words concerning travel blogs as a commoditized form of contemporary travel writing finds its full explanation: "just as travel loses some of the philosophical potential of journey as self-discovery," they note, "and as once exotic routes become ever more well-worn and accessible, so the travel blog now enacts a pro forma stability that threatens some of the individuality such sites originally traded on" (306). The paring postulated by Butor ([1974] 2001) between how one travels and the kind of writing produced seems once more confirmed.

As one last example, it is worth returning to blogger Becki, as the two versions (2012 and 2014) of her blog can highlight how changes in the conception of the travel blog as a genium can affect the chronotopic horizon of what is recounted. Both versions of Becki's blog are built upon a Wordpress Premium plan (i.e. they requires an economic investment) that, by allowing the optimization of various options related to the blog's performance (e.g. easier traceability on search engines, the use of HTML5 design, etc.), has relevant consequences for the fruition of the blog and its enjoyment by the reader. For example, it is possible for the blogger to customize the blog's content fully – which would have been unthinkable if she relied on a generic blog platform – by inserting "heavy" materials in the form high-resolution pictures and videos, or by integrating the blog with the on-going flow of her Facebook and Twitter updates. The presence of this multimodal and interactive content opens up the possibility of multiplying the ways in which such content is effectively enjoyed. In other words, such a variety of content promotes – and possibly exacerbates – the hyper-reading already discussed in relation to Emil's blog. For instance, not only can readers, at any time, browse through all the sections of the blog (which are found on the navigational bar), thus switching between a syntagmatic reading and a paradigmatic reading, but they can also click on Becki's Facebook or Twitter accounts and, in doing so, have access to her last updates. These options, then, lead to repeatedly reconfiguring the chronotopic horizon of Becki's experience. An emblematic example, in this sense, is the fact that Twitter, by allowing very fast updates, conveys the idea of an on-going flux of travel episodes that radicalizes more than the blog's posts the apparent eventfulness of the reporting (i.e. everything becomes relevant). Therefore, by exploiting the connectivity granted by social networks, Becki pushes to the extreme the rhythm imposed by the blog format onto the travel narrative (which is ultimately broken down into minimal parts, i.e. tweets).

The fragmentation of the chronotope of Becki's journey(s) occurs both at the level of the whole website and when reading the posts dedicated to China. To begin with, the homepage appears since the outset as a puzzle of different heterogeneous pieces. For instance, on the old version at the date of the 30th of April 2014, one could read an entry on London criminal spots, a review on Kensington Palace, four entries concerning German destinations (namely Erfurt, Weimar, Potsdam and Berlin), an entry on the benefits of renting an apartment on vacation and one with tips on snowboarding clothing. This leads to suggest that, similarly to Flavia, the chronotopic horizon of the blog comes to coincide with Becki's entire online activity, independently from where she goes and how long the journey takes. Moreover, similarly to BitByTheTravelBug, Becki's travel account dedicated to China is eventually dispersed into a variety of unrelated posts, so that if readers really want to follow the Becki's peregrinations in China, they must browse the blog, or use the search box. This is because Becki tends to present her travels as unbound experiences in terms of both time and space: being a professional globetrotter, she can go where she wants whenever she wants. This (chronotopic) conception is very different from the "normal" touristic trip, which usually has precise dates of beginning and end, or the loop "home-away-home" (which will be discussed in the next chapter). By contrast, Becki's experience seems governed by a (romantic) "free wandering lust" which echoes Bettinelli's self-representation as the eternal traveller. As a consequence, any effort to retrieve an overarching coherence among Becki's stories is doomed to fail, precisely because there is no second-order architecture (either on a rhetorical or medial level) that encompasses the posts of the blog. In particular, such epicization of the travel narrative(s) is reinforced in two ways.

As seen in the previous chapter, the posts rather than narrating the stages of her journey in China constitute self-sufficient episodes which are concluded by an off-the-record commentary that seals them off from the others. Moreover, in the older version of the blog the posts were dated only by day and month, so that it was already quite difficult to retrace the whole itinerary followed by Becki in her "indefinite Round the World adventure", as one can read in the "About" page. This aspect, however, becomes even stronger in her new blog where posts' dates are completely erased. The stress is all on the present, but this dimension is not rooted, as Blanchot (1983: 29) mentions with reference to the literary journal, in the immanent and irreversible "movement of writing in time, in the humble succession of days whose dates preserve the routine." Rather, it is an absolute present: an ethereal time, disjoined by any rigid sequential logic.

The aspect in which Becki differs greatly from other bloggers is the visual. The pictures uploaded within each of her posts are consonant with the blogger's effort to always provide an alternative look at the country she visits. For instance, even when she goes to tourist places, such as Beijing, she tries to avoid major landmarks and to avoid the tourist gaze in favour of a more personalized point of view on China.

Figure 38. A picture of hutongs on Beck's blog (reproduced with permission)

If Emil tended to (re)present China in a very axiomatic way – on one side the developed metropolis (such as Beijing and Shanghai) and on the other side the poorer regions (Tibet) – in Becki's case, instead, such a contrast is embedded within each photo: it is applied to the subject and its mode of representation, rather than being the result of a juxtaposition. So, for instance, Beijing is symbolized by the hutongs (Figure 38) rather than by the Forbidden City of the Great Wall. Moreover, in the photograph that portrays the hutongs one can see the humbleness that characterises these houses, but also – contrary to what one could suppose – the fact that middle-class people live in there; one sees old dwellings in front of which new motorbikes stand; and one sees garbage randomly thrown next to windows finely embellished with plants and flowers. Besides, it must be noted that the majority of the pictures are devoted to the Other. The Chinese, indeed, dominate the scene, and when Becki appears in the photographs, she is often among locals. In this sense, the (touristic) "having-been-there", which connotes many of Emil's pictures, is here diluted showing a deeper engagement with the people encountered. Finally, some notations can be made on the photographs' mode of representation. Pictures generally suggest a fair knowledge of the medium by Becki, insofar as they are all well-framed, have a good light balance, present a varied array of subjects and match the text. This means that 1) the blogger has not uploaded the pictures randomly, but took care of the selection; and 2) the display of the photographs does not respond to a mere logic of accumulation but to an organic arrangement alongside with words. Furthermore, it is possible to note that although the photographs adhere to the contemporary idea of visual "naturalism", conceived by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996: 158) as "how much correspondence there is between the visual representation of an object and what we normally see of that object", they nonetheless manifest a degree of appropriation and re-elaboration of the subjects' mode of representation by Becki. The sporadic recourse to black and white, for example, far from conveying a neutralization of affect as suggested by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), or an epicization of the "represented world" as it was the case with Lotti's works, is symptomatic of Becki's attempt to produce the subject, rather than merely reproducing it. The blogger does not hesitate to make use of the camera as a means of mediation of and towards the chosen subject, trying to escape the touristic chronotope.

Conclusion

Complementing the analysis in Chapter 1, the formal and semantic features of travel books and blogs were investigated here through the lens of Bakhtin's ([1937] 1981) chronotope.

This concept was particularly well-suited for two reasons. First of all, travel writing is a genre presupposed by a physical and metaphorical displacement (the journey and the writing). In this sense, travel books and blogs are geniums in which the coordinates of space and time belong to both the represented world and its mode of representation. Secondly, the Russian intellectual himself, in the last pages of his work, hinted at the possibility of extending the concept of chronotope beyond the texts to the medium that "carries" them. The chapter argued that the book and the blog, as different medial formats, present specific chronotopes. At the same time, the chronotope was also applied to the visual realm, proposing the chronotopic analysis of pictures (multimodal books and blogs) and pictorial illustrations (Faravelli's carnet).

From here, the intra-medial and inter-medial analysis showed how travel books and travel blogs "interpret" the travel writing genre differently. The comparison between three pairs of travel books highlighted the role played by the book, as a physical artefact, in dictating not only what is included in the text, but also how the account is shaped. It emerged that, however rhapsodic the thematization of the chronos and topos of the journey may be, the book functions as an overarching architecture that literally keeps the narrative together. In travel blogs, instead, we witness the epicization of the narrative, that is, the predilection for the recounting of brief episodes that are chronotopically disconnected one from the other. In this case, the blog, as a media format, does not structure the text; rather, it asks readers to perform, to various degrees, a hyper-reading that mixes paradigmatic and syntagmatic logics of apprehension of the text (and of use of the medial format). The epicization of the accounts manifests, in turn, an objectification of the "represented world" and a datafication of the whole (travel and writing) experience. In fact, travel blogs are usually conceived for a precise readership (i.e. other bloggers and/or tourists). Therefore, it could be said that, on the one hand, travel books embed comprehensive narratives that, so to speak, provide readers with a vision of the traveller's experience in China (e.g. the challenges, the surprises, the confirmation of certain imaginaries, etc.). In doing so, travel books tend to fulfil the readers' desire to travel to the extent that all that has to be experienced is in the book. Travel blogs, by contrast, offer readers with a parcelled and fragmentary picture of China, which is mainly composed of hints and suggestions. Hence, travel blogs nurture the desire to travel, being grounded on the (silenced) assumption that "anybody can do it" and "anybody can write about it". In this regard, the following chapter will address more closely the pragmatic side of the travel writing genre, discussing how travel authors and bloggers travel *and* write through a number of interviews conducted with them.

Chapter 3

Unpacking the Genre: In Dialogue with Travel Writers

Looking at the travel writing genre from a pragmatic perspective means, on the one hand, considering travelling and writing as practices that not only give birth to the literary work but also anticipate, surround and follow it. On the other hand, it is necessary to explore and unpack the interplay between these two practices, in order to overcome a purely textual approach to the travel writing genre. Methodologically speaking, the analysis provided here relies on the interviews conducted with the contemporary travel authors and travel bloggers surveyed and puts these interviews in relation with the final works of these writers. In this way the texts enter into dialogue with the writers' voices, so that it becomes possible to highlight convergences and discrepancies between what the writers say about their activities (i.e. their ways of writing and travelling) and what the finished works effectively comprise. Specifically, the analysis: 1) delves into that grey area that precedes and follows the "landing" of travelling and writing on a particular medial format; 2) addresses the much-debated distinction between "traveller" and "tourist", on the one hand, and that between "amateur" and "professional" writers, on the other; and 3) questions and widens the interstitial border separating *in loco* and "itinerant" travel experiences, or also, the loop "home-away-home".

As mentioned in the Introduction, travel writing started to attract academic attention around the 1970s, when literary studies began to host an increasing number of theoretical interventions from a variety of other fields. Since then, travel writing has been addressed as a "politicized" (in a broad sense of the term) literary form embedding a hegemonic gaze directed towards the other, that is, those people who were invariably silenced. These studies (among which, Pratt 1992; Lisle 2006; Huggan 2009; Edwards and Graulund 2011) have certainly the merit of reframing travel writing within the broader political, cultural and ideological context that fuelled them. For instance, many of these studies have correctly pointed out the extent to which contemporary travel writing depends upon and unfolds a "romanticized vision" of travelling and writing, which implies the erasure of the practical conditions that are behind the very possibility of travelling and writing. "Much of this [travel] writing," Debbie Lisle (2006: 10) notes, "would have us believe that the increase in mobility brought about by globalisation results in the equal movement of people, goods and ideas around the world. […] The idea that 'everybody moves freely' in a globalised world is a fallacy." Besides this inflated conception of travelling and writing, to be idealized is also the figure of traveller, who often emerges, in contrast with the disdained figure of the tourist, as a solitary and eclectic person: "some travellers," Thompson (2011: 124) notes, "will make great show of the extent to which they journeyed 'off the beaten track', thereby avoiding tourists and the infrastructure that support them." These tendencies characterise much of 20th century travel writing. Yet, with the steady growth registered by the tourism industry since the aftermath of World War II[82] the canonical distinction between tourist and traveller has become less and less tenable. Sure, sill today some travel authors (pretend to) distance themselves from mass tourists, either inflating the freedom they enjoy, stressing the search for authentic places, or recounting extremely adventurous tales. However, more and more they come to terms with tourism, by resorting to different ethical approaches. The "self-conscious engagement with global modernity," Graham Huggan (2009: 6) points out, "has resulted in several new, or at least reinvigorated, forms of travel practice. These include practices attached to specific forms of 'responsible' tourism (ecotourism, humanitarian tourism, spiritual tourism)." This means that "travel writing can no longer take refuge in the classic distinction (tourist/'native', local/foreigner, etc.) on which it previously depended" (2009: 4). These observations are certainly valuable for any serious attempt to understand contemporary mobility in relation with the travel writing genre. However, insofar as these observations chiefly focus on the texts as finished works, as literary artefacts, they overlook the practices that underpin the texts. By contrast, the analytical dialogue established here between the texts and the interviews aims to transcend the literary work *per se* and to explore the genesis of travel writings. Kevin Hannam, Mimi Sheller and John Urry (2006: 13) explain this point well when they contend that "there is a complex relationality of places and persons connected through performances" that "need to be examined in their fluid interdependence and not in their separate spheres (such as driving, travelling virtually, writing letters, flying, and walking)." It is exactly the relationship between two of these performances – the practice of travelling, on the one hand, and the writing that derives from it, on the other – that is of interest here. Hence, it will become possible to assess how travel authors and bloggers conceive of travelling and writing; or also: the motives behind their travels and the strategies behind their writings, as well as how they think of themselves in relation to both practices.

[82] This growth is also signalled by the statistics of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), according to which in 2012, for the first time, more than one billion tourists travelled worldwide (http://media.unwto.org/en/press-release/2012-12-12/international-tourism-hits-one-billion).

The Writing Process

To begin with, let us consider the writing process adopted by travel authors and bloggers. This will shed some light on how these writers represent themselves in the texts as well as in the interviews, leading to an understanding of their own perception of the writing as a professional and/or amateur activity. Secondly, building on the synopses of the texts provided in Appendix, to be addressed will be the travelling practice with the goal of investigating the reasons behind travel writers' journeys and what fuels the idea itself of travelling.

All the interviewed travel authors affirmed that they take notes *while* travelling so that they can be accurate and not forget important details. Colin Thubron, for instance, stated that: "I take notes, all the time […] My memory is not particularly good, and I need to take notes in order to remember."[83] At the same time, almost all the authors mentioned the need to take a rather long time to write the whole manuscript once they are back home. It usually takes "about a year" for Colin Thubron, while it can takes "up to four years"[84] for Italian writer Bamboo Hirst. French author Constantin de Slizewicz, instead, adopts a rather heterogeneous strategy: "first of all comes the time during which you digest the experience and you write the book in your mind," then "because I am usually caught up in several projects I prefer to dedicate sessions, slots of time, to the writing."[85] De Slizewicz's strategy, then, implies a long gestation, but this does not require a full-time dedication to the writing. This is why, ultimately, the author does not think of himself as "a person who focuses exclusively on what I write." As for travel artist Faravelli, we have seen in the previous chapter that, despite defending the immediacy of his creations, which are depicted in loco, he does not disdain to work through his carnets in different phases, so that the "writing" – here in a broad sense – encompasses the artist's whole life. The only exception with regard to the need to take some time for the writing is represented by Germain-Thomas, who, concerning *La traversée*, said that he wrote it very quickly just after the journey, when "memories were still fresh in my mind."[86] However, the French writer also mentioned that *Le Bénarès-Kyôto* demanded much more time to be completed. Therefore, it could be suggested that all travel authors acknowledged, to various degrees, the importance of letting the time pass as a gesture that allows to mediate between the self and the

[83] Colin Thubron, interview by Stefano Calzati, May 27, 2013, in person.
[84] Bamboo Hirst, interview by Stefano Calzati, April 28, 2014, in person.
[85] Constantin de Slizewicz, interview by Stefano Calzati, July 17, 2014, Skype.
[86] Olivier Germain-Thomas, interview by Stefano Calzati, January 22, 2014, Skype.

experience; a mediation that, while not being technologically dependent (unless one thinks of body and memory as technologies), selects and shapes what is going to be written. This means, from a pragmatic point of view, that while their writing is certainly rooted in a precise travel experience, it nonetheless calls upon a reworking (and recollection) of this same experience, which can only be accomplished at a certain distance from the events. In this sense, Paul Fussell's argument that travel books have to make constant reference to actuality (1980: 203) can only be intended as a cross-reference to those "actual" notes that anticipate the writing and work as anchorage for it. Yet, such anchorage necessitates a reworking that is already, *per se*, a *mise en abyme* of the experience. This is even more so if considering that the recording of the events is always a subjective act that implies processes of selection as much as deletion. Hence, it is not much a matter of exclusive options (factual travel accounts vs. fictional travel accounts) but of a whole spectrum of possibilities opening up. As Thubron acutely noted, "there are two kinds of diary: one that triggers your memory and one that almost takes the place of memory because it is extremely detailed." This means that there can be different degrees of accuracy and factuality, spanning from a dutifully precise travel account to one, as travel writer Bruce Chatwin (1988: introduction) points out, in which "the word 'story' is intended to alert the reader to the fact that, however closely the narrative may fit the facts, the fictional process has been at work."

More generally, the interviews brought to light the complexity of the temporalities of travelling and writing: far from being linear and consequential practices, their overlap and interpenetration are much thicker than a textual analysis might lead one to suppose. This interpenetration can produce as much a synergy as a mutual negation of the practices. Not only, indeed, is the passing of time a form of mediation but also the choices of what to write and how are, at once, a confirmation and a negation of the experience. To a certain extent, then, the writing overwrites the travel on which it depends. This, as we will see shortly, is explained well by Italian blogger Gattosandro Viaggiatore.

In fact, the most interesting remarks about the writing process are those that pertain to travel bloggers. From the interviews, it became clear that the need to put some distance between the event and its recollection concerns travel bloggers too, despite the fact that they use a medium that favours, due to the collapsing of the publishing processes, immediate, daily-based writing. Almost all the travel bloggers interviewed said that they dedicate a discrete amount of time to rework the notes taken while on the road. Ataritouchme, for instance, argued that "After a trip, I try to get right on with [the writing], but it often takes a long time. Sometimes it's nearly a year after I've travelled. This actually works out better: things you think so important to share in the moment aren't actually that important, and you can spare them down or cut them out completely."[87] Ataritouchme suggests that the passing of time is not only important but necessary for his writing, insofar as it allows him to apply to his notes a selective process that eventually makes them worth remembering. In his case, then, the writing immediately follows the experience – or is parallel to it – but it takes some time for the notes to be uploaded online. Italian blogger Gattosandro Viaggiatore, on her part, affirmed that she writes once she has returned home for two reasons: "It takes a lot of time to be precise and include all the information for each place, the correct links and to verify the information in order not to give incorrect advice. Moreover, writing when I am back allows me to live the journey a second time, and this is a great sensation."[88] On the one hand, the long span of time dedicated to writing is functional to the fact-checking of the information provided, so as to be as useful as possible for other bloggers and travellers. Time, rather than diluting memories, is required precisely to make them clearer and more accurate. On the other hand, it is worth noting that Gattosandro Viaggiatore conceives of the writing as a means to go back: it allows her to retrace the experience and to live it a second time. The writing is in itself a journey that, by skipping the temporal and psychological lapse separating the blogger from what-has-been, permits her to relive the experience.

The only exceptions in this respect are bloggers Becki and Robjstaples. Having turned her whole life into an endless journey around the world, Becki is urged to regularly update her blog wherever she is, precisely because her travel experience has neither a point of departure or end. In her case, the sole mediation between the experience and the publishing of the posts is represented by the tweets and Facebook's updates that parallel her blogging. Robjstaples, instead, is a British blogger who spent in China a whole year teaching English. Then, at the end of his experience, he spent a few months travelling around the country. He is the only blogger that overtly stated to be writing while travelling, to the point that the two practices almost coalesce: "The travel blog was a new experience to go alongside that of travelling and living outside of my home country for an extended period of time. It was based on notes I made as I travelled about what I was thinking – one might think of it as photographs of my state of mind."[89] Robjstaples's words testify that the writing became part of his journey and this is so because the journey was a rather long experience (about three months). Hence, similarly to Becki, he felt it "natural" to write and he updates the blog whenever he had time. It is also remarkable that he defined his posts as

[87] Ataritouchme, interview by Stefano Calzati, July 3, 2014, email.
[88] Gattosandro Viaggiatore, interview by Stefano Calzati, July 8, 2014, email.
[89] Robjstaples, interview by Stefano Calzati, August 28, 2013, email.

"photographs" of his mood, reasserting implicitly the idea of the epicization of the narrative discussed in the previous chapter, but also the idea of photography as a non-mediating apparatus which the online writing tends to approach.

With the exception of Becki and Robjstaples, by reading the interviews with the travel bloggers, a legitimate question concerning the discussion about the medial chronotope of blogs arises: if, indeed, bloggers tend to write in the "old way", that is, by taking a long time before uploading their posts, does this mean that the blogs' chronotope is, in a way, foresworn? Was it not the case that the online medium impressed over the writing precise chronotopic features in terms of rhythm, syntax, style, etc.? Clarification is needed. It could be that writing in the "old way" while making use of the new medium constitutes a form of (conscious or unconscious) resistance to the chronotopic features of the blog as a media format. Hence, travel bloggers would pretend to take their own time, *despite* adopting a medium that, in theory, reduces the distance between the experience and the writing. To an extent, this would constitute an opposition to the overwhelming flow of content that new media favours nowadays. At the same time, however, the very fact that posts are often very short, bare in syntax and not rarely filled with typos – that is, they manifest features that are typical of online writing, despite being the result of a rather long period of reflection – reasserts, rather than undermines, the strength of the blog chronotope, even beyond such hypothetical resistance. Travel blogger Becki, for instance, said that she is always very busy: "This is a full-time job and you take on every role possible – editor, writer, advertiser, sales, PR, new business pitching, photographer, etc."[90] From this testimony it becomes interesting to investigate more in depth how travel bloggers and travel authors think of themselves in relation to their writing and travelling, that is, what are the reasons and commitment that lay behind such practices and how each writer conjures them up to shape his/her own persona.

Travel Bloggers and Authors' Self-Representation

Before calling upon the interviews, it is worth looking at the texts. In particular the analysis focuses on what constitutes the most evident element in the definition of the writers' identity: the signature. Genette's (1997) work on paratext provides again a good starting point. Genette considers the signature of the writer as a peritextual element. He notes that

> The author's name fulfils a contractual function whose importance varies greatly depending on genre: slight or non-existent in fiction, it is much greater in all kinds

[90] Becki, interview by Stefano Calzati, April 28, 2014, email.

> of referential writing, where the credibility of the testimony rests largely on the identity of the witness. The maximal degree of this involvement is obviously autobiography. (1997: 41)

According to Genette the signature not only has the nominal function of legitimating the paternity of a work, but it also bears a role in defining the kind of genre to which the text belongs. Whenever we are in presence of "referential writing" – such as travelogues – the signature plays a determinant role in granting the text's credibility in that all that is recounted is related to an identifiable authorial stance. This is why travel books usually fall under what Genette calls the case of "onymity", in which the work is signed with the author's real name. The other two cases identified by Genette are "anonymity" (when the work is not signed) and "pseudonimity" (when the author recurs to an fictitious name to hide his/her identity). If, on the one hand, all travel books analysed represent, in fact, cases of onymity, on the other hand bloggers resort to a different strategy. With the exception of Becki, who alongside the renovation of her blog abandoned the alias "Backpacker Becki" to use her real name, all bloggers under discussion adopt aliases: we go from Robjstaples and Supermary58 – which are somewhat close to the real names of the bloggers – to Millycat, Gattosandro Viaggiatore and Curieuse Voyageuse, which have very little to do with the bloggers' real names. Online aliases can be defined as fictional identities in the spirit of pseudonyms. Yet, they also differ from these latter in some respects, if we are to follow Genette's definition of pseudonyms. Indeed, while Genette argues that the most intriguing aspect of pseudonyms is that of appearing as real names, online aliases are often easily recognizable as fictitious. As a consequence, with aliases a reversal of both the "pseudonym-effect" and the effect of "given pseudonym" identified by Genette (1997: 48) can be noted. The French scholar affirms that "the effect of a pseudonym is not in itself different from the effect of any other name" (1997: 48), meaning precisely that a pseudonym (aims to) function(s) as a real name without blatantly appearing as fictitious. On the contrary, an alias does have an effect of its own, for it is straightforwardly identified as a fictional name. If real names strengthen the credibility of what is recounted (particularly autobiographic texts), online aliases, it is argued, tend to generate a *ludicization of authorship*, to be intended as a form of softening of the blogger's authority within the public sphere. In order to assess this assertion, it must be framed within the broader perspective concerning blogging practice and the nature of cyberspace.

The Web is a space that allows a wide spectrum of negotiations in terms of self-representation (Nakamura 2002). The adoption of aliases moves precisely within this spectrum of possible negotiations, as it allows bloggers to take a middle way between the need for recognizability (by other users) and the protection of sensible data. Vanessa Dennen (2009) wisely notes that aliases prove to be a double-edged sword: they are usually perceived to be reliable by other bloggers but unprofessional by outsiders. Hence, aliases do bear "given effects" – differently from pseudonyms – because their fictionality is responsible for affecting both the self-representation of bloggers – as more reliable than anonymity but also as informal and not fully trustworthy – as well as the contested perceptions that outsiders can have of them. Conversely, the "pseudonym effect" of aliases rests not so much on the pleasure to discover their fictitiousness, as noted by Genette in relation to pseudonyms, but on the consequences they bear on the text for the very reason of being fictive. In this respect, the distance marked by the travel bloggers' aliases from their real names, while perfectly conformable to the practice of blogging, weakens the bloggers' authority (compared to "classic" authors) and presents their accounts as basically amateur tales. This claim finds proof, for instance, in the introductory post to Robjstaples's blog, in which the blogger defends the unpretentiousness of his account:

> What to write? Well, let's try this for size: 1. Write to amuse myself and learn about myself. 2. Assume most things are the same everywhere. 3. Observe the differences. 4. Few if any people understand China, least of all me, and certainly not the Chinese! 5. The writer's discretion is final, always totally rational (honest) and mine alone! (Robjstaples 2005)

Robjstaples argues that his writing is fully discretional: he wants to describe how he sees China and the Chinese (rather than provide an objective representation of the experience) and he wants to do so by amusing himself along the way. In this sense, the text should not be assessed for its accuracy, insofar as the blogger claims for himself a disengaged, unpretentious role. In fact, the adoption of an overtly fictitious alias responds to this same logic in that it smoothens the formal expectations of rigorousness that might be demanded of a travel account. This applies not only to Robjstaples, but to the greatest majority of travel bloggers analysed. At stake, then, is not so much the assessment of the trustfulness of what is recounted, but the realization that online bloggers play with their identities in ways that challenge the relations instituted by Genette among the autobiographic genre, onymity and the intrinsic self-referentiality (and trustworthiness) of the text. It is also significant that the decision to choose an alias is independent from the travel blog being hosted on a platform or independent. So, for instance, on platforms one finds Millycat and

Robjstaples, but also bloggers that have decided to open their own spaces resort to fictitious names, such as Gattosandro Viaggiatore and Curieuse Voyageuse.

The main difference between travel blogs on platforms and individual ones is in the "About" page that characterises each blog. It is here that the travel bloggers' self-representations are played out more overtly. By analysing the travel bloggers' personal profiles and putting them in connection with the interviews, it becomes possible to better understand how travel bloggers think of themselves in relation to their writing and travels. As seen in Chapters 1 and 2, travel bloggers on platforms are largely dependent upon "the infrastructure behind the interface" (Uszkalo and Harkness 2012: 18). This means that the platforms both establish what kind of information the bloggers can provide about themselves (usually: their name, age, nationality and a picture) and also decide what data about the bloggers' activity to include in the profile (which often leads to the "datafication" of the bloggers' personae). When they were asked to characterise their blogging and travels, all the bloggers on platforms confessed not to see themselves as travel writers. For them, to blog is functional to "keep record of the events"[91] and "share experiences with relative and other bloggers."[92] Emblematic, in this respect, is the position of Ataritouchme who mentioned that he does not consider himself as a "good writer in any sense except for perhaps spelling" and he added that "I am, quite frankly, shocked when any post is viewed more than a few times," suggesting low expectations in terms of social exposure. This also shed a light onto the reasons why, as discussed in Chapter 1, the account of travel blogs on platform are usually characterised by a mono-rhythmic narrative that tends to flatten the representation of both the traveller and China.

As far as the way of travelling is concerned, the experiences of the bloggers on platforms comply with the prototypical tourist tour, even when it up to them to decide where to go, as in the case of Italian Supermary58 and Millycat. The former said in the interview: "To be honest, I had some problems planning the trip because China is a huge country, rich in history and landmarks. […] Eventually, I opted for the classic tour"; similarly, the latter writes on her blog that "having planned 6-7 itineraries, we decided to opt for the one that many tour operators call "classic China": that is, Beijing, Xi'an, Guilin and Shanghai"[93] (Millycat 2013; author's translation). This homogenisation of the experience also triggers a clear-cut self-representation: indeed, all travel bloggers on platforms think of themselves as tourists, the best reworking of such category being

[91] Emil, interview by Stefano Calzati, February 24, 2014, email.
[92] Supermary58, interview by Stefano Calzati, July 4, 2014, email.
[93] "Dopo aver fatto 6-7 itinerari possibili, ci decidiamo per quello che ricalca un po' quello che i tour-operator chiamano la "Cina classica", e cioè, Pechino, Xi'an, Guilin, Shanghai."

Mathieu's definition of himself as a "curious tourist."[94] In this respect, it can be argued that, not only travel bloggers on platforms fully embrace a touristic persona, but they do not even feel the need to model it according to a more ethical, sensible or sustainable perspective.

Individual travel bloggers, instead, manifest more composite self-representations. To begin with, if we look at their "About" pages it is possible to find some autobiographical information that goes beyond what is found in the blog (sometimes the blogger's real name is also disclosed). This is how Gattosandro Viaggiatore and Curieuse Voyageuse present themselves:

> My name is Simona […] On this blog, I describe my experiences and I make available information, addresses and useful links to all those who are about to leave. And obviously I also provide some personal advice […] When I am not dedicating myself to the organization of a journey, I love drawing and gardening. I am a cashier and also work as a film operator.[95] (Gattosandro Viaggiatore 2012; author's translation)

> I have loved to travel since I was a child and have been writing for a few years. I share my travel writing on Curieuse Voyageuse (and sometimes something else). In March 2009, I decided to go to live in China. So, I started to share my impressions about everyday life and trips around this strange elsewhere. My passion for writing quickly equalled that for travelling.[96] (Curieuse Voyageuse 2009; author's translation)

These autobiographical aperçu constitute a sort of behind-the-scenes glimpse of the travel bloggers' lives. They are particularly useful in the present discussion because they reveal the motives that fuel the bloggers' writing and travels, as well as how they think of both. Gattosandro Viaggiatore acknowledges her willingness to share her experiences with other bloggers, while also providing personal tips. In this latter respect, she also pointed out in

94 Mathieu, interview by Stefano Calzati, July 3 2014, email.

95 "Mi chiamo Simona. […] Quando non sono impegnata nello studio di una meta mi piace dedicarmi al disegno e al giardinaggio. Nella vita faccio la cassiera e all'occorrenza l'operatore cinematografico. […] Per chi se lo stesse domandando, il titolo del mio blog è un omaggio al peloso di casa, il mio super Gatto Sandro [Pertini]."

96 "Je suis passionnée par les voyages depuis mon enfance, et par l'écriture depuis quelques années. Je partage sur *Curieuse Voyageuse* mes récits de voyage (et parfois d'autres choses). En mars 2009, je décide de partir vivre en Chine. Je commence à partager mes récits de vie quotidienne et voyages dans cet étrange ailleurs. La passion de l'écriture égale rapidement celle du voyage."

the interview that she plans her journeys independently, marking a certain distance from mass tourism: "I like to organise my travels completely alone: to study the destination, the itinerary and the places to visit, be it a trip down the road or to the other side of the world." As a consequence, Gattosandro Viaggiatore ends up mapping out a rather personalized itinerary for her second journey to China:

> It was hard, but eventually the itinerary of my second trip to China was ready! The most difficult thing was to decide the area to cover and ensure the feasibility of the transfers. The result is good, maybe a bit ambitious, but within my budget limits. Here are the legs: Guangzhou Zhangjajie, Wulingyuan, Fenghuang, Guilin, Yangshuo, Beihai, Weizhou Island, Hainan – Haikou, Hainan – Sanya, Guangzhou. (Gattosandro Viaggiatore 2013; author's translation)

On the other hand, when I asked Gattosandro Viaggiatore to characterise her online activity she revealed an ambiguous conception: "insofar as writing is a pleasure for me and not a job – although I would really like such a job – when I have free time I prefer to relax rather than being chased by the anxiety of updating the blog." To a certain extent, Gattosandro Viaggiatore thinks of her blogging as chiefly a leisure activity. However, both her effort towards accuracy and her hope that blogging might one day become a job testify to the blurring of any neat demarcation between amateur and professionalism. In fact, if ever such a distinction can be traced it pertains to the economic realm only. This resonates with José van Dijck's (2013: 32) claim that, nowadays, online bloggers "may be considered amateurs and citizens as well as professionals and labourers" and it reasserts the contamination between amateur and professional realms.

Curieuse Voyageuse has an even more ambivalent position: on her blog she defines writing as a passion that is equal to travelling. The two seem entrenched passions, but once one confronts this piece of information with what the blogger said in the interview the travelling and writing are displaced onto a more professional level. In the interview Curieuse Voyageuse argued that she thinks of herself in terms of "a traveller and also a blogger in the process of becoming a writer."[97] On the one hand, this statement seems to imply a hierarchy between blogging and writing, where the former is considered as amateurish and the latter as professional. At the same time, these words reveal Curieuse Voyageuse's awareness of the economic potentialities of her online writing in relation to her journeys (in particular around China where she lived for two years. We should also not

[97] Curieuse Voyageuse, interview by Stefano Calzati, July 28, 2014, email.

forget that she published her first book out of her blog). In fact, she noted that "blogging has become central in my life: it helped me to find my present job, it opened the door to my publisher, it allowed me to travel and it allowed me to take wonderful trips." Here, then, amateurship and professionalism are completely blurred; they are two sides that presuppose each other. Telling is also the fact that Curieuse Voyageuse manifests constant effort in keeping a dialogue with readers, both through the blog and through other social networks, which are integrated into it: "The social, interactive and communitarian aspects," she noted, "are very important in my blog. These aspects are almost non-existent when it comes to a book: once the author has finished it, it does not interact with the readers, apart from some meetings, but only very few readers meet all the authors they have read, while my blog's readers can directly interact with me." In other words, Curieuse Voyageuse shows a good degree of expertise in the managing of the virtual relations that online social networks strongly enhance.

In terms of self-representation – and here the circle closes – the most radical position is certainly Becki's. For her, not only is blogging a professional activity but travelling has become a commoditized activity:

> I'm Becki and I'm a British Travel Press award winning writer and avid explorer. […] This website first came about over two years ago when I quit and sold everything (yes, that familiar story) to leave for what was meant to be an initial 18 month adventure around the world. My passion for insightful travel, combined with my inherent love for English literature, history and sociology, alongside the skills harnessed from my 10 year PR career, led me to setting up the blog "Backpacker Becki" and growing it as a go-to resource for those wanting to travel in a similar way. (Becki 2014)

This passage, found on the "About" page, testifies the extent to which for Becki blogging has turned from a passion into a profession. This position was radicalized in the interview, where she argued that "We just happen to be the information providers […] Our profession is slowly becoming more well-known and is growing rapidly." In this case, the traveller persona, despite the blogger's statement in the interview that she likes "to go with the flow" without planning the journey too much, loses its romantic aura and is fully inscribed into a business-minded framework that stresses the commodification of mobility. As a consequence, the blog also changes its *raison d'être*: rather than simply recounting a journey or giving tips, it aims at "talking about travel with a social conscience and understanding places that are misunderstood. It's from a personal account but not written like an on-going diary." Becki is also aware that having the ability to manage an individual space grants her greater control over the content and its layout: "Your website is your open book, so you have full editorial control." Interestingly, the comparison she makes is not between her website and those hosted on platforms but between her website and other social networks: "Currently, Twitter and Instagram are not that limited, but Facebook is enforcing a lot of control in regard to who sees your updates, in the hope that people will pay more to promote posts." From such a statement, it is possible to argue that Becki aims not only at being in control of all that she writes but also at getting the most out of her blogging activity in terms of social exposure and economic compensation.

The analysis moves on now to discuss the travel authors' self-representation and how they think of their writing and travels. To begin with, it is worth noting that in all the travel books selected the authors' signatures not only appear on the front covers and title pages, but also on the back cover (an occurrence apparently overlooked by Genette). Such signatures go beyond a mere nominal referentiality: they rather take the form of brief paragraphs that are similar to the "About" page on travel blogs (or vice versa). Reading these, one is introduced to some biographical information concerning the authors. For instance, one learns that:

> Clara Arnaud was born in 1986. She studied Mandarin and geography while travelling in Central Asia. Then, some missions to Africa brought her to Senegal, Benin and Ghana, before reaching Congo. Settled in Kinshasa, she worked there for two years leading a few projects of international development.[98] (Arnaud 2010: back cover; author's translation)

Or also:

> Sergio Ramazzotti was born in Milan in 1965 and works as a freelancer for various magazines, among them *Lo Specchio della Stampa* and *D* by *la Repubblica*. Feltrinelli

[98] "Clara Arnaud est née en 1986. Elle étudie le chinois et la géographie, tout en voyageant en Asie centrale. Ses premières missions en Afrique l'amènent au Sénégal, au Bénin et au Ghana, avant la République Démocratique du Congo. Basée à Kinshasa, elle y travaille durant deux ans sur des projets de développement international."

> Traveller has published his works *Vado verso il Capo* (1996) and *Carne Verde* (1999).[99] (Ramazzotti 2002; author's translation)

These peritextual pieces of information have at least three consequences for: 1) the self-representation of the authors beyond the text; 2) the perception that the readers get of them; 3) the (perceived) literary form of the text itself. Knowing, for instance, that Ramazzotti has already written other travelogues confers upon his persona an expertise that surpasses that of the occasional traveller or writer. This, in turn, is likely to shape the reader's perception of him, possibly in the direction of higher credibility. Moreover, the fact that Ramazzotti is defined as a freelance journalist can variously steer, confirm or even dismiss some considerations made by the reader about the author's style and the literary form of the book. Lastly, any reader sufficiently acquainted with the Italian press can recognize *Lo Specchio della Stampa* and *D la Repubblica* as two weekly magazines that enjoy a wide distribution but that nonetheless limit the presence of in-depth analyses, usually preferring to focus on light/popular contributions (hence, Ramazzotti's writing may be expected to fit within the editorial guidelines of these magazines).

Similarly, reading that Clara Arnaud has studied Mandarin and voyaged around central Asia projects over her persona the allure of the navigated traveller when it comes to China. Besides, her interests in Africa and her commitment to humanitarian and developmental projects further broaden her self-representation as not simply a traveller and writer, but also a politically engaged person. A different self-representation from both Arnaud and Ramazzotti's is Thubron's. His persona adheres monolithically to that of

> An acknowledged master in travel writing. His first books were about the Middle East […] In 1982 he travelled in the Soviet Union, pursued by the KGB. From these early experiences developed his great travel books on the land mass that takes up Russia and Asia […] He has won many awards. (Thubron 2006)

Thubron appears as the "classic" traveller and adventurer; one was his literary talent has been widely acknowledged worldwide. This, in turn, steers the expectations that the readership projects onto his work – as eminently literary – and his own persona, to the point that readers fairly acquainted with the travel writing genre in English could be led to associate Thubron with another great travel writer, Peter Fleming. More broadly, all these

[99] "Sergio Ramazzotti è nato a Milano e lavora come freelance per diverse riviste, tra cui 'Lo Specchio della Stampa' e 'D di Repubblica'. Di Ramazzotti, Feltrinelli Traveller ha pubblicato *Vado Verso il Capo* (1996) e *Carne Verde. La straordinaria storia del peyote, dio del Texas* (1999)."

brief biographical notes, apart from extending Genette's discussion on the signature of the work beyond the mere signature, testify to the extent to which authors attempt to provide a self-representation that enriches the one emerging from the book (of course, it is not a matter of who wrote these excerpts, but the effects they produce). When it comes to the interviews, all authors showed widespread agreement in defining themselves as writers and travellers. To a certain extent, this complies with the idea that having published a book constitutes a form of official sanctioning of their status. For instance, Clara Arnaud thinks of herself as a "writing traveller", while French author Luc Richard argued that: "I'm a bit all of these: an author, a journalist, a traveller." At the same time, under the umbrella of "travel writer", some differences can be retrieved. Legerton and Rawson, for example, amended such status by seeing themselves as experts of China, but also as amateur writers, insofar as they had never published a book before *Invisible China*. "We were always very cognizant of the fact," they said in the interview, "that we were very fortunate to be able to make this journey. Travelling took a large chunk of time, and a lot of places were not particularly easy to reach."[100] In a way, then, Legerton and Rawson undermine the romantic traveller persona by acknowledging the material conditions that made their journey possible. To this, they also added that "We were both novice writers, so writing was definitely a learning process." On his part, Germain-Thomas rejected any formalization of his writing activity, claiming that "writing is a vocation. I do not see it as a profession because I have never really lived out of it. I do it as a pleasure". This latter case, while drawing back on to a romantic idea of writing as an unbound activity, testifies paradoxically to the reversal of Becki's position, who moved from the amateur realm towards the professional one. Overall, however, Germain-Thomas's words remain as an admonishment of the intrinsic instability of all forms of writing, even those that managed to eventually get published. Lastly, Italian author Ramazzotti unfolds a rather controversial self-representation. In the interview, he overtly declared the professional purposes of his journeys: "When I travel, I try to make the most out of this investment, not so much economically speaking but in terms of personal experiences."[101] Hence, Ramazzotti is willing to offer of himself a professional portrayal, of which the traveller-facet is only one minor aspect. Reinforcing this, he added: "sometimes, I must respect precise deadlines for the reportage to be delivered, so I usually rely on an interpreter or, more generally, a fixer: a local person who can help you to solve bureaucratic issues better and faster." In Ramazzotti, the emphasis on the professionalization of the practices of travelling and

[100] Colin Legerton and Jacob Rawson, interview by Stefano Calzati, November 4, 2013, email.
[101] Sergio Ramazzotti, interview by Stefano Calzati, September 18, 2013, Skype.

writing is very strong, but the consequence of this is that he cannot help but draw back, as far as his self-representation is concerned, on rigid distinctions of amateur/professional and local/foreigner. At the same time, while he negated the possibility, nowadays, of "leaving all behind and travelling," he nonetheless confessed to dislike "to plan all the details of the journey in advance because I believe that the component of the unexpected – what English people call 'serendipity' – is essential to the trip, to preserve its allure." Here we find a controversial approach to travel, considered as both a practice out of which the most has to be taken, but also one to be accomplished unconditionally. This controversy entails, in turn, a double articulation of Ramazzotti's self-representation: on the one hand, as a reporter, he admits to resorting to locals' help; on the other hand, he pretends to be perceived as a traveller who has the needed freedom to make of the journey something unique. In fact, Ramazzotti's polarized strategy seems to epitomize Alex Gillespie's (2006: 362) claim about travellers' self-perception: "[they] usually claim, at a discursive level, a position that is superior to that of the 'average tourist' or 'typical tourist'." However, their actions are likely to run counter to these claim." (As seen in Chapter 1, both Ramazzotti's short stay in Shaoshan and his attitude towards Celia support such a claim.)

To conclude this section, it is remarkable that none of the authors and bloggers framed their travelling and writing within a gender perspective. As for the travel, China appears as a safe place to go that does not solicit any concerns in terms of security, while the writing seems disjoined from any manifest gender-related awareness in terms of potential access to publication. In other words, the texts under examination here – travel accounts and interviews – seem to have left such gender-related issues behind. Two cases are very useful to show this apparent retreat of the gender issue into the background. Blogger Becki rejects any clear-cut gendered self-representation: she does not want to appear either as an empowered woman or as one that took over a male role. In this respect, while on her old blog she overtly negated a possible gendered interpretation of her adventures: "I'm not just another solo female traveller, but a curator of great travel tales", it could be read on the old "About" page (2012), on her new blog she describes herself as "a British Travel Press award winning writer and avid explorer", a definition that erases any possible gendered framing. Similarly, travel author Clara Arnaud, who travelled alone to the Western regions of China, affirmed in the interview that her journey was "also shaped by the Chinese authorities […] who did not allow me to go wherever I wanted."[102] In this sense, while she acknowledged politically-imposed limitations on her wanderings, she did not hint at the fact that these issues had something to do with her being a woman: "I have

[102] Clara Arnaud, interview by Stefano Calzati, January 22, 2015, email.

found that Chinese people are much funnier and more sympathetic than we think in Europe. Some labourers hosted me when travelling in Tibet." Hence, it seems that her female persona has not been subjected to any specific form of attention, despite the fact that her way of travelling was rather perilous, having walked hundreds of kilometres and ridden horses up to Tibet. More generally, while the adoption online of aliases hinders a clear-cut genderization of the writing, it is evident that also in printed travelogues gender issues are backgrounded in favour of travel writers' personae that tend to overlook such issues.[103]

Travelling and Moving while Dwelling: "Home" and "Away" Reconsidered

The last aspect to be discussed concerns the difference – if any – between in loco and itinerant experiences, as well as the kind of representations of China that these experiences can provide. Underpinning such discussion is the idea that travelling is both a moving – literally and metaphorically – and sedentary practice. Indeed, although all the texts analysed here refer to actual journeys, it does not mean that the dwelling within the country did not play a role in them. In fact, it is the case that some of the travel writers surveyed were living in China at the time of the journey and it is also the case that some of them decided to focus on specific places rather than wandering around the whole country. These occurrences invite one to unpack the relations between travelling and dwelling, as well as writing while on the road, or once the journey is over (which, as seen, is what many travel writers do). This leads one to question the concepts of "home" and "away" as two terms that, while theoretically constituting the extremes of any travel experience, in practice are constantly worked through by the practice of moving and writing.

For many travel writers the above-attested need for writing after the return seems to imply a sharp distinction between "home" and "away". Epitomizing this is Gattosandro Viaggiatore's position who, in the interview, explicated that the kind of distance that she requires for writing is not only a temporal distance but also a spatial one (she has to be back at home in order to recollect the journey). In this regard, Robyn Davidson (2001: 2) contends that it is contemporary travel writing that "create[s] the illusion that there is still an uncontaminated Elsewhere to discover," which one opposes to the security of a familiar environment. That being the case, in order to effectively investigate the conceptual validity of the terms "home" and "away", the question becomes: what *kinds* of "home" and "away" are at stake here? For some authors and bloggers – such as Richard, Thubron, Ramazzotti, Hirst, Flavia, Supermary58 – home is, no doubt, identified as their homeland: a precisely

[103] This argument will be also tackled in the next chapter dedicated to "older" travel writing about China.

locatable place that, temporally and spatially, frames the greatest part of their lives. For these writers, travelling can have an infinity of reasons – curiosity, profession, desire, even necessity – but the horizon that frames such practice is well-defined: they travel to distant lands for a certain amount of time *and* they come back to tell their stories. Tzvetan Todorov (1995: 68) can be of help in explicating this point: "a true travel narrative," he claims, "recounts the discovery of others, either savagery of faraway lands or the representatives of non-European civilizations." This characterization of travel rests upon a conception of space as an ontological dimension: a Cartesian space that can easily function as the ground for the encounter/clash between the traveller and the Other. I have criticized this vision and the consequences it has on the analysis of travel writing elsewhere (Calzati 2015a); yet, here Todorov's words serve well the purpose of exemplifying the paradigm "home-away-home" that is at the base of many travels accomplished by the writers discussed here. At the same time, there are some travel writers for whom home comes to represent more an imaginative space: a space of security and isolation, in which the writing can be done without interferences. This, however, does not have to coincide with the writers' physical home or with a single place. Rather, the spatial coordinates of home sublimate to the point of becoming either ephemeral or multiple. In this respect, investigating the pragmatics of travel (and writing) helps to deconstruct the loop "home-away-home". So, for instance, artist Faravelli spreads the "writing" through different locations: in loco during the journey, but also in his artistic studio, in his house, or open air when he is returned to Italy. On the other hand, it can happen that the writing, although coming after a certain time, is accomplished in a place that is still part of the "visited" country, such as the cases of Robjstaples, Curieuse Voyageuse, de Slizewicz. The implications are not only nominal – what to call home – but cultural. Regardless of whether these writers are long-term residents or temporary visitors in the visited country, theirs represents an in-between condition that differs from both the self-enclosed travel experience, in which the traveller goes to a place and then comes back, and the so-called "home travels" or "domestic travels", in which the travel writer wanders around and reports about his/her own country of origin.[104]

Globalization and the exponential development of human mobility have challenged any neat definition of what travel is and who travellers are. Consequently, there have been many efforts within and outside academia to characterise both. Very often, the principles at the base of these studies are spatial, temporal or a combination of the two, For instance,

[104] To this latter occurrence is dedicated Chapter 5 that focuses on contemporary Chinese-authored travel books and blogs about China. This will allow an understanding of how Chinese people think of and represent their own country, rearticulating the concept itself of "home" in a plurality of perspectives.

the World Tourism Organization of the United Nations (UNWTO) broadly defines tourism as

> the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for less than a year, for any main purpose (leisure, business or other personal purpose) other than to be employed by a resident entity in the country or place visited. (UNWTO 2013)

In other words, tourism is a displacement over a limited span of time and to places that are beyond the everyday context. Moreover, the UNWTO outlines a series of sub-classes of tourism: "domestic tourism, inbound tourism, and outbound tourism. These can be combined in various ways to derive the following additional forms of tourism: internal tourism, national tourism and international tourism." (UNWTO 2013) The purpose of this classification is to outline a taxonomy that helps to distinguish tourism from other forms of contemporary mobility (commuting, migrations, exile, etc.). However, in doing so, the definition advanced by the UNWTO works via criteria of negation: that is, it tends to deduce what tourism is by excluding other forms of movement, rather than by defining it *per se*. In contrast to that, a definition via positive criteria is that advanced by Francesca Battisti and Alessandro Portelli (1994), according to whom tourism and exile are considered as two extremes of a spectrum of mobility forms, of which migration represents a sort of in-between. Along this same line, Allan Williams and Colin Hall (2000) come to consider tourism as strictly interwoven with migration: "Many forms of migration generate tourism flows. […] Migrants may become poles of tourist flows, while they themselves become tourists in returning to visit friends and relations in their areas of origin. […] Tourism may also generate migration flows. Most obviously this is through the demand generated for labour which, if it cannot be met locally, will stimulate labour migration" (8). However deep and varied the analysis of (the relation between) tourism and migration may be, the main problem with these definitions is that they rest upon a binary distinction between mobility *and* settlement, movement and dwelling. Such a distinction, while being useful for mapping and disentangling the differences between one form of mobility and the other, is based on rigid space-time coordinates that are of problematic applicability when it comes to investigating the functioning of tourism and travel as social practices. It is in this spirit that Adrian Franklin's (2012: 45) warning about the urgent need to rethink the dominant paradigm within tourism studies has to be intended: "we should begin to view modern tourism," he writes, "not as based on basic binaries such as ordinary/extraordinary or home/away, but as something that had to be made to happen, that belongs to a story of becoming." By exploring how travel writers think of travelling and writing as practices, this is precisely the line followed here, so it will be possible to understand how the detailed taxonomy elaborated by the UNWTO is culturally, politically and ideologically charged. What globalization has brought about is the intensification of travel (and, along the way, of writing). However, this intensification cannot be solely seen as a quantitative increase: it also needs to be explored qualitatively. Not only have we seen that the idea that "everyone moves freely" is a fetish idealization (Lisle 2006), but the soaring in travels goes hand in hand with a hybridization of its forms: from the all-inclusive tourist experience to the ongoing travel experience, passing through the journeys accomplished by temporary dwellers or permanent residents. In this respect, a mere taxonomical approach to travel fails to discuss its cultural and ideological implications, which are of interest here. By contrast, establishing a dialogue between texts and travellers can help develop interesting reflections from a different angle.

According to French author de Slizewicz, a travelogue is worth publishing if it matches at least one of the following three conditions: "you can accomplish an extraordinary journey"; you can have "a great literary and descriptive talent"; and "the third possibility is that you are so immersed in a local culture that you have the chance, so to speak, to write about it from the inside, unfolding a more critical perspective." In de Slizewicz's opinion, the particular knowledge that a travel writer acquires by settling and travelling around is what grants him/her sufficient credit for writing about the place. De Slizewicz goes on to contend that "unfortunately, many contemporary travel writers do not have the necessary cultural background for describing what they see, differently from 19th century travellers, who usually departed after having acquired the knowledge needed. The majority of contemporary travellers are empty: they usually go abroad and stop at the surface of things, judging everything as more beautiful than at home and stupidly criticizing the Western culture." Here, an overt critique of a certain widespread way of travelling – possibly touristic, but surely superficial – is advanced. In so doing, the spatial and temporal coordinates of travel are qualitatively charged and evaluated. It is not simply a matter of going elsewhere and/or staying somewhere for a specific period that are sufficient for writing a good travelogue. Rather, it is important to give substance and weight to the experience. According to de Slizewicz, the knowledge of a place anticipates as much as derives from the journey; in other words, differentiating a superficial travel writer – as a mere "spectator", in de Slizewicz's own words – from a proper traveller writer – who becomes an "actor" – is not as much down to the temporal duration of the travel experience but to the critical stance that the writer (and secondly the reader) is able to bear in the face of the other-culture. On the one hand, de Slizewicz's position echoes Butor's idea that to travel in a certain way means, first of all, to read (about) the Other. It is only when one is able to do this that travelling bears a transformative power (for the traveller, the Other and the reader). On the other hand, de Slizewicz's argument is radically different from the idea of travel as a form of evasion. As a matter of fact, for de Slizewicz it is precisely the plunging into a culture that allows the writer to deconstruct that undifferentiated background – that banal gaze – that, according to him, characterises much contemporary travel writing. What is important to stress, however, is the quality of such plunging: for de Slizewicz, being immersed into a culture is not synonymous with dwelling; it is not a matter of duration, but of learning to "read" the Other, constantly testing oneself through cultural negotiation. The author made this point clear when he said, with regard to his experience in Yunnan, that: "I am a Westerner. […] I know that everyday is a fight: I am not at home, every day I have to re-negotiate the pact of coexistence with them [Tibetans]." Such an idea further articulates home not so much as the place where one has past roots, but as a dynamic space of interaction that is projected onto the future as a "becoming-home". Sara Ahmed's (1999: 332) words are clarifying here: "home is indeed elsewhere, but it is also where the self is going: home becomes the impossibility and necessity of the subject's future (one never gets there, but is always getting there), rather than the past which binds the self to a given place." In this way de Slizewicz's stance comes to represent an implicit critique of those paradigmatic positions, as seen above, that consider a "true travel" only that accomplished in remote places. It is not geographic distances that can define travel as such, if ever a definition of "true travel" can exist. Rather, it is the way in which each traveller models his relations with the place s/he visits. Specifically concerning Yunnan, where he has been living for years now, de Slizewicz affirmed that he chose this province for precise reasons:

> I arrived in Beijing when I was 19, and in the beginning I loved in particular the optimism of Chinese people. After some time, however, the eastern part of China – that is, the most developed one – started to deceive me more and more, and it is for this reason that I left Beijing and moved inland, towards the world of minorities. In a certain way, through my ten years in China, I have witnessed the progressive inscription of the country into the global world.

From this passage, it is possible to better understand that the terms "home" and "away" acquire for de Slizewicz very precise ideological connotations. The French travel author identifies home with those communities within China's borders (communities that are becoming increasingly segregated and menaced) that have not been Westernized (yet). Hence, one could say that home, for him, is a "negative" concept in that it is derived as a subtraction from all that is not capitalist China. More than a physical place, home is a place of resistance. Quite telling, in this regards, are his words: "I fight in order to preserve the Tibetan culture. You know, we have to face a force that destroys everything." Here, the main point arises: de Slizewicz certainly considers himself as an insider, in terms of his involvement with the Tibetan cause; yet, his (Western) cultural roots will never put him on the same level as the local people. To be more precise, it is these roots that allow him to constantly look at Tibetan people with a critical gaze and one that promotes a different image of Tibet from that generally constructed by Westerners. In fact, with *Ivre de Chine* (2010) his goal is to "desacralize Tibetan people. Let's be clear: I love them, I live with them every day, but I also deemed necessary to represent them for what they are, that is, beyond all mystifications." The turning of home into a place of resistance has the effect of reframing its relation with all that is "away" within a broader picture, in which traditional cultures (plural) are opposed against the modern society (singular) both internal and external to China. This is why de Slizewicz, far from defining himself as a European or a French person, thinks of himself as a Westerner. Westerner is a concept that, however anchored to a geopolitical location, has increasingly come to identify a precise neo-capitalist way of interpreting contemporaneity: that same way against which he strives to protect Tibetan regions.

Concerning the need to dwell in a place in order to fully understand it, a rather different perspective from de Slizewicz's is that taken by Nathan Gray. In his 2000 journey, Gray walked the whole length of the Great Wall together with four other companions, and once he concluded the walk he wrote *First Pass under Heaven* (2006). Because this is a walk that no one had ever done before (or at least recorded) Gray's text matches the first condition mentioned by de Slizewicz in regard to the publishability of a travel book: namely, the accomplishment of a unique endeavour. In the beginning Gray's account fully embraces the perspective of the whole group:

> Kitted out in our matching-red jackets, the Great Wall team stands proudly near the base of the flagpole – a horde of Chinese tourists lining up to get their photos taken […] I imagine our faces spreading like the diaspora, adorning dusty

> mantelpieces throughout the continent. Yet, how will our young faces look at the end of 4,000 kilometres? What in the world will we all be thinking? (Gray: 39)

Soon after the departure, however, the group splits and Gray remains alone. This event contributes to kindling a shift in perspective, passing from a Western-centripetal focus – the group of walkers as conquerors of the Great Wall – towards the author's subjective interiority (and his Maori background):

> The race is solely with myself. And like a baby who falls flat on his face when learning to walk, the most important thing is to get back up and try again. The Maori – a warrior race renowned for never giving up – have a similar saying: *Whitu ki raro, waro ki runga. Seven times down, eight times up.* (Gray: 212)

As far as the type of journey accomplished is concerned, Gray's experience is similar to Arnaud's, who also walked in remote regions of China. At the same time, Gray's shift in perspective mirrors Luc Richard's experience, narrated in his *Voyage à travers la Chine interdite* (2003). Richard was dragged onto a car journey from Beijing to Tibet by his friend Constantin de Slizewicz (although their two tales recount different journeys) and two other companions. In the beginning of the book, Richard notes that "I didn't know anything about it [China], but he [de Slizewicz] had mentioned these things so many times to me"[105] (8; author's translation). This implies that Richard's persona initially revolves around a fully Western-centred position and in the text it comes often to coincide with a plural "We" that includes all the members of the expedition. Yet, almost at the end of the journey the group needs to split for logistic reasons (Lao Shi, Xia Jia Xia and de Slizewicz have to wait for some components of the car to be replaced) and Richard remains alone travelling through the western region of China, up to Kashgar. It is at this time that he is compelled to become the real protagonist of his own account: "Leaving Xia Jia and Constantin in the station hall, I had the impression of starting a journey within the journey. […] I knew that this time, if anything happened to me, I could only rely on myself"[106] (188; author's translation).

Finally, coming back to Gray, his experience can be seen as a metaphor of de Slizewicz's escape from a too Westernized China towards what is perceived as a more

[105] "Cette fois, il me proposait de partir avec lui. La Chine immense et rouge, l'Empire de steppes, le Toit du monde… Je n'en connaissais rien, mais il m'en avait tellement parlé."
[106] "En laissant Xia Jia et Constantin dans le hall de la gare, j'avais l'impression d'entreprendre un voyage dans le voyage. […] J'éprouvais une certaine appréhension à l'idée de partir seul […] et je savais que cette fois, s'il m'arrivait quelque chose, je ne pourrais compter que sur moi-même."

authentic way of living. Both Gray and de Slizewicz spent quite a long time in China and, to an extent, Gray shares de Slizewicz's argument about the necessity to plunge into a country in order to fully appreciate it. Gray arrived to contend in the interview that "some expatriates may live in a country for years, but be so sheltered from its actual realities they don't actually have a clue as to what is really going on." This implies, again, a qualification of the dwelling as not a temporal matter but the ability and will "'to become' someone else's culture"[107] in Gray's own words. The point on which de Slizewicz and Gray's perspectives diverge is in the epistemological value they project onto their travelling experiences. Initially, Gray's intention was to walk the 4.000 kilometres in one go, but he soon realized that the plan was so demanding that he had to stop, take a rather long break (he went back to New Zealand, where he lives, and also accomplished other trips around Asia) and then go back to China to complete the walk. It is because of that that Gray was able to shift from a Western-centripetal stance to a more personal one. What is most remarkable is that, according to Gray, the breaking up of the experience helped him to understand China and Chinese better once he was back in the Middle Kingdom. These were his words from the interview: "I realized how much more I had learnt going back to places after a few months' break, having explored places like Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and India during those breaks, which gave me a far greater awareness of the context China is set in, in Asia in general." Here Gray suggests that it is precisely because he decided to let some time and distance separate himself from China that he was later able to "read" the country and its people more clearly. Of course, this might be symptomatic of Gray's attempt to find legitimization for his need to interrupt the walk (an attempt he shares with other travel writers, as we will see). However, the crucial point to stress is that Gray's vision is rather different from de Slizewicz's, in that for the latter it is only by remaining in the hosting culture and negotiating every day the struggle that diversity entails, that one can really understand the Other. By contrast, Gray supports the need to find the "right distance" from oneself and the other-culture so that one can put one's judgement into focus. Eventually, for Gray understanding a country seems, above all, a matter of individual disposition; one that, by being based on spiritual connections among the people, is able to overcome any cultural gap. "Home", then, intended as a place of familiarity, is anywhere the traveller is able to empathize with the others around him and feel accepted. It is no coincidence that Gray reminded me in the interview that, before going to China, he "had already travelled through nearly 50 countries, most times solo, and knew how to survive in a context where I was going from one place to the next in a nomadic day-to-day fashion."

[107] Nathan Gray, interview by Stefano Calzati, September 30, 2013, email.

In this way, he not only stresses his ability to establish (social and empathic) connections wherever he goes, but also projects onto himself the aura of the "eternal traveller". Lastly, he overtly declared how he achieved getting in contact with locals when walking the Great Wall: "my interactions were hugely inspired by my Maori side, which encourages loving others and being appreciative at all costs." Hence, the extent to which Gray's conception of the contact with the other and the plunging into the hosting culture is very intimate becomes clearer: to understand China and the Chinese is not, in the first place, a question of acquiring a certain amount of knowledge, but to open oneself to the people, communicate with them, listen to them. It is through such un-mediated exchange that the spiritual ethos of the journey can be fully realized, breaking down all the cultural or ideological paradigms that could constrain the experience.

Finally, Sergio Ramazzotti's position deserves to be discussed, as he unfolds a quite unique conception of the travel experience and its cultural value. Ramazzotti argued that "very often, it is not necessary to visit a country in its wholeness in order to understand it; on the contrary, it is sometimes sufficient – and this holds true in particular for China, which is a huge country – to identify a place or a person that is paradigmatic of the country." The Italian author rejects the idea that being a long-term resident in a place is necessary in order to fully appreciate it and he also criticizes those writers who travel everywhere because they want to "see it all". Rather, Ramazzotti defends the potentiality of a short, sedentary travel experience, in comparison to an itinerant one. In doing so, he subverts the assumption at the base of travelling as a moving practice by claiming that it is when one stays still in one place that s/he can really grasp its *modus cogitandi*. Surely, this attests to (as in Gray's case) Ramazzotti's need to find coherent legitimization for his (professional) choices. As a matter of fact, Ramazzotti is a journalist who writes short reportages on assignment: hence his way of conceiving travelling and writing as practices is very much driven by the material conditions at their base. It should not surprise that Ramazzotti specified: "I am well aware that this kind of journalism on assignment is the negation of the romantic idea of travel. […] For me, it is also a matter of time and economic resources." Here, then, Ramazzotti overtly demystifies a certain idealized idea of travelling and writing in that, at the base, it is chiefly a matter of finding a compromise between time and money. Of course, this way of conceiving travel has consequences on its outcomes. When asked, in the interview, whether he felt he had grasped something of the cultural, historical and political momentum of China, Ramazzotti answered in the affirmative:

> I can say that that particular journey was illuminating; it showed me emblematic aspects of China's present and of its imminent future; this, despite the fact, as you mentioned, that I only visited Shaoshan. I am rather confident of this because the journey of which I speak in *La birra di Shaoshan* was not the first trip I made to China; I had already been there, and this allowed me to realize the rapid cultural and economic development of the country [...] In this respect, Shaoshan was surely a case in point, as in it you could find all the contradictions of Chinese society: passion and longing for the past, disillusion for the new socialism way, and all the factors that are nurturing even today its economic and cultural revolution: discipline, entrepreneurship, creativity, resilience, etc.

This passage is significant for two reasons. Firstly, Ramazzotti reveals that the journey he recounts in *La birra di Shaoshan* was not the first trip he had taken to China. In other words, he could be defined as a "returning traveller" and certainly one for whom China was not a complete novelty. At the same time, there is no mention in the text of any antecedent experience, nor comparisons between the different experiences (but this is possibly a reason why he keeps a demiurgic position within the text). Secondly, the statement above is quite surprising when compared to various passages in the text, in which the author confesses to Celia his difficulty in understanding China (see Chapter 1). One could say that the incompatibility between what Ramazzotti told me in the interview and what is in the text is due to his willingness to inflate the positive outcomes of his experience. But to a certain extent it is also possible to argue that both positions are valid. On the one hand, Ramazzotti feels unable to understand China when he faces a Chinese person; on the other hand, he suggests to his readership that such a difficulty is precisely the emblem of contemporary China.[108] When talking to Celia, then, Ramazzotti is clinging (consciously or unconsciously) to the border that separates the urgency to know from an effective understanding of China; encountering the other, after all, does not straightforwardly mean being able to read it. When talking to his readers, by contrast, the author draws back on secure cultural values that consequently reframe the representation of China as a whole against what is perceived as familiar, i.e. the West, in particular Italy. It is not by chance, then, that China is defined as a mystery, that is, a country which is unknowable; unknowable, of course, for all those who look at it from the outside. At this point, the question becomes: to what extent is this difficulty in understanding China related to the

[108] The analysis in the following chapter will show that this is a very common trope also in older travelogues about China.

kind of travel experience accomplished? Or: could a longer travel experience, or one that involved residing in the country, have modified this (Western-derived) perception? A univocal answer is certainly unwise. However, by comparing Ramazzotti's travelogue with others, one can draw some reflections. We have seen in Chapter 1 that Rob Gifford is rather willing to represent China according to a macro geopolitical confrontation with the West. This is so, despite the fact that he lived in China for many years, working as a journalist. Similarly, Thubron, who stayed in the country longer than Ramazzotti, still frames his experience within a West-East opposition. Escaping the alluring temptation to make sense of otherness by comparing it to what is known seems, then, rather difficult (the writers who escape this tendency the most are Colin Legerton and Jacob Rawson). One possible explanation is that for travel authors, readers are very important because the authors know that they have to sell their stories once they are home. There is, then, out of necessity, a reassertion of precise ideological and cultural borders that distinguish home and away, insofar as the authors' main goal is to be understood and appreciated in their home countries.[109] It is worth noting, however, that Thubron reversed the relation West-China arguing that, despite all economic changes, "the character of the people has not changed. It is a much slower process; you do not change a culture by changing its economy. In fact, I think that China has been less Westernized than it has Chinatized the West." Thubron is the only writer among those interviewed who mentioned the possibility not only of a mutual influence between China and the West, but of a dominant position of the former over the latter. Thubron did not develop this argument any further. Yet, even so its relevance is high because it implies the subversion of the relation of power between the two spheres, at least as they are conceived and represented by the majority of contemporary travel authors. In Gifford's opinion, for instance, it is the East that has to catch up with the West (xix); de Slizewicz, in turn, thinks of the Tibetan regions as a place of resistance against the capitalist forces that have gradually affected China but whose origins remain in the West. Luc Richard agreed with this: "the 'divide' [between the East and West of China], as you say in English, will increase, mainly from a social point of view and in terms of quality of life"; then "there will be a new process of assimilation, of Tibet in particular, but more in general of all the ethnic minorities that populate the borderlands of China."[110] Richard's core idea is that, soon or later, all the regions of China will follow the way to Westernization. While there cannot be a univocal answer to that, it is significant

[109] In this respect, Ramazzotti is, again, controversial. While in the text he manifests the awareness of writing for a precise target of readers (Italians), when questioned on this topic, he mentioned that "I do not think of the reader when I write."
[110] Luc Richard, interview by Stefano Calzati, December 5, 2014, Skype.

that Richard's response to such a prediction rests on the (possibly consolatory) reaffirmation that in today's China there are still forbidden, inaccessible places (from which the title of the book derives): "The forbidden China I speak about is the one that foreigners cannot access. But 'forbidden' has also a metaphorical meaning. I mainly refer to the China that is usually not shown, the one that you do not want to see or visit." The main problem is that Richard's stance still coincides monolithically with that of a Western subject, so that China remains an object to look at from the outside, even when traversing it. More generally, none of the writers (with the partial exception of Legerton and Rawson) has granted an agency to China in its own right, nor envisioned the possibility of a mutual influence and interdependence between China and the West (apart from Thubron). This pattern is telling of the (re-)emergence, despite and beyond all discourses informing globalization and global mobility, of precise cultural and ideological boundaries when it comes to the (Western-inspired) representation of the China. The Middle Kingdom, in fact, is still widely considered as the "Elsewhere"[111] against which to assess the West's state of (negative or positive) advancement, that is, the confirmation/critique of all that is familiar to (many) of these authors and their readers. In so doing, to China is denied an active role on the global stage and/or the possibility to trace its own destiny independently from the West.

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To conclude, the analysis is complemented with the investigation of how travel bloggers rearticulate their concepts of "home and "away" and their sense of belonging or alienation in relation to China. Again, the distinction between travel bloggers on platforms and individual ones brings with itself substantial nuances. It suffices to refer to the Appendix to realize that the greatest majority of travel bloggers on platforms conceive of their trips as "escapes" from the daily routine. As such, the journeys are usually brief and well-defined in both space and time. The main purpose is to live and taste something different from what can be found at home – fulfilling the desire of exoticism that tourism fuels – and then go back to all that is familiar (and recount the experience). The main exception within this scenario is Ataritouchme (who has been living in China for years now) and it is from him that it is worth starting the discussion. Ataritouchme seems to embody de Slizewicz's specular positioning, insofar as he affirmed the following:

[111] A concept that will also return in the travel writers of the first half of the 20th century, who will be analysed in the following chapter.

> I live in China. What it comes down to now is: 'where have I not yet been in China? Is there anything – even third, fourth or fifth tier – that I would like to see there?' […] Keeping the 'travel gaze' is a bit difficult, for sure; almost every city in China looks the same (that is, like my home city here) […] But the food is always different, the language (at least slightly) different, the people often nicer (I live in the northeast, famous for brusque personalities).

On the one hand, Ataritouchme argues in favour of a loss of surprise when travelling around China – a country he knows very well by now; on the other hand, however, it is precisely this condition of permanency in China that allows him, as a resident-traveller, to notice those subtle differences that can still astonish the acquainted eye. The passing of time, then, acquires an ambivalent role: it dilutes the impact that otherness has on the traveller and also forces the traveller to seek different kinds of otherness. Time thickens China, which is not, then, something given but is always reconfigured by the traveller's gaze, as if, after all, differences were nothing but what one considers as such. It is for this reason that the blogger usually feels the need to postpone the writing much later than the return; at stake, again, is not only the mere quantitative passing of time but the qualitative effect that time has on memories. Similarly, this leads to a distinction between the inbound traveller, whose experience is chronotopically well-defined, and the resident-traveller, who, having more time and expertise at his/her disposal, learns to identify those small details that occasional travellers cannot perceive. On this issue, Ataritouchme specified the following:

> My idea of China now is probably far too complex for me to voice in words – thousands and thousands of words wouldn't do it – but I can say that travelling has certainly shaped it. In general, though, most visitors to China are really missing out if they don't go west. Many only make it to Xi'an and, while different, it's not really enough.

If one unpacks Ataritouchme's statement, it is possible to reflect on the blogger's idea of travel, as well as on his perception of China. To begin with, Ataritouchme affirms that it was his various travels around China that made him perceive the country as extremely complex. The apparent paradox is that this is a similar conclusion that other travel authors, as seen above, also reach. However, it would not be wise to equate all positions. While the representation of China as an impenetrable world, which authors such as Ramazzotti, Thubron or Gifford provide, rests on the ultimate resistance to thinking of the Middle Kingdom in isolation, thus beyond a macro cultural opposition, Ataritouchme favours an immanent representation; one that attempts not to transcend China's borders. In this sense, similarly to de Slizewicz, Ataritouchme marks a cultural, internal distinction between East and West of China, which goes hand in hand with a historical and economical divide. Regions and cities on the coast are much more developed than those inland. According to Ataritouchme, however, this tendency has not (yet) affected China's cultural diversity, so, while his home city is certainly the same as many others around the country, there is still a heterogeneous cultural background, in terms of language, food and traditions, to be explored. This is where de Slizewicz's heavily politicized vision – Westernized China is opposed to minority cultures – is deconstructed from the inside by Ataritouchme, for whom otherness and differences can still be retraced everywhere in China. Home for Ataritouchme is the security of everything that is equal to itself; yet, it is enough to go beyond one's hometown to disrupt such homogeneity and feel in an other-place. Lastly, in the passage above, the blogger indirectly distinguishes himself from those one-time visitors, whose travel itineraries are usually confined to the well-beaten path on the east side of China. By contrast, he not only explored the Western regions but also went there many times, learning, on each occasion, to appreciate the diversity that China has to offer. Here, at last, although Ataritouchme does not overtly create any opposition, he moves a critique against the commoditized way of travelling to which he prefers one that is more independent and unbound.

The discussion focuses eventually on individual travel bloggers. Curieuse Voyageuse unfolds a controversial positioning in relation to the condition of writing when still in the visited place. Concerning the difference between travelling as a resident and doing it as a traveller, she told me that: "It changes completely: when you travel for a day or a week, you do not have time to really get to know the country or develop relationships with the local population. By contrast, when you live in one place, you have all the time to do that!" Despite she dwelled in China for two years and she blogged about it, in Curieuse Voyageuse seems to return an ontologically-defined conception of travel. Indeed, she distinguishes the traveller experience from the resident one based upon a temporal and spatial fracture: travel is shorter and it is such only to far away places. On the "About" page on her blog (2009), however, she does defend the possibility of keeping a travel gaze also when in the country of permanent residence (which at present is France). This contradiction was not disentangled in the interview, where she remained quite vague on whether she considers that a sedentary experience would be more productive than an itinerant one for reading otherness. A possible answer, however, can be detected on her blog. After having travelled widely in China, it is only when she settled down in Shanghai that the blogger opened a section on her blog called "Portrait de Chine", in which she interviewed Chinese friends or some of the people she met. Put differently, it could be said that Curieuse Voyageuse began to really "see" Shanghai and its citizens – and them to see her – only once the blogger moved there. So, the question becomes: to what extent is Shanghai perceived as home? In this regard it is advanced that, for the very fact that Curieuse Voyageuse felt the need to question the possibility of keeping a travel gaze only once she went back to France, any straightforward definition of Shanghai as home should be suspended. Indeed, what this self-reflection reveals is rather that France is perceived, first and foremost, as home; this country is so familiar to the blogger that she wonders whether she can explore it with sufficiently attentive eyes. By contrast, China, despite having been the blogger's home for some years, is still conceived as an other-place.

Finally, Becki is the blogger in whom the interplay between travelling and writing reaches a conflating point. All boundaries between physical or imaginative concepts of home, between journeys as a resident or as a *stricto sensu* traveller, and between sedentary or itinerant experiences are blurred. In fact, Becki is an on-going traveller who has travelled continuously around the world over the last few years. It could be said that Becki appears as much a "global soul" (Iyer 2000) as a nomad soul: that is, a subject who does not anchor herself to any precise location. As a consequence, she is an on-going writer as well, one of the few to write *while* travelling. This is so precisely because her being constantly on the road erases any possibility of electing a specific place in which to accomplish the writing. "I update Facebook, Twitter and Instagram daily and post at least one article on my blog per week. […] I always try to find my own unique story when I am there." "There" stands, of course, for anywhere she fancies going; the idea of uniqueness, then, applies not only to the writing (as discussed in the previous chapters), but also to her travel's flexibility, as well as the places she reaches (for instance in 2015 she managed to go to North Korea). Through this statement, one also understands the crucial aspect of Becki's travel blogging. Her being an eternal traveller and writer seems to have triggered a paradox: far from freeing Becki from temporal and spatial constraints, these two conditions have serialized the practices of travelling and writing. In other words, it is precisely at the moment in which travelling and writing become the travel blogger's life choice that they ask to be strictly organized, if not drained out of that serendipitous sense that runs through others' amateur blogs and fuels others' travellers personae.

Conclusion

In this chapter, many of the texts considered in the thesis were connected with the interviews conducted with the writers. The aim was to address the pragmatic features of the travel writing genre by investigating the interplay between travelling and writing as practices, thus unveiling the conditions and reasons that guide them. Concerning the writing, authors and bloggers manifested the need to accomplish it a certain time after the experience. This is particularly surprising in the case of travel bloggers, insofar as the medial format they use invites almost immediate writing. The discussion on the writing also led to question the distinction between amateur and professional writers. From the interviews it emerged that the great majority of authors think of themselves as travel writers (or journalists). Concerning bloggers, instead, the picture is more ambivalent. While those hosted on platforms have trouble defining themselves as writers – insofar as their blogging is usually functional to simply keep memory of the events – each individual blogger builds a self-representation that is a negotiation – rather than an exclusive choice – between the amateur and professional realms. This also destabilizes those assumptions about blogging as a chiefly amateur practice which derives from early studies on blogs, as seen in the Introduction.[112] Epitomizing in this regard is the case of blogger Becki who abandoned her alias in favour of her real name when she launched her new blog, ultimately sanctioning the passage from an amateur to a professional conception of her online activity. More generally, while bloggers on platforms perceive their writing as amateur – an aspect that also explains the homogeneity of their accounts, as witnessed in Chapters 1 and 2 – individual bloggers put a great effort into their writing and strive to professionalize it, even when this remains unpaid.

Concerning the travelling, the comparison among and between travel blogs and travel books shed a light onto how travel writers think of (and plan) their journeys. On the one hand, this involved assessing how writers see themselves along the spectrum traveller-tourist. As remarked by previous studies on tourism and travel writing, a neat distinction between these two terms is by now untenable. Yet, it is possible to see a polarization

[112] In the 2003 Nieman report it is also possible to read that "many traditional journalists are dismissive of bloggers, describing them as self-interested or unskilled amateurs. Conversely, many bloggers look upon mainstream media as an arrogant, elitist club that puts its own version of self-interest and economic survival above the societal responsibility of a free press." Here, a sharp distinction between professionals and amateurs is openly asserted: under the latter term are subsumed features of honesty and independence, as much as incompetence and approximation, while the former is synonymous with quality, precision and accuracy but also limited freedom. This vision has become largely unsustainable nowadays, insofar as the blurring between online blogs and traditional media is much more accentuated than a decade ago and traditional journalists and native bloggers have deeply influenced each others.

between authors and bloggers: the former (still) attach their own personae to the "traveller" label, while the latter manifest more ambivalent positions. While bloggers on platforms straightforwardly define themselves as tourists – and do not feel urged to qualify their being tourist in any respect – individual travel bloggers tend to bridge the gap – if any – that separates the tourist from the traveller, by unfolding hybrid positions and self-representations. On the other hand, the discussion on travelling-as-a-practice compelled to unpack the conceptual validity of the loop "home-away-home" which usually characterises travel in its abstract form. The analysis showed that such a loop, far from identifying a recursive pattern, is practically remodelled in various ways. Each travel writer positions him/herself in relation to at least three coordinates: 1) the possibility to travel either for a short period (Ramazzotti and many travel bloggers) or a long one (Thubron, Legerton and Rawson, de Slizewicz, and Robjstaples, Becki); 2) being residents in China (Legerton and Rawson, de Slizewicz, Robjstaples, Ataritouchme, etc.) or travellers *stricto sensu* (Thubron, Ramazzotti, Supermary58, Mathieu, Gattosandro Viaggiatore, etc.); and 3) the favouring of sedentary experiences (Ramazzotti and partially Curieuse Voyageuse) or itinerant ones (the majority of the travel writers). Aside from the number of options, what is most important to note is that each author charges the notions of "home" and "away" with precise cultural and ideological values, thus resisting any attempt to classify their experiences according to a taxonomic classification of travels that draws upon fixed space-time coordinates. This also highlighted the rhetorical strategies to which authors resort when trying to make sense of the experience (of the Other) in terms of what is known and familiar. Interestingly, there is widespread compliance with the framing of China and the Chinese within a Western-inspired and Western-oriented perspective, even when the writer has lived in China at length. The majority of these writers cannot help but look at China from "home", be it a real or putative place.

The following chapter will assess how "older" travel writings about China coincide with and differ from contemporary ones, particularly in terms of the representation of the country and the travellers.

PART TWO

TRAVEL WRITING AND CHINA OVER A CENTURY

Chapter 4

Looking Back at "Classic" Western Travel Writing

In this chapter the synchronic trajectory that has hitherto guided the transmedial analysis of contemporary travel books and travel blogs is abandoned. The purpose is to adopt a diachronic perspective that will allow the historical evolution of Western-authored travel books about China to be explored. Nonetheless, the analysis will draw upon the theoretical tenets that have been developed in the first part of the work, particularly with regard to: 1) narrative discourse and its ideological implications; 2) hypertextual and peritextual features; and 3) chronotope of photography. The aim is, on the one hand, to explore if travel writing has undergone substantial changes in terms of its generic features, and, on the other hand, to understand if the representation that Western travellers provide of themselves as well as of China has changed over time.

The analysis refers to a dozen travelogues in English, French and Italian covering a period of roughly a century: from the 1890s to the 1980s. Isabelle Bird's *The Yangtze Valley and Beyond* (1899)[113] constitutes the oldest referenced text, while Luigi Malerba's *Cina Cina* (1985)[114] is the most recent one. The boundaries of this temporal framework are not arbitrary, but respond to precise historical factors. As briefly mentioned in Chapter 1, it is at the end of the 19th century that China became a tourist destination, attracting Westerners who wanted to enjoy the country's imperial allure and witness its socio-political changes. At the other end of the spectrum, it is in the late 1980s and early 1990s that China put an end to its geopolitical self-closure and returned to be the target of an increasing number of tourists. Moreover, the choice to extend the analysis to the 1980s is motivated by the fact that the "oldest" travelogue analysed in the first part of the thesis – Colin Thubron's *Behind*

[113] Isabella Bishop Bird (1831-1904) was a British novelist and travel writer, also known for her journeys in Australia, the US and Japan. In this travel book, enriched with several pictures taken by the author, she recounts her long journey in the Middle Kingdom, in particular along the east coast and following the Yangtze River from east towards the Tibetan plateau. The journey was accomplished in 1896-7 and the book represents Bird's last major travelogue.

[114] Malerba, Luigi (1927-2008) was an Italian poet and novelist. He wrote the travelogue *Cina Cina* (trans. *China China*). This short book, published in 1985, derives from the journey that Malerba made to the post-Mao China in 1980, together with other Italian writers, among whom Vittorio Sereni and Alberto Arbasino. By reading *Cina Cina* it is difficult to retrace precisely the itinerary followed by the Italian delegation because Malerba writes very short chapters about small details of Chinese daily life. Among the titles of the pieces we find "Le diecimila cose" (trans. "The Ten Thousand Things"), "Tempo circolare" (trans. "Circular time"), and "Il piacere della ripetizione" (trans. "The pleasure of Repetition"). It is ascertained that Malerba visited Beijing, Hangzhou, Shanghai and Suzhou, thus largely complying with the itineraries that the Chinese authorities prescribed to foreign visitors. The book does not contain any pictures.

the Wall – dates back to 1987: hence, the historical overview provided here eventually catches up with the temporal outer limits of what have hitherto been characterized as "contemporary travelogues". Overall, the temporal frame surveyed can be divided into two segments: the years from 1899 to 1949 mark a period of turmoil in China, with the fall of the last imperial dynasty and the birth of the Republic, but also the wars against Japan and the fight between Communists and Nationalists, which ended with the victory of the former and the rise to power of Mao Zedong. To this first segment belong texts such as *Westward to the Far East* (1900)[115] by US-American Eliza Scidmore, *A Woman in China* (1914)[116] by Australian Mary Gaunt, *Peking Dust* (1919)[117] by US-American Ellen LaMotte, *Voyage d'une parisienne à Lhassa* ([1927] 2008)[118] by Belgian-French Alexandra David-Neel, *Forbidden Journey: From Peking to Kashmir* ([1937] 2003)[119] by Swiss Ella Maillart, *Travels in Tartary: One's Company and News from Tartary* (1941),[120] two travelogues by British Peter Fleming, and *Shark's Fins and Millet* (1944)[121] by Polish-born writer Ilona Sues. The proclamation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 paved the way to almost four decades of isolation of China with regard in particular to Western countries. Accessing the Middle Kingdom during these years meant either to be invited by the Chinese government, or to rely upon the China Tourism Agency, which arranged the whole stay. The texts analysed here that refer to the period 1949-1985 all bear, to various degrees, the

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115 Eliza Scidmore (1856-1928) was a journalist and writer. This travelogue, a sort of travel guide, was first released in 1892 but it became so popular that it was reprinted several times (the edition referred to here dates 1900). Many drawings are interpolated into the text.

116 Mary Gaunt (1861-1942) travelled in China in 1913-4. At that time the Boxer Rebellion and the fall of the Qing Dynasty had just occurred, leaving the country in a state of profound instability. Gaunt (also a novelist) is well known for her travelogues about the West Indies and West Africa. Many pictures accompany the text.

117 US-American journalist and author Ellen LaMotte (1873-1961) stayed in Beijing for a few months in 1919 dwelling within the delegation quarter. She also travelled to the southern regions of China for a few weeks. In this book, the author shows some political concern about China's political situation, but overall her stay is presented as a leisure experience.

118 The book also appeared in English in 1927 with the title *My Journey to Lhasa*. Alexandra David-Neel (1868-1969), an explorer and writer, narrates her endeavour to reach and access the city of Lhasa, which at that time was forbidden to foreigners. She accomplished the journey together with her adopted son Yongden, who was a lama. This chapter refers to both the 2008 French edition and the 2005 English edition: the former comes without pictures, while the latter has illustrations in it. Moreover, the two texts present different versions of the introduction.

119 Ella Maillart (1903-1997) was an explorer and journalist. In *Forbidden Journey* she recounts the crossing that she accomplished in 1935 towards Tartary together with British journalist Peter Fleming. At that time several conflicts among Chinese warlords affected the whole region. The 2003 edition of the book referred to here comes without illustrations (it is ascertained, however, that Maillart took pictures along the road).

120 Peter Fleming (1907-1971) was a journalist and a writer. The book *Travels in Tartary* collects two different travel accounts: the first one – *One's Company* – recounts the journey that Fleming made in China in 1933 and which led him to witness the fights between the Nationalists and the Communists; the second one – *News from Tartary* – was accomplished in 1935. On this second occasion Fleming travelled together with Maillart towards Xinjiang, until reaching India. In this book's edition there are no illustrations. The 1941 edition of *Travels in Tartary* is a monomodal book.

121 Ilona Sues reached the country in 1936 as a freelance reporter. At that time, the Japanese invasion of China was looming. Sues, also an expert on the issue of the opium trade, visited the frontline of both the Nationalists and the Communists and hoped for a joint collaboration against the Japanese. Many pictures inserted in the middle of the book document Sues's acquaintance with Generals from both sides.

mark of the impossibility of freely moving around the country. Apart from Malerba's *Cina Cina*, the analysis focuses on: *Io in Russia e in Cina* (1958)[122] by Italian Curzio Malaparte, *Cara Cina* ([1966] 1972)[123] by Italian Goffredo Parise, and *Travels in China* (2012)[124] by French Roland Barthes. The selection of the texts is by no means exhaustive, but it ideally covers each decade of the whole temporal frame and it takes into account texts in the three languages surveyed.

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When it comes to the investigation of pre-modern and modern Western-authored travelogues about China, the corpus of studies is substantial. Concerning the study of late-19th and early-20th century travel writings, Kerr and Kuehn (2007: 6) argue that, "one field [of enquiry] asks 'literary' questions about form, genre and tradition, (narrative) voice and modality, and fictionality. […] Another field focuses on the 'factual' and discursive side of the travel text." However blurred in itself this distinction might be, the bridging of these two fields is, in fact, one of the aims of the first part of the thesis as well as of the present chapter. To be sure, focusing on the "represented" China – that is, the written China of travellers – does not mean exclusively embracing a discursive perspective that denies the existence of a "real" China: a China that was physically there and constituted, over time, the reference point for the travellers. Hayot, Saussy, and Yao (2007: viii) are right when they warn that "the intricacies of the relationship between various written Chinas – the texts – and the nation/culture known simply as 'China' – their main shared context – are so complex as to be nearly unspeakable […] China is spoken in many idioms at times

122 Curzio Malaparte (1898-1957), an Italian journalist and novelist, wrote the book *Io in Russia e in Cina* (trans. *Me in Russia and China*), which was published posthumous in 1958. In this travel reportage Malaparte recounts the journey he made in 1957 to Russia and China, which had just witnessed the birth of the People's Republic. He was invited to China for the commemoration of the writer Lu Xun. He visited the main cities and archaeological sites around the country. At the core of Malaparte's account is the encounter he had with Chairman Mao Zedong, whose veracity remains, however, unsure.

123 Goffredo Parise (1929-1986) was an Italian journalist and writer. In 1966 Parise went to China and published a series of articles for the newspaper *Corriere della Sera* which were later collected in a book titled *Cara Cina* (trans. *Dear China*. The edition to which this work refers is the one released in 1972 by Einaudi). Parise reached China when the Cultural Revolution was at full steam. Despite Parise rejecting Communism altogether, he remained fascinated by China's history and culture. Parise is one of the few Italian writers of the period who went to China alone, relying for his trip on the China Travel Agency. He visited the major and most developed cities: Guangdong, Beijing, Nanjing, Hong Kong. The book does not include any pictures or illustrations.

124 Roland Barthes (1915-1980) filled three carnets on the occasion of his journey to China, from the 11th of April to the 4th of May 1974. *Carnets du voyage en Chine* (released in France in 2009 and translated into English by Andrew Brown in 2012 with the title *Travels in China*) gathers all of Barthes's travel notes. The French philosopher was part of a delegation composed of Philippe Sollers, Julia Kristeva, Marcelin Pleynet and François Wahl. It is uncertain whether Barthes had planned to publish his *Carnets* how they are, as they largely constitute a set of short comments and sketches. They have been released without any editorial adjustments.

overlapping and at times mutually hostile ones." In order not to privilege one side – the textual – over the other – the geo-cultural – it is necessary to look at what is (or is not) in the texts (for example, notations of historical events and autobiographical information, but also the discursive strategies adopted), as well as to contextualize each account within the cultural and historical background that surrounds it. Nicholas Clifford (2001: 2) reminds us the importance of always bringing the ethos of the text to the surface: "that means examining not only the ways in which China was described for the readerships back home, but also the reasons why particular forms of representation were chosen and the ways in which those forms reflected changes taking place both in China itself and in the societies from which the traveller came". Put differently, each representation of China is always and necessarily the result of the interplay between the cultural, and historical conditions of the country at a given moment in time, as well as the traveller's own background and attitudes. This is why Kerr and Kuehn (2007: 5) specify that positive or negative perceptions of China cannot be uniformly applied to any specific historical period; on the contrary, they have to be inscribed into their own time (and within the author's biography) in order to be assessed and understood.

Here the attempt is to outline convergences and divergences – in terms of rhetorical and medial characteristics – among travelogues from different decades of the 20th century (up to the present) and to rescue the singularity of each work, intended as the outcome of a precise authorial vision. To be challenged is the tendency – from which also Clifford's *A Truthful Impression of the Country* does not fully escape – to derive linear, homogeneous macro-trajectories of evolution specifically concerning 1) how travel writing as a genre has evolved; 2) the way in which China has been represented; and 3) how the travellers have represented themselves. The venture, Peter Hulme (1986: 12) reminds us in his study, is archaeological: "no smooth history emerges, but rather a series of fragments which, read speculatively, hint at a story that can never be fully recovered." In fact, the present analysis will portray a heterogeneous textual landscape made of synchronic differences as well as diachronic similarities; a landscape that contests any coherent reconstruction and reasserts, *a posteriori*, the irreducible uniqueness of each text.

Despite some degrees of overlap, the chapter is divided into three main sections, each of which addresses a specific theme: travel writing as a genre; the representation of Chinese history, landscape, and people; the (self)representation of the travellers. In each section the analysis follows a chronological trajectory, starting from the oldest travelogues and moving onwards through the 20th century. In so doing, connections will be made with the contemporary travelogues analysed in the first part of the thesis, thus making evident the uneven (and maybe unsettling) continuity or discrepancies with older texts.

Has the Travel Writing Genre Evolved?

The first issue concerns the generic features of the selected travel books. More precisely, this section offers a survey of the texts, focusing on their literary elements, how the narrative discourse is shaped and the effects it produces. Even a cursory reading of the travelogues reveals that their literary form is often a combination of sub-genres, styles, and discourses. In this sense, similarly to contemporary authors, late-19th and early-20th century travel writers draw upon a variety of registers to give shape to their accounts. For example, Ellen LaMotte's *Peking Dust* and Ralf Sues's *Shark's Fins and Millet* present a heterogeneous collage of newspaper articles, private letters, and quotations from other texts. Sues, in particular, acknowledges this, by warning the reader that the book is "a medley of everything, as unorthodox as life itself" (1944: 6). On the same line, Isabelle Bird's *The Yangtze Valley and Beyond* is, in the words of the author, a set of materials "consist[ing] of journal letters, photographs and notes from a brief diary" (1899: vii). Another example comes from David-Neel's *My Journey to Lhasa* (2005). In the opening pages, which serve as a framework to motivate the author's decision to enter the forbidden city of Lhasa, David-Neel enriches the text with quotes from a variety of texts, such as the work of the English monk Edmund Candler, who remembers that the capital "has not always been closed to strangers… Until the end of the 18th century, only physical obstacles stood in the way of an entry to the capital"[125] (David-Neel 2005: xxxiv). These examples demonstrate that these texts are the result of substantial research (which either anticipates or follows the journey); but, most importantly, they reveal the intrinsic hypertextuality of the accounts in that the mix of registers and sources is overtly acknowledged. This means not only, as argued in the first part of this thesis, that hypertextuality does go beyond a mere matter of medium, but that it cannot be confined to contemporary publications either. Secondly, one understands from the authors' own voices that their texts underwent a radical rewriting and/or editing process in order to arrange all the materials. It suffices to compare, for instance, Bird's minimal diary notes, which she sometimes includes in her book, with the final version of what is recounted:

[125] In the English edition this excerpt is fully contained in a footnote, while in the French edition Edmund Candler's words are reported in the text and then the reference to his book is given in a footnote.

> My door was broken down with much noise and yells of "Foreign devil!" "Horse-racer!" "Child-eater!" but an official, arriving in the nick of time, prevented further damage. He ought to have appeared an hour and a half before. The entry in my diary for that evening was, "Wretched evening; riotous crowd; everything anxious and odious; noises; too cold to sleep." My lamp sputtered and went out, and my matches were too damp to strike. It is objectionable to be in the dark, you know not where, with walls absolutely precarious, and in the midst of the coarse shouts of rough men to hear a feeble accompaniment of rats eating one's few things. (Bird: 246)

This quotation attests to Bird's reworking of her notes and the inclusion in the text of personal anecdotes. Overall, however, the first-person stance from which the account is narrated is counterbalanced by Bird's effort to deliver a "truthful" (viii) representation of her destinations, which translates into an objectification of the account. For instance, in the first chapter one finds detailed notations regarding the characteristics of the Yangtze basin:

> Geographically the Yangtze Valley, or drainage area, may be taken as extending from the 90th to the 122nd meridian of east longitude and as including all or most of the most important provinces of SZE CHUAN, HUPEII, HUNAN, KIANGSI, NGANHUI, KIANGSU and HONAN. […] Its area is estimated at about 650.000 square miles, and its populations, one of the most peaceful and industrious on earth, at from 170.000.000 and 180.000.000. (Bird: 1)

The portrayal of the Yangtze valley in terms of geopolitical features is functional, not only to provide verifiable data *per se* (and implicitly reassert the author's competence over the subject), but also to clear the ground from the presence of autochthons, who are turned into numbers. The Chinese people who live in the valley are barely mentioned and, when this happens, they are described as "peaceful" and "industrious", two adjectives that make of them a homogeneous mass of people and imply the relative easiness of governing them.

Discursively speaking, those passages by Bird that provide accurate data about China echo vividly the seminal travelogue by Marco Polo. Below is a comparison of the two descriptions that Polo and Bird dedicate to today's Hangzhou (known as "Kinsay" by Polo and "Hangchow" by Bird):

> In this city there are 12 guilds of different crafts, and each guild has 12,000 houses in the occupation of its workmen. All these craftsmen had full employment since many other cities of the kingdom are supplied by this city. […] Both men and women are fair and comely, and for the most part clothe themselves in silk, so vast is the supply of that material, both from the whole district of Kinsay and from the imports by traders from other provinces. […] All the streets of the city are paved with stone or brick, as indeed are all the highways throughout this area so that you ride and travel in every direction without inconvenience. (Polo 1958: 217)

> The "west-end" streets are, however, broad, light, well flagged, and incredibly clean for China. Hangchow impresses one with a general sense of well-being. […] Everything in the city and neighbourhood suggests silk. In all the adjacent country the mulberry tree is omnipresent […] in expectation of a greatly increased demand for this staple product. There are 7000 handlooms for the weaving of silk in Hangchow, employing 28.000 people. (Bird: 37)

The similarity between these two passages makes literally collapse the time gap of more than 800 years that divides *The Travels of Marco Polo* and *The Yangtze Valley and Beyond*. These two pieces manifest the same tendency to objectify the places and people visited and show the extent to which the (Western) desire to map and commoditize China is shared between different epochs (to change, rather, are the consequences of such desire: peer trading for Polo, colonial purposes for Bird).

In fact, Bird's goal is to make the text useful not only for a popular readership at home, but also for those people directly involved in the commercial exploitation of the Yangtze basin. As Susan Morgan (2007: 118) rightly points out, the Yangtze represented "an economic promise for British merchants and investors [due] to its appropriate international position." The underpinning logic of Bird's text, which reflects the historical ethos of what has been defined "the scramble for China"[126], is that China's natural resources could be, and indeed needs to be, managed by the British. The author's concluding remarks to her book are particularly telling:

[126] Following the Opium Wars and alongside the weakening of the Qing Dynasty, at the end of the 19th century China increasingly became the target of Western powers, whose intentions were to seize its resources and control its territory. Although this "interest" never led to a proper colonization of China, it fuelled what has been named the "scramble for China". In this regard, refer to Robert Bickers's *The Scramble for China* (2012).

> China is certainly at the dawn of a new era. Whether the twentieth century shall place her where she ought to be, in the van of Oriental nations, or whether it shall witness her disintegration and decay, depends very largely on the statesmanship and influence of Great Britain. (Bird: 544)

Here Bird abandons any form of "detached" accounting and a patronizing tone emerges. Readers are not simply confronted with "the impressions received in fifteen months of journeyings" (Bird: 520), but with the manifest call for a major political involvement of the British Empire in China. These impressions serve to support Bird's political agenda, which is also the British agenda, as the dedication of the book to the K. G. Marquess of Salisbury – who had been three times Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and four times Foreign Secretary – also attests.

Another example of Bird's defence of the British role in China occurs when she touches upon the delicate issue of the opium trade. Firstly, she diplomatically overlooks Britain's role: "I shall not touch on the history of the growth and use of opium in China" (497); later, she suggests that the spreading of opium is largely due to the indolence of Chinese people: "Outside of commercial pursuits an overpowering shadow of dullness rests on Chinese as upon much of Oriental life. […] All make the blissful dreams and the oblivion of the opium pipe greatly to be desired." (Bird: 514) It is by remarking on the Chinese passive attitude towards life, that the author claims the necessity to intervene in the country. In so doing, the interests that Bird promotes are masked by the allure of a *mission civilisatrice* which has moral rather than commercial motives (epitomizing this is also the author's claim that China should be considered not as an area of "control", but as one of "influence"). Moreover, such a mission restores Britain's integrity and assigns to it a leading position as far as China's affairs are concerned.

Bird was by no means the only author to betray a political agenda in her travelogue. The US-American Ellen LaMotte, for instance, defends in *Peking Dust* (1919) the US's non-intromission policy into China's affairs. Mirroring Bird's erasure of Britain's responsibilities in the opium trade, LaMotte only mentions how "the European powers just arrange it among themselves, each decides what provinces it wants, agrees not to trespass upon the sphere of influence of one another, and then notify China" (19). In her reporting of the situation, then, LaMotte overlooks that the US also had concessions in Beijing (the international legation quarter where she was staying) as well as in the International settlement in Shanghai (where the Americans remained for almost a century, from 1848 to 1945). Moreover, the US also had commercial interests in China, which were best exposed by the "Open Door"[127] policy, aimed at securing free trade in the Middle Kingdom by and among Western powers. A further attempt to conceal the book's political agenda can be retrieved in LaMotte's opening statement concerning the generic features of her account:

> Two classes of books are written about China by two classes of people. There are books written by people who have spent the night in China, as it were, superficial and amusing, full of the tinkling of temple bells; and there are other books written by people who have spent years in China and who know it well, – ponderous books, full of absolute information, heavy and unreadable. […] This book falls into neither of these two classes, except perhaps in the irresponsibility of its author. It is compounded of gossip – the flying gossip or dust of Peking. Take it lightly; blow off such dust as may happen to stick to you. (LaMotte: 7)

This passage conveys an idea of her account as a ruffled set of notes that do not aim to be accurate or precise. Put differently, LaMotte makes a plea in defence of the amateurish nature of her account. At the same time, it is precisely such supposed unpretentiousness that projects onto the "irresponsible" LaMotte a politically disinterested allure, so that she can claim to provide readers with an honest report on China's current situation. Yet, even conceived as a flying "gossip", LaMotte's account manifests the fragility of its supposed impartiality whenever the author resorts overtly to a paternalistic tone, by reclaiming a sort of private ownership of China:

> That is what makes Peking so absorbing, the peculiar protective feeling that it gives one. In a way it seems to belong to us; its interests are *our* interests; its well-being is peculiarly our concern. You wish the best to happen to China, you wish Chinese interests to have the right of way. (LaMotte: 123)

In LaMotte's case it is not objectivity, nor the shaping of the account as a supposed "truthful" text, that guides the author's political agenda, but rather the presentation of the book as an unpretentious mix of volatile and off-the-record notations; a sort of diary that has (voluntarily) transcended the borders of privacy to go commercial. In fact, in the quoted passage China and the Chinese are domesticated and considered as unable to decide for themselves. We witness the conflation of any distance dividing the traveller and the

[127] See the following governmental online resource: https://history.state.gov/milestones/1899-1913/hay-and-china.

Other, as if she was immersed into China and not separated from it by the walls of the international legation quarter. This sense of familiarity has the effect to undermine the potential allegations of the US having interests in China and allows for a reversal according to which it is China's destiny that comes to coincide with all that matters to the US.

A travelogue that constitutes a formal compromise between these two works is David-Neel's *My Journey to Lhasa*. The journey, we have seen, is motivated by the willingness to break the restriction on foreigners accessing Lhasa. One can say that such a goal represents a political motive. However, the endeavour is presented more as a personal achievement than as a confrontation between national interests. For example, discussing the contested involvement of Britain in Tibet, David-Neel rejects any speculation that her critique might be generalized: "before ending I wish to assure my many English friends that my criticism of the part their government has played in this situation is not the outcome of bad feelings against the English nation as a whole" (David-Neel 2005: xxxix). Hence, David-Neel thinks primarily of her journey as an individual endeavour. In this respect, it must be noted that the book, despite never falling into introspection, flirts with the canon of the initiation journey, in which the author – indeed the protagonist of the plot together with her companion Yongden – is asked to pass a series of "tests" and surmount difficulties due, not least, by the harshness of the walk. This also finds a reflection in the literary style:

> Night came and snow began to fall again. The sky was pitch dark, but a dim, dull light, that made me think of Hades, seemed to ascend strangely from the white ground and issue from the snow-clad trees. White from head to foot, mind and body benumbed […] In that fantastic landscape, we looked like two queer ghosts *en route* to answer the call of a Tibetan wizard. (David-Neel 2005: 168)

The passage testifies to a certain tendency of the author to poeticize the narrative. In so doing, David-Neel abdicates by and large that observatory stance which, as Sara Mills (1991) notes, was expected from early-20th century female-authored travel writing. By contrast, David-Neel's account approaches those contemporary travelogues in which the tale is openly filtered through (and depends on) the traveller's persona. In fact, according to Mills (1991: 153) the filling of the narrative with descriptive elements that belong to the realm of the "irrational" "is enough [for some critics] to call the entire account into question." David-Neel's text, then, presents a fictionalization that draws upon the literary form of the mystic journey, the picaresque adventure and the personal diary, while, at the same time, being based on an endeavour that has a political *raison d'être*.

Continuing the survey of the travelogues from a formalistic point of view, Scidmore's *Westward to the Far East* is a text that does not respond to (or support) any stringent political agenda. In fact, its generic affiliation approaches the contemporary travel guide. Her brief book (roughly 80 pages) aims at presenting China (but also Japan and Indonesia) as a tourist destination. More specifically, the passenger traffic manager of the Canadian Pacific Railway, who wrote the introduction, states that the book wants

> to tell the possible traveler what there is to be seen and the actual traveler how to see it. It is the result of personal observation and enquiry prompted by the desire to acquire the knowledge most useful to a tourist, and while being a trustworthy guide to those traveling in the countries referred to, will teach others a great deal about China and Japan which they cannot fail to be interested in knowing. (Scidmore: 1-2)

Such a statement could easily be found on the cover of one of today's travel guides. It is also remarkable that the author openly identifies a kind of knowledge that is proper to the tourist; as such, this claim positions the text differently from all the others written about China up to that point. The "I" of the writer disappears from the text together with any concrete reference to the effective unfolding of the journey, which sublimates in a rarefied experience with no temporal anchoring points. It could be advanced that the narrative of the text is very close to that found in travel blogs, but also, more radically, that the absence of a manifest subjective stance in charge of the tale pushes the text to the limit of travel writing as defined in the introduction to this thesis. To the extent to which China is conceived as a tourist destination, the narrative (and ideological) discourse of the text is objective (and the representation of China objectified): no more patronizing "I"s, but advice on where to go, what to see and how to move around; no more commercially driven mappings, or politically motivated seizures of lands, but leisure and entertainment. Once we accept this, however, we are confronted with a practical short circuit: in the Middle Kingdom – more radically than elsewhere – there has been a synchronic collapsing between the practice of mapping the territory for ethnographic and explorative purposes and the practice of tourism. Mike Crang (2011: 211) notes on this issue that "a destination becomes such by producing a sense of 'hereness' and becoming a place distinguished from others through its possession of some attributes. Increasingly, one might argue, the ‘hereness’ of destinations are socially inscribed values and meanings layered onto the landscape.” On the one hand, China’s acquisition of social value – as a tourist destination – is exemplified by Scidmore’s listing of the things to be seen in Beijing:

> The Summer Palace, without the walls, destroyed by the French in 1861, is now being rebuilt, and is closed to visitors. The Temple of Heaven, where the Emperor annually worships, was burned a few years since, but its ruins and the other temples within its park are interesting. The Confucian Temple, the Hall of Classics and the Examination Hall, where the students assemble every year to strive for rank and honors, are also to be seen. (Scidmore: 57)

On the other hand, if we consider that Bird’s account – which is contemporary to Scidmore’s – recounts the immersion into “the beyond” – that is, the easternmost unexplored areas of the Yangtze – it is evident that also “natural” – and not only “social” – features of the country – as Crang calls them – had a great relevance for Western travellers (to the point that, according to Morgan [2007] Bird’s final pages recount an exploration in the tradition of 19th century ethnography). This overlap of natural and social features is particularly visible when looking at the pictures that accompany Bird and Scidmore’s texts (according to Crang, a photograph “can almost stand as a marker of the tourist on occasion” [2011: 206]).

A wider discussion on the visual elements in early travelogues will be conducted later on in this chapter; here, however, one specific picture deserves to be analysed: on page 69 of Bird’s text is a picture whose caption states “street in Hangkow”. This same picture appears in Scidmore’s travel book on page 54, and here it stands for a “street in a Chinese city” (Figure 39). What Scidmore does is to decontextualize the picture, which, in this way, loses its geographic specificity and comes to stand for a generalized “street”. In Scidmore’s text, one could say, the picture functions as a proof of how Chinese streets are and, most importantly, of “having been” in China. The dynamics of (re)appropriation of this image are telling not only of the social stratification of a specific place, from being geo-localizable to a mere touristic aperçu, but also of the history that pertains to photographs as reproducible artefacts. In fact, the photograph was taken neither by Bird nor Scidmore, but by the eminent British photographer John Thomson, who travelled in China and collected his shots in *Straits of Malacca, Indo-China, and China* (1875). The link that this picture creates among these authors shows – more than the fact that China was already a widely photographed subject at the end of 19th century – the circulation and uses to which images of China were subjected. Clearly, the meaning of these images depends on, and influences, the kind of projects they serve, similarly to what happened with Hirst's *Il mondo oltre il fiume dei peschi in fiore* where Giorgio Lotti's photographs, which in themselves had the function of witnessing China in the 1970s when the country was closed to Westerners, in the travelogue were subservient to visualize Hirst's own memories.

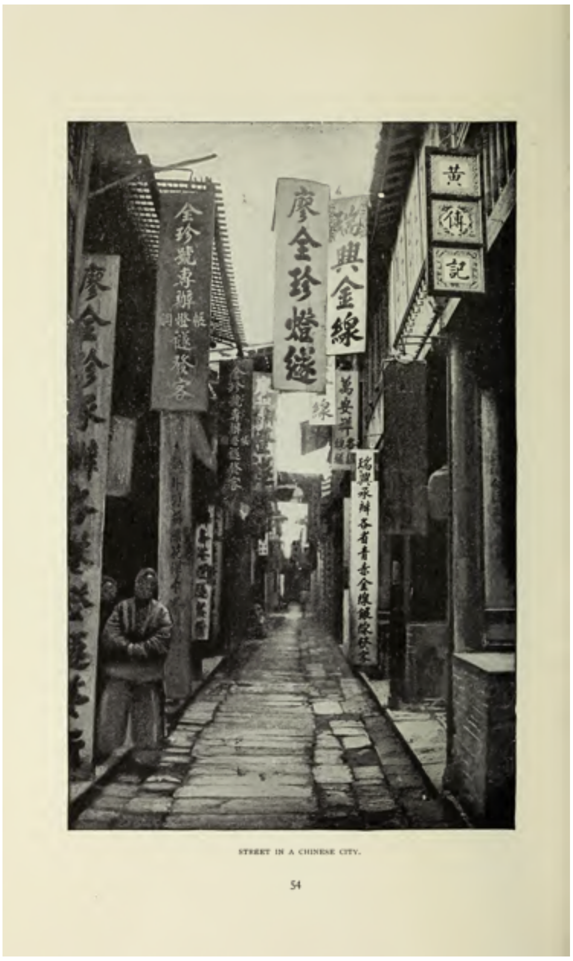

Figure 39. The picture of a "street in a Chinese city" in Scidmore's Westward to the Far East

To conclude, one last example of the generic diversification of late 19th century – early 20th century travel writing is associated with the reportage. "By the 1930s," Clifford (2001: 6) argues, "the line between the travel account and journalism becomes less and less clear." According to Clifford, the affiliation of the travel book (about China) to journalism parallels the escalation of internal conflicts and the approaching of the second Sino-Japanese War. However, such parallelism does not hold when a broader diachronic perspective is favoured. Not only, as seen in Chapter 1, do contemporary travelogues take the form of reportages, despite the current stability of the country, but in the first decades of the 20th century there were also travel writers who refrained from addressing China's stringent actuality.[128] David-Neel's journey to Lhasa, as seen, is one example; a second one is Mary Gaunt's (1914) *A Woman in China*. When the Australian traveller and novelist travelled to China, the first Sino-Japanese War (1894–95) and the Boxer Rebellion (1900) were just over, but even more recent were the fall of the Qing Dynasty and the establishment of the Republic (1912). Despite informing China's socio-historical background of the period, these events are rarely mentioned by Gaunt in her account. Overall, the author thinks of herself as an independent traveller, affected by a wander fever that leaves no space for politics. The following passage, in the overture of the book, frames the horizon of the tale well:

> I got into the habit of gauging my chances of seeing a country by the number of books written about it. China, judged by this standard, fell naturally into the place assigned to it by my grandmother's curios; for from the days of Marco Polo men have gone up and down the land, painfully, sorrowfully, gladly, triumphantly, and at least half of them seem to have put pen to paper to describe what they have seen. Was it likely there would be anything left for me to write about? (Gaunt: 2)

The inscription of the author's desire to travel in China into a sort of epic genesis has the effect of "privatizing" the account – Gaunt does not go to China to witness what is going on as, for instance, Peter Fleming and Ella Maillart do – and impressing upon the Middle Kingdom the allure of a long-desired destination, which can be rewritten over and over. Even when Gaunt does mention important events that are more or less contemporary to her journey, she tends to seal them off from historical contingency:

> Tuan [Gaunt's coolie] had got as far as the fact that a President had taken the place of the Manchu Emperor, but I wondered very much whether the inhabitants of Tsung Hua Chou had. I meditated on my way back to "Missie's Inn" on the limitations of the practical Chinese mind that because it is practical, I suppose, cannot conceive of liberty, equality, and fraternity that a Republic denotes. The President, to the humble Chinese in the street, has just taken the place of the Emperor, he is the one who rules over them, his soldiers are withdrawn. (Gaunt: 200)

[128] The already mentioned "scramble for China" saw involved primarily Britain, France, Germany, the US, Russia and Japan. At the same time, the instability accompanying the last decades of the Qing Dynasty led to internal instability and the rise and fall of warlords who fought among themselves for the control and partition of certain areas of the inland. This state of uncertainty spanned well over fifty years between the end of the 19th century and the first three decades of the 20th century.

The birth of the Republic is described as an almost transcendent event, one that "just happened" and did not change at all the life of the (close-minded) Chinese. More than that, for such an event the Chinese have no responsibility: Gaunt's text exemplifies, once more, that China is conceived as an object of study – an object to be partitioned among foreign powers – rather than an empowered political subject which is arbiter of its own destiny.

Overall, the shaping of travel books as reportage neither is a homogeneous phenomenon, nor a historically determined one. Generic affiliation (the comparison between Bird and Marco Polo's accounts is a case in point) is largely a trans-historical issue; one in which China's actuality plays only a role, together with the individual choices made by each traveller on where to go and what to tell. Similarly, Clifford's (2001: 184) argument that "as the war closed in, changing the frame through which travellers saw China, out of the faceless mass there began to come into focus at least a few individuals with recognizable features" is controversial. In this respect the case of Peter Fleming and Ella Maillart is emblematic. Fleming was a British journalist for *The Times* and travelled to China in two occasions – 1933 and 1935 – the first one of which is recounted in *One's Company* (now collected in *Travels in Tartary*, 1941). Despite addressing the Chinese internal situation directly and witnessing the Civil War between the Nationalists and the Communists, in this book Fleming tends to look at China from a distance: "I kept major issues in the background" (xi), the author warns in the opening. In other words, Fleming reports on China's current situation, but he does not effectively engage with it. A similar approach also characterises his second travelogue, *News from Tartary*, in which the British author recollects the journey he undertook together with the Swiss writer and journalist Maillart through the western region of Xinjiang. At that time, a series of conflicts affected Xinjiang: both Fleming and Maillart, who recounts her experience in *Forbidden Journey* ([1937] 2003), set off to get a more accurate picture of the whole situation. While Fleming focuses on the progression of the journey, Maillart is less obsessed with getting the news and more open to engaging with the people. Below is a comparison of two short passages that recount the same encounter with a Cantonese man:

> Kini shared the seat beside the driver with a mysterious little Cantonese, who wore spats and smoked a pipe, but spoke no word of any foreign language. He said that he was a friend of the Governor of Sinkiang and was going to fly up to Urumchi from Lanchow, then go on to Moscow and afterwards to London. At first the only question in our mind was not whether he was a secret agent or not, but whose

> secret agent he was; but gradually he showed himself to be such a silly, ineffectual little man that we were not in the least surprised that he never got farther than Lanchow. (Fleming 1941: 290)

> Another privileged passenger sat with the driver beside me. Wearing European clothes and smoking a little, pretty pipe, he had shining teeth and smiling eyes. He was a Cantonese, the son of a rich merchant, and he was going to see the world, just to amuse himself. "I am going to Urumchi," he said as though it were quite a simple matter. "A friend who is a general has invited me. I'll take a plane from Lanchow." "But," I protested laughing, "the air service has stopped. You'll never get there." I was certain of my facts, but I did not disclose the secret of my own itinerary. "Haven't you heard," I enquired, "about the mortifying experience of Lo Wen-kan himself?" Lo Wen-kan was one of the Nanking ministers. Following an ill-advised order to make a landing at Urumchi, he had only been able to get back to China by going round through Siberia. My fellow-traveller began to ask questions and I told him we were going to visit the famous lamasery at Kumbum. But suddenly a terrifying idea crossed my mind – unjustified, as it proved in the event. Perhaps he had been sent to spy on us? (Maillart 2003: 30-1)

The different approaches to the travel and to the writing that Fleming and Maillart manifest are quite striking. The above passages show the extent to which Maillart tends to communicate with, and give space to, the people they meet, while Fleming embeds these encounters into the narrative. This is also reflected in the presence of dialogues in the form of direct speech in Maillart's text, while in Fleming's these take the form of reported speech. In the third section of this chapter, dedicated to the authors' self-representation, there will be a discussion of how differently Fleming and Maillart think of themselves and of the journey; here it suffices to note how different their writing – and its form – is, despite they relate the same experience.

Among the authors surveyed, Ilona Sues manifests the deepest involvement and engagement with China. When the Polish-born writer reaches China in 1936, the second Sino-Japanese war is looming and Communists and Nationalists are forced to collaborate in order to stop the foreign invasion. Generically speaking, it could be said that Sues's work highlights the blurring between the travel book and reportage. However, there emerge substantial (narrative and ideological) differences with texts of the same period. Clifford suggests that, despite Sues's effort to be "the eyes and the ears of the man-in-the-street" –

as she claims to be – she cannot help but linger on the portrayals of relevant figures. As an example, Clifford (2001: 248) recalls Sues's description of Mao Zedong, as a person who "combined all the characteristics of the Chinese people: their wisdom, in his high square forehead; their patient and untold sufferings in those spare, painfully knitted brows; their dreams and their keenness, their shrewdness and irony in his large black eyes". The point is that this description – which is ideologically inflated – is the exception rather than the rule and by no means does the author limit herself to the representation of Chinese leaders.

Sues's goal to "live and work with people who make history, to see their real faces undistorted, unembellished by propaganda. […] A leader in Headquarters, a Kuomintang official, a racketeer banker, a missionary, an educator, a soldier, a campaign school's child" (10), is pursed in various ways. Although her first contacts *in loco* are usually Western people, these, rather than representing the outer horizon of the author's experience (such as in Bird, LaMotte, Gaunt), help Sues to get in contact with local people. For instance Sues, who had been also employed at the Anti-Opium Information Bureau in Geneva, gets to work for a while for the Nationalists as a press officer. This, however, does not stop her to reach the Communists' front and report on their military and educational actions. In this way, Sues meets a varied number of Chinese people and is able to represent them from a peer-to-peer, anthropological perspective:

> I looked into the round face of a peasant boy in uniform. "Foreign comrade," he said, "you must not say 'Down with Japan.' We have no grudge against the people of Japan. What we are fighting is Japanese militarism. Do you understand my language?" "Yes I do. Go on and tell me – do you hate the little devils that invade your country? The soldiers, I mean?" "We do not hate them. They are forced to fight in a foreign land, far from their families. They suffer as we do. They are peasants and workers, as we are. And when they are killed, their mothers and wives and children weep as our womenfolk weep." (Sues: 234)

Sues makes a great effort to open herself towards common people, to whom she grants a voice. Moreover, in the quoted passage it is the Chinese man who provides an "illuminated" and tolerant perspective, in a way shaking Sues's own expectations about the war. The Chinese are no longer solely an object to stare at, but a subject to get in contact with. The consequence of that on the literary form of the book is that the journalistic register that characterises the text is contaminated with elements of novelization. It could also be suggested that the book constitutes an example *ante litteram* of the American new journalism, in which fact and fiction are invariably mixed. The following is an example in which the author recounts, not without a dramatic emphasis, the raids of the Japanese:

> The most fascinating hours during my employment at Headquarters were watching the air raids with Donald, on a hill at the foot of Purple Mountain. The valley below and the soft contours of the surrounding hills in their rich green, which autumn was slowly splashing with flaming dabs of yellow, red and orange, made a superbly serene setting for the airfield before us and the southern wall of the city to our right. High up behind us, at a distance, cushioned in a velvety carpet, half-up Purple Mountain, the white gleaming Sun Yat-Sen Mausoleum with its dark blue roof… (Sues: 144)

Sues's book was published in 1944, one year before the end of World War II and five years before the birth of the People's Republic of China. From 1949, the political situation in China stabilizes. However, far from meeting the hopes that Sues and many Western travellers had expressed, the rise to power of Mao Zedong coincides both with a (re)closure of the Middle Kingdom to the outer world, and with restrictions on mobility and civil rights for its people. As a consequence of the historical situation, it is possible to witness not only a quantitative reduction of travelogues about China,[129] but also a reshaping of its literary form.

The four books selected for this period are the French *Travels in China* (2012) by Roland Barthes, and three Italian texts: Curzio Malaparte's (1958) *Io in Russia e in Cina*, Goffredo Parise's ([1966] 1972) *Cara Cina*, and Luigi Malerba's (1985) *Cina Cina*. The three Italian texts could all be classed as travel reportages, although some differences among them are to be found. Malaparte's is surely the most narrative one; while Parise and Malerba opt for short, self-standing thematic chapters that provide brief aperçu on some aspects of China's life. As for Barthes's carnets, they adhere to the diary form, in that the French author dutifully reports the dates and hours of all visits. At the same time, his notes present neither a coherent thematic organization, nor a thread that ties them together; rather they constitute – similarly to *Cara Cina* and *Cina Cina* – a skeleton of impressions whose sole structuring principle is the chronotopic sequentiality of the stay.

One reason for the rarefication of the diegetic discourse in the texts is the control that the Chinese authorities exert on the travellers: "Who travels in China and is not a host of the Chinese government," Parise (1972: 716) notes, "is a (paying) host of the Chinese

[129] As seen, this paucity also concerns the number of studies on Western travel writing going from the birth of PRC to the death of Mao and the rise to power by Deng Xiaoping.

Travel Service, the sole travel agency for the whole country. In both cases, he is a prisoner, body and soul"[130] (author's translation). This means that these writers were confronted with a one-sided, uncontested image of China – the one prefabricated by the Chinese authorities who accompanied them – which left no space for serendipitous encounters. As a consequence, all four travellers resort, to various degrees, to an imaginative, metaphorical writing. According to Parise (1972: 662), for instance, Chinese architecture comes to stand for eternal repetition – spatial and temporal – while for Barthes (2012: 27) tea functions as a metonymy of the whole country: it is as tasteless as the impression that the traveller can get of China. Also Malerba (1985: 25), who went to China in 1980, writes that "every civilization, after all, is the representation of a utopia, but utopias are undecipherable for those who have not attended at their staging" (25; author's translation).[131] The apparently unavoidable tendency, common to all writers, is to present to the readers reflections and observations in which it is not the referent – China – that dominates, but the referential: the sign. Barthes is again illuminating when he denounces the "bricks" – as he calls it – of the Chinese propaganda through a parallelism with language:

> [1. Discourse of the signifier (writing)
> 2. Discourse of the signified (Bricks)
> 3. Interpretation. Struggles, Structures. Process.]
> [Level of the signified: in other words: what bars the signifier.
> Total eviction of the signifier.] (Barthes 2012: 122)

For these travellers China is staged; reality is there, but it is one that must be overcome; life is there, but it is still, it is a scenic view. Everything in China stands for something else and such otherness can only be metonymically implied (i.e. inferred).

Beyond the socio-historical situation of China, a second reason at the base of the texts' formal features is connected to the writers' own background. However rigid the Chinese prohibition might be, there is, as David Scott (2004: 37) puts it, "an ulterior motive shared by many western travel writers: that of escaping – if only momentarily – the determinism and essentialism of western linguistic and cultural Structures." Parise, Barthes, and Malerba – and partially Malaparte – were involved in the European literary neo avant-gardes of the 1960s. These movements wanted, among other goals, to rethink the canonical

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130 "Chi viaggia in Cina, e non è ospite del governo, è ospite (pagante) pagante del China Travel Service, la sola agenzia turistica cinese. In entrambi i casi è prigioniero, anima e corpo."
131 "Ogni civiltà in fondo è la rappresentazione di un'utopia, ma le utopie sono indecifrabili per chi non ha partecipato alla loro messa in scena."

use of language and the epistemological foundation of Western thought. To an extent, then, the travelogues of these writers can also be seen as *exercises de style* in which China constituted a privileged terrain of experimentation, given its resistance to being represented. The Italian critic Romano Luperini writes in the introduction to Malerba's *Cina Cina* (1985) that

> Here, one of the themes (or rather: the theme) of Malerba's intellectual and artistic research emerges: the "indecipherability" of reality. This word refers to a universe of signs and to their alterity to the code known by the interpreter. The world is made up of words, but these are unable to communicate and even master reality.[132] (Malerba: 8; author's translation)

Hence, if it is true that in the new-born PRC "everything that these travellers are about to accomplish is established, pre-ordered since the departure" (Pellegrino 1985: 87; author's translation), it is also true that the cultural ethos to which these authors refer compels them to turn their journeys into an almost virtualized experience whose means of expression can only be, ultimately, a language that reflects upon itself. Even in Malaparte's text – which is the oldest of the four – one can attest to the sublimation of the experience, particularly in the portrayal of Mao:

> President Mao […] stared at me silently for a few moments. Meanwhile, I was staring at him too. The President of the People's Republic of China, the hero of the Chinese revolution, the commandant of 600 million people, is a sixtyish man, tall beyond the average, with wide shoulders, a wide face, a wide front and black, thick, soft, hair. […] His gaze fascinated me: a still, serene, sweet and deeply good gaze. […] If his prodigious life as a man of action, as a revolutionary, is the mirror of his courage, his sense of sacrifice, his iron will, his face is the mirror of his good and generous heart.[133] (Malaparte: 121; author's translation)

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[132] "Appare qui uno dei temi (anzi: non un tema tra gli altri: il tema), della ricerca intellettuale e artistica di Malerba: l' "indecifrabilità" del reale. Il termine rinvia a un universo di segni e alla loro alterità rispetto al codice dell'interprete. Il mondo è fatto di parole, ma queste sono incapaci di comunicare e anche di impadronirsi davvero della realtà."

[133] "Il presidente Mao […] mi ha osservato per alcuni istanti in silenzio. Anch'io l'osservavo. Il Presidente della Repubblica Popolare della Cina, l'eroe della rivoluzione cinese, il capo di un popolo di 600 milioni di abitanti, è un uomo sui sessant'anni di statura oltre la media, dalle spalle ampie, il viso largo, la fronte altissima, I capelli neri, folti e soffici. […] mi affascinava il suo sguardo: che è fermo, sereno, dolce, profondamente buono. Se la sua prodigiosa vita di uomo d'azione, di rivoluzionario, è lo specchio del suo coraggio, del suo spirito di sacrificio, della sua volontà di ferro, il suo viso è lo specchio del suo animo buono, generoso."

This portrayal sounds almost like an elegy and, in fact, it becomes so once one acknowledges that it was written by an intellectual who had embraced fascist ideology and was miles away from the political ideals of Mao. It could also be remarked that this description is very similar to that provided by Sues at the end of her book. However, whereas in Sues such a description functioned as a synthesis of the author's hopes about the future of China and did not prevent her from engaging with Chinese people, in Malaparte's book Mao's description sets the tone of the whole account. Even for Malaparte, the discovery of China could only be the one prescribed by authorities and, as such, it required being imagined. The utmost paradox, in this respect, is that it is not ascertained that he really met with chairman Mao. Some critics, indeed, suggest that he fabricated the episode.[134] If this is the case it would imply that the definitive collapsing between factual and fictional modes of telling.

Lastly, it is worth recalling that also a number of travel authors surveyed in the first part of the thesis, such as Thubron, Ramazzotti, Bettinelli, and Richard, proclaim the difficulty of properly reading China. This issue will be at the core of the following section.

China in Space, Time and Its People

Here it is explored more closely how travel writers from the turn of the 20th century up to the 1980s perceive and represent China as an object/subject of interest. In particular, it is possible to identify three major threads: the history of China (as a country and a civilization); the places visited and, more broadly, the space of travel; and the Chinese as peoples. Of course, the distinction among these three threads is operational: in practice, they are very much intertwined, so that the analysis not only does not pretend to keep them separated, but aims, in fact, at stimulating comparisons and cross-references.

In the first chapter of his book, Clifford (2001) notes that late-19th century travel writers tend to conceive of China as a timeless country, or better, one whose civilization, by sinking into a remote pre-history, annihilates any possibility of historical development. In fact, almost all authors avoid exploring the past of the country: it is not, to be sure, that China does not have a history of its own, but that such history is perceived as so "old" and overwhelming as to appear meaningless and still. In *One's Company*, Fleming stresses on

[134] Giordano Bruno Guerri, for instance, notes in his monumental study *L'arcitaliano* (1980) dedicated to Malaparte that one needs to question any piece of information that comes from Malaparte as he tended to mix autobiographical facts and fiction. After all, the epigraph that opens Malaparte's book – "What's the purpose of saying the whole truth?" – sounds like a warning. See also *In Cina: Il Gran Tour degli italiani verso il centro del mondo, 1904-1999* (2010), edited by Danilo Soscia.

various occasions the dullness of the journey, and he writes that "our progress was as uneventful as progress can be in China" (1941: 134). Evidently, it is a historical and materialistic (Western) progress about which Fleming is talking – one that is straightforwardly negated, without even the attempt to explore China's past. Similarly to Fleming, Gaunt does not refrain from projecting onto her experience a rather trans-historical allure. Indeed, what she sees is often described as unchanged since old ages: "here come the camels from Mongolia, ragged and dusty, […] laden with those 'black stones' that Marco Polo noted seven hundred years ago […] Here come slowly, in stately fashion, the camels, as they have come for thousands of years." (Gaunt: 44) Interestingly, this same perception of being confronted with an ageless past is also traceable in those writers who visited China after 1949. In particular, Malerba poetically writes that:

> Pagodas, Imperial Palaces, the Great Wall, the Yellow River and the Blue River, all the unavoidable places of China's history, which you cannot erase burning books, nor scraping tombstones (and not even killing literati), are the mirror of an imperial tradition that also includes inundations, famines, massacres, lice. But history jumps: the Republic, the betrayal of the Republic, the Civil War, the Long March, the Victory, the Cultural Revolution, the After-Mao, are eventually mixed with monuments, sanctuaries and monsters created over four thousand years. The ancient Function becomes the modern Ornament, history vertiginously drifts away and acquires unrecognisable connotations.[135] (Malerba: 22; author's translation)

Malerba's passage exemplifies very well travel writers' tendency to address China's history as a whole, that is, a realm in which events lose their own specificity, to the point that they can be easily interchanged, or forgotten. China's history is a hoover that absorbs everything: in it, all answers can be found, if only one were able to decipher them. A specular perception is that offered by Parise. By rhetorically asking how it was possible for emperors and dynasties to survive and succeed one after the other, he claims that this had to do:

[135] "Le pagode, i Palazzi Imperiali, la Grande Muraglia, il Fiume Giallo e quello Azzurro, tutti i luoghi obbligati della storia cinese, che non si cancella né bruciando i libri, né raschiando le lapidi (nemmeno decapitando i letterati) sono specchio di una tradizione imperiale nella quale sono comprese anche le inondazioni, le carestie, le carneficine, i pidocchi. Ma la storia fa i suoi salti: la Repubblica, il tradimento della Repubblica, la Guerra Civile, la Lunga Marcia, la Vittoria, La Rivoluzione Culturale, il Dopo-Mao si trovano così a convivere con i monumenti, i santuari e i mostri creati in quattromila anni. La Funzione antica diventa Ornamento moderno, la storia si allontana vertiginosamente e assume connotati irriconoscibili."

> First of all, with the passing of centuries and then with the stronger and stronger conviction that outside or beyond that "point in infinity" [the Forbidden City] nothing existed, or, if ever anything existed, it was always as a function of that "point". In this way, for millennia China has remained the same.[136] (Parise: 662; author's translation)

Even more strongly than Malerba, Parise provides a representation of China's history as an abstracted dimension. Time becomes an indefinite coordinate, while China becomes a purely imaginary space of mirrors and returns. There is no contingency, nor immanence, but mere categories. In fact, what distinguishes the earliest travellers from those of the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and 1980s is that the latter tend to transfigure China into a form that transcends observation: "all these notes will probably attest to the failure, in this country, of my writing (in comparison with Japan). In fact, I can't find anything to note down, to enumerate, to classify" (2012: 73), writes Barthes disappointingly. In this respect, Steve Clark and Paul Smethurst's (2008: 32) claim that "early travellers to China did not only suffer from a 'traveling incarceration' because their own 'cultural baggage' prohibited them from seeing (understanding, appreciating) the Chinese; instead they were literally isolated, restricted and forbidden from looking beyond the city walls" needs to be contextualized. Indeed, not only were there writers such as David-Neel and Sues (and partially Maillart) who engaged with locals, but early travellers, after all, enjoyed a greater freedom than those coming after 1949.

In many of the writers surveyed here the idea of China as an immutable country is often linked to the denouncement of the country's backwardness and conceptually framed within a precise spatial frame: the countryside. As far as metropolises are concerned, indeed, they already bear the mark of progress. Cities such as Beijing and Shanghai are so developed that Isabella Bird – who wrote the oldest travelogue among those discussed – confesses that her "chief wish on arriving at a foreign settlement or treaty port in the East is to get out of it as soon as possible" (Bird: 15). To emerge here is the classic trope of the escape from (Western) modernity, which fuels many modern and contemporary travelogues: an escape aimed chiefly at finding authenticity outside of what is perceived as compromised. It is no coincidence that Bird defines Shanghai as a "foreign city risen on Chinese shore" (Bird: 15). Bird – who is not alone in this – wishes to plunge into that rural China which conforms to her expectations of a timeless country, as if other, more

136 "Col passare dei secoli innanzitutto e con la convinzione sempre più profonda che, al di fuori o al di là di quel 'punto nell'infinito', non esistesse nient'altro: o che, se esisteva, esso esisteva ancora una volta come funzione di quel 'punto'. Così, per millenni, la Cina è rimasta uguale a se stessa."

advanced realities were not Chinese enough. To witness "real" China, then, means to be able to experience a travel back in time: not much through the past of China, but through the past of the West. It is this purpose that the countryside often serves. Fleming, for example, when travelling in Tartary, does not hesitate to straightforwardly characterize the landscape as prehistoric: "We were passing through country which, according to the learned men, is the original home of the Chinese race. […] There was a kind of prehistoric look about this land, through which the train snorted laboriously like an antediluvian monster" (281). Fleming's description is not necessarily inflated: Sinkiang *was* – and still is – an extremely inhospitable area. The point is that it functions surreptitiously as a mirror which attests to how far the West has progressed.

By looking back at the first part of the thesis, it is notable that the city/countryside dichotomy, defined in terms of advancement vs. backwardness, is still present in today's travelogues, such as those by Gifford and de Slizewicz. Similarly, it should not be surprising that both today's and early travelogues share common descriptions of the progression of the journey, perceived as exhausting, tedious, and full of inconveniences as soon as the "civilized" city is left behind. From Bird and Maillart to Richard, from Gaunt and Fleming to Thubron, almost all travel writers represent the journey through the West of China as a tiring experience, due to the bad conditions of roads and transport and the lack of commodities. It is, rather, on the cultural and ideological plan that differences among these writers play out. So, if for Bird and LaMotte the backwardness of the countryside is an implicit motivation for the intervention of Western powers, for Fleming it is proof of the harshness of his endeavour. In turn, while de Slizewicz favours the countryside over the city, because he perceives the former as a place of resistance against the process of modernization that has already affected the eastern region of the country, Gifford fills the timelessly poor countryside with the anonymity proper to the "old one hundred names" he wants to meet. Each author, then, pours into what he observes a whole set of values that, while being kindled by the material socio-historical conditions of the country, belongs to his/her own vision of the country (and the experience) in the first place.

The desire to leave the metropolis and visit the countryside also has consequences for how the travellers perceive themselves. Indeed, it is only when they go to the outback that they lose their privileges and become the other to be stared at. This happens unevenly to a number of travellers from all decades. In one of the early quoted passages in this chapter, taken from Bird's travelogue, the British traveller is addressed by local people as

"Foreign devil!" "Horse-racer!" "Child-eater!" (246). In a similar tone, Gaunt reports on her excursion out of Beijing as follows:

> The people came and looked at me, and they were invariably courteous and polite, with an old-world courtesy that must have come down to them through the ages […] It was just as well to make the most of a show, because their lives were uneventful, that was all. (Gaunt: 178)

For these authors the longing to explore China's inland goes hand in hand, willingly or not, with the fact of being perceived as different. It seems as if travelling in China acquires the seal of authenticity only once the traveller finds him/herself in the situation of being othered by local people. The main exception among early-20th century authors surveyed is David-Neel. This happens for a specific motive: in the first pages David-Neel confesses that her biggest concern all along the journey is to disappear among the other pilgrims, so as not to be identified (as a Westerner). In David-Neel's case, then, to experience authenticity, means, above all, not being othered: "I had decided to disguise as an *ardjopa* [pilgrims on foot] because this was the best way for me to wander without raising suspects" (David-Neel 2005: 17).

The practice of being othered almost disappears in the travelogues of the in-between generation (1950s, 1960s, 1970s, 1980s). The Chinese people whom Malaparte, Parise, Barthes and Malerba met were most of the time well-chosen figures, who were used to meeting foreigners. Parise explains the pre-arrangement of every encounter noting that "between the man and the object, or the variety of objects, that he, as an inexhaustible traveller, wants to know, does not open the abyss of the unknown (always fascinating), but the plain way (always boring) of conventionality"[137] (717; author's translation). Barthes, however, reports some occurrences in which he and his companions are stared at: "[Yesterday Opera: We are *sacred*: people come up in crowds to stare at us, they move aside as not to touch us]"[138] (2012: 113). In this example the French delegation is vividly perceived by the Chinese as different. In contrast with what happens to many travellers of previous and following epochs, however, the othering process to which the French are subjected puts them in a privileged position, to the point that Barthes suggests the idea of being worshipped (rather than being despised).

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137 "Tra l'uomo e l'oggetto, o la varietà di oggetti che egli, viaggiatore inesausto, vuole conoscere, non si apre più l'abisso dell'ignoto (sempre affascinante) ma la strada piana e sempre noiosa della convenzione."
138 "Hier Opéra: nous sommes sacrés: on s'approche en masse pour nous regarder, on s'écarte pour ne pas nous toucher."

Lastly, the thrill of being perceived as different also emerges in contemporary travelogues, as a consequence of China's opening to the world. The following is a telling passage from Thubron's *Behind the Wall* (but occurrences are also in Gray's *First Pass under Heaven*):

> His son emerged from indoors with a bird-like wife and child. As the little boy saw me he stopped dead with a breathy squeak, and rushed against his mother. "Don't be afraid." The woman turned the child's face towards me. "It's only a foreign devil." (Thubron 1987: 164)

This episode vividly echoes the one quoted above by Bird. Moreover, it is most surprising that this episode in Thubron's journey happens when he is in the area surrounding Hangzhou, which is one of the biggest and most prosperous cities on the east coast.

One further tile can be added to the analysis of the temporal and spatial representation of China by discussing one aspect that is usually overlooked. The idea that the Middle Kingdom is a timeless country is complemented by a symmetrical – and paradoxical – conception: China as being constantly on the verge of change. In the previous section of this chapter, two excerpts were provided in which, respectively, Bird affirmed that "China is certainly at the dawn of a new era" (544), while Sues was sure that to be in China in the 1930s meant, above all, "to live and work with people who make history" (10). Their standpoints are different: one is supporting Britain's intervention, the other celebrating the Chinese resistance against the Japanese. However, they both claim that China has reached a historical turning point and action must be taken. Remarkably, this same idea runs throughout the whole century. Indeed, at the beginning of the 21st century Gifford is convinced that "there could well be a crunch coming in China. […] There is one big question in my own mind: which is it going to be for China, greatness or implosion?" (xix–xxi) The recourse to this trope grounds Clifford's claims that – still a century after Bird – "the West needs to pay more attention to China's problems" (xix).

The difficulty of finding a coherent solution to the conflicting views of an immutable China and a rampant China is possibly one of the reasons why many authors – from all periods – tend to think of the Middle Kingdom as incomprehensible and inaccessible. This idea can be disentangled either as a physical, political impossibility of entering certain regions, or as a more metaphorical impossibility of knowing, which results in China being represented as a mystery. To the first group belong, among others, David-Neel, whose journey is a challenge to Tibet's closure; Maillart and Richard, the titles of whose travelogues are exemplary, and all the travellers of the in-between generation, insofar as, being obliged to follow predetermined itineraries, they were confronted with the phantom of a China that had not to be seen. In the second group are contemporary authors such as Thubron and Ramazzotti: the former confessed his difficulty in understanding China in the interview; the latter confesses to Celia to not understanding China (although he argued in the interview that his experience helped him grasp the country's spirit). Moreover – again – within this group are travel writers from the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Malerba is exemplary when he suggests at the very beginning of his work that "to orient oneself in this universe of mad signs and gentle metaphors is a desperate endeavour"[139] (9; author's translation).

This idea of a metaphorical inaccessibility is also present in the writings that belong to the earliest temporal frame discussed here. Authors such as Bird, Gaunt and LaMotte all manifest to various degrees a sense of alienation and disorientation. Bird (1899: 12) confesses at the beginning of her book that "the human product of Chinese civilization, religion, government, is to me the greatest of all enigmas, and so it remains to those who know him best". Beyond the objectification to which both China and the Chinese are subjected – they are defined as a product – it is notable that, according to Bird, the country and its people remain incomprehensible also to those Westerners who have studied it and lived there. Gaunt, for her part, acknowledges many times in the text that she has trouble interpreting certain customs or situations, marking an incommensurable distance between her and the people she deals with (e.g. Gaunt: 285-6; 347; 445). The main point to highlight is that even when these authors declare that they have troubles understanding China, early 20th century travellers only seldom question their role and position within the Middle Kingdom. The very possibilities of travelling, writing and learning about (and from) the Chinese go undisputed. In other words, however difficult it might appear to understand China, the fact of being there proves sufficient for providing an accurate portrayal of the country. Fleming, for instance, at the end of his first journey to the south of China where the Communists where fighting, remarked to his (self-flattering) surprise that he had become one of the "Greatest Living Authorities" on the Communist areas (236). Such a claim, which overlooks a discussion of the practical conditions underpinning his travels and writing, makes it appear as if it is enough for the traveller to be there in order to be able to competently report on China. Expertise and ignorance are not the two extremes of a spectrum of possibilities, but rather two mutual exclusive conditions.

[139] "Orizzontarsi in questo universo di segni pazzi e metafore gentili è un'impresa disperatissima"

Of course, not all authors follow this trend. Travel writers such as Sues and David-Neel resist the temptation to reduce China to a matter of incomprehensibility. Specifically, they do so either by granting to the Chinese a well-rounded representation (see the previous quoted dialogue between Sues and a Chinese soldier), or by reflecting on their own persona. For example, David-Neel shows herself on various occasions questioning the solidity of her stance and competences. It is true, as noted by Mills (1991), that David-Neel sometimes secures for herself a position of superiority with respect, for instance, to her travel companion Yongden, such as when she jokingly teases his superstition (2005: 22). Yet, the author also mentions a number of circumstances in which it is Yongden who plays a leading role, and certainly he emerges, with the passing of time, as the one on whom a greater responsibility is placed, either when it comes to dealing with locals, or for the solution of ordinary needs:

> As we were in a hamlet and night protected us, Yongden thought he might well take the opportunity to purchase some food. […] I wrapped myself in the thick dress according to the manner of the poor Tibetans, and made a pretence of sleeping to avoid useless talk if, by any chance, some one passed near me, while my companion went toward the houses. The first one he entered happened to be that of the lama in charge of the Lhakang-ra shrine. He was welcomed on his two-fold title of colleague and buyer. (David-Neel 2005: 37)

This is just one example that attests to the rather balanced relation between David-Neel and Yongden. Albeit showing a good dose of self-confidence, the author is able, whenever necessary, to set herself aside and let Yongden take the lead. More generally, both Sues and David-Neel show awareness of the not-so-granitic position they occupy. It is precisely because they strive to take an insider perspective that they are capable of deconstructing that superior, uncontested position occupied by other travellers.

After having discussed how travellers perceive and represent China according to time and space coordinates – i.e. lack of history vs. imminent change; city vs. countryside – at this point it remains to discuss more closely the representation of Chinese people, although some notes have already been provided.

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The people of the Middle Kingdom are approached from different perspectives not only within the same epoch, but sometimes even within the same text. It is in these latter cases – Sues, Gray, and Legerton and Rawson are good examples – that the travel experience sets in motion an epistemological path that is both self-reflective and open to the Other. Conversely, there are texts whose horizon of knowledge remains largely unaltered from the beginning to the end, and in these travel books, more than elsewhere, one can detect the tendency to conceive of the Chinese as an indistinct mass. As seen in Chapter 1, contemporary authors such as Gifford and Bettinelli manifest this to various degrees, but the same happens with Bird, LaMotte, Gaunt, and the travellers of the in-between generation, for whom the homogeneisation of the Chinese betrays the unwillingness or difficulty to engage with them.

Concerning the representation of people, the role of photography in the travel books under analysis acquires particular relevance. To begin with, there are travellers for whom photography has a chiefly documentary function. Pictures have to attest to what the traveller saw, or the places s/he went to. This is the case with Bird, who actually "had taken a course in developing and printing her own films before leaving England" (xix). This piece of information by Pat Barr, who wrote the introduction to the book, while enhancing the ethnographic and explorative motives of Bird's travel, projects onto her persona a professionalism that is at odds with her opening claim that the journey to China was "undertaken for recreation and interest solely" (preface). After all, being able to develop and print films is not something that was expected, at that time, from an amateur traveller. It can also be advanced that Bird represents an early case in which the two pairs of concepts – professional-amateur and traveller-tourist – are very much blurred.

Overall, Bird's book is enriched with 116 illustrations – both photographs and drawings – out of 545 pages. One year after *The Yangtze Valley and Beyond*, Bird published *Chinese Pictures* (1900) that contains a selection of 60 photographs taken during the journey. According to the captions that accompany each image in *The Yangtze Valley and Beyond*, the great majority of Bird's pictures portray sceneries or visited places, while only a few of them focus on the people encountered along the journey or those who accompany the author (Figure 40). The paucity of photographs representing people is symptomatic of that domestication of the space of China witnessed in the opening of this chapter, where it was discussed how the Chinese are either overlooked, or defined as peaceful and industrious. In fact, Figure 40, which portrays the author's truckers, is a good example of how Bird tends to typify the people who surround her journey (and make it possible). The point of view from which this picture is taken – as almost all Bird's pictures – is frontal, a perspective that calls for an engagement between the viewer and the represented subject (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996). In this way Bird (attempts to) show(s) matter-of-factually who her Chinese crew is and how her truckers behave (i.e. in a very docile way, being all gathered together on the sampan). At the same time, these people are photographed from afar, a choice that makes them emerge as a whole; the details – their faces – are sacrificed in favour of an overall seizure of the group. Such distance reflects the one that separates the author – and the staring viewer – from the truckers, thus reasserting a clear division of roles and spaces. It is in this respect that Rosalind Morris (2009: 8), introducing a collective work on photography in (and about) East Asia, argues that photography, rather than a technology, constitutes the "discursive elaboration of a technologized relation to difference; a discourse, that is, that formalizes and reproduces difference, either social, racial or cultural.[140] Lastly, the caption of Bird's picture – "author's truckers at dinner" – definitely relegates the subjects to their function: as Morgan (2007: 117) acutely notes "Bird repeatedly presents and names the people she photographs as representative types. Together these types add up to one great prototype […] which would be named 'The Chinese'." This aspect is reinforced by the presence of drawings in the text which usually integrate pictures when the author writes about something that she did not witness directly (it is the case, for instance, with the Chinese's fishing technique represented in Figure 41). These drawings, by reducing the saturation of details (even more than pictures), strengthen the effect of typologization of Bird's photography and they come to metonymically stand for the generic ensemble (of people or a region) to which they point.

To conclude, beyond places and people there is one picture in Bird's text that deserves to be mentioned: a self-portrait of the author in a Manchu dress (Figure 42, staged once Bird was back in England). This is the sole picture in the whole book that portrays Bird, attesting to the author's tendency to move the attention away from her and towards what she witnesses. Again, the photograph is taken from a frontal perspective and the subjected is photographed at a sufficient distance to be fully framed within the picture. In her *A Traveller in Skirts: Quest and Conquest in the Travel Narratives of Isabella Bird*, Evelyn Bach (1995: 593) notes that Bird, by performing "an ongoing literary cross-dressing and re-dressing" allows "the narrative to escape a fixed gender category as Bird contrives to carve out an unsteady niche for herself." Bach is exclusively referring to Bird's shift in her writing from an authoritative masculine stance towards a more "poetic" and "rapturous" feminine stance, as she defines it. What is remarkable is that these same cross-dressing and re-

[140] Similarly, by studying John Thomson's work about China, from which, we have seen, Bird took the picture "a street in Hangkow", Thomas Prasch (2007) contends that Thomson's work "reveals the ways in which Victorian photography was employed to define, delimit, and categorize groups" (53).

dressing occur – literally and metaphorically – also in the picture. Indeed, by dressing up in a Manchu dress – a characteristic chinoiserie that reinforces the Western imaginary of China – Bird crosses and blurs the boundaries of a clearly gendered persona, whose traits are smoothed by both the distant perspective from which the picture is taken, and by the pompous outfit she wears.

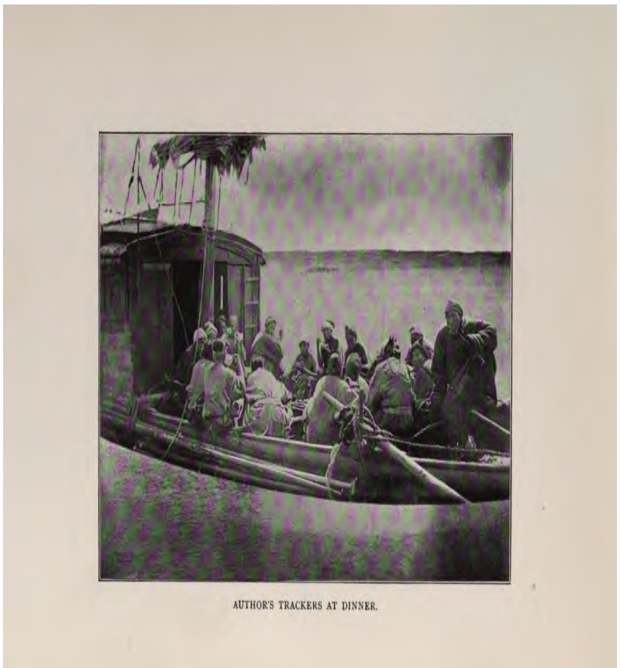

Figure 40. A photograph of Bird's truckers inserted in The Yangtze Valley and Beyond

Figure 41. One of the drawings in Bird's travelogue

Figure 42. Isabella Bird's self-portrait in Manchu dress

Overall, Bird's conception of travel writing's photography follows the ethos of the Royal Geography Society to which she – one of the first women – belonged. According to Morgan (2007: 117), at that time "the view of photography as providing objective data, a scientific record, was already well entrenched at the Royal Geographical Society." In fact, the pictures that Bird included in the book have the function of presenting the reader with the referent of her writing – however biased such an idea might be, as discussed in Chapter 2 – and visually proving where she went. In this respect, Bird's pictures also escape the "tourist chronotope" not only in that the author is reluctant to appear in them – as a form of double sanctioning of her "having been there" – but also because she resorts to photography as a tool for mapping those inland areas of the Yangtze that were still unseized by Western powers (from which the prevailing of pictures of landscapes derives).

The underpinning logic of representation of Bird's pictures can be retrieved also in Gaunt's, at least to the extent they pretend to document that what is recounted is credible. Again, places and broad views (Figure 43) are favoured over people and details, although the ratio between pictures representing sceneries, on the one hand, and people, on the other, is more balanced than in Bird's text.

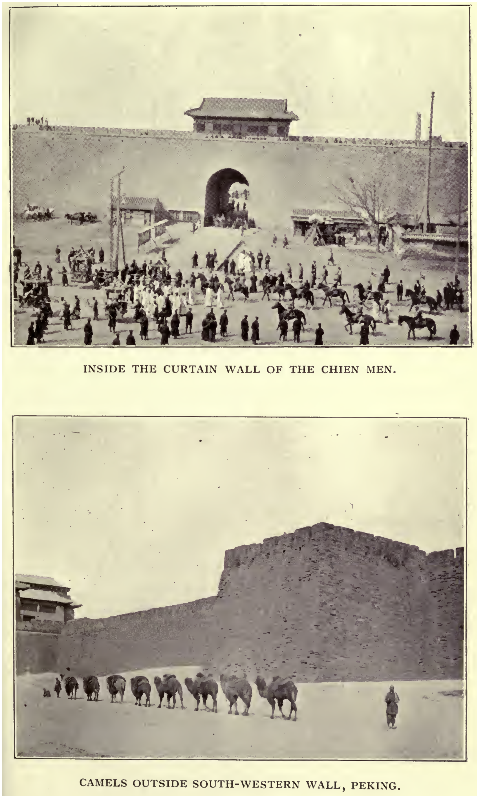

Figure 43. Two pictures in Gaunt's A Woman in China

These representational choices reassert the idea of China as an object of interest – a place to be observed – rather than one into which to delve or with which to actively engage. At the same time, Gaunt's case is worth discussing because the book is introduced by a self-portrait of the author taken together with the truckers (Figure 44), an occurrence that seems to go in an opposite direction from what has been said so far.

Figure 44. The picture that opens the book A Woman in China

The travelogue opens with a detailed table of content and a list of all the photographs included. Yet, the photograph of the author reproduced above is not mentioned, despite being not *a* picture among the others, but *the one* that occupies the frontispiece. The picture, it is suggested, takes on an exemplary significance of what the reader will find in the text. Unlike Bird, Gaunt is here shown among local people. In a way, then, the distance between the traveller and the Chinese is zeroed. Yet, the power relations and roles between them remain very much unbalanced and separated. Gaunt is photographed while seated on her sedan chair and placed at the centre of the frame; the coolies, instead, sustain her at both sides. Furthermore, while the author is starting at the camera, none of the truckers is, anyone of them looking in a different direction or keeping the gaze down. This leads to contend that, albeit being included within the photograph, the Chinese maintain a subaltern position with respect to the author and they only exist as far as their function is concerned. In this respect, it is also notable that the caption, which reads "the author at the Ming tombs", makes no reference to the people surrounding Gaunt, as if they were merely an unavoidable part of the context. More than that, Gaunt fails to acknowledge the author of the picture, whose identity is unmentioned in the book. This is the realm of photography intended as a social performance: as Larsen (2006: 250) points out: "the camerawork is concerned not only with consuming places, but also with producing social relations". It could be advanced that the picture exemplifies, *ex principio*, the disparity between Gaunt and the people with whom she travels, and, more generally, the stance maintained by the author throughout the whole text: one of privileged mobility – at least for that time – and imbued with a good dose of paternalism for all the people she encounters.

Continuing to follow a chronological path, a third example for the discussion of photography is LaMotte's *Peking Dust*. The analysis has already shown that the American author manifests in her writing the tendency to deny the Chinese an active agency concerning their own destiny. By contrast, the pictures, which where taken by Warren R. Austin, F. C. Hitchcock, Margaret Frieder, T. Severin, and Rachel Snow, as LaMotte acknowledges at the beginning of her work, convey a different attitude.

Figure 45. A photograph of a "fruit stall in the bazaar" inserted in LaMotte's Peking Dust

Figure 46. The photograph of a "village outside walls of Peking" in LaMotte's travelogue

Figure 47. The picture of a "fortune teller"

First of all, LaMotte never appears in the pictures. This means that China and the Chinese are the sole subject in focus (Figures 45, 46, 47 are examples). Specifically, the majority of pictures portray people rather than places, a feature that distances these images from both Bird and Gaunt's. Moreover, the mode of representation that characterizes the photographs in LaMotte's text is different from what we have hitherto seen: by getting closer to the subject, these pictures break away from the afar views favoured in *The Yangtze River and Beyond* and *A Woman in China*, preferring to take a closer look at the subjects portrayed. It is true, as the captions of the Figures 45 and 47 above testify, that the Chinese are still represented according to their activity. Yet, the proximity of the photographers to their subjects allows pictures to become less typological: people's roundness thickens; life – in its serendipitous manifestation – begins to fill the frame. What Morris (2009: 3) characterises as the "self-disclosing and static quality of the Asian images", that is, the intentional staging of the subject to be photographed, loses in these pictures part of its strength. China, in other words, begins to be perceived in its plurality, as an ensemble of subjects with whom to get in contact. Hence, the engagement between Westerners and the Chinese, which in LaMotte's written text is largely unmentioned, finds a form of mediation – if not a realization – in and through photography.

With the passing of time, one can observe an improvement in the pictures' quality – photographs become neater – as well as a reworking of the modes of representation. Sues is a case in point. The pictures that are inserted in her travelogue mimic the author's attempt to become "the man in the street" (Sues: 9). First of all, almost all the illustrations portray people: not only famous leaders, but also common soldiers and locals. Sceneries and landmarks are almost completely eschewed. Photography acquires an eminently social and reportage-like connotation: it does not pretend to show how China is; Rather, it compels readers to become aware of the internal conflicts and the political tensions that affect China. Pictures give faces – suffering but smiling – to both Nationalists and Communists. Besides, the predominant point of view is the close-up, a choice that, together with the improvement in photographic films and developing processes, gives a higher-quality definition to the subjects portrayed. Captions finally report the names of the people shown, going beyond their mere roles or functions. Most importantly, Sues becomes herself part of the visually represented world and she does so by engaging *intra pares* among the Chinese, be they military authorities or humble people (see Figure 48).

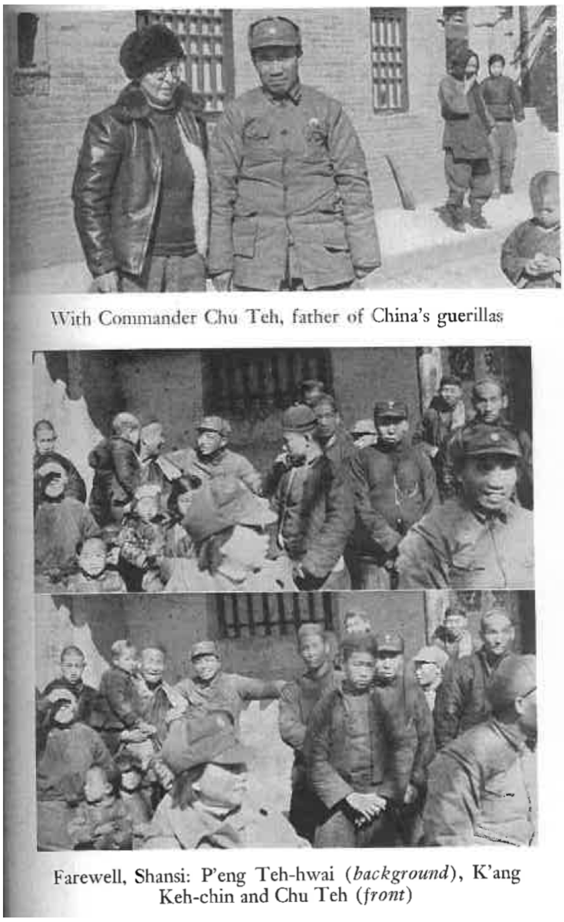

Figure 48. Ilona Sues portrayed with commander Chu Teh and soldiers

More generally, early travel writers refrain from entering the scene of photography. It is only from the 1930s that we witness a turn of the camera towards the traveller. The comparison between photographs from different epochs shows that pictures bring with(in) them, beyond the chronotope of the "represented world", the historicized "chromos" of the mode of representation, i.e. the evolution of photography as a medium.

Lastly, the analysis addresses a few examples of monomodal travelogues. As it was for the contemporary travel writers analysed in the first part of this work, the absence of pictures can be symptomatic of a number of reasons, such as editorial choices or the political implications that photography embeds as a medium.

Pictures are absent from the chosen edition of Fleming's travel books. Fleming, however, does mention that he took some photographs during the two journeys, so the motivation for their absence shifts towards an editorial-related matter. The same logic also applies to Maillart: not only does the French edition of *Forbidden Journey* – *Oasis interdites* – include some pictures, but Maillart also published visual works – e.g. *La vie immédiate* (1991, with accompanying text by Swiss traveller Nicolas Bouvier) – which are devoted to presenting the pictures she took on her journeys. This means that a thoughtful discussion on the presence/absence of illustrations from "classic" travelogues should also take into account the various editions and reprints of the "same" text, as well as the release of country-tailored publications (such as the mentioned distinction between the French and English edition of Maillart's travelogue). "Even original editions," Stacy Burton (2014: 56-7) notes on this matter, "differ in the number and placement of photographs: Fleming's *One's Company* was published with four pages of photos in Britain, twenty in the United States. […] Reprints typically treat visual images as ephemera akin to cover art, excising them entirely or in part without acknowledgement." This means that when it comes to investigating early-20th century travelogues as artefacts, the analysis should configure a diachronic collation among the various mediations of each genium (contemporary texts, instead, usually have one single edition). As far as the present work is concerned, however, this task would exceed its scope. Therefore, to be taken into account was only one edition for each travelogue and, whenever possible, it was the first edition.

Concerning David-Neel, the insertion of images in her text calls directly into question the political and documentary relevance of photography. The author specifies at the beginning of her *Voyage d'une parisienne à Lhassa* (which is monomodal):

> It was impossible for me to include a camera in my beggar's bundles. Moreover, neither Yongden nor myself, disguised as poor pilgrims as we were, could run the risk of getting caught while taking photos. The most part of those that illustrate this book have been taken during my earlier peregrinations in Tibet.[141] (David-Neel 2008: 16; author's translation)

From this passage, we deduce that all the pictures that enrich *My Journey to Lhasa* (2005) refer to experiences that are antecedent to the travel described. In this regard, some literary – but not photographic – critics[142] have attempted to prove that the pictures inserted in the books are hoaxes, which would then attest to the fact that David-Neel never reached Lhasa. However valid these arguments might be,[143] for the present discussion it is crucial to highlight once more photography's fragile relation to truthfulness, whose epistemological function can be, at once, that of documenting or challenging what words allude to. At the

[141] This passage, which concludes the introduction in the French edition of David-Neel's travelogue, has been excised from the 2005 English edition: "Il m'était impossible d'inclure un appareil photographique dans mes bagages de mendiante et, ni Yongden, ni moi, déguisés en pauvres hères ne devaient être surprise prenant des photographies. La plupart des celles qui illustrent ce livre ont été prises au cours de mes précédents pérégrinations au Thibet."

[142] Sara Mills (1991) discusses in depth Jeanne Denys's critique of David-Neel's endeavour: according to Denys, David-Neel never made it to Lhasa.

[143] Refer back to Chapters 1 and 2.

same time, from the passage quoted above one realizes that David-Neel is aware of the consequences that photographing might have on her goal. In other words, photography becomes a discriminating medium; one that can attract the attention of locals and authorities alike and, as such, that can spoil the author's endeavour. Quite interestingly this statement echoes what Thubron said during the interview, namely that one of the reasons why he did not take a camera with him is the fear of seeing his freedom of mobility limited.[144] It seems as if certain restrictions in China continue to run throughout the 20th century up to the present day. On this point, it is also worth mentioning that none of the travel books from the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and 1980s under analysis present pictures. Be it a conscious choice by the authors or an imposition by the publishers or the Chinese authorities,[145] the absence of illustrations in these three travel books reinforces the sense of unrepresentability proper to the travellers' experiences. Among them, a quite unique case is that of Barthes. His diary does not include pictures, but here and there readers encounter small pencil sketches of the places visited, or the people encountered. These sketches are sometimes so stylized that their intelligibility can become problematic. It could also be contended that the effect they produce is to further complexify the Chinese universe – that is, the reading of what is "worth looking", according to Barthes's (2012: 79) own words – rather than clarifying some of its features. Through these sketches, the country becomes even more skeletal and phantasmal and, as soon as the bricks of propaganda are bypassed by the trait of the pencil, China appears as a signifier that has ultimately lost its referent. It could be said that China is turned into that *Empire des signes* (1970) that Barthes had sketched out of Japan just a few years before. However, while in Japan these signs, as Charles Forsdick (2006: 71) notes, "evolved from the untranslatability of his surroundings into Western terms as well as the dislocations this provoked, from China he [Barthes] returns with 'rien'."

The Self-Representation of Late-19th to 20th Century Travel Authors

Mirroring the analysis conducted in Chapter 3 – without however the possibility of collating the texts with the authors' own voices – this section briefly explores the way in which the travel writers under analysis think of and represent themselves.

We have seen that Bird offers to the reader a composite image of herself. On the one hand, she underlines the unpretentiousness of her journey, arguing that she travels for

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144 Colin Thubron, interview.

145 In this respect, it must be remarked that Franco Fortini, an Italian writer who went to China in 1955, took a great number of photographs, which were later exhibited in Italy.

leisure. This is so, despite the fact that the author travelled well beyond beaten tracks and sometimes in uncomfortable conditions. On the other hand, the kind of information she provides, together with the paternalistic, pedagogic tone that permeates the travel book, confer upon Bird a decisive authority as far as China's matters are concerned. Moreover, the accompanying of the writing with a variety of pictures that required a fair degree of expertise of photography shows Bird's desire, *ex principio*, to go to China in order to accurately report on the country, rather than as an amateurish visitor. A similar ambivalence can be found in Fleming's persona. In the foreword to *One's Company*, Fleming warns the reader that:

> This book is a superficial account of an unsensational journey. […] The book describes in some detail what I saw and what I did and in considerably less detail what most other travellers have also seen and done. If it has any value at all, it is the light which it throws on the process of travel – amateur travel. (Fleming: xi)

As soon as one adds to this self-deprecating statement Fleming's disclosure that he cannot speak any Chinese, what emerges is a representation of the author as an amateur figure. Yet, as soon as one begins to read *One's Company*, one "discovers" that Fleming is a journalist and he is travelling on the premise of going into the field and getting a clearer idea about the latest updates on the "great game" in which China is caught at the turning of 1930s. In this sense, the professionalization of his persona clashes with the pretension of appearing as an amateur, either in writing or in travelling. When passing through Poland by train, he reports this telling dialogue:

> I dine with a pleasant young Englishman. He claims to know Warsaw and we embark on a markedly one-sided discussion on the Upper Silesian plebiscite of '21. My mission, when revealed, awes him. "Manchuria!" he exclaims. "But can you speak Russian, or Chinese, or Japanese?" Alas, I cannot. "Then, how will you manage?" I say I do not know. He eyes me with respect; a desperate fellow, this, he is thinking. It is clear that he finds me Ouidan. […] My own sense of proportion I regard as impregnably established. In the light of it, a journey to Manchuria is a perfectly normal undertaking: nothing to get excited about. But the world at large persists in maintaining a set of values the simplification of travel […] has rendered obsolete. (Fleming: 17)

By resorting to the transposed speech – quite rare in the text and never with Chinese people – it is possible to derive the two complementary facets of Fleming's persona. On the one side, so unprepared is he that he appears to the other's eye as a naïve traveller; on the other side, however, the bewilderment of the interlocutor once Fleming reveals his plans has the function of projecting onto the author's persona the allure of the adventurer: not only does he accomplish an uncommon journey, but he turns the "extraordinary" into the ordinary. Fleming's persona becomes even more complex when one thinks that at the end of the first book he mentions having become – to the others' eyes – a sort of authority on China's political matters: a professionalization of his figure that contrasts, once more, with the opening of the second book where the value of the information he got while travelling is downplayed. In the opening of the second book, however, he declares more overtly than before the two motives at the base of his journey: as a journalist, he aims to get a closer look at the current situation in the region; as a traveller, he wants to satisfy his selfish desire to move. More broadly, Fleming loves to let his self-representation float between an amateur traveller persona and a more professional role, as both a traveller and a writer.

For her part, Maillart does not refrain from straightforwardly presenting herself as a journalist. At the same time, it is in the different way in which she conceives the whole experience that she distances her own traveller persona from Fleming's. All along the journey, Maillart tends to linger, to take her own time, to let time flow unreservedly. As a consequence, if for Fleming the journey consists of a physical crossing to be accomplished in the fastest way possible, Maillart's experience configures a much more interiorized space-time dimension. She acknowledges this divide in various circumstances:

> United in the craving to succeed in our enterprise, we had come to a perfect understanding. Yet, we did not see things from the same angle. Every night Peter would repeat his refrain "Sixty *lis* nearer to London." He did it to annoy me and I would tell him to shut up, for I wanted to forget that we had, inevitably, to return home. I should have liked the journey to continue for the rest of my life. (Maillart: 88)

To be sure, Fleming himself is aware of the fact that he and Maillart have different horizons in sight. Indeed, he remarks in the last pages of his book that the end of the journey probably meant less to her than to him, who craved being back in London as soon as possible. Maureen Mulligan (2008), who has devoted an article on the comparison between the two texts and authors, contends that Maillart's inclination towards a more subjective, slow-paced approach to the journey reflects a broader picture in which Fleming and Maillart re-enact a traditional gender division of roles while on the road. In fact, a gendered taintedness characterizes both accounts, often in the form of an overt mirroring of Fleming and Maillart's different visions:

> P. was bored by my craving to understand the thousands of diverse lives that make up humankind and bored, too, by my need to relate my own life to life in general. […] Peter was troubled by none of these things. (Maillart: 148)

Fleming and Maillart share the same wish to travel, but this responds to very different – if not opposite – conceptions of the experience. Fleming wants to witness and report; Maillart thinks of the journey as a diversion from Western materialism. On these premises, the journalistic facet of Maillart's persona becomes secondary in favour of a self-representation as a freed and unbound explorer. Again, it is Maillart herself who puts this in print: "what mattered was myself, I, who was living at the centre of the world – that 'I' who did not want to disappear without accomplishing something worthwhile" (268). Despite the radical differences between Fleming and Maillart, the two manage to get along quite well for the whole duration of the journey. In particular, it is Fleming who pays tribute in the book to his companion, pointing out that "I got, during our seven months together, so used to regarding Kini as an equal in most things and a superior one in some that perhaps I have paid over-few tributes to (among other things) her powers of endurance" (223). While, at the base of such praise, certainly lies a gendered representation of feminine and masculine roles, it also works as an acknowledgment of the positive outcome of their pairing along the road, notwithstanding the mutual reluctance, at the beginning, to travel together.

This same form of gender mirroring is also present in David-Neel's text. As noted, between David-Neel and Yongden there is a rather balanced division of roles and competences. It takes roughly 20 pages for David-Neel to report Yongden's own words for the first time, but from that moment on his figure becomes essential, for the better – such as when he is the "key" to getting hospitality from other lamas – and the worse – for example when he is injured and David-Neel is obliged to care for him. Hence, one gets a representation of the author as an intrepid (and persevering) traveller, but also one who is aware of her own constraints as a Western woman, which compel her to travel with somebody more expert than her. Such awareness finds its manifestation in the constant confrontations between the two, as if the accomplishment of the journey in a pair promoted a definition of each person's own persona as a mutual process, bringing to the surface of the text a neater distinction of roles. This does not mean that gender issues are altogether absent from texts such as those by Bird and Gaunt, nor that these authors necessarily take on a male role, but that in texts where a man and a woman are travelling together gender issues are more likely to appear. As Mills (1991: 149) correctly points out, in solo female travelogues "the narrator is a strong, determined figure who battles against extremes of hardship, rarely losing face or making reference to 'feminine' concerns." This tendency was also touched upon in the previous chapter, noting that in contemporary travel books and blogs – retrospectively, one could say *also* in contemporary travel books and blogs – female travel writers avoid explicitly defining their persona in terms of gender. Arnaud, Becki, Curieuse Voyageuse and Gattosandro Viaggiatore rarely underline that they are female travellers, preferring to stress either the uniqueness of their journey, or their desire to write in order to share their experience. In this respect, if Thompson (2011: 163) warns that "women have always travelled more extensively than such masculine mythology would suggest", Mills (1991) complements such statements by arguing that travel writing appears as a predominantly male literary form because of the systematic exclusion, especially in the 18th and 19th centuries, of female voices from the publishing market. Mills's claim acquires an even greater significance when taking a transmedial perspective. Indeed, while, through the whole 20th century, the number of travel books about China authored by male writers is substantially greater than that concerning women-authored publications, the ratio is much more balanced when one looks at travel blogs. The online environment, in other words, seems to represent a more easily accessible (and accessed) channel for female travellers than the publishing market.

Lastly, with regard to the self-representation of the travel writers who went to China between 1949 and the early 1980s, one can observe a radical erasure of that galaxy of terms – explorer, traveller, tourist, amateur writer, journalist, novelist, etc. – that characterizes earlier and later peers. Political restrictions, on the one hand, and predetermined itineraries, on the other, are so encumbering that they turn the experience into a sort of parade, to which travellers attend powerlessly. They are not even urged to question or contextualize their roles: as Westerners, they simply are privileged subjects – delegates – whose function is to report on China, or, better, on the smooth functioning of propaganda. By being confronted with loads of "bricks", it becomes arduous for these delegations to think of themselves as travellers or even tourists; rather, they could be more properly defined as spectators – spectators of a reiterated show. This is how, mockingly, Barthes reports the question of a Chinese writer, who wants to know the perception in France of Confucius and Lin Biao: "Lin Biao Confucius in France? Up until now, confusion in France, incomprehensible. One of our tasks when we get back: make him better known and divulgate. [What did you do on this trip? We worked!]" (Barthes 2012: 48)

Conclusion

This chapter provided a diachronic analysis of Western travel books about China, beginning at the end of the 19th century and covering almost a century, up to the 1980s. In so doing, the survey merged with the analysis conducted in the first part of the work. The study highlighted that some of the rhetorical tropes and medial features that are characteristic of early travel books run, in fact, throughout the whole century. Authors from different epochs represent China's history, geography, and people very similarly (both verbally and visually, although as far as photography is concerned a major difference with contemporary authors is that these latter tend to appear much more often in pictures than early travellers). In particular, the idea of China as a timeless country, whose authenticity can be only found in the outback, as well as the recurrence of the travellers' dissatisfaction when it comes to understanding the Chinese are common tropes to many of the travelogues surveyed. At the same time, it can also happen that contemporaneous travel writers deliver radically different accounts in form and content. It is the case, for instance, of Fleming's *News from Tartary* and Maillart's *Forbidden Journey*, but also David-Neel's *Une parisienne à Lhasa* and LaMotte's *Peking Dust*. These contrasting trends demonstrate that the historical and cultural conditions of China played a role – as suggested by Nicholas Clifford (2001) – in dictating the travel books' agenda, but the individual attitude with which each traveller approached China is also a decisive factor. In this sense, it is argued that it would be hazardous to identify an overreaching linear evolution of the way in which China has been represented. Rather, the picture that derives is very much fragmented. The same also applies to the conception of travel writing as a genre. Wars and conflicts in early 20th century China attracted (and were the consequence of) the attention of Western powers and people: from popular readers, to professional reporters and political and commercial stakeholders. Nonetheless, it also emerged that a number of travel writers of that period overlooked these same events, preferring to provide a more romantic representation of the experience. Hence a univocal transition from the travel book to the travel-reportage is contested, insofar as it was ultimately the travel writer's attitude towards China to shape his/her work.

As for the self-representation of travel writers, the chapter brought to light that the blurring of concepts such as "traveller", "tourist", "resident", "amateur", and "professional", already witnessed among contemporary travel authors and bloggers, is also indicative of early travel writers. This poses the question of whether a clear distinction among these terms has ever had any practical foundation, beyond an abstract theorization.

Lastly, the generation of Western travel writers who went to China between 1949 and the early 1980s constitutes a case in itself. The suffocating limitations on mobility imposed by the Chinese authorities, together with the following of pre-fabricated itineraries, led to a sublimated representation of China, one that often conveys to the reader a sense of powerless unintelligibility. At the same time, contributing to such a representation is also the literary credo of the surveyed authors. To a greater or lesser degree, Malaparte, Parise, Barthes, and Malerba were all influenced in their writings by the experimentations of the neo-avant-gardes of which they were part.

The proposed survey did not aim at being exhaustive, but hopefully it managed to show the variety of stances as well as the common (Western) imaginary through which China has been approached in printed travel writing over the 20th century. Returning to the transmedial comparison that framed the first part of the thesis, it could be argued that the medium plays a more relevant role in the shaping of the travel writing genre than the passing of time. This was epitomized by the striking similarity posited in the opening to this chapter between Bird and Marco Polo's descriptions of Hangzhou; a similarity that led to contend in favour of the trans-historicity of the rhetorical and medial features of the texts.

PART THREE

DELVING INTO CHINA

Chapter 5

"Heterodox" Representations in Chinese Travel Books and Blogs

This last chapter "rescues" the transmedial axis characterising Chapters 1 to 3 and applies it to Chinese travel writing. The analysis presents an overview of six contemporary Chinese-authored travel books and three travel blogs about the Middle Kingdom. Such overview does not pretend to be exhaustive or to counterbalance the analysis of the texts offered in the previous chapters, but rather aims to provide an exemplary choice of Chinese texts, in order to 1) understand how Chinese writers perceive and represent their own country (and the extent to which these accounts are rhetorically and medially consonant with, or differ from, those analysed so far); and 2) investigate how Chinese writers make use of the chosen medial format (and how such use may be culturally dependent). Eventually, the chapter offers insights into the travel writing genre and the figure of the travel writer as they are conceived and shaped in today's China. As a matter of fact, the geopolitical notion of "China" is questioned through the chosen authors and travelogues. Given that the materials was largely collected in Hong Kong, many of the texts are written by Hongkongers, whose positions towards China, as well as their own self-representations, make evident the extent to which the relations between Mainland China and the ex-UK colony – but also Taiwan and Macau – remain subjected to a latent instability.[146] Moreover, the way in which these texts are written also raises debate. Indeed, some authors, although being Chinese, resort to English as their preferred language for publication. In this regard, when I interviewed Chinese writers who made such a choice, I also tried to bring to the surface their underpinning motives, which largely relate to the fact of having a hybrid cultural background. In practice, the chapter is structured following a gradual transition: it starts from the analysis of an English travel book written by a Chinese-born and currently UK-based author – Sun Shuyun – and concludes with Chinese travelogues and travel blogs written by Mainlanders, passing through those texts that have been authored in English

[146] Epitomizing is the case of the Umbrella Movement, which was also mentioned by some writers in the interviews. The Umbrella Movement was a protest held up in Hong Kong for over two months at the end of 2014 against the proposed reform of the election system, which basically introduced the possibility for the Chinese Communist Party to pre-screen the Hong Kong's candidates before they could take part in the electoral campaign. The protest, however, did not let to any kind of amendment to the reform. At the same time, it raised further concerns about the way in which the coercive force of the police was put in service of the government during the protest.

and/or Chinese by Hong Kong writers. In such transition, the analysis follows the critical path developed from Chapters 1 to 3, in terms of the texts' narrative form, their hypertextuality and paratextual elements, and the kind of information they provide (with considerations of the chronotope of photography). Moreover, as was the case with Western writers, here too the analysis is complemented by interviews with Chinese authors and bloggers.

Historical Overview

When it comes to investigating contemporary Chinese travel writing, it is necessary to draw upon two main research axes in order to contextualize the analysis. On the one hand are those studies that look at Chinese-authored travel accounts about the West. In this sense, it is essential to note a widespread tendency in Western scholarship to diminish, if not dismiss completely, the presence and impact of these accounts. For instance, in the introduction to the collection *Travel Writing and Empire: Postcolonial Theory in Transit*, Steve Clark (1999: 3) contends that "to a certain extent […] travel writing is inevitably one-way traffic, because the Europeans mapped the world rather than the world mapping them." Clark's claim seems to postulate a deterministic linkage between (more or less) expansionist projects – by Western powers – and the production of travel writing. Eventually, then, the absence of hegemonic goals – by the Chinese – is symmetrically tied to the lack of travel accounts. To be sure, Clark is not alone in holding such a position. James Clarke (1997: 29) argues that "on the whole the East has not approached the West with enthusiasm and curiosity, has not on its own accord welcomed Western ideas, nor used the latter to undermine its own". Clarke's core assumption about how the East – China and India in particular – has played a chiefly passive role with respect to the West is not that dissimilar to Clark's argument about the univocal mapping of the world by Westerners. The picture, however, is much more complex than that. The claims of these two scholars – which seem affected by the same ethnocentrism they aim to criticize – have been undermined by recent research on pre-modern and modern China in relation with travel. This is the case, specifically, with Xiaofei Tian's (2012) *Visionary Journeys*. By proposing a parallel between modern and medieval China, on the basis that in both epochs the contacts between the West and China were extremely frequent, Tian (2012: 2) argues that travels were also undertaken by Chinese people to the West and "not just by sailors and traders but by members of the elite who wrote accounts of their journeys for the eager consumption of a home audience." This finding is illuminating for two reasons. Firstly, it tells us that pre-modern and modern Chinese people also demonstrated an eagerness to know and explore the West. Therefore, the (supposed) passivity of the East seems chiefly the result of a Western lack of interest, at best, or of conscious erasure, at worst. Secondly, Tian makes clear that the reporting was done not only for official motives, but also for information and entertainment. Hence, it would be hazardous to univocally relate the production of travel writing to hegemonic and mapping projects.

The second research axis addresses those travel accounts written by Chinese people about the Middle Kingdom (which is of greatest interest here).[147] *Inscribed Landscapes* (1994) by Richard Strassberg is a seminal standpoint for any research that aims at exploring the evolution of the travel writing genre within China. By providing translations into English of texts authored by Chinese poets, aristocrats and scholars from the 1st century A. D. to the 19th century, Strassberg identifies the emergence of two canons. The main differences between the two have to do with the texts' purposes and their characterizing discourses: "at one pole," Strassberg (1994: 10) points out, "was the objective, moralizing perspective of historiography; at the other, a mode of expressive and aesthetic responses to the landscape derived from poetic genres that could be termed 'lyrical'." Yet, to make these canons similar is the fact that they both offer a static, immutable representation of the experience. Indeed, in the case of historiographic travel accounts, the travel experience was subservient to a portrayal – and reassertion – of the social, cultural, and political status quo, celebrating Confucianism and its founding precepts of waiting, detachment, and balance. Similarly, those texts that celebrated landscapes provided a "pictorial" flattened representation of China, in which the writing subject was merely a gazing "I" who did not manifest any engagement with the context or personal growth. As Strassberg (1994: 22) himself notes, "the quest is less significant in Chinese travel writing," and therefore "whereas Western travel writing, with its novelistic orientation, emphasizes social events and portraits of noteworthy characters, the poetic underpinnings of Chinese travel writing tend to stress objects and qualities perceived in the landscape" (31). Even James Hargett (2016), albeit acutely distinguishing various phases within the Chinese travel writing's tradition, claims that "one key aspect of Chinese travel literature is its visual quality.

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[147] These texts recount journeys that go under the label of "home travels" (see also the previous chapter). However, given the presence of special administrative regions (such as Hong Kong), this term is contested when it comes to today's China. The analysis will bring this to light and discuss the fragmentation of the notion of "China" operated by the writers surveyed. This largely depends on the writers' biographies. In fact, some of them are Hongkongers, others are returning (Chinese or Hong Kong) expatriates, and still others are Mainlanders. While all of these writers can rely upon a deep knowledge of the language and the culture of the places they visited in China, speaking exclusively in terms of "home travels" is reductive insofar as for some of them China does represent a "different" context from Hong Kong or from the place abroad where they lived a part of their lives. Hence, for some of these writers it is more a matter of "retuning travels" and of acknowledging what are the differences and similarities they share with today's Mainland China.

Essentially, authors are creating cinematic-like word-pictures of places – places they want readers to 'see' by reading a text" (114).

As the analysis will show, contemporary travel books are rather distant from modern and pre-modern ones, in terms of their epistemological horizon and rhetorical features. At the same time, travel blogs do bear some similarities with classic printed texts.

The Long March Deconstructed

The analysis starts from an English travelogue written by Chinese-born writer, scholar and filmmaker Sun Shuyun. After studying English literature at Beijing University, Shuyun obtained a scholarship from the University of Oxford, where she moved to complete her studies. Since then, she has been working between Beijing and London (where she currently lives). Having lived in the UK for decades, Shuyun has a privileged position from which to speak about the Middle Kingdom to both Chinese and Western audiences. In this respect, one question in the interview revolved around how she judged the Western perception and representation of China. Shuyun answered promptly that

> When you look at Western mainstream media reports on China it all revolves around very few subjects: politics, religion, environment, dissidents. But why is that so? China is much more complex. I also met personally with some foreign correspondents and I have to say that I was not impressed by their knowledge of China: it was, indeed, very superficial.[148]

With this as a departure point, it is possible to see that Shuyun's varied projects as a writer and filmmaker share the common goal of presenting a different, more composite image of China. In terms of her written works, Shuyun has published three major books: *Ten Thousand Miles Without a Cloud* (2003), *The Long March: The True History of Communist China's Founding Myth* (2006), and *A Year in Tibet* (2008). *The Long March* – which is of most interest here – recounts Shuyun's effort to re-travel the whole itinerary of the Long March and, along the way, to meet up with the few surviving veterans who accomplished that endeavour. Shuyun's goal is to understand, from direct testimonies, if what is narrated in history books is plausible. In fact, the lived reality of soldiers turns out to be much more complex and contradictory than the one construed by the Communist Party. "Genuinely, 90% of the people did not know what they were doing," Shuyun reported in the interview, "if they had something to eat, it was enough for them; they were living day by day." The

[148] Sun Shuyun, interview by Stefano Calzati, December 16, 2014, in person.

author's journey, then, represents the opportunity to travel around China and (try to) deconstruct the grand narrative at the base of today's China. This is what she writes in the introduction:

> For us the Long March is a story on a par with Moses leading the exodus out of Egypt. We can hardly escape it. […] Few have ever challenged or even modestly questioned the Long March myth; it is just part of who we are. […] In 2004, seventy years after it began, I set out over the same route to discover as much as I could about the realities beyond the myth. […] I managed to find more than forty veterans, happily with their memories still fresh and their spirits undiminished. Once I started talking to them, their stories poured out. (Shuyun 2006: 2-4)

From the outset, Shuyun presents her work as one grounded in the firm will to dig into the past. It could also be suggested that her purpose, rather than being instrumental to a celebrative representation of China, as was the case with historiographical classic travelogues, is to exploit the epistemoligical power of travel (and writing) in order to destabilize many of the commonly held assumptions about the country's recent history. In the book at least three discourses about the Long March intertwine: the one of the interviewed veterans, the one which belongs to Shuyun (as a representative of her generation), and the official one promoted by the Communist Party (which is variously quoted by the author throughout the text). While at the beginning Shuyun's perspective is closer to the official one, largely due to her indoctrination since primary school, with the unfolding of the journey she realizes the extent to which veterans have a different story to tell. Each of these discourses is, at the same time, collective and individual; it frames the conception that a whole society has elaborated around the Long March, as well as the individual memory(ies) – direct or indirect – from which each subject derives his/her own representation of the events. This also means that the book is structured on varying degrees of factuality – the official/collective one of the Party and the individual ones of the veterans and Shuyun herself – and it is only through an accurate collation of the three discourses that the debunking of the myth – which is in itself a-temporal – can occur. The potential discrepancy among the different discourses is overtly addressed by Shuyun while talking about veteran Huang with a government clerk:

> "He [Huang] is only a peasant. You should really talk to old Wu. He used to be the Prime Minister's bodyguard. He knows things." […] I knew what he thought: it was

> only worth talking to the heroes and the big decision-makers; but their stories are already in our history books, told and retold until they have become symbols, the eternal refrain. Perhaps to him, Huang was not enough of a committed revolutionary, but his ordinary life as a foot soldier on the march was just what I was missing. With luck it would tell me the unadorned truth. (Shuyun 2006: 28)

Notwithstanding Shuyun's optimistic faith in the possibility of uncovering an ultimate truth about the Long March, what is of greatest importance here is the strategy she professes: if a reliable understanding of what happened during the Long March can ever be achieved, it will be by avoiding dominant voices and contrasting those with the testimonies that have not been heard yet. It is, in other words, an archaeological matter: one of excavation, research, collation, and assessment of the ideological charge of the sources. Shuyun explained in the interview:

> The discovery of the journey begins much earlier than the physical displacement. […] The joy that came to me from the reading of the books included in the bibliography is already part of the journey. […] But it was difficult because the Party controls the books published. Therefore, the journey really played a crucial role and allowed me to bring home a significantly different view from the one you can find in official documents.

Ignorance and knowledge, oblivion and re-discovery: to connect these polarized terms is travel, intended as a practice that, if mindfully performed, can bring (self)clarification. In particular, it is worth highlighting that Shuyun acknowledges the intertextual canvas that underpins her work: she read a lot before the departure and reported all the quoted documents in the bibliography. This, together with the insertion of pictures of the veterans and a map of China that signals the Red Armies' wanderings, strengthens both the text's hypertextuality and its generic hybridity, mixing features of the treatise, the collective autobiography, and the ethnography.

Looking retrospectively at Chapter 1, it could be said that *The Long March* gets close to Legerton and Rawson's *Invisible China* as far as the documentary and dialogic features of the work are concerned. At the same time, however, Shuyun's work is quite different from all the texts hitherto encountered: what makes it unique is to be found where the epistemological plan of the text intersects with the autobiographical plan of the author. It emerged in the previous chapter the extent to which, beyond the fluctuating socio-historical conditions which inform each journey, the individual background and the attitude of each travel writer greatly influence how the account is shaped. Shuyun's work differs from Western ones in that it is framed within a qualitatively different horizon: her point of departure, her *modus operandi*, and, finally, her conclusion are different. Emblematic is the fact that the book opens with the author's following remembrance: "I was born to the sound of a bugle in the barracks of the People's Liberation Army where my father served; I grew up with stories of his battle" (2006: 1). Acknowledging the cultural and autobiographical terrain on which the whole experience rests is of primary importance here, because it is precisely on such terrain that the author builds her desire to move beyond what she has been taught about the Long March. It is, in other words, the fact of "travelling at home" that substantiates the text with a completely different ethos. The questions posed by Shuyun – both to veterans and herself – come from a different set of needs than those that usually inform Western travelogues. Alongside this, the more the author delves into the incongruities of the myth, the more her persona unfolds a plurality of facets and it shifts from the "travel writer" towards the ethnographer and researcher, whose basis are both autobiographical – Shuyun's memories – and professional (indeed, Shuyun was trained as an historical scholar).

In the end, the clash/encounter between Shuyun's own memories and those of the veterans call into question the line that separates official history and bottom-up counter-narratives; or also: the desire to know, the possibility of knowing, and the contested knowledge that a journey like Shuyun's can provide. A crucial episode that sums up these tensions is the recollection of the battle on the Xiang River in 1934, when the Red Army was escaping from the Nationalists. Shuyun writes:

> This is the general description of it in the official history of the Long March: "The battle on the Xiang River was the longest and most heroic on the Long March. It involved the largest number of soldiers and the fiercest fighting, with the heaviest casualties for the Red Army, a loss of almost 50.000 men in five days." […] The official story says that the Red Army lost two-thirds of its 86.000 men, but it is implausible that they could all have died in battle. […] Nobody wants to admit it but the majority almost certainly deserted. […] As Liu remembered, he hardly experienced any fighting until the Xiang River; even then, his unit was mainly running rather than fighting. (Shuyun 2006: 79)

From this passage, the thickness of the propaganda's fabrication of the myth vividly emerges: a fabrication that – Shuyun notes – is sometimes based on minor adjustments, but often rests upon radical distortion or suppression of events. Eventually, then, the journey becomes a journey back in time; a rescuing endeavour for the sake of truth before the testimonies of the witnesses will be lost forever; an individually accomplished journey whose narration, informed by the voices of the unheard, aims at deconstructing the institutionalized, collective imagination.

The analysis moves on to discuss the work and activity of a Hong Kong author – Wong How Man – who, similarly to Shuyun, spent much time in the West; however, contrary to her, How Man has now returned to China.

To the Source

Wong How Man (1949-) is a Hong Kong explorer, conservationist, and journalist. Back in 1987, he founded the Chinese Exploration and Research Society (CERS) with the goal of "committing ourselves to China's remote regions and implementing projects to conserve nature and culture, in a sensitive and equitable manner."[149] How Man completed his academic studies in the West – more precisely in Wisconsin – where he graduated in journalism. His experience in the US was crucial not only for his education, but also because it is from that outsider-insider standpoint that How Man fostered his connections to, and interest in, China: "it wasn't until I entered University," he writes in the introduction to *From Manchuria to Tibet* (1998: 9), "that I began to identify deeply with China. Throughout college, I sought to understand better my heritage, avidly reading about China's geography, history, art and culture, both past and present." Then, sensing that China was a country with a huge unexploited potential for ethnographic-journalistic work, in the mid-1970s How Man decided to return to China, and officially embarked on his career as an explorer with the support of the National Geographic Society. In 1985 How Man accomplished what is possibly his major achievement: at the head of a team of Chinese geographers, he surveyed the full length of the Yangtze River, eventually claiming the discovery of an even remoter source than the one usually credited.

This journey is recounted in his book *Exploring the Yangtze: China's Longest River* (1989). In all respects, this can be considered as a travelogue because it recounts the expedition's journey from the lower reaches of the river up to the Tibetan plateau where it originates. How Man's account is largely a description of the features of the Yangtze and the difficulties that the team encountered with the progression of the mission. The text is

[149] http://www.cers.org.hk/index.php/en/about-cers/mission-statement.

certainly not a scientific mapping: indeed, it presents the unfolding of a narrative, which is enriched by dialogues with the local population. Nonetheless, How Man's reluctance to expound on the recounting of the events – as if unwilling to thicken the discourse with too many personal insights – is evident. Hence, the narrative takes on a rather steady and monochord rhythm in which well-rounded, subjective apercus on the experience are just a few. The following passage, taken from the beginning of the book, is a good example:

> One of our first stops was the Yangtze Valley Planning Office at Wuhan. "The Changjiang (Long River [as the Yangtze is called in China]) is treacherous and difficult to tame, both for a hydrologist and a boatman," remarked Cao L'an. His next line: "Our goal is to put the river to work for people," sounded all too familiar to China. Some hundred kilometres downstream at Xiaogu Shan, an old monk saw it differently: "The Changjiang is peaceful, like a mirror flowing by." […] When it is peaceful, the Yangtze serves its populace. […] But at other times, its ravaging water inundates thousands of kilometres and leaves devastation behind. The massive flood of 1931 menaced seven provinces, left over 140.000 people dead and made 28 million people homeless. (How Man 1989: 58)

On the one hand, How Man's commitment to interact with locals (in this case, an officer and a monk) is necessary because their knowledge can be of help to the expedition. How Man also stressed this point in the interview by calling for a coupling, instead of an opposition, between scientific and indigenous knowledge.[150] The quoted passage is just one of the many occurrences throughout the book which testify to how the whole experience, far from being a mapping in isolation of the Yangtze River, relies on the sharing of information with the people encountered along the road. On the other hand, the author does not let these encounters take centre stage. Therefore, the narrative is never really dialogic, nor is it open to self-reflectivity. In this passage, for instance, the testimonies of the officer and the monk are juxtaposed without any commentary. The argument is then complemented with statistics which recontextualize these testimonies within a historical, documented perspective. Overall, a certain formal technicality –concerning not only the reporting of data, but the writing itself – permeates the whole account. According to How Man, this is due to both the process of writing he adopts and the function he projects over it. With regard to the former aspect, How Man noted in the interview that "usually, I write short pieces, which do not require a great deal of editing. Even though I miss the

[150] Wong How Man, interview by Stefano Calzati, April 11, 2015, in person.

possibility to reflect on my reflections – or to shape my writing in a literary way – the writing is kindled by the immediacy of the event: there is less packaging, but more truthfulness." The effect of detachment conveyed by How Man's narrative is the result of his attempt to let the events speak for themselves, avoiding the temptation to edit them or make them more appealing. Photography – which is How Man's second occupation – responds to this same logic, as it is considered as a way of documenting what is written: "I thought since the outset that I wanted to use my photographs […] to illustrate what I was writing about, so even when I write something quite dramatic, the picture is there to prove it." Concerning the second point, when asked how he thinks that his studies in the US have shaped his vision of China and his writing about it, How Man answered that:

> No doubt, my writing has been affected by my studies in arts and journalism in the US, but many other factors have influenced it and still influence it: emotions, age, my leftish leaning, my own prejudices, which I am willing to admit, although this does not have to prevent someone from moving on.

Through this answer, it is easier to understand How Man's predilection for delivering a kind of writing that is as reliable as possible. How Man's standpoint is not surprising when one considers that what he writes and photographs largely responds to a scientific epistemological paradigm of observation and measurement. In this respect, How Man seems keen to avoid the association of his figure with those of other commercially-driven travellers and writers who publish their accounts with a well-defined readership in mind.[151] In other words, while he may well be considered a travel writer, How Man pretends to be perceived, in the first place, as an explorer and a researcher.

Last, How Man's effort to achieve accuracy has to do with the language he decides to use (which reflects his hybrid cultural background). In the interview How Man affirmed that whenever he wants to be analytical he resorts to English, while he privileges Cantonese for conveying emotions and personal impressions. Taken in isolation, this claim is rather straightforward. However, when it is collated with How Man's view about his writing process, one can see more clearly the extent to which the objectivity he tries to attain through his writing cannot be the result of an immediate spontaneity, as he claimed. The choice of adopting the English language already represents a filtering of the explorer's own

[151] In this regard, How Man's critique of Joseph Rock's work (he was How Man's predecessor at the National Geographic) is emblematic. In a couple of articles, which he shared privately with me, How Man points out that Rock was more of "a flowery pen rather than an exacting perfectionist".

views and the *a priori* sheltering of his subjectivity, which is prevented from surfacing in the writing.

Once again, the closest point of comparison that comes to mind when reading *From Manchuria to Tibet* is *Invisible China* by Legerton and Rawson. The aim of bringing to light the cultural and ethnical variety of China is the same for all three authors. At the same time, as was the case with Shuyun, How Man is able to accomplish this purpose in more depth and breadth by exploiting his fully insider position. On a similar note, *Exploring the Yangtze* could be said to share the adventurous ethos as Bird's *The Yangtze Valley and Beyond*. Indeed, although the mapping of the river's basin rests on two very different motives – Bird's was commercial and political, while How Man's is largely ethnographic and geographic – the desire to venture into uncharted areas is very similar. What distinguishes the two is the fact that Bird was penetrating what she considered as "the beyond" by maintaining a Western perspective, while How Man works from within a Chinese frame, and from here he manages to rewrite the "history" of the Yangtze as it is known by both Chinese and Western people.

The next author to be analysed is Hong Kong-born blogger and writer Jason Y Ng. With him the discussion begins to bridge the gap between print and online Chinese travel writing. At the same time, Ng still presents a hybrid cultural background: born in Hong Kong, he spent much of his youth in the US and Europe, before settling down again in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong as a State of Mind

Blogger Jason Y Ng argued in the interview that he stumbled upon blogging after he set up his own online website to promote his career as a singer:

> I really wanted to become a professional tenor, so I hired a Web designer to build a website to promote my singing. Then, this Web designer told me: "Well, now you should put something on your website, apart from your biography. You need content, you need to blog." I didn't know exactly how to do it, or what to write, but because I have always been a politics junky, I began to blog about that: political issues in Hong Kong.[152]

Later, Ng broadened his thematic focus to culture, current events, and travel. In fact, the generic labelling of Ng's blog – *Asiseeithk.com* – and books – *Hong Kong State of Mind* (2011)

[152] Jason Y. Ng, interview by Stefano Calzati, April 19, 2015, in person.

and *No City for Slow Man* (2013), which are the remediation of some of his blog's posts – is usually that of "writings about Hong Kong". The span of such a label is certainly wider and more heterogeneous than that of travel writing. Having said this, there are some good reasons why Ng's work is worth discussing here. A first hint comes from Ng's self-representation on his blog: he defines himself as "a globe-trotter who spent his entire adult life in Italy, the United States and Canada before returning to his birthplace to rediscover his roots. He is a full-time lawyer, a published author, a writer."[153] It is notable that Ng's first mention goes to his wanderings around the world – which also inspire a good deal of his writing – rather than to his occupation as a lawyer. The following extract from *Hong Kong State of Mind* does justice to the author's globe-trotting inclination:

> I gazed at the magnificent skyline before me. Only a handful of cities in the world rival Hong Kong as a true megalopolis: New York, London, Tokyo, Paris and Shanghai. To this biased citizen, Hong Kong is hands-down the most livable one among them. New York's infrastructure is shamefully antiquated; London is prohibitively expensive; Tokyo never stops treating you like a *gaijin* and Paris is as impenetrable as Tokyo except without the good manners. As for our old nemesis Shanghai, the city pampers and indulges until it doesn't. All hell breaks loose should anything happen and you find yourself at the mercy of the local, mostly corrupt, system. (Ng 2011: 77-78)

In this excerpt Ng takes a global perspective from which to look at Hong Kong. More precisely, the author's persona is that of a cosmopolitan subject who went to and got acquainted with a number of diverse contexts, before resettling in Hong Kong. Most remarkable is the fact that from this cosmopolitan standpoint Ng is able to launch a camouflaged critique of Mainland China, epitomized by Shanghai's faulty system. One of the questions in the interview aimed at understanding the author's own experiences when travelling to China; Ng's reply is condensed into an anecdote:

> I was in Beijing a month ago to participate in the Beijing Literary Festival. […] In one panel I spoke exclusively of Occupy Central. You know, it is very rare for someone to speak openly of political movements in Hong Kong when on China's soil… so I felt a little nervous. At the end of the panel, the festival organizers came to me and said: "Oh, congratulations Jason, we didn't know you were so popular."

[153] http://www.asiseeithk.com

> I thanked them, believing they were trying to flatter me, but then they specified: "Have you seen all the police officers at the back?!" This is how things go: authorities are sent to venues where political issues are treated, in order to pick out too sensible things.

However marginal such an episode may appear, it is telling of the bumpy relations that still endure between Hong Kong and China, in particular after the Umbrella movement (see footnote at the beginning of the chapter). At the same time, this episode signals the incongruence of Ng's global persona: for all his experiences around the world, he still perceives Mainland China – *de facto* his homeland – as an alienating place to be, either culturally, politically, or socially.

In terms of his writing process, the most evident sign of Ng's cosmopolitanism is his deliberate use of the English language to talk about Hong Kong. This is Ng's own opinion on the point: "My luck was that there are really few commentators on the Web that write about Hong Kong in English, so this gave me a rather unique angle." Insofar as blogging (in order to be successful) requires the identification of a unique niche, Ng has decided to give voice to his cosmopolitan persona through not only the perspective he unfolds – as a returning expat – but also the linguistic channel to which he resorts. If How Man saw the English language as a privileged tool for achieving clarity and objectivity, Ng thinks of it as his characterising blueprint. It could also be suggested that Ng's resorting to English represents a way for distinguishing himself and resisting the impact on Hong Kong of Mainland China. On this point, it must be noted that both Ng's blog and his books are banned in Mainland China[154], while his choice to write in English also spurred some critiques on his blog, as he revealed in the interview. Through the use of English, then, Ng's hybrid cultural background finds an ultimate terrain of performativity that becomes the *raison d'être* of his writing, even though this has consequences for how he is perceived both in Mainland China and in Hong Kong.

Another reason for including Ng's work in the present analysis is that on his blog and in the last section of his *Hong Kong State of Mind* he dwells in more detail upon some travels he has taken over the years to Hong Kong's neighbouring countries. In so doing, he reflects on both Hong Kong and Asia at large as travel destinations and/or as places where to live. Ng explained: "the reason why I created the third section about the journeys I took out of Hong Kong, it's because this section *is* about Hong Kong: it gives you a more

[154] However, the rigidity of this ban remains contentious, considering that he was invited to the Beijing's literary festival.

objective perception of what is going on here." "Here" stands for Hong Kong, but it also suggests the role of the city within the continent. The most relevant piece, in this regard, concerns Ng's reflections about Macau and Shenzhen:

> Shenzhen, Macau and Hong Kong are three sisters separated in childhood. Tucked away in the Pearl River Delta, they might have been mistaken for triplets if it weren't for the vicissitudes of history that put them on such different paths. […] Good or bad, Shenzhen was the only sister of the three spared from colonial rule. While Hong Kong thrived under British rule and Portuguese Macau carved a niche for itself as Asia's Sin City, Shenzhen didn't begin to come of age until 1980 when Deng Xiaoping handpicked her to be China's first Special Economic Zone. […] In the late 1990s, China celebrated the homecoming of Hong Kong and Macau, only to find the abductees emotionally attached to the kidnappers in a textbook case of Stockholm Syndrome. The two sisters bade a tearful farewell to the European colonizers who modernized them and returned to a family they barely recognized. Decolonization had never been so sullen. Economically inferior and culturally worlds apart, Shenzhen looked on as the Westernized sisters came home, suddenly conscious of her own Chineseness. (Ng 2011: 160-61)

To begin with, Ng inscribes his piece into a historical narrative which owes much to a univocal way of conceiving progress. Indeed, to argue that Shenzhen, Macau, and Hong Kong were sisters separated in childhood not only flattens the three different histories of these cities, but also puts them into a linear representation of history according to which all that comes before Western colonization is to be regarded as backward. Secondly, the comparison established by Ng is valid from a geographical point of view – insofar as the three cities are all in proximity to the Pearl River Delta – but it does not hold when a political angle is favoured. As Ng himself specifies, Hong Kong and Macau had to deal with colonial powers, while Shenzhen did not. The point is that the trilateral parallelism built by Ng responds to a more subtle logic, namely to show the extent to which Hong Kong is different from Mainland China (of which Shenzhen represents the urban prototype). This idea finds its most vivid example in the conclusion of the passage when Ng remarks that, despite all efforts, Shenzhen remains unmistakably Chinese. Lastly, the divide between Hong Kong and Mainland China is reasserted through a dramatized representation of the island's handover: an event that, according to Ng, sparked feelings of resentment and frustration. At stake is not so much the assessment of the truth of such a claim, but rather the acknowledgement that Ng poured his own experience as a self-imposed expat to the US. In fact, Ng's biography inscribes itself into the diaspora of all those Hongkongers who left the island before 1997, fearing the consequences of the imminent return of Hong Kong to China's jurisdiction. In hypostasizing the clash between Hong Kong and Mainland China, however, Ng overlooked those individual and collective nuances – e.g. the imagined and real expectations of the handover – that his position as an insider and outsider in Hong Kong could have helped to disentangle. More generally, it can be suggested that, against his cosmopolitan self-representation, Ng opts by and large for unfolding a macro-opposition – cultural, ideological, individual – between the West and Hong Kong and between Hong Kong and Mainland China (eventually making his approach close to that of many contemporary Western travel writers).

The last factor that makes Ng's work relevant here has to do with the remediation process undergone by his blog. The episode that Ng recounts in the introduction to *Hong Kong State of Mind* is illuminating:

> When I first told him [Ng's brother] the idea of turning my blog into a book, Kelvin, true to form, served up a dose of reality. "Who would want to read about stuff they already know?" he asked rather rhetorically. "And you don't even write in Chinese!" Kelvin continued his bubble-bursting routine. But he does have a point. Even though every Hongkonger grows up speaking Cantonese (the city's *lingua franca*) at home and learning English at school, the latter remains ever elusive, ever feared. […] But if two wrongs make a right, then this book is it. When the stories we know are told in a different language even the familiar and the mundane can spring to life. (Ng 2011: 11)

Through his brother's words, Ng is prompted to consider the risk of transposing the posts of the blog – which anyone can read online for free – into a book. His answer is rather acute: whatever one may claim to know, as soon as things are told in a different language – i.e. English – and, in addition, through a different medium, then what is familiar is cast in a new light. By subverting the factors at the base of travel writing, it is as if the process of remediation comes to constitute a "travel of the writing": a mediated process that projects onto the "déjà-dit" the aura of novelty. As seen in the previous chapters, for this to be really the case the "new" text has to exploit the specific affordances of the target medium. In this sense, two main features differentiate Ng's blog from his book. The pictures that enrich the posts on the blog have been substituted with drawings made by his father. This choice, as Ng stated in the interview, is mainly due to the fact that the pictures that appear on the blog are usually taken from the Web, and sometimes he has to remove them due to copyright infringement. Hence, by opting to include his father's drawings, Ng managed, at once, to circumvent copyrights negotiations and to turn the book into a more personalized artefact. Overall, when comparing the online and printed versions of the posts, it is evident that they are fundamentally the same. At the same time, the posts that have been included in *Hong Kong State of Mind* are now only partially accessible on the blog: indeed, it is possible to read only the first few paragraphs, after which readers are invited to buy the book. Without doubt, this represents an original solution: it strengthens the links between the online and printed versions, while keeping them fairly unique. (This solution is also an indirect response to Ng's brother's claim that nobody would read something that is already available online.)

Portraying China's Ordinariness

At this point the analysis takes into account the work of Hong Kong reporter and photographer Leong Ka Tai. In doing so, the discussion conducted in Chapter 2 about Hirst and Lotti's *Il mondo oltre il fiume dei peschi in fiore* is also recalled. Leong is another Hongkonger who has a globetrotting biography and a multicultural background. "The best decision I have made in my life," he writes in the "About" page on his website,

> was to quit my job as an engineer in England and move to Paris to learn photography. […] After three years I returned to Hong Kong and started my own studio. The second best decision was when, after six years, I found studio work too restrictive. I stopped the studio work and turned to travelling. After a while, magazine assignments started coming in.[155]

Leong's first travel destination for his reportages was Mainland China, where he journeyed around between 1982 and 1987. These years marked a crucial epoch in contemporary China, as they witnessed Xiaoping's opening of the country to the four modernizations. These were also the same years during which Giorgio Lotti was working in China as a foreign Italian correspondent. The parallelism between Leong and Lotti does not stop there, but involves a similar conception of photography, which will be explored shortly.

One of the projects that Leong developed from his travelling experience around China is the photo-book *On China: One to Twenty Four* (1988) which collects a selection of

[155] http://www.camera22.com/about/p01.html

24 pictures taken while on the road. Each photograph is accompanied by a poem written in Chinese by writer Leung Ping Kwan and then translated into English by Leong himself. The two versions are juxtaposed on the page. One of the questions in the interview concerned the work of translation, in order to understand how the passing from Mandarin to English had affected the meaning of the poems or their relations with the pictures:

> The translation is very important, but I do not think that the passing from Mandarin to English adds anything to the images. […] The Chinese text, on the contrary, I believe that it adds a new dimension to the images. There is one photo, in particular, taken in the early evening: a man is standing on a balcony of a building painted in yellow and the sky is deep blue. In his poem Kwan says something about the sound of the Yellow River, which runs near where the picture was taken. The symmetry is incredible; it creates a multimedial, multisensorial sensation.[156]

The picture (Figure 49) and poem to which Leong refers are the following:

Figure 49. One of the most significant pictures in Leong's book (reproduced with permission)

> The bright blue sky is boundless.
> You lit a cigarette at dusk,
> Looking at the yellow earth under your feet, the yellow walls.
> The yellow desert is boundless too.
> With bowed head, you think of the distant hills beyond the distant hills,
> The ancient Yellow River meandering towards the bright blue seas. (Leong: 28)

[156] Ka Tai Leong, interview by Stefano Calzati, April 21, 2015, in person.

As Leong points out, the synergy between the picture – its colours – and the words – i.e. the allusion to an imagined but proximate Yellow River – creates a multisensorial experience, whose result is greater than the sum of the two modes. In fact, the verbo-visual relation between the pictures and the poems could be said to constitute the major narrative force of the whole work. Leong himself remarked that "for the rest there is no story or a precise choice behind the organization of the images." In this respect, Leong's work offers a parallel to Hirst's *Il mondo oltre il fiumde dei peschi in fiore*, in which a considerable number of photographs by Giorgio Lotti accompany the text. When it comes to assessing the role and status of photography Lotti and Leong share very similar views:

> [Lotti]: Photography is an art that requires a long period of study of the subject. A click at the right moment is not enough to get a good image; you also have to know the subject. […] Paradoxically, with the spreading of digital technologies and their wide commercialization, Photography – with a capital P – has become, or better has returned to being, an elitist art. It demands time: time for studying the subject as well as for conceiving what you want to tell visually.[157]

> [Leong]: You could say I was just lucky [he is referring to a shot he took of a man eating his soup at dawn]… But then it's also true that I woke up at four in the morning and went out in order to witness the city's awakening… So you have to place yourself in situations in which luck can happen… Luck is letting oneself be able to take advantage of the situation. […] When I am alone I can spend all the time I need on a single shot… So, the overall idea is that you have to adapt to the circumstances – be it the medium or the people – in order to do your best.

Both Lotti and Leong conceive of photography as an art that requires full-time dedication. This means not only being ready for the right moment, but also getting acquainted with the subject in order to correctly interpret it. Lotti further specified that: "the majority of today's photographers not only cannot properly 'read' the subject once they are in front of it, but they arrive on the spot without the necessary knowledge." The parallels between Lotti and Leong's views show the extent to which travel, writing, and photography (as well as reading) are all specular practices. Most importantly, it is only when they are supported by the necessary knowledge and expertise that they become forms of art.

[157] Lotti, interview.

Returning now to Leong's work, it is worth to explore his approach to photography, as it can provide some further insights into the discussion about the chronotope of photography developed in Chapter 2. The celebrated quality of Leong's work is to seize the subjects' intimacy, by framing it within ordinariness. Figure 50 is the picture of the man eating his soup at dawn to which Leong referred in the interview, while Figure 51 is the second-to-last found in the book:

Figure 50. Soup at dawn (reproduced with permission)

Figure 51. Child and father at Beijing's hospital (reproduced with permission)

What does it mean to portray ordinariness? Why is Leong considered a master in his quest to represent people's intimacy? And how is Leong's representation of daily life different from that of tourism photography? Undoubtedly, in order to take good shots one needs to master the technique of photography, so that the camera becomes not only a means to reproduce the subject, but a vehicle to bring it to life. Yet the problem is not exclusively technical, but practical: it is also necessary to accomplish that kind of study, advocated by Leong and Lotti, which can eventually turn the right instant into an absolute and the subject into a story. In fact, what Leong does is to investigate ordinary places – such as hospital, squares, streets – and to make ordinariness become thick, perspectival, and, possibly, moving. Leong is able to look at ordinary places unconventionally: his pictures ask to be stared at and interrogated; they are the result of a patient waiting and they embed a whole tale to be heard. Perhaps, the picture of the man eating his soup at dawn could be regarded as the outcome of Leong's good timing, but in it – in the eyes of that man staring at the camera – the photographer was able to capture a whole narrative: the fatigue of early-morning Chinese workers; the longing for a bowl of rice and a better future; the pride, loneliness, and shiftiness of a gaze that encompasses a whole generation. The point – again – is not whether these interpretations are correct, but that they are possible: the photograph speaks for itself. Similarly, the picture of the young child and his sleeping father in a Beijing hospital rests on the principle of circumspection; it signals the exploration of institutional places and their metamorphosis into familial realities. Leong's pictures, then, bear the mark of ordinariness precisely because they show the intimacy (differently from tourism pictures) of well-known public places. The colours of this picture are cold and the setting is inhospitable; yet the father's exhausted face, his defensive arm over his son, the multicolour blanket and the kid's open eyes above the oxygen mask all conjure up a sense of warmth and fight and longing for life. In this case, Kwan's poem provides the reader/observer with one story:

> Children's hospital, Beijing.
> "Father is tired.
> Here the quilts are warm, the doctors are friendly
> Sleep tight, and when you'll wake up, you'll be well again!"
> "Father you are tired.
> Sleep tight and when you'll wake up, I'll tell you a story!"
> About the Monkey whose somersaults land a hundred and eight thousand miles away." (Leong 1988: 44)

Kwan's poem digs into the photograph's novel to such an extent that it rescues the kid's voice: the silent petition of his staring eyes is enunciated. Firstly, the child speaks to the readers, by recollecting the doctors' prognosis of a full recovery; then, he speaks to his father and, eventually, through an epic reversal of the roles, he promises to tell him a story once he wakes up (thus implying a full recovery). Kwan's is just one possible tale, one interpretation, but the very fact that the picture triggered such a response is indicative of Leong's ability to explore the subjects' intimacy and portray them from a personal standpoint, which calls for a syntagmatic reading of the image.

Transcending the micro level of daily ordinariness, the last point addressed during the interview was Leong's perception of China as a Hongkonger who also travelled and lived in Europe:

> Before starting to travel I knew I had some notions of China, culturally speaking… I know Chinese cultural basics, I know what things mean, the meaning of people's behaviour. But on the other hand, as soon as I went to Mainland China I realized it was a foreign country to me: the political system, the economics, the people's way of life. There was a tension between the known and the unknown. Between what I thought I knew and what travel revealed to me. Yet, I have to say that I felt and still feel different from Mainlanders…

On a cultural level, Leong's answer is close to Ng's idea of a great divide between Hong Kong and Mainland China. Yet Leong adds a further layer to this feeling: it is a matter not only of knowing the other's culture but of creating a link, an empathy, between the self and the unknown. Leong continued by arguing that: "This is maybe because my pictures are intimate: I strove to create a connection with my subjects, going beyond the cultural, historical differences that still endure."

The next section moves away from Hong Kong and is dedicated to two artists who were born and currently live in Mainland China: Zhen and Qiang Gao, internationally known as the "Gao Brothers". Further on, the analysis will return to discuss the work of a Hong Kong author and blogger, Lam Fai Fred, as this will serve as a transition to the study of Chinese travel blogs.

A Day in Beijing

The Gao Brothers are widely known in China and abroad for their provocative installations, sculptures, and photography often revolving around the recollection of the Cultural Revolution, which was a traumatic experience for both of them due to the imprisonment and death of their father (when they were aged 12 and 6). Apart from their artistic works, the Gao Brothers have also sporadically ventured into writing. Of particular interest here is their *One Day in Beijing* (2004, original title: 在北京一天能走多遠), in which they recount a whole day spent wandering in the capital. The opening of the book frames the rationale of the project: "Here we are trying to capture the hustle and bustle of an urban city in China. We hope to capture the essence of time and space in a moment. This is the purpose of the volume" (1). This goal is pursued via an equal mix of words and pictures. In the interview the Gao Brothers defined themselves as "witnesses, recorders: we tried not to think that we were working."[158] The whole book interrogates the border that separates visibility and anonymity, transparency and engagement, the need to show and the effort not to intervene. In this regard, two main axes structure the work: one is the exploration of "authentic life", as the authors mentioned in the interview; the other has to do with the political implications of making a reportage in and about Beijing. With regard to the former, the authors adopt various strategies to appear as the casual witnesses of scenes that would unfold in the same way without their presence. Firstly, they make use of direct speech to convey a sense of closeness to the events and give voice to other people. Secondly, as Figures 52 and 53 show, they take photographs from unusual angles in an attempt "to capture the 'authentic' expressions and moment"[159] (Gao Brothers 2004: 17).

Figure 52. Passengers on a bus (reproduced with permission)

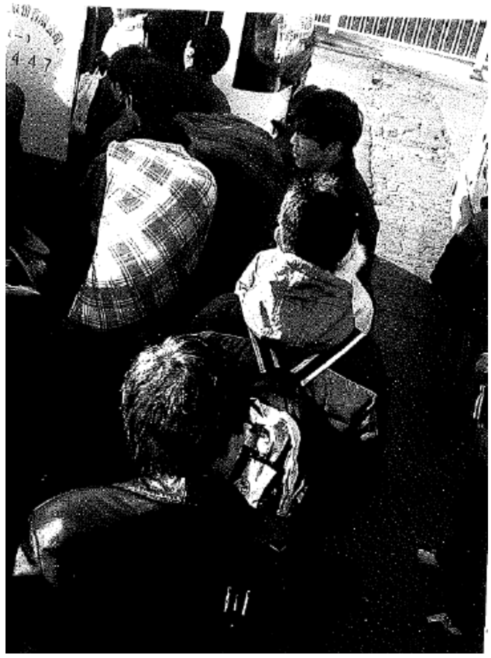

Figure 53. People queuing (reproduced with permission)

Thirdly, the authors refrain from evaluating what they see and let the events flow, so that their engagement with the scene remains marginal. In the interview the Gao Brothers claimed: "The book is political as far as the things we recorded are political. We wanted to record what we saw, heard and thought during one whole day in Beijing. Everything in the book responds to this." These words seem to reassert the Gao Brothers' goal to distance themselves from the scene. Yet, despite all efforts to conceal the camera and approach

158 Gao Brothers, interview by Stefano Calzati, June 12, 2015, in person.
159 "一天的行动，而且摄影也尽可能用偷拍的方式完成。我们希望记录北京没有被镜头打扰变形的真实的日常状态。"

people discreetly, the transparency to which the authors point can only be an ideal. When we discussed if and how photography and language can represent authenticity, the Gao Brothers elaborated on their practice in a much more ambivalent way than what they state in the book:

> Neither pictures nor texts are better or worse. The authenticities of the two are relative, limited, and difficult to identify. Our task was to try our best to document the day objectively, but we did not think about how to identify authenticity. Also we did not mind whether people believe our words or photos, as long as these can trigger their imagination.

This claim reveals the authors' awareness of the intrinsic instability of their goal to capture authenticity. Authenticity is not to be found in the portrayed subject; rather, it is a social and medial construction. The role of photography and language, then, is to kindle the feeling of authentic life, complying with the way in which society think of authenticity. This leads the Gao Brothers to seek to neutralize the effects of photography and language as means-of-telling (quite differently from Leong and Lotti) and to convey through them a sense of non-intrusiveness and non-mediation.

The interview also revealed the extent to which the relation between photographs and words in the book is itself political. One question addressed the occasional discrepancy between text and image. The authors replied:

> We do hope the pictures can match the texts as much as possible, but due to the censorship and editing issues before publishing, some pictures and texts had to be removed. So some pictures and texts are not really matched.

It becomes clearer that the publishing process is charged with a political burden that was absent from Western-authored contemporary travelogues. Of course, in the West the publishing process does also affect how each travelogue is formed; however, none of the contemporary texts analysed was subjected to overt censorship. The Gao Brothers' claim sheds light on the varying degrees of censorship to which Chinese authorities can resort when it comes to sensible content: it is a matter of neither completely silencing dissidents' voices nor of promoting outspoken propaganda, but of an on-going and ever-changing compromise.[160] It was not possible to find out more about the missing pictures. However, the very fact that words and illustrations are sometimes discrepant remains as a blueprint of the untold story of censorship undergone by the book.

On another level, the political implications of making a reportage in Beijing are also vividly present in the text. Insofar as the Gao Brothers talk with people, they not only "become visible", but are sometimes rejected because of the questions they ask. The most emblematic example is the encounter in the subway with three musicians who are reluctant to speak with the Gao Brothers. This could appear as a rather common reaction between strangers. Yet, it conceals a deeper motivation. The three musicians' claim that "we just arrived in Beijing and we need to make a living. We don't want you to follow us" (2004: 106), betrays their distress as new-coming migrants to Beijing. This issue is unpacked by the authors when they discuss with another commuter the deficiencies of the system for regulating the flux of migrants to the capital:

> [Gao brothers]: "We are also not from Beijing. What do you think of the policy which allows migrants into Beijing?" [Commuter]: "Last time, there was a Guangzhou person who didn't have a residential permit and he got beaten to death… this makes me feel really sad… I think the temporary residential permit has its pros and cons." [Gao brothers]: "Do you think they should cancel this system?" [Commuter]: "Yes, but they should have a registration system for the flow of incoming migrants for regulation. During the SARS period, if there wasn't a registration system to control the flow of migrants, it would have been disastrous."[161] (Gao Brothers 2004: 73-75)

This passage addresses the social stratification of Beijing's society and the inequalities that divide urban residents from (Chinese) internal migrants. Through it, the Gao Brothers give voice to the multitude of workers and people who fuel the wealth of the city, but are obliged to live at its margins for fear of being discovered and expelled.[162] On the one hand,

[160] On this issue, Michel Hockx (2015), in surveying erotic Chinese literature on the Internet, has noted how online censorship tends to be looser than in print. He argues that the Internet represents a space where moral and political boundaries are more easily renegotiated.

[161] "问：'我们都是外地来的，你对一直让外来人 头疼的暂住证制度问题怎么看？' 答：' 我觉得上次广州那个因没有暂住证被打死的孙志刚事件，让人感觉很 '悲惨- - - - - - 所以我觉得暂住证制度有利有弊。' ' 问：.你觉得暂住证制度应当取消吗？' ' 答：暂住证制度也许应连取消，但应当有一 个登记制度，这样可以对外来人口有一个控制，比方前一段时期的"非典"，如果没有一个登记制度就没法控制流 动人口，出现问题很麻烦。' "

[162] The migration from the countryside towards the city began in the late 1970s alongside Deng Xiaoping's reforms of the labour's market. According to the latest statistics by Chinese government

these dialogues are a good example of the Gao Brothers' effort to let the "political" rise effortlessly to the surface of the text, without commenting on it. On the other hand, however, they epitomize the ultimate impossibility of delivering a transparent reportage, which was the preliminary intention of the authors.

The last issue to be discussed points to the Gao Brothers' personae as "explorers" of what constitutes for them a familiar, urban dimension. More precisely, beneath their project lies a double disjuncture: familiarity/unfamiliarity on the one hand, in loco/itinerant travel experiences, on the other. While, to a certain extent, their personae get close to the European figure of the flâneur, the Gao Brothers do not limit themselves to stare at the city, but they challenge it. After having lived in Beijing for years, the authors' plan is to deconstruct the city as a commoditized space and look at it with different eyes. This project echoes that of the Situationist International (SI), a French avant-garde movement born in Paris in 1957 and active until 1972. One of the goals of the SI was to perform a critique of the capitalist urban space uncovering its tensions through the practice of the "dérive", a walking strategy which allows to both traverse the city serendipitously and keep a critical mind-set about the aesthetic and architectural features of the surroundings. Today, the ethos of the SI finds a reflection in the practice of psychogeography, as a way of "responding to the environment in an active rather than passive way" (Richardson 2015: 4). This is precisely what the Gao Brothers did: "we looked like wandering aimlessly on that day, but consciously we observed, experienced and took notes. As such, we might see, feel and think more about Beijing than those who were around." It is through this attentive disposition, which is reminiscent of Bourdieu's (1990) idea of travel, that the authors are able to arouse in themselves that magnetic interest which is usually triggered by new places rather than familiar ones. In the interview the Gao Brothers specified that, because they started their peregrination at an unusual time for them (early morning), "the variations in the lights and sounds, or the sudden change in the size of the crowd, could render a place you are quite familiar with a strange one." For one thing, then, deconstructing familiarity is chiefly related to a matter of a change in perspective. Eventually, travel, rather than being a trivial, superficial practice, becomes an interrogative form of strolling that demands a high level of self-consciousness. But this also means that the reporting cannot be, ultimately, as neutral as the Gao Brothers pretend it to be. As never before, travelling and writing come to represent in the Gao Brothers' work two conflictive practices. Pleasures and duties, enjoyment and self-awareness: to write

(http://data.bjstats.gov.cn/2012/tbbd/201201/t20120104_218341.htm), more than 7 millions migrants currently live in Beijing, which is more than one third of the capital's whole population.

about one's own experience – be it in loco or itinerant, about familiar or unfamiliar places – is always a negotiation between what one perceives and how one thinks of oneself.

Committed Travel Writing

Fred Fai Lam is a Hong Kong-born travel writer and travel blogger. At the end of 2014 his first travel book, titled *Travelling between Hope and Suffering* (original title: 旅行在希望與苦難之間), was released in Taiwan and Hong Kong (but not in Mainland China due to its political content). The book recounts the first half of Lam's world tour, which lasted almost two years and touched 40 countries. Specifically, in *Travelling between Hope and Suffering*, Lam narrates his experiences in China, Asia, and the Middle East.

Lam and his work are relevant to the present discussion for a number of reasons. First of all, Lam's book, as a cultural artefact, reflects more than any other some of the features that characterise Chinese contemporary travel writing. In terms of multimodality, one can note the presence of a great number of colour pictures – usually one per page – reasserting the tendency of Chinese travel writers to build a balanced relation between words and illustrations. To this, one could add that the Chinese characters, as pictorial ideograms, impress upon the writing a visual complexity that forces – if not transcends – the threshold of paravisuality (as discussed in Chapter 2). In terms of paratextuality, when one looks at the structure of Lam's book, it is notable that the narration *per se* is introduced by not just one, but five forewords: three of these are written by Lam's fellow writers, one is a collection of short reviews – very similar to the endorsement found on the back covers of Western books – and the last one is Lam's own introduction. Therefore, the readers face a proliferation of peritextual elements which relate to multiple authors. This, in turn, fragments the book's single authorship and opens the book to a complex hypertextual dialogism made up of both internal cross-references and quotations from other oeuvres.

Beyond these notations, what makes this work worth analysing is the way in which the author represents himself and how he conceives of travelling and writing. Lam is the Chinese author who, more than anyone else (among those surveyed), stresses his being a traveller and a writer. These are his words in the introduction:

> When I was applying for my border pass [to get into Tibet as a Hongkonger] I was wondering whether to write 'traveler' or 'writer' in the occupation column. I suddenly realized that I had two identities and both of them were equally romantic. Being a traveler and a writer enables me to go on trips to record my experiences

> and then sharing them with an audience. This, in turn, helps pay for my travels.[163] (Lam 2014: 16)

Unlike the Chinese writers analysed so far, who tended to present multifaceted personae, Lam is keen to claim for himself the clear-cut label of travel writer. At the same time, however, he makes sure that he deconstructs the romanticism that contours such a label, by specifying that it was possible for him to travel only because he regularly published articles in a variety of magazines. More generally, the balance between idealism and pragmatism characterizes not only Lam's persona but also his writing. The author addresses this polarity in the introduction to the book: "Though this book is a 'travel documentary'," he writes, "the topics touched upon bear a certain gravity. I have tried to interweave 'travel' and 'the suffering of mankind'." (Lam 2014: 16) The (political) commitment of the work is, indeed, a major trait. Wei Ba, who wrote the first foreword to the book, remarks that:

> Being a "responsible traveler" who aims to change the living conditions of people in the world, his travel account doesn't only contain records of his travel experiences. The account also contains notes on cultural differences and his reflections on these lifestyle differences.[164] (Lam 2014: 4)

While in the West the idea of a "responsible traveller" (or ethical traveller) is usually linked with a rejection of the massified, socially exploitative and ecologically harmful tourist practice, from the Chinese perspective "responsibility" is chiefly related with the need to denounce injustices and political misdeeds, both at home (such as in the case of the Gao Brothers), but also internationally. In China, much more than in the West – and contrary to Strassberg's findings concerning pre-modern and modern travelogues – travelling and writing are considered as privileged practices for destabilizing the political status quo within and outside the country. On the one hand, the politicization of Lam's book is evidently a reaction against the authoritarianism that still affects some regions of China and aspects of its life. It is again Wei Ba who touches upon this point by remembering that, as a Tibetan, he is not granted the same freedom of movement as Lam:

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163 " 記得出發不久，在某國邊境辦入境手續，表格上有著「職業」 一欄，我在想：我該寫 Traveller (旅行者) ， 還是 Writer (寫作人)呢？突然發現，原來 我同時擁有了兩種相當浪漫的身分，浪漫得甚至有點虛幻——可以將旅行的見聞寫成文字與讀 者分享，並透過寫作賺取旅費，讓我可以持續旅行下去。"

164 "正如林輝在遊歷了許多地方之後發現，世界的苦難太多 。好在，仍然見到希望」。履行責任旅遊理念，並對公民社會的建設傾注心力、希望人人生活有所改變乃至世界得以改變。"

> This year is the Year of the Horse. According to the Tibetan tradition, it is the year for taking a pilgrimage to the most respectable mountain – Mount Kailash. […] To visit Mount Kailash, one must have a border pass to access China. But the government is not willing to grant this pass to Tibetans, but only to the Chinese.[165] (Lam 2014: 4)

On the other hand, the book's politicization is a reflection of Lam's worldwide activism. In fact, Lam is concerned with a number of political and civil causes around the world. Zhang Cui Rong, author of the second foreword to the book, remembers that in 2009 "a foreign group who protested against the bombings of Gaza by Israel invited me to go for a talk in Hong Kong: Lam was amongst them" (Lam 2014: 8). Zhang's words impress upon Lam's figure a global political commitment which is eventually stronger than that of any other Chinese author analysed so far. The (ironic) paradox is that when Lam reached the Tibetan plateau to begin his journey, according to the bureaucratic language of the Chinese government, he was a simple "tourist". From activist to tourist – or rather, accepting being a tourist in order to be politically active – Lam blends his longing for travelling and writing – his being a travel writer – and turns it into a critical stance through which he denounces sorrow as well as exalts hopes.

Finally, Lam represents a fruitful case study in that he is the co-founder of Ironshoetravel.com, a Hong Kong-based blog platform entirely dedicated to travel. This is how Lam described the project in the interview:

> We wanted to create a website that included mainly travel blogs and also some news about travel, but not guide-related information such as transport costs or accommodation. We want to provide stories: good articles, literarily speaking; in-depth analysis or inside stories.[166]

Lam also specified that each new blog must be approved by the platform's staff – Lam and his two colleagues – before going online. The screening is meant to assess the literary quality of the work. However, as it will be argued, it could also represent a way to avoid censorship in Mainland China, where the platform is currently accessible. Lam's

165 " 緣於依西藏傳統，今年即馬年，為西藏神山之尊——岡仁波齊的朝 聖之年，對於虔信佛教的藏人屬必修功課。然而去轉山朝聖必須辦「邊境通行證」，但當局偏 偏不給藏人辦此證，卻給中國各地旅遊者開方便門。"

166 Fred Fai Lam, interview by Stefano Calzati, April 18, 2015, in person.

predilection for quality over quantity and literariness over information represents a countertrend in the blogosphere (at least as far as the present analysis is concerned): after all, a gatekeeping process contrasts with the idea(l) of the Web as a free space where anyone can publish at will. This process, in turn, redefines Ironshoetravel.com as a hybrid between a platform and an individually managed blog, blurring the distinction between the two categories. It is no coincidence that the layout of Ironeshoetravel.com gets closer to that of the typical blog, rather than that of a multi-service platform (Figure 54):

Figure 54. The home page of Ironeshoetravel.com *(reproduced with permission)*

The home page presents the heading at the centre, two navigational bars – one above and one below the title – and then the latest updates directly below (in the form of a slideshow). Moreover, apart from two advertisements in the right column, the page is polished, which means that the peritextual elements are limited in number and chiefly organized around the posts. Thirdly, by reading the labels of the major navigational bar below the title – “Latest News”, “Walker Mood”, “Local Riders”, “On Travel”, “Top Travellers” – it is evident that the platform revolves around travel and travellers, marginalizing other informative, commercial, and data-related aspects. For these reasons, the platform turns out to be rather distant from those analysed in the first part of the thesis (with the exception, perhaps, of “Blogdiviaggi.it”). At this point, it is worth understanding the extent to which such diversity is also reflected by what is published in the blogs. In order to do this, the case of blogger Kong Pazu – an old, good friend with Lam – is examined.

Chinese Travel Blogs

Kong Pazu is a Hong Kong-born travel writer and blogger. In 2010, he published his first travel book, *Spinning in Tibet – Selling Coffee in Lhasa* (original title: 風轉西藏 -我在拉薩賣咖啡), in which the author recounts his six-month bike tour from Thailand to Tibet. The title also refers to the coffee shop that Pazu opened in Lhasa once he reached his destination: "I settled down [in Lhasa] because I liked it very much," he explained in the interview, "and I have launched this coffee shop, which stays open half a year."[167] Similarly to Lam, while he was travelling Pazu financed his biking adventure by publishing columns in magazines and newspapers. To these, he also added the regular posting of "articles" – as he classed them in the interview – on his website[168] and Facebook page.[169] Considering the medial variety of his activities, Pazu is a travel writer very aware of the channels at his disposal for promoting his pieces and wanderings. In this regard, he revealed in the interview how he also learnt to adapt his writing:

> Online is kind of more spontaneous. I can touch upon a lot of different topics, without going into depth or worrying about the coherence of what I write. It is maybe more superficial, but wider in scope. When I wrote the book I had to plan the writing more carefully. For the same reason, whenever I have to do some research, let's say for a destination, I prefer to read a book, rather than going online. I think printed publications are more accurate.

Pazu shares his view on the formal features of online writing with many other travel writers encountered. Yet, to that, he adds a reflection about the content of the articles: when he is online he feels free to cut across subjects and topics independently from their overall coherence. This statement supports the analysis conducted in Chapters 1 and 2 by stressing, respectively, the looseness of travel blogs' boundaries, the tendency online to "epicize" the narrative, and the book's imposition upon the narrative of an overreaching coherence that binds together the single episodes recounted. Pazu's posts published on Ironshoetravel.com coherently follow the blogger's view. When we met in May 2015, the platform had just been launched and Pazu had published only a few posts: they go from one dedicated to his acclimatization in Tibet – *My Sharing on How Breathing Keeps Me Warm in Lhasa* – to his confession to no longer using shampoo in order to save some space in his

167 Kong Pazu, interview by Stefano Calzati, May 14, 2015, in person.
168 http://www.pazu.com.
169 https://www.facebook.com/pazu88?ref=ts&fref=ts.

backpack – *In the Past 12 Months, I Used No Shampoo or Shower Gel* – passing through a post in which he gives some suggestions on how to keep fit: *In the Past 6 Months, I Spent 7 Minutes Doing One Exercise Everyday.* The pieces provide the reader with insights into the behind-the-scenes of Pazu's long experience as a traveller. The major point to stress is that the articles are rhetorically ruffish, very short, and usually touch upon light topics, as admitted by Pazu himself in the interview.[170] The following is an example:

> Why can't some people stand cold weather while others can? […] I read a book called *Becoming the Iceman.* The author claimed that we have been taught to keep warm because the cold is bad for us. Yet we should learn to accept the cold through training, for example, by taking cold showers or cold baths. When being exposed to the cold, it is all about concentration on breathing and meditation. […] Since this summer, I have been taking cold showers nearly every day, wearing thin clothes, shorts, and sandals. My friends wondered if I could live with this outfit till winter. Now, winter has arrived. The outside temperature is only –3 °C and I have proved this outfit works well for me. When I am walking on the street, people are surprised and say to me: "Wow, aren't you cold?"; "No" is always my reply. I actually don't feel the cold. Precisely, I put my feeling aside. I'm no longer afraid of the cold.[171] (Pazu 2015)

This quote represents roughly half of the whole post. The first reflection that comes to mind is formalistic: the style is not too different from that of other blogs previously analysed.[172] In terms of content, this post testifies to Pazu's own acquaintance with Tibetan life, which is perceived as much different from how the blogger lives in Hong Kong. In this respect, it could be suggested that also for Pazu – as for many Westerners – Tibet represents an "elsewhere" where the traveller is asked to negotiate his attitudes, behaviours

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170 This could also be due to the fact that the platform had just been launched and needed some content to get promoted.

171 " 為甚麼有些人怕冷，有些人耐冷？今年自身的生活習慣改變挺大，例如減了十公斤（Insanity Workout）也重新審視一下怕凍這個問題。[…] 讀了《Becoming the Iceman》（變成雪撈人），書中提及荷蘭人 Wim Hof，穿著短褲跑上珠峰 7000 尺。作者說我們從小到大都注重保暖，總覺寒冷是害，但其實我們應該學習接受冷感。其中一些訓練，洗冷水澡，洗冰塊浴，遇冷時注意呼吸頻率，冥想等。[…] 今年在拉薩，夏季到冬日，幾乎每天也用冷水洗澡，穿件單薄上衣、短褲加涼鞋。有朋友一直都懷疑，這身衣服，能否支持到冬天。現在冬天了，有時外邊攝氏零下 3 度，我還是這身打扮。走到街上，總有陌生的藏族人驚訝地叫：「Aw, ke-gi min-du-geh?」（哎，不冷嗎？）我總說：「Ke-gi min-du!」（不冷！）其實也不是完全不冷，更準確來說，我儘量把感覺抽離，我知道這叫冷感，但已不再害怕。"

172 This, in turn, would lead to an interrogation of the consistency of the quest for literariness at the base of the platform, but in order to do so the analysis should be extended to other blogs.

and beliefs. The peculiar trait of Pazu's experience is that his journeys to Tibet have by now turned into a sort of extreme commuting practice, as he claimed in the interview: "I usually spend six months in Lhasa and then I split the other half of the year between travelling and staying in Hong Kong." This situation is different from both the travel experiences of inbound visitors to China and the journeys accomplished by China's residents, either foreigners or Chinese. In Pazu's case, dwelling takes prominence over mobility, but the former is always temporary, precarious. A similar schism also affects the writing: although it is evident that the chronotope of the blog tends to dry the narrative skeleton of the posts, Pazu manages not to flatten completely the writing on a monochord rhythm, for instance by enriching the pieces with references to other readings, or by letting Tibetans enter the narrative via direct speech. On the one hand, these features suggest that Pazu's blog is similar to individual ones, despite being currently hosted on a platform. On the other hand, Pazu's traveller persona is torn between the slow plunging into the Tibetan culture and the restless desire to move. When I asked Pazu about his perception of Mainland China and Tibet as a Hongkonger, his reply firstly stressed similarities and differences: "I found many resonances with what we have to study in school. We share a good deal of cultural background. But, at the same time, the way of thinking, the people, their behaviours are different…" Secondly, Pazu turned his attention to the political implications of being a Hongkonger in Tibet:

> When I went to Iran I felt free to write whatever crossed my mind without worrying about the possibility of hurting or disappointing people I knew. In Tibet, on the contrary, I am part of the society and I have to be more careful and responsible for the people that surround me: for example, because I am the Hongkonger that has lived the longest in Tibet, it occurred to me to see that my words about Tibet are sometimes reported or quoted matter-of-factly. I am considered a kind of expert, so I have to be aware of this exposure.

This last passage unpacks the contradictions of Pazu's persona as both an insider and an outsider in Tibet. Because Pazu shares with (or has acquired from) Tibet what he perceives as a partially common background, the blogger is able to delve into the region and write about it with a good degree of accuracy. In so doing, however, Pazu finds himself in a delicate position, insofar as the things he writes are re-circulated among Chinese people, Hongkongers, as well as those Tibetans who are the focus of his attention. Hence, he must be able to keep a detached perspective in order to be not only sensible towards locals, but also attentive to how his pieces are received outside of Tibet. Paradoxically, while the conception of travel writing as a form of ethical commitment returns here, it is precisely Pazu's deep involvement in Tibet that compels him to favour light topics over more political ones, so as not to displease the people among whom he lives, or risk the banning of the posts.

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Remaining focused on blogs, it is worth proposing finally a brief analysis of the major Chinese travel blog platform: Travel.sina.com.cn. Sina.com.cn is the main online service provider for the Chinese-speaking world. Its section dedicated to travel is rich in a varied array of information, similar to what can be witnessed on Western platforms (Figure 55):

Figure 55. Image removed for copyright reasons

The main bar at the top contains the following links: "Top", "Destination", "Theme Breaks", "Travel Raiders", "Pictures", "Air Tickets", "Hotels", "Blog". Blogging is only one aspect of the whole website and travelling constitutes a mere section within the broader conception of mobility as entertainment. Below the bar one finds an advertisement and, further below, a patchwork of recent, popular posts. What is striking is the predominance of pictures over words, a feature that follows and reinforces a tendency already highlighted in travel books. Moreover, the layout of the page is structured horizontally rather than vertically and is composed of squares and rectangles of varied dimensions. This way of organizing the content is quite different from the prototypical structure of the websites encountered so far (with the sole exception of Becki's newer blog). The favouring of a horizontal layout helps fill the screen "above the fold" (Nielsen and Tahir 2002: 23) with more content, thus reducing the need to scroll down the page. In this particular case, the horizontality of the layout is expanded beyond the lateral borders of the page through the insertion of two arrows at the sides, which enable scrolling from left to right and vice versa. From a paratextual point of view, the elements found on the home page are of the same kind (e.g. advertisements) and distributed in the same way (e.g. they tend to invade the space of the text) as those appearing on Western platforms. More radically from what happens on this latter, however, on Travel.sina.com.cn we witness the proliferation of animations, pop-ups, and interactive content (which a static image as Figure 55 cannot convey). All these elements impress upon the whole website a dynamic that demands a complex form of enaction in order for the users to discern what is relevant for them and orient their browsing towards the reading.[173]

In order to investigate what is written in the travel blogs hosted on Travel.sina.com.ch, two cases are taken into account. The first one[174] is dedicated to Kunming, the capital of Yunnan province in the Southwest of China. The author of the blog is Viagra8868 (偉哥 8868). Overall, the journey comprises four stages: the top central part of the page is occupied by a large slideshow of pictures that pertain to the first of the four stages (Figure 56). The others are accessible by clicking on a narrow column on the left, which remains constantly visible as the page scrolls down. By accessing stages 2, 3, and 4, one sees that the content is organized in the same way as on the first page: a big slideshow of pictures occupies the central part of the screen and is accompanied by a few lines of text on the right.

Figure 56. Image removed for copyright reasons

The primary position of the pictures and the fact that they are of a very good quality reassert a decisive supremacy of images over words. In fact, the blogger, who defines

[173] The Western travel blog platform that comes closest to Travel.sina.com.ch is Turistipercaso.it, which – as seen in Chapter 1 – is the one where the platform's agents manifest their presence on the page the most.
[174] http://i.travel.sina.com.cn/qcyn/kunming/321.html

himself as a lover of "microblogging, photography, cars and sports" (Viagra 8868: 2015), writes just below the slideshow that the best thing to do in Kunming in the autumn season is to look at its colours: a claim that points to a chiefly visual experience. Also, the pictures of this first stage are accompanied by the following words:

> Wake up in the early morning and go out in a hurry if you want to arrive at Dongchuan before sunrise, so as to witness the magnificent beauty of the sun rising slowly above the horizon and shining on the red land. […] Around the time of sunrise, standing at a high slope along the roadside overlooking the village of Da Ma Kan it is possible to see that the village is surrounded by red fields which are filled with smoke from kitchen chimneys, while the poplars around the village are glowing with the oblique sunbeam of the morning sun, which constitutes a touching tranquil rural scene. If we are lucky, we can enjoy the fantastic sunrise and the rosy clouds of dawn.[175] (Viagra8868: 2015)

The paragraph shows an aestheticization of the travel experience: one in which the landscape is regarded as a vector of pleasure and emotions. Although by now Kunming has become a popular touristic hub, the blogger is able to look at its surroundings from an unusual perspective, that is, through the colours of autumn. More specifically, the discourse draws upon a poetic use of words,[176] which resonates with Strassberg's argument that pre-modern and modern travel writing favoured "being in a place" and the "quality" of the landscape, rather than the diegetic development of the journey. Secondly, the traveller's persona is almost elided from the text: the narrator's "I" disappears behind a gazing stance that interrogates neither the landscape nor himself. Even when the blogger, in the third stage of the journey, visits the Red Army Memorial in the village of Ke Du he largely focuses the post on nature and contemplation, avoiding providing comments on the historical relevance of the site. Hence, while visually speaking Viagra8868 is able to look at Kunming from a unique angle, when it comes to the writing, aestheticism outweighs historicism and observation takes critical reflection over.

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175 "要进行云南寻‘色’ 之旅，无论如何是不能少了东川红土地的。早上早早的起床出了门，紧赶慢赶，希望在日出之前赶到东川，这样就可以目睹到太阳从地平线慢慢升起照耀红土地的壮阔美景。打马坎是一个村子的名字，早晨日出前后在公路边的高坡上俯瞰打马坎村，红土围绕的村子里炊烟缭绕，村子四周杨树在朝阳斜射下泛着光辉，一派宁静动人的田园风光。运气好的时候可以欣赏到梦幻般的日出和朝霞。"

176 Bakhtin contrasted poetry with novel on the basis that in the former the whole burden of signification rested on and emanated from words, while in the novel the meaning is derived relationally as the intertwining of different registers.

The second blog, by blogger Yǒu Gè A (Pinyin of the untranslatable 有个啊), recounts a five-day visit to Suzhou and presents many similar features.[177] Posts are largely constituted by descriptions of the places visited. The following excerpt comes from the first post, dedicated to the Humble Administrator Garden:

> The entrance to the park is located at the southern end, after passing through Lan Xue Tang (Orchid and Snow Parlour) via the porch and the front courtyard. On the east side, there is a lawn with a wide open area, and the Western side of the lawn is surrounded by the earth-piled hill on which there is a wooden pavilion, surrounded by running water, with the drooping willows along the river bank, with the stone breakwater and erected hill in between, and with the waterside pavilion and bridge near the water. On the northwest side of the hill, where black pines form a grove, there is a tearoom. Further to the west, there is a double corridor along the wall, and on this a series of decorated windows and a number of artistic doors allow the viewer to look at the central area of the garden. Then, turn right and walk towards a pavilion. Several minutes later, I sighed: if people could live in this park for their whole life, there would be no need to try to be immortal! Then, after several minutes, the crowd surged here... Well, in order to enjoy the Humble Administrator Garden you must come early.[178] (Yǒu Gè A 2015)

The main goal of the blogger is to provide a precise representation of the place. It is no coincidence that it is only in the last two lines that his persona surfaces in the narrative through a comment. In terms of style, while Viagra8868 opted for embellished writing, here readers face a milder, paler vocabulary: accuracy is favoured over lyricism. At the same time, however, both blogs give a strong sense of dealing with a static experience: one that has no internal motion. The performative force of travelling and writing is annihilated, and an attitude guided primarily by sight prevails. A very similar approach also characterizes the third part of the account, which describes a visit to the so-called Lion Grove:

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[177] http://i.travel.sina.com.cn/js/suzhou/498.html.

[178] "园的入口设在南端，经门廊、前院，过兰雪堂，即进入园内。东侧为面积旷阔的草坪，草坪西面堆土山，上有木构亭，四周萦绕流水，岸柳低垂，间以石矶、立峰，临水建有水榭、曲桥。西北土阜上密植黑松枫杨成林，林西为秫香馆（茶室）。再西有一道依墙的复廊，上有漏窗透景，又以洞门数处与中区相通。然后朝右走向一个亭子。几分钟后，我感叹：在这个园子里活一辈子，神仙也不用做了！又过了几分钟，人群奔涌而至……唉，看拙政园，必须来得早。"

> Lion Grove was built in the Yuan Dynasty. Originally, it was a temple, which was converted to a private garden later in the Qing Dynasty […] Because in the park there are tens of thousands of bamboo in the grove, and there are many strange stones under the bamboo, in the shape of Suan Ni (lion), the name "Lion Grove" was adopted.[179] (Yǒu Gè A 2015)

The representation of the legs of the journey as idyllic, self-standing episodes or aperçu complies with the epicization of the discourse that also characterises Western travel blogs. However, two main differences are identifiable. Firstly, the writing of Chinese travel blogs is less objectified: it is very descriptive, but this feature is subservient to the fostering of a contemplative *régard* that eventually downplays any stringently functional purpose of the blog (e.g. touristic information). Secondly, the way in which Western and Chinese travel bloggers travel is different: the former often follow well-beaten tracks; the latter are more prone either to go to places that are usually overlooked by tourists – such as the visit to the Lion Grove in Suzhou – or to shape the experience depending on a particular point of view, as is the case with the appreciation of Kunming's autumn colours.

Conclusion

This chapter revived the transmedial approach that characterizes Chapters 1 to 3 and projected the analysis on to contemporary Chinese-authored travel books and blogs, in order to reverse the Western perspective of the analysis. When compared to both Western travelogues and Chinese blogs, Chinese travel books manifest a stronger political connotation. This, however, happens on varying levels: some authors, such as Shuyun, address the legitimacy of China's current political system; others look critically at the relations between Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, or inscribe China into a global discourse of inequalities, injustices, and fights for rights (e.g. Ng, Pazu, Lam). Nuances are also at stake: works by How Man and Leong, for instance, do carry a political meaning, but they tend to filter it, either through focusing closer on everyday life, or by favouring an academic, scientific stance. Beyond these differences, it emerged that contemporary Chinese travel writers distance themselves quite radically from the tradition of pre-modern and modern Chinese travel writing – as investigated by Richard Strassberg – in that they

179 "狮子林建于元代，原为寺庙，后清朝才转为私家园林。 […] 因园内"林有竹万，竹下多怪石，状如狻猊（狮子）者"，又因天如禅师维则得法于浙江天目山狮子岩普应国师中峰，为纪念佛徒衣钵、师承关系，取佛经中狮子座之意，故名"狮子林"。另外在北京圆明园、承德避暑山庄中则各有一处仿建。"

refuse to resort to the genre as a vehicle for celebrating he country or its landscape. On the contrary, this latter tendency reappears in Chinese travel blogs. Here, the hegemony of visual elements, together with the fact that posts are chiefly descriptive, conjures up an aestheticization of China which becomes a place to be looked at, rather than experienced or lived (and political issues are overlooked).

Once one compares Chinese travel blogs to Western ones, both similarities and divergences come to the surface. In terms of layout, the Chinese blog platform Travel.sina.cn is richer in interactive and multimodal content than Western ones. What is mostly remarkable is that the distinction between platforms and individual blogs is less clear-cut when it comes to the Chinese blogosphere (although this claim would require a greater number of case studies to be confirmed). In terms of what is recounted, Chinese bloggers – either on platforms or as individuals – manage to avoid a touristic stance by looking at their destination(s) from angles that are usually different from those adopted by (Western) tourists. This is so because Chinese travel bloggers occupy an insider position within China and this implies certain advantages in terms of linguistic and cultural knowledge. Hence, Chinese travel bloggers are able to re-imagine China from the inside: they move beyond the homogenising tourist gaze and break down the country's space into a multiplicity of places and experiences. At the same time, however, it was highlighted that the treating in blogs of "light" themes over sensible ones might indicate a form of self-censorship of the bloggers who do not want their posts to be removed (hence, the insider position also have disadvantages).

Although the sample of texts is not wide enough to draw any generalization, it could be suggested that both Chinese travel authors and bloggers are more inclined – when compared with Western peers – to look at China "heterodoxically". This term does not suggest that Chinese writers write against a supposed doxa – a dogmatic representation of China – but rather that they manage to build a composite picture. Heterodox, then, has to be intended, in the spirit of Bakhtin's notion of "heteroglossia", as those representations that are informed by a variety of perspectives (or voices), be they touristic, political, ethnographic, artistic, or focused either on ordinariness or on global issues. This is reflected, ultimately, in the self-representation of Chinese travel writers. Apart from Lam, the figure of the travel writer is fragmented into a plurality of personae, attitudes, and professions that resist an easy aggregation around a coherent unique self-representation. We encountered not only photographers and journalists, but ethnographers, historians, artists and many of them – if not all – claimed for themselves a hybrid cultural background.

Afterword

These concluding remarks are divided into two brief sections. The first one will provide some broader reflections – and possible future developments – concerning the analysis accomplished; the second will be devoted to the discussion of the fieldwork and its outcomes.

Three axes of enquiry underpinned the whole work. The most important was the transmedial comparison between contemporary travel books and blogs. The study showed the extent to which printed and digital travelogues, despite sharing basic generic features, respond ultimately to different expectations and are shaped by different logics of production. Firstly, travel books and blogs, as geniums, promote two kinds of writing: the former chiefly novelistic, the latter predominantly epic. The main consequence is that in travel books it is easier to identify a precise vision of China, usually one based upon an overreaching narrative in which the journey is represented as a gradual process of discovery. Travel bloggers, by contrast, tend to deliver informative, fragmented accounts, which are addressed to a precise readership: other tourists/bloggers. Secondly, the authors of books and blogs do not travel in the same way. The former plan personalized (longer) experiences, the latter usually follow well-beaten paths, even when they travel independently. Hence, the answer to one of the main research questions of this work – i.e. if travel blogs could represent an alternative channel to mainstream media for getting an updated representation of China – tends to be in the negative: travel blogs are framed within a horizon of leisure that leaves little space for an in-depth investigation of the country. To be sure, this scenario pertains by and large to Western texts, to which greater attention was dedicated. Concerning Chinese authors and bloggers, the situation is more complex. On the one hand, it is certainly possible to notice a medial and rhetorical divide between Chinese-authored books and blogs (as is the case with Western works). Printed texts are very much politicized, while digital ones favour a contemplative representation of the country. On the other hand, however, Chinese bloggers too manage to provide readers with unusual *régards*, even when they travel to touristic places. Despite the small corpus of texts studied, it was argued that both Chinese authors and bloggers are able to approach China heterodoxically, making its representation more articulated and varied. In the case of Chinese writers, then, what is at stake is the very possibility, as cultural and linguistic insiders, of drawing upon a deeper and broader knowledge of the country and, from this standpoint, of deconstructing its monolithic conception as a mere travel destination.

This leads to the second axis of the research: the cross-cultural confrontation between Western and Chinese writers. In this regard, the analysis made clear that the cultural background does influence the way of conceiving and shaping printed and digital travelogues. So, for instance, Western travel books and Chinese travel books are rather different geniums, despite the fact that they share the same medial format. Similarly, Western and Chinese travel blogs are framed by, and inform, precise cultural and literary expectations, which find a reflection in how the medial format is eventually used (e.g. Chinese blogs are visually richer than Western ones). This also led to suggest that blogs, albeit constituting a major sphere within the global medium *par excellence* – i.e. the Web – also present features that are affected by the context of production and reception. One essential point to note is that among Western blogs it was possible to detect a clear distinction between accounts hosted on platforms and individual ones. This divide implies, to various degrees, a greater commitment of individual bloggers, who, in turn, challenge through their activities any clear distinction between amateur and professional writers. When it came to explore the Chinese blogosphere, however, the gap between platforms and individual blogs was more blurred. Moreover, it was rather difficult to identify for both Chinese bloggers and authors a coherent self-representation that could go under the label "travel writer" (although these findings would need a more conspicuous archive to be confirmed).

Thirdly, by collating Chapters 4 and 5, it is possible to draw some conclusions about the third axis of the research, namely the historical evolution of Western- and Chinese-authored travel writing about the Middle Kingdom. The survey of Western travel writing from the end of the 19th century to the 1980s highlighted the difficulty of clearly tracing a linear genealogy of the genre, in terms of both rhetorical and medial features. Rather, it emerged that any text is always the negotiation of socio-cultural factors *and* individual attitudes. *A posteriori*, it could be argued that Western travel authors, as a whole, share a communal ethos in the way in which they travel to, and write about, China. This, however, should refrain from drawing broader inferences about the homogeneity of the tropes found in the texts. In fact, one of the aims of the present work was to rescue and preserve the literary and medial specificity of each genium.

From the last chapter a substantial difference between contemporary and older Chinese travel writing emerged. While pre-modern and modern travel authors – up to the 19th century – usually resorted to the genre to deliver a celebratory representation of the cultural and political situation of the country, contemporary authors mainly "use" travel writing as a means for criticizing China's current status quo. Again, however, it is necessary to avoid generalizations: such commitment, indeed, presents varying nuances depending on the authors' own biographies. Moreover, it must also be taken into account that the analysis largely drew on texts published by Hong Kong writers, who enjoy a greater freedom than Mainlanders. In this respect, Lam's words come to mind here, when he noted during the interview that considerable differences can be found in travelogues written by Taiwanese, Hongkongers, and Mainlanders. According to him, authors from Hong Kong tend to focus on the practical unfolding of their experience, while Taiwanese authors usually exploit the journey as a pretext to elaborate deep reflections. This also happens with Mainlanders, although they primarily write about China, as their access to foreign countries is rather limited.

This work offered a comparative reading of roughly 50 texts. It is important to reassert this in order to say that conclusions drawn here could and should be tested further. This applies in particular to Chinese travel writing. Specifically, it would be beneficial not only to dedicate greater attention to the blogosphere, but also to (re)engage with the historical evolution of the travel writing genre in China in light of the analysis provided here of contemporary texts. This kind of investigation could open the way to a different and more accurate understanding of China's past (and its engagement with the West) and of the diverse historical and literary trajectories in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macau, and Mainland China. At the same time, given that according to the UNWTO China as by now become the greatest source of outbound travellers, it might be also interesting to investigate how Chinese travellers represent the West. Similarly, the specific study of the Chinese blogosphere could delineate more clearly how the use of social media is nowadays culturally (and politically) affected within the country.

Another line of enquiry is one that starts from within the blogosphere – either in China or in the West – and moves towards the realm of Social Networking Sites (SNSs). As discussed in the Introduction, blogging is certainly the oldest and most stable form of social writing on the Web. However, the proliferation of SNSs has begun to challenge the hegemony of blogs. Separating blogs from SNSs is not only a temporal span, but a qualitative leap: indeed, however minimal the writing on blogs may be, posts on Facebook, Twitter, or Weibo (the Chinese version of Twitter) radicalize blogs' minimalism and we also witness a proliferation of paratextual elements that further threaten the existence of the text. Eventually, SNSs are pushing to the extreme that objectification and epicization of the writing (and of the writers' self-representation) witnessed in blogs. The consequences that such phenomena have on the way we think of ourselves, interpret our "real" experiences, and write about them online still constitute a largely uncharted field of enquiry – a field that looks extremely promising, but is also problematic when considering the speed of evolution of the Web and its agents.

From here, I arrive to touch upon one last research line. It has mainly to do with a "reversed gaze", back to the origins of the Web. At stake is not much a further exploration of the effects that the passage from the Web 1.0 to the Web 2.0 (and possibly 3.0, with the birth of the semantic Web) has had (and will have) on what we publish and do online. Rather, it is urgent to tackle the issue of the preservation of online content. Today, the Web is already more than two decades old. This triggers a paradoxical condition: while the Web represents the arena where massive and increasing amount of information is shared (and exploited) by a soaring number of users and corporations, it also constitutes the archive itself of this load of information. In other words, the Web is, at once, a constantly changing stage and its own repository. The most delicate point is that the bare fact that information is stored does not mean it is accessible or easy to retrace. The reasons for that are exogenous – for instance, the speed at which technology becomes obsolete – as well as endogenous, such as the threats to which webpages are constantly exposed either in the form of cyber attacks, or due to the internal dynamics of the Web as a flow that endlessly swallows up and regurgitates content, that forgets and remembers, erases and overwrites. Web content is magmatic to such an extent that to find a way to selectively discern and preserve what is deemed relevant becomes crucial not only for our processes of remembrance but for the Web itself, which risks collapsing under its own weight. Studies that connect digital cultures to digital memory(ies) address these issues (see Fiormonte 2003; Numerico, Fiormonte, and Tomasi 2010), but much more needs to be done. In particular, the wish is that these studies will increasingly get involved with language programming, insofar as doing research on the Web can no longer be disjoined from the technological know-how that fuels its evolution.

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I spent roughly three months in China, thanks to two grants I received from the Worldwide University Network (WUN) and the Universities' China Committee in London (UCCL). From mid-March to mid-May 2015 I was visiting scholar at the English Department at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. After that, I spent one month in Mainland China, which I traversed by train from south to north, up to Beijing. During this

period I conducted the interviews that enrich the last chapter of this work and I also kept a blog – www.stefanocalzati.com – in which I wrote about my ongoing experiences in the Middle Kingdom (with the exception of a few later posts that relate to some publications derived from the fieldwork). In other words, the blog represented a way to test the analysis presented here.

While blogging I tried to avoid what I thought were the main weaknesses of the blogs I analysed, in terms of either medial choices or the reification of certain stereotypical discourses about China. For example, I made an effort to organize paratextual elements in a polished way, through the subdivision of the blog into sub-sections and the creation of a side column where I listed references and sources to useful materials for my research. In this sense, I made the blog as hypertextual and interactive as possible: I inserted several links, both to other posts and to external websites, without, however, fragmenting the flow of the text too much – at least that was the intention. Moreover, I tried to create a balance between words and visual elements, by uploading within the posts and in a dedicated section of the blog high-quality images and a few videos (I had a reflex camera with me). Lastly, I included an interactive map that could help to keep track of my wanderings. These choices required me to get a personal domain and also pay for data upload and the use of external tools. I would say that this draws me into that grey area where professionals and amateur bloggers meet.

Strictly speaking of the writing, my goal was to mix reflections and narration, in order to keep the blog appealing to the reader but also self-conscious. For instance, whenever I sensed I could not understand Chinese people – a feeling and a trope I was rather acquainted with by the time I went to China – I strove to unpack such distress and see what lay beyond it. Often, it was simply the fact that in Hong Kong life is organized differently from the UK; but this, I am sure, happens at all latitudes. At the same time, I also attempted as best as I could to let my impressions flow effortlessly on the screen: after all, I did not want the theory – and my academic role – to condition entirely my writing. This meant that, while on some occasions I was consciously reflecting upon my presence in China, on others I left my blogging free to linger upon diverse topics. This resonates with Pazu's idea about the heterogeneity of his writing for the Web. In particular, I noted that such heterogeneity affected the posts I published when I was settled in Hong Kong, as if dwelling in one place naturally triggered the transversal exploration of the host culture. Hence, if coherence has to be found in the blog, it lies chiefly in the chronological organization of the posts. Extracts of what I wrote also appeared on the Italian literary magazine *Le Reti di Dedalus*. In this regard, not only did the blog undergo a remediation process, but only some of its posts were selected – i.e. those less attached to the contingency of the moment – and they were partially re-edited to fit the magazine's guidelines (e.g. I removed all the passages in English). The mixing of English and Italian is another feature of the blog which had an unexpected development. In the beginning, I intended to split each post into two parts, which recounted the same episode in the two languages. Soon, however, I realized that in so doing the blog would have become boring and extremely time consuming for me. So, I let my mood and the events I was talking about decide which was, on each occasion, the most appropriate language to use. As a pattern, when I discussed academic issues I resorted to English, while I wrote in Italian when I had less time at my disposal or I wanted to speak to a precise readership in my home country.

Once I took to the road, the posts followed more closely the linearity of the journey, although it also occurred to me to plan and write posts in advance (it became more of a duty than a pleasure). This meant that the flow of the narrative did not coincide with the writing process. Quite surprisingly, I noted that my writing kept a steady pace throughout, independently from the fact that I was either in Hong Kong or travelling. In fact, when on the road I was even able to write longer posts than those I published when I was comfortably settled in Hong Kong. Sure, I had in mind to write as regularly as possible, but I had expected that the journey would have brought with itself some impediments. On the contrary, I was always able to find time, energy, and a good Wi-Fi connection to post on the blog. Technically speaking, I only needed a VPN to bypass the "Great Firewall" and be able to share my writing on social networks.

Overall, my blogging was a rather intense practice: roughly 60 posts, 45,000 words, and 400 pictures over a period of three months. The blog also recounts the last ten days of the journey, which I spent onboard the Trans-Siberian railway from Beijing to Moscow. The traversing of Siberia was the only time when I could not blog live, due to the lack of Wi-Fi. However, I kept writing on my carnet, and I uploaded the posts once I reached Moscow. The main reason for such intensity in the writing is that I knew from the outset it was for a short period, and the experience would have been wasted if I had written sporadically and inconsistently. This demanded a greater dedication than I had planned in the beginning (usually two to three hours' work per day). In fact, I soon realized that writing good articles on a regular basis required a consistent amount of work, from the moment of creation to the editing and pagination of the text.

There is one main aspect that connects my experience to those of many others that I have read about online: the itinerary. I became conscious of that during the interview in

Beijing with travel curator Zhang Mei, quoted in the first chapter. As soon as she told me that there is much else to see in China beyond the loop Guilin-Hangzhou-Shanghai-Xian-Beijing, I realized that, with minor diversions, these were also the stages of my journey. However, as Zhang Mei pointed out, "to travel differently does not mean to avoid popular places, but to look at them from a renewed perspective". I hope to have done so, at least to a certain extent. Initially, I had planned to go west, as many writers suggested I visit Xinjiang and the Tibetan plateau. However, I was held back by my language skills, which I felt were not good enough to venture into these regions. Eventually, it turned out that even on the east coast very few people speak English, so I think I could have got along fine anywhere in China. After all, as I write on the "About" page on my blog, I believe that only a minor percentage of what we know passes through language: the greatest part depends on emotions, vibes, and the body. But this is another story.

Appendix

Below is the list of all the contemporary travel books and blogs analysed, together with a brief historical and editorial contextualization for each work and writer and the itineraries followed, to give an indication of the diversity of travel experiences as well as their forms of expression.

Contemporary Travel Books and Blogs Listed by Writers

Arnaud, Clara (1986-) is a French author who wrote the travel book *Sur les chemins de Chine* (trans. *On China's Paths*). The travelogue, published in 2010, recounts the solo journey that Arnaud accomplished in 2008 in the western regions of China (i.e. Xinjiang and the Tibetan plateau). She travelled either on foot or riding two horses and the whole journey lasted a few months. This was Arnaud's first travel book: currently, she is working as a consultant in Paris and writing a novel.

Ataritouchme is a German blogger who published the English-language blog *All o'er China during Spring Festival Holiday* (2006) on the platform Travelpod.com. The blogger is currently living in China and exploits working breaks to travel around the country. On his space on the platform, Ataritouchme published 15 blogs (as of December 2015). These concern both his journeys in China and abroad. *All o'er China during Spring Festival Holiday* is the first blog he wrote and the most popular one, according to the number of visits it has received. It contains 16 posts: as the title suggests, Ataritouchme travelled around the whole country over a period of a month and a half. He visited well-known places such as Nanjing, Beijing, Xian, Chengdu, as well as other cities beyond the tourist routes: Urumqi, Nanning, Nanhai, Dalian. In the introductory post, the blogger states that he has only travelled on ground, avoiding planes. The blog contains many pictures taken by Ataritouchme's travel companion Hannah.

Becki (real name: Rebecca Enright) is a British blogger. *Backpackerbecki.com* and *Bordersofadventure.com* are two travel blogs she created individually. *Backpackerbecki.com* was active from 2012 to 2014, after which Becki decided for a radical restyling of the blog, which has become *Bordersofadventure.com* (the older version is now accessible at http://archive.org). As the titles suggest, the two blogs recount Becki's globetrotting experiences around the world. Becki went to China in 2012 for roughly two months and wrote 11 posts about this experience. The posts were published on the first version of the blog and now they appear unchanged on the new one. In China Becki visited the major touristic destinations around the country, including Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu, and the Yangtze River.

Bettinelli, Giorgio (1955-2008) was a popular Italian travel writer. *La Cina in Vespa* (trans. *Around China on a Vespa*) was released in 2008, just months after the sudden death of the author. Bettinelli is known for having travelled around the world always riding his scooter. The journey he accomplished around China lasted several months and was divided in two stages: Bettinelli's goal was to be the first person to ride an imported vehicle in China – a practice usually forbidden by law – and visit all the 34 geographic areas of China. A dozen pictures are inserted in the middle of the book, which was released by Feltrinelli publisher in the series "Traveller".

BitByTheTravelBug is a US-American blogger (real name: Shannon) who published the blog *China 2014* (2014) on the popular platform Travelblog.org. The journey lasted two weeks – from the 17th of May to the 1st of June – and it was made together with a group of other visitors. On her space on the platform, Bit By The Travel Bug published one more blog, dedicated to Thailand and Singapore.

Croiziers, Aurélie is a French author who published the travelogue *La Chine à fleur de peau* (trans. *Under the surface of China*) in 2011. Due to her job, Croiziers travelled to China many times and to different places between 2005 and 2009. In 2009, the author moved to China for good, although the relocation lasted eventually only two years: in 2011, indeed, Croiziers went back to Paris. The book is a collection of the some of the posts that Croiziers has published on her blog *Curieuse Voyageuse* since 2009 (see below), primarily focusing on her journeys around the country.

Curieuse Voyageuse (trans. Curious Traveller) is a French blogger (real name: Aurélie Croiziers) as well as the title of her individual travel blog *Curieusevoyageuse.com*. The blog was founded in 2009 when Curieuse Voyageuse moved to China (and it is still updated today). Curieuse Voyageuse has published countless of posts about China, due to the fact that she travelled there four times before settling down in Shanghai between 2009 and 2011. Since her return to Paris, she has widened the spectrum of her blog, writing about her journeys in France and abroad.

De Slizewicz, Constantin (1977-), a French writer and reporter, is the author of *Ivre de Chine: Voyages au coeur de l'Empire* (trans. *Drunk with China: Journeys to the Heart of the Empire*), published in 2010. In it, de Slizewicz recounts his journey from Beijing to the south-western areas of China on board of a motorbike. The journey was accomplished in 2002 together with his friend Alexandre and lasted a few months. De Slizewicz arrived in China in the 1990s: after settling down in Beijing, he gradually moved westward and eventually settled down in Kunming.

Emil (real name: Kang Emil) is a US-American blogger who published his individual blog titled *Emil's Trip to China* (2006) using the CMS blogger.co.uk (*Emilstravels.blogspot.co.uk*). Emil went to China with an organized tour that lasted a couple of weeks. He was together with a group of colleagues from the US. They visited the most popular places, among which Beijing, Shanghai, Guilin and Lhasa.

Faravelli, Stefano (1959-) is an Italian artist: *Carnet di viaggio: Cina* (2005, trans. *Journey's Notebook: China*) is a travel book he completed in order to recount his journey to the Middle Kingdom. The book is, in fact, a pictorial artefact: in each page watercolours and handwritten words give life to a precise scene witnessed by Faravelli. The author went to popular destinations such as Xian, Beijing and Hong Kong, as well as to less known areas of the west of China. Due to the dense mingling of pictorial illustration with words, the book is not only multimodal, but could be defined more precisely as "transmodal".

Flavia is an Italian blogger found on the platform Blogdiviaggi.com (trans. "Travel Blogs"). *Conoscere Pechino tra dinastie e imperatori* (2013, trans. *Getting to Know Beijing between Dynasties and Emperors*) is the heading of the first post dedicated to China by Flavia. The blogger has written a total of five posts on China and, according to the dates of the first and last posts, she spent roughly one and a half months in the Middle Kingdom, from 21st September to 5th November 2013.

Gao, Qiang (1962-) and Gao, Zhen (1956-) are two Chinese artists known worldwide as the "Gao Brothers". Much of the Gao Brothers' artistic work focuses on the critique of the Cultural Revolution, during which they lost their father. Differently from their main corpus of works, *One Day in Beijing* (original title: 在北京一天能走多遠) is a 2004 travel reportage that the Gao Brothers published to recount their one-day experience in Beijing as (unofficial) reporters. They wandered around the city, took photographs and interviewed people in order to witness a normal day in China's capital.

Gattosandro Viaggiatore (real name: Simona) is an Italian blogger who created the homonymous individual blog *Gattosandro-viaggiatore.blogspot.it*. The blogger went to China twice: the first time in August 2012 – for 20 days – the second time in July-August 2013, for a month. She dedicated two blogs to these experiences: *Cina e Hong Kong* (2012, trans. China and Hong Kong) and *Cina del sud e isole* (2013, trans. *South of China and Islands*). In the first blog, which counts 21 posts, she recounts her journey around the most well-known cities along China's east coast: Beijing, Shanghai, Suzhou, Hangzhou, Hong Kong. On the second occasion she travelled to those popular destinations that had remained excluded from her previous journey – among which Guangzhou and Guilin – as well as to less renowned places such as Fenghuang, Beihai and Zhangjiajie. The first blog contains 21 posts, the second one 27. Both blogs contain a good number of pictures taken by the blogger. The whole site also includes accounts to the other journeys that Gattosandro Viaggiatore has accomplished to the "Orient", as she calls it, and to Italy, Europe and Africa.

Germain-Thomas, Olivier (1943-) wrote two travelogues in French that focus on China: *La traversée de la Chine à la vitesse du printemps* (2003, trans. *The Traversing of China at Spring's Rhythm*) and *Le Bénarès-Kyôto* (2007, trans. *The Varanasi-Kyoto*). In the first brief travelogue Germain-Thomas narrates his journey from the south of China – at the border with Vietnam – to its capital Beijing, accompanied by the coming of spring. The book largely revolves around the author's intimate discovery of China and its philosophical and religious thoughts. The journey lasted roughly a month and was accomplished taking public transport. This text was later included with some editorial adjustments within Germain-Thomas's travel book *Le Bénarès-Kyôto*. The book reports the author's long journey from the city of Varanasi, in India, to Kyoto, in Japan, passing through China. The journey took several months and the peculiarity is that the author never took flights, but travelled remaining on ground all the time. Both books are exclusively composed of written text.

Gifford, Rob is a British journalist who published in 2007 the travelogue *China Road: A Journey into the Future of a Rising Power*. After having worked many years as correspondent for

National Public Radio (NPR), Gifford was ordered by NPR to return to the UK. Before leaving China, he decided to traverse the country from east to west along the highway 312, known as the Chinese Route 66. The book presents only an introductory map that traces the trajectory of the journey from Beijing to Kashgar, after which the travelogue is entirely composed of written text.

Gray, Nathan, a New Zealand writer and reporter, authored the travel book *First Pass under Heaven: One man's 4000-Kilometre Trek along the Great Wall of China* (2006). Gray wrote this travel book to recollect his experience walking the whole length of the Great Wall of China. The book is a detailed journal which follows the walk almost day by day. Gray started this journey in 2000 together with other four companions: a Buddhist monk, an Argentinean photojournalist, an Italian freelance journalist and a Mormon golfer. The trek turned out to be mentally and physically exhausting. Having departed from the westernmost garrison of the Great Wall in the Gobi Desert, after a few weeks the group split and Gray remained alone. When he was still at 1000 kilometres from the Pacific shores, where the Great Wall ends, Gray gave up the walk, completely worn out. He returned to the same spot three months later to conclude the journey. Some pictures are inserted in the middle of the book: some of these are taken with a camera; others come from the documentary that the group filmed during the walk.

Hirst, Bamboo (1940-) is an Italian Chinese-born author who wrote two travel books about China. The first one is *Il mondo oltre il fiume dei peschi in fiore* (1989, trans. *The World beyond the River of the Blossoming Peach Trees*); the second is *Cartoline da Pechino* (1998, trans. *Postcards from Beijing*). Hirst was born in Shanghai to an Italian diplomat and a Chinese woman. She moved to Italy (where she currently lives) when she was 13, due to China's political insecurity at that time. Hirst returned to China for the first time in 1988, just months before the events of Tiananmen Square. *Il mondo oltre il fiume dei peschi in fiore* gathers her impressions about her homeland after many years of detachment. She visited, among others, Beijing and Shanghai, Hangzhou, Qufu, Suzhou. The book is enriched with pictures taken by Italian photojournalist Giorgio Lotti, who went regularly to China in the 1970s and 1980s as a correspondent for a number of Italian magazines. *Cartoline da Pechino* narrates Hirst's second journey to the Middle Kingdom in the mid-1990s. However, many of the episodes and places described are the same as those appearing in *Il mondo oltre il fiume dei peschi in fiore*. Differently from this latter, *Cartoline da Pechino* is a monomodal travelogue as there are no pictures included.

How Man, Wong (1949-), a Hong Kong explorer, conservationist and journalist, published a number of books centred on his several expeditions in China. *Exploring the Yangtze: China's Longest River* is a 1989 travel book that focuses on How Man's mapping of the Yangtze. At the head of a Chinese expedition, How Man followed the whole river from the east to the west, eventually discovering a newer and remoter source of the river than the one usually credited. The book, which is largely a collection of notes recounting the difficulties and the encounters experienced during the expedition, includes a variety of pictures interspersed in the text. *From Manchuria to Tibet* (1998) is a second travel book by him. Being also a photographer, How Man conceived *From Manchuria to Tibet* as a photographic book: pictures dominate the whole narrative and are only accompanied by some explicative text. Gathering his many experiences about and with the ethnic minorities that live along the borders of China, the book aims at doing justice to many of these groups, starting from the north-easternmost region of the country to its south-westernmost conflictive region.

Lam, Fai Fred (1979-) is a Hong Kong writer and blogger. In 2014 his travelogue *Travelling between Hope and Suffering* (original title: 旅行在 希望與苦難 之間) was released in Taiwan and Hong Kong. Lam travelled around the world for two years between 2012 and 2014: in this book he recounts his experiences in China – in particular the south-west regions – south-east Asia, the Middle East and Europe. The book, which is currently banned in Mainland China, contains many pictures taken by Lam himself and mingled into the text. Lam is also the founder of the Chinese travel blog platform Ironshoetravel.com, launched in 2015.

Legerton, Colin and Rawson, Jacob are two US-American writers who authored the travelogue *Invisible China: A Journey through Ethnic Borderlands* (2009). Legerton and Rawson got their Master degrees in China; they learnt Mandarin as well as the languages of two China's minorities: Korean and Uyghur. At the end of their studies they embarked on a journey to the remotest regions of China – from north to south and through the west – in order to understand more about the ethnic minorities that populate China's borderlands. The journey was divided into two stages, depending on climate conditions. The book, published in 2009, presents many pictures of the minority groups encountered by the authors.

Leong, Ka Tai is a Hong Kong photographer and reporter. *On China: One to Twenty Four* is a photo-book he published in 1988. After some years spent in Europe – first in London where he studied engineering and then Paris where he studied photography – Leong came back to Hong Kong at the end of 1970s. Here, he opened his own photographic studio, Camera 22. This, however, did not prevent him from leaving his activity between 1982 and 1987 for travelling around Mainland China. *On China: One to Twenty Four* presents 24 shots taken during Leong's five years of wanderings: each one of the pictures is accompanied by a poem written in Chinese by writer Leung Ping Kwan and translated into English by Leong himself.

Mathieu (real name: Mathieu Décore) is a French blogger who posted his account titled *Un peu partout en Chine* (2007, trans. *A Bit Everywhere around China*) on the platform Top-depart.com. Mathieu went to China together with his Chinese wife and they stayed in the country for four weeks. He wrote 10 posts on his blog. The journey was the chance for Mathieu to get to know his wife's home country, by visiting the main common destinations such as Beijing, Shanghai and Chengdu. Mathieu has published only one blog on his space on Top-depart.com.

Millycat (1966-) is an Italian blogger who published the blog *Cina: Terra di grandi contrasti* (2013, trans. *China*: *A Land of Big Contradictions*) on the Italian blog platform Turistipercaso.it. This is the most famous and visited Italian portal focused on tourism and travel blogs. Millycat's journey lasted roughly three weeks, during which she visited China's major tourist destinations: Beijing, Xian, Guilin, Shanghai. Millycat has uploaded another blog on her space on Turistipercaso.it, dedicated to her journey in Bretagne and Normandy.

Ng, Jason is a Hong Kong blogger, travel writer and lawyer. Ng returned to Hong Kong in 2005 after many years spent in the United States, where he studied, and Europe. His departure from Hong Kong in the 1980s was part of the Hongkongers' diaspora due to the fear for the then imminent hand over of the island to Mainland China. Since his return to Hong Kong, Ng has been blogging about his home city on his page *As I See It*. The book *Hong Kong State of Mind* (2011) is composed of a collection of the best posts that appeared online. Substituting the pictures that appear on the blog, the book is filled with drawings made by Ng's father, who is an illustrator. Although the text touches upon a variety of subjects, the last section of the book is fully dedicated to Ng's journeys to Taiwan, Macao and China's neighbouring countries.

Pazu, Kong is a Hong Kong blogger and travel writer. *My Sharing on How Breathing Keeps Me Warm in Lhasa* (original title: 從愛斯基摩到共享陽光 ——我在拉薩用呼吸來保暖的經驗分享) is the title of the first post that Pazu published on the blog platform Ironshoetravel.com. In 2006, Pazu cycled from Bangkok to Lhasa and eventually settled down in the Tibetan city, where he opened a coffee shop. This experience is narrated in his travel book *Spinning in Tibet – Selling Coffee in Lhasa* (original title: 風轉西藏 -我在拉薩賣咖啡), which appeared in 2010. He has also widely travelled in China, especially in the western regions.

Ramazzotti, Sergio (1965-) is an Italian photographer and freelance journalist who authored the travel reportage *La birra di Shaoshan* (trans. *A Beer in Shaoshan*). In this book, published in 2002, Ramazzotti writes about his visit to Mao Zedong's hometown – Shaoshan – where he stayed for a couple of weeks always accompanied by Celia, his Chinese guide and translator. This was Ramazzotti's second journey to the country, but the first one to find publication as a book within the "Traveller" series by Feltrinelli publisher. Despite Ramazzotti's profession, in the book there are no pictures.

Richard, Luc is a French travel writer and journalist who published in 2003 the travelogue *Voyage à travers la Chine interdite* (trans. *Journey into Forbidden China*). The journey, made by car, lasted a couple of months and led Richard to enter into Tibet, following his old friend Constantin de Slizewicz and two Chinese companions from Beijing: Lao Shi (literally: the teacher) and Xia Jia. In the last few weeks the group is obliged to split and Richard travelled alone through Xinjiang in the north-east of China. The book does not contain any illustration, despite the fact that Richard took many pictures and drew also sketches along the road, which were sometimes used to communicate with the people, as he could not speak any Mandarin at that time.

Robjstaples (real name: Robert Staples) is a British blogger who wrote the blog *Going Walkabout and Answering Some of my Questions About China... Like When I'll Win the Lottery with All These Useless Tickets They Keep Selling Me!* (2005). This blog is hosted on the blog platform Travelpod.com. Robjstaples undertook his journey at the end of his one-year stay in China, where he worked as a teacher of English. His wanderings around the Middle Kingdom lasted almost three months: most of the places he visited and dwelled in are off the beaten track: Dongguan, Longsheng, Chengyang, Zhaoxing. Robjstaples published 11 other travel blogs on his Travelpod's space, some of which concerns China, while others recount his journeys around the world. *Going Walkabout and Answering Some of my Questions About China...* is one of his blogs that has received the greatest number of visits.

Shuyun, Sun is a Chinese writer, filmmaker and scholar. After graduating in Beijing, Shuyun got a scholarship from the University of Oxford. She currently lives in London. *The Long March: The True History of Communist China's Founding Myth* is a 2006 travelogue (in English) that narrates Shuyun's effort to retrace the paths and vicissitudes of the soldiers who participated in Long March. During this journey, she interviewed some of the last few veterans still alive with the intent to deconstruct the narrative of the Long March – the founding myth of today's China – as it is presented by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). A map of the itineraries followed by the Red Army and a few pictures of the veterans encountered are included in the book.

Supermary58 (1958-) is an Italian blogger who wrote the blog *Cina, nel regno di mezzo* (2012, trans. *China: Into the Middle Kingdom*) on the platform Turistipercaso.it. Supermary58's journey lasted two weeks during which the blogger visited the most popular tourist places in China: Beijing, Shanghai, Xian, Suzhou. The blog counts 10 posts and in none of them are included any pictures. Overall, Supermary58 has published 14 blogs on her space on the platform: *Cina, nel regno di mezzo* is the sole one dedicated to China.

Thubron, Colin (1939-), a renowned British travel writer, published two travel books dealing with China: *Behind the Wall: A Journey through China* (1987) and *Shadow of the Silk Road* (2006). The first travelogue is entirely focused on a journey that Thubron accomplished around the Middle Kingdom when the country had just reopened its frontiers to tourists. In order to be able to approach Chinese people Thubron learnt some Mandarin before embarking on his journey. He spent several months in the country following a circular itinerary: firstly, he descended from north to south touching Beijing, Qufu, Nanjing, Hangzhou, Shanghai, Xiamen and Hong Kong. Then he ascended the country visiting, among others, Guangzhou, Shaoshan, Kunming, Chengdu, Xian and stretching westward as far as Jiayuguan. In *Shadow of the Silk Road*, Thubron recounts, as the title suggests, his vicissitudes along the Silk Road, from Xian, in China, to Istanbul, in Turkey. The book is particularly relevant as it offers some impressions about China, ten years after the author's first visit to the country. Apart from two maps at the beginning of each book that retrace the author’s path, the two travelogues do not present any illustrations and are exclusively composed by written text.

Viagra8868 (original name: 偉哥8868) is a Chinese blogger who wrote a blog titled *Trip around Kunming Looking for Colours* (2015; original title: 我在云南過春節游云南尋“色”滇中 昆明周邊一日游). Also this blog is hosted on the platform Travel.sina.com.cn. The blogger dedicates this blog to his few days journey to Kunming in Autumn. The blog has four posts and is enriched with several pictures.

Yǒu Gè A (original name: 有个啊) is a Chinese blogger who published his travel blog about *Suzhou* (2015; original title: 古韵园林風--讀不完的姑苏) on the main travel blog platform in China: Travel.sina.com.cn. *Suzhou* recollects the blogger’s journey to one of the most known and celebrated cities of the whole country. The blog counts five posts and contains several pictures.

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