

Exploring the world between nostalgia and desire

In the Middle Ages there are many places where you can meet a *clericus vagans*, the wandering scholar who discovers the world, visits wise masters and discusses with skeptical workers; he takes notes, uses new tools, reads poems and essays. His path is shared by many other curious and brave individuals who travel through a global network of places where knowledge is kept and diffused, speak a universal language and explore a very wide landscape where new ideas are fertilised and transformed into objects and actions.

In these beautiful and often majestic sites where enormous halls contain thousands of books a group of scholars and pupils copy the texts received from the past to study and spread their contents, to diffuse their philosophy and ideas, to keep barbarians and unbelievers away from civilisation. Although nobody seems to acknowledge it, copyists are less rigid and docile of what rules would allow: they re-create the pages, draw allegoric and sometimes subversive illustrations, write comments and even correct the original text. Posterity will receive a richer and more complex culture, generated by fertile confusion and individual creativity.

In such a rapidly changing world certainties are strongly needed, and communities share a painful nostalgia for an idyllic past. While powerful people try to stop time a growing tribe of innovators and non-prejudicial individuals build a sort of network able to generate new views and to face new horizons. When the world fears change it means that its backbone is frail, and it cannot rely upon any consolidated principles or beliefs, therefore it can only protect the traditional ones. In the meantime new people accept the challenge and craft a new mankind. They only travel and explore, exchange intuitions and inspirations, ride donkeys, bring light luggage and read the stars to get oriented.

Among the many outcomes of such an intensive and complex period we find the evolution of describing the world with maps where many various sites, routes and atmospheres were analysed and painted; and the evolution of books, in some decades transformed from manually written sheets to printed volumes. When they were developed not everybody felt at ease with these mysterious and unexpected objects.

Now please go back to the first line and read again, only adapting words and images to the contemporary world, to our everyday lives. You just need to add the word 'Digital' to the label 'Middle Ages'. Actually, we can meet many *clerici vagantes* almost everywhere, observing their fast and ironic exploration of infinite material and virtual hubs. They do not dress as monks, although their praxis shares styles and etiquette.

The main difference is that the contemporary tribe of wandering scholars (do we like to define them 'creative brains'? 'fertile geeks'?) hosts much more women than men: the world prefers girls, since their lateral thinking will makes us much happier than the typically male path for conventional success.

They reproduce the existing knowledge adding creative annotations (we call these 'user generated contents'); they explore chaotic but rich landscapes, sometimes they create them; they speak and write in a universal language able to incorporate new jargon and to create new words; they devote a lot of time in elaborating new formats and building new products and actions. They do not need expensive means of transportation, and move with an essential backpack containing toothbrush, tee-shirts, a jumper, a moleskine and certainly a smartphone and a tablet. And, rather than relying upon official tourist guides they listen to advice and information coming from the world's tribe.

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Among the most significant views and tools of the emerging world (the Digital Middle Ages, indeed) we should understand maps, as *Giorgia Lupi* suggests inviting us to listen to the digital city; and we should observe without any prejudice the new frontiers of the publishing industry, as *Pierre-Jean Benghozi* and *Elisa Salvador* argue analysing the new framework where books and readers meet. We can be sure that this magmatic passage from dimensional to soft and receptive values will improve the quality of our lives.



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