

## Rethinking Rome as an Anthology: The Poeti der Trullo's Street Poetry

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**Abstract.** Questo articolo presenta una classificazione tematica e geografica, accompagnata da uno studio linguistico, della Street Poetry praticata da un gruppo di artisti romani che ha cominciato la propria attività nel 2012: i Poeti der Trullo. Attraverso l'uso delle Digital Humanities, saranno sviluppate alcune considerazioni in merito al linguaggio e i temi che caratterizzano le loro poesie. L'obiettivo di questo articolo è analizzare le radici socio-culturali di tale fenomeno poetico e gli effetti che ha prodotto sulla società romana contemporanea. Infatti, questo studio fornisce un'interpretazione delle modalità con cui i Poeti der Trullo interagiscono con la società che li circonda. Ciò grazie ad un approccio interdisciplinare che coinvolge strumenti digitali quali WordSmith, TXM, RStudio, Q-GIS, CartoDB e Gephi. L'attività artistica dei Poeti der Trullo rappresenta un atto di resistenza poetica nei confronti della dell'odierna società dell'immagine e si inserisce nel contesto romano attraverso richiami alla tradizione dei graffiti, praticati a Roma fin dall'antichità, e a quella delle Pasquinate. Tali usanze storiche si fondono, nella poetica di questi street poet, alle modalità artistiche tipiche della Slam Poetry. Attraverso un gesto semplice come scrivere un messaggio su un muro, questi giovani performer svelano la forza di una tradizione culturale che si esplica in atto di nuova resistenza, tale da produrre effetti tangibili sulla realtà cittadina. In soli sei anni, questo gruppo di poeti ha effettivamente creato un movimento capace di generare un cambiamento reale e profondo, all'interno del proprio quartiere.

This paper catalogues, maps, and studies of Roman street poetry, which street artists known as the Poeti der Trullo (*The poets of the Trullo*) have written on the Italian capital's walls since 2012. This article uses digital humanities tools to describe the Poeti der Trullo and their district, developing some arguments on the themes and language that characterise their poems. Its aim is to understand the cultural and social roots of this street poetry phenomenon and its effects on contemporary society. This study, which combines tools such as WordSmith, TXM, RStudio, Q-GIS, CartoDB, and Gephi, explains how the Poeti der Trullo interpret and interact with society through an interdisciplinary approach. The Poeti der Trullo's work, which blends the tradition of Roman graffiti and Pasquinate with the urban culture of slam poetry, shows a poetic resistance towards the outward appearance of contemporary society. Through a simple gesture such as writing a poetic message on a wall, these young performers reveal the strength of a cultural tradition that discloses a new act of resistance which has a pragmatic effect on society. In only six years of existence, these poets have effectively created a movement capable of generating effective change in their district.

## Introduction

Street art deeply marks contemporary cities' visual aspect and popular image, to the point that today it is impossible to think of London without Banksy's works 10., or Naples without Jorit's graffiti 8.. This article focuses on the cataloguing, mapping, and study of Roman street poetry 13., which the Poeti der Trullo have written on the Italian capital's walls since 2012. This ensemble of urban performers, who call themselves "poets", is composed of seven anonymous people coordinated by thirty-year-old Inumi Laconico (Laconic Inumi), whom I interviewed for the purpose of this research. The rest of the group is composed of four other men, Er Bestia (The Beast), Er Quercia (The Oak), Er Farco (The Hawk), and two women, 'A gatta morta' (The Dead Cat) and Marta der Terzo Lotto (Marta from the Third Block). There is also another poet who collaborates with them, though he is mainly devoted to publishing his poems: Er Pinto 26.. Their artistic works are concentrated in the Roman South-Western district of the Trullo, but each has their own special area, probably corresponding to where they live in Rome.

To better understand the phenomenon, I will describe the Poeti der Trullo and their district, then develop some arguments on the language that characterises their poems and the poems' territorial distribution according to their themes. Finally, I will expand on street poetry's cultural and social roots and its effects on contemporary society. For the purpose of this study, I have created a corpus of all the poems the Poeti der Trullo have written in the streets, referred to as *ST*, and the works they have published 51., generically referred to as *poems*. The Poeti der Trullo also wrote two manifestos: one about street poetry, and the other about published poetry. The first is called "Street Poetry Manifesto", and is available online, and the second is entitled "Metroromanticismo", and is included in their last volume.

The entire corpus was analysed with software tools dedicated to textual analysis. WordSmith 63. was used to calculate word recurrence and the type-token distinction. TXM 32. and the plugin TreeTagger 33. were used to analyse parts of speech in the corpus, which afterwards were represented graphically using Voyant tools 66.. After the word category disambiguation using TXM, a list of place names for each poet and a wordlist were extracted in order to better understand each poet's favourite themes. These data were elaborated and visualised using the software Q-GIS 52., the online tool CartoDB,<sup>2</sup> and Gephi 5.. The corpus was also explored by the software RStudio 58. and the R-language stylometry package Stylo 23.,<sup>3</sup> to understand the stylistic similarities between these poets, through a stylometry methodology.<sup>4</sup>

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1 In Italian *fare la gatta morta* is a common expression that means to play dumb; it often has sexual connotations.

2 <https://carto.com/>.

3 «R is a language and environment for statistical computing and graphics. [...] R provides a wide variety of statistical (linear and nonlinear modelling, classical statistical tests, time-series analysis, classification, clustering) and graphical techniques, and is highly extensible. <https://www.r-project.org/about.html>.

4 The stylometry methodology follows the work of the Computational Stylistics Group composed of Maciej Eder (Director of the Institute of Polish Language at the Polish Academy of Sciences), Jan Rybicki (Assistant Professor at the Institute of English Studies, Jagiellonian University, Kraków,

A basic overview of this corpus shows how the Poeti der Trullo are the mouthpiece of several relevant themes. Love, politics, architecture, and urban life combine themselves in the Poeti der Trullo's artistic style of the 'Is something missing?', as they describe today's society in a unique way. This new popular avant-garde can be considered the people's direct voice, as its language demonstrates. Formally, the plan of these poems mixes literary writing with colloquial and, sometimes vulgar, statements.

The corpus, in its final form, consists of two-hundred-and-fifteen poems. One-hundred-and-thirteen were written on the walls and one-hundred-and-two were transcribed from their published works. The poems, mainly concentrated in the districts shown on the map below, are divided as follows:

Poet	Favourite areas
Inumi Laconico (25 ST/24 poems)	Trullo, Portuense, Valco S. Paolo
Er Bestia (46 ST/ 18 poems)	Trullo, Portuense, Pian due Torri, Trastevere
Er Farco (12 ST/ 12 poems)	Trullo, Corviale
Er Quercia (15 ST/11 poems)	Trullo, Gianicolense
'A Gatta Morta (10 ST/ 5 poems)	Valco S. Paola
Marta der III lotto (5 ST/ 13 poems)	Corviale
Er Pinto (19 poems)	-

Table 1: Corpus of poems

The Poeti der Trullo's activity is strongly linked to Rome's spatiality, and concerns mainly districts around the Trullo, where the movement was born. This phenomenon represents more than an object to analyse, it is a 'problem', using Moretti's expression, 'that asks for a new critical method and no one has ever found a method by just reading more texts' (48.: 55). Indeed, to fully analyse the Poeti der Trullo's poetry, it is necessary to combine different methodologies because these street artists' style and themes are indissolubly connected to Rome's local linguistic reality and to the geographical locations in which the poems are pinned up.

The Trullo district is the centre and source of inspiration for this poetic protest. The Trullo has a long history of being mentioned in artistic productions. Pasolini used the Trullo as the setting of a famous sequence in his film *Uccellacci e uccellini* (1966), in which two lovers commit suicide, and Gianni Rodari, an Italian author of children's books, mentions the Trullo in his fable *La torta in cielo* (1964) (56.: 92).

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Poland), and Mike Kestemont (a post-doctoral research fellow at the University of Antwerp for the Research Foundation of Flanders) 24..



Figure 1: districts of Rome



Figure 2: the Trullo district

The district takes its name from a Roman sepulchre shaped like an Apulian *trullo*.<sup>5</sup> It is one of Rome's southern districts, characterised by high population density, and marked by urban decay and micro-criminality, where the cityscape varies between huge buildings – such as Regional offices of Lazio – small popular houses, and historical constructions, like those in the district of Eur.<sup>6</sup> This environment has given way to a typically Roman sense of community

5 The name Trullo (plural Trulli) commonly designates the typical and historical residential houses of Alberobello (Apulia) that are built with dry stone and are characterised by a conical roof.

6 A complete report of the state of Roman peripheries from 1993 to 2010 is the topic of the documentary *Le forme della periferia* (The shapes of the periphery), the final production of the project *La periferia metropolitana come bene comune* ("The metropolitan periphery as a common good") promoted by the Italian Centre for the Reform of the State in 2010. The document is accessible at: <https://www.centroriformastato.it/wp-content/uploads/le-forme-della-periferia.pdf>

that binds the people together, because they suffered the economic crisis and from the indifference of politicians. One characteristic of Roman urban spaces is each district's capacity to create art forms that speak of the whole city, while also expressing the local reality of specific areas (18.: 56). The Trullo district is representative of the neglect that it and other peripheral parts of Rome's South-West suffered, despite politicians' plans to reassess these territories. The district's philosophy is well expressed in the following poem by the Poeti der Trullo:

Rispetta l'anziano!  
Proteggi er bambino!  
A chi te vò bene  
staje vicino!  
Impegnate a esse  
sempre migliore...  
Nun lo nasconne se c'hai er batticòre!  
Nun esse violento,  
cinico, bullo...  
Da' retta ar poeta  
che vien dar Trullo!<sup>7</sup>

This poem describes perfectly how the district should be, namely, a place where the old generation, ('anziano') meets the new ('er bambino'). Trullo residents should love their district and their neighbours, and strive to make it a better place to live. Indeed, the Poeti der Trullo started their artistic activities alongside other groups, which specialised in graffiti, such as the Pittori Autonomi der Trullo, in order to re-evaluate the district through their street art. By using graffiti 2., the Poeti der Trullo represent a contemporary phenomenon of resistance that has developed using this tool, traditionally employed by Roman contestation during the history.

## History

Graffiti is known to have been widespread in Ancient Roman culture, a discovery mostly owed to the archaeological site of Pompeii 37.. This form of expression involved both sexes, just as the Poeti der Trullo are composed of men and women (50.: 151). There were two different kinds of graffiti: painted inscriptions (usually public notices) and engraved inscriptions (spontaneous messages). The latter covered a large range of topics including advertisements and political statements, but also poems (47.: 203). Following this tradition, the Poeti der Trullo have literally rethought Rome as an anthology, writing their poetical works on the walls of the Italian capital in a everyday language, as though the buildings were a blank page.

Ever since the Classic age, Romans have used walls to voice their critiques of institutional

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<sup>7</sup> Translation: *Respect the old man! Protect the child! To those who love you - stay close! Commit yourself to always improving... Don't hide it if your heart pounds! Don't be violent, cynical, destructive... Listen to the poet who came from the Trullo!*

power, express their feelings, or mock other commoners, nobles or even the Pope. This is also the case with the poems that were pasted on the talking statues like Pasquino 67., from the seventeenth century onwards 54.. The reworking of the Pasquinate is another particularity of the resistance performed by the Poeti der Trullo.

Pasquino, one of the talking statues of Rome, situated in Piazza Pasquino, provided an outlet for a particular form of anonymous political expression in Rome. This statue impersonated the anonymous Roman satire that was mainly directed at three categories of individuals:

- The Pope and his government (the cardinals and the curia)
- The city government
- The people and customs which were to blame

The poets who practiced Pasquinate mainly wrote sonnets on the sculptures' torso or pedestal, or on the surrounding walls. The other statues used for this poetic tradition were Babuino (Via del Babuino), Facchino (Via Lata), Abate Luigi (Piazza Vidoni), Madama Lucrezia (Piazza San Marco), and Marforio (in the courtyard of the Capitolino Museum).

The Poeti der Trullo have adopted a similar technique by pinning writings on buildings or objects in the city. As Ancient Romans did with the Pasquinate, the Poeti der Trullo voice their disapproval of politics and contemporary habits. These poets call this type of street art *#sepoteseparlare* 34. ("If it could speak"). In order to understand this phenomenon's dissemination, I have mapped the main examples of its performance. The map is accessible at <https://goo.gl/36bLyk><sup>8</sup> and allows us to understand where the Poeti der Trullo have practiced the modern urban Pasquinate. For instance, in the northernmost occurrence on the map, the poets give a voice to Saint Peter's Basilica (Piazza San Pietro) in order to voice their criticism against the Church and the transformation of religion into a tourist attraction. The Vatican Cathedral 'says' that it is tired of being objectified by tourists and that it would like to remain closed so that it will not be contaminated by mass culture.

The Poeti der Trullo, as explained above, strongly disapproved of local institutions. One example of their dissent is a poem that gives a voice to the red Fiat Panda of ex-mayor Ignazio Marino, which the poets found parked in Piazza del Campidoglio. Marino was subjected to a brutal, constant smear campaign by opponents and Roman inhabitants during his mandate. What the car says is that Marino may not be innocent, but the real culprit behind the city's poor administration is the Partito Democratico (The (centre-left?) left-wing Democratic Party).

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8 Alternatively, you can find the map following this link:  
<https://uploads.knightlab.com/storymaps/63e59d585135787e1ee85f1aab344b68/la-pasquinata-dei-poeti-der-trullo/index.html>

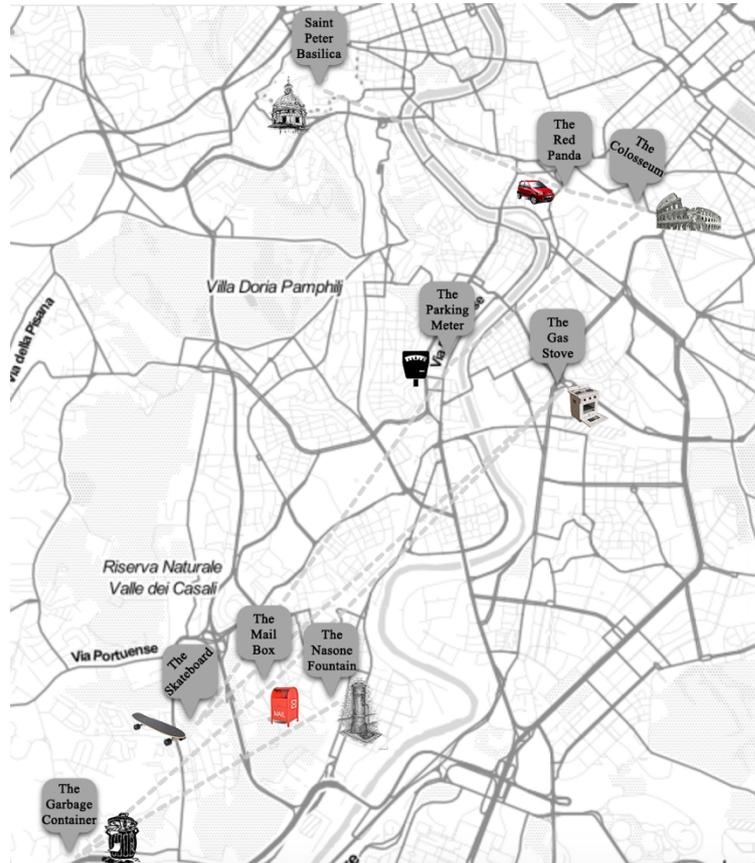


Figure 3: map of recorded phenomena related to #sepotesseparlare

Another criticism against politics lies in a poem pinned to the Colosseum. Through this text, the monument expresses itself, complaining about its state of neglect. It evokes its glorious origins and the fact that it never agreed with the Vatican's decisions. Churches have remained in a good state of repair, while Italian public buildings have fallen into a state of neglect: this is a metaphor for today's Italy, as monuments belonging to the Church enjoy more government protection than the public artistic heritage.

Elsewhere, a parking meter in Lungotevere declares that the cost of parking increased during the holidays while Rome's inhabitants were away. It is a criticism of local institutions that increase the prices of common services while preserving their privileges.

In the Montecucco area, an abandoned skateboard complains about its situation, saying it would like to go back to the period when its owner put his feet on "its face" instead of spending all his time playing videogames. By giving a voice to an object that is typical of young people, the Poeti der Trullo describe how the new generation prefers to spend time indoors instead of living outside in the district. On a similar topic, the poem left on a mailbox at the

post office in Via Lenin complains about modern society that has abandoned letters in favour of emails and WhatsApp. It says that now letters are used exclusively for bills sent by tax collectors, who reduce families to poverty.

Conversely, other examples are dedicated to urban cleanliness and criticise both those who litter the district, and the AMA, the Roman waste management agency, accused of failing to collect garbage. For instance, an abandoned gas stove at the Piramide Cestia explains, through a poem, that no one gave it a proper burial even though it spent its life cooking for its owners. Similarly, the Poeti der Trullo pasted a text on a garbage container in Via della Magliana asking Romans to dispose of their garbage appropriately.

Finally, the last example of urban Pasquinata is the fountain of Nasone,<sup>9</sup> erected in 1873 by Mayor Luigi Pianciani, in the context of his new hydric plan. People have denounced the fountain as a waste of water because it has no valve. The Nasone says that even though people disapprove of it, it has always been at their disposal, through the ages, in the face of adversity.

The reworking of the *Pasquinate* displays how the Poeti der Trullo insert themselves into a cultural tradition that literally brings poetry to the streets. They not only adopt this typical Roman custom, but also the Roman vernacular, which is one of the symbols of the city.

## Language

It is no surprise that Inumi Laconico, in an interview with me, directly names language as one of the most important topics in describing the nature of their poetical act of resistance. He says:

Il mio appello ai giovani è stato sempre quello di esprimersi con i propri strumenti, con i dialetti soprattutto, le parlate locali, i termini e le parole tramandate da generazioni, per resistere al livellamento linguistico che tutti subiamo giorno dopo giorno. Abbiamo una lingua bellissima fatta di decine di variazioni che devono essere usate.<sup>10</sup>

Inumi Laconico highlights language's importance in his poems, and indeed the Poeti der Trullo pay particular attention to their art's linguistic aspect. His statement confirms a proximity between oral language and that used in street poetry. As Dawes has observed, this proximity is the result of artistic productions linked to urban culture:

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9 Nasone (big nose) is a reference to the long faucet of this kind of fountain.

10 Translation: *I have always encouraged young people to express themselves using their own communication tools, especially dialects, the local parlance, the terms and words passed down through generations, to resist the cultural levelling of language that we are subjected to day after day. We have a beautiful language made of dozens of variations that must be used.*

Since so-called “street poetry” is characterised by an intense oral execution or performance and since it is inextricably linked with the growth of poetic expression in the music industry (rap, dub poetry, deejaying), there is a quality of social stratification that is inherent in its relegation to the place of “street poetry”. At the heart of this relegation is an emphasis on its “otherness”, its peripheral position in relation to the mainstream (21.: 3).

Indeed the proximity of the Poeti der Trullo’s poetics with modes of expression that are typical of urban culture, like rap, is undeniable. Er Bestia, for instance, in one of his poems, states that rapping was one of his previous activities:

Ve dico ‘na cosa  
che nun è segreta:  
‘na vorta c’avevo er rap come meta  
mo che de rapper  
è pieno er pianeta  
me sento ‘na scheggia  
a esse poeta!<sup>11</sup>

In Italy, forms of artistic expression such as rap, which are typical of urban communities, are also characterised by a meaningful use of dialects (61.: 139-49). For several artists, even widely successful ones, the use of linguistic native variations symbolises the link with their origins (3.: 67-70). Rome has a long-standing tradition of ‘ethnorap’ (38.: 43), practiced by classic Italian rap and hip-hop bands such as Assalti Frontali, Colle der Fomento, Corveleno, Piotta, Flaminio Maphia, Brokenspeakers, and the Artificial Kid, who sing both in Italian and the Romanesco dialect. Indeed, Roman people perceive their vernacular as the symbol of their attachment to their territory (30.: 14) and, due to that, linguistic regional variety seems to be particularly relevant in the production of the Poeti der Trullo, just as in the songs of the aforementioned rap bands. These artists’ language is closer to oral speech than the traditional linguistic standards of poetry. Indeed, the language of the Poeti der Trullo graphically reproduces the Romanesco dialects’ most representative traits 19.. It replicates the Roman vernacular’s consonantal and vocalic aspects 46. in order to claim their belonging to a specific regional identity.

An example is the verb *volere* (to want) (22.: 4082), one of the most common lemmas used in these texts, which follow typical Romanesco pronunciation rules. For instance, the Poeti der Trullo imitate the palatalization of the nexus /gl/ in /jj/ (14.: 120), in the first person of the present indicative, transforming *voglio* (“I want”) into *vojo*.<sup>12</sup> The conjugation of *volere* in the third person presents another characteristic of the Roman dialect’s phonetical traits. This form is normally *vuole* (“he/she wants”) and it is subjected to the monophthongization in /ò/ that transforms it into *vòle* (9.: 132).

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11 Translation: *Let me tell you something that is not a secret: some time ago my goal was to be a rapper but now there are too many rappers in the world and I feel more comfortable being a poet!*

12 This form is quite popular in the dialects of central Italy. The Italian Etymological Lexicon reports *vojo* in several cases (40. - X (2008): 1031-32).

The Romanesco dialect is also characterised by the progressive consonantal assimilation (49.: 73) that corresponds to an assimilation of the nexus /nd/, /mb/, /ld/. Through this phenomenon, a word like *mondo* (“world”), becomes *monno*. In the case of *andare* (“to go”), which becomes *anna*, the infinitive form also loses its suffix (49.: 179-80).

Another consonantal characteristic typical of this territory’s phonetical variety is the combination of the consonants /ng/, which in Romanesco become /gn/ (57.: 362-63). An example is given by the verb *mangiare* (“to eat”) that is graphically reproduced as *magna*. One of the most common traits the Poeti der Trullo reproduce in their texts is the use of the indefinite article *un/una/uno* (a/an). These lemmas are subjected to an apheresis, becoming respectively *n / na / no* (9.: 131). The definite article *il* (“the”) keeps its pre- and post-tonic /e/ and is pronounced like *er* (20.: 57). Another example of vocalic conservation is represented by *di* (“of”). This preposition in the Romanesco dialect is pronounced like *de*, showing the conservation of the atonic *e*, a phonetical trait that becomes even more common in the case of a vowel in the pretonic position (49.: 178).

The Poeti der Trullo’s poems are characterised by their use of a loose version of the Romanesco dialect. The use of the Roman variety’s vernacular aspects shows that these performers are a group of Italian native speakers who tried to reproduce Romanesco, but with some inaccuracies. An example of this is the coexistence of Romanesco forms and their Italian equivalents.

The first example is the article /il/ that is used in alternation with its dialectal form /er/:

ST	Poems
Il - 19	Il - 209
Er - 37	Er - 141

Table 2: Usage of articles and dialectal forms

It is interesting to note that, the Italian article /il/ is more frequent in the poems, contrary to street poetry. In their published works, the Poeti der Trullo tend towards a more normative use of the language. This trend is confirmed by the use of the form *vojo* (13 times) and *voglio* (20 times). Indeed, the latter form is more diffuse than its vernacular version.

Present-tense use of the third person of the verb *volere* further confirms this phenomenon. Variation between the forms *vuole* and *vòle* shows that in the published poems, the Poeti der Trullo prefer to use language that is closer to standard Italian.

ST	Poems
Vuole - 0	Vuole - 14
Vòle - 2	Vòle - 4

Table 3: Usage of verbs and dialectal forms

These examples are representative of the Poeti der Trullo's linguistic choices and testify to the nature of their street poetry. The pains they take to write poems in the Romanesco dialect are emblematic of their main objective of being the last advocates of a popular tradition, which in Rome is deeply rooted in the past.

As shown, the Poeti der Trullo's poetry uses language differently according to the medium on which it is written, whether that is street poetry or published poems, but also according to the intentions behind the writing. The linguistic differences between those two textual categories allow us to gain a better understanding of the approach that these poets have towards the poetry.

### Street VS Poems

As we try to understand in greater depth the differences between these two categories of texts the first dissimilarity is, of course, their length. Indeed, the street poems aim to leave short, striking messages that are often closer to aphorisms than poems. Some street poems have been taken up in the published volumes, in extended versions. The published poems often aim to tell a story or a feeling to narrate these poets' daily lives. However, the elements that determine the differences between street poetry and published poems 21. are linguistic rather than thematic even if, for instance, social topics are more often encountered in their street poetry. A useful tool that immediately reveals the differences between the language of these two categories of texts is the Type/Token Ratio (TTR) 4., the most frequently used measure of lexical richness 25.. Indeed, it gives a statistical indication of the lexical variety of a corpus. This ratio measures the number of different types, divided by the total number of tokens. The types are the unique words that occur in the corpus. In contrast, the tokens are the total number of words in the text. In the corpus, this *ratio* is multiplied by 100 so it can be expressed as a percentage that indicates the lexical density. This indicator gives a global idea of the texts' lexical variation. In the given corpus, this is equal to 20% (6390 types out of 32344 tokens). Applying this method to each specific poet, and to the textual typology, it is possible to summarise lexical differences within the corpus as follows:

Name	Percentage	ST (Percentage)	Poems (Percentage)
Inumi Laconico	37% (1472 out of 3990)	56%	35%
Er Bestia	32% (1707 out of 5253)	43%	36%
Er Farco	44% (829 out of 1882)	64%	46%
Er Pinto	43% (1355 out of 3152)	-	-
Er Quercia	25% (2357 out of 9421)	64%	25%
'A gatta morta	30% (1746 out of 5855)	71%	30%
Marta der III lotto	36% (995 out of 2791)	71%	37%

Table 4: Lexical differences within the corpus

The TTR percentage is proportional to the texts' lexical variety. A result close to 100% represents greater vocabulary variation in the corpus and, on the contrary, when the TTR is close to zero, it means that the corpus presents a lesser degree of vocabulary innovation. The published poems' lexical density (5875 types out of 28988 tokens - 20%) is lower than that of street poetry (1310 types out of 3356 tokens - 40%). Published texts, consequently, tend to be more lexically innovative.

To graphically represent the differences between the styles of these individual poets, the above data can be visualised in the following Radar graph:

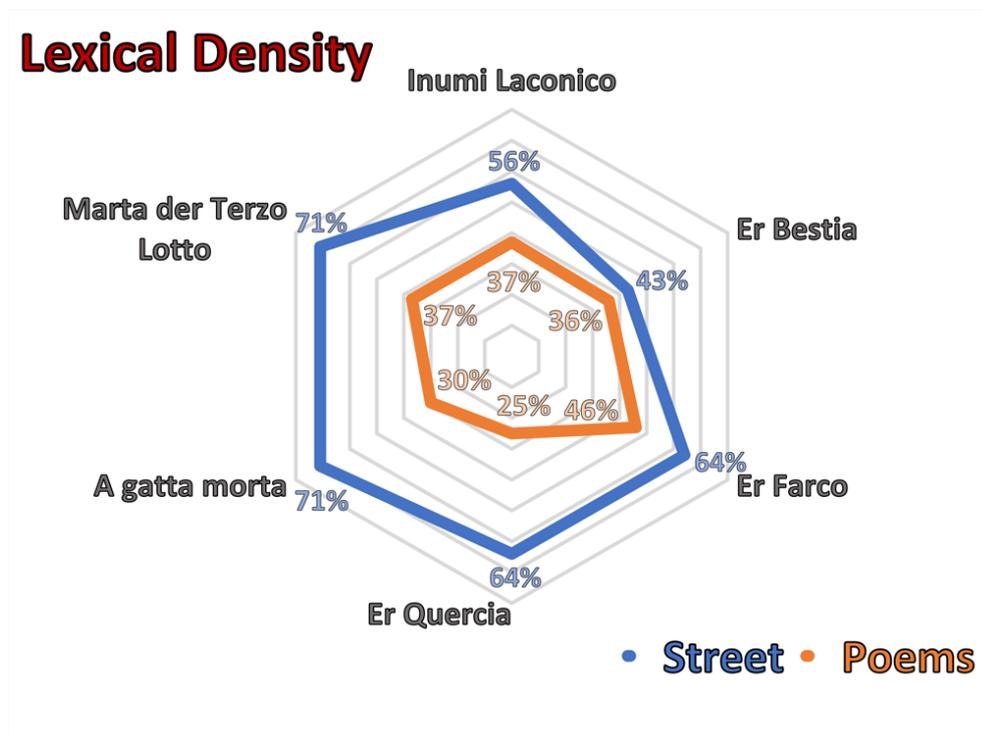


Figure 4: differences between the styles of individual poets

This Kiviat diagram shows that Er Bestia is the poet whose street poetry and published works are most similar. On the contrary, 'A gatta morta is the poet whose street poems and published poems are most different. To underline the stylistic differences between street poetry and published poems indicated by the TTR, the corpus was subjected to an analysis through the R package Stylo, which assembles a set of texts in groups according to their similarities. Considering the nature and length of these texts, I chose to analyse the corpus with a consensus tree method, which is less sensitive to the texts' length. The consensus tree script produces a virtual cluster analysis, which shows the variety of parameters that characterise the corpus,

producing a final diagram that reflects a compromise between the underlying cluster analyses (23.: 7). One parameter of the consensus tree is consensus strength (with values between zero and one) that provides a measure of agreement between the original trees. It reveals a statistical arrangement between a number of virtual cluster analyses for a variety of most frequent words (MFW), culling parameter values, and resulting in the automatic removal of words that are too characteristic for individual texts. The graphical representation of the three sections of the corpus was made with a consensus strength of 0.5 (27.: 35), which means that a link is made if it appears in at least 50% of the cluster analyses. Culling values could not be collected due to the poems' brevity compared to a corpus of novels. The distance between the frequency patterns of individual texts in the corpus is defined by Classic Delta vector, a method to supervise word classification, introduced by Burrows 11. and based on word frequency. It computes a table of distances between samples and compares each sample based on the test set against training samples, in order to find its nearest neighbour.

For the consensus tree of the three sections of the corpus, the algorithm runs from the one hundred most frequent words to the one thousand most frequent in increments of a hundred words, because this gives the most accurate results. This means the Stylo package has run subsequent analyses for the following frequency bands looking for similarities: 100 MFW, 100–200 MFW, 200–300 MFW, until 900–1000 MFW.

The result of the Stylo inquiry is a consensus tree that divides the corpus in four distinct branches. These four groups of poems show similarities that go beyond the language of street poetry and poems.

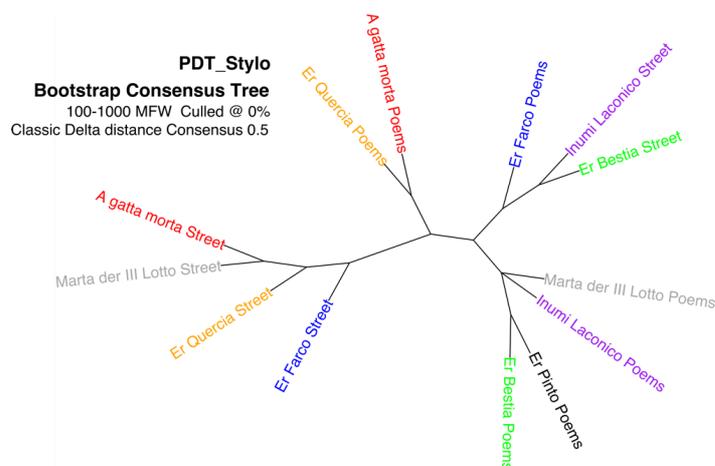


Figure 5: graphical representation of the Stylo inquiry

This stylometric inquiry confirms the TTR data. It displays that between street poetry and published poems in the work of Marta der Terzo Lotto, 'A gatta morta, Er Farco and Er Quercia there is a relevant difference in the amount of lexical variation.

The top right and the bottom right branches contain all the street poetry and show how similar Inumi Laconico and Er Bestia's styles are. These two poets are the most prolific of the group and the similarities in their styles set them apart from the rest of the group. For instance, their styles share common features with hip-hop and rap.

It is interesting to note that the corpus is clearly divided into two groups of street poetry and poems, except for the case of the published poems of Er Farco, which Stylo places in a branch with the street poetry of Inumi Laconico and Er Bestia. This happens because the function words in Er Farco's texts are dialectal for both street and published poems. Indeed, the stylometric analysis is based on the use of the function words and, even if the corpus is not extremely big in terms of the number of words, there is a relevant difference between the published poems and the street poetry, especially in the use of articles, auxiliary verbs and pronouns. Indeed, the function words are mainly in standard Italian in the poems, but in dialect in the street poetry. This means that by analysing the function words' recurrences, Stylo can establish stylistic similarities among the several poets clearly because it finds a clear variation in the kind of function words used in these two textual forms.

Taking the one hundred most-frequent function words, it is clear that the variation in the use of function words between published texts and street poetry is relevant:

Type	Number	Tokens
Poems (Dialect)	22	1731 (27%)
Poems (Italian)	78	8344 (83%)
ST (Dialect)	42	500 (40%)
ST (Italian)	58	750 (60%)

Table 5: Variation in the use of function words between published texts and street poetry

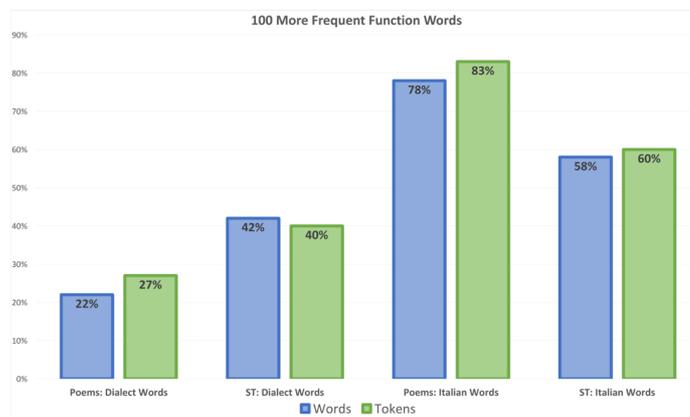


Figure 6: variation in the use of function words between published texts and street poetry

As the diagram shows, the function words are distributed differently between street and published poetry. Even if both ST and poems use dialect, street poetry is more characterised by this stylistic and linguistic trait, which is considered emblematic of the Roman community. Therefore, street poetry is the poetic activity that better represents the local linguistic reality and the reason I chose to focus my analysis on street poetry. Indeed, since the Poeti der Trullo are deeply-rooted in Rome's underground, it is hardly surprising that their street poetry, as a local activity, is characterised by a strong dialectal influences.

## Themes

Considering Roman culture's close relationship with street art and street poetry's linguistic proximity with Rome's cherished spoken dialect, it is not surprising that the Poeti der Trullo's street poetry found broad appeal. Some of their street poetry has even been copied by others in several parts of Rome. Indeed, their texts' content, like their language, can be adapted to popular audiences as well as to Roman underground culture. Below are four samples of poems that the Poeti der Trullo and their followers rewrote in some other parts of Rome. The first poem, by Inumi Laconico, juxtaposes mass culture, represented by television, with street culture, where poetry still exists.

Prima che er cervello,  
te lasci e scappi via,  
spegni la tv  
e leggi 'na poesia<sup>13</sup>

The suggestion 'leggi una poesia' (*read a poem*), given by a street poet, invites people to take to the streets and find poems both on the wall and within themselves, thus forming a community and committing themselves to others. The aim is to conceive of poetry as a way to improve people's lives, to make the districts better places to live. However, these poets are also conscious of graffiti and street poetry as intrinsic tenets of Roman culture. Er Bestia highlights this concept ironically in the following poem, in which he defines himself as the new Catullus, who comes from the district where, according to the Poeti der Trullo, poetry was born again.

So er nòvo Catullo  
e vengo dar Trullo<sup>14</sup>

Like Inumi Laconico's, Er Bestia's poem is an example of how street poetry can be considered a contemporary resurgence of early Roman history. Er Bestia pays attention to the city's historical context and, in the following poem, mentions some episodes from the Italian capital's recent past.

Tor bella c'ha  
la bamba.

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13 Translation: *Before your brain abandons you and runs away, turn off the television and read a poem.*

14 Translation: *I'm the new Catullus and I come from the Trullo.*

La Chiesa c'ha  
i segreti.  
Majana c'ha  
la banda...  
Er Trullo c'ha  
i poeti!!!<sup>15</sup>

In this text, he juxtaposes the Trullo's poetry with drug-dealing (an activity often associated with the Tor Bella Monaca district), the mysterious and remote world of the Church (which these poets criticise), and the illegal activities that characterise the Magliana district (*Majana* in the Romanesco dialect), alluding to the 'Banda della Magliana,' the famous gang that has plagued Rome since the 1970s. This gang's criminal activities continue in Rome to this day: for instance, the Mafia Capitale scandal, focused mainly on Massimo Carminati 43., a neo-fascist affiliated with the banda della Magliana ("the gang of the Magliana district") (70.: 174-75), broke out in 2014 65.. Against the backdrop of these aspects of Rome, Inumi Laconico proposes his vision of poetry as a form of struggle:

'A vita è una  
E pure corta!  
Gira, Viaggia,  
Spigni, Sbotta!  
Leggi, Pensa,  
Scrivi, Ascorta!  
Vivi, Ridi, Ama,  
Lotta!<sup>16</sup>

It is interesting to note that the Poeti der Trullo, at a time when political commitment is in decline, continue to use lemmas like 'lottare' (to struggle) that are typical of the left-wing tradition. However, this group's political commitment has more to do with the individual experiences of the inhabitants of marginal areas than with allegiances to institutional political parties. These people struggle against institutional power, because its actors have forgotten them and left them in the hands of criminality and neglect, whatever their political colours.

To better analyse the thematic aspects of their poems, I have divided the Poeti der Trullo's themes into five categories: *Esistenziale* (Existential – 43 ST), *Sociale* (Social – 43 ST), *Arte* (Artistic – 17 ST), *Amore* (Romantic – 9 ST), and *Sesso* (Sexual – 2 ST).

These themes are disseminated in several districts of Rome, because local issues are very important in the Poeti der Trullo's imagery.

The theme of **arts** is present in seventeen street poems in which the Poeti der Trullo assert their stylistic originality within the street art panorama. Due to their position as famous artistic figures, they propose a reflection on street art's essence and scope, privileging Trullo and

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15 Translation: *Tor bella has the snow [cocaine]. The Church has the secrets. Majana has the gang... Er Trullo has the poets!!!*

16 Translation: *You have only one life, And it is short! Travel, Visit, Push, Burst, Read, Think, Write, Listen! Live, Smile, Love, Struggle!*

Trastevere. Interestingly, Trastevere has hosted many urban artistic performances recently. **Love** and **sex** are not these artists' favourite themes, as there are only nine street poems on love and two on sex. Love poems, especially common among Trullo, Corviale and Portuense, essentially deal with the dimension of romantic relationships and the pragmatic aspects of couples' lives. On the other hand, sex, evoked in only two poems situated in Tormarancia and Borghesiana, is seen as a relationship resulting from a mixture of physical and mental attraction.

There are forty-three **existential** poems, making it one of the favourite themes of Poeti der Trullo's work. Trullo, Pian Due Torri, Portuense, and the area between Colli Portuensi and Aventino are the districts with the highest concentration of existential poems. This category of street poems focuses on general reflections on life and how to cope with day-to-day problems. They reflect the 'Metro-romanticism' ideal, which the Poeti der Trullo define as a contemporary form of romanticism in which man is alone in the immensity and complexity of the city – the city replacing nature as the force with which mankind must contend. In their manifesto on 'Metro-romanticism', the Poeti der Trullo describe their poetics as originating in metropolitan life, metonymically symbolised by the subway, which is at the core of their life as poets. These poets reproduce imagery that echoes Jonathan Raban's description of the new imaginaries suggested by the urban cityscape:

Cities, unlike villages and small towns, are plastic by nature. We mould them in our images: they, in their turn, shape us by the resistance they offer when we try and impose a personal form on them. [...] The city as we might imagine it, the soft city of illusion, myth, aspiration, nightmare, is as real, maybe more real, than the hard city one can locate in maps and statistics, in monographs on urban sociology and demography and architecture (53.: 2).

The geographical aspects of the corpus reveal how they concentrate their acts of resistance in Rome's South-Western peripheries, denouncing the state of neglect in those areas.

Political and **social** dynamics are also popular topics in these artists' work, and poems on these topics are found mainly in Trullo, Pian Due Torri, Portuense, Trastevere, and the areas between Colli Portuensi and Gianicolesse. This category of street poems formulates a criticism of general society, local institutions, and political parties such as the Lega Nord. Although the Poeti der Trullo is non-partisan, they tend to express left-wing ideals. As Beasley shows, this form of street poetry performance explicitly displays stronger political content 6., assuming some aspects of pre-existing left-wing ideologies.

To underline the relationship between themes and districts, I built a Gephi graph, in which the nodes are organised according to their real geographical coordinates using GeoLayout:

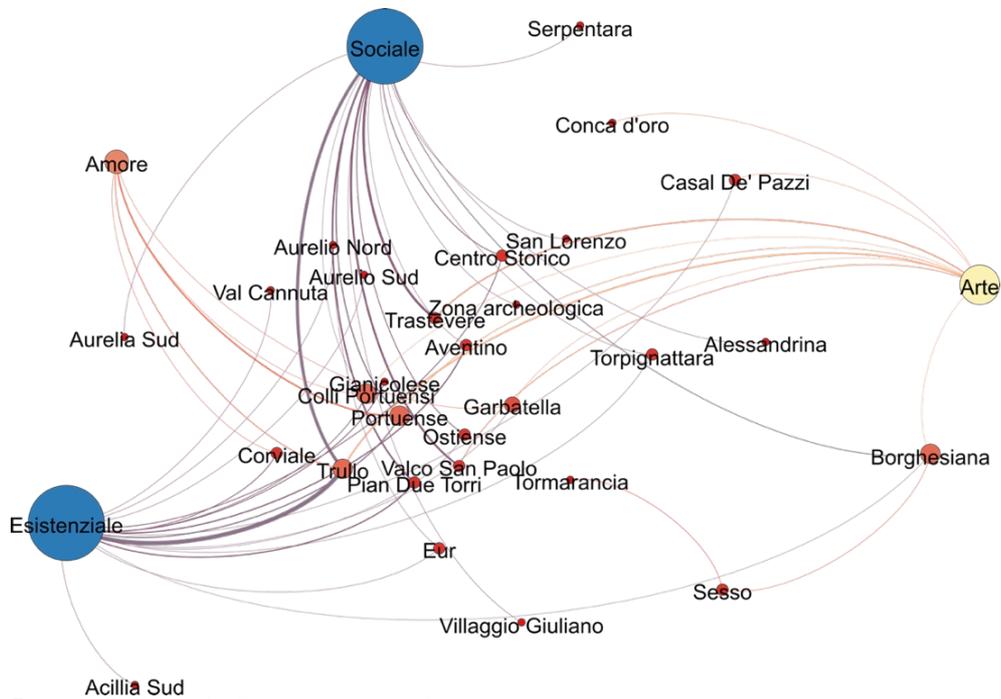


Figure 7: Gephi graph of relations between themes and districts

This networking diagram gives a good representation of the territory, but in order to gain a better understanding of the link between poets, themes and districts, I also built a digital map, using CARTO DB and QGIS, which is accessible via this link: <<https://goo.gl/kMGWMN>>. <sup>17</sup>

17 An alternative map is available at: <https://koine82.carto.com/builder/0329f2f3-1cfa-42d3-8062-255ee257d139/embed>



shown in the following chart where it is shown the absence of a given theme in a poet's work:

Name	Social	Existential	Artistic	Romantic	Sexual
Er Bestia	23	15	7	0	1
Inumi Laconico	11	7	4	3	0
Er Quercia	4	10	0	1	0
'A gatta morta	4	3	1	1	1
Er Farco	1	9	2	0	0
Marta der III lotto	1	0	0	4	0

Table 6: Distribution of themes in poets' work

The following Gephi graph represents the chart data. The red dots represent the poets, and their sizes match their impact in terms of output. This diagram allows us to immediately understand the links between each poet and the aforementioned themes.

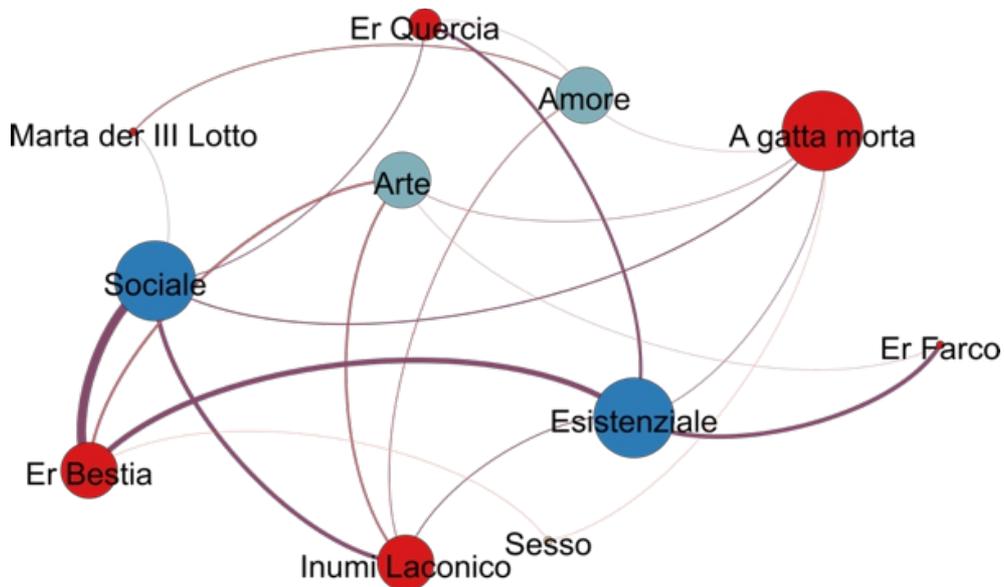


Figure 9: distribution of themes in poets' work

As we can see, Er Bestia is the group's most prolific poet, though he does not write romantic texts. The only poet who wrote at least one poem in each category is 'A gatta morta. It is interesting that the texts reflecting on street art itself are mainly by Er Bestia and Inumi Laconico, who appear to be the group's leaders. They are also the artists most concerned with social themes as if they sought in street poetry a form of political criticism.

Each poet not only has their favourite themes but also their preferred places. The following graph, obtained using Gephi, depicts a network that links each poet to the districts where they have written, represented in their real geographical positions:

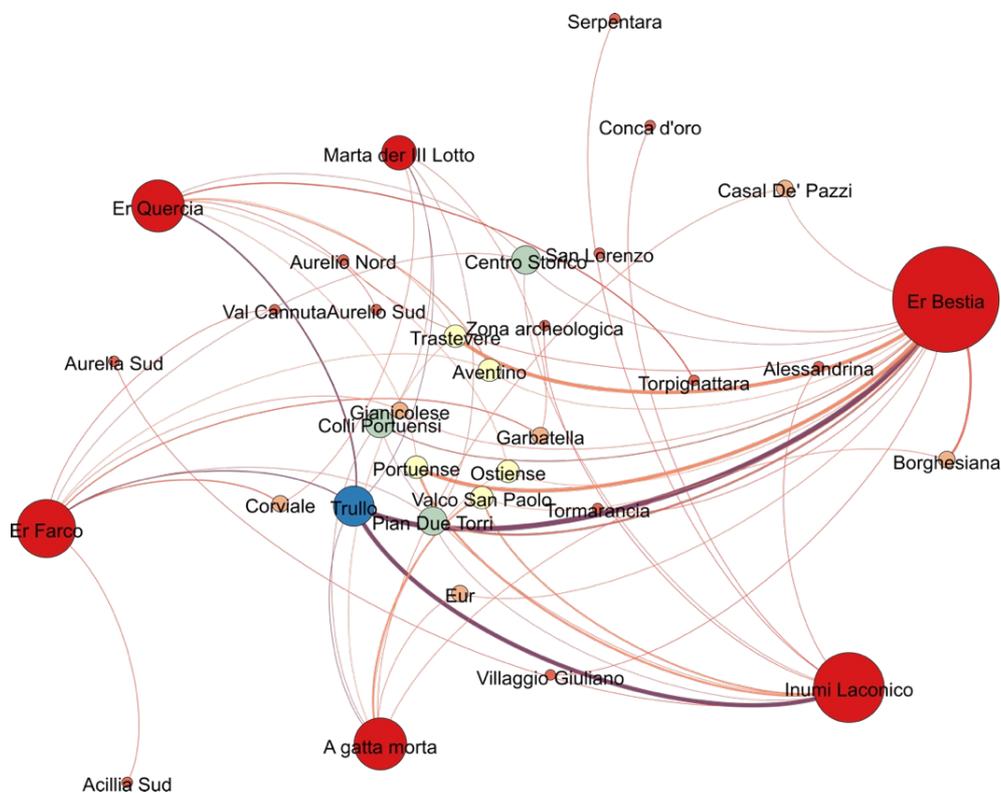


Figure 10: Gephi graph including links between poets and the districts where they have written

The dots' size is proportional to the number of poems. The red nodes represent the poets, while the others represent the districts. The graph shows how the dissemination of the Poeti der Trullo's work is more relevant in Rome's South-Western districts. Considering these poets' strong links to their territory, it is interesting to consider the relationship between the location and the type of message. Adding a layer of themes to the previous Gephi graph creates the one below, with new nodes and edges:

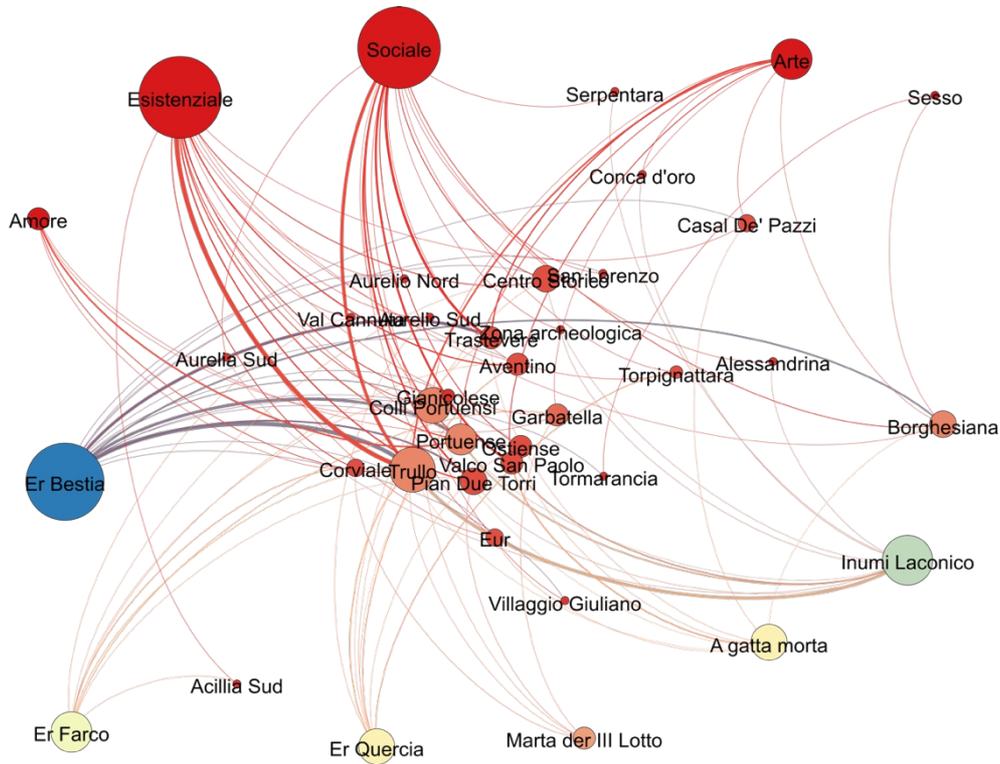


Figure 11: Gephi graph showing the relationship between the location and the type of message

This graph shows Trullo's central role, as the largest node in the centre. The adjacent areas confirm the importance of each poet's place of origin. Indeed, the Poeti der Trullo emerged in the wake of Rome's architectural transformations in the last twenty years, a catastrophic political move which has transformed the look of the peripheries, demonstrating the incompetence of the political class.

Social poems then appear as the most important theme, and the common denominator of groups of poets. This data is also confirmed by the Gephi graph, where the node of social poem provides seventeen links with the districts. On the other hand, the existential node has three fewer links, meaning these poems are more concentrated in specific districts. Even though the corpus contains almost the same number of existential and social poems (forty-three for each theme), the latter are more widely distributed throughout the city's territory and in the works of each single poet.

To better understand how the poems are dispersed through all the Roman territories I isolated the Themes-Places layer, displaying its edges and nodes differently:

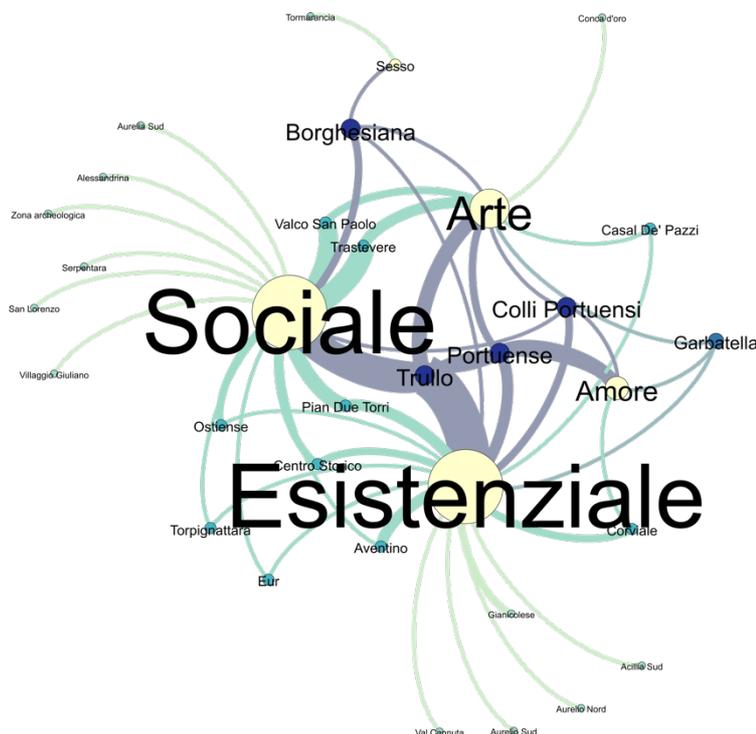


Figure 12: Themes-Places layer

This diagram brings to light a division between the Portuense – Corviale area, where love, existential and social poems predominate, the Gianicolese – Valco San Paolo area, which concentrates the themes of love, sex, and society, and the Trullo – Colli Portuensi area, where all the themes are represented.

The Trullo, Colli Portuensi and Portuense districts host most of the Poeti der Trullo's street art. If we combine these considerations, the network analysis and observations from the CartoDB map affirm that in these parts of Rome, the poets' native districts, the Existential theme is more common. Then, considering that the corpus contains the same number of Social and Existential poems, this means that the Poeti der Trullo usually write social texts outside of the territories close to them in order to disseminate their political message in other scenarios of the city.

The Poeti der Trullo's social impact on the territory is relevant, and their poems touch people with various social and professional backgrounds, as is shown in their social media presence.<sup>18</sup> Through their active citizenship, the Poeti der Trullo have sparked a new interest in their district, as is shown by a street poem that a group of their followers left on a wall of the district to pay homage to their street poetry (see following example):

<sup>18</sup> This group of poets searches for social network visibility. Their Facebook page, for instance, shows the vitality of the community that follows their activity 35..

*We get drunk on these seven poets,  
each of them has a different perspective  
made from unmeasured emotions,  
which, if not expressed, make you feel lost.  
Er Pinto makes your heart lighter,  
Er Bestia is incisive and impulsive,  
Marta is sweetness, the truest of loves,  
A Gatta seduces through her introverted manner.*

*Er Quercia is deep, he watches and tells,  
Er Farco keeps his pain under his skin,  
Inumi compares himself with time,  
finding relief in more beautiful ages  
You are the experts, but we are those striving  
to rhyme properly.  
We are trying to dedicate this to you  
YOU GAVE US  
SOMETHING TO BELIEVE IN AGAIN*

This celebrative poem also shows how the district's people perceive the work of each poet. Taking this poem as an example, it is interesting to note how their public recognises some stylistic traits that the poets themselves claim as their own, in their public self-descriptions on social media. Marta der Terzo Lotto, for instance, specialises in love poems, Er Quercia prefers to write intimate poems, Er Farco writes mainly existential poems, 'A gatta morta has a deeply critical and acute style, and Inumi Laconico and Er Bestia tend to focus their poems on social criticism.

## Conclusion

The Poeti der Trullo interpret society linguistically and politically because their activity emerged in the context of bad territorial administration, which had noticeably impacted on society. Since 2000, Rome has had three special commissioners, appointed by the city council to try and solve the problems caused by the previous administrations.

Years	1993-2001	2001	2001-2008	2008	2008-2013	2013-2015	2015-2016	2016-today
Political party	Left-wing	Commissioner	Left-wing	Commissioner	Right-wing	Left-wing	Commissioner	Five Star movement
Mayor	Francesco Rutelli	Enzo Mosino	Walter Veltroni	Mario Morcone	Gianni Alemanno	Ignazio Marino	Francesco P. Tronca	Virginia Raggi

Table 7: Administrations in Rome since 2001

The decay of the Roman outskirts<sup>19</sup> began in 1993 with the progressive application of the 'Modello Roma' (59.: 217), an architectural plan that aimed to create a new urban model for the future whose climax was the works conducted to adapt Rome for the 2000 Jubilee 1..<sup>20</sup> In 2003, the local administration devised a building plan that boosted construction works, causing a progressive increase of the population in the peripheries, which were not designed, in terms of public services, to host so many people (15.: 32). After an exodus to these areas, the construction speculators began to increase the prices of flats, resulting in a consecutive property bubble that burst in 2010 (39.: 4). In the wake of these measures, the social fabric of the South-Western districts started to evolve. Artists, clubs and associations began to mushroom, which prompted the birth of such movements as the Poeti der Trullo. In 2010, local institutions began to use street art systematically as one of the most common instruments to reassess the peripheries and redeem them from their state of neglect (29.: 180). Tommasini has highlighted how, in those periods, street art, due to its low cost, was mainly used to this end (45.: 106). This is particularly the case in Rome, as the council guarantees total anonymity to the writers (16.: 251), shielding them from legal issues related to the practice of graffiti.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, from 2010 onwards, the council provided 200,000 euros towards the improvement of street art in the peripheries 12.. This favourable attitude towards street artists led in 2015 to the birth of an artistic project in Tormarancia 55., a district beside the Trullo, named *Big City Life 68.* This initiative, similar to the 2010 project M.U.Ro 69. (Museum of Urban art in Rome), aimed to take urban performers to the streets in order to transform the peripheries into an open-air museum.

The combination of the institutional liberalisation of street art and the most recent demonstrations of the system's utter corruption, such as *Mafia Capitale* (2014) 64., has been extensively addressed by artists, and prompted several resistance movements. In a personal interview with Inumi Laconico, the poet told me how he perceived this sense of resistance:

Resistenza rispetto proprio alla città: una Roma sempre più pensata e progettata sul turista, dove i romani, cittadini e poeti, sono emarginati nelle periferie. Noi da quelle periferie, ma anche dal centro quando possibile, facciamo un gesto: scrivere sul muro un pensiero, manifestare la nostra esistenza, poetica, energica, costruttiva. Ci piace resistere alla spersonalizzazione della nostra città e credo che tutti dovremmo farlo.<sup>22</sup>

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19 In order to have a global vision of the social and territorial phenomena that have characterised Rome in the last twenty years, the website #mapparoma gives a complete description, supplemented by a great number of maps 44..

20 The architectural plan for the peripheries also included plans for twelve new churches and sacred buildings built by famous architects such as Marco Petreschi (31.: 128-129).

21 In Italy the crime of defacing or defiling moveable or immovable properties is ruled by Penal Law articles 635 and 639. The sanction amounts to a six-month detention and a penalty of 1,000 euros. In the case of defiling historical or artistic patrimony, the detention can amount to one year with a penalty of 3,000 euros, which become 10,000 euros in the case of recidivism. (17.: 392, 398).

22 Translation: *Resistance towards the city: Rome is constantly conceived and designed for the tourists, while the Romans, its inhabitants and poets, are marginalised in the peripheries. From those peripheries, but also from the city centre whenever possible, we make a gesture: writing a thought on a wall, manifesting our poetic, energetic, and constructive existence. We like to resist the depersonalisation of our city and I think that everybody should do it.*

The Poeti der Trullo are deeply connected to Rome's past, but they also blend their local roots with a new vision of poetry that has developed over the last forty years. Slam poetry (41.: 125), for instance, represents the link between the age-old practice of political criticism and a new art form. This phenomenon was created in November 1984 by American poet Marc Smith, who is credited with launching slam poetry at the Get Me High lounge in Chicago. In his essay *Poetic Pugilism*, Terry Jacobus makes a common argument. He argues that 'beat and slam' poetry

[...] brought poetry back to the street in massive doses. Through bouts and slams, Chicago was at the root of a performance poetry revolution, giving a huge adrenaline shot in the arm to an art form that touches youth from a different angle, and gets poetry followers and activists involved in an engaging atmosphere [...] (36.: 89).

In this passage, Jacobus suggests that bringing poetry back to the streets is an ideological act in itself, that performance poetry is by definition a revolutionary art form, which connects 'poetry followers' and activists. The activism expressed by slam poetry mixes itself with the defence of the district in the Poeti der Trullo's street poetry, becoming a form of resistance against the oppression of bad politicians and the image of society.

To conclude, this phenomenon represents an evolution in the traditional opposition between underground culture and mass culture (29.: 18), the former being built in resistance to the latter. Here, the tool of resistance is poetry, becoming an act of rebellion in itself, even just by its presence in the metropolitan greyness, beyond the meaning of its words (7.: 263). Contrary to previous examples of street art or graffiti, the Poeti der Trullo have organised themselves in a movement with a manifesto and a structured plan of interaction with the city that has had a strong impact on local cultures, in and around the district.

The phenomenon's impact on society at large is undeniable, as being anonymous enabled the writers to become symbols (42.: 10). Indeed, the Poeti der Trullo's poetry has been used by studied in schools, reworked and shared on social networks, or quoted by business boards. Young people from the Trullo district have poems tattooed on their skin, or write them on their clothes or objects like school notebooks.

On 5<sup>th</sup> January 2017, the Poeti der Trullo started a social campaign involving their public, aiming to transform a project initially led by seven people into a collective experience. This is their 'call for poems':

Fallo usci fori er  
Poeta che hai dentro.  
Daje 'na penna  
a quer sentimento.  
Sporca de versi  
la pagina bianca...  
Scrivi! Componi!  
Immagina! Canta!<sup>23</sup>

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23 Translation: *Let the poet inside of you come out. Give a pen to this feeling. Let the blank page get dirty*

Their poetry's impact on society demonstrates how a simple gesture can become stronger by contributing to changing society. The power of the Poeti der Trullo's words is hidden in the simplicity of a format that has given birth to a new form of contemporary resistance, which Inumi Laconico defines as follows:

Sicuramente la nostra resistenza si manifesta rispetto a un'attualità dominata dall'immagine, dai volti, dall'ego. Noi mandiamo avanti la parola, la poesia che quindi resiste a un capovolgimento di sensi e valori... Tutto è opinione, grido, prevaricazione di convinzioni, sia in tv che sui social, le nostre parole invece entrano in punta di piedi e si lasciano catturare nei luoghi più nascosti della città.<sup>24</sup>

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*with verses... Write! Compose! Imagine! Sing!*

<sup>24</sup> Translation: *Surely our resistance manifests itself in a modernity which is dominated by images, faces, egos. We bring forth the word, the poetry that resists the upending of meanings and values... Everything is opinion, screaming, silencing convictions, be it on TV or in the social media, but our words tiptoe in and let themselves be captured in the most hidden corners of the city.*

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