

# On the birth of G.EN.TE.



GAETANO BERTINI MALGARINI  
FOUNDATION

NPO



## Index

What does G.EN.TE. mean?	p. 6
The question and the specter	p. 8
The “via Padova” tag	p. 10
Technology today	p. 12
Social - hardship	p. 14
Disidentification	p. 15
Paranoid and non-paranoid technique	p. 17
What is happening?	p. 19
Masses and pack	p. 21
From hardship to music	p. 25
Repositories of the human	p. 28
Google, Kiva, and Wikipedia	p. 31
Google and del.icio.us	p. 35
On the structure of knowledge	p. 38
What's at stake speaking about difference?	p. 41
Farewell	p. 45

## What does G.EN.TE. mean?

G.EN.TE. stands for Youngsters and New Technologies (the acronym comes from the Italian phrase “Giovani e nuove tecnologie”). It is the name of a project. In its official version, it means that nowadays new technologies represent for youngsters a widespread vehicle of loneliness, alienation, and isolation, which can at times even cross the border into addiction and disease.

G.EN.TE. project wants to try and reverse the pattern, by exploring technologies from a different point of view. While they were originally thought as *tools for conviviality*, G.EN.TE. believes they can be aimed at rebuilding social ties, where these bonds got shattered.

From education to job placement, from applied research to the theoretical one, from cultural production to its enjoyment, from conviviality to recreation, there are so many ways to *make use of* new technologies, and to reinvent with them those social ties that got severed.

In its more concise and strategic version, G.EN.TE. means opening a way through three, often non-communicant, poles: social solidarity, entrepreneurship, and internationality, under the common denominator of new technologies.

Lastly, G.EN.TE. is the title given to a space, that a Foundation has been given the task to revive. It is located in via Caroli 12, Milan. This is a space that needs to be envisioned. G.EN.TE., youngsters and new technologies is the signifier through which we'll start doing it, because we feel it's concrete enough to start drawing a path, but also abstract enough for that path not to be already drawn.

# The question and the specter

Among other things, Italy is also rich in large abandoned spaces. There are plenty of former asylums, ex-factories, former villas whose nobility declined over time, and so on, through a long chain of former places. Everyone knows of at least two or three such examples in his neighbourhood. If we had a map of these spaces, it could be defined spectral in two different ways. Firstly, we would certainly be overwhelmed by the intensity of a world that is no longer there; so many spaces and so much neglect, so many jewels covered by ivy. This is the noble sense of the word “specter,” thanks to which those who have long left us still preserve some sort of a presence, although ethereal, on earth. It is the noble sense, dear to all people with a saturnine and nocturnal disposition. “Specter,” though, can also have another meaning, more disquieting. Our map of the neglected places assumes this meaning if we transform it into a map of the *renovations* these places undergo. It is the sinister tinge of the term specter, according to which rampant overdevelopment is spectral. What strikes us the most is not just the immorality of this property speculation, but rather its poverty of spirit.

The latter, in fact, is demonstrated by the unshakable urge to alternate streets and blocks in a never ending motion, and the absolute spontaneity in repeating asphalt and concrete, asphalt and concrete, over and over again. Yet we must understand this contradiction, or else their poverty of spirit risks to become our own, if *we don't know what to think*. If in front of a large and beautiful abandoned space—deep down, leaving aside all whims and aberrations—we also see *only* residential and commercial blocks. Will we ever be able to accomplish something meaningful?

## The “via Padova” tag

This little musing that we are thus starting is taking place in via Caroli 12, Milan, very close to via Padova. Towards the end of this century’s first decade, this street assumed international fame. Due to its multiethnicity, broadmindedness, violence, but also depth of creativity in a metropolitan discomfort, it entered in a kind of international Olympus, along with Tepito, in Mexico City, and several others. Via Padova thus became, over the years, on one hand an example of a ghetto, of a city within the city, of a separate place; on the other hand, an example of both practiced and potential multiethnicity. The “via Padova” *tag*, when searched on Google, returns a long list of newspaper articles speaking of violence. “Via Padova – what a shame!” is the cry that keeps resounding from mouth to mouth. It is a sort of challenge to who will pronounce it first, it seems as if this phrase alone could fill up the lack of other words, and the difficulty of other strategies. “The problem of social cohesion in via Padova” is an enigma that the best minds in the city have tried to solve, but it’s not just that, it also assumes the form of a textbook of the social problem in modern cities.

What kind of city do we want? What kind of via Padova do we want? Are we able to be broad and skillful, and allow the difference to take place? Are we able to be resolute as well, elaborating and keeping a direction in the difference?

# Technology today

What is technology today, and why could it be a new vector to rebuild social ties? Today, technology seems to increasingly besiege, block, invade, and finally, using a word dear to the twentieth century, alienate. A *laptop* on your lap, a *smartphone* at your ear, a *tablet PC* in your hand, our technological devices are more and more accompanying our gestures, from the most common to the rarest ones, delving into our intimacy in an unprecedented and appalling measure.

*User* is the name that in English ironically associates drug addicts to Internet users, chased by their social network accounts, by showers of e-mails and *alerts*, by swarms of phone calls and text messages, and especially by the implicit order to write and produce as much, not to be erased from the social space. This is what technology—New Technology—seems to be doing, today more than yesterday; alienating.

However, we learned one thing; deliverance and emancipation don't happen against historical forces, but beyond them.

Here is some truth about technology—it is a great historical force which passes its impartial hand over all things.

It provokes job losses, it creates new jobs, it disrupts the equilibrium; it does what History has always done. The only way its dark side could be deactivated and finally overcome is by exploring it, living it again, redesigning it, and reinventing it.

Youngsters and New Technologies delves into the technique from within, as technique delves into us. G.EN.TE. stares into the darkness of the present, fearlessly immersing itself into this darkness, to suddenly rid itself of the obscurity with a flap of its wings.

## Social – hardship

G.EN.TE. is not a technological cathedral in a spiritual desert, nor is it a mawkish plea from an American philanthropist—against all poverty, for all suffering kids. G.EN.TE. is a project that is prompted by—and headed towards—specific, living, and vital figures of contemporary hardship.

The stories of individuals and organizations interlace, and their choices are always interwoven with experience and contingency. Therefore, we shall not attempt a transcendental deduction a priori on how G.EN.TE. originated from—and will be addressing for the most part—psychiatric patients, political refugees, and former inmates. We won't even describe how its take on the contemporary world winds among folly, exile, and jails. However, these are the hardships, this is the knowledge, and these are—among others—the people with whom we will attempt to tackle the riddles and the alienation of technology. We wish that, while we look at the monster, it will also look back at us, and in this reciprocal observation—between social and technological, between hardship and discomfort, between alienation and loss—we will be able to find some lines of flight, or rather, of emancipation and deliverance.

# Disidentification

G.EN.TE. is a signifier put into the social space, to gather in one—today—a multiplicity otherwise scattered. Let's ask ourselves again the question we posed at the beginning: we have a space to fill, there is a giant to revive; how can we make this happen? Especially, how can we make this happen in a way that would allow for invention, experimentation, dispassionate and updated research of a possible community? Of course, there are several methods available. The space in via Caroli 12, even if it would be 20 stories high, it would still be easily filled with a large community college, or a conglomeration of rehab communities, or the headquarters of a large multinational NPO. In each of these cases the task would be clear, as well as its implementation. The project could start and develop following standard roles and procedures, easily defined and already tested. However, we at G.EN.TE. cannot do this. But then again, perhaps the best occasion to pursue something like *ethics* is when there are no tasks to be carried out. Speaking about ethics in 2010, after this frail word has been minced by the media, may sound anachronistic.

Associating it with new technologies may sound grotesque. And yet this is G.EN.TE.; a signifier put into the social space neither to carry out a task nor to comply with a school, but to open a shared space of thought and action among some intricate problems that represent everyone's concern. As everyone's concern is also this *ethical earth* we walk on and we try to open every day, finding it time and time again broken and reconfigured by the challenges of time.

# Paranoid and non-paranoid technique

Until the last century, when people were thinking of “technique,” they were thinking of machines, robots, assembly lines, and perfectly engineered planning. This is what we call the military dress of technique. It led to great wonders and great disasters in the history of mankind.

With its double effect, this still exists nowadays. The deliberate, carefree, and unscrupulous performance of tasks relentlessly given to us by the machine is consuming a large part of the energies present on the planet.

Nevertheless, an interesting and noteworthy movement took place in the last decades. From more and more sides, in more and more fields, it happened that agile start-ups got the better of large, completely automated, corporations. It happened that the “enterprise irregular” was a figure destined to substitute the specialist, with his muddled equipment of knowledge rapidly becoming obsolete. Similarly, it happened that in many companies the visionary lunatic was more crucial than the strict lieutenant, and that winning the innovation match was more important than winning the automation one.

All this has been given different names, mainly of Anglo-Saxon origin (*new economy, web 2.0, tribalization of culture, etc.*), and it corresponds to the ebbs and flows that, although only partially known over the long period, still allow us to spot a limpid tendency. It is the *mutant* dress of technique. The fact that something different from military technique exists can be belittled, denied, and tainted in many ways. Yet we place here a clear polarization, regarding which we don't want to spare anyone the effort of thinking. Television was military technique. Internet is mutant technique.

# What is happening?

In 1990 the World Wide Web was a pioneering path, in 2000 it was just one—albeit new—of many communication means. In 2010 it is clearly a universe in staggering expansion, which is changing human relationships in their entirety, street by street, habit by habit. Anyone who deals with both young people in their twenties, who haven't been living in a digital era from birth, and youth in their teens, who have been, can realize what happened in less than a dozen years. The same can be understood by anyone who has an ability to peep into the future, and would try to consider what will be the attitude in just three, six, or at most nine years. Everyone will have a *smartphone*, as nowadays everyone has a mobile. This *smartphone* (iPhone, Nexus, Nokia or any other) will be permanently online via *broadband*, and will be easily connected to the speakers of the car radio, to the stereo, to the television. *Reader devices* (iPad, Kindle, Nook, or any other) would have limited the use of paper to the cardboard industry and gift wrappings.

People will pay at the mall, through simple OCR, and cross the turnstiles of the subway using these *devices*, that will be connected in one unique language, in which the search for the needle in the haystack will take place crossways, according to the same criteria. What does this all mean? What will it mean? Among the several kinds of consequences derived from it, we can spot one; the end of communication monopolies.

## Masses and pack

Anyone who has an account on Facebook or on Twitter, or even just on Gmail, knows about the waves of spam that cross the web, and doesn't deny that sordid narcissism and marketing tricks are the two large driving forces behind the social network's idle chat. What then is driving us to sail these foul-smelling seas? For what reason does G.EN.TE. see in the new media a source of deliverance and emancipation?

Leaving aside those that throw themselves forward in an unseemly way, and equally those who think all this is none of their business, we can identify two positions—different and complementary—on what is happening. The first belongs to those who hold the crowd dear. It may be leaders of the masses, hierarchs of the masses, or people within the crowd. They tend to reproduce on the web the behavior they were having in the old media, at all levels. Sometimes they make it, because a cultural sector built in forty years of television is hard to dismantle in just three years of web 2.0; at other times, they fail. This is the position of the majority.

The other position is held by a minority, and yet the opinion of this minority is incredibly powerful. It is the opinion that sees in the web a dazed kaleidoscope, where layers and layers of broken, inconsistent, and often automatically generated information pile up on one another, to generate a shallow ecosystem of comments on blogs, *tweets*, and silly videos on YouTube.

There is no elaboration, no criticism, no culture, and no reasoned discussion. There is not a real relationship. There is no Man. The Internet would then be one of the many non-places; that is, one of those postmodern spaces where a postmodern pseudo-socialization is in force, such as hotels, airports, malls, clubs. Non-places where the only laws are loneliness, imitation, consumption, competition, dismay; non-places where there are no relationships and no values.

These are the lucubrations of the humanist intellectual who imposes himself here as a second, opposite and mirror image to the demiurge of the masses. The humanist intellectual, with his remarks and lamentations and harangues, with his nostalgic little game, with his decadent tinge, and a winding grudge harbored for a long time.

Nowadays in the United States the humanist intellectual is experiencing a full bloom, particularly due to the work of the repentant technocrats. We certainly cannot reconstruct the gems of thought that Hegel, Stirner, Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Kojève, Foucault, Lacan, and Derrida have donated to us, while unmasking this attitude. They produced a fire power, compared to which our new humanists' postmodern ballets instantly fade.

G.EN.TE. cannot be applied to the masses, but at the same time it shakes off the humanist moaning.

Because the individual—be he intellectual or otherwise—is no different from the masses, in fact he is always included in them and complementary to them.

The *pack* is different from the masses. Both the pack of wolves and the pack of humans are. To the fake movement of the masses corresponds the swift movement of the pack, always storming into new territories and crossing all borders. To the passivity of the masses corresponds the orientation, harmony, and instinct of the pack. Where there is a crowd there is also a lynching instinct, whereas in the pack there is generosity and invention.

To the individual that becomes anonymous within the masses corresponds the multiplicity of individuals in the pack, “When the pack forms a circle around the fire, each person can have someone sitting to his right or to his left, but never behind his back. His back remains naked and exposed to the woods.” The Internet and the challenges it brings about can be neither thought nor crossed without a concept like the one we decided—following Canetti—to call here pack.

## From hardship to music

Music and hardship are two words that have always been intrinsically connected. Music as a way of *giving words to one's own sorrow, for the grief that does not speak, whispers the o'er-fraught heart and bids it break*. What interests us the most, beyond Shakespeare's citation, is giving voice to this distress in a public space, or at least in a social space. From the ancient mourning songs of distant people up to the rage of the punk era, the catharsis brought about by music could be really enacted only in the moment of its enjoyment, or better of its action—both public and social. The relationship with music was mediated by the tens or hundreds of people in the pack, or by the hundreds of thousands of people in the crowd, who were living it and sharing it.

What happens when this component is missing? What happens when social relations disappear? The answer is right here in front of everyone's eyes. Nowadays, in fact, people can have in their homes, in just a few clicks, all music ever produced or recorded by anyone, anywhere in the world.

Along with the predictable whimpers from the world record industry tycoons, unable to deal with an announced revolution, this also gave the musical experience a sort of coldness, as it gets minced in the bulimic loop of *search-download-listen-delete-restart-from-step-one*. This doesn't only prevent these fragments of art from growing inside us, but drives us to consider music like an industrially motivated enjoyment to carry out in the loneliness of our rooms, mainly while we are busy—or distracted—by other activities on our PC. Music and hardship meet, but this time as cause and effect.

Now we could also curse the web, and complain about the way it completely tore contemporary music apart. We could have all defendants sitting one by one at their dock, from the invention of the *midi* format, up to Napster, Pirate Bay, and all the others. However, if there is no golden age to which we desire to go back, the other way is to admit that, even if they took from us most of what we knew about music, new technologies are offering us at least as much.

The digital revolution, in fact, allowed everyone who has a PC, a few hundred euros and a little training—not necessarily academic, to create, share, and broadcast his own music.

*Digital recording and loop stations* allow bringing the moment of music creation within everyone's reach, while the digital convergence allows music to become a part of and a binding force in an infinity of other types of media that run on the web—like videos, radios, and portals. Doing all this together means giving back to music its own potential for socialization. G.EN.TE. would like to be a place where all this is possible, and where there are spaces to bring back music—this music—to its own living and shared dimension.

# Repositories of the human

In a letter dating November 1924, Rilke wrote:

For our grandparents a “house,” a “spring,” a familiar tower, yes even their clothes, their coat: infinitely more and infinitely more intimate; each thing, almost, a vessel in which they found the human, and preserved and added the human to it. Now, from America, empty indifferent things, sham things, *counterfeit life* are pushing their way across...

What is an iPhone? Certainly, it is more of a “vessel in which we find and preserve the human” than a “sham thing,” even if probably Rilke would not agree. Our technology is always with us, whoever we are, wherever we are. It creeps into the innermost recesses of our body and spirit. All repositories of the human are becoming entirely technological, strictly linked to the great *Technium* to which they belong. Let’s take as an example the channels to convey culture, and let’s consider what is represented today by books, encyclopedias, libraries, copyrights, publishers’ properties and power, and by the same knowledge structure—and what will they represent tomorrow.

Here the concept of ‘apparatus’ comes in handy. ‘Apparatus’ is, according to Foucault, any discourse, institution, architectural form, regulatory decision, law, and administrative measure that has the capacity to capture, orient, control, intercept, and model the life of individuals. Our repositories of the human are devices. An iPhone is a very powerful device, but so are also *games*, video cameras, and statistics. Technocrats compete to invent devices to capture men, without realizing that this way they are the first guinea pigs and victims of these devices; forced, as often guinea pigs are, to run around faster and faster inside an aimless and meaningless wheel.

What can we do when faced with these devices? The first reaction is to get lost in them, let them capture us, absentmindedly rescheduling our habits following commercials, without worrying too much. Immediately afterwards we get a hard reaction to these devices. There are many forms our rejection to the Technium and to the devices can assume; such as neglecting them, sabotaging them, destroying them, and deactivating them.

Finally, there are those who believe that there is only one way to solve the device riddle. We must be able to *use* the new devices in a shared, convivial way, instead of *being used* by them in a private, isolated way. Also, we should be able to rewrite on the new devices what we hold dear about the declining world. Last but not least, we must be able to reinvent what we don't want to lose, and inject in the coming time what we want to find in it. This is the only way to solve the riddle, and our city will be able to face the plague that is scourging it.

G.EN.TE. is among the latter.

# Google, Kiva, and Wikipedia

Let's make a little *detour* in the flesh and blood of platforms, and let's assign ourselves a point in the map on which we are setting a course. A great, real risk of the web is to miss the complexity vision. The web allows us to build answers to many different needs. There are social networks to share good tips for diabetics, any kind of software for architects, platforms to peruse law books, allowing for a totally new usability. However, we notice a remarkable poverty of language. On Google, in fact, we can search for a "recipe for licorice ice cream," and we'll get the recipe; "how to do a 360i *redirect*," and we'll get the tutorial; "haute couture *promo codes*," and we'll get the coupons; "which is the most complex videogame existent, and how can I get it?" and we'll be given the answer.

This is a perfect behaviorist machine. To each stimulus corresponds a response. It can be constantly enhanced in each single detail. However, today it is impossible to ask questions to the G-shaped oracle, with all its million pages analyzed in a few tenths of a second, regarding abstract concepts, general questions, ethical and political positions, historical and theoretical dilemmas.

If we ask for Brecht's poems, we'll get them. But we'll only be able to ask for them if our high school teacher instructed us to love them. If Brecht or we, or both, would have been raised inside Google, as it is today, this search could never have taken place, because poems, artworks, as well as ethico-political ideas, and general questions cannot fit in a *keyword* system. This wouldn't be a problem if Google weren't, every day more, *running the world*; that is to say, if it weren't—so to speak—a revolution comparable to that of the print, with which clearly a great part of the oral culture got lost forever. A similar loss of poems, artworks, ethico-political ideas, and general questions, is something we simply could not bear. One of the first things we can do not to let this happen is to appreciate, guard, and learn a great lesson from the complex visions. As heuristics to clarify this concept, we'll oppose it to what we can call "simple device." Let's make an example; Kiva.org, one of the noblest enterprises on the web since its inception, thanks to the 110 million dollars distributed, after being simply collected online.

Kiva does what every other *platform*—worthy of its name—does; it enables relationships that were impossible before. In this case, it allows the users, anywhere they are, to adopt single projects in the poorest regions of the world, through microcredit and micro donations.

Kiva demonstrates, with its own existence, that the Internet can be much more than a simple conglomeration of marketing and narcissism. However—with all the respect we have for Kiva, and wishing it all the best—what we said before doesn't change. Kiva belongs to the “sum of simple devices” structure that the web is assuming. A structure of very advanced micro-solutions to completely operationalized needs. Of course, also G.EN.TE. will invent its own “simple devices.” Or else, it couldn't be on the Internet. And yet, we don't want to lose sight of the complex visions, of the importance of the complex visions.

Wikipedia, for example, is a complex vision.

Twenty-five years ago was the time of the collective infatuation with the wonders of artificial intelligence, with the miracles of robotics, and with these great machines and robots that would have been delivered by military technique. As they often say in America, try to imagine if twenty-five years ago someone would have said, “In a near future, there will be an encyclopedia with over 3 million entries, written in over 270 languages. It will be compiled voluntarily and for free by experts from all over the world. It will feature pages over pages of discussion behind each entry, and it will be easily expanded and monitored in a structured and extended system.” Whoever would have pronounced this “try to imagine” twenty-five years ago, at the time of the miracles of robotics, would have been called a madman. Therefore G.EN.TE. is grateful to Jimmy Wales and his pack, for having donated us this complex vision.

# Google and del.icio.us

We call “performative” those speech acts that cause what has been uttered to happen. The action is implied in the utterance. Google is performative in a double meaning. First, its search algorithm—thanks to which Google became unique and winning—doesn’t just allow to find what is searched (utterance), but it permits only the existence of what can be found (action). All what cannot be isolated, atomized, read by spiders, and last but not least, linked to, cannot be indexed by Google, and cannot therefore be found on the Internet. This content that cannot be found becomes a sort of strange suicidal animal in the web biosphere. The poetry of a tale would then want to see Google as a horrifying monster, which encompasses and regurgitates colors, shapes, words, allowing only some of them to exist. There might then be a little girl guarding the secret to deactivate the monster. However, we have a second, subtler sense in which Google’s word is performative; the visitor’s performance. The user types in (utterance), and makes it happen (action). He inserts a signifier and its relata appear.

The infinite reference of semiosis gets automatically ordered around the shape given to it by the user. Google doesn't *enact* a message, but it *reacts* to it. It doesn't *enact* a need, but it *reacts* to it. It follows the ways of evolution.

What we called above "humanist intellectual," could say, "*Apparently*, Google is built around the visitor's performance, around his ten or fifty keystrokes a day typed in the candid mask titled by the G." *Apparently*, Google is built around the man. In reality, though, Google is built around the performance of algorithms, machines, robots, military technique, enveloping and standardizing all data. And yet there is something more to it than this cheap dreariness.

Google swept away its precursors, as old dinosaurs, and along with them also the last attempts to organize knowledge through human minds. We still have difficulties understanding the real extent of this. It's not possible anymore, and it will never be possible again, for *one* man or *one* group of men to organize knowledge.

Del.icio.us, however, teaches us that even if this is true, the man-machine match is still far from being won by the machine, and it injects a principle of organization (not the algorithm, but the *communities*) which—although today largely unrecognized—might be able to reserve us some surprises in the future.

## On the structure of knowledge

Seth Godin, arguably the greatest contemporary marketer, helps us focus on a concept. It is the apologue of his advisory service at Disney, the same *company* that in the last ninety years has been showering us with its cartoons, surprisingly managing to remain on the *leading edge* of each technological change. Under the push of barbarian start-ups, also Disney, as all other large *corporations*, started to suffer, and that's precisely why it asked Seth for help. In extreme synthesis, his response was along these lines. Disney has dozens of departments, from videos to *storytelling*, from comic strips to *gadgets*, from design to advertisement in the parks, and so on; so, in the era of the Internet, they had built a web department, which was broadcasting on the web the results of all other departments. Seth told Disney that this department would have been the reason for Disney's doom. Because, in his opinion, having a separate department meant comparing the web to the print or the television, and misunderstanding its ever-changing structure.

What Disney should have done, according to Seth, was to eliminate this department and spread it over the other departments. That is, acting so that each department would know internally and first-hand all movements of the Internet, and would have the possibility to move within the Internet in a timely fashion. The meaning of ‘parks’ on the Internet will not be determined by a web department procedure, which deals with parks the same way it deals with cartoons (what we called above military dress). It will be determined by the start-up of a person who loves parks, and knowing the subject, knowing the *communities*, knowing the fresh potential of interaction offered by the Internet, would invent a new platform for parks, or a new way to interact on the existing platforms. This, translated in our language, was the word of Seth. (We spoke here of parks, but we might have mentioned museums, newspapers, foundations, etc.).

What we really want to say is that for this “mutant dress” to take place, it’s necessary to have a widespread circulation of knowledge, both in its fundamentals and in its outposts. *Analytics, leads, SEO, e-mail, social media, tools, usability, mobile*: each of these concepts is dependent on the others, and at the same time it is required by them. Now, each of these concepts has been widely spread in the United States, and is freely available to anyone who wants to build a start-up from the tranquility of his own bedroom. How could that same person hire one of the few highly-priced consultants who are the only repositories of knowledge on our side of the world?

G.EN.TE will be also this, a hatchery of knowledge, and at the same time, a hatchery of business. We feel this is neither little nor bad. And yet we have left behind us too many readings and too many dreams to invest good energies in a position that wouldn’t be—and couldn’t be—other than that of *good followers*, resigned to ‘run after’ a universe already otherwise determined. On this point our match result is not predictable, and we are trying to win our match speaking about difference.

## What's at stake when speaking about difference?

The web has been thought and planned in a land of large prairies and large spaces, where you never have to worry about finding a parking space, where you can drive for a whole week and still find people speaking your own language. As we are used to be able to find always someone able to speak or, at least, to translate our language, no matter how far we are going. Advocating what we're mentioning here would take pages over pages, and we could not treat it as lightly as we're doing here, as if Europe was the land of extensive difference. Beyond abstract considerations and extemporaneous sociological disquisitions, we can isolate three concrete points, which can be outlined in a few strokes, and through which such an important concept comes to life.

First, the difference between languages and cultures; among the hundreds of thousands of *websites* that populate the *World Wide Web*, the systematic multilingual works are just two, and we named them already: Google and Wikipedia.

Of course there is also Coca-Cola, and a whole list of multinational *brands*, but that's all another story. For example, we noticed that there are no multilingual publishing platforms. So a system, in which various languages could actually interact and create a virtuous circle of exchange, instead of separate tracks, is still to come. And yet, such a system is certainly possible on the Internet. As Europeans, dealing everyday with the limits of our language, the splendor and the isolation of our literature, we would have perhaps some cards to play.

Second, the difference among and within different industries (both *for-profit* and *nonprofit*); also here, as above, we won't delve into a thorough analysis of American capitalistic structure, nor will we strike up a paeon for the Italian SMEs, but we will only point out another fact. When we think of a 'social network,' we think of Facebook and Twitter; or, to put it differently, we think of large systems in which all subjects—be they teens, *marketers*, or whoever else—act in the same way, each for a different reason.

When we think of a ‘professional social network,’ we think of the original LinkedIn, and of its imitators Xing and Viadeo, that connect *businesspeople* from all over the world and that work mainly to help international colleagues and acquaintances keep in touch, to allow for some personal research and, why not, also to provide some *lead generation*. Certainly, in 5 years there will be a platform taking advantage of the web 2.0 technologies to resemble the structure of a complex industry, be it for-profit or nonprofit, and permit different relationships for different reasons and to different subjects (people, groups, organizations), but nowadays such a platform still needs to be devised.

Third, the difference intended as otherness.

G.EN.TE. will be an NPO that will deal mainly with psychiatric patients, political refugees, former inmates, and more in general with the large groups of vulnerable people that are widespread in our cities. When taking care of social and charity work, there are two possible ways to follow: the first is pursuing integration at all costs; the second, although difficult, is appreciating and emphasizing the intrinsic potential of people different from us.

G.EN.TE. is going for the latter, and is not alone at that. Without delivering impressive speeches, G.EN.TE. believes that also this, actually especially this, could be a moment of invention, instead of an obstacle.

# Farewell

We tried to outline a new concept, G.EN.TE., which refers—at the same time—to a reflection on what is technology nowadays, to a reflection on a possible community, and finally to a pragmatic strategy to revive and return to the city a space that is now empty. Although the final result is not predictable, our attempt is to build, in the chaos we live in, a platform that should be at the same time incisive and accessible.

Where, as we see it, incisive organizations (the renowned *excellences*) often are not accessible, while accessible ones (which still think it's important to be open to dialogue and participation) are hardly able to be incisive. So, G.EN.TE. will not hide itself behind an extreme specialization, thanks to which it would have the possibility to be have an impact on the existent. However, it won't try to find consolation either if—having lost any grip on reality—it will be, at least, accessible. G.EN.TE., community of exiles and inventors, we wish you to be so vertical to be incisive, and so broad to be accessible, so we will be able to grow fond and feel proud thinking of you.

*Nicht um die Erfinder von neuem Lärme:  
um die Erfinder von neuen Werthen  
dreht sich die Welt; unhörbar dreht sie sich*

*F. Nietzsche, Von grossen Ereignissen*

*Not around the inventors of new thunders,  
but around the inventors of new values,  
doth the world revolve; inaudibly it revolveth.*

*F. Nietzsche, Great Events*



On the birth of G.EN.TE.

Finished printing on May 2010

*All contents are published under a Creative Commons*

*Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives General Public License 2.5 Italy.*