

CITY & COMMUNITY - VISUAL & PERFORMING ARTS - TRAVEL - FASHION & STYLE - FOOD

# BLENDING

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## *en/Visible*

A Florence far away from the routes of tourism, lived and recounted by those whose daily lives are the city and who imagine a different future for it.

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Direttore Responsabile / Editor-in-chief  
Matteo Brogi

Caporedattore / Editorial Director  
Grace Joh

Coordinamento editoriale / Managing Editor  
Federico Cagnucci

Coordinamento studenti / Student Editors  
Renee Puno, Yun-Yen Chuang

+++++

IN REDAZIONE / MASTHEAD

Redazione / Copy Editors  
Renee Puno, Katelynn Rusnock, Laurel Yetter

Progetto grafico e impaginazione /  
Graphic design and layout  
Federico Cagnucci

Fotografi / Photographers  
Tiffany Aguiar, Yun-Yen Chuang, Holly Ciocci,  
Nicolette Sarzosa, David Weiss, Laurel Yetter

Illustratori / Illustrators  
Yun-Yen Chuang

Copertina / Cover By  
Federico Cagnucci

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Editore / Publisher  
Florence Campus per INGORDA Editore  
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# BLENDING

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*A Day in the Life of...*

## WRITER



VANNI  
SANTONI

BY BLENDING STAFF

Illustration by  
YUN-YEN CHUANG

## UNWRITTEN

*Writer Vanni Santoni is a literary treasure cove when it comes to invisible people and places. He writes about the little known facts and secrets of Florentine streets weekly for the Corriere Fiorentino newspaper, and the characters of his books range from faceless tourists to emarginated souls. He is the cofounder of Scrittura Collettiva Industriale, which has perfected a method for collective novel writing and released a book on Italian partisans written by 115 authors.*

Florence very much resembles an invisible city for its qualities – or, by now, flaws – that appear immutable, lapidary, and symbolically dense as its stones and marble. Immutable like the relics, tourists, students, ghosts, and wannabes that circle around its streets..



**VANNI, YOU'RE A WRITER, TRANSLATOR, AND JOURNALIST.**

**WHAT'S A TYPICAL DAY LIKE FOR YOU?**

In the past several years, books have become a totalizing activity, which is inevitable if you want to take the craft seriously. My typical day starts at 6am when I wake up and is spent alternating between working on a word processor and reading books by others.

**WHAT BROUGHT YOU TO THE PROFESSION OF WRITING?**

Halfway through 2004, I found an issue of *Mostro* at my university campus. It was a self-produced magazine created by folks who hung around an independently managed space called Elettropiù where I often went. I proposed a story and they responded with an invite to participate at an editorial meeting. It was a Friday night, inconceivable in those days, I was struck by how a group of individuals seriously dedicated their evenings to discussing their respective tests and reading classics in a way that was different from mine. It was, in fact, the writer's approach. I began to regularly attend meetings and write stories and poetry in the attempt to reach their level, which was already near professional. Thus the famous spark was ignited, and within less than a year, I was able to publish various articles on *Mostro*, begin *Personaggi precari*, an online literary project, and write a novel titled *Vasilij e la morte*. The book had even won a contest for new writers, but the publisher behaved inappropriately and never published the winners. The episode further incited me; the lost publishing opportunity was searing and could be relieved only by releasing something else, at any cost. After numerous failed attempts, in 2007 a selection of *Personaggi precari* won first place for a contest involving texts adapted from the web and was released in bookstores. During the same year, given that the writing frenzy born out of *Mostro* showed no signs of slowing down, I began to collaborate with various literary blogs and newspapers. I also founded the "SIC - Scrittura Industriale Collettiva" with Gregorio Magini, and I completed yet another novel. *Gli interessi in comune* was picked up by Feltrinelli and gave me enough exposure to dedicate myself full time to being a writer.

**WHAT IMAGES OR ASSOCIATIONS COME TO MIND WHEN THE WORDS "INVISIBLE" AND "FLORENCE" ARE PLACED TOGETHER?**

The phrase from Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, "Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears," which is also the epigraph of my novel *Se fossi fuoco arderei Firenze*, comes to mind. Florence very much resembles an invisible city for its qualities— or, by now, flaws – that appear immutable, lapidary, and symbolically dense as its stones and marble. Immutable like the relics, tourists, students, ghosts, and wannabes that circle around its streets.

**WHAT ABOUT WHEN THE WORDS "IMAGINE" AND "VISIONARY" ARE COMBINED WITH FLORENCE?**

Visionaries from centuries ago come to mind, since the city has significant difficulty in trying to imagine itself as something different and when seeking to have visions. San Miniato al Monte also comes to mind. It's essential to observe Firenze from there, especially when one's particularly receptive whether for natural or induced reasons, because it's where the rationalizing mind is able to imagine anything and everything. San Miniato al Monte is radius that generates Florence.

Photograph by  
DAVID WEISS

**YOU'VE WRITTEN ABOUT ALL TYPES OF CHARACTERS AND PLACES IN FLORENCE AND TUSCANY. WHICH HAVE BEEN THE MORE SILENT AND SUBTLE, LESS RESONATING FIGURES THAT HAVE BEEN THE MOST INTERESTING TO REVEAL TO READERS?**

Recently, I became very fond of an article about Costa Scarpuccia, written for my weekly Sunday column on Florentine streets in *Corriere Fiorentino*. Out of the minor Tuscan characters that populate my books – whether written by myself or collectively – I'm fond of Imbe from *Gli interessi in comune*, the janitor from *L'ascensione di Roberto Baggio*, Annabel (who's not so much a minor character considering that she's 1/23 of the novel) from *Se fossi fuoco arderei Firenze*, and Restighi and Castelli from *In territorio nemico*.

**DO YOU WRITE WHILE TRAVELING? HOW DO THE SENSATIONS AND EMOTIONS OF WRITING CHANGE AWAY FROM HOME?**

I'm often in Stockholm for long periods. The approach, however, doesn't change much, perhaps for the totalizing nature of writing. The environment clearly influences the final result, at times heavily, but it's something I realize only afterwards while the approach remains unchanged.

**THE BOOKS PRODUCED BY SCRITTURA INDUSTRIALE COLLETTIVA, WHICH YOU FOUNDED WITH GREGORIO MAGINI, ARE WRITTEN BY GROUPS SMALL AND LARGE UP TO 100 AUTHORS. LOOKING BACK ON THE VOLUMES THAT HAVE BEEN RELEASED UP UNTIL NOW, WHAT HAVE BEEN THE GREATEST SATISFACTION AND DISCOVERIES ABOUT COLLECTIVE WRITING FOR THE INVOLVED AUTHORS?**

I'd say that the biggest satisfaction is, without a doubt, the release of *In territorio nemico*, which is the culminating and crowning point of the collective itself. The best is just about to start – after six years of developing the writing method, the book will finally confront itself with the readers.

**WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUNG ITALIAN AND FOREIGN WRITERS IN TERMS OF TAKING INSPIRATION AND IDEAS FROM FLORENCE?**

Florence is entirely a question of esthetics. I advise to wander by night, when the city is deserted and it's possible to fully enjoy it.

**YOUR FAVORITE INVISIBLE CORNER OF THE CITY?**

The intersection between Via del Campuccio and Via delle Caldaie, where Caffè Notte is located.

**YOUR LATEST BOOK *SE FOSSI FUOCO ARDEREI FIRENZE*\* WAS CALLED AN "UNUSUAL GUIDE" AND A "GUIDE-NOVEL" THAT DESCRIBES ANOTHER FLORENCE. TITLE WORDPLAY PERMITTING, WHAT WOULD YOU ENVISION ARISING AS A FLORENCE-PHOENIX FROM THE CITY'S ASHES?** It's difficult to say, I used to repeat often that I'd like to demolish the entire Por Santa Maria area and substitute it with some sort of transparent absurdity born out of the mind of a megalomaniac architect. Then one day an architect friend (and member of the *Collettivomensa* magazine) explained to me that this operation would bring down the Duomo and thus I felt torn. Given how things are going these days I'm afraid that in the absence of the Duomo the flagship store of some luxury brand will be erected in its place. **B**

\*The title translates to "If I were fire I would burn Florence" and is inspired by the lines of 14th century Siense poet Cecco Angiolieri who wrote, "If I were fire I would burn the world."

BOOKS HAVE BECOME  
A TOTALIZING ACTIVITY [FOR ME],  
WHICH IS INEVITABLE IF YOU WANT  
TO TAKE THE CRAFT SERIOUSLY.



Photo Courtesy of  
VANNI SANTONI