

Fabrizio Nevola and David Rosenthal, ‘Locating experience in the Renaissance city using mobile app technologies: the *Hidden Florence* project,’ *Mapping the Early Modern City: Digital Mapping as Tool and Template for Social and Cultural Analysis*, ed. Nicholas Terpstra, London: Routledge 2016

Introduction: The kinetic city

Hidden Florence is a smartphone app in which a ‘contemporary’ character, a late fifteenth-century wool worker dubbed Giovanni, invites the user to go with him on two walks around the city.¹ The first walk is focused on the parish of Sant’ Ambrogio, the neighbourhood in which Giovanni lives; the second guides the user around the dense urban centre in which he works. Of all the 17 stops on Giovanni’s itinerary, Site 3 of the neighbourhood walk, via dei Pilastrini, may well be the least visually spectacular, yet it quickly takes us to the heart of the agenda that underpins the project – to explore how mobile technologies can offer historians a tool, and a methodology, for researching and conveying urban experience as a dynamic relationship between place and identity.

As the user walks into Via dei Pilastrini, they discover a fairly typical *centro storico* ‘canyon’. Two rows of apartment buildings, four storeys of shutter-blinkered windows, face each other across the narrow street. With earphones plugged in and one eye on the smartphone screen, they see their own geo-located avatar as it moves along a much earlier via dei Pilastrini, the one painstakingly drawn by Stefano Buonsignori in his 1584 map of Florence. [Figs 1 and 2] The Buonsignori map reveals that the streetscape of the past was also something of a canyon, a continuous wall of terraced dwellings, three storeys rather than the present four, typical of the housing developed by

¹ Released in July 2014 to the AppStore and GooglePlay, *Hidden Florence* is a collaboration with the developers Calvium Ltd, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC, UK) and published by the University of Exeter. For an accompanying website including all audio content, brief articles by the authors and details of the project team see: www.hiddenflorence.org. Unless otherwise stated all content in the app and website is by the authors. For reasons of space, footnotes focus on supporting the theoretical framing of the project rather than the extensive specialist scholarship that underpins the app’s content.

religious institutions in the predominantly artisan districts of the urban outskirts. After walking a few metres along Pilastrì, the app asks the user to find a hole in the wall, probably used for selling wine. Once they have found it, the user triggers the audio and Giovanni starts to talk. He tells the user that the house they are standing in front of is rented by the wineseller, an out-of-towner called Pierfrancesco, who lives there with his family of eight. The house next door is owned, unusually, by an artisan, a shoemaker who rents it to a dyer called Cesare, a man who is notoriously unlucky at dice. Further up, at the streetcorner, there are a couple of shops, a bakery and a firewood store, the latter run by a literate man who has also acted as scribe for the local confraternity for ten years. Giovanni continues in this vein for a minute and then says: “I know, I’m starting to sound like a *catasto* official doing the rounds for a tax census. But it is a kind of a census every time you walk down the street, it’s as if you’re measuring the neighbourhood.”

In via dei Pilastrì, the Giovanni character keys into a number of urban historical themes – neighbourhood and community, networks and literacy, streetcorners and shops as social junctions – and the ‘discover more’ audio as well as the brief articles on the app’s website delve into these issues further. But what the character also underscores is the significance of movement in this ecology of the street. In recent years, movement has become increasingly intrinsic to the analysis of everyday urban experience; indeed, recent sociology has coined the notion of a “mobility turn” in the humanities, a phrase designed to echo the “spatial turn” identified by the cultural geographer Denis Cosgrove more than a decade ago.² Historians of early modern Italy, adapting the ideas of influential thinkers such as Michel de Certeau, have started to incorporate everyday movement into an already vigorous scholarship addressing the spatialised politics of urban existence.³ Movement, essentially walking, is seen as

² T. Shortell and E. Brown, ‘Introduction: Walking in the European City’, in Shortell and Evrick (eds.), *Walking in the European City: Quotidian Mobility and Urban Ethnography*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2014, p. 5; D. Cosgrove, ‘Landscape and Landschaft’, *German Historical Institute Bulletin* 35, 2004, pp. 57–71. Highly influential here are M. de Certeau, ‘Walking in the City’, in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, pp. 91-109; H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.

³ F. de Vivo, ‘Walking in Renaissance Venice’, *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, **forthcoming or details**; N. Eckstein, ‘Florence on foot: an eye-level mapping of the early modern city in time of

one practice through which city-dwellers effectively produced urban spaces and social relations (and as “an intensely social activity”, as Filippo de Vivo points out, rather than the solitary and alienated practice sometimes imagined by the theorists of the twentieth-century city⁴). Walking, suggests Niall Atkinson, was one of the critical ways identity was shaped. In the often crowded streets of the early modern city, he argues, people were constantly engaged in re-locating and re-establishing their sense both of self and community externally, in a physical fabric alive with personal and familial, local and civic resonances.⁵

Hand-held devices enabled with GPS (global positioning systems) are clearly well placed to develop such lines of investigation, to apprehend and communicate the complex and above all kinetic relationship between city-dwellers and the built environment. Giovanni tells the user that simply walking down the street is like “measuring the neighbourhood”. Everyday movement, we want to suggest, recalled, affirmed and modified urban knowledge for the early modern city-dweller –and it frames that knowledge as a dialogue between the actor in motion and the urban fabric. As Giovanni measures, or recreates, the neighbourhood he also in effect maps his own sense of identity, tracing out ideas of self, territory and community as he puts one foot after another. Meanwhile, the 21st-century user is offered a sense – and an interpretation – of a non-elite Quattrocento man’s engagement with the journeys, spaces and objects that they, too, are experiencing. As they walk from site to site, they

plague’, *Renaissance Studies*, **details**. N. Atkinson, “Percorrere la Città”: Urban Itineraries in an Age before the Flâneur, *Renaissance Quarterly*, **details**. Our thanks to these three authors for sharing their articles pre-publication. Several collections attest to the recent focus on ‘spatial’ themes in early modern Italy: F. Nevola and G. Clarke (eds.), ‘Experiences of the Street in Early Modern Italy’, Special Issue, *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, 16, 2013, pp. 47-229; R. Laitinen and T.V. Cohen (eds.), *Cultural History of Early Modern European Streets*. Special Issue, *Journal of Early Modern History* 12, 2008; J. Paoletti and R. Crum (eds.), *Renaissance Florence: A Social History*, New York: Cambridge UP, 2006. See also F. Nevola, ‘Review Essay: Street Life in Early Modern Europe’, *Renaissance Quarterly* 66, 2013, pp. 1332-1345.

⁴ De Vivo, ‘Walking in Renaissance Venice’, **tbc, last par.**

⁵ N. Atkinson, ‘They Rang the Bells at the Wrong Time’, interview by D. Rosenthal and F. Nevola, 2011. Online <http://earlymoderncommunities.org/home/interviews-2/niall-atkinson> (accessed 20 June 2015)

are invited to confront the similarities and disjunctures between past and present, and to consider how getting there is as important as being there.

The sections that follow more fully unpack our approach in *Hidden Florence* and consider the potentialities and issues associated with locative media. The sections roughly mirror the way the app unfolds for the user – from the remarkably detailed 1584 Buonsignori map, which allows a degree of navigability and immersion not possible with previous maps of the city; to the specific sites and objects that engage the user with the material culture of public space; to the audio and the invented Giovanni character. Despite the chronological dislocation with the map, we chose to set the app historically around 1490. *Hidden Florence* was a research experiment, but it was also conceived as a pedagogical tool and a way to engage as wide a public as possible in what in effect is an alternative tour of the city. The Quattrocento and the early Medici tend to be the focus of the many history and art history courses run in Florence and they also represent the ‘Renaissance’ as widely promoted to tourists. Giovanni, pitched as a textile worker, was not only designed as a vehicle to explore everyday urban experience, but to raise questions about perception and the politics of place in a period most visitors will already have encountered through the city’s monumental sites and its most mythologised figures.

Buonsignori’s map and locative media

Like the DECIMA project that constitutes the primary example for this collection, *Hidden Florence* adopts Stefano Buonsignori’s map. As far as we know, it is the first geo-located app to adopt a pre-modern map, what we might loosely describe as a sixteenth-century streetview interface.⁶ Towards the middle of the city centre walk, Giovanni brings the visitor to the Piazza della Signoria (City Centre, Site 4). In Buonsignori’s map, the piazza is rendered as one of the largest open city-centre spaces, the surveyor’s south-western vantage point offering a clear view onto the square, which is dominated by the imposing mass of the Palazzo Vecchio [fig 3]. As

⁶ There are numerous precedents for the use of nineteenth-century maps. For a wider discussion of digital humanities adoption and use of early modern maps, see F. Nevola ‘Microstoria 2.0: Geo-locating Renaissance spatial and architectural history,’ in D. Jakacki, L. Estill and M. Ulliyot, (eds.), *Early Modern Studies and the Digital Turn: New Tools for New Research Questions*, Toronto: Arizona CMRS and Iter, 2015 [forthcoming].

is well-known, Buonsignori made his map for Grand Duke Francesco de' Medici during his tenure as court "cosmographer"; nowhere is this more evident than in the depiction of the Piazza della Signoria, which is placed at the visual centre of the huge (123x138cm) map.⁷ Significantly, the elaborate display of statuary assembled along the *aringhiera* and beyond to the Neptune fountain and Giambologna's equestrian monument of Cosimo I are prominently visible – the reordered princely space that supplanted the civic centre following the Medici accession.⁸ But Giovanni, speaking to us from the latter decade of the the fifteenth century (almost a century before the map was made) has a different point to make – about rare citizen participation in *parlamenti* and popular politics in the piazza. He invites the viewer to look for the fourteenth-century marble sculpture of Justice, high up above the arcade of the Loggia dei Signori. A symbol of the city's pre-ducal republican institutions, the loggia is rendered invisible in Buonsignori's map, whose perspectival angle privileges sites of Medicean monarchical rule over monuments of civic government.

This is a powerful reminder of the fact that the cartographic gaze is not necessarily objective, and that urban space as it is constituted on the printed page of the map represents the politics of sixteenth-century Medici patronage.⁹ Buonsignori's was an innovative piece of map making, combining a more traditional axonometric ("birds-eye view") approach with the more technically accurate ichnographic (figure ground) survey to create an unusual compound view of clear street networks and recognisable elevations.¹⁰ Thus the key network of streets can be understood – and is indeed revealed to be quite similar to the modern layout in most areas – while landmarks also stand out as prominent. This combination lends itself especially well to the function of

⁷ F. Else, 'Controlling the Waters of Granducal Florence: A New Look at Stefano Bonsignori's View of the City (1584)', *Imago Mundi*, 61, 2009, pp. 168-85, esp. 168-70.

⁸ As Else, 'Controlling the Waters', makes clear the addition of the Cosimo I equestrian monument appears in the second printing of the map in 1594 by Girolamo Franceschi (this is the edition used throughout this collection). M. Cole, *Ambitious form: Giambologna, Ammanati, and Danti in Florence*, Princeton [N.J.]: Princeton UP, 2011, pp. 244-82.

⁹ A recurring theme in F. Fiorani, *The Marvel of Maps: Art, Cartography and Politics in Renaissance Italy*, New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2005, and the more military-political M. Pollak, *Cities at War in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

¹⁰ T. Frangenberg, 'Chorographies of Florence: The Use of City Views and City Plans in the Sixteenth Century', *Imago Mundi*, 46, 1994, pp. 41-64; F. Else, 'Controlling the Waters'.

depicting a version of city in which particular monuments stand out in the city fabric – a representational form loaded with period-specific meaning.

In the DECIMA project, the precision of the sixteenth-century map has been updated and rendered GIS-compliant, so that information from the census documents can be accurately plotted using location coordinates.¹¹ As Leah Faibisoff shows elsewhere in this collection, by understanding the movement of census officials along the city streets as they compiled their documents, it is possible to propose a plausible location for each household and shop they visited.¹² While DECIMA's use of the map is locked to a detailed GIS rendering, the approach we took with the app designers we worked with at Calvium was somewhat more approximative and experiential. In *Hidden Florence*, Buonsignori's map is adopted as a navigational tool – not something it was designed for – allowing modern-day users to walk through the city and experience the streets and piazzas as they are depicted in the Renaissance map. The GPS functions of the smartphone plot the user's location – using a simple avatar, a Renaissance-robed version of the Google streetview yellow man – and allow the authors to present information to them as they approach sites of significance for Giovanni, the guide-character.

Within the app, we wanted to show the user their location on the historic Buonsignori map as well as on a modern street map of Florence.¹³ That meant turning the historical map into a set of map tiles that could be selected and presented by the app as appropriate, while also providing three map zoom levels to give the user both an overview of the neighbourhood and a detailed view of a few local streets. The superb

¹¹ D. J. Bodenhamer, 'The Potential of Spatial Humanities,' in *The Spatial Humanities: GIS and the Future of Humanities Scholarship*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2010, pp. 14-30; I. N. Gregory and A. Geddes, *Towards Spatial Humanities: Historical GIS and Spatial History*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2014.

¹² L. Faibisoff, "The route of governmentality: Surveying and collecting urban space in ducal Florence" [need to complete]. Since GIS referents have to be unique, complicating factors such as multi-level occupancy –the fine grain of urban living – are somewhat homogeonised in the DECIMA-Buonsignori streets.

¹³ Thanks to Richard Hull (Calvium) for providing a brief account of the technical transfer process on which this paragraph is based: www.hiddenflorence.org/about/about-bonsignori-map/, accessed 10 June 2015.

detail of Buonsignori's printed map made this zoom function possible, but also raised problems relating to how to limit the amount of memory needed to build the map into the app. Consequently, we created historic tile sets only for the areas of Florence visited through the app. Having selected the relevant sections of Bonisignori and stitched them together as a composite image in an image editor, this was rotated, scaled and skewed until it lined up with a modern street map imported as a base layer (OpenStreetMap). When the match was good, we discarded this layer and exported the composite historic image. Finally, we geo-located that image by defining the latitude and longitude of its borders. The end result is a historic Google-like map that provides an amazingly accurate representation of what would have been around the visitor in Buonsignori's time.

The use of the historic map as a navigational tool both historicizes the experience of moving through the city and estranges the user from their surroundings; by so doing it highlights ways in which the Florence of today is different from its Renaissance self. The historical elisions and inconsistencies that occur between the app's visual interface map (a rendering of the city in the 1580s) and the narrative underpinning the discussion of the site (located 1490) also offer a useful entry point to thinking about locative media and the creative practice that underlies the app design. Apps like *Hidden Florence* encode content (sound, film, text etc.) onto fixed places, identified by their geo-spatial codes (e.g. GIS), and trigger that content by the user's movement into their proximity (using geo-fences or i-beacons, etc.).¹⁴ Tagging information to place in such a way that it can be unlocked by movement has been termed "urban markup", a process enabling information to be encoded onto the fabric of the city in far more informal ways than epigraphs, inscriptions or signage.¹⁵ The implications for

¹⁴ For a broader discussion of locative media as a digital humanities practice see J. Farman (ed.), *The Mobile Story: Narrative Practices with Locative Technologies*, London: Routledge 2013. Also G. Goggin and L. Hjorth (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Mobile Media*, London: Routledge 2013 and the special issue R. Wilken (ed.), 'Locative media', *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 2012, 18:3.

¹⁵J. Farman, 'Storytelling with mobile media', in Goggin and Hjorth, *The Routledge Companion*, pp. 528-37, esp. 529-32 follows M. McCullough, 'Epigraphy and the public library', in F. De Cindio and A. Aurigi (eds.), *Augmented Urban Spaces: Articulating the Physical and Electronic City*, Burlington and Farnham: Ashgate 2012, pp. 61-72.

such technologies – which in quite simple ways visualise the long-established concept of the city as palimpsest – for urban and architectural history are significant.¹⁶ On the one hand the approach enables a more embodied, practised research process, which is discussed further in the following section. On the other, working with multiple sorts of information – the underlying base map, the historic Buonsignori map, the historical content voiced by the Giovanni character, the modern photographic cues delivered on screen and the present-day urban fabric itself – the app can be understood as a locative media experiment which highlights the degree to which the city can be experienced as historically permeable, adaptive and layered.¹⁷

Thus, when Giovanni steps into the Piazza della Signoria, he is at once in the 1490s, in the 1580s and in the present day. While he describes fifteenth-century popular government practices of groups gathering in the piazza to voice, at least in theory, the opinion of the crowd, as users we to some extent experience his account informed by the crowds (of tourists) that fill the piazza with us, while at the same time we might historicise that view through the representation of it by Buonsignori, visible on screen. In spite of the fact that only a brief account is provided of the phenomenon (Giovanni speaks for no more than two minutes in any one site), users will understand the visual and social history of that particular space in quite a different way to how they might through more traditional text-based communication. Through the affordances of locative media, sensory experience – audio, visual, environmental – is placed at the heart a new way of approaching and understanding historical “data”.

If we return to the via dei Pilastri example discussed at the outset, we might contrast Buonsignori’s view with that which emerges from the 1561 *Decima* documents. The former offers a fairly generic view of a working-class residential district with simple housing scarcely differentiated along the street front, while the archival document

¹⁶ T. Presner, D. Shepard, and Y. Kawano, *HyperCities: Thick Mapping in the Digital Humanities*, Cambridge Mass.: Harvard UP, 2014.

¹⁷ Locative media’s creative practice is the subject of growing scholarly attention, for which see collections in the notes above for numerous examples; also useful are the more critical stances of N. Thrift, ‘Lifeworld Inc—and what to do about it,’ *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 29:1, 2011, pp. 5-26 and M. Tuters, ‘From mannerist situationism to situated media’, *Convergence: International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 18:3, 2012, pp. 267-282.

offers a highly detailed record of largely rented housing in multiple ownership, of workers and their professions, mouths to be fed, and rent due, some of it to the nearby nuns of Sant' Ambrogio. In *Hidden Florence* a compound understanding is proposed, by which a user walking along the street is offered a sense of who might have lived behind these doors, and what their stories were – Buonsignori's map, combined with the modern city, comes together to unpack the dense archival evidence so that we can see and hear the streetscape of the neighbourhood.

Material culture of urban space

Rendering Buonsignori's map responsive to movement through the smartphone or tablet is only really the first step in the process by which *Hidden Florence* engages the user. The second step is to return the user to a more direct dialogue with the extant city fabric at selected sites, where material evidence provides the visual cue for the brief commentaries on everyday life provided by the Giovanni character. While much of the content and interpretation voiced by Giovanni might be described as socio-cultural history, the *Hidden Florence* app seeks also to be a work of art and architectural history, in that it engages the user above all in exploring the extant material culture of the public spaces of the Renaissance city. In so doing, we would argue that it also reshapes our understanding of the embodied experience of urban space and the complex meanings inscribed on particular places in the past.

We might consider the next site in the neighbourhood walk following via dei Pilastrini, the Monteloro tabernacle on the northern corner of the intersection of via dei Pilastrini and Borgo Pinti (Sant' Ambrogio, Site 5). Florence, like most Italian cities, is peppered with street-shrines which mostly cluster around street corners [**figs 4-5**]. As Edward Muir has pointed out, they are a visual reminder of how the sacred permeated everyday life in Italian cities, as people moved around doing their daily business.¹⁸ While a number of the more significant Florentine tabernacles have undergone

¹⁸ E. Muir, 'The Virgin on the Street Corner: The Place of the Sacred in Italian Cities', in *Religion and Culture in the Renaissance and Reformation*, ed. S. Ozment, (*Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies*, XI), Kirksville, Missouri, 1987, 24-40; also F. Nevola 'Surveillance and the street in Renaissance Italy', *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, 16, 1/2, 2013, 85-106. M. Holmes, *The miraculous image in Renaissance Florence*, New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2013, ch. 3 on the topography of the sacred.

restoration in recent years, attention has tended to focus on the paintings that adorn these streetside shrines, with the prevalent concern of art historians to establish their attribution, and in many cases guarantee their preservation through relocating the often damaged frescoes to museums.¹⁹ Much less attention tends to be afforded to their physical placement, its wider urban context and the social histories of devotional practices that rotated around these objects and sites. Giovanni observes:

I don't usually come up this way...

I know! I can hear you saying it's just a block from where I live, in Sant' Ambrogio. But the thing is, this is another district, someone else's turf.

This *canto* or street corner tells the story. Look at the street shrine there, on the left. It's a pretty old painting – they say it's been there for generations. But the symbols in the frame – they were added just a few years ago. They show golden hills and a cross above them – *monti d'oro* – That's the name of these crossroads.

Look on the other side of the street and you'll see another stone marker - just like the one I showed you at Sant' Ambrogio. This is another *potenza* neighbourhood. It's the Monteloro *potenza* territory, and as the stone says they fear God, *timor domini*; you'll hear those words from every fraternity in town. In fact, there was a tavern here – the Candeli (the candles) – that was only just recently closed down because people got too rowdy ... too close to Our Lady you see. It's also too close to the nunnery of Santa Maria Maddalena, just up the road there. That symbol with the hills? That's the convent's symbol [...].

By choosing the Monteloro tabernacle, the first aim of the app trail is to draw the user's attention to an all-too-often overlooked feature of the streetscape, the sort of site whose very ubiquity and association with popular devotional practice sets it apart from the body of works traditionally invested with scholarly attention. Giovanni's commentary then inscribes the site with a variety of overlapping meanings that contextualise those practices in the light of everyday neighbourhood community life. In the second half of his account, he explains how the shrine is managed by the men

¹⁹ See for example A. Paolucci (et al. eds.), *Arte, storia e devozione. Tabernacoli da salvare*, Florence: Centro Di, 1991; scholarship tends only to focus on the images, often indeed cropping out all context from published photographs.

of a local confraternity, who keep the site clean and dignify the Madonna with a crown and robes on special occasions, and even that its name derives from the coat of arms of “monti d’oro” (golden hills topped by a cross) of the nearby convent of Santa Maria Maddalena.²⁰ But Monteloro is also the name of one of the city’s carnivalesque artisan brigades (*potenze* or ‘powers’) that carved out ‘kingdoms’ across Florence, a neighbour and sometimes rival to Giovanni’s own brigade of the Red City (Sant’Ambrogio, Site 1). This is brought home by directing the viewer’s gaze across the street to the Monteloro *potenza*’s territorial stone marker, a visible expression of a largely ‘secular’ tavern-based sociability – in this case the tavern that intermittently existed on the same street-corner.²¹

Here, then, the app moves out of the map into the physical fabric of the city. The Giovanni commentary is brief and touches on many issues – religious enclosure, confraternal devotion, carnival brigades and drinking, the signage assembled at a street corner – but they come together because the information is “performed” on site in a close interaction between the audio guide and the visual traces in front of the user. Thus the technology facilitates an embodied engagement with the meanings of the site, where our physical presence and experience of movement to and through that site is integral to our understanding of it.²² Sites such as streetcorners were nodes in networks of information, sociability and devotion; they were places where key services such as taverns, apothecaries, bakeries clustered, and where neighbourhood groups and local lineages marked themselves physically and ritually and through artistic and architectural elements such as loggias and street shrines. Writing for locative media makes these places newly significant, framing a process of enquiry that can lead to fresh research questions and findings.

²⁰ B. Paolozzi Strozzi, ‘Tabernacolo di Monteloro’, Paolucci (et al. eds.), *Arte, storia e devozione*, pp. 89-94..

²¹ For a first tavern called Candeli which probably closed in the 1470s, see *L'illustratore fiorentino: Calendario per l'anno bisestile 1836*, Firenze: Tipografia Galileiana, 1835, p. 105; on the *potenze*, D. Rosenthal, *Kings of the Street: Power, Community and Ritual in Renaissance Florence*, Turnhout: Brepols, 2015; for the Monteloro’s marker, pp. 19, 168.

²² D. Freedberg. ‘Movement, Embodiment, Emotion’, in *Histoire de l'art et anthropologie*, Paris, coédition INHA / Musée du Quai Branly («Les actes»), 2009 [on-line: accessed 1 July 2015, at <http://actesbranly.revues.org/330>]

Microhistory and the making of ‘Giovanni’

Engaging both researcher and user in a close reading of the relationship among actors, places and objects raises, as pointed out earlier, issues of perception and identity – and this leads to a closer consideration of the Giovanni character. Our decision in *Hidden Florence* to focus on everyday social experience and a non-elite perspective is informed to a significant degree by microhistorical approaches. First developed in Italy in the 1970s, in reaction to what was perceived as the perspective-flattening (we might say axonometric) scientism of quantitative history and the *longue duree*, *microstoria* is perhaps less a methodology than an “exploratory stance”.²³ Yet it has a number of persistent features. Most fundamental is the idea that a micro-analysis of specific scenarios and their actors can illuminate larger social and cultural processes, mentalities, conflicts and appropriations. In keeping with this, microhistorians have given ample room to contingency and agency, in particular (though not exclusively) the agency of non-dominant individuals or groups. In this respect, microhistory finds an affinity with the analysis of urban space and movement set out by De Certeau, who wanted to suggest that apparently simple activities such as walking constituted creative assertions of agency by ordinary city-dwellers – a politics of everyday life.²⁴ Lastly, microhistory has been distinctly committed to ‘thick’ description and narrative devices as a means of critically reconstructing experience, in short to bring the past to life.²⁵

Locative media offers a powerful vehicle for developing microhistorical-type approaches, and the *Hidden Florence* app represents one model for putting this into practice. Clearly the character at the centre of the app, ‘Giovanni’, is not a recovered

²³ J. Walton, J. Brooks and C.R.N. DeCorse, ‘Introduction’, in Walton, Brooks, DeCorse (eds.), *Small Worlds: Method, Meaning and Narrative in Microhistory*, School for Advanced Research Press, 2008, p. 4; C. Ginzburg, ‘Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know about It,’ *Critical Inquiry* 20, 1993, pp. 10-35. For recent assessments of microhistory by its practitioners, see S. G. Magnússon and I.M. Szijjártó, *What is Microhistory? Theory and Practice*, New York: Routledge, 2013, ch. 1; S. Bednarski, *A Poisoned Past: The Life and Times of Margarida de Portu, a Fourteenth-Century Accused Poisoner*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014, ch. 1.

²⁴ De Certeau, ‘Walking in the City’.

²⁵ T. Cohen, ‘The Larger Uses of Microhistory’, Microhistory Network. Online posting. http://www.microhistory.eu/the_larger_uses_of_microhistory.html (accessed June 19, 2015).

voice, a Ginzburgian miller contextualised and probed through narrative reconstruction. While there are parallels with microhistory's use of fictive techniques, he is entirely a fiction. We must also stress that there was no intention to invent an 'authentic' period voice, such as those attempted by Simon Schama in *Dead Certainties (Unwarranted Speculations)* or Robin Bisha with her invented voice of an eighteenth-century Russian noblewoman.²⁶ Giovanni, who addresses the present-day user directly, in non-period language, is unambiguously a device that playfully replaces the modern tourist guide with a pseudo-contemporary one. Nonetheless he sits loosely within this strand of experimental history. The reasons for choosing this model were linked to our desire to locate the experience of ordinary, often overlooked, Florentines. Certainly, there are non-elite sources that could have been used. The most obvious example is the diary of the apothecary Luca Landucci (1450-1516). Giovanni in fact refers to Landucci when he stands at the Strozzi palace (city centre, site 9), which was close to the apothecary's shop, and some of the detail of his narrative there is drawn from the diary.²⁷ However, our aim was to explore the journeys of a late fifteenth-century artisan man organised around routines of home (neighbourhood) and work (city centre). No single source could have provided a voice that would have allowed the linked-up and cross-referenced perspective that any Florentine would have had on the city as a whole and which we wanted to represent – at least not one that would have allowed us to engage users with a range of specific sites through the functionality of an on-site mobile app.

Here, inventing a character allowed a further degree of experimentation. Giovanni is pitched as a *battilano* or wool beater, a labourer at the base of the textile industry's hierarchy and a figure for whom little unmediated source material exists. We wanted to imagine not simply the urban world of a male labourer but how a 'descendent' of the revolutionary Ciompi wool workers of 1378 might read his city. In the introductory audio, Giovanni starts by saying he is a Florentine, baptised like every

²⁶ S. Schama, *Dead Certainties (Unwarranted Speculations)*, London: Penguin Books, 1991; R. Bisha, 'Reconstructing the voice of a Noblewoman of the Time of Peter the Great: Daria Mikhailovna Menshikova. An Exercise in Pseudo-Biographical Writing', *Rethinking History* 2, 1998, pp. 51-63; Magnússon and Szijártó, *What is Microhistory?*, pp. 70-2.

²⁷ L. Landucci, *Diario Fiorentino: dal 1450 al 1516. Continuato da un anonimo fino al 1542*, Florence: Sansoni, 1883, pp. 57-8 (for beginning of construction).

other inhabitant of the city in the ancient baptistery. But he quickly points out that he is “not a banker or great patron but a humble wool worker – Giovanni the magnificent wool beater”. His ironic use of the honorific customarily given to Lorenzo de’ Medici establishes a wry and politically aware voice, and he goes on to say that Lorenzo “orders the republic more or less as he likes it, a friend to all of us, so long as all of us show our love for the house of the Medici”. It is a theme continued at Site 1 in the neighbourhood walk of Sant’ Ambrogio, where Giovanni stands outside his parish church and invites the user to examine the stones wrapped around the streetcorner there by the Red City *potenza* [fig 6-7]. He explains that non-citizens such as him are barred from holding office in the Florentine republic but on certain festive days, the *potenze* elect kings (“I was king once myself”) and play a game that turns the world upside down, so that the rich briefly become the “subjects” of the poor.²⁸

Just how irreverent or reflective a ‘typical’ wool worker would have been is a matter of speculation, yet the voice we chose to give Giovanni is informed by a significant body of research. The brief revolution of 1378 was a bid by textile workers and other artisans excluded from guild government – the Ciompi labourers their most radical wing – to seize a place at the civic table. As Niall Atkinson explains in his article here, outlying neighbourhoods, such as Giovanni’s Sant’ Ambrogio, where most textile workers lived, were the flashpoints of worker organisation.²⁹ In the fifteenth century, that social geography became more emphatic as the palace building boom destroyed cheaper housing in the centre (one of the themes at the monolithic Strozzi Palace).³⁰ Yet while class tensions remained and there were sporadic instances of industrial agitation, there was far less class conflict. If this was due to a more vigilant government apparatus, it was also because Florentine elites, armed with a humanistic ideology of the civic good, closed ranks around a more conciliatory approach, a combination of charity, allowing workers to associate in confraternities, and the

²⁸ Rosenthal, *Kings of the Street*; on this site and the Red City marker, esp pp. 17-20.

²⁹ J. Najemy, *A History of Florence, 1200 – 1575*, London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008, chap. 6, with earlier bibliography.

³⁰ F. Nevola, ‘Home Shopping: Urbanism, Commerce and Palace Design in Renaissance Italy’, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 70.2, 2011, pp. 153-73.

cultivation of new patronal attitudes and vertical networks.³¹ This patronage –or ‘friendship’, as Giovanni uses the term – is especially evident in the case of the increasingly authoritarian Medici. Lorenzo de’ Medici openly sponsored the *potenze*, groups that speak at once to an acute awareness of the deep social rifts that all Florentines experienced in their daily lives and to the perceived need to mitigate hostility through a form of civic representation for the politically excluded.³²

The point was to underscore how contemporaries might read their city in very different ways, how place evoked and shaped a politics of memory and identity, of subjectivity in short. This is brought into stark relief at ‘iconic’ civic sites such as the guild church of Orsanmichele (City Centre, Site 2) and, as discussed above, at the Piazza della Signoria, where Giovanni goes as far as to say that “the game is rigged”. As Stephen Milner has argued, the Piazza may have been a space theatrically produced by dominant groups but it was also, borrowing from De Certeau, a ‘practiced place’, never able to shut down resistance to supposedly authoritative representational strategies.³³ In other words, reception, while sharing common features, partially depended on the receiver, the person standing in front of an object and the notions about self and community that they carried with them.

If these issues condition Giovanni’s voice, as the earlier examples of *via dei Pilastri* and the tabernacle at the Canto al Monteloro pointed up, there were a broad range of themes we wished to address. It is worth detailing one more site to give a fuller sense of how *Hidden Florence* exploits the ‘invented character’ model. The city-centre alley of *Vicolo del Giglio*, parallel to the main processional thoroughfare of *via dei*

³¹ F.W. Kent, ‘Be Rather Loved Than Feared’: Class Relations in Quattrocento Florence’, in W.J. Connell (ed.), *Society and Individual in Renaissance Florence*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002, pp. 13-50; M. Jurdevic, ‘Civic Humanism and the Rise of the Medici’, *Renaissance Quarterly* 52, 4, 1999, pp. 994-1020.

³² For Lorenzo de’ Medici’s ties with the *potenze*, see R. Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence*, New York: Academic Press, 1980, pp. 399-418; F.W. and D. Kent, ‘Two Vignettes of Florentine Society in the 15th Century’, *Rinascimento* 23, 1983, pp. 237-60.

³³ S.J. Milner, ‘The Florentine Piazza della Signoria as Practiced Place’, in Paoletti and Crum, *Renaissance Florence*, pp. 83-104, the relevant passage at p. 84.

Calzaiuoli, is one of two sites where Giovanni tells a complete story [Figs 8].³⁴ In this case there is a close affinity with the microhistorical mode, where a source ‘story’, often extrapolated from trial records, is critically reconstructed to shed light on broader issues. Here, while the effect is the same, the arrow points in the opposite direction: the story is a fiction, one into which a number of wider themes are condensed.

Giovanni invites the user to enter the alleyway and keep on walking until it comes out at the other side into the Corso.

And while you do, I’ve got a great story to tell you. One evening about a month ago, I came down here with a few wool-beaters from the shop. All men from the neighbourhood, all brothers in our *potenza* of the Red City. We were heading to the Fico. It’s the best-known tavern in Florence. A magnet for men of every rank. They come to satisfy their desires, for women... or men (some aren’t bothered either way). Or they come to gamble. Or just to talk and drink that golden Trebbiano wine. Anyway, we get to the Fico, and who’s there but a crowd of weavers from Santa Lucia all of them from the *potenza* of the Prato. Now the Prato is supposed to be the head of all the *potenze* in Florence, but we don’t worry too much about that. Well, we all start drinking together, but then a couple of the Prato boys start to give our Michele a hard time. They said he’s ‘kept like a women’ by some Giorgio or other. They even threaten to shop him for sodomy to the Officers of the Night. So our Michele throws a punch. Now I don’t know if Michele is a sodomite, and to be honest I don’t care (though he is getting a bit old for that kind of thing). But the sneering of these Prato weavers? None of us were going to put up with that. Before you know it we’re dragged in to a fight and the tavernkeeper throws the whole lot of us out into the alley. We should have left it there, but our blood was boiling. We picked up some stones and started a proper street fight. Just like we do as *potenze*. It was almost like May Day. Except on May Day the cops usually stay out of our way. Not this time. When we spilled out the other end of the alley and into the Corso they came at us. We had a bit of luck though. The Prato men were out first and the *birri* were too busy arresting them to notice us slipping away towards the Mercato...

The aim of this story – as with Giovanni’s narratives at several other city-centre sites – was to suggest how the urban core was a special arena of social interaction. By day, it was alive with the rhythms of work, commerce,, shopping and street performance;

³⁴ The other is in Piazza della Repubblica, the former Mercato Vecchio (City Centre, Site 6)

hundreds of wool-beaters such as Giovanni headed daily in to work in the *botteghe* of the wool merchants.³⁵ After dark, the city centre continued to exert a pull, mainly because of well-known taverns such as the Fico.³⁶ Bringing Giovanni to the Fico with cohorts from the Red City neighbourhood *potenza*, then having them run into members of the ‘imperial’ brigade from Santa Lucia sul Prato, on the opposite side of the city, was designed to suggest how city-centre taverns were hubs of sociability for men from across Florence.³⁷

At the same time, Giovanni’s story draws out aspects of Florence’s sexual topography, as well as reflecting on gender identities and masculinity more widely. The city centre, particularly its taverns, also featured prominently in the pursuit of sex; it was a hub both for prostitution – the Fico was one of the *osteria* in what effectively was the red light area between the Mercato Vecchio (Piazza della Repubblica) and the Baptistry – and for male sodomitical encounters.³⁸ While highly transgressive, as much as two-thirds of the male population aged under 40 in late fifteenth-century Florence had at some point been officially implicated as sodomites. Sex between men was widely understood as a life stage, linked to oppositional and hierarchical notions of gender. The ‘norm’ was for teenagers to take what was understood as a passive ‘feminine’ role, males in their twenties and thirties the active ‘masculine’ role.³⁹ Denunciations to the Officers of the Night, established in 1432 to

³⁵ M.L. Bianchi, M.L. Grossi, ‘Botteghe, economica e spazio urbano’, in F. Francesechi and G. Fossi (eds.), *Arti fiorentine. La grande storia dell’artigianato. Volume secondo. Il Quattrocento*, Florence, 1999, pp. 27-63; E. Welch, *Shopping in the Renaissance: Consumer Cultures in Italy 1400-1600*, New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2005; Nevola, ‘Home Shopping’.

³⁶ On the Fico and city-centre taverns more widely, see D. Rosenthal, ‘The Barfly’s Dream: Taverns, Community and Reform in Early Modern Italy’, in D. Toner and M. Hailwood, (eds.), *Biographies of Drink: A Case Study Approach to Our Historical Relationship with Alcohol*, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015, pp. 14-29.

³⁷ For the ‘emperor’ of the Prato, D. Rosenthal, ‘Big Piero, the Empire of the Meadow and the Parish of Santa Lucia: Claiming Neighbourhood in the Early Modern City,’ *Journal of Urban History* 32, 2006, pp. 677-92.

³⁸ N. Terpstra, *Lost girls: Sex and death in Renaissance Florence*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2010, ch. 2; M.S. Mazzi, *Prostitute e lenoni nella Firenze del Quattrocento*, Milan: Saggiatore, 1991; M. Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence*, New York: Oxford UP, 1996, pp. 159-61.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5 and *passim*.

prosecute the vice, regularly and derogatorily characterised the passive partner as being “kept like a woman”.⁴⁰ Thus the taunt against a member of Giovanni’s cohort labelled this man as emasculated and dishonourable. It would have been especially stinging since, as Giovanni implies, he was no longer a teenager. The ensuing street brawl represented a re-assertion of virility, and this is linked back to the more formal hypermasculine ritual of the *potenze*, in particular the stone fight, an emblematic form of combat between the city’s artisan kingdoms, a means by which they claimed public, and civic, space.⁴¹

5. Conclusion: The City as Experience

New technology delivered through an app allows the historian to revisit old questions in the study of the Renaissance city, and open up new ones; it enables both researcher and user to approach the evidence in such a way that knowledge is constructed in new ways, that are deeply inflected by their being experienced on site. Kevin Lynch was the first to show that the meanings of urban space, and how it is assembled to fashion an image, can only be accessed through experiential analysis.⁴² As Diane Favro indicated at the turn of the milenium, urban and architectural historians have followed the work of the urban theorist in seeking to recover the experience of cities in the past, through the adoption of empirical and experimental methods.⁴³ Moreover, as was discussed at the outset, the spatial turn in early modern studies can also be said to have taken a ‘mobility turn’, the new attention to the everyday politics of movement through the cities of the past arguably informed by the recent revival of psychogeography as both a practice and a literary genre.⁴⁴ Locative media both enable the delivery of historical *dérive* and serve to focus the researcher’s perspective on a fine-grained engagement with site-specific urban space, as opposed to the more

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 107-10.

⁴¹ Rosenthal, *Kings of the Street*, pp. 121-3, 237; more widely, R. Davis, ‘Say it with Stones: The Language of Rock Throwing in Early Modern Italy’, *Ludica* 10, 2004, pp. 113-28.

⁴² K. Lynch, *The Image of the City*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1960.

⁴³ D. Favro, ‘Meaning and Experience. Urban History from Antiquity to the Early Modern Period,’ *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 58, 1999, pp. 364-373; also G. Clarke and F. Nevola, ‘Introduction: Experiences of the Street in Early Modern Italy’, *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, 16, 2013, 1/2, pp. 47-55.

⁴⁴ For an overview: M. Coverley, *Psychogeography*, Harpenden: Pocket Essentials, 2010.

distant analysis of patterns and typologies – to evoke the dichotomy set up by de Certeau in his formulation of practiced place.

Thus, it is worth considering that while the Hidden Florence project began life as an experiment in the application of new technology for public engagement purposes, it has emerged as a worthwhile research practice in its own right. The format proposed is one that is infinitely extensible: given the wealth of studies on Florence it is easy to imagine multiple walks that would engage different aspects of the city's early modern history, all of them overlaid on Buonsignori's map. Our intended next step – which is inevitably contingent on further funding – is to develop an editing platform which would ease the creation and addition of new stories/walks to the existing app and possible new apps developed for other cities. Moreover, mobile technology offers considerable pedagogical opportunities. Initial feedback shows some take up by on-site courses, while trials with students suggest that writing for locative media involves students in compelling ways, by harnessing technologies with which they are familiar from their everyday lives, but which rarely find their way into the humanities classroom.

In conclusion, if we recall de Certeau's famous observation from the top of New York's World Trade Centre, we might say that the use of GPS location coordinates in H-GIS projects (such as DECIMA) maintains a panoptic and hierarchical vision on the city, while their adoption in locative media projects (such as *Hidden Florence*) delivered on site shapes an experience that aims to recover the practices of everyday life in the past. Here meaning, narrative and intention only emerge and make sense through the embodied practice of movement, and the kinaesthetic dialogue that is established between past and present and the standing material culture of the city.

Captions

Figure 1: via dei Pilastrri, detail from Stefano Buonisignori, *Nova pulcherrimae civitatis Florentiae topographia accuratissime delineate*, 1594 (Harvard Map Collection) as viewed on screen in the *Hidden Florence* app (© University of Exeter).

Figure 2: *Hidden Florence* app users on via dei Pilastrri (photo: authors)

Figure 3: Piazza della Signoria. Detail from Stefano Buonisignori, *Nova pulcherrimae civitatis Florentiae topographia accuratissime delineate*, 1594 (Harvard Map Collection) with *Hidden Florence* avatar (© University of Exeter).

Figure 4: Canto di Monteloro: intersection of via dei Pilastrri and Borgo Pinti. Detail from Stefano Buonisignori, *Nova pulcherrimae civitatis Florentiae topographia accuratissime delineate*, 1594 (Harvard Map Collection) as viewed on screen in the *Hidden Florence* app (© University of Exeter).

Figure 5: Canto di Monteloro: intersection of via dei Pilastrri and Borgo Pinti (photo: authors)

Figure 6: Red City Potenza stone on the corner of the church of Sant' Ambrogio (photo: authors).

Figure 7: Red City Potenza stone on the corner of the church of Sant' Ambrogio as viewed on the “found it” screen in the *Hidden Florence* app (© University of Exeter).

Figure 8: Vicolo del Giglio. Detail from Stefano Buonisignori, *Nova pulcherrimae civitatis Florentiae topographia accuratissime delineate*, 1594 (Harvard Map Collection) as viewed on screen in the *Hidden Florence* app (© University of Exeter).

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