



**MONASH** University

**Power and the Senses: The Embattled Sensescapes of  
Savonarolan Florence**

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Arts at

Monash University in (2023)

School of Philosophical, Historical and International Studies

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## Abstract

Between 1494 and 1498, the Italian city of Florence came under the influence of the Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola. The years of his meteoric rise and ascendancy were a highly conflictual time for Florence, as the Piagnoni (Savonarolans) attempted to execute a comprehensive program of political and spiritual reform against concerted political resistance. This thesis explores the role of the senses in informing the actions and motivations of the historical actors that participated in the dynamics of power in Savonarolan Florence. I probe how and why the creation, consumption and mediation of sensory experiences was crucial for the movers and shakers of 1490s Florence to negotiate the nature of social networks and relationships, as well as the hierarchies of power. By assessing the socio-political activities of both Savonarola and his opponents between 1482 and 1498, I explore how social actors and political groups contrastingly upheld and contested hegemonies, by not only creating but also limiting the possibilities of sensory experiences that comprised the fabric of urban life. Overall, my thesis argues that the deployment of sensory repertoires was essential for social actors and power structures to build consensus, mobilise support, institute reforms, and silence dissent. In so doing, I reveal that the creation and contestation of sensescapes was an essential mechanism of power dynamics in the social world of Renaissance Florence.

## Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis does not contain any material previously published or written by any other person unless so stated in the text of the thesis.

Signature:

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## Acknowledgement

There are several people that I need to thank for helping me elevate my thesis to a better standard than it would otherwise be. However, first things first. This thesis was supported by two scholarships: The Australian Government Research Training Program (RTP) Stipend Scholarship and the Monash Graduate Excellence Scholarship. I am immensely grateful to the Australian Government for its continual support for higher degree research, as well as to Monash University for investing in my potential by offering me this top-up scholarship. If not for these, my thesis could have been years away from submission.

The expert guidance of my supervisors, professors Carolyn Patricia James and Guy Geltner have been invaluable and essential to the completion of my thesis. No words can express how thankful I am to the both of them for agreeing to supervise my research. To Carolyn, my mentor and collaborator of four years, thank you for your continual support, expert guidance, and patience with my work. Many thanks for all the books you have lent me, all the resources you have made available to me, and all the wonderful opportunities you have presented me with to grow as a researcher and an emerging professional. As your last specialist HDR student before you close this chapter of your academic career, I hope I have not let you down. To Guy, *ti ringrazio*, for your pragmatism, straightforwardness, and perceptiveness in reviewing and commenting on my work. Your expertise and transparency in pointing out the various infelicities contained within my thesis drafts have been necessary and sobering reality checks that have prevented me from going down too many erroneous rabbit holes in my research. Thanks again to the both of you for encouraging me during my low points, for providing constructive criticism and feedback when needed, and giving coherence to my often-vague thought processes.

The completion of this thesis is also indebted to the unwavering support of Monash University's library services. Having completed the bulk of my research during the challenging times posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, the Matheson Library's document delivery team have been invaluable, for delivering volumes upon volumes of much-needed books to my home during the long months of lockdown, and for locating published sources unavailable in Australia that have been essential to the writing of this thesis. Special thanks also go to Yasmin Moore for contributing to the establishment of the library's document delivery facilities before her retirement in 2020. I was truly lucky to have met her by pure chance while attending the Monday night meditation sessions at the Buddhhaloka Centre of the Buddhist Society of Victoria in East Malvern. I would also like to thank Monash University's history librarian Melanie Thorne for helping me purchase the 2<sup>nd</sup> volume of Piero di Marco Parenti's *Storia Fiorentina* for the Matheson Library, another marquee published source for my research.

Gratitude goes to the wider postgraduate research community at Monash University's School of Philosophical, Historical, and International Studies (SOPHIS). Thanks first of all to my colleagues and mentors in Monash's Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (CMRS): to Lucy Moloney, Elizabeth Burrell, and Jonathan Lo. Working alongside them on the CMRS committee has been an invaluable opportunity for personal growth, as well as a welcoming outlet for me to present my research within a friendly and mutually supportive environment. Heartfelt thanks to my office mates, Marvin Martin, Kate Rivington, Becks Shin and Rachel Lansel, for their words of encouragement, their confidence in me, for all the lunches we have had together, and for keeping our often-isolating work environment lively. Thanks also to everyone in the CMRS and in my milestone review panels for reviewing, proofreading, and providing feedback on my chapter drafts and presentations. I have tried my best to put their sage advice into practice.

I must also thank my old mentors and friends, Professor Peter Howard, Dr. Lana Stephens, and Matthew Topp, for sparking my interest in Renaissance Italian studies in general. If I had not come on the Renaissance in Florence study tour in Prato back in 2018, I would probably have never done my honour's and my master's theses in this field and made all of the connections in the CMRS that I had.

Familial support is just as important as academic support. Thus, I most profusely thank my mum and my dad for supporting my decision to pursue a research degree in history. As the only arts and humanities specialist in my entire extended family, I am immensely indebted to my parents for trusting in my passion and talent for historical research, a trust that few other conventional Chinese parents so readily offer.

From the very bottom of my heart, I must thank the love of my life, Nguyen Huong Giang (Jenn), for accompanying me through all the two years it took to produce this thesis. She is my partner in life, my super best friend, and my most enthusiastic cheerleader. Without her sunny optimism and emotional maturity, I would have been a much weaker person; without her love and support, I would not have found as much personal value in my research as I do now. Through countless moments of self-doubt and despair, she has always been there for me like a beacon guiding me back on the right path. She has shared the entirety of this amazing journey with me, and so it only seems right that I dedicate this dissertation to her.

In my native Hokkien, I would like to tell all who have accompanied, assisted, and mentored me:

真感謝逐家個支持 [POJ: tsin kám-siā tàk-ke ê tsi-tshî], Thank you for all of your support.

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## Introduction

On the morning of 28 February 1496, the Dominican preacher and self-professed prophet Girolamo Savonarola mounted the pulpit of Santa Maria del Fiore, Florence's cathedral, to preach a sermon to thousands of Florentines gathered to hear him. By then, he was in the process of carrying out a sweeping program of moral and spiritual renewal set to purge Florence of immorality and to create a society living in perfect harmony with the precepts of the Gospel.<sup>1</sup> Towards the end of the sermon, he singled out a seemingly innocuous donut shaped cake made of sweet dough and raisins, typically sold during Carnival, as the subject of one of his hallmark verbal assaults. His mighty voice booming across the void of the cathedral, he instructed his devotees to "honour the holidays very little, and everything sold during the holidays, especially the *berlingozzi*."<sup>2</sup> He subsequently authorised the *fanciulli*, also known as the Piagnoni (Savonarolan) religious youth brigades, to "confiscate [the *berlingozzi*] from those who sell them and eat them."<sup>3</sup> The diarist and apothecary Luca Landucci reported bands of *fanciulli* inquisitors clearing the streets of baskets of *berlingozzi*.<sup>4</sup>

Why were these *berlingozzi* targeted for censure and what did their prohibition reveal of Piagnoni sensibilities? In the Tuscan dialect, the word *berlingozzi* derived from the verb

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<sup>1</sup> Stefano Dall'Aglio, *Savonarola and Savonarolism* (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2010), 23-34; Lorenzo Polizzotto, *The Elect Nation: The Savonarolan Movement in Florence, 1494-1545* (Oxford: New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1994), 1-7; Nicolai Rubinstein, "Savonarola on the Government of Florence," in *The World of Savonarola: Italian Elites and Perceptions of Crisis*, ed. Christine Shaw and Stella Fletcher (Aldershot; Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2000), 42-54.

<sup>2</sup> All translations of primary source excerpts in this thesis are mine unless otherwise stated. The original Italian or Latin-language sources are referenced in the footnotes, in this case, Girolamo Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Amos e Zaccaria*, ed. Paolo Ghiglieri, 3 vols. (Rome: Belardetti, 1971), I:334.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*; Polizzotto, *Elect Nation*, 1: *Piagnoni* (wailers) was an insulting epithet that the anti-Savonarolans initially coined to degrade Savonarola's supporters by questioning their sanity. They later took possession of the name as a testament to their distinctiveness and spiritual providence.

<sup>4</sup> Luca Landucci, *Diario fiorentino dal 1450 al 1516*, ed. Jodoco Del Badia (Florence: G.C. Sansoni, 1883), 126.

*berlingare*, meaning to chat or prattle on with a gut full and a belly heated by wine.<sup>5</sup> This then spawned two related nouns, *berlingaiuolo* and *berlingatore*, which referred to people who delighted in “filling their mouths, gobbling and prattling”.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, *Berlingaccio* was also what Florentines called Fat Thursday, the last Thursday of Carnival, a time for feasting and banqueting.<sup>7</sup> The *berlingozzo* was also the subject of Lorenzo de’ Medici’s carnival song, the *Canzona de’ Fornai*, composed less than a decade earlier, which would have been widely sung by revellers in the streets.<sup>8</sup> In many of Lorenzo’s songs, the act of baking (*fornare*) is a metaphor for fornication, and pastries often carry phallic symbolism.<sup>9</sup> With these insights in mind, one can see why Savonarola and the Piagnoni focused their attention on the *berlingozzi*. Eradicating these traditional carnival treats from sight and mind was part of the Piagnoni’s campaign to suppress what they saw as the excesses of Renaissance civic magnificence and of Carnival revelry and to replace them with a new festive regime that prioritised modesty, solemnity and self-restraint.

The meteoric rise and fall of Savonarola is one of the most compelling chapters in the annals of Florentine history. He had arrived in the city in 1482 as an unremarkable young lector. However, it was during the turbulent autumn of 1494, when Charles VIII of France invaded Italy to make good on his claim to the throne of Naples, that Savonarola shot to fame. During their passage through the Fiorentino at the end of October, the French had captured two dozen frontier fortresses and villages and effected a brutal sacking of the bastion of Fivizzano near

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<sup>5</sup> *Vocabolario universale della lingua italiana*, ed. Anton Enrico Mortara et al., 8 vols. (Mantua: presso gli editori fratelli Negretti, 1847), II: 92; and early use of this verb is attested to Boccaccio in Giovanni Boccaccio, *Il Corbaccio di M. Giovanni Boccaccio* (Florence: Per Filippo Giunti, 1594), 80: “...quando berlinga con l’altre femmine...”

<sup>6</sup> *Vocabolario universale*, II:92.

<sup>7</sup> William F. Prizer, “Reading Carnival: The Creation of a Florentine Carnival Song,” *Early Music History* 23 (2004): 204.

<sup>8</sup> Full lyrics in Lorenzo de’ Medici, *Canti Carnascialeschi*, ed. Paolo Orvieto (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 1991), 76-77.

<sup>9</sup> Editor’s notes in *Ibid.*, 102-105; see also Jean Toscan, *Le Carnaval du langage: le lexique érotique des poètes de l’équivoque de Burchiello à Marino (XVe-XVIIe Siècles)*, 4 vols. (Lille: Presses Universitaires de Lille, 1981).

Carrara.<sup>10</sup> Worse still, in a move that directly caused his deposition and exile, Piero de' Medici, the de facto lord of Florence and successor to Lorenzo de' Medici (*il Magnifico*), ordered Florentine commanders to surrender the key port cities of Pisa and Livorno, as well as the military strongholds of Sarzana, Sarzanella, and Pietrasanta in an effort to mollify the French.<sup>11</sup> By early November, the French were in control of the entire western half of the Florentine dominion, and from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 28<sup>th</sup> were able to enter and occupy Florence.

The presence of a large, unruly, and foreign armed force in the city was cause for a period of intense fear and anxiety. During this period, some twenty-five to thirty-thousand French troops were billeted in the homes of the Florentine elite.<sup>12</sup> Landucci recounts that the French were wont to acts of violence, harassing civilians, committing robbery, attacking or executing dissenters, and parading about the city acting like conquerors.<sup>13</sup> As the Medici regime collapsed in this atmosphere of terror, Savonarola was among those who stepped to the occasion and acted as a key member of the delegation that negotiated Florence's peaceful surrender. For his role in facilitating the relatively uneventful departure of the French on 28 November, Savonarola was seen as hero and a natural leader in Florence for saving the city from a potentially bloody fate.<sup>14</sup> His counsel now bearing a new air of authority, Savonarola henceforth began to deeply involve himself in Florentine political affairs. Seizing at the opportunities that his political *gravitas* brought, he skilfully appealed to the citizens' sense of civic chauvinism in his prophetic sermons, and his message resonated deeply with many of

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<sup>10</sup> Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 71; For details of the twenty-four or so positions captured in October 1494, see Marin Sanudo, *La spedizione di Carlo VIII in Italia raccontata da Marin Sanudo e pubblicata per cura di Rinaldo Fulin* (Venice: Tipografia del commercio di Marco Visentini, 1873), 105-106.

<sup>11</sup> Sanudo, *La spedizione*, 107.

<sup>12</sup> John M. Najemy, *A History of Florence 1200-1575* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2006), 380.

<sup>13</sup> Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 83-86.

<sup>14</sup> Kenneth R. Bartlett, *Florence in the Age of the Medici and Savonarola, 1464-1498: A Short History with Documents* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2018), 52-56.

them.<sup>15</sup> In the years that followed, Savonarola became an influential figure in Florence, acting as a moral dictator who sought to create a Christian utopia. His impact was far-reaching, and he transformed both the public and private lives of the city's denizens.

Accordingly, scholars have sought to elucidate from contrasting angles the myriad consequences and implications of his participation in Florentine history. Pasquale Villari, Joseph Schnitzer, and Roberto Ridolfi, represent three generations of the foremost biographers of Savonarola from the 1880s to the 1950s. Shaped by the times they lived in, all three were sympathetic towards the Piagnoni, and they each carried a strong ideological edge to their research that wedded Savonarola's legacy to the socio-political issues of their nineteenth and twentieth century worlds. Villari in particular was among the first scholars to critically examine the life of the friar with support from a solid array of primary sources to construct a nuanced image of the political and social contexts of Savonarola's time, to which he presented the friar as the champion of Florentine liberty against Medicean tyranny.<sup>16</sup> Schnitzer on the other hand, shifted his emphasis towards Savonarola's relationship with the broader ecclesiastical world, linking Savonarola's spirituality and martyrdom to the Reformation movement of the following decades.<sup>17</sup> As the last of this triumvirate of biographers, Ridolfi asserted the interpretation of Savonarola as an immovably determined reformer, in the process making major advancements towards conveying a clear and trustworthy narrative of Savonarola's with the assistance of a large collection of new archival material that he made available throughout his career.<sup>18</sup>

As important as these earlier contributions were with regards to source criticism and narrative complexity, their key limitation lies in their persistent hagiographical perspective of

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<sup>15</sup> On religion and politics, see Donald Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence: Prophecy and Patriotism in the Renaissance* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970); Lorenzo Polizzotto, "Savonarola and the Florentine Oligarchy," in *The World of Savonarola: Italian Elites and Perceptions of Crisis*, ed. Christine Shaw and Stella Fletcher (Aldershot; Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2000), 55-64; Polizzotto, *Elect Nation*.

<sup>16</sup> Pasquale Villari, *Life and Times of Girolamo Savonarola* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1889).

<sup>17</sup> Joseph Schnitzer, *Savonarola*, 2 vols. (Milan: Fratelli Treves, 1931).

<sup>18</sup> Roberto Ridolfi, *The Life of Girolamo Savonarola* (New York: Knopf, 1959).

Savonarola as a redemptive figure and a historical protagonist. More recent scholarship has tended to shift away from a biographically centred approach and from the outmoded bias of reverence to critically analyse his specific roles in Florentine political and religious landscapes and to uncover hitherto unnoticed avenues of agency to which the Piagnoni gained and maintained power. For instance, Donald Weinstein produced in 1970 the first comprehensive study of Savonarola's religiosity and politics from a principally Florentine perspective, attributing his rise to political prominence as a result of skilful efforts to weave Florentine rhetoric on civic exceptionalism into his socio-political messaging.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, Richard Trexler innovatively examined Savonarola's exploitation of ritual images and symbols to build rapport with his followers, asserting for the first time the importance of non-verbal forms of communication that are sometimes not apparent in conventional primary sources.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, Alison Brown's work not only examines Savonarola moulding of political images and symbols in a way that revolutionised Florentine political culture, but also links the Medicean and Savonarolan periods through a transfer of power that existed in a dialogic relationship.<sup>21</sup> Last but not least, Lorenzo Polizzotto's study goes beyond the personage of Savonarola to examine how the durability of his ideology held the Piagnoni movement together well into his afterlife, and how his partisans rooted their influence strategically in well-established cultural institutions such as youth confraternities and charities.<sup>22</sup>

Over the course of more than a century, historians have gradually advanced the depth of our understanding on this monumentally important figure in Florentine and broader Italian history. Their collective contributions have fostered more nuanced understandings on the

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<sup>19</sup> Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence*; Also see, Donald Weinstein, *Savonarola: The Rise and Fall of a Renaissance Prophet* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

<sup>20</sup> Richard C. Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 462-490.

<sup>21</sup> Alison Brown, *Medicean and Savonarolan Florence: The Interplay of Politics, Humanism, and Religion* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011).

<sup>22</sup> Polizzotto, *Elect Nation*.

political, cultural and social contexts of Savonarola's activities and ideas, as well as his influences on Florentine society long after his death. Nevertheless, historians have yet to pay due attention to the role that sense perception played in Savonarola's reforms, and in informing the various strategies and actions underpinning the construction of his political movement. The crackdown on *berlingozzi* sales discussed previously was just one example of a slew of social, cultural and political reforms that displayed a concerted effort by the Piagnoni to alter the sensed experience of street life to impose a particular vision of society onto the Florentines. The contribution of my thesis to the historiography on Savonarola is to demonstrate that he and his contemporaries placed paramount importance on the senses, and that this understanding of the potency of sensory stimuli had a driving influence on the practical and theoretical conduct of social and political actions. By homing in on the activities of both Savonarola and his opponents between 1482 and 1498, I explore how social actors and political groups contrastingly upheld and contested hegemonies, not only creating but also limiting the possibilities of sensory experiences available to their targeted constituents. My research reveals that the creation and contestation of sensescapes, a concept I will elaborate on presently, enriches our understanding of power dynamics in Renaissance Florence.

### The Sensescaping Approach

In 2007, Mark Smith augured that it was “a good moment to be a sensory historian.”<sup>23</sup> Fifteen years on, the state of the field does indeed seem promising. More and more researchers have taken up the ‘habit’ of sensory history, sifting through their sources for fragments of past ways of sensing.<sup>24</sup> There are now many studies exploring a multitude of historical actors, places and

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<sup>23</sup> Mark M. Smith, “History of The Senses: Producing Sense, Consuming Sense, Making Sense: Perils And Prospects For Sensory History,” *Journal of Social History* 40, no. 4 (2007): 841.

<sup>24</sup> Mark M. Smith, *Sensory History* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 4.

themes, such as war, revolution, racism, technology, and urban culture.<sup>25</sup> In Renaissance Italian scholarship, for instance, Niall Atkinson merits mention as the foremost sensory historian, having demonstrated the importance of bells and ringing practices in configuring daily interactions and constituting the built environment of Florence as a communicative space.<sup>26</sup> All of these studies have done away with the notion that senses are biological, static or unchanging. Instead, there is now firm evidence that sensory perceptions are social and cultural constructs and specific to temporal and spatial contexts.

Although historians have generally heeded Smith's advice in approaching past senses in terms of their multimodality and intersensoriality, few have done so with the aid of a theoretical framework that can sufficiently contain and order the range of sensory experiences under study. Hence, in my study of Savonarolan Florence, I propose the 'sensescape' as a theoretical model through which the sum total of sensory modalities and experiences in my area of study can be linked and valued.

What exactly do I mean by 'sensescape'? To answer this question, it is necessary to discuss past definitions of the term. This idea originally emerged in the discipline of human geography. In his article on smellscape, J. Douglas Porteous coined 'sensescape' in passing as the suprajacent system of the smellscape, suggesting the idea that physical environments can be sensorially constructed.<sup>27</sup> Porteous' article opened the floodgates for a deluge of works in this field that demonstrated that the five senses, and not just sight as previously predominated

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<sup>25</sup> For these themes, see Mark M. Smith, *The Smell of Battle, the Taste of Siege: A Sensory History of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Jan Plamper, "Sounds of February, Smells of October: The Russian Revolution as Sensory Experience," *The American Historical Review* 126, no. 1 (2021): 140-65; Andrew Kettler, *The Smell of Slavery: Olfactory Racism and the Atlantic World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Joseph S.C. Lam, et al. eds. *Senses of the City: Perceptions of Hangzhou and Southern Song China, 1127-1279* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2017).

<sup>26</sup> Niall Atkinson, "Sonic Armatures," *The Senses & Society* 7, no. 1 (2012): 39-52; Niall Atkinson, *The Noisy Renaissance* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2016).

<sup>27</sup> J. Douglas Porteous. "Smellscape," *Progress in Physical Geography* 9, no. 3 (1985): 375.



by the ocular-centric landscapes, can be spatially ordered and place-related.<sup>28</sup> These works invoke ‘sensescape’ in both singular and plural terms. In singular form, it is used in conjunction with the definitive article as when referring to the amalgamation of sensory perceptions specific to a particular environment. As a plural noun, ‘sensescapes’ are used as categorizers for each of the constituent “-scapes,” i.e., soundscape and visualscape as ‘sensescapes.’ However, beyond the implication of ‘sensescape(s)’ as sensorially constructed environments, these earlier works in human geography do not provide sufficiently robust definitions or theoretical conceptualisation.

The first scholar to explicitly define ‘sensescape’ was the anthropologist David Howes. Building on the work of past human geographers, he defined it as “the idea that the experience of the environment, is produced by the particular mode of distinguishing, valuing and combining the senses in the culture under study.”<sup>29</sup> Howes, alongside his close collaborator Constance Classen are key figures in effecting a wave of interdisciplinary interest in studying the senses in the humanities and social sciences. Three main contributions of this “anthropology of the senses” school must be ascertained to explain the implications behind Howe’s definition of ‘sensescape.’ The first insight is that sense perception varies from society to society, and different societies attach different meanings and emphases on each of the senses.<sup>30</sup> The second insight complements the first by positing that each society espouses a particular “sensory model” composed of sensory meanings, values and hierarchies, according to which members of that society “make sense” of their world or translate those sensory

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<sup>28</sup> For example, see Paul Rodaway, *Sensuous Geographies: Body, Sense, and Place* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994); J. Douglas Porteous, *Landscapes of the Mind: Worlds of Sense and Metaphor* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990); Jon Kabat-Zinn, “Touchscape,” *Mindfulness* 4, no. 4 (2013): 389-91; on sight and landscape perception see, Yi-fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979).

<sup>29</sup> David Howes, *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader* (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2005), 143.

<sup>30</sup> David Howes, ed., *The Varieties of Sensory Experience: A Sourcebook in the Anthropology of the Senses* (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 4.

perceptions and concepts into a particular world view. Crucially, this sensory model provides a basic sensory paradigm for members of that society to follow, but is also liable to contestation by internal forces who differ on certain values.<sup>31</sup> The third contribution is the idea of intersensoriality, which posits that there exists a hierarchy of the senses and that the senses interact with each other in all kinds of ways to produce meanings of culturally constructed environments.<sup>32</sup> With these insights in mind, Howes' definition begins to reveal its logic. It suggests first and foremost that sensescapes are perceptual constructs that are specific to times, places, and cultures. By virtue of their contextual particularity, sensescapes are therefore multitudinous as multiple sensescapes can exist in a particular society or context.

Despite the aforementioned contributions, there is still little theoretical engagement with the concept of sensescapes among historians and other social scientists. Most scholars who invoke the term do not provide explicit theoretical definitions or debates surrounding it, merely using it as a way of describing the sensory dimensions of culturally constructed environments.<sup>33</sup> Aside from the pioneers of the anthropology of the senses school, the only other discipline that has significantly advanced the concept of sensescapes are human geographers in tourism studies. These researchers have worked on refining Porteous's original coinage into what they call the 'destination sensescape' index, defining it as the aggregate of the five "-scapes" – soundscape, visualscape, smellscape, hapticscape, tastescape – as a way of quantitatively evaluating and controlling the sensory stimuli perceived by tourists at tourist

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<sup>31</sup> Constance Classen, "Foundations for an Anthropology of the Senses," *International Social Science Journal* 49, no. 3 (1997): 402.

<sup>32</sup> David Howes, "Scent, Sound and Synesthesia: Intersensoriality and Material Culture Theory," in *Handbook of Material Culture*, Christopher Tilley et al. ed. (London: Sage 2006), 164-165.

<sup>33</sup> For example, see Allison Karmel Thomason, "The Sense-scapes of Neo-Assyrian Capital Cities: Royal Authority and Bodily Experience," *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 26, no. 2 (2016): 243-64; Asli Igsiz, "Documenting the Past and Publicizing Personal Stories: Sensescapes and the 1923 Greco-Turkish Population Exchange in Contemporary Turkey," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 26, no. 2 (2008): 451-87; Franco Nicolis, "The Scent of Snow at Punta Linke," in *Modern Conflict and the Senses*, ed. Nicholas J. Saunders and Paul Cornish (New York: Routledge, 2017), 61-75; Christin Hoene, "Senses and Sensibilities in Sarojini Naidu's Poetry," *South Asia* 44, no. 5 (2021): 966-82; Kelvin E.Y. Low, "Sensing Cities: The Politics of Migrant Sensescapes," *Social Identities* 19, no. 2 (2013): 221-37; Michael Ian Borer, "Being in the City: The Sociology of Urban Experiences," *Sociology Compass* 7, no. 11 (2013): 965-83.

destinations.<sup>34</sup> Given the importance of the so-called five senses in translating sensory stimuli from the external environment into the embodied processes of perception, memory and behaviour, more work is needed in advancing the sensescape as a theoretical model.

The existing literature that I have reviewed addresses the idea of the sensescape in universalising, etc, terms. As an anthropologist, Howes' interests are in the ways in which sensory experiences are invested with meaning across culture. However, the goal of an historical specialist is to produce insights and understandings of a society in a particular time and place. Thus, it is necessary to reframe the theory in a way that allows for its utility as an interpretive tool for historians to analyse the sensory landscapes of particular times and places. This brings us to my intervention in this discourse. I define a sensescape as a context-specific sensory landscape – the perspectival construct of a particular socio-cultural and physical environment, produced and contested by the unique ways in which the senses are distinguished, valued and understood within a given context. Building on Howes' definition, I propose three key variables that sensescapes must account for:

1. *Transience* – Sensescapes are fundamentally fleeting, being constantly influenced by the ever-shifting conditions of political situations, social trends, cultural practices and language.
2. *Configurability* – Different strata of social actors from hegemonic groups to marginalised communities and persons, have the potential to modify the sensory experiences and meanings attached to a particular sensescape through direct or indirect actions individually or collectively.

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<sup>34</sup> Daniela Buzova, Silvia Sanz-Blas, and Amparo Cervera-Taulet, ““Sensing” the Destination: Development of the Destination Sensescape Index,” *Tourism Management* 87 (2021): 104362; Dora Agapito, Patrícia Pinto, and Júlio Mendes, “Tourists’ Memories, Sensory Impressions and Loyalty: In Loco and Post-visit Study in Southwest Portugal,” *Tourism Management* 58 (2017): 108-118; Mengyuan Qiu, Xin Jin, and Noel Scott, “Sensescapes and Attention Restoration in Nature-based Tourism: Evidence from China and Australia,” *Tourism Management Perspectives* 39 (2021): 100855.

3. *Diversity* – even within a particular culture at a particular time and place. That is to say that different sensescapes co-exist and sometimes overlap with each other within a singular historical context.

These three variables provide a more complete theoretical realisation of sensescapes as comprised of a fluid and panoramic range of perceptions and experiences and underscored by diverse ways of sensing that differ between subjectivities. They consequently comprise some of the building blocks of what the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai called “imagined worlds.”<sup>35</sup> Because they are imagined, they are fickle, numerous and modular, and since subjectivities are infinite, social actors have unlimited potential in contesting and even subverting the sensescapes ordered by hegemonic groups.

Having provided a more nuanced definition of the concept, I will now elaborate on its theoretical applicability in a historical sense. I call this the ‘sensescaping approach.’ Like all other “-scape” terms, the *-scape* suffix derives from the notion of the landscape, embodying the ideas of symbolic abstraction and creative shaping.<sup>36</sup> Since sensescapes are configurable they certainly can be *-scaped* just as landscapes are landscaped. Thus, I define ‘sensescaping’ as the creative process through which sensory landscapes are constructed through physical, social, cultural, legal, political, and administrative means. The sensescaping approach therefore seeks to examine how sensescapes are created, maintained, and contested through these actions. With this expansion of Howes’ definition of it as something that is context-specific, dynamic, modifiable and heterogenous, and with the added insight that sensescapes can be sense-*scaped*, this idea can more reasonably be discussed in emic or historical terms. Though the people who lived in the time and place under study never used the term, this thesis hopes to demonstrate

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<sup>35</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 33.

<sup>36</sup> Kenneth Robert Olwig and Yi-Fu Tuan, *Landscape, Nature, and the Body Politic: From Britain’s Renaissance to America’s New World* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 18-20.

that deliberately manipulating the senses for political purposes was indeed a Renaissance Florentine ideal and something that Florentines of all levels of society and power actively pursued. It was something that Renaissance Florentines expressed through the specific actions that they undertook in the range of their activities from the machinations of high politics to the quotidian actions of daily life.

The specific actions that comprise the creative processes of sensescaping are what I call ‘sensory repertoires.’<sup>37</sup> The etymology and varied meanings of the term *repertoire* reveal some of the underpinnings behind my choice of coinage. Originally adapted from the French *répertoire* meaning inventory or index, the English *repertoire* has a double meaning; as a stock of rehearsed dramatical or musical pieces to be performed theatrically; and more broadly as an inventory of regularly performed skills, abilities and experiences possessed by individuals or groups.<sup>38</sup> A sensory repertoire is therefore any action, tool, ability, experience or technique that is familiar to the communities that comprise particular sensescapes and conducive to their creative moulding or contestation. Just as the meanings of the word *repertoire* suggests, sensory repertoires can similarly be divided into two different categories. These two categories are practical and performative sensory repertoires, and the two modalities are linked to two different ways of sensing – doing versus performing. Firstly, practical sensory repertoires are actions or experiences that shape sensescapes through subtle and easily overlooked ways. Practical sensory repertoires are products of inhabitants’ daily tasks and habits, generating

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<sup>37</sup> In developing this idea, I was inspired by the concept of ‘repertoires of contention’ developed by scholars in social movement theory, see Charles Tilly, *Regimes and Repertoires* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Charles Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Brett Rolfe, “Building an Electronic Repertoire of Contention,” *Social Movement Studies* 4, no. 1 (2005): 65-74.

<sup>38</sup> Oxford English Dictionary Online, n. “repertoire,” accessed 7 June 2022, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/162782?redirectedFrom=repertoire#eid>.

sensescapes as sites of dwelling, practice and doing within a community.<sup>39</sup> In the Florentine context these include:

- Legal statutes
- Administrative controls
- Quotidian movement (ie. walking)
- Police action
- Mob violence
- Daily routines and behaviours (eg. socialising in the piazza, gossiping between neighbours, displaying wares in a shopfront during business hours, routine interactions with public architecture etc.)

To offer an example, when a plague outbreak struck the north-western outskirts of Florence in 1481, the diarist Landucci observed that the Signoria ordered the adjacent Porta a Faenza shut to prevent the spread of the plague.<sup>40</sup> When we consider that in early modern Italian medical thought, which associated infectious diseases with noxious odours arising from contaminated water and matter, and also with poverty and dirt, this subtle administrative measure can be seen as a form of practical sensescaping.<sup>41</sup> The act of shutting a gate generated a salutary sensescap by limiting the mobility of people in and out of those affected areas and by erecting a physical barrier that shut off sightlines. This created a sense of safety and hygiene by controlling people's exposure to potentially hazardous smells and by keeping the filth of diseased and

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<sup>39</sup> Inspired by the idea of 'taskscape' as arrays of quotidian activities in Tim Ingold, "The Temporality of the Landscape," *World Archaeology* 25, no. 2 (1993): 152-74.

<sup>40</sup> Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 38.

<sup>41</sup> Nicholas A. Eckstein, "Florence on Foot: An Eye-level Mapping of the Early Modern City in Time of Plague," *Renaissance Studies* 30, no. 2 (2016): 275; for a primary source outline of noxious sensations and disease, see Francesco Rondinelli, *Relazione del contagio stato in Firenze l'anno 1630 e 1633* (Florence: S.A.R. Per Jacopo Guiducci e Santi Franchi, 1714), 22.

poverty-stricken bodies out of sight. Thus, mundane bureaucratic tasks like these could have powerful influences in shaping the possibilities of sensory experiences within the urban body politic.

The second group are performative or theatrical sensory repertoires, which are actions or experiences that engage the senses conspicuously through staged performances often in hierarchical social spaces. Performative sensescaping results from systems of interpersonal communication and perception that are often political, generating sensescapes as theatres of power and intention. As sensory performances of political agency, they allow hegemonic groups to construct narratives of order and perceptions of control, while also permitting contenders to stage sensory acts of resistance.<sup>42</sup> In the context under study, these include:

- Civic/secular rituals
- Banquets and feasts
- Processions
- Musical performances and dramatical plays
- Sermons
- Festive triumphs and displays of art and pageantry
- Ritualised violence and collective insult
- Vandalism and defacement

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<sup>42</sup> See the essays in Sally Banes and Andre Lepecki eds., *The Senses in Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

For example, consider a snippet of Lorenzo de' Medici's marriage to the Roman aristocrat Clarice Orsini in June 1469 as recorded by an anonymous correspondent.<sup>43</sup> In this letter, the author provides an account of the wedding as he had witnessed it and supplemented by some insider information relayed to him by a certain Cosimo Bartoli, who he states was one of the event organisers in charge of food catering. On the morning of 4 June, the marital festivities began with a grand procession that transported the bride from the house of the Alessandri to the Medici household. Preceding the bride were two cavaliers and their retainers, a retinue of thirty sumptuously dressed bridesmaids, a group of youths dressed for dancing, and a train of trumpeters and fifers. The wedding procession was arranged in such a way that broadcasted the felicitations onto the wider community. The spectacle of richly adorned processors was meant to be eye-catching, and for those not within eyeshot the blaring of trumpets and fifes would have been inescapable in the dense urban environment of Florence, keeping everyone cognizant of what was transpiring. The context of the marriage is important. The Orsini were one of the most important baronial families of Rome, renowned for its military prowess and ecclesiastical contacts.<sup>44</sup> In the sensory choreography of the wedding, Lorenzo was presented as a bridging entity between the Medici oligarchs and the Orsini family for the betterment of Florentine prestige. This communicated the union of Medicean domestic affairs with the public interests of the broader Florentine body politic. The performances of Lorenzo's wedding thus constituted a theatrical display of power that represented the welfare of the Medici as that of Florence's.

The sensescaping approach is primarily centred around the careful scouring of primary source documents or media for evidence of sensory repertoires. I draw from a very diverse

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<sup>43</sup> The following description is paraphrased from an anonymous letter contained in Janet Ross, *Lives of the Early Medici, as Told in Their Correspondence: Translated & Edited by Janet Ross* (Boston: The Gorham Press, 1911), 129-134.

<sup>44</sup> F. W. Kent, *Princely Citizen: Lorenzo de' Medici and Renaissance Florence*, ed. Carolyn James (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 55.



range of primary sources, but my main sources are chronicles, diaries and letters, and sermon transcripts. Due to limitations imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, I am wholly reliant on published sources available in physical print or in digitised form. The most noteworthy of these chroniclers include Piero Parenti, the Pseudo-Burlamacchi, and Bartolomeo Cerretani, whose narrative histories of late fifteenth-century Florence provided a causal, analytical account of events. Of the era's diarists and correspondents, Luca Landucci and Paolo Somenzi come to mind, providing contemporaneous observations of the practicalities of street life and noteworthy occurrences, and of public and private perceptions while the memory of events remain fresh. Lastly, the extensive transcripts and summaries of Savonarola's sermon cycles, transcribed verbatim by the notary Lorenzo Violi and published in over a dozen volumes by Angelo Belardetti have proven invaluable in supplying insights into the structure, content, languages and performative techniques of Savonarola's preaching.

By investigating the Savonarolan moment in Florentine history through the sensescaping approach, it is the conviction of this thesis that new insights into the underlying mechanisms of historical processes can be uncovered. As Martin Jay has written, "meaning comes to a great extent through the senses, while the senses filter the world through the prior cultural meanings in which we are immersed."<sup>45</sup> By utilising this novel way of interpreting the past, moreover, we are exposed to what Joy Damousi and Paula Hamilton have called "subliminal histories" – histories that have always been there but are only revealed when we have chosen an alternate path to understand their meanings.<sup>46</sup> Sensory perceptions not only function as sources of knowledge, orientation, and meaning, but also as avenues to pain and pleasure, advocacy and contestation. By considering the actions, practices, materials and

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<sup>45</sup> Martin Jay, "In the Realm of the Senses: An Introduction," *The American Historical Review* 116, no. 2 (2011): 307.

<sup>46</sup> Joy Damousi, and Paula Hamilton eds., *A Cultural History of Sound, Memory, and the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 2.

performances that generate sensory landscapes, the sensescaping approach presents a multi-faceted vision of how the senses exist as sites of formative and performative power. It is within such a framework that it is possible to conceive of the senses as pertaining simultaneously to corporeal and physiological dimensions, while informing understandings and transformations in the realms of politics, culture, aesthetics and economics. The sensescape, as a geographical and an ideological model, can thus be historicised to understand how historical actors imprint ideas and practices in constructing, conceptualising and navigating their cultures and societies, and built and natural environments.

I structure my thesis chronologically, starting in the 1480s with Savonarola's earliest activities in Florence, before exploring the Piagnoni movement at its apogee from 1494 to 1497, and ending with Savonarola's decline and fall from 1497 to 1498. Chapter One explores the sensescaping strategies that aided Savonarola's rise to power until 1496. I demonstrate how his sensitivity towards Florentine religious and political culture, his skilful choreography of sermons, and innovations in public ritual were crucial to the generation of an identifiably Savonarolan sensescape that was a product of the engineering of consensus around the Piagnoni regime. By analysing the way in which Savonarola manipulated and organised physical places and acoustic spaces, I show how the Florentine citizenry were mobilised into narratives of civic exceptionalism and religious zealotry, ensuring a high degree of group consensus and social control.

Chapter Two investigates how sensescaping allowed the Piagnoni to consolidate and cement their power from 1494 to 1497. By exploring the sensory dimensions of their moral and spiritual reform program, I reveal that the regulation and moderation of sensory experiences was a critical social policy aim. By considering the multifaceted ways in which the Piagnoni targeted every facet of secular culture in Florence for reform, I demonstrate how they intended to create a civic environment that was conducive to citizen's piety and self-

discipline. Moreover, by shedding light on the role of the Savonarolan *fanciulli* as moral enforcers and agents of reform, I illuminate a more sinister side to the Piagnoni spiritual reform program that witnessed the imposition of a regime of surveillance that had no qualms about using coercive and repressive strategies. Overall, this chapter frames the Savonarolan sensescape as a means of imposing and perpetuating hegemony, aiding the Piagnoni as they sought to set the boundaries for accepted social practices and behaviours.

Lastly, Chapter Three investigates the decline and fall of the Piagnoni regime through the sensescaping lens. By considering the diverse range of sensory repertoires that Savonarola's principal clerical and secular enemies had at their disposal to contest the Piagnoni, I uncover the widespread acceptance of sense perception as sites of identity-formation, as well as communicative and performative power and show how the senses played a significant role in the organisation of space and the contestation of power. And by highlighting the success of the anti-Savonarolans in supplanting the influence and popularity of the Piagnoni, I reveal that appeals to the senses were at the forefront of the process of the renegotiation of power in Florence.

Overall, my thesis argues that the deployment of sensory repertoires was essential for social actors and power structures to build consensus, mobilise support, institute reforms, and silence dissent. In Savonarolan Florence, the inundation of the city's streetscapes with sights, sounds and imagery, as well as the enforcement of strict controls on the boundaries of social practice and the availability of sensory experiences, were methods that immersed Florentines in narratives of social order that commanded their acquiescence to Savonarola's authority. Conversely, I also show that the function of sensory repertoires as consensus-building techniques was just as important to Savonarola's enemies in the contestation of the Piagnoni hegemony. Sensescaping was therefore a crucial mechanism of power dynamics in the social and political world of Florence.

## Chapter One – Florence as the New Jerusalem: Constructing and Consolidating the Savonarolan Sensescape

Amidst the heat of summer in August 1496, the Florentine apothecary Luca Landucci attended a sermon given by Girolamo Savonarola in Santa Maria del Fiore, the great domed cathedral of Florence. Like many Florentines in 1496, he was a fervent believer in Savonarola's redemptive program of reform. His shophouse was in the Canto de' Tornaquinci, one of the busiest parts of Florence. Situated between the patrician palaces of the Strozzi and the Tornabuoni, Landucci was in an excellent position to experience intimately the sights and sounds of the city. Two years earlier, he had heard the deafening peals of the liturgical and civic bells, the cries of "*Popolo e Liberta*" and seen the armed mobs that pillaged the city on the day the Medici fled Florence.<sup>1</sup> He witnessed the triumphal entry of the French monarch Charles VIII into Florence, and observed the dread and intimidation that the whole city felt at the prospect of a French sacking.<sup>2</sup> Landucci was also aware of Savonarola's efforts in facilitating the speedy departure of the French, describing him as "a prophet and a man of holy life, both in Florence and throughout Italy."<sup>3</sup> He became a keen observer and participant in Savonarola's activities in the following years. To Landucci, Savonarolan Florence must have seemed a vision of concord in contrast to the tumult of previous years.

The sermon of 15 August 1496 was Savonarola's eighteenth in his series on Ruth and Micah that expounded a simple form of Christian piety and attacked recalcitrant Florentines who opposed his spiritual regime. As usual, Savonarola's sermon was a visceral experience where the choreography of various sensory repertoires was designed to produce multilayered

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<sup>1</sup> Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 73-76.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 79-83; For the exile of the Medici and the arrival of the French, see Alison Brown, *Piero di Lorenzo de' Medici and the Crisis of Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); David Abulafia, *The French Descent into Renaissance Italy, 1494-95* (London: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 88.

sets of meanings and emotions. Savonarola's *fanciulli* (boy brigades) usually accompanied him at his sermons. The sounds of their singing and angelic appearances added immensely to the spiritual drama of the experience. Landucci described a feeling of sweet consolation in hearing the boys sing, their voices echoing throughout the wide and angular spaces, creating a resonance that gave him and his fellow listeners a sense of "spiritual sweetness." Truly, he remarked, "the church was full of angels."<sup>4</sup> His presence during the sermon of 15 August was not an anomaly, since he declared: "I write this because I was present, and saw it many times."<sup>5</sup>

This chapter begins with an elaboration of how preaching culture, which had long been a fixture of the Florentine sensescape and one of the most important mediums of communication, was elevated to new heights of importance under Savonarola. I also probe how Florence's ritual landscape was altered, as Savonarola endeavoured to transfigure his convent of San Marco into the political and spiritual nerve centre of Piagnoni activity. Under San Marco's oversight, children became the key performers of public ritual, acting as agents of reform and propaganda, extending the display of religious imagery and symbolism to the audiences of the streets. Overall, this chapter contends that the efficacy and rapid emergence of the Savonarolan sensescape demonstrates that its architect was adept at manipulating spaces and places to mobilise people into narratives of civic exceptionalism and divine favour, ensuring a high degree of group consensus and social control.

### Sight, Sound, and Ecclesiastical Space

To explain how the Savonarolan sensescape came to be, it is necessary to unveil the spatial configuration of Florence's network of ecclesiastical institutions, as well as the role of the senses in determining their architectural setting. As a member of the Dominican Order (also known as the Order of Preachers) Savonarola's success was predicated on a centuries-long

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 136-137.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 137.

tradition of mendicant preaching that brought a series of complex material and spatial changes to the cities in which the Dominicans operated.

A dramatic shift towards orality in Florentine society occurred during the thirteenth century with the arrival and growth of the mendicant orders, whose primary method of organisational outreach was preaching. Peter Howard has called Florence an “oral-aural society” where the spoken word was the primary form of communication, and where public architecture was planned around the necessity to accommodate orators and listeners.<sup>6</sup> As mendicant preachers gradually increased in numbers and influence, the sounds of sermons and the sight of crowds of listeners came to exert an increasingly salient presence in the lived experiences of urban life. As a result, churches and piazzas had to be designed around the need to facilitate preaching and to tackle the ever-unresolved problem of space to accommodate growing audiences. In his *De re aedificatoria* of the 1450s, the architect Leon Battista Alberti discussed the need to construct monasteries and convents “alongside public places” so that the masses would “gladly converge there of their own accord.”<sup>7</sup> Alberti was merely prescribing what had already been the case in Florence for two centuries. All the mendicant churches in Florence (with the exceptions of Santo Spirito and San Marco) were built in the thirteenth century during a period of major urban expansion in suburban areas where space was readily available.

By the fourteenth century, preachers were in such popular demand that crowds of listeners often broke out of the confines of the churches into the streets. The architectural response to this was the expansion and development of piazzas to accommodate the ever-increasing crowds and to facilitate open-air preaching, all at public expense.<sup>8</sup> The presence of

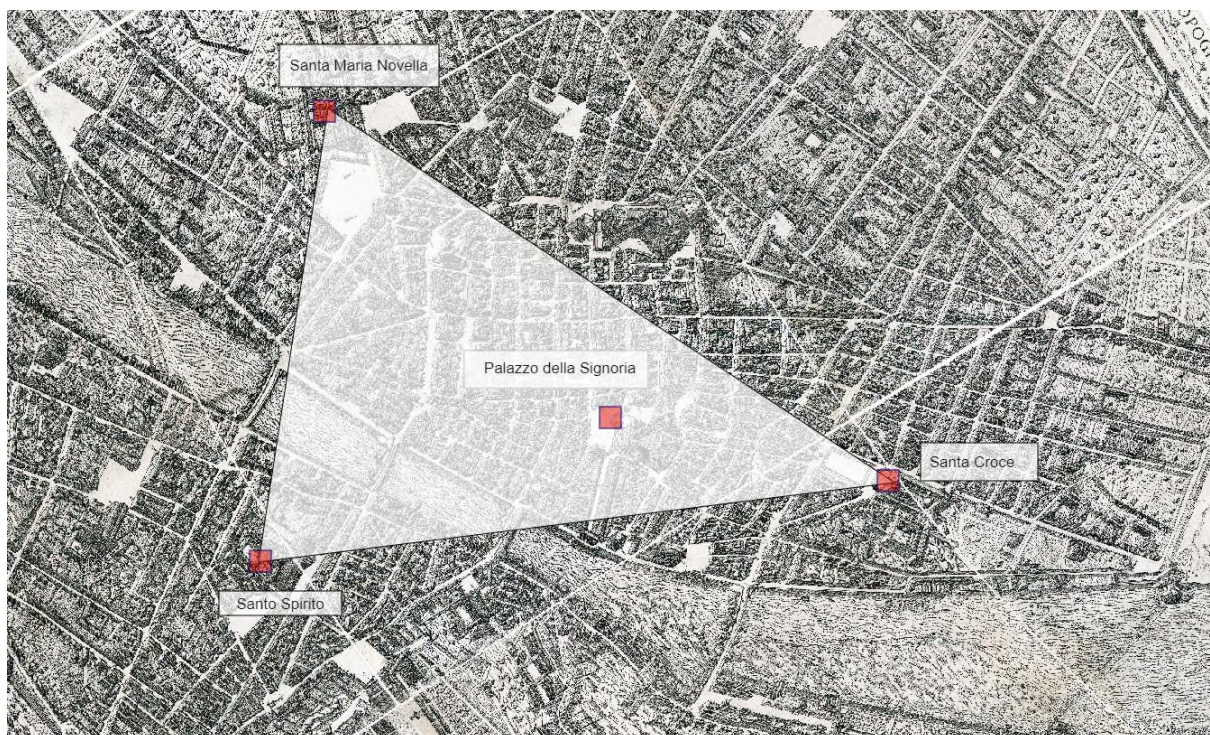
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<sup>6</sup> Peter Francis Howard, *Beyond the Written Word: Preaching and Theology in the Florence of Archbishop Antoninus, 1427-1459* (Florence: Olschki, 1995), 79-86.

<sup>7</sup> Leon Battista Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, trans. Joseph Rykwert, Neil Leach, and Robert Tavernor (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), 128.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 385-386.

large piazzas further added to the visual impact of the churches, as the long sightlines offered by the piazzas dramatically enhanced their perceived physical stature in the dense and constricting streetscapes of Florence. Given these attributes, the mendicants were able to effortlessly project their seen and heard presences to such an extent that they often dominated urban life in their respective neighbourhoods.<sup>9</sup> The mobilizational power of the friars can be further inferred from their positioning in the urban map of Florence. The three most important mendicant churches of Santa Maria Novella, Santa Croce, and Santo Spirito, formed the corners of an imaginary triangle (Figure 1) which had its centre-point the town hall (the Palazzo della Signoria), an urban layout which is consistent across all medieval Italian cities.<sup>10</sup> The placement of the mendicant churches effectively framed the city in accordance with the division of space between the various mendicant orders, and their symbolic unity with the heart of the civic commune.



<sup>9</sup> Howard, "Aural Space," 385.

<sup>10</sup> Carlo Delcorno, "Medieval Preaching in Italy (1200-1500)," in *The Sermon*, ed. Beverly Mayn Kienzle (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 462-463.

*Figure 1: Map of Florence's major mendicant churches relative to the town hall.*<sup>11</sup>

Sightlines and acoustics were also crucial considerations in the architecture of mendicant churches. Dominican churches tended to favour large halls where visibility and communication among the naves was emphasised, whereas Franciscan churches typically resembled barns or hangers that allowed for the installation of wall paintings that gave onlookers a visual guide to emulating the pious life.<sup>12</sup> In the second half of the fifteenth century, the interior design of churches experienced a reorientation of the spatial arrangement in the part of the nave reserved for the laity. Where preachers once preached from ambos incorporated into rood screens, delineating a separation between clergy and laity, pulpits came to supersede ambos as the quintessential stage from which preachers performed their orations.<sup>13</sup> In the mendicant churches, these pulpits were typically installed in the lower section of the nave in the midst of the lay congregation, usually towards the side aisles to avoid echoes from the transept.<sup>14</sup> This implied a breakdown of the division between preacher and listener in spatial terms. The pulpit served as a virtual theatre, where the preacher could rhetorically identify himself with his listeners and dramatically involve his listeners in the spiritual experience of his sermon. The proximity of the pulpit to the lay congregation and the elevated vantage of the preacher in the pulpit meant that sermons became intensely engaging sensory experiences. The wide, singular spaces of the churches gathered audiences into a visual manifestation of

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<sup>11</sup> Created with DECIMA (Digitally Encoded Census Information and Mapping Archive). <https://decima-map.net/what-is-decima-overview/>. The DECIMA Project uses the 1584 Buonsignori map of Florence, created during the Medici Grand Ducal period, for all its cartographical data. In the almost one century period between Savonarola's time and the creation of the Buonsignori map, Florence underwent significant urban development, seeing the widening of streets and the creation of new public spaces especially in the Oltrarno district and in the expansion of the city walls and adjoining fortifications. Nevertheless, the Buonsignori map is still relevant for my uses for two main reasons. Firstly, the basic urban layout of Florence and the position of Florence's key architectural landmarks remained largely consistent. Secondly, the Buonsignori map represented up to that point, the most accurate cartographical survey ever undertaken of Florence, combining a traditional axonometric approach with an innovative ichnographic survey.

<sup>12</sup> Delcorno, "Medieval Preaching," 463

<sup>13</sup> Marcia B. Hall, "The Tramezzo in Santa Croce, Florence, Reconstructed," *The Art Bulletin* 56, no. 3 (1974): 340.

<sup>14</sup> Nirit Ben-Aryeh Debby, "Italian Pulpits: Preaching, Art, and Spectacle," in *Charisma and Religious Authority: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Preaching, 1200-1500*, ed. Katherine Ludwig Jansen and Miri Rubin (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 126-127.



communal unity, while the proximity and elevation of the pulpit allowed preachers to make eye contact with his listeners, and to project his voice in a charismatically intimate manner.

Renaissance Florence thus developed a “preaching culture” where sermons occupied a central role in interpersonal communication.<sup>15</sup> Preachers were powerful people because of their ability to mobilise and persuade large crowds, and good preachers were always in demand by communal and religious authorities for their ability to bring stability to what could otherwise be unruly mobs.<sup>16</sup> For example, communal tensions were so volatile at the end of 1494 that Landucci reported that if not for Savonarola’s physical presence at his sermons, blood was sure to be spilt.<sup>17</sup> Having first arrived in Florence in 1482, Savonarola had come at an opportune time to reap the benefits of this mature culture of preaching along with all of its spatial and architectural implications. These were the tools, facilities and amenities that Savonarola had at his disposal to sway congregations and to construct a base of power. Just as the senses were a key consideration in stimulating the spread of preaching culture in Florence, so to would they assume a pivotal role in the growth of Savonarola’s Piagnoni movement.

### Savonarola and the Sensescape of Sermons

On Ash Wednesday 1494, Savonarola ascended the pulpit of the basilica of San Lorenzo to begin a new sermon cycle on the Book of Genesis. The theme of this inaugural sermon was on building an ark just as Noah did in the Old Testament, so that Florence could weather the impending ruin of Italy and emerge renewed.<sup>18</sup> The diarist Bartolomeo Cerretani attested the massive turnout to Savonarola’s preaching, noting that “the people flocked in to hear these sermons as did many very great men, including Messer Marsilio Ficino, Messer Oliviero

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<sup>15</sup> Corrie E. Norman, “The Social History of Preaching: Italy,” in *Preachers and People in the Reformations and Early Modern Period*, ed. Larissa Taylor (Boston: Brill, 2003), 126.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Francis Howard, “Preaching to the Mob: Space, Ideas, and Persuasion in Renaissance Florence,” in *Mobs: An Interdisciplinary Inquiry*, eds. Nancy Van Deusen and Leonard Michael Koff (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2012), 218.

<sup>17</sup> Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 93.

<sup>18</sup> Pasquale Villari, *Life and Times*, 185-186.

Arduino, Messer Malatesta da Rimini, and Girolamo di ser Paolo Benivieni, highly distinguished philosophers and theologians, and Count Giovanni della Mirandola, the most learned man of his time, as well as many leading worthies.”<sup>19</sup> The Lenten sermons were terrifying to the Florentines. Savonarola made it seem as though every facet of life in Florence was tainted with sin, and that these necessitated some form of divine retribution. In such an atmosphere of collective guilt and fear, the only recourse was to take spiritual refuge in the Ark of Jesus and repent.

Adjacent to the Palazzo Medici and within earshot and eyeshot of the Duomo, San Lorenzo was the parish church of the Medici family. The fact that Savonarola could preach there, holding a congregation so large that it must have spilled out into the piazza, signalled the tenuousness of the Medici position on the eve of their exile. And given how even the most famous humanist thinkers in the city put stock in his prophecies, Florence was evidently gripped by a deep sense of anxiety fuelled by rumours of Charles VIII’s plans to make good on his claim to the throne of Naples from its Aragonese occupants.

Savonarola’s doom seemed to fulfil itself later that year. After summering in Lyons, a French army over 40,000 strong, massive by contemporary standards, crossed into Savoy in August 1494. Seizing the moment, Savonarola quickly shifted his prophetic message to ride the tide of fear rife in Florence. On 21 September, he resumed his series of sermons on the Ark of Noah, vividly describing the great deluge that was to come.<sup>20</sup> The bells of Santa Maria del Fiore pealed to summon the people as Savonarola mounted the pulpit under Brunelleschi’s magnificent cupola, which still dominates the city’s skyline today. The Duomo was one of the largest edifices in all of Christendom and occupied a special semiotic place in the Florentine civic universe. Compared to most church interiors of medieval and early modern Europe, the

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<sup>19</sup> Bartolomeo Cerretani, *Storia fiorentina*, ed. Giuliana Berti (Florence: Olschki, 1994), 193.

<sup>20</sup> Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 70.

Duomo's was extraordinary in its sheer volume, and remarkable in its relative lack of artistic embellishment. Marvin Trachtenberg has deduced that the Duomo's austere interior architecture invoked the monumental spatial and physical forms of classical antiquity and represented to the Florentine imagination the Temple of Jerusalem.<sup>21</sup> The Duomo lay at the centre of the city's religious ritual axis. That Savonarola was invited to preach at the metaphorical and physical "Temple" of Florence not only validated the providence of his agenda, but also attested to the spatial demand to accommodate a gargantuan volume of listeners.

Attuning his prophetic message to contemporary sentiments, his sermon electrified an attentive crowd that had by then recognised his prophetic validity. Savonarola evoked the apocalyptic imagery of the world-engulfing deluge, particularly expounding the quotation: "Lo, I will bring the waters over the Earth."<sup>22</sup> This phrase was undoubtedly familiar to all Christians, and to hear Savonarola preach this oft-repeated text in conjunction with the impending arrival of the French seemed uncanny and convincing. The sound of his voice resounded through the cathedral like thunder, and the doom of his words provoked an intense emotional reaction from the crowd. Cerretani, for instance, noted that upon hearing his sermons, the church interior became inundated by the sounds of "terrors and alarms, cries and lamentations." This emotional frenzy spilled beyond the confines of the cathedral, such that "everyone went about the city bewildered, speechless, and, as it were, half-dead."<sup>23</sup> Savonarola later related that upon hearing him speak, even the respected philosopher Giovanni Pico della Mirandola had told him that he had felt a cold shiver run through him and that his hair stood on end. Savonarola's sermons on Noah's Ark were thus pivotal to his growing influence. His

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<sup>21</sup> Marvin Trachtenberg, "Architecture and Music Reunited: A New Reading of Dufay's "Nuper Rosarum Flores" and the Cathedral of Florence," *Renaissance Quarterly* 54, no. 3 (2001): 760-762.

<sup>22</sup> Girolamo Savonarola, *Compendio di rivelazioni, testo volgare e latino, e dialogus de veritate prophetica*, ed. Angela Crucitti (Rome: Belardetti, 1974), 11.

<sup>23</sup> Cerretani, *Storia fiorentina*, 200.

masterful manipulation of the acoustic qualities of the massive church interiors combined with his skilful choice of words and sensitivity towards collective sentiment imbued his sermons with a powerful resonance. The apparent realisation of his prophecies not only validated him as a prophet in the eyes of many Florentines, but also strengthened his own conviction that he spoke with divine authority.



*Figure 2: Aerial view of the nave of Santa Maria del Fiore. Photo by author (2018)*



Figure 3: Savonarola Preaching from the pulpit of Santa Maria del Fiore.<sup>24</sup>

As a member of the Dominican Order, preaching would always remain Savonarola's first line of offense and defence and his primary method of communication. If the stellar successes of his sermons on the Ark were anything to go by, it demonstrated that Savonarola was a master at linking social affairs to religious doctrine, allowing him to relay systems of meaning that were grounded in worldly concerns. Worldliness was an immensely potent attribute, as it allowed the preacher to resonate more easily with lay audiences, thereby enhancing the potential for the preacher to affect his audiences and manipulate their behaviours, beliefs and actions.<sup>25</sup> However, Savonarola had not always been perceived as an

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<sup>24</sup> Cropped woodcut from a page of Girolamo Savonarola, *Compendio di revelationi* (Florence: Lorenzo de' Morgiani & Johannes Petri, 1495), Section a, i. The *Compendio* was distributed widely in print from 1495 until the death of Savonarola. The woodcut image above was created as a propaganda piece for the *Compendio* and conveys Savonarola's aspiration to be seen as a charismatic and domineering authority figure, doubtlessly with the hope of compounding his following through visual media.

<sup>25</sup> Peter Francis Howard, "The Aural Space of the Sacred in Renaissance Florence," in *Renaissance Florence: A Social History*, ed. Roger J. Crum and John T. Paoletti (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 380.

acclaimed preacher. His success in 1494 was owed largely to experience gained from a long career fraught with setbacks. As shall be clarified, his effectiveness as a sencescaper developed out of repeated failures and long hours of self-reflection.

As a young lector at San Marco in the early 1480s, Savonarola gained infamy as an incompetent preacher. According to the sixteenth-century priest, Francesco Caloro, he was so inept in the years before he began to prophesy, that his relatives, brothers, and close friends encouraged him to give up preaching. They were afraid that he would dishonour “his *patria*, his family, and the doctrine,” for he lacked the “voice, gestures, styles, grace, and artfulness that are sought in the ideal preacher.”<sup>26</sup> Savonarola himself confirmed his ineptitude as a preacher. He would later recall in a sermon of February 1498 that “everyone who knew me ten years ago knew that I had neither voice nor breath nor preaching style, in fact everyone disliked my preaching.”<sup>27</sup> His first preaching assignments were at the Benedictine convent of Murate and at Orsanmichele in 1482, which we unfortunately know very little about.<sup>28</sup> As a foreigner, the sound of his heavy Romagnol accent, his gravelly voice and his awkward gestures were grating to Florentine audiences.<sup>29</sup> Even two years later, preaching was still something of a challenge to him. The performance of his Lenten sermons at San Lorenzo in 1484 “satisfied almost nobody,” commented Fra Placido Cinozzi who was there to witness him. By the end of the Lenten season, fewer than 25 men, women and children remained in the audience.<sup>30</sup> For this occasion, the Pseudo-Burlamacchi, an anonymous biographer of Savonarola, noted that

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<sup>26</sup> Francesco Caloro, “Defensione contro gli adversarii de frate Hieronymo Savonarola prenuntiatore delle instanti calamitate, et renovatione della chiesa,” in *Prediche devotissime et piene de divini mysterii del venerando et sacro theologo Frate Hieronymo Savonarola da Ferrara. Defensione del predetto contra i calumniatori* (Ferrara: Giovanni Mazocco dal Bondeno, 1513), III:479.

<sup>27</sup> Girolamo Savonarola, *Prediche sopra l'Esodo*, ed. Pier Giorgio Ricci, 2 vols. (Roma: Belardetti, 1955-1956), I:50.

<sup>28</sup> Roberto Ridolfi, *The Life of Girolamo Savonarola* (New York: Knopf, 1959), 16.

<sup>29</sup> Donald Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence; Prophecy and Patriotism in the Renaissance* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970), 84.

<sup>30</sup> Placido Cinozzi, “Estratto d’una epistola . . . de vita et moribus reverendi patris fratris Hieronimi Savonarole de Ferrara,” in *Scelta di prediche e scritti di fra Girolamo Savonarola con nuovi documenti intorno alla sua vita*, eds. Pasquale Villari and Enrico Casanova (Florence: G.C. Sansoni, 1898), 10.

audiences were put off by his hoarse manner of speaking and his unattractive gestures: “He had no grace in preaching, and he appeared in every part to be incredibly rude.”<sup>31</sup> The disappointment was so devastating to him that he apparently considered abandoning preaching and leaving Florence for Lombardy to pursue teaching.<sup>32</sup>

These contemporary accounts, and Savonarola’s own self-reflection, suggest he was an aural failure. In a city like Florence, where the populace was interested in spectacles, skilled at listening, and readily compared and criticised preachers, Savonarola was unprepared and unaccustomed to a seasoned and discerning audience.<sup>33</sup> As Beverly Mayne Kienzle has pointed out, the goal of sermons was to persuade and convert. Preaching was fundamentally a performance that was always evaluated in terms of its impact and efficaciousness.<sup>34</sup> The size of the audience was the most obvious metric for gauging the charisma of a preacher. The low turnout to his sermons meant that Savonarola almost certainly earned himself popular apathy in his early career. Nevertheless, he was clearly destined to learn from these early setbacks.

The Florentine elite traditionally appreciated sermons that emphasised subtle arguments, poetic allusions, and the systematic organisation of texts.<sup>35</sup> The humanist poet Angelo Poliziano related his experience of listening to a sermon delivered by Fra Mariano da Genazzano in April 1489, an Augustinian preacher influential in Medici circles. Initially sceptical, Poliziano was soon enchanted by Genazzano’s elegant aural delivery, which he praised as making the preacher seem to soar “to a gigantic height in the pulpit, far beyond all human proportions.” He could not help but be swayed by Genazzano’s “harmonious cadence,”

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<sup>31</sup> Pacifico Burlamacchi, *La vita con alcuni scritti di fra Girolamo Savonarola arso in Firenze l'anno 1498 scritta da Pacifico Burlamacchi lucchese domenicano suo familiare* (Venice: dalla tipografia di Alvisopoli, 1829), 38-39.

<sup>32</sup> Cinozzi, “Epistola d’una epistola,” 11.

<sup>33</sup> Lauro Martines, *Fire in the City: Savonarola and the Struggle for the Soul of Renaissance Florence* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 17.

<sup>34</sup> Beverly Mayne Kienzle, “Medieval Sermons and Their Performance: Theory and Record,” in *Preacher, Sermon and Audience in the Middle Ages*, ed. Carolyn Muessig (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 104.

<sup>35</sup> Donald Weinstein, *Savonarola* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 34.

which heightened the persuasive qualities of the sermon. The preacher's elegant technique, amplified by the acoustic properties of the church interior seemed to produce an otherworldly sensory experience.<sup>36</sup>

However, there was another preaching tradition that appealed to humbler audiences. Bernardino da Siena (1380-1444) had achieved great success in Florence and elsewhere by delivering folksy, self-dramatic, and conversational performances that invoked vignettes of daily life.<sup>37</sup> Folksiness was not Savonarola's forte, but he began to prefer a simple, unadorned style of preaching that emphasised direct communication and a fundamentalist interpretation of the core biblical texts. The logic behind Savonarola's preaching style is aptly revealed in a conversation years later between him and the Piagnoni poet Girolamo Benivieni. Savonarola trivialised Genazzano's style as "verbal elegancies and ornaments," while adding that "the simplicity of my way of preaching should be exalted and sublimated."<sup>38</sup> To him, the learned loquaciousness of his rival's humanist-inspired preaching served more to boost the ego of the preacher than to transmit spiritual doctrines. He believed that his assertive back-to-basics approach to preaching was a more substantial and accessible alternative to the esoterism of the erudite.

By the 1490s, contemporary accounts begin to suggest that Savonarola was coming into his own as a preacher. Cerretani, who had become aware of Savonarola in 1491, was impressed by his directness and by the fresh simplicity of his interpretation of scripture.<sup>39</sup> Later, his admirer Simone Filipepi described how Savonarola's delivered "very fervent and fruitful" sermons, and how his voice and pronunciation were so clear and powerful that it was

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<sup>36</sup> Angelo Poliziano. *Angeli Politiani Opera. Quorum primus hic tomus complectitur Epistolarum libris XII. Miscellaneorum Centuriam I. Omnia iam recens a mendis repurgata* (Lyon: Apud Seb. Gryphium, 1533), 116.

<sup>37</sup> Weinstein, *Savonarola*, 34-35.

<sup>38</sup> Girolamo Benivieni "Epistola di Girolamo Benivieni a Clemente VII," in Benedetto Varchi, *Storia fiorentina: con i primi quattro libri e col nono secondo il codice autografo*, ed. Gaetano Milanesi, 3 vols. (Firenze: Le Monier, 1857-1858), III:313.

<sup>39</sup> Cerretani, *Storia fiorentina*, 192.



“universally heard” as though he were Saint Paul himself.<sup>40</sup> Savonarola had clearly taken notice of his past failures and learned from them. We know that he kept sermon notes in his early career that evaluated his own performances and the reactions of his audiences. In one of these, he curtly noted that he was satisfied by the allegorical and moral components of his sermon, but “I did not like my manner of speaking.”<sup>41</sup> Over years of experience and introspection, his preaching technique matured and established its own idiosyncrasies. On the eve of his ascendancy, he had already gained repute as a charismatic preacher with a forceful voice and a magnetic charm. And by 1496, Filipepi observed that Savonarola seemed “greater than his ordinary stature, displaying an invincible and virile soul” in his lofty pulpit, pontificating and gesticulating with great intensity.<sup>42</sup> His apparent success demonstrates that there was a growing market for his unadorned and direct style of preaching. His simplistic interpretation of scripture and his use of plain language endeared him to more listeners than his competitors (who catered to elite tastes) could. By finetuning his sermons in a way that appealed to as well as shaped popular tastes, Savonarola’s verbal communiques were able to sway the largest possible segments of the population to his cause.

In order to integrate his populism into a coherent performative framework, Savonarola had begun tapping into the prophetic undercurrent of Italian preaching from around the late 1480s. This was a culture of prophesying that was so pervasive that one historian called Florence a *terra profetis*.<sup>43</sup> Savonarola lashed out at the perceived corruption of Florentine society, which he blamed on the degeneration of the clergy and the abuses of the rich and

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<sup>40</sup> Simone Filipepi, “Estratto della Cronaca di Simone di Mariano Filipepi novamente scoperto nell’Archivio vaticano,” in *Scelta di prediche e scritti di fra Girolamo Savonarola con nuovi documenti intorno alla sua vita*, eds. Pasquale Villari and Enrico Casanova (Florence: G.C. Sansoni, 1898), 475.

<sup>41</sup> Girolamo Savonarola and Giulio Cattin, *Il primo Savonarola. Poesie e prediche autografe dal Codice Borromeo*, ed. Giulio Cattin (Florence: Olschki, 1974), 286.

<sup>42</sup> Filipepi, “Cronaca,” 475-476.

<sup>43</sup> Stéphane Toussaint, “Profetare alla fine del Quattrocento,” *Studi Savonaroliani*, ed. Gian Carlo Garfagnini, 167-171 (Florence: SISMEL, Edizioni del Galluzzo 1996), 168.

powerful, and warned that it heralded the coming apocalypse.<sup>44</sup> The only thing that would save Florence was ecclesiastical reform and a city-wide reversion to a simple, pious life. He expounded a simple yet terrifying catchphrase in many of his sermons, “Behold the sword of the Lord, falling quickly and swiftly onto earth” (*Ecce gladius Domini super terram cito et velociter*).<sup>45</sup> One anxious Florentine commented that Savonarola preached “every morning” that “we would be visited by God’s scourge” and that there was no recourse from it.<sup>46</sup> Repetition was a powerful tool for an orator such as Savonarola. The repetition of plausible statements could indeed persuade people of its validity.<sup>47</sup> Before long, Savonarola and his lieutenants from San Marco would proclaim this prophecy, not only from every important pulpit in Florence, but also from those of the churches of the surrounding Tuscan towns.<sup>48</sup>



Figure 4: Commemorative medal by Niccolo di Forzore Spinelli (1498). Obverse: Girolamo Savonarola; reverse: The Sword of God suspended over Florence.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Weinstein, *Savonarola*, 82.

<sup>45</sup> Girolamo Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Aggeo: con il Trattato circa il reggimento e governo della città di Firenze*, ed. Luigi Firpo (Rome: Belardetti, 1965), 15; Ridolfi, *Life*, 49.

<sup>46</sup> Niccolo Guicciardini, “Estratti di lettere di Niccolo Guicciardini a Piero Guicciardini Console di Mare a Pisa,” in Roberto Ridolfi, *Studi Savonaroliani*, 262-264 (Florence: Olschki, 1935), 264.

<sup>47</sup> Lynn Hasher, David Goldstein and Thomas Toppino, “Frequency and the Conference of Referential Validity,” *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior* 16, no. 1 (1977): 111-112.

<sup>48</sup> Weinstein, *Savonarola*, 90.

<sup>49</sup> Morton & Eden, *Auction 41 The Stack Collection: Important Renaissance Medals and Plaquettes* (London: Morton & Eden, 9 December 2009), lot 113.

By early 1495, his full prophetic vision for Florence finally took form. Savonarola recalled in his Renovation sermon of 13 January 1495, and later in his *Compendio di rivelazioni* of the following August that in 1492, he was presented with a vision of a hand holding a sword in the sky, inscribed with his oft-repeated catchphrase *Gladius Domini super terram cito et velociter*. Then, a great voice issued forth from three faces surrounded by a single light that beseeched him to repent before the coming of the divine punishment. Following this, multitudes of angels in white descended to earth and offered men red crosses and white mantles, some accepting, some refusing. There followed terrible images of war, pestilence and famine, and angels offered the cup of penitence, which ensured refuge for those who took it, and suffering for those who did not.<sup>50</sup> But all was not lost. He declared that just as the children of Israel had begun to rebuild their Temple after the captivity of Babylon, it was also time for the Florentines to rebuild after the passing of the deluge.<sup>51</sup> Once the floodwaters had abated, Savonarola promised that God would make Florence “richer, more powerful and more glorious than ever it was, and she will reform all Italy.”<sup>52</sup> Savonarola’s prophetic visions were a highly effective persuasive device. He preached it consistently and published it in print, circulating it throughout the city to such an extent that it became something like a leitmotif of the Piagnoni movement. His lucid mental images must have been both terrifying and reassuring to the Florentines.

The events of autumn 1494 seemed to manifest these apocalyptic scenes. It was clear to Florentines that King Charles VIII was indeed Savonarola’s “Sword of God” and that he symbolised God’s scourge. After the French host left Florence to continue their march to the south, thus allaying the fear that the city would suffer divine retribution, the second stage of

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<sup>50</sup> Girolamo Savonarola, *Prediche sopra i Salmi*, ed. Vincenzo Romano, 2 vols. (Rome: Belardetti, 1969), I:52-54; Savonarola, *Compendio di rivelazioni*, 13-14.

<sup>51</sup> Savonarola, *Aggeo*, 151.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

Savonarola's prophecy seemed to be the logical next step. To achieve this, Savonarola prescribed that Florence should undergo a series of political reforms, beginning with a renewal of the Republican constitution.<sup>53</sup> The city's office-holding classes complied, abolishing the oligarchical Medicean councils in favour of a more democratic Great Council inspired by the Venetian Republic when the new government was formed in January 1495.<sup>54</sup> Meanwhile, Savonarola was quick to capitalise on his new political sway. During the critical period of December 1494, Landucci observed that Savonarola preached in the Duomo every day, holding congregations numbering up to thirteen or fourteen thousand people.<sup>55</sup> Even if some of his more critical listeners had previously challenged the validity of some of his prophetic claims, most were inclined to believe in his authenticity. Landucci once again related that "the greater part of the people believed him, especially those who were without passion about the state or about political parties."<sup>56</sup> No doubt his Haggai and Psalm sermons of late 1494 to early 1495 were consummate performances. The sonic power and the visual authority he commanded from his lofty Cathedral pulpit swept his growing audiences, who were convinced by the passage of recent events and gratified by the providential role that he ascribed them.

Savonarola had developed his prophetic message in two stages, starting with tribulation and doom and shifting to promises of divine love and favour. Political renewal had become a central fixture of his prophetic message and with his formal entry into the Florentine political arena came the establishment of a Piagnoni political movement. Now he had to work towards giving that movement some organisational cohesion and an identifiable face. As consensus towards his de facto custodianship of Florence grew, so too did a distinct "Savonarolan" sensescap emerge commensurate with his growing public footprint.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>54</sup> Stefano Dall'Aglio, *Savonarola and Savonarolism* (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2010), 20.

<sup>55</sup> Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 92, 94.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 103.

## Reorienting the Ritual Axis of Florence

One of Savonarola's earliest priorities in grounding his movement and carrying out his spiritual reforms was to sacralise the urban landscape. Savonarola sought to elevate the city's churches and especially his friary of San Marco as the primary sites of ritual efficacy and exemplary affect, a role which Medici private palaces and villas once performed.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, San Marco had once been part of this spatial network of patronage. It has been described by Allie Terry-Fritsch as a "practiced place" where secular patronage and spiritual practice were interwoven, serving to communicate Medicean power and advertise their role as humanist benefactors for the common good of Florence.<sup>58</sup> The convent lay in a traditionally Medici dominated neighbourhood, almost in clear sight of their palace and in close proximity to the headquarters of several of their sponsored lay confraternities, such as the Magi.<sup>59</sup> The subversion of this ritual arrangement was a conscious effort simultaneously to appropriate San Marco's ritual role and disconnect it from its Medicean heritage.

Savonarola intended that San Marco would be the first point of reference for the spiritual renewal of Florence as a sacerdotal utopia. He made it clear in a sermon of 17/18 December 1494 that a united city is like a "well-regulated religious convent" which had everything in common and lived in peace and tranquillity.<sup>60</sup> To realise this vision of the city as a holy friary, Savonarola urged the lay population of the city to "go to mass every day" and to imitate the early Christians by regularly taking communion.<sup>61</sup> The implication was clear, laypeople were to become more frequent in their churchgoing and that San Marco was to guide the Florentines into a pious life.

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<sup>57</sup> Trexler, *Public Life*, 469.

<sup>58</sup> Allie Terry-Fritsch, "Florentine Convent as Practiced Place: Cosimo de' Medici, Fra Angelico, and the Public Library of San Marco," *Medieval Encounters: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Culture in Confluence and Dialogue* 18, no. 2-3 (2012): 270.

<sup>59</sup> Weinstein, *Savonarola*, 28.

<sup>60</sup> Savonarola, *Aggeo*, 275-276.

<sup>61</sup> Girolamo Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Giobbe*, ed. Roberto Ridolfi, 2 vols. (Roma: Belardetti, 1957), I:396.

For the convent of San Marco to serve as a mirror for reform, its community had to be seen and to be experienced as austere and chaste. Savonarola's reforms demonstrably succeeded when Florentine laymen began to record the edifying impressions that the friars left on them.<sup>62</sup> By 1496, the inhabitants of San Marco were so respected that representatives of the community were invited to say mass to inaugurate the election of the new Signoria for the May-June term.<sup>63</sup>

Savonarola also utilised the architectural presence of San Marco in a way that was conducive to engaging Florentine churchgoers in the Piagnoni reform program. Churches had long played a very important role in the city's ritual sensescape. They were mediums of aural communication, works of art, loci for the movement and gathering of people, and symbols of order and stability. In particular, the power of church bells had a significant quotidian impact, sounding out the cycle of the religious and processional calendar and structuring the daily lives of Florentines. The sounds of the city's churches typically revolved around the Duomo, adhering to an ecclesiastical hierarchy that communicated each church's position in relation to it. However, the ringing of bells was also a way for certain religious institutions to express their autonomy and their connection to specific communities.<sup>64</sup> This was the impetus behind Savonarola's sensescaping of the San Marco precinct. By elevating San Marco's prestige to rival the Duomo's, he was effectively reorienting the ritual axis of Florence, paving the way for Piagnoni mastery over ritual motion and space.

The bell had a critical role to play in this program. San Marco had a single bell in its *campanile* donated by Cosimo de' Medici, which was first rung in 1436 to honour him for having granted the Dominicans care of the convent.<sup>65</sup> Under Savonarola, the bell gained the

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<sup>62</sup> For example, see Filipepi, "Cronaca," 477-478.

<sup>63</sup> Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 129-130.

<sup>64</sup> Niall Atkinson, *The Noisy Renaissance* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2016), 77.

<sup>65</sup> Guido Carocci, "La campana di S. Marco di Firenze," *Bollettino d'arte* 2 (1908): 256.

nickname *La Piagnona* (Lady Wailer) because it was perceived as accompanying the cries of citizens who were affected by Savonarola's sermons.<sup>66</sup> The philology of this sobriquet reveals the mobilizational power of the bell. The sound of *La Piagnona* became a regular fixture of daily life in Florence, pealing regularly to summon Florentines to prayer and to signal the passage of religious processions. The heightened role of San Marco transformed street life in the surrounding neighbourhoods. *La Piagnona* pealed regularly, and each time its sounds directed people to San Marco to see and hear Savonarola speak from his pulpit. Filipepi described how the Via Cocomero (now the Via Ricasoli), the main thoroughfare that ran between San Marco and the Duomo was often "crowded with scores of men and women who went to see him [Savonarola], as though they had never heard him before."<sup>67</sup> The establishment of a Savonarolan sensescape centred on San Marco signified the conquest of urban space by the Piagnoni. By injecting the surrounding neighbourhoods with the sights and sounds of processions, sermons, and bells, San Marco was imbued with a sense of institutional authority. As a natural result of this, the Savonarolan sensescape overlapped with the pre-existing sensory environment of the urban neighbourhoods, integrating itself into daily life to an extent that created the impression among Florentines that San Marco was a necessary component in the overall moral and social welfare of the political commune.

### Mobilising Children

In persuading Florence's turbulent youth to embody the visible face of the Piagnoni movement, Savonarola deployed a long-standing tradition: Florence's youth confraternities. Youth confraternities had emerged in Italy around the beginning of the century but it was only in Florence that they were formally incorporated into civil and ecclesiastical life, receiving papal sanction and entrusted with specific roles pertaining to the spiritual and material welfare of the

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 256.

<sup>67</sup> Filipepi, "Cronaca," 475.

city.<sup>68</sup> These included a mix of secular and religious duties, from the recitation of the divine office, singing of religious lauds and participation in processions, to the election of confraternal officers, the management of their financial and economic investments, and negotiations and contracts with parties external to the confraternity. Within the educational context of the youth confraternities, members learned and taught catechism, were trained in the delivery of sermons, staged plays, and learned music and singing.<sup>69</sup>

Lorenzo de' Medici was himself an active promoter of these youth confraternities. Under the Medici, confraternities of *fanciulli* became a prominent element of Florentine religious life. Medici children were usually enrolled in the youth confraternity of San Giovanni Evangelista, and Lorenzo even wrote a play, the *Rappresentazione di San Giovanni e Paolo*, which was performed by the confraternity in 1491, at a time when his son Giuliano was a captain.<sup>70</sup> Having come to power at an unusually young age, youths were an important support base for Lorenzo.<sup>71</sup> For example, in 1478, a group of “youths and lad labourers” from the Canto alla Macina, many of whom certainly members of the festive *Potenza* of King of the Millstone and the surrounding Medicean youth confraternities, wrote a letter to Lorenzo relating that during the Pazzi Conspiracy, they had rushed to defend the Medici palace and hunt down the conspirators.<sup>72</sup> Yet, youth violence could be hard to control. In 1488, a group of boys plotted to assassinate and rob a Jewish moneylender after listening to the Franciscan Bernardino da Feltre preach against the Jewish presence in Florence.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Lorenzo Polizzotto, *Children of the Promise: The Confraternity of the Purification and the Socialization of Youths in Florence, 1427-1785* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1.

<sup>69</sup> Konrad Eisenbichler, *The Boys of the Archangel Raphael: A Youth Confraternity in Florence, 1411-1785* (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 18.

<sup>70</sup> Polizzotto, *Children of the Promise*, 54; Nerida Newbigin, “Piety and Politics in the Feste of Lorenzo’s Florence,” in *Lorenzo il Magnifico e il suo mondo: convegno internazionale di studi (Firenze, 9-13 Giugno 1992)*, ed. Gian Carlo Garfagnini, 17-41 (Florence: Olschki, 1994), 39-40.

<sup>71</sup> Najemy, “History of Florence,” 371.

<sup>72</sup> D. V. Kent, and F. W. Kent, “Two Vignettes of Florentine Society in the Fifteenth Century,” *Rinascimento* 23 (1983): 252-260.

<sup>73</sup> Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 53-54.



Just as Lorenzo de' Medici had understood the symbolic and political importance of the youths in Florence's cultural universe, so too did Savonarola. To capitalise on youths as a major communal and ritual force, he entrusted the task of reforming Florence's youth to his right-hand man Fra Domenico da Pescia. Instead of cooperating with those pre-existing youth confraternities, many of which had previously received Medicean patronage, da Pescia and his proteges opted for the creation of a new Savonarolan youth confraternity, its members possibly recruited from both the children of Savonarola's supporters and from those pre-existing youth confraternities.<sup>74</sup> Savonarola's greatest achievement in reforming the youths was to lend pre-existing traditions and practices with new meanings and priorities. The *fanciulli* were completely absent during his first year of ascendancy. By 1496 they had become the ritual centre of public life in Florence, becoming prominent fixtures at all of Savonarola's public appearances thereafter.<sup>75</sup>

Savonarola intended for the *fanciulli* to be the visual and aural centrepieces of religious rituals. The *fanciulli* were essentially San Marco's poster boys, living and moving pieces of propaganda. Their primary purpose was to be seen and heard by laypeople to create impressions that could persuade people to convert to the Piagnoni cause. By Savonarola's reckoning, the best way to visually communicate his philosophy of spiritual piety was for the *fanciulli* to display a modest countenance and to "abandon all pomp."<sup>76</sup> In 1496, the Great Council approved of a reform plan submitted by Domenico da Pescia to moderate the dress and hairstyles of the Florentine youth, prescribing that their hair had to be cut above the ears.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, it was determined that the *fanciulli* uniform would imitate Savonarola's visions of angels as described in his *Compendio di rivelazioni*.<sup>78</sup> In public, they would be dressed

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<sup>74</sup> Polizzotto, *Children of the Promise*, 112-113.

<sup>75</sup> Trexler, *Public Life*, 475.

<sup>76</sup> Girolamo Savonarola, *Prediche sopra i Salmi*, ed. Vincenzo Romano, 2 vols. (Rome: Belardetti, 1969), II:89, 68.

<sup>77</sup> Cerretani, *Storia fiorentina*, 232.

<sup>78</sup> Savonarola, *Compendio di rivelazioni*, 13.

exclusively in white, the colour of innocence, and carry little red crucifixes that they would display and hand out to people during their processions.

Savonarola had long been wary of the potential for music to seduce Christians from the pious life. In a 1495 sermon, he attacked polyphonic singing and the playing of organs with incendiary vitriol, claiming that the devil was behind the impulse to “build beautiful churches, and conduct beautiful ceremonies, and give themselves to the *canti figurati*” to such an extent that “nothing was left of the spirit.”<sup>79</sup> The kind of music that best emulated the ethos of spiritual piety was the “plainchant ordained by the Church.”<sup>80</sup> Savonarola determined that music for the sake of music was hollow and esoteric. It obliterated the words of the song, shifting the listeners’ focus from the intended message to the beauty of the melody.<sup>81</sup> Savonarola encouraged the *fanciulli* to sing *laude*, an oral tradition based on music familiar to the commonfolk and typically memorised by ear. Many of these were sung to the tunes of popular carnival songs and other secular folksongs, but the lyrics communicated religious imagery and ideas.<sup>82</sup> Since the tunes were already familiar, people could quickly memorise the new lyrics and sing-along. Their catchiness and simplicity made for an efficient sensory repertoire for the communicative and immersive attributes of religious propaganda.

The *fanciulli* became a regular presence at Savonarola’s sermons from around the beginning of 1496. Filipepi further noted that they would often arrive an hour or two early to “read the psalms and to recite the Crown, and often in choirs sang lauds and psalms most devotedly.”<sup>83</sup> Landucci records that steps were erected along the walls opposite the chancel of

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<sup>79</sup> Savonarola, *Salmi*, II:114-115.

<sup>80</sup> Girolamo Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Amos e Zaccaria*, ed. Paolo Ghiglieri, 3 vols. (Rome: Belardetti, 1971), II:23.

<sup>81</sup> Patrick Paul Macey, *Bonfire Songs: Savonarola's Musical Legacy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 98.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>83</sup> Filipepi, “Cronaca,” 475.

Florence's cathedral to accommodate the immense numbers of *fanciulli*.<sup>84</sup> The historian Iacopo Nardi corroborates Landucci's report, observing that steps of timber with rows of seats "in the manner of a theatre" were installed.<sup>85</sup> The theatrical connotation of Nardi's report hints at a conscious effort to direct attention towards the *fanciulli*, who were positioned at a higher elevation above the congregation to be seen and heard, as if the Duomo were their stage. The performances that the *fanciulli* gave captivated their adult audiences and elevated the spiritual drama of Savonarola's sermons. Landucci was dazzled upon hearing them sing to officiate the start of a sermon of 17 February 1496 as the clergy emerged into the chancel. He had found it exceedingly beautiful, remarking how many adults cried tears of joy, and utterances of "this is a thing of the Lord's" were repeated throughout the crowd.<sup>86</sup>

### Consolidating the Savonarolan Sensescape

No single moment announces the emergence of the Savonarolan sensescape in Florence. As I have endeavoured to demonstrate, its appearance was a result of a gradual process of organisational planning and ritual choreography that responded and adapted to shifts in social and political conditions. The key threads of this broader program were preaching, public ritual, and the practice of places and spaces. Largely through the production of sights and sounds, these threads worked together in concert to offer crisis-weary Florentines an attractive vision of Florence that was promised to be stable and harmonious. However, if there was one event that displayed all of these various facets of Savonarolan sensescaping coming together in a cohesive way for the first time, it was the Palm Sunday celebration of 27 March 1496.

The festivities of Palm Sunday 1496 were held to celebrate the establishment of the Monte di Pieta charity loan fund, and it was carefully choreographed by both Savonarola and

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<sup>84</sup> Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 125-126.

<sup>85</sup> Iacopo Nardi, *Istorie della città di Firenze di Iacopo Nardi*, ed. Agenore Gelli 2 vols. (Florence: F. le Monnier, 1858), I: 79.

<sup>86</sup> Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 126.

the newly incumbent pro-Savonarolan Signoria for maximum emotional efficacy. In his Lenten sermon cycle on Amos and Zaccaria for that year, Savonarola mustered the forces of sound and space to centre the *fanciulli* within his New Jerusalem and to dictate the strict guidelines they had to obey in order to attain spiritual purity. During a sermon of 20 March, he declared to the *fanciulli*: “My children, I hear that you wished to hold a procession on Palm Sunday.” He beseeched the populace to allow the *fanciulli* the necessary freedoms to participate in the planned festivities as it amounted to “divine instinct.”<sup>87</sup> In subsequent sermons over the next week, he prescribed to both *fanciulli* and grown audience-member alike how they should dress and behave during the festivities, how the procession would be ordered and arranged, persuading them of the providential role that they all had a part to play in the transfiguration of Florence.<sup>88</sup>

After a week of engineering hype, the celebrations took off with great fanfare at the Duomo on the morning of 27 March. As the cathedral’s bells pealed, mustering thousands of Florentines to listen to his inaugural address, Savonarola made history by dedicating this sermon to the *fanciulli*, inviting all adults to “become like children in purity.”<sup>89</sup> In a monumental departure from past ritual practice, the *fanciulli*, not the clergy, were entrusted with the leadership of this city-wide religious festival. To an audience that had already been weaned on a regular diet of Savonarolan preaching and prophecy for years, most were happy to regard these children, innocent and uncorrupted by the turbulent years of the early 1490s, as their spiritual leaders and saviours.

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<sup>87</sup> Savonarola, *Amos e Zaccaria*, II:433.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 71,123,139.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

The religious procession that followed was recorded by various chroniclers and diarists.<sup>90</sup> The procession began in the piazza of the Santissima Annunziata and moved to the Piazza San Marco. From there, they continued down the Via Larga to the Duomo and onto the Piazza della Signoria. Spearheading the procession were thousands of *fanciulli* draped in their signature white robes, donning olive garlands on their heads and carrying little red crosses and palm-leaves in their hands. The *fanciulli* were followed by a massive tabernacle containing panel paintings of Jesus on his donkey processing through Jerusalem on Palm Sunday on one side, and the Virgin Mary as Queen of Florence on the other. In front of the tabernacle, two crowns were carried to symbolise Savonarola's ideal of divine monarchy for Florence. Following the tabernacle were a troupe of girls in white, and behind them, a pole ensign of the Monte di Pietà. The back of the procession was comprised of a cavalcade of adult processors in hierarchical order, from the clergy to the city and guild officials, and finally the laymen and women of the city. All the while, the *fanciulli* collected alms and sang lauds as they marched, crying "Long live Christ our King!" as the adult participants and onlookers joined them in a frenzy of singing and chanting. When they arrived at the Piazza della Signoria, the *fanciulli* performed a laud composed by Girolamo Benivieni, its lyrics reiterating the Virgin's promise to Savonarola in his *Compendio* that Florence would be "richer, more powerful, and glorious than ever."<sup>91</sup> Finally, the procession ended in the cathedral, where a huge altar with the ensign of the Monte had been assembled where the collected alms were donated to set up the loan fund.

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<sup>90</sup> Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 128; Burlamacchi, *Vita*, 122-128; Parenti, *Storia fiorentina*, I:326-328; Girolamo Benivieni, *Canzoni e sonetti dell'amore e della bellezza divina* (Florence: Per S. Antonio Tubini & Lorenzo di Francesco Venetiano & Andrea Ghyrlandi da Pistoia, 1500), cxii-cxiii.

<sup>91</sup> Benivieni, *Canzoni e sonetti*, cxii; Savonarola, *Compendio di rivelazioni*, 23.

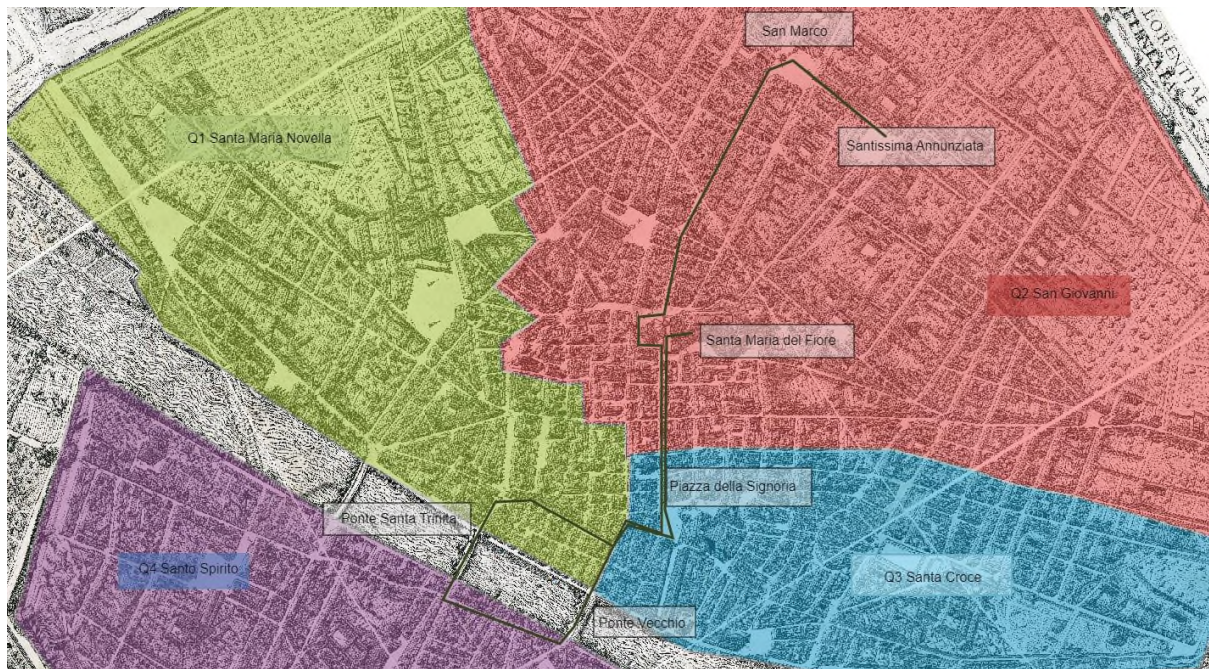


Figure 5: Probable Palm Sunday Processional Route. Each colour denotes one of the Florence's four administrative quarters according to which the *fanciulli* were organised.<sup>92</sup>

The Palm Sunday procession was a great success, and a powerful sensory performance of public and divine affirmation over the Piagnoni reform program. The streets of Florence became a site of religious and political practice, as thousands of *fanciulli* and pro-Savonarolans created an imposing presence spatially, aurally and visually. It would have been almost impossible to isolate oneself from this festivity. Parenti noted that “all the people, men and women, in vast numbers, swelled the crowd” while Landucci reckoned that every single person in the city had come to the cathedral to donate to the Monte fund.<sup>93</sup> The result among the Florentines was an explosion of devotional frenzy. Savonarola later recounted that many adult men were so enthralled by the spiritual madness of the affair that they chanted “Viva Cristo” and danced in the streets.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, the Pseudo-Burlamacchi observed that many adult men

<sup>92</sup> Created with DECIMA (Digitally Encoded Census Information and Mapping Archive). All major Savonarolan processions followed the same route. No account of Palm Sunday provides complete details for the route, but Landucci fills in these blanks when he mentions that during the Carnival procession a month prior, the procession crossed the Ponte Santa Trinita from the Piazza della Signoria and went round over the Ponte Vecchio (likely via the Borgo San Jacopo) before returning to the piazza, see Landucci, *Diario Fiorentino*, 125.

<sup>93</sup> Parenti, *Storia fiorentina*, I:327; Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 128.

<sup>94</sup> Savonarola, *Amos e Zaccaria*, III:160.

were unable to control their tears, overcome by such jubilation as if Florence had transformed into an earthly paradise.<sup>95</sup> The theatrical role of the *fanciulli* processors themselves played a major role in provoking this emotional outburst. The sight of docile boys of angelic appearance and the sounds of their singing, which guided the ebb and flow of the festivities, produced an otherworldly sensory experience that captivated their elders. The *fanciulli* were accorded the role of spiritual leaders due to the perception of their youthful innocence. As they moved through all the key sites of religious and political importance in the city, they created the impression of symbolic conquest over these spaces. The singing of Savonarola's doctrines in lyric-form and the parading of religious art injected the contents of Savonarola's sermons into the domain of street entertainment. In the mind's eye of many onlookers, Florence was momentarily transfigured into a celestial sphere, from whence every image and every sound that radiated forth from the agents of San Marco channelled divinity and civic glory.

The planning and execution of the Palm Sunday festivities can be seen as an analogue for the way in which sensescaping aided Savonarola's ascendancy. He created anticipation for the event through his sermons on Amos and Zaccaria, which served as a constant reminder of its divine purpose, provided instructions for how it should be executed, and created hype and excitement for the appointed day. When the day came, Savonarola served as the executive choreographer of the visual spectacles and auditory performances that accompanied the procession. The ordering of the procession, the display of religious iconography and the inundation of the city's soundscapes with sequentially ordered musical pieces collectively guided public onlookers through a narrative that conveyed the harmonious marriage of religion and public welfare. Through the careful direction of sensory repertoires and the skilful choreography of urban space and ceremonial architecture, Savonarola was overtly weaving his agenda of spiritual renewal into the very fabric of popular social culture. The sensory

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<sup>95</sup> Burlamacchi, *Vita*, 126.

choreography of the procession effectively conveyed this narrative of civic exceptionalism and divine providence citywide through visual and aural mediums, immersing onlookers and participants in its meanings in an accessible and entertaining manner.

## Conclusion

Though Savonarola continued to rely on the broad support of the Florentine populace, and though his influence was never comprehensive, he was fully ascendant in Florence by early 1496. Foreign and domestic observers alike were astonished at the power that this unlikely foreign monk had over one of Italy's greatest and proudest cities. If we are to believe the anti-Piagnoni Milanese agent Paolo Somenzi, during the Palm Sunday festival two-thirds of Florence were devoted to the Piagnoni cause.<sup>96</sup> Even nonaligned sceptics within the Florentine body politic made similar observations, such as the chronicler and political analyst Piero di Marco Parenti, who noted that Savonarola was “going at full speed and you could almost say he was running our city.”<sup>97</sup> Savonarola himself claimed again and again in his sermons that he alone was God's spokesman in Florence. No other cleric voiced pretensions as lofty as his.

The rise of Savonarola was due to a mix of circumstance and strategy. This chapter has sought to reveal how sensescaping was a critical means through which he was able to engineer consensus. The first part of the chapter has shown that Savonarola's success cannot be seen in isolation from pre-existing trends in preaching and urban expansion associated with the mendicant orders. Having access to the tools and amenities of mendicant preaching that had become embedded in the urban fabric of the city, Savonarola was able to utilise them in unique and innovative ways. The choreography of various sensory repertoires, from the establishment of a unique vocal style to the mobilisation of crowds and the manipulation of aural space,

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<sup>96</sup> Paolo Somenzi, “A Lodovico Maria Sforza, detto il Moro, Duca di Milano (1495-1498),” In *Fra Girolamo Savonarola*, ed. Isidoro del Lungo (Florence: coi tipi di M. Cellini e C. alla Galileiana, 1861), doc III, 22.

<sup>97</sup> Parenti, *Storia fiorentina*, I:321.



elevated the drama and urgency of his prophecies. As a unique preacher with a penchant for idiosyncrasy and a sensitivity towards contemporary trends, Savonarola was able to surf the tides of sentiment and direct them in his favour. By attuning his sermons to contemporary socio-political developments, Savonarola was able to engineer a broad consensus about his political and religious vision for the city.

Once group consensus was achieved, Savonarola worked to consolidate it through the refashioning of ritual spaces and the organisation of social agents. Sound and sight were once again the primary means through which Savonarola sought to engage the public in his reform program and transmit its narratives and meanings. In the first place, San Marco was designated as the cosmological linchpin of Savonarola's New Jerusalem. In its capacity as a monastic community, a place of public congregation, and an architectural monument and sound-making facility, San Marco was reorganised and enhanced to serve as the centre of religious life in the city, as well as a nexus of quotidian movement in daily life. The *fanciulli* were an essential tool. The aesthetic and musical considerations that informed their presentation in public were manufactured spectacles that extended the affective spiritual drama of Piagnoni millenarianism into the theatre of the streets. With the construction and consolidation of consensus by early 1496, it is possible to conceive of a distinct Savonarolan sensescape, whereby an array of distinguishable sensory experiences was recognisable as leitmotifs for the Piagnoni movement. To be seen and heard was one thing, but the true power of this program of sensory display was in its capacity for skilful communication – its ability to tactfully match public sensory outreach with prevailing trends and attitudes. This lent the Piagnoni an acute ability to influence not only social organisations, but also the social dispositions and behaviours of individuals.

## Chapter Two – Savonarola’s Holy Terror: Sensescaping Piety and Discipline

During the Carnival of 1496, the Milanese ambassador to Florence, Paolo Somenzi, wrote a letter to his master, Duke Ludovico “il Moro” Sforza. In the letter, Somenzi relayed his observations concerning the Piagnoni direction of the Carnival festivities. In the weeks preceding Lent, Savonarola had encouraged Florentine parents to allow their children to participate in a city-wide exercise of building street-altars. Visible on every street corner, they were adorned with crucifixes and other holy figures, and were manned by the *fanciulli* who used them as alms-collecting stations for the *poveri vergognosi* (shame-faced poor).<sup>1</sup> By constructing these altars, Savonarola sought to establish a pervasive network of the sacred in the city.<sup>2</sup> He surmised that if the visualsapes of daily commuting were inundated with religious imagery, Florentines would naturally fall under their influence and would thus be more liable to conduct themselves piously.

On Ash Wednesday, 16 February, Somenzi reported that all of Florence bore witness to a solemn procession of the *fanciulli*. Divided according to the city’s four quarters and marching with impeccable discipline to the accompaniment of state trumpets, they sang hymns and filled the city’s streets with deafening cries of “Long live Christ” as they passed. They followed the usual Savonarolan processional route (see Figure 5) before terminating in the church of San Martino, where the collected alms were ceremonially donated to the *poveri*

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<sup>1</sup> Paolo Somenzi, “Lettera di Paolo Somenzi, oratore del Duca di Milano in Firenze, al suo Signore,” in Pasquale Villari, *La storia di Girolamo Savonarola e de’ suoi tempi: narrata da Pasquale Villari con l’aiuto di nuovi documenti*, 2 vols. (Florence: Felice le Monnier, 1898), I: xci.

<sup>2</sup> For similar studies on the street presence of altars and votive imagery, see Machtelt Israels, “Altars on the Street: The Wool Guild, the Carmelites and the Feast of Corpus Domini in Siena (1356-1456),” *Renaissance Studies* 20, no. 2 (2006): 180-200; Edward 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. Stephen Ozment (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1987), 27-28; Evelyn Welch, *Shopping in the Renaissance: Consumer Cultures in Italy 1400-1600* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 76-77.

*vergognosi*.<sup>3</sup> Like Somenzi, many other Florentines were impressed by the otherworldly discipline and self-restraint of this new Piagnoni Carnival. The chronicler Piero di Marco Parenti for instance, took notice of the restraint shown by the processing *fanciulli* and marvelled at how children had abruptly abandoned the old Carnival tradition of stone-throwing battles around bonfires in the streets.<sup>4</sup> The diarist Luca Landucci, whose young sons were among the processing *fanciulli*, relayed his feelings of pride and affection, describing how everyone shed “tears of spiritual sweetness” at this celestial spectacle.<sup>5</sup>

Piety and coercion came hand in hand in Savonarola’s New Jerusalem. Somenzi further observed that the street-altars the *fanciulli* almoners operated were essentially toll booths. The *fanciulli* used long wooden poles to blockade the street, harassing women and denying passage to anyone who was reluctant to donate to their charity. Moreover, *fanciulli* inquisitorial patrols roved the streets of Florence in the leadup to Carnival, shutting taverns, harassing prostitutes and well-dressed women, and violently repressing gamblers, alleged sodomites and blasphemers. In this context, the pervasive visual presence of street-altars can also be interpreted as instruments of surveillance and discipline. They served as visual signals that compelled denizens to avoid sinful behaviour and to act in accordance with the *ben vivere* (good living). Savonarola’s Carnival of 1496 was the blueprint for the rest of Savonarola’s festivals. The pervasiveness of *fanciulli* enforcers and altars in the streets, the sounds of music, and the performances of hierarchically ordered processions during this festive season temporarily transformed Florence into a celestial sphere which immersed Florentines in the presence of Christ and compelled people to adhere to strict Piagnoni values.

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<sup>3</sup> Somenzi, “Lettera,” xci.

<sup>4</sup> Parenti, *Storia fiorentina*, I: 312.

<sup>5</sup> Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 125.

This chapter investigates the role of the senses in Savonarola's consolidation of power between 1494 and 1497. It firstly explores how he attempted to control and influence legislation on social behaviour through his preaching efforts as well as through the militancy of the *fanciulli*. The second half of the chapter highlights the importance of festive rituals as an avenue of power projection and behavioural manipulation. In all instances, Piagnoni activities collectively represent efforts to finetune the sensory atmosphere of the city in a way that was conducive to the moral reform of the Florentine body politic. The *fanciulli* were the primary outlet for Savonarolan sensescaping, and they creatively channelled the *ben vivere* to inspire deference while also employing coercive methods to intimidate and discipline uncooperative Florentines. By investigating how they targeted every facet of secular society for spiritual reform, I illustrate how sensescaping was a powerful method of social control. The Piagnoni were acutely aware of the ways in which sensory experiences could influence the behavioural and affiliative dispositions of individuals. At the height of their political influence, they made sure to maintain an institutional monopoly on the visual and aural means of public communication. In doing so, every sensory experience in Florence was subjected to scrutiny, regulation and configuration, allowing them to bind people to their value systems and set the boundaries of social practices and behaviours.

### The Friar in the Sensual City

When he first arrived in Florence, Savonarola saw corruption and sin in every nook and cranny of the city. From his perspective, people gambled freely in the taverns, and prostitutes flouted themselves openly in the streets; patrician women roamed the streets in revealing dresses and displaying fine ornaments while young men dressed flamboyantly and sodomised without consequence. He explained that over the years of Medicean rule in Florence, the Florentines had grown so accustomed to hedonism that they could no longer perceive the disease that so infected them: "And they have said that the virtues are sins and sins virtues, and that simple

living is something for lunatics and inconsequential people.”<sup>6</sup> He juxtaposed Medicean social values to that of an archetypal tyranny in how men were drawn away from righteous living and encouraged to indulge in sensory and material temptations.<sup>7</sup> If we recall from the previous chapter, Savonarola had likened a well-governed and united city to a “well-regulated convent.”<sup>8</sup> To manifest the spiritual reform of the city, sensory indulgence had to be expunged in toto. The citizenry had to self-discipline, or have it forced upon them.

Before Savonarola’s arrival, civic authorities in Florence had operated several legal institutions that observed, moderated and penalised certain sensory experiences associated with impropriety and crime. In 1403, the *Onestà* (The Office of Public Decency) was founded to regulate the sex industry by limiting the movement and activities of prostitutes in the city.<sup>9</sup> And in 1432 the Office of the Night was founded specially to prosecute men guilty of sodomy, levying monetary fines and sometimes incarceration to deter such behaviour.<sup>10</sup> Even under the supposedly debauched Medici this traditional form of policing was maintained and even escalated. The first decade of Lorenzo’s rule witnessed the most widespread repression of sodomy in Florentine history, with the Office of the Night convicting 535 men between 1469 and 1474 alone. Prostitution was heavily regulated under Medici auspices as well. Over the course of the mid-fifteenth century, efforts were made by the *Onestà* and the *Otto di Guardia e Balìa* (The Eight on Security) to contain prostitution to the area of the Mercato Vecchio and to prohibit prostitutes from working and living in the vicinity of churches and monasteries.

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<sup>6</sup> Girolamo Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Ruth e Michea*, ed. Vincenzo Romano, 2 vols. (Rome: Belardetti, 1962), II:204.

<sup>7</sup> Savonarola, *Aggeo*, 438-442.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.

<sup>9</sup> John K. Brackett, “The Florentine Onesta and the Control of Prostitution, 1403-1680,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 24, no. 2 (1993): 273-300.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 45-54.

Additionally, the 1470s and 1480s saw the *Otto* make repeated attempts to expel pimps and to place direct controls over the nocturnal activities of prostitutes.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, the policing of debauchery under the Medici seemed superficial in Savonarola's eyes. He reckoned that Florence's traditional bureaucratic method of policing was ineffective because it failed to address the root of the problem – the temptation of sensual pleasures. Savonarola's utopian vision of Florence assumed an explicitly sensory angle. He thought it crucial that Florence was dominated by a sensory atmosphere that was conducive to self-reform and this meant the wholesale eradication of all sensory experiences deemed inappropriate and impermissible.

As usual, the pulpit was his primary medium of aural communication and dictation. He preached tirelessly, calling for a united effort from civic authorities, kinship circles, and private individuals to stamp out immorality wherever they saw it. His list of prescriptions was extensive: prostitutes were to be driven out into the open with the blowing of trumpets; dances had to be abolished both in Florence and in country villas, and spies had to be sent to keep a watchful eye on potential revellers; heavy fines were to be levied on taverns that refused to close at dusk, or on shops that stayed open on holy days; fathers had to prevent their sons from dressing effeminately in public; and women had to reform themselves, dress more modestly and discard their jewellery.<sup>12</sup> By using dramatic and persuasive language that highlighted the distastefulness of a range of tactile, visual and aural experiences that seemed to tarnish Florence's civic *dignitas*, Savonarola hoped to precipitate grassroots action to clear the streets of perceived vices. Under the schema of the Savonarolan sensescape, Florentines themselves were encouraged to act as agents of their own self-discipline.

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<sup>11</sup> Nicholas Terpstra, "Sex and the Sacred," *Radical History Review* 2015, no. 121 (2015): 76.

<sup>12</sup> Savonarola, *Salmi*, I:168-170; Savonarola, *Giobbe*, I:383.

To demonstrate the sensory dimension of moral reform with respect to Savonarola's preaching efforts, his focus on the issue of sodomy serves as an illustrative case study. Sodomy had traditionally been regarded as one of the most abominable acts in both Christian doctrine and legal rhetoric, often billed by moralists and theologians as a "sin against nature" (*contra naturam*).<sup>13</sup> Florence had long been infamous among the cities of Italy in its reputation for sodomy. It was such an indelible and infamous part of Florentine male culture that in contemporary Germany, to sodomize was commonly dubbed *florenzen* and a sodomite was called a *Florenzer*.<sup>14</sup> In fact, sodomy was such a critical concern to local authorities that the legalisation and control of female prostitution was precisely so that men would be less inclined to engage in it. This was done by making prostitutes readily available through the establishment of state-sanctioned brothels, enticing men to engage in normative modes of sexual activity.<sup>15</sup>

The toleration of heterosexual prostitution had a firm basis in Florentine conventional thought. If the effeminate touch was the supreme enticement to sin, the homosexual touch did exactly that and more, by effeminising male bodies and confusing gender boundaries and social conventions.<sup>16</sup> A major share of these fears were rooted in anxieties concerning the visual culture of fashion, since crossdressing was an important mode of producing homoerotic signification.<sup>17</sup> Clothes were an important component of individual appearances, and were themselves multisensory objects that communicated non-verbal meanings through visual,

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<sup>13</sup> Ruth Mazo Karras, "The Regulation of 'Sodomy' in the Latin East and West," *Speculum* 95, no. 4 (2020): 969-86; Michael Goodrich, "Sodomy in Medieval Secular Law," *Journal of Homosexuality* 1, no. 3 (1976): 295-302; Dyan Elliott, *The Corrupter of Boys: Sodomy, Scandal, and the Medieval Clergy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), 135-136.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Davidsohn, *Storia di Firenze*, 8 vols. (Florence: Sansoni, 1969), 7:612.

<sup>15</sup> Richard C. Trexler, *Dependence in Context in Renaissance Florence* (Binghamton, N.Y.: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1994), 373-374.

<sup>16</sup> Constance Classen, *The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch* (Baltimore: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 75-76.

<sup>17</sup> Mario Michael August DiGangi, "The Homoerotics of Early Modern Drama," PhD Thesis, Columbia University, 1994, 307.

olfactory and tactile cues.<sup>18</sup> There was a basic trend amongst Italian humanist thinkers that generally disapproved of “feminine” or “womanly” ornaments in male dress partly due to their overstimulating and seductive properties.<sup>19</sup> In this context, dress played a central role in the threat of gender ambiguity, as clothing had both the potential to support and convolute the traditional gender binary.<sup>20</sup> These fears of non-heteronormativity inspired Savonarola’s efforts to press for sartorial regulations on both men and women.



Figure 6: Approximate area of Florence's network of brothels and taverns in the fifteenth century with the site of the infamous Frascato tavern labelled.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Ann Marie Fiore, “Multisensory Integration of Visual, Tactile, and Olfactory Aesthetic Cues of Appearance,” *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 11, no. 2 (1993): 45-52; Nettie Boivin, “Multisensory Discourse Resources: Decolonizing Ethnographic Research Practices,” *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* (2020): 1-15; Joanne B. Eicher, “Dress, the Senses, and Public, Private, and Secret Selves,” *Fashion Theory* 25, no. 6 (2021): 777-97.

<sup>19</sup> Elizabeth Currie, *Fashion and Masculinity in Renaissance Florence* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 119-122.

<sup>20</sup> Currie, *Fashion and Masculinity*, 116-117; Also, see the essays on hermaphrodites and cross-dressing in early modern England, in Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub, ed. *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

<sup>21</sup> Created with DECIMA. Information inferred from David Rosenthal, “The Barfly’s Dream: Taverns and Reform in the Early Modern Italian City,” in *Biographies of Drink: A Case Study Approach to our Historical Relationship with Alcohol*, eds. Mark Hailwood and Deborah Toner (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 19.



Moreover, Savonarola was acutely attentive to the spatial networks of sodomy. In particular, he knew that taverns were social hubs that facilitated sexual liaisons between men of every social background – *taverniere* was a slang term for sodomites.<sup>22</sup> These architectural enclosures functioned as emporiums of the senses, facilitating the transaction of pleasurable tactile and gustatory experiences like eating, drinking, gambling and sex. As such, sodomy came to be seen as a linchpin of vice that tainted the moral integrity of Florence. To him, whose utopian ideal for Florence shunned all sensuality and pleasure, good government was impossible so long as sodomy was allowed to be practiced.<sup>23</sup>

It was through anti-sodomitic rhetoric that Savonarola saw perhaps the most success in prompting the legislative rulings. As early as his famous political sermon of 14 December 1494, he urged the state to legislate mercilessly against sodomy: “make a law, I say, that is merciless so that such people [sodomites] will be stoned and burned.”<sup>24</sup> Two weeks later, on 31 December, the councils overwhelmingly voted on instituting “the harshest law against sodomy in Florentines’ living memory,” which saw the abolishment of fines, and the prescription of public, corporal and capital penalties in successive order of re-offence.<sup>25</sup> Though this new legislation did not meet his brutal expectation that sodomites should be “stoned and burned,” it demonstrated the communicative power of sermons in influencing the expansion of disciplinary action and state surveillance. With the right amount of political clout, preaching could function as a tool not only for constructing consensus but also imposing it, a fact noticed by many contemporary commentators. Landucci remarked that laws were seemingly written and passed “entirely on the friar’s orders.”<sup>26</sup> The contemporary chronicler Jacopo Nardi similarly attributed Savonarola’s preaching in effecting the passage of “terrifying

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<sup>22</sup> David Rosenthal, “The Barfly’s Dream,” 15-21.

<sup>23</sup> Savonarola, *Ruth e Michea*, I:28.

<sup>24</sup> Savonarola, *Aggeo*, 220.

<sup>25</sup> Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*, 205-206.

<sup>26</sup> Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 94.

laws” which disciplined people into living “in a very Christian manner in our city compared to past times.”<sup>27</sup> The impact of Savonarola’s preaching was rapid. By June 1495, Parenti, a sharp political commentator and no friend of Piagnoni, marvelled at how “on the orders of Fra Girolamo...all gambling was abandoned, and every reproachable practice was banned: what a marvellous thing that in one stroke there was such transformation in behaviour.”<sup>28</sup>

Nevertheless, Savonarola’s fundamentalist doctrines did not always see eye to eye with the complex socio-political realities of Florentine society. The Night Officers were confronted with long-standing bureaucratic hurdles, and citizens were generally reluctant to denounce their neighbours and potentially condemn them to death.<sup>29</sup> Throughout 1495, Savonarola repeatedly complained from the pulpit that nothing was being done about sodomy despite the new laws. In a sermon of 1 May, he continued to urge the state to “take away the taverns, the *casolini*, and the sodomites” and to punish sodomites without mercy.<sup>30</sup> Eventually, even Savonarola had to admit that his violent sense of justice was too extreme for most Florentines: “If you don’t want to kill them, at least drive them out of your territory.”<sup>31</sup> He encountered similar problems on other fronts. Prostitutes were still everywhere, taverns still stayed open late into the night, women dressed immodestly, and the city-folk continued to debauch. Sartorial vibrance, seductive sights and carnal delights were old habits of Florentine urban culture that proved hard to expunge. He needed more innovative solutions to enforce the *ben vivere* and to exorcise the sensuous sensibilities of Florentines. To this end, Savonarola looked to his rising stars, the *fanciulli* boy brigades, as his new militants and moral inquisitors.

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<sup>27</sup> Nardi, *Istorie*, I:79.

<sup>28</sup> Parenti, *Storia fiorentina*, I:245-246.

<sup>29</sup> Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*, 207-209.

<sup>30</sup> Savonarola, *Salmi*, I:157.

<sup>31</sup> Savonarola, *Amos e Zaccaria*, III:97.

## The Making of Militants

The previous chapter touched on how *fanciulli* were reformed into the political and spiritual activists of San Marco from early 1496, functioning as ritualised bodies that affected the Florentine adult citizenry through spiritual propaganda. In this chapter, the focus shifts to investigating how Savonarola exploited their potential as moral enforcers in a quasi-paralegal capacity, exacting the disciplinary power of San Marco in ways which the limitations of civil institutions precluded.

At the outset, Savonarola was confronted with several intrinsic problems with youth culture, namely their proclivities towards sex and violence. In the social world of Renaissance Florence, young males were stereotypically believed to be motivated above all by sexual passion and social irresponsibility.<sup>32</sup> They frequented taverns and baths, participated in brawls, dressed boisterously and delighted in bawdy music.<sup>33</sup> David Herlihy and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber have offered insights into the structural problems that created youth volatility. Among economically prosperous urban families, the high stakes involved in interfamilial marriage alliances, the conflict between career interests and the responsibilities of wedlock caused many Tuscan men to put off marriage until well into their early 30s, or to stay single indefinitely. The abundance of unattached young males in the city denied legitimate sexual outlets caused erotic tensions to overspill in the city, resulting in an inclination among Tuscan males towards unbridled violence and profligacy, which included partaking in prostitution and sodomy.<sup>34</sup>

The role that youths traditionally played in the urban sensescape was well-known to contemporaries. The clerical chronicler Placido Cinozzi stressed that before Savonarola's

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<sup>32</sup> See Leon Battista Alberti, *I Libri della Famiglia*, ed. Ruggiero Romano and Alberto Tenenti (Turin: G. Einaudi, 1969), 78.

<sup>33</sup> Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*, 159-161.

<sup>34</sup> David Herlihy and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Tuscans and Their Families: A Study of the Florentine Catasto of 1427* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 215-223; David Herlihy, "Some Psychological and Social Roots of Violence in the Tuscan Cities," in *Violence and Civil Disorder in Italian Cities, 1200-1500*, ed. Lauro Martines (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 135-137.

intervention, children were “immersed in every vice,” worst of all their inclination towards sodomy. Cinozzi was especially repelled by the fashionable raiment and stylish long hair that boys and young men flamboyantly displayed in the social arena of the streets which made them seem “not only [like] girls but public prostitutes, with their indecent speech and acts.”<sup>35</sup> Contemporaries recognised that the visual appearances of youths had a significant role in communicating and influencing social behaviours and in facilitating opportunities for sexual transactions. Savonarola himself saw an inextricable link between these material and visual dimensions and Florentine youth culture. This was precisely why he preferred to focus his efforts on indoctrinating and recruiting younger boys to his confraternity of *fanciulli*. Where the old youth confraternities of Florence typically comprised boys between the ages of 13 and 24, the Savonarolan *fanciulli* were much younger on average, typically between 5 and 18.<sup>36</sup> Savonarola figured that since young men and older boys had been irredeemably corrupted by their upbringing under the Medici, it was up to younger boys to spearhead the reform of the city.<sup>37</sup>

As seen in the previous chapter, sartorial reform enhanced the propagandistic efficacy of the *fanciulli*. By having their hair cut short above the ears and by exclusively donning modest white robes, Savonarola lent them an unmistakably chaste appearance.<sup>38</sup> In doing so, Savonarola was attacking mainstream youth culture by visually removing sexually enticing adolescent male bodies from public life and public places. Having reduced the availability of these sensory experiences, not only were older males denied an important sexual outlet, but youth culture also took on a more self-restrained character. Overall, these measures appear to have succeeded. Michael Rocke notes that during the Savonarolan epoch, the age of passive

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<sup>35</sup> Cinozzi, “Estratto d’una epistola,” 7.

<sup>36</sup> Eisenbichler, *The Boys of the Archangel Raphael*, 18-21; Trexler, *Dependence in Context*, 311.

<sup>37</sup> Trexler, *Dependence in Context*, 311.

<sup>38</sup> Cerretani, *Storia fiorentina*, 232.

male partners rose from 16 to 18, meaning that fewer young males were engaging in sodomy.<sup>39</sup> Savonarola must have felt a sense of righteous irony in transforming the very objects of some men's sexual desire into their moral enforcers.

Moreover, from around early 1496 until early 1497, a comprehensive series of changes were gradually made to the organisational structure of the *fanciulli*. The result of these changes was described in detail by Pseudo-Burlamacchi: A permanent organisation was created to oversee the *fanciulli*, who were split into four groups based on the four city districts of Florence. A chief, or custodian (*custodi*) was appointed to lead each of the four groups, ensuring that they conducted themselves consistently with the demands of the *ben vivere*. Each custodian was aided by four councillors (*consiglieri*). They were in turn assisted by a host of other officials, such as the peacemakers (*paciali*) who maintained order among the *fanciulli*, the orderers (*ordinatori*), who were in charge of arranging them during processions, the correctors (*corretori*), empowered to reprove sinners, and the almoners (*limosinieri*) who collected alms for the poor during processions. In time, two extra agencies were created. The polishers (*lustratori*) surveyed the city to ensure that all the wayside holy images were properly maintained and cleaned, while on feast days, after lunch and vespers, the inquisitors (*inquisitori*) searched the whole city for gamblers and confiscated their playing instruments and also their money, which they donated to the poor.<sup>40</sup>

The *fanciulli* were centralised, politicised and regimented, roughly mirroring the city's territorial divisions, consultative procedures, and governing methods reflected by the political subdivisions and governing apparatus of the Florentine state.<sup>41</sup> It is important to note that its

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<sup>39</sup> Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*, 211.

<sup>40</sup> Burlamacchi, *Vita*, 115-117.

<sup>41</sup> See, Richard C. Trexler, "Ritual in Florence: Adolescence and Salvation in the Renaissance," in *The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion; Papers from the University of Michigan Conference*, ed. Charles Trinkaus and Heiko Augustinus Oberman (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 200-265, reprinted in Trexler, *Dependence in Context*, 259-323. Also see, Ottavia Niccoli, "Compagnie di bambini nell'Italia del

structural organisation conspicuously mimicked the political geography of Florence: the four *fanciulli* divisions roughly corresponding to Florence's four administrative districts (Santa Maria Novella San Giovanni, Santa Croce, Santo Spirito; see figure 5). This lent them some semblance of governmental authority, using the internal political structure of the city as a source of legitimacy for the activities of the *fanciulli*.<sup>42</sup> As a result of these comprehensive changes, they now had the organisational and logistical capacity to act as Savonarola's moral enforcers. As I shall demonstrate in the next section, their policing activities indelibly altered the sensed experiences of public life in Florence, as they were licenced to target every facet of secular culture for spiritual reform, appropriating many of the institutional modes of aural and visual communication. Under their custodianship, social control became an integral facet of Piagnoni efforts to impose a particular sensory regime on the city as the *fanciulli* were instructed to employ coercion in their execution of Savonarola's will.

### Sensescaping the Holy Terror: The *Inquisitori*

Between 1496 and 1498, the *fanciulli* became a regularly seen and heard presence in daily life as they went about transfiguring Florentine society to conform to the *ben vivere*. The *inquisitori* added a new dimension to the sensed experience of street life, employing a series of sensory strategies and routines to police vice and to stamp out deviancy. Group mobilization and the act of coordinated walking became salient repertoires of Savonarolan sensescaping.<sup>43</sup> The movement of empowered bodies through social spaces – ie. the foot patrols of the inquisitors – signified a strategic mastery of place. In this respect, the visual sense predominated, and a two-way exchange existed between their disciplinary gaze and the persecuted gaze of the moral

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Rinascimento,” *Rivista Storica Italiana* 101 (1989): 346-374; Eisenbichler, *The Boys of the Archangel Raphael*, 49-53.

<sup>42</sup> Trexler, *Dependence in Context*, 315-316.

<sup>43</sup> On the contexts, functions and meanings of walking, see Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (New York: Viking, 2000); Joseph Anthony Amato, *On Foot a History of Walking* (New York: New York University Press, 2004); Timothy Shortell and Evrick Brown, eds., *Walking in the European City: Quotidian Mobility and Urban Ethnography*. (Farnham: Routledge, 2014).

offender, allowing them to observe, measure, and control the boundaries of social practice within their scope of vision.<sup>44</sup> Seeing and hearing, and conversely being seen and heard, were central to this transaction of power. As Savonarola's eyes and ears on the street, the sensed presence of the *fanciulli* inquisition created an atmosphere of terror in Florence during the peak of Savonarola's ascendancy. Contemporary chroniclers were particularly vocal about the inquisitors, who tended to escalate their activities during festive seasons like Easter, Carnival and Corpus Christi when Florentine society temporarily took on a more unrestrained and merrymaking character. Every facet of secular society from entertainment and leisure to material culture was a target of surveillance and censorship. Under Savonarola's auspices, the material, sonic, and carnal delights that regularly accompanied festive seasons were to be removed out of sight, ear, and mind.

The disciplining patrols began in early 1496. The earliest mention of such policing comes from Landucci, who reported on 7 February 1496 that a group of *fanciulli* caused a scene when they forcibly confiscated a girl's *veliera* (a kind of hair ornament) in full view of her family.<sup>45</sup> Their heavy-handedness was a clear signifier that coercion was an integral strategy of their policing methods, even if Savonarola generally did not condone overt physical violence when dealing with unrepentant Florentines. Rather, he encouraged the *fanciulli* to adopt systemic formulas of verbal confrontation. His instructions to them on how to reproach sodomites displays a step-by-step escalation of verbal harassment in relation to the uncooperativeness of the sinner:

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<sup>44</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 36. On the relationship between gazing and power, see Marita Sturken, and Lisa Cartwright, *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (London: Tavistock, 1973); Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*; Bell Hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 115-131.

<sup>45</sup> Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 123.

“If one of these ribalds who engages in that cursed vice speaks indecently with you in secret, the first time correct him yourselves, saying: - Ribald, shame on you – etc. The second time, several of you should give him a fraternal reprimand. The third time, all of you together should ridicule him publicly in the piazza, with each one shouting: - This is the ribald! – Or denounce him to the Otto.”<sup>46</sup>

Savonarola’s instructions for the *fanciulli* to denounce wrongdoers “in the piazza” reveals his sensitivity towards Florentine soundscapes of sociability. In the oral-aural society of Renaissance Florence where ‘face’ and honour were paramount concerns, verbal insults in public were particularly sensitive.<sup>47</sup> In the case of suspected sodomites, their labelling as “ribalds” was doubly damaging on account of its precise sexual nature, a form of insult that inverted gender conventions.<sup>48</sup> This is compounded by the fact that the *fanciulli* naturally drew much attention to themselves wherever they went, especially since they were deliberately loud and tended to operate in large groups. In the wide-open spaces of piazzas where sound and light could travel unobstructed, the ritual shouting of verbal abuses was sure to capture the curiosity of people in the same social and physical spaces. This strategic manipulation of aural-visual space served a twofold purpose: to shame and disgrace the offender before members of the public, and to communicate this very same threat of abuse to the wider public if they dared to make a mockery of the *ben vivere*.

On the other hand, Savonarola was acutely aware of the almost instinctive inclination of youths towards violent behaviour. As such, he acknowledged that violent action could

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<sup>46</sup> Savonarola, *Amos e Zaccaria*, I:91.

<sup>47</sup> On public insult in Renaissance Italy, see Peter Burke, *The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy: Essays on Perception and Communication* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 95-109; Richard Trexler, “Correre la terra. Collective Insults in the late Middle Ages,” *Mélanges de l’école française de Rome* 96, no. 2 (1984): 845-902; Dean, Trevor. “Gender and Insult in an Italian City: Bologna in the Later Middle Ages,” *Social History (London)* 29, no. 2 (2004): 217-31.

<sup>48</sup> Savonarola’s use of “ribald” (*ribaldo/rubaldo*) had precise sexual and insulting connotations when applied to sodomites. The root of the word – Old French *ribaude* originally referred to prostitutes, see Trexler, “Correre la terra,” 848-857.



sometimes have some merit in combatting deviancy. In a sermon of March 1496, Savonarola spoke at length on the issue of prostitution in the city. Taking his usual stance, he advised that if “good women” noticed prostitutes (literally cows, or *vacche*) in their streets, they should file a complaint to the *Otto* and that the *fanciulli* should reproof the prostitute in a brotherly manner to get them to clear off by shaming them in public. However, if the *Otto* failed to act, they were instructed to become “Soldiers of Christ” and “drag them away.”<sup>49</sup> Therefore, the use of violence was encouraged when applied as a last resort when all other diplomatic or bureaucratic options were exhausted. The ultimate objective was always the censorship of audio-visual stimuli that could tempt people through entertainment or pleasure. As such, he deemed it necessary to sometimes violently assault and physically manhandle prostitutes, gamblers, immodest women, and sodomites to disperse them from the streets.

As children and adolescents operating in an urban environment filled with adults of larger physical stature, the mobilizational tactics of the *fanciulli* were an important factor in ensuring compliance. In today’s terminology, their coercive tactics would be considered ‘swarming,’ a form of group behaviour often seen in gatherings of youths and in community self-help groups in the absence of institutional support.<sup>50</sup> Cinozzi stated that they always moved in groups of 25 to 30, and scanned the surrounds of both urban neighbourhoods and settlements in the *contado* in search of gamblers, confronting them “with good words or with threats” that often resulted in physical altercations.<sup>51</sup> Landucci corroborates Cinozzi by commenting on the pervasiveness of their scope of surveillance, “going everywhere, along the city walls, to the taverns wherever people gathered.”<sup>52</sup> Additionally, Simone Filipepi estimated that their area of

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<sup>49</sup> Savonarola, *Amos e Zaccaria*, I:326.

<sup>50</sup> Rob White, “Swarming and the Social Dynamics of Group Violence,” *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, no. 326 (2006): 1-6; Naing Ko Ko and John Braithwaite, “Baptist Policing in Burma: Swarming, Vigilantism or Community Self-help?” *Policing & Society* 30, no. 6 (2020): 688-703.

<sup>51</sup> Cinozzi, “Estratto d’una epistola,” 7-8.

<sup>52</sup> Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 127.

surveillance stretched beyond the city limits, extending 5 to 6 miles out to the countryside.<sup>53</sup> The *fanciulli* were evidently knowledgeable about the spatial networks of vice in the urban topography of Florence. The streets around taverns and marketplaces were regular haunts of the inquisitorial patrols, who harassed and harangued gamblers, drunkards, blasphemers, sodomites, women and prostitutes wherever they saw them. Their swarming also had a distinctively sensory angle. Not only did a swarm of patrolling eyes maximise their scope of surveillance, the sound and sight of ordered masses in motion also had an intimidating effect that caused adults to think twice about being outnumbered if they confronted them. Indeed, various contemporary commentators gave accounts of malefactors fleeing in terror or demonstrating submissiveness upon hearing or seeing the inquisitors.<sup>54</sup> Their sensed presence especially during festive seasons became so commonplace that they were seared into the public consciousness as the face of Savonarola's holy terror. They had attained such a reputation of invincibility that Landucci went so far as to point out that whosoever opposed the *fanciulli* risked losing their lives.<sup>55</sup>

Nevertheless, acts of resistance towards the *fanciulli* did occur. Savonarola himself complained in a sermon of August 1496 that some recalcitrant gamblers would "draw their swords" on them when they reproached them.<sup>56</sup> The Piagnoni responded in kind, providing an armed guard for each of the four regiments that accompanied them on their disciplinary rounds.<sup>57</sup> The presence of a mobile armed escort enhanced their coercive power. The bearing of arms in the streets not only acted as a visual signifier of violent force that discouraged public opposition towards the *fanciulli*, but also relayed the institutional sanction of their activities. Although the necessity of armed escorts betrayed underlying insecurities surrounding the

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<sup>53</sup> Filipepi, "Cronaca," 477.

<sup>54</sup> Burlamacchi, *Vita*, 119; Cinozzi, "Estratto d'una Epistola," 8; Filipepi, "Cronaca," 477.

<sup>55</sup> Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 127.

<sup>56</sup> Savonarola, *Ruth e Michea*, II:160.

<sup>57</sup> Burlamacchi, *Vita*, 117-118.

escalation of anti-Piagnoni resistance, the Savonarola's primacy remained relatively unchallenged until at least mid-1497. And given that the older boys who led the disciplinary patrol came from the city's leading families, such as the Salviati or the Strozzi, for a time they were surrounded by an air of untouchability that licensed them to act with a degree of impunity.<sup>58</sup>

The efficacy of the *fanciulli* surveillance program cannot be fully understood without appreciating its relationship with the broader goals of the Savonarolan sensescape. Their sheer numerical strength lent the effect of visually and aurally dominating wherever they passed through. In doing so, they were physically and symbolically laying claim to urban spaces. By accentuating their presences across the landscape of the city, the *fanciulli* were making a conscious effort to drown out unwanted sensory stimuli and to hound out their opposition. Additionally, the sound and sight of their patrols had the frightening effect of intimidating people into disciplining themselves, as people tended to modify their behaviour to avoid confrontations with them. Their targets often made themselves scarce. According to Landucci, whenever the cry, "Hear come the boys of the Friar!" was heard, every gambler, no matter how bold, fled, and women dared not to be seen in public if they were not properly veiled.<sup>59</sup>

Ultimately, the disciplinary operations of the *fanciulli* patrols were efficient and efficacious in a way that substituted the state's capacity to enact social reform. Landucci concluded that they were held in such reverence (or feared) that people generally abstained from immodesty and especially "the unmentionable vice [sodomy]." He further added: "You couldn't even hear anyone talk about such things, neither from old men nor youths in this holy time."<sup>60</sup> The *fanciulli* had rapidly succeeded in imposing the Piagnoni sensory regime into the

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<sup>58</sup> Trexler, *Dependence in Context*, 313-314; Burlamacchi, *Vita*, 118.

<sup>59</sup> Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 123.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 123-124.

secular arenas of Florentine sociability, suppressing a large range of sensory experiences that were once keynotes of urban culture. As the Savonarolan moment reached its crescendo between 1496 and 1497, the Piagnoni became the masters of Florence's streets, directing its ebb and flow and dictating the boundaries of social practice.

### Festivals and Power

Along with serving as moral enforcers, the *fanciulli* also functioned as the key actors in Savonarola's festive reform program. While the Piagnoni were ascendant, they functioned as one of the primary agents of aural and visual production in Savonarola's festive sensescape. Savonarola clearly recognised the formative and propagandistic qualities of festive ritual just as the Medici had before him.<sup>61</sup> Popular festivals were keynote events during the calendrical cycle of urban experiences. They were loud, rambunctious, vivid and emotive. Not only were they legitimised subversions of quotidian hierarchies and outlets for unrestrained expressions of popular sentiment, their memorability and enjoyability also made them effective tools through which hegemonic groupings could project power and influence through the display of pageantry and symbols.<sup>62</sup> In no other public occasion were the senses more heavily engaged than in the production and consumption of festive rituals.

A noteworthy case study of how hegemonic groups can appropriate the sensory displays of festive events can be found in Lorenzo de' Medici's direction of the 1491 Feast Day of San Giovanni, the patron saint of Florence. The Feast of San Giovanni was typically celebrated as both a sacred observance and a potent expression of civic pride, punctuated by banquets, processions, and *palio* races. Some of the hallmark spectacles of the festival were the *edifici* –

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<sup>61</sup> For Medici festivals, see Michel Plaisance, *Florence in the Time of the Medici: Public Celebrations, Politics, and Literature in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, trans. Nicole Carew-Reid (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2008), 17-40; Giovanni Ciappelli, *Carnevale e Quaresima: comportamenti sociali e cultura a Firenze nel Rinascimento* (Rome: Edizioni Di Storia E Letteratura, 1997), 195-211.

<sup>62</sup> Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Florence: Routledge, 2009), 255-259; Roy Strong, *Art and Power: Renaissance Festivals, 1450-1650* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1984).

processional floats that visually conveyed biblical scenes, and the *mostra* – exhibitions whereby artisans and workmen displayed their most luxurious wares and crafts on their shopfronts, all in service of the joint goals of celebrating the material and spiritual pedigree of the city.<sup>63</sup> Lorenzo’s direction of the affair was unmistakably clear in its ideological agenda. He had his client festive brigade, the *Compagnie della Stella*, construct him fifteen massive *edifizi*, drawn by as many as 50 pairs of oxen and 5 teams of horsemen, that depicted the triumphal return to Rome of the consul Aemilius Paulus after his conquest of Macedon. The diarist Tribaldo de’Rossi, who witnessed the processions dissected the blatant symbolism employed by Lorenzo, “as Aemilius Paulus had brought such riches in the time of Caesar Augustus, Lorenzo provided it now.”<sup>64</sup> Lorenzo’s endeavour to captivate the senses and sensibilities of his fellow Florentines seems to have worked. The visual splendour of the triumphal procession was so remarkably eye-catching that many onlookers were left awestruck, leading de’Rossi to comment, “it was held to be the worthiest thing that had happened on San Giovanni.”<sup>65</sup> Lorenzo had commissioned a visual spectacle that was not only aesthetically marvellous, but also narratively symbolic in how it wedded Florentine civic pride with Medicean magnificence.

Savonarola was doubtlessly wary of the emotive and communicative power of Medici pageantry in festive performances, and of the sumptuous displays of material culture and the unrestrained behaviour that typically accompanied popular festivals. He influenced the cancellation of the San Giovanni festivities in 1496, most certainly with this cognizance.<sup>66</sup> Savonarola clearly thought it imperative that Florence’s festive system be brought under his

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<sup>63</sup> Accounts of this can be found in Gregorio Dati, *Istoria di Firenze* (Florence: Nella stamperia di Giuseppe Manni, 1735), 84-89; and Matteo Palmieri, “Di una riforma delle feste fece ricordo Matteo di Marco Palmieri,” in *Le feste di S. Giovanni Batista in Firenze: descritte in prosa e in rima da contemporanei*, ed. Cesare Guasti (Florence: Giovanni Cirri, 1884), 20-23.

<sup>64</sup> Tribaldo de’Rossi, “Ricordanze tratte da un libro originale di Tribaldo de’Rossi,” in *Delizie degli Eruditi Toscani XXIII*, ed. Ildefonso di San Luigi (Florence: Gaetano Cambiagi, 1786), 271.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 133.

control. His motives for taking control of Florence's festive scene were twofold. Firstly, he sought to erase all sensory experiences perceived as stimulating sexual licence, rowdiness and gluttony in an effort to remould existing festivals with a more self-restrained and sober atmosphere to suit his reform goals. Secondly, he understood the power of spectacles to elicit affective responses, to persuade and mobilise support, as well as to impose narratives and values.

### Sensescaping Carnival: The Bonfire of the Vanities

Carnival was the biggest and most anticipated popular festival of the Florentine year. It contrasted deeply with the austere period of Lent which followed, in its unbridled celebration of worldliness and materiality. As Mikhail Bakhtin put it, Carnival was the supreme expression of “the culture of folk humour.” It subverted societal norms through ridicule and degradation particularly through sexual humour, with an emphasis on the obscene images of “the material bodily lower stratum.”<sup>67</sup> The traditional order of daily life was temporarily subverted, and the breaking of convention norms was institutionally sanctioned. For instance, during the Carnival season preceding Savonarola's reforms, Florentine youths often camped in roadside huts and installed *stilli* or barriers using long wooden beams, denying people and especially women passage unless paid a toll which they spent on “food and other gluttonous pleasures.”<sup>68</sup> They also erected *capannucci* or bonfires in the middle of streets, which became focal points of violent and sometimes lethal games of stone-throwing where teams of boys battled to destroy their opponents' *capannucci*.<sup>69</sup> Carnival transformed the open spaces of the city into a theatrical stage, where food, sex and violence were elevated as the main foci of revelry. These

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<sup>67</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 1-58.

<sup>68</sup> The *fanciulli* toll booths discussed above were a rebranding of this practice.

<sup>69</sup> Paolo Somenzi, “Lettera di un agente segreto del Moro,” in Pasquale Villari, *La storia di Girolamo Savonarola e de' suoi tempi: narrata da Pasquale Villari con l'aiuto di nuovi documenti II* (Florence: Felice le Monnier, 1861), xci; Burlamacchi, *Vita*, 116; Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 124; Nardi, *Istorie*, I:93.

were expressed through an eclectic collection of ritualised activities, from dramatic plays, music and pageants to erotic games, bonfires and mock battles.<sup>70</sup>

Savonarola's approach to Carnival was indelibly linked to the precedents set under Lorenzo de' Medici. Lorenzo had a complicated relationship with Carnival, owing to his complex understanding of its highly theatrical and public nature. For example, his wariness of the use of Carnival as a public platform for powerful Florentine families to demonstrate their wealth and social standing is documented by the chronicler Alamanno Rinuccini, who wrote: "all the things that in ancient times gave grace and reputation to citizens, such as weddings, balls and parties whereby they displayed fine raiment, he condemned and abolished with by his words and example."<sup>71</sup> However, when his authority was relatively unchallenged in his later life, Lorenzo fully embraced and upgraded Carnival as a core component of his festive policy, involving himself in it at a personal level to do exactly what he aimed to prevent his rivals from doing. For the Carnivals of 1490 to 1492, he had the *Stella* stage extravagant triumphal processions that thematically and visually enmeshed his pageantry into the foreground of street revelry.<sup>72</sup> He also wrote his own *sacre rappresentazione* plays, staged sumptuous carnival banquets, and penned a selection of bawdy and licentious carnival songs, which were all publicly performed for the consumption of the masses.<sup>73</sup> By inundating public spaces with sights, sounds, smells and tastes that channelled himself, Lorenzo was effectively building consensus towards his regime. Revellers were more easily convinced of his magnificence when much of the aural, visual and gustatory forms of entertainment were supplied by him.

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<sup>70</sup> Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 93-101; Burke, *Popular Culture*, 260-271; Jack Santino, "From Carnavalesque to Ritualesque: Public Ritual and the Theater of the Street," in *Public Performances: Studies in the Carnavalesque and Ritualesque*, ed. Jack Santino (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2017), 3-15.

<sup>71</sup> Alamanno Rinuccini, *Ricordi storici*, ed. Giuseppe Aiazzi (Florence: Piatti, 1840), cxlviii.

<sup>72</sup> Ciappelli, *Carnevale e Quaresima*, 200-201.

<sup>73</sup> Konrad Eisenbichler, "Confraternities and Carnival: The Context of Lorenzo De' Medici's 'Rappresentazione di Giovanni e Paolo'," *Comparative Drama* 27, no. 1 (1993): 128-39; For Lorenzo's carnival songs, see Lorenzo de' Medici, *Canti Carnascialeschi*, ed. Paolo Orvieto (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 1991).

Despite Savonarola's revulsion towards Lorenzo and his milieu, he certainly imitated Lorenzo in appropriating the festive sensescape as a communicative medium and a tool of social control. Under Savonarola, Carnival was to be in his words, "like Lent."<sup>74</sup> Instead of suppressing the festivities outright, he opted instead to transform it into a solemn religious celebration. Much of this was achieved through the repurposing of earlier Carnival activities to give them a more religious touch. For instance, the street altar cum toll booths discussed in the introduction to this chapter were essentially continuations of the traditional carnivalesque practices of building huts and barricading the streets with *stilli*. If Savonarola's inaugural Carnival of 1496 seemed radically transformative, it was but the preamble to what Savonarola was to hold the following year – his famous Bonfire of the Vanities. It was staged in a markedly militant way that exuded a self-righteous confidence and launched a frontal assault on sensuousness and material culture in Florence. In doing so, he was simultaneously pandering to the popular appeal of Carnival practices, while reappropriating it to censor and censure all the worldly behaviours and material objects that it had once symbolised.

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<sup>74</sup> Savonarola, *Amos e Zaccaria*, I:38.





Figure 7: Relief of a bonfire of the vanities by Bernardino da Siena in the Oratory of San Bernardino, Perugia, by Agostino di Duccio, c. 1457-1461.<sup>75</sup>

The centrepiece of Carnival 1497 was a massive bonfire upon which a host of material objects were heaped and burnt. This eye-catching spectacle had its precedents in the Franciscan tradition. Bonfires of vanities were a regular feature of Bernardino da Siena’s outdoor sermons in the early fifteenth century (see Figure 7).<sup>76</sup> And in 1493, a Franciscan chapter general meeting ended with a bonfire of vanities staged by Fra Bernardino da Feltre before the church of San Salvatore al Monte on the outskirts of Florence.<sup>77</sup> Franciscan bonfires were sensory repertoires that mocked carnivalesque *capannucci*, symbolising the destruction of sin and serving as attention-grabbing spectacles that impressed themselves onto onlookers. It was reckoned that the powerful visual imagery conveyed by the bonfires would be seared into the minds of onlookers in a way that could even supersede the content of sermons. The affective and mnemonic power of this spectacle made it an ideal choice for Savonarola’s purposes.

<sup>75</sup> Sailko, *Agostino di duccio, san bernardino organizza un falò delle vanità*, photograph, [File:Agostino di duccio, san bernardino organizza un falò delle vanità.JPG - Wikimedia Commons](#).

<sup>76</sup> Cynthia Polecristi, *Preaching Peace in Renaissance Italy: Bernardino of Siena & His Audience* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 79.

<sup>77</sup> de’Rossi, “Ricordanze,” 282; Bartolomeo Masi, *Ricordanze di Bartolomeo Masi: calderaio fiorentino, dal 1478 al 1526*, ed. Giuseppe Odoardo Corazzini (Florence: G. C. Sansoni, 1906), 18-19; Rinuccini, *Ricordi storici*, cl.



Figure 8: *The Piazza della Signoria in Florence*, c. 1740.<sup>78</sup>

Next, Savonarola needed to select a venue for his conflagration. Unlike past bonfires, which were typically held in the piazzas of churches, Savonarola's bonfire was to be staged in a secular environment – The Piazza della Signoria. Stephen Milner has described the Piazza della Signoria as a “practiced place” – a site and symbol of communal imagination through which impositions of social order were produced and contested by the coming-and-going of successive power structures.<sup>79</sup> Towering over the Piazza was the Palazzo della Signoria, the administrative heart of the Florentine Republic. Its high tower, great bells, monumental façade and symbolic imagery framed the exercise and boundaries of republican power.<sup>80</sup> As works of public ceremonial architecture, the Palazzo and Piazza della Signoria were crucial sites in the

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<sup>78</sup> Bernardo Bellotto, *The Piazza della Signoria in Florence*, c. 1740, oil on canvas, 61x90cm, Museum of Fine Arts Budapest.

<sup>79</sup> Stephen J. Milner, “The Florentine Piazza della Signoria as Practiced Place,” in *Renaissance Florence: A Social History*, ed. Roger J. Crum and John T. Paoletti (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>80</sup> See, Dati, *Istoria firenze*, 108; Nicolai Rubinstein, *The Palazzo Vecchio, 1298-1532: Government, Architecture, and Imagery in the Civic Palace of the Florentine Republic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

political cosmology of Florence. The spatial boundaries of its urban precinct facilitated the seeing and hearing of public proclamations and civic rituals, and the sounding of its bells convened parliamentary sessions and announced the beginning and conclusion of the working day.<sup>81</sup> Awe-inspiring in its visual grandeur and omnipresent in its sonic outreach, it unmistakably represented societal order and political control to those who dwelled within its spatial confines. So went the contemporary axiom, “whoever controls the piazza is always victorious over the whole city.”<sup>82</sup> This was the piazza of piazzas, and Savonarola’s anointment of it as his staging ground for the bonfire dramatized the fusion of politics and piety. Its long sightlines would have made the bonfire widely visible, and the visual prominence of the Palazzo tower dominated the ocular perspective of anybody standing in the piazza. These carefully mediated visual experiences essentially conveyed the union of Piagnoni spiritual reform with the political wellbeing of Florence.

Florentine material culture took centre stage in Savonarola’s incendiary rhetoric against sinfulness and frivolity. The list of vanities that the *fanciulli* collected for the bonfire was extensive. Pseudo-Burlamacchi provides a meticulous catalogue of the vibrant array of objects assembled:

The most precious foreign cloths...a number of sculpted figures and portraits of Florentine women, and others, executed by the hands of the most excellent painters and sculptors...gaming tables, cards, blocks for printing cards, dice, and triumphs...musical books, harps, lutes, citterns, accordions, cymbals, pipes, cornets, and other instruments...vanities of women: wigs, veils, ampules of rouge, cosmetics, mirrors, perfumes, Cypriot face powder, hats and suchlike...the books

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<sup>81</sup> Niall Atkinson, “Sonic Armatures,” *The Senses & Society* 7, no. 1 (2012): 39-52.

<sup>82</sup> Giovanni Cavalcanti, *Istorie fiorentine scritte da Giovanni Cavalcanti. Con illustrazioni*, 2 vols (Florence: Tip. All'insegna Di Dante, 1838-39), I:577.

of poets in Latin and the vernacular full of all sorts of lasciviousness, Morganti, military books, Boccaccio, Petrarch and others...masks, beards, liveries and other diabolical carnivalesque instruments.<sup>83</sup>

The compendium of objects reveals the multisensory and multimodal thought that underscored Piagnoni reform aims. All material objects and spaces are interacted with and manipulated via sensory perception, since humans exist in three-dimensional space and have always used the five senses in intellectual, affective, expressive, and communicative practices.<sup>84</sup> As elaborated by Henry Drewal, the senses play a crucial role in the formation and interpretation of material objects – ‘sensiotics’ as opposed to semiotics.<sup>85</sup> Accordingly, in Piagnoni thought, vanities potentially evoked sensations relating to sensual pleasure and entertainment: the fragrance of perfume, the sight of voluptuous nudes in sculpture or in painting, the sound of bawdy music played on lutes and sung to the lyrics of *morganti* love songs etc. Savonarola was aware of how the material objects people interacted with in daily life could determine their dispositions and influences as individuals. Thus, the bonfire highlights the material dimension of Savonarola’s reforms, signifying that he endeavoured to determine not just how people could behave, but also what items they could possess and what forms of aural, visual, gustatory, tactile, and olfactory media they could consume.

To fuel the flames of the bonfire, Savonarola employed the usual combination of persuasion and coercion. On one hand, he preached tirelessly in the pre-Lenten season of 1497 to persuade Florentine citizens to rid their houses of vanities of their own accord.<sup>86</sup> On the other

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<sup>83</sup> Burlamacchi, *Vita*, 129-130.

<sup>84</sup> See Richard M. Carp, “Perception and Material Culture: Historical and Cross-Cultural Perspectives,” *Historical Reflections* 23, no. 3 (1997): 269-300; Leora Auslander, “Beyond Words,” *The American Historical Review* 110, no. 4 (2005): 1015-1045.

<sup>85</sup> Henry John Drewal, “Sensiotics, or the Study of the Senses in Material Culture and History in Africa and Beyond,” in *The Oxford Handbook of History and Material Culture*, ed. Ivan Gaskell and Sarah Anne Carter, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 275-276.

<sup>86</sup> Girolamo Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Ezechiele*, ed. Roberto Ridolfi, 2 vols. (Rome: Belardetti, 1955), I:147.

hand, he commissioned the *fanciulli* inquisitors to patrol the city on vanity collection rounds, going from door-to-door and compelling citizens to surrender their vanities.<sup>87</sup> Expunging these vanities from both the domestic and public spheres was essentially an effort by the Piagnoni to exorcise Florence of its materiality and its inclination towards licentiousness. In so doing, they were attacking the very root of Florentine sensiotics, making taboo the material culture that had once been a focal point of civic splendour and that had previously encapsulated the essence of the carnivalesque. The visual spectacle of the vanities going up in flames was a dramatic statement that symbolised the ultimate destruction of sin.

The bonfire took place on Shrove Tuesday, 7 February 1497. The religious procession followed the usual route and in a similar manner as previous Savonarolan festivities, with thousands of *fanciulli* marching in perfect order, singing lauds and hymns along the way. They first converged in the Duomo and performed a newly composed laud by Girolamo Benivieni restating Savonarola's divine promise to Florence. Part of the first stanza of this laud is worth quoting, for it assumes a remarkably strident and intimidating undertone: "Why don't you [God] tie up and put bits in the mouth of this incurable mob which so disturbs the wellbeing of the city of flowers?"<sup>88</sup> Benivieni's laud represented a tonal shift in the Piagnoni's public communications. They now felt secure enough in their power and influence that they could brazenly taunt and threaten their detractors through a platform as hallowed as religious ritual. One can imagine how the aural and affective power of the laud was amplified by the acoustic architecture of the Duomo. The meanings conveyed by the music served as a resounding message that marked out anti-Savonarolans as outcasts and directed popular scorn onto them.

The procession then came to the Piazza della Signoria. Savonarola's *capannuccio* loomed over the piazza. Contemporary spectators described a round pyramidal structure like a

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<sup>87</sup> Nardi, *Istorie*, I:92.

<sup>88</sup> Benivieni, *Canzoni e sonnetti*, cxvi-cxvii.

massive triumphal float, reaching to the sky in multiple tiers on which the vanities were heaped.<sup>89</sup> Completing the spectacle was a throned anthropomorphised figure of Carnival “so deformed and monstrous” that crowned the pyramid, as if he were “the prince of those vanities.”<sup>90</sup> Looking up towards the *cappanuccio* from the edge of the piazza, the onlooker’s eyes would have also been directed towards the tower of the Palazzo della Signoria, confirming to the onlooker the political validation of Savonarola’s spiritual mission. Around the great *capannuccio*, the *fanciulli* were neatly arranged, occupying the spaces on the *ringhiera* (banister) of the Palazzo della Signoria and inside the Loggia della Signoria. Throngs of people came to see the spectacle as Parenti noted that almost all of Florence was present for the ritual, and that “the windows all around were full of women.”<sup>91</sup> Once in the Piazza, the *fanciulli* choir sang yet another laud, this time a witty invective that mocked a caricature of Carnival, announcing the dethronement and defeat of Carnival as King of Florence.<sup>92</sup> The festivities ended with a barrage of trumpets and pipes, as the four guardians of the *fanciulli* divisions each bore a torch and set fire to the pyre.

The execution of the 1497 bonfire reveals how festive rituals could be choreographed to pursue a political agenda. The Piagnoni had arranged the festivities in such a way that guided onlookers through a sequence of sights and sounds that seamlessly implied a narrative of civic ascendancy and spiritual ecstasy. The *fanciulli* procession commanded the attention of much of the city’s denizens, who came out to accompany the procession through the streets and into the Piazza della Signoria. At the piazza, the bonfire had been erected in such a way that directed the public gaze not only at it, but also at the ceremonial architecture that bounded the piazza,

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<sup>89</sup> Parenti, *Storia fiorentina*, II:76; Nardi, *Istorie*, I:92-93; Burlamacchi, *Vita*, 129; Cerretani, *Storia fiorentina*, 232.

<sup>90</sup> Burlamacchi, *Vita*, 130.

<sup>91</sup> Parenti, *Storia fiorentina*, II:76.

<sup>92</sup> For the full text of this invective, see Anonymous, *Canzona d’un piagnone pel bruciamento delle vanità nel carnevale del 1498; da una rarissima stampa contemporanea, aggiuntavi la descrizione del Bruciamento fatta da G. Benivieni*, ed. Isidoro Del Lungo (Florence: Grazzini, 1864), 1-21.

affirming the spiritual and political union between the Florentine state and San Marco. The musical and corporeal performances built up to a crescendo as the civic trumpets and pipes signalled the burning of the bonfire. At this climax, the crowd seemed to erupt into a state of divine madness. Benivieni wrote that “not only the men, women and children, but also the insensible creatures, such as the public bells, pipes, and trumpets seemed in that hour to exult miraculously in the exuberance of so much joy and public gladness.”<sup>93</sup> Despite what appeared to be a “splendid and devout Carnival feast” that exuded piety and civic harmony, the Piagnoni subtext was clear to see: they were the masters of Florence and their values were Florence’s.<sup>94</sup> Those who thought otherwise were called out and marked to be cast out of the New Jerusalem. Therefore, the bonfire was ultimately a ritual that exorcised the city of its sensuality and licentiousness. In this dramatic subversion of Carnival tradition, the Piagnoni were symbolically sacralising Florence by laying claim to its inhabited and institutional spaces. In the process, they positioned themselves as the city’s paramount guardians and the arbiters of Florence’s destiny.

## Conclusion

The Bonfire of the Vanities was the culmination of two years of religious reform in Florence that sought to impose the *ben vivere* as the basis of normative social practice. From the outset, the Piagnoni accorded a high degree of importance to the senses as sites and conduits of power dynamics. They understood how social exposure to sensory experiences could influence an individual’s behaviour, attitudes and beliefs. Thus, it was a key policy aim to assume mastery over the Florentine sensescape so that they could more easily influence the Florentines to conform to their reforms. A major strategic concern was the wholesale expungement from the arenas of public and private life of a range of illicit or indulgent social practices and material

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<sup>93</sup> Benivieni. *Canzoni e sonnetti*, cxvii.

<sup>94</sup> Nardi, *Istorie*, I:92.

commodities. Savonarola's preaching was the first line of offense in this effort. His sermons functioned as oral-aural communiqués that provided justifications for his ideas and instructed his listeners on how to conduct themselves.

Where Savonarola's preaching proved insufficient in compelling acquiescence, the *fanciulli* of San Marco were brought in to strong-arm recalcitrant citizens and sceptics. They were utilised as a quasi-paralegal militant force and commissioned with the task of acting as moral enforcers. They not only policed sensory experiences but also became a sensory experience in their own right. The public visibility of their activities created an atmosphere of terror as they patrolled the streets in numerical force. These elements of Piagnoni social reform were also extended to Florentine festive culture, as festive rituals were recognised as a potent amplifier of public communication and organisational outreach. Savonarolan festive spectacles were choreographed in such a way that constructed and relayed narratives of civic glory and prophetic vitality. The roles of music, ceremonial movement, visual imagery and spatial manipulation served to affirm the alignment of Savonarola's disciplinary regime with the moral welfare of the Florentines, while functioning as exposés that called attention to dissidents as pariahs and outcasts.

Despite these efforts, public reception towards Savonarola's social and festive reforms remained ambiguous. Contemporaries who harboured Piagnoni sympathies generally viewed the program positively. Landucci, for instance, expressed delight at the sweeping social transformations that had overtaken Florence, remarking "God be praised that I saw this short period of holiness."<sup>95</sup> But, on the other hand, critics of Savonarola tended to see his influence over Florence in these years as an overextension and abuse of power. Parenti called attention to growing resistance towards Savonarola's efforts to radicalise Florentine society. According

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<sup>95</sup> Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 124.



to him, the self-righteous tone and the extravagance and material waste of the 1497 Bonfire were widely criticised as frivolous and hypocritical. Severe division began to afflict Florence, splitting families down the middle over the question of political and ideological allegiances towards the Piagnoni.<sup>96</sup> As it stood, the spring of 1497 was the apotheosis of the Savonarolan movement. Soon after, his popularity would begin to falter. As we shall see in the next chapter, the following year saw Florentine sensescapes increasingly become sites of contestation, as Savonarola's growing opposition began to escalate their resistance against the Piagnoni social order.

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<sup>96</sup> Parenti, *Storia fiorentina*, II:76.

## Chapter Three – The Battlefield of the Senses: The Arrabbiati, Compagnacci and the end of Savonarola

The final year of Savonarola's life witnessed his fortunes turn dramatically. The first major deprecation came in June 1497 when he was excommunicated by a high-profile papal brief obtained by his Arrabbiati opponents in the Signoria. Moreover, after a series of pro-Savonarola governments that were incumbent throughout late 1497 and early 1498, the Signoria elected for the March-April 1498 term headed by Piero Popoleschi had a strong Arrabbiati disposition, though popular support for Savonarola remained relatively strong.<sup>1</sup> The Savonarolan controversy came to a head at the end of March 1498 when the Franciscan preacher Francesco da Puglia electrified his Santa Croce congregation by challenging Savonarola to an ordeal by fire.<sup>2</sup> As news of da Puglia's challenge spread, the city seemingly erupted into a sonic frenzy as challenges and counterchallenges issued forth from pulpit to pulpit. Girolamo Benivieni could only express his amazement as clerics, laymen and children offered to take Savonarola's place in the trial, and as women screamed "Me! Me!" as if having been offered a hand in marriage.<sup>3</sup> Savonarola, who had remained silent on the issue, was backed into a corner. It was the consensus of both the Piagnoni and the anti-Savonarolans, one side trusting in divine intervention and the other hoping that Savonarola would immolate, that the ordeal of fire should take place. The date was set for 7 April 1498, with Domenico da Pescia as Savonarola's surrogate in the trial. This was to be the first of its kind to occur in Florence in over four centuries.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Martines, *Fire in the City*, 203.

<sup>2</sup> Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 166.

<sup>3</sup> Girolamo Benivieni, "Lettera di Girolamo Benivieni a don Francesco Fortunati pievano di Cascina," in *Nuovi documenti e studi intorno a Girolamo Savonarola*, ed. Alessandro Gherardi (Florence: Sansoni, 1887), 216.

<sup>4</sup> On trials by ordeal, see Robert Bartlett, *Trial by Fire and Water: The Medieval Judicial Ordeal* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); Lauro Martines, *Lawyers and Statecraft in Renaissance Florence* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968), 202-203.

Unlike Savonarola's previous public appearances, the Piagnoni did not have an executive role in the organisation of this spectacle. The anti-Savonarolan showrunners had long been aware of the sensory power of ritual performances to affect audiences and construct consensus, which they had helplessly watched Savonarola do for years.<sup>5</sup> They were also acutely aware of how the affective power of Savonarolan spectacles was bolstered by emotive displays of passion by his devotees. By carefully manipulating the spatial and sensory elements of the trial, their aim was to limit the agency and presence of the Piagnoni as much as possible. Firstly, the ordeal was chosen to occur in front of the Palazzo della Signoria. This move was intended to direct the gazes of onlookers onto its towering edifice, thereby framing the trial as an unmistakably political issue while discrediting the religious convictions of the Piagnoni. Moreover, access and mobility in and out of the Piazza della Signoria was strictly controlled, the Signoria barricading all but three entrances to the piazza and posting guards to order and limit the mobility of the gathered crowd. Recognizing the devotional affinity of women and children towards the Savonarolan cult, the Signoria promulgated a decree with the aid of town criers and trumpeters barring these groups from attending. The chronicler Piero di Marco Parenti tells us that this was done to avoid "the occasion of scandal," meaning that the Signoria was wary of how the sounds of their zealous wailing often overwhelmed Piagnoni events.<sup>6</sup> The bearing of arms was also forbidden by the Signoria, though a special exemption was made for the Compagnacci, the primary anti-Savonarolan youth gang, who were authorised to be posted as guardsmen. They were reported to have been armed to the teeth and adorned in armour "like paladins," signalling their conscious desire to project a visual presence and to intimidate the Piagnoni.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the Arrabbiati-moderated sensory atmosphere of the trial was intended as an

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<sup>5</sup> See the essays on the power of performance in Laurie Postlewaite and Wim Hüsken, eds., *Acts and Texts: Performance and Ritual in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Amsterdam: Brill, 2007), 17-148.

<sup>6</sup> Parenti, *Storia fiorentina*, II:160.

<sup>7</sup> Filipepi, "Cronaca," 482.

exercise in authority, situating Savonarola's sympathisers within a subordinated power dynamic whereby their ability to express themselves was severely limited.

The anticlimax of Savonarola's *Prova del Fuoco* is a famous episode in Florentine history. It was the beginning of the end for Savonarola, as the historian Francesco Guicciardini put it, "he alienated many of his friends that day and public opinion became very hostile to him."<sup>8</sup> The macro-historical reasons for Savonarola's rapid fall in the final year of his life are well-known. Instead, this chapter examines the faltering durability of the Savonarolan sensescape as an indicator of the weakening of the Piagnoni movement and underscores the diverse array of sensory repertoires that the anti-Piagnoni factions had at their disposal to subvert, upstage and disrupt Piagnoni agency. The first part of the chapter introduces the anti-Piagnoni factions and briefly outlines their means of waging war on Savonarola's partisans. Having established the *modus operandi* of the anti-Savonarolans, I then provide in-depth investigations of multiple case studies demonstrating how the anti-Piagnoni influenced the various stages of Savonarola's decline between March 1497 and March 1498. The chapter concludes with the culmination of this protracted war of attrition in Savonarola's final defeat at the siege of San Marco in April 1498, revealing how the anti-Savonarolans choreographed the spatial and symbolic conquest of San Marco. I argue that their counter-sensescaping strategies played a critical role in the erosion and final collapse of the Piagnoni movement. The anti-Savonarolans were highly cognizant of the importance of sensory perceptions as sites of identity-building and performative power. By generating a spatial-sensory environment that disrupted and subverted the Piagnoni sensory regime, the anti-Savonarolans were challenging Savonarolan institutions, rituals and claims over urban space, as well as enticing Florentines with an attractive counterculture that contrasted heavily with San Marco's sobriety. The success of the anti-Savonarolans reveals that power was always negotiated in Florence, and the

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<sup>8</sup> Francesco Guicciardini, *Storie fiorentine* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 2011), 117.

planning and execution of sensory spectacles played a crucial but often overlooked role in both the passive and performative processes of power dynamics.

### The Anti-Savonarolans and their Weapons

Piagnoni chroniclers and commentators emphasised the widespread support for Savonarola. If we recall from earlier chapters, the Milanese agent Paolo Somenzi estimated that two-thirds of Florence were sympathetic towards him at the height of his popularity.<sup>9</sup> But it would be imprudent to ignore the sizeable minority (one-third, perhaps between ten- and twenty-thousand citizens) whose opinions of him ranged on a spectrum of indifference to outright hostility towards the Frateschi.<sup>10</sup> As long as he had been in the limelight, Savonarola had constantly accrued a growing list of enemies.

The earliest and most outspoken sources of contention were indubitably the anti-Savonarolan preachers, who came from a diverse range of mendicant sects, such as the Franciscans, the Augustinians, and the Lombards and Conventuals of Savonarola's own Dominican Order. These were represented by some of the most talented and eloquent preachers of their time – men like Mariano da Genazzano, Giovanni Caroli, and Domenico da Ponzo, who resented Savonarola for various theological and political reasons, but shared a common opinion of him as a false prophet.<sup>11</sup> As the Savonarolan movement was largely predicated on Savonarola's preaching efforts, these preachers engaged him head-on within the arena of the pulpit in what was a protracted campaign of attrition to dispel his influence over the hearts and minds of the Florentines. Savonarola and his clerical opponents became embroiled in what

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<sup>9</sup> Paolo Somenzi, "A Lodovico Maria Sforza," doc III, 22.

<sup>10</sup> I am basing this estimate on Malanima's population estimate of 50,000 inhabitants in 1500. Paolo Malanima, "Italian Cities 1300–1800. A Quantitative Approach," *Rivista di Storia Economica* 14, no. 2 (1998): 112.

<sup>11</sup> Polizzotto, *Elect Nation*, 56-61.

historians have come to call the “pamphlet wars” that began in 1495, lasting well into his afterlife.<sup>12</sup>

The pamphlet war was waged between the Piagnoni and their adversaries. Both sides relied on the established sensory repertoires of preaching culture to undermine each other, delivering sharply acidic sermons, sometimes publishing them in print. Aside from being a contest of ideas, the pamphlet war was also a contention of form and style. If we recall from Chapter One, Mariano da Genazzano was the very same preacher that Savonarola had disparaged as hollow and Poliziano had contrastingly praised for his eloquence. He and many of Savonarola’s clerical opponents possessed a sophisticated command of Neo-Platonic and classical learning, as opposed to Savonarola’s deliberately coarse and direct preaching style based on a fundamentalist interpretation of scripture.<sup>13</sup> Savonarola’s approach must have sounded barbarous to Florence’s elitist milieu, who were more receptive to the elegant erudition of Fra Marino and his colleagues. But just as Savonarola adapted his messaging to the needs of the Florentine public, so too did his clerical enemies extend their systematic dismantlement of his prophetic claims to broader audiences in a bid to displace his influence. The effect of the pamphlet wars was the partitioning of the urban landscape of Florence into territorial spheres of influence. It became public knowledge by 1497 that Santa Maria Novella, Santa Croce, and especially the Oltrarno district (Figure 9) presided over by the Augustinian church of Santo Spirito were the turfs of the anti-Piagnoni friars. Which is why, when Savonarola’s excommunication notice arrived on 18 June 1497, it was at these churches that the papal brief was publicly proclaimed by these very same friars.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The main studies on the pamphlet war are: Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence*, 227-246; Joseph Schnitzer “Die Flugschriften-Literatur für und wider Girolamo Savonarola,” in *Festgabe Karl Theodor von Heigel* (Munich: Verlag von Carl Haushalter, 1903); Joseph Schnitzer, *Savonarola*, 2 vols. (Milano: Fratelli Treves, 1931), I: 485-502; Polizzotto, *Elect Nation*, 54-94.

<sup>13</sup> Weinstein, *Savonarola*, 23; Alessio Giovanni Maria Assonitis, “Art and Savonarolism in Florence and Rome” (PhD Thesis, Columbia University, 2003), ProQuest (3182993), 18.

<sup>14</sup> Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 152-153.

Aside from anti-Savonarolan clerics, two factions of secular anti-Piagnoni merit elaboration. The first of these were the Arrabbiati. The term *Arrabbiati* (the Angered) was used by Savonarola and his supporters to describe the most intransigent Florentine political enemies of the Piagnoni, originating from a portmanteau of “anger” (*rabbia*) and “dogs” (*cani*) which Savonarola had used to denigrate his political enemies in a sermon of January 1495.<sup>15</sup> The Arrabbiati were a loosely organised group of politicians led by wealthy patricians like Filippo Corbizzi and Tanai de’ Nerli, who were united in their desire for Savonarola’s political influence to be expunged from Florence.<sup>16</sup> They saw him as a foreigner meddling in Florentine affairs and viewed Savonarola’s utopian vision with disapproval. They relied on political lobbying and bureaucratic controls in their bid to subvert the Savonarolan sensescape, and their main tactical aim was to limit the scope and extent of Piagnoni activity wherever they could. Though largely impotent between 1495 and early 1497 when the bimonthly Signorial elections tended to favour Piagnoni councillors, the Arrabbiati were devastating when they formed the majority in government in mid-1497 and again in early to mid-1498. During those terms, they passed legislation which banned Savonarola from preaching, limited his partisans’ mobility within the city, and overturned some of Savonarola’s festive reforms.

Closely related to the Arrabbiati were the Compagnacci, the biggest anti-Piagnoni youth gang. Where the Arrabbiati (many of whom were probably the parents of the Compagnacci) were loosely defined by their diametric opposition towards the Piagnoni, the Compagnacci were a clearly distinguishable political sect defined by their visceral hatred for Savonarola and his policies, with a clear agenda and a unified *modus operandi*.<sup>17</sup> Numbering

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<sup>15</sup> Savonarola, *Salmi*, I:26.

<sup>16</sup> On the Arrabbiati, see Giovanni Cambi, *Istorie di Giovanni Cambi*, 4 vols. (Florence: Gaetano Cambiagi, 1786), 4: 7, 232-233; Nardi, *Istorie*, I:98-99; Villari, *Life and Times*, 327-328; Martines, *Fire in the City*, 171-172.

<sup>17</sup> Filipepi and Pseudo-Burlamacchi refer anti-Savonarolan youths as *Compagnacci*, see Filipepi, “Cronaca,” 498-499, Burlamacchi, *Vita*, 103-105; but this term does not appear in Cerretani and Parenti until the Carnival season of 1498, see Cerretani, *Storia fiorentina*, 241-243; Parenti, *Storia fiorentina*, II:153-154. Even in the

roughly 150 strong and operating under the leadership of the aristocrat Doffo Spini, they were apparently financed by two cadet members of the Medici family of the Popolani branch.<sup>18</sup> Reared in patrician families during the heyday of Lorenzo de' Medici, the Compagnacci were concerned by the way in which Savonarola encroached on their elite lifestyles. Though they appeared to represent the civic virtue of magnificence that had been mainstream throughout Italy since the mid-1400s, I would argue that they were aestheticists rather than true proponents of the philosophical underpinnings of the idea.<sup>19</sup> Humanist expressions of magnificence stressed personal glorification as subordinate to the wider interest of glorifying the civic commune, as in the famous words of Giovanni Rucellai "for the honour of God, the good of the city, and the memory of me."<sup>20</sup> The Compagnacci on the other hand flaunted outward splendour without much regard for the public good in a manner in line with the established tendency for Florentine adolescents to flout serious responsibilities. This simplification of ideals perhaps allowed them to be some of Savonarola's most effective opponents. They made a point of dressing lavishly, banqueting exuberantly to the accompaniment of music, and engaging in orgies, generally living it up in a way that said 'in your face' to the often-sanctimonious Piagnoni. Their sensescaping strategies were quintessentially performative, confronting the Piagnoni directly in the streets and employing confrontational methods such as parodies, ritual insults and violence. The Compagnacci essentially presented Florentines with

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absence of the term, it is clear that by May 1497, an organised gang of anti-Savonarolan youths are becoming more involved in Florentine street life. Thus, the term Compagnacci will be applied to any and all gang activity from this period onwards.

<sup>18</sup> Parenti, *Storia fiorentina*, II:154; Cerretani, *Storia fiorentina*, 142.

<sup>19</sup> On Magnificence in Renaissance Florence, see A. D. Fraser Jenkins, "Cosimo de' Medici's Patronage of Architecture and the Theory of Magnificence," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 33, no. 1 (1970): 162-70; Louis Green, "Galvano Fiamma, Azzone Visconti and the Revival of the Classical Theory of Magnificence," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 53, no. 1 (1990): 98-113; F. W. Kent, *Lorenzo de' Medici and the Art of Magnificence*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

<sup>20</sup> Giovanni Rucellai, *Giovanni Rucellai ed il suo Zibaldone*, ed. Alessandro Perosa, 2 vols. (London: Warburg Institute, University of London, 1960), I:121-122.



an alternate vision of Florentine society that appealed to those marginalised by the Piagnoni for their oppositional values and those nostalgic for the magnificence of Medicean Florence.

#### Foreshock – Ascension Day 1497

Having introduced Savonarola's opposition, their motivations and their methods, I shall now proceed to explore in detail how these diverse groups worked in concert to diminish and eventually destroy the Piagnoni consensus in the final year of Savonarola's life. My starting point is the immediate aftermath of the Bonfire of the Vanities. Despite the triumphant expression of spiritual fervour during the Bonfire, times were bleak in Florence by the end of March 1497. As Parenti had observed at the climax of the Bonfire, Florentine society was now more divided than ever.<sup>21</sup> There was widespread discontent in the city under the gonfaloniership of the arch-Frateschi Francesco Valori, as the French had severed their alliance with Florence and as the city reeled under the pressure of a grain shortage.<sup>22</sup>

Under these trying circumstances, the pamphlet war intensified as oratorical attacks against Savonarola grew more vicious. In February, the Franciscan preacher Jacopo Grumel lambasted Savonarola from his San Lorenzo pulpit so ferociously that the Otto suspended him from preaching after a single sermon.<sup>23</sup> And over the course of March and April 1497, the Augustinian friar Leonardo Neri da Fivizzano launched a caustic oral assault on the Piagnoni movement from his Santo Spirito pulpit, repudiating Savonarola's authenticity.<sup>24</sup> He later published his propositions against Savonarola in the form of an epistle that Parenti tells us Santo Spirito made sure to distribute widely.<sup>25</sup> The Augustinians in particular had been systematically refuting Savonarola's claims since 1491, maintaining a long-term outlook as did

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<sup>21</sup> Parenti, *Storia fiorentina*, II:76.

<sup>22</sup> Weinstein, *Savonarola*, 220; Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 143-145.

<sup>23</sup> Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 144; Weinstein, *Savonarola*, 220.

<sup>24</sup> Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 145; Parenti, *Storia fiorentina*, II:93; Achille Neri, "Un avversario di Girolamo Savonarola," *Archivio Storico Italiano* 5, no. 117 (1880): 478-482.

<sup>25</sup> Parenti, *Storia fiorentina*, II:107.

many of his other clerical opponents.<sup>26</sup> These preachers attempted to affect and persuade their audiences with their verbosity, peppering their sermons with a formidable blend of sarcastic quips, personal insults and textual references. Fivizzano for instance condemned Savonarola as a “hypocrite” and an “angry viper,” denouncing his doctrines as “fictions” and his followers as “barking dogs.”<sup>27</sup> Even at this moment in time, when crowds of up to fifteen thousand continually attended Savonarola’s weekday sermons, these preachers continued to go on the offensive.<sup>28</sup> Their staying power was in consistency and territoriality. As long as they kept up the pressure on Savonarola, they continued to draw audiences who were not only sympathetic towards their factional dispositions, but who found the sounds of their loquacious and incendiary performances more tasteful than Savonarola’s roughness. Given the tendency of the visual and aural presences of mendicant churches – their architectural form, and the sounds of bells and preaching – to impose on their surrounding neighbourhoods, Santo Spirito, Santa Croce, and Santa Maria Novella continued to draw its own congregations, contesting the Dominicans of San Marco over the spatial domination of the city’s urban topography.<sup>29</sup> All of this constituted a protracted contest over space and perceptions, aiming above all to draw supporters away from Savonarola.

Concurrently, the Piagnoni’s worst fears were realised with the election of the first ever Arrabbiati Signoria for the May-June term, headed by the anti-Medici anti-Savonarolan gonfaloniere Piero degli Alberti.<sup>30</sup> One of the first things they did was to enact a two-month ban on unlicensed preaching, citing the danger of summer diseases exacerbated by crowded church interiors. Crowdedness, filth and noise were indeed genuine concerns in medieval European medical thought and public health policy, and surveillance and crowd control

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<sup>26</sup> Polizzotto, *Elect Nation*, 82.

<sup>27</sup> Leonardo da Fivizzano, “Epistola ... a tutti e’ veri amici di Iesu Cristo Crocifixo,” in *Il Propugnatore* (Bologna: Gaetano Romagnoli, 1879), Vol 12, Part 2: 233-240.

<sup>28</sup> Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 145.

<sup>29</sup> Howard, “Aural Space,” 384-387.

<sup>30</sup> Parenti, *Storia fiorentina*, II:100.

measures were often instituted to contain epidemics.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, contemporaries saw through the Arrabbiati agenda immediately. The diarist Luca Landucci perceptively commented that this was motivated by nothing more than “great envy against the poor friar.”<sup>32</sup> The Arrabbiati essentially sought to disable the mechanisms of the Piagnoni sensory regime. In the deliberations that produced the measures of the preaching ban, it was clearly stipulated that all the benches and pews, including the steps in the cathedral that had been installed to accommodate the *fanciulli* were to be removed from every church.<sup>33</sup> The ban on preaching and the removal of pews and benches implies that the Arrabbiati were directly addressing their fears concerning the power of performances and acoustics. They recognised that Savonarola’s voice was his most powerful weapon. With it silenced, the Piagnoni were deprived of their most crucial platform of communication and command. The Arrabbiati also recognised that church interiors functioned as echo chambers that intensified the usual outpouring of emotion accompanied Savonarola’s sermons which regularly created sensescapes that reinforced Piagnoni solidarity. The musical and visual performances of the *fanciulli* from atop those benches played an essential role in buttressing this ideological echo chamber. By removing the benches and pews, the Arrabbiati were not only limiting Piagnoni access to churches but also denying them a crucial rallying point. The implications of an enforced preaching ban were devastating for the Piagnoni. Their partisans in government could not muster enough votes to block this motion, but they did win one concession: Savonarola was allowed to preach one last time on Ascension Day, 4 May 1497.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Guy Geltner, *Roads to Health: Infrastructure and Urban Wellbeing in Later Medieval Italy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 6, 85; Dorothy Porter, *Health, Civilization, and the State: A History of Public Health from Ancient to Modern Times* (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), 38-39.

<sup>32</sup> Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 148.

<sup>33</sup> Full text of these deliberations can be found in Anonymous, “Deliberazioni della Signoria circa al predicare nel giorno dell’Ascensione,” in Pasquale Villari, *La storia di Girolamo Savonarola e de’ suoi tempi: narrata da Pasquale Villari con l’aiuto di nuovi documenti*, 2 vols. (Florence: Felice le Monnier, 1898), xxxv-xxxvij.

<sup>34</sup> Parenti, *Storia fiorentina*, II:100.

Although the Signoria had decreed that this final Ascension Day sermon would go ahead without issue, the Compagnacci were hell-bent on wreaking havoc, tacitly backed by their Arrabbiati allies. During the early hours of 3-4 May, a group of Compagnacci broke into Santa Maria del Fiore. They smeared Savonarola's pulpit with dung and affixed a putrid, rotting carcass of a donkey to it. Moreover, they drove nails up under the lectern in the pulpit, with the intention of tearing his hands to ribbons as he gesticulated and pounded it for emphasis.<sup>35</sup> This act of vandalism was intended to obstruct him from giving the sermon and to discourage his congregation from assembling there. Aside from producing a ghastly sight, the faeces and the donkey carcass would have been perceived as emitting a repugnant smell that would have created a public health hazard, as noxious fumes were thought to cause diseases.<sup>36</sup> The nails on the lectern elicited sensations of pain with a clear message: if Savonarola dared to preach that day, harm would come to him.

Recognising the threat that the Compagnacci posed, Savonarola arrived at the Duomo on the morning of 4 May from San Marco with a reinforced armed escort.<sup>37</sup> Even as the scene of the vandalism had been discovered by sacristans early in the morning and hastily cleaned, the putrid stench of the faeces and the carcass lingered in the poorly ventilated nave of the cathedral. The biographer known as Burlamacchi records that as early as four hours before the start of the sermon, churchgoers were greeted by an "insufferable stench" as they entered the duomo, signalling to everyone that some mischief had been done.<sup>38</sup> Still disappointed by the unfulfillment of the full measure of their earlier plot, the Compagnacci presented themselves in the Duomo that morning, plotting yet another move. One can imagine how they must have stood out in the congregation in contrast to the sombre Piagnoni. The Compagnacci's fine

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<sup>35</sup> These details are observed in Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 147; Parenti, *Storia fiorentina*, II:101; Burlamacchi, *Vita*, 105; Filipepi, "Cronaca," 485; Nardi, *Istorie*, I:100.

<sup>36</sup> Eckstein, "Florence on Foot," 275; N. J. Ciecieznski, "The Stench of Disease: Public Health and the Environment in Late-Medieval English Towns and Cities," *Health, Culture and Society* 4, no. 1 (2013): 91-104.

<sup>37</sup> Parenti, *Storia fiorentina*, II:101.

<sup>38</sup> Burlamacchi, *Vita*, 106.

raiment and heavy perfumes must have made a dramatic contrast to the monochrome vestments and neutral scents of their enemies. As Savonarola commenced his sermon, he deigned to address the previous night's mischief. Pontificating with power in his voice, he relayed his own embattled situation and dramatized the circumstances of the sermon: "You thought I shouldn't have entered this pulpit this morning. See that I have come."<sup>39</sup> How inspired his congregation must have felt as he towered over them from his pulpit in the face of so much pressure.

Roughly two-thirds of the way into his sermon, just as he began to reproach those *cattivi* or evil ones who had conspired to silence his preaching, the Compagnacci sprang into action.<sup>40</sup> What exactly transpired is unclear, but a loud crash from the area near the choir initiated the chaos that ensued.<sup>41</sup> It began when Francesco Cei, a Compagnaccio, seized an alms box and hurled it onto the ground producing a loud crashing sound. Then, a barrage of discordant noises like a drumroll reverberated throughout the church as many Compagnacci followed up on the opening crash by yelling insults, and thumping on pews, benches and doors, disrupting the cadence of the sermon and startling everyone in attendance and causing some to flee in fear. Some of Savonarola's supporters rushed off to retrieve weapons and returned to confront the rioters. Others rushed towards the pulpit to defend Savonarola, driving off two members of the Otto, known Arrabbiati, who had apparently approached the friar with the intention of assaulting or killing him. Savonarola attempted to maintain order. With his mighty voice, he tried to reassure his congregation of their strength, producing a crucifix from his robe and holding it aloft as his devotees filled the nave of the Duomo with cries of "Misericordia!" and "Jesu!" However, when he realised that his words were muted by the uproar of both his

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<sup>39</sup> Savonarola, *Ezechiele*, II:351-354.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 366.

<sup>41</sup> What follows is extrapolated from the accounts of Giovanni Borromei, "Lettera che racconta il tumulto avvenuto in Duomo, il giorno dell'Ascensione," in Pasquale Villari, *La storia di Girolamo Savonarola e de' suoi tempi: narrata da Pasquale Villari con l'aiuto di nuovi documenti* 2 vols. (Florence: Felice le Monnier, 1898), xxxviii; Burlamacchi, *Vita*, 107-109; Parenti, *Storia fiorentina*, II:101-103; Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 147-148; Nardi, *Istorie*, I:100.

supporters and the Compagnacci, he promptly departed and was escorted back to San Marco by a throng of armed men. There he concluded his sermon in private to a much smaller audience composed of his friars. Claiming victory, Savonarola concluded his sermon by praising the Lord for delivering him from evil and promising retribution towards his persecutors.<sup>42</sup>

The Ascension Day riot was a well-documented episode in Savonarolan history, and many past historians have recognised it as a turning point in Savonarola's political fortunes.<sup>43</sup> However, none thus far have examined the sensory underpinnings of its execution. The riot was very much an aural contest between the Compagnacci and the Piagnoni – the Compagnacci producing discordant noises on one end and the Piagnoni chanting Christian slogans on the other. Victory was determined by who could more comprehensively drown out the other with their sounds. From what the sources imply, it seemed like the Piagnoni won the day, as cries of *Viva, viva il Signore!* burst out of the Duomo into the streets and piazzas of Florence.<sup>44</sup> The Compagnacci were outnumbered, overwhelmed, and routed. However, they achieved their short-term aims of intimidating the Piagnoni and above all, cutting Savonarola's sermon short. This proved to them that their theatrical antics, which invaded the Savonarolan sensescape with sonic, olfactory and visual intrusions, was a viable strategy of attrition.

The following day, the preaching ban came into effect. Deprived of an oral platform to access his followers, he turned to the tried and tested medium of text. His Ascension Day sermon was hastily diffused throughout Italy as a pamphlet, containing a transcript of the sermon and a fancifully sanctimonious account of the riot penned by the Piagnone Girolamo Cinozzi.<sup>45</sup> And on 8 May, feeling the heat from da Fivizzano's recently published epistle, Savonarola responded with a pamphlet affirming the authenticity of his prophetic apostolate

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<sup>42</sup> Savonarola, *Ezechiele*, II:369-371.

<sup>43</sup> See Ridolfi, *Life*, 195; Dall'Aglio, *Savonarola and Savonarolism*, 50-51; Weinstein, *Savonarola*, 224–226.

<sup>44</sup> Parenti, *Storia fiorentina*, II:103.

<sup>45</sup> Girolamo Savonarola, *Predica fatta la mattina dell'Ascensione*, ed. Girolamo Cinozzi (Florence: Bartolomeo Libri, 1497).

and asserting the solidarity of the Piagnoni movement.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, with an Arrabbiati government at the helm, Savonarola's political reforms were gradually overturned. Landucci could only lament when the infamous Frascato tavern precinct was reopened, as people gave themselves over to "gambling and indulged in vices."<sup>47</sup>

### Excommunication and Decline

On 12 May 1497, Pope Alexander VI finally issued Savonarola's long-anticipated excommunication *breve*. His brief not only excommunicated Savonarola, but also threatened anyone "all men and women of both sexes, both clergy and laity" that spoke to him, attended his sermons, or had any other kind of contact with him with the same penalty of excommunication.<sup>48</sup> When the excommunication brief finally arrived in Florence on 18 June, it was publicly proclaimed in five of the city's most important mendicant churches and civic institutions. These were the anti-Piagnoni mendicant bases of Santa Maria Novella, Santo Spirito and Santa Croce, as well as the Badia and the Servi.<sup>49</sup> Landucci was present for the proclamation at Santo Spirito, and he relays that there, the denunciation was read by none other than Leonardo da Fivizzano. Once the denunciation had been read, two small bells were sounded, and two large lighted tapers were symbolically turned upside down to have their flames extinguished on the ground.<sup>50</sup> The symbolism behind the excommunication ritual was clear to those present to witness it. Firstly, the physical spaces selected for the reading implied that Savonarola was charged by both civic and ecclesiastical authority. The reversal and extinguishment of the tapers metaphorically denied Savonarola the light of the Church and expelled him from the Christian community. Given the communicative and authoritative

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<sup>46</sup> Girolamo Savonarola, "A tutti gli eletti di Dio e fedeli cristiani," in *Lettere e scritti apologetici*, ed. Roberto Ridolfi et al. (Rome: Belardetti, 1984).

<sup>47</sup> Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 149.

<sup>48</sup> Full text of *breve* in Rodrigo de Borja, "Breve con cui il Savonarola viene scomunicato," in Pasquale Villari, *La storia di Girolamo Savonarola e de' suoi tempi: narrata da Pasquale Villari con l'aiuto di nuovi documenti*, 2 vols. (Florence: Felice le Monnier, 1898), II:xxxix-xl.

<sup>49</sup> Parenti, *Storia fiorentina*, II:110-111.

<sup>50</sup> Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 152-153; Martines, *Fire in the City*, 169.

function of bells in Renaissance Florence, their tolling must have meant an extension of the same treatment to those who continued to associate with Savonarola.<sup>51</sup> Savonarola's excommunication was a devastating blow from which he would never fully recover. Excommunication meant that Savonarola's original two-month preaching ban was effectively extended *ad perpetuum*, and his festive program was also put on hiatus. This had a crippling effect on the sustenance of the Piagnoni sensescape, as Savonarola was indefinitely deprived of a crucial means of mass communication and power projection.

The entire affair of Savonarola's excommunication had been precipitated by anti-Savonarolan lobbying towards the papacy for years. When it seemed all but certain in May 1497, Savonarola's opponents in Florence were sharply emboldened in escalating their attacks and counter-reforms against the Piagnoni. Arrabbiati policymakers in the Signoria quickly moved to reverse some of Savonarola's festive reforms. On 11 June, the Signoria revived the *palio* or horserace traditionally held on the feast day of Saint Barnabas after a two-year Piagnoni-prompted ban.<sup>52</sup> *Palio* races were expensive spectacles that emphasised the display and distribution of opulent silk and brocade banners called *palii* as competition prizes and as expressions of civic magnificence.<sup>53</sup> No details surrounding this *palio* survive, but one can imagine how the noise of cheering onlookers and of galloping horses in the piazza, and how the visual splendour of the pageantry on display would have reacquainted Florentines' to their love for fun and outward extravagance. Indeed, Landucci mentions a member of the Signoria having remarked: "Let us cheer up the people a little; are we all to become friars?" In mediating a counter to the Savonarolan sensescape, the Arrabbiati were essentially appealing to nostalgia

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<sup>51</sup> On bells, see Atkinson, *The Noisy Renaissance*, 12.

<sup>52</sup> Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 152.

<sup>53</sup> On the magnificence and opulent visual culture of *palio* races, see Elizabeth Tobey, "The Palio Banner and the Visual Culture of Horse Racing in Renaissance Italy," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 28, no. 8-9 (2011): 1269-282; Elizabeth Tobey, "The Palio in Italian Renaissance Art, Thought, and Culture," PhD diss. (University of Maryland, 2005).



in offering an attractive alternative to the sober and sombre atmosphere that the Piagnoni had maintained in the city over the years.

The *palio* of 11 June must have been well-received, since the Signoria also revived the observance of the *palio* for the feast day of San Giovanni Battista on 24 June, which Savonarola had cancelled the previous year.<sup>54</sup> To add salt to an open wound, Savonarola's clerical enemies also sought to use the San Giovanni feast to undercut the Piagnoni. The Franciscans and Augustinians informed the Signoria that they would not participate in the holiday's traditional procession if the Dominicans of San Marco were present, using Savonarola's excommunication to highlight the inappropriateness of their attendance. The Signoria was all too happy to comply, ruling that they should "stay indoors" lest they created "greater scandal."<sup>55</sup> The barring of San Marco from attending a major religious celebration was humiliating. By then, the *fanciulli* had almost become a permanent fixture of religious festivities, their singing voices and ordered marches functioning as keynotes in the sensory experiences of religious processions. By prohibiting the Piagnoni from the streets on such a momentous occasion, the anti-Savonarolans were making a concerted attempt to reclaim the city's institutional spaces. As for the Signoria's decree reviving "the ancient customs of racing and *palii* in the land," Parenti claims it "made everyone happy" with the notable exception of Savonarola's partisans.<sup>56</sup>

Emboldened by the affair of Savonarola's excommunication and incentivised by the lessons of the Ascension Day riot, the Compagnacci soon took centre stage in Florence as the primary agents of militant action against the Piagnoni. As early as 25 May, during the Piagnoni procession for the occasion of Corpus Christi, the Compagnacci ambushed *fanciulli* processors

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<sup>54</sup> Parenti, *Storia fiorentina*, II:113.

<sup>55</sup> Nardi, *Istorie*, I:104.

<sup>56</sup> Parenti, *Storia fiorentina*, II:113.

as they crossed the Ponte Santa Trinita. Landucci tells us that as the *fanciulli* approached the bridge, they sarcastically cried out “here come the boys of Fra Girolamo” before snatching a little red crucifix from one of the processors that they then snapped and flung into the Arno.<sup>57</sup> They also began a routine of sensory disturbance around the San Marco precinct. On some nights, the Compagnacci would circumambulate the convent grounds shouting profanities and sounding a noisy cowbell particularly while the friars were saying Matins in the early hours of the morning.<sup>58</sup> Concurrently, certain anti-Piagnoni poets and songsters had begun to circulate songs and sonnets that parodied or attacked Savonarola and his doctrines.<sup>59</sup> These satirical songs caught on with the Compagnacci immediately. Filipepi observed that they sang parodies of some of Savonarola’s most beloved lauds like the *Ecce Quam Bonum*, which they performed all over the city.<sup>60</sup> And just as on Ascension Day, the Compagnacci were wont to acts of vandalism. On one occasion, Filipepi reports that they had affixed a rotting donkey’s carcass that “stank strongly” to the front door of San Marco. If that was not enough, they had punctured several holes in the donkey’s belly which caused puss, blood and guts to leak out and “[taint] the whole piazza.”<sup>61</sup>

One noteworthy case demonstrates how the Compagnacci blended several of these sensory tactics to produce a counter sensescape that contested and mocked San Marco’s. Filipepi relates that they held a mock procession of young girls, for which they dressed about thirty layabouts as shrews and had them parade through the city singing “songs and other verses, with the most shameful words,” attacking Savonarola. The procession proceeded to the Piazza della Signoria, to the Mercato Nuovo, to several brothels and taverns in the city before ending in the Piazza San Marco like all Savonarolan processions did. There, they sang even

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>58</sup> Filipepi, “Cronaca,” 480; Nardi, *Istorie*, I:104.

<sup>59</sup> Nardi, *Istorie*, I:104.

<sup>60</sup> Filipepi, “Cronaca,” 496.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 497

more loudly so that everyone inside the convent could hear them, before convening at the infamous Frascato tavern precinct and feasting in the company of prostitutes.<sup>62</sup> It was no coincidence that the Compagnacci categorically selected the San Marco neighbourhood for their slew of sensory intrusions. This was where Savonarola and his closest companions and supporters resided. Indeed, sonic disturbances and ritualised ridicule that created sensory trespasses onto the premises of an enemy's dwelling-place were well-established strategies through which early modern European youths relayed threats and insults.<sup>63</sup> But going beyond mere aggression, what they were effecting was both the symbolic and practical conquest of San Marco's ritual space from the Piagnoni. San Marco was the nexus of the Savonarolan sensescape and the exemplary model from which Savonarola had based his city-wide reforms on – it was the holy of holies in Savonarola's cosmological map of Florence. The only loud sounds that were permissibly audible were the peals of San Marco's lone bell, *La Piagnona*, to call devotees to prayer, and the only allowed visual spectacles were solemn religious processions. By polluting San Marco's carefully moderated atmosphere with unpleasant noises, unsightly spectacles, and putrid smells, the Compagnacci were not only undermining the Savonarolan sensescape, but also laying claim to the architectural and ritual spaces of San Marco. Sounds and smells were particularly potent weapons in this campaign since they were especially difficult to contain and isolate oneself from.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 496.

<sup>63</sup> On sonic trespasses and its genres of ritual behaviour (eg. *scampanata*, *mattinata*, *charivari* etc.) in early modern Europe, see Kate Colleran, "Scampanata at the Widows' Windows: A Case-Study of Sound and Ritual Insult in Cinquecento Florence," *Urban History* 36, no. 3 (2009): 359–78; Elizabeth Cohen, "Honor and Gender in the Streets of Early Modern Rome," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 22, no. 4 (1992): 597–625; Natalie Zemon Davis, "The Reasons of Misrule: Youth Groups and Charivaris in Sixteenth-century France," *Past & Present* 50, no. 1 (1971): 41–75; Christianne Klapisch-Zuber, "The Medieval Italian Mattinata," *Journal of Family History* 5, no. 1 (1980): 2–27.

<sup>64</sup> Constance Classen, David Howes, and Anthony Synnott, *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 1994), 4; Atkinson, *Noisy Renaissance*, 170.

## Sensescapes in Collision: Carnival 1498

Despite the re-appointment of Frateschi governments through the second half of 1497, Savonarola's status as an excommunicate meant that there was little that he could do to respond to the escalating attacks by his opposition. His only recourse was to petition the Pope to annul his excommunication and allow him to preach once again.<sup>65</sup> When in early February 1498, it became clear that the pope would not acquiesce to his demands, he elected the path of defiance. The stands and benches in Santa Maria del Fiore were hastily reinstalled and Savonarola returned to the pulpit despite the ban to preach a new Lenten cycle expounding Exodus. Nevertheless, times had changed. His performance as a preacher lacked the same fire that he had before. He tired more easily and had to rest more often. In one sermon, he excused himself by telling his congregation that he was out of practice after a nine-month absence from the pulpit: "Pray for us as we recover our strength, as we will improve the more we continue preaching."<sup>66</sup> No doubt his feeble performances, coupled with his defiance towards his excommunication lost him many listeners.<sup>67</sup> Recognising that his audience was shrinking, Savonarola was resolved to catch the city's attention.

On Sunday, 25 February 1498, Savonarola preached his third Exodus sermon in the Duomo. His voice echoing throughout the cathedral nave with clarity and gravity, he plainly stated the Piagnoni's state of affairs to his listeners: "We, dearly beloved in Christ, are on the battlefield to fight against the lukewarm."<sup>68</sup> His means of confronting the *tiepidi* was to stage yet another Lent-like Carnival procession, to "sweep away the carnal pleasures of the devil and bring in the spiritual pleasures of God."<sup>69</sup> One can imagine the jubilation that his closest supporters must have felt upon hearing and witnessing Savonarola's renewed zeal. Nardi, for

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<sup>65</sup> Weinstein, Savonarola, 245-249; Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 161.

<sup>66</sup> Savonarola, *L'Esodo*, I:24.

<sup>67</sup> Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 162.

<sup>68</sup> Savonarola, *L'Esodo*, I:68.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, I:97.

one, rejoiced in observing more and more people flocking to San Marco to confess and hear Mass.<sup>70</sup> For the first time since May 1497, the Piagnoni would re-emerge from their erstwhile hibernation and flood the city's streets in a sensory deluge of piety and divine fervour. The spectacle they had planned was another bonfire of the vanities more magnificent than the previous year's.<sup>71</sup> The anti-Savonarolans caught wind of this and immediately plotted to upstage the event by celebrating their own iteration of Carnival. Thus, two opposing festive sensescapes were set to collide as the Piagnoni and the anti-Savonarolans competed for the soul of the civic community.

As the *fanciulli* inquisitors were busying themselves by rounding up vanities, and while the *capannuccio* for the conflagration was being prepared, the Compagnacci organised a spectacle of their own that offered friar-weary Florentines an alternative to Savonarola's Carnival. On the evening of Monday 26 February, they organised a lavish banquet at a palazzo owned by a certain nobleman named Antonio di Bindo Altoviti in Parione.<sup>72</sup> Although the banquet was a private event for certain well-to-do Florentines, they were intent on letting all of Florence know what they were up to. Before the banquet began, they made a procession through the city, finely dressed, bearing torches and accompanied by musicians, parading through the city on their way to fetch their chief, Doffo Spini near the Santa Trinita bridge, making "many sounds" as they went along. As the company returned to Parione, Spini rode atop a magnificently harnessed mule, crossing many of the same urban spaces that the Piagnoni would traverse in their upcoming procession. The luxurious display the Compagnacci put up and the seductive sounds of their musicians drew a large crowd of bystanders who followed the procession. When they returned to Parione the banquet commenced, a refined feast replete with beautiful servings of the most "delicate wines and sweetest confections." The banquet was

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<sup>70</sup> Nardi, *Istorie*, I:114.

<sup>71</sup> Burlamacchi, *Vita*, 132-136.

<sup>72</sup> Filipepi, "Cronaca," 484.

accompanied by masquerades, farces, music and dancing which lasted until eight in the morning. Cerretani tells us that the unrestrained hedonism of the banquet drew a large crowd of onlookers outside the palazzo. Denied entry to the party, they caused a commotion in the street, shouting and causing a great disturbance that must have kept the whole neighbourhood awake through the night and cognizant of the course of events.<sup>73</sup>

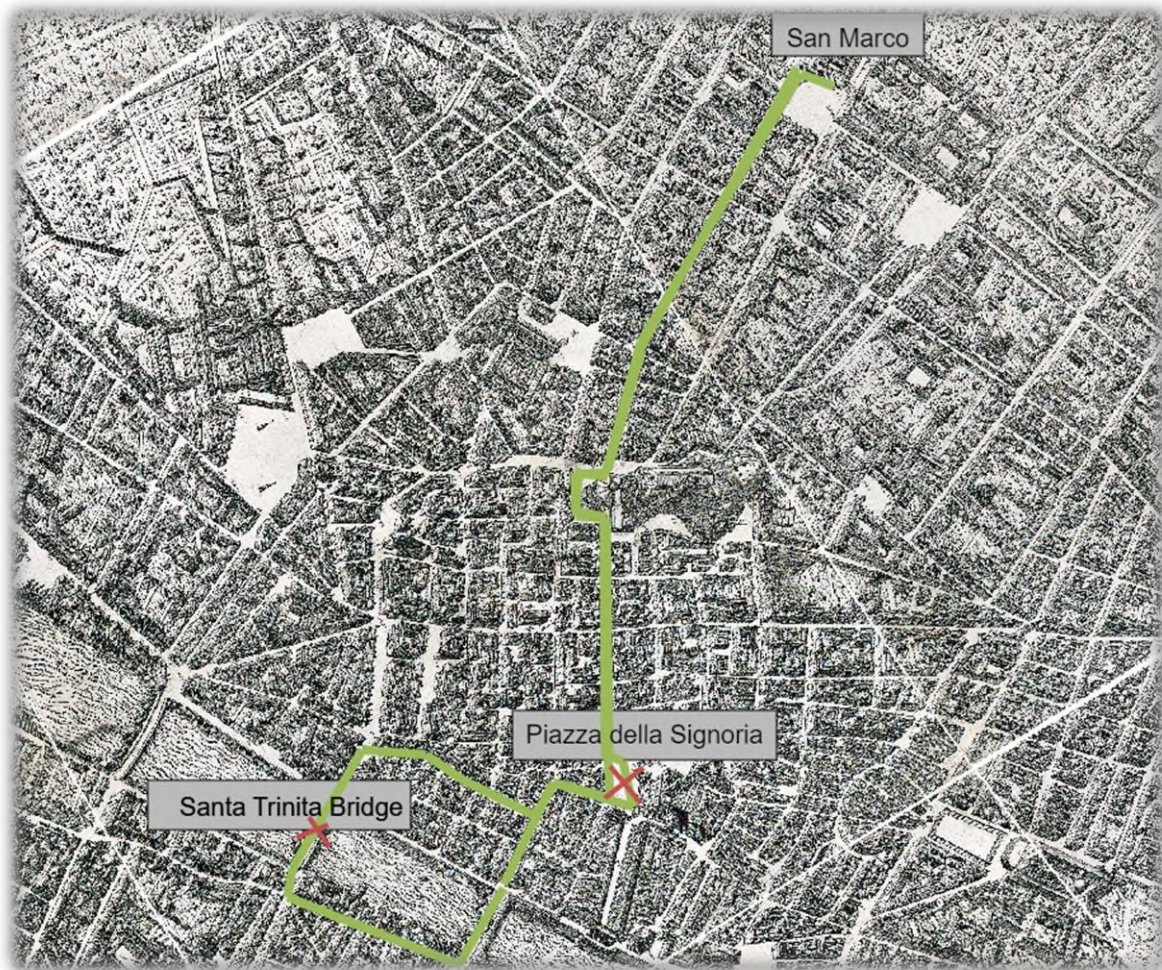


Figure 9: 1498 Carnival procession route with contested sites marked.<sup>74</sup>

The following morning, Savonarola's Carnival procession began. The Piagnoni festive program for Shrove Tuesday 1498 was much the same as the previous year's. It began with the singing of mass at San Marco, followed by a *fanciulli* procession through the city that

<sup>73</sup> Cerretani, *Storia fiorentina*, 241-243.

<sup>74</sup> Created with DECIMA.

culminated in a bonfire of the vanities at the Piazza della Signoria. The Compagnacci, fresh out of their banquet, were already lying in wait to harass the Piagnoni. When the *fanciulli* procession reached the Santa Trinita Bridge, the Compagnacci pelted them with volleys of stones, sparking a scuffle at the bridge.<sup>75</sup> Following the *fanciulli* to the scene of the bonfire, they continued to torment them and impede the smooth execution of their festive rituals. Parenti reported that they showered the *capannuccio* with all sorts of refuse including the rotting carcasses of cats, which created a ghastly sight for onlookers and emitted noxious fumes.<sup>76</sup> All the while, the Compagnacci jeered and shouted, attempting to provoke a melee and destroy the *capannuccio*, which they were only prevented from doing by the presence of an armed guard deployed by the Otto.<sup>77</sup> Given this pressure, the *fanciulli* hastily set fire to the *capannuccio* and cleared the piazza, retreating to the Convent of San Marco.<sup>78</sup> There was less of the fanfare or ritual sophistication that they had exuded from the previous year. It is worth mentioning that the poet and composer Girolamo Benivieni had composed yet another laude for the 1498 Carnival, the lyrics containing a sharp invective against the *tiepidi* that invoked divine retribution on them. However, it seemed that they never had the chance to perform it, having been drowned out and forced into a hasty retreat by the raucous Compagnacci.<sup>79</sup> Returning to the Piazza San Marco, the *fanciulli* ended the festivities with a set of round dances and the performance of ecclesiastical hymns. Burlamacchi embellished the outcome of the Piagnoni Carnival: “all the people seemed mad for Christ’s sake.”<sup>80</sup> But this was far from the truth. Only around their bastion of San Marco did the Piagnoni have the confidence and security to broadcast a statement of victory.

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<sup>75</sup> Parenti, *Storia fiorentina*, II:144.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 163.

<sup>78</sup> Parenti, *Storia fiorentina*, II:145.

<sup>79</sup> For a full text of this *canzone*, see Benivieni, *Canzone e sonetti*, cxvii.

<sup>80</sup> Burlamacchi, *Vita*, 127-128.

Carnival 1498 was an important juncture during the Piagnoni-*tiepidi* (lukewarm) culture wars. This was the final public ceremony that Savonarola would direct, and its clumsy execution presaged the shifting tides of public sentiment about Savonarola.<sup>81</sup> Many onlookers must have tacitly agreed when they heard the Compagnacci retort, “he’s excommunicated and he gives communion to others.”<sup>82</sup> More significantly, the Piagnoni setback on Carnival 1498 was a stunning defeat in the battlefield of the senses. The “carnal pleasures of the devil” that Savonarola had set out to eradicate had prevailed that day. The Compagnacci banquet was a masterstroke of anti-Piagnoni sensescaping in its choreography and in the scope of its advertisement. Even though the banquet was private, they had reserved half of the banquet hall for a select few well-to-do spectators.<sup>83</sup> And despite its exclusivity, they made sure to broadcast their revelries to the public, most obviously with their evening procession, replete with musicians and dancers. It would also be reasonable to suggest that while the banquet was in motion, the sounds of music, laughter and dancing, as well as the scents and tastes of wines and the choicest meats leaked beyond the boundaries of the palazzo and wafted down into the crowd of curious denizens who had gathered outside. These sensory experiences resuscitated the familiar notion of civic magnificence, such that the merchant Piero Vaglianti believed the Compagnacci could “return things to the good life.”<sup>84</sup>

Just as the banquet cemented the reputation of the Compagnacci, so too did the implications behind its success allow for their triumph on the battlefield the following day. The Piagnoni turnout to Savonarola’s Carnival was ambiguous. Many attendees were not devotees but were merely curious onlookers; some were overhyped by Savonarola’s Exodus sermons and were disappointed at expecting miracles that never happened; and many devotees

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<sup>81</sup> Macey, *Bonfire Songs*, 86-90; Weinstein, *Savonarola*, 253-254.

<sup>82</sup> Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 163.

<sup>83</sup> Cerretani, *Storia fiorentina*, 241.

<sup>84</sup> Piero Vaglianti, *Storia dei suoi tempi, 1492-1514*, ed. Giuliana Berti et al. (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi e Pacini, 1982), 41.



abstained, sharing Landucci's sentiment: "I never wished to endanger myself by going to hear him."<sup>85</sup> With a weaker Piagnoni showing, the Compagnacci were almost unchallenged in drowning out the pious atmosphere of Savonarola's Carnival with the sounds of their jeering and taunting as well as polluting the visualscape and smellscape of the piazza with the sight of filth and the stench of rotting cadavers. As the day dragged on, the Piagnoni festivities dwindled into silence. The Piazza della Signoria, the civic heart of Florence, had been seized from the clutches of Savonarola.

### The Siege of San Marco and the Fall of Savonarola

Within two weeks of Carnival, two disastrous portents befell the Frateschi. The first was the election of the most pro-Arrabbiati Great Council yet for the March-April term. The second was the arrival of a series of papal briefs that requested the extradition of Savonarola into papal custody, the threat of interdict on Florence, and an order to the canons of Santa Maria del Fiore to block Savonarola's access to its pulpit and to confine him to San Marco.<sup>86</sup> Savonarola would never preach in the Duomo again and his activities were limited to San Marco. With his aural capabilities dealt a mortal blow, the Piagnoni were rendered moribund.

Open attacks on them escalated exponentially over the course of March. Deprived of his Duomo pulpit and confined to San Marco by bureaucratic controls, Savonarola was helpless to combat the flurry of anti-Piagnoni preaching that would rattle the city and culminate in his trial by ordeal in April. Concurrently, the Compagnacci became even bolder in their nocturnal

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<sup>85</sup> Paolo Somenzi, "Lettere del Somenzi, del vescovo Stefano Taverna, e del cardinale Ascanio Sforza, scritte al Duca di Milano ragguagliandolo dei fatti di Firenze e del Savonarola, fino all' sospensione delle Prediche," in Pasquale Villari, *La storia di Girolamo Savonarola e de' suoi tempi: narrata da Pasquale Villari con l'aiuto di nuovi documenti* 2 vols., (Florence: Felice le Monnier, 1898), II:lij; Parenti, *Storia fiorentina*, II:144; Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 163.

<sup>86</sup> Full texts, Rodrigo de Borja, "Breve di Alessandro VI alla Repubblica fiorentina, nel quale si ordina che il Savonarola venga imprigionato o mandato a Roma," in Pasquale Villari, *La storia di Girolamo Savonarola e de' suoi tempi: narrata da Pasquale Villari con l'aiuto di nuovi documenti*, 2 vols. (Florence: Felice le Monnier, 1898); Rodrigo de Borja, "Breve di Alessandro VI alla Signoria," in *Nuovi documenti e studi intorno a Girolamo Savonarola*, ed. Alessandro Gherardi (Florence: Sansoni, 1887).

sensory attacks and pranks at the expense of San Marco. Landucci recounts that one such practical joke involved groups of Compagnaci holding candle-ends pretending to go about searching about the city telling passers-by “I am looking for the key that the friar has lost.” Then, they would seize their victims and make them kneel before a lighted lantern, telling them to “adore the true light.” This was a satirical mockery of some of Savonarola’s preaching taglines concerning the renovation of the Church.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, so pervasive was the open ridicule of Savonarola that the friars of San Marco were unable to go outside at night without getting harassed.<sup>88</sup> The containment of Piagnoni movement to the San Marco precinct suggested their deterioration of their influence in Florence. That rival preachers and social movers like the Compagnacci could so impudently attack and ridicule the Piagnoni revealed the rearrangement of public sentiment and the renegotiation of the spatial boundaries of power.

The death-knell for the Piagnoni came in the immediate aftermath of Savonarola’s anticlimactic trial by fire. Da Pescia’s failure to enter the fire was the final straw that caused what followers Savonarola had left to turn on him. As the Dominican party withdrew from the Piazza della Signoria on the evening of 7 April, angry spectators mocked and attacked the Piagnoni in the streets, spurred on by the Compagnacci who called out their hypocrisy and falsity. When Savonarola returned to his San Marco pulpit and declared victory, public sentiment became even more incensed.<sup>89</sup> Tensions in Florence had reached a tipping point. A tidal wave of anger wafted throughout the city, seeming to call for a purge that would bathe Florence in an orgy of violence.

Things were calm at the beginning of Palm Sunday, 8 April. That evening Savonarola’s assistant Mariano Ughi was scheduled to preach and say vespers. Despite the mortal blow to

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<sup>87</sup> Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 165-166.

<sup>88</sup> Filipepi, “Cronaca,” 484.

<sup>89</sup> Parenti, *Storia fiorentina*, II:162.

the Piagnoni the previous day, the anti-Savonarolans knew that a large crowd would still converge on the cathedral to hear what Ughi had to say. As usual, they were determined to subvert the Piagnoni. But this time, recognising the anger in the air, they hoped to arouse the populace in a bid to deal Savonarola a coup de grâce.<sup>90</sup> That day, the well-dressed Compagnacci paced about the Mercato Vecchio sizing up passers-by, shouting insults and roughing up people that they identified as Piagnoni. Later that evening, when Ughi's party crossed the Via del Cocomero en route to the Duomo, they were assailed by a hail of stones, thrown mainly by plebeian boys spurred on by the Compagnacci. Before Ughi could even enter the pulpit, a certain Antonio Alamanni pounded on his seat and shouted that there would be no sermon. More Compagnacci who had infiltrated the church, followed suit, pounding their seats and jeering. In a flash, the atmosphere within the church was thrown into chaos. Swords were drawn, people fled, and the sermon was prevented from occurring. As bewildered worshippers fled the scene, the anti-Savonarolans had assembled a large crowd outside the cathedral. As Ughi and his party were witnessed to be fleeing, the anti-Savonarolans recognised an opportune moment to take advantage of this pathetic display of weakness. Compagnacci and Arrabbiati provocateurs started shouting *a' Frati, a' Frati, a San Marco!* In an instant, the streets of Florence became engulfed in a cacophony of chanting. On hearing this command, a confused and aimless crowd transformed into an angry mob that chased Ughi and his party up the Via del Cocomero back to San Marco.

As the mob approached San Marco, Savonarola was saying vespers. The deafening shouts of the mob and the crash of stones and other projectiles on the walls and doors of the

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<sup>90</sup> My account of the siege of San Marco is based on the reports of Parenti, *Storia fiorentina*, II:162-168; Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 169-171; Filipepi, "Cronanca," 487-490; Nardi, *Istorie*, I:121-124; Burlamacchi, *Vita*, 157-173; Cerretani, *Storia fiorentina*, 244-247; Paolo Somenzi, "Otto lettere del Somenzi ed una del Tranchedino al Duca di Milano, le quali dano ragguagli sull'assalto al Convento di San Marco, sulla prigionia e processo del Savonarola e de'suoi compagni," in Pasquale Villari, *La storia di Girolamo Savonarola e de' suoi tempi: narrata da Pasquale Villari con l'aiuto di nuovi documenti* 2 vols. (Florence: Felice le Monnier, 1898), II:xcv-xcviiij.

convent announced the arrival and the bloody intent of the mob. As San Marco was placed under siege, the anti-Savonarolans took advantage of heightened emotions to purge some of their political enemies. Strategically coordinated chants of *A casa Francesco Valori! A sacco!* by the Compagnacci set off another chain reaction of violence that caused the mob to sack and plunder the houses of prominent Piagnoni politicians such as Francesco Valori and Andrea Cambini, resulting in the violent deaths of Valori and his wife. Meanwhile, the friars of San Marco rang *La Piagnona* in alarm, a final desperate plea that hoped to summon the civil militia to the defence of San Marco. The Signoria, perceiving an easy victory against Savonarola dispatched instead a herald to San Marco who publicly announced he and his key attendants' banishment from Florence, offering a cash reward to anybody who could apprehend him. Despite pleas by Savonarola to resolve this peaceably, he could not restrain his friars and supporters from mounting an armed defence of San Marco. Soon, the piazza was enveloped by fighting as his defenders from within and beyond San Marco battled the mob from the walls of the convent and in the streets. For four hours, a cannonade of arquebus and crossbow fire, the clashing of swords and spears, the dust and smoke of improvised projectiles, artillery fire, and incendiaries, and the stench of blood and steel transformed San Marco into a hellscape. The sound, sight and smell of battle was so overwhelming and uncontrollable that many of Savonarola's erstwhile supporters were intimidated into keeping to the safety of their homes. Landucci remarked, "none of the Frate's adherents dared to speak, or else they would have been killed."<sup>91</sup> Finally at 3am, a group of soldiers broke through the burning doors of the convent and secured Savonarola's surrender and arrest. He and two attendants were shackled and escorted away just before the angry mob was able to surge around and lynch them.

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<sup>91</sup> Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 170.

Historians have treated the siege of San Marco and its religious, social and political consequences with forensic scrutiny.<sup>92</sup> What I hope to relay is this same scrutiny from the anti-Savonarolan perspective – their mobilizational strategies and their ideas on how to engage the sensory dimension to suit their aims. The Compagnacci and Arrabbiati success would not have been so stellar if not for their previous efforts which gradually whittled down the robustness of the Savonarolan consensus. Anti-Piagnoni legislation did much to remove their street presence, and the theatrics and mockery of the Compagnacci persuasively reinforced perceptions concerning Savonarola’s pretences. By clearing the lived experiences of street life of Piagnoni sounds and spectacles, Florentines were slowly reminded of the attractiveness of a civic culture free of fanatical religiosity. With public sentiment boiling over after the foiled ordeal of fire, the anti-Savonarolans perceptively harnessed this anger to deal San Marco a knockout blow. Primarily through the usage of vocal signals, the Compagnacci were able to direct the ebb and flow of mob violence. Undoubtedly, they relied on the noisiness and intimidating appearance of the aggressive mob they rallied which instilled such fear in Savonarola's supporters, that *La Piagnona*’s desperate peals were left unanswered. Indeed, during his trial and interrogation, Savonarola recounted how his worst fears were realised when he “[heard] the number of people [outside] was increasing while none of our friends were coming to help [us].”<sup>93</sup> The Arrabbiati were themselves quick to exacerbate this sense of hopelessness when they had Savonarola’s decree of banishment read aloud while the siege was underway. Those who heard it must have felt empowered by this legitimisation of mob violence, and further incentivised by the attractive prospect of a monetary reward attached to his capture. In a sense, the collapse of the Piagnoni movement resulted from the silence of Savonarola’s supporters as the San Marco precinct became subsumed by an uproar that called for the blood of the friars.

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<sup>92</sup> Martines, *Fire in the City*, 231-243; Ridolfi, *Life*, 241-257.

<sup>93</sup> Girolamo Savonarola, *I processi di Girolamo Savonarola, 1498*, ed. Ida Giovanna Rao, Paolo Viti, and Raffaella Maria Zaccaria (Florence: SISMELE Edizioni Del Galluzzo, 2001), 30-31.

## Conclusion

The total conquest of San Marco was a conquest both spatial and symbolic in nature: spatial because the anti-Piagnoni mob had physically and aurally overwhelmed the Piazza San Marco and ousted its friars, and symbolic because of the cultural significance of San Marco to Piagnoni cosmology. Regarding its symbolic conquest, nothing exemplified this more than the failure of *La Piagnona*'s peals to solicit a show of arms for the friars. For years, San Marco's lone bell had been a keynote sound in that part of the city, pealing routinely to call devotees to prayer and coordinating the flow of Savonarolan public rituals. The silent response to *La Piagnona*'s call to arms marked the last gasp of the Savonarolan sensescape.

Virtually overnight, the Piagnoni became pariahs in Florence. As Somenzi reported, everyone was terrified of voicing support for Savonarola lest they incurred the wrath of the mob.<sup>94</sup> To make matters worse, Savonarola later confessed to the fallaciousness of his prophecies under duress, turning even more Florentines who had continued to cling to faith against him. Landucci was particularly disillusioned, lamenting, "My soul is so aggrieved to see that such an edifice has fallen to the ground on account of having been founded on a lie."<sup>95</sup> With this final ignominy, Savonarola's time in the sun had well and truly ended. A month later, on 23 May, he and his two companions were burned at the stake before thousands of his former devotees.

Throughout this chapter, we have seen that public consensus surrounding Savonarola's moral and political influence over the city was negotiated on shaky foundations. As soon as Savonarola entered the limelight in 1494, enemies emerged like weeds, all determined to undermine and oust Piagnoni influence from Florence. As Guicciardini closed his chapter on the fall of Savonarola, he posited that Savonarola's demise was engineered to satisfy the anger

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<sup>94</sup> Somenzi, "Otto Lettere," xcviij.

<sup>95</sup> Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 173.

of his enemies.<sup>96</sup> Though these disparate groups of anti-Savonarolans never formed anything like a united front, their interests and activities often intersected, and they each had their own role to play in his fall. Ultimately, the justifications for Savonarola's overthrow were not self-evident to most Florentines. The anti-Savonarolans had to demonstrate to the Florentines that the Piagnoni regime had overstayed its welcome. My main contribution is to illuminate how the senses comprised an integral facet of human agency, informing and guiding the courses of action those historical actors took. In this respect, sensescaping was to the anti-Piagnoni a means of engineering consensus. It was the sum of all of these efforts – anti-Piagnoni preaching and the distribution of pamphlets; legislative measures and decrees that impeded Savonarola's preaching efforts and limited the scope of Piagnoni movement and activity; street violence, vandalism, satirical performances, and self-flaunting theatrics – that played a key role in eroding and overturning the perception of Savonarola's ascendancy. Through all these strategies, the anti-Savonarolans simultaneously offered Florence an alternative vision of politics, culture and society, communicated their contempt towards San Marco's imposition of civic order, and menaced the Piagnoni. Understated yet ubiquitous, the senses were an essential factor in the organisation of space and the influencing of identities and allegiances.

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<sup>96</sup> Guicciardini, *Storie fiorentine*, 280.

## Conclusion

For over a month following his arrest and imprisonment, Girolamo Savonarola and two of his closest associates, Domenico da Pescia and Silvestro Maruffi, underwent three gruelling rounds of trials and interrogation between Florence's secular authorities and an inquisitorial commission dispatched by the Church. Under torture, Savonarola confessed to having invented his prophecies, before recanting, and then confessing to his charges again. Finally, on the morning of 23 May 1498, the three friars were sentenced to die. The notaries who recorded the proceedings of their trial and execution curtly declared: "Fra Girolamo, fra Domenico, fra Silvestro at hour 13 were degraded (*degradazione*) then burned in the Piazza della Signoria."<sup>1</sup> Betraying the blunt tone of these trial minutes was a concerted effort by Savonarola's executioners to dramatize his fall from grace. Before their executions, the condemned friars were ritually humiliated before thousands of attendees, many of whom had followed and venerated the friar for years. Piero Parenti provided a vivid account of these degradations. An "eminent dais" had been installed on the *ringhiera* of the Palazzo Vecchio, on which the three friars were brought out dressed in full clerical robes, and defrocked layer by layer as words of degradation were recited that affirmed them as heretics and cast them out of the Christian fold.<sup>2</sup> The diarist Luca Landucci added that the friars also had their hands and faces shaven, before being hanged and burned one after another.<sup>3</sup>

The elevated position of the dais hinted that both the Arrabbiati-led Signoria and the ecclesiastical authorities were intent on creating an ironic spectacle out of Savonarola's death, one that would visually and aurally theatricise his final ignominy. The subtext was undeniably clear to

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<sup>1</sup> *I processi*, 44.

<sup>2</sup> Parenti, *Storia fiorentina*, II:180.

<sup>3</sup> Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, 177.



see. For instance, the pyre upon which Savonarola and his two attendants were immolated conspicuously resembled one of his *capannucci* or Carnival bonfires. The carnivalesque undertone is even more apparent in Landucci's observation that gunpowder was purposefully used in Savonarola's pyre so that it "burst out with a noise of rockets and cracking."<sup>4</sup> The Carnival practice of stone throwing was also revived in a macabre fashion. Parenti reports that some children created a furore by shouting verbal obscenities and stoning Savonarola's charred corpse with such violence that bits of him were gradually chipped off, falling to the ground.<sup>5</sup> It was as if his executioners were choreographing Savonarola's immolation to resemble a festive celebration. They were mocking him by engineering a series of ironic images: by setting him ablaze on a Carnival bonfire and allowing children, some of whom may have been *ex-fanciulli*, to stone his corpse. Savonarola's detractors certainly enjoyed seeing this. The merchant Piero Vaglianti for instance, was so impressed by the choreography of Savonarola's execution that he could not help calling it a "beautiful affair."<sup>6</sup> All of this drama ultimately served to ridicule the Piagnoni in a way that showcased the folly and failure of their entire enterprise.

Savonarola's damnation did not end with his death. In the immediate aftermath of his execution, the possession of Piagnoni texts and pamphlets was criminalised, discussion of his theological works was banned, and even the singing of Savonarola's favourite psalm, the *Ecce Quam Bonum*, was expressly forbidden.<sup>7</sup> This persecution was also symbolically extended to inanimate objects that were perceived as accomplices of Savonarola. On 28 June 1498, *La Piagnona*, the lone bell of San Marco, was put on trial and banished from Florence for a period of

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>5</sup> Parenti, *Storia fiorentina*, II:181.

<sup>6</sup> Vaglianti, *Storia*, 48.

<sup>7</sup> Weinstein, *Savonarola*, 298.

50 years to the Franciscan convent of San Salvatore al Monte located beyond Florence's city walls "as is done to rebels."<sup>8</sup> Even more remarkably, the Signoria assigned a hangman, who "with whips and instruments of torture and a cart," tortured the bell as the Franciscans paraded it through the streets of Florence on their way to their countryside convent.<sup>9</sup> Once again, the Signoria's agenda in staging this bizarre trial was deliberately theatrical. They were acutely aware of the communicative power of bells, and the specific role that *La Piagnona* had played under Savonarola as a mobilizational tool. By forcing the friars of San Marco to surrender their bell and to witness it dragged through the streets and flagellated confirmed their abject powerlessness and their new status as pariahs: visually, spectacularly and in full view of the general populace.<sup>10</sup> With this final ignominy, Savonarola's disgrace was complete. By the end of the year, almost all of Savonarola's moral and behavioural reforms had been overturned and all memory of him was suppressed. Commenting from December 1498, the historian Giovanni Cambi aptly captured the throwing off of restraints post-mortem: "Because the friar [Savonarola] was dead, it seemed as if [people] were at liberty to commit every kind of sin, he by his preaching having removed all such things."<sup>11</sup>

This thesis has investigated the role of the senses in guiding the dynamics of power in late fifteenth century Florence. To do so, I developed the sensescaping approach, which advocates the idea that a physical and an ideological environment can be sensorially constructed – as a useful frame for gaining insights on many of the underlying factors that guided how historical people interacted with one another through the manipulation of their natural and built surroundings. In

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<sup>8</sup> Filipepi, "Cronaca," 490.

<sup>9</sup> Anonymous, "Deliberazioni contro la campana di San Marco," In Pasquale Villari, *La storia di Girolamo Savonarola e de' suoi tempi: narrata da Pasquale Villari con l'aiuto di nuovi documenti* 2 vols. (Florence: Felice le Monnier, 1898), II:ccxcj-cxcij.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel M. Zolli and Christopher Brown, "Bell on Trial: The Struggle for Sound after Savonarola," *Renaissance Quarterly* 72, no. 1 (2019): 54-96.

<sup>11</sup> Cambi, *Istorie*, II:130.

this process, I have devised the schema of sensory repertoires as a system for analysing and categorising a nebulous array of contextually defined social actions that historical actors performed, which constituted the creative processes of sensescaping. Savonarolan Florence has proven to be a highly fruitful case study in demonstrating the applicability of my approach. This is due in large part to the dynamism of the Piagnoni movement: its accentuated radicalism and controversiality, and the existence of a sharp opposition towards it by reactionaries from within the Florentine body politic. The meteoric nature of his rise and fall, along with the sweeping transformations he effected in Florence in such a brief period makes it possible to conduct a systematic analysis of the various instances of sensory repertoires being employed within a relatively fixed cultural context.

This thesis began with an exploration of the period encapsulating Savonarola's earliest arrival and subsequent rise to power in Florence. It is widely known that the establishment of Savonarola's Piagnoni movement was attributed largely to his skill and repute as a populist preacher and his brilliant exploitation of domestic fears about the French invasion of Italy. I highlight how the manipulation of the acoustic and visual properties of space and architecture enhanced the persuasive qualities of sermons and led to the gradual emergence of a distinct Savonarolan sensescape by early 1496. I show that all of the disparate threads of the Savonarolan sensescape, especially in the case study of the Palm Sunday procession, worked in concert to indoctrinate ordinary Florentines to the Piagnoni cause through the creation of immersive experiences in the theatres of everyday life. Thus, the causes of Savonarola's success in converting such a broad sector of the Florentine populace in such short order cannot be fully understood without respect to sensescaping.

Just as sensescaping could be used as a persuasive medium to build consensus, so too could it be used as a method by political leaders to impose and perpetuate hegemonies. The middle chapter of this thesis applies this lens to the peak of Savonarola's influence between late-1494 and mid-1497, shedding light on how social control was conducive to the Piagnoni goal of effecting moral and spiritual reform. The symbiotic link between persuasion and coercion is one of the central theses of this chapter, highlighting the conspicuous relationship between the creative moulding of a sensory regime and the agenda of social control at Savonarola's apogee. The vitriolic and dictatorial nature of Savonarola's preaching, in addition to his appointment of the *fanciulli* as religious enforcers were purposed towards limiting the range of accepted social behaviours and practices. Wherein the previous chapter, festivals were assessed as sites of community-building, this chapter shifts the focus on festivals towards their functions as conduits of surveillance technologies and platforms for projecting and imposing power. This is especially salient in the climate of terror created by Savonarola's *fanciulli* in their policing and vanity-collection roles, and in the dramaturgical elements of festive rituals – music, temporary festive architecture, fixed ceremonial architecture, bodily performances etc. – which reinforced narratives of legitimate incumbency while advertising and designating certain groups of dissidents as undesirables and outcasts.

Conversely, just as sensescaping was practiced by those in power to impose consensus, so too could dissidents challenge hegemonies through their own methods of counter-sensescaping. This is apparent in my third chapter, where I examine the arsenal of sensory repertoires that Savonarola's opposition weaponised to challenge Savonarola's influence in his final year in power. I have aptly used the word "battlefield" to characterise Florentine sensescapes in this chapter to capture the essence of Piagnoni-*tiepidi* conflict between 1497 and 1498. The key tactical objective

of this conflict was the contestation of space, both inhabited and symbolic, in a protracted tug-of-war between Savonarola and three main factions opposed to him: anti-Piagnoni clerics, the Arrabbiati, and the Compagnacci. Their tactics were diverse, ranging on a broad spectrum of actions from preaching and legislating to ritual violence, defacement and vandalism. Victory in this battlefield was determined by the ability of each belligerent to exert a more dominant sensed presence, and by who was able to disrupt and drown the other out, through noise, smell or visual presence, as we have seen in the case study of Carnival 1498.

The senses encapsulated an important facet of human agency in the socio-political environment of Renaissance Florence. This thesis has shown that all social actions in Renaissance Florence were dramaturgical to a great extent: they were intended to be seen, heard, smelt or felt by their social peers in the daily transactions of meanings, memories, and reputations. Sensory repertoires were crucial as a means of social communication that informed the social identities, affinities and allegiances of citizens. Therefore, sensescaping was a process that was specific and essential to the dynamics of power in the social world of Renaissance Florence.

There is a growing corpus of theoretical literature across various social science disciplines on how the senses have informed how people past and present have structured and engaged in their societies.<sup>12</sup> This thesis represents a contribution to the broader field of sensory studies through the development and application of the sensescaping method, which seeks to open new avenues of inquiry into the senses as an independent and formative facet of human agency. Additionally, the study contributes to the more localised field of Renaissance Florentine historical studies, an area

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<sup>12</sup> For examples of the most recent theoretical works in sensory studies, see Justin Patch and Thomas Porcello, *Re-Making Sound: An Experiential Approach to Sound Studies* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2022); Michele White, *Touch Screen Theory: Digital Devices and Feelings* (MIT Press, 2022); Erin E. Lynch, *Locative Tourism Applications: A Sensory Ethnography of the Augmented City* (Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2022).

woefully underrepresented compared to other historical contexts by historians of the senses.<sup>13</sup> This is especially unfortunate, given that Renaissance Florentines were often more skilled in their ways of sensing than we are in our sensorially overloaded modern urban conglomerations.

Much work remains to be done on the history of sensescaping in the context of Renaissance Florence. Focusing on a well-known and long-studied figure such as Savonarola advances knowledge on that specific niche but falls short of providing a truly comprehensive picture of how his contemporaries of various social strata actively mediated their sensory environments for various communicative and mobilizational purposes. My chosen case study of Girolamo Savonarola's contentious impact on Florentine politics and society is but a brief chapter in a centuries' long history of both continuity and transformation. Future scholars could explore other influential figures or movements to examine how they utilised sensescaping practices to shape the world around them. Opportunities abound to extend the sensescaping approach to other topics within the field, enabling us to gain a better understanding of the ways in which sensory experiences shape and reflect the social and cultural norms of different communities. This is just the beginning of a much larger and more complex field of interdisciplinary research with many opportunities for further exploration and discovery within and beyond the scope of Renaissance Florentine studies.

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<sup>13</sup> Leaders in applied sensory history in Renaissance Italian studies include, Atkinson, *Noisy Renaissance*; David Karmon, *Architecture and the Senses in the Italian Renaissance: The Varieties of Architectural Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

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