Not My Queer: Queer Representation in Contemporary Italian Serial Television

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NOT MY QUEER:
QUEER REPRESENTATION IN CONTEMPORARY ITALIAN SERIAL TELEVISION

by,

Julia Heim

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Julia Heim

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

Not My Queer: 
Queer Representation in Contemporary Italian Serial Television

by

Julia Heim

Advisor: Giancarlo Lombardi

Contemporary Italian television, like many national televisions, has entered a period in which the relationships the producers and consumers of televisual content are increasingly indistinguishable. In this age of media convergence the new participants of this medium work across platforms to actively engage, consume, create, and recreate both televisual content and our understanding of the medium. These new relationships require a new understanding of the semiotic and discursive changes taking place in television so that we may reconceptualize the contemporary interplay between media and society.

This dissertation maps out a new understanding of the televisual economy through an elaboration of the dynamics between the four main “bodies” of television, understood as: the consumed televisual body; the produced televisual body; the community bodies of production and consumption; and the individual bodies of production and consumption. These bodies dismantle traditional understanding of identity coherence and must be taken as unstable assembled moments of connection whose mercurial forms depend on technology and on their proximity to the other televisual bodies at play. The compositions of these bodies, which all shape and are shaped by one another, embody queerness as they
reflect the queer theories of assemblage (Puar), temporality (Edelman, Halberstam, and Dinshaw), phenomenology (Ahmed), and utopia (Muñoz). Throughout this dissertation, Italian television is used as a steppingstone, as a gateway through which we may understand the intersections of national and global television in this queer moment of media convergence.

In sharp contrast, investigations of contemporary representations of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) people on Italian national television lie in direct opposition to the queerness embodied by the contemporary structures of the medium. By using Stuart Hall’s theory that identity is formed through representation (see Questions of Cultural Identity), we may understand that the depictions of LGBT people on Italian television shape the ways these groups are understood by and positioned within society, and the effects and consequences of their positionality. The analyses of LGBT people on family fiction programing produced by mainstream (satellite, private, and public) Italian television between 2007 and 2017 reveal the problematics of the contemporary trend of “normalizing” these minorities. Depictions of LGBT characters repeatedly mirror and thus naturalize the desire for monogamous procreative futurity. The necessary consequence of this is the erasure of difference both between LGBT people and heterosexuals and gender conforming individuals, and between people within these Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual (LGBTQIA) communities. The invisibilities of LGBTQIA intimacies, desires, alternative modes of living, and communities on Italian television only allow for a partial integration of these people in the larger Italian society. Mainstream LGBT depictions frame these communities as marginalized while necessarily reinforcing the naturalness of their homonormative presentation. If we, however, expand
our gaze to include televisual engagement that lies outside mainstream representation—which, in this age of convergence, is more representative of the contemporary structure of television—we may reframe the identities being created through the representations produced and consumed. In this way the individual and community bodies that participate in the technologies and aesthetics of this contemporary moment of television, unlike the LGBT depictions that reify and naturalize normative social models, can be understood as queer.
Without community there is no liberation... but community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist.

– Audre Lorde (“The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House”)

Here, just a brief moment to thank the bodies and communities of bodies that have pushed and supported me through this process, without them this body of work would not be.

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Introduction: What Have We Queer?

*Not My Queer* is an investigation into the relationship between queerness and Italian television. More specifically this work is an exploration of the intersections between queerness\(^1\)—understood as a qualifying adjective, and substantive noun that touches the categories of identity, politics, theory, temporality, space, and aesthetics—and contemporary Italian television fictions. As the title may suggest, this project began when I was watching the Italian television remake of Samuel Richardson’s 1740 novel *Pamela*, entitled *Elisa di Rivombrosa* (Alessi and Bodrato 2003). The portrayal of the sexual tension between marchioness Lucrezia Van Necker Beauville and her lady maid Isabella during a particular bathing scene led me to throw my remote on the ground and utter the words that would later become the title of this work (“Season 1 episode 2”). This particular scene inspired me to question whether there was anything queer in heteronormative representations that appeal, more than anything, to the straight male gaze. If depictions of LGBT characters are not geared toward attracting those minority populations, or if they are unsuccessful, can anything about television actually be queer? And what can the ways these characters are framed, represented, and ignored teach us about the societies that portray them?

Here and throughout this work, I use *fiction* the way it is used in Italian television contexts, as a term to describe the television macro-genre that encompasses all genres of invented narrative storytelling. In other words, television fictions are all series and serials

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\(^1\) The use of the term “queer” is meant as a theoretical construct while the acronym LGBTQIA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual) is used when the emphasis is on an individual or community. Decisions to shorten the acronym to LGBTQ or LGBT are meant to clarify that specific groups within the acronym are being addressed and others are not.
constructed for the small screen, which depict made up stories. My decision to concentrate this study on television fictions, and family fictions more specifically stems from two foundational understandings. First, fictional narratives speak to society about society through the construction of narration in a way that nonfictional content often does not. As Italian television scholar Milly Buonanno argues, “fiction offers precious material to understand the world we live in. Without perfectly mirroring reality, but without distorting it, television stories select, reconfigure, discuss and comment on the themes and problems of our personal and social lives” (Le formule del racconto televisivo 38)². Second, I consider family, as I explain in chapter two, to be foundational to Italian identity. Thus, family fictions—which are series and serials that center on family narratives—serve as the prime area of investigation when considering the position of LGBTQIA people in Italian society.

Research on the relationship between minority populations and media has largely been based on the assumption that identity is shaped by and through representation (see, for example, Hall Cultural Studies 1983). The contemporary climate surrounding LGBT rights in Italy, as I discuss in chapter one, is fraught at best. On the one hand civil unions have been legalized for same sex couples, and collective actions like the boycott against Barilla pasta after homophobic remarks from the company’s chairman resulted in a complete turnaround by the company, which now receives a perfect score on the Human Rights Campaign’s Equality Index (Ennis). On the other hand, right wing and church groups are leading movements to reaffirm the compulsory heterosexuality of the family and perpetuate fear about the dangers of gender variance. Furthermore, Italian public television network RAI 3’s decision to replay episodes of the docu-reality show Stato Civile

² Unless otherwise stated all translations of Italian works and shows are mine.
(2016)—in which same-sex couples are filmed before and after their civil unions—for five consecutive evenings during the Christmas holiday season, was met with a flood of hostility both on social media and in the press. The couple Simona and Stefania who were portrayed in the show even received death threats after the rebroadcast (“Stato Civile’, Rai Tre trasmette le repliche in preserale: è polemica”). Given this seesawing of social acceptance, and in light of the media’s role in creating and shaping notions of identity, an exploration into Italian television’s representations of LGBT populations provides insight into the cultural positioning of these marginalized groups. Furthermore, the very public nature of the socio-cultural ambivalence toward LGBT people in Italy makes this national television study perhaps more fruitful than one performed on a country which is either openly anti-gay, or considers itself socially and legislatively gay friendly.

The five chapters of this book put different queer theories in conversation with the representations of LGBT people on Italian fiction programing, and with these programs and Italian television more generally, keeping in mind that the television content under investigation always necessarily includes the forms and structures that shape it. Queer theories of temporality, kinship, failure, phenomenology, performativity, and reception studies are used to help understand the ways that LGBT characters are represented, and also, perhaps more importantly, to locate other structures and ways of looking at this televisual content.

Chapter one sets the stage of this investigation by providing brief histories of the politics and infrastructure of Italian television, serial programming, gay portrayals on Italian TV, and technological advances of the medium. These brief diachronic outlines serve not only to contextualize the shows and characters under investigation in the subsequent
chapters, but also to evidence the foundations on which these depictions are based—foundations that create the systems through which society builds a sense of itself. Looking at the mutations of form, content, and technology as interrelated televisual constructions, what begins to come to light is the fact that many of the elements foundational to television appear more queer than the LGBT characters they portray; a fact which will come to the fore even more in chapter five's discussion of texts in the age of media convergence. In this way the very notion of Italian national identity, formed through and by television, is called into question, proving no longer to be a stable unifying concept. Italian fiction genres and family-centric narratives, likewise, challenge the Italianness of these national productions. While destabilizing essentialist notions of identity, these shows also fracture the boundaries that define genre. Finally, the shifting structures of television that mutate with every technological innovation reveal the complex relationship between the medium of television and the temporalities it depicts and facilitates in those who watch it.

The subsequent three chapters look more specifically into eight family fictions that have been aired on Italian television within the past ten years. Beginning with a theoretical conceptualization of family fictions and their relationship to national identity formation, chapter two goes on to perform close readings of the lesbian, gay, and transgender characters in these contemporary family dramas and comedies. These analyses look at the way these characters are aesthetically presented, their relationships to their straight counterparts, and the general trajectories of their narratives within the frame of the larger stories in these shows. Dominant trends surface through and across these investigations, as these characters, and their treatment by straight characters, largely reaffirm culturally imposed gender and sexuality binaries, and conform to normative social expectations. The
stereotyped flamboyance of previous gay portrayals seems to have gotten replaced by an excessive normalcy that ultimately raises the question: just how are these characters gay?

Chapter three rereads the programs analyzed in chapter two, this time in an effort to bring to light what remains unsaid and unshown in these depictions. Putting semiotics and specifically Judith Butler’s theoretical elaborations of interpellation into conversation with feminist and queer theories of intersectionality and fractured identity formations, I discuss the larger social and personal repercussions of representational invisibilities. This serves as a larger frame to understand the ways that difference is rendered unacceptable by the media. In order to create a sense of unity or wholeness in both the narratives and characters, certain elements must be relegated to what Teresa de Lauretiis calls the “space-off.” This chapter calls attention to the parts of LGBTQIA lives—namely sexual expression, relationships not founded on reproductive monogamy, and LGBTQIA communities, just to name a few—that must be erased from these narratives in order for the normative representations discussed in chapter two to function.

Chapter four takes one last look at these shows, this time paying particular attention to the relationship between the viewers of these programs and the content they consume. José Muñoz’s theory of disidentification creates an active practice of exposing problematic, universalizing, disempowering messages in media and radically reinterpreting and recoding them in order to give agency to marginalized minority spectators. Using disidentification alongside Donna Haraway’s elaboration of diffraction, I propose an alternative way of approaching these televisual texts. When confronted with the normativities brought to light in chapter two and the invisibilities of chapter three, the active spectator may engage in a performative queer gaze by looking elsewhere and
looking differently at the content, formats, technologies, and temporalities of these programs. I argue that these ways of looking acknowledge certain queer elements even in the most normative of representations. This active decoding approach thus speaks to the ways that making media and making meaning contain a large amount of queer potentiality.

This queer potentiality lies at the center of the theoretical foundations of the final chapter. Up to now, this study has focused on content created by mainstream televisual industries, and has only peripherally engaged in producer/consumer dynamics. Considering this contemporary televisual moment of media convergence, where the technologies and functionality of televisions and computers merge, mainstream productions cannot fully portray the dynamics between queerness and television. Chapter four used an active approach to spectatorship but was still confined to those depictions produced by big industry. Chapter five delves deeper into the active engagement of the spectator in a way that more thoroughly reflects the expansiveness of the contemporary televisual text. In this chapter I analyze contemporary viewer-generated content, namely, webseries, remediations, and slash fiction by completely reconceptualizing the dynamics between the four main bodies that constitute the televisual experience: the individual body, the community body, the consumed content as body, and the produced content as body. I put Jack Halberstam’s elaboration of the technotopic body—understood as a site comprised of multiple parts and representational modes shaped by technology and aesthetics—in conversation with Jasbir Puar’s theory of assemblages—which considers bodies unstable moments of affective encounters that resist unified identity formations. I understand these bodies as moments of connection whose forms depend both on technology and on their proximity to the other televisual bodies at play. These bodies,
however, are not distinct from one another; the produced televisual bodies are also the consumed bodies, which are made by and help make the bodies of the individuals and the bodies of the communities of which they are a part. Looking at the performativity, temporality, and potentiality of these televisual bodies through this new reframing, they become reflective of José Muñoz’s notion of queer utopia.

By considering the history of Italian television and the development of its fictional programming alongside queer theories of temporality and identity formation, the stability of both national identity and television are called into question. Deconstructing the portrayals of LGBT characters on Italian television reveals the ways in which they reaffirm normative socio-cultural relations and expectations. The identities of those people who consider themselves a part of the LGBT acronym, in being shaped by these depictions, may also partake in these same normative structures. Reorienting our gaze to include the expanded understanding of television in this age of media convergence, however, reveals the possibility of understanding this moment as a queer televisual moment, which produces queer identities through its complex technological and temporal composition. While this queer moment of television may be fleeting, in the true spirit of the televisual archive, that gets consumed and re-consumed, mediated and remediated, this queer moment will live on in the multiplicity that is the temporal present of the medium.
Chapter 1: Contextualizing Queerness in and on Italian Television

1.1 A Historical Consideration of Television’s Form and Content

To argue for or against the queerness of Italian contemporary television fictions seems perhaps a stranger endeavor; let’s face it, no one would mistakenly believe that the “educate” in RAI’s [Radiotelevisione Italiana]—Italy’s public television—mission statement includes anything outside the confines of traditional Catholic compulsory heterosexuality—we need only think of Pope Francis’ statements denouncing the idea that people have a right to choose their gender (Ring). But a look at the portrayals on LGBTQIA people on Italian television will surely provide insight into the position of these groups within the cultural climate of the nation.

In order to understand these depictions we must also consider what these depictions are doing, and how and why they are doing it. These fundamental questions that seek to show how media representation creates meaning for its consumers point to the need to consider not only what gets represented, but also the social, political, and technological structures that help generate media signification. Thus, more than a contextualization, the parallel histories of Italian television networks, fiction programming, LGBT representation, and television technology discussed in this chapter show the complicated interconnection between television’s form and content. Keeping these histories separate but in conversation with one another makes clear the ways that content often facilitates cultural understanding of national and marginalized identities while form, being more mercurial, has a tendency to call these identities into question. Ultimately what
begins to come to light is that the moments of connection between queer theories and Italian television may have very little to do with portrayals of LGBT minorities.

1.2 Italian National/Televisual Identity

The creation and concept of an Italian national identity has gone hand in hand with the creation and structures of Italian media. Michela Ardizzoni has elaborated on linguist and politician Tullio de Mauro’s claim that RAI linguistically unified the nation, adding that “the introduction of nationally based radio and, later, television broadcasting,” indicates “a parallel and interconnected development of the notion of Italian national identity along-side the Italian media system” (8). She goes on to argue that, “the structure of RAI was marked by a deliberate attempt to address a ‘nationally unified’ Italian audience with a common national culture” (32). Thus the very idea of Italianness was constructed and perpetuated by the burgeoning Italian media; a symbiotic relationship highlighted by Stuart Hall’s claims that identity is formed through representation (Du Gay and Hall 4). From a semiotic perspective, Hall has also noted that signifiers, in this case “Italian identity” and/or “Italian national media,” “gain their meaning, not because of what they contain in their essence, but in the shifting relations of difference” (Hall 8). Understanding identity construction through representation and relational difference is of utmost importance in understanding and exploring LGBTQ media representations within the Italian context, but what is perhaps surprising is how pivotal it becomes in understanding the queerness at the very heart of the idea and entity known as Italian national television.

Discussing the Italianness of Italian television necessarily assumes an accepted geopolitical idea of national identity. The concept of “identity” requires us, as Trinh T. Minh-ha
has argued, “to reopen [...] the discussion on the self/other relationship” since identity “requires the elimination of all that is considered foreign or not true to the self, that is to say, non-I, other” (415). We will see that when negotiating the meaning of Italian national television, this us/them, domestic/foreign, self/other binary, becomes unclear, muddled, queer. The deconstruction of these binaries is not merely a result of increased globalization in contemporary culture and media—though we cannot underestimate its influence when discussing how, when, and where spectators consume television content—it has, instead, always been at the foundation of Italy’s national televisual development. As Milly Buonanno notes, when speaking of Italian television dramas: “what has come to be considered as peculiarly ‘national’ storytelling has gone through a process of recombination between domestic and foreign, native and imported, local and global elements and cultural ingredients” (Italian TV Drama and Beyond 6). The frames mapped out here, in revealing the faultiness of binaries, destabilize the foundations of identity construction that often serve as a basis for marginalizing LGBTQIA people and other minority groups. Looking at the history of the Italian fiction macro-genre seems likewise to reveal a certain instability reflective of queerness.

1.3 Inter/National Television Fictions

If television is the way that society speaks to itself about itself, Aldo Grasso and Massimo Scaglioni go so far as to say that television fiction is the only genre capable of narrating the story of the country (167). In the case of Italian fictions, generally speaking, the most quintessential “Italian” television fictions have been based around or constructed
from foreign-born structures, calling the roots of everything that is “national” about the
history/story of the nation, and its national television into question.

Before the word *fiction* entered Italian televisual vernacular about thirty years ago,
the popular term was *sceneggiato*. The *sceneggiato* had the theater as its point of reference
and was characterized by its use of the studio, electronic technology, and live broadcasting
(Buonanno *Le formule del racconto televisivo* 49). The *sceneggiato* took its episodic form—
with each one averaging six but no more than ten episodes—from its feuilleton forefather.
The feuilleton began as a four page newspaper supplement that included literary criticism,
theater reviews, recipes and other short cultural pieces, but then in the mid 1830s it
became a space to publish episodic narratives. At first the space was used to reproduce
fragments of classic novels, but soon writers learned the particularities of the platform and
began incorporating the technique of suspense to encourage continued readership (Cardini
28). Taking this structure and the aesthetics from the popular *fotoromanzo*, or photonovel,
the *sceneggiato* proved an exceptionally successful format and lent itself well to RAI’s
educational mission since quite often the *sceneggiati* were televisual adaptations of classic
literary works that introduced a predominantly illiterate population to a large body of
cultural narratives.

From a linguistic standpoint the Italian use of the English term *fiction* to depict a
plethora of television dramas and comedies, from fictional serials to series created
specifically for television, is particularly interesting in light of the initial resistance of
Italian public television to adopt these formats and the concerted effort to distinguish
Italian seriality from its American counterpart. What is especially telling, for our purposes,
is that the word *fiction* first came into the Italian televisual vernacular shortly after the
Dallas phenomenon. As scholars like Daniela Cardini have noted, the use of the English term points to an indebtedness to the American model that Italians, despite appropriating the word, are quick to negate (52).

The use of an English word to speak about shows that are often entirely Italian in their production and broadcast history exemplifies the interrelation between cultures, between the foreign and the native, the self and the other, the national and international. The influence of one in the definition of the other is not about establishing clear delineations between two countries or televisual styles. In fact, as Buonanno argues in her book Italian TV Drama and Beyond, the “Italianness” of Italian television is very much made up of both national and international traits, as global and local elements combine together to forge a sense of televisual self (6).

Let us note, however, that the integration of this “otherness” in Italian fiction has roots that significantly predate the transition to using the English word. In fact, the origins of the seriality of literature find their roots in England in the 1830s, as literary works began to be produced and disseminated episodically—Cardini sites Dickens’ The Pickwick Papers as a primary example (25). Furthermore, the feuilleton, the direct ancestor of the sceneggiato, is French. The foreign elements at the foundations of the sceneggiato must not be overlooked when investigating its position as one of the primary creators of a unified national identity and as a privileged format during Italian television’s early years. Elements of foreignness in this national genre carried into its content as the majority of the stories and narratives retold were of foreign origin (Buonanno, Italian TV Drama and Beyond 16). In fact, as Buonanno notes, of the twenty-six sceneggiati produced during RAI’s early years, only seven were of Italian origin (16).
This inherent otherness within the national framework of Italian television extends far beyond historic and linguistic reflections. As we will see, shorter form serials such as La piovra (Petraglia 1984) and long form serials like the soap opera Un posto al sole (Doyle 1996), both quintessential Italian programs that speak strongly to place (Sicily and Naples, respectively) and the particularities of Italian identity, came into being because of direct aid and support from other countries, namely, Australia—as in the case of Un posto al sole—or because of globalized structures of access that “contaminated” genre structures and led to the hybrid text that La piovra was to become. Buonanno has stated, in her response to criticisms about the genre shifts in later editions of La piovra—as it became more of a soap opera and less of a miniseries—: “what is seen to be at work in the serialization of La Piovra is the interpenetration between the ‘global’ and the ‘local’ in terms of narrative formulae” (Italian TV Drama and Beyond 74). The format changes of La piovra are indicative of the elasticity of fiction itself, as it simultaneously mixes tradition (understood as televisual temporal persistence) and innovation, which Grasso and Scaglioni remark is true on both textual and consumption levels (167). The multiplicity inherent in the national with regard to Italian fictions, and their mutability in terms of form thus seem to typify theoretical constructions of queerness, as they challenge the stability and unified nature of normative understandings of identity formation.

The historical sketches of both the rise of television fictional content and the representations of LGBT characters on these programs put the wheels in motion for this destabilization, while simultaneously basing changes in industry and the content within the programing on normative notions of identity that rely heavily on national, sexual, and gender essentializing strategies.
1.4 How did we get here? A Brief History of Italian Television (1970s-Today)

Since the mid 1950s, when Italy first began its television broadcasting, RAI, the country’s national public television, set out to produce content for a general audience that adhered to its quintessential mission to educate, inform, and entertain. With the introduction of more than one RAI network (RAI 2 in 1962, and RAI 3 in 1979) public television was able to expand its content to include more factual and regional programming in addition to the socially and culturally educative content of RAI 1. In the early 70s local private networks known as “televisione libere” or free TV began to appear. In 1974, after several years of court proceedings to determine their legality, the courts ruled that private networks had the right to broadcast syndicated foreign programming, and could use cable technology on a local level (Menduni 38). In the late 70s these local networks started sprouting up in abundance, but it wasn’t until 1980 and the subsequent few years, when Silvio Berlusconi’s TeleMilano became Canale 5 and began distributing prerecorded content to local networks, that RAI began to face anything that could be considered competition.

As these small networks grew, in addition to building audiences on a local level, they began banding together to share the costs of acquiring foreign content. To add to their collective power, in the early 80s they began to make use of what was called a *pizzone*, namely a group of pre-recorded cassettes with a strict order and schedule that included advertising breaks. The idea was to disseminate the *pizzone* to a national group of local networks who would adhere to the assigned broadcast times of the cassettes’ content. By
broadcasting the same content at the same time these local channels circumvented the rigid laws aimed at preventing private national competition (Barra *Palinsesto* 118).

Private channels, and specifically Berlusconi’s band of affiliated networks were facing a set of challenges their public competition did not have to deal with: they were forced to rely on publicity and spectator loyalty, they were up against laws that prohibited them from broadcasting live content, and they needed to distinguish themselves from RAI. The answer the private networks found resulted in what is often called the “Americanization” of Italian television. Carlo Freccero argues that while RAI represented the greatest source for cultural information, private television represented the greatest Americanizing and internationalizing force for taste (*Televisione* 54). The private networks were not able to broadcast live content, thus eliminating live sporting events and news programming. Accordingly, they made recourse to entertainment based genres and series, and while they would slowly begin to produce their own content, especially co-productions with already established companies, it was easy and effective to build their libraries by acquiring American programs—preferring American serial content to films, which were too varied to insure viewer loyalty (Menduni 82). The appropriation of American “readymade” content, and the distribution of pre-programed cassettes that allowed them to broadcast on a national scale meant a mirroring of the American televisual model, which was a complete reconceptualization of the temporality of their scheduling. This new scheduling structure—known in Italy as the palimpsest—was also a drastic shift from RAI’s model; unlike RAI, which positioned its ads in between shows, these private networks used the American fragmented structure already in place in these shows and thus inserted
advertising breaks in the middle of their programming. The success of this televisual model could be felt early on with the importation of *Dallas* (Jacobs 1978).

1.5 The Rise in Italian Serial Programming

The 1979-1980 season of the American prime-time soap opera *Dallas* ended with a murder attempt on Texan oil tycoon and anti-hero J.R. Ewing. Audiences were forced to wait all summer to find out if J.R. Ewing was still alive, and who, of all his enemies, had pulled the trigger. Using this cliffhanger as a metaphor for Italian television we might say that if J.R. is RAI then the Italian private networks (in this case Canale 5 in particular) are Kristin Shepard (J.R.’s sister-in-law, mistress and attempted murderer), and the gun is *Dallas* itself. *Dallas* was aired in the spring of 1981 on RAI 1. Scholars like Milly Buonanno, have elaborated the many reasons behind *Dallas’* failure on RAI, including public television’s disdain for American products, and the sense that RAI was forced to acquire the series (*Le formule del racconto televisivo* 52). Whatever the case, RAI aired *Dallas* the same way it aired the era’s various series, namely, once a week on Wednesdays as independent one-off episodes with no regard for their order or seriality. After the show’s failure on RAI, Canale 5 acquired the rights, and in June of 1981 with heavy advertising, *Dallas* became the prime-time event of the season. Airing it twice a week in the early evening and strictly adhering to the show’s serial structure, Canale 5 soon created such strong viewer loyalty that the show was able to compete with Mike Bongiorno’s extremely popular quiz show and even with *Dynasty* (which aired on Rete 4 before it got acquired by Berlusconi’s Fininvest) when it later moved to Wednesdays. This Americanization, emblematic of the network’s library building focus, led to a distinct shift in the programming schedule. In fact,
Canale 5’s entire palimpsest was structured around *Dallas*, changing the conceptualization of the television schedule from vertical—day as entity—to horizontal—timeslot as entity. Because it was aired twice a week at the same time, loyal viewers no longer focused on the day but on the specific time across days, and viewers could learn to expect consistent themes and genres during specific times (Barra, *Palinsesto* 126; Menduni 83).

The vertical to horizontal temporal shift both matched and shaped viewer televisual tendencies. It matched the repetitive horizontality of what Cardini calls the “discontinuous flux” of our own organizing times (21), while simultaneously producing, regulating, and reinforcing cultural and domestic times and patterns (Barra *Palinsesto* 17). The introduction of Auditel—a company that quantitatively measures program viewership—in 1984 (though it didn’t publish its first data until 1986) marked a decided shift toward an obsession with audience numbers and “customer” satisfaction, and was a pivotal factor in palimpsest formations (Freccero 51). During the era of the public television monopoly, RAI did indeed research the public’s interest and satisfaction with its programming through its internal “opinions service” but it was not interested in market share numbers to sell to advertisers. Once commercial television entered the picture measuring audience numbers became much more of a priority (Scaglioni “Per una storia culturale di Auditel” 378). The move toward a concentration on customer satisfaction made evident by the heavy reliance on Auditel numbers is indicative of further changes in the nation that would prove to have a large impact on the television industry. The increase in the visibility and power of the private networks, along with the temporal shift in scheduling, and the increased importance of spectatorship numbers set the stage for the technological, industrial, and
cultural changes that would, and continue to develop, changes that mark the mercurial nature of what we may call “Italian national television.”

One of the other important consequences of this televisual temporal reconstruction was the ability to exploit the popularity of *Dallas* in its primetime slot in two ways: first, by promoting the network's other products during its broadcast, and second, by scheduling domestic products with high ratings potential immediately afterward. Canale 5 chose to piggyback *Dallas* with a similar nationally made product; thus marking the rise of commercial television productions (55).

RAI, which has a long history of producing “films in installments,” otherwise known as telefilms or miniseries, responded to the success of *Dallas* by producing *La piovra*. *La piovra*—which takes place in Sicily and deals with the systemic effects of the mafia—condensed the continuous serial format into a miniseries and used themes and locations that reflected the notion of Italianness. RAI’s response to *Dallas* became an (inter)national sensation (*La piovra* continued for ten seasons) (Buonanno *Le formule del racconto televisivo* 60). The program very much reflected Italy's idea of its own national identity, both in its abbreviated miniseries format, and its content (the 1980s in Italy were tainted with systemic criminality which was reflected in Italian society’s “culture of suspicion”) (Buonanno *Italian TV Drama and Beyond* 45). Even so, this national televisual phenomenon relied heavily on foreign serial television strategies in its construction. As Milly Buonanno notes, *La piovra* was “influenced by the serialized narratives imported from America, yet unmistakably Italian in being a successful ‘re-territorialization’ of the foreign models” (45).

*La piovra*’s mainstream market appeal, while important in marking a shift toward content
production, occurred at a time when the industry was taking a turn away from strictly generalized target audiences.

By the end of the 1980s, Italian television could be split into three distinct categories: generalist TV, which tries to appeal to an undifferentiated mass audience; what Carlo Freccero calls “complimentary TV,” which tries to appeal to younger more cosmopolitan viewers not enticed by generalized programming; and theme-based television, which appeals to a particular specialized market (56-7). While generalist television had to maintain its appeal to the largest population possible, private networks focused more on “complimentary” TV. With a younger, more international viewership in mind, they relied heavily on American imports and on fiction genres. As we will see, complimentary television would later become culturally and industrially marked as cult, or elite television.

The success of *Dallas* and the new horizontal palimpsest structure increased the brand recognition of Canale 5 and created heightened viewer loyalty. Private networks also managed to acquire a certain level of viewership because, as Ortoleva notes, they focused on broadcast times that were either not being used or not being exploited by RAI (In Barra *Palinsesto* 115). Slowly but surely the national networks responded by increasing airtimes as well—in 1986 RAI 1 extended its morning hours and in 1985 RAI 2 began its nighttime programming (115). The increase in airtime should be considered a large contributing factor in the increase in television serials that was about to begin because, quite simply, there was more airtime to fill (Silj 189). Together, these factors, along with the shift in cultural mentality toward one of commodification, and the diversification of “types” of television would aid in orchestrating the surge of television fictions in the mid 90s.
By the early 90s, commercial television, with Berlusconi at the fore, had changed the landscape of Italian television. Unlike RAI, commercial television was not bound to any educational model, as such; vulgarity began to take center stage. Furthermore, as Carlo Freccero argues, spectators no longer treated politics or politicians with the reverence both reflected in and created by RAI (61). Thus, when the government’s corruption (otherwise known as the “Bribe City” scandal) was exposed by the mani pulite or “clean hands” team, public opinion was easy enough to sway, and television took advantage of this by increasing the number of TV Verità or “Truth TV” shows (65). At the same time, the Mammi law was passed which essentially assured Berlusconi’s Fininvest a duopolic share of Italy’s television industry, as it allowed him three national networks that were now legally authorized to broadcast live (Menduni 131). This was the televisual landscape in Italy when Silvio Berlusconi first took office as Prime Minister in 1994.

In the early to mid 90s, thanks to the Mammi law, commercial television began making use of their new direct TV potential by increasing viewer participation by phone (Barra Palinsesto 141). Otherwise, with now fairly stable finances, the mid 90s saw little variance in terms of scheduling and content, with the exception of two significant changes: Fininvest became Mediaset and officially became a publically traded company in 1996, with the backing and participation of a handful of international companies and financial groups; and public and private television alike began investing in more domestic production (Menduni 158). The rise in nationally made products was met with huge success as Italian audiences preferred local shows to their foreign counterparts. Then, in 1998, this increase became mandated by a law that expanded the “Televisions without Borders” European directive. Public television was to invest 20% of its television tax, and private television
was to invest 10% of its advertising income to national productions and European co-productions (Buonanno *Le formule del racconto televisivo* 58).

The fiction surge of the 1990s was not limited to the short format seriality we saw in *La piovra*. With the increase in palimpsestual space for content broadcasting, and the trend toward more nationally made products, the stage was set for RAI to launch *Un posto al sole*, the first Italian soap opera and continuous serial, in October of 1996. *Un posto al sole* was created by Wayne Doyle, of the Australian corporation Grundy Pearson, which collaborated with RAI on the production (Cardini 186). *Un posto al sole* is an Italianization of the Australian soap opera *Neighbours* (Watson 1985); centering on an apartment building in Naples, the show manages to push beyond the melodramatic nature of American soap operas, to include socio-political elements particular to Naples, as well as specific Italian class dynamics. The three main narrative arcs of every episode—one romance, one drama, and one comedy—also help distinguish it from its American counterparts, and other Italian soaps that would quickly rise in popularity. While Doyle initially served as primary screenwriter, foreign control was slowly taken over by RAI as it learned how to produce the show (Cardini 188). In this way, Italian national long format seriality, much like short-form serials, created its identity in part on the coattails of other national televisions. Cardini stresses the importance of socio-cultural elements that denote nationality when maintaining a successful long format serial such as the soap opera or telenovela, but also acknowledges the transnational aspects that today define how these shows are made, and circulated, as well as their globalized content (61). Thus an underlying thread is created between the investigations into Italian television fiction and its structures and
representations, and television as a/n inter/national (technological, and socio-cultural) economy.

Many television scholars, like Stefania Carini, have marked 1996 and *Un posto al sole* as the start of modern Italian serial television production (300). In the last twenty years certain television trends have emerged that speak to the differences and convergences between private, public, and satellite television. Making use of an array of different production houses, RAI has seen considerable success with long form serialities such as *Don Matteo* (2000), which is dependent on its older generalist audiences, and family dramas with a younger target like *Tutti pazzi per amore* (Cotroneo 2008). Mediaset, which predominantly uses its own production houses, is interested primarily in long form seriality, as it claims that a longer spectator loyalty optimizes costs (297). The 2000s also marked the entrance of Italian pay-TV productions when Sky Italia satellite channel Fox broadcast Italian-made meta-fiction *Boris* (Manzi 2007). Often in conjunction with foreign production companies, the Italian satellite company Sky began to create “series-events,” designed to draw in a more niche, more discerning, more educated spectatorship compared to its public and commercial competitors (298).

Sky’s interest in original fictional content production is growing. In fact, in its first five years Sky produced and broadcast eleven different fictions, from short form serials like *Quo Vadis Baby?* (Salvatores 2008) and *Faccia d’angelo* (Porporati 2012) to longer form projects like *Romanzo Criminale* (Sollima 2008), *Gomorra* (Saviano 2014) and *1992* (Accorsi 2015) (Scaglioni, *(Not so) complex TV* 14). The fact that these shows target younger, more cosmopolitan audiences means high production values. More importantly, it means they are primed for international distribution, as we saw with *Romanzo Criminale,*
1992, and *Gomorrah*, which were made available to American audiences on Netflix (15). This global outlook is not only reflected in recent distribution efforts, but, more significantly, has resulted in more production collaborations such as *The Young Pope* (Sorrentino 2016), *Medici: Masters of Florence* (Spotnitz and Meyer 2016), and Netflix’s forthcoming first Italian original series *Suburra* (Placido 2017).

1.6 “No Homo?”: A Diachronic Look at Gays and Italian TV

I have, up to now, discussed some of the history, growth, and changes that have and are taking place in terms of the Italian televisual landscape and Italian fiction programming more specifically. A reflection on the history of Italian televisual representations of LGBTQIA people is also necessarily a history of the socio-political positioning of these minorities. Thus the recent socio-political see-sawing surrounding LGBT rights that I discuss briefly in the introduction, not only carry over to the television industry but are indeed in part created by and through the Italian media. Even very recently television and those working within it have perpetuated anti-gay sentiment and homophobic justifications for television censorship. Indeed, RAI administrative advisors like Rodolfo De Laurentiis come out with statements such as: “Gay couples cannot be contextualized in our legislative rules and RAI must only air positive models,” as he threatens to eliminate everything to do with gay people and gay couples from national television (“Rodolfo De Laurentiis ‘Fuori i gay dalla Rai.’ Commenta”). In addition, popular imported fictions are censored because of “inappropriate” queer content such as Chuck Bass’ gay kiss in episode three of the sixth season of *Gossip Girl* (Schwartz and Savage, 2007), or the gay marriage ceremony episode of *Un ciclone in convenuto* (2004). In light of the fact that until very
recently the use of words like “abortion” or even “armpit” were not allowed to be uttered on television, such acts of censorship and discrimination could almost appear to be progress (Jelardi and Bassetti 11).

Yet despite all of these outward prejudices, Italian television does have its own history of LGBTQ representation; Jelardi and Bassetti’s Queer TV, a self-categorized “historical reference book” of gayness on Italian television is a testament to the phases and transformations of such representations. Though this study focuses specifically on contemporary television fictions, it is important to consider the historical progression that led to such a landscape, and the contemporary relevance and present-ness of this history. As such a brief sketch of the major moments and factors that have created the foundations for such representations are an important nod to the complex formations of contemporary representations. When speaking of televisual convergence one of the main arguments about the present and future states of television makes the claim that nothing in this mediated and remediated process of creation and consumption gets erased, replaced, or destroyed; it all lives together, builds upon old technologies, old habits, old modes of expression, and changes, and reshapes, and redefines them. Thus from a temporal standpoint all or most of the content and programming that was available since television’s advent is still present, still circulating, still part of the contemporary televisual body. To speak only of the programs and brands that have been created in the last ten years would be to erase the vast majority of representations and socio-cultural expressions still in circulation. Similarly, from a categorical standpoint, just as television has looked to theater and cinema for inspiration, and now more than ever shows are pushing past the confines of genre, a study about contemporary fictions would be vastly limited if it did not in some way
reflect on the representations of LGBTQ people in other genres, especially given Italy’s historical penchant for the variety show.

Jelardi and Bassetti’s work, which reflects on industry reaction, censorship, and audience reception, spans decades. Though their investigation covers such a temporal expanse, there are some consistent themes present in Italian television’s relationship to and depictions of gay communities. In the 50s and 60s gays began their very slow entrance into Italian TV alongside showgirls. Their acceptance, as Jelardi and Bassetti note, is aided by the humorous tone of the shows and their international origins (18). Television personalities like Don Lurio, who, coincidentally, was American born, paved the way for homosexuals on Italian television, but though his homosexuality was widely known, he was forced to never speak of it publically. Through the 70s, the comic nature of such representations made their transgressiveness more acceptable. Without ever dealing with sentimental or human aspects of these people’s lives, gay men could be depicted as “different” and “foreign” without upsetting cultural norms, as was true for celebrities like Renato Zero (42). Through the 80s, with the rise of commercial television and the increase in foreign content, the presence of gayness on television rose as well. Jelardi and Bassetti, however argue that seen as americanate or “exuberant superficialities usually attributed to Americans” such representations were not necessarily censored because they were so far outside of the cultural landscape of average Italian television viewers. With satellite television, narrowcasing meant an increase in niche programming, and channels such as Canal Jimmy—which began broadcasting in Italy in 1997 and aired its final programs in 2011—explicitly welcomed gay content, airing episodes of Sex and the City (Star 1998), and
programs involving personalities like transgender activist and drag queen Sylvia Rivera (Roffi; Jelardi and Bassetti 110).

Along with the gay content coming from American imports, Italian-made reality shows like *I Fantastici 5* on La7 (Musci 2003)—an Italian adaptation of the American *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (Collins and Metzler 2003)—and talk shows like *Cronache marziane* on Italia1 (Perricone and Marano 2004)—based on the Spanish show *Crónicas marcianas* (Roca and José 1997)—expand LGBT representations beyond the classic exoticized, humoristic spectacles they initially and historically have been. The numbers and types of representations are indeed increasing, in fact, on September 10th 2016, Italy aired its first gay wedding on Canal 5’s show *Forum* (1985) (Landi). A “we have come a long way” argument is often perpetuated by people within the Italian television industry—by people like Stefano Rulli and Sandro Petraglia, for example, who remark: “It took ten years for them to appear on television for what they are: people integrated into society who are not forced by screenwriters to have creative, bizarre or excessive jobs” (Mammì). While comments like this speak to some shifts in attitude and increasingly diversified representation, they cannot erase the very public sentiments of people like media mogul/politician Silvio Berlusconi, who in 2010—the very same year Rulli and Petraglia made their above cited comment—was quoted as saying that it is better to have a fondness for beautiful women than to be gay (“Ruby, Berlusconi attacca gli omosessuali: ‘Meglio guardare ragazze che essere gay’”). Bassetti and Jelardi have stated, “the evolution of gay characters in [Italian] productions will go hand in hand with (if not a step behind) the evolution of our society’s way of thinking” (131).
If we appropriate this lens when approaching representations of LGBTQIA people on Italian television, the seesawing mentality of RAI in July of 2016 is rather telling. RAI 2, after censoring a sex scene between two male characters on *How to Get Away With Murder* (Nowalk 2014), which airs under the title *Le regole del delitto perfetto*, received so much backlash from the Italian public—sparking #RaiOmofoba [#HomophobeRai], one of the most popular hashtags on Italian social media at the time—that the network decided to rebroadcast the uncensored version of the program just two days later, blaming the homophobic event on an employee who suffered from “excessive modesty” (Gusatto). Indeed the act and repeal of RAI’s censorship seems indicative of the current political climate surrounding LGBTQIA communities within Italy; while Italy has approved civil unions between same sex couples, adoption is not an option, and queer and trans people are still very much oppressed by the social stigmas behind the perpetuation of fear around the church-created concept known as the “teoria del gender” [the theory of gender] and the refusal of Italian legislators to incorporate EU mandated sex education in the classrooms.

Investigating contemporary television fictions available to Italian publics is thus a way to understand and explore, as Merri Lisa Johnson puts it, “one of the ways our culture talks to itself about itself” (19). Thus a look into contemporary representations creates, as Luca Malici states in “Italian Televisibility,” “a reflexive site to ponder where queer identities stand” in Italian culture (126).

The current socio-political climate of negotiation with regard to LGBTQIA identities in Italy and on Italian television, however, does not give us the full story when exploring representations of these minority populations, queer televisual identifications, and the relationship between theories of queerness and Italian television consumption and
production. Because while television is, as Amy Villarejo notes, “one of the most [...] gendered and sexualized repetition apparatuses of modern technoscience,” we must explore the temporalities (as Villarejo herself has done), technologies, and modes of consumption of the texts themselves to broaden our understanding of the socio-cultural-political relationships between nation, television, and queerness (7).

1.7 The Technology of Contemporary Italian TV

Technological innovations that began at the end of the twentieth century would and are continuing to change the face, space, and place of what we understand Italian television to be. This brief sketch of more recent changes should not be considered independent of the socio-political history outlined above; indeed the two go hand in hand. However, this parallel historical trajectory, when considered separately, will later prove to contain a certain queer potentiality that is distinct from and often counter to the televisual structures discussed in the previous section.

The first significant technological change came with the introduction of pay television, which was introduced in Italy in 1990 by the company Tele+. The three theme-based channels—Tele+1 dedicated to cinema, Tele+2 dedicated to sports, and Tele+3 dedicated to culture—offered by Tele+ eventually required an in home decoder. In 1997, when Tele+ was bought by the French company Canal Plus, a new pay TV called D+ was created and competitor Stream TV came onto the television scene. The competition between Tele+ and Stream TV, however, resolved itself in July 2003 when the two merged into the newly born Sky Italia, a date which marks Rupert Murdoch’s official entrance into the Italian televisual landscape and introduces satellite television as a true contender.
capable of challenging the previous public/private television duopoly (Ricciardi 22). The dissemination and widespread acceptance of digital television along with satellite and pay television led to an enormous increase in channels, which necessitated a need for more content, and narrowed target audiences (Pulcini 38, 33).

By the early 2000s digital television in Italy became more prominent and would soon lead to the infamous “switch off”—the conversion of all analogue television to digital—at the end of 2006, though the process did not get fully completed until the summer of 2012 (Temporelli 426). The fact that analogue frequencies were so limited in number meant that there was a limit to the number of channels, which in turn led to more generalized programming that would appeal to broader audiences (Pulcini 34). With the switch to digital this was no longer the case and the niche narrowcast programming that was once found in “complementary” TV became a norm of satellite and digital television. In the beginning of this new age of abundance, as Massimo Scaglioni notes in La TV dopo la TV, characterized by a drastic increase in channels, crossmediality, and a fracturing of consumption, both foreign acquisitions and national productions increased (70).

The beginning of contemporary media convergence—understood as the mixing, overlapping, and combining of all means of communication (Grasso and Scaglioni 11) was due in part to (or as some scholars argue, completely caused by—see Jenkins, Convergence Culture 11) the digitalization of television. This convergence is often discussed in terms of a rise in spectator participation—television shifts, as Pulcini says, from a “mass” medium to “my” medium (114). Participation in television content is one of the primary ways that television continues to redefine itself. Technological modes of broadcast, the proliferation of the Internet along with other technological advancements, create a foundation for an
ultimate convergence between televisions and computers; these technological changes have helped to redefine the relationship between producers and consumers of televisual content.

In order to begin discussing media convergence, and television convergence more specifically, let us first explore the development of the Internet and the ways that Internet based streaming shapes and is shaped by social factors in Italy (Centorrino 24). While the first Internet connection in Italy was established in 1986, it was not until 1994 that the country began creating and developing a commercial and technological infrastructure that could support Internet use on a national scale. Even then, with the majority of Italian citizens living in areas with smaller populations, providing access throughout the country proved quite difficult (Mosca).

In terms of video streaming capabilities, in the 90s the Internet’s infrastructure only allowed for a limited number of bits to be transmitted at any given time, which meant that only short video clips could be streamed online (Pulcini 69). At the same time, changes were happening on the traditional Italian small screen as, in 1999, Rainews24 began mixing audiovisual material, text, and graphics, broadcasting them all on the same screen at the same time. In retrospect this innovation seems to forecast the intertextual and paratextual desires of contemporary television audiences (69). TV networks with an online presence initially tried to replicate the flow of traditional television, and IPTV (Internet Protocol Television)—which distributes TV signals using Internet technology—has also followed traditional televisual content models. All the while, web TV’s new technological platform created a space where users could not only access content for free, but also create
and share their own, thus blurring the lines between producer/consumer, and spectator/author (65; 67).

Today, as Massimo Temporelli notes, television has seemingly found some stability with the choice of land or satellite digital access, but as the interactive capabilities of the television have begun resembling the functionality of the Internet, and the Internet expands the capabilities and boundaries of televisual content, continued changes seem inevitable. With online streaming the instantaneity of content availability and the creation of platforms that support user generated content have meant that the ways viewers consume material, and the sources through which they consume it are no longer limited to the big private and public television providers (Menduni 111). The Internet makes it possible to create fictions similar to the ones on the traditional small screen but production and distribution costs are generally much lower and interactivity and paratextual spectator engagement is much higher (Pulcini 97).

The consequences of these changes far exceed the modes of production; the aesthetics and temporalities of television are more and more frequently reproducing those found online, and the same content is being made available across platforms to better meet the needs of viewers who choose to watch programming on their computers, tablets, or cell phones, and who wish to choose precisely where and when they will watch. In Italy the first iteration of the kind of television/Internet convergence we take for granted today was Cubovision—now Timvision—which began in late 2013. Timvision is now just one of many Internet streaming competitors in Italy vying for subscribers. Infinity, Sky Online, and Netflix also provide television content on a variety of platforms to anyone with Internet access and an account. The differences between these services are largely content based—
Sky Online, for example, is the only one to offer sports streaming. Generally speaking consumers base their Internet streaming service on: the kinds of programs they are interested in; the kinds of devices they would like to stream on; how many devices will be streaming at the same time; and whether or not content can be made available when offline. It should be noted, however, that Sky Online and Netflix are the only ones that offer their own original content, and are the only ones not originally produced in Italy (Delli). So while convergence is felt on a global scale, Italy's participation as producer seems once again to follow or copy the models of its foreign predecessors.

We often think of media convergence in terms of technological advancement, but we must recognize that spectators had already exhibited their desires to be more active in televisual participation and creation before much of this technology was available. In this current state of televisual convergence there is a blurring of the boundaries of both technology and content. In terms of the televisual text, extensions created by the networks and those created by consumers across technological platforms all work to form a kind of "megatext." In other words, official twitter feeds, websites, interviews, spin-off series, books, fan fiction and fan art all extend the narrative universe of a program. Technology, in turn, creates the means by which these extensions are possible. It is important to keep in mind that participation and enjoyment of each extension of the megatext is not necessarily determined by whether fans or the networks that produced the original program created these works. Tertiary extensions—extensions created from the "bottom-up," namely by the public actively participating in the text's narrative, are often sparked by the necessity to fill voids not being met by the institutions that created or imported the brand (Barra, Penati and Scaglioni 26). In terms of viewer creation and consumption, spectator participation in
content production is one of the elements that facilitates the coming together of a community around a character, an episode, a season, a series, a moment, or a narrative line of a text. The kinds of communities that are created by televisual convergence depend largely on desired engagement with a brand, but also on the chosen mode of consumption—chosen, of course, is a loose word that is not meant to dismiss any economic limitations that might actively force consumers into a category with which they might not otherwise identify. In the next section we will see how this diversity of engagement, much like the change to a horizontal palimpsest structure, alters the way we must understand television’s temporality.

If we consider American-born series, or other non-Italian series for that matter, in a time of such televisual convergence and informational access, it is important to recognize that distinctions based around national borders tend to fade or lose importance, especially from the viewpoint of accessibility. This notion is especially true for those communities that tend to wait for a foreign born show to make its way to free generalist programming after the show has been dubbed into Italian, often censored, and otherwise culturally modified. On the one hand, those that choose this more distanced level of engagement are not exposed to many of the national aspects of brand distinction. On the other hand, those “prosumers” [producer-consumers] that actively—and illegally—seek access to shows when they are initially released in their country of origin, are often the most actively engaged with the brands, and create the product’s tertiary textuality. The creation of this type of textuality—through fan-subbing (subtitling of shows by fan communities), for example—lends a distinct local/national flavor to the product, one that is separate from the textuality of the nation of origin (Penati 88). Any text, understood as encompassing the
entire paratextual landscape surrounding it, is therefore necessarily marked and limited by the language of content creation, and the language of the consumer seeking access to the textual brand. Thus the borders of access to a program prove largely to be determined by socio-economic factors.

1.8 Queering Televisual Temporalities

To speak of television’s temporalities is to speak to both the temporal formats of the shows themselves, and the modes of consumption and underlying technologies that create and/or allow for these consumption practices. In the discussion of *Dallas’* televisual influence, we saw that it led to a change in the temporal conceptualization of television. The horizontal temporal shift that was created began to better reflect the temporality of domestic life. I argue, however, that the temporality of Italian television fictions, both historically and in this age of media convergence, is more reflective of theories of queer temporality than it is of theories that have historically positioned television as operating within the frameworks of post-industrialized capitalism (see Gitlin’s “Prime Time Ideology,” for example). Jack Halberstam has argued that queer temporality lies within the resisting of heteronormative procreative lifestyle choices that imply a forward moving “progress” (Dinshaw, et al. 182). Lee Edelman, instead, conceives of queer temporality as an “unbecoming,” caused by the pull of a drive that facilitates repetition. As he explains, “call it the queerness of time’s refusal to submit to a temporal logic—or, better, the distortion of that logic by the interference... of some other, unrecognized force (188). Despite these differences, we may see overlap between their theoretical formulations when Edelman argues that queerness, “troubles the relentlessly totalizing impulse informing
normativity, [and thus] we should expect it to refuse [...] the consolations of reproductive futurism” (189).

When television scholars speak of spectator pleasure, many like Jen Ang point to viewer identification, about the spectator’s recognition of the “emotional realism” and the “structures of feeling” that create spectator loyalty to a particular program (Ang 20). These structures and the emotional realism that create the connections between the viewer and the viewed speak to cultural commonalities on which programs depend. The miniseries—a preferred Italian fiction format—requires, by design, a shorter commitment from spectators than its longer-form counterparts. The relationship that spectators have with characters, settings, and narratives is not a long-term commitment; be it casual or intense, the identification is fleeting. There is not a future, there is no promise of a future in a miniseries, there is a moment of identification, a transitory meeting of viewer and viewed that pushes back against the hegemonic idea of identity’s longevity. This short-lived connection between the spectator and weak-format fiction thus coincides with the resistance to futurity we see in both Edelman and Halberstam’s queer temporalities.

Similar arguments can be made about the contemporary trend of binge-watching, though while in short-form seriality the brevity is inherent to the structure of the shows themselves, binge-watching is entirely dictated by the spectator. It can be argued that binge-watching may speak to a spectator’s need for closure, for completeness, for that happy ending that seems antithetical to Edelman’s conception of queer temporality, the brevity that it assumes, the “I’ve had you and now you’re finished,” parallels the short-term identification practices of the mini-series outlined above. In this way, the temporal desires
of the spectator can be found in the queerness of the temporality of both the mini-series and binge-watching tendencies.

Binge-watching, the consecutive consumption of episode after episode of a program, was initially made possible by technologies that have long been available to television viewers—the VCR, Video On Demand, DVDs, Digital Video Recorders—but has become, as of late, much more of a social phenomenon thanks to the streaming service approach to show distribution, namely the making available of entire seasons of a program on its initial release date. This creates a kind of eternal, yet fractured present within contemporary television that requires spectators to be active participants in a show’s temporal process.

I have spoken of the various temporalities of Italian spectator communities based on their desired engagement with televisual content and the televisual platforms to which they have access; these three lines of engagement create different televisual temporalities for each spectator community, but the spectator’s temporal burden (or delight) does not end there. Streaming platforms such as Amazon, Netflix, Sky Online, Infinity, or RaiPlay—just like their DVR, DVD, VCR, VOD predecessors—allow audiences to pause, fast-forward, and rewind programs, completely fracturing narrative temporal logics. This fragmentation and multiplicity speak to yet another queer theoretical approach to time. Carolyn Dinshaw speaks of queer temporality in terms of heterogeneity: “one way of making the concept of temporal heterogeneity analytically salient, and insisting on the present’s irreducible multiplicity, is to inquire into the felt experience of asynchrony” (Dinshaw et al. 190). The fractured nature of contemporary television viewing patterns embodies this asynchrony; to quote Menduni, television “allows one [...] to record and archive one’s own library of televisual content [...] suspend viewing of a transmission [...] or go back, skip ahead, start
watching again [...] all of these practices completely subvert televisual temporality” (118). The “subversion” Menduni spoke of in 2009 has become the norm in this time of media convergence, but this temporality extends beyond spectator engagement with content consumption, it encompasses the entire cultural economy of television.

The introductions of new technologies and new media consistently create a cultural period of preemptive mourning of old forms, but as Henry Jenkins points out in *Convergence Culture*, “Cinema did not kill theater. [And] television did not kill radio. Each old medium was forced to coexist with the emerging media. [...] Old media are not being displaced” (14). By the same token the televisual archive, the history of shows that have been aired, is still very much alive, very much a part of contemporary consumption, and often available at the click of a button or mouse. What we experience in our media consumption is thus a multiplicity of forms and content as products of the past are just as accessible as those produced today. Thus, as increasing access to programs from other nations shatters spatial boundaries, temporal linearity also fades. The relationship between time and television I have mapped out here speaks directly to the theoretical overlap between Carolyn Dinshaw and Lee Edelman’s conceptions of queer temporality. Edelman’s assertions that “queer challenges assumptions of time as historical by nature or that history demands to be understood in historicizing terms,” and “[m]aybe we need to consider that you don’t get ‘from here to somewhere else’” since the subject is perhaps “caught up in structural repetition,” seem to go hand in hand with Dinshaw’s claims that in thinking outside narrative history we must think of experiences “not relegated by ‘clock’ time or by a conceptualization of the present as singular and fleeting; experiences not narrowed by the idea that time moves steadily forward [...] that we live on only one
temporal plane" (Dinshaw et al. 181; 195; 185). These theoretical elaborations of temporal queerness are mirrored by both Italian theorists and television creators Luca Barra and Carlo Freccero who have spoken precisely to television’s temporal pluralities and elasticities, as well as its inherent nature as perpetuating an “eternal present” (Barra, *Palinsesto* 19; Freccero 102).

1.9 Approaching a Queer (National) Cultural Television Economy

To investigate the queerness of contemporary Italian fiction is thus to investigate not only representations of LGBT people on national programming, but to understand and investigate the technologies, modes of consumption, acts of engagement, remediations, and communities that make up the mercurial nature of “national” television. In this vein, I must also note that fiction is understood and used here as a loose generic category in order to evaluate specific textual sites, their representations, and viewer engagement and participation with such loci. I understand, however, that the category, as a cultural construction, necessarily implies an elasticity that mirrors the shifting structures and understandings of both television—in light of the convergences mentioned above—and notions of Italianness. There is a queerness in the slippery nature of these signifiers, a queerness that seems to transcend the queer within the LGBT representations of the programs under investigation in the following chapters.
Chapter 2: LGBT Visibility, The Case Studies

2.1 Italians and the Family Fiction Genre

Journalist Luigi Barzini has claimed that for Italians family is “the only fundamental institution in the country [...] the real foundation of whichever social order prevails” (190). For them, he continues, “family loyalty is their true patriotism” (194). Thus, the family ties that bind Italians together are the true foundation of the nation. To analyze “family fictions” as a genre would thus be to analyze the ways that Italians portray Italianness to themselves. What’s more, when considering the temporal structures of the televisual palimpsest, as Gary Needham notes: “it is necessary to [...] highlight the family’s correspondence to concepts of straight time: normative time is mutually reflected by family time, family time is mutually reflected by television’s organizing time (146). So if Italy is built on the concept of the family, and families all adhere to generally similar temporalities that then get reflected in the timetables of the television schedule, presumably Italian families will all sit around at the same time watching shows that tell them stories about their family-ness and their Italianness, which indeed may be one and the same. To investigate LGBTQIA representation on Italian television, a focus on family narratives may provide particular insight into the ways that the nation has socially and culturally positioned these populations, as, to see gays in the family is to see gays in Italy.

The family fiction genre is for all intents and purposes exactly what it says it is, fictions whose narratives focus primarily on family dynamics, events, and situations. This chapter consists of eight case studies of programs that span networks and platforms: from public to private to satellite to streaming, and all eight include at least one LGBT identified main character.
This is in no way meant to be a comprehensive investigation into all family fictions with LGBT characters that Italian audiences have had access to in the last decade, nor does it fully explore the breadth of programming that might in fact queer the limits of the family fiction category itself. Soap operas like Incantesimo (Venturi 1998) and Un posto al sole have very strong familial components; period pieces such as Orgoglio (Serafini and De Sisti 2004) and Downton Abbey (Fellowes 2010) also center on family structures; teen fictions like Fuoriclasse (Donna 2011) include family dynamics; and crime fictions including Gomorra (Saviano 2014) and Romanzo criminale (Sollima 2008) contain both traditional and organized crime families. All of these shows have or have had lesbian or gay characters on them, and they are just a handful of further examples of fictions on Italian television with LGBTQ characters.

The selection of programs under investigation in this chapter was chosen primarily because the shows all fit into the traditional structures of the family fiction genre, because their narratives all include LGBT characters from the start and not as additions to previously generated storylines, and because they represent the majority of Italy's institutional television structures (public, private, satellite, and streaming on demand). We must not forget, as Amanda Lotz reminds us, that varying institutional contexts clearly shape content, and as such both the timeslot of the programs and the network more generally restrict what may be portrayed (in Villarejo, Ethereal Queer 50). These case studies are not meant to be used in comparison to one another so as to make any claim about “who did gay best.” Instead, putting them together we may gain a broader understanding of the variety of representations available to Italian audiences so that a clearer picture of Italian society’s portrayal and positioning of LGBTQIA people can be
created. In other words, this is not about the shows in and of themselves, but what they as a collective representation may tell us.

The case studies below are split into three categories, family comedy, family drama, and American family fiction. The family comedy is not unique to Italy, and in fact Publispei, the company that produces many Italian family comedies for RAI often appropriates formats and acquires shows from Spain. It does, however, find in Italy a fertile tradition of comedy, from theater's *commedia dell'arte* genre to cinema's *commedia all'italiana*, which perhaps not so coincidentally not only centers on “ordinary” or “everyman” characters, but also includes a certain level of darkness and drama in its humor (Gunsberg 64). The family drama tends much more toward the aesthetically and narratively dark and the longer take, but despite these clear genre differences LGBT depictions may not be clearly marked along these lines. In other words, there is no underlying foundational difference in LGBT representation that is based on the comedy/drama divide. The American shows which are analyzed as micro-case studies fit seamlessly within the Italian family fiction genre, and despite their temporal difference (the episodes of both shows run under 30 minutes), both can easily be categorized as family comedies.

2.2 Methodological Approaches and Lines of Inquiry

Taking these media representations as reflecting and producing Italian social opinion toward these minority groups, the main goal of the case studies below is to understand what they say about LGBT characters and how they say it. What do these depictions assume about their audiences and what can they tell us about these spectators and their society more broadly? I will consider these representations in relation to the
traditions of LGBT representation that came before as difference might be suggestive of socio-cultural, political and economic change (I resist the term “progress” here as it reflects a normative temporality and simultaneously dismisses the nature of television as a medium which continually reproduces and rebroadcasts its own library).

Visibility requires a certain amount of legibility, and thus these studies deconstruct the cultural codes that are implemented to mark these characters as LGBT. Any level of linguistic and social interpellation inevitably brings with it certain limitations and exclusions, as it is limited by the structures that create coherence (Butler, *Excitable Speech* 30). Villarejo notes that visibility functions by “simultaneously revealing and concealing, rendering apparently visible but also covering over the workings of value that make appearance possible” (*Lesbian Rule* 25). How then might we understand these representations in relation to normative social values? Lisa Duggan has defined homonormativity as a “politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them” (179). Do these shows, in assuming a heterosexual audience, create a level of homonormativity in their LGBT narratives? If so, how much does the ability of these characters to participate in the narrative depend on their sameness to their straight counterparts? If not, is their difference seen as disruptive to the social structures in place? In analyzing the ways that legibility is performed by these characters, I consider the kinds of sex and gender binaries that are reiterated in these programs. Do these characters reaffirm essentialist ideas of gender that ultimately present normative binary-based expressions of gender as “natural?” I extend these analyses beyond sexuality to include normative structures of gender using Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity.
Lastly, given that all these shows center on the family, I pay particular attention to the role of the domestic and its use as a normalizing space that may reaffirm commonalities between the LGBT characters and the foundational socio-cultural structures at the root of what Adrienne Rich has labeled "compulsory heterosexuality." In this way we see the domestic not as a locus of tolerance or acceptance but as an agent for promoting sameness and thus a structure of marginalization.

2.3 The Family Comedy

2.3.1 Tutti pazzi per amore

Over the course of thirteen weeks between 2008 and 2009 RAI 1 aired the twenty-six episode first season of Tutti pazzi per amore. This show is written by Ivan Cotroneo and produced by RAI Fiction and Publispei, as is also true of its sequels and È arrivata la felicità, analyzed below. The program tells the story of widower Paolo and his teenage daughter Cristina who move next door to Laura, a single mother raising two children on her own after her husband left her, moved to the United States and came out of the closet. The show won a Premio TV (also known as Oscar TV) award for best fiction in 2009 (Odello), and at the time was lauded for including the never-before-aired-on-TV narrative of a father coming out to his son (Fumarolo). Writer Cotroneo himself has said that homosexuality has been acceptable on television since Commesse (which began airing on RAI 1 in 1999), and that with younger audiences now tuning in, and the Italian people at large being more open to progressive topics, the story of a gay father within the show is just one of the narrative
lines like all the others (Fumarolo). Mario Landolfi, a member of the oversight committee Commissione di Vigilanza Rai, however, while stating that there shouldn’t be discrimination against gay people, remarked, when questioned about the show, that there were too many programs with gay characters and homosexuality should not be presented as an acceptable thing because it is not (Fumarolo).

It would seem, thus, that, including the first instance of a parental coming out on Italian television, and facing institutional pushback set the first season of Tutti pazzi per amore to be groundbreaking for LGBT visibility and societal acceptability. To a certain extent, as we shall see, the show depicts the difficulties that all parties face when homosexuality is introduced into an otherwise heterosexual familial situation. The questions at hand, however, have to do with whether these depictions end up facilitating and perpetuating the kinds of behaviors and perceptions that they claim to reject.

Spectators do not meet Riccardo, Laura’s ex husband, until one third of the way through the first season, and up to this point the only information the audience has is that he is a famous writer—who, according to the women in the show, “really understands women” (see for example “Ed io tra di voi”)—, he has moved to the United States, and no longer loves Laura though they maintain an amicable relationship. It is not until episode nine “Strani amori” (no, the episode title “Strange Loves” is not a coincidence) that we find out that Riccardo is gay and lives in California with his American lover Peter.

As we will see again and again in these case studies, and as Carlo Freccero has noted in discussions about portrayals of gays on television during the 1960s, tolerance of gays on television was largely motivated by their foreign origins which in some way made their transgressive nature more palatable (in Jelardi and Bassetti 18). Not only is Peter American
and thus different, but America is also positioned against Italy in terms of its LGBTQ tolerance. When Peter comes to Rome and Riccardo meets him at the airport, for example, he asks Riccardo why Emanuele, his son, is no longer speaking to him, to which Riccardo responds “we aren’t in America. Having a gay dad here in Italy is a problem, a big one” (“L’anno che verrà”). America is pitted against Italy as a land where gayness is accepted, and where gays like Riccardo should go—this is problematic in its own right and is an idea perpetuated not only by this show but also by scholars of Italian television themselves (Bassetti and Jelardi for two). Foreignness and the difference it implies work directly in contrast to the perceptions of the Italian protagonists in the show. While America is the land where gays can roam free, in Rome, a character like Paolo—the protagonist and thus the one that older straight male audiences would potentially most identify with—admits to never having had any gay friends, and to never having seen any Almodovar movies (notice again the reference to a gay foreign director) (“Inevitabile follia”). Riccardo himself even exhibits shame made evident by the difficulty he has coming out to his son, and by the responsibility he assumes for Emanuele’s aggressive behavior later on.

Emanuele, Laura’s son, the teenage male protagonist and possible identificatory subject for younger audience members, takes the news of his father’s homosexuality extremely poorly. Initially Emanuele runs away from his father and refuses to engage him in conversation, telling Cristina, Paolo’s daughter, that he “wants a normal father” (“L’anno che verrà”). Emanuele then, in a dramatic televisual twist, goes to visit Peter outside his residence, blames him for his father’s homosexuality (“he was normal before he met you, it’s your fault”), bashes Peter in the head with his moped helmet, and leaves him there unconscious and bleeding (“Inevitabile follia”). Though the title of the episode “inevitable
madness,” a reference to the 1988 pop song by Raf, speaks to the love story between Paolo and Laura, it is easy to use it as a lens through which to read Emanuele’s acts of aggression. Reading the title this way puts a kind of “of course he would” lens on Emanuele’s actions, an “of course” rendered even more poignant by Riccardo’s self-blame in the face of his son’s violent actions.

Emanuele runs away, and later shows understanding of and remorse for his actions, but the damage, both on screen and off, is already done. When Stefania, Laura’s sister, hears that Peter has been gay bashed her response is one of disbelief: “what kind of country do we live in?!” (“Certe notti”), but this very clear statement declaring the horror of the act and the underlying sentiment, is quickly brushed under the rug. Suddenly the act becomes, if not accepted, at least understood in the face of the knowledge of the aggressor. The kind of attitude of “well, it’s not okay but we understand because he is hurting and this is hard for him” is perpetuated by the other main characters in the show, even by Riccardo and Peter. So not only are spectators provided with a main character who is capable of committing such an act of violence against gay people, we are also shown that this kind of behavior is understandable and ultimately accepted because difference or abnormality (“he was normal before he met you”) is hard and disgusting.

Eventually Emanuele comes around, bonding with his father and Peter. These connections, however, prove completely self-serving. Though Emanuele does make the kind gesture of calling the hospital to check on Peter’s condition, the next time he reaches out is to inquire about Peter’s work colleague for whom he has feelings. Similarly, Emanuele reaches out to his father asking him to give a lecture to students during their occupation of the school. After coming to the school, Riccardo, recognizing his son’s social
standing (or lack thereof) tells Emanuele that he suffers from an invisibility problem which he can help fix with a wardrobe change. Emanuele references the show *I Fantastici 5* (the Italian version of *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* in which gay men help straight men dress more fashionably) (Musci 2003). While the show and Emanuele are quick to point out the plot’s use of the “gay men are more fashionable” stereotype, using this perception as a tool to create a connection between these characters ends up perpetuating the stereotype itself. Thus the idea is created that gay men are useful and we can have a relationship with them on the grounds that they have aesthetic attributes that can in some way benefit the heterosexual world. And once again Emanuele overcomes his homophobia in order to suit his own self-interest.

Looking further into the presentation of gender and sexuality during the show’s first season we find what might, at first, appear to be a somewhat open understanding of gender performativity that aligns with Judith Butler’s queer theoretical approach to the subject. In *Gender Trouble* Butler affirms that “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender [...] identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its result” (34). Gender is created through its performance, the repetition of such actions on a large cultural scale create social legibility and the illusion of a biological imperative linking sex to gender. While this repetition generally serves to maintain heterosexual structures within society, challenges to these norms can be created through what Butler refers to as “subversive repetition” (44).

The character that most obviously encapsulates gender as performance is Elio, the graphic designer and only man working at *Tu donna*, the women’s magazine at which Laura is employed. Already by the second episode, “Io vorrei non vorrei ma se vuoi” Elio’s gender
identity seems linked to his actions. He complains to his colleagues that he now uses a hair dryer and is considering eye cream. In response, the women vocalize their desire to turn him into the only man on the planet who understands women. Elio's response, “if I don’t become one first,” expresses a clear connection between his gender and his new body care routines. This link between gender and performance renders gender legible only through strictly enforced societal codes, and culturally intelligible through the repetition of performances that conform to these normative codes; he will turn into a woman because women are the ones who wear eye cream and care about their appearance. In Tutti pazzi per amore the causal link between the performance of certain actions and gender identity, however ultimately ends up reaffirming the gender binary and establishing a fixed connection between one’s gender and sex; two heteronormative ideas that Butler and others have sought to deconstruct.

Other characters such as Giulio (Laura's sister’s partner) and Maya (another employee at the women's magazine) perform actions throughout the season that are in contrast with social gender expectation. Instead of challenging the limits of such restrictive ideas of gender, however, the actions ultimately reinforce the narrowness of acceptable gender expression. At the beginning of the season Giulio is presented to the audience as a pushover who is constantly being used and ignored by his girlfriend Stefania. Emasculated and at the end of his rope, Giulio writes to Tu donna seeking advice about his troubled relationship (“Quello che le donne non dicono”). Laura and the others at the magazine make a big deal about the fact that a man is seeking advice in a women's magazine, and Laura, not knowing the author of the letter, tells Giulio that he should break free from that toxic situation. What we are presented with is a man who has been stripped of his
“manhood” and goes from taking orders from his girlfriend to taking the advice of another woman (namely Laura as advice columnist). Thus while it seems as though the show is stretching the limits of the man/woman binary by depicting an atypical man who does not necessarily conform to norms of masculinity; only through emasculation are such actions possible. Ironically, the title of the episode “What women don’t say” performed by Fiorella Mannoia, was actually written by two men Enrico Ruggieri and Luigi Schiavone. Men are thus the ones who tell women what they don’t say, filling the gaps with their own misogynist fantasies—as evidenced by lyrics like “The wind changes but we don’t/And if we transform a bit/It’s from the desire to be pleasing to the one who’s here or could come to be with us” (1988). In a sense this proves the point of Giulio’s emasculation even further; in a world where men are the ones telling women what they think and how they feel, for a man to ask a woman for help is truly a point of weakness.

Similarly, on the other side of the binary, we are presented with Maya, the man-eating magazine columnist. Maya is noncommittal in relationships, clearly enjoys having lots of sex with many partners, and despises foreplay. Again it would seem that in the face of a heteronormative society in which women are all looking to get married, settle down, and have children, Maya presents an alternative that might in some way push the boundaries of acceptability. But once more, looking more closely at her colleagues’ reactions, we find that their understanding of her must go hand in hand with her de-feminization. Not only does Monica, the director of the magazine, initially say to her “good thing you are a woman or you would be everything I detest about men,” but later in the season she goes so far as to say “you aren’t a woman, you are a male velociraptor” (“Quello che le donne non dicono;” “Ti lascerò”). In a linguistic move that confirms and reifies the
rigidity of the gender binary, Maya must be turned into a man for her actions to be understood.

If we look once more at the character Elio, we see that his representation does more than just reestablish traditional gender binaries; it creates a clear connection between gender and sex, ultimately positioning gays as a third gender. Initially Elio expresses concern for his new-found preoccupation with his looks, but this worry is not limited to aesthetics and beauty regimes. Elio truly believes he is becoming something “other,” something gay, that is, until Maya helps restore his virility. Elio’s offhand remark that he has heard about PMS so often he has started to get it every month ultimately creates a link between his femininity (his gender expression on which we elaborated earlier) and his sex, as if his hair drying and other “feminine” activities were somehow directly connected to his newly formed uterus (“Quello che le donne non dicono”). What we have here is a visual representation of the very causal relation that Butler seeks to challenge when she states “the presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it” (Gender Trouble 9).

The show goes one step further when Elio, taking part in a conversation about the magazine’s cover, uses the word “ecru” when discussing the latest trends in bridal gowns. In response, Maya tells him that only gays use the word ecru (“Amore che vieni amore che vai”). Not only, once again, do we have the reinforcement of the “gays know about fashion” stereotype, we also get a glimpse of another false causality perpetuated throughout the program, namely, that gays are in some way closer to women than their straight counterparts. This creates a confused connection between sexual orientation and a less
restrictive (read hetero) gender expression. Thus, a third gender is formed, and reinforced by Maya, who, knocking on the bathroom door, asks “Who’s in there? A man, a woman, or Elio?” (“Amore che vieni amore che vai”).

The middle ground in which homosexuals seem to reside, this “third gender,” is hinted at in the episode “E intanto il tempo se ne va” when Elio remarks that sex between women does not count as losing your virginity. It is further elaborated at the end of the season when Paolo refuses to marry Laura after discovering she has had sex with her gay ex-husband Riccardo. In the final episode “Datemi un martello,” Michele, Paolo's best friend explains the reason for which Paolo has left Laura at the altar, and qualifies Laura’s actions as “half-cheating” because Riccardo is gay and so it does not fully count. If gay men are closer to women and understand them better, if Elio, in his exposure to so many women, ends up taking on the behaviors and language of a gay man, if Elio is then something other than a man or a woman when he uses the bathroom, and if sex with a gay man is only half sex, it follows that gays occupy an in-between space, representing a gender onto themselves. We cannot, however, call this gender “queer” because it is one that is founded on connections between sex and gender, connections that are based on culturally constructed biological imperatives that act to delimit and essentialize the actions and attitudes that regulate the categories of “man” and “woman.” Furthermore, to categorize two characters that identify as men as genderqueer both limits “man” as a gender category, and imposes identities on culturally negative grounds, stripping the characters of their (fictional) agency. Ultimately we are left with representations that reaffirm stereotypes to perpetuate narrative plots, excused actions of physical violence against gays, and a reaffirmation of the legitimacy of rigid gender expressions. The third season, which
pursues a significant lesbian storyline, as we shall see, once again reaffirms traditional modes of gender expression to safely appeal to broader heteronormative audiences.

2.3.2 Tutti pazzi per amore 3

Compared to its predecessor, the third season of Tutti pazzi per amore—called Tutti pazzi per amore 3 in keeping with the Italian tendency to consider seasons separate but related texts—seems to have come leaps and bounds in terms of its presentation of LBGT characters. The season contains a very prominent lesbian narrative between Eva, Laura’s old school friend who is newly employed by Paolo, and her partner Roberta. While Riccardo and Peter showed no outward markers of gayness and we witnessed Riccardo struggle with negotiating his homosexuality and maintaining a relationship with his family, Eva and Roberta, as evidenced by the number of times the couple is seen kissing on screen, seem to live out their lesbian relationship very openly. Not only is Eva in a clearly sexual relationship with her current partner, Roberta, but viewers are also privy to a brief but extensive kissing montage featuring her and her previous lesbian partners. We are thus presented with the existence of a community, or at the very least a number of lesbians in the world, all of whom are sexually active and like to kiss each other. In the face of a national television that continually rejects representations of alternative communities this should not be taken lightly. The rendering legible of this sexuality however is where the representation of lesbianism in the show becomes problematic.

In an interview about the show Anita Caprioli, the actress who plays Eva remarks that “love can only be treated one way because there’s only one” (“Anche l’amore lesbico in tutti pazzi per amore 3”). This is precisely the way the show handles its representations of
lesbian desire, exactly the same as its heterosexual equivalent. When Eva is initially introduced she is the object of the male gaze, and the characters, as well as the audience, are welcome to appreciate her aesthetic body as she moves in slow motion toward the camera with her hair angelically backlit by the sun. Capone, Paolo’s employee, greets Eva introducing himself as Adamo, or Adam. This portrayal serves two purposes: it presents Eva as a character who is desirable to men, and it creates a heterosexual lens through which we are to understand sexual desire. This frame is recreated when Eva develops a crush on a woman named Claudia, rendering Eva’s same-sex sexual desire legible solely through the previously established straight lens. We as viewers understand that Eva has a crush on Claudia because we view her from Eva’s perspective as she approaches the camera in slow motion with sun backlighting her hair (“Martedì, 20 dicembre”).

Not only is sexual desire represented and understood in a single unifying—read hetero—way that uses the male gaze to objectify the subject of desire, but the same sex couple Eva and Roberta are, in a representation that strips them of their sexual agency, consistently depicted as attainable to straight male audiences. Roberta, Eva’s partner, is in a sexual relationship with a woman for the very first time; positioned as a man-hater, audiences are left to make assumptions that she isn’t with men anymore because she has been hurt by them and no longer wants anything to do with them. This bisexuality is presented as the result of disappointment and not of sexual desire. The possibility that she came to discover her sexuality later in life—since she does come out as a lesbian in the last episode of the season—because of oppressive societal expectations of compulsory heterosexuality is not presented as an option. Regardless, Roberta has been, and thus still could be, with men. Likewise it is revealed that Laura is not mad that Paolo had a night of
sexual intimacy with Claudia because she and Eva have also kissed. While it is possible to read Laura’s same-sex moment as representative of sexual fluidity or sexual experimentation, we must also understand that it creates space for straight spectators to imagine sexual engagement with gay characters.

Eva and Roberta are stripped of their sexual agency and objectified by both characters and spectators on the one hand, and normativized on the other. Their relationship is never questioned, and appears as legitimate as any of their heterosexual peers’ relationships, that is, until Roberta’s parents come to visit. Roberta has not yet come out to her parents and initially upon their arrival she tells them that Eva is in a relationship with Paolo (“Giovedì, 29 dicembre”). Tired of closeting their relationship and lying to Roberta’s parents, Eva tells Roberta that she must come out of the closet or their relationship is over. Shortly after New Year’s Roberta comes out to her parents, and when she tells Eva the news, Eva declares that this is their first real year together (“Domenica, 1° gennaio”). In the ultimate of homonormative acts Eva herself makes it clear that without public recognition their relationship is fake, or illegitimate, mirroring liberal discourses at the heart of fights for marriage equality.

In this third season Eva and Roberta are allowed more sexual intimacy than their first season gay counterparts, Riccardo and Peter. Their sexuality, however, is depicted exclusively in heterosexual terms and caters to straight male viewer desire. Furthermore, the couple requires public acceptance to legitimize their relationship, and as such they conform and reinforce normative social constructs.

2.3.3 È arrivata la felicità
The first season of this family comedy began airing in October 2015 on RAI 1. The twenty-four episode show was condensed into twelve Thursday prime-time viewing dates, and filming of the second season is slotted to begin in February 2017. Created, once more, by Stefano Bises, Ivan Cotroneo, and Monica Rametta, the program has been described as a mix between the American sitcom *Modern Family* and *Tutti pazzi per amore* (of which they are also the creators). Positioning the show between these two popular programs serves to create viewer expectation and hopefully eventual loyalty. In addition, however, it reveals a considerable amount about the way the program considers itself and society more generally. In fact, the reference to *Modern Family* goes beyond situational comedy dynamics of the program’s contemporary family setting, and speaks specifically to what is “modern” about both families, as the show continually verbally reiterates the modernity of the depictions portrayed. The fact that the show is considered to depict familial configurations that are more modern, is one of the reasons it won the Diversity Media Award (DMA) in the domestic television series category in May of 2016 (“And the winner is...”).

The family comedy’s narrative resemblance to its predecessor is striking, though perhaps not surprising. While in *Tutti pazzi per amore* the protagonists are single because Paolo’s wife has died and Laura’s husband has left, in *È arrivata la felicità* Orlando’s wife has left and Angelica’s husband has died. Both Orlando and Angelica are raising their children as single parents, and the two protagonists meet when Orlando’s architecture firm is hired to build Angelica and her fiancé Vittorio’s future dream home. The modernity of the program can be seen in the topics discussed (the migrant issues that Orlando’s parents’ association deals with, and the cultural differences between Orlando’s brother and his
Neapolitan girlfriend to name a few), and in the characters and family formation more broadly (the interracial couple Francesca and Vittorio, the interregional couple Pietro and ‘Nancy,’ the coupling of the protagonists’ children Laura and Umberto despite the relationship of their parents, and the lesbian couple Valeria and Rita who expect a baby after getting artificially inseminated in Spain). This last example is precisely why the show won the DMA; to use the association’s own words, “the story of a couple of young lesbians who are about to become mothers is a really beautiful love story that uses a reassuring and quotidian narrative style” (“And the Winner is...”). We might even add the remarks that Giulia Bevilacqua (who plays Valeria, Angelica’s lesbian sister) made to Italy’s Vanity Fair: “they thanked us for depicting a topic that still ‘stings,’ as if it were the most natural thing in the world. Which it should be, because love is love” (Sallustio).

The natural, reassuring, quotidian, modern depiction of a lesbian couple planning on having a baby and start a family is socially and televisually significant given the socio-political hotbed that issues of surrogacy and artificial insemination continue to be in feminist and catholic circles alike. The fact that Valeria and Rita must go to Spain to get artificially inseminated, in fact, speaks to what Dines and Rigoletto have discussed regarding Italy’s politics as compared to its European counterparts when speaking about the show Il padre delle spose (Gasparini 2006): “Spain acts like an ambivalent double to Italy, standing for loss but also opportunity for social change” (480). The issue of hospital rights is also brought to the fore in the episode “Quando abbiamo preso la decisione.” Not able to contact their gynecologist, Rita is not allowed into the delivery room when Valeria is giving birth. While they are, in the eyes of the majority of characters on the show, a family, they are not recognized by the hospital and without the consent of the gynecologist Rita
may not witness her child’s birth. Orlando, upset at the hospital’s regulations, takes it upon himself to track down the doctor at her house and drive her to the hospital so that she may give the authorization for Rita to be in the room. Given that it is Orlando—one of the show’s protagonists with whom the audience is visually and emotionally asked to identify—who takes this active and sympathetic stance on the issue of hospital visitation, we may assume that audiences will feel similarly angered by the barriers that prevent Rita from joining the rest of her family. Furthermore, even Giovanna, Valeria’s homophobic mother—whose intolerance is a recurring theme in the show—exhibits compassion for her daughter’s partner when it comes to hospital visitation rights. Given the tendency of RAI to attract an older, more generalized audience, this sympathy can be seen as a strategy for promoting tolerance in those who, given their age, may be able to understand hospital visitation from a personal standpoint.

Francesca Vecchioni, in discussing the motivations behind and needs for the Diversity Media Awards, has said that “representing LGBT people correctly is fundamental, because the way that the topic is handled influences both the identity construction of the people themselves, and the way they are perceived by the public” (“Al via i diversity media awards,” Italics mine). This correctness of representation, in this case, seems to be equated with naturalness and as such LGBT identity and the correct choices of those who identify as such are apolitical. Only once is the nature versus nurture question brought up, almost flippantly, as Valeria, quoting Lady Gaga, assures her father that everyone thinks that she was “born this way” (“Quando mi hai tirato uno schiaffo”). While the dismissiveness of Valeria’s comment and the otherwise absence of discussion around the issue make the
topic seem almost irrelevant, what is of recurring interest to the characters, and a topic of frequent discussion is Valeria and Rita's choice to start a family.

On the one hand we have Valeria’s mom Giovanna, her niece Beatrice, and Valeria and Rita’s work colleague, who all seem unaccepting of this modern family formation. Giovanna’s narrative of intolerance rears its head in every episode of the show; not wanting to recognize Rita as mother of her future grandson Giovanna tells everyone that her daughter is a widower and that Rita is Valeria’s dead partner’s sister. Later, after the child is born and Giovanna has seemingly made amends with Valeria and accepted Rita as her grandson’s mother, the audience still witnesses her repeatedly telling her grandson Giuseppe that Valeria is his one and only mother. Leafing through magazines she points to famous heterosexual couples and tells him that they are normal because they are couples made of men and women (“Quando è arrivata la felicità”). Beatrice, Angelica’s daughter, is the other character to verbalize some resistance to her aunt’s choice, stating that though people have a right to do what they want, they cannot expect everyone to accept their choices. We quickly find out that this opinion is determined not by any actual moral or religious conviction, as is the case with Giovanna, but instead by a desire to receive gifts from her grandmother. In fact, immediately after Bea is forced to return the gifts, she stops criticizing her aunt.

On the other hand all the other characters seem to completely accept Valeria and Rita’s familial formation. The extreme end of this acceptance comes from Orlando’s parents Guido and Anna whose fervent left leaning politics are often the source of mockery. The couple frequently refers to Valeria and Rita’s choice as “courageous” and asks them to come speak to their association. In relation to these two extremes we have what becomes
positioned as the “correct” way to perceive their decision to start a family. Their choices are reflective of their apolitical nature; they are just two people who get together, love each other, and follow this love down its *natural* course, namely, procreation and family. Valeria and Rita themselves say as much when they go to speak to a group at Guido and Anna’s association (“Quando non avevo paura di mia moglie”).

Valeria and Rita thus spend the majority of the season trying to build a normative domestic life that aligns them with all the other couples in the program. “As a representational strategy,” Steven Edward Doran notes, “homodomesticity constructs a symbolic space that allows for the safe consumption of gay otherness by straight audiences while simultaneously protecting them from the threat of deviant gay sexual desire” (101). Their non-threatening, apolitical, normal desires mirror everyone else’s and as such difference and otherness are erased; love is love, we are all the same, all gays and all straights seek domestic familial capitalist bliss. The only difference between Valeria and Rita and the other couples on the show is that Rita is a woman, but two key representational tactics are strategically used to minimalize her gender, and reassure the presumably heterosexual audience; one being the equating of Rita to her hetero male counterparts, and the other being the aesthetically/emotionally femme representation of both women.

Maintaining gender essentialist notions, Rita is continually being compared to men. When she gets cold feet about the pregnancy and their new house, Rita flees. Negotiating her feelings Rita talks to her mother and compares her fears to a man’s fears. Similarly, other characters blame her flight on the fact that she has a very strong masculine side. Finally their mutual work colleague, seeing Valeria suffer from Rita’s absence, remarks that
Valeria might as well be with a “normal man” since it isn’t any different (“Quando non dovevamo più vederci”). These essentialist notions are visually reinforced when Valeria, looking at a baby catalogue, replaces the hetero couple with images of herself and Rita, Rita, of course, in the man’s role, and, more subtly, by their overtly gendered blue baby room.

Despite the clear visual and verbal demarcation of Rita as taking on the man’s position, both women are presented as aesthetically femme, and, even benefit from their presumed heterosexuality, when they decide to flirt with the men who help them move. So the roles of man and women are visually and verbally solidified, and both women aesthetically conform to traditional models of femininity. Thus neither gender normativity nor those audiences that expect it are made upset by the couple’s representation.

Given this normativity it is no surprise that neither character is portrayed using any cultural or aesthetic markers of gayness. The only moment when we are given any access to LGBTQIA cultural codes is more safely introduced when Anna and Guido express doubts about their grandson Umberto’s sexuality. Approaching Orlando, Anna uses several legible signs, namely the tightness of Umberto’s shirts, and his penchant for listening to women singers like Lady Gaga and Madonna to make the argument that the boy is gay, and suggests that Orlando should be encouraging of his son’s homosexuality. Couched in the safe space of misunderstood youth, these cultural markers are used as devices that add to the levity and humor of the intergenerational narrative, and do not, in any way, threaten the story by introducing alternative lifestyles.

Representing an alternative family narrative on generalized national television during prime time is without a doubt a considerable change especially in light of the cantankerous socio-cultural climate around which it was broadcast. The depoliticization,
normativization, and domesticity of this lesbian narrative, however, intentionally erase difference in favor of social acceptability and as such eradicate narratives that allow for alternatives to the accepted homo/heteronormative, gender essentialist liberal ideal of inclusivity.

2.3.4 *Tutti insieme all’improvviso*

In January and February 2016 Canale 5, Mediaset’s flagship channel, broadcast its own family comedy with a lesbian storyline. Very successful in creating brand extensions and paratextual components such as blogs, webseries, and even publishing one character’s novel, *Tutti insieme all’improvviso* was nevertheless considered a flop, so much so that while it initially aired on Friday evenings, the last three episodes were aired on Sunday and Wednesday in an effort to quickly terminate the program (Ino). Directed by Francesco Pavolini, the program included celebrated comedic actor Giorgio Panariello as main character Walter, and up and coming Giuseppe Maggio as Paolo.

Walter Brandi, the central protagonist, moves back to Rome to take over his recently deceased brother’s veterinary clinic after discovering that his nephew Paolo is actually his son. The story weaves together work, school, and domestic narratives: Walter ends up romantically involved with Laura, the sister of his sister-in-law Annamaria; Paolo (Walter’s son) sleeps with Walter’s business partner’s wife Serena while trying to overcome his love for Serena’s daughter Elena; Annamaria grieves the loss of her husband; and Sara, Annamaria’s seventeen year old lesbian daughter struggles to come to terms with her sexual identity while finding her voice as a writer.
Sara’s storyline of young unrequited love and sexual exploration is positioned alongside the teenage love dramas of her friends and brother; friends Viola and Federica both like Adriano, Paolo falls for Elena, but gets mixed up with her mother Serena, and Luca falls for Sara who is in love with her friend Federica. The complicated teen web of sex, love, and cheating easily incorporates Sara’s lesbian narrative, which is presented as one of the many issues teenagers deal with when discovering the physicality of their sexualities. In this way, Tutti insieme all'improvviso does not problematize Sara’s identity any more than anyone else's, in fact, when Sara anonymously declares her sexuality on her blog she is met with nothing but affirmation, encouragement, and solidarity (“Se il padre non coltiva... il figlio non eredita il campo”).

The way Sara’s sexual identity is integrated within the framework of teenage sexuality positions it as a sexual possibility for anyone, and this non-judgmental presentation is taken one step further as the show seems to take an LGBTQ positive position on the pressing contemporary issue of gay parenting. Indeed, though Sara eventually declares herself a lesbian, she has unprotected sex with her brother’s friend Luca and becomes pregnant. In the episode “Il paziente beve il latte della giovenca,” Walter tells Sara that she can raise a child even if she likes women, a phrase that seems to be a game changer for Sara who decides to keep the baby but break things off with Luca. Audiences are therefore presented with a pregnant lesbian who will one day raise a child in a same-sex relationship. This is a clear stance against those predominantly Catholic Italians who believe that children have a right to be raised by a mother and a father. As we saw in chapter one, Italy is still a hotbed of political and social unrest regarding same-sex couples’ rights. Proponents of so-called “Family Day” held in Rome on January 30th 2016 maintain
that minors should be raised in heterosexual households, and while same-sex couples were granted the right to civil unions, right wing organizations and religious groups were successful in removing clauses that would allow for adoption or the use of assisted reproductive technology (Sirocchi; Segreti). Looking at the representation of Sara in light of the political climate of the time (the show aired precisely when Family Day was taking place), it would seem that her character embodies all the possibilities that those against same-sex child rearing oppose. Investigating the representation further, however, shows that the program does not counter any of these conservative stances: Sara is only seventeen and, despite her declared sexuality she is not in a relationship with a woman; She repeatedly tells Luca that though he will help raise the child they are not a couple (thus the child will be raised by a mother and a father); and Sara got pregnant by having unprotected heterosexual sex without technological assistance.

While her narrative may not explicitly express one political position or another, audiences are asked to come face to face (or should I say screen to face) with the physicality of her sexual identity. Indeed on two separate occasions Sara and her crush Federica kiss on screen: first, saving Sara from Luca’s advances Federica runs in between them and kisses Sara on the lips; the second kiss happens on a nightclub dance floor where the girls pretend they are together for the benefit of two lesbians (“Si nasconde una malattia... ma non si può nascondere la morte;” “Non c’è bisogno di mostrare l’elefante con il dito”). Though audiences are given insight into Sara’s feelings and desires, these kisses remain veiled under the pretense of “jokes.” Sara herself tells her friend Viola that her first kiss with Federica was because Luca was getting too attached, and her brother Paolo confirms to Luca that the kiss was meant to make fun of him. Later Sara again orchestrates
the “joke” (though this time it is clearly an excuse) and tells Federica it would be fun to pretend they were together. When considered not serious or indicative of any underlying sexuality the jokes remain unchallenged and accepted by the other characters. And though her blog remains a space for sexual exploration, she never tells her readers who she is.

The positive feedback she receives from her blog gives Sara the encouragement to keep writing and act on her desires. She, however, continues to have trouble accepting and understanding her feelings, and the way her difficulty is positioned frames her homosexuality as a problem. All the members of the nuclear Brandi family face difficulties throughout the season: Annamaria grieves her dead husband and cannot seem to manage parenting her children; her youngest son Samuele is also struggling with the loss of his father; Paolo the eldest son has dropped out of school, gets in a series of relationship troubles, and has to deal with the discovery that Walter is his biological father; and Sara must come to terms with her sexuality and later with her pregnancy. Several times through the course of the season, narrative connections are made between these struggles, as is the case when Sara is writing on her blog about the difficulty of closeting her sexuality, and the episode cuts to a montage of all of the family members in their respective discontents (“La tartaruga non abbandona... la sua corazza”). Once more, as Sara begins to tell her mother about her identity crisis, her mother immediately compares her daughter’s feelings to her lost sense of self after the death of her husband (“La rana minaccia... ma non parte in battaglia”). The difference between all the other narrative drama in these characters’ lives and the one Sara faces is that all the other problems are relational and not inherent to the individual. The other issues exist within the realm of the normative, while Sara’s struggle is based on the recognition that her very identity could be deemed socially unacceptable.
It is true, as I have said, that those who come to know Sara’s sexual identity and those to whom she comes out—her friend Viola, her crush Federica, and her uncle Walter—are all accepting of her, but the characters often position this acceptance within a frame that supports a reading of homosexuality as weakness or transgression. After Sara and Federica’s second kiss, Viola confronts Federica about Sara, and in an effort to explain Sara’s feelings, says that she is “not as strong as she seems,” clarifying “we all have our weak points” (“Non c’è bisogno di mostrare l’elefante con il dito”). So Sara’s sexuality is accepted but simultaneously posited as a weakness that renders her inferior to her heterosexual peers. Similarly, after accidentally reading about Sara’s feelings for Federica, Walter tells Sara that sometimes in Africa lions mate with tigers and their babies are referred to as ligers (“La iena non ride... se il ghepardo non corre”). To understand this metaphor between lesbianism and interspecies mating one must understand the social logics at its core. Both instances seem linked in some way to transgression; their irregularity or “unnaturalness” read as taboo within the framework of our biological understandings. Walter, therefore, positions Sara’s sexuality as other, as a violation of society’s accepted practices, conflating a sexual act (the mating of lions and tigers) with a sexual identity (Sara’s declared lesbianism). What is interesting here is that while doing so he simultaneously normativizes Sara’s identity by equating it with a procreative act. The lion and tiger engage in a sex act that results in procreation, and points to the possibility of a futurity centered on family, however unconventional.

Walter frequently incorporates his experiences in Africa into daily conversation, using animal based adages to impart his wisdom on his family, and indeed every episode is named after one such idiomatic expression. Often met with dismissiveness or confusion,
these remarks remain fairly illegible to the other characters in the program. There is a distinct parallel between character reactions to these expressions and the positioning of Africa as primitive and uncivilized, a position that mirrors Sara’s accepted but othered (no matter how normative) role. Mamy, the Brandi family’s hired nanny and housekeeper, is African, and throughout the season she is the one who predominantly becomes irritated in the face of Walter’s disorder and uncouth ways. What is striking is that when she chastises Walter for eating with his hands, wearing the wrong thing, sleeping in a tree, or making a mess, she refers to him as “Africa” or tells him to “go back to Africa” (see, for example, “L’uccello che non si muove... non troverà mai l’albero di frutta” and “Piccoli problemi presi uno per uno”). Africa becomes, thus, not a continent but a marker of the unacceptable.

The show’s opening credit sequence gives us clear insight into Walter’s personality, and his relationship to the other characters. Passing from room to room, Walter enters various domestic spaces inhabited by the different characters and he is given or accidentally procures various outfits which he then wears as he enters each subsequent room. Walter takes a dress from Sara’s room, which he puts on as he enters the kitchen and comes face to face with a disgusted Mamy, who, in response hands him something more appropriate. The inclusion of Walter in drag is a direct visual homage to actor Giorgio Panariello’s career—during which he was made famous for his characters and imitations, including several women and famous singer and presumed homosexual Renato Zero—but it also directly connects him to the queer world of which drag is very much a part. The fact that Walter takes the dress from Sara’s room creates a connection between Walter, his “Africanness,” Mamy’s disapproval, and Sara’s lesbianism, and simultaneously renders
Sara’s sexual identity less “spectacular” and more normative than Walter’s queer otherness.

Depicting a pregnant teenage lesbian who receives nothing but support from her family, peers, and online community, *Tutti insieme all’improvviso* seems no less gay positive than the more celebrated family comedies discussed above. Through deeper investigation, however, it becomes apparent that this lesbian portrayal is both normativized and only accepted when perceived as a joke or weakness, or through a process of othering.

2.4 The Family Drama

2.4.1 *Le cose che restano*

In the fall of 2010 the miniseries *Le cose che restano* made its world premiere at the 5th International Rome Film Festival where it won for best miniseries (Cau). Directed by Gianluca Maria Tavarelli, the program is considered the sequel to screenwriters’ Sandro Petraglia and Stefano Rulli’s previous miniseries *La meglio gioventù/The Best of Youth*, (2003) and rides the border—as many “quality television” programs do—between film and television.

Set entirely in the present, the miniseries tells the story of the emotional collapse and reconstruction of the well-to-do Giordani family and household. Andrea Giordano, the prodigal gay son played by Claudio Santamaria, returns home after five months to a happy family that soon gets torn apart by the tragic death of the youngest son Lorenzo. Anita, the mother goes insane, Pietro the father splits town, Nino, the middle son distances himself, has an affair with his advisor’s wife and gets mixed up in the life of Shaba, an illegal
immigrant. Nora, the psychologist sister leaves her husband shortly after the birth of their child, and lives vicariously through her patients.

The gay characters, eldest son Andrea and his partner Michel, have been celebrated by the writers, actors, and by the press, for offering Italian television a new and enlightened way of portraying the LGBT community. Claudio Santamaria has commented: “We asked ourselves how to depict the character, and we decided to do it in the most natural way possible. We wanted to avoid accentuated and stereotyped characterizations of his sexuality. You can't tell that he is gay” (Minniti). In stripping the characters of any seemingly gay visual features the show does break from the historical norm of gay representations, a trend which is also true for the contemporary case studies above. It is equally progressive in its choice of non-stereotypical vocations: Andrea works for the foreign ministry and Michel works in a bank.

What is perhaps even more noteworthy about Le cose che restano is that the gay couple seems to be in a relationship that not only lasts, but in some ways fosters the relationships around it. As Alessandra Mammì states in her article “La Rai sdogana i gay”: “The only serious characters capable of holding together the rest of the family are Andrea and Michel. They are gay without the mannerisms, and convinced that feelings carry with them a responsibility toward others. They are men of another time, you might say. If they weren’t ‘different’ they wouldn’t seem believable” (Mammi). Leaving the “different” comment aside for the time being, what we have here are two characters who, stable in themselves, create stability for others. Michel manages to get Andrea to settle down, and the two of them move back into the Giordani house with Michel’s young daughter Lila. Michel and Andrea essentially bring the new modern family all together through their
relationships with each member of the household. Andrea helps Nino with Shaba who ultimately gets her residency into the country after Andrea and members of the police employ her daughter as an informant. Thus Nino, Shaba, and Shaba’s daughter Alina all move into the previously deserted house thanks to Andrea and Michel.

In addition to an absence of stereotypically gay attributes, not only do Andrea and Michel reconstruct their family, they also come across as comfortable in their own sexuality. Jelardi and Bassetti have criticized depictions of gays in Italian fictions because, while evolving and becoming more positive, they often tell the story of psychologically unstable characters, as they say: "to represent gays, old stereotypes are still too often used... [they are gays] with problems being accepted and in an unstable psychological situation that does not allow them to live peacefully with their condition" (126). Especially within the family drama genre this kind of instability can provide a great amount of dramatic fodder for the plot; but the miniseries refuses this narrative device, extending the possibilities for LGBT representations. Michel does seek psychological counseling, not because he is gay but because he is terminally ill and is trying to come to terms with his mortality. The show is extremely emotionally charged and psychologically oriented, but the characters in need of help, the mother, the father, Nora the therapist, and her other patients, are dealing with issues of loss, loss of a son, loss of love, and loss of memory respectively. Homosexual identity remains, when a problem, a problem for others, but more than anything it is portrayed as just one of many character traits, an identity and not a psychosis, in fact no one in the show seems to want to talk about their sexuality at all.

Returning to the “different” comment made by Alessandra Mammi, we may begin to break down the social understanding of the kind of gayness Andrea and Michel embody.
They are caring towards others and help reunite the Giordani family, and because of this they seem like men from another era. The remark, while coming from a place of flattery, positions men in a temporally determined essentialist category. In different time periods men act certain ways, and to act differently signifies a lack of the qualities that constitute manliness. So, the characters Andrea and Michel are only believable as characters because as homosexuals they already lack these qualities, thus their anachronistic behavior becomes credible. Ultimately by saying that men who have sex with men are less manly than their straight counterparts, the comment affirms the heteronormative assumption about “man” as a gender category and simultaneously creates a necessary correspondence between gender and sex. Andrea and Michel are “different” so our understanding of them cannot be based on traditional social understandings of gender (or sex?). What is interesting here is that though the characters are positioned as safe and do not exhibit any stereotypical gay traits, they are also viewed as other, and as such unreadable.

However enigmatic these characters may seem, their representation is very much reflective of the normative trends we saw in the family comedy case studies above. Initially when Andrea and Michel meet and begin dating Andrea says that he doesn’t like to put down roots, that he is against permanence. Michel responds by saying that he is looking for a person to settle down with (“Episode 1”). While the two seem at odds, eventually Michel’s values win out and the third episode begins with Michel and his daughter Lila moving into the Giordani house. The homodomesticity of the characters is complete with a child, which, as with Sara in Tutti insieme all’improvviso was brought to the world heterosexually, and as such possibly calls Michel’s sexual identity into question. Regardless, it is Michel’s desire for domesticity that trumps Andrea’s uprooted ways, showing the audience that the
normative ideals are those that bring the most happiness. The fact that the household is now made up of the Giordani family, the gay couple and their daughter, and political refugees Shaba and Alina, seems a liberal commentary on the future of the family and of the nation more generally; if we want to move forward we have to accept certain changes. These changes, however, come with the need for conformity to normative domesticity. Interestingly enough, even in this bright push toward futurity, Michel, the character who wanted to settle down and have a family in the first place, dies before he truly gets to enjoy it; a narrative move that can easily be read as punishment for his sexuality. This alternative domestic space is a temporary one that becomes inhabited by those who are waiting to achieve their own personal heteronormative domesticity, as such Michel must be taken out of the picture.

Michel’s character teeters on both sides of the acceptability scale as we see him embodying both the more normative sides of gay representation and those that have traditionally been markers of transgression. Jelardi and Bassetti discuss the fact that in the 1960s the presence of gays on television was accepted because they were not Italian: “Tolerance toward these new television protagonists is essentially motivated by their foreign origins which in some way justify them and render their exuberance and transgressiveness acceptable” (18). French born Michel is just one example of the continuance of this tradition into the new millennium (foreign gay partners in the recent fictions Io e mio figlio (Odorisio 2010), Il padre delle spose, Tutti i padre di maria (Manfredi 2010), and Tutti pazzi per amore are several other examples). Michel’s foreignness in itself, while fitting into this longstanding tradition, is not a clear marker of his transgressive position within the narrative. It is after he has built a relationship with Andrea that viewers
become privy to his dark past, his night with a drug addict named Jenny that resulted in his child Lila, and his terminal disease that, though never discussed, one might easily assume is AIDS.

Perhaps indicative of a larger social ambivalence toward LGBT peoples, when their difference is depicted, either normativity wins out (as with Andrea’s turn toward domesticity) or it creates disruption and unrest (as with Michel’s disease and child). *Le cose che restano* manages to deconstruct and reconstruct the family through the domestic. But this domesticity remains a place where normativity and heterosexuality are the norm despite the changing looks of the modern family.

2.4.2 *Una grande famiglia*

The first two seasons of *Una grande famiglia*, directed by Riccardo Milani, and written, among others, by Ivan Cotroneo (writer of *Tutti pazzi per amore* and *È arrivata la felicità* discussed above) are two miniseries broadcast on RAI 1 in the spring of 2012 and the fall of 2013 respectively. I look at both seasons as one textual body to mark the continuation of the gay narrative, unlike what we had in with *Tutti pazzi per amore*. The show is a drama that takes place largely in Inverigo, Como about the plight of the Rengoni family and family business after the mysterious disappearance and presumed death of the eldest son, Edoardo. The Rengoni family consists of elderly parents Nora and Ernesto, and their adult children: the presumed-dead Edoardo, Laura, Raoul, Nicoletta and youngest son Stefano. After Edoardo’s disappearance his wife Chiara and their two children move into the Rengoni estate, and Chiara rekindles an old flame she had with Edoardo’s brother
Raoul. Shortly thereafter Nicolò, often called “Nic,” also moves into the estate in an effort to distance himself from his Catholic mother Laura and come out of the closet.

Like the other gay characters I have discussed, Nicolò does not read as stereotypically gay; the only physical signifier of his budding sexuality is an earring he wears. He does, however, exhibit other stereotypes that mark his sexuality—or at least position him on the women’s side of the gender binary comfortably at play within the miniseries—which pertain to his work and psychological state. Throughout the two seasons, Nicolò expresses severe anger, specifically in relation to his mother and several classmates who bully him. His anger at his peers comes out when, after being teased, Nicolò bashes the main bully in the head, and as a result gets suspended from school (“Season 1 Episode 2”). Tensions between him and his mother escalate after this and Nic decides to move in with his grandparents (“Season 1 Episode 4”). All of this disturbing behavior occurs before Nicolò comes out to his family and before he meets his older soon-to-be live-in boyfriend. These narratives of instability reflect those discussed by Jelardi and Bassetti, who claim that LGBT characters are often presented as psychologically unstable (126).

Raoul, Nicolò’s uncle, is the only other main character to exhibit acts of aggression and anger similar to Nic’s, but his rage is always positioned as naturally impassioned behavior, often culminating in the equally “natural” action of mounting a horse and riding fervently through the woods. Nic’s rage, instead, leads to the more “unnatural” destruction of bathrooms and physical violence. Though this difference is clear, Nic and Raoul do end up sharing a resistance to typical relationships and structures of intimacy, and thus both challenge normative family structures.
While Nic is too young to have a solid career, I would argue that his choice to work in the family factory positions him with the women on the show. Struggling to get back on her feet after her husband’s disappearance, Chiara goes to work in the Rengoni family factory, and Nic explicitly states that he wants to mirror her behavior (“Season 1 Episode 4”). Instead of challenging gender binaries, Nic’s character perpetuates the idea (which we also saw in *Tutti pazzi per amore*) that gay men are more like women.

Davide, Nic’s boyfriend, much like Michel in *Le cose che restano*, represents the more transgressive side of homosexuality. It may come as no surprise, therefore, that Davide’s mother is Spanish, making this yet another example of the “foreign partner phenomenon” typical of these homosexual representations. Their relationship ends, however, when Nic finds out that Davide is using the Internet to hook up with men when Nicolò isn’t home. The gay hook-up site, and Davide’s promiscuity and non-monogamous desires ultimately push Nicolò to move back to his grandparents’ house (“Season 2 Episode 8”). Nicolò firmly rejects this side of gay culture, preferring the traditional, albeit fraught, domesticity upon which his entire family has been built. Even a teenager like Nicolò knows to reject this level of non-monogamy, or perhaps he is too young to have been indoctrinated into the salacious homosexual lifestyle that Davide represents.

Like the other shows investigated in these case studies, neither David nor Nic seem to have any gay friends or belong to any gay community, aside from the online hookup site that ends their relationship. Viewers do, however, see one LGBTQ-related community in the show that is not actually for the gay characters themselves. Agedo, the association for parents of homosexual children, is an actual organization that provides support for parents trying to cope with the sexuality of their children, and works to prevent homophobic
bullying. The director of Agedo at the time, Rita De Santis, was initially reluctant to agree to this fictional representation as, generally speaking, cases of homosexuality on television are “treated” by psychiatrists or clergymen who are there to judge or absolve gays from judgment (Quaranta). The use of an actual Agedo branch and the fact that the organization was consulted during the production of the show finally put De Santis at ease and she praised it as a great moment of visibility for an otherwise little-known organization. But, as the title of the article in La Repubblica in which De Santis was quoted, makes clear—“Rai, gay in the family. The fiction for moms and dads”—the fiction is not for LGBTQ people themselves, but for those with LGBTQ family members (Quaranta.). This reaffirms the presumed heterosexuality of audiences, and positions the show within the limits of RAI’s educational mission; parents have options should they choose to try to understand the sexuality of their children, watch and learn.

Slowly through the course of the show the Rengoni family begins to fall apart: Edoardo has created a level of financial instability, Laura is waiting to separate from her husband, Nicolò comes out of the closet, Raoul breaks off his ten-year relationship at the risk of losing his foster child, and the matriarch of the family becomes increasingly ill. Queerly, this slow disintegration seems to parallel normativity’s instability as “the culturally constructed binaries of secrecy/disclosure, private/public, and utopia/apocalypse lose the clarity of their distinction (Sedgwick 11). The story at this point seems to foretell the end of stability and the rise of chaos (a chaos of which homosexuality is a part), but the imposing and dominating force of the family insures the security of the socio-cultural normative binaries.
The strength of the public/private binary is dependent on the strength of the house: the symbol of familial stability and order. It is the expectation of this public/private divide that facilitates much of the homonormativity on the program. Only after Nicolò has moved into the Rengoni family estate is he able to successfully come out of the closet. And it is behind the house, in this secretive space, that his mother first catches him kissing his boyfriend Davide. Furthermore, the safety of the inside space of Agedo is what finally helps Laura come to terms with having a gay son, and her hesitation to enter is a hesitation to make the internal/private feelings she has about such a private/familial matter public. When Nic wants to bring Davide to his aunt’s outdoor wedding, Davide turns him down on the grounds of impropriety as this public space is not acceptable for such a private homosexual matter; thus privacy allows for a certain level of homosexual legitimacy ("Season 2 Episode 5"). Once again the stability of the family structure keeps the binaries operating in the program, and evidences the hegemonic ideological and societal relations of production behind the creation of this, and all televisual product (Marx 164).

2.5 American Gay Families in Italy: Two Micro Case Studies

American Family series and serials, and family-centric teen serials with gay themes or characters such as Beverly Hills 90120 (Star 1990), Desperate Housewives (Cherry 2004), Brothers and Sisters (Baitz 2006), Gossip Girl (Schwartz 2007) and Modern Family (Lloyd and Levitan 2009), just to name a few, have all aired on Italian television within the last six years. As I have said, to distinguish between nations at a time when media convergence and televisual access are rapidly increasing would be to construct both political and temporal borders where they no longer exist for many viewers (while 90210 initially aired in Italy in
1992 on Italia 1, it has been re-aired by RAI 4 in the last six years). Thus this next section will provide two brief case studies of contemporary American shows with LGBTQ content. As we will see, these programs occasionally broaden but often mirror the restrictive nature of Italy’s own nationally produced representations. Italian audiences can stream the dramedy *Grace & Frankie* on Netflix, and thanks to the arrival of Amazon Prime Video in Italy in December 2016, viewers no longer need access to Sky Atlantic to watch another family dramedy, *Transparent*.

2.5.1 *Grace & Frankie* (Season 1)

*Grace & Frankie*, which was first made available as a complete season in the United States in May 2015, reached Italian audiences just five months later, the day Netflix arrived on the peninsula on October 22nd 2015. The entire premise of the show is built around Frankie and Grace who get dumped by their respective husbands Sol and Robert because the two divorce lawyer business partners have fallen in love and want to get married and start a life together.

Throughout the first season the normativity of the two gay characters is portrayed as anything but normal. Essentially by “radicalizing” their normativity and distinguishing it from other queer lifestyles, the show creates a clear divide between Sol and Robert (the couple) and the other gay characters (and many less normative LGBTQ audiences). The first episode “The End,” sets the tone for the entire season as Robert and Sol come out to their families and express their intention to get married. For Robert and Sol the pinnacle of their gay happiness is monogamous marriage: “After hiding all those years I want to get married in front of everyone, including you,” Robert says to Grace (“The Invitation”).
continually stress this desire, and indeed the overarching narrative of the season is the planning of their, to quote Grace, “big gay wedding” (“The Invitation”). Being in a monogamous relationship and getting married are the end goals that everyone is assumed to desire. Even Brianna (Robert and Grace’s daughter)—who, with her aggressive personality and powerful job might be positioned as a less normative character—agrees when Bud (her soon-to-be step-brother) tells her “You want what everyone wants, to come home at the end of the day to someone who’s happy to see you” (“The Spelling Bee”).

The only characters to clearly challenge this normative ideal of “settling down” are Robert and Sol’s gay friends. The prime example of this opposition occurs in the episode “The Secrets” when Robert and Sol are tasting samples for their wedding prepared by their gay caterer friends Jeff and Peter. Jeff makes his case against monogamy by saying: “My god, what’s the point of being gay? [...] If you can’t shed the conventions of a hetero life where’s the fun?” Sol clearly disagrees, replying: “I’m not gay in order to shed conventions, I’m gay because I love this man.” After the caterers leave, Robert and Sol both agree that they want to be in a monogamous marriage. So, while the show provides audiences a depiction of various forms of desire and coupling, through Sol and Robert, these alternatives which seek to challenge the normativity celebrated by the show are quickly dismissed.

What’s striking, as I mention above, is the ways that this normativity is positioned as radical or in some way challenging to societal constructs. Two clear examples of this come during the first and last episodes of the season. In the very first scene, when Robert and Sol are coming out to their wives, Sol says “We want to get married because we can do that now” to which Frankie responds “I know, I hosted that fundraiser” (“The End”). What
happens in this quick exchange is a calling out of a certain kind of liberal mentality; it’s one thing to host a fundraiser, it’s quite another to deal with the emotional trauma of having a gay husband. In this exchange there is a claim that this representation, that everything we are about to see, will challenge those who seem okay with homodomesticity, and helped support gay marriage. Again, in the last episode, the show practically positions the gay couple as poster boys for liberal individualism. When Robert, not wanting to write his own vows, remarks “There’s something to be said for being part of a tradition that’s been going on for thousands of years,” Sol responds: “Who wouldn’t want to be a part of the ancient tradition of misogyny and homophobia” (“The Vows”). Thus writing your own vows becomes a radical political act of individual expression that challenges traditions of oppression. Never once do they question whether the institution itself is a locus of oppression and consumerism.

Regardless of audiences’ views of Robert and Sol’s radicalness, we must remember that the program, which the title makes evident, is not actually about Robert and Sol, but about their soon-to-be ex-wives Grace and Frankie. Audiences primarily deal with the coming out of this elderly gay couple from the perspective of those hurt by the news. For audience identification purposes, thus, our narrative trajectory lies with the rejected women, and we, alongside them, learn to become stronger, more sexual, and more independent as the season progresses, but what we don’t become, necessarily, is gay accepting or gay identified.

As an American show broadcast in Italy we must consider the ways that these depictions coincide with Italian socio-political constructions and the areas of difference that might result in a loss of signification or understanding. When we consider the ways
Robert and Sol seem to challenge their ex-wives’ liberal mentality, for example, these insults are very much rooted in criticism toward socio-political positions that are particular to the American context. Unlike America, there is a distinction in Italy between *liberismo* and *liberalismo*: the first is economically based and the second is more political. What Americans understand to be liberalism is thus more in line with the Italian democratic party, though fights between social democrats are often rooted in religion. Thus, the specific cultural nuances that distinguish Frankie and Grace from Sol and Robert, and likewise Sol and Robert from their gay friends, and form the basis of several parts of this case study, may indeed get lost on Italian audiences. But, I argue, for the purposes of this investigation the dynamics between the characters can be perceived by Italian audiences in other ways despite the specificity and nuance of the language. Sol and Robert embody the difference between tolerance of an idea (namely support for marriage equality) and tolerance of the physical reality of their gayness, and thus necessarily facilitate social awareness and discussion regardless of the audiences’ nationality. To use the words of former Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi: “[*The Bold and the*] Beautiful did much more by coming into one-third of Italian homes for an hour at lunchtime for ten years than any discussion about PACS [Civil Solidarity Pacts]” (Sironi).

### 2.5.2 Transparent (Season 1)

When it comes to identifying with characters, *Transparent*—which, began airing in Italy on June 9, 2015 on Sky Atlantic and is now available for streaming via Amazon Video—is probably not the first program that comes to mind. In fact, creator Jill Soloway and members of the cast have often been asked about the unlikeability of the characters in
the show, which they predominantly blame on viewer expectations. Soloway has said that this unlikeability is actually just another way of saying that the show “doesn’t make a white cis male feel better” (James). So the claim would be that shows that do not use the classic male-gaze create discomfort in spectators. Amy Landecker, who plays Sarah, goes one step further arguing that the characters depict human struggles, and thus we hate and love them just as we sometimes hate and love ourselves (Coates). On the other side of the audience identification spectrum, many trans people have taken issue with Jeffrey Tambor in the role of transgender main character Maura, claiming that transface, or, as is the case in this show, a straight cis man portraying a transgender woman, is humiliating to the trans community (James). But by not relying on viewer identification for viewer fidelity, the show may have more freedom to depict certain aspects of queerness that run counter to the normativities in the previous case studies. We can show you more if you aren’t necessarily meant to like or identify with what you see.

The first season of Transparent tells the story of the Pfefferman family: Maura Pfefferman comes out as transgender to her family and begins the process of her transition; her oldest daughter Sarah leaves her husband for her old college lover Tammy; middle child “love-addict” Josh loses his job, all of his relationships, and his ability to cope after hearing Maura’s news; youngest child Ali begins and ends a series of relationships, dietary restrictions, and life choices; and Maura’s ex-wife Shelly grapples with a dying husband.

Whether you identify with these characters or not, they do give the viewer both access to a wide array of sexual and gender expressions and identities, and insight into the existence of and support provided by LGBT communities (here I have intentionally omitted the Q to reflect the LGBT community center depicted in the show). Maura, indeed, finds a
lot of solace and support at the LGBT center of which she is a part, and spectators see her participate not only in a support group, but in yoga, and a talent show. It is through this center that she makes friends with Divina who lives in another kind of queer community, namely, an apartment complex inhabited by many LGBTQ folks who look out for one another. Ali decides to return to school as a gender and sexualities studies major, and in one of her classes she meets transgender teaching assistant Dale with whom she investigates her own femininity (“The Wilderness”). Sarah, as I have said, breaks up her marriage to Len to be with Tammy, and through this old/new flame, viewers gain access to a wider, queerer conception of family, as Tammy comes with children from both her first and second marriages.

In addition to the variety of communities depicted, room is given for queer moments and exploration, ultimately increasing the kinds of representations of gender and sexuality on television. Ali generally dresses in a gender neutral way, and when she decides to dress as a high femme she ends up ripping all her clothes off as she feels too restricted and confined by the bodice (and the gender role?) she has taken on (“Symbolic Exemplar”). Likewise we have a broadening of gender understanding in the depiction of the cross dressing camp that Maura attends with her friend Marcy. These men, as they claim, “are cross dressers but [they] are still men” (“Best New Girl”). The fact that men wear “women’s” clothing does not make them question their gender, and the same is true for Ali who rejects the femininity that society may assign her, but does not reject her womanhood. These depictions expand the socially imposed gender categories and allow for more feminine or masculine moments to occur making space for notions of gender fluidity that challenge identity formation.
Maura presents an interesting opposition to the fluidity and openness of these gender representations. In both the examples listed above Maura is the one who expresses confusion or concern for these gender expressions, which border on the socially unacceptable. As she overhears the men at cross-dressing camp, Maura is visually upset by their proclamation. It must be said that this moment—which is part of a flashback series that traces Maura’s gender understanding through time—occurs after people at the camp discuss one of the old members who was kicked out because she was transgender. Maura is upset because she is dealing with an internal struggle with her gender identity, and her refusal to cheer that she too is a “cross-dressing man” is understandable. The depiction, however, presents us with a kind of rigid understanding of gender identity that positions performativity as necessarily based upon the social binary of man/woman. This becomes clear to audiences when Maura tells Ali that she has always been gender confused because she used to dress like a tomboy. Thus, for Maura, there is no room for play in performativity, and the binary structure is what allows her to slowly construct her womanhood. She wants to be legible, but in order to be legible as her true gender she must conform to the societal understanding of femininity, and as such all acts of gender play that challenge this binary are rejected by her.

Maura wants to be legible, she wants others to appropriately gender her, and she desires conformity to the societal norm. What is interesting with respect to this legibility is that her new name Maura, and her parental name Moppa are both given to her by other people; “Maura” by Marcy when they are cross-dressing at a hotel, and “Moppa” by Ali when Maura comes out to her (“Moppa”). Her identity as a woman is thus based on others’
expectations and desires of her and not from an internal feeling that would create an expression of this womanhood.

*Transparent* has been received by the Italian press in ways that clearly reflect already existent socio-political divisions. Mainstream left-leaning sites like Huffington Post Italia, L’Espresso, and GQ Italia, stress all the awards the show has won and its importance for trans visibility. Religious organizations like Famiglia domani, contrastingly, use it as an example of the moral deterioration of society and even suggest boycotting Sky Atlantic (Lugli). Italian television scholars like Chiara Checcaglini have pointed to the limits of the program: it is made by a cis gender woman and depicts a trans character’s transition within the relatively safe space of a white liberal family. Checcaglini, however, uses male pronouns and endings when describing Maura and acknowledges that the series is a great step, considering it “legitimate to expect an increase in care” with respect to such representations (Checcaglini). Scholars and popular media’s reception seems to exhibit a lack of critical investigation that would problematize the portrayals in the series. Given the reciprocal dynamics between society and television, in a country where courts are still determining whether you are required to have surgery before changing the gender on your legal documents, perhaps the lack of critical inquiry should also come as no surprise.

2.6 Initial Conclusions

It would seem from these case studies, that the days of the flaming queen are behind us, in her place, most of the time, we find someone, anyone; a character who, if we didn’t see his/her partner, would read as completely straight. A few remnants of the old stereotypical depictions remain, like a penchant for foreign partners, but the effeminate
hairdresser or store clerk is no longer the only role afforded gay characters—this is not to say that these stereotypes have disappeared completely, one need only look at family comedy Tutti i padre di maria or family/workplace drama Io e mio figlio to see they are still alive and well. The only characters who struggle with their LGBT identities are generally younger (Sara in Tutti insieme all'improvviso and Nic in Una grande famiglia), but they are both just discovering or understanding their sexualities, and are hardly the psychologically unstable characters that just ten years ago Jelardi and Bassetti claimed many LGBT characters to be (126). The normalization of these characters may seem to suggest a certain level of acceptance which may be reflective of a larger societal tolerance of these minority populations, but, as I have shown, this normalization largely equates to a homonormativity that ultimately reifies the institutions that support and promote the assumed naturalness of heterosexuality. Thus, the question remains, what kinds of gayness are being normalized in these representations and who and what gets left out in the process?
Chapter 3: New Invisibilities

“It’s okay Cookie, we’re invisible here.” – Louise Bryant, Boardwalk Empire

3.1 Interpellation and Invisibilities

In Technologies of Gender, Teresa de Lauretis states that the limit of “‘sexual difference(s),’ [...] is that it constrains feminist critical thought within the conceptual frame of a universal sex opposition [...] which makes it difficult, if not impossible, to articulate the differences of women from Woman, that is to say, the differences among women or, perhaps more exactly, the differences within women” (2). This limitation proves categorical as it erases or cancels out the possibilities of investigating the particularities of each individual woman, or the differences, as de Lauretis claims, within each woman herself. Audre Lorde has furthered this point: “I find I am constantly being encouraged to pluck out some one aspect of myself and present this as the meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the other parts of myself” (120). Not only are there differences between women, differences that reflect class, race, sexual identity, religious affiliation, socio-temporal location, etc., but there are also different elements within women that create and determine social positioning each individually and as a collective. To assume any overarching classification of identity imposes limits on those placed within those categories.

The inevitable problem with identity is that for individuals, as Stuart Hall has remarked: “there is no experiencing outside of the categories of representation or ideology” (Cultural Studies 1983, 138). It is through interpellation that the subject participates in the socio-cultural world, and this interpellation makes individuals complicit in the ideologically
constructed categories in which they are placed. Thus identifying what is said and shown (as I have done in the preceding chapter) within these LGBT televisual representations would be to identify the elements that society has accepted about the categories represented by the acronym and about the social beings to whom it refers. To discuss, on the other hand, the invisibilities, or those elements that are deemed unrepresentable, or too different to be understood or accepted, is to understand the socially abject, the ideological surplus, the unspeakable. This is not to say that there is no power in this silence, in this invisibility; understanding mainstream representation of subaltern groups can help define the lines of opposition by those groups, and provide opportunities for counter-discourse brought on by the need for a representation that is not created as a reflection of “the biases and interests of those elites who define the public agenda” (Gross, 21).

Understanding these Italian televisual representations necessitates inquiry into interpellation from both ideological and semiotic perspectives, while keeping in mind that the latter is a method for understanding the language of media and the former the system through and in which the latter creates meaning. This relation does not, however, assume a hierarchy or temporality between ideology and its signs and symbols. They are indeed completely interdependent as signs provide the language through which ideology manifests and the means through which it is generated.

3.1.2 Ideology and Representations of Subjecthood

In Stuart Hall’s lecture “Ideology and Ideological Struggle” he maps out the key arguments within and critiques against Althusser’s theory of ideology. For Althusser, ideologies fix meaning, they provide the frameworks of thinking, they are the “‘ideas’ with
which people figure out how the social world works, what their place is in it, and what they ought to do with it” (Cultural Studies 1983, 131). They are the “systems of representation” that create collective understanding through repetition and social practices. Individuals become subjects within a given ideology through acts of interpellation wherein they recognize themselves in language and enter society.

Years earlier, Adorno and Horkheimer elaborated a theory of “The Culture Industry” that positioned ideology and the individual in relation to cultural modes of production and consumption in capitalist frameworks. For them, much like for Althusser, ideology is “the emphatic and systematic proclamation of what is” (118). What they make evident, which Althusser does not, is the amount of individual suppression produced by the culture industry. What happens within the process of naturalizing production and consumption is that all aesthetic production (television included) must inevitably reproduce the “real,” which is understood as the culture industry itself. Thus nothing that is produced may lie outside since the culture industry is constantly producing "new effects which yet remain bound to the old schema, becoming additional rules, merely increases the power of the tradition with which the individual effect seeks to escape” (101); this approach clearly foreshadows the contemporary convergence culture outlined in chapter one. Hence the individuals who exist within the socio-economic frame of the culture industry must identify with the system to participate in it, as “everyone amounts only to those qualities by which he or she can replace everyone else: all are fungible, mere specimens” (116). Here, Adorno and Horkheimer acknowledge the space for and existence of individual and artistic difference which will either become appropriated by or erased from the dominant ideology of the culture industry.
3.1.3 The Semiotics of Subject Representation

To be named by or within a specific structure of meaning, is to become legible as a signifier within a chain of signification. This naming is what interpellates the subject and lends it visibility and legibility. Naming is always inevitably a framing, a containment, a limitation, one that, as I have said, may not be completely representative of the individual’s own complex understanding of selfhood (in all its multiplicity). The subject, as Judith Butler notes, “is constituted (interpellated) in language through a selective process in which the terms of legible and intelligible subjecthood are regulated” (*Excitable Speech*, 41). Each naming is an act that has been confined by the historical repetition which created its signification. The individual thus comes into “being” through linguistic recognition that is controlled and contained through social rituals (26). This act of social ritual, to continue with Butler, “is material to the extent that it is productive, that is, it produces the belief that appears to be ‘behind’ it” (25). We must not limit semiotics to investigations of written and oral language, but rather use it in our understanding of visual and televisual representation—which creates meaning through the combination of visual and linguistic signification. In this way television becomes one of the generators and perpetuators of meaning through repetitive, ritual representations. For our purposes, then, the visual and linguistic representation of LGBT people produced by television ostensibly creates and confines the meaning of the categories within the LGBT acronym.

The problem with the creation and repetition of these dominant ideologies through television is that these semiological systems of communication that mark an individual’s entrance into the social, cannot simultaneously account for all of the selves within the
individual. In other words, an individual may not be able speak from a position of sex, gender, race, and class all at once, and may not necessarily position all her, his, or their identities within the same ideological and discursive frame. In *Excitable Speech*, Butler brings this to light by asking: “And what if one were to compile all the names that one has ever been called? Would they not present a quandary for identity? Would some of them cancel the effect of others? Would one find oneself fundamentally dependent on a competing array of names to derive a sense of oneself?” (30).

3.1.4 Televisual Invisibilities, a Semiological Approach

We must understand televisual texts, their language, and visual representations, as semiological signs that are enjoyable to audiences because they are legible. To mark the invisibilities within these televisual signs of signification is to understand the limits of representation within dominant media discourse as dictated by the larger ideologies at play within society. By comprehending what is spoken/shown, and what cannot be or is not, we may gain insight into the ways that Italian society understands and talks about the category of people represented by the LGBTQIA acronym.

Many television scholars such as Larry Gross, and later Jane Arthurs, have discussed the relationship between the social structures that perpetuate dominant ideologies, and minority groups, specifically within the televisual context. To use Arthurs’ words, as she speaks specifically with regard to sexuality: “It is not the case that discourse about sexuality merely describes a pre-existing thing; instead, it is constructed through the very discourses that seek to study, describe and regulate it” (6). Villarejo pushes the discussion further in *Lesbian Rule* by noting that visibility inevitably covers “over the workings of
value that make appearance possible” (25). The social values that create and regulate sexuality (and gender) result in a kind of televisual visibility of LGBTQIA people that lacks mobility, it renders the representation static, which fixes homosexuality and gender variance according to terms of normative acceptability, or, as has historically been the case in Italy, extreme deviancy.

3.1.5 Sutures, Space-Offs, and Closets

When it comes to media representation, viewer identification with an image, character, or program, as has been argued at length for cinema, relies heavily on acts of editing and camera framing that work to erase the frames, camera, and external technologies needed to create the images and narratives. This is what Kaja Silverman and others have referred to as the cinematic “suture.” As she notes: “The operation of suture is successful at the moment that the viewing subject says, ‘yes, that’s me,’ or ‘that’s what I see’” (205). Cinematic or televisual representation is a specific iteration of subject interpellation that establishes identity and enjoyment through processes of ideological integration.

The “space-off,” to use Teresa de Lauretis’ term—whatever is left outside the frame, including the camera and the viewer—must remain invisible for these stories and structures to work (see Technologies of Gender). Silverman confirms this by speaking of the “multiple cuts and negations” required for narrative coherence to function (205). The narrative coherence required for viewer identification mirrors identity coherence in the act of naming in that both require cuts and negations; cuts and negations that render certain elements of LGBTQIA culture and identities invisible on Italian television. Here we may
draw some direct connections with the homosexual notion of the closet. The act of coming out of the closet is a performative speech act, and as Eve Sedgwick notes in her seminal work *Epistemology of the Closet*: “‘Closetedness’ itself is a performance initiated as such by the speech act of silence – not a particular silence, but a silence that accrues particularity by fits and starts, in relation to the discourse that surrounds and differentially constitutes it” (3). Given the presumed heterosexuality of individuals in Italian and Western societies, to remain silent is to remain in the closet. Invisibility, or the partial invisibility of specific aspects of queerness or LGBTQIA embodiment and subjecthood on television is the visual semiological equivalent to verbal silence, and as such what is not represented on these television programs remains closeted by the televisual structures that created these representations. These closets, these invisibilities are powerful precisely because of the ignorance they exhibit and perpetuate into society, to use Sedgwick’s words, “the fact that silence is rendered as pointed and performative as speech, in relations around the closet, depends on and highlights more broadly the fact that ignorance is as potent and as multiple a thing there as is knowledge (4).

3.2 Case Studies of Invisibility, an Introduction

To talk about the societal ignorance showcased by the silences in these televisual representations of LGBT people seems like an occasion to air grievances about all the people, traits, and moments that are not depicted. The vocalization of these invisibilities would prove not only exceptionally cathartic, but also serve as a space to render visible, if only paratextually, these mainstream erasures. That being said, the list that would follow would inevitably be inexhaustible, as there are as many of not more types of LGBTQIA
representations are there are people identifying with those categories. This would result in extreme repetition from one case study to the next, as questions like “where are the people of color?” could be posed in relation to nearly all the programs under investigation, and it would perhaps more importantly end up creating and reifying the invisibilities that were not discussed, essentially falling prey to the criticisms the chapter itself poses against these programs and the networks and social structures behind them.

Instead, this chapter will evidence those invisibilities not allowed within the frameworks of the lives and “lifestyles” of the characters depicted. In other words, without questioning the kinds of characters or their general narrative storylines, we will explore what does not get depicted or vocalized within these portrayals. In this way this chapter serves as a space to understand the parts of queerness or LGBTQ culture that are deemed unacceptable or un-presentable so that we may better understand the boundaries of semiotic understanding and their necessary implications for dominant Italian socio-cultural ideologies.

These mini case studies—which follow the categorical divisions created in the previous chapter—take as their theoretical base Hall’s elaboration of identity as being formed by and within representation. They acknowledge representation as being subject, as Althusser would have it, to the ideologies that create legibility. During acts of close reading within these televisual investigations I use Butler’s elaboration of the limits of naming in order to contextualize the invisible, which is understood as that which is relegated to the space-off (de Lauretis), in a social act of closeting (Sedgwick). The goal, which necessarily grounds itself in Adorno and Horkheimer’s idea of individual suppression, is to render the invisible visible by naming it. This will allow viewers access or
agency to queer their lenses of understanding, as we shall see in the following two chapters.

3.3 Family Comedies

3.3.1 *Tutti pazzi per amore*

In exploring the erasures in the gay representations of Riccardo and Peter on *Tutti pazzi per amore* it seems relevant to reiterate Samuel A. Chambers’ remarks in *The Queer Politics of Television*: “heteronormativity accrues privilege to those behaviours, practices, and relationships that more closely approximate the norm, while stigmatising, marginalising, or perhaps rendering invisible the behaviours, relationships, and practices that deviate from the norm” (66). We must not forget, as well, that RAI 1, despite trends toward younger audiences, maintains a broad generalized audience and there is a certain need to protect viewers from things that might make them uncomfortable and therefore stop watching. This censorship exists not only on an industrial level but has an influence on spectators as well; the idea of “third-person perception,” namely, viewers’ ideas of how other viewers might perceive content, has been shown to have a significant effect on the viewers and their watching practices (Malici “Queer TV Moments,” 191).

Given these tendencies, it should come as no surprise that there is a complete lack of intimacy between Laura’s ex-husband Riccardo and his American boyfriend Peter. When Peter comes to Rome and audiences first meet him, his appearance is in no way visibly marked by his gayness, and there are no physical displays of affection between Riccardo and him that would signal to the audience that theirs is anything more than a friendship. In fact, their generic hug is very quickly verbally countered by Peter’s remark that having a
gay dad is a problem in Italy, and thus, Peter’s existence and his arrival will become problematic (“L’anno che verrà”). Furthermore, the couple is almost never seen together in their home, marking a clear difference between Riccardo and Peter and the representation of Valeria and Rita we see in È arrivata la felicità; a difference that might be explained by social expectations of gender. Valeria and Rita, two women, use their combined femininity to build their home and family, while the same is not expected or deemed possible for Peter and Riccardo. Their denied domesticity seems to increase the likelihood that the couple will not engage in any sexual activity, or at least not with one another. In fact, Laura, Riccardo’s ex is seen spending more time in Riccardo’s new apartment than his partner Peter. Thus perhaps it is no surprise that the only sex that either character has is when Riccardo and Laura get together. Riccardo and Laura’s sexual encounter creates a landslide of emotional conflict and drama. While the event is quite surprising, it is understandable that these two characters who were married and had two children could have a moment of sexual intimacy even after they separated. What remains however is the linguistic signifier of Riccardo’s sexual identity with no clear signified. The series of episodes that deal with Riccardo’s coming out present the linguistic task as an extremely difficult one, but the emphasis on the difference that this linguistic signifier represents remains without a referent. Jane Arthurs, speaking of Judith Butler’s speech act theory notes that codes of language and other forms of communication work “by repetition to construct the very thing that they name” (17); if this is true, what is the gayness being represented here? The only thing that makes Riccardo gay is that he says he is, all his other actions position him as a figure to be desired by women (both on screen and off); as evidenced by the fact that when the women on the show speak of Riccardo they continually mention his good looks and
how well he understands women. Despite, (or because of?) his gayness Riccardo remains a heterosexual object of desire. Just as Katherine Sender has argued when speaking of Bravo's gay programming, shows can market gay content toward heterosexual women by “carefully regulated manifestations of gay masculinities” (310). Their good taste and sensitivity make them ideal partners, and if presented as they are here, they remain potentially attainable for straight women.

We are presented with one verbal depiction of the sex-acts that represent Riccardo's sexuality though it comes not from Riccardo himself, but from his son Emanuele. When Emanuele talks to Paolo about his difficulty accepting the news that his father is gay (before Emanuele’s physical aggression) he asks Paolo to close his eyes and imagine his own father kissing another man on the mouth with tongue. The two heterosexual men then share a moment of mutual disgust. The only representation of the physicality of Riccardo’s gayness is presented by two straight male protagonists, one of whom voices his complete lack of understanding of homosexuality (Paolo) and the other of whom shortly thereafter turns his disgust into an act of physical violence (“Inevitabile follia”). Though there are no visual depictions or even innuendos that would lead the viewer to understand that the couple does have a sexual relationship, the social understanding of its very idea is defined by the heterosexual characters; a fact which mirrors the ways that the dominant majority functions to linguistically and thus ideologically reinforce the power of the heterosexual norm.

The erasure of Riccardo and Peter's intimacy, and the negative (and exclusively verbal) representation of the physicality of sexual orientation marks difference as a point of contention and removes Riccardo's agency in defining his own minority identity which
is, instead, created and judged by the heterosexual majority. In the third season of *Tutti pazzi per amore*, as we will explore in the next section, this normalization through invisibility of difference proves more subtle.

3.3.2 *Tutti pazzi per amore* 3

In the previous chapter we noted that lesbians Eva and Roberta are allowed—thanks to assumed desires of heterosexual male audiences—a certain level of sexuality that Riccardo and Peter are not afforded. Their sexual expression is, however, thwarted and visually substituted with sexually explicit actions between straight characters. This substitution is best evidenced during Eva’s musical fantasy scene set to Phoebe Cates’ “Paradise.” The scene recreates Paolo’s memory of Claudia as a “snow queen,” in a fake snowy scenario where Eva, dressed in ski attire, watches as Claudia slowly and sensually sings while taking off her gloves and seducing Eva. Not only is Eva’s pleasure positioned within the structures of heterosexual desire (literally Paolo’s desire and experience as recounted to her by him), but in her own sexual fantasy she is denied the ability to act on her desire. During the “Paradise” sequence the viewer is shown two heterosexual couples who, replacing Eva, are allowed to much more explicitly elaborate her striptease fantasy (“Venerdì, 23 dicembre”). This same-sex sexual act, or rather the visual representation of the desire for that act, is pushed beyond the limits of the screen to de Laurentis’ “space-off,” namely, “the space not visible in the frame but inferable from what the frame makes visible,” “the elsewhere” (*Technologies of Gender* 26). Thus not only is her sexuality equated with that of her hetero counterparts, it is very obviously halted pre-striptease while the other characters are allowed to “go all the way.” The “likening” of lesbian and straight love
through interchangeable acts and desires can only be presented if fulfillment of such desires are defined using heterosexual bodies. Compared to the first season of the show, in which no same-sex sexuality is presented at all, Eva’s sexuality—which ends up compromising her relationship with Roberta—seems to establish lesbianism as more dynamic. But if this sexuality is constantly being visually substituted with heterosexuals who are allowed to enact Eva’s desires, is this actually a representation of lesbian desire?

Similar to Riccardo and Peter, Eva and Roberta have no home life. When Eva and Roberta initially split up because of Eva’s infatuation with Claudia, Roberta goes to Eva’s work and drops off several suitcases filled with her things, remarking that these are the things Eva had at her house (“Lunedì, 26 dicembre”). This could very well be an expression of the fact that Roberta has kicked Eva out of the house and is taking complete possession of it. The situation remains ambiguous, however, and we do not fully understand if the couple cohabitates or not until the final episodes when Roberta’s parents come to town. Speaking to Paolo about her problems with the fact that Roberta has not come out to her parents, Eva remarks that when they come to town the couple pretend to be roommates and separate their bed into two single beds (“ Giovedì, 29 dicembre”). Their home life, which spectators never get the privilege of seeing, remains solely a site for moving out or moving furniture. Their domesticity is dictated, just like their external expressions of affection, by the actions and expectations of those outside their relationship. Time and again within the show the domestic space serves as a visual representation of the inter-social dynamics of the characters living within those quarters. We may thus consider the constant negative renegotiation of their domestic space synecdoche for the problems with
lesbian relationships more generally, and the external factors that define their relationship reflective of the limits of linguistic and ideological representation of this minority group.

Eva and Roberta’s relationship provides Italian television viewers another depiction of (male pleasing) femme-love within the safe confines of the normative expectations of the show’s presumed audiences, despite evidence that such spectators are significantly younger and more “open” than typical national television audiences (“Anche l’amore lesbico in tutti pazzi per amore 3”).

3.3.3 È arrivata la felicità

Much like Modern Family to which it is often compared, È arrivata la felicità shows us a small fraction of a population (white, middle class) within the confines of a narrow frame (family, work, home). This limited view is made even more narrow given the normalization strategies in place that render the lesbian storyline more palatable to mainstream Italian audiences. In order for the “sameness argument”—namely the liberal tendency to equate all gay love to all straight love, which scholars like Doran have called “equality as sameness” (98)—to work, all difference between heterosexuals and homosexuals must be erased. In the previous chapter we discussed the ways in which Valeria and Rita are normalized through their desires, their homodomesticity, and their ability to conform to normative models of femininity. Their conforming to the social ideals of monogamy and femininity establish visual and narrative signs of similarity with their straight counterparts. Erasures are however necessary in order to create the “seamlessness” of this narrative similarity, the most evident of which being sexual desire exhibited through sexual expression. Valeria and Rita, the show’s lesbian couple, are seen
kissing on a number of occasions, but their intimacy ends there. Viewers may justify this lack of sexual expression because Valeria is pregnant, but in light of the representations of intimacy of the other heterosexual couples—Pietro’s constant animalistic advances toward Nunzia, his sexual role-playing with Cristiana, and even teenage Umberto’s sexual encounters with both twins Laura and Bea—the lack of anything but closed mouth kisses renders Valeria and Rita’s relationship little more than a homo-affective one. In order to create a semblance of sameness, *È arrivata la felicità* ends up actually creating a clear difference; straight couples are sexual and lesbian couples are not. Lesbian signification, to remain palatable and legible to presumed straight spectators must be stripped of sexuality, and while this seems to increase the similarity between lesbians and heterosexual couples, this legibility creates a different kind of difference between these couples, one that is less socially provocative.

The other seemingly intentional invisibility in the program is one that once again seeks to create similarity, this time of lifestyle. In these family programs it is not uncommon for LGBT characters to be portrayed as isolated, or not belonging to any kind of community. So given this, and in light of the fact that none of the other characters seem to have any friends outside the workplace, it may not appear significant that Valeria and Rita do not have any friends, or know any other LGBTQIA people. What renders this lack of community more striking is that Valeria herself is the one to negate any possible connection between the couple and other LGBTQIA people. When she and her sister Angelica attend a birthing class, the other women in the class want to know where Valeria and Rita met, asking if they had met at a gay bar, but Valeria is all too quick to assure them that they met at work ("Quando non capivo cosa avessi"). This swift dismissal reads as a
rejection of the notion that the couple could possibly participate in a larger LGBTQIA community. Furthermore, at the beginning of this narrative sequence, when Valeria enters the class with her sister Angelica and not her partner Rita, the entire class stops and silently stares at them. Valeria reassures the group that this is her sister and that everything is fine between herself and Rita, putting the minds of the rest of the (otherwise straight) class at ease (“Quando non capivo cosa avessi”). Here, in a more subtle gesture, we are presented with the possibility that other lesbians might exist and that Valeria could potentially be with one of them (albeit in a normative monogamous way). In these circumstances it is always Valeria to reassure the characters and the viewers that she maintains no connection to any outside communities, and having found her partner Rita at work and not because she was out looking, she secures her hetero-similarity and homodomesticity through this negation.

The difference between these two invisibilities within the program, namely the lack of sexuality and the lack of community, however, is that the former created a new kind of difference between straight and gay characters while the latter is a trait common to both. What this distinction makes clear is that difference between LGBTQ people and heterosexual and gender conforming people is okay as long as it is in the service of placating the assumed audience majority (namely heterosexual spectators). As we shall see these two invisibilities formulate the dominant limits of LGBTQ televisual discourse, as evidenced in the case studies that follow. What we must keep in mind is that the constant sexlessness of LGBT characters works semiotically to redraw the lines of social signification for these peoples. Thus the categories Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender, will be used
to signify groups of people whose sexual identities (in terms of the LG and B) are based on desires that cannot be rendered legible or visible.

3.3.4 *Tutti insieme all’improvviso*

Continuing along the lines of representations of expression of homosexual physical desire discussed above, we must reflect on the visibility of lesbian character Sara’s sexual identity. As we know, Sara’s kisses are accepted by the other characters on the program with the understanding that they were carried out in jest. The remainder of the visual representations of her sexuality is reduced to homo-affective actions—a stroke of the hair, a hug, lying side by side on the bed—leaving further sexual expression to the confines of Sara’s imagination and writing. This too, however, stops short of anything explicit as her dreams and blog express her desire without going into details of what expressions of this desire might entail. Imagining that Federica takes Luca’s place during their sexual encounter, Sara’s imagination provides spectators with a visual one-to-one substitution that immediately equates straight and gay sex. For lesbian sex to be legible it must be understood in straight terms, and as such these visual depictions of her imagination are limited to initial gestures of affection and seduction (“Riunione di volpi... strage di galline”).

The largest instance of erasure or emission is not, however, related to the physicality of Sara’s sexuality. The program is filled with double entendres that allow the characters to speak about Sara’s sexuality without actually saying anything at all. To give a few examples: Right after Sara is outed to Federica, the two of them are at Federica’s work discussing their different jobs, and Federica remarks: “we have different tastes” (“La scimmia ruba perché non lavora”). Later in that same episode after everyone discovers
Sara is pregnant, Walter, expressing his surprise, says: “What do you mean she’s pregnant? That’s impossible, Sara is [pause] she’s young” (“La scimmia ruba perché non lavora”). Filling the dialogue with these double meanings can make viewers feel connected or complicit, as they are able to read both denotative and connotative messages. This connotative level, which ultimately casts homosexuality beyond the boundary of utterability, is understood precisely because it is supported by the heteronormative ideology that has created the coded language in the first place.

Using Stuart Hall’s elaboration of the ways that viewers decode televisual messages, we might say that the audience’s understanding of these double entendres still positions them as “dominant decoders.” The “preferred readings” of these encoded messages include both connotative and denotative levels of understanding since “the domains of ‘preferred meanings’ have the whole social order embedded in them as a set of meanings, practices and beliefs” (“Encoding/Decoding,” 134). Thus, these codes of dominance “connect events, implicitly or explicitly, to grand totalizations, to the great syntagmatic views-of-the-world” (137). What we have here are a series of messages that refer to Sara’s sexuality without ever having to speak of it, and audiences, operating within the dominant methods of interpretation, perpetuate the acceptability of this silencing within the hegemonic modes of discourse since “the audience is both the ‘source’ and the ‘receiver’ of the television message” (130). If we know that homosexuality exists but we must speak of it through connotation and never outright, what can “lesbian” as a signifier actually signify?

The use of these connotative codes assumes a heterosexual audience and often the meanings implied by these codes include social judgment of the subject or topic of discussion. For example, Mamy, allegedly referring to the pastries at the bar where
Federica has asked Sara to go for breakfast, remarks, “that girl is leading her [Sara] astray” (“Riunione di volpi... strage di galline”). Here we have a parallel between the “off the normative path” nature of Sara’s lesbianism, which can be read in Mamy’s sentence, and the closeted, “outside of language” positioning of lesbianism by these connotative codes. In this way homosexuality is both unspeakable and “not the right path,” a parallel that actively mirrors the larger acts of ideology as shaping the languages of its interpellated subjects.

Sara herself is complicit in the use of these double entendres, as she, when speaking about her desire to start writing, says “I don’t want to hide anymore,” a clear reference to her desire to come out of the closet (“Riunione di volpi... strage di galline”). LGBTQIA audiences, positioned outside of legibility and utterability by these connotative codes, are given a glimmer of hope in Sara’s writing, however. Deciding to write, for Sara, is a decision to come out of the closet, to map out the language of her sexual identity in a way that allows her to define her own homosexuality within the frame of socio-cultural discourse. Judith Butler, in Excitable Speech explains that, “it is by being interpellated within the terms of language that a certain social existence of the body first becomes possible” (5). Thus in naming herself, in exploring her sexuality through language, she not only renders herself legible, but in some ways is allowed agency to define this legibility. The drawback of such intelligibility through linguistic interpellation is that Sara must adhere to terms that allow her to be recognized. As Butler explains, “the terms that facilitate recognition are themselves conventional, the effects and instruments of a social ritual that decide, often through exclusion and violence, the linguistic conditions of survivable subjects” (5). Sara begins to enter the realm of social legibility, a legibility that, as we saw in the preceding
chapter, goes hand in hand, however, with the normativity (read: acceptability) of her character.

3.4 Family Dramas

3.4.1 Le cose che restano

This Italian miniseries has been used as an example in the argument that Italians have a greater cultural understanding and acceptance of the LGBT community than ever before; no longer confined to certain roles, careers and physical traits, gays can be anywhere and anyone in reality and on television. Through this strong desire to portray the LGBT identified population as “normal” this show, like the family comedies explored above, presents an irreality that closets the differences between a heterosexual’s daily life and an LGBT person’s daily life. The hiding of these differences makes the distinctions themselves appear negative. In November 2009 the Ministro per le Pari Opportunità (The Equal Opportunities Secretary) Mara Carfagna released an anti-homophobia public service announcement (PSA) that we may look at as an example of these socially and politically perpetuated strategies of negating difference. The PSA shows an ambulance driver taking a woman to the hospital. The voiceover asks the audience whether it matters if the driver is homosexual or not, and ends with two striking sentences that serve to bring its message home “In life, certain differences can’t matter. Reject homophobia, don’t be the one who is different” (Associazione Trans Genere). Even in an attempt to stop homophobic acts, the message ultimately reinforces the negative connotations associated with difference. If difference makes people lesser than or weaker and the liberal factions of Italian society are
pushing to make gays seem “normal” and equal, this difference must be erased. In *Le cose che restano* these erasures, however, often perpetuate old stereotypes by taking for granted specific cultural connections that allow for understanding. The reliance on connotative codes to create narrative legibility however is a reliance on codes that sustain the negativity of LGBT difference.

In the previous chapter I talked about Michel as a transgressive figure in this miniseries, and I discussed the silence surrounding his sickness and death. Spectators never learn what is killing him, but we intuit he is dying of AIDS based on his sexual encounter with a drug addict and his homosexuality. The silence, which in some way aligns spectators with Andrea’s ignorance in regard to his partner’s pending death, fortifies the assumptions that drug addicts and homosexual men both die of AIDS. In this instance the lack of transparency regarding Michel’s illness narrative ultimately reinforces the stereotypes associated with these groups and perpetuates negative social perception.

The silence surrounding Michel’s sickness goes hand in hand with another resounding silence in the miniseries: though there are two gay protagonists in the program no one ever mentions the word “gay.” In fact, the only time we hear it spoken is when Nino jokes with his friend Valentina that her boyfriend might be gay because he is taking a boat trip with some male friends. For a show that presents itself as forward thinking in its characterization of gays, it is peculiar that the words “gay” or “homosexual” are not even mentioned when Nino finally discovers that Andrea is a homosexual and they have a conversation in which Andrea comes out to him. This silence seems to serve an opposite function with respect to the silences within the illness narrative. We are not faced with an
assumption that needs no words because everyone knows what gays and drug addicts die of, instead, we have a normalizing erasure that reifies Andrea’s similarity to everyone else.

In showing how “normal” these gay men are, the show hides or obscures the very differences that make them gay. Using words like gay, queer, and homosexual are important parts of being gay, queer, or homosexual. This linguistic erasure aids in normalizing Michel and Andrea. However, eliminating this language from the representation of these populations is akin to a partial closeting of these characters. They avoid a language of representation that establishes the differences in hetero and homosexual people; differences that are fundamental to the day-to-day embodiment of LGBTQIA identities, and that require constant public linguistic acknowledgment. As Eve Sedgwick states: “the deadly elasticity of heterosexist presumption means that [...] people find new walls springing up around them even as they drouse [...] Even an out gay person deals daily with interlocutors about whom she doesn’t know whether they know or not” (68). It is this speech act, this continual outing, that renders a person legible as gay, and to not speak this gayness is to fall prey to “heterosexist presumptions” that perhaps, through invisibility, render these characters more palatable to straight audiences.

As with the other programs analyzed to this point, Le cose che restano denies its gay characters proximity to both gay communities and gay bodies. While, obviously, issues of censorship may have prohibited the writers and directors from crossing too many boundaries in this regard, as with Tutti pazzi per amore and È arrivata la felicità the absence of any sexual content or physical relationship between Andrea and Michel appears even greater in the face of the other instances of sexual explicitness within the program. To give just one example, Nino ends up falling for his professor Nicolai’s wife Francesca. A
drunken kiss one night turns into a sexually explicit affair. Despite the extramarital nature of their passions, viewers bear witness to the adulterous couple’s impassioned first sexual encounter in an unfinished museum ("Episode 2"). In contrast, when Andrea must go away on business for twenty days and Michel knows that he is so sick that this is probably the last time they will see one another, their goodbye is reduced to a strong hug and a near, side-of-the mouth kiss ("Episode 3"). Such displays of platonic affection, while possibly justified by the writers for censorship reasons, read as a stifling of non-heteronormative sexual desire. Viewer satisfaction is one of empathy, which requires that this depiction be completely devoid of sexuality. By blocking out the social and sexual elements of gay life, Andrea and Michel are reduced to the aspects of their lives, which are not socially or morally uncomfortable. This reduction proves even more evident, in light of the more explicit depictions of the other characters; thus, this erasure of difference to facilitate viewer pleasure and normative similarity ultimately creates the difference it seeks to erase.

3.4.2 *Una grande famiglia*

What remains invisible within increased LGBT visibility often fragments these portrayals in an effort to “normalize” the characters, to emphasize similarities at the expense of differences in order to create heteronormative viewer tolerance at the expense of queer viewer identification. This multiple season miniseries family drama proves no different in this regard. Looking at Nic and Davide’s intense short-lived, solitary relationship, once again, it is the heterosexual couples that fill in the blanks for all that is missing in their representation. When Nicolò and Davide go on a date at the end of the first
season, the editing and extended non-diegetic romantic music pair the two with Nic’s straight teenage cousin Valentina and her boyfriend Pierluigi, their mirrored kissing putting them on the same romantic plane. They are two teenagers experiencing love for the first time, and both aid each other’s efforts to see their respective partners, and discuss their feelings to one another. In the subsequent episode this parallelism is reinforced when Nic and Davide are eating dinner: after a moment of very intimate eye contact, Davide takes Nic’s hand and they walk off screen together. The music links their unseen sexual act with the next scene of Valeria and Pierluigi kissing in front of his house (“Season 1 Episode 6”).

The similarities in representation and sentiment however end there. Davide and Nic’s sexual relationship is left to the viewer’s imagination, cast to the invisible sphere of the space-off. The romance between Valeria and Pierluigi, however, makes it all the way to the bedroom. Both cousins lose their virginity to these lovers, but the event “that we will remember forever” belongs to fifteen-year-old Valentina, whose relationship gets consummated right when Nic’s begins to crumbled. The scene, complete with candles and romantic music gives viewers an extended (though not complete) view of Valentina’s first time (“Season 2 Episode 7”).

In a show whose title makes explicitly clear the focus of the main narrative plots, it is no surprise that the sense of community is one that centers on family. Davide, however, remains completely outside of Nic’s family circle, an absence that is striking given the closeness of their family and their acceptance or attempts at acceptance of Nic’s homosexuality. Pierluigi, Valentina’s boyfriend gets invited to dinner at the Rengoni house and becomes a welcome addition to the family while Davide is never given that same privilege and even seems to reject the idea on the grounds of decency. When Nicolò’s aunt,
Nicoletta, is getting married and Nic asks Davide to accompany him, Davide says Nicolò is just trying to rub their relationship in his mother’s face and there is nothing to show off. Nic then apologizes saying that he was selfish even asking Davide to accompany him (“Season 2 Episode 5”). With Pierluigi and even Laura’s (Nic’s mother’s) new love interest Leonardo (albeit by accident) invited to the wedding, this choice to deem Davide’s participation absurd ultimately casts their relationship outside the boundaries of the family. Not only does Davide never enter the family community, the couple is always alone; they live a solitary, brief relationship that includes neither a family community nor any LGBTQ community. Indeed, the only gay community of which Davide is a part is the online gay sex community the ends up ruining their relationship, in a narrative move similar to the one in Grace & Frankie wherein Sol and Robert’s relationship is nearly destroyed because of gay sex that takes place outside the relationship.

3.5 American Gay Invisibilities

3.5.1 Grace & Frankie

We have, thus far, seen no sign of significant sexual expression on the queer horizon, and though Grace & Frankie airs not on network television, but on Netflix, it is no exception. It seems as though we meet Sol and Robert after their sexual peak, and 20 years into their relationship they clearly verbalize that theirs is not lust, but love (“The Earthquake”). What the audience has access to, instead, is a kind of care and nurturing, as clearly evidenced in the first episode when, immediately after Sol and Robert kiss, Robert says “Now, eat your vegetables” (“The End”).
In the previous chapter I discuss the fact that Grace and Frankie are the two main agents of viewer identification. The suffering they endure after learning about their ex-husbands’ homosexual affair provides the overarching lens through which the narrative is presented. It comes as no surprise, then, that the sexual acts of Sol and Robert are likewise presented to the audience predominantly through the eyes of Grace and Frankie. Sol and Robert are afforded the agency to describe their kissing, but other acts of sexual expression are linguistically provided to audiences by their straight family members. In keeping with the narrative of suffering created by their homosexuality, Grace and Frankie frame the terms of their exes’ homosexual sex in explicitly negative terms. For example, Frankie and Grace go to the store to buy cigarettes and Frankie mentions that Sol would never let her smoke because he was always judging what she put in her mouth. She then turns to the shop clerk and, making a hand gesture that alludes to oral sex, continues, “the whole time they were doing blow jobs” (“The End”). What we are presented with is Frankie’s direct correlation between the cancerous act of smoking a cigarette and oral sex between two homosexual men; they are both disgusting, and they will both kill you—perhaps a subtle nod to the lack of futurity inherent in gay sex, or to the social connection between these sex acts and AIDS. The same sentiment of disgust is given by Coyote, Sol’s son, upon hearing the news of his father and Robert’s relationship. At first Coyote brings up Sol’s flamboyance: “You’ve always had a big personality, but I never thought...” and he continues, “I don’t see it. Oh god, now I see it. I can’t stop seeing it” (“The End”). This subtle but problematic series of remarks reflects increasing levels of disgust as a discussion of personality quickly becomes a discussion about sex. In between Coyote’s “I don’t see it” and his “Oh god, now I see it” the subject of the conversation switches to sex, a shift that creates a problematic
correlation between personality and sexuality, while positioning one (his personality) as acceptable, and the other (sexuality) as unacceptable. So while audiences are allowed no first hand knowledge or visual representation of the gay couple’s sexuality, we are left with two very concrete (and problematic) negative linguistic associations.

Serving as visual synecdoche for the show’s active negation of and disgust for the sexuality of homosexuality, Grace grabs a chair with Ryan Gosling’s face on it that Robert has ordered. Taking the chair as she leaves Robert’s office, Grace remarks: “If anybody is going to sit on Ryan Gosling’s face, it’s going to be me!” (“The End”). Grace, the suffering heterosexual object of viewer identification strips Robert of his sexual expression, while keeping hers active and secure, and indeed the last shot of the episode shows Grace sitting on Ryan Gosling (the chair).

Stripped of their sexuality the gay couple remain linguistic signifiers with no visual referent for signification, but even their position as gay signifiers is placed on shaky ground by the couple themselves. Throughout the first season Sol and Robert openly discuss their difficulty in labeling one another, not knowing how to express their relationship to the outside world. The issue becomes one of legibility, how to linguistically convey their relationship in a way that would satisfy their own self-representation but also be clear to others. During the conversation each one tosses out various possibilities: boyfriend, long-time companion, “friend,” and soul mate, but each time the signifier is rejected. The scene ends without a decision when the couple goes to their friend’s funeral, viewers experience a certain level of lighthearted unease as Sol, attempting to explain their relationship, declares: “We are homosexual law and bed partners for life” (“The Funeral”). Meant as a moment of humor, their lack of linguistic certainty reinforces the couple’s unintelligibility.
Not only are they stripped of sexuality, but by rejecting the language that would name their relationship, the couple is cast outside the boundaries of signification.

3.5.2 *Transparent*

Depicting the only transgender main character and secondary transgender characters of color, *Transparent* most certainly expands the range of visibility on Italian television. Likewise, the kinds of communities highlighted, and the number of sexually explicit LGBTQ moments also mark the show's separation from the programs investigated above, as the invisibilities previously discussed become central narrative elements for *Transparent*. These clear distinctions, however, must not be used to justify or dismiss the erasures of the program, instead, we must note the differences in semiotic invisibilities that are particular to this instance and use them in conjunction with the erasures that up to this point have been rather repetitive. It is as a collective that they may be used to map out the frames of understanding that are being ideologically and semiotically created and perpetuated by these programs.

Beginning with sexual identity and its visual iterations, audiences are shown both butch and femme presenting women that are seen in relationships with women. Tammy and her ex-partner Barb both present as masculine of center—namely they are more masculine leaning in their appearance—and viewers might infer they are lesbians since we never see or hear of them with men. Without the verbal confirmation of their sexual identities we are left to make assumptions based on what is visible to us. This creates a direct silent connection between butchness and lesbianism. It is perhaps not a coincidence therefore, that after Ali cuts off all her hair she both has sex with a trans-man and her
friend Syd confesses her love for her. The other characters that appear more femme are all seen having relationships with both men and women. This would seem to be a kind of push back against the need for sexual identity labels, and allows for the possibility of a certain level of sexual fluidity. At the same time this lack of linguistic specificity ends up muddling the differences between identities denoting sexual orientation and those based on gender. Or perhaps more appropriately, in emphasizing gender identity and refusing linguistic acknowledgment of identities based on sexual orientation the show ultimately erases the latter. At the community center talent show, Josh’s remark that “Four out of five Pfeffermans prefer pussy,” actively positions sexuality as shiftable preference (“Symbolic Exemplar”). In contrast, labels of sexual orientation are used by Maura as slurs, such as when she yells “Turn it down, you faggots,” when vocalizing her discontent at the loudness of her neighbors who are having a party (“Moppa”). Sexual identity is thus either left up to viewer intuition based on what we have visible access to, or it is used in a derogatory way.

The transgender depictions on the program are presented to audiences through Maura as she begins her initial transition. Tracing her narrative back through flashbacks and her own memories, her womanhood and her trans identity are presented as embodied narratives. For Maura, very much in keeping with Jay Prosser’s theoretical investigations into transgenderism: “gender is not so much undone as queerness would have it as redone” (488). This approach stresses an essentialism within the transgender experience that positions it against queerness, which, Prosser argues, “celebrates unbelonging” (486). Maura must learn to perform the femininity of her gender, all the while making a claim for the genetic, biological foundations at the root of her transgenderism. If there are no other outwardly expressed positions on identity (based either on gender or sexual orientation),
the viewer is not being asked to frame Maura’s understanding within a larger community of ideas surrounding theoretical approaches to queer theory or transgender theory. There are depictions of the sociality of gender expression, as evidenced by Divina’s attempts to help Maura walk more femininely and cross her legs. The sociality remains, however, the outward, socially accepted manifestation of a gender based on biology. This eliminates the space for alternative approaches that are actively part of trans communities; approaches that position transgenderism alongside queerness and homosexuality, especially in relation to hegemonic heteronormative social paradigms. I am talking about theories like those posited by Susan Stryker who has understood transgender theory as providing an alternative mode of embodiment that challenges normative space and authority and likewise serves as a productive locus for uniting various social justice struggles (155; 149).

Erasing discussions of sexual orientation, and not providing perspectives other than Maura’s biologically essentialist stance on transgenderism, these alternatives, and the complications and the potential social and political implications of their existence are rendered invisible. We are presented with one unchallenged version of transgenderism’s relationship to lesbian, gay, and queer identities. Sexuality remains fluid and potentially unfixed, and transgenderism is recognized as embodied biology that becomes legible through the performance of that gender. Without any alternative views, these approaches to transgenderism and sexual identity are taken for granted and solidified as truths.

3.6 The Social Implications of Semiotic Invisibilities
The restrictive ways that television represents the LGBTQIA category not only erase the differences between queers and between various identities within the queerness of individuals (their class, race, and gender identity for example), they also erase the differences between straight or heterosexual identified people and LGBTQIA identified people in an effort to “naturalize” sexual and gender variance and render these depictions more “palatable” to mainstream audiences. While same-sex sexual desire is often presented, as I have mentioned, through the straight-male lens—especially in the case of lesbian desire—it is depicted as equal to that of heterosexual desire. In order for this correspondence to function, same-sex sex acts are often pushed beyond the limits of the screen to “space-off.” If homosexuality is an identity based on certain kinds of sexual desires and expressions, but is presented as sexless, what kind of identity is it? Narrative and editing strategies of “equality” that create these invisibilities ultimately establish difference in their efforts to erase it. Such acts of normalization are once again present in the gender expression of those identifying as LGB or T in these programs. As Samuel Chambers makes clear when speaking specifically about lesbian representation, this visibility which is claimed to be “progressive by definition can be challenged if we shift (read: broaden) the frame of analysis to politics of norms. This frame reveals that there is nothing automatically positive about having lesbian characters maintaining given norms of gender, not to mention potentially mimicking heteronormative structures” (92). The majority of the lesbians depicted on these shows, for example, is feminine presenting and therefore these characters support the socially imposed gender binary and cater to the desires of straight male audiences. In the case of Transparent where those who are
understood to be lesbian present as masculine of center, their sexual orientation is never actually named.

In the majority of case studies examined above the LGBT characters are or become partnered. This serves two key functions for audiences: it solidifies monogamy as a universal desire, and it makes these characters “safer” as their relationship status makes them less likely to make advances at unexpected, undesiring heterosexuals. Similarly, the general lack of LGBTQ friendships or communities present isolates the characters and tokenizes them. When the characters do have LGBT friends, or are seen participating in LGBT communities it is generally a narrative tool to upset their homodomestic monogamous stability. While there is nothing that visually or verbally distinguishes these characters from their straight counterparts, they are still positioned as different to everyone else around them, a difference that must be coped with or accepted by the other characters.

Looking at these erasures from the perspective of interpellation and ideology we must recall, as Adorno and Horkheimer state, that the subject may participate in the dominant ideology (the culture industry, in their case) only to the extent that the subject molds to the universal understanding of subjecthood within the system. The normalizing strategies of the LGBT characters serve to reinforce the universality of this subjecthood. The elements that are left out, that do not conform, may either get appropriated through a change in signification or become suppressed (Adorno and Horkheimer 111).

The invisibilities required in these representations in order for television to generate and regenerate the dominant ideologies, can, however, provide spaces for alternatives or resistance to these representations (and their erasures). For example,
through the negation of same-sex sex, oppositional readings become possible as queer
viewers might refuse to identify with these sexless representations. Adorno and
Horkheimer’s position, unlike Althusser’s, allows for multiple ideologies to exist within one
macro social structure, and as multiple ideologies exist so too must different semiological
understandings and expressions of these ideologies. Thus the same signifiers and signs
may produce differing significations within the same socio-cultural context and even within
the same individual. Furthermore, the systems of representation are multiple, and even the
dominant/subordinate ideological binary “is an inadequate way of representing the
complex interplay of different ideological discourses and formations in any modern
developed society” (Hall Cultural Studies 1983, 137).

Similarly we may find the possibility of resistance to hegemonic ideologies in what
Hall calls “countertendencies” if we narrow our lens to better understand invisibility from a
semiological perspective (131). If ideology requires that meaning be created through the
repetitions and rituals that establish interpretative fixity within a certain social framework,
there is always, inevitably, the ability for rupture, or slippage that risks disrupting or
breaking down the whole chain of signification.

Investigation into these invisibilities may create the possibility of linguistic and
visual reappropriations by these minority groups, or perhaps a counter semiotics that may
create—as it is beginning to—alternative mediatic loci in which these invisibilities may
begin to find new language and new representation (see chapter five). Like de Lauretis and
her call for avant-garde cinema to bring the space-off to the fore, discussions of the
invisible which necessarily render these erasures visible, new ways of reading queerness
through alternative interpretive strategies, and the creation of new media that includes
what has traditionally been relegated to the space-off, provide opportunity for queerness in
the face of the normalizing semiotics that perpetuate the heteronormativity inherent in
dominant ideologies (de Lauretis, 26).
Chapter 4: The Queering Gaze

4.1 Diffraction, Opposition, and Disidentification

The question, which these final two chapters seek to answer, is: in the face of the restrictive representations of LGBT people on Italian TV where, if anywhere, do queer televisual moments and identifications exist? In *Modest_Witness@Second_Millenium*, Donna Haraway uses a cyborgian feminist approach in order to deconstruct the relationship between science and society. In her work she acknowledges that “the empty spaces of both the ‘culture of no culture’ of self-invisible technoscientists and the ‘nature of no nature’ of the chimerical entities emerging from the world-constructed-as-laboratory must be remapped and reinhabited by new practices of witnessing” (269). In pushing back against essentialist notions of biology and people’s inability to understand science as a constructed paradigm, Haraway calls for diffraction as a way of looking at and being in the world. For her, “strong objectivity and agential realism demand a practice of diffraction, not just reflection. Diffraction is the production of difference patterns in the world, not just of the same reflected-displaced-elsewhere” (268). It is precisely through diffraction that these new ways of witnessing can come to be.

I use Haraway’s reflections in this chapter about alternative reading strategies for the visual image that diffraction, specifically white light diffraction, conjures. Diffraction is the term used to describe what happens when something interferes with a wave; when white light encounters a diffraction grating the result is a series of light spectrums, or rainbows. If we look at this as a metaphor for televisual signification, the white light is the television show (and all the encoded messages that make it up), the diffracting grating is
the medium of television itself, and the rainbows produced on the other side represent the possible decodings performed by spectators. Let us note that the programs (our white light) carry with them the ideological foundations of their making, and television, the medium, shapes the language of these codes and allows for the possibility for diffraction in the first place (the medium is, after all, the message). Haraway remarks that “diffraction is about heterogeneous history, not about originals [...] Diffraction is [...] for making consequential meanings” (276). It is precisely within the heterogeneity of spectators and the multiplicity of their decodings that we find queer potentiality of meaning production.

Speaking about the negative depictions of black women in the media, bell hooks has argued that women of color often take an oppositional approach that gives them agency through their rejection of these images. The “oppositional gaze” bell hooks champions allows for the critical assessment of televisual constructions that creates a pleasure of resistance, a pleasure that rejects the classic categorizations of mass-media, and continually operates counter to that dominant, straight, white, heteronormative gaze that gets reaffirmed by television (see “The Oppositional Gaze”). The acts of opposition outlined in her text are two-fold: spectators may reappropriate the negativity of the depictions they see and view them as markers of illegibility—as she notes, “In opposition they claimed Sapphire as their own, as the symbol of that angry part of themselves white folks and black men could not even begin to understand” (514)—or they may use their oppositional gaze to reject the depictions outright, refusing to identify with the way that the mainstream portrays them, as “there was nothing to see. She was not us” (514). The queering viewer, in appropriating this oppositional gaze can find pleasure in the rejection of LGBTQ representations on Italian television, by locating the heteronormative tropes within these
presentations and negating them. This opposition has been, in large part, foundational to the investigations carried out in the two preceding chapters. But however necessary the oppositional gaze may be for providing viewers agency through resistance, it remains dependent on the existence of modes of dominant discourse for self-identification, acting purely in response to the ways that certain communities are depicted. To this extent, the oppositional gaze is a response to a much more narrow white light in our diffraction metaphor, as the rainbow of rejection is created only by reading the representations of these minority groups and not of the entire televisual text.

Stuart Hall maps out a similar approach to viewer reception in his seminal work “Encoding/Decoding.” He argues that the codes used by televisual discourse to create meaning can be decoded by spectators according to three basic interpretive strategies, namely, dominant readings, negotiated readings, and oppositional readings (136-138). The distinction between Hall’s and hooks’ oppositional approaches lies in the broader potential of Hall’s theory since his opposition encompasses all signs within the televisual discourse not just the ones used to represent minorities. In addition, Hall’s oppositional decodings are, in a sense, creating meaning while simultaneously rejecting the meanings encoded by the creators of the programs. Jose Muñoz uses Hall’s oppositional decodings specifically in relation to queerness in Disidentifications, paying particular attention to the active “process of production” that they entail (25). He explains:

Disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message’s universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and
empower minority identities and identifications. Thus, disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture (30).

Disidentification is subversion, and is distinct from identification (which requires erasures of pieces of the self in order to conform) and from counter-identification (which, like the oppositional gaze risks reaffirming the hierarchies of the dominant mainstream discourse). Vagueness of characters or limits in general allow for radical reinterpretations, as does a repositioning or reorienting, to use Sara Ahmed’s term, of both the objects within the shows and the shows themselves.

This chapter looks beyond the LGBT representations in order to perform queer readings of these heteronormative texts. The queering gaze is an act that acknowledges the multitude of rainbows produced during white light’s diffraction, and it also acknowledges the multitude that is the white light itself, as the “text” of a show includes paratextual products and metanarratives. While there is not just one way to queer, this does not mean that queer gazers are not limited by the semiotic constructions of the programs and medium. This queering, rather, acknowledges the hegemonic structures and ideologies within each show, and, in recoding the languages used to reinforce them, proves their stricture and replaces it with multiplicity and possibility. The queering gaze performed here differs from Muñoz’s disidentification in that it isn’t necessarily about identity. Creating agency through recoding allows for moments of empowerment and recreation. The possibility of locating fragments of queerness, in some way rejects the totalizing and
inevitably limiting endeavor of identification, opening up the possibility that most, if not all, of television and the spectators who watch it can be queered if only in part.

This chapter, therefore, offers up a series of alternative readings that result from active queering practices. This approach is very much in keeping with the subversive viewing strategies Merri Lisa Johnson makes use of in “Gangster Feminism.” Using Mimmi White’s words, Johnson clarifies: “the claim is not that tv in general offers radical representation as an alternative to dominant social-cultural values. Rather, these readings are interested in the latent possibility of alternative viewpoints erupting within the multiple strategies of appeal that are normally at work” (49). Rejecting the normativizing representations that have been mapped out in the previous two chapters, viewers, and LGBTQIA viewers especially, may find power through radical reinterpretations of dominant codes. Straight characters, objects, spatial constructions, temporality, and narrative strategies become queerable in such a way that they may indeed, when viewed as a collective, better represent the mosaicked nature of embodied queer life, and increase viewer pleasure.

4.2 Queering Family Comedies

4.2.1 Tutti pazzi per amore

*Tutti pazzi per amore* uses temporal flexibility to provide the audience with insight into the feelings of the characters. This is made particularly evident in the separate narrative between television host Carla and expert-of-everything Dr. Freiss who comment on the characters’ feelings and actions on the television show within the show that has largely no impact on the main characters but provides audiences lighthearted insight into
the social dynamics of the characters’ emotional states. Within the dominant storylines, characters’ emotions are expressed in dialogues that the viewer only later recognizes as existing solely in the characters’ imagination. Jumping backward in time, the same situation is depicted once more, but this time the viewers witness the actual responses given by the characters. The alternative narrative possibilities that spectators witness require a suspension of the story’s linear time. This suspension breaks up the narrative flow of the show much like dream or fantasy sequences in other contemporary series that, as Jeffrey Sconce argues, allow characters to “escape diegetic constraints […] without long-term diegetic consequences” (102). Though ultimately these thoughts to which we are privy have no effect on the story, they create both temporal and narrative multiplicity, and implicate the spectator in socially unacceptable expressions of feeling, while closeting the sentiments or desires expressed. As Samuel A. Chambers states in his investigation into subversions of normativity on Desperate Housewives: “to reveal the norm may be to subvert it since norms work best when they are never exposed. In other words, the optimal operation of the norm is an invisible operation” (121). Thus, by giving us a direct alternative to the proprietary behaviors and responses of the characters we are confronted with the restrictive side of social norms. If fitting in, conforming, and not hurting other people’s feelings means hiding a part of ourselves, the result is an acknowledgement of liminality and a closeting of aspects of personality that directly resemble the closeting LGBTQ individuals are often forced to or choose to do in order to maintain their positions within their communities and society.

When it comes to the characters themselves, while, Riccardo and Peter are stripped of their sexuality and cast beyond the bounds of any viewer’s gaydar, several other
characters may cause a blip on the radar of queering audiences. Looking beyond the words Maya’s work colleagues use to describe (and hyper-masculinize) her, she is presented as a woman who likes sex for its own sake, resists monogamy, and seems completely content in her choice to go down a path far removed from normative female domesticity. The positivity of her presentation makes her a queerer figure, especially for LGBTQIA audiences who might not see themselves in Riccardo’s character, or wish to harp on the difficulties of their coming out experiences. Not only does Maya depict a positive and unfettered sexuality, she also belongs to a community of women who share her lifestyle. After Maya has sex with work colleague Elio she is so impressed his prowess that she recommends him to her friends, so while we may never see them together as a community, audiences are still exposed to the idea that she is not alone, that there are others like her who share her chosen way of life. This becomes the closest thing to a queer community in Tutti pazzi per amore, and while it remains invisible, it is allowed to exist in the discursive imaginary of the program. Finally, the most visual of the qualities that render Maya a more identifiably LGBTQ friendly character is her hair which at first is dyed red but then toward the end of the season becomes a strikingly hot pink, a color appropriated by the gay rights movement.

Viewers may also look to the homo-sociality of Paolo’s elderly aunts Filomena and Sofia. The two zie have never married and live together in the same apartment building as Laura and Paolo, and their living situation is an integral part to the building and to the plot more generally. Throughout the season it becomes clear to spectators, by way of jokes and misunderstandings, that the two elderly women have never had romantic or sexual partners. When the women hire a chef to give them cooking lessons he equates cooking to sex, saying that both require passion and abandonment. The two women, however, make it
very clear that they have no idea what he is talking about ("Le cose che abbiamo in comune"). Viewers cannot be certain whether or not Filomena and Sofia are asexual or abstinent by choice, but they do provide us with a representation of an alternative to the heteronormative expectations of monogamy, marriage, and procreation. Furthermore, before taking cooking lessons, when the women are initially banned from their kitchen, they react by calling themselves “two useless women” ("Come si cambia"). While acknowledging the normative role of women in society, namely their role as cooks and caretakers, Filomena and Sofia live outside of this expectation and as such are deemed “useless.” But it is precisely this uselessness, this inability to conform to expectations, that makes them perfectly queer.

4.2.2 Tutti pazzi per amore 3

In the third season of the program, the aunts Filomena and Sofia continue to represent an avenue for queer readings. Not only does their homo-social living situation remain unchanged, they are active agents in bringing Eva and Roberta back together after a jealousy-induced argument temporarily splits them up. The couple’s reunion reaffirms their normativity, but it is the aunts’ attitude toward them that in some ways radicalizes the representations. When they reunite the lesbian couple, Filomena and Sofia congratulate one another, calling each other “modern,” and saying that next year they will even go to the gay pride parade. Paolo’s attempts to hide the gender of Eva’s partner from the zie are rendered ridiculous by their immediate understanding of Eva and Roberta’s homosexuality. What is interesting here is that Paolo is acting upon his assumptions of the aunts’ reactions to homosexuality, providing us with a televisual depiction of actions based on “third-
person perception” that mirrors spectator TPP we discussed in the previous chapter. By reacting counter to Paolo’s expectation, the aunts provide a clear depiction of the futility of censorship. If they do not mind that Eva and Roberta are in a same-sex relationship, Paolo’s hiding it from them is unnecessary, thus personal acts of censorship such as changing the channel for fear that a family member will not tolerate the LGBTQ content are deemed equally excessive. The zie therefore not only present audiences with a homo-social lifestyle that runs counter to classic normative models, they also provide an avenue for spectator self-reflection that challenges the need for viewer-imposed LGBTQ content censorship.

I have spoken of the temporal queerness of the show’s oneiric scenes in the previous section. I argue, however, that though, as Luca Barra notes, the show’s “mosaic structure” creates moments of narrative pause to allow for “flow[s] of thoughts and emotions,” the structure of this third season, and the normative models that override the lesbian desires of the program, tend to mar the potential for the spectator’s queering gaze (“Tutti pazzi per amore” 180). Each episode of the third season of the show represents twenty-four hours, and the season spans from the 7th of December through New Year’s Day. The linearity of this temporality stands in sharp contrast to queer temporal structures that challenge productivity of and need for forward moving time, which influences and reflects normative economies of consumption and desire. Nothing is left to the imagination of the spectator as all the events are laid out on the screen to be fit together into the perfect narrative puzzle. Furthermore, the spaces which were used to suspend time, to create space for productive alternative realities where full expressions of feeling could find respite are stunted and thwarted by a medley of visual mash-ups that, while opening up space for temporal possibility, ultimately negate non-normative sexualities by replacing them with traditional
heterosexual portrayals. In this way, the third season of the show is less queerable than the first despite the comparative openness of the lesbian characters, and their overall acceptance.

4.2.3 È arrivata la felicità

In È arrivata la felicità several key narrative elements that lie outside the normativized lesbian portrayals contain queer potentiality, the first of which occurs through a reframing of the character Nunzia, or “Nancy.” Nancy is visually and verbally marked by the socio-cultural differences created by her Neapolitan background. Not only does her dialect make it difficult for others to understand what she says, but she is frequently mocked or disparaged by those around her because of her appearance and mannerisms. The loudness of her attire marks a clear visual difference between her and the other characters, but it also connects her to drag culture and to the flamboyance of gays in early television depictions, creating the possibility of a queer nostalgia in viewers and a queer aesthetic reading of her style. Furthermore, Nancy is completely othered in her new environment. Even leftist, foreign-born activist Anna must check her prejudice toward Nancy—which she does by using the language tools she implements when fighting racism toward migrant communities—and confront her own judgmental attitude. In the early episodes, before Pietro and Nancy become a couple, she is stripped of her agency and used as a tool, acting as a steppingstone to help Orlando out of his emotional funk. Finally, Nancy is exoticized by Pietro; their passion is extremely animalistic and seemingly outside of their control or any kind of logic. It is this kind of othering that renders Nancy the queerest character on the show, as she is positioned only in relation to her difference and either
exoticized or demonized for it, and used as a tool by the characters to try to mend Orlando’s heart, and by the storyline to create drama and instability. Acting here as an object, viewers might choose to identify with this feeling of objectification, as was the case for many of the black women hooks discusses. hooks explains that women may claim a character “as their own as the symbol of that angry part of themselves that white folks and black men could not even begin to understand” (514). In this way, Nancy’s queer positionality is capable of creating empathetic viewer identification.

The documentary style narrative—which again creates a clear link between the show and its “American counterpart” Modern Family—breaks down the fourth wall typically in place in cinema and television which is used to maintain the stability of the fictional world within the show. Looking into the camera incorporates what would otherwise be part of the space-off and implicates the spectator. By acknowledging a behind-the-scenes, a camera operator and an “interviewer,” the fictional world is expanded and audiences become more aware of what is not shown, or rather, that there exists a world outside of the world being depicted. The complicity in the narrative created by the lack of fourth wall, and the knowledge of a lack or incompleteness in the story world, work together to give audiences a space to recognize that there may be pieces of themselves that are not depicted or represented despite a level of pleasure and investment in the show. This partial identification mirrors the fractured nature of selfhood that marginalized groups often acknowledge when watching mainstream programs. The fact that È arrivata la felicità facilitates this awareness creates a recognition that is often intentionally erased by mainstream media in an effort to achieve narrative unity and wholeness.
In addition, from a temporal standpoint this documentary style format positions the spectator’s present as the characters’ past because they are reflecting on past events that we, the audience, witness as our present. This all changes however during the last two episodes in which the audience catches up to the temporality of the characters, aligning the audience’s and characters’ time. Furthermore, the recurring presence of “specters” of the past, namely the haunting ghost of Claudia, Orlando’s ex-wife, and Gianluca, much like in Tutti pazzi per amore, give the audience entry into the inner feelings and troubles of the main characters, and provide us with access to a past that exists before the show’s narrative. Characters from the past are used to talk about what cannot be said in the present, or, I should say, the spectator’s present. Temporality is therefore no longer strictly linear, instead, past, present, and future all coexist in an eternal present that debunks the connection between progress and futurity. This works against “progressive, and thus future-oriented, teleologies” that Carla Freccero argues, are “aligned with heteronormative reproduction” (“Queer Times” 489). The multiplicity of time portrayed in show’s narrative present is reflective of a queer temporality that, in keeping with Freccero’s theorization of the subject, includes a “queer spectrality” wherein the returning of ghosts serves to help work through trauma or mourning (489).

4.2.4 Tutti insieme all’improvviso

Despite the normativity of lesbian character Sara, audiences may look for queer potential in aspects or moments embodied or performed by other characters. In chapter two I discuss the ways in which Walter, the show’s protagonist, is presented as an “othered” figure. Right from the opening credits, audiences may read a queerness in
Walter’s character, as his moments of drag easily position him within drag culture. Straight audiences who remember the history of the actor’s career may view this, as I have said, as a nod to his past and use it to understand the show as belonging to the family comedy genre, while queering audiences might frame this within the televisional history of drag representation. Mapping out the history of queerness on television, Jelardi and Bassetti discuss the ways in which drag was used in television comedy during the sixties and seventies (39, 43); this spectacularization and objectification may serve as a moment to acknowledge the subaltern position of LGBTQ people on Italian television. This acts as a reminder of a history (and a present) of oppression, something to push back against; it retains the non-normativity of queerness that gets lost in lesbian character Sara’s portrayal.

Other elements of Walter’s character create spaces for queer readings as well, the most poignant example of which is his casual non-monogamous commitment to his African lover Fatima. In the very first episode Walter explains, “in Africa there is a way of coupling that is based on the seasons, we see one another every now and again” (“Si nasconde una malattia... ma non si può nascondere la morte”). This approach to dating is based upon a completely different temporal logic than the one through which monogamy and heteronormative futurity are constructed. Transitory though not devoid of affection, audiences are presented with a queer alternative that, at least initially, is fairly positive, especially if you look at the number of affectionate dialogues that take place between Walter and Fatima via videochat. After returning to Rome, Walter begins a relationship with Annamaria’s sister Laura, and it is only when this relationship becomes serious that Fatima’s presence begins to become a problem. Indeed, in the last episode Fatima travels to
Italy (entering Westernized normativity) to tell, or rather show Walter that she is pregnant with his child (“Piccoli problemi presi uno per uno”). Thus the problems with alternative coupling styles exist not in and of themselves, but only when they are forced to merge with Italian heteronormative ideals.

Carlo, Walter’s childhood friend who works in the shop of the veterinary clinic where Walter and Laura both work, despite his desires for a girlfriend, represents another aspect of queerness, namely queerness as negativity and failure. Carlo is as old as Walter, still lives with his mother, is extremely parsimonious, and — according to the other characters on the show — far from typically attractive. When it comes to love, spectators witness two of Carlo’s failed attempts to attract the opposite sex: the first being an old childhood friend who very blatantly has feelings for Walter, and the second being Annamaria. This second mini-narrative extends through several episodes allowing for Carlo to be rejected numerous times because he neglects to read the connotative signs of Annamaria’s disinterest. While Carlo seems to desire or participate in normative socio-cultural economies, it is his failures that position him as a queerable subject. Jack Halberstam, in his book The Queer Art of Failure has claimed that “queer failure [...] can stand in contrast to the grim scenarios of success that depend upon ‘trying and trying again,’” as failure “provides the opportunity to use these negative affects to poke holes in the toxic positivity of contemporary life” (3). This failure creates disruption to the norm, it creates alternatives to a constant drive toward futurity, and Carlo is the embodiment of this failure, making him another locus of queerness.

4.3 Queering Family Dramas
4.3.1 *Le cose che restano*

As we know from the preceding two chapters, the majority of the narrative of *Le cose che restano* revolves around the disintegration of the Giordani family. The mother needs psychiatric help after her son Lorenzo’s death and checks into a clinic outside Rome. The father Pietro ends up leaving the country for work. Andrea the eldest son leaves on a work assignment, and with daughter Nora already out of the house coming to terms with her own fragile family situation, the Giordani house is abandoned. It is precisely in the face of this normative domestic failure created by loss that queer moments, readings, and identifications can arise for viewers.

The queerness in this familial failure is most prominently in the character of Anita. Losing her youngest child, Anita essentially loses at motherhood, she has failed at her familial obligation and this failure positions her well within the frameworks of queerness Halberstam has mapped out in *The Queer Art of Failure*. For Halberstam “the social and symbolic systems that tether queerness to loss and failure cannot be wished away” (97). Normative societal expectations rely on the family as a construct that creates and perpetuates futurity through procreation and as such maintains the foundational cultural cornerstones of “connection and succession” (71). I argue that Anita’s decline into mental instability and her abandonment of the institution of family are the result of a queer failure. She is, in fact, the one to ask to leave and be placed in the clinic despite her daughter’s efforts to convince her to stay in the house with the family (“Episode 1”). These acts position her as a queer agent that disrupts the normativity presented to spectators at the very start of the show. Falling into deep emotional darkness, the show depicts Anita’s inner state by situating her in dark rooms (the kitchen, and Lorenzo’s room, for example) that,
once again, very much reflect the “particular ethos of resignation to failure, to lack of progress and a particular form of darkness, a negativity really... [that] can be called a queer aesthetic” (Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* 96).

The darkness of this queer aesthetic represented by Anita goes hand in hand with a certain kind of stagnation that the quotation above also speaks to. This stagnation participates in a queer temporality that halts progress and refuses futurity; a futurity which Anita already believes she has failed at. Once again Anita makes use of this queer temporality by stilting the narrative, when, for example, the other characters must wait for her to leave for Lorenzo’s funeral. Anita’s pausing, her refusal to move forward, literally creates a fissure between her and her family as the others progress, go to the funeral, and leave her there alone ("Episode 1"). This active resistance to futurity comes to a head when Anita attempts to kill everyone in the house by turning all the burners of the stove on while everyone sleeps ("Episode 1").

While Anita is away at the clinic, Shaba slowly takes her place as the maternal figure. Initially the appropriation of the role is shown by Shaba’s borrowing of Anita’s clothing, and her moving into the house (“Episode 2”; “Episode 3”). In the final episode, after Shaba nurses Michel through his illness and cares for him during his final moments, Andrea asks her, given all she had done for his partner, if he can be her daughter’s brother. In this moment, as Shaba embraces Andrea and calls him “son,” she becomes a mother to him (“Episode 4”). Andrea, as we know, however, already has a mother who is finally ready to return home from the clinic. Anita does admit that she initially felt a bit jealous of Shaba and the role she had taken in her children’s lives, but this comment is made fleetingly and there is no visual tension or sense of competition between the two women. In fact, Anita
returns home and she and Shaba are seen happily sharing the space and the maternal role within the household. With Pietro out of the picture, as he has found a new partner and is off once again on business, the show concludes much in the same way it started—with Andrea returning home from a business trip—though the heteronormative household is replaced by one with two homo-affective maternal figures (“Episode 4”)

The family that lives in the now-flourishing Giordani house is a restructured alternative family that consists of Anita Giordani, her daughter Nora, Nora’s infant son, Andrea and Andrea’s deceased partner’s daughter Lila, Nino, Shaba, and Shaba’s daughter Alina. The typical normative structures that link the man/woman and bread-winner/care-taker binaries are broken down in this new household formation, and the privileging of longevity is replaced with the happy impermanence of the now. Alina will soon move to Sicily with her boyfriend, Nora is staying in the house temporarily while she separates from her husband, Andrea’s work makes him a transitory figure, and Nino’s budding relationship with his friend Valentina points to an inevitable move. Once more the de-emphasis on biological ties and the lack of a need to emphasizes sustainability makes queer readings possible, as Halberstam argues, “queer lives exploit some potential for a difference in form that lies dormant in queer collectivity not as an essential attribute of sexual otherness but as a possibility embedded in the break from heterosexual life narratives” (The Queer Art of Failure, 70). Aspects of queer temporality, failure, and alternative kinship formations create queer moments within the show and between the audience and the otherwise straight characters and narratives—a queering that lies, once again, outside the depictions of the celebrated gay characters Andrea and Michel.
4.3.2 Una grande famiglia

Talking about queerness on television, Samuel Chambers discusses the relationship between ghosts and closets:

Ghosts are signifiers of closeted existence: ghosts are entities that can never fully regain a material existence, nor can they (at least not yet) enter a completely spiritual realm that leaves the material world behind. Ghosts are doomed to a liminal existence [...] that remains ill-defined with respect to the ‘real’ world and all those human beings they encounter within that world (41).

There are ghosts in both Tutti pazzi per amore and È arrivata la felicità, here I argue that the character Edoardo Rengoni too, in faking his own death and going into hiding in the first season of the show can be considered a ghost. Unable to participate in his home or work life, Edoardo must closet himself and live in liminality for fear of death. The queerness of this position, especially in relation to the “safe space” of the LGBTQ closet seems fairly evident. What’s more, the secrecy surrounding Edoardo, his business transactions, and disappearance destabilizes the family. Ideas of legacy and the passing down of the patriarchal torch are called into question precisely because giving Edoardo power over the family business led to financial insecurity and the near loss of the entire Rengoni estate. Here Edoardo’s queer positionality challenges the assumptions at the very foundations of normative familial and social structures, offering us a—albeit vilified—version of queerness.

During Edoardo’s presumed death, Ernestino, Edoardo’s young son is unrelenting in his conviction that his father is still alive. Ernestino engages with, and accepts of his father's
ephemeral position; he believes in the invisible space inhabited by his father and is reassured by the silent phone calls he receives from unknown numbers. Through this young character, spaces and existences that operate outside the social and outside of language are legitimized. These same intuitions that allow Ernestino to believe his father is alive, carry over into the second season when Ernestino’s dreams enable him to understand that the men with whom his father works are evil “monsters.” From an ideological perspective, normative socio-cultural paradigms are completely reliant on the temporal logics of progress and the spatial infrastructures that enable these logics. Since Ernestino affords his dreams, premonitions, and feelings as much value and time as (the often questionable) empirical evidence, we may say that Ernestino challenges the spatio-temporal structures at the heart of normativity and therefore advocates for a queerer understanding of relationality and communication.

There are, likewise, other elements of the show that challenge the legitimacy of hegemonic normative systems, the most poignant for our queerings is the contentious relationship between kinship and Italian law. The entire family is asked to lie to the police and pretend that Edoardo had been kidnapped so that they might save their family and their business. Here fidelity toward family shows how community must band together against dominating structures that challenge or jeopardize ways of living and being in the world. The survivalist actions carried out by the Rengoni family parallel the strategies of support used by queer communities threatened by governmental laws or social stigma.

The second major narrative that draws a divisive line between family and the law involves Raoul’s attempts to adopt his foster son Salvatore. Fed up with having to negotiate visits between Salvatore and his drug addict birth mother Silvia, Raoul and his then partner
Martina discuss the idea of adoption. Laura tells them the upsetting news that despite the couple’s ten years together, they are not a family under Italian law. Unfortunately Raoul’s argument that the existence of divorce proves that marriage is not a guarantee of security for the child does nothing to change their situation (“Season 1 Episode 5”). Later when Raoul and Martina split up, Raoul continues his efforts to adopt Salvatore, running into yet another legal obstacle since, as the judge tells him, single people have no legal right to adopt (“Season 2 Episode 5”). In an act that circumvents the law in the name of family, Nicoletta, Raoul’s newly married sister, says that she will adopt Salvatore. Here not only is the law questioned, but the traditional lines of family are extended for the sake of community and for the good of those that the community was created to support. Elizabeth Freeman, in “Queer Belongings: Kinship Theory and Queer Theory” explores the ways that queer theory can push the limits of kinship theory beyond the confines of the biological connection on which it is often based. Freeman, quoting Pierre Bourdieu, affirms:

“Kinship is, effectively, the ‘utilization of connections’ as a realization of, or even substitute for ‘those uses of kinship which may be called genealogical [which] are reserved for official situations ordering the social world and... legitimating that order.’” In sum, kinship is a set of acts that may or may not follow the officially recognized lines of alliance and descent, and that in any case take precedence over the latter in everyday life (305).

These acts, the act of keeping a secret in the name of family, and the act of legally mothering in order to keep community together, represent the performative nature of kinship that pushes it beyond the bounds of the biological and into the queer.
4.4. Queering American Family Fictions

4.4.1 Grace and Frankie

I have argued in the previous two chapters that audiences are not positioned to identify with *Grace and Frankie'*s two gay male protagonists, Robert and Sol, who are depicted as disruptive subjects capable of performing disgusting acts (which we never see). Instead, viewers are asked to identify with the two women who were left behind by their gay cheating husbands. We cannot forget, however, that one of these women is played by Lily Tomlin, an unapologetically open lesbian actor. As Jason Mittell notes in *Complex TV*, “Actors serve as sites of intertextuality, merging viewer memories of previous characters and knowledge about off-screen lives to color our understanding of a role” (Ch. 5). The knowledge of Lily Tomlin's sexual orientation adds an interesting layer to the audience’s engagement with her character, as viewers may come to understand that identification with the character Frankie is, in some sense, identification with the lesbian actor portraying her. If we think of *Transparent*, and Jill Soloway's casting of Jeffrey Tambor in the role of Maura, some of the backlash from the Trans community, as I have discussed, was in part due to the fact that Tambor is a man and not a transwoman, thus the depiction reinforces the idea that transwomen are mannish or men in drag. In this discontent the connection between actor and character becomes strikingly clear and as such Frankie the character cannot be separated from Tomlin the actor. This connection is further reinforced by the media hype surrounding the reunion between Tomlin and acting partner Jane Fonda, as the two worked side by side in the classic feminist caper movie 9 to 5 (Higgins 1980).
Lily Tomlin the actor is not the only reason why queer and straight audiences alike might consider Frankie to embody or perform a certain amount of queerness. Since she is unable to conceive, Frankie and her then-husband Sol adopted two children. Julia Erhart has discussed the fact that “In popular discourse, donor conception and queerness participate in similar debates—for instance, ‘nature versus nurture’ and the limits around what counts as a family. For these reasons, donor conception has an association with queerness that normative reproduction does not” (84). While Frankie and Sol do not use a donor, I would argue that adoption, like surrogacy, is recourse taken by couples that cannot participate in reproductive sexual intimacy. Furthermore, their adoptions produce a radical familial construction that, unlike donor conception, has absolutely no basis in biology. Their familial bonds are formed through love, recurring actions, and traditions, which reflect Elizabeth Freeman’s queer notions of kinship, that, she argues, are created and maintained through repeated embodied performance (“Queer Belongings” 298). Therefore, the very ways that Frankie and Sol established and solidified their biracial adopted family resonate with queerness in that their family challenges the biological essentialism at the foundations of kinship discourses. This queer kinship extends beyond Frankie and Sol’s family and carries over to Frankie and Grace’s new cohabitational living situation. If, as we saw in Tutti pazzi per amore, sex is taken out of the picture, Grace and Frankie’s homo-social domestic space proves no less gay than that of Robert and Sol. In fact, one might argue that Frankie’s sex positive nature—as evidenced by her making of and attempts to sell sexual lubricant—creates a more complex character that better reflects the queerness of LGBTQ audiences who see themselves as having an active sexuality in addition to having sexual orientation and gender identity.
Lastly, it is because of Frankie’s domestic and social life that audiences are introduced to characters from socially marginalized groups. Frankie and Sol adopt their black son Bud precisely because Frankie cannot conceive, making her the reason for his existence within the family and within the show. Jason, Frankie’s gay friend, and Jacob, Frankie’s love interest and yam provider, are the only other two black men on the program, both of whom are introduced to us through Tomlin’s character. In addition to providing the narrative justification for these characters of color, Frankie also teaches art to ex-convicts in her beach house studio. These former prisoners are depicted neither as menaces to society nor in relation to the law or their crimes. With Frankie as the lens through which these characters are portrayed, viewers are presented with occasionally dark, occasionally sexy men who express their feelings through art. Frankie is thus the vehicle through which otherness and difference can be seen devoid of the classic negativity that typically accompanies their presence, and as such serves as a queering figure despite her heterosexuality and her trouble accepting the homosexuality of her ex-husband Sol.

4.4.2 Transparent

With more focus on LGBTQ characters and narrative plotlines than the other shows under investigation here, there would seem to be little room for viewers to find queer moments or identifications outside the overtly LGBTQ elements within the show. That being said there are a few extra-narrative aspects, namely the show’s construction and framing, that allow for a kind of queering pleasure even from audiences who disapprove of or cannot relate to the lesbian and trans storylines and characters.
While, as I have said, the leading trans character is played by cis male actor Jeffrey Tambor, there are transwomen actors of color playing the secondary trans characters on the show, and Jill Soloway has been very vocal about the autobiographical nature of the plot, and the fact that many LGBTQ identified people work behind the scenes. This background knowledge is readily available to viewers, and given the convergence of paratextual sites and metadiegetic fan universes, an issue I explore in the first chapter, this information easily infiltrates the fabric of the narrative for viewers who choose to participate in the discourses the show generates. Thus technological access of information increases the program’s queer potential, or rather, it increases sympathetic engagement or identification from queering spectators.

The potential for queerness provided by the show’s extratextual elements is matched by the queerness of its temporality. In chapter one I discuss the ways that online streaming platforms support binge-watching tendencies, which provide an occasion for temporary viewer identification with shows and characters. Given the unlikeability of the characters on *Transparent* the possibility of short-term viewing affords audiences a temporary engagement that makes viewer fidelity more appealing, and in turn gives spectators access to queering moments outside the show’s main narrative. Furthermore, this brevity provides an alternative to the sense of normative futurity inherent in longer commitments to seriality, and thus the fact that all episodes are made available at the same time speaks to Lee Edelman’s position on queer temporality (see chapter one). The same can be said of *Grace & Frankie*, and, for that matter, all of the other shows under investigation here, as they are all now available in full on network websites. The difference with these Italian made shows, however, lies in the fact that initially they partook in the
classic palimpsest structure and were made available for streaming according to those same temporal logics. Thus queer engagement through the act of temporal freedom and short-term viewer fidelity is one of the initial characteristics of the streaming shows *Transparent* and *Grace & Frankie*, but possible for audiences of the Italian made shows only after they have aired in full.

Within the context of the show’s diegetic world, queering possibilities emerge through a fracturing or negotiation with objects that are already coded as LGBT. Munoz’s disidentification practices, like Stuart Hall’s oppositional reading strategies, reconstruct culturally coded messages thereby evidencing and separating them from dominant ideologies these signifiers reflect and reproduce (*Disidentifications* 26). The Fire Island sweatshirt Ali wears and the dildo that she and her transman fling Dale almost use in the LGBT center bathroom, are two examples of objects that are imbued with gay signification even for those who do not necessarily participate in LGBTQ communities themselves; here the gay connotative power of these objects has entered mainstream discourses. Those queer audiences who do not want to participate in or feel represented by the queerness or trans-ness being represented by the show may, however, negotiate the readings of these objects by acknowledging them and appropriating them in a way that allows for identification. Following Sara Ahmed’s analysis of objects in *Queer Phenomenology*, we understand that to queer objects is to disrupt the lines that orient them and give them meaning, to take them out of the clusters of which they are a part (147). Separating the Fire Island sweatshirt from the “cluster” around which it is given meaning, namely, the character Ali, creates a partial or fractured engagement wherein the viewer may assign a different queerness to the object. In separating them from the character, we may fill the
Fire Island sweatshirt or the dildo with queer meanings that speak to us; recoding them because our relationship to the objects is not reflected in their relationship to the character making use of them.

In episode six of the first season, entitled “The Wilderness,” Josh has trouble coming to terms with Maura’s transition, and, after a difficult conversation, Josh walks into Maura’s bedroom where he sees wigs on her dresser and makeup on her vanity. If we, once again, remove these objects from the character to whom they belong we may strip them of their association to Maura’s biological essentialist notions of gender and read them as tools used in gender expression and performativity. Here we have a queering of LGBT coded objects. While the wigs and makeup belong to the trans character and signify her womanhood, they may be re-queered or differently-queered into signifying the performativity of gender. Queering the objects themselves, or rather disrupting the culturally established lines of orientation that give objects meaning, creates space for the unrepresented to empower their gazes and construct their own moments of identification.

4.5 Categories of Queerness

Viewing these queerings in their collectivity, categorical patterns become apparent. This is not to say that other ways of reading and recoding are not possible, indeed they must be, and it is important to acknowledge my own limits of seeing and the ways that my relationship to queerness as an identity and a politic influence the readings being performed here. What the patterns speak to, however, is a potentiality; they mark the beginnings of a kind of “manual for future use” for those looking to read queerness and those seeking to perform queerly.
The first of these groupings consists of subjects and objects that reflect aspects of certain LGBTQIA communities, or the way they might feel positioned by the larger heteronormative society. Walter’s drag in the opening sequence of Tutti insieme all’improvviso, and Maura’s make up and wigs in Transparent, for example, participate in LGBTQIA culture and theoretical and artistic acts of gender performance. Reflections on drag culture also bring to the fore the marginalization of LGBTQIA groups and their spectacularization within the mainstream; a positionality that highlights a social othering that viewers also see in characters like Nunzia in È arrivata la felicità. Differences used as comedic tools or narrative devices for drama creation become opportunities for empathic viewing pleasures, wherein spectators may look compassionately upon the person whose difference is seen as a disruptive force. Homo-social living arrangements like those of Grace and Frankie and the elderly zie in Tutti pazzi per amore become loci for queerings, depicting domestic spaces that provide same-sex alternatives to normative domestic expectations. On a more theoretical level, furthermore, shows like Una grande famiglia challenge many of the social norms surrounding the idea of family, and this problematization results in kinship formations that reflect queer communities and ways of living.

In evidencing some of the drawbacks of classic family formations, queerer depictions of kinship also enter into the second queering category which points to moments of rupture within traditional normative structures and expectations. Raoul’s failure to adopt Salvatore in Una grande famiglia, for example, rings queer for LGBTQ people wishing to adopt, and showcases the downside of Italian legislation that supports normative family formations in the name of traditional family ideals. The queerness of
Raoul’s failure, like Anita’s in *Le cose che restano*—as her character dismantles (and nearly destroys) the domestic sphere—ultimately creates space for alternative, queerer understandings of interpersonal relationality, and kinship formation. Edoardo’s ghosting, in *Una grande famiglia*, and the presence of ghosts and specters of past relationships in *Tutti pazzi per amore* and *È arrivata la felicità*, are also often the result of failure or difficulty in the face of social expectations and propriety.

These ghostings also participate in the final category that looks queerly upon the structural changes of television itself, and our viewing habits and engagement with the mercurial medium. Ghosts, like streaming patterns of online content, challenge the notion of time’s forward-moving flow, allowing for both temporality play (pause, rewind, fast-forward, binge-watch), and temporal multiplicity (the past, present, and future can indeed all exist in the now). Similarly, the multitude of texts, paratext, and viewer-generated content provides avenues of queer connection, as is the case with actor knowledge influencing character perception in both *Grace and Frankie* and *Transparent*.

While these categories may serve, in part, to point to locations that hold considerable queering potential, the number of items that transgress these categories or operate within two categories at once, shows that these demarcations are as open and fragmented as the queerness they seek to qualify.

The queering gaze creates potential, and choosing it as a mode of viewership activates a queerness in the most normative of constructions and depictions. Through an understanding of the relationality between queerness, intersectionality, and fragmentation, we may create a lens through which to understand selfhood and acknowledge that its queerness is not only applicable to those with non-conforming genders or sexualities. Thus,
whether we are talking about people or televisual representation, sometimes the L, G, B, and T, prove to be the least Q. We must, therefore, push beyond the limits of bell hooks’ oppositional gaze to find potential in objects that superficially seem to reify dominant ideologies, and find empowerment and agency beyond discourses of identification or even disidentification (if it is viewed as totalizing). Thinking about the queerings performed here in terms of Haraway’s use of diffraction, these alternative ways of reading and recoding create new significations that multiply and expand outward. The rainbows that result in white light’s diffraction are symbolic of the plethora of possibilities that can be created from one semiotic sign, one scene, one character, or one show. Using Sara Ahmed’s elaboration of orientation in Queer Phenomenology, we may understand these rainbows as establishing new lines that allow for new orientations. If we reject the ways that we have been positioned within space and society, it is through a disorientation—an acknowledgement of loss or a failure to feel familiarity with the representations around us—that we may create new connections. These readings trace new lines of meaning production, deviating from normative social codes in order to open a space for queer moments and queer pleasure. This deviation, as Ahmed affirms: “leaves its own marks on the ground which can help generate alternative lines which cross the ground in unexpected ways. Such lines are indeed traces of desire” (20). These readings produce lines that reorient the viewer and the viewer’s relationship to these programs. The performativity of this experience, and the pathways created pave the way for new ways of making and relating to media that do not require recoding in order to be queer. The possibilities of this are precisely what I will explore in the following chapter.
Chapter 5: The Elsewhere; Looking Outside the Box

5.1 Technotopic Bodies and Queer Futures

Up to now the works under investigation have all been created and disseminated by global or national forces within the television industry. This might seem to suggest a one-sidedness in television’s relationship to the spectators who consume its content. We must keep in mind, as Stuart Hall’s theory of encoding and decoding suggests, that television’s representations are as much reflections of society as they are creators of it. More importantly we must acknowledge that the television industry is not the only producer of televisual content. Thus, spectators not only help to shape the industry’s content, they often actively create their own. Furthermore, performing close readings of mainstream content might also falsely suggest a unity within the various spectator communities and within the identities of the individuals who form them. In chapter three I discuss fragmentation as a queer concept in relation to identity formation in an effort to show the powerful disruptive effect of revealing invisibilities in mainstream television narratives. I would like to further frame this fragmentation by putting it in conversation with Jasbir Puar’s elaboration of the concept of assemblage, and Jack Halberstam’s investigation into the technotopic body. The combination of these theoretical ideas creates a queer lens with which we may view the rise of Italian spectators/producers, the bodies of work they create, and the shifting technological landscape with which they engage. This discussion ultimately positions television as a spatio-temporal locus capable of embodying the potentiality at the heart of Jose Muñoz’s queer utopia.
In *In A Queer Time and Place*, Jack Halberstam discusses representations of the transgender body in art. He makes the claim that the transgender body is one through which art depicts unstable or ambiguous embodiment. Speaking of JA Nicholls’ work he writes, “the body itself in Nicholls’s painting is a collage form, but the collage is made up of not only different body parts but different perspectives [...] and different modes of representation” (98). The composition of the body contains a multiplicity of both body parts and their depictions, but the end result does not contain within it any unifying sense. Halberstam expands on this idea by introducing the term “technotopic,” which he uses “to refer to the spatial dimensions of this aesthetic, its preoccupation with the body as a site created through technological and aesthetic innovation. Technotopic inventions of the body resist idealizations of body integrity, on the one hand, and rationalizations of disintegration on the other” (124). Embodiment is necessarily spatial, bodies take up space, and the aesthetic presentation, the visualization of this space-taking is presented as necessarily linked to the technology used in its creation.

The technotopic bodies at play when considering the relationship between queerness and television seem, at the very least, to be four: the individual as body; the community as body; the consumed televisual text as body; and the produced televisual text as body. While I have identified them as four, they should not be viewed as necessarily separate from one another or whole in themselves. Bodies are thus materializations; they are matter-in-performance. The indeterminacy of this speaks not to intersectionality—which may rely heavily on the notion of identity, and create a fixity of the multitude of components of which bodies are comprised—but rather to Jasbir Puar’s elaborations of assemblage. The assemblage can be understood as “a series of dispersed but mutually
implicated and messy networks” which “allow us to attune to movements, intensities, emotions, energies, affectivities, and textures as they inhabit events, spatialities, and corporealities” (*Terrorist Assemblages* 212, 215). The televisual bodies to be explored, in this light, become technotopic assemblages whose multiplicities run both inward (in the case of the individual body, the bodies of community in which it partakes, and the televisual body’s reception and conceptualization), and outward (as for the body of the televisual product, and the bodies’ affective response to reception).

This chapter explores the queerness of the interplay between these technotopic bodies in light of their collective and individual relationship to technology and aesthetics in this current moment of media convergence. I argue that these bodies and their relationship to space and time speak to a queer televisual futurity reflective of José Muñoz’s theory of queer utopia. In the very beginning of his book *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz explains queerness as “that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing [...] Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world” (1). This futurity is not the one Lee Edelman rejects on the grounds of its requirements of reproductivity, instead it asks that we reconceptualize time not as forward moving, but as horizontal, as “the present must be known in relation to the alternative temporal and spatial maps provided by a perception of past and future affective worlds” (26). His claim is that looking to the “then and there” challenges time’s linearity while simultaneously expanding our modes of organizing space (29). This queerness is about potentiality and collectivity giving rise to alternative modes of being bodies through space and time. In this way, analyzing the Italian webseries, remediations, and fan fiction depicting LGBT subjects we must consider these
works through a queering lens, but also in relation to their potentiality, considering the ways they have come to be. By turning to their potentiality, we must turn not only to their content, but to the socio-technological foundations of these spatio-temporal assemblages. In this way, how these bodies mean something becomes perhaps more significant than what these bodies mean.

5.2 Webseries

In the last several years there has been a rise in television content available on the web that focus on LGBTQ narratives and characters. The programs under investigation in this section, G&T (GETwebserie 2012), Tris (Tris LaSerie 2012), Bowtieboy (Bowtieboy The Series 2015), LSB (LSBTheSeries 2013), and Re(l)azioni a catena (Badholevideo 2013) are all Italian webseries created between 2012 and 2015. The first three shows center on gay men and the latter three on women who fall somewhere along the lesbian continuum. Many of the shows (Re(la)zioni a catena, Bowtieboy, and G&T, for example) are video adaptations of real life events and situations, and most of the shows’ creators are explicit about the fact that their work stems from a desire to fill a serious hole in mainstream LGBTQ representations (Tris, and LSB). The intended audiences would seem to be those seeking alternatives to mainstream programming, but surprising or not, shows like Tris are intended for heterosexual audiences in the hopes that the representations on the program will challenge their assumptions (“Tris, la prima web serie gay italiana”). Tris in fact, in lauded to be the very first Italian webseries, but G&T (which came out not six months later) and the others were quick to follow suit.
This investigation into LGBT representations on Italian television has looked specifically at family centered narrative fictions, as the family is the primary locus of Italian identity and therefore is significant for discussions of the relationship between minority populations and national identity. In this section *Re(l)azioni a catena* is the only webseries to actually center on a traditional family narrative. But if we look to queer kinship formations that challenge the necessity of biological connection in family and community constructions, we may indeed consider all these programs “family fictions.” Indeed within these shows the alternative kinship communities depicted prove themselves more supportive and productive than the normative biological families they replace. We see such an example in *LSB* when Martina tells Benedetta that her group of friends is like a family (“1x02”). In the case of *Tris*, Daniele actively combats his sister’s normativity and bigotry only thanks to the help of his gay community. Likewise, in *Re(l)azioni a catena* it is familial bond that leads Silvia to become the caretaker of her younger cousins Chiara and Emma. Though the three cousins hardly know each other, after Chiara and Emma’s mother runs away they are entrusted to Silvia because of their familial link. Both shows represent family, not as a supportive community through which growth and love are fostered, but rather, as a kind of obstacle that must be overcome in order to achieve happiness and fulfillment. If kinship, as Elizabeth Freeman notes is the “process by which bodies and the potential for physical and emotional attachment are created, transformed, and sustained over time,” and “small-scale relationships become [...] the basis for larger social formations” such as communities and nations, we must look beyond the boundaries of the biological and recognize these that these queer connections often replace traditional normative families when it comes to providing emotional and physical support (“Queer
By understanding queer kinship as an alternative to normative family formations we may see these shows as expanding and queering the limits of family fiction genres.

In the previous chapters I show that the primary method for presenting LGBT characters on mainstream Italian television is through a “normalizing” lens. To avoid the classic stereotypes that have plagued LGBT representation in television’s past, these shows erase all signs of difference (read gayness) in these characters, who embody normative societal expectation by desiring monogamy and procreative futurity just like their straight counterparts. Both LGBT and straight characters in these webseries, instead, seem to celebrate their diversity and weirdness, which is presented as unrelated to their orientations or identifications.

From a representational perspective these shows offer viewers more variety, not necessarily by covering more of the acronym—indeed we are still show only the L, G, and B, and no T, Q, A, or I—, or any racial diversity, but more range of gender presentation and types of classifications of identity within each sexual orientation category. In the mainstream series previously discussed, lesbians were generally femme presenting in an effort to adhere to gender norms and male desire, while men were more often than not stripped of any gay markers whatsoever. Contrastingly, in the first season of lesbian-centric show LSB, viewers are exposed to a gamut of aesthetics and modes of lesbian living. Couple Giulia (lesbian identified and masculine of center presenting) and Martina (bisexual, and femme presenting) are in a monogamous, albeit troubled relationship; Filomena, the hard-femme bisexual who lives with Martina is single and always looking to fall in love; Nic is fairly androgynous and very promiscuous; and Benedetta is questioning her sexuality and,
after a makeover from Nic, reveals herself to be more femme and sexually attractive than anyone expected. In terms of gay male representation, from twink identified Alex in *Tris*, to bear identified Alex in *Bowtieboy*, and all the drag queens, otters, and unreadable characters in between, spectators are given a huge visual variety of what gayness can look like.

In these webseries the assumed desires and expectations of this normativity seem to disappear. Some of the characters do desire monogamous relationships, as is the case with Giulio and Tommy (*G&T*), Alex (*Tris*), and Martina and Giulia (*LSB*) to name a few. Others like Daniele and Giulio on *Tris*, Benedetta, Filomena, and Nic on *LSB*, and Alex on *Bowtieboy* are single, looking to date, and engage in various levels of promiscuity, but their desires for monogamy are never made clear. In fact, even straight characters are vocal about rejecting domestic and procreative familial expectation. Sara, Giulio’s straight roommate and best friend on *G&T* for example, is the one to intentionally seek out an alternative to normativity. After getting impregnated by her “friend with benefits” Gianluca, Sara asks Giulio to be the father instead of seeking domestic stability with the biological father of her child.

It is only when the future or social expectation is brought up in these shows that we are introduced to normativity or the possibility of societal difficulty. In *LSB* for example, Martina is in a relationship with Giulia but during a period of romantic strife she begins to voice her concerns about the future. She notes that one day she would like to have a family of her own but her family and society would judge her if she chose to do that with a woman (“1x06”). Likewise, in *Re(l)azioni a catena*, Silvia’s mother attempts to set her brother up with a woman that she believes is wife-material. Silvia scolds her mother for her constant
meddling, and in response she replies “of course I am, he’s the only one in the family that I can set up, given that you...” (“Episodio 3 'Innocua apparenza'”). The results are depictions that problematize not the characters for their sexual orientation or choice of partners, but the societies that turn these attributes into issues.

The diversities present in these programs push against any clear idea of normalcy, and reject any essentialism that would reaffirm the straight/gay and man/woman binaries. Ultimately weirdness becomes a cause for celebration or appreciation more than anything. In Bowtieboy, for example, gay main character Alex’s love of everything “kawai’” or cute and Asian, is matched by his friend Victory’s obsession with the color pink, her Hello Kitty car, and her anthropomorphizing of cakes and cupcakes. Similarly, on Re(l)azioni a catena, when Chiara, aka “Skemmy,” Silvia’s cousin finds out that Silvia is a lesbian, the two engage in a pivotal discussion that challenges the meaning and foundations of what normal is:

Chiara: I thought you were normal.

Silvia: Am I not normal because I don’t have a husband, kids, and a color TV? Am I not normal because I like women? Look, you’re not so normal yourself: you steal, you spend more time lying down than on your feet, and you have secret boyfriends.

Chiara: But I’m seventeen years old, I have a right not to be normal.

Silvia: Well, I’d also like this right, is that asking too much?

Chiara: Okay, you win; you have the right not to be normal (“Episodio 7 ‘Zero assoluto’”).

Determinants of normalcy are proven to encompass many more behavioral tendencies than those that foretell sexual orientation. Not only does Chiara realize that she too lives her life
outside of the boundaries of expectation and acceptability, but abnormality ultimately becomes something to desire and be celebrated. This kind of approach to representation lies in direct opposition to the “we are all the same” rhetoric espoused by mainstream Italian television. These shows, thus, tend to afford all characters the ability to seek ways of living that lie outside the restrictive boundaries that dictated the lives of the characters on the previous shows; boundaries that were so naturalized that questioning them would jeopardize the very foundations at the heart of the narratives themselves.

In addition to what seems to be a celebration of difference in these webseries, spectators are privy to representations of same-sex sexual intimacy that is not visually equated with or substituted by images of heterosexual sex, is not complicated by psychological angst or regret, is not problematized for not having procreative ends, and is as varied as the desires and investments of the parties participating in these acts. We must not overlook the fact that webseries are not constrained by networks and do not face scrutiny and threats of censorship in the same way that programs being aired on RAI or Mediaset might. This plays a very large role in what may or may not be depicted. That being said after the show Tris aired a gay kiss on Youtube the number of complaints received led the site to block the episode. After an influx of grievances about this censorship were aired, however, Youtube once again agreed to publish the episode (Premoli). It is also important to keep in mind viewers must seek out these webseries, which, in turn, rely heavily on festival circuits and word of mouth for publicity. The comparatively limited reach of these shows, and the niche market that must intentionally look for such programs allows the creators to make certain assumptions about what their audiences want or are willing to watch. The benefit for viewers when seeking out and consuming these webseries is that
they are given a broader range of representations that may provide more points of identification. And from a queering perspective, the lack of necessary correlation between the straight and LGBT characters means that binary understandings of gender and sexuality are not foundational for viewer comprehension or pleasure.

Discussions of the potential for increased and more varied visibilities in these webseries must be placed in relation to an acknowledgment of the silences and invisibilities within these television shows. As I discuss in chapter three, invisibilities help us understand the boundaries of the legible and socially acceptable. In this respect the major commonalities linking these programs are the ultimate source of their invisibilities. Made by Italians who are not necessarily in the TV or film industries, produced on low or next to no budgets, born from a desire to see more gays on TV, these shows are produced by relatively young LGBTQ people looking to represent themselves and their communities in ways that reflect their actual lives. Because of this the age range of the characters is extremely limited (most of them are in their twenties and early thirties). The plus side of this is that the characters are presented as unfettered by normative social expectation because they are not necessarily ready to settle down and are largely at ease with their sexuality. The inevitable downside is that these shows lack diversity in age, race, and gender variance.

Unlike these representational voids, the linguistic silences that spectators may notice in these webseries seem intentionally positioned to highlight the inevitable problems with invisibility or presumed heterosexuality. As we saw in Re(l)azioni a catena, for example, Silvia’s mother tries to set her brother Stefano up with Alessia, assuming that the woman she has chosen for her son is straight. Presuming heterosexuality ends up
creating moments of confusion and drama as Alessia has feelings for Silvia and not for her brother Stefano.

Misunderstanding is created within these narratives time and again when expectation is paired with silence. There is a similar situation in G&T when Tommy hears that his ex-friend Giulio is roommates with another old friend Sara. Tommy assumes that the two are a couple which causes a lot of anger and confusion later when Tommy catches Giulio making out with a man on the roof of a bar. Likewise, in Tris, when Alex assumes that he and his boyfriend are monogamous but the couple never has a conversation about it, this lack of clarity creates the drama that ultimately leads to their breakup. Language not only provides a certain level of social legibility and interpellation, it also helps expand or destroy expectations based on compulsory heterosexuality and normativity. Taken to the extreme this silence often results in violence against LGBTQ people, as is the case in Tris when Alex is walking alone at night and gets gay bashed. The assumptions the aggressors make about Alex and their speechless understanding that they are both ready and willing to perform this act of violence, show the power of silence surrounding normative expectation and the potential dangers it signifies for those who lack semiotic representation. It becomes, therefore, linguistically significant that Daniele in Tris mispronounces “gay” as “ghee” until he is finally ready to come out of the closet. Often in these webseries, and very much in contrast with the mainstream family fictions, these silences and invisibilities are used as devices to highlight the damages they create for LGBT characters.

On the other side of this semiotic coin, these shows use verbal and visual language to reiterate several actions and expressions that are culturally coded within LGBTQIA
communities. Perpetuating these semiotic signs serves to broaden their reach and deepen the understanding of non-normative signification within dominant linguistic discourses. In terms of the language used by gay culture, when Alex in *Bowtieboy* joins online dating and hookup apps, we learn along with him that acronym AOP (which in English would be TOB—“top or bottom”) stands for active or passive and is used by gay men to establish sexual preference (“01x01 ‘un nuovo inizio’”). Similarly in *Tris* when Daniele says that he doesn’t know where to meet men, Alex immediately lends him his dog and tells him to go to the park, giving spectators access to the LGBTQ connotative codes for this everyday space. Semiotic signification becomes multilayered or complicated by the verbalization and visualization of subcultural codes. At times this even leads to moments of intersection between LGBTQIA and heterosexual cultures, especially, for example, in *Bowtieboy*, when Alex asks Victory if she is menstruating because she is acting strange. Victory’s response, “you are just a typical gay misogynist, a miso-gay-nist,” points out a common grievance in the LGBTQIA community, namely that gay men appear to hate women (“01x06 ‘Rompiamo le uova’”). Two things happen in Victory’s comment: first gay men are acknowledged for their gender and as such have the ability to be as misogynist as any straight man, and second, the common societal phenomenon—which we have seen repeated in the programs previously discussed—of seeing gay men as either a third-sex or more in tuned with women because they are more feminized, is dismantled.

By problematizing assumption by making silence the catalyst for drama, these shows point to a need for semiotic representation. And it is through their visual and linguistic representations of LGBT characters that the cultural codes of these groups may ultimately merge into the semiotics of the larger society, the result of which just might be a
level of interpellation for LGBT people that allows for greater diversity and greater legibility.

From a temporal perspective, queerness is a force that challenges linear narratives of progress, questions continuity, and engages in multiplicities that allow the past, the present, and the future to coexist within the same moment. In these webseries we see various depictions of queer time not unlike those outlined in the previous chapter. In G&T, for example, the entire first season contains flashbacks to five years earlier when Tommy and Giulio had a moment of same-sex intimacy in the bathroom of a nightclub. The everpresentness of that moment, as it is used to explain much of the behaviors we witness in the story’s narrative present, creates the feeling that the past and present coexist. In Cruising Utopia, Munoz states: “The here and now has an opposite number, and that would be the then and there. [...] the past that disrupts the tyranny of the now is both past and future” (29). Indeed in G&T the past acts as a queer disruptive force that prevents Tommy from living out the heteronormative life he and his fiancé are planning and pushes him to explore his feelings for Giulio. Thus the future created by the disruption of the past within the present is, for Tommy, a future separate from his homophobic brother and a future cradled in the safety of a community that supports him and his new relationship with Giulio.

Tris, unlike G&T, has a strictly linear temporal format. This linearity, however, is not one that implies progress or succession; instead what viewers are presented with is a queer moment that contains both community and individual self-reflection. The three friends in the program, Alex, Daniele, and Giulio are not building anything together; they are not creating a future based on productivity or reproduction. We might understand Tris
as a slice of life show that gives viewers a window into a particular group of friends at a particular time with no further expectations. This, however, does not mean that the characters reject futurity, or rather, the queer futurity that Muñoz speaks of when he says that “queerness is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing” (*Cruising Utopia* 1). The desire and search for that which is missing is precisely Muñoz’s queer utopian futurity, and is very much embodied by the character Daniele at the end of the first season of *Tris*. Daniele tells his friends that he is leaving, that though he feels safe with them in their little gay bubble, he wants to go out and find spaces where he can always feel safe; there is hopefulness in his endeavor. Whether or not Daniele is successful is beside the point, as Muñoz reminds us “queer failure, as I argue, is more nearly about escape and a certain kind of virtuosity” (173). Thus *Tris* plays with two different queer temporal concepts: on the one hand it provides a queer moment without forward movement, giving audiences a time and place that exists largely outside dominant normative discourses, and on the other hand it gives spectators a glimpse into a queer temporal futurity that points to a need for something other, something outside heterosexual space and time that Daniele may or may not find.

*Re(l)azioni a catena* provides spectators with yet another form of queer temporality. Sara Ahmed has argued that queer is a spatial term, that things are straight when they are “in-line” and disorientation is the product of a kind of slanting of these lines and perspectives. I would argue that a *slant* gets created when Silvia’s cousins—with whom she has no relationship—come to live with her. The disappearance of their mother destroys the traditional family linearity and draws a new line that temporarily reorients the dynamic between these estranged relations. Again, looking to Ahmed we see that, “Queer
orientations might be those that don’t line up, which by seeing the world ‘slantwise’ allow other objects to come into view. [...] [they] follow a diagonal line, which cuts across ‘slantwise’ the vertical and horizontal lines of conventional genealogy” (107). What the series does is present spectators with a queer moment within the lives of Silvia, Chiara, and Emma that gets created when the normative genealogical familial trajectory is diverted. The temporality of this new family formation is uncertain and as such the characters largely focus on figuring out how to live moment to moment. Instead of planning for the future, the characters must cope with their new situation. In Time Binds Elizabeth Freeman argues that, “people are bound to one another, engrouped, made to feel coherently collective through particular orchestrations of time” (3). In the case of (Re(l)azioni a catena, I would argue that it is their forced collectivity that creates a communal relationship to time that exists and functions outside normative forward moving temporality. These three webseries thus provide three different examples of narrative temporality that can be seen as queer precisely because they work contrary to the continuous, productive, forward moving time inherent to dominant heteronormative socio-cultural temporal structures.

5.2.1 Beyond the Narratives

Looking beyond the narratives of these shows we spectators may find a queerness within these programs’ temporal structure that facilitates a queerness of engagement and pleasure. Indeed the brevity of these programs—generally ranging from seven to twenty-five minutes—means that viewers do not need a very substantial temporal commitment to enjoy these shows. They themselves, just like the content they depict, are fleeting queer moments of engagement for spectators. Furthermore, their existence online and not on
traditional broadcasting platforms means that viewers have more power to control both the content’s flow (just like DVR or watching a program on DVD) and the time and place of consumption.

Existing outside the television industry, and relying on very limited budgets, the aesthetics of these shows run in direct contrast to the stylized and sutured framings we saw in the big budget small screen productions previously discussed. BADhOLE, the cultural association that created and produced Re(f)azioni a catena, and more recently 10percento—a lesbian film for Instagram made up of one hundred ten-second clips—is comprised of only five women. These women-activists made these works from a sense of indignation in the face of societal ills like discrimination, and not from a desire to become rich or be discovered (badholevideo). The aesthetic result, as with LSB, is a stylistic rawness of sound, editing, attire, and location. Bowtieboy, which began as a blog, is written and produced by Simone Botte who also plays Alex, the main character in the program. The do-it-yourself attitude of these small-scale productions gets reflected in the amateurish aesthetics of the programs (“Bowtieboy la webserie nata da un blog”). This is not a negative judgment of the shows, to the contrary, Bowtieboy's use of clips from movies and television, and the often fragmented frames that seem to intentionally refuse to show viewers a character’s face or whole body, give the show a postmodern “mash-up” feel. The cut-and-paste quality recreates the fragmentation that we find in queer identity construction. As Robert J. Hill notes, “queer shares with postmodern perspectives the refusal to be positioned as solitary and intact. Queer is a category that no one can ever fully own or possess because it requires a shifting identity to practice” (87). Through these aesthetics audiences are visually reminded that these programs are constructions. While, for Kaja
Silverman the cinematic suture that erased the technology behind the representation allowed for easier identification between the viewer and the viewed, it is the lack of suture, the evidence of the technology (as evidence of the space-off) that makes identification with the process of constructing the characters a queer identification. This is much like what Halberstam has deemed the “technotopic” which refers, as he explains, “to the spatial dimensions of this aesthetic [...]” Technotopic inventions of the body resist idealizations of the body integrity, on the one hand, and rationalizations of disintegration on the other; instead they represent identity through decay, detachability, and subjectivity in terms of what Hesse referred to as ‘the non-logical self” (In a Queer Time and Place 124). In Halberstam’s work expressions of the queer body through trans aesthetics are alternative modes of embodiment that necessitate fracture. The queer body, for our purposes, does not only refer to the physicalities of the bodies represented within these programs but also the body of the text, which in turn is dependent on technology (the medium through which consumption happens) and technology’s relationship to space and time.

In this age of media convergence, which I discuss in chapter one, the changes in technology and viewer consumption practices go hand in hand with an increase in viewer participation. Grassroots and so-called “bottom-up” viewer-generated materials are in abundance and are actively reducing the socio-cultural force of big industry by providing alternative content that better speaks to whatever niche market these works attract or represent. This increased viewer participation blurs the lines between the maker and the consumer. Furthermore viewer participation takes many forms as spectators not only contribute financially to programs they support, they also create content by generating fan fiction, fan art, slash fiction, and other works that make up the paratextual universes of
these programs. These webseries, for example, are often created as a reaction to the creators’ experiences as spectators of traditional television programs. Because they operate outside institutional televisual structures these shows rely heavily on viewers for financial support. Thus a barebones sub-industry of makers and producers leans on pre-existing communities, in this case often LGBTQIA communities, and in turn these creators help make or expand the communities that have helped them come to be.

Webseries are not the only method for creating other representations of LGBTQIA populations or responding to those produced by the television industry. In addition to the production of new material and narrative worlds, spectators looking to queer their televisual content often engage in acts of remediation or fan fiction to create the things they would like to see in the content that is already available to them.

5.3 Remediations

*Remediation* is a word used to define a repurposing of content, or as Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin explain, it is “the representation of one medium in another” (45). While Bolter and Grusin do make the claim that remediation within one medium is also possible, for this investigation a cross-media perspective on repurposing is fitting.

The gay, lesbian, and trans narratives within the mainstream programs that I have looked at in the previous three chapters become, in this digital age of convergence and participatory media, material for remediation, especially on online platforms such as Youtube and Dailymotion. In fact, nearly all the programs can be found remediated on user-generated content websites. Users with names such as Yukimax79, Edos90, and Alterego have remediated these programs by stripping them of the heterosexual narratives and
pasting together only the storylines of the gay or lesbian characters. Alterego, who used to be on Youtube but, out of frustration for all of the erasing of her videos, has turned to other online platforms such as altervista.org and Google+ (on which she is now known as alterego198x), represents a perfect example of user renegotiation and remediation.

Both on Google+ and her altervista website alterego1983.altervista.org, Alterego has created various playlists of remediated lesbian film and television content from Italy, Germany, and Anglophone nations, including the story of Eva and Roberta on Tutti pazzi per amore 3, Rita and Valeria on È arrivata la felicità, and Sara and Federica on Tutti insieme all’improvviso. In Ethereal Queer, Amy Villarejo discusses the potential for queerness in the spatio-temporal dynamics of remediated television. When discussing the made-for-TV movie Losing Chase she refers to a fan who has, similar to Alterego, cut up the film and pieced together the lesbian love scenes. Villarejo remarks, “Where Losing Chase requires quite a bit of effort to bring Chase Philips (Mirren) and Elizabeth Cole (Sedgwick) together [...] [this Youtube user] cuts, as it were, right to the chase of lesbian desire [...] We get all the good stuff [...] and almost none of the bad stuff” (156). Alterego, like the user Villarejo discusses, reduces these shows to their lesbian narratives and in so doing eliminates some of their invisibilities and the inequalities between them and the heterosexual love stories. The show, obviously, does not change and as such nor do the problems of the representation of the characters, but without the presence of the straight narratives there is no juxtaposition. Viewers need not come face to face with the show’s choice to exclude intimacy only for the same-sex couple, as such a large part of the representational imbalance is removed. That being said, whether we watch scenes like the one in Tutti pazzi per amore 3, depicting Eva’s fantasy of snow queen Claudia through
Alterego’s sites or on RAI we are still faced with the replacement of Eva and Claudia with their straight counterparts. The narratives are reduced, and those watching explicitly for the lesbian narratives can enjoy them without wading through a predominantly straight show for glimpses of gayness, but the presentation of the lesbian content comes with all the problems of its representation no matter on what platform it gets viewed. bell hooks has attested that for Black women watching mainstream Hollywood movies “to experience fully the pleasure of that cinema they had to close down critique, analysis; they had to forget racism” (“The Oppositional Gaze” 514). Similarly, though these are abbreviated and explicitly LGBT narratives, the act of remediation through abridgment reaffirms many of the issues of representation, and those watching may be forced to “forget homophobia” to find pleasure much like the women of which hooks speaks.

We might argue that it is precisely the issues of these mainstream representations that make the kinds of remediations performed by Alterego, Yukimax79, and Edos90 possible. The lack of community present in these shows and the normative monogramy of the plotlines streamline the content. Without a complex web of relations, these LGBT people can be literally plucked out of their original narratives and repositioned as isolated stories. What these online users do, however, is create a different kind of community for these characters. In the case of Alterego, the lesbian narratives of Tutti pazzi per amore, È arrivata la felicità, and Tutti insieme all’improvviso, are all positioned together along with those of other Italian shows and films such as I bastardi di Pizzofalcone (De Giovanni 2017), Ragion di stato (Pontecorvo 2015), L’amore è imperfetto (Muci 2012) and others. Furthermore, Alterego’s placement of these programs alongside the lesbian narratives of other countries—providing Italian, English, and German subtitles for her audiences—
creates a new kind of community formation of lovers of lesbian stories that transcends national borders. Providing a locus for multinational LGBT representation is an act of what Henry Jenkins has called “pop cosmopolitanism,” by which he means, “the ways that the transcultural flows of popular culture inspires new forms of global consciousness and cultural competency” (“Pop cosmopolitanism” 156). Jenkins emphasizes the importance of grassroots intermediaries such as Alterego in facilitating the cultural exchange of products and media. Acknowledging that perceptions of these media products cannot necessarily be controlled, and are often left to the mercy of these bottom-up culture sharers, he is optimistic about its potential: “What cosmopolitanism at its best offers us is an escape from parochialism and isolationism, the beginnings of a global perspective, and the awareness of alternative vantage points” (166). Viewers now have access to a new kind of palimpsest that provides a larger textual body of LGBT stories and provides a new context and community for those who seek out these modes of consumption.

Through the remediation of mainstream LGBT narratives, these media user/producers create a kind of queerness that the stories they cut-up and stream do not. Much like the webseries discussed above, these narratives come in abbreviated clip form. Often the “episodes” of remediated content are just a few minutes long, giving viewers fleeting moments of gay narrative. In addition, the ability to watch a storyline that traditionally spanned an entire season in just seven clips that are around ten minutes—as is the case for *Tutti pazzi per amore 3*—each strips the story of its future-oriented trajectory and forward movement. Viewers can experience all the futurity in the now, no anticipation or extended viewer fidelity required. The elasticity and fragmentation
indicative of the queer temporalities created by these users and sites is mirrored in the way they play with both physical and textual space.

On the one hand Grusin and Bolter speak of a certain “seamlessness” of digital technology, which disguises mediation and renders the depicted images as “realistic” as possible. The streaming and automatic flow of one “episode” to the next facilitate a sutured aesthetic that, together with the high definition images, work to perpetuate normative time and the notion of unity and wholeness (24). On the other hand, I argue that these LGBT remediations call into question the very boundaries needed to establish wholeness in the first place. By cutting up the original programs, viewers are presented with a fractured part of what was a “whole” story and this new text is put into conversation with all the surrounding textual fragments, producing a mosaic body of narratives that span across both shows and nations. Furthermore, these cut-ups still bear the trace of the shows of origin. Grusin and Bolter have noted that “the digital medium can be more aggressive in its remediation. It can try to refashion the older medium or media entirely while still marking the presence of the older media and therefore maintaining a sense of multiplicity or hypermediacy” (46). The multiplicity of this remediation is increased even further by the addition of subtitles and other text written on the older media products. Thus, these remediations contract and expand the body of the text as they layer and refashion media and put them in conversation with other similar textual bodies. Far from being sutured to appear seamless, it is precisely this piecing together, and the highlighting of these remediations as constructions that make them queer and allow them to expand the textual landscape of the original work. Here the stability of boundaries, or the limits of the political geographies used to produces ideas of nationhood and of media are called into question.
and rendered futile. The multiplicities of time, space, and technology that help produce these mediations would therefore seem queerer than the images and narratives of which they are comprised.

5.4 Slash Fiction

Fan fiction, generally speaking, is a work of fiction written by a fan of a particular book, film, television show, comic or other narrative medium. Usually fan fiction creates an extension of some area of the original text. These works range from the extremely short (known as “drabble”) to the long form multiple chapter works. Those who engage in fan fiction largely take part in active online or real life communities and exchange, comment on, and enjoy each other’s stories (Sly).

Slash fiction, a subcategory of fan fiction, puts two heterosexual male characters in situations of homoerotic intimacy. Femslash, its less common counterpart, does the same with straight female characters. Many scholars, like Henry Jenkins, have theorized as to the roots and possible effects of slash fiction in these communities and in society more generally. Jenkins argues two key points: First that “slash is not so much a genre about sex as it is a genre about the limitations of traditional masculinity” (Textual Poachers 191). And second, that “slash allows for a more thorough exploration of issues of intimacy, power, commitment, partnership, competition and attraction” (202). Slash as a genre, regardless of content, exists therefore because of a need not being met by traditional depictions of desire in mainstream media products.

The content of these slash works, while depicting acts of same-sex sexual intimacy, are constrained by the narratives and characters within the works they paratextually
extend. Slash writers seek to maintain the voices of the characters and generally the types of situations in which they find themselves, thus “slash, like most of fan culture, represents a negotiation rather than a radical break with the ideological construction of mass culture; slash like other forms of fan writing, strives for a balance between reworking the series material and remaining true to the original characterizations (119). In this way these slash works are very much like the remediations discussed in the previous section; both are limited by the mainstream narratives and character constructions of the works from which they derive.

Those who read and write slash fiction may not necessarily produce queer content but we may understand it as containing, producing, and facilitating queerness from community formation and technological perspectives. Furthermore, we may view it as a locus of queer potentiality in that it provides a space where alternatives to hegemonic representations of gender and sexuality get created.

Italian speaking slashers (writers of slash fiction) can find their largest outlet on efpfanfic.net which was created in 2001 by webmaster Erika, or they may choose to interact with the communities on fanfic-italia.livejournal.com or post and comment on slash fiction and slash art on Facebook.com/slashandfemslash, to name a few. The texts these Italian speaking communities engage with vary enormously in terms of nation of origin and genre, and slashers may choose to remain specific to a genre or program or move between them.

Reflecting for a moment on the content produced by these Italian slashers, what stands out are the myriad programs being slashed that already contain LGBT narratives or moments. If we stay within the frame of programs with large family components what
seems particularly relevant is the slashing of the American sitcom *Modern Family*. Used by the Italian media to position—and laud—the show *È arrivata la felicità*, *Modern Family* is celebrated for its depiction of gay couple Mitchell and Cameron. Italian slashers, however, consider it a text wanting for actual sexual intimacy between the gay characters. A text entitled “Problemi in paradiso” [“Trouble in Paradise”] written by slasher Whity on Efpfanfic.net, takes Cameron and Mitchell’s relationship to the next level. In her story, after a day of turmoil caused largely by Cam’s body insecurities, Mitchell orchestrates a night of romance for the two, which ends up in the consummation of their relationship. The reviews of Whity's story are flush with compliments regarding the “authenticity” of the characters, and her ability to make the couple seem introspective while maintaining the comic nature of the genre. Most telling for our purposes, however, is a remark made by user Memi91, who writes, “finally we know who gives it to whom” (Memi91). Here slash fiction is used to fill a void, to give audiences what is lacking in the narratives of origin.

The same can be said for the Italian slash fiction about the teen drama (which is equal parts family and school dramas) *Gossip Girl*. In 2011 Mediaset aired the third season of the show as part of their summer programming and decided to censure a gay kiss between main character Chuck Bass and secondary character Josh Elliot (“Mediaset censura il bacio gay di Gossip Girl”). Many Italian online blogs and magazines responded by criticizing the censure and providing links to the cut content. But while mainstream media was questioning the motives for eliminating a tongue-less kiss between two men, Italian slash fiction was busy with inserting much more than kisses into the narrative. Interestingly, the majority of the slash fiction for this program on the EFP fan fiction site involves the character Chuck Bass. Slashers are providing audiences with the sexual
expressions lacking or removed from mainstream depictions, and in this case Chuck Bass becomes a point of convergence for gay or straight audience desire.

In these slash works a direct connection gets created between those spectator/authors who desire depictions of gay sex, because they more fully represent LGBTQ populations and those spectator/authors who find the depictions of the female characters to be unsubstantive and therefore create same-sex intimacy between straight male characters in an effort to better represent the complexity of heterosexual relationships. Given that the majority of slash fiction writers are straight women, scholars have theorized several possible reasons for their desire to produce homoerotic narratives. Alexis Lothian et. al., reiterating many dominant understandings for this authorship, note that:

*Few female role models are available in media texts [...] if they are, their overdetermination for female viewers complicates or even prohibits identifications [...] feminist readings offer same-sex relationships as models for a more equal relationship; psychoanalytic analyses address the fact that women can be and desire both subjects within a given pairing, thus offering a wider variety of identificatory options (106).*

Representations of women lack the depth of the men in these programs and women respond by looking elsewhere. The beauty of this is that slash fiction affords them multiple possibilities for identification and pleasure. The very same or similar reasons draw those who seek better representations of queerness to slash fiction. The result is that “slash fandom has become a place where a young urban dyke shares erotic space with a straight married mom in the American heartland, and where women whose identity markers
suggest they would find few points of agreement have forged erotic, emotional, and political alliances” (104). This diverse community comes together because of the limitations of representation in these mainstream programs. In rejecting normative standards of gender and sexuality, these slashers produce bodies of work that challenge the strict categorizations enforced by imposed socio-cultural binaries. The result is three-fold.

These slasher challenge the foundations of identity politics by producing and performing works and acts that often run counter to the socially accepted understanding of their identity which is based on their chosen sexual partners. In other words, writing gay and acting straight questions the validity of identity categories that cannot reconcile these differences. In this way, Westernized social constructions centering on identity may be replaced with alternative understandings of the flexibility of positionality based on performativity.

Secondly, just as their actions seem to reject “the automatic primacy and singularity of the disciplinary subject and its identitarian interpellation,” so too do the communities they form reject the identity politics too often at the heart of feminist discourses of intersectionality (Puar Terrorist Assemblages 206). I am arguing here that the queerness of these slash fiction communities lies in the “affective tendencies” that bring them together as an assemblage (Puar, “I Would Rather be a Cyborg than a Goddess” 387). We may look at these communities as queer performing bodies made up of the multiple bodies which in and of themselves are also “unstable assemblages that cannot be seamlessly disaggregated into identity formations” (378-9).

Lastly, though from a textual perspective not all the works produced can be considered queer—especially in light of their desire to conform stylistically to their works
of origin—their existence as paratextual extensions calls into question the boundaries of the televisual text as a fixed entity. Just as knowledge about actors seeps into spectator perception of a program and alters it, so too do these texts extend and obfuscate the definition of the text. We might say that slashers put homosexual intimacy within these texts, but more importantly we may argue that by extending the texts slasher queer television through the dismantling of televisual textual boundaries.

5.5 Queer Television Assemblages

The content of the bodies of work in this chapter varies greatly both from the webseries, to the remediations, to the slash fiction discussed, and from one work to the next within each category. The webseries are limited largely by resource availability due to financial constraints, and potentially by the time limits imposed by the online platforms on which they have chosen to stream, while the remediations and slash fictions are constrained in content or genre and style by their works of origin.

The LGBT webseries, like slash fiction, afford characters a level of sexual expression not limited by acceptable representations of identity. In presenting more than one or two token LGBT characters they have the space to express the diversity within each sexual orientation and gender identity, and use culturally connotated codes that are more specific to the represented populations. The shows make use of queer aesthetics as well that highlight the technological aspects most mainstream programs are quick to suture. Though these Italian webseries tend to lack variety in the age and ethnicity of their characters, they speak to the potential for more and other kinds of representations on grassroots programs.
The limits of what they depict are matched by their limit of accessibility. In fact, most of these webseries are prohibited from being streamed outside of Italy.

For remediated material, problems of LGBT representation are for the most part inherited from the shows they cut up. Homonormative characters remain such even when the stories of the straight characters are removed from the narrative. Furthermore, the choice to re-air these normativities and make them available on more online platforms essentially spreads these problematic depictions by making them available to broader audiences. Despite these issues, the reshaping of this content still creates new bodies of work whose stories are focused entirely on LGBT characters, taking them from their secondary roles and positioning them front and center. We might also say that the sites created by these remediators are assemblaged LGBT spaces; each remediation—which is an assemblage onto itself—is placed next to other LGBT remediated assemblages that, when grouped on these user generated content sites, enter into new conversation with one another.

The works of slash fiction, as I have mentioned, largely attempt to stick to the genre and tone of their work of origin, and seek to capture the voices of their characters. The same-sex erotic acts that slashers create are essentially inserted into the narrative worlds they are slashing. Thus, where remediators take content out of the show and reposition it, slashers put content in while repositioning the content in the frame of fan community sites. Both the action of remediating and that of slashing change and extend the bodies of the televisual texts with which they play. This repositioning consequently puts the texts in contact with new texts, creating a space that potentially changes not only the experience of consumption but the works themselves. In their extensions of these narrative worlds, the
slashers also dismantle the misconception of a single televisual author; the work is now collectively created by all those who add to or rewrite it. No longer are these programs industry texts, they become texts created both from the top down and the bottom up, often crossing nations and languages along the way.

Thinking of these works and acts of production in terms of Muñoz’s queer utopia, their failures, by which I mean the ways they miss moments of potential queerness, or recreate normative binaries or modes of being, should not necessarily be considered problematic. Indeed, as Muñoz claims in Cruising Utopia, “utopia [...] is always destined to fail,” but, he adds, “within failure we can locate a kernel of potentiality. I align queer failure with a certain mode of virtuosity that helps the spectator exit from the stale and static lifeworld dominated by the alienation, exploitation, and drudgery associated with capitalism” (173). Their failure still stems from a desire, a desire that is at the root of Muñoz’s queer utopia. Their productions, which are responses to the Italian representations created by the mainstream, show the potentiality of media engagement and creation to produce queer utopic assemblages. Television’s queer futurity lies in the potentiality created by and through moments of interaction between bodies made possible by technology and the dissolution of prescriptive definitions of what television is. This futurity is thus not dependent on the heteronormative reproductive imperative, but rather relies on, as Puar states, “the capacity to regenerate” and we might add, remediate (Terrorist Assemblages 211).
Coda: Queer, There, and Everywhere

I have used Italy as my geopolitical area of investigation for this study of queerness on and through television. I argue that television grew as a medium and industry alongside Italy's idea of national identity, as it was in part through televisual depictions that the notion of Italianness took on meaning. Looking at fictional television, and as I have argued, and family fictions specifically, we may see the ways that Italians depict and understand themselves. An investigation into LGBT representations on these programs thus shows the positioning of these marginalized groups within this national imaginary, how they are allowed to participate in Italian identity, and what must be erased from representation in order for this visibility to be acceptable.

What has come to light in this research is that Italian television itself, and fictions perhaps even more so, allow for and embody a queer potentiality not afforded the LGBT characters they depict. From the sceneggiati to contemporary fictions, these television productions, which are so symbolic of Italianness, have relied heavily on other nations for their structure and often their narratives, challenging the us/them binary of the very national identity they help to create and reflect.

In this age of media convergence Italian television fictions continue to challenge the socio-cultural binaries that they depict in their narratives. Grassroots television makers in Italy actively embody Henry Jenkin's notion of pop cosmopolitanism. They aid in creating global “contact zones” of information sharing and exchange. As Jenkins states, “the top-down push of corporate convergence [and] the bottom-up pull of grassroots convergence [...] intersect to produce what might be called global convergence, the multidirectional flow
of cultural goods around the world” (“Pop cosmopolitanism” 155). These grassroots media
makers and sharers embrace changing technology as a tool and an aesthetic, and with it
they dismantle the linearity of time and the politics of space. Likewise, they create
communities that break linguistic and class barriers to collaborate in creating and sharing
modes of understanding and representation that challenge the hegemonic structures on
which local and global television industry depend.

Perhaps it isn’t the content we should be looking at when considering queerness’
relationship to television, not yet at least. Perhaps looking past the censorship, the
normativity, the marginalizations and erasures, we might see Italian television fictions—
with their assemblaged structures, technological mutability, temporal play, and grassroots
engagement—as a locus for queer potentiality. Italy and fictions become a springboard for
approaching the queer utopia that is our engagement with the space, time, and technology
of the televisual body.
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