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## The Neglected Spaces of Feminism and Queer in Contemporary Italian Political Cinema

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**A**t the end of 2018, one of Italy's best-known directors, Nanni Moretti, released a documentary about the Chilean coup d'état of 1973, *Santiago, Italia*.<sup>1</sup> Following a career made of self-reflexive films that combine political commentary with an autobiographical slant, almost always featuring the director himself in front of the camera, this documentary is more "selfless": though his authorial presence is strong (as the narrator and in the film's publicity), he is not the focus, and is rarely seen in front of the camera. Moretti does appear in one sequence, however, to interview Raúl Iturriaga, the ex-army general who was responsible for the violent *Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional* under Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship. At a certain point, Iturriaga expresses doubt about the partiality of the interview, to which Moretti quickly and confidently responds "I am not impartial," before smiling at someone (presumably an interpreter) off-screen. Though brief, this sequence, which also features prominently in the film's trailer, serves as a kind of banner for Moretti's cinematic ideology: unabashedly political; confidently, even smugly, moralistic; and embodied in a white, straight, bourgeois, (family-)man.<sup>2</sup>

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After the release of *Santiago, Italia*, the Italian edition of *Wired* published an article entitled “Once upon a time, there was politically-engaged cinema.” The article states that the documentary marks a turn back to political cinema, which is described in decidedly nostalgic tones. Like Moretti, the author is not impartial: he compares the way the film “recalls sweetly and tenderly a Communist utopia” to “a whole season of *impegno* that had cinema at its forefront, that no longer exists today.”<sup>3</sup>

The term used in this article, “*impegno*”, the Italian equivalent of “commitment” or “engagement,” has long sat at the centre of critical discourses surrounding political culture in Italy. As Jennifer Burns writes, thinking about *impegno* has typically accompanied an “instinctive association with a rather oppressive type of political literature, associated with neorealism and Soviet ‘social realism.’”<sup>4</sup> Though, as Burns illustrates, political commitment actually evolved in a complex and nuanced way, this assumption nonetheless characterizes contemporary political culture in Italy, tying it to aesthetic histories of realism and political histories of the left and class conflict.

Italy has a rich history of political culture, which has for a long time gravitated around the political left and overlapped with various socialist and communist causes.<sup>5</sup> Its discussion has remained coherent with the global left’s attentiveness to the importance of culture in enacting social and political change, and the complex theoretical work undertaken predominantly by Marxist thinkers across the globe, from Antonio Gramsci to Jean-Paul Sartre and the Frankfurt School to the influential ideas on realism, literature and historical consciousness by György Lukács.<sup>6</sup> Italian political cinema is no exception. The season invoked by the critic in *Wired* is embodied in the films and personalities of certain key figures, such as Francesco Rosi, Elio Petri and Gian Maria Volonté, and the Political Cinema genre of the 1960s

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## **VOLUME 6 RESOURCES**

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and '70s. These directors and actors were self-declared Marxists, and the political themes of their work (class conflict, corruption, the mafia) lend themselves to these critical lenses; this has further cemented a continual cycle that re-affirms *impegno* as tied to the left, and raises these artists as the *maestri* of committed cinema.

As a result, *Cinema politico* has come to function both as the foundation for nostalgia in the present—though this is quite anachronistic<sup>7</sup>—and an inescapable point of comparison for films in the present. Moretti's film invokes this comparison, as did the films of Matteo Garrone and Paolo Sorrentino, when *Gomorrah* and *Il divo* were awarded, respectively, the Grand Prix and the Prix du Jury at Cannes 2008. To some critics and journalists, this was a perfect re-enactment of the shared Palme d'Or won by Francesco Rosi and Elio Petri in 1972,<sup>8</sup> and reason enough to connect the engaged acting of Toni Servillo to that of Gian Maria Volonté, despite the significant cultural, historical, social and media-industrial changes of the thirty-six years between the editions of the festival.

Such comparisons evidently shape assumptions about political culture today, though this is counterproductive due to the *omissions* that are automatically invoked. This insistence nostalgically legitimates past forms of political cinema. As important as it is to recognize the contributions of figures like Francesco Rosi, forcing their shadow onto the present risks obscuring important historical differences, namely any model that transcends an outdated definition of an *engagé* director: an intellectual auteur, one that is implicitly a white male, with left-wing politics (albeit a specifically Italian, nostalgic, and bourgeois left).

Over the past two decades, scholars of Italian screen studies have begun to identify new modalities of politically-engaged culture beyond the mainstream (including “queer” and “bottom-up” *impegno*) and lambasted the failures and risks of the old definition.<sup>9</sup> In an example of the latter, O'Leary has sought to interpret this kind of

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selective construction of *impegnò* in cinema as a Foucauldian “discourse,” unveiling its close ties to functions of nationhood, the engaged auteur and audience constituencies, as well as the shortcomings in its disavowal of sentimentality. This also enables O’Leary to tantalizingly hint at how this discourse has “masculine terms” and is “posited on a set of exclusions, salient among which might be both female subjectivity and agency.”<sup>10</sup>

In keeping with this idea of the discourse of *impegnò*, the following discussion focuses concretely on the dangers of such omissions. We seek to illustrate how explicit recourse to the anachronistic model of political commitment cited above allows certain films to reproduce a series of restrictive social categories, and most perilously the terms of the hetero-patriarchy. This normative discourse occurs in two stages: first, at the representational level, it depicts political themes while simultaneously restricting non-hetero/white/male subjects to subsidiary, decorative roles, while heterosexuality and traditional gender roles dominate. Second, this normativity is bound to past forms of political engagement which, in terms of register, are depicted using nostalgic tones that re-project a previous temporality onto the present. As we will seek to illustrate here, queer and women’s political movements (both autonomous groups and their collective contributions) in the past and present are denied any cultural or symbolic relevance.

To demonstrate this, we will illustrate a handful of narrative and representational agendas of different forms of contemporary political cinema, addressing its engagements with gender and sexuality. Specifically, we trace how traditional, hetero-patriarchal understandings of minority politics have led to normative representations in three areas of contemporary film production: mainstream political dramas, documentaries about feminism, and LGBTQ+ films.<sup>11</sup>

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The films we are considering in this essay can be roughly labelled as mainstream in the context of contemporary Italian cinema, with some distinctions. The political dramas studied in the first section have certainly achieved the most critical attention, a wider circulation and a better performance at the box-office. They also best exemplify a prescriptive use of the cinematic and historical past as a marker of political commitment, something that has become a salient, even normative, character in contemporary Italian film production. For this reason, we first analyse these films in order to outline the discursive framework that has made the exclusion of queer and women not just a narrative pattern, but somehow a normative interpretation of the past.

The documentaries about feminism that we examine in the following section, generally directed by women, lay in the middle ground between this “mainstream” political cinema and niche productions. Some of them achieved institutional and critical recognition, but had a limited circulation, reflecting the many structural constraints that female directors face in the Italian film industry.<sup>12</sup> The films’ approaches to politics and temporality often result from the combination of experimental aesthetics, such as found footage or animation, with personal narratives and the reconstruction of the past, generally second-wave feminism. This means that women’s political engagement is reflected at two levels: one of authorship and the other of images and narratives of the past. Despite this, as we will demonstrate below, these documentaries struggle to build a collective notion of the political in the present, reducing its political intervention to the individual perspective of the author or the emotional work of the spectator.

We see a similar dynamic at play in the LGBTQ+ cinema studied in the second section, despite, as we observe, the increased presence of queer characters in mainstream films. The only space where queer political activism finds a voice is in niche documentaries; in fictional queer cinema, politics is disguised underneath

individual, personal drama. This enables the construction of a series of normalizing techniques, constructing queer characters either as more “accessible” and friendly in the terms of the neoliberal subject, or as the cause for crises in heteropatriarchal families.

While the combination of case studies used here might appear arbitrary on the surface, the common thread that intersects them is their engagement with politics and temporality. In a way, we have been inspired by the question that Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover posed themselves in their book *Queer Cinema in The World: “where in the world is queer [and feminist] cinema?”*<sup>13</sup> By any means, we do not claim this corpus to be exhaustive or symptomatic of any broader tendencies. Rather, this selection moves from our very personal frustration, as queer and feminist spectators, of being forced to look against the grain, and *still* struggle with the impossibility of a collective politicized gaze. Indeed, as much of the cinema we are considering loses itself in the narcissistic exercise of celebrating the past, its very act of remembering ultimately erases us.

In a way, this essay is a partial and precarious archive resulting from very specific acts of queer and feminist spectatorship, that aims to pose questions about the meanings and opportunities of representation. It is also a reflection on our sentiment of political rejection, and a call for a wider participation of queer and feminist activists in contemporary film cultures.

## **Female and Queer Characters in Political Dramas**

Contemporary Italian cinema has produced a significant body of political dramas that narrate, with varying degrees of historical accuracy, what film scholar Christian Uva calls *misteri d'Italia*, “Italy’s mysteries,” i.e. the country’s various, infamous “affairs”: assassinations, scandals, cover-ups.<sup>14</sup>

Though not the only way that contemporary Italian culture is working through some of the country’s difficult, recent history, these films have gained legitimacy and primacy as representatives of engaged cinema thanks largely to their considerable impact: they often inspire energetic debates in the public sphere (especially regarding the nature of truth and historical accuracy). This attention allows these films and their filmmakers to help to shape the discourse of *impegno*.<sup>15</sup> As we have anticipated, this discourse has glaring omissions: though such films often endorse a political message that is tied to social collectives, they nonetheless exclude or sideline women and minorities. Let us consider a few examples of this phenomenon.

Marco Tullio Giordana’s *Romanzo di una strage/Piazza Fontana: The Italian Conspiracy* (2012) dramatizes the 1969 bombing of Banca Nazionale dell’Agricoltura in Milan and the mysterious death of the suspect and anarchist Giuseppe Pinelli a few days later at the city’s central police station. The film focuses in particular on the characters of Pinelli and Luigi Calabresi, the police officer in charge of interrogating Pinelli, who was assassinated in 1972 as a result of the affair. The police, politicians, and all political groups depicted in the film consist entirely of men. The women of the film—predominantly the wives of Pinelli and Calabresi—are only represented in domestic contexts. Gemma Capra (Calabresi’s wife), for example, watches the movement of people in Piazza Duomo at the funeral of the bombing’s victims from her home, rubbing her pregnant belly with a concerned expression. Pinelli’s wife and mother are depicted almost always in domestic, maternal spaces, or grieving at the hospital and the funeral. In the latter, they are even visually dislocated from the male anarchists; they fight off tears and



look sorrowful, whereas the anarchists sing and raise their fists. The film thus affirms, in a very consistent way, a spatial and thematic differentiation between men as political beings and women as carers and feelers.

A second example is found in *Il grande sogno/The Big Dream* from 2009. This film narrates the events of 1968 in Italy, and in particular a violent clash between police and students in Valle Giulia, Rome. It shows this story from the perspective of essentially two protagonists: Nicola, a young police officer who intercepts the student movement in plain clothes, and Laura, a student from a bourgeois family who becomes increasingly involved with the anti-capitalist youth movement. The film's image of the student movement is nuanced, illustrating some of its flaws as well as its positive ideals, and the depiction of the police is similarly complicated by our sympathies towards Nicola. Ultimately, however, the political conflict plays out through a romantic triangle, as Laura's affections shift between Nicola and Libero, a charismatic leader of the youth movement. The film therefore provides a very common trope of Italian middlebrow cinema, as O'Rawe has argued, whereby the historical social conflict is concentrated into a homosocial relationship, stereotyping class conflict, and leaving the female character as essentially inconsequential. With recourse to Eve Sedgwick's work, O'Rawe illustrates (in reference to a group of films including *Il grande sogno*), that the same homosocial trope *between men* is "important in helping us work through the ways in which this genre of middlebrow *impegno* constructs the terms of its address to its constituency, and in helping us understand the fundamental irrelevance of women to its politics."<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, though Laura often shows keen intelligence and leadership capacities within the movement, she remains in the shadow of Libero, and is often relegated, again, to emotional labour in relation to the two men and to her home (especially around the death of her father). Moreover, as if to confirm perfectly Sedgwick's own premise—that misogyny and homophobia are intrinsically connected in their service

of the patriarchy<sup>17</sup>—*Il grande sogno* tries (and perhaps consequently fails) to make it incontestable that there is to be no queer misreading of Nicola, at least. In an early sequence, when Nicola is watching Marco Bellocchio's 1965 arthouse, generational conflict drama *I pugni in tasca/Fists in the Pocket*, and a queer in the audience (the only explicitly queer character in the film) makes a move, Nicola's violent response is to threaten the man with his gun.

À propos of veiled queers, the protagonist of *I cento passi*, Peppino Impastato (played by Luigi Lo Cascio) provides an interesting third example. The film recreates the true story of Impastato, the son of a Sicilian mobster, murdered for his outspoken political actions against the Sicilian mafia. Though for some time the sexuality of the historical figure was not widespread public knowledge, Impastato's diaries and spoken interviews with his friends have confirmed that he was gay.<sup>18</sup> Giordana's film makes only considerably veiled references to this possibility.

The potential of associating Impastato's queerness to his political engagement is, however, made more explicit in another, unmade script of his life, *Nel cuore della luna*, written by Antonio Carella.<sup>19</sup> In it, Peppino comes out very dramatically to a friend (the narrator), in a moment of crisis that interconnects his gender, sexuality and political identity. Though we know both scripts were in direct competition for funding in the late 1990s,<sup>20</sup> and it is no terrible stretch to imagine that silencing Impastato's sexuality was strategic, in enabling a more broadly accessible film in a homophobic society,<sup>21</sup> it would of course be problematic to speculate too extensively about the various motives for which the script of *I cento passi* was made and *Nel cuore della luna* was not. Still, the script of the latter and its "unmadness" serve to signal some of the most interesting tensions surrounding the limits of the representable, even in the early 2000s.<sup>22</sup>

These brief examples have in common a historical representation of important political collectives, united against police violence, terrorism or the mafia. Such collectives, however, are profoundly immersed in the actions of heterosexual men, while other identity characters are excluded. Queer men are extremely rare, and are to be unveiled only through archival digging or insistent queer theoretical readings, as O’Rawe’s scholarship clearly illustrates—and this often relates to at best unpleasant and at worst homophobic characters (such as Nicola), none of whom contribute anything to the queer community. Queer women, trans or non-binary people do not exist. Women appear only as vehicles of emotional labour, as motherly carers, or as the scapegoats of homosocial political conflicts.<sup>23</sup>

If these films contribute to a notion of political engagement, both in the representation of constitutive social conflicts in Italy’s past and by participating within the “discourse of *impegno*,” then in both cases this contribution can be understood as fundamentally patriarchal and homophobic. As problematic as this already is, this preservation of homophobic and misogynistic silencing is all the more troubling precisely because the films depict social groups. The vital contributions of Italy’s feminist and queer groups are excluded, at best swept into less visible forms of cinema.

It is our conviction that enough has been said about such cases and that more urgent attention is needed on women’s and queer cinema. This will therefore be our focus on the remainder of this essay.

## **The Past, the Maternal and the Beauty Trade-Off: Documentaries about Feminism and the Backlash against #MeToo**

Despite the “persistent engagement of female directors with social topics,”<sup>24</sup> it is difficult to find narratives centred fully on women’s political commitment. The few films dealing with these questions present narratives of the past (in particular of second-wave feminism),<sup>25</sup> or frame the gendered experience of politics into an affective dimension in relation to “feminine” topics such as motherhood, family and personal relationships. Most of the films analysed in this section are documentaries that have benefitted from institutional acknowledgement and some circulation through festivals and limited theatrical and television distribution. In other words, they have had some chance to be seen outside of activist circles.

The relationship between politicized documentary filmmaking and Italian female directors is a complex one, for a variety of reasons that reflect the trans-historical, patriarchal structures of Italy’s national film culture. We can trace a genealogy of politicized documentaries made by female directors, including *Essere donne/Being Women* (1965) by Cecilia Mangini, works made for television by Liliana Cavani in the mid 1960s, the feminist documentary *Processo per stupro/Trial for Rape* (1979), and more recent examples by Sabina Guzzanti.<sup>26</sup> The persistent difficulties in accessing funding, including public funding, and the structural precariousness of labour in the creative industries have forced many female directors to work with limited budgets and few collaborators;<sup>27</sup> a constraint that has often resulted in the use of archival footage, documentary filmmaking and, more recently, personal narratives. Indeed, though these choices to some extent reflect a broader *autobiographical tendency* in experimental and militant documentary filmmaking,<sup>28</sup> the material conditions that have pushed many female directors towards this form are equally as important when assessing the margins that Italian film culture has imposed upon women’s political engagements on screen.

Our first example is Alina Marazzi's second feature *Vogliamo anche le rose/We Want Roses Too* (2007), which provides an intimate account of the Italian second-wave feminist movement. The voice-over commentary narrates, alternating between a plurality of different voices, a series of personal reflections and diary entries of activists, guiding the spectator through archival footage and animated sequences. These parts remarkably represent the most memorable and noteworthy visual aspects of the film, moreover, stimulating reflections on the political meanings of the aesthetics of found-footage. For instance, according to Sara Filippelli, *Vogliamo anche le rose*, part of a "maternal trilogy,"<sup>29</sup> connects the director's interest in motherhood with the theories of the Diotima group, a community of feminist philosophers who provided a theoretical and academic systemization for a so-called "feminism of difference" (*femminismo della differenza*).<sup>30</sup> Though "feminism of difference" has contributed much to a number of important debates via productive dialogue with other groups in Italy, more recent generations of feminists have become more critical of this approach, which has since become more of a minority. As Daniela Chironi explains, generational conflicts are constantly at play in Italian feminism, but "even though plurality remains a movement value, generational replacement has led to a final predominance of intersectional feminism and growing diffusion of queer perspectives."<sup>31</sup> As a fully-fledged strategy of "citation and affect,"<sup>32</sup> Marazzi's use of archival footage and personal writings represents "the basis of a reflexive, accountable historiography."<sup>33</sup> The film's narrative and visual strategies put the spectator, especially the young female spectator, into a genealogical, filial relationship with the struggles of the past, and promotes the identification with the words and sensibility of the activists of the 1970s. As a result, the film presents the fights of 30 years ago as compelling, through strategies of emotional and affective identification. As such, *Vogliamo anche le rose* establishes a nostalgic and introspective view on feminism, that despite its genealogical aims, does not acknowledge the existence of new

generational questions, especially in terms of intersectionality, which were already emerging in the period of its release and have eventually found an articulation in the contemporary transfeminist movement *Non Una di Meno* (Not One Less, NUDM).<sup>34</sup>

Further examples of films about the women's condition and second wave feminism present similar characteristics, including Giovanna Gagliardo's *Bellissime/Beauties* (2004) and *Bellissime 2* (2006), and Paola Santagiovanni's *Ragazze la vita tremala/Girls Life is Shaking* (2009). Each of these use archival materials to signify the political arena and the public sphere, while women's political engagement is represented through the individual, affective dimension of personal testimonies and memories. As such, the institutional quality of archival footage offers a sort of pedagogy of activism that certifies the achievements of the past, and puts women's first-hand political experiences in an a-temporal dimension of identification and affect. A patronizing and almost judgmental view on the younger generation is present even in the recent documentary *Femminismo//Feminism!* (2018) by Paola Columba, which alternates the opinions of a few notable women who began their political journey in the 1970s and '80s, such as Luisa Muraro, Lea Melandri, Maria Rosa Cutrufelli, Emma Bonino, Dacia Maraini, Marisa Cinciari Rodano, Lidia Ravera, and interviews with teenagers and young women who seem to show little interest in feminism.

This celebration of the struggles of the "mothers" was already present in a film released many years before: Francesca Comencini's *Carlo Giuliani, ragazzo/Carlo Giuliani, Boy* (2002). The documentary reconstructs the tragic death of a protester, Carlo Giuliani, who was killed by a police officer during the demonstrations against the 2001 G8 summit in Genoa, alternating footage of the protests with readings of Carlo Giuliani's personal notes and a long interview with his mother. The documentary immediately presents itself as a political text through an opening title



which reports the following words: “All the box-office incomes in Italy and abroad, as well as the profits from the theatrical distribution, will be devolved to the Comitato Piazza Carlo Giuliani and to the Fondazione Cinema nel Presente for the realization of films of social and political engagement.” Despite the use of this traditional trope of engaged cinema, according to Mauro Sassi, *Carlo Giuliani, ragazzo* refuses to take a partisan point-of-view because of Comencini’s “delegation of all authorial prerogatives” to the mother of Carlo, Haidi Giuliani.<sup>35</sup> The film establishes an interesting correspondence between the maternal and the political, which assigns to Haidi Giuliani a specific, superior ethical position in relation to the political questions posed by the social movements, leaving little room for women’s political engagement outside of the affective and nurturing role of the mother.

These strategies of reflexive representation are particularly effective in suppressing collective women’s agency today. Indeed, as the Xenofeminist collective Laboria Cubonicks puts it:

melancholy—so endemic to the left—[is] an attitude which generates nothing but political lassitude, and at its best, installs an atmosphere of pervasive despair which too often degenerates into factionalism and petty moralizing. The malady of melancholia only compounds political inertia, and—under the guise of being realistic—relinquishes all hope of calibrating the world otherwise.<sup>36</sup>

This critique of self-reflexivity and leftist melancholia comes from the urgency of radical politics to mobilize “collective agents capable of transitioning between multiple levels of political, material and conceptual organization.”<sup>37</sup> The same need is expressed in other terms by José Estaban Muñoz when he discusses the importance of utopias and futurity for queer politics, drawing from Ernst Bloch’s

notion of “concrete utopia.” By understanding queerness in terms of pleasure, feeling and temporality Muñoz argues that “we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds.”<sup>38</sup> And these new worlds can also be imagined and enacted through the pleasures of entertainment and popular culture, including films. To use Richard Dyer’s words, entertainment embeds “what utopia would feel like rather than how it would be organized. [It] thus works at the level of sensibility, [...] an affective code that is characteristic of, and largely specific to, a given mode of cultural production.”<sup>39</sup> That said, why is it that, seemingly, none of these feminist and queer “concrete utopias” are able to find a space in Italian contemporary political cinema? And why are melancholic and self-reflexive accounts of the past often serve as such powerful devices for heterosexist notions of political commitment?

We see the tangible consequences of the persistent suppression of any women’s political community in the Italian reception of the #MeToo campaigns. Among a series of embarrassing episodes, in which members of the Italian film industry were involved in or publicly defended the American producer Harvey Weinstein,<sup>40</sup> the Italian #MeToo movement was characterized by multiple attacks against the few women who denounced and openly named their abusers, such as Asia Argento and Miriana Trevisan.<sup>41</sup> The backlash against them was particularly violent, with accusations of hypocrisy, lies and a lack of gratitude for the career benefits supposedly obtained from their abusers. These arguments reproduce the mechanisms of what Danielle Hipkins has identified as the “beauty trade-off”: “namely the equation between female beauty, stupidity and sexual incontinence,” which relies on a practice of “denigration [...] internalized [also] by those very women who want to distance themselves from it.”<sup>42</sup> In other instances, the failure of #MeToo in Italy was justified via its association with “a leadership mostly composed by financially affluent, and physically able white women, [whose experience] is

partial and limited in comparison to the difficulties of people facing the intersection of sexism, racism, classism and ableism.”<sup>43</sup> A similar argument puts women’s experiences of violence in a hierarchy with social, ethical and racial positions, reflecting a fatal misunderstanding of intersectionality. This attitude has participated in the broader silencing of victims and therefore nurtured existing patterns of gender segregation in the public sphere, while also accentuating the separation between those women who are deemed to speak by virtue, and those that rather *deserve* backlash. Indeed, the #MeToo campaign, including the related hashtag #quellavoltache in Italy,<sup>44</sup> included an unprecedented number of young Italian women, who publicly discussed episodes of sexual harassment in the workplace. Despite this, a fixation with the status and credibility of the VIP denouncers has overshadowed the parallel participation of thousands who relied on forms of digital and hashtag feminism in Italy, joining a global trend in feminist and queer activism.<sup>45</sup> As regards our discussion, this backlash and the corresponding disinterest in the broader participation in the campaign further attest to the limited space in mainstream media for women’s public refusal of hetero-patriarchal structures when they go beyond the re-proposition of a dignified model of womanhood—as in the case of another mainstream feminist movement, *Se Non Ora Quando?* (If Not Now, When?), which exploded a few years earlier in opposition to Silvio Berlusconi’s innumerable sex scandals.<sup>46</sup> Across the movements that lie at the intersection between cinema, media and feminism, then, there are a series of common themes: a nostalgia for past forms of feminist politics (that are depicted as personal agendas) and an emphasis on the most socially comfortable experiences, i.e. bourgeois, white, able-bodied women, at the expense of a varied and intersectional perspective and of the most recent generation’s activism.

## Queer Politics and Characters, and Troubling Normalization

In mainstream cinema, queer representation and queer politics can be grouped into three loose and overlapping categories of films: documentaries, mainstream popular comedies, and auteur dramas. While there are some differences in their representational agendas (and, of course, their impact on audiences), these films share a common trait with the cinemas we explored above: queer people are almost universally tied to private lives and romantic affairs. Though queer politics are rarely an emphatic or explicit issue, and rarely collective, the representation of queer relationships even at a personal level can be considered an already-political gesture in a heteronormative society.

An immediate partial exception can be found in a small but relevant group of queer documentaries that engage with LGBTQ+ rights and activism in the past. Among a larger tendency of documentaries that focus on historically important figures in the international LGBTQ+ community (from Derek Jarman to Giò Stajano), some pioneers—such as Marcella Di Folco, leader of the Movimento Identità Trans (Trans Identity Movement), who features in *Una nobile rivoluzione/A Noble Revolution* (2014) and *Mitica Marcella/Mythical Marcella* (2011)—appear over a useful backdrop of past political engagement. This is implicit in Gianni Amelio's (male<sup>47</sup>) gay history of Italy in *Felice chi è diverso/Happy to Be Different* (2014), as well. In a handful of films by Andrea Adriatico, historical queer movements are the principal focus.<sup>48</sup> The documentaries *Torri, Checche e tortellini/Towers, Queers and Tortellini* (2015) and *Il sesso confuso/The Confused Sex* (2010) engage with gay rights respectively in Bologna between the 1970s and '90s, and during the AIDS crisis specifically.

Queer political engagement is more commonly depicted in present-day documentaries. Though few films focus on specific activists and groups, many others deal with issues and experiences surrounding civil partnerships and queer families, again with varied representations of political activism as a backdrop: *Improvvisamente, l'inverno scorso/Suddenly Last Winter* (2008), *Prima di tutto/First of All* (2012), *Lei è mio marito/She Is My Husband* (2013), *Vorrei ma non posso/It's Wedding Time* (2013) and *L'unione falla forse/Union is Strength, Maybe* (2017). Other minor cases focus on the difficulties of putting together pride parades in the conservative South of Italy (e.g. *Alla luce del sole/In the Sunlight*, 2010, in Naples, or *Pride*, 2013, in Palermo). Further instances still reflect more generally on queer identities and rights, denouncing homo-/transphobia, such as *Sei uomo o sei donna, chiaro?/Are You a Man or a Woman, of Course?* (2008), *Sesso, amore e disabilità/Sex, Love and Disability* (2012), *Ci chiamano diversi/They Call us Different* (2014), or *Fuori!/Out!* (2015<sup>49</sup>).

Overall, these documentaries provide an important vehicle for (and representation of) queer political engagement in Italy.<sup>50</sup> They are very marginal within today's cultural scenario, however, and struggle to gain mainstream circulation, be it theatrical or online—even *Improvvisamente, l'inverno scorso*, which is among the most visible of these examples, sold only 1,850 tickets in Italian theatres.<sup>51</sup> With this limitation in mind, it is useful to turn to those other modes of LGBTQ+ filmmaking to provide a more comprehensive sense of the queer politics today.

In fact, the representation of LGBTQ+ people in mainstream media<sup>52</sup> has been consistent, with the past decade observing a notable growth in the presence of queer characters in popular cinema and on television. In films such as *Cado dalle nubi/Fall from the Clouds* (2009), *Nessuno mi può giudicare/Escort in Love* (2011), *Tutta colpa di Freud/Blame Freud* (2014), *Scusate se esisto!/Do You See Me?* (2014),

*lo che amo solo te*/Only Love You (2015) and *Perfetti sconosciuti*/Perfect Strangers (2016), the romantic troubles of lesbian, gay and bisexual people are placed on the same level as the heterosexual characters they are surrounded by, signaling their increasing acceptance in Italian society. What these characters do represent in terms of progress, however, is, weighed down by the very clear representational agenda: they are almost entirely white, bourgeois and cis-gender. Their “access” to the mainstream is therefore reliant on a kind of neoliberal normalization, rather than any intersectional notion of queer.<sup>53</sup>

Within the context of these popular products, the personal focus on queer characters is homo-normative, with a strong emphasis on dating, companionship and family unity, and no explicit representation of sex.<sup>54</sup> In fact, one of the most common motifs is the fear of coming out to conservative parents, which is often undermined or downplayed in the happy end of the film (or of the queer subplot). Nevertheless, this seemingly positive resolution always accompanies the re-assertion of rigidly patriarchal families. This can be seen in in *lo che amo solo te, Il padre delle spose*/Father of the Brides (2006, TV film), *Cado dalle nubi, Come non detto*/Tell No One (2012) and *Puoi baciare lo sposo*/My Big Gay Italian Wedding (2018).

On the other side of fictional queer cinema, auteur (melo)dramas, intersectionality is embraced more openly. The “poster boy” of this genre, Ferzan Özpetek, has made a series of films that represent queer characters from a variety of classes, races, geographies and histories (for example, in 2001’s *Le fati ignorantil*/Ignorant Fairies, which also includes an AIDS patient). A handful of auteur films also feature explicitly trans characters (for instance, *Gloss: cambiare si può*/Gloss: Change Is Possible (2009), *La bocca del lupo*/The Mouth of the Wolf (2009)). Although these films neither depict political engagement directly nor articulate themselves as



socially engaged, these inclusive representations of queer experience in Italy are certainly politicized. However, even in this body of work the impulse to normalize ultimately undermines much of its potential political impact, this time due to the implicit connotation of queer and trans folk, as the cause of suffering or difficulty. Already in the case of *La bocca del lupo*, the depiction of the working-class man and trans women makes explicit recourse to neorealist tones to represent the characters as “marginal,” “excluded,” demonstrating an implicit distance from a bourgeois perspective.

More broadly, this issue emerges from the personal problems of LGBTQ+ characters. While queer auteur dramas are comparatively much more explicit in depicting sex, they often fall short as regards sex positivity: often queer pleasure serves primarily as a trigger for drama and upset. In *Il compleanno/ David's Birthday* (2009), the film's melodrama and the characters' crises are built around the breakdown of the relationship between Matteo and Francesca, when the former begins to lust for the adult son of a friend. When Matteo and David have sex, something depicted explicitly, Francesca catches them and, in shock, flees onto a road where she is struck down and killed by a passing car. In Ozpetek's *Hamam, il bagno turco/ Steam*, Francesco's affair with a Turkish boy, Mehmet, leads him to remain in Istanbul where he is murdered by business competitors. In *Et in terra pax/ And Peace on Earth* (2010), and *Un bacio/ One Kiss* (2016), oral sex and a kiss, respectively, cause a dramatic escalation of violence among teenagers that leads to brutal killings by queer boys suffering from internalized homophobia. In each of these cases, queer sex serves not as a freeing, political function but merely a narrative one that is moreover tied to meaningless violence and loss of life.

As these examples anticipate, a recurrent motif in recent queer cinema is fluidity in sexual identity. The motif of a straight, often married (usually) man beginning a gay affair is common; what is more surprising is the prevalence of queer characters who

stray “back” into heterosexual relationships. This can serve one of two purposes. The first is, once again, narratological: it marks, for instance, the breakdown of the lesbian relationship in *Io e Lei/Me, Myself and Her* (2015), or to create comedy, around a liberal gay politician who begins an affair with a woman in *Diverso da chi?/Different from Whom?* (2009), or a lesbian who, following too many heartbreaks, “decides” to be bisexual in *Tutta colpa di Freud*. (She succeeds, only to have her heart broken again).

On other occasions, romance or sex between queer and straight characters serve an explicitly political reflection on the fluidity of sexuality. This occurs in *Un altro pianeta/Another Planet* (2008), winner of the Second Queer Lion at the Venice Film Festival. The film is a careful reflection on the character of the cold and independent gay man, Salvatore, that culminates in his learning to forge better human interactions—by sleeping with a woman on the beach. In Ozpetek’s *Le fati ignoranti* and *Le mine vaganti/Loose Cannons* (2010), too, we see queer men kissing women.<sup>55</sup> While on the one hand, this can be read as an original and provocative interpretation of sexual fluidity, on the other hand, any radical concepts of queer or any celebration of queer life and history are undermined and “saved,” unnecessarily, by heteronormative acts. Across these many forms of queer representation, it seems that the fundamental and uncomfortable differences of queer sexualities and identities are either transformed into violent drama, or narcotized so as to access a more hetero-friendly audience.<sup>56</sup>

## Conclusions

ur analysis here has sought to illustrate that the social constitution of politically engaged cinema today is markedly tilted towards an ideological representation that silences the rich array of sexual and gender identities in contemporary Italy. These already problematic erasures are even more surprising in the light of the importance of feminist and queer grassroots movements from the past half century. The last fifteen years in particular have witnessed the growth of the Italian feminist movement and its mobilization against the feminization of labour, the increasing precariousness of the job market, and gender-based violence.<sup>57</sup> This historical moment can be better understood in the framework of “fourth wave feminism,” as characterized by the use of digital activism, and the intersectional and transnational approach to social struggles.<sup>58</sup> In Italy, this “new wave” also features an unprecedented inter-generational coalition, which unites young activists with the feminists who participated to the women’s movement in the 1970s—something distinctly absent in the documentaries studied in our second section.

The latest tendencies in queer and feminist grassroots activism are shifting back towards the (re)construction of politics across generations and the creation of collective intersectionality. These different perspectives result from divergent approaches to contemporary politics, with the former based in static textual analysis and the latter in dynamic processes and practices, with an increasingly transnational aim. To paraphrase Emi Koyama’s “Transfeminist Manifesto,” today’s movements “believe in the importance of honoring [...] differences as well as similarities.”<sup>59</sup> Indeed, contemporary queer and feminist understandings of difference increasingly aim to establish political coalitions beyond the gender/sex duality, and at last engage fully with intersectionality, as the experience of the Italian movement NUDM demonstrates. However, all these experiences of the queer and feminist coalition are, as we have seen, virtually absent from recent Italian

cinema, even when it is present itself as politically engaged: these representational and narrative strategies suppress the agency of queer and feminist subjectivities in the name of hetero-patriarchy, signalling the persistence of difficulties for non-normative identities and women to find any kind of space in filmmaking and the cultural industries more broadly.

The process of erasure that we have sought to trace out here is inevitably dangerous. Dyer's work has constantly re-affirmed the importance of representation; the ideological depiction of women and LGBTQ+ people in the terms seen here, as non-political beings, can only re-affirm restrictive stereotypes.<sup>60</sup> This is worsened, however, precisely by the close interaction of these representational agendas with political engagement. The terms of political engagement (at least in the sphere of audiovisual media) are these ideological "negotiations." In a heavily mediatized society, these terms are also key to the composition of the public sphere, a space that *should* be available to all.<sup>61</sup> By excluding certain identity forms, the culture of *impegno* in contemporary Italy risks naturalizing their exclusion from accessing, affecting and challenging that sphere. As a result, Italy's political make-up can only continue to reproduce itself, past and present, as a gerontocratic heteronormative patriarchy.

## Notes

1. This essay was conceived entirely through dialogue and collaboration between both authors, who penned the introduction together. Dalila Missero wrote the sections "The Past, the Maternal and the Beauty Trade-Off: Documentaries about Feminism and the Backlash against #MeToo" and "Conclusions," and Dom Holdaway wrote the sections "Female and Queer

Characters in Political Dramas” and “Queer Politics and Characters, and Troubling Normalization.”

2. As Sergio Rigoletto has argued, Nanni Moretti’s masculinity is essentially challenging insofar as it troubles hegemonic male models, ironically trying to seek out the potential for a male, non-patriarchal voice. As Eleanor Andrews has observed, however, Moretti’s political engagement in his films is closely tied to his representation within family units, employing positive—though, we would add, traditional—images of the family to contrast socio-political unrest in Italy (for instance, in contrast to Silvio Berlusconi as the patriarch of Italy. Cf. Rigoletto, *Masculinity and Italian Cinema: Sexual Politics, Social Conflict and Male Crisis in the 1970s*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press 2014, in particular chapter 6 (pp. 126-158); Andrews, “Family Life, Moretti Style,” in: *Italy on Screen: National Identity and Italian Imaginary*, edited by Lucy Bolton and Christina Siggers Manson, Peter Lang, Oxford 2007, pp. 49-62.
3. Gabriele Niola, “C’era una volta il cinema di impegno politico,” *Wired.it*, 12/12/2018, available at:  
<https://www.wired.it/play/cinema/2018/12/12/cinema-impegno-politico-moretti/> (<https://www.wired.it/play/cinema/2018/12/12/cinema-impegno-politico-moretti/>).
4. Jennifer Burns, *Fragments of Impegno: Interpretations of Commitment in Contemporary Italian Narrative, 1980-2000*, Northern Universities Press, Leeds 2001, pp. 4-5.
5. After 1945, key figures and debates about *impegno* were traced out in the pages of left-wing magazines like *Rinascita* (from 1944), *Politecnico* (from 1945), and especially around the Italian Communist Party. Cf. Nello Ajello, *Intellettuali e PCI. 1944-1958*, Editori Laterza, Bari 1979; Stephen Gundle, *I comunisti italiani tra Hollywood e Mosca: la sfida della cultura di massa: 1943-1991*, Giunti, Florence 1995. See also Christian Uva and Michele Picchi, *Destra*

*e sinistra nel cinema italiano: film e immaginario politico dagli anni '60 al nuovo millennio*, Edizioni Interculturali, Roma 2006; David Ward, "Intellectuals, Culture and Power in Postwar Italy," *The Italianist*, 21, 1 (2001), pp. 291-318; Alan O'Leary, "Marco Tullio Giordana, or the Persistence of Impegno," in: *Postmodern Impegno*, edited by Pierpaolo Antonello and Florian Mussnug, Peter Lang, Bern 2009, pp. 213-231. We refer also to our recent volume: Holdaway and Missero, eds., *Il Sistema dell'impegno nel cinema italiano contemporaneo*, Mimesis, Milano 2020, which collects a series of reflections on the production and distribution functions of "impegno" in the contemporary period.

6. Jean Paul Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature*, Gallimard, Paris 1948; Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1974; Ian Aitken, *Lukácsian Film Theory and Cinema: A Study of Georg Lukács' Writing on Film, 1913-71*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 2012.
7. Claudio Bioni, for instance, has noted that the left-wing press responded negatively to the genre of Cinema Politico insofar as it appeared to favor spectacle and profit over authentic politics. Cf. Bioni, *Gli anni affollati: La cultura cinematografica italiana (1970-79)*, Carocci, Roma 2009, pp. 89-94.
8. See Anton Giulio Mancino, "Politico/Politico-Indiziario," *Cinema e generi*, edited by Renato Venturelli, Recco, Le Mani 2009, pp. 42-57, and Paolo D'Agostini, "Matteo e Paolo mi ricordano l'abbraccio fra me e Petri," *La Repubblica*, 27/05/2008, p. 39.
9. Burns, *Fragments of Impegno*; Antonello and Mussnug, *Postmodern Impegno*; O'Leary, "Marco Tullio Giordana"; cf. also, e.g., Pierpaolo Antonello, *Dimenticare Pasolini. Intellettuali e impegno nell'Italia contemporanea* Mimesis, Milano 2012; Ibid., "Impegno Reloaded / Impegno 2.0," *The Italianist*, 33, 2 (2013), pp. 244-49; Ibid., "Impegno 3.0. Towards participatory criticism?," in *Between*, 10 (2015), available at:



<https://ojs.unica.it/index.php/between/article/view/2115/1883>

(<https://ojs.unica.it/index.php/between/article/view/2115/1883>); John

Champagne, "Sandro Penna and Anti-Oedipal *Impegno*," *Modern Italy*, 18, 4 (2013), pp. 339-354; Charles L. Leavitt, "*Impegno nero*: Italian Intellectuals and the African American Struggle," *California Italian Studies*, 4, 2 (2013), pp. 1-23.

10. O'Leary, p. 216 and p. 227. Catherine O'Rawe has illustrated how O'Leary's findings enable us to productively review the function played by melodrama and sentimentality in recent political and historical dramas: O'Rawe, *Stars and Masculinities in Contemporary Italian Cinema*, Palgrave, New York 2014.
11. For clarity as regards terminology, we use the terms "queer" and LGBTQ+. Our understanding of the term "queer" is based on the critical notion, whereby a sexual identity is a space of resistance against normativity, following Judith Butler, "Critically Queer," *GLQ: Gay and Lesbian Quarterly*, 1 (1993), pp. 17-32. While we recognize that Italian cinema's representational agenda is problematically skewed towards gay men, we prefer to be inclusive in our terminology in order to leave open an active space for queer viewers and queer interpretation.
12. The 2016 report on the film industry, commissioned by the EWA – European Women's Audiovisual Network, brings together comparative research on seven European countries, including Italy, and reveals the existence of systemic barriers for women working in this profession. According to the report, 88% of public funding that is available for sponsoring cinema related projects in Italy goes to male directors, and 90,8% of feature films distributed in the theatres are directed by men. Cf. "EWA Report – Italy," available at: [https://www.ewawomen.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/06-Italy\\_compressed.pdf](https://www.ewawomen.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/06-Italy_compressed.pdf) ([https://www.ewawomen.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/06-Italy\\_compressed.pdf](https://www.ewawomen.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/06-Italy_compressed.pdf)).

13. Rosalind Galt, Karl Schoonover, *Queer Cinema in the World*, Duke University Press, Durham NC 2016, p. 15.
14. Christian Uva, ed., *Strane storie. Il cinema e i misteri d'Italia*, Rubbettino Editore, Soveria Mannelli 2011.
15. Within this discussion, we limit ourselves to a brief summary of representation. With that said, we take for granted that representation must be situated in a complex position of causality within a broader set of other discursive functions—production, exhibition, and reception—that, as O’Leary writes, create the “porous [...] circle of *impegno*.” O’Leary, “Marco Tullio Giordana,” p. 226.
16. O’Rawe, “Brothers in Arms: Middlebrow *Impegno* and Homosocial Relations in the Cinema of Petraglia and Rulli,” in *Intellectual Communities and Partnerships in Italy and Europe*, edited by Danielle Hipkins, Peter Lang, Bern 2011; cf. also O’Rawe, *Stars and Masculinities*, in particular the chapter “Brothers in Arms: History and Masculinity in the *anni di piombo*,” pp. 117-137.
17. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, Columbia University Press, New York 1985.
18. Cf. Anna Papparcone, “Echoes of Pier Paolo Pasolini in Contemporary Italian Cinema: The Cases of Marco Tullio Giordana and Aurelio Grimaldi,” unpublished dissertation, Cornell University 2009. Peppino Impastato, *Amore non ne avremo: poesie e immagini*, Navarra, Palermo 2008.
19. Antonio Carella, *Nel cuore della luna*, 1996-1998. The script is held at the Archive of the Centro Sperimentale di Cinema/Experimental Center for Cinema in Rome.
20. An article in the newspaper *L’Unità* from this period reveals that both were openly in competition, and it is interesting to observe—from a handwritten and

signed note within the script—that *Nel cuore della luna* originally had the support of Impastato's brother, Giovanni. Cf. Michele Anselmi, "Omicidio Impastato: duello di copioni," *L'Unità*, 09/12/1998, p. 23.

21. This is made more historically clear in view of the fact that in early versions of the winning script for *I cento passi*, Impastato was depicted as explicitly heterosexual. Cf. Claudio Fava and Monica Zapelli, *I cento passi*, 1998, held at the Archive of the Experimental Center for Cinema in Rome.
22. On the historical and political potential of unmade films, cf. Luca Peretti, "Unfinished Projects, Unmade Films, Unfilmed Objects: The Difficult Relationship between Cinema and the Italian *anni di piombo*," *The Italianist*, 38, 2 (2018), pp. 189-203.
23. It is interesting to note that, rather than enabling women to enter the "mainstream" of left-wing social conflicts or recognizing that the "personal" issues behind feminist conflicts (anti-violence, abortion rights, access to contraception, divorce, etc.) are fundamentally political and a part of a public *impegno*, the only influence to discourses of *impegno* conceded to feminism are in the "awkward juxtaposition of personal and political" in, for example, (that given by O'Leary), the films of Moretti ("Marco Tullio Giordana," p. 228). This is of little reassurance; such films quite firmly detach themselves from feminism's concrete concerns and entirely anchor unrelated anxieties to the realm of individual men.
24. Maristella Cantini, *Italian Women Filmmakers and the Gendered Screen*, Palgrave, London 2013, p. 4.
25. We use here the conventional term "second wave" feminism to refer to the international women's movement during the 1970s. We are aware that "waves" have been widely contested in feminist historiography. However, for

the sake of this article, the term will only be employed for identifying a certain phase of the movement from a chronological perspective.

26. It is impossible to cite here all the female documentarists in the Italian film history, nor to reference the related bibliography. For the purpose of this essay, we will signal some works that specifically concentrate on the political engagement of these authors: Missero, "Cecilia Mangini: A Counter-Hegemonic Experience of Cinema," *Feminist Media Histories*, 2, 3 (2016), pp. 54-72; Gaetana Marrone, *Liliana Cavani: The Gaze and the Labyrinth*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2000; Bernadette Luciano and Susanna Scarparo, "Tra Storia e memoria: Il movimento femminista nel nuovo documentario femminile," *Filmare il femminismo: Studi sulle donne nel cinema e nei media*, edited by Lucia Cardone and Chiara Tognolotti, ETS, Pisa 2015, pp. 117-127.
27. The structural character of these mechanisms is aptly depicted in the reports on the issue of gender inequality in the film industry conducted by the European Women's Audiovisual Network (EWA) and the Italian organization Donne E Audiovisivo (DEA).
28. See for instance Jim Lane, *The Autobiographical Documentary in America*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison 2002; Alisa Lebow, ed., *The Cinema of Me: The Self and Subjectivity in First Person Documentary*, Wallflower Press, London 2012; Laura Rascaroli, *The Personal Camera: Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film*, Wallflower Press, London and New York 2009. An interesting reflection on this subject applied to the Italian film director is in Laura Busetta, "Sguardi in conflitto: scrittura femminile e memoria collettiva nel documentario contemporaneo italiano," in *Schermi. Storie e culture del cinema in Italia*, 2, 2 (2018), pp. 87-102.
29. The centrality of the maternal in Marazzi's work is analyzed in detail in Nicoletta Marini-Maio's video essay "Tutto parte da me: Alina Marazzi, regista" in the special issue of the journal *Gender/Sexuality/Italy* on "Reproduction,

Fertility, and Parenthood: The Italian Case,” 5 (2018), available at: <http://www.gendersexualityitaly.com/13-tutto-parte-da-me-alina-marazzi-regista-videosaggio-2/> (<http://www.gendersexualityitaly.com/13-tutto-parte-da-me-alina-marazzi-regista-videosaggio-2/>). Other than this contribution, there is a large bibliography on Marazzi, especially in comparison to other contemporary filmmakers. See for instance: Cristina Gamberi, “Una nessuna centomila: genealogie femminili nel cinema di Alina Marazzi,” *Arabeschi*, 8 (2016), available at: <http://www.arabeschi.it/33-una-nessuna-centomila-genealogie-femminili-nel-cinema-di-alina-marazzi-/> (<http://www.arabeschi.it/33-una-nessuna-centomila-genealogie-femminili-nel-cinema-di-alina-marazzi-/>); Stefania Benini, “‘A Face, a Name, a Story’: Women’s identities as life stories in Alina Marazzi’s cinema,” *Studies in European Cinema*, 8.2 (2012), pp. 129-139; Maura Bergonzoni, “Alina Marazzi’s *Un’ora sola ti vorrei* and *Vogliamo anche le rose*: The Personal Stands for the Political,” *Studies in Documentary Film*, 5, 2-3 (2011), pp. 247-253. Very interestingly, this latter essay underlines the potential of Marazzi’s “innovative” aesthetics as a way to counteract mainstream representations of women.

30. By endorsing a radical revision of the symbolic order through language, Diotima’s philosophy of sexual difference sees in the figure of the mother the mythological access to new forms of knowledge of the world and the self. For an in-depth analysis of Diotima’s theories see Graziella Parati and Rebecca West, eds., *Italian Feminist Theory and Practice: Equality and Sexual Difference*, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, Madison 2002.
31. Daniela Chironi, “Generations in the Feminist and LGBT Movements in Italy: The Case of *Non Una Di Meno*,” *American Behavioral Scientist*, March 2019, p. 23.

32. Claire Hammings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory*, Duke University Press, Durham NC 2011, p. 22.
33. Hammings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 23.
34. Non Una di Meno (NUDM) is an Italian movement born in 2016 and inspired by the protests of the Argentinian group Ni Una Menos against violence towards women. In 2017, NUDM collectively wrote a feminist manifesto on violence against women and every year continues to mobilize thousands of people on March 8, for the women's strike, and on November 25, the international day against violence towards women.
35. Mauro Sassi, "Carlo Giuliani, ragazzo: A Counter-Hegemonic Italian Documentary," *Studies in Documentary Film*, 5, 2-3 (2011), p. 177.
36. Laboria Cuboniks, "Xenofeminism: A Politics For Alienation," available at: <https://www.laboriacuboniks.net> (<https://www.laboriacuboniks.net>).
37. Cuboniks, "Xenofeminism."
38. By committing to the notion of utopia, José Esteban Muñoz explicitly disagrees with the "antirelational thesis" of queer theorists such as Leo Bersani and Lee Edelman. Muñoz describes their work as a "denouncement of relationality [... as] a distancing of queerness from what some theorists seem to think of as the contamination of race, gender and other particularities that taint the purity of sexuality as a singular trope of difference. In other words, antirelational approaches to queer theory are romances of the negative, wishful thinking, and investments in deferring various dreams of difference." Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, New York University Press, New York 2009, p. 11.
39. Richard Dyer, *Only Entertainment*, Routledge, London and New York 1992, p. 20.

40. Luciano Lombardo was allegedly employed by Harvey Weinstein at Miramax Italy “in part to help satisfy [his] voracious appetite.” Cf. Jason Horowitz, “Harvey Weinstein’s Italian Friend is Now in the Eye of a Media Storm,” *The New York Times*, 24/10/2017, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/24/world/europe/fabrizio-lombardo-harvey-weinstein-italy.html> (<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/24/world/europe/fabrizio-lombardo-harvey-weinstein-italy.html>). Another example with a certain international resonance took place at the 2018 Venice Film Festival, when director Luciano Silighini wore a t-shirt on the red carpet which stated that “Weinstein is Innocent.” For a detailed reconstruction of the Italia media coverage of the Weinstein scandal see also Claudia Torrisi, “Harvey Weinstein: Italian Media Coverage of the Scandal Has Been Predictably Outrageous,” *Open Democracy*, 20/10/2017, available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/italian-media-harvey-weinstein-asia-argento/> (<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/italian-media-harvey-weinstein-asia-argento/>).
41. A detailed reconstruction of the backlash against the Italian #MeToo is available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/21/world/europe/asia-argento-italy.html> (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/21/world/europe/asia-argento-italy.html>). Following the heated reactions to Asia Argento’s accusation, more than one hundred women from the Italian entertainment sector signed a letter denouncing the existing systemic patterns of sexual abuse in the film and media industry. However, to mark their distance from the #MeToo movement, the campaigners did not give the names of any particular molester, nor explicitly endorse Argento. It is also relevant that the letter does not account for any specific experience of harassment, but rather uses abstract and even

psychoanalytical notions to approach the question. It is available (in Italian) at: <http://www.dissensocomune.it> (<http://www.dissensocomune.it>).

42. Danielle Hipkins “‘Whore-ocracy’: Show Girls, the Beauty Trade-Off, and Mainstream Oppositional Discourse in Contemporary Italy,” *Italian Studies*, 66, 3 (2011), pp. 413; 419.
43. Ella Fegitz, “Dalle veline a Asia Argento: perché in Italia #MeToo è stato accolto con scetticismo,” *La Stampa*, 03/09/2018, available at: <https://www.lastampa.it/rubriche/lo-stato-delle-donne/2018/09/03/news/dalle-veline-a-asia-argento-perche-in-italia-metoo-e-stato-accolto-con-scetticismo-1.34042582> (<https://www.lastampa.it/rubriche/lo-stato-delle-donne/2018/09/03/news/dalle-veline-a-asia-argento-perche-in-italia-metoo-e-stato-accolto-con-scetticismo-1.34042582>).
44. One week from its launch, on October 12, 2017, the hashtag #quellavoltache (“that time that”) obtained more than 20,000 references on Twitter. See Redazione, “#quellavoltache, le molestie raccolte in un libro,” *Wired*, 10/03/2018, available at: <https://www.wired.it/play/libri/2018/03/10/quella-volta-che-molestie-libro/> (<https://www.wired.it/play/libri/2018/03/10/quella-volta-che-molestie-libro/>). See also Angiola Codacci-Pisanelli, “La galleria degli orrori di ‘quella volta che’: tra rabbia e disgusto le denunce delle donne,” *L’Espresso*, 07/03/2018, available at: <http://espresso.repubblica.it/visioni/cultura/2018/03/06/news/quante-molestie-quellavoltache-1.319237> (<http://espresso.repubblica.it/visioni/cultura/2018/03/06/news/quante-molestie-quellavoltache-1.319237>).
45. On the increasing weight of this form of activism and its contradictions, see: Hester Baer, “Redoing Feminism: Digital Activism, Body Politics, and Neoliberalism,” *Feminist Media Studies*, 16, 1, (2016), pp. 17-34.



46. On February 13, 2011, the network mobilized thousands of women for a massive demonstration in Rome to protest against the sexist attitude of the prime minister and media tycoon Berlusconi. For a disquisition of the “moralizing traits” of this movement, see Giovanna Gribaldo and Alessandra Zapperi, *Lo schermo del potere. Femminismo e regime della visibilità*, Ombre Corte, Verona 2012; Caterina Peroni, “Gender Violence and Sexism in Italy. Norms, Control and Sexuality,” *La Camera Blu – Journal of Gender Studies*, 10 (2013).
47. In Italian queer cinema, there is a clear if not exclusive predominance of gay men over lesbians, bisexuals, trans people and other queer identities. As Alessia Palanti has observed, the history of lesbian politics in Italy can at best be traced out as an implicit and invisible parallel story to other historical cases—such as that of *Vogliamo anche le rose*, mentioned above. Cf. Palanti, “We Want Lesbians Too: A Lesbian Feminist Counter-History Inspired by *We Want Roses Too*,” in *Queering Italian Media*, edited by Sole Anatrone and Julia Heim, 2020, pp. 31-55.
48. At the time of writing, the release of Adriatico’s next film, *Gli anni felici/The Happy Years*, a dramatization of the life of activist Mario Mieli, has been delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic.
49. FUORI, acronym for the “Fronte Unitario Omosessuale Rivoluzionario Italiano” (Unitary Revolutionary Italian Homosexual Front), was a queer-Marxist activist group established in 1971 in Turin, which also produced and circulated an eponymous queer magazine. Its members included the activist Mario Mieli mentioned in the previous note. For a more detailed account of the group, see Andrea Pini, *Quando eravamo froci. Gli omosessuali nell’Italia di una volta*, Il Saggiatore, Milan 2011.
50. This has had some impact on scholarship, as well. For example, cf. Clarissa Clò, “Improvvisamente l’inverno scorso/Suddenly, Last Winter: Queer Sex in

Public,” in *Studies in Documentary Film*, 5, 2-3 (2011), pp. 255-261; for the broader context of engaged documentary-making, see Michela Ardizzoni, “Narratives of Change, Images for Change: Contemporary Social Documentaries in Italy,” *Journal of Italian Cinema & Media Studies*, 1, 3 (2013), pp. 311-326.

51. Data source: the “Lumière” European Audiovisual Observatory, available at: <http://lumiere.obs.coe.int> (<http://lumiere.obs.coe.int>). Of the other films mentioned here, most are completely absent from the Observatory, the few that appear have similarly low audience figures (from *Una nobile rivoluzione*, 1,450, to just 31 for *Prima di tutto*), signaling no local or European distribution in theatres.
52. Cf. *Queering Italian Media*, edited by Anatrone and Heim, 2020. In some senses, the Italian renaissance of pay-TV dramas with political themes seems to be doing a better job of inclusivity. For example, the Sky production of *Romanzo criminale – la serie* (2008-2010) featured a gay character, Ranocchia, around which minor discourses about AIDS and homophobia are established. Though he features in the novel of which both are adaptations, Ranocchia did not feature in the 2005 film edition. In a similar vein, the crime TV series *Suburra*, produced by Netflix (2017-) includes an openly gay character (albeit one that chooses to prioritize, with extreme violence, his straight front and patriarchal privilege). On this representational agenda, see Heim, “Italian LGBTQ Representation in Transnational Television,” *Journal of Italian Cinema & Media Studies*, 8, 2 (2020), pp. 189-203.
53. Cf. Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*, Beacon Press, Boston 2003.
54. A few interesting exceptions of this homonormativity: the popular comedy *Nessuno mi può giudicare*, when a minor gay character, Denis, makes explicit references to anonymous sex in dark rooms; *Una piccola impresa*

*meridionale*/A *Small Southern Enterprise* (2013), which presents an alternative queer family in place of the homophobic reaction to a lesbian wedding; and *Perfetti sconosciuti*, which seems to advocate *not* coming out as a defensive strategy for the queer character. Further discussion of these films, and of the broader queer potential in interpretations of these films “against the grain,” can be found in Holdaway, “The Queer Potential of Mainstream Film,” in *Queering Italian Media*, edited by Anatrone and Heim, 2020, pp. 75-95.

55. This has a historical precedent in one of Italy’s most important queer films, *Una giornata particolare*/A *Special Day* (1977). What the kiss between Sofia Loren and Marcello Mastroianni does to reveal the emotional states of the two characters and their relationship is important, but one struggles to downplay, simultaneously, the normalizing relevance of two of Italy’s most infamous stars sharing an on-screen kiss.
56. Though his interpretation is less skeptically connected to the possible profits of the film, this is the conclusion reached by Rigoletto in his interpretation of *Le fate ignoranti*. Rigoletto interprets the “queer triangle” of the main characters in the film as the means of potentializing a heterosexual gaze on (male) queer desire, therefore positively expanding the film’s potential impacts. Cf. Rigoletto, “Sexual Dissidence and the Mainstream: The Queer Triangle in Ferzan Ozpetek’s *Le fate ignoranti*,” *The Italianist*, 30, 2 (2010), pp. 202-218.
57. See Laura Fantone, “Precarious Changes: Gender and Generational Politics in contemporary Italy,” *Feminist Review*, 87, 1 (2007), pp. 5-20; Cristina Morini, “The Feminization of Labour in Cognitive Capitalism,” *Feminist Review*, 87, 1 (2007), pp. 40-59.
58. Ealasaid Munro, “Feminism: A Fourth Wave?,” *Political Insight*, 4, 2, (2013), pp. 22-5.

59. As Koyama puts it: “Transfeminism is primarily a movement by and for trans women who view their liberation to be intrinsically linked to the liberation of all women and beyond. It is also open to other queers, intersex people, trans men, non-trans women, non-trans men and others who are sympathetic toward needs of trans women and consider their alliance with trans women to be essential for their own liberation.”
60. Cf. Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation*, London, Routledge 2002.
61. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Cambridge, Polity 1989; cf. also David Forgacs, “Looking for Italy’s Public Sphere,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 18, 3 (2013), pp. 348-361.

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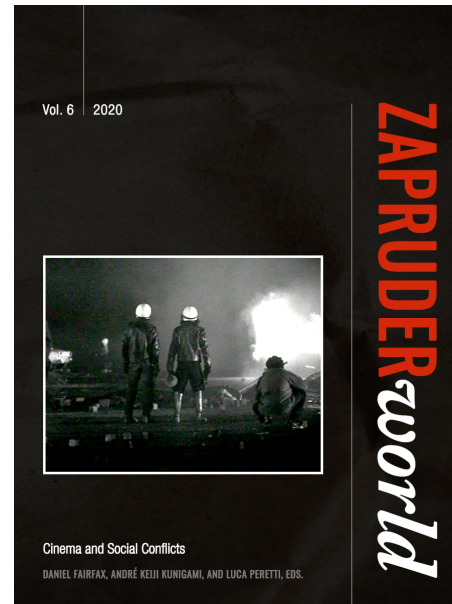
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