Trans* Time: Projecting Transness in European (TV) Series

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campus

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Foreword

Jutta Hergenhan

"We are getting closer and closer to the point where the social world is primarily described—and in a sense prescribed—by television". This statement issued by Pierre Bourdieu in 1996 (1998, 22) seems today paradoxically outdated and topical at the same time. Since the nineties, television has changed profoundly: in technical and aesthetic appearance; in the quantity and diversity of channels, programmes and formats; and with regard to its status in society. Still, television remains an important medium for information and entertainment with considerable impact on public opinion. TV productions are therefore highly relevant for both continuity and change in normative orders, including gender regimes.

This volume takes a closer look at a very particular and highly successful genre: series. Initiated by public television, carried on by private TV and later by streaming platforms, series exist in a broad variety of formats. One thing they seem to have in common is the implicit discussion of societal issues via the staging of fictional everyday life situated in a particular place or country. The possibility to observe and, in a way, participate in other people's lives—albeit fictional—is probably a key factor for the long-lasting success of many series. However, producing imaginations or representations of everyday life is an ambiguous endeavour. It implies the power to put topics on the agenda which otherwise remain unseen or unconscious, although they may be of importance for society as a whole. Offering information and creating comprehension, and possibly also identification, may result in the evolution of mentalities and lead to cultural change. At the same time, this kind of agenda-setting may in fact comprise an unduly simplified presentation of issues and therewith induce new, but likewise or otherwise problematic, normativity.

The editor and the authors of this book have undertaken a critical analysis of the projection of transness in European television and streaming se-

ries. The knowledge obtained by this systematic investigation of single country cases in a comparative approach appears particularly relevant in the actual debates around transness. This is for three reasons:

1. In Europe, legal gender norms evolved considerably in recent years. Trans* activism has raised awareness for the situations and needs of trans* people. Discriminatory legislation and administrative practices were partly prohibited, either by law or by court ruling. In some countries, the legal status of trans* persons improved indirectly due to gender legislation on same-sex marriage or civil status options for non-binary persons (e.g. in Germany). Still, national legislations differ considerably from one country to another. Gender equality and full identity rights for trans* persons are far from achieved. Trans* activists still fight against obligatory sterilisation and surgery as a precondition to change identity documents, against obligatory examination by physicians and psychologists, against any type of forced gender assignment (Adamczak 2018). They fight for the permanent and irreversibly guaranteed change of the first name and gender assignment in all administrative documents, for full marriage, reproduction and adoption rights as well as for further social rights.

2. Public interest in trans* lives has increased considerably, in particular since 2014. Research projects in the social sciences, educational material for schools or civic education (e.g. Katzer and Voß 2016), broadcasted and digital media productions, documentaries as well as fictional literature or films (i.e. *The Danish Girl* 2015) have raised public awareness for lived trans* realities. Along with the media production of knowledge about trans* lives, be it documentary or fictional, comes the necessity to have a close and critical look at the way trans* life is depicted. Media producers will tend to reach a large audience and are not always adequately informed about the complexity of trans* realities. Although radical changes in trans* representations seem to be clearly noticeable since the early nineties (Koch-Rein, Hashemi Yekani and Verlinden 2020), the representation of trans* persons may still follow victimising, stigmatising or voyeuristic narratives. Trans* persons largely do not recognise themselves in the characters created by the media and therefore feel maltreated, according to Karine Espineira (2015).

3. Alongside the progression of trans* rights and the media representation of trans* realities is the necessity for and awareness-raising of gender-adequate language. The correct use of a person's first name and self-chosen pronouns is crucial for respectful human interaction. In addition, trans* re-

alities concerning procreation, pregnancy and parenthood equally need appropriate language. Trans* men may decide to give birth to a child and will thus be (one of) its biological father(s) (Czarniak 2018), while trans* women may decide to conceive a child and will become a second biological mother (Ewert 2019). There is a "desire […] for a gender vocabulary that feels adequate to one's lived experience, that does justice to it", states Eliza Steinbock (2019, ix) before continuing, "people should have access to the categories to which they want to belong, and those categories must include so-called binary and nonbinary versions of being female/woman/she or male/man/he" (ibid., viii).

The case studies presented in this book are taking into account the interaction between these different fields. Trans* activism, legal action and media representation all influence each other. The appearance of a lead or supporting transgender character in a scripted television drama may precede or be a result of public debates on trans* rights. Still, it is important to keep in mind that these fictional productions are subject to the rules of a specific genre and medium. "Television calls for *dramatization*. […] There is nothing more difficult to convey than reality in all its ordinariness", states Pierre Bourdieu (1998, 19, 21, emphasis in the original). By the country cases and media productions selected by the authors, you will discover a broad variety of series, characters and social contexts of trans* lives that may have been unknown before on a larger scale. This book provides useful information on the respective historical and political contexts of each serial production and serves as a precious guide to watch series representing trans* lives with a critical and informed view.

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Introduction—On Trans* Times

Danae Gallo González

Trans* is used in this edited volume as an umbrella term including a whole spectrum of identity-generating and/or contingent expressions of gender variability, gender embodiment and non-standard gender identities. The term is also employed for self-designations and life plans in various geopolitical and historical contexts from a decolonial perspective. The asterisk evokes the language of informatics, by which the addition of an asterisk (*) after the entering of a word on a server gives the user access to all entries found that contain said word accompanied by others complementing them (Gómez Beltrán 2018, 425). From this standpoint, *Trans* Time: Projecting Transness in European (TV) Series* explores multiple and complementary understandings of being trans* and reveals the way trans* people are depicted in European televisual and digital streaming series in France, Great Britain, Italy, Portugal, Spain and the Netherlands. Trans* visibility has reached a peak in recent years, so much so that we can state that we are living in trans* times at present. This peak is especially noticeable in the media, and most specifically in television series, where we are also witnessing a prime time for trans* representations, and hence a trans* time in series. Sophia Burset in *Orange is the New Black* (Kohan et al./Netflix 2013–2019) or Maura, the protagonist of the series *Transparent* (Soloway et al./Amazon 2014–2019,) are maybe two of the most internationally well-known examples of this media surge.

This visibility is not completely new and does not come from a vacuum.[1] Christine Jorgensen's 'transition' in 1953 favoured the mediatisation of transness in mass media, but did not reach television, since the "topic was considered too risquée for family-oriented entertainment" (Meyerowitz

1 For a genealogic approach of today's status of transness, or of the activist "Roots of Today's Revolution", see Stryker 2017.

2002, 89; Platero 2018, 00:51:47; see also Espineira in this volume).[2] The same year—in the broader context of the biomedical epidemiologisation of social determinants that started in the 19th century (Foucault 1976) and became progressively standard in the sixties (Strasser 2019, 3)—, the endocrinologist Harry Benjamin (1953, 1966) popularised the concept of 'transsexualism'. Following the dimorphic notion of gender, sex and the human body characteristics of modern science,[3] he framed 'transsexuality' as a distinct pathology from homosexuality and transvestism and argued that it could only be effectively treated with hormones and chest and genital surgeries in order to palliate the 'patient's' profound discomfort with their body (Benjamin 1966, 11).[4] Through the pathologisation of 'transsexuality', the knowledge production of transness became hierarchical and paternalistic: trans* people became non-agentic 'patients' that were not attributed any expertise about their body-mind reality and therefore needed medical and other scientific 'experts' to theorise and decide on how they should be treated in therapy. This medical narrative got progressively adopted in Europe around the turn of the nineteen seventies and early eighties (Missé 2012, 30) and forged, despite its subtle variations through time and depending to the geographical context, the "transsexuality paradigm" (Baumgartinger 2017; Mas Grau 2015). This paradigm has been uncritically used and therefore reified by lawmakers, government administrations and the courts, and has affected how mass media, including television, represented and to some extent still represent trans* people.

Media representation has predominantly returned to the archetypes of either the pathetic victim or the deceptive "passing" villain (Serano 2007, 12) that is emplotted around the conventional narrative technique of the often "comic […] sensationalized, dramatized, or eroticized" 'reveal' of a character's transness (Seid 2012, 176–177). Sometimes the reveal or the (often forged) disclosure is displayed for the audience's scopophilia by visually showing their genitals or chests and is mostly intertwined in a more or less

2 Also note that in comparison to the United States, where television was more widespread (Meyerowitz 2002, 89), in the post-World War II Europe, access to this technology was more limited.

3 About dimorphism's ideologically sustained influence on modern science's understanding of transness, see Laqueur 1994, Hausmann 1995, and Bento 2006. For a good genealogical overview of discourses on transness in psi* and medical sciences, see Dellacasa 2016.

4 For a critique of the narrative of trans* people's discomfort with their body, see, among many others, Stryker and Whittle 2006; Coll-Planas 2010; Stryker and Aizura 2013; Missé 2018; Platero 2018.

dramatic "spectacle of suffering" (Chouliaraki 2006, 8). As the articles in this volume show, trans* characters made their first appearances on TV in the late eighties and nineties with the rise of private TV channels and the proliferation of late-night slots of morally transgressive programmes that, driven by the "spectacle of alterity" (Hurtado García 2016, 103), projected transness in a grotesque mode. In the late nineties and in the early first decade of the 21st century, trans* characters entered family time slots with their sporadic presence in formats such as talk shows and reality TV, two formats that became popular back then and that simultaneously contributed to the delegitimisation of television (Newman and Levine 2012, 35). This means that trans* had only been hosted in devalued television formats lacking moral and social legitimacy, which in turn prevented or hindered the projection of images and discourses on transness disassociated from an assumed lack of generally accepted morality and/or sociality.

Today's trans* televisibility surge has occurred concurrently with three further processes. First, in both traditional or 'classic' television—scripted prime time and cable television—and in internationally available online streaming services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime and Hulu, there has been a popularisation of television series in recent decades. Some specialists even argue that we are currently experiencing a golden age of television series (Smith 2018, 72; de Gorgot 2014). Barra and Scaglioni go so far as to claim that Europe, between 2008 and 2020, underwent a European fictional television renaissance (2021, 1). 'On demand' online streaming services, media convergence and transmediality have influenced consumption habits. This popularity has simultaneously increased potential access to production, circulation and reception of programs as well as to the discourses explored in the series to potentially extend them beyond the imposed broadcasting times of traditional access technology on an international level (Jenkins 2006, 13). However, this does not mean that we have come to a gender-neutral, classless, racism-free utopia, among other intersections of discrimination in the digital world, as the majority of series are produced by platforms that participate in the neoliberal capitalist system and reproduce, to a large extent, the mechanisms of economic and discursive domination of traditional television. What's more, audience ratings for series on alternative platforms are rising, due to the increasing social influence these platforms have.

Second, these alternative platforms are slowly and steadily gaining academic recognition and scholarly legitimisation for the series in which trans* people have been 'projected' on small screens internationally. Once regarded

as products of a low-brow medium—television—, series have acquired moral and aesthetic legitimacy in different spheres of society (Muñoz Fernández 2016, 69–70). As it happened with architecture during the Renaissance, with music during Romanticism, poetry in Expressionism and the cinema in the 20th century, (TV) series are being framed lately as the "art of the 21st century" (Aumont 2007, 278). Series are now being shown at the Berlinale and the renowned Cannes Film Festival, to cite one example, has established a not undisputed separate selection category for television series, thereby recognising the growing popularity and social influence these series have in society. Similarly, television studies took on disciplinary solidity from the 2000s on (Newman and Levine 2012, 156) and with it, series—also those 'projecting transness'—entered scholarship and were therefore bestowed with unprecedented intellectual legitimacy.

Paradoxically, contrary to the conviction that visibility univocally leads to social acceptance of minoritised people, trans* people face ever-mounting discrimination, insidious physical and/or structural violence and considerable murder rates. On the other hand, there have been significant advances in medical classifications and in the legislation of transness in the last couple of years: The World Health Assembly (WHA) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) adopted, in May and June 2019 respectively, the 11th revision of the *International Classifications of Diseases* (*ICD-11*) that depathologised trans* people and that is to be enforced by 2022 the latest (Atienza-Macías 2020). In *ICD-11*, instead of being classified in the chapter on "Mental Health Disorders" within the category of 'gender dysphoria', trans*-related diagnoses have been included in a new chapter on "Conditions Related to Sexual Health" under the not entirely unproblematic and undisputed category of 'gender incongruence'.[5]

Some months after the publication of the *ICD-11*, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe called member states "to swiftly implement the full revision of the ICD-11" (Parliamentary Assembly 2019, 1).[6] However, as of the time of writing, only 39 member states enabled legal gender recognition. Most of them impose years-long procedures and/or the payment of a legal and/or administrative fee ranging from 100 to 5000 Euros (European Commission 2020, 167), which constitutes a clear class

5 See to this respect, Lucas Platero's comments on 'incongruency' (2018, 00:39:06).

6 About the measures taken by EU institutions, see Dunne 2020. On challenges and contestation to current trans* politics and policies in Europe and Latin America, see Verloo's and van der Vleuten's special issue (2020).

barrier to legal gender recognition. Twenty EU member states require a mental health diagnosis, seven compel sterility and eleven demand divorce before adapting identity documents. Some of these requirements infringe on human rights standards adopted by the European Court for Human Rights (ECtHR).

In the countries covered by this volume, only Portugal implements legal gender recognition based on self-determination. France does not require medical intervention or diagnosis but has procedural requirements; the Netherlands impose mental health diagnoses or at least medical supervision on applicants; Spain, Italy and the UK require different kinds of medical treatments not including mandatory sexual reassignment surgery (European Commission 2020, 117). Mental health diagnoses or hormonal treatments not extent of dangerous collateral consequences violate the soft law human rights standards formulated in the Yogyakarta Principles (Hirschfeld-Eddy-Stiftung 2018) and can "be burdensome, patronising, disproportionate and humiliating for trans individuals" (European Commission 2020, 132). Not in vain, the European Parliament expressed in December 2019:

> deep concern at the growing number of attacks against the LGBTI community coming from the State, State officials, Governments at the national, regional and local levels, and politicians in the EU. It recognises that such attacks have seen a rise in violence against LGBTI people, with hate crimes motivated by homophobia and transphobia on the rise across the EU while responses from authorities too often remain inadequate. (ILGA Europe 2020, 11–12)

Additionally, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) alerts that trans* people are particularly at risk of being seriously physically assaulted, especially in moments of special visibility, such as during 'Prides' around Europe (ODIHR 2018).

Following the insight that series also increase visibility by 'projecting' in the polysemic sense of 'representing', 'generating', 'offering' and—to a certain extent—'promoting' models of society and identification for minoritised people (Beil 2012, 15), it seems urgent to ask what may be going wrong. In this line, Gossett, Stanley and Burton warn of the "trap of the visual", of univocally and acritically linking representation with social acceptance (2017, xv–xvi). Green reminds of the invisibility of all variances within the trans* spectrum lurking behind the logics of hypervisibility (2016, ix). In the same line, Snorton and Haritworn point out the invisibilisation of poor and black trans* people that entails (over)representing the "privileged transgender subject" (2013, 71, 74). Beauchamp goes further and relates a

rise in visibility to an increase in surveillance that might reduce exposure to harm for certain people but facilitate the "workings of surveillance" for more vulnerable others (2019, 20). Koch-Rein, Haschemi Yekani and Verlinden insist in the necessity of coupling "trans activism and political commitment to trans rights" for representation not to be futile (2020, 3). Similarly, visibility does not equate with positive identification that improves trans* folks' self-esteem and life quality. As Hurtado García notes, audiovisual media's insistence on certain tropes can also act as "performative settings for discomfort" (2016, 102).

This volume draws on these key insights on trans* visuality by bringing politically committed scholarship and trans* activism together[7] in order to investigate the following hypothesis: the popularisation of trans* people in mainstream series leads to the spread and normalisation of certain gender embodiments, performances and associated gender as well as sexual practices, which projects—in Baudrillard's postmodernist sense—a simulacrum of the (easily) consumable and apolitised 'good trans* person'. In this way, and adapting the logic of the singular 'but for' articulated by Crenshaw for explaining intersectionality (1989, 152), we could argue that the 'good trans* person' is projected in series in a sympathetic light because these characters seem to happily comply with heteronormativity 'but for their transness', for only one exception to the norm is socially acceptable, as it also happened with the 'good gay' and the 'good black person', among other intersections of discrimination. This logic works, in addition to the hegemonic medical narrative on transness, also as a "social tranquilizer" for the majoritarian society (Raymond 1994, xvii) and domesticates the potential challenge to the hegemonic naturalised fictions of binary, linear and/or complete sexed embodiment and sexuality that some gender expressions and/or understandings of transness potentially embody (Joyrich 2014, 133–139; Villarejo 2014; Halberstam 2018, 4–5). Without privileging or advocating for any kind of 'queernormativity' for approaching the rich variability and self-understandings of transness (Volcano in Soley-Beltrán 2012, 92), this book tackles this issue by closely examining which projections of transness circulate through Europe in this unprecedentedly popular medium.

The third process that has taken place simultaneously with the so-called boom of trans* televisibility is the academic legitimisation of trans* studies.

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7 About the importance of trans* people's role in constructing and conveying trans* epistemologies also in scholarship, see Radi 2019, 44.

According to Erving Goffman, stigma is conferred by a visible and/or otherwise perceptible attribute conveying devualed stereotypes about what become discredited subjects (1963). Paul Preciado goes further and states that transness is a symptom of the inadequacy of the "political-visual regime of sexual difference" sustaining the naturalised dimorphic notion of gender, sex and the human body to incorporate life's complexity (2019, 14). In this sense, considering the insidious and outraging stigmatisation that trans* people are still facing nowadays in this 'political-visual regime', analysing transness through the lens of visuality seems especially pertinent. Yet, trans* studies have prioritised narratology over more audiovisual-centred concerns (Keegan 2020, 387). After what we could consider the seminal text of trans* studies by Susan Stryker, "My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage" (1994), and without trying to be exhaustive and in strict chronological order, the following works have inestimably contributed to the analysis of the representation of transness in audiovisual media: Julia Serano (2007); Karine Espineira (2015, 2016a, 2016b); Amy Villarejo (2016); Jamie C. Capuzza and Leland G. Spencer (2017); Ralp Poole (2017); Eric Stanley and Johanna Burton (2017); Mariecke Van den Berg and Marinus Mir (2017); Looi van Kessel, Liesbeth Minaard and Eliza Steinbock (2017); Cáel M. Keegan, Laura Horak and Eliza Steinbock (2018); Jack Halberstam (2018); Michael N. Goddard and Christopher Hogg (2019); Eliza Steinbock (2019); Anson Koch-Rein, Elahe Haschemi Yekani and Jasper J. Verlinden (eds.) (2020); the last issue of *Transgender Studies Quarterly* (TSQ) on Trans Pornography (Stryker 2020); and Karine Espineira (forthcoming, 2021).

However, most of these works do not focus on series and cover exclusively English language cinematic representations of trans* characters, most of which were produced in the US. Some of them are rather devoted to theoretical reflections on cinema as an unstable medium, always in flux, and as a transing practice (Currah, Stryker and Moore 2008; Keegan, Horak and Steinbock 2018; Steinbock 2019; Koch-Rein, Haschemi Yekani and Verlinden 2020). There are also important dissertations defended in the field of trans* visual studies, such as Shelby Strong's examination of South Korean K-dramas (2018). However, K-dramas are a different genre from the series this book aims to analyse. Since the foundation of the journal *Transgender Studies Quarterly* (*TSQ*) in 2014 and in a few special issues of other journals, such as in Goddard and Hogg's (eds.) (2019) and Koch-Rein, Haschemi Yekani and Verlinden's (eds.) (2020), some TV series have been

the object of analysis indeed and the issues include one article or a review about non-anglophone audiovisual products (for example, de Waal and Armstrong 2020). Still, none of these non-anglophone and very exceptional inclusions deal with series.

While globalised distribution services of (TV) series and academic work are becoming more and more international, we have yet to see an international approach to the representation of trans* people in series before this collection. *Trans* Time* is, therefore, 'one of a kind'. It is the first international, media, comparative book on the representation of trans* people in series. In contrast with most of the studies dispersed in different journals with various medial and theoretical foci, this book brings special visibility to trans* representation in European series. Thereby, this book can and does concentrate on the specificities of the medium and pursues an examination of the multimodal discourses (Kress 2010)—or the visual, acoustic and linguistic forms—, the depiction techniques, the genres and/or different formats in which the representations of trans* people take place. Moreover, the comparative international method aims to decolonialise trans* studies by focusing on the fluxes of knowledge on transness produced by the national series within the dominance of US-centred trans* representations. Because, although there is indeed a significant increase in the number of trans* characters in series in the USA and other English-speaking contexts, this does not mean that there is no 'trans* time in series' in other countries.

As decolonial approaches warn, the production of trans* knowledge is articulated in violent capitalist geo-economic globalising politics (Boellstorff et al. 2014, 419; Camminga 2017). These conditions are based on colonial and modern epistemological premises that impose, by cultural imperialism, anglophone concepts and experiences of sexuality, gender in general and life designs globally, and therefore undermine local knowledge and feelings. Science and scholarship cannot completely avoid this scenario. No knowledge is detached from context and/or subjectivity. Consequently, ethical scientific work, according to Haraway, can only take place in "situated but strong knowledge", which continuously reflects that one's own social and body-bound point of view influences the research results. This approach reduces the effects that power has on knowledge production (Haraway 2002, 368–370). In view of this, this book responds to the strong anglicisation of trans* studies and includes, with equal priority, analyses of televisual and scholarly productions of European countries with less international competitiveness. These endeavours are pursued by paying attention to the specific contexts

of knowledge production without ignoring that we are still dealing here with so-called capitalist 'First World' Western countries that have also been part of colonialist endeavours and are therefore responsible for the contemporary projection of the coloniality of power and of knowledge in Quijano's sense of the term (2001).[8]

'Projection' is used here as a conceptual metaphor encapsulating the technological, psychological and postmodernist senses of the term.[9] The latter has already been presented above for signalling the hypothesis that series project a simulacrum of a good trans* that is easily integratable into our neoliberal societies. Furthermore, this term evokes the optical technologies that made possible the screening of the first real moving images in the 19th century and the role assigned to them by European national authorities. According to Frodon (1998), these new media possibilities and their acceptance in society—going to the cinema became one of the most widespread forms of sociability in the 20th century (e.g. Palacio and Vernon 2012, 465)—favoured the use of cinema to 'project the nation', thereby representing as well as producing ideologically-charged discourses that strengthened the cohesion of the respective imagined communities and their Others.[10] This book focuses on the trans* Other and examines a mutation of the mode of consumption of moving images in the 21st century—watching series—that shares with early cinema the popularity of this social practice and the potential it has in massively representing, disseminating and generating depictions of transness in specific imagined communities, be it Europe and/or each national state.

This understanding of the medium draws on Paul Ricœur's 'mimetic circle' and its tripartite model of elucidating the relation of fiction and reality in terms of 'prefiguration', 'configuration' and 'refiguration' (1983). First, series are related and 'prefigurated' by a pre-existing reality that comes into

8 According to Segato, Western gender construction is one of the least creative and sophisticated since it encapsulates social roles, sexuality and personality in anatomical dimorphism (2010, 15). For non-Western understandings of transness, see, for example Amadiume 1987; also Campuzano 2006. Witten and Eyler (2012) give a good overview of scholarship on non-Western notions of transness.

9 For a revision and actualisation of the conceptual metaphor theory that originated in the seminal *Metaphors We Live By* by Lakoff and Jonson (1980), see Kövecses 2020.

10 The term 'imagined communities' draws on Anderson's (1983) conceptualisation of the role of the printing press in 19th century Europe for the circulation of (selective) vernacular narratives in the context of the democratisation of the journals that was made possible by technical improvements.

being in the context of specific cultures with specific symbolic normative orders. As the coronavirus crisis has dramatically evinced, countries still construct themselves as communities through media in their respective languages. Therefore, following the insight that languages determine the comprehension of the world and of thought (Trabant 2011, 10) and also taking into account Netflix and other international streaming platforms' conscious management of the "ideological constructs of 'the nation'" (Jenner 2015, 219) where the series are visualised, it is important to examine how transness is illustrated in the series and in the languages of each European country. In this sense, each article focuses on productions of one country, but examines how the respective 'national' series relate to the dominance of US-centred trans* representations and how they refute, reinterpret and perhaps adopt them. Second, series 'configurate' reality, that is to say, they can disseminate, generate or project socially sanctioned, desired or excluded and repressed forms of life with their supporting values and norms in a specific context. Third, such fictional productions have an effect on extra-literary reality and can potentially 'refigurate' social conceptions of once devalued or stigmatised forms of life.

This poietic approach of the series relates to the medial-psychological acceptation of the term 'projection', or the process of transferring ideas, feelings and desires by identificatory watching of these series. We have already hinted at the 'trap of the visual' from the point of view of how projecting transness on small screens influences or shapes the perception of the 'majoritarian society' towards trans* people. However, it is also important to focus on the substantial influence media's projections of transness exert on the psyche of trans* audiences (Sandil and Henise 2017, 47). Projections of transness in series affects the way trans* people shape their own narrative and live their lives in relation to imagined worlds 'configurated' and potentially 'refigurated' in and through the series, both with positive and negative outcomes.

The chapters of this volume firstly trace a genealogical journey through the socio-legislative context and the projections of transness that have been conveyed by the televisions of each country since its invention in the mid-twentieth century. Then, they concentrate on the analysis of the most recent national projections of transness in TV and/or streaming series in this trans* time of televisuality. For this purpose, the authors assess how broad is the represented spectrum of gender variability that contains the predicate 'trans*', to what extent intersectionality is included and what experiences and

life designs are privileged in filmic modelling. By doing so, this book aims at evaluating whether and how filmic and other televisual archetypes, narrative techniques and tropes illustrating the 'transsexuality paradigm' are also recurrent in this trans* time in series. In this light, it examines whether the 'good-trans* person' projected is trapped in this paradigm. Furthermore, the authors seek to show and analyse examples of alternative representations that rupture and/or go beyond this paradigm.

Karine Espineira opens the volume with an article examining the still rare but recent representations of the trans* characters of Louise in *Louis(e)* (Perrier, Lesieur et al./TF1/Cinétévé 2017), Dimitri in *Plus belle la vie* (Besson et al./France 3/Telfrance Série 2004–present, with a trans* character since 2018) and Morgaine in *Demain, nous appartient* (Aubert, Thybaud et al./TF1/Telfrance 2017–present).[11] She pursues an intersectional analysis and points out to some advances in this French trans* time in series while diagnosing the stagnation of French series' emplotment of transness in their projection of a new archetype: the mature and reproductible 'good trans*' family woman. Teona Micevska examines the depiction of Mia in *Hit & Miss* (Abbott et al./Sky Atlantic/AbbottVision/Red Production Company 2012) and of Judy in *Boy Meets Girl* (Kerrigan et al./BBC Two 2015–2016), two of the only series with a trans* character in leading roles in the United Kingdom. She assesses, in the lens of intersectionality and of Kosofsky Sedgwick's (1997) understanding of 'reparative practice', the articulation of transness and familial bonds displayed in the series, despite their reversion to many tropes of the 'transsexuality paradigm'. Luca Malici's article problematises the scarce, but recurrent articulation of transness in Italian series around an expiatory Catholic narrative including high doses of audiovisual and sometimes familial violence that guide the resolution of the storyline of Gianna in *I Cesaroni* (Paragnani, Favot et al./Canale5 2010), Luca in *Gomorra—La serie 1* (Saviano, Comencini et al./Sky 2014), Nina in *Gomorrah—La serie 2* (Saviano, Sollima et al./Sky 2016) and Carla in *Un posto al sole* (De Paola et al./RAI 3 2019).

Alice Azevedo's analysis of Catarina in the Portuguese *telenovela Ouro Verde* (Costa, de Souza et al./TVI 2017) also scrutinises expiation as the inevitable outcome of the Portuguese trans* character, what she frames as 'tragic transness' within the conventions of the *telenovela* genre and on the basis of Aristotle's theorisation of tragedy in his *Poetics*. Danae Gallo

11 Articles appear in strict alphabetical order according to the name of the country analysed.

González's article is devoted to examining the character of Angie in *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (Crespí et al./TVE/Grupo Ganga 2001–present), a series with record audience and running time in broadcast television. She reveals the complex and often contradictory modes deployed to audiovisually articulate transness in alliance with other diversities and vulnerability by orbiting around the poles of liberation and victimisation. Laura Copier analyses two Dutch web/television series, *Anne +* (Bisscheroux et al./BNN-VARA/Millstreet Films/Anne+ Foundation 2018–2020) and *Queer Amsterdam* (Peters et al./BNNVARA 2017). The author ponders to what extent these streaming shows develop and advance representations of trans* masculinity beyond the tropes of the 'wrong body' and the focus on the transing process and examines the function of the racially diverse universe projected in both series in the framing of transness. Greta Olson closes the volume with an essay about the ambivalences involved in the hypervisibility of trans* characters in international television series. The Afterword speaks to how the essays in this collection move beyond an emphasis on dominant representations in US television, and with this beyond a predominantly white Anglophone and US driven paradigm in trans* studies more widely.

This volume offers a first but firm access to the still understudied subject of how trans* people are represented in broadcast and streaming series internationally. It takes the first steps towards the eroding of "academic nationalisms" (Bourdieu 2002) and paves the way for a progressive internationalisation of trans* studies research dedicated to cultural production and representation. The results prove that it would be fruitful to continue and deepen the investigation. *Trans* Time: Projecting Transness in European (TV) Series* has opened the path for the still urgently needed endeavour of examining and comparing non-European and non-Western projections of transness in series around the world. Additionally, after many 'nice tries' and good intentions but insufficient outcomes, it seems that precisely now—in the turn of this newly inaugurated second decade of the 21st century—the time has arrived for trans*-affirmative, intersectionally-varied and empathetic portrayals of less 'good trans*' people that are more and more played, written and/or directed by trans* folks in mainstream series, such as it occurred with *Pose* (Murphy et al./Netflix 2018–present) in the United States and is happening now in France with *Plus belle la vie* (Besson et al. 2004–present) and in Spain with *La Veneno* (Ambrosi, Calvo et al./Atres Player/HBO 2020). This second or mutated peak of trans* televisuality in series and its consequences in the forms of life it might project would be another desirable

continuation of this research. In the meanwhile, welcome to (this) *Trans* Time*.

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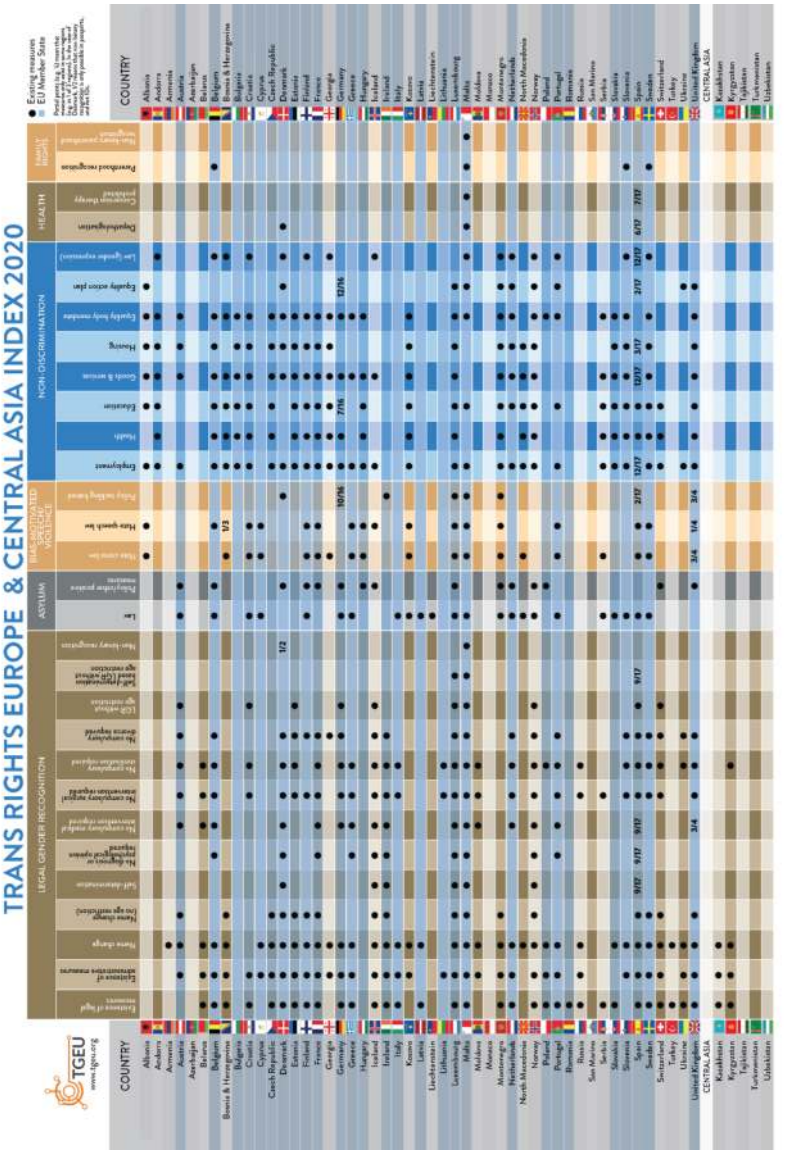

Fig. 1: TGEU. Trans Rights

Trans* Characters in French Series—An Obsolete yet Hegemonic Representation?

Karine Espineira

Abstract

French series with trans* characters are rare and recent such as in *Louis(e)* (2017), *Plus belle la vie* (2018) and *Demain, nous appartient* (2019). This chapter examines how these characters are represented. In order to do so, it first undertakes a short comparative study with serial productions of other countries, including those of the United States, which serve as references for trans* presentation in French series. Then it examines the French national specificity, tracing a historical analysis of how transness has been modelled in the media since the popularisation of the trans* life experience at the beginning of the 20th century. By doing so, this contribution assesses the effects these popularisations have had in the construction of popular and media imaginaries in France and questions recent French cultural series that mobilise consensual and sometimes outdated models of transness. Beyond key scenes, this article focuses on the modelling process that constructs very normalised characters, which are more or less subversive in relation to gender and sexuality orders.

The representation of trans* people in French television series is infrequent.[1] To understand this recent and incipient representation, we need to return to the popularisation of the theme with a perspective between France and the unavoidable reference point represented by the United States. In 2014 and 2015, the French mainstream and specialised community press spoke of a "transgender wave in the media"[2] symbolised by the recurrent use of two illustrations on now famous magazine covers: *Time* magazine with Laverne Cox (2014) and *Vanity Fair* with Caitlyn Jenner (2015). In the French context, the transgender theme seems to enter pop culture. In the first place,

1 In this chapter, the generic term "series" is used for television series.

2 This wording is considered as the synthesis of the various French press headlines.

this contribution offers a review of the main stages of the popularisation of the transgender theme from a Francophone perspective. In a second part, we will share the transgender typologies in French series and fiction, updated by a study on the audiovisual corpus in the archives of the Institut National de l'Audiovisuel (INA) undertaken between 2008 and 2012, enriched by analyses of recent productions. In the third section, by using an intersectional approach, we will describe and analyse the models of representation that seem to oppose a consensual, acceptable and demonstrable transidentity, in the face of a more authentic but more subversive transidentity that French creation struggles to represent.

1. Popularisations of the 20th and 21st Century: Biography, Popular Press, Newsreels

We believe that the media coverage of Laverne Cox and Caitlyn Jenner does not mark the beginning of the cultural inscription of trans* people in popular culture. In our research on media modelling of trans* people, we have chosen a number of criteria, including 'gender shift'[3] and media coverage. For example, we could start the 'media wave' with the documentary about 6-year-old Jazz Jennings answering Barbara Walters's questions on ABC (Walters et al./ABC News 2007). This documentary initiates an important media coverage of trans* children and teens in several countries around the world (Espineira 2011), as well as the media coverage of trans* children of stars such as Chaz Bono, son of Sonny and Cher. However, it is necessary to go further back in time. In the twenties and thirties as well as in the forties and fifties, we often find trans* life experiences, autobiographies or stories in the popular press. These narratives gave rise to cultural representations and inscriptions that shape the patterns of trans* representation in series.

The early transitions of known trans* people have generated a great deal of public and media interest, with 'sex changes' arousing a great deal of curiosity, especially those of trans* women, whose journeys are perceived as more dramatic than those of trans* men. Doctor Alan L. Hart (1890–1962) went, so to speak, under the radar of the popular press, as did Dora Richter

3 We prefer this expression to 'sex change', which obliterates life experiences in favour of a strictly medical approach.

(1891–1933), one of the servants at Magnus Hirschfeld's Institute of Sexology in Berlin. In contrast, the stories of the painters Lili Elbe (or Lili Ilse Elvenes, 1882–1931) and Michel-Marie Poulain (1906–1991) go beyond the realm of medical writing in a way that influenced literature (biography) and the popular press. Maxime Foerster points out that Lili's story inspired Niels Hoyer[4] (a friend of Lili's) to write the first biography of a trans* person, published in German in 1932: *Lili Elbe: Ein Mensch wechselt sein Geschlecht. Eine Lebensbeichte, aus Hinterlassenen,* and translated into English as *Man into Woman: An Authentic Record of a Change of Sex*, with a preface by the British sexologist Norman Haire, in 1933 (Foerster 2018, 42–43). In 1934, under the title "A Man Changes Sex: According to the Authentic and Scientific Documents Gathered by Niels Hoyer",[5] the French magazine *Voilà* (no. 185–189), published the story of Lili Elbe over several weeks (ibid., 43). In 1954, the story of Michel-Marie Poulain was published under the title *J'ai choisi mon sexe; confidences du peintre Michel-Marie Poulain* [I have chosen my sex; confidences by the painter Michel-Marie Poulain]. Foerster indicates that media coverage of the artist in the popular press was orchestrated to a certain extent, with headlines such as: "The Matisse of Èze-village has changed sex", "This elegant brunette is none other than Michel-Marie Poulain, former dragon, painter and family man" (ibid., 61).[6]

The fifties and sixties marked a new stage, with film and newsreels. Two documentaries illustrate two new ways of talking about trans* women on both sides of the Atlantic: "Christine Comes Home", broadcast in 1953 by Universal International News, and *Reflets de Cannes* in 1962 by the ORTF.[7] The first clip, from international film newsreels, relates the 'return home' of Christine Jorgensen (1926–1989):

—Voice-over: Christine Jorgensen, who used to answer to the name of George, caused a sensation in New York when she came back from Copenhagen. Christine made the headlines after a series of operations in Denmark that turned her from a man to a woman.

—Journalists: There's a picture there! A photo!

4 Pseudonym of the journalist Ernst Harthern (born Ernst Ludwig Jacobsen).

5 Original in French: "Un homme change de sexe: D'après les documents authentiques et scientifiques réunis par Niels Hoyer".

6 Le Matisse d'Èze-village a changé de sexe", "Cette élégante brune est n'autre que Michel-Marie Poulain, ancien dragon, peintre et père de famille".

7 Office de Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française [French Broadcasting Corporation].

—Christine Jorgensen: I am impressed that so many people have come. (Universal International News 1953, 00:01:48)

This media coverage is that of a celebrity. There's nothing in the image to suggest a malicious reception.[8] She was long considered as 'the first operated transsexual', but lost this cinematic title to Lili Elbe with the 2015 film *The Danish Girl* by Tom Hooper (Universal Pictures 2015). This status of 'first' will perhaps be taken by Dora Richter if one day cinema decides to adapt the story of her life to the screen. In the sixties, Coccinelle (1931–2006) was greeted in a similar manner to Jorgensen when she travelled abroad. Such a scene is found in the archives of the French National Audiovisual Institute (INA) in which Coccinelle, world-famous as a cabaret star, is shown in Milan, Italy, getting off a plane in 1959; this news piece is classified as unused (ORTF 1959, 00:11:58).

The second clip is about Coccinelle, in an excerpt from *Reflets de Cannes*, a prestigious French television program:

Voice-over: Another glance at the beach. Who is this seemingly inspired crowd looking at? A woman naturally. What question do they have? Naturally of the best of sorts. There is only one problem. Indeed, this woman is a man. It seems that she even got married in church. Then who would think anything bad about it? Not her nor him, whatever pleases you. But does that really please you? Not us. (ORTF 1962, 00:09:25)[9]

This perspective shows that the French media coverage of trans* people has been negative right from its beginning. Television programmes made fun of Coccinelle on other occasions in news programmes, especially during reports devoted to the Cannes Film Festival in 1973 (ORTF 1973a, 00:00:32 and ORTF 1973b, 00:01:46). Research carried out on the INA archives (from 2008 to 2012)[10] and on a corpus covering the period 1946–2010 shows that the trans* person was for a long time confined to the fringes and the world of the night, or even as a tragicomic figure. It seems that series such as cinematic ones perpetuate this: a trans* person is above all 'a transvestite' to whom 'misfortune' happens, such as being murdered or being the murderer, especially in detective series. "Maigret et l'homme dans la rue" in *Les enquêtes du commissaire Maigret* by Jean Kerchbron in 1988 (Hamster

8 Irving Rapper's biopic, *The Christine Jorgensen Story* (Edward Small Productions/United Artists 1970), chronicles this same scene while reporting mockery. Jorgensen participated in the film as a consultant.

9 Unless otherwise noted, all translations from French into English are my own.

10 See Espineira 2015a and 2015b.

Productions) and "Graine de macadam" in *Navarro* by José Pinheiro in 2001 (Hamster Productions/TF1) are two possible examples among many others.

Throughout the seventies and eighties, the transgender theme shifts towards debate programmes on prostitution and the underworld. There are also audiovisual reports on the sexual revolution, afternoon programmes and prime time programmes with a cultural, musical or literary theme, focusing on trans* autobiographies or short debates involving trans* people, philosophers, general practitioners or urologists.[11] Our research shows that in the French context, the use of specialists is reinforced by inviting psychiatrists to participate in debate programmes. The 'transsexualism/transsexuality' question or the TS/TS paradigm (Baumgartinger 2017) is perceived and exposed in an increasingly complex way, so that the recourse to psychiatric experts to explain it becomes generalised.

The theme also became part of entertainment with the popularisation of cabaret on television and variety shows. In addition to the multiplication of channels and broadcasting media, television diversified and new programme types appeared, with talk shows and reality TV in the nineties and the first decade of the 21st century. These new areas of television do not ignore trans* people, quite the contrary, as we saw in the United Kingdom with Nadia Almeda on *Big Brother* in 2004 (Downing et al./Channel 4/Endemol) or in France with Erwan Heneaux (2007) and Thomas Beatie (2018) on *Secret Story* (Daum et al./TF1/Endemol).

Since 2012, French media have focussed on trans* American personalities from Laverne Cox to Lana and Lilly Wachowski, to Caitlyn Jenner, Carmen Carrera, Janet Mock, Kye Allums, Chaz Bono, Shiloh Jolie-Pitt and Jazz Jennings, among others. TV series are also attracting interest: *Hit & Miss* (Abbott et al./Sky Atlantic 2012), *Orange is the New Black* (Kohan et al./Netflix 2013–2019), *Transparent* (Hsu et al./Amazon Studios 2014–2019), *Sense8* (Wachowski et al./Netflix 2015–2018), *Pose* (Murphy et al./Netflix 2018–present), *The OA* (Marling et al./Netflix 2016–present), as well as the following web series: *Eden's Garden* (King et al. 2015), *HerStory* (Richards et al./Speed of Joy 2016), *Crave* (Sheth et al./Honey Toad Productions 2016) and *Brothers* (Lundberg et al./Vimeo on Demand 2014–2018), in addition to the following filmic works: *The Danish Girl* (Hooper et al./Universal Pictures 2015), *Tangerine* (Baker et al./Duplass Brothers Productions 2015), *Girl* (Dhont et al./Menuet Producties 2018) and *Lola vers la mer* (Micheli et

11 Many examples are given in Espineira 2015b.

al./10:15! 2019). There are also programmes combining documentary and reality TV: *Becoming Us* (Seacrest et al./Disney–ABC/Domestic Television 2015), *I am Jazz* (Aengus et al./TLC/This is just a test 2015) and *I am Cait* (Goldschein et al./Murray Productions 2015–2016). These media play a greater role in what appears to be a turning point in France, thanks to such productions from abroad.[12] In these series, trans* actors and actresses are part of the cast: Candis Cayne (*Dirty Sexy Money*, Wright et al./ABC/Touchstone Television 2007), Laverne Cox (*Orange is the New Black*, Kohan et al. 2013), Jamie Clayton (*Sense8*, Wachowski et al. 2015–2018), Alex Blue Davis (*Grey's Anatomy*, Vernoff et al./ABC/Shondaland Production Company 2018), Ian Alexander (*The OA*, Marling et al. 2016), Angelica Ross, Mj Rodriguez, Dominique Jackson and Indya Moore (*Pose*, Murphy et al. 2018–present), and in France Jonas Ben Ahmed (*Plus Belle la vie*, Besson et al./France 3/Telfrance Série 2004–present, with a trans* character since 2018).[13]

Following the story of the popularisation of transidentity or transitude (Baril 2018) in various media in the United States or Chile, among other countries, allows us to contextualize the evolution in France, which seems to us more laborious, as we will describe in this contribution. We will go back in time to describe the transgender typologies of the eighties to 2000 in French fiction and series, while at the same time putting them into perspective with examples from the United States.

2. Trans* Typologies in French Fiction and Series, 1980–2018

In the fictions and series of the eighties, nineties and the first part of the first decade of the 21st century, detective thrillers favour the figure of the 'transvestite', as a reduction of the 'transgender' figure, thus opposing the 'transsexuality',[14] apprehended as 'authentic sex change' and reducing the trans* experience to a medical technique. If there is a shock (of emotions and images), it goes through a "gender disorder" (Butler [1990] 2005) and a public

12 Some of these productions have raised debates in trans* groups. For example, *Girl* was very well received by critics but was highly criticised by trans* people.

13 The examples given are limited to series broadcast on French screens.

14 The use of these different terms forms what we call a "shift in the media transidentity lexicon" (Espineira 2016a, 48).

order disorder (Espineira 2011, 194), or disturbances in the relationships of couples, of parenthood and of filiation in the broad sense.

When transsexuality becomes pathology, the portrait becomes darker. In 1989, the episode "Portrait du jeune homme en jeune fille", from the series *Drôles d'histoires* (Coldefy, Merlin et al./TF1 1989), shows a serial killer (of young women) face to face with the journalist who writes about him. The summary speaks of a game of "cat and mouse" to describe a closed-door environment and "ambivalent impulses" (Producer's summary, INA file).[15] One scene shows the two characters swapping clothes, separated by a blind that takes the dimension of a border between genders. In the very last moments, the assassin says: "When I see them, I would like to be them" (ibid.), orchestrating his own death at the hands of the journalist (who herself, for a moment, changes into a young man). The theme of repression thus seems to come to the fore: to kill what one cannot become or does not accept to be. Once the 'thing' has been said, peace can only be found in death, choosing to die "as a young girl" (ibid.) by the hand of a young woman who has symbolically become a young man.

In the field of representations of trans* people, there are many scenes of police stations holding prostitutes, including trans* characters designated as transvestites and suspected of an unassumed homosexuality: "Les habitudes de la victime" in *Renseignements généraux* (Barma et al./France 2 1989), "Le destin du docteur Calvet" (Lucker et al./TF1/Sahara Production 1992, 1993), "Dernière reunion" in *Eurocops* (Lepre, Lauterbach et al./Channel 4 et al. 1993), "Comme il vous plaira" in *Placé en garde à vue* (Sarraut, et al./France 2 1994), "Mac Macadam" in *Groupe Flag* (Summer, Alexandre et al./France 2 2002) and "Confusion des genres" in *La crim'* (Monnet et al./France 2/FIT Productions 2004), among other examples. The Bois du Boulogne theme is omnipresent in audiovisual archives. The setting also includes the bars of Pigalle and the sidewalks of La Madeleine in Paris, in order to stage prostitutes around police heroes: Antoine Bourrel in "Impasse des brouillards", *Les cinq dernières minutes* (Loursais et al./France 2 1982), Inspector Maigret in "Maigret et l'homme dans la rue", *Les enquêtes du commissaire Maigret* (Kerchbron et al. 1988), Navarro in "Folie de flic" (Granier-Deferre et al./Hamster Productions 1989), and Nestor Burma in "Fièvre au marais" (Marx et al./France 2/DEMD Productions/SFP/M6

15 Producer summaries are often found among the files when searching for a program in the INA archives. To consult the files referenced in this article, simply carry out a search with the references of the series given in the cited works.

1992). Most of the referenced episodes were rebroadcast in the nineties until the first half of the first decade of the 21st century. The transvestite character is often the 'token marginal' at the heart of the miscellaneous news stories. Whether endearing or disturbing, the character is always colourful: he is visible and easily identifiable by his colourful clothes and/or demonstrative personality. Sometimes, the police officer's involvement is strong, sometimes in a negative way, as in *Le Privé* (Aristarain et al./TVE/CARTEL 1986): Dominique is in love with Pepe Carvalho and reveals her identity to him on the beach. He puts his hand on her crotch and then hits her. She falls down, takes off her wig and leaves (ibid., 00:47:45). Or sometimes, in a positive way, as in the *Ludovic Sanders* 1987 episode "La reine de la jungle" [The Queen of the Jungle] (Kassovitz et al./TF1 1987): "The incredible story of a Brazilian transvestite called Tarzan, from the Bois de Boulogne, who will inspire the investigative writer" (Producer's summary, INA file).

The sets of the series are said to be risky areas and are: the Pigalle district, the public park Bois de Boulogne, the clubs in the 'hot districts' of the capital or provincial towns in the context of sulphurous reputations, banditry, prostitution in the nightlife venues of cabarets, nightclubs and brothels. In 1984, Inspector Maigret (present on small screens since 1964) was confronted with this *terra incognita* that the Bois de Boulogne suddenly becomes at nightfall. When we combine marginal characters, miscellaneous news items and social issues, the encounter weaves fiction and reality into a single net. The AIDS pandemic is added in the context of how it was portrayed in the following years. Trans* activists of the nineties and the first decade of the 21st century defended themselves against their reduced portrayal equating them with prostitution, the underworld and their systematically dramatic purpose (Espineira 2008, 66, 140).

The examples taken from detective series can be considered as special cases, as the transgender characters do not reappear. They may not be the defining force, but they are nevertheless cultural references in their own right. Specific examples include: "Maryline", an episode in the series *La Mondaine* (Pico, Madral et al./Flach Film 1997), features an international prostitution network "specialising in transsexuals" (Producer's summary, INA file). Lola, strangled in the Bois de Boulogne, was about to undergo the operation that would have completed "her metamorphosis", while she was selling her "ambiguous charms" (ibid.). A police superintendent meets one of Lola's friends during his investigation. We learn that Maryline is in fact "the son of a prostitute" (ibid.), whom the investigator has imprisoned after

having had an affair with her. This melodrama seems to benefit from serious documentation of the stages of the trans* journey. The INA file also noted this point: "This telefilm emphasises the steps that transsexuals need to take to change sex" (ibid.). In the same vein, "Les voleuses" in *Au Coeur de la loi* (Malleval, Assous et al./France 2/ Expand Drama/K'Ien Productions 1998) also integrates the theme of financing the genital operation.

The title of the episode "Vice-Versa" in the series *Disparition* (Barrois et al./Antenne 2 1984) already directs us to the plot: two investigators work respectively on the disappearances of a fashionable decorator and a young socialite before realising that they are the same case. 'Transsexuality' is described as a "troubled environment", akin to swinging. A surgeon nicknamed 'Pygmalion' (he undertook the transsexual character's last operation) explains that: "The life expectancy of the transsexuals is very short. Four to five years in general. Afterwards, it's suicide. . . I perfected my work with hormones over a period of two years" (ibid., 00:46:54). The soap opera's two gay figures are unashamedly caricatured as "mad women", although still not to the extreme example of the "Zaza" from *La cage aux folles* (Molinaro et al./Les Artistes Associés/Da Ma Produzione 1978). The young socialite who disappeared (and was later found) explains: "I was a man, I loved my wife, but I was unable to. . . I couldn't do it. At first, I only adopted a woman's finery. I was a transvestite. And then, I wanted to go further, I had an operation" (ibid., 00:52:20). When speaking about the surgeon: "I had become his creature in spite of myself. I had to continue the treatment, which is how he controlled me" (ibid., 00:52:22). There are known biographical elements of trans* transitions. Here, the relationship between trans* and surgeon is one of power and submission, from which the trans* character frees themself by flight and disappearance. The concluding scene is worthy of note. Pia and her companion, laughing and intertwining: "They almost stayed for dinner"/"What good did you do me?"/"Come on, Simone! I'm still your husband, aren't I?" (ibid., 00:54:00). Full of mockery and humour, the ensemble creates a world of coded play in an apparent schema of a renegotiated couple, as we will see with the fiction *Une autre femme* (Foulon et al./France 2/Pachli Productions 2002).

When the trans* character is not defined as transsexual, they are qualified as a transvestite. In the series we also find the erotic classification under the title "pink series". These are series that take the form of an anthology of libertine stories adapted from literary works and that also play on transvestism, necessity, libertine and amorous games. In the erotic collection *Série*

rose, produced by Pierre Grimblat (Chavarri, Grimblat et al./FR3 1986–1991), there is light-hearted banter during the episode "Elle et lui" involving the cross-dressing of two lovers who want to go unnoticed. Difficulties and disappointments inherent to the 'other sex' punctuate the story (he sees himself coveted by 'a lesbian'; she by a 'pederast') for an astonishing moral lesson in such a setting: "The state of a woman or a man is not necessarily enviable, so let each remain in his original sex" (ibid. Episode 12, 00:27:00).

Comedy series also play the card of the transvestism being a necessity. In the episode "Androgyne Tonic" from the series *Tel père tel fils* (Albert et al./France 2 1989) the plot is as follows: Olivier cross-dresses to get a job as the head of an advertising campaign for women's rights. The bias here is that of misogyny and sexism: "But I don't know how a woman thinks, or even if a woman thinks […] they are the only ones concerned" (ibid., 00:19:28). The character's sexism is corrected by a brief and modest experience of the female gender. In the episode "Lettres roses" from the series *Juliette en toutes lettres* (Marx et al./TF1 1989) the emphasis is put on an unusual figure of 'transvestism', the *Pierrot lunaire*. A postmistress investigates anonymous pink letters addressed to women in the neighbourhood. At the same time, she is worried about a certain gentleman 'transvestite poet' who sends letters to himself in order to get the postmistress to come. Summoned to the police station, it is a 'Pierrot'[16] who is facing the police officers in charge of interrogating him. He exclaims: "You want to portray me as a dangerous madman, an obsessed man. But I have a beauty culture. I am an aesthete. But I don't think that the law sees anything problematic in that" (ibid., 00:25:00). The director Gérard Marx had already been noticed from his short film *Nuit féline* (URC 1979), in which we follow "a former transvestite from Pigalle who has become a cat shelter caretaker" (Producer's summary, INA file). From this, we see a marginality (intrinsic to the 'transvestite state'), but it is poetic and non-threatening. In France, trans* representations have been numerous in detective series and there have been far fewer incursions into other serial genres. The best audiences are, moreover, achieved by detective series and the detective genre is "a malleable programme that allows social issues to be addressed, by the gang, without addressing them head-on" (Augros 2009, 30).

Although they did not mark a real turning point, the productions from the first decade of the 21st century offered significant new performances. *3*

16 Italian comedy character who appears in French theatre and pantomime. He is naive and dreamy, dressed in white, with a floury face.

femmes… un soir d'été (Grall, Magnan, Fontanille et al./France 2 2005) is a soap opera broadcast over the summer (a 'summer saga'). It is a detective thriller featuring a young captain from the Toulouse regional police department. Julie Leroy has returned to her home village in the Gers region to solve a series of murders. As the story unfolds, she must solve family enigmas about her own origins. One of the three women is played by Isabelle, a character who turns out to be Ludovic, an older brother 'who disappeared into the wilderness', an 'effeminate' young man, who was raped by players of the local rugby team many years before. 'Transsexuality' as a family secret is not a recent springboard for detective dramas. Additionally, another positive outcome is that there is a happy ending for Isabelle. In 2002, Jérôme Foulon had told the story of *Une autre femme* (Foulon et al.). The trans* character is a woman named Léa who, after a long absence of ten years, is reconnecting with her family. One of the innovations in this fiction is the character of Anne, an unhappy wife of bygone days who takes a liking to Léa. The theme of renewed ties, of family reconstruction (reviewed, corrected, adjusted) is not only embodied by the trans* character. If Isabelle (*3 women…*) sees her happiness within the framework of a heterosexual loving relationship, Léa's situation (*Une autre femme*) is more complex within the framework of a family under reconstruction. Léa is "a father who has become a woman", Anne is the "troubled" ex-wife and Pierre is her partner who attributes value to his "man's place" by trying to keep Léa away (Producer's summary, INA file).

For a comedy, "La reine des connes" in *Suite noire* (Nicloux et al./France 2/Arte France/Agora Films 2009) marks a noteworthy development. The TV film tackles the theme of 'sex change' through comedy: Emmanuelle has been accumulating failures since her childhood and she goes so far as to fail in her attempt at suicide. She ends up deciding to have her operation in Bangkok, which leads to new embarrassments. The producer's summary is eloquent:

> The first time Emmanuel Cyprien jumped into the void, he was 7 years old. The second time was a few seconds ago… It wasn't really a suicide this time, but another failure. A pathetic consequence of a misfortune that's been hanging over him forever. All because he wanted a sex change! However, once he became a girl, his luck could have changed, and the opportunity seemed good, an easy one… Goodbye to the dependence on bourgeois and stuck-up parents! Thanks to his sweetheart and his friends, he was going to be able to double his capital, pay for the round trip to Bangkok, treat himself to a penectomy and a buttock reshaping! Although in terms

of jumping, as with other things, there are never two without three! (France 2 press release, INA file).

Beyond the confusion in the summary between 'penectomy' and 'vaginoplasty', this fiction presents an unusual character. Emmanuelle is a trans* woman 'of her time' in the sense of being contemporary. She is not based on the model from the fifties or sixties nor on the noir fiction detective thrillers. The fact that the character is endowed with incredible bad luck renders the situations comical, rather than Emmanuelle herself, who is young, endearing and determined, feminine but never a caricature.

Changing perceptions mould attitudes with varying degrees of success, and these influence the way in which we see and participate in the modelling processes which are situated non-trans* points of view (Haraway 1988, 2007; Harding 1986, 1991). In this perspective, the *Sense8* series, in its queer and LGBT dimensions, must be considered as a situated point of view, a situated cultural production (Wachowski et al. 2015–2018). For example, in episode 2 of season 1, through the character Nomi Marks, many aspects of transgender life experiences are familiar to those involved (Wachowski et al. 2017). Given that Lana and Lilly Wachowski are at the helm, we could say that the episode in question conveys 'messages about trans* people' or we could think that these messages are 'trans* messages' and hence situated points of view. Nomi is a superhero on a human scale, and this is not without significance. On the one hand, she experiences ordinary transphobia through misgendering, the use of her dead name in the form of family abuse, but she also faces her own vulnerabilities and the infantilisation of her person by both family and medical personnel throughout the episode. On the other hand, she takes responsibility for her body and a fulfilled lesbian sexuality; she is a thoughtful, high-level hacker and a skilled and dedicated teammate throughout the series. To describe her differently: Nomi is not elderly; she is not heterosexual; she has no past as a 'father'; her transidentity is not central to the plot; she is not confined to a status of suffering; she is not devoid of any capacity to act (quite the contrary). Nomi's character is however still unthinkable in French cultural production, as we will demonstrate with the question about the persistence of an obsolete, but yet hegemonic model unfavourable to the evolution of representations.

3. Obsolete and Hegemonic Model vs. Authenticity of Representations?

The mini-series *3 femmes… un soir d'été* (Grall, Magnan, Fontanille et al. 2005) distinguishes itself by a degree of evolution, with a happy ending and by avoiding the usual detective plot scenes. However, we see the representations remain limited to obsolete schemas when we consider the evolution of the trans* movements: younger trans* people with earlier transitions, affirmation and visibility of trans* men, politicisation of discourses and demands, feminist activism, pro-depathologisation activism, affirmation of sexualities other than heterosexual, etc. French productions seem to be disconnected from the evolution of the "transgender movement" (Califia 2003). Until 2018, the rare trans* characters in series and fictional film are mature, white, heterosexual, apolitical women, who were 'husbands and fathers' before their transition. The absence of trans* men is what we call a first inequality of representation. There are others which the intersectional approach (Crenshaw 1989) allows us to bring to light. Crenshaw's approach was forged to shed light on the condition of African American women in the lineage of "Black Feminism" (Collins 1990). The intersectional approach decompartmentalises and de-hierarchises the categories of sex/gender, race and class. Adjusted to our field of study, it allows us to analyse more extensive and complex power relations (Collins and Bilge 2016), while opening up to other criteria such as age or ability. In our research, intersectionality makes it possible to describe the intersecting mechanisms of valuation and devaluation, and visibility and invisibility on the criteria of gender, sexuality, class and skin colour.[17]

As far as plots are concerned, they evolve little and often boil down to: a trans* woman has disappeared to make her transition; she returns years later to reconnect with her ex-wife and children; the return doesn't turn out well because she sows discord in the family, in gender and, in fact, in society. The plot of the fiction *Une autre femme* seems to have been transposed to the first prime time series involving a trans* woman as the main character in 2017 (Foulon et al. 2002). The series is entitled *Louis(e)* (Perrier, Lesieur et al./TF1/Cinétévé 2017). Created by Thomas Perrier and Fabienne Lesieur, it was broadcast in France from 6 March 2017 on TF1, the first private French TV channel. Louise is a doctor; she returns after her transition and

17 This is further developed in: Espineira 2016b and Espineira 2021 (forthcoming).

tries to reconnect with Agnès, her remarried ex-wife, and her children. Among the pieces of dialogue in the trailer, we hear Agnès's husband exclaim about Louise "so he's a tranny" (ibid., 00:00:10). Other scenes include Louise operating a lawnmower in red high heels (ibid., 00:00:21). The vocabulary (tranny, transsexual) and Louise's hyper-femininity thus gave rise to contrasting opinions and analyses both by activists on social networks and by support group leaders (Kirschen 2017). Our own viewing of the series leads us to similar observations. However, we need to go beyond the presentation of hyper-femininity. The lawnmower scene could be perceived as the staging of a power relationship: by mowing the lawn, Louise takes on the task of her ex-wife's new companion while not denying her feminine gender (Figure 1).

Fig. 1: Louise's staging of a power relationship (TF1 2017, 00:00:23)

We have also noticed that when Louise is shown as a doctor, not only is the acting more sober in the expression of femininity, but the character is also presented as very professionally competent. How should we interpret such a contrast? The feminist analysis of audiovisual productions, by their critical dimension means that if we were to raise a question, it would be controversial. Sellier defines feminist analysis as: "[…] taking into account the way in which audiovisual fictions are constructed, with their own formal means, gendered identities, sexual relations and sexualities, taking into account the

dynamics of social domination of which they are the field and the stake" (Sellier 2016). The question concerns Louise, as when she is portrayed as a doctor, hyper-femininity fades away. Does professional competence depend on a return to a standard femininity, to the supposed remnants of a certain masculinity, or simply to the representation of an accomplished professional? Louise keeps putting on make-up and redoing her hair, hence reminding us of the need not to be detected as a trans* person in the public space in order not to put themselves in danger.

Louise's character also corresponds to the hegemonic pattern (female, white, western, hyper-feminine, non-subversive, among other criteria) and fits into the most common plot type just like other characters already discussed (a mature woman with a past as a 'father' who returns after her transition). It is far removed from more innovative representations such as Marina Vidal in the Chilean film *Una mujer fantástica* by Sebastián Lelio (Fabula Komplizen Film 2017) or Nomi Marks in the *Sense8* series (Wachowski et al. 2015–2018), as previously mentioned. To put things into perspective, let us take the example of Marina. She is young and she does not play the hyper-femininity card in her daily life. Faced with the difficulties and violence that arise, she does not stop progressing nor does she submit to oppressive norms. In this respect, she is fantastic. The script says that she is trans* of course, but the trans* theme does not question Marina's personality or the trouble she would create within the family, gender and society. Rather, the theme questions the social and family violence against trans* people. It is not transidentity that causes the disorder but rather the functioning of patriarchal society. It is as if the prism is inversed. It's a perspective reversal that French creative media has not yet achieved. Even in 2019, the series *Demain nous appartient* (Aubert, Thybaud et al./TF1/Telfrance 2017–present) introduces Morgane, a mature trans* woman and "Gabriel's mum/dad". On a positive note, it can be emphasized that Morgane is certainly a recurring character, but still lacking in innovation.

4. Conclusions

This article has presented elements of the popularisation of the theme and of trans* life experiences with well-known examples. Our research shows that confinement to the medical, legal and factual fields has been significant

and that its effects continue to be felt in the social and media imaginations as illustrated by the trans* typologies in fictions and series. Perspectives not only show the persistence of outdated ideas, but they also allow us to sketch the outlines of models that become hegemonic in the absence of significant evolution and value characters who are more subversive and more critical of society.

There was a notable shift in trans* representation in French series in 2018, but without any follow-up for the time being: the transgender actor Jonas Ben Ahmed playing the positive role of Dimitri in the series *Plus Belle la vie* (Besson et al. 2004–present). The representation is new in several ways: a trans* actor plays a role of a young and positive trans* man. In the role of Dimitri, he plays a new character who comes to the help of Clara, played by the actress Enola Righi. Clara's character wants to transition as Antoine. Dimitri's character is equal to that of a protective and wise big brother. This changes with the role of Jonas: a young, racialised (at least by name), responsible and protective trans* man. The actor himself underlines the fact that this evolution is considered to be late:

> Honestly, I also say to myself: It's good. You've opened a door. You've opened a door, okay, but in 2018. And that, honestly, it shocks me a little bit. It shocks me a little bit, because I think that this door, in other countries, it was opened long before. (Brut 2018, 00:00:21)

Between 2009 and 2010, in a field survey conducted as part of a doctoral thesis, we found that the respondents were looking for positive trans* characters in other countries and in three types of cultural production: TV series, cinema and anime (manga adaptations). These representations are used in two ways by trans* people: as positive and authentic representations, but also as a valuable example to be given to explain trans* identities to friends and family.

In France, gender studies include film analysis ever since the socio-historical approach advocated by Noël Burch and Geneviève Sellier (1996). Gender studies are in fact linked to reception studies:

> […] sociological studies concern the differentiated reception of cultural productions according to audiences, in their social, sexual, "ethnic", generational dimension. […] The meaning of the work varies according to the sociocultural context of reception, but also according to the gender identity of the spectators. […] This trend has made it possible to re-evaluate popular culture aimed at women, by showing the different modes of production of the socio-sexual identity compared with the models offered by the films. (Burch and Sellier 1996, 77)

Trans* people are also audiences for cultural creations made almost exclusively by non-trans* people. Following this perspective, how can we analyse the omnipresence of the transvestite[18] model in police stations, whether he is a prostitute or Pierrot lunaire?[19] How can we analyse the repeated violence or the hegemonic representation model? How can we construct ourselves as a person, as an individual, when the culture is abusive or oppressive because of the weight of binary norms? In the same way that black people celebrated in front of Ryan Coogler's film *Black Panther* (Coogler et al./Marvel Studios 2018), trans* people celebrated in front of *Pose* or *Sense8*. On French social media, and particularly on Twitter, we have seen, empirically, that the character of Jonas Ben Ahmed allowed young trans* boys to explain their trans* identity to their families. However, we are still waiting for the diversity of representations based on gender criteria (non-binarity, rejection of the sex-gender system), skin colour (racialised trans* representations are rare), sexuality (not all trans* people are heterosexual or asexual) or even age and ability, among other features. Questions and reflections also lead us to the idea that one of the interests in remaining close to the field of study is not to deprive ourselves from a form of subjectivity as a form of intimacy with the trans* field and thus not to lose sight of the human element.

18 For the description of a transvestite figure in the film *La Triche*, see Rollet 2009.

19 We think of both the pantomime Pierrot and the Pierrot lunaire from *Opus 21*, composed by Arnold Schönberg in 1912.

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A Trans* Family Affair in British Television Series—Or, the Interplay of Community, Law, and Media

Teona Micevska

Abstract

There are more and more trans* characters in British scripted television series of different genres, from soap opera to family drama, thriller, crime, noir and romantic comedy. Since the Gender Recognition Act of 2004, legal debates on trans* lives are becoming more and more vigorous. At the same time, there is a proliferation of organisations that focus on informing the public about trans* lives and supporting trans* communities, as well as monitoring and advocating for changes in media representation, such as Trans Media Watch. This article looks closely into these simultaneous developments, zooming in on two series with trans* leads, *Hit & Miss* (2012) and *Boy Meets Girl* (2015–2016), to investigate the affordances and limitations, not only of television representation, but also of the broader contexts in which these series are produced and circulated. In doing so, this article aims at evaluating how the interplay between community organisation, legal regulation and visual politics of different television series shapes the playing field of possibilities for trans* presence on the small screen.

Trans* visibility on British small screens continuously grows as an increasing number of television series in various genres depict trans* characters. On the one hand, long-running series have included trans* characters that were featured in a limited number of episodes: *Coronation Street* introduced the first trans* character on British television in 1998 (Kerrigan, Kay, Dowd et al./ITV/Granada Television), *Waterloo Road* followed in 2011 (Gallagher et al./BBC One/Shed Productions) and *EastEnders* (Holland, Smith et al./BBC) and *Doctor Who* (Moffat, Minchin et al./BBC One) in 2015. On the other hand, trans* characters have been at the centre of significantly shorter

series: *Hit & Miss* (Abbott et al./Sky Atlantic/AbbottVision/Red Production Company 2012), *Boy Meets Girl* (Kerrigan et al./BBC Two 2015–2016) and *Butterfly* (Marchant, Shindler et al./ITV/Red Production Company 2018). Since the Gender Recognition Act of 2004, legal debates on trans* lives have not subsided. At the same time, there is a proliferation of organisations that focus on informing the public about trans* lives and supporting trans* communities, as well as monitoring and advocating for changes in media representation, such as Trans Media Watch. This article looks closely into these two simultaneous developments, zooming in on two series with trans* leads, *Hit & Miss* and *Boy Meets Girl*, to investigate the affordances and limitations not only of television representation but also of the broader contexts in which these series are produced and circulated. In doing so, this article aims at evaluating how the interplay between community organisation, legal regulation and visual politics of different television series shapes the playing field of possibilities for trans* presence on the small screen.

1. Trans* Representation across British Media: An Edge State

> I try to catch a firm hold of the direction in which we're moving and find myself unable to do so. It depends on the day, on the latest breaking story.
> (Lester 2017, 190)

Despite opening their chapter titled "Futures" with a long list of successes trans* people have achieved, C. N. Lester contends that trans* futures are still uncertain. In the UK, content featuring trans* lives have been increasingly produced across various media including magazines, television documentaries, scripted series, reality TV and talk shows. Organisations supporting trans* rights and communities have gained visibility online, on the ground and in political and public life. They have significantly contributed to the availability of accessible information online by providing various informative materials on their websites. Trans* presence in UK media has become not only more and more diversified itself but it has also been accompanied by a diversification in the structures that advise, monitor and regulate trans* media representation. The following analyses show that this coupling is not coincidental but conditions two seemingly separate spheres, media and social (legal and communal) representation, and delineates their

intertwinement on the examples of selected organisations, legislation and television series.

A legal milestone for trans* people in the UK was The Gender Recognition Act 2004 (GRA) (Government of the United Kingdom 2004). It was the first legal document in British law that enabled people to have their acquired gender legally recognized, as long as that gender is male or female. After an elaborate bureaucratic procedure and application approved by a Gender Recognition Panel consisting of medical and legal members, a person may obtain a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC) confirming they have fulfilled the criteria required for full legal recognition of their required gender and are entitled to a new birth certificate. The procedure prescribed by the GRA has been continuously disputed by different stakeholders: trans* communities, women rights groups and political parties, with clashes ensuing on multiple points. Among the most controversial preconditions are the necessity of a diagnosis for gender dysphoria for the completion of the procedure, living full time in their acquired gender for at least two years and the obligatory declaration of consent by the spouse (Mordaunt 2018, 18, 19). Trans* rights have further been determined by the Equalities Act 2010 regulating, among other things, access or lack thereof to single-sex services, and prohibiting discrimination on the basis of gender reassignment (ibid., 45). A chronology of events reveals that these legal milestones happened concomitantly with the release of television series that depicted trans* characters, bearing substantial implications on trans* representation both in law and in media.

An episode of the television comedy *Moving Wallpap*er (Jordan et al./ITV 2008–2009) by ITV in 2009 featured an episodic trans* woman character "seemingly for the sole purpose of being the target of relentless transphobic jokes" (Belcher 2018, 318).[1] Hundreds of complaints to Ofcom, "the regulator for the communications services that we use and rely on each day" were received, all of which were rejected (Ofcom 2020a). A panel was created that presented several minutes of audiovisual clips with transphobic content that

1 In this episode, the writers struggle to meet a deadline and a new writer is brought in, Georgina, who is supposed to help them out. As the writers begin a strike in protest against external help who is also paid more than them, conflicts worsen, and when Jonathan, their boss, figures out she is trans*, a series of transphobic slurs follows, including: she is called the wrong name and with the wrong pronouns (Jordan et al./ITV 2009. Renaissance Part IV, 00:04:23) and is called "it" (ibid., 00:05:05), a "bloke in a dress" (ibid., 00:05:21), a "cock in a frock" (ibid., 00:08:35) and "hairy hands" (ibid., 00:09:09).

had been broadcast only the year before, all of which demonstrated divergences from Ofcom's Broadcasting Code. The panel further made the argument that the language used in media transfers as violence on the streets (Belcher 2018, 318).[2] Thus, Trans Media Watch (TMW) was founded in 2009.

In response to the lack of information on trans* lives, TMW was engaged in both intervening when transphobic media content was produced and broadcasted and in providing educational and informative materials on trans* realities. In 2011, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed with Channel 4 and other major media networks "who share our aims of improving the coverage of transgender people and issues" (Trans Media Watch 2011a). The four core points of the MoU are:

> Eliminating transphobia in the media.
> Ending the provision of misinformation about transgender issues in the media.
> Increasing positive, well-informed representations of transgender people in the media.
> Ensuring that transgender people working in or with the media are treated with the same respect as non-transgender people in equivalent positions. (Trans Media Watch 2011b, 4)

Later in 2011, TMW became part of a larger initiative called All About Trans. All About Trans continues to work with the trans* community and British media to promote more trans* voices in the media, inspire new programming and improve reporting (All About Trans 2020). The inauguration of the Trans Comedy Award followed, which resulted with the production of *Boy Meets Girl* (Kerrigan et al. 2015–2016).

Trans* media presence in the UK was simultaneously shaped by print mainstream media, documentaries and television series. Print media has been repeatedly reporting on the deaths of trans* people with a glaring lack of respect and sensationally outing them. In 2010, a prominent human rights lawyer Sonia Burgess was pushed under a train in London. Both she and the perpetrator were trans* women. In some news they were misgendered and the focus was on details of their personal lives while the tragedy was trivialized, as exemplified by the headline of the *London Evening Standard* "Sex Change 'Woman' Accused of Killing Cross-Dress Lawyer on Tube"

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2 Ofcom's Broadcasting Code is a guidance of practices, "a code for television and radio, covering standards in programmes, sponsorship, product placement in television programmes, fairness and privacy" (Ofcom 2020b).

(London Evening Standard 2010). In 2012, after a primary school had communicated that one of its teachers henceforth will be known by the name of Lucy Meadows and referred to as a she, a letter of a concerned father to the school reached the media. First a local newspaper published a story about her transitioning, then it hit the national press and the BCC, to the point where a columnist in the *Daily Mail* published a piece under the headline "He's Not Only in the Wrong Body… He's in the Wrong Job" (Littlejohn 2012). The press camped outside her door and she was found dead several months later.

A 1980 four-part documentary by the BCC titled *A Change of Sex* (Mills et al./BBC2 1979) followed the transition of Julia Grant and is considered to be the first primetime television documentary on transitioning. In 2011 and around the immediate aftermath of the signing of *Memorandum of Understanding*, the documentary series *My Transsexual Summer* (Chambers, Whittaker et al./Channel 4/Twenty Twenty 2011) was released on Channel 4 with seven trans* people discussing different stages of their transition. It has been praised as a step in the right direction in trans* media representation because it provides space for trans* people to shape their own narratives. It was also criticised however because of the lingering presence of known stereotypes and lack of diversity among the participants (Belcher 2018, 320). Another Channel 4 documentary series, *The Making of Me*, aired in 2019 and focused on trans* people and their families, and has so far received positive reviews (Jackman 2019). Trans* lives attract the interest of both producers and audiences in television genres that aim at fictionality and those that aim at factuality which juxtaposes the increase in visibility of trans* stories and characters, as well as the persistent need for communicating information on lived trans* realities. The medial production of knowledge and the medial production of fiction about trans* lives still go hand in hand.

Yet backlash did not lag too far behind. J. K. Rowling sparked outrage with (yet another) transphobic tweet that (again) exposed lines of division among feminist and LGBT supporters. In response to an opinion piece from 28 May 2020 titled "Creating a more equal post-COVID-19 world for people who menstruate", on 6 June, Rowling tweeted "'People who menstruate'. I'm sure there used to be a word for those people. Someone help me out. Wumben? Wimpund? Woomud?" unleashing countless reactions by people who read her tweet as transphobic (Rowling 2020a). She responded with a 3,500-word essay on her website on 10 June 2020 titled "J. K. Rowling

Writes about Her Reasons for Speaking out on Sex and Gender Issues". In it Rowling elaborates on her concerns with 'trans issues' and their effects on the understanding of biological sex and the consequences of this on the well-being of 'biological' women, lesbians and children, the safety of single-sex spaces especially concerning women who have experienced domestic violence and sexual abuse, as she herself has, which is also put forward in the context of the essay (Rowling 2020b). Backlash followed from individuals and organisations across different genders and professions.[3] Trans* visibility and representation seem to happen hand in hand with increasingly elaborate and prominent outpours of transphobia originating across and within racial, ethnic, class and sexual minorities (Koch-Rein et al. 2020, 3). The quantitative increase in trans* presence in UK media is not to be confused with a progress narrative.

Instead, permanent alertness and critical monitoring of new media production and content seem necessary. Trans* media representation can be seen by analogy with the unceasing need to come out again and again: the effect and consequences of coming out as trans* and also of trans* presence in the media are never certain. Patterns of past problematic presence of trans* people on screen can still emerge in any newly produced and aired content. Rather than a narrative of progress, trans* representation in media can be understood as 'an edge state':

> Something is happening—something powerful and exhilarating and frequently terrifying—but it is an edge state: I couldn't tell you upon which side we will fall. Trying to balance on that edge is dangerous, exhausting, a constant wash of adrenaline. (Lester 2017, 191)

2. Trans* in British Scripted Television Series: The Tipping Point

With the height of trans* visibility has also come the height of trans* violence and murder. And so it's very important for people to acknowledge that yes, it is important to see these figures in the spotlight, but it is also necessary to recognize that

3 On the background of Rowling's transphobia, see Robertson 2020. On the chronology of Rowling's tweet and the backlash, see Hoffmann 2020. On her essay and its aftermath, see Breznican 2020.

this "trans tipping point" is bringing an unsettling rate of violence toward trans* women. (McDonald, Griffin-Gracy and Meronek 2017, 26)

On 24 May 2014, Laverne Cox was on the cover of the *Time Magazine*, with the title of Katy Steinmetz's piece on the frontpage: "The Transgender Tipping Point: America's Next Civil Rights Frontier". In an interview of CeCe McDonald and Miss Major Griffin-Gracy by Toshio Meronek after the documentaries about each of them were released—*Free CeCe!* (Gares et al./Jac Gares Media Inc 2016) and *Major!* (Ophelian, Florez et al./Floating Ophelia Productions, LLC. 2015)—both point that media representation is "a monumental thing": "this [Steinmetz's article] is the first article that was geared toward us as a community. She's a black woman, and she's trans, and she's in what people consider the profession—she's an actress" (Mc Donald, Griffin-Gracy and Meronek 2017, 26). Furthermore, McDonald points, "trans women are being acknowledged and are in the spotlight in ways that are not just about depicting trans women as stereotypes. We're human beings" (ibid.). This watershed moment however comes with a flipside attached to it.

Trans* presence in television series invites the impression that a progress narrative can be identified beginning with the first trans* character on primetime television in 1998 on the soap opera *Coronation Street* (Kerrigan, Kay, Dowd et al. 1960–present). Ever since, trans* characters have been featured in scripted series time and again: over the years, from characters present only during a certain stretch of the show to the protagonists around which entire series revolve. Yet series' production has been held in check by public discourse in which numerous voices have raised concerns and calls for improvement with how existing and new series depict trans* characters. What follows is an overview of milestones in British scripted television series that illustrate the pendulum of trans* television presence with some series swinging towards progressive representation and with others towards a revival of discriminatory tropes.

Coronation Street, the world's longest-running television soap opera, introduced the trans* woman character Hayley Patterson in the episode on 26 January 1998 (Hemley 2010). Julie Hesmondhalgh portrayed Patterson until her exit from the show on 22 January 2014. Patterson shows up as initially a fleeting flirt with the then-secondary character Roy Cropper (played by David Neilson), but then marries him and stays on the show for a decade and a half as his importance in the show grows. She dies by suicide after facing a terminal pancreatic cancer diagnosis. Hesmondhalgh, who does not

identify as trans*, reminds in the *Forever Manchester* podcast in December 2018, that "the massive effects" soap operas can have "are not to be sniffed at", as she was remembering that the Gender Recognition Act came through in 2004, after Patterson and Cropper had their first unofficial wedding, and who, in consequence to the changed legislation, married later in the show (Forever Manchester, Hesmondhalgh et al. 2018). An online petition was raised, she continues, in the period around Patterson's death by Maggie Blanc after the death of her husband of pancreatic cancer, turning attention to the lack of funding for pancreatic cancer treatments which later turned into the still existing Pancreatic Cancer Research Fund (ibid.). Hesmondhalgh donated the character's signature red anorak to the People's History Museum in Manchester where it is being exhibited. While the complexity of the contexts that led to the Gender Recognition Act cannot be squarely traced to the character of Hayley Patterson, neither can the awareness of and funding for pancreatic cancer to the character's death, as her over a decade long presence in the longest running British soap has been an opinion-maker with lasting and multifaceted effects.

Yet in December 2008, in an episode of *The IT Crowd* (Linehan et al./Channel 4) titled "The Speech", an episodic trans* character, April (played by Lucy Montgomery, also a cis woman), appears, again as a date for one of the show's main characters. After she states she "has a problem" and "a secret" over dinner, she explains about her hormone therapy and operation but her date mishears her and they have an affair (ibid. Episode 4, 00:10:46–00:11:40). Her portrayal—for example, she likes action movies, junk food, and can hold her liqueur—can be seen as echoing both the stereotype of a trans* woman who never ceased to be a man and that of a particular kind of masculinity connected with love for violence and alcohol (ibid., 00:12:10–00:12:57). A physical fight ensues after the date learns that she "used to be a man" and as a result breaks up with her (ibid., 00:19:40–00:22:02). A main source of a purportedly comic effect in the finale of the episode is her being a feminine-presenting woman "who used to be a man" and who still fights like one. The backlash against the transphobic portrayal, characters and plot only fuelled the show's creator Graham Linehan's public transphobic statements, culminating in Twitter suspending his account (@glinner) permanently on 27 June 2020 after he had tweeted "men aren't women tho" in response to a Pride post by the Women's Institute in support of its transgender members. The official reason for the ban was "repeated violations of our rules against hateful conduct and platform manipulation"

(Blackwall 2020). A benchmark of progress in trans* representation set by *Coronation Street* was followed by a blow not only by a transphobic depiction of a trans* character in *The IT Crowd*, but also by the repeated public outbursts of unrelenting transphobia by its creator who enjoyed a wide-reaching public platform with millions of followers on social media.

Then there was another tipping point. The American *Vogue* dubbed the year 2015 as "the year of trans visibility": "there are far too many mainstream moments to choose from: Caitlyn Jenner's interview with Diane Sawyer, watched by 16.9 million people; Laverne Cox being named one of the world's most beautiful women by *People*; the debut of trans* teen Jazz Jennings's reality show, *I Am Jazz*, on TLC" (Taylor 2015). The article lists major mainstream appearances of openly trans* people including Caitlyn Jenner's coming out, Chelsea Manning's blog posts about her transition in a military prison, Jazz Jennings's show (Aengus et al./TLC/This is just a test 2015), *Transparent*'s airing (Hsu et al./Amazon Studios 2014–2019), Raffi Freedman-Gurspan becoming the first trans* White House official, the series *Tangerine* (Baker et al./Duplass Brothers Productions 2015), Aydian Dowling becoming the first trans* man on the cover of *Men's Health Magazine* and the release of the *Danish Girl* (Hooper et al./Universal Pictures 2015).

The year also marked a turning point for trans* presence on British serial television. Another soap, this time on the BBC, *EastEnders* (Holland, Smith et al. 1985–present), has been hailed for its introduction of the first trans* character played by a trans* actor in a British scripted television in 2015 with Riley Carter Millington in the role of Kyle Slater. By then, the series had already collected several 'firsts', including a character with HIV and a gay character with a gay kiss around the time *Coronation Street* introduced their trans* character (Hodari 2015). The Channel 4 series *Cucumber* (Strevens et al./Channel 4/Red Production Company 2015) and its companion series *Banana* (Davies, Shindler, Gardner et al./Channel 4/Red Production Company 2015) casted the trans* actress Bethany Black in the role of Helen Brears. Black also appeared in the *Doctor Who* episode "Sleep No More" (Moffat, Minchin et al. 2015). *Boy Meets Girl* aired with the trans* actress Rebecca Root in the leading role of the trans* woman Judy (Kerrigan et al. 2015–2016).

The pendulum of trans* on British television continues to swing. In 2018, ITV released another series, *Butterfly* (Marchant, Shindler et al.), focusing on an eleven-year old trans* child, a landmark in the representation of

trans* children on television which was both highly praised while also inciting transphobic comments, especially on Twitter (Gill 2018). In 2020, the long-running BBC show *Little Britain* (Walliams, Lucas et al./BBC 2002–2007) revived one of its most transphobic sketches from more than a decade ago, in which the famous duo Matt Lucas and David Walliams revisited their past characters, including the two "unconvincing transvestites" Emily and Florence (Maurice 2020).

Trans* presence in British scripted television series, praised as a step forward or criticised as transphobic, interlocks in the wider context of contemporary television production. The series mentioned thus far were produced either by the BBC, ITV or Channel 4. These three major producers currently rely on similar production politics. While there is a growing tendency to entertain and release diverse television products, some of which gear towards mass, some towards niche audiences, they still bear the traces of the traditional understanding of primarily BBC to "inform, educate and entertain, and to maintain standards of quality" (Bignell and Lacey 2014, 9). With the entry of ITV onto the British television scene however, a major change happened that was motivated by competition: ITV's "research into audience sizes and preferences became more significant, and television viewers began to be seen as consumers" (ibid., 9). The consequence of this shift in both production and in the understanding of audiences led to a change in the role and reputation on television which "was increasingly considered as a market in which providers of programmes would give their publics what they seemed to want" (ibid.). When Channel 4 began broadcasting in 1982, its policy combined the inherited with new guiding principles (ibid., 19). Nowadays, production policies of these three major television networks can be summed up as follows:

> Rather than supervising the viewer's cultural education towards 'better' taste and informed citizenship, television institutions increasingly either offer mixed programme schedules, which attempt to satisfy perceived desires and capture audiences through entertainment, or diversify their offerings into themed channels which offer related programme types to small niche audiences. (ibid., 13)

Trans* presence in television series bears a component of entertainment as much as it does of awareness-raising and just representation. Television production policies allow for the unceasing recurrence of transphobic media portrayals. The entertainment part of production policy, as well as the still-developing broadcasting regulations allows producers to release content that adheres to those parts of the audiences who still find entertaining what has

been by now widely accepted to be transphobic portrayals. Yet television, and with that television series, next to entertainment, still "allow for much more information and contradiction to enter into the representation of complex lives" (Halberstam 2018, 97).

3. A Family Woman: *Hit & Miss* and *Boy Meets Girl*

Hit & Miss (Abbott et al. 2012) and *Boy Meets Girl* (Kerrigan et al. 2015–2016) stand out because both series have trans* characters in the lead roles who stay in the focus of the series from beginning to the end, as opposed to the long productions such as *Coronation Street* (Kerrigan, Patrick, Dowd et al. 1960–present), *EastEnders* (Holland, Smith et al. 1985–present), *Doctor Who* (Moffat, Minchin et al. 2015) and even *Banana* (Davies, Shindler, Gardner et al. 2015) and *Cucumber* (Strevens et al. 2015), where trans* characters are present in one stretch of the shows, or as episodic characters as in the *Moving Wallpaper* (Jordan et al. 2008–2009) or *The IT Crowd* (Linehan et al. 2006–2013). Both series do not squarely fit into traditional genres: the one fuses family drama with crime and noir, the other situational and romantic comedy. Another similarity between the two can be seen in the construction of the lead roles: the trans* protagonist is accompanied by another lead: her family.

3.1 Family and Murder: *Hit & Miss*

—So I'm not a girl inside?
—No, you're a boy. And one day you'll be a man.
—How do you know?
(Mia and her son Ryan in Abbott et al. 2012. Episode 2, 00:38:52)

Hit & Miss is a Sky Atlantic production which premiered in 2012, first in the UK in May and then in the US in July. Sky Atlantic was launched in 2011 as a British pay television channel and holds the broadcasting rights for HBO and Showtime productions, which is also most of its broadcasting content. There are original productions by the channel, among the first of which was this series. It was created by John Abbott, who has also worked on *Coronation Street*, and written by Sean Conway. Chloë Sevigny is in the role of Mia, a

'preoperative transsexual', who works as a contract killer in Manchester and its surroundings. The series begins as she discovers that she had fathered a son Riley with her ex-lover Wendy, who has recently died of cancer and left her to be the guardian for their son and Wendy's other three children that live on a farmhouse in rural Yorkshire. The series has six episodes.

There is a thin line on which the series steadily balances, between falling into the "spectacle of suffering" trap (Chouliaraki 2006, 8) and the risk of presenting trans* characters as embodiments of the "radical", subversive and antinormative (Serano 207, 110).[4] Beginning with the opening scene throughout all six episodes, the series flirts with the traditional tropes that have defined trans* representation: the obligatory mirror or reveal scene, the unavoidable overload of suffering where trans* characters are caught up in a Gordian knot of violence, criminality, marginalisation, exoticisation, excessive sexualisation and pathologization (Steinbock 2019, 16; Prosser 1998, 89). On the other hand, the series also offers unexpected twists in its evocation of these tropes, placing the trans* assassin in the role of the primary adult caregiver and provider of a family she never knew she had. It juggles with the stereotypical trans* tropes and with the binary logic of radical vs. conservative, to present a complex reality in which the trans* character is firmly embedded in a family context that is entrapped in its own dysfunctionality, but which also provides unexpected leeway and room for mischievous manipulation of the status quo.

The series begins when a person dressed in dark, hooded athletic clothes assassinates a man (Abbott et al. 2012. Episode 1, 00:00:33). Only after the hood is taken off is it revealed that the murderer is a feminine-presenting woman who puts on red lipstick while looking at her car's mirror (ibid., 00:01:11; Figure 1). In the next scene, she is in her spacious industrial loft getting ready to shower by slowly removing her clothes. She removes her underwear and turns briefly to the camera, completely naked with her chest and penis clearly visible (ibid., 00:02:28). After the shower, she sits on her bed and takes a pill, followed by her tucking her penis between her legs with

4 "Such arguments—that bigendered and genderqueer people are more 'radical' or 'queer' than transsexuals—are highly reminiscent of similarly naive accusations made in the past by homosexuals who argued that they were more 'radical' or 'queer' than bisexuals. The creation of such radical/conservative gender binaries are both self-absorbed and anti-queer, as they dismiss the very real discrimination transsexuals and bisexuals face in favour of establishing pecking orders within the queer community" (Serano 2007, 110).

a towel, getting dressed and continuing with physical exercise (ibid., 00:02:28–00:03:30).

Fig. 1: The assassin
(Abbott et al. 2012. Episode 1, 00:01:11)

As an assassin, Mia is shown in androgynous clothes and with her face covered. She moves like a faceless, anonymous shadow. By contrast, when the hood which serves as a mask is removed, we see a very feminine woman who applies makeup, which can also be seen to serve as a kind of mask. When she is finally completely naked, it seems that the truth of her gender is finally 'revealed'. In her home environment and private life she is shown as overtly and overly feminine: she wears colourful clothes, dresses, high heels, or, as Poole notes, is a "trans fatale" (Poole 2017, 10). She is a dangerous woman who makes a living as a contract killer, but also is highly feminine and seductive. Just as the viewers repeatedly follow her while she is hunting down and killing her victims, they see her putting on makeup and dressing up. In visually pairing anonymous and murderous androgyny and ostensible hyper-femininity, the series nods to the legacy of film noir.

But it also plays with clothes and makeup understood as masks: as an assassin, Mia is by default undercover while working, which raises the question which is the mask covering the 'real' Mia, with feminine attire that needs time and equipment to be put on, or the hoodie and sweatpants that seem

effortlessly worn. As Mia visually cannot exclusively fit either in the androgynous or in the feminine box, both of these contrasting appearances emphasise her individuality becoming unique to her character in the series. Even though the scene evokes the infamous tropes—a reveal scene, a hyper-feminine male to female trans* person filmed in the act of putting makeup, her refusal to touch her penis as hinting to gender dysphoria diagnosis (supported by the fact that she works as an assassin to collect money for the surgery), taking pills as part of her transition, the transsexual as criminal and outlaw—they quickly prove short-lived. Within the same first episode, the series throws Mia in the middle of the family of her former partner Wendy and her children, one of which, the boy Ryan, was fathered by Mia before her transition.

Finding out in a letter that after her death Wendy wished for Mia to be the 'guardian' of her children, Mia commutes between her Manchester loft and the run-down rural house trying to take care of Ryan and the rest of Wendy's children, all of which are half-siblings: the eldest daughter Riley, the son Levi, the youngest daughter Leonie, as well as Wendy's disabled brother Liam. The teenage children are trapped in a cycle of poverty, desperately trying to function as a family: in order to keep the house, Riley is forced into a secret abusive sexual relationship with the owner of their house, John (who also owns his farm and has a family of his own), same as her mother was; Levi hangs out with a group of aggressive youth; Ryan is being bullied at school by John's son; Leonie is often left alone and is still shocked and paralysed with grief after her mother's death; Liam is being ostracised due to his disability, forced into hiding and living in a hut outside the village but still keeping an eye on the family and especially on Leonie when nobody else does. It is the family's daily struggles that enforce the impression of misery porn, rather than the fact that Mia is trans*.

Mia struggles together with the children to save their house and keep them out of trouble. The moment she enters their house with Wendy's letter asking her to be their guardian, she tells all of the children that she used to be a man, she and their mother loved each other and if "she wasn't a transsexual" they would have still been together (Abbott et al. 2012. Episode 1, 00:13:17). The children rebel primarily against having a guardian, then they are mistrustful about her job as she does not reveal what she does but helps them financially. In the course of the series, she assumes several different roles of care for each and every one of them which have traditionally been gendered differently.

Concerning Riley, Mia notices her pregnancy because of the morning sickness. When Riley tells her that the baby is John's, Mia assures her of her support and that Riley does not have to abort unless she wants to. She punches John in the face as he verbally abuses Levi and threatens to sell the house they live in. She sits with other mothers at Leonie's school dancing class, supporting Leonie who refuses to dance without her mother. All of this happens while she remains the best employee of her boss in Manchester. Mia becomes the main and only provider as well as the primary caregiver at the same time. She teaches Ryan to box and makes him punch John's son in the face as he bullies Ryan. She also reassures Ryan that he is "not a girl inside" as he dresses up like one visually, approximating Mia's style on her birthday (Abbott et al. 2012. Episode 2, 00:37:48). Ryan goes through her clothes and accessories, picks up a colourful flowery long dress and in it presents himself in front of everyone as they are celebrating (Figure 2). His feminine presentation, with Mia's clothes, unlike Mia's feminine presentation is sanctioned as he is laughed off by everyone and runs up in his room crying, which serves as a cruel reminder of the fragility of feminine legitimacy. The same family that gradually gathers around Mia seemingly automatically excludes and ridicules her son's steps towards femininity. The sparks of conflict between the children and Mia relate to her status as a guardian, but not her transness or femininity. When stripped of its adjacent legitimising factors—age, money, displays of violence that fights off threats, sex appeal—and approximated by a boy, femininity becomes the grounds for scorn by an otherwise caring family.

In the midst of all that, Mia's transness repeatedly comes forward. She has a brief relationship with a local man, Ben, who leaves her after learning that she is trans* but then attempts to come back and continue the relationship. The series also suggests that Mia had been abused by her brother, a trauma which is linked to her perception of her own body, at which point the series slides deep into the traditional transphobic tropes. With repeated shots of Mia looking herself in a mirror, her troubled relationship with herself and her body is emphasised (ibid. Episode 1, 00:01:21, 00:02:44, 00:20:03; Episode 2, 00:11:51; Episode 3, 00:07:00, 00:32:40; Episode 4, 00:03:06, 00:12:34, 00:20:40, Episode 5, 00:37:18; Episode 6, 00:09:54, 00:14:32, 00:15:42, 00:19:59, 00:31:13). Family is not idealised, as the series shows the difficulties of Mia establishing a relationship out of the closest, and the difficulties of her growing up with her brother. Yet the family Mia joins and upholds turns into a supportive space—as her life intersects with

those of the children, Mia's traumas and struggles as a trans* woman intersect with the traumas and struggles of rest of the family.

Fig. 2: Ryan on Mia's Birthday
(Abbott et al. 2012. Episode 2, 00:37:48)

The entire family, including Mia, become more and more entangled in a vicious cycle of poverty and violence that only worsens at the expense of each member. At the end, Mia and the children stand for one another and in the last scene, after a series of violent altercations and deaths, prepare to leave (without Ben and without anyone else outside of the family, that after a tragic turn of events also omits Liam). Mia becomes a single working-class parent, not of a chosen but of an adoptive family, and the children, despite the dysfunctionality of their family before and after she came, at the end stick together. Mia's adoptive family can be seen as queer because on several bases it appears non-normative: half-siblings form the family unit, the primary provider and care giver is not their blood-relation and does not privilege the only blood-related child, one person unites traditionally separate gendered roles of the provider and the caregiver, and who, to the children, is openly trans* but a closeted assassin. However, what brings and holds them together is their search for normalcy in which they can have a safe roof over their heads and be their true selves in the face of the harsh reality of a working-class family trapped in the cycle of poverty and violence.

The series has been read as an example of "the new queer cinema" because it is "propelling a postmodern aesthetics and politics that consisted of visual experiments, shocking plots, a radical turn away from moral norms, and excessive violence" (Poole 2017, 11). Yet Mia attempts to do the morally right thing and provide for and support what in the course of the series begins to resemble a nuclear family unit as it has been traditionally imagined: as support structure of a provider, caregiver and dependable children. Mia's turn away from moral norms through her work as an assassin and use of violence in her private sphere serves her attempt to keep a family together and create a safe environment for each of them, which is one of the paradigmatic moral norms. Mia's character does not dismantle the traditional idea of a family as a core unit. Her character dismantles the idea that such a family depends on the traditional understanding of binary gender roles and blood ties. The primacy of family in the organisation of her life, as well as those of her adoptive children remains intact.

Poole also aptly reminds of the prognosis of the founder of New Queer Cinema, B. Ruby Rich that "trans is the new queer" (ibid.).[5] Yet the family's aspirations seem to aim for a set of outcomes—to live in the house they own, take care of their farm, go to school, get a job, live in the gender of their choosing and with the partner they want—which can be described as a bearable, if not pleasurable, normalcy. An informative reading for disentangling the relation between trans*, queer and norms relevant for *Hit & Miss* is Andrea Long Chu's reading of Agnes, "the pseudonymous transsexual woman who famously posed as intersex at UCLA's Gender Identity Clinic in the late fifties in order to obtain access to vaginoplasty":

> What no one wants to talk about is what she actually wanted: a cunt, a man, a house, and normal fucking life. […] That doesn't mean that norms don't structure people's desires; what it means is that the desire for the norm consists, in terms of its lived content, in nonnormative attempts at normativity. Agnes was a nonnormative subject, but that wasn't because she was "against" the norm; on the contrary, her nonnormativity was what wanting to be normal actually looked like. Like most of

5 "By the twenty-first century it was clear: trans was the new queer. […] The early energy of NQC was reborn as a cinema of transgender and gender-queer identity formations and representations. The New Trans Cinema brought the excitement, uncompromising demands, litany of oppression, new iconic representations, and, yes, the youngsters, all back out in force again. Not only did the NQC stake out new territory; it also overturned the now settled theatrical and televisual norms that had arisen in the wake of NQC" (Rich 2013, 271).

us, Agnes was making do in the gap between what she wanted and what wanting it got her. (Chu and Drager 2019, 107, emphasis original)

While Mia is positioned outside the law through her job, and outside traditional gender norms through the transition, what is not questioned is her attempt at a normalcy that includes her identifying herself on one side of the gender binary, as a woman, and her taking the role to sustain one of the oldest and most traditional human organisations, the nuclear family. She even decides to repurpose her money she saved for the operation in order to sustain the family and buy the house they live in (Abbott et al. 2012. Episode 2, 00:25:02). What could be seen as queer is their audacity to imagine that such normalcy is also possible for them.

The vicious cycle of poverty and violence is what entraps them all and renders their aspirations to a bearable normalcy almost impossible. Poverty cripples their lives but the series also shows how poverty intersects with gender expression: Mia kills in order to afford the transition surgery, Riley trades sex for a roof over their heads, Levi becomes criminal to do his part of providing for the family and the house, Ryan's child masculinity is not masculine enough to save him from bullying, Leonie's child femininity falls short when she is expected to sing and dance as if she has not just lost her mother, Liam is completely ostracised from the rural community because of his disability until Mia becomes aware of him. Intersectional interpretation of the series offers a language with which to understand trans* lives and the reality that surrounds them. The genre hybridity including crime, family drama and noir allows for those different aspects to formally mirror their intertwining with the lived reality of this family and its trans* guardian.

3.2 Family and Marriage: *Boy Meets Girl*

Why, if I meet a girl, do I have to be all like "Oh, I am trans"?! I mean, I walk down the street and people don't know.
(Charlie in Kerrigan et al. 2016. Episode 2, 00:10:21)

This series came into being as a result of a competition. In 2013, the BBC Writersroom and All About Trans installed the Trans Comedy Award with

the intention to discover new ideas about a sitcom that features trans* characters that will then become a full series intended to lead by example.[6] *Boy Meets Girl* was one of the two finalists, together with *Nobody's Perfect*, the first being a romantic comedy, the second a comedy "about a very twenty-first-century-family—the parents being a cisgender woman and her trans partner" (Wallace 2018, 212–213). *Boy Meets Girl* aired on BBC Two in September and October 2015 with six episodes of the first season, and from July to August 2016 with the same amount of episodes in the second season. Rebecca Root in the main role of the trans* woman Judy was "the first trans actor to play a trans character in a mainstream series on British television" (Belcher 2018, 327). The production and airing of this series happened almost simultaneously with *EastEnders* (Holland, Smith et al. 1985–present) introducing its trans* character, Kyle Slater, who was played by the trans* actor Riley Carter Millington.

Boy Meets Girl centres on the evolving love story between Judy and Leo, from how they met and their first date up to their wedding. The daily adventures and challenges of their respective lower-middle-class families intertwine with their romance: Judy's mother, sister and her boyfriend, and Leo's mother, father and brother. Judy is a trans* woman in her early forties and 14 years older than Leo, who is in his mid-twenties. Both still live with their parents. The show was set and filmed in Newcastle upon Tyne.

Judy tells Leo over dinner that she "was born with a penis" in the first scene of the pilot episode, as they have their first date and in a moment when both do not notice that the waiter is standing at the table waiting to take their orders (Kerrigan et al. 2015. Episode 1, 00:00:10; Figure 3). The events that led up to their date follow, including Leo disclosing to his family that he has just lost yet another job. They meet in a bar where Judy delivers a cake made by her mother for a hen party. Conversation develops as Judy realises that she took the wrong cake: the right one shaped as a "giant cock" landed in a retirement home (ibid., 00:07:15). Leo then justifies himself for drinking a cosmopolitan and Judy teasingly notes that "there is nothing

6 The BBC Writersroom "is a cross-genre department for scripted content" (BBC Writersroom 2020) working within the BBC from several different cities throughout the UK. It understands itself as: "the public face of the BBC to the UK writing community, online and in the real world. Our focus is developing scriptwriters working in the English language. We run targeted Writers' Groups, support talent initiatives, offer career and script advice, and champion the writers we work with. We look for unique voices, identifying and developing talent through our schemes" (ibid.).

wrong with a man drinking a Cosmo" (ibid., 00:06:43). The allusions to gendered habits continue as Leo asks her if she wants a drink and they shake hands, after which he notes that she has a "strong handshake" which, he concludes, "means that [she] is trustworthy and reliable" (ibid., 00:07:55). Both end up admitting that they do not know if that is what it really means. Then the episode ends by returning to the opening scene.

Each episode opens with a brief comic scene followed by the opening credits, which is then repeated after the events that led to it are exposed over the course of the episode. Such an episodic structure contains the development and resolution of a situation within each individual episode. This formal realism can also be related to the visual presentation of the protagonists. Judy's gender presentation throughout the series is subdued feminine, just as Leo's is subdued masculine. They seem to be just ordinary people that are temporarily caught up in daily mishaps. Even their first date, while it carries the potential for a conflict (as Judy's seriousness implies when she informs Leo that she is trans*), is humorously resolved.

Fig. 3: The First Date
(Kerrigan et al. 2015. Episode 1, 00:16:33)

Their date begins with Leo introducing a wheel of truth and suggests playing. As he explains the rules and categories, he stops to think of what could be an example of 'personal stuff', Judy interrupts him by saying she "was born with a penis" (ibid., 00:16:25–00:16:47). He thinks that it is a joke and laughs so she turns the wheel which points to 'personal stuff', saying again that she

is "a transsexual" (ibid., 00:16:47). At that moment he thinks he sees an actor he likes in the restaurant and gets excited, so he does not hear what she says. After he has calmed down and the unnoticed waiter comes, she states again that she was born with a penis. The first thing Leo says after the awkward silence is: "so, you were born in the wrong body?" (ibid., 00:17:55). The conversation then quickly moves to the starter as Leo is hungry and continues with Judy asking about him and him being ashamed by the fact that he still lives at home and clumsily avoids to admit that he is out of a job, again. The 'revelation' that Judy is trans*, traditionally sensationalised, is immediately contextualised with other facts about their personal lives that are also traditionally unacceptable both in terms of gender and of class, such as Leo living with his parents and being out of a job yet again, or that Judy is nearly 40 and still lives 'at home' with her mother and sister, or even the relationship of a woman with a younger man.

By virtue of being a comedy where the situational and romantic elements are intertwined, the show abounds in feel-good plot developments. The sitcom dimension is mostly reserved for the rest of the family members who struggle to navigate their daily lives. Leo's father also gets fired, his mother works at a hair salon and tries to balance the ongoing gossip and the family as an overbearing main provider, his brother's buffoonery, while hilarious, leaves him without a job and social connections other than his family. On the other side, Judy's mother is barely managing a living by making cakes at home while her sister jumps from one failed relationship to another and is struggling with being overweight. Judy and Leo attempt to build a life together in an environment where the main social bond is the primary family. As individuals and a couple, Judy and Leo are firmly anchored in the family setting.

The romcom dimension is reserved for Judy and Leo and most of their challenges come from the meddling of their families into the relationship, which is mostly well-intended and produces comic effects. Leo's family learns one by one that Judy is trans*, with his mother being told last. The biggest hurdle for the two is when Leo accidentally sees Judy's photograph before she transitioned on what should have been their first stayover (ibid. Episode 4, 00:09:31). So they part ways but return together at the end of the episode. Then Leo asks her to marry him but she misunderstands it as a joke and says no. Even as Leo admits to having been rejected, he finally tells his mother that Judy is a transsexual, to which the first reaction of his mother is to ask astonishedly if "he were about to marry a 40-year-old man in a dress?!"

(ibid. Episode 6, 00:15:32). Being initially upset, she comes around after talking to Judy. Judy and Leo are safe in their environment, both as individuals and as a couple. Judy's transition has also been safe and supported by her closest family. When Leo's father learns that Judy is trans* and asks Judy's mother whether she misses having a son, she replies: "I never had a son. I had a daughter who came out a bit wrong" (ibid. Episode 5, 00:24:56).

The sources of conflict within the family seem to be easily and painlessly overcome as Judy and Leo are surrounded by accepting and loyal family members. This can be read as a lukewarm flattening out of potential conflict because, "following the conventions of comedy, the playful discussion of cultural topics is not an end in itself, but aims at entertaining audiences and creating laughter among them" (Kamm and Neumann 2016, 2). Comedy, however, also "temporarily suspends the rigid regimes of normality with performances, behaviour patterns, practices, dialogues and images of surreal absurdity, grotesque exaggeration and drastic vehemence, inviting viewers to interrogate the moral ground of cherished norms and established values" (ibid., 3). Judy's transness deviates from the rigid gender binary norms which can be seen to be so smoothly and safely possible only in a comedy because the genre allows it by its defining convention to entertain. But also by virtue of another defining convention—to invite interrogation of the moral regimes by temporary suspension of norms—the glitches among the family members in this series can also be read as a temporary suspension of the trope that trans* representation has to be defined by suffering (Prosser 1998, 89). It is the prerogative of comedy as a genre to provide grounds for contrasting interpretations without resolving them. Just as the series can be criticised for deflating conflicts, it can be praised for showing a possibility in which family violence towards a trans* member does not have to be the norm.

In the second season, next to the family, another support structure gains prominence: a trans* centre called LGBT Foundation and the regular meetings there. The first episode introduces the trans* man Charlie who becomes Judy's friend and is played by the trans* actor Tyler Luke Cunningham. Charlie is a trans* man of colour with masculine gender presentation. Charlie, too, is portrayed as just an ordinary bloke from the neighbourhood. However, he is also shown as very social but also impulsive, which can be understood as a gesture towards the trope that increased testosterone as part of the transition leads to explosive temperament (Kerrigan et al. 2016. Episode 2, 00:10:04–00:10:21). He ends up living with Leo's parents, as Leo

spends more time in Judy's house and Charlie is also transitioning in his professional life, on the lookout for a job and a flat. Charlie's family remains unaccounted for, but as the series progresses, he accompanies Judy and Leo, and effectively becomes part of the household of Leo's family.

At different points, Leo attends the meetings with Judy, as do Judy's and Leo's mothers. While Charlie and Anji, the owner of the hair salon where Leo's mother works, are the only characters of colour, similarly to *Hit & Miss*, where the two characters of colour are the eldest daughter, Riley, and the eldest son, Levi, race is not thematised as such. In the foreground are the struggles that trap all characters and the ways they intersect with gender and class, not with race. The trans* protagonists are white and able-bodied, which also does not represent the issues with physical and mental illness as well as disability and obesity that intersect with the experiences of many trans* people. Both series shed light on the intersection of only some experiences and factors and not others, which is concomitantly to their contribution to the diversification of trans* presence on screen and the limitation in their contribution.

Fig. 4: Charlie explaining surgery
(Kerrigan et al. 2016. Episode 4, 00.13.23)

Charlie delivers one of the informative talks in the series when he explains the boyfriend of Leo's sister how does female-to-male transition work (ibid. Episode 4, 00:14:33–00:15:19; Figure 4). Prior to that, Judy's mother and

sister explain to her boyfriend why Judy is and has always been a woman. In the previous season, Judy's mother leads Leo's father and later brother through her experience as a mother of a trans* child, and Judy goes through her transition with Leo's mother. Combined with the humorous scenes, these conversations correspond to a tradition in British television as well as the policies of Trans Media Watch for content to be both informative and entertaining. These informative conversations, while showing the additional labour trans* people still have to go through to educate, also display a possibility of safe and understanding interactions that in the series always lead to improvement in the human relations. Also in *Hit & Miss*, the numerous conflicts with Mia's boss and adoptive children revolve not around her being trans*, about which she is straightforward with them, and even if her lover initially breaks up because of that, he attempts to salvage the relationship later. While these storylines do not encompass the risks and danger trans* people face when they talk or are forced to do so about their transness, they do show a plausible reality in which transness is not a death sentence. These storylines draw attention to how trans* lives could also be lived. Therein lies their reparative potential.

4. The Reparative Potential of Television

Careful optimism concerning the development of trans* presence on television is being voiced time and again, supported by equally careful delineation of the accompanying backlash and setbacks.[7] My viewing of *Hit & Miss* and *Boy Meets Girl* is informed by this permanent alertness and foregrounds the reparative potential. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick theorised a diversity of reparative practices that assume "heterogeneous relational stances"; allow for "surprise", for the "accidental occasion of joy" and "love"; act upon the "reparative mode of seeking pleasure"; and provide "additional opportunity of experimenting with a vocabulary that will do justice to a wide affective range", including both negative and positive affects and an entire spectre in-

7 A detailed investigation of television visibility as a double-edged sword mostly in US-American productions, see Koch-Rein, Haschemi Yekani and Verlinden 2020; Chu and Drager 2019; Steinbock 2019; Halberstam 2018; Capuzza and Spencer 2017; Horlacher 2016.

between (Kosofsky Sedgwick 1997, 8, 16, 24). The turn to projected normalcy opens up venues for imagining potential models of representation of trans* lives that make such a turn possible.

The two analysed series offer a model of reparative trans* representation because they show possible realities built around families that, in the various forms they take, function as support structures that can anchor trans* lives. The opening scenes of the two series provide the gist of the main characters, including the fact that, in both of them, she is trans*, but also that these women are, from the onset, part of a larger social structure that they actively shape and maintain. Both leads are embedded in a complex set of intertwined conflicts and struggles that cannot be squarely traced back to them being trans*. These series steadily push viewers to put the leads in an intersectional perspective.

In an attempt to embed trans* presence on television in the long tradition of genres, ranging from noir and crime, to sitcom and romcom, these series bring trans* lives onto prime time television and contribute to the diversifying multitude of trans* representation. They display a reparative mode of seeking normalcy, including the wide range not only of norms and conflicts that challenge such quests, but also of affective practices, supporting structures and vocabularies, imagery and plot twists that do justice to the potential of television, as well as human relations and social contexts to present, represent and integrate trans* lives. Transness as such does not break the family bonds nor does it prevent them from being firmly established. Put into the wider contexts of their production, these two case studies remind that media representation still must go hand in hand with legal regulation and communal organisation in order to positively affect the place of trans* people in society. Finally, these series open venues of possibility for the organisation of lived reality that includes and respects trans* lives in all of their diversity.

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Hixstory Repeating? Italian Trans Televisibility through Realism, Family, Catholicism and Violence

Luca Malici

Abstract

Trans* subjects in Italy have historically been invisibilised, misrepresented and mistreated in society and the media. Despite global advancements and the important achievements of Italian trans* activists, the situation of many trans* individuals in Italy remains precarious and threatened by cis-heteronormative violence and traditional and religious family values, often mirrored in the media. To date, the representation of trans people and issues on Italian television remains a contentious, under-researched and often overlooked area. In this chapter, after presenting and discussing the history and achievements of Italian trans* activism, how trans* subjects and issues have been represented through language, film and television in Italy is analysed. Subsequently, the author scrutinises more recent TV productions available: a very small number of portrayals of Italian trans* people in scripted television dramas, comedies and soap operas which are anchored to problematic discourses of trans* invisibility, the family, Catholicism and brutal violence in southern Italy. On thematic and distribution levels, these portrayals retrace trajectories already seen in the past and they reflect, with realism, the transphobia and trans-misogyny perpetuated in the country. These instances reveal some timid advancements in, and room for criticism and significant improvement of, trans* media visibility in contemporary Italy.

Discussing the situation of trans[1] people in contemporary Italy, Poropora Marcasciano, leading figure and former president of the Italian Trans Movement (MIT), claims that "although there is a lot of talking about transsexualism, very little is still actually said in newspapers, on television and in Parliament. A negative stereotype and the strong stigma persist as prejudice remains the main problem" (2007, 131).[2] Together with Luki Massa, in their opening address to the sixth edition of the Divergenti International Trans Film Festival in Bologna, they also question:

> What image of transsexualism does the media offer? How much does their narrative correspond to real life? The relationship with one's own image is the central element in the transsexual experience. Does the image of that body reflected in the mirror but also in the press and on TV match, satisfy, feel right? (Schinardi 2013)

Media representation of trans people in Italy has been limited, with the majority of occurrences being often that of trans women in news reports linked to discourses of eroticism, illegality and transphobic violence. For many years, there was a paucity of alternative, constructive portrayals of trans people in Italy, even in films and scripted television. More recently, also thanks to a complex web of socio-political and economic changes, Italian media have started to follow international trends coming mainly from the US televisual and cinematic markets. This had already happened in the nineties for the increasing media representation of homosexuality in Italy and, although the mediascape has dramatically changed since then, it seems as if the 'hixtory'[3] is repeating itself with the rising trans televised visibility, or televisibility. Just like in the past, when gay males were, and to an extend still are, quantitatively more represented than lesbians, for many years, 'the trans question' in Italy has almost exclusively been that of trans women (Voli 2017, 21; Bocchetti and Cuccio 2007), even in films and TV.

Despite an increasing number of Italian trans-themed documentaries and reality shows, scripted Italian representations of trans people in TV

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1 I employ the term 'trans' in the way Italian activists use it as an umbrella term to name jointly a plurality of non-standard gender variances and identities (see discussion on terminology below).

2 Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Italian into English are my own.

3 In this wordplay, I use the ungendered pronoun 'hix' for a 'history' viewed from a broader queer, gender-neutral perspective as opposed to one that was traditionally and putatively cisgender, heteronormative and patriarchal. Although the term 'history' is etymologically unrelated to the possessive pronoun 'his', in a similar way, "herstory" was firstly introduced by theorist Robin Morgan (1970, 551) to mean a history told by women and understood with specifically feminist perspectives.

series remain scarce, as is the scholarly attention devoted to them. This chapter initially heeds Johnathan E. Booth's call for an investigation of fictional TV's representation of transgender lives (Booth 2015, 125; Capuzza and Spencer 2017, 227), applied here to the Italian context. In this country, due to the abovementioned quantitative or perhaps ideological reasons, studies that chorally interpellate BGILQT[4] TV and cinematic analyses often result in focusing predominantly on gay and lesbian portrayals. The representation of trans people and issues in Italian media is still a contentious, under-researched and often overlooked area.

In this chapter, after discussing the hixtory of Italian trans activism and its accomplishments, I will analyse how trans subjects and issues have been represented through language in Italy. Subsequently, by examining the Italian hixtory of trans-themed filmic and televisual representations, I will focus on the most recent TV series available. The findings gesture towards a very small number of portrayals of trans people in scripted television dramas, comedies and soap operas which are anchored to problematic discourses of trans invisibility, the family, Catholicism and brutal violence in southern Italy. In the country, the cradle of the Catholic Church, the media narration is often the one of the trans person trapped in the wrong body, in search of expiation through pain as a necessary process towards social acceptability.

1. A Brief Hixtory of Italian Trans Visibility through Activism and Language

Italy has had a conflicting relationship with the trans world. On the one hand, it is the country where Marcella di Folco was the first openly trans woman to hold a public political office in 1990 and 1995–1999 (Voli 2017, 37), in 2006, Vladimir Luxuria became the first trans woman Member of the European Parliament and, in 2019, Gianmarco Negri, was the first elected trans man mayor of an Italian city. On the other hand, Italy is sadly toward

4 In my scholarship, I employ the acronym BGILQT—bisexual, gay male, intersex, lesbian, queer, trans—to jointly and readily name marginalized sexualities and gender expressions in an alphabetical and linear order so to avoid problematic hierarchies and imbalances of power and visibility. I willingly use this acronym 'improperly' and synecdochally as I am aware that these are just limited examples of sexual and gender expressions.

the top of European rankings for transphobic hate crimes and the number of homicides of trans people, 37 in the decade of 2008–2018, and second only to Turkey (TMM 2018). The lack of specific legislation against homo-lesbo-transphobic crimes that would protect against discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics exacerbate this situation in this country.[5] Together with this normative silence, there are neo-fundamentalist and reactionary positions of the so-called 'no-gender' groups whose aims are to defend traditional nuclear family values, preserve cisheteropatriarchy[6] and repress any other form of gender expression or experience in the peninsula (Garbagnoli and Prearo 2018, 6).

Negative attitudes towards trans people have clear historical roots in Italy. Before the 1980s, Italian trans individuals had to live in hiding for fear of being detained in prison or in psychiatric hospitals (Benadusi 2008, 37) following the, since abrogated, law on "preventive measures against persons who are a danger to public security and morality" (Italian Government 1956, 4690). A pioneer Italian trans figure was Romina Cecconi, or 'la Romanina', the first trans woman to publicly disclose her transition towards the end of the sixties, and for this reason was sent to an internal exile (Benadusi 2008, 38; Cecconi 1976). Mario Mieli, another prominent figure of the Italian gay movement, published *Elementi di Critica Omosessuale* in 1977, one of the first Italian theoretical treatises on sexual dissidence, in which he used the term 'trans-sexuality' to mean a polymorphic drive that breaks down binary boundaries between sexes, genders and desires (Mieli 1977, 14). For this reason, Mieli is now regarded as a precursor to Queer Theory (Dean 2002, 235).

Amongst the Italian sexual organizations, the Italian Trans Movement was the last in chronological order to form at the end of the seventies. Trans activists joined initially the Italian gay movement named FUORI ('out' in Italian and acronym for the Italian Unified Homosexual Revolutionary Front, see Rossi Barilli 1999), formed in 1971, but soon did not recognise their specificities and revindications (Mattioli 2015). During the summer of 1979, in a public swimming pool in Milan, a group of trans women rallied,

5 At the time of writing, a law written by Democratic Party MP and activist Alessandro Zan is still being discussed in Parliament after almost three decades of political debates (Gusmeroli and Trappolin 2019, 10–11).

6 Defined here as the system of power based on the supremacy and dominance of cis-heterosexual men through the exploitation and oppression of women and BGILQT people.

unapologetically wearing only the bottom part of a bikini to challenge public opinion and the institutions that considered them legally men (Marcasciano 2006, 42). This event represented the symbolic birth of the Italian Transsexual Movement. Also, thanks to the support of the Radical Party and after only three years of mobilisation (Voli 2017, 28), in 1982, Italian trans people achieved one of the first laws in Europe to give individuals access to free sex reassignment surgery, albeit only after rigid medical and bureaucratic verifications (Italian Government 1982, 2879). Nevertheless, this law prevented the alteration of the identity documents of those who were, or decided to remain, in transition (Garosi 2009, 7). This was the case until numerous verdicts including those by the Italian Supreme Court (2015), the Italian Constitutional Court (2015, 31) and, later, even by the European Court of Human Rights (2018) ruled that sterilisation is not necessary to change identity documents. Nonetheless, the process remains long, taking at least two years (Caruso 2019). As part of the "Another gender is possible" campaign (Mattioli 2015), the MIT is now fighting to achieve the right to self-determine one's gender identity without being forced into physical and psychological journeys that further exacerbate discrimination and access to the world of work for trans people in Italy.

The way the MIT has changed the meaning of its acronym over time helps to exemplify the terminology employed to talk about the T world in Italy. It started as the Italian Transsexual Movement but in 2006 changed into Transsexual Identity Movement, highlighting a wider transnational standpoint. In 2017, the acronym changed again as explained in their website:

> The MIT is still transitioning and it redefines itself as Trans Identity Movement, to continue on the path of recognition of the plurality of experiences that gravitate around gender variances. Trans fluidly includes, amongst others, transsexuals, transgender, trans women and men, mtf, ftm, genderqueer, non-binary, and other identities not recognized, but equally worthy of existing for the movement. (MIT 2020)

This clearly shows that 'trans' is used as an umbrella term to include a plurality of subjects and it is sometimes used as shorthand to mean 'transgender' or 'transsexual'. The term 'transessuale' is still preferred by older people who have permanently changed, or seek to change, their bodies through medical intervention, including but not limited to hormones and/or surgeries. As per the changing MIT acronym example, however, the Italian trans community is progressively dismissing this term that has medical and

pathologizing origins (see e.g. Bovo 2019; Caruso 2019). There is not a real consensus for the use of the Anglophone term 'transgender' in Italy but it often replaces 'trans' and sometimes it refers to people who are, or decide to remain, in transition. Italian is a romance language that does not have gender-neutral forms like the pronoun 'hix' used in this chapter. When grammatically in doubt, this historically patriarchal language always favours masculine forms and Italian BGILQT communities have been increasingly adopting linguistic expedients like the asterisk, -@ or -u at the end of nouns, verbs and adjectives to promote neutral forms (Baldo 2017; Indiano 2020; Marotta and Monaco 2016). Without such conventions, the Italian language constantly confronts speakers with decisions regarding grammatical as well as identity gender.

Due to the insufficient training of journalists, a lack of attention towards these issues or because of internalised cisheteropatriarchal ideologies, in most Italian news media, transfeminist activist Antonia Caruso claims that there is "heinous media violence, perpetuated through discriminatory journalistic language" towards trans people as they are frequently represented as "victims, sex workers, isolated, jobless, and often mentally ill" (Caruso 2019). Italian media professionals still tend to use dead names to feed the gossip machine; they favour the use of 'transessuale' to 'trans' or 'transgender', often choosing the wrong article in front of these terms, using them as objectifying nouns that promote even more prejudice and confusion. Examples of this in the Italian press and on TV are countless.

In the second half of the first decade of the 21st century, a succession of sex scandals involving trans women and prominent Italian men arguably dominated Italian public and media discourses (Gribaldo 2018; Israely 2009; Stanyer 2013, 122–123).[7] In these years, former Italian Prime Minister and media mogul, Silvio Berlusconi, also became involved in a series of alleged

7 In October 2005, the grandson of the former head of FIAT Automobiles, Lapo Elkann was found overdosed on cocaine in the flat of a 53-year-old trans woman, Patrizia Broco. In 2007, the spokesperson of the left government at the time, Silvio Sircana, became implicated in 'Vallettopoli'—investigations of paparazzi blackmailing public figures with compromising pictures—for being photographed with a trans woman in the street. In 2009, the President of the Lazio region, Piero Marrazzo, stepped down from his role after four police officers blackmailed him with video footage of him in a bedroom with a Brazilian trans woman, Brenda, and a limited quantity of cocaine. This case ended with the charging of the officers and the suspicious deaths of three trans women including that of Brenda, killed in an arson only a month after the scandal surfaced (Frignani 2010).

dalliances with cisgender underage girls and escorts (Gribaldo 2018). Juxtaposing all these events, *The Time* journalist Jeffery Israely highlights how they all helped solidifying Berlusconi's reputation as "the real ladies' man" (Israely 2009). The gendered, cultural stereotype of the Italian macho and 'Latin lover' reinforced the counter discourse for which liaising with trans women became a reason for blackmailing, shame and violence. In this period, trans women were at the centre of an unprecedented media scrutiny and debates but the discourses produced routinely surrounded salacious prostitution, drug use, illegality and, in some cases, violent death. Israely also reports that "Italy is a Catholic country, where everything is eventually forgiven" (ibid.), but only for cis-men, not to the forgotten trans lives implicated, misgendered by the media and lost in these cases. After the umpteenth episode of misrepresentation of trans women in the Italian press, in 2017, on the heels of the similarly-named English organisation, Trans Media Watch Italia (2017) was born to monitor and fight the biased way Italian media represent and talk about trans people.

2. Trans on Italian Screens

In the fifties and sixties, information for Italian trans people, including medical knowledge, as well as 'the first' more legible images of trans women came to Italy from France (Voli 2017, 22–23). It was the case of the representation of trans women performers Coccinelle and Bambi in Italian films and documentaries.[8] However, only in 1978 did *C'era una volta un ragazzo* [Once Upon a Time: A Boy], an 8-minute Italian reportage about the aforementioned Romanina air on Rete 2 (Bolognini, Sacerdote et al. 1978; also Jelardi and Bassetti 2006, 146). In the sixties, celebrated Italian director, Federico Fellini also included veiled representations of sexual dissidence in some of his movies through several of his 'queer' extra such as Dominot,

8 French trans woman Bambi (Marie-Pierre Pruvot, born in 1935) and Coccinelle (Jacqueline Charlotte Dufresnoy, 1931–2006) became successful as showgirls in the Parisian club, Le Carrousel. In Italy, Coccinelle appeared in *European Nights* (Blasetti et al./Avers Films 1958) whereas Bambi starred in the Italian-French comedy *Wild Cats on the Beach* (Sala et al./Glomer Film 1959) and in *90 Days Around the World* (Loy et al./Documento Film 1963). See also the more recent documentary *Bambi* (Lifshitz et al./Un Monde Meilleur 2012).

Giò Stajano and Marcella Di Folco, the final of which later became one of the founding members of the MIT (Cangelosi and Massa 2010).

Despite these few examples, and as per Vito Russo's (1981) seminal study on the portrayal of homosexuality in films, fictional representation of trans people in Italy has followed a very similar script of historical invisibility and misrepresentation through ridiculed portrayals on the one hand, or trans individuals depicted as villains or victims on the other hand. Since the inception of Italian broadcasting in the fifties, oblique references to transsexuality were allowed when the characters were famous transvestite cisgender male artists, whereas other queer performers faced continuous problems and censorship (Jelardi and Bassetti 2006, 39). In these decades, the boundaries between media representations of homosexuality, transvestitism and transsexuality often remained blurred. Early popular cinematic examples of the above include *Gran Bollito* [Black Journal] (Bolognini/PAC 1977) in which all three women victims of the female serial killer are played by popular cis-actors. In the well-known Italo-French comedy *La cage aux folles*, *Il Vizietto* in Italian (Molinaro et al./Da Ma produzione 1978), another stereotypical caricature influenced many films, sequels and spin-offs of the following decades (Russo 1981, 326–327). In the comedy *Nessuno è perfetto* [Nobody's Perfect] (Festa Campanile et al./Titanus 1981), the hyper-feminine cisgender actress and Italy's sweetheart Ornella Muti played a trans woman who was formerly a German paratrooper. In Dario Argento's horror movie *Tenebre*, trans actress Eva Robin's played a woman killed by the assassin (Argento et al./Sigma Cinematografica 1983), whereas a drag queen, played by queer actor Vinicio Diamanti, suffered the same fate in the crime comedy *Delitto al Blue Gay* [Cop in Drag] (Corbucci et al./Medusa 1984). In all of these examples, the representation of trans femininity was almost exclusively ridiculed or harmed.

From the eighties, following the rise and growing competition of commercial TV channels, late-night slots began to represent more dissident sexualities in transgressive programmes that only infrequently included rumoured trans women. This was the case for Amanda Lear, the multifaceted singer, actress and TV presenter known as Dalí and David Bowie's muse, and trans woman Maurizia Paradiso, known for publicising erotic chat-lines on local channels and for presenting the 1991 sexy game show *Colpo Grosso* (Laudisio et al./Italia 7/G.E.I.T. e A.S.A. Television). An increasing number of talk shows and programmes, such as the *Maurizio Costanzo Show,* continued to be occasional platforms where 'even' trans people could tell their

stories (Pietrangeli, Tocco et al./Rete 4/Canale 5 Mediaset 1982–present). Trans-themed cinematic productions remained scarce during these years. Remarkable was the popular film *Mery per sempre* [Forever Mery] (Risi et al./Numero Uno 1989), set in a violent 'monosexual' Sicilian prison, as it was the debut of Alessandra Di Sanzo, who soon transitioned and acted in other minor films. Later, *Belle al bar* (Benvenuti et al./Union PN 1994) and *Come mi vuoi* [As You Want Me] (Amoroso et al./Canal+ 1996) represented perhaps two of the first Italian films that ended well for the trans women portrayed.

The new millennium saw more varied and constructive cinematic portrayals of Italian trans people in films like *Le fate ignoranti* [His Secret Life] (Özpetek et al./R&C 2001), *Mater Natura* (Andrei et al./Kubla Kan 2005), *La bocca del lupo* [The Mouth of the Wolf] (Marcello et al./Indigo 2009) and *Più buio di mezzanotte* [Darker Than Midnight] (Riso et al./Ideacinema 2014). However, all these narratives revolved around different understandings of the family, a pivotal aspect in Italian culture, and they regularly dealt with the relationship with estranged families of origin, the creation of an extended family/community and the desire to form a nuclear family. Recent thought-provoking productions also include *Nati 2 volte* [Born Twice] (Di Lallo et al./Green-film 2019) and *La dea fortuna* [The Goddess of Fortune] (Özpetek et al./R&C 2019). Starring trans actress Vittoria Schisano[9] in a supporting role, the former is a real story about a trans man's return to his rural hometown in central Italy, whereas the latter includes trans woman character, Mina, a same-sex wedding planner played by trans actress Cristina Bugatty.[10]

The first decade of the 21st century were also the years in which reality TV became a popular format. *Grande Fratello* [*Big Brother*] saw the presence of the first openly trans woman in 2008 (Silvia Burgio) (Calvi et al./Canale 5/Endemol Italia 2008) and trans man in 2010 (Gabriele Belli) (Colabona et

9 Before transitioning, Schisano took part in one of the first made-for-TV miniseries on male homosexuality, *Mio figlio* (Odorisio et al./RAI 1 2005; see also 2010). In 2011, she announced her transition to the weekly magazine *Sette*, which was then followed meticulously by various 'trash' TV programmes, including those presented by host Barbara D'Urso (for a discussion on queer and trash see Malici 2020). Schisano was the first transgender person on the cover of Playboy Italia (F.Q. 2016).

10 Cristina Bugatty is a popular Italian trans actress and TV personality. In 2003, she was initially invited to co-host the Dopofestival, a companion show to the Festival di Sanremo—the most popular annual Italian song contest aired by the public service broadcasting—but she was dismissed for being trans (Vaccarello 2003).

al./Canale 5/Endemol Italia 2010). In 2008, even Vladimir Luxuria took part in, and ultimately won, the 6th edition of the Italian *Celebrity Survivor*, *Isola dei Famosi* (Romio et al./Rai 2 2008). In 2015, trans woman Rebecca De Pasquale entered *Big Brother*, yet hosts often mentioned her dead name and previous monastic life in sensationalist ways. In this edition, a concealed married trans couple (Arianna Ghiglieri and Marco Angioni) also entered the house for a week as part of a task for which housemates had to discover "their secret" (Colabona et al./Canale 5/Endemol Italia 2015). This kind of trans visibility on TV has been criticised, yet its progressive, pedagogical impact is undeniable as it provides heterosexually-identified viewers and families with more true-to-life and diverse examples of gender identities and experiences that are able to confront prejudice (Malici 2014; 2020). Italian media seem particularly invested in providing trans realism and the past ten years saw the production of several Italian film-documentaries (see Table 1), with recent ones even airing on public service broadcasting channel RAI 3, albeit in a late-night slot. It is remarkable how most of these films are set in Naples and southern Italy where, although improved in recent times, the attitudes towards BGILQT people is still largely conservative, hence such productions could also help challenging prejudice.

An increasing number of documentary-reality series also appeared on television (Table 1) including *Vite divergenti* (Sbernini, Belegni et al./Real Time 2015) created with the assistance of the Italian Trans Movement. RAI 3 has been particularly proactive in representing trans voices, remaining true to the network's mission to "inform, educate, entertain" (Lombardi 2009, 245). However, 2018 docu-series *Storie del genere* (Marconato et al./RAI 3 2018) presented by hyper-feminine cisgender actress, Sabrina Ferilli, seemed to focus more on the pain trans people and their family experienced than on more sophisticated aspects of their lives, which buys into the contemporary spectacularization of suffering at the core of the current television entertainment (Caruso 2019). This might be the reason why, for once, this programme did not attract polemics whereas other BGILQT-themed programmes faced routine complains by right-wing politicians and conservative viewership. For example, they accused Vladimir Luxuria's participation in *Alla lavagna* [To the Blackboard] (Di Pasquale et al./RAI 3 2018), and her lecture on discrimination to a classroom of nine to twelve-year-old pupils, of "gender propaganda" to children (Falcini 2019).

Year	Title	Channel	Genre
2019	*Io sono Sofia* (Silvia Luzi)	RAI 3	Film documentary
2018	*Nata Femmena* (Pasquale Formicola and Elisabetta Rasicci)	RAI 3	Film documentary
2018	*Love Me Gender with Chiara Francini*	Laf	Docu-reality series
2018	*Rivoluzione gender with Eva Robin's*	CIELO	Docu-reality series
2018	*Alla lavagna with Vladimir Luxuria*	RAI 3	Docu-reality series
2018	*Storie del genere with Sabrina Ferilli*	RAI 3	Docu-reality series
2017	*Anatomia del miracolo* (Alessandra Celesia)	--	Film documentary
2016	*Stato civile: L'amore è uguale per tutti*	RAI 3	Docu-reality series
2016	*Pechino Express 5*	RAI 2	Reality TV
2015	*Grande Fratello 14*	Canale5	Reality TV
2015	*Vite divergenti - Storie di un altro genere*	Real time	Docu-reality series
2014	*Pechino Express 3*	RAI 2	Reality TV
2013	*Nessuno è perfetto* (Fabiomassimo Lozzi)	--	Film documentary
2010	*Grande Fratello 10*	Canale 5	Reality TV
2008	*Isola dei famosi 6*	RAI 2	Reality TV
2008	*Grande Fratello 8*	Canale 5	Reality TV

Table 1—Italian reality TV, docu-reality series and film documentaries about trans people © Malici 2020

The aforementioned rulings by the highest Italian courts of appeal in favour of the rights of trans people in 2015, as well as the political debates preceding the 2016 law recognising same-sex civil unions in Italy, the 'Cirinnà Law' (Italian Government 2016, 1), influenced this exponential increment of trans media portrayals in Italy. Increasing trans visibility was also arguably promoted by MIT initiatives such as the aforementioned Divergenti Film Festival in Bologna, which has showcased national and international trans films and documentaries since 2008. Additionally, the complex web of socio-political global changes and economic trends, as well as increasing discourses and representations of trans characters in films and TV series particularly coming from the US, represented prominent factors for the growing Italian trans televisibility. As per Table 2, Italy has indeed welcomed

most of the foreign Anglophone trans-themed TV series, without problems or censorship, despite this not having always been the case for foreign fictional representations of homosexuality (Malici 2011; 2015; 2020).

Original release	Original channel	Title	Italian release	Italian Channel	Months
16.06.2019	HBO	*Euphoria*	26.09.2019	Sky Box Sets	3
14.10.2018	ITV	*Butterfly*	17.12.2018	Fox/Sky Atlantic	2
03.06.2018	FX	*Pose*	31.01.2019	Netflix Italy	7
26.07.2015	E!	*I am Caitlyn - Io sono Caitlyn*	09.12.2015	MTV 8	2
15.07.2015	TLC	*I am Jazz - Io sono Jazz Jenning*	26.10.2015	Realtime	3
08.06.2015	ABC	*Becoming Us - Tutto su mio padre*	21.09.2015	Realtime	3
05.06.2015	Netflix	*Sense8*	22.10.2015	Netflix Italy	5
11.04.2015	Discovery	*New Girls on the Block*	16.11.2015	Realtime	3
18.03.2015	CBS	*The Bold and the Beautiful*	22.06.2015	Canale 5	3
26.09.2014	Prime	*Transparent*	09.06.2015	Sky Atlantic	9
11.07.2013	Netflix	*Orange is the New Black*	05.06.2014	Infinity/ Netflix Italy	11

Table 2—Foreign TV series aired in Italy with dates and number of months between original and Italian releases © Malici 2020

The majority of these, however, appeared on paid, on demand, streaming platforms, rather than mainstream TV. In most cases, the interval between US and Italian releases is only a few months, and this would include the time for dubbing, still imperative in Italy. Possible delays can be attributed to ratings and economic factors rather than ideological ones, as was the case

for the Italian release of Ryan Murphy's *Pose* (Pierri 2018). In 2015, commentators noted that "Italian TV is a mirror of US television" (QueerTV 2019) and the array of "good trans narrations" increased exponentially (Magni 2015) to the point that now "it's raining Trans" (QueerTV 2019), as if there were ever-growing media portrayals. Despite the excitement, a quantitative US study revealed that trans characters still account for only two percent of characters on prime-time mainstream TV and seven percent on streaming platforms (GLAAD 2015). Still, in 2015, the Vice President of Italian channel Realtime, Laura Carafoli, admitted that after the news of Angelina Jolie's transgender child and the growing number of TV products coming mainly from the US, "times are also ripe in Italy" to produce more programmes with trans themes and characters (Fumarola 2015).

3. The Purgatory of Trans Characters on Scripted Italian Television Series

The availability of fictional representations of trans people in Italian TV series remains very limited. The only five examples found are all very temporally distant from one other: Nicky in *Un posto al sole* (De Paola et al./RAI 3 1996), Gianna in *I Cesaroni* (Paragnani, Favot et al./Canale 5 2010), Luca in *Gomorrah—La serie 1* (Saviano, Comencini et al./Sky 2014), Nina in *Gomorrah—La serie 2* (Saviano, Sollima et al./Sky 2016) and Carla in *Un posto al sole* (De Paola et al./RAI 3 2019). Nonetheless, recent instances are slightly more frequent. Television genres are very different too as the trans representations appeared in a family comedy, a crime drama and a soap opera. Apart from the most recent example, the transgender character is always in a supporting role that disappears even before the end of a single episode. On a more optimistic note, in the majority of cases, three out of the five trans characters are played by trans actresses and all representations are included in extremely popular mainstream products. Apart from noteworthy exceptions (Antonello 2016; Renga 2019), there is very little scholarship on Italian trans characters in scripted TV series.

3.1 Nicky's and Gianna's Transphobic Love Rejections

In the two oldest examples of an Italian trans character in a scripted TV series, the filmic trope is identical: a man unknowingly falls in love with a trans woman and, once the 'truth' about her transitioning is finally revealed, the trans character disappears from the series. Both examples aired on two popular mainstream TV channels during peak viewing slots. The earliest occurrence is Nicky in *Un posto al sole* in 1996. Considered the start of modern Italian continuous serial television (Carini 2013, 300) and the first Italian soap opera launched in 1996 on RAI 3, it employs the production methods of the Australian soap *Neighbours* from the same original producers (Capecchi 2000, 72). Centring on an apartment building in Naples, the show includes socio-political elements and three main narrative arcs in every episode: one romance, one drama and one comedy. It is during the very first season that traffic warden Guido Del Bue (Germano Bellavia) starts a relationship with Nicky Baldini (played by cis-actress, Roberta Lena), only to find out that he fell in love with "a transsexual" (Conti 2019).

As late as fourteen years later, a second trans character, Gianna, appeared in the family TV series *I Cesaroni* (Paragnani, Favot et al. 2010), which narrates the stories of an extended family in Rome. Inspired by the Spanish series *Los Serrano* produced by Telecinco, it aired on prime time for six seasons on Canale 5, all part of Silvio Berlusconi's family media empire. In episode 8, season 4, the middle-aged protagonist, Giulio bet his brother (Cesare) and best friend (Ezio) he would soon find a new girlfriend. To help him, Ezio organises a date with a beautiful woman, Gianna. During the dinner, Gianna tells Giulio she is a trans woman. Despite her effort to clarify this to his friends, they had planned everything without realising this aspect. Cesare and Ezio discover 'the truth' about Gianna and they run to tell Giulio at the restaurant. Bothered by their prejudice, Giulio decides to fake a relationship with Gianna sending Cesare and Ezio into panic. Despite his arguably good intentions and the fact that they seemed like a good match, Giulio ultimately refuses to date Gianna and uses her to teach his friends a lesson just because she is a trans woman. The episode presents pseudo-transphobic remarks too: ex-sex worker and now Cesare's wife, Pamela, is appalled when she discovers that her work colleague Gianni is now Gianna. Ezio uses offensive transphobic metaphors to tell Giulio of the "misunderstanding" which involved words such "piton" and "bowling pin with two balls" (Paragnani, Favot et al. 2010, 01:01:40). Furthermore, they appear disgusted

of the idea of Giulio kissing Gianna and say that it would be "shameful" (ibid., 01:10:45) if their relationship goes on. All of this clearly clashes with Giulio's simplistic, politically correct moral that "you must really get to know people before judging" (ibid., 01:11:25). It is clear that there was no input from trans activists, scriptwriters nor the perspective of the trans actress who played Gianna, the aforementioned Cristina Bugatty. These first two examples remained timid attempts to open up trans televisibility but collided with the series' genre, underlying prescriptive morality and transphobic undertones.

3.2 Luca's White Immolation

Two more recent episodes are in *Gomorra—La serie* [*Gomorrah*], an Italian crime drama series created and produced by Roberto Saviano and based on his acclaimed book (Saviano 2006) and film (Garrone et al./01 distribution 2008) of the same name. The four seasons originally aired on the premium satellite channel Sky Atlantic (Erbaggio 2015, 335) and they are available internationally on Amazon Prime Video. The series was "hugely successful" and, because of its quality, sold to other 170 countries (ibid., 335). The title is a play on the Neapolitan mafia, Camorra, and on the biblical city of perdition linked to Sodom. The series is set and filmed in Naples and tells the story of the Savastano clan and their illicit dealings. One episode of both *Gomorrah 1* and *Gomorrah 2* focuses on a trans character, something 'exceptional' in an Italian context (Renga 2019, 200). The first occurrence, Luca, represents a trans man narrative, also uncommon on Italian TV.

In episode 7 of season 1 (Saviano, Comencini et al. 2014), Luca attempts to embrace his trans man identity in a hyper masculine and criminal ecosystem. After his father's suicide, Luca seeks protection from Imma, the wife of the boss provisionally in charge of the clan while her husband is in prison. Luca soon becomes Imma's right-hand man, responsible for distributing money and reporting Imma's orders. When other envious clan cis-male members confront him on his gender, Luca tells them that the penis does not make a man, but the brains do (ibid., 00:22:46). Through the episode, Luca is victim of transphobic insults as he is also described as "a dirty, filthy lesbian" (ibid., 00:07:52). Imma herself fails to address Luca not by his preferred name and pronouns but simply as Marta, his dead name, despite his short air and masculine gender expression and attire.

In a key scene, Luca is alone in his father's bridal shop, now abandoned, while he tries on a wedding gown in front of a mirror, a visual trope in the filmic representation of trans people (Figure 1). Melancholic extradiegetic music accompanies the camerawork, which shows Luca dressing up in a meticulous alternation of extreme to medium close-ups of his body facing the mirror until the camera resumes by focusing on him from behind in a medium full shot (ibid., 00:31:00). In so doing, the director makes certain to show his breast binding, the game of mirrors and the word tattooed on his shoulder: Luca. Religious Catholic symbolism pervades this whole episode and, arguably, the whole series. For example, the clan uses statues of the Virgin Mary to smuggle cocaine. Motherly Virgin Mary iconography is particularly central in this episode (Antonello 2016, 322), with the white wedding gown also representing a stereotypical symbol of femininity and purity. This latter narrative device remains queerly troubling as, although the music seems to suggest Luca's contemplation to adhere to cisheteropatriarchy, it may also represent his will to momentarily 'drag up' and play with his putative cisgender role.

Fig. 1: Luca in the mirror
(Saviano, Comencini et al. 2014. Episode 7, 00:31:48)

Scholar Pierpaolo Antonello claims "this episode performs a normalizing function whereby characters who transgress traditional gender roles such as Luca and Imma are ultimately punished through violent death" (Antonello 2016, 324). Luca had some power over other cisheteropatriarchal male mafiosi and had to pay for his thorny position and for not complying with

traditional gender binary logics. In fact, later on the mirror scene, two fellow gangsters chase Luca on the street and ferociously shoot him down in a butcher shop next to carcasses of slaughtered cows. The chase is emblematic as it happens in broad daylight and nobody does anything, despite Luca's calls for help. Ultimately, the trans character is represented as trapped in the wrong body, in search of unlawful integration and in his vest of white lamb is once again sacrificed on the altar of mediatic representation.

3.3 Nina's Home Hiding and Humiliation

The third episode of *Gomorrah 2* (Saviano, Sollima et al. 2016) is about rival boss Salvatore Conte and his relationship with Nina, a transgender female singer who he loves but with whom he cannot be seen in public. The episode plays again on Catholic connotations of guilt and punishment as the title "Mea culpa" suggests. Whilst Nina is depicted in a highly sympathetic light, Salvatore Conte's characterisation is complex. He has a close relationship with his mother and tells her she is 'the only woman' in his life. However, he leaves her question unanswered, one that is dreaded by people who live in hiding a non-normative relationship: "When are you finally going to introduce me to your girlfriend?" (ibid., 00:20:51), highlighting her clear cisheteropatriarchal expectations. Conte is also portrayed as deeply Catholic with his house crammed full of religious effigies and as fixated with physical exercise and diet or, as Nina simply puts it: "he doesn't smoke, he doesn't drink, he doesn't make love" (ibid., 00:02:25). In fact, Salvatore is very loving but, despite Nina's encouragements, he is unable to do more than just kissing her whereas "his rejection of Nina could be read as his inability to allow himself physical pleasure" (Renga 2019, 202). Conte regularly visits Nina in her home as her family accepts the relationship. However, Nina is visible outside of the reclusive and protective space of her home only when she performs and, when needed, her sister plays the part of Conte's girlfriend publicly. At Conte's birthday dinner, Nina surprises him with a love song but his fellow gangsters surrounding him look very uneasy. One of them shouts several transphobic insults directly at Nina, addressing her with masculine pronouns, as everybody else laughs. She then runs away as Conte does nothing; the song Nina was singing proves revealing in the final lyrics—"he's cold and he hides for fear" (Saviano, Sollima et al. 2016,

00:27:15)—, although he later drives a knife into the man's hand as retaliation. The storyline concludes with Nina rejecting him for good as viewers see her crying alone in her gloomy bedroom (Figure 2).

Fig. 2: Nina in her bedroom
(Saviano, Sollima et al. 2016. Episode 3, 00:40:14)

Crucially, Conte's religiosity and violent reaction at his party later contribute to his killing by the hand of his fellow gangsters. The sacrifice is staged in a church at night after the Good Friday penitential procession in which Conte and dozens of other hooded men beat their chest with a cork covered in pins until they bleed (Ricciardiello 2016). Sins, repentance, betrayal and punishment are all instrumental themes in this episode with the final top shot of Conte also evoking that of Christ on the cross. This time around, there is an important shift in the narrative as it is not the trans character dying but the one who had a loving relationship with the trans person that ends up punished.

Echoing the golden age of Italian cinema, *Gomorrah* the film, as the series have been associated with the wave of 'neo-neorealism', which is characterised by a desire to re-appropriate the present also through the casting of non-professional actors taken from the streets (O'Leary and O'Rawe 2011). Susi di Benedetto, who plays Luca Giacobone is one of them and after her role in the series, went really to prison for extortion (Fierro 2014). Nina is played by trans woman Alessandra Langella who stated that this debut role came very natural to her, particularly in what she calls the emblematic party

scene described, because she has had to constantly confront social invisibility and transphobia in her real Neapolitan life (Sbrizzi 2016). One must then agree with Dana Renga's claim that Nina's episode realistically "points towards endemic transphobia in Italy today onscreen and offscreen" (2019, 202).

3.4 Carla's Violent Consequences of Her Choice

The final occurrence of a trans character analysed in an Italian scripted TV series is once again in the soap opera *Un posto al sole*, yet twenty-three years after the first timid portrayal of Nicky, as previously discussed. On 6 August 2019, viewers discovered that the estranged father of regular characters, twenty-something Alessandra (or Alex) and teenager Mia Parisi, is now Carla, and is back to reconcile with them (De Paola et al. 2019. Episode 5312). In previous episodes, a call anticipating this had deeply shocked their mother, Rosaria, who suffers a breakdown for which she sought cures. Before leaving her daughters alone, Rosaria mandates Alex, who is aware of the situation, that her sister "Mia must not see 'one like him' even in a photograph" (ibid. Episode 5306, 00:08:10).

From this point on, the mere existence of Carla as a trans subject becomes a piece of information to unveil carefully to some characters or to withhold to protect others, like Mia. Gradually, Carla must gain acceptance and forgiveness, or, as Alex puts it, "she has to pay the cost of her choice" (ibid. Episode 5336, 00:22:14). Cisheterosexual attractive male characters, the forty-something family friend, Andrea, and Alex's boyfriend, Vittorio, play instrumental roles to reunify Carla and Mia. Some of their dialogue seems to address in a pedagogical, at times patronising, way more so the viewers than the other characters. For example, Andrea tells Mia, "Carla is still your father. She has experienced a very painful condition, being a man but feeling like a woman" and to Mia's question "so, is he sick?" Andrea answers, "it is one of the many possibilities that nature contemplates, it's a diversity, a uniqueness" (ibid. Episode 5326, 00:03:15). In another episode, Andrea also mentioned how before 2019, the World Health Organisation considered being transgender a disease (ibid. Episode 5339, 00:20:10), showing once again RAI 3's purpose of divulgation.

In November 2019, Carla's expiation purgatory continues, as she is victim of harassment in a bar by three men who "want to see the evidence" of

her 'real' gender. They also ask her to perform a 'pole dance', and to let them know "the pavement" where she works so they can visit (ibid. Episode 5375, 00:15:40), evoking longstanding stereotypes linking trans women to prostitution that are clearly unsupported by Carla's sophisticated appearance and the mundane context. Accompanied by suspenseful music, the transphobic attack continues in the street: they tell her she is disgusting, they touch her breasts and ask if her bra is padded, before Vittorio arrives (ibid., 00:25:10). In the following episode, Carla and Vittorio have black eyes and ice bags; viewers learn that a "lady on a balcony who screamed like crazy" (ibid. Episode 5376, 00:05:50) eventually saved them from the bashing. Carla often repeats that "scenes like this are common" for her (ibid., 00:06:45) and decides not to file a police report as she is certain that "they would do nothing" (ibid. Episode 5377, 00:11:05), underlining the helplessness and the previously discussed lack of specific legislations in Italy.

The narrative of trans victimisation has been widely criticised as "overdone and stereotypical" (Capuzza and Spencer 2017, 226), as it can contribute to episodes of emulation and further stigma for the trans community, and in the soap opera, scriptwriters problematically used it as a device to help reconciling Carla with her daughters. Various characters, including Mia and Alex, tune in to Vittorio's radio show monologue about the transphobic episode. Alex seized the moment to tell Mia to "think about Carla's difficult choice, sense of guilt, shame, and pain", and how "she's now in the right body" (De Paola et al. 2019. Episode 5376, 00:25:30). The scene cuts to capture Carla suffering alone in her bedroom, as she is thinking about the attack, her solitude and the situation with her daughters (Figure 3).

In the following episode, also thanks to Vittorio's intercession, Carla and Mia finally talk (ibid. Episode 5377, 00:21:20), yet quickly the arrival of Rosaria disrupts the achieved tranquillity (ibid. Episode 5386). Later, Mia buys Carla a framed picture of the two of them with Alex for Father's Day, celebrated in Italy on the 19th of March. It is on this day that Alex convinces Rosaria to speak with Carla and the two finally reconcile (ibid. Episode 5464). While Andrea's and Vittorio's cis-plaining helped to normalise trans representation and reassure viewers, Carla's airtime and presence appeared limited in comparison and so were her opportunities to speak for herself. An exception to this is when Carla tells Andrea that she had suffered harassment at work and was forced to quit, adding "now I am better, I have a job and nobody judges me" (ibid. Episode 5339, 00:11:33).

Fig. 3: Carla in her bedroom
(De Paola et al. 2019. Episode 5376, 00:26:20)

Carla also shows some agency when she seeks legal advice to obtain the custody of her daughters while Rosaria is hospitalised. However, the overall message passed to viewers is clear; Carla's redemption and positive ending came at a high price: initial rejection, suffering and transphobic violence. Despite several references to this and the 'wrong body' tropes, Carla is generally represented sympathetically, appears well off and is dressed elegantly. She is played by trans actress Vittoria Schisano and her recurrent and rather stable role in the cast is a real productive novelty in Italy. The whole Carla subplot unravelled over the duration of 35 episodes and two seasons, from July 2019 to March 2020. Now that her family storyline is resolved, it is interesting to see if and how the scriptwriters keep this character involved, and whether they will blend more her being transgender with her ordinary life. Schisano herself had lamented in an interview that when producers invite a transgender performer to a casting, it is not to represent a role but a gender identity (Ravarino 2017), meaning that there are still many constraints to the roles for trans actresses and scripted trans televisibility.

4. Conclusions

When compared to the past, trans people are starting to become more visible in Italian television, particularly in reality shows and documentary series where Italian viewers can hear first-person trans voices talking about their own identities. Hixtory is repeating on a distribution level as, together with (inter)national socio-political advancements, once again, the US market influenced this growing televisibility in Italy. Only recently, there have been scant examples of trans characters in Italian scripted TV series of popular genres: soap opera, family comedy and crime drama. The former two appeared at peak viewing slots on mainstream television channels, and the latter is still circulating on international online streaming platforms. Despite a significant exception (Carla), the already quantitatively limited presence of trans characters in Italian series remains circumscribed within the time of a single episode.

The findings of this research suggest that there is a prominent mode of representing trans people through different levels of transphobia and violence: from the refusal of Nicky and Gianna for being trans, to the public ridiculing and shaming of Nina, forced to hide from society, passing through to the verbal and physical violence towards Carla, to the misgendering and assassination of Luca. Invisibility, mockery, villains and victims: hixtory is indeed repeating also on a thematic level in Italy. Influenced by Catholicism, transgender characters pay the cost of their 'choice' through a painful expiation obstacle course that might lead to cisheteropatriarchal acceptance and the resolution of their storyline, be this positive or, most frequently, negative. The majority of these representations, four of the five examples discussed, are set in Naples, and narrate a religious, violent, transphobic south of Italy. Should this remain the prominent mode of portraying trans subjects, it could normalise violence towards trans people and amplify a perceived greater stigma in southern Italy.

Italian TV representations of trans characters do not seem to go beyond one-dimensional characterisations and monolithic narratives of transitioning and the wrong body. This notwithstanding, Luca's trans masculinity, Nina's supportive family and Carla's fatherhood are innovative narratives in an Italian context. The traditional nuclear Italian family, particularly that of origin has a pivotal, often negative, role in these scripts as the trans characters are routinely portrayed as socially isolated, alienated and rejected by

their families. The Italian trans community and movement remain symbolically annihilated in modern scripted Italian TV. Very little infor-mation is provided about the past and daily lives of trans characters; they appear completely depoliticised and exert scarce agency while transgender issues are talked about rather than directly discussed by transgender people. In order to appeal 'safely' to a putative cisheteropatriarchal audience, the represented trans subjectivity appears domesticated, commonly desexualised and deprived of any subversion. White, Italian, abled and, too often, cisgender people usually play trans roles. There are very few trans actresses and, to my knowledge, no trans actors in mainstream media in Italy. Access for trans professionals in front and behind the camera, including scriptwriters, is key to achieve multifaceted and complex Italian trans portrayals able to confront cisheteropatriarchy. Crucially, if hixtory is repeating, the best is yet to come on TV, and, as studies show, fictional narratives can productively influence attitudes towards transgender people (Gillig, Rosenthal and Murphy 2018, 515). More, varied and future trans televisibility must contribute to a more constructive challenging of transphobia and better the lives of trans individuals in contemporary Italy.

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Lambs to the Slaughter—Trans* Representation in Portuguese Serial Fiction via the Case Study of Catarina in *Ouro Verde*

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Abstract

The widespread discursive practice of television series cannot be overlooked in their potential to disseminate, reinforce or reinvent discourses. This chapter explores the representation of trans* subjects in Portuguese television series and what notions of transness they convey to their audiences. First, it outlines the most common discourses on transness in the Portuguese political panorama and contextualises trans* representation in Portuguese media with examples from television series, some coming into Portugal from Brazil. Then it concentrates on the single case study of the character Catarina, a trans* woman in *Ouro Verde*, a Portuguese soap opera from 2017. This case study presents itself as essential, as this is one of the first ever trans* characters in a television series of national production. Drawing on the most common tropes of trans* women in cinema, as well as the reality of trans* issues in the Portuguese landscape, this chapter shows that Catarina embodies an articulation between discourses on pathologisation and a performance of the 'good trans* subject'. Studying the intersection of these elements, and supported by an analysis of some of the soap opera's narrative and filmic devices, they appear to result in a seemingly inevitable outcome of tragic transness.

As the field of television studies evolves, studying the complexities of its emergent ramifications becomes an ever-present urgency. Of the immense array of audio-visual formats developed for television, serial fiction has had, and maintains, a historic and exponential importance. Television series of all types have, since their creation, provided a structure for society to process

ideas of itself, or even to develop and reinforce said ideas. As networks multiplied, and with the current advent of streaming services, the genres, narratives and realities that are possible to represent have greatly multiplied. As these formats proliferate and their formulas are repeated and reinvented, the ways in which they represent the world, as well as the way the world is influenced by this form of fiction, need growing attention. The mutually fed cycle of art-imitates-life/life-imitates-art is thus of the utmost relevance. Particularly interesting is to understand how this ecology of meanings affects our collective understandings of certain topics.

In this contribution, the focus is set on how this mechanism relates to the circulation and development of ideas about trans* people—specifically, in Portugal. This contribution privileges the study of Portuguese productions of serial fiction as it aims to understand what notions of transness exist here and were brought into the development of trans* characters, and most importantly, what notions of transness these characters ultimately convey. First, this contribution outlines the most common discourses on transness in the Portuguese political landscape, as well as contextualises previous trans* representation in Portuguese media with some examples, both from news outlets, as well as foreign examples from television series coming into Portugal from Brazil. Then, it focuses on the single case study of the character Catarina, a trans* woman in *Ouro Verde*, a Portuguese soap opera from 2017 (Costa, de Sousa et al./TVI 2017). This case study presents itself as essential, as this is the first ever trans* character in a television series of national production (Domingues 2016). Furthermore, this show had extremely high ratings (Sousa 2017), having broken records on both the first (Coelho 2017) and last (Pinto 2017) episodes. The elevated viewership numbers make it a key element in understanding the circulation and fixation of epistemologies about trans* people in Portugal.

The analysis will be grounded on the specificities through which the soap opera format affects the meanings it conveys. Drawing upon classical cinematic archetypes of trans* women, and other archetypal lines of trans* womanhood that are outlined by commonly circulating discourses on transness in Portuguese society, this chapter will examine the ways in which these elements are imbued into the weaving of both the character and plot structures. Ultimately, the defense is raised that there is a tragic narrative arch that guides our 'good trans* subject', like a lamb to the slaughter, to the seemingly inescapable fatal outcome of transness.

1. A Brief Chronology of Trans* in Portugal

To understand the flux of the discourses on transness in Portuguese serial fiction, the discourses on transness that exist in this context must be identified. To achieve this, it is advantageous to first look back on some hallmarks of trans* history and activism in the country. In 1996, the association ILGA Portugal (Intervenção Lésbica, Gay, Bisexual, Trans e Intersexo) was founded. Although not the first 'gay' group to have existed since the 1974 democratic revolution, it is the first known to have had a trans* woman as an active member: Jo Bernardo. Feeling the space for trans* activism and representation within the association suffocated by a growing homonormativity and a practice of 'respectability politics'[1] where trans* femininity was deemed as not commodifiable, she left the association in 2001. The following year, she founded @T—Associação para o Estudo e Defesa do Direito à Identidade de Género [Association for the Study and Defense of the Right to Gender Identity, in my own translation], the first ever trans* association in the country. This group was unprecedented nationally in the way it conceptualised gender identity as an enriching and diverse factor of human experience that should be understood and defended, instead of pathologised and controlled. The group was extinct in 2005, the same year that Transgender Europe (TGEU) was founded, with Jo Bernardo in its first steering committee.

In 2006 occurred, in the northern city of Oporto, the brutal torture, rape and murder of Gisberta Salce Junior. She lived at the intersection of several social oppressions, being trans*, a Brazilian migrant, HIV positive, a sex worker and in a situation of homelessness. The crimes happened throughout the course of three days and were perpetrated by a group of boys aged twelve through sixteen who were placed by the state under the care of the Catholic church. The case was immensely mediatised, and was unprecedented in Portuguese newscasting, both in the gruesome nature of the crimes, as well as in the fact the story was about a trans* person. This crime prompted TGEU, in articulation with the Portuguese Pink Panthers[2] and Jo Bernardo, to launch its first international campaign: "Justice for Gisberta". This case was a landmark for trans* issues, both within LGBT activism and in the

1 A political project that aims to assimilate a marginalised community into its oppressors' standards. For some of the nuances of these mechanics in an analysis of the Dutch example, see Robinson 2012.

2 A queer direct-action group founded in 2004.

wider national panorama. There is a before-Gisberta era and an after, in the way that it brought to light the levels of violence trans* bodies are potentially exposed to. Similarly, to many people in the country, it might have been the first instance they ever heard of a trans* person. The media referred to Gisberta originally in the masculine form of Portuguese grammar, mentioning that the corpse of "a homeless man […] a transvestite" had been found (Publico Portugal 2006).[3]

In 2009, the Pink Panthers started work related to the Stop Trans Pathologization international campaign, advocating for the right to self-determination. In 2011, a long legislative process culminated in the law commonly known as the Gender Identity Law. This legislation created an administrative procedure for trans* people to access legal gender recognition (LGR) and ended forced sterilization as a condition to access it. Up until this point, LGR was only achieved by judicial procedure. The pathologization of trans* identities stayed within the law, as it defined a gender identity disorder (later renamed gender dysphoria) diagnosis as a mandatory requirement to access LGR. Efforts to review and update that law intensified in 2015 and culminated in the Self-Determination Law in 2018. LGR has become independent from the medical sphere. Formal gender and name change are, as of 2018, a process based exclusively in each person's decision, based thus in self-determination.

2. Medical Discourse: Of Sickness and Victims

Medical transition is not based in a model of self-determination, working instead within a framework of pathology. Access to medical transition is, unlike LGR, still gatekept by medical professionals. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (*DSM*) *IV* (1994) was the basis of the gatekeeping process that led doctors to diagnose trans* people with 'gender identity disorder'. That diagnostic conceptualised transness as pathological, as being a 'displaced' gender identity. The pathology was, in this clinical understanding, the transness *itself*. Although this notion still has some supporters, this diagnostic was reformed into its current denomination as gender

3 Unless oherwise noted, all translations from Portuguese into English are my own.

dysphoria in the *DSM-V* (2013).[4] Here, the 'dysphoria' is said to be the suffering that derives from said displacement. The pathology is now the clinically relevant suffering that is understood as a consequence of transness, and not the transness itself. In both forms of the diagnosis, the proposed therapy is that of medical transition. The focus is thus placed in the trans* body as either a disease or diseased, and treatment is, consequently, the correction of said body. A relevant shift is, however, that in the first form of the diagnosis, the trans* person is defined by inherent wrongness, while in the second, the trans* experience is defined by inherent suffering.

This understanding of transness as suffering, of trans* people as victims, is the one that has the greatest adherence in discourses of medicalisation in Portugal. Trans* people are thus taxonomised under (or excluded from) the clinical label of transexuals, and gender dysphoria is thus the defining characteristic that determines the presence of said transexuality. This discourse on medicalisation is pervasive and imposed on all, or most, trans* bodies. The social practices and power dynamics inherent to it create trans* subjects that are victimised, and trans* subjectivities of the self as victim.

3. Portuguese TV (Non-Fiction): Oh, Poor Thing!

In non-fiction settings, Gisberta's story in 2006 was a tragic hallmark of trans* presence in the media, and a real-life cautionary tale of the trans* person, in particular woman, as a victim of transness. Less fatal examples of this presence include interviews with trans* people in daytime talk shows *Você na TV!* (TVI 2015) and *A Tarde é Sua* (TVI 2017–2019). The narrative of victimisation is prevalent here, mostly in relation to the idea of dysphoria and suffering as inherent to the trans* experience. There was a trans* contestant in *Secret Story 4* (TVI 2013), a reality TV show in its 2013 edition. The show consists of a group of people enclosed in a house, like in *Big Brother*,

4 As of the time of writing *DSM-V* is the manual that is used by medical practitioners in Portugal (Hilário 2019, 465). In the future version of another manual, the *ICD-11*—International Statistical Classification of Diseases—, transness will be taxonomized under 'gender incongruence' and will move from the "Mental and Behavioural Disorders" chapter into the "Conditions Related to Sexual Health" chapter (World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe 2020). This is not the case with the *DSM-V*, which retains the diagnostic of 'Gender Dysphoria'.

and each has a secret that they are meant to hide. The secret of one contestant, Lourenço Ódin da Cunha, was that he was a trans* man. He has since gained a platform to talk about trans* issues and employs a medicalised discourse on transness (It Gets Better Portugal 2016, 00:05:10).

In September 2017, the show *E se fosse consigo?* (roughly translatable to "What if it happened to you?") debuted on national television (SIC Notícias 2017). It consisted of enacting scenes of violence and analysing the reactions of passersby to these occurrences. In late October, one of the show's episodes focused on transphobia (SIC Notícias 2017). The show innovated in the sense that it articulated the idea of 'transphobia', effectively identifying it as a structure of oppression, and focused on that when discussing suffering. This can be argued to shift the origin of the victim status from the trans* self to the other (oppressor), but maintains said status. Besides the reenactment and the passersby's reactions, the show also included some interviews with trans* people and a round table with them at the end.

Following this overview of examples of trans* issues being addressed in non-fiction television formats in Portugal, some trends are present. Firstly, all of these discussions of transness center (or forcefully include) narratives of pain and suffering. Secondly, they tend to propose a medicalised narrative of transness. Thirdly, they place the onus of the suffering on the self, except for *E se fosse consigo?*, which articulates transphobia as an idea, externalising somewhat the origin of the suffering. All of these performances of suffering (explicit reenactments, first person guided interviews, sensational descriptions, etc.) could be argued to be commodifying trauma and suffering. Furthermore, these could be seen as pornographic representations, in the way they commodify the other's suffering for eroticised consumption (Dean 2003, 102).

4. Portuguese TV (Serial Fiction): Fearing Men

Portuguese TV transmits Brazilian soap operas with high audiences and have been able to maintain elevated ratings throughout the years, even with the maturing of national soap opera production (Ferreira 2014, 174). Some examples can be found of trans* characters in these throughout the years

(Xavier 2012), amongst which is the 2001–2002 soap opera *As Filhas da Mãe*[5] (de Abreu, Fernando et al./Rede Globo 2001), where the trans* character is very central. Ramona, one of the daughters, follows the soap opera trope of the male figure that disappeared, or travelled, and came back post-transition. Usually a reveal moment occurs, which consists of the character's transgender status being spectacularly revealed either to the audience or to the other characters (Seid 2014, 176–177). The idea of transness present in the show is also extremely medicalised. One of the main themes of the character is the fear that her love interest will find out she is in fact trans* and react violently, the recurrent trans* trope of the reveal story. The character can be considered to be represented 'positively' in the sense that a part of the family structure seems to mimic Cinderella: two mean sisters that are snobbish, mean and egotistical, plus a humble, kind, altruistic and beautiful third sister. Ramona is the Cinderella in this structure, thus placing a trans* character in an archetype the audience is meant to root for. In Brazil, broadcast by TV Globo, the show had particularly low ratings (Castro 2001). In Portugal however, broadcast by SIC, the show had very high ratings (Meios & Publicidade 2001), as this also coincided with a year where the channel itself was leader in ratings (Publico Portugal 2001).

From June 2019 until March 2020, another trans* woman, Britney, from a Brazilian soap opera was present on Portuguese TV in the show *A Dona do Pedaço* (Carrasco, Mautner et al./Rede Globo 2019–2020). One of the main arches of this character was also that she feared that her love interest, a cisgender straight man, would react negatively to the revelation that she was trans*. In the scene where she tells him, he does react negatively, although not violently (Carrasco, Mautner et al. 2019a, 00:00:15). However, he later goes on to marry her nonetheless (Carrasco, Mautner et al. 2019b).

5. Case Study: Ouro Verde

Ouro Verde is a Portuguese-Brazilian co-produced soap opera from 2017. It was developed by Plural Entertainment and broadcast on TVI, a national channel. It won the Emmy for best *telenovela* (Publico Portugal 2018). The story is set between a bank in Lisbon and a farm in the Amazonian region.

5 Which translates to 'daughters of the mother', an expression that in Portuguese has the double meaning of 'son(s) of a bitch', here written as 'daughters'.

The main narrative is a revenge plot. The protagonist's family was murdered, he survived and fled to Brazil. Eventually he became a wealthy landowner in rural Amazonia and plans his revenge against the banker who had his family killed. Back in Lisbon, the plot revolves around the bank that is presided over by the main antagonist. The show includes several sensitive topics and, superficially, could be considered 'progressive' in their portrayal. These include banking collapses (by explicit consequence of ruinous management and corruption), the disappearance of environmental activists in the Amazonian forest (suspected of being victims of the rural financial interests of this region) and domestic and gender violence in intimate relationships.

All these topics are sewn into the larger plot of the show. In the Amazonian plotline, which includes the protagonist's love interest being an environmental activist, these disappearances are present. There is a straight, cis and adolescent couple in which very toxic dynamics of control and abuse are shown developing throughout the show, and these are felt and described by other characters, such as when her father confides about her boyfriend's abusive behaviors to a friend (Costa, de Sousa et al. 2017. Episode 144, 00:14:03). The main antagonist is a banker that steals from the bank and practices other ruinous and corrupt banking schemes. This topic is extremely sensitive in Portugal, as the second biggest Portuguese bank collapsed for similar reasons in 2014, and the consequences of both the collapse and the consequent government bailouts are still felt in Portuguese society today (Carvalho 2017). Amongst all of these socially progressive topics, the exploration of trans* as a topic is the one focused on here. There is a single trans* character in the show, a trans* woman named Catarina.

5.1 Lamb to the Slaughter: After Aristotle, Take a Right

Catarina's plot is based around the bank and has diverse ramifications connecting her with numerous and unexpected characters, thus creating significant amounts of tension and dramatic moments, as is expected of the *telenovela* narrative structure. The breakdown of the family and corporate structure where Catarina is included goes as follows: José, who is now retired, is the former director of the bank. He had a secretary named Amanda, and they were romantically involved at one point. Amanda has a child, who is Catarina, the character that will be examined here. Amanda is also secretary to the current bank's director. José's son, Miguel, is the current director

of the bank. His own son, Tomás, is head of the bank's marketing department. Catarina works for Tomás in said department. It is later revealed that Catarina's father is José, thus making Catarina Miguel's sister and Tomás's aunt. The management of this information on part of the show is essential to how the plot develops. She first appears under the guise of 'David', the masculine identity assigned to her at birth and under which she lives. This character is presented in this way, and transness or a feminine identity are not explicitly addressed over the course of the first episode. There are a few vague elements of foreshadowing, like when this character is encouraging another character saying "if that is really what she wants, she needs to have courage and not give up" (Costa, de Sousa et al. 2017. Episode 7, 00:23:35), or when Tomás hands her an invitation to a marketing event of the bank and the frame closes in on her revealing that she is both smiling and blushing for having been invited by him (ibid. Episode 13, 00:38:40). This character thus works in said marketing department and scenes hint to us that this character might have a crush on Tomás (who often confides in this character, unaware).

Outside the bank, Catarina presenting as herself appears for the first time in episode 15, where she runs face to face into Tomás at a party and drops her glass (Figure 1). This is followed by the employment of a slow-paced shot-counter-shot sequence first of silence and gazing between both, followed by dialogue (ibid., 00:29:45). A sensual song starts playing during this scene (ibid., 00:30:03), which is the leitmotif that accompanies the relationship between both characters throughout the show.[6] Tomás attempts to flirt, and Catarina reacts with shy interest but definite apprehension, and quickly escapes the interaction. The scene is framed as 'love at first sight', as is confirmed by the close-up of Tomás after Catarina's exit, where he exclaims that he is in love (ibid., 00:30:39).

6 In soap operas, it is a common narrative tool to have a set of songs that are exclusively associated with a specific character/couple.

Fig. 1: Catarina runs into Tomás
(Costa, de Sousa et al. 2017. Episode 15, 00:30:31)

After this episode, Tomás continues to interact with this character in both her presentations, unaware of the fact that it is the same person. Although the fact that these two characters are indeed the same is not explicitly addressed at this point, it should be noted that the actress is the same, changing only her gender presentation, length of hair by wearing a wig when presenting feminine and, perhaps most importantly, the fact that when presenting in a masculine form, she wears glasses, unlike when presenting as herself. The inability of the other characters to recognise her in these moments could be attributed to a Clark Kent/Superman-type phenomenon.

Catarina and Tomás have an on and off relationship, where Catarina frequently disappears and is unreachable, until they accidentally run into each other again. On a specific occasion, Tomás sees her as a dancer in a video clip and performs an investigation worthy of the label of 'stalker' until finding her (ibid. Episode 37, 00:31:18). In her masculine persona, she continues to work for Tomás and is his confidant. In her job at the bank, she organises a big party for a promotional campaign. Tomás was meant to see Catarina there, but thought that she was absent as she went in her masculine persona, as the organiser (ibid. Episode 65, 01:59:30).

Fig. 2: Amanda raises Catarina's hospital gown
(Costa, de Sousa et al. 2017. Episode 66, 00:43:05)

Another plot line, one of terrorist activity, culminates here, as the party becomes a hostage situation for a terrorist group in episode 66. The terrorists attempt to execute Tomás, but Catarina jumps to protect him and is shot in the process (ibid. Episode 66, 00:22:40). During her time at the hospital recovering from the gunshot, her mother discovers she is trans* after the doctor shares this information with her. The mother, Amanda, reacts with disgust and pain. In a scene, she uncovers the unconscious Catarina's chest to confirm she has breasts (ibid., 00:42:30). This is done extremely slowly, with a semblance of distress and disgust slowly growing in the mother's face, in a medium-long low angle shot that includes the unconscious Catarina in the frame (Figure 2). In another scene, she raises the hospital gown to look between her legs, in an invasive and symbolically violent moment (ibid., 01:04:10). In a close-up, she reacts to her discovery with a sense of calmness (ibid., 01:04:27), as if the confirmation that a penis was still present gives her pause, as if it represents the possibility of cisness for this body yet.

In a scene, Catarina expresses deep anguish for the fact that her surgery keeps being delayed in the public health system (ibid. Episode 91, 00:30:45). She emphasizes the surgery as necessary for her wellbeing. In this conversation, her mother alternates paradoxically between resistance to her daughter's transness and a positive and supportive attitude to the fact. Later, in a conversation with a friendly doctor (ibid. Episode 94, 00:29:45), Catarina

discovers she can have her surgery in the private sector, or even abroad, and because of her socio-economic status, the barrier suddenly dissipates.

It is of note that the show includes this topic from trans* people's lived realities in Portugal: the delays of medical processes, in particular of surgeries, in the public health service. The solution presented here—discovering there are options in the private sector and being economically privileged, thus not needing to access healthcare via the public health system—is not shared by most middle and working class trans* people who struggle with these delays in the public system. It is a class based, instead of divine, *deus ex machina* narrative resolution to the presented problem (Pavis 2008, 92).

After the above conversation, she leaves to go abroad to have her surgery in episode 97. While she is away, her masculine persona is said to 'have gone travelling'. Here there is the semi-fulfillment of the trans* *telenovela* trope of the male figure (father, brother or son) who is either missing, living abroad or 'has gone travelling' and comes back 'after a sex change' presenting in a feminine gender expression, like the case of Ramona in *Filhas da Mãe*. One element of the trope that is unfulfilled in *Ouro Verde* is the fact that the character appeared 'pre-transition'[7] and already presenting as a woman, thinking and expressing her transness to the audience. In Catarina's case, a spectacular reveal for the audience is non-existent, as the show informs us of her transness slowly throughout the course of nearly a hundred episodes before her 'post-op' return from abroad. Her inner circle (which here is her mother and her doctor) is also already knowledgeable of the fact. A second big 'reveal' of the transness that usually exists in this trope (with a focus on the trans* character's love interest, as will here be the case) is still possible in *Ouro Verde*, and the suspense of this is intentionally played into going forward in the plot.

In episode 118, the relationship between Catarina and Tomás (that continues existing on and off until this point) is sexually consummated (Figure 3). At no time in the show is any mention made of post-operatory care for Catarina's vaginoplasty. No notion of healing timing or the use of dilators in the months following the surgery exists. The spectator doesn't know how long passed between said surgery and this moment where the sex scene is framed with Catarina in a cowgirl position on top of Tomás, filmed from behind her, and leads the viewer to suppose they are engaging in vaginal intercourse (Costa, de Sousa et al. 2017. Episode 118, 00:42:00).

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7 The expression here is employed to emphasize how the character's personal narrative conceptualizes this surgery as a turning point.

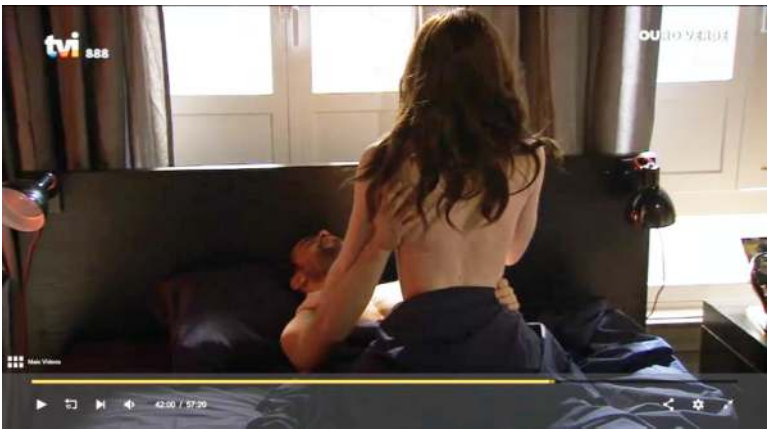

Fig. 3: Catarina and Tomás have sex
(Costa, de Sousa et al. 2017. Episode 118, 00:42:00)

This moment, besides creating possible misinformation about the realities of sexual intercourse with a recent neovagina, also serves as the 'great crime' that sets us up to expect an inevitable tragic outcome. Before exploring the idea of the transness itself, it is to be noted that these two characters are related by blood, being that Catarina is Tomás's aunt. The incest is not as direct as Oedipus's (and unlike him, she is aware of their blood connection), but still serves as a shocking attack on both ancient Greek, as well as current Portuguese, cultural values, thus fulfilling the function of hamartia in the tragic arch as defined by Aristotle in his *Poetics* (Landa 2004, 27). Besides the incest, the idea of the "deceptive transexual" (Serano 2007, 36–37) or the 'trickster' trans* woman trope also plays into here, given she is conceptualised as lying by not informing him of her transness. By having sex with him and being passable as a cis woman in his eyes even during sexual intercourse, all the while maintaining the idea that she is 'lying' as a valid truth, the show makes this the definitive act of betrayal. The notion of lying stems from the idea that a trans* woman is ultimately a man, and articulates with naturalised homophobia as a mindset. She is seen, and even sees herself, as having 'tricked' a cisgender straight man into having sex with someone that can ultimately be considered a man. In this tragic plot embedded into the soap

opera's more general narrative arc, the hidden transness is considered morally more condemnable than the hidden incest and is thus the true sacrilegious act of the tragic, aggravated by the incest.

There is a dialogue that Catarina has with her father that is probably the most paradigmatic one pertaining to how she sees her transness. This happens later on, when he is already aware she is trans* and confronts her with the fact, expressing disappointment with her for having made this 'choice'. She tells him:

> Did you know that there are cases like mine in nature? Nature makes errors too. […] Do you know four leaf clovers? Think of how we spend our childhoods looking for a four-leaf clover. Think about how important they were for being different. Because we thought they brought good luck. (Costa, de Sousa et al. 2017. Episode 124, 00:13:50)

In this excerpt she seems to be making a point on the value of difference and diversity. She continues:

> Four leaf clovers are a genetic malformation. People like me pass by a similar process, also a genetic malformation that is beyond us, that is superior to our being. (ibid., 00:14:30)

The idea of transness having a medically identifiable genetic origin gained some popularity amongst some trans* people that embody the medicalised discourse in Portugal. The protagonist of the *RIP 2 My Youth* (ESCS 2017) documentary about a trans* man's transition story, is someone who publicly claims that "[being trans*] is suffering from a pathology called gender dysphoria which happens at 3 months in the fetus where my brain developed as a man and my body as a woman" (Figueiredo 2017). This theory however neglects the social dimension that has always shaped the trans* experience. For Catarina, this is the first moment that she proposes a basepoint 'explanation' for her idea of transness as medical. Independently of how this reinforces the pathologisation of her transness, she seems to be arguing how special and valuable trans* people can be, through her comparison of trans* with the four-leaf clover as a symbol of luck. She continues:

> But we are people, not plants. So we think, and talk. Have you imagined what those clovers who are born different would say if they could speak? They would say they wanted to be like the others, and they would wonder why they were born different, with an extra leaf. Why couldn't I have been born a girl like the others? Do you understand? (Costa, de Sousa et al. 2017. Episode 124, 00:14:50)

Although having started the metaphor by attributing ideas of luck and uniqueness to four-leaf clovers, and then comparing trans* people to these, she ultimately does not transfer those qualities onto transness. Instead, she argues that the presence of consciousness corresponds automatically to a pulsion towards assimilation, and repulsion in regard to one's own difference. There is no space in her metaphor for difference left 'uncorrected' in the human sphere.

In episode 130, Catarina's father (who is, as has been noted above, also the grandfather to Catarina's love interest, Tomás) becomes aware of the whole situation, and blackmails Catarina into breaking off the relationship. She does this, and Tomás shows up at her house infuriated and refuses to accept the break-up. She then proceeds to expel him from the premises (ibid. Episode 129, 00:34:56). He runs into another character from whom he learns that Catarina is both trans* and his aunt. In episode 131, he confronts her about how she knew about their blood relation, and about "everything else" (the transness), and proceeds to deadname her (ibid. Episode 131, 00:05:35). The conversation continues in a simple shot-counter-shot montage where Tomás is crying and a slow piano song starts playing. Catarina touches his arm, which prompts him to yell and start to act violently (ibid., 00:10:45), asking her abusive and transphobic questions about "what" she is. Scared but simultaneously feeling guilty, she claims that she was born in the wrong body but now is "100% a woman" (ibid., 00:11:10), maintaining her consistent discourse of medicalisation. He continues to verbally harass her, all whilst screaming, crying and holding his head with his muscles tense, a display of despair and angst worthy of classical tragedies' canonical performativity (ibid., 00:11:40).

In some of the other scenes that take place in the episode, Catarina's absence at a dance rehearsal is felt and mentioned several times, helping foreshadow the moment of violence that is slowly and intermittently arriving. This build-up of tension happens in fragments throughout the larger story, as is typical of plot lines in the soap opera structure. Tomás asks her if she already "had the operation" when they first started dating (ibid., 00:15:12), and suddenly starts acting in an apparently fragile manner, crying and begging for this answer. To augment the tragic value of the scene, he negotiates by promising "please tell me the truth. I swear I will not hurt you. I swear I won't touch you, I won't hurt you, but please tell me" (ibid., 00:15:21). This proposed negotiation pre-supposes that this violence would be his right to exercise, or waiver. It also feeds the spectator a sense of false

hope which they already known to be false: that she might be spared of her punishment. The spectator knows of the outcome, as big plot points in Portuguese soap operas are widely divulged beforehand, using the suspense of the 'how' and the 'when' privileged above the 'what'.

She tells him she had not in fact had an operation at the time, he yells "so you were a man?!" (ibid., 00:18:50) in a mix of affirmation and interrogation and proceeds to attack her violently (ibid., 00:19:05). He yells transphobic insults throughout and emphasizes the idea of her being a 'freak'. During this scene, he pulls off her wig, revealing her short hair underneath (ibid., 00:19:30). In a medium shot, he is portrayed holding the wig, looking at it with disgust, throwing it on the floor and continuing the beating. This moment of wig-pulling mid attack can have a particular reading when inserted in a moment of violence against a trans* woman in visual media. As the character is already fulfilling the 'trickster trans* woman' archetype, of which this moment of violence is a direct consequence, the wig-pulling serves in this symbolic structure as an unveiling of the 'fake' femininity to reveal the 'man' underneath.

In the aftermath of this moment, the secrets surrounding Catarina become widely known to all the characters: the secret of who her father is, and thus her blood connections to other characters, as well as her transness. The whole situation between Catarina and Tomás is discussed by several characters in several moments, and the general opinion seems to be that Tomás is the perpetrator and Catarina the victim. In a closer analysis, however, most characters agree that she was in the wrong, or at least consider Tomás's shock legitimate. It is the reaction that they blame Tomás for, agreeing that the extent of the violence was disproportionate. What they mean is not that it was wrong that she was punished, it was that the punishment was cruel and unusual. One character even suggests that he could have "sued her, asked for money, but hitting is an animal's affair!" (ibid. Episode 138, 00:21:40). This discourse is transversal throughout episodes and characters and keep validating the premises of the 'trickster trans* woman' archetype. Another post-aggression aspect is Catarina's own mentality regarding the situation. She agrees with, and embodies, this guilt. Firstly, she agrees with the idea that she is an "aberration", "a junction of two weird parts, all and naught", while he thought "she was a woman" (ibid. 00:10:20), implying herself that she is not. She considers his outburst understandable and lies to the police to avoid him suffering consequences for his actions. Other characters

discuss how it seems counterintuitive that she would lie to protect her aggressor, and in one occasion a policewoman rebuts that "this is common behavior in victims" (ibid. Episode 137, 00:07:07). This insertion of notions of the psychology of victims invalidates the idea of victim-blaming and serves as a counter-discourse against the idea that she is guilty, especially when professed by a figure of authority. This is however scarce in the prevalence of her blame.

After the aggression, Catarina ends up in a hospital bed, ironically, right where she ended up after being shot in defense of her aggressor. Tomás visits her in the hospital to apologise, hoping to save face. In this encounter, Catarina reverses the thought structure with which she thought of herself throughout the whole show, especially after the attack, and makes an empowering speech. In this speech, she both deconstructs the romantic narrative she had of their love claiming the violence proved the absence of love (ibid. Episode 138, 00:31:45), as well as unequivocally asserting her womanhood.

This mirroring, between both moments where she is in a hospital bed, seems intentional. Both serve as tipping points where this character makes life-changing decisions. In the first hospitalisation, the decision to have "her surgery", the action which confirms her as a woman in the recurrent discourse of trans* medicalisation. The second hospitalisation becomes an epiphany on her lack of guilt, her humanity and the validity of her gender. She declares "this has all been a mistake, even the thinking that this was my fault [the beating]" (ibid., 00:38:08). Tomás implies that the fault is hers, as he would "never under normal conditions kiss a man" (ibid., 00:38:54). "Can't you see I'm a woman? Catarina has always existed; it was David who was a lie" (ibid., 00:39:00), she replies. This is the first time in the show where she doesn't equate her transness with the comprehensibility of violence or disenfranchisement from others. Simultaneously, she employs notions of self-determination when saying "Catarina has always existed" (ibid., 00:39:10), validating her womanhood without relation to her surgery for the first time in the show. "My name is Catarina and I have the right to be happy" (ibid., 00:39:40), she yells while Tomás leaves the room, leaving her crying from emotion. The plot arc of the 'reveal story' and consequent suffering seem to wrap up here. Afterwards, her appearances become less frequent, as before. She starts sporting her natural short hair which she dyes blonde, and stops using the wig, as the wig up until now could be seen as

serving the premise of 'fake womanhood' in the trickster archetype. This choice seems, on that premise, to legitimise her womanhood without artifice.

Soap operas thrive on plant and payoff mechanisms (sometimes, with more than a hundred episodes between the planting and the paying off) and Catarina's plot line is at this point advanced by something she did in the beginning of the show. Catarina's mother, Amanda, was compiling documents that proved criminal financial activity on the part of the bank's director and could send him to jail. Back in the first episodes, Catarina stole these from her mother and hid them in her vault at said bank. She did this to protect the family of her love interest, as she already had a crush on Tomás, who is the banker's son. Over the course of about 10 episodes after her recovery, she appears only once or twice in short scenes per episode. The elements developed throughout these short moments are those of her happiness while living in truth (ibid. Episode 141, 00:27:30), but also the persistent 'love' for Tomás and the reframing of Tomás's reaction as understandable (ibid. Episode 147, 00:39:05)—ignoring her speech of independence from him—as well as her preparation to expose the criminal activities of Tomás's father.

In episode 153, she photocopies the documents and goes to meet Tomás (Figure 4). She tells him that she intends to divulge them, that his father deserves punishment and also that she is still in love with him (ibid. Episode 153, 00:38:15). In the next episode, Tomás and his father plot to steal the documents from her. He pretends to still harbor feelings for her, and organises to meet with her under this premise: he would distract her with promises of love, while his father (also Catarina's brother) would steal the documents. They organise to meet up near the beach. Amanda, Catarina's mother, discusses with Aparecida[8] how happy Catarina is, and what a bright promising future she has in front of her. She calls Catarina. She is near the beach and Tomás, as well as, secretly, his father, arrive. She tells her mother they will have dinner together later and hangs up.

8 A character from another plotline who is known to have powers of clairvoyance.

Fig. 4: Catarina meets Tomás to inform him of documents
(Costa, de Sousa et al. 2017. Episode 153, 00:28:29)

Fig. 5: Tomás and Catarina meet at the beach
(Costa, de Sousa et al. 2017. Episode 154, 00:46:03)

While Tomás approaches her in the vicinity of the cliff, the camera rises from behind him to a high angle shot over the meeting (Figure 5). They start a conversation that is edited in shot-counter-shot, with the detail that, when framing Tomás, the shot is a low angle one, and when framing Catarina, it is a more common over the shoulder eye level shot (ibid. Episode 154, 00:46:05). It can be considered that framing Tomás in a low angle shot represents Catarina's positioning as underneath; she is however framed as being at eye level with him. This framing of Tomás can either symbolically frame him as superior, or even foreshadow Catarina's position below him by the end of the interaction. They start a cliffside walk, and Tomás tells her to "be careful walking here" (ibid., 00:46:33). The scene cuts to Amanda talking with Aparecida about how it is amazing to see Catarina doing so well after everything that has happened. They hold hands, and in a close up, Aparecida seem visibly distressed (ibid., 00:47:05), presumably because of her clairvoyant powers, thus foreshadowing the imminent death. This adds to the build-up of visual and dialogical foreshadowing mechanisms that are guiding the narrative. The alternation between the cliffside scene and Amanda and Aparecida's interaction could be described as a slower and fragmented form of cross-cutting, which would be the only possible form for cross-cutting in the stretched-out format of soap operas. Similarly, this dialogic edition of the scenes contrasts the foreshadowing of her death with her mother's wishes of wellbeing, thus thickening the dramatic effect. Tomás starts telling her he still loves her, yet that he is "repulsed" by her transness (ibid., 00:49:25). Ironically, the episode closes leaving this plotline in a cliffhanger by the cliff side.

Episode 155, entitled "Catarina Falls Off a Cliff", starts with a repetition of the scene where Aparecida grabs Amanda's hand from the previous episode, and both cliffside moments previously described. The episode continues and when coming back to Catarina and Tomás, it introduces them with a high angle shot over the cliff side with the sea in the background, again. They continue talking and declare their mutual love. Tomás says he loves her deeply, despite knowing she is trans* and his aunt (ibid. Episode 155, 00:10:20), as if the narrative of 'love conquers all' could be arriving to wash away the tragic essence of both the incest and the transness. When they are leaning in for a kiss, Tomás's father appears and pushes Catarina off the cliff (ibid. Episode 154, 00:10:55). There are several different angles of both fixed and travel shots of her corpse down in the rocks throughout the rest of the episode.

About the title of the episode where she is murdered, it cannot go unnoticed that using the expression 'falls off a cliff' instead of 'is pushed off a cliff' discursively turns her into the action-enacting subject of the sentence, instead of the target of said action. It shockingly mirrors how the court decided upon Gisberta's death: "she died by drowning" instead of "she was pushed into a well" (Rodrigues 2016).

6. Discussion: Towards No More Tragic Transness

It can be argued that the mere presence of marginalised identities and topics in any form of mass media is positive, considering how many people have been reached. But more and more, the need has been felt to differentiate between representation being good and good representation. Jen Richards argued in the 2020 Netflix documentary about trans* representation in media, *Disclosure: Trans Lives on Screen*, that 'more' would be the keyword to describe what trans* representation needs. 'More' would mean, in her words, that the "occasional clumsy representation wouldn't matter as much because it wouldn't be all that there is" (Feder et al./Netflix 2020, 00:24:20). More seems to be a necessity in quantity, but 'more of the same' could be considered no addition at all.

Ramona's story in *As Filhas da Mãe* was on Portuguese television in the early 2000s. The show engaged with her transness in the form of a reveal story of her in a romantic relationship with a cisgender straight man. She fulfilled the trope of the trickster trans* woman. Catarina's story in *Ouro Verde* aired in Portugal in 2017. The show engaged also with her transness in the form of a reveal story of her in a romantic relationship with a cisgender straight man. She fulfilled also the trope of the trickster trans* woman. Britney's story in *A Dona do Pedaço*, a Brazilian TV Globo soap opera, aired in Portugal from June 2019 until March 2020. The show engaged again with her transness in the form of a reveal story of her in a romantic relationship with a cisgender straight man (curiously enough, he is played by the same actor who plays Tomás in *Ouro Verde*). She fulfilled again the role of the trickster trans* woman. The format of trans* women's presence in soap opera's aired in Portugal, of which Catarina is the only national produced example, seems to have remained unchanged throughout the course of two

decades (Britney's story has a different outcome, as the relationship continues after the reveal, but has the same baseline). Their transness, and their lives, seems to serve exclusively as a spectacle of suffering and disfranchisement, a ritualisation through repetition, a forced narrowing down of the possibilities of what being a trans* woman can mean.

Besides being trans*, Catarina belongs to the privileged side of all other axes of oppression. She is white, rich, able-bodied, heterosexual. Her transness is lived and framed through the expected medicalised discourse. She is the 'good trans* subject', where no dissidence manifests. And yet she dies. Her main narrative is tragic, and she is brutally attacked in the climax of the tragic arc, surviving. Yet ultimately, the writers killed her nonetheless. She was an important narrative device while her suffering was exploitable, her pain marketable and her guilt fabricated. When this was no longer the case, her greatest narrative asset was decided to be her death. She was only calm and free of underlying anxieties when providing the audience with the comfort of knowing she was finally happy with the sole purpose of contrasting this with the pain and cruelty of her death. She was only happy when being led, like a lamb to the slaughter, by a pantheon of limited possibilities and fetishistic writers. Ultimately, this show presents us with the inevitability of 'tragic transness'. It paints us an idea of trans* possibility that will either live in tragedy or end in tragedy. The reproduction of this tropes and tragedies can only further limit the scope of possibilities for trans* lives. More is an essential keyword, but not more of the same. There is a need for more diverse, imaginative, nuanced and humane narratives, and much less tragedy.

* The author of this constribution is a trans* woman who, growing up, spent a lot of time in a small cottage with a garden in the countryside. Her mother would raise her, amongst other things, on Celtic myths and legends—and told her of the good luck and magic brought by four leaf clovers. In their garden, there were clovers on most plots—all of them were four leaf clovers. She has always thought that, if they could talk, they would speak of how lucky they are to be the way they are. She also considers herself to be extremely lucky.

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Towards a New Scene of Enunciation? Trans* Characters in Spanish TV Series from the Transition to Angie in *Cuéntame cómo pasó* and Beyond

Danae Gallo González

Abstract

Until recently, trans* characters in Spain were a great exception and were concentrated in Pedro Almodóvar's films, which despite their international success, constitute a 'quirky' niche in Spain where any eccentricity is tolerated. Today transness is experiencing a peak in visibility and social recognition in some sectors of society, such as in visual culture. Considering the challenges that trans* people continue to face despite years of tireless activism, as well as the consequences of epistemologies in making trans* lives more liveable, analysing the few, but impactful representations of trans* people in Spanish series takes on new relevance. First, this article will briefly sketch the history of trans* representation in Spanish TV series. Then, it will focus on how trans* characters are projected on the small screen in *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (2001–present, with a trans* character since 2018), the series with a record intergenerational audience and running time in public broadcast television. This analysis reveals the complex and often contradictory modes deployed to audiovisually articulate the triad of transness, vulnerability and alliance between minoritised groups in a liberatory light that intermittently orbits around the conventional pathologising victimisation of trans* people.

Summer 2020 will not only be remembered by the COVID-19 pandemic. On the 10th of June, shortly before the date on which the Spanish Minister of Equality Irene Montero (Unidas Podemos) had announced the approval of the Ley Trans Estatal [Trans State Law], on the occasion of the LGBTQ pride, a controversial document with the official stamp of the PSOE (the

Spanish Socialist Workers' Party) was leaked via Twitter. It contained 'arguments' very reminiscent of Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminism (TERF) against the self-determination of trans* people in legal gender recognition.[1] The Trans State Law is on hold since 2018, first because of the governability crisis,[2] then the coronavirus and now this internal crisis of the government, as this law was part of the programmatic agreement signed by PSOE and Unidas Podemos, Spain's first coalition government since democracy was restored in 1978.[3]

This document has provoked a major generational debate within feminism and the broader society. On the one hand, this debate has facilitated the perturbing entry of more or less openly transphobic discourses into the mass and social media,[4] and, on the other hand, the confluence of trans* activism in Confluencia Trans.[5] This collective has taken to the streets to demand from this left-wing coalition government the promised measures to subvert discrimination against trans* people. Thereby trans* politics has gained significant visibility not only in the streets but also in the mass media covering the news. Additionally, the controversies surrounding the Trans State Law are occurring concurrently with a peak in visibility and social recognition of trans* people in some sectors of society, such as in visual culture. Good examples are the choice of the trans* actresses Jedet and Daniela Santiago—known for their work in the series *La Veneno* (Ambrossi, Calvo et al./Atres Player/HBO 2020) for which they won an Onda's Prize—to moderate the closing ceremony of the Malaga Film Festival on

1 For a nuanced approach to TERF ideologies, see Pearce, Erikainen and Vicents's special issue (2020).

2 Between December 2015 and December 2019, Spain was not able to form a governable executive.

3 See, to this respect, Platero and Ortega Arjonilla 2016; Álvarez 2020; Platero 2020.

4 Such as 'feminist' Lucía Etxebarrías's criminalising approach to transsexuality in El sentido de La Birra on 22 August 2020 (Moya et al. 2020, 01:26:55–02:03:51). For such arguments, the Partido Feminista de España [Spanish Feminist Party] was expelled from Izquierda Unida [The Left United], in coalition with Podemos under the name Unidas Podemos) in February 2020.

5 Confluencia Trans is a movement that was created in response to the aforementioned internal document of the PSOE. It groups more than 200 trans* associations and collectives that signed a letter asking the PSOE for a response to the document from a part of its militants and called for a demonstration on 4 July 2020. A month later, Confluencia Trans was invited to negotiate with the government, but left the reunion outraged. The government suggested to form a working group to submit the law proposal they had being working on for five years to the opinion of other LGB groups. See Reguero 2020.

29 August 2020, and, as it will be focused in here, especially their presence in (TV) series.

Yet trans* people are still facing many challenges. Therefore, considering the consequences of epistemologies in making trans* lives better or more liveable and the singular role Spanish series has had and still has to this purpose nowadays (Mateos 2014, 64), analysing the representations of trans* people in Spanish series takes on a new relevance. For all these reasons, this article will sketch the history of transness and visibility in Spain and explore in a close-watching how *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (Crespí et al./ TVE/Grupo Ganga 2001–present)—the series with a record intergenerational audience and running time in public broadcast television (Carcajosa Virino 2020, 215)—depicts transness. This analysis will reveal the complex and often ambivalent modes deployed to audiovisually articulate certain expressions of transness, vulnerability and alliance between minoritised groups in a liberatory light that intermittently orbits around the conventional victimisation of trans* people. It will do so by examining in a historical perspective the interplay between community organisation, the 'communitarian discourses' that reach legitimacy in the majoritarian society, legal regulation, social debate and mainstream visuality in the process of moulding which expressions of transness are acceptable in series nowadays and which still cause the commotion in the majoritised society.

By doing so, this chapter fills a void in scholarship: there is not much work done on LGBTQIA* representations in Spanish televisual fiction (Marcos Ramos, González de Garay and Arcila Calderón 2020, 308).[6] Academic publications on transness in Spanish cinema and other visual media are scarce, with the exception of Almodovar's cinema, a 'quirky' niche in Spain where any eccentricity is tolerated (Sánchez Ramírez 2016). Furthermore, as it will explained next, these publications focus on cultural products of the seventies and eighties (Mira 2012; Díaz Fernández 2013; Esteve 2013; Mérida Jiménez 2014, 2016; Vega 2019).[7] Missé touches on trans* people being problematically screened on *Big Brother* (2018, 67) and Tortajada, Caballero-Gálvez and Willem on the autorepresentation of trans* vloggers

6 Among them, see González de Garay 2009; Alfeo Álvarez and González de Garay 2010 and González de Garay and Alfeo Álvarez 2012.

7 Velasco Malagón's thesis (2017) does not deal with audiovisual representation, but has a helpful annex (Anexo 10) indexing films dealing with transness. Many works have been published lately about Ventura Pons's documentary on Ocaña's performances (1978). See, for example, Fernàndez 2004; Preciado 2011; Domènech and Lema-Hincapié (eds.) 2015, Rodrãguez-Solãs 2018; Thamassian 2019.

(2019). However, notwithstanding this peak in visibility, especially in (TV) series, to my knowledge, nothing has been published on this topic.

1. Trans*itions and Visibility

This peak in trans* visibility and trans* politics shows some parallels to that of 1977's first very political Gay Pride demonstration in Barcelona. In that decade, with the ideology of liberation that prevailed in the political transition to democracy (1975–1978), the discourse of "visibility, non-culpabilisation and identity" (Calvo Borobia 2001, 95) emerged among minoritised groups that fought in alliance against repression (Platero and Ortega Arjonilla 2016, 47).[8] Accordingly, as the scarce remaining visual documents of the time prove, demonstrations were headed by trans* people demanding legislative changes (Platero 2018, 00:06:52). This context was characterised by an extreme legal and social vulnerability, especially for those considered "a danger to morality" in virtue of the Ley de Peligrosidad y Rehabilitación Social [Law of Social Dangerousness and Social Rehabilitation] (Franco 1970, 12551), who could be prosecuted for "acts of homosexuality". The law was a continuation of the Ley de Vagos y Maleantes [Vagrancy Act] (Cantos Figuerola 1935, 1044–1053), established in 1935 during the Second Spanish Republic (1931–1936), a year before Franco's military coup d' État that led to the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939). The Republican law aimed to 'pre-criminally' internalise those considered to be social dangers—such as 'vagabonds, nomads and pimps'—to prevent them from committing future crimes.[9] Franco's regime reformed this law to target homosexuality explicitly (Franco 1954, 4862). Homosexuality included any expression of gender-sexual dissidence and therefore also comprised transness, which was called 'transvestism' back then (Garaizabal 1998, 51) and understood as "genuine homosexuality" (Sabater Tomás 1962, 197–202). 'Homosexuals' were imposed into internment in a work camp or agricultural colony, in isolation from other 'bums and thugs', exiled or submitted to the surveillance of delegates. The new legislation in 1970 established penalties ranging

8 The author of this chapter has translated all Spanish original quotes into English.

9 This type of law—standard in the European legal system of the time—was intended to fulfil a supposed protective function for society (Terrasa Mateu 2017, 368).

from economic fines to five years of internment in prisons or psychiatric centres.

After Franco's death in 1975, Spain was established as a constitutional monarchy through a democratising process known as the 'Transition'. The 1977 Amnesty Law decriminalised all political crimes committed between 18 July 1936 and 15 December 1976. However, it did not lead to amnesty, nor to the release of those persons prosecuted for such laws. In 1979, "acts of homosexuality" were removed from the law, but until 1983, 'homosexuals' could still be prosecuted for public scandal (Franco 1973, 24210). In the same year, sterilisation and gender reassignment therapy and surgery was decriminalised upon free and express consent in the case of transsexuality (Spanish Government 1983, 17910). Until then—and even afterwards because of the high costs of such treatments abroad, especially in Casablanca—many trans* people clandestinely automedicated with negative or fatal effects on their health (Guasch and Mas 2014, 5).

Yet, in the late seventies and early eighties, trans* people acquired an equally potent and ephemeral boom in visibility and recognition (Guasch and Mas 2014, 4–6; Mira 2012, position 9985). Mérida Jiménez speaks of a "golden trans age" (2014, 281) in Spain. Trans* people—often visually subverting gender binaries—were also highly visible in the streets, be it in traditional activism or within the underground niche and the hedonistic ludic-libertarian movement of the so-called *La Movida*, which showed special interest in non-normativity, particularly regarding sex and gender expression and/or identification, drugs and its manifestation in popular culture. Trans* people were also in demand for cabaret-like shows (Gracia 2006, 155) and erotic magazines for both a presumably heterosexual and non-heterosexual audience (Moix 1978 in Mérida Jiménez 2016, 118; Mira 2012, position 9977). Mainstream cinema was also devoted to representing transness, which turns Spain into a pioneer of the cinematic representation of transness (Mérida Jiménez 2016, 14).[10] Nonetheless, these films had melodramatic and sensationalist plots (Mira 2012, position 9995) and, as did other media of the time, used transness as a mere metaphor for the openness,

10 See, to this respect, Mérida Jiménez 2016, 10–11; Esteve 2013, 172–173; Mira 2012, position 10192–10282; Dentell 2011. Among other films, *Cambio de sexo* (Aranda 1977), *El transexual* (Jara 1977), *Pepe no me des romento* (Gutierrez Santos 1981). Vegas provides a detailed list and analysis of films depicting transness during the Spanish Transition and the early nineties (2019, 1–66).

progress and freedom that was supposed to come together with the political transition to democracy (ibid., position 9997).[11]

There is a gap of around 40 years between these two trans* times in Spain, yet the similarities are salient. Both movements in recent Spanish history are characterized by important surges in trans* activism to combat forms of legal and social discrimination. This included a significant rise in the recognition of trans* people in certain sectors of society as well as an increase of transphobia in others during the midst of enormous social change: the societal anxieties experienced during the Spanish transition to democracy and those due to the curtailment of freedoms caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Gayle Rubin argues that "disputes over sexual behaviour often become the vehicles for displacing social anxieties, and discharging their attendant emotional intensity. Consequently, sexuality should be treated with special respect in times of great social stress" (1984, 143). In this sense, it seems sound to ponder whether there are similarities in the way transness or a specific expression of transness was projected between and in both *momenta* of social stress. The next section provides some clues to this respect.

2. Gaypitalist Primacy and the Hoarding of (Certain) Visibility

Social stress decreased with the establishment of Spanish democracy that historiography has—not indisputably—situated in 1982. That year, the PSOE won the elections and its mandate (1982–1996) consolidated the principles that had guided the political culture of the Spanish Transition: democratisation and Europeanisation of Spain following a liberal conception of modernity (Moreno Nuño 2006, 357). According to Mouffe, liberalism naturalises the conception of politics built on the rhetoric of consensus that neutralises the intrinsic conflictuality of the political, the latter being framed as a serious threat to rational consensus (1994, 147). In the case of Spain, this rhetoric was emplotted around the latent risk of another Civil War if society would not leave aside radicalism and embrace serious European contained models of democracy (Delgado 2014, 60; Ruiz-Huerta Carbonell 2009, 190–213).

11 See Picornell 2010, 283; Pérez-Sánchez 2008; Paredes 2007, 56; Garlinger 2005, 33.

Simultaneously, trans* visibility declined (Mira 2012, position 10172). This happened concurrently with the gradually tamed appropriation of *La Movida* by mass culture, politics and media in the mid-eighties that catapulted the movement (Ugarte 2003, 361). In this decade, not only the AIDS and Hepatitis pandemics undermined the vitality of trans* people, especially of those in socio-economic vulnerability (Preciado 2011, 168; Chamouleau 2017, position 882). Additionally, the LGBT movement *avant la lettre* "introjected the metaconcept of consensus" (Chamouleau 2017, position 1272) and imported the "Anglosaxon gay model" (Guasch 1991, 79–82; Hocquenghem 1972): a liberal and masculinist homonormative discourse and a virile performance in the fight for social respectability. In this fight, trans* people, among other sexual dissidents that did not fit in the promoted pacification (Gomez Beltrán 2018, 436), were contemplated by the LGBT subculture *avant la lettre* a "strategic error" to pursuing the major goal of acceptance through assimilation (Guasch and Mas 2014, 2, 5). Moreover, in the eighties, social marginality—where trans* folks were often led by transphobia—was no longer the place to enunciate political participation (Chamouleau 2017, position 884). Therefore, individuals whose gender-sex expressions transgressed binarisms and/or were not able to perform a middle-class heteronormative habitus—be it out of conviction or lack of access to hormonal and/or surgical treatments, socio-economic status or cultural capital—were considered, in a majoritarian meritocractic liberal logic also adopted by "sexual minorities", a danger to social stability. For these reasons, they tended to be invisibilised or stigmatised in a transphobic drift of the homosexual subculture (Vélez-Pelligrini 2008, 417).

In 1981, transness entered the small screen with "El enigma de una belleza" in the show *Entre dos luces* (del Pozo et al./TVE 1981) and "Violeta, ni rosa, ni azul" in *El Dominical* (TVE 1984). These documentaries had a clear pedagogic function and were articulated through interviews with trans* people. The same year, "Transexuales, en busca de una identidad" in *Informe Semanal* (González et al./TVE 1985) examined social and juridical problems faced by trans* people due to the lack of legislation of the phenomenon (Vegas 2019, 55–58). In 1985, scripted series started to sporadically include some trans* feminine characters who were mostly the target of ridicule, justified by the genre of the comedy, as in *Platos rotos* (Serrano et al./TVE 1985). Transness also served to recreate real criminal cases such as "El secreto de un burgués" in *Página de sucesos* (Guiménez Rico et al/TVE. 1986). In the same line as the documentaries, a few realistic series used the

dramatic genre in order to instil social awareness about the rejection faced by trans* folks even within their families, such as in the episode "Corazones en vivo" in *Tristeza de amor* (Ripoli et al./TVE 1986; Vegas 2019, 58–60).

In the nineties, gay capitalism was then imposed as a dominant logic by which a specific middle-class consumerist gay visibility was regulated by big economic groups (Shangay 2016). This was also the case in television with the rise of commercial TV channels, which came together with a great expansion of television fiction (Carcajosa Virino 2020, 213; Medina 2018, 48). *Farmacia de guardia* (Mercero et al./Antena 3 1991–1995)—a long-running and leader of audience intergenerational family-comedy series—became the canon for subsequent televisual serial fiction (Palacio 2001, 181–182). Trans* people were mostly relegated to non-respectable late-night shows such as *Esta noche cruzamos el Misisipi* (Navarro et al./Telecinco 1995–1997) and *Crónicas Marcianas* (Sardá et al./Telecinco 1997–2005). These shows regularly invited Cristina Ortiz Rodríguez, known as 'La Veneno' and Carmen de Mairena, whose cheeky, low-class habitus contributed to project a grotesque, if not monstrous image of transness (Guasch and Mas 2014, 5–6). The only exception is the futile appearance of the character of Clara Eugenia precisely in *Farmacia de guardia* (Mercero et al., 16 January 1992). This character represented the aunt of the protagonist, who, self-confidently responds to bad taste jokes and deadnaming, but that ends up being treated benevolently.

Reality TV gained popularity with the turn of the century. In 2004, during the sixth edition of *Gran Hermano* [Big Brother] (Zambrano et al./Telecinco/Endemol), Nicky Villanueva's participation—the first trans* man in Spanish television—went viral. However, Nicky was portrayed as intolerant, aggressive and sexist, which according to Missé, was irresponsible in terms of the stereotyping that this projection could promote within the void of trans* masculine representation on TV (2018, 67).

3. Transness Meets TV Series: A World of Contradictions

After years of tireless trans* activism, a law on transsexuality was ratified by the Parliament in 2007 (Spanish Government 2007). Before the approval of this law, transsexuality had been dealt jurisprudentially and Spain's Supreme Court had relied on the position taken by the Supreme Court of Human

Rights to prevent the legal recognition of a trans* person if no reassignment surgery had been performed (Atienza Macías and Armazza 2014, 369; Belsué Guillorme 2012, 216). After the passing of the law, a diagnosis of gender dysphoria, a hormonal treatment, living according to one's felt sex for at least two years and Spanish nationality are still required for legal gender recognition (Platero 2020, 262).

Trans* serial televisuality related to this legislative change in two very different ways. On the one hand, the—equally internationally successful as crude and foul—comedy *Aquí no hay quien viva* (Caballero, Caballero et al./Antena 3 2007) continued with the conventional stigmatising and 'humorous' take on the treatment of transness. The unemployed Raquel is steadily deadnamed by her father, ridiculed by being shown shaving in front of the mirror and rejected by Emilio because his friends question his virility for dating her. Its sequel, *La que se avecina* (Caballero, Caballero et al./Telecinco 2007–present), seemed to be willing to distance itself from the former's transphobic tendency by explaining Alba's transsexuality as gender dysphoria, but resorts to too many transphobic and misogynous pranks on the character's 'non-functional' corporality. On the other hand, in the context of Spain's "notable quantitative and qualitative improvement in national TV series" since 2007 (Marcos Ramos et al. 2013, 175), in *El síndrome de Ulises* (Torrente et al./Antena 3 2007–2008), trans* actress Carla Antonelli performed Gloria, a secondary but regular character of a respectable bar owner that happened to be a trans* woman, presenting thereby a model for an integrative portrayal of transness. In 2009, the international campaign Stop Trans Pathologisation emerged from the initiative of—mainly Spanish—activist groups (Guasch and Mas 2014, 9), asking for self-determination on how to live and express transness beyond medical paternalising tutelage. Concurrently, the long-running family series *Hospital central* focused for the first time in TV series on the consequences of transphobic violence inflicted upon trans* youth and discussed in a pedagogic manner the legislation regulating access to hormones (Vila et al./Telecinco 2009).[12]

Since 2012, sixteen regional laws granting rights to trans* individuals have been passed in Spain with differing scopes, ranging from self-determination in legal gender recognition and anti-discrimination policies, to the very exceptional economic redistribution. The latter has been applied

12 In 2006, *Hospital Central* had already resorted to this narrative focusing on the possible pernicious consequences of taking hormones in trans* folks' health (Pizarro et al./Telecinco 2006).

mostly to foster employment, to compensate elder trans* people that suffered under the dictatorship and to the funding of surgeries (Platero 2020, 261). In spite of the clear legislative advances, Spanish scripted fiction is still split in two clear and contradictory tendencies. In 2014, the telecomedies *Bienvenidos al Lolita* articulated the cabaretist Rocky's transness around the non-fulfilled genital surgery, which makes her "99% a woman", as the voice-over states (González Molina et al./Antena 3 2014. Episode 1, 00:06:09). The camera insists on this point by showing her urinating standing up in a men's toilet, so that another character sees her, gossips on her genitalia (ibid., 00:55:36) and makes several transphobic insults. A year later, *Cuéntame cómo pasó* used the same comic trope to reveal to the protagonist Carlos that his very conservative, rural and wide-eyed friend El Rana has unknowingly spent the night with a trans* person in the Madrid of *La Movida* (Crespí et al./TVE/Grupo Ganga 2015. Episode 279, 01:00:20). Fatima's plot in the comedy *Anclados* also orbits around her genital surgery—of whether she is or not a "bell with clapper" (Montero et al./Telecinco 2015. Episode 8, 00:29:06)—and debates the virility of some cis men that are attracted to her. In this case, after a first date, in which she burps, thereby making the man have visions of her as a man, it is Fátima who rejects having sex again with the man because she just wanted a one-night stand. In all cases, the trans* character is depicted as frivolous but very self-assured and takes deadnaming, transphobic looks and comments with incredible doses of humour.

At the same time, *Vis a vis* (Colmenar et al./Antena 3 2015–2020) and *Merlí* (Cortés et al./TV3 2016) have projected a much more integrative image of transness with the characters of Luna, a peaceful and fully integrated woman in a female prison, and Quima, a guest trans* feminine character featuring a determined and not perfectly 'passing' secondary school philosophy teacher. Luna was a secondary character played by trans* actress Abril Zamora at the beginning of her transition, but the plot does not revolve about this facet of her personality. From 2018 on, when the non-cis woman Ángela Ponce won Miss Spain's beauty pageant, Spanish serial fiction witnessed a boom in trans* televisibility, inaugurated by the inclusion of Angie as a regular character in *Cuéntame cómo pasó,* the series that will be analysed in the next section.

4. Angie in *Cuéntame*: G-Rated Transness?

Cuéntame cómo pasó [Remember When] recounts, since 2001, the experiences of a traditional middle-class family—the Alcántara's—living in San Genaro, a working-class neighbourhood in Madrid, on Channel 1 of Spanish public television in prime time slot. The dramedy is narrated in analepsis by a mature character, Carlos—the youngest child of the family—, who articulates the family life with the social, cultural, economic and political changes occurring in Spain since the late sixties until the early nineties. These narrative strategies inevitably mark the not uncriticised memorial nostalgic tone of the show that is boosted by the inclusion of "emotionally resonant commodities" (Smith 2004, 369) and music. In the following, it will be examined which role has nostalgic emotionality and especially vulnerability in the regular projection of transness of this show, the only G-rated family series in free-access television since the boom of trans* televisibility.[13]

Angie makes her entrance in the first chapter of season 19 (2018) on a Sunday in January 1987 in Madrid. A subjective camera introduces her from the point of view of the character Abraham. He is on the top of a stair installing some reddish lights in a disco-pub that is about to be inaugurated. He sees her approaching the hairdresser across the street. Angie is thin and tall, her hair is short and dyed blonde and she wears long earrings, a short red skirt, black tights, red high-heeled boots and a beige leather jacket with fur collar in a perfectly combined eighties style. As she finds the hairdresser closed, she approaches the disco-pub and, with a generous smile, asks Abraham for the owner of the hairdresser's salon (Figure 1). The immediate effect of the interaction in Abraham's emotions is shown by a sudden change in the music towards the fairy tale romance genre and the reddish reflection of the light on a speechless Abraham's face. Abraham, certainly intimidated, accompanies Angie to the cafeteria, where Nieves is eating with friends. She sits down directly at the table with them and asserts "I'm the hairdresser you're looking for" (Crespí et al. 2018. Episode 330, 00:11:51). With the same kindly determination, Angie convinces Nieves to give her a test with her friends, despite it being a Sunday, because she needs an employment contract the next day to be able to sign a flat contract.

13 According to the Motion Picture Association's film rating system, G stands for General Audiences. This means that there is nothing in theme, language, nudity, sex, violence or other matters that the ratings board considers potentially offensive to children.

Fig. 1: Angie meets Abraham
(Crespí et al. 2018. Episode 330, 00:10:44)

As the test is successfully finishing, they hear a voice from the disco-pub singing a karaoke version of "No hago otra cosa que pensar en ti" [I do nothing but think of you]. Angie asks who this beautiful voice belongs to. Casandra replies that it is Abraham, and argues that everything in him is beautiful and that he is her age (ibid., 00:31:09). Everyone is quite surprised and touched, since Abraham—a young man with Asperger syndrome—is conveying his feelings through a song. As Angie and a group gather at the pub's door to contemplate his singing, he even dares to look at Angie, who, in a series of shot-reverse-shots, looks back at him obviously moved, even if she had answered defensively to Casandra's pairing remark before (ibid., 00:32:39). The subsequent episodes depict the progress of the flirtation between Abraham and Angie. They meet at the door of the cafeteria and exchange glances while a slow-motion shot and the leitmotiv fairy tale music emphasise Abraham's feelings (ibid. Episode 332, 00:06:00). Angie then heads self-assured to the hairdresser, while Abraham gawks at her smiling, who in his self-absorption is about to be hit by a car. Since then, Abraham often (awkwardly) stands in front of the hairdresser to stare at Angie through the window. Nieves complains, but Angie says she finds it very tender and looks him back with a friendly smile (ibid., 00:46:08). Nieves warns not to pay him attention, so that it does not raise false hopes, because, she and also the good-hearted protagonist Mercedes—the Alcantara's

mother—argue that it is difficult, if not impossible, "for him to find a normal girl" (ibid., 00:46:23). Olga, his mother and the owner of the bar, asks him to come in, so that he stops staring at Angie, but does not succeed. Back at the bar, she confesses to Casandra that she is afraid that Angie would hurt her son. Casandra, a compassionate and liberal character, skilled in the art of reading the cards, wants to reassure Olga by revealing that "Angie keeps a secret, but she has a large heart" (ibid., 00:46:58). Olga enquires about the secret, but Casandra has no more information, which makes her elaborate on her scepticism: "that's a lot of a woman. She will never pay attention to Abraham" (ibid., 00:46:59). To her surprise, she is wrong, as she will find them having a drink and dancing in the disco-pub. Abraham is extremely nervous, and feels vulnerable. He explains to Angie that he cannot dance because of the noise (ibid. Episode 333, 01:01:57), but she encourages him to keep up with her and praises how well he does, which makes Abraham begin to relax, even to the point of daring to sing with her the song "The Final Countdown" by Europe (ibid., 01:04:42). The song deals of the imminent travel to Venus of two people not fitting in on the Earth, which metaphorically anticipates their romance and the fact that they both share a diversity to the face of hetero-ableist-normativity.

The next morning, Olga loses her temper when she sees Abraham with a hickey and confronts Angie, who is sitting with Mercedes, Casandra and Ramón at the bar. Before leaving and obviously offended, Angie defends Abraham and criticises Olga's way of treating him and "making him different" (ibid. Episode 334, 00:11:39). Mercedes, Casandra and Ramón approve of their relationship, but Olga insists that she will leave him and break his heart. At the hairdresser's, Nieves gossips about what happened and praises Angie's reaction, but Herminia—the Alcantara's grandmother—admits that she cannot understand her attraction to Abraham, since, she thinks, he is not normal. Angie replicates self-confidently that he is very attractive and intelligent, and states that being like everyone is boring (ibid., 00:32:58). This empathy and even taste for difference alert a sharp-eyed viewer of Angie's close if not own experience to this respect. In this sense, with Angie's alluded possible difference in mind, the series seems to be willing to put in practice the academic Platero's pledge of approaching different kind of diversities through the same prism. According to this academic, the communal suffering experienced by various minoritised groups due to their differences should be positively used to form alliances among

them. These alliances could consequently contribute to deconstruct normative desire by incorporating—following the intersex activist Mauro Cabral—stigmatised bodies to desire communities (Platero 2018, 00:33:45; Missé 2018, 111). *Cuéntame* symbolises this alliance literally by romantically and sexually pairing two people with different diversities.

The conversation between Angie and Herminia stops because the demential, aged priest shows up in pyjamas and Angie needs to go to the church to find some appropriate clothing for him. On her way, she meets Abraham, who, stammering, excuses his mother and declares his love for her. This advance makes Angie hesitate, reversing the direction of the doubt of Abraham's non-normative desirability, when she argues that "maybe you wouldn't love me if you knew me better […] because many times people are not what they seem" (Crespí et al. 2018. Episode 334, 00:34:58–00:35:08). In the church, Angie has a moment of revelation, framed by the audiovisual semantics through the sudden zenithal illumination of Angie and the diegetic religious choral music, and she asks for a confession (ibid., 00:37:38; Figure 2). Through this scene, it is confirmed that Angie hides a secret, but its nature remains unresolved. The audience reflects on whether to align with Olga's scepticism towards Angie's intentions and doubts on the purpose of the confession: what is sinful, the act of hiding *per se* or what she is hiding? The disclosure takes place when—after several excuses—Angie ends up handing Nieves her ID because she needs to register her with the social security system. Nieves is confused and asks her whether the man on the ID is her twin brother or whether there has been a mistake.

The camera shows Angie behind a wrought iron folding screen—acting as a metaphor of the societal barrier that is about to be built for her through the 'reveal'—as she discloses her 'secret' accompanied by melancholic music that emphasises her feelings: "there was a mistake indeed, I was born a man, but I am now a woman" (ibid. Episode 335, 00:17:02–00:17:07) (Figure 3).

Fig. 2: Angie's revelation
(Crespí et al. 2018. Episode 334, 00:37:38)

Fig. 3: Angie's reveal
(Crespí et al. 2018. Episode 335, 00:16:46)

The next scene shows us Nieves heading to the cafeteria where she meets Casandra and tells her that "Angie is a man […] and is saving for surgery" (ibid., 00:19:46). Casandra then argues that she is a transvestite, using a widespread nomenclature for the phenomenon in the eighties, but Nieves corrects her in a pedagogic moment for the contemporary audience of the show

and explains that Angie is a transsexual: "apparently a transvestite wears women clothes, but is still a man, a transsexual does not" (ibid., 00:19:57–00:19:59). Casandra and Nieves accept Angie's transness unproblematically, but push Angie to tell Abraham to the point of menacing to telling him themselves if she does not do so. Thereby, the show fosters the stereotype of the trans* as the 'evil deceiver' in visual media (Serano 2007, 12; Steinbock 2019, 5) through the trope of the confession that had been anticipated in the last episode. Faced with this choice, Angie decides to do it herself, even though she considers it is none of their business (Crespí et al 2018. Episode 335, 00:42:07).

Angie and Abraham have the conversation with the same metaphorical folding screen between them. Abraham asks at one side of the screen whether it is something bad and she replies at the other side that it is just 'different', referring to the argument of their bonding differences presented above. Abraham seems to resonate with this argument as he answers, "different, as I am" (ibid., 00:44:14). Angie says that she is also different and adds: "I am nearly a woman, I miss just the 'nearly'. I am saving to have the surgery. […] Sometimes nature makes a mistake and we come to the world in a body that does not corresponds to us" (ibid., 00:44:15–00:45:22). Abraham gets angry, screams that he is not a faggot and leaves the hairdresser's salon, which implies that he categorises her as a man because of her genitalia. He therefore stigmatises her—up until now—desirable body and excludes it from desire communities. Although Angie refers to the problematic victimising and apolitised discourse of the 'wrong body' that reifies the genital binary epistemology sustaining the gender/sex regime (Missé 2018, 11), she keeps her composure, replicates agently that she is not a faggot either and joins the group of neighbours that are leaving to a popular party.

Abraham disappears and Olga finds him getting drunk in the disco-pub. When Angie and the rest of the group enters the disco-pub, Abraham goes sing a song of lovesickness in an *in crescendo* desperate voice until Olga insults and attacks Angie, while everyone else tries to stop her (Crespí et al. 2018. Episode 335, 01:15:36). The day after, Olga confronts her again in the street and blames her for playing with her son. This makes Angie realise that Abraham has not told Olga the reason of their separation. Then Abraham approaches them and tells Olga himself that "Angie is a woman, but she was born in the wrong body" (ibid. Episode 336, 01:11:38), which is an indirect rectification of the reason why he left her, not being a homosexual.

Angie looks at him recognising his indirect apology and proudly adds that she is a transsexual. Olga derogatorily calls her "hermaphrodite" and tells her to stay away from her son. Abraham refuses to go with Olga and defends Angie in public stating again that she is not a man (ibid., 01:12:02). However, he is still struggling and goes alone crying.

Some days later, people start gossiping and Angie leaves the hairdressers salon offended by the commentaries of some clients (ibid. Episode 337, 00:18:45). The comments are not shown, but only, for the first time in the story of serial televisuality of transness in Spain, her vulnerable but agentic reaction to them. As she tells Nieves, she is leaving because "I am nobody's show monkey" (ibid. Episode 337, 00:18:45). In the meanwhile, Ramón—Abraham's aged boss in the mechanical garage, known for his very fascist past until he met Casandra—is having a conversation with Abraham about his lovesickness. Surprisingly, when Ramón hears that they have not had sex yet, he tells Abraham that he once ended up in bed with a woman that turned out "to come with a surprise" (ibid., 00:19:17). He states that he could have left, but he did not and recommends Abraham to listen to his inner voice (ibid., 00:20:20). Ramón confirms some heterosexual cis men's attraction and sexual relationships with trans* women that Spanish series had being pointing to. However, in this case, Ramón does not hide it nor puts into question his or Abraham's sexual orientation in this incorporation of non-genitally-operated trans* people in desire communities.

Despite his mother's threat of breaking off her relationship with him if he comes back with "this girl, boy or whatever it is" (ibid., 00:23:18), Abraham invites Angie on a romantic date and they end up at the garage, where he shows her a car he has beautifully tuned up for her. They then enter the car and, as they get closer, Abraham gets very nervous and is not able to finish what he wanted to say. Angie asks whether he is sure and they start kissing, while the scene closes with a high angle shot and a circular iris out focusing on the kiss, typical of classical romantic movies (ibid., 00:42:07). The sexual act—following the convention of prude Hollywood classical cinema, as alluded to through the aforementioned technique—is not depicted, but it is implied with a comic note in the next scene. Ramón enters the garage the next morning and catches them half-dressed in the car, while a candid music anticipates his reaction. He only asks whether everything is ok and, to Abraham's positive answer, he leaves (ibid., 00:42:38–00:43:27; Figure 4).

Fig. 4: Abraham's positive answer
(Crespí et. al. 2018. Episode 337, 00:43:11)

This, together with Angie's accomplice look, confirms to the audience of the satisfactory outcome of including Angie and also Abraham in desire communities despite their respective diversities. Abraham then enters the kitchen of the bar to help his mother out because, he argues in an unfiltered manner: "Angie has told me that I cannot leave you alone" (ibid., 01:02:43). He further informs his mother that he expects her to be nice to Angie and announces to a perplexed Olga that he plans to spend every night at her place. The season does not represent any further act of gossiping nor bullying of the couple. Even the grumpy Olga accepts their relationship and starts recognising Angie as a good match for her son (ibid. Episode 342, 01:04:16), but not that Angie is a woman, as she steadily repeats throughout the show.

After the resolution of the romantic arc and the stabilisation of their relationship, Abraham and Angie's plots lose protagonism, but the show assures the audience that they are a normal harmonic functioning couple to the point that Angie's transness stops being central. Nevertheless, the series comes back several times to the (unnecessary) topic of Angie's future genital surgery. Once it is Abraham, countering his mother by saying that Angie is a woman "in their minds and hearts" and that they are saving, anyway, for her expensive "sex-change surgery" (ibid. Episode 340, 00:25:45). Angie also jokes at the hairdresser's with Antonio—the sexist protagonist of the

series and father of the Alcantara's—and says she would use the money of the lottery, first, for renovating the salon she has taken over, and then "to get the surgery" (ibid. Episode 359, 00:08:40). On the one hand, this insistence in the "genital epistemology" of transsexuality (Steinbock 2019, 5) reifies the medical-based discourse on transsexuality that discursively supports—or according to some transgender activists, creates (Missé 2018)—the profound need of trans* people of remodelling their bodies.[14] On the other hand, surgery is not articulated as a priority neither for Abraham, who wants to marry her and does not understand why he cannot, nor for Angie, who would prioritise the money for boosting her business. It could be therefore stated that this couple is not a nuisance to the system in their compliance with meritocratic and classist neoliberalism and middle-class-habitus heteronormativity, despite of their respective diversities in relation to majoritarian society: Asperger syndrome and transness. Angie is therefore "a self-made heroic trans* person", as the activist Galofre would put it (Missé 2018, 103). In this sense, no one, not even the most traditional characters, except for Olga, seems to doubt the couple's legitimacy or Angie's womanhood, at least until the middle of season 20 when, years later, in a diegetic 1991, Benja enters the show.

This character is introduced in the show as Angie's brother through a discussion they are having about money, which makes Abraham approach them to check on her. Benja calls him "retarded" and reveals that "Ángel"—as he stubbornly calls Angie—paid for her hormonal treatment "at the West Park", a clear allusion to a red-light district for trans* people (Crespí et al. 2019. Episode 361, 00:51:49). Angie loses her middle-class habitus and gives him a head butt in the nose that makes him finally leave. Benja is then the protagonist of the only violent transphobic attack of the series, destroying Angie's hairdressing salon and writing "faggot" on the window. Unexpectedly, he manages to get a job at Olga's and manipulatively meddles in Angie's life to the point of moving in together. Angie is divided. On the one hand, she feels indebted to Benja for having left him, on the other, thinks she deserves her new life because she has worked hard to "get out of the pit" (ibid., 00:15:00). However, Abraham cannot handle Benja deadnaming her, loses his nerves and even attacks him (ibid. Episode 362, 00:48:00). Progressively, the determined and self-assured Angie starts being represented as insecure, dependent on Benja and continuously anguished.

14 See, to this respect, the 'transsexual paradigm' in the introduction of this book and also Baumgartinger 2017 and Mas Grau 2015.

She is depicted as pale, with a constrained body presence (Figure 5). Her usually impeccable make-up, eyebrows and hairstyle contrast with the less groomed look of Angie projected this season (Figure 6).

Fig. 5: Angie's reaction to her first encounter with Benja
(Crespí et al. 2019. Episode 359, 00:52:10)

Fig. 6. Angie's look
(Crespí et al. 2019. Episode 362, 00:15:43)

In Episode 366, Herminia sees Benja forcing Angie to kiss him (ibid., 00:23:37) and offers her to talk. She confesses that he is not her brother, but an abusive ex and that she needs to leave the neighbourhood, manipulated by him, so that Abraham does not find out. The conversation's editing

occludes the exact reason of her departure and which information should not reach Abraham, but the audience senses that it could have something to do with the reference to prostitution as cited above. The trope of the confession is visualised through a playful and alternative recourse to the conventional mirror scene depicting transness (Figure 7).

The mirror is not used for showing her bodily discomfort, nor animates the audience's scopophilia by visually showing her genitals in a more or less dramatic "spectacle of suffering" (Chouliaraki 2006, 8; also Seid 2012, 176–177). Angie's hunched bodily reflection replicates her inner state of culpability for hiding another secret and the despair and shame for being psychologically dependent on Benja. Herminia recognises that she does not understand her very well but animates her to stay and tell the truth (Crespí et al. 2019. Episode 366, 00:31:27).

Fig. 7: Angie's mirror scene
(Crespí et al. 2019. Episode 364, 00:24:33)

The next episode depicts Angie's departure with Benja in a car in the middle of the night—according to the voice-over, "a survivor about to embark on a journey to the place she has been fleeing all her life" (ibid. Episode 367, 00:00:53)—to the sound of the first phrases of "Entre dos tierras" [Between Two Earths] by Héroes del Silencio. With this song, the series emphasises the complexity of the dilemma, that is to say, her need to "delete a lot of traces" if she thinks of "backing out" and staying. Furthermore, the verse "déjame, que yo no tengo la culpa de verte caer" [leave me, it is not my fault to see you fall] problematises the question of who is to blame. The song plays with the narrative instances and the audience does not know to whom

this verse could be applied. This episode also focuses on Abraham's deep sadness and preoccupation for Angie (ibid., 00:06:41) and surprises with a sudden encounter between Angie and Inés in a cafeteria. There, Angie, fully scared and despaired, manages to convey to Inés—the eldest daughter of the Alcantara's—the feeling that she needs help and Inés, ignoring Angie's remark that she cannot help her, notes her phone number and tells Angie to call her in front of the controlling Benja (ibid., 00:35:17–00:36:39). Despite the sorority entailed in this and in Herminia's act of caring, which according to Castillo Mateu "breaks the cycle of representing revictimized women [… to] evoke female emancipation from a sustained collective project" (2019, 171), the process of victimisation of Angie in this season is clear.

However, in contrast to other victimising narratives on transness following the transsexual paradigm, Angie is not shown suffering because she has a discomfort with her body, nor due to a lack of social acceptance in the present. She is depicted, on the one hand, as a victim of Benja, who psychologically manipulates her in the name of love, but blackmails her by threatening to reveal her past. This constellation makes her lie and makes Angie re-orbit around the topos of the trans* trickster. She cannot stand the idea of Abraham knowing, and rather sacrifices their happiness together in order to avoid the reveal. Therefore, it could be stated that Angie is depicted, on the other hand, as a victim of her past. The real 'reveal' she is trying to avoid is neither that she is trans*, nor that she has not gone through genital surgery. The forced disclosure she is trying to avoid is to what means she had to resort in order to be able to pay for her hormonal transition. This is referred to as to "the hole she has dug herself out of" and could have to do with prostitution. This further societal stigma would exceed the moral borders of the meritocratic logic within heteronormativity that contributed to project Angie as a 'good trans* person' in the neighbourhood and to the other side of the small screen. Angie's desperate flight could be interpreted as her introjection of this idea. Similarly, the stagnation of the tragic narrative arc in the veiling of the nature of this 'reveal', during and beyond the whole season, and the consequent stretching out of the suffering for all parties implied in the plot, seem to metaphorically represent and eventually even criticise the societal and televisual invisibilisation of transness and social marginality that took place during the eighties and nineties.

In the last episode, Olga informs Abraham that she has gotten a letter from Angie in which states that "she is in Malaga and has got rid of Benja" (Crespí et al. 2019. Episode 369, 01:06:16). To the audience's surprise, she offers to go with Abraham to look for Angie since "she is the woman of your life" (ibid., 01:06:19). Olga thus finally joins the list of conservative characters who—surprisingly for their traditional understanding of gender and the diegetic time—recognise Angie as a woman and show empathy for her difficult situation. Taking into consideration the burdens that trans* people still face nowadays, Angie's full acceptance in San Genaro in the late eighties and early nineties confirms Smith's analysis of *Cuéntame*'s use of nostalgia as a vector to promote an active use of the past as an "elusive education for compassionate citizenship" (2004, 374) in a liberatory manner for the present.[15] Moreover, Angie's victimisation is rehabilitated by showing her capable of interrupting the cycle of vulnerability in an agent manner. In this sense, the series applies the academic revaluation of vulnerability as a never-ending state and as the fundamental source of empowerment among minoritised people to the depiction of Angie's transness (Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay 2016). With this realistic and complex depiction of Angie and Abraham's vulnerabilities, *Cuéntame* breaks with the linear teleological discourse of transitioning as 'a one-way ticket' to happiness that Spanish trans* activists and academics have criticised about mainstream representations of transness in US series (Missé 2018, 102). This way, in this culturally important dramedy, the meritocratic projection of the self-made hardworking heteronormative Angie of season 19 gets nuanced in season 20. This happens thanks to the series' fine treatment of vulnerability, its very subtle and still unresolved incorporation of (certain) intersectionality through the case of class and/or social marginality, as well as its sound depiction of the alliance among minoritised groups and the process of including them into desire communities (Platero 2018, 00:33:45; Missé 2018, 111).

Despite Angie orbiting around some problematic tropes in the visual representation of transness, this nuanced character has been very well received by the wide intergenerational audience of this G-rated series. Consequently, it could be concluded that this trans* character represents a model for a 'G-rated transness' on Spain's broadcast television that, therefore, does not cause a societal commotion.

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15 Smith draws on Nussbaum 2001. See also Maganzani 2019, 164 and Pickering and Keightley 2014, 84.

5. Whither Transness? Towards a New Scene of Enunciation

Since transness met series by the end of the first decade of the 21st century, trans* characters have been portrayed around two contradictory poles. The first is a 'humorous' take on the treatment of transness focusing on masculine performative or bodily 'traces' in trans* feminine characters that are frivolous and self-assured and do not seem to suffer under steady micro and macro-transphobia. The second pole ranges from quite integrative and non-disturbing representations of 'respectful' secondary or guest characters to some benevolent treatments that still revolve around a conventional victimisation in the depiction of trans* people, for example being passively treated at a hospital due to transphobic violence. Angie's nuanced characterisation intermittently orbits around the victimisation of this second pole but overcomes it. She is shown vulnerable, but in a liberatory light. She suffers under transphobia and at the same time handles herself agently and in alliance with other minoritised groups against discrimination. However, as this historical journey through transness in Spanish TV series has proved, none of these projections have truly shaken Spanish society. Hence, whither transness? Since Angie in *Cuéntame cómo pasó* and with the exception of the role of the trans* actress Lara Martorell in the police drama soap-opera *Servir y proteger* (Torrejón et al./TVE 2019–present. Episodes 532–714)—whose politically correct depiction as a competent middle-class white heterosexual inspector has gone pretty unnoticed—, the boom of transness's serial televisuality has not taken place on free-access television. Concurrently with the 'streaming wars' for subscribers among platforms such as Netflix, HBO Spain and Movistar, most series, and therefore those representing trans* people, have gone online upon payment (Green 2019).

Transness entered the world of streaming in 2018 with *Las chicas del cable*/*Cable Girls* (Campos et al./Netflix/Bambú 2017–2020), the first Spanish production for Netflix. Despite being the first Spanish series with a recurring trans* masculine character, Óscar, it has not received much attention. Since 2019, the projection of transness has passed mostly into the hands of *los Javis*, Javier Calvo and Javier Ambrosi, a gay and trans* ally couple behind the cameras. They have led what could be called 'community television' and have fostered a diversification in the depiction of trans* people and their stories. *Paquita salas* (Calvo, Ambrosi et al. Flooxer/Netflix 2016–2019) included trans* actress Laura Corbacho in the third season to discuss cis performers playing trans* roles. In *Terror y feria* (de Rosa et

al./Flooxer 2019), the spirit of a trans* person, also played by Corbacho, appears to avenge her death, inviting thereby to reflect on how little the media speaks of transphobic crimes. In 2020, *La casa de papel/Money Heist* (Pina et al. Antena 3/Netflix 2020) was criticised for hiring a cis actress to play the role of the trans* woman Manila. However, Manila's scarce plot development does not allow a proper analysis of the series' projection of transness.

The show that represents a true shift in the projection of transness is the biopic of the real trans* person Cristina Ortiz Rodríguez in *La Veneno* by Calvo and Ambrosi (2020). Aired between 29 March and—due to the COVID-19 pandemic-related delay in post-production—25 October on Atresplayer Premium, *La Veneno*'s success has brought transness played exclusively by trans* actresses both ephemerally and potently back to free-access television and therefore to a larger sector of society.[16] So did the communitarian discourses once channelled by *los Javis* for 'community television' reach majoritarian society, causing in the way a truly societal commotion. It is not by chance that the airing of the first two episodes in March 2020 took place alongside with the first lockdown due to the pandemic, the heated debate on the Trans State Law and the subsequent internal crisis of the coalition government.

This is precisely because *La Veneno* brings to the fore something of what Angie in *Cuéntame* was trying to hide: an expression of rural, low-class, cheeky, foul-mouthed habitus with a surgically-achieved hyper-feminine embodiment and an unapologetically non-passing transness that comes from the world of prostitution and applies its aesthetics to late night TV shows in the nineties. These, as the dramedy soundly meta-reflects, commodified her and projected a grotesque depiction of transness. As did her life, the biopic ends tragically: La Veneno spent several years in a men's jail for corruption and died under still unclear circumstances after a bump on the skull in 2016. The show does not edulcorate her reality, but it does not stigmatise, victimise, pathologise or paternalise her tragic life either. It manages to instil her with dignity through empathy and respectful humour, recovers her for the history of the trans* collective and uneasily points the finger to the transphobic society and the LGBT movement *avant la lettre*.

16 Only two episodes were aired on 25 October 2020, so that audiences would continue watching the series upon subscription after its sale to HBO Spain. The episodes were the most watched show of the day (Eldiario.es, 26 October 2020).

The series marks them as responsible of the stigmatisation and media invisibilisation that painted the tragic arc of Cristina Ortiz's life and, more generally, of the expression of transness with other intersections of discrimination that she embodied. This way, *La Veneno*'s warm reception within the width of the Spanish trans* community and beyond signals that it is neither about which subjects or topics should be depicted, nor about the genre and its conventions to articulate them. It is rather high time to "invent a new scene of enunciation" (Rancière in Preciado 2019, 86) that makes all trans* lives equally matter on and beyond the screen, so that when the next great social stress arrives, there is no need for any further trans* time for displacing social anxieties. This is why televisual transness in series needs to be further studied, especially its projections in streaming platforms given its contemporary flourishing, but more importantly, by which audiovisual means this new scene of enunciation is and will be articulated.

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Streaming Trans* in the Netherlands—The Narrative Function and Development of Trans* Masculine Characters in *Anne+* and *Queer Amsterdam*

Laura Copier

Abstract

This essay takes up the rather one-sided form that trans* representation has in Dutch media. The limited research on this topic points to the relative dominance of trans* women in representation. Furthermore, there is a prevalence of trans* representation in non-fiction genres such as documentary, reality television and vlogging. I will shift focus to two cases that feature trans* men, whose characters and storylines are fictional, rather than reality-based (even though both examples certainly use devices and conventions borrowed from the reality television format). Crucially, both series were produced and distributed via a streaming media platform, rather than traditional broadcasting. The first case study is the Dutch web/television series *Anne+* (2018–2020) and the second case is the online web series *Queer Amsterdam* (2017). These series do not unequivocally present 'good' representations of trans* masculinity. Despite their attempts to break with a number of clichéd conventions of the transition narrative, they also inevitably seem to confirm the limits of the representation of a trans* character. As such, they are apt examples of how Dutch LGBTQ identity politics is expressed in fictional narratives. Both display the Dutch 'act normal' motto, its insistence on the unproblematic nature of homosexuality and the, perhaps, naïve belief that with increased visibility comes social acceptance.

In January 2020, the well-known Dutch make-up artist and beauty vlogger Nikkie de Jager, better known as NikkieTutorials, posted a video on her YouTube channel entitled "I'm coming out" (NikkieTutorials 2020). In this video, which has since been viewed over 35 million times, she reveals that

she is transgender. In the 17-minute video, Nikkie addresses her viewers directly and the static camera position gives it the aesthetic not only of a confession, but also of a formal declaration. The reason for Nikkie's coming out as transgender was the fact that she was blackmailed by a person who threatened to make her gender assigned at birth public. Towards the end of the video, Nikkie states that she never intended to publicly come out as transgender, because the main reason for making beauty vlogs is the "power of make-up, the power of transforming myself" (NikkieTutorials 2020, 00:12:34). The forced admission of this "secret", as she strongly reiterates multiple times over the course of the video, does not take away from her real self which was there from the first moment she started making beauty vlogs.

NikkieTutorials's forced confession follows the familiar trope of the reveal of the secret of being trans*.[1] The moment of the great reveal can be found in films and reality television shows from as early as the 1980s, for instance, in the 1982 Hollywood film *Tootsie*.[2] Within the Dutch television context, the most well-known example of the reveal of a trans* woman's identity occurred in 2001 in the Dutch version of the reality television series *Big Brother*, when contestant Kelly van der Veer, through a number of one-on-one confessionals with her fellow-contestants, came out as transsexual.[3]

There is approximately a 20-year gap between Kelly and Nikkie's disclosures, yet the similarities between the two are salient: both women already enjoyed immense popularity before coming out and they both adopted a very particular convention: the confessional, an essential narrative element of reality television. Through it, contestants (or characters) reflect on their behavior. Nikkie's use of the confessional disclosure trope in her vlog has especially enabled her to take control of her narrative: moving from the powerless and passive victim of blackmail, to the active agent of telling the truth and no longer being ashamed or afraid.

The reason I am invoking these two examples of Nikkie (and, to a lesser extent, Kelly), is because they exemplify the rather one-sided form that

1 On the concept of the reveal, see Seid 2014.

2 For a sustained problematisation of the reveal (or forced disclosure) in popular cinema of the 1990–2000s, see Steinbock 2019, 5.

3 The format of *Big Brother* was developed by the Dutch production company Endemol. Its first season aired on Dutch commercial television in 1999. The format was bought and successfully developed in over 54 different countries.

trans* representation takes in Dutch media. It points to the relative dominance of trans* women in representation, as Koch-Rein, Haschemi Yekani and Verlinden point out, "trans visibility remains often deeply and conflictingly gendered in a binary. This binary has long been characterised by a disproportionate, sensationalised visibility of (certain kinds of) trans femininities and a comparative lack of media attention to trans masculinities" (Koch-Rein et al. 2020, 4).

Furthermore, there is a prevalence of trans* representation in non-fiction genres such as documentary, reality television and vlogging. In this essay, I will shift focus to two cases that feature trans* men, whose characters and storylines are fictional, rather than reality-based (even though both examples certainly use devices and conventions borrowed from the reality television format). Crucially, both series were produced and distributed via a streaming media platform, rather than traditional broadcasting.

The first case study is the Dutch web/television series *Anne+* (Bisscheroux et al./BNNVARA 2018–2020), and the second case is the online web series *Queer Amsterdam* (Peters et al./BNNVARA 2017). As I will argue, both cases do not unequivocally present 'good' representations of trans* masculinity. Despite their attempts to break with a number of clichéd conventions of the transition narrative, they also inevitably seem to confirm the limits of the representation of a trans* character. What interests me is in what ways streaming platforms are not only enabling different kinds of trans* representation, but more importantly, how the stories they tell make room for trans* characters and to what extent these shows develop and advance different representations of trans* masculinity in a Dutch context.

1. Scripts of Trans* Representation in Dutch Media

The Netherlands is regarded as one of the most liberal countries in the world and its LGBTI rights are generally valued as progressive and aimed at 'mainstreaming': "the consideration of sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) issues in all aspects of policy, at all levels, as well as actively promoting greater social acceptance of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons" (Government of the Netherlands 2018, 3). The decades-long fight for transgender rights culminated in the passing of the *Wet*

erkenning transgenderpersonen [Transgender Persons Act] in the Dutch parliament in 2014. This law states that:

> all a person needs in order to change their registered gender is a declaration by an expert that they are mentally capable and that their desire to make the gender transition is permanent. With this document, the transgender person can require a registrar to change the recorded gender on their birth certificate (to either male or female). They can also change their forenames(s) to reflect their gender identity (ibid.).[4]

With the legal protection of trans* people in place, the Dutch special interest organisation Transgender Network Netherlands (TNN) aims to increase visibility and representation of trans* people with the publication of the monitor of the representation of transgender people, which gives an overview of all the reporting on trans* issues in Dutch broadcast media.[5]

In order to assess what types of trans* representations are circulating in Dutch media, a short overview of the way trans* issues have been represented in the last two decades is necessary. Surprisingly, the amount of scholarly work done on LGBTQ—let alone trans*—representation in the Dutch media is nearly non-existent at this point.[6] Given the fact that the Netherlands (whether deservedly or not) still has a reputation as a country for being a liberal leader in issues regarding sexuality, one would expect this supposed tolerance to be researched and analysed in scholarly and popular writing. Perhaps this absence of a sustained discourse has something to do with the typical Dutch adage, '*doe normaal*' [act normal]. The Dutch have a strong sense of what accepted behavior is and deeming someone 'not normal' is a way of policing these socio-cultural boundaries. For LGBTQ people specifically, it means they are accepted as long as they do not flaunt their behavior or overall presence. This results in relegating LGBTQ identity, including (homo)sexuality and all its assorted expressions, to the private sphere, thereby effectively rendering it invisible. As Gert Hekma and Jan Willem Duyvendak argue, "while the Netherlands may seem exemplary in

4 For more facts and figures regarding public attitudes towards sexual and gender diversity in the Netherlands, see Government of the Netherlands 2018.

5 The monitor is only available in Dutch. For a PDF of the monitor, see Transgender Netwerk Nederland 2018.

6 For a brief historical overview of the representation of homosexuality in Dutch television and radio, see Andere Tijden, a Dutch website and television program devoted to contemporary Dutch history (in Dutch). For an overview of the history of transgender people in the Netherlands, see Bakker 2018.

its acceptance of homosexuality, this applies more to its laws than to daily life" (2012, 3). Acceptance means self-chosen invisibility, which in turn seems to at least partially explain the dearth of academic work done on media representation.

The most systematic study of transgender media representation in the Netherlands can be found in the article by Mariecke van den Berg and Mir Marinus, published in a special issue devoted to new approaches, methods and concepts in trans* studies in *Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies* in 2017. Van den Berg and Marinus investigate the growing visibility of trans* people in Dutch media over a 25-year period: from 1991 until 2016. Their main focus is on traditional written media, exemplified by a cross-section of Dutch newspapers, but they also analyse two television programs, both of which fall in the category of unscripted documentary/reality television. On the basis of these media, they "explor[e] the terminology and rhetoric techniques by which 'the transgender' has become a distinguishable public persona" (Van den Berg and Marinus 2017, 380).

Crucially, Van den Berg and Marinus distinguish between different types of patterns in the representation of trans* people, "scripts" which "underlie the construction of 'the transgender' as a public figure: a collection of possible roles, story lines, plots, supporting acts, protagonists, and antagonists" (ibid., 282). Based on their research, they formulate six dominant scripts: "the successful trans", "the pioneer", "the pawn", "the victim", "the fringe figure" and "the fraud" (ibid., 386). The "successful trans" script refers to the "accomplishment of self-development, the pursuit of happiness, and an emphasis on finding your 'authentic' self" (ibid., 386). Van den Berg and Marinus posit that this script is the most 'iconic' of the six scripts. This may have to do with the script's applicability: it can be found in representations of famous trans* people (they mention Kelly van der Veer as an example of this script) and non-famous trans* people alike.

For my argument, it is important to point out that even though Van den Berg and Marinus exclusively focus on non-fictional representations of trans* personas, the 'successful script' is particularly insightful when applied to fictional representations of trans*. Of all the scripts distinguished, this one has the clearest narrative structure: it is the narrative of conversion, change, and transition. It hinges on a recurring set of dichotomies that are being played out and eventually become successfully resolved along the way: before versus after, unhappy versus happy, mind versus body, masculine

versus feminine, wrong versus right. Dichotomies such as these are conducive to the advancement of narrative development, that is, they create obstacles and boundaries that the trans* character must overcome in order to succeed. As such, this script resembles the canonical Western way of storytelling, exemplified by Hollywood cinema. Television, however, and specifically recent forms of television, has opened up possibilities for LGBTQ representation that confirm, yet also transcend the restricted scripts hitherto available.

2. Transitional Television

Among television scholars, there is wide-spread consensus that television in the age of digital technology has radically changed the ways in which television is produced, distributed, consumed and evaluated. Internet-distributed, streaming or platform television is no longer bound to the rigidity of analogue, one-to-many, network-based television of the classic era (1946–2000). The far-reaching consequences of this systemic change, both in technology as well as content and aesthetics are now increasingly becoming the focus point of discourses within television studies. As Michael N. Goddard and Christopher Hogg argue in the introduction to their dossier on the latest developments and trends in digital television, new technology fundamentally alters existing structures of content production and consumption:

> these new modes of production, distribution and consumption, defined as they are according to the active desires of niche users rather than the controlled transmission model of the network, schedule and advertising, might themselves open new avenues for a trans or queer aesthetic, not only in the greater proliferation of non-heteronormative characters, narratives and viewer experiences but also as a queering of television itself into a kind of divergent heterotopia, radically different from preceding corporate or national spaces of televisual transmission (Goddard and Hogg 2018, 471).[7]

The crucial argument Goddard and Hogg advance is that technological transformations and content, aesthetic and representational levels, should not be studied as separate realms. Rather, form and content are intricately

7 The dossier, published in two parts in *Critical Studies in Television*, records the main outcomes of the Trans TV conference, which took place at the University of Westminster in 2017.

connected and should thus be studied in relation to one another. As my two case studies will show, the advent of digitally-distributed television in the Netherlands has managed to open up space for trans* narratives and representations within the configuration of the Dutch media landscape.[8]

3. Trans* Ambiguity in *Anne+*

I will begin my analysis with two episodes of the Dutch web/television series *Anne+* (Bisscheroux et al. 2018–2020).[9] The project of *Anne+* originated within a group of young female media professionals, writer Maud Wiemeijer, director Valerie Bisscheroux and producers Laura Bouwmeester and Renee Janssen, who felt that the lack of lesbian role models in media needed to be addressed. On the series' website, they state that there is an "unmistakable need" for a series in which homosexuality is not treated as a problem, but simply as a given. Moreover, they state, "homosexuality is not necessarily a recipe for tribulations" (Anne+). The series aims to make up for the lack of representations the creators themselves experienced when they were growing up. In order to gather funding for the project, they established the Anne+ Foundation, which enabled them to shoot the first two episodes. The larger objective of the foundation is to "contribute to the widening of media representation of sexual diversity, gender identity and the acceptance of themes worldwide" (Anne+).[10]

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8 The peculiar way the Dutch media are organised needs some clarification. As Piet Bakker and Peter Vasterman argue, the "Dutch media landscape the broadcast media are hard to explain to foreigners. The unique system was created around 1925. Radio was broadcast by different organisations (socialist, Catholic, Protestant, liberal) that rented radio time. This system survived World War II and was also introduced for television around 1955. It is not government broadcasting. Organisations are independent, the government cannot interfere with programming. Throughout the years, there have been commercial initiatives but until 1989 without any success, except for commercial pirate stations in the 60s" (2007, 148).

9 Season one has been available with English and seven other language subtitles on YouTube since January 2020, see Anne+. For Season two, see Bisscheroux et al. 2020.

10 The series was eventually picked up and produced by Millstreet Films, which is known for producing a number of highly popular Dutch films and television series. Millstreet's mission statement positions the company as a producer of female-centered stories, which is expressed in stories that focus on strong, female lead characters. It also aspires to give female writers a podium for their work. See Anne+.

The way the project and the team behind *Anne+* present their unambiguous expression of mission and purpose for the series highlights a number of characteristics of how internet-distributed television is written, produced, distributed and consumed. It exemplifies the 'for-us-by-us' mentality, where writers, directors and producers create content based on their own experiences of representation, or in this case, the lack of thereof.[11] Rather than waiting to be invited to participate, the creators took the initiative by crowdfunding their project, which led to them being noticed by more mainstream producers and distributors. The independent financing and producing of the first two episodes enabled *Anne+* to gauge their LGBTQ target audience and get them to back the project through crowdfunding, thus guaranteeing goodwill for the project, regardless of whether it would ever be accomplished. After completing the series, its premiere took place at the *Nederlands Film Festival* [Dutch national film festival], a festive occasion which helped to promote it, but more importantly, a festive black-tie event that recognises and rewards its sponsors and funders. Even though the series was broadcast on traditional Dutch television, it found its main audience through its own YouTube channel. Through that platform, it also fulfilled one important ambition of the creators: to reach a global audience.[12]

The series revolves around the 24-year old lesbian Anne (played by Hanna van Vliet) and her group of straight and gay friends. The first season consists of six episodes with a running time of approximately 11 minutes each. Every episode's title consists of Anne (+) plus the name of her lover whom that particular episode revolves around, notably except for the final episode of season one, just titled *Anne*. The first episode *Anne+ Lily*, opens *in medias res* with a momentous occasion in Anne's life: she has just moved into her own apartment for the first time. It signals a new beginning for Anne, no longer a student, but also not quite an independent adult. Seated among the unpacked moving boxes, Anne's voice-over wonders, "where do I begin?" (Bisscheroux et al. 2018. Episode 1, 00:00:16), which is followed by a hard cut to the chance encounter on the street with her ex-girlfriend Lily (played by Eline van Gils) and her new partner Doris (played by Flip Zonne Zuijderland) (Figure 1).

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11 For a sustained discussion of independently-produced television, see Christian 2018.

12 The first episode has been viewed more than two million times; on average the other episodes received between 500,000 and 600,000 views. The comment section shows its international viewership, from countries throughout Europe and South America, to Kenya and India.

Fig. 1: First Encounter Anne, Doris and Lily (Bisscheroux 2018. Episode 1, 00:00:39)

In the Dutch pronunciation, the difference between Doris (a woman's name) and Dorus (a man's name) is very hard to discern. This ambiguity is obvious in the interaction and dialogue, but is not made explicit in this first encounter between these characters.

The opening of the series establishes the recurring narrative structure which is used throughout the other episodes: starting in the here and now of Anne in this new phase of her life, when somehow a name mentioned in conversation with friends or through various social media triggers Anne's flashback to the time she was dating this particular person. This framed narration is reinforced by Anne's voice-over, which both initiates and ends the flashback. Thus, the voice-over brackets the flashback while also anchoring the unfolding narrative from Anne's point of view. If these two narrative devices were not already firmly confirming this to be Anne's universe, she is continuously physically present in every scene of the entire series (which of course makes sense, because of the decidedly subjective nature of the flashback as a storytelling ploy).

The first season's chronicling of the past lovers of Anne enables it to showcase a number of connected issues with regards to LGBTQ representation in general. In line with the foundation's already mentioned mission statement, *Anne+* does not treat homosexuality as a problem. Its characters, despite being in their early twenties, all seem very much at ease with their

sexuality, which seems to have not impeded them much in their personal or professional life. Furthermore, the series constructs a world (which is basically Amsterdam, and not much else) where LGBTQ and straight characters happily interact and share the same uncontested spaces. The actual difference between LGBTQ and straight is minimal: the majority of its characters are white, able-bodied, highly educated and financially solvent.

The diverse representation of lesbian-identified people is where *Anne+* does seem to break new ground however. Initially, it uses the trope of a longtime love lost as its springboard (Anne and Lily were high school sweethearts after all). This story of a first lesbian love, played by two actresses who are basically the same physical type (pale white skin, long dark hair and conventionally pretty and feminine), is dropped for the remainder of the season. In the following episodes, a wide range of lesbian and other identities is represented, ranging from soft butch to mixed race, from middle-aged to migrant.

The one character that subtly subverts this lesbian world, a minor character that initially seems to be somewhat a part of it, but in the end ends up not quite fitting in, is Doris. After their 'blink-or-you'll-miss-it' appearance in episode one, Doris disappears only to be brought back verbally in the final episode.[13] In a conversation between Anne and Lily, Anne remarks what a pretty girl Doris is, to which Lily replies: "Doris does not necessarily identify as a girl. Usually we just say Doris. Sometimes he, sometimes she. There isn't really a neutral term in Dutch" (ibid. Episode 6, 00:04:15). The issue is quickly dropped in favor of showing the sexual tension still present between Anne and Lily. When they predictably end up having sex with each other at the finale of season one, which clearly functions as a cliffhanger for season two, it painfully contradicts Lily's previous statement about how happy she is with Doris.

The emphasis in season two shifts from Anne's relationships to the relationships of well-known characters from season one, starting with Lily and Doris.[14] Doris is in the process of transitioning: wearing a binder, taking

13 Later in the first episode, there is subtle hint with regards to gender ambiguity. In the flashback of Anne and Lily's relationship, they discuss the name and work of the openly lesbian Dutch writer Anna Blaman (1905–1960), whose last name (a pseudonym) is an acronym of "ben liever als man" (I would rather be a man). For an overview of her work, see Literatuurmuseum (in Dutch).

14 To watch the episode, see Bischeroux et al. 2018. At the time of writing, there are no English subtitles available.

hormones (Lily administers Doris's hormone injections) and regularly visiting the gender clinic. Doris and Lily are in a committed relationship even though they are not living together, much to Doris' chagrin. Things get complicated when Lily confesses to Doris that she slept with Anne six months ago. In an increasingly heated conversation, Doris demands that Lily no longer be friends with Anne, before asking Lily what it was like to have sex with a girl again. To this, Lily replies, "it was Anne, it was just different" (Bisscheroux et al. 2020. Episode 1, 00:09:16). Lily's confession accelerates the ending of their relationship and by the end of the episode, they have broken up.

The Lily and Doris episode demonstrates the second season's shift in narrational strategy: rather than being exclusively tied to Anne's optical point of view through flashbacks, Anne has become an omniscient narrator. She can now interject with her voice-over during events she herself was not physically present at, or may not even have after-the-fact knowledge about. This ability is introduced in the scene where Lily and Doris fight over Lily's cheating. While Lily strains to explain that her having sex with Anne was no big deal, Doris says, "I don't want you to ever see her again", during which Anne's voice-over exclaims "What?!" (ibid., 00:08:54). When Lily tries to reassure Doris that it was just different and not a sign of her preference for women, Anne's voice-over pleads, "Oh Lil, don't say it…" (ibid., 00:09:16), to no avail, of course. By giving Anne the power of commenting on events, the series' narration is increasingly anchored on her character, despite the fact that Anne is no longer the dominant character in every episode.

Thematically, the second season also attempts to widen its range. In the Lily and Doris episode, there is one key thematic strand: continuing or abandoning a committed relationship under hardship. Doris and Lily's predicament is echoed by the sudden announcement of the divorce of Anne's parents and, less dominantly, the tumultuous relationship plagued by infidelity between the characters of Anne's best friend Jip (played by Jade Olieberg) and Maya (played by Ayla Satijn). This larger focus is understandable from a writer and producer's point of view: season two consists of more episodes (eight instead of six), and the running time per episode is almost doubled. This first episode introduces a set of relationships, including Jip and Maya who get their own episode, which requires a proper initial set-up.

Unfortunately, the depiction of Lily and Doris's relation is crushed by the weight of this theme of how and when to stay together and the larger

statements the episode wants to make about the givenness of being a lesbian. Part of the problem seems to be that the series wishes to emphasize the sameness of human relationships, which again is reflected in the producers' statement that homosexuality should be seen as normal and not as a problem. Hence, a relationship between a lesbian-identified woman and a non-binary masculine person (who later, when pursuing medically assisted transition care, seems to have a more binary trans* male identity) is equated with a long-time heterosexual marriage and, for good measure, a lesbian relationship where both partners were shown to be incapable of fidelity: they lied to each other about their unfaithfulness or used it as a weapon to hurt one another. This results in the erasure of both characters, who could easily have been a source of recurring plotlines in the series since the Doris and Lily relationship points to the multi-themed issues of conflict arising due to changing physically and psychologically in terms of identity, desire, friendship and love. The viewer thus loses the chance to see how the inclusion of difference within a relationship could be resolved successfully.

It is nevertheless helpful to take stock of what ways the Doris narrative does attempt to address and represent trans* and transitioning issues. Crucially, the actor who plays Doris, Flip Zonne Zuijderland, is a trans* man, who was transitioning at the time of shooting. This casting choice is not insignificant, rather, it reflects the creator's intent on doing justice to the story of this character.[15] The transitioning of Doris is the most important element in the depiction of their relationship with Lily and its eventual demise. Certain key elements of transitioning are explicitly brought up, such as having regular check-ups at the gender clinic, and, even explicitly represented, the administering of hormone injections. The episode seems most concerned though with the ways in which relationships change when one of the partners is transitioning.

After the events at the end of the first season, approximately six months have passed, during which Lily has not told Doris about her one-night stand with Anne. The viewer is reintroduced to Doris and Lily the morning after a night of heavy drinking with Anne. Clearly, in the last six months Anne and Doris have become friends, which makes Lily's betrayal later on even more painful to Doris. While Lily is texting with Anne, we see Doris take off his shirt to put on a binding top, briefly showing his pre-op chest. The struggle with the binder prompts Lily to offer help, which Doris refuses.

15 For more information on the casting of Flip Zonne Zuijderland, see Mensen 2020 for an interview with Hanna van Vliet.

The conversation then changes to Doris's upcoming visit to the gender clinic. Lily offers to accompany him, and again Doris declines, saying "You don't always have to come with me", to which Lily replies "But I want to" (ibid., 00:03:34). Doris shifts the conversation by asking, "Isn't it about time we move in together? Start our life together officially?" (ibid., 00:03:45) Lily's response is non-committal, ending the scene on a deliberately ambiguous note. This short scene is indicative of their relationship: Lily obviously deeply cares for Doris but expresses this by taking on the role of the helper. Doris, on the other hand, does not want a helper, but a committed partner.

Lily's confession to Doris uncovers how sexual drive and desire are affected by being in a committed relation while transitioning. It sparks Doris's uncertainty about Lily's sexual desires for him and he demands to know if having sex with a girl was different. The effect of hormones on one's sex drive is also thematised: Doris has held back from acting upon the urge to "jump everything and everyone" (ibid., 00:09:26) as he remarks at one point, whereas Lily obviously could not resist. This prompts the feeling that Lily perhaps is no longer sexually interested in Doris, a presumption which leads to the scene where Doris abruptly stops while in the middle of having sex with Lily, whispering "Sorry" (ibid., 00:18:50). By then it is obvious that their relationship will not last and in a final talk between the two, Doris again emphasizes that he does not need a helper, and "If that's the only reason we are together, we might as well call it quits" (ibid., 00:21:17). Doris wants things to be "simple", meaning a girl that loves him and whom he can make happy in return. The strongest statement on his well-being in this process of transitioning comes next, when Doris tells Lily, "You think I'm constantly unhappy while I'm transitioning. This is not the case, I'm happy. When I look in the mirror, I see I'm growing a mustache, I'm getting more muscles and my voice is dropping. This makes me fucking happy, but you're not, I think" (ibid., 00:21:28).

The Doris character adheres to the 'successful script' Van den Berg and Marinus outline, with its emphasis on the "accomplishment of self-development, the pursuit of happiness, and an emphasis on finding your 'authentic' self" (2017, 386). Doris's speech indeed accentuates the steps in the process of growing into one's true identity. It is commendable that *Anne+* makes room for a trans* character amongst all its other (non) LGBTQ characters, but both Doris and his story are nothing more than peripheral and short-lived to its larger microcosm in the end.

4. Trans* Front and Center: *Queer Amsterdam*

In my second case, the online web series *Queer Amsterdam* (Peters et al. 2017), the storyline of the trans* character unambiguously takes center stage.[16] The idea for the series was developed by Bart Peters, a trans* man, who crowd-funded and shot a short pilot in 2013 for what was to become the *Queer Amsterdam* series. The Dutch broadcaster BNNVARA picked up the format and enabled Peters, together with writer Toby Chlosta and producer Dorien Rozing to produce the nine-episode series in 2017. The series was broadcast on Dutch public television once in its entirety in the summer of 2017, before it was made available on BNNVARA's streaming platform and eventually, YouTube.

The intentions of the creators of *Queer Amsterdam* are expressed through Peters's webpage and through the Facebook page of the series.[17] In their joint statement on the Facebook page, they claim to "feel at home in the queer community, however, they do not recognize themselves in the current representation of men, women and everything in between" (Peters et al. 2011). To that end, they decided to create "our own series, with its own story, vision and philosophy" (ibid.). This active, almost grassroots intervention into the existing modes of representation previously available is similar to the intentions of the creators of *Anne*+. Both series also have the setting of Amsterdam as the undisputed center of LGBTQ life in the Netherlands in common. However, *Queer Amsterdam*'s focus on the representation of "men, women, and everything in between" (ibid.) means its spectrum of representation is much broader. Also, it chooses not to use the words homosexuality or lesbian, which dominated the production notes of *Anne*+. Rather, the universe created in *Queer Amsterdam* transcends the narrow, one could say normalised, categories of lesbian or homosexual. Not because they do not matter or due to an attempt to 'normalise' divergent sexuality (like *Anne*+ could be faulted for), but because by transcending clear gender and sexuality categories, the series tries to address larger issues, not only in mainstream media representations, but more importantly, in the LGBTQ community.

16 All episodes available with English, Dutch and German subtitles via YouTube, see Peters et al. 2017.

17 For Peters's other projects, see De Filmbakker 2020; for other short media productions made by Peters's collaborators, see Peters et al. 2011.

The narrative structure reflects this aspiration to address a multitude of issues and identities by using an ensemble cast of characters, who are connected to one another, but each have individual problems that are a reflection of larger issues in the LGBTQ community. Over the course of nine, six-minute episodes, the stories of these three main characters are developed. Sam (played by non-trans* or cisgender actress Stefanie van Leersum) identifies as trans* by using the tired trope of being 'a man born in a woman's body', and during the series decides to start the process of transitioning. However, Sam's transition process becomes complicated when he meets a politically engaged, lesbian-identified person of colour, Mira (played by Stacyian Jackson), whom he falls in love with. The third character is Jesse (played by Milan Sekeris), Sam's older brother who feigns to be firmly gay, but struggles with his feelings for both men and women.

Every episode opens with a so-called cold open, where the viewer plunges into the story before the opening titles roll. What makes *Queer Amsterdam* such an interesting case in terms of trans* representation, is that it literally takes the trans* perspective as its visual and thematic focal point for the telling other, related stories. The cold open is presented in the form of the vlog that Sam is making of his transition, and which he posts online multiple times a week. Each cold open is about twenty seconds long, except for the first one, which is forty seconds long.

Visually, the importance of the trans* point of view is reiterated by the aesthetics of the vlog: it is an intimate, first-person account, similar to a diary. The vlogger is in control of the narrative: they handle the camera, directing its gaze to either themselves, other people or objects (Figure 2). The vlogger breaks the fourth wall and controls what is narrated to its imagined audience, and when to stop or resume narrating. Thematically, the vlog functions as an emblem: it introduces the main issue of each episode. When viewed in sequence, the vlogs chronicle some of the key issues and obstacles in Sam's transition trajectory.

Fig. 2: Sam addresses the viewer in his first vlog (Peters et al. 2017. Episode 1, 00:00:12)

The overall narrative structure of the series clearly follows the 'successful trans script', in that Sam's journey towards self-actualisation unfolds along the archetypal patterns of storytelling, namely, the singular protagonist, the use of a double plotline and the dynamics of narrative events. Sam is the undisputed center of the story: he is presented by two main challenges, the action plotline concerns coming out as trans* to the world and the romantic plotline involves Sam and Mira falling in love (despite both character's initial misgivings about one another). The narrative presents obstacles and challenges in order for Sam, and to a lesser extent Jesse and Mira, to reach these goals.

The series' narrative progress obeys the stages of the canonical story format perfected by Hollywood cinema: the introduction, complication, transition to the turning point, the actual turning point and, finally, the resolution. Episode one and two present the viewer to the main protagonist Sam, his helper Jesse and Sam's love interest Mira. Here the vlogs provide crucial insight into Sam: the very first vlog marks the moment Sam has decided to "go through life as a man" (Peters et al. 2017. Episode 1, 00:00:38). This cold open of the first episode ends with Sam pressing the button to upload his first vlog (which is shot in an objective way, not in the traditional handheld vlogger type of camerawork), making his transition a public matter. The trope of going public is extended when Jesse invites Sam to see his

first performance as a drag queen during a men-only club night. Unfortunately, when Sam walks up, the bouncer greets him by saying, "Good evening. It is men only tonight, so you can't come in" (ibid., 00:05:05). Initially, this throws Sam off and he is about to walk away, but he finds the courage to tell the bouncer, "I'm a trans man" (ibid., 00:05:40). This public declaration is successful, because in the next shot Sam is inside the club watching Jesse struggling through his first drag performance (also a public coming out of sorts).

In episode two, Sam and his friend Robin (played by Jackson Adney) go shopping for binders and packers. Thematically, the episode revolves around acquiring and mastering the markers and tools of masculinity: older brother and helper Jesse shows Sam how to shave and asserts that "ladies love beards" (ibid. Episode 2, 00:00:46). Since Sam is on the waiting list for testosterone, this marker will take time. Later in the episode, the vlog continues when they are in the shop, but then switches to the objective narration. Robin, a trans* man further along in his socially and medically assisted transition, provides Sam with advice and moral support, assuring him that things will be fine, while he proudly shows Sam his post-op flat chest. Taken together, episode one and two set Sam on his quest towards fulfilling trans* manliness and maturity.

The first complicating factor and the love object are introduced in episodes three and four, which really are one long episode. In the cold open, Sam shows off his new packer. Despite his excitement, he ponders the fact that the packer is fake, asking "So what do I do when I'm with a girl I really like?" (ibid. Episode 3, 00:00:13). This foreshadows the introduction of the girl he will really like: Mira, who shows up for an interview as Sam and Jesse's new roommate. The interviews force Sam to ponder his coming out strategy with strangers, "Do I have to present myself as trans? Who needs that?" (ibid., 00:03:41). The transition from episode three to four is seamless, meaning there is no jump in terms of time. Episode four has Sam vlogging in the midst of interviewing potential roommates, complaining that "Today, I came out 23 times as trans* man, a record" (ibid. Episode 4, 00:00:01). The act of coming out is crucial in this episode, or rather, Sam's refusal to come out. Despite Jesse bringing up Sam's vlog to facilitate his coming out and his urging of Sam to "share something" with Mira, Sam retreats. This leads Mira to assume that Sam is short for Samantha, stating "I couldn't see myself with two men, but you are something else" (ibid., 00:01:29), which, as it turns out, is a woman in Mira's estimation.

The complication of hiding sets up the transitional episodes five and six, where Sam continues his narrative of the 'journey towards myself', despite having obvious doubts about the process. Sam has taken off his packer, and though he still wears his binder, it physically pains him. His constraints are also expressed emotionally: "Am I a lesbian, straight, am I a better boy or a better girl?" (ibid. Episode 5, 00:00:16). Following Jesse's advice, Sam calls Mira to apologise, clearing the path towards success in the romantic plotline. Episode six focusses on Sam and Mira's developing attraction, announced in the opening, when Sam wonders how to flirt as a trans* man. The narrative seeks to demonstrate that hiding one's true identity is never a good idea and the inevitable moment of the reveal cannot be averted.

Episodes seven and eight lead to the inevitable turning point of Sam's reveal and the road towards a resolution and finale in episode nine. Episode seven solely focusses on Sam and Mira's date to go swimming. Before the inescapable coming out of Sam transpires, Mira opens up to Sam about her fairly recent coming out as lesbian. This sets the stage for Sam to share his 'secret', but he seems incapable of doing that. Only when their physical attraction leads to kissing, Sam is compelled to declare his transness (ibid. Episode 7, 00:03:51). Mira's firm assertion that she does not want a man and simply cannot be with a man, signals the possible failure of the romance plot. Episode eight starts with the morning after the botched date. Significantly, it is Jesse who addresses the viewer in the cold open: in his burning curiosity to find out what happened on the date, he has taken Sam's camera in order to film the happy end, only to find Sam alone hiding under the covers of his bed. This is the lowest point in the narrative; Sam feels he has failed in both his quests: he failed to properly perform as a man and he has driven away the woman he's attracted to. Before the final episode leads towards resolution though, this episode deals with Sam and Mira reckoning with their feelings. Here, Mira's lesbian identity seems under threat of collapsing by her attraction to a trans* man, prompting her friend to ponder, "so someone's sex is more important than how they make you feel?" (ibid. Episode 8, 00:01:56)

The significance of the vlog not only as narrational device and as Sam's character-building tool, but also as the main vehicle of narrative development upon which much of the series relies for its progression, becomes even more apparent at the end of episode eight and the start of episode nine. The reveal, at the end of episode eight, of the actual title of Sam's vlog: "It's a

Sam's World" [sic] is very late, which is probably intentional from the perspective of the creators, but it comes off as forced and even a bit ham-fisted (ibid., 00:06:49). Nevertheless, this crucial piece of information enables Mira to trace and (re)construct Sam's trajectory towards becoming Sam. More than his initial reveal and coming out, it is the vlog that helps Mira better understand what has been driving Sam all along (Figure 3).

Fig. 3: Mira watches Sam's vlog
(Peters et al. 2017. Episode 9, 00:00:32)

The vlog provides Mira with a first-hand account of Sam's thoughts and feelings, which he had trouble expressing to her personally before. It seems to enable Mira to let go of her trepidations of dating a trans* man. Unsurprisingly, Sam and Mira are united over Mira's "Free the Nipple" protest, a radical celebration of male, female and 'everything in between' physicality, solidarity and love, allowing *Queer Amsterdam* to present its viewers with a triumphant, happy and political ending (Figure 4).

Fig. 4: Queer Amsterdam's finale
(Peters et al. 2017. Episode 9, 00:04:56)

5. Conclusion

At the beginning of this essay, I asked the question of in what ways the stories told by *Anne+* and *Queer Amsterdam* create a space for trans* masculine characters and to what extent these streaming shows develop and advance different representations of trans* masculinity in a Dutch context. The advent of internet-distributed television is certainly an important factor in increased representation, partly because series like *Anne+* and *Queer Amsterdam* are not entirely subjected to the rules and constraints of corporate systems of national (and international) broadcasting. In both cases, the series were already fully developed and partially financed, with a solid intended audience alerted to both projects through crowdfunding and a pilot episode. This enabled the publicly-funded network BNNVARA to procure partially finance and eventually broadcast these shows for a relatively small cost. Equally, this process offers opportunities for young, inexperienced television creators working on a small budget to have their work produced and shown within the system of public broadcasting. So, the positive trend that can be discerned in these two Dutch examples is that representations of trans* characters are increasingly made by actual trans* producers, directors

and actors. In this regard, the Dutch examples echo similar developments in the United States of America, even though the mainstream marketability of low-budget productions such as *Anne+* and *Queer Amsterdam* pales in comparison to their American counterparts.

Based on these two examples, a number of "specific national investments in a visibility of legible scripts of trans lives" (Koch-Rein et al. 2020, 5) can be discerned. As my close readings of *Anne+* and *Queer Amsterdam* have shown, it is clear that both still profoundly rely on the 'wrong body' trope in conjunction with the 'successful trans script', and as a result, being trans* and living one's life outwardly as transgender is reduced to the transition process. Doris and Sam are primarily characterised by their burgeoning trans* identity, resulting in a body and an identity that are very much works in progress. This dominates the narrative and their development as characters, even more for Sam than Doris. When read against the other available scripts in transgender representation, it seems disappointing that the narratives of *Anne+* and *Queer Amsterdam* adhere only to the 'successful trans script' and do little by way of innovating it. In the context of narrative fiction, the hurdles, obstacles and setbacks they must overcome is useful for narrative purposes. The consequence of this narrative is that it undercuts and limits representational complexity. This lack of complexity is glaring in *Queer Amsterdam*: given that Sam is the main character, it is remarkable how little backstory is provided. Does Sam have a job? Does he go to school? What is his relationship to his and Jesse's parents? The viewer apparently does not need to know more than Sam's determination to start his transitioning, thereby rendering everything that came before that moment insignificant.

Furthermore, in *Anne+* and *Queer Amsterdam*, transgender identity is shown in relation with and contrasted with racialised others. It is remarkable how both series expressively construct a racially diverse universe as a backdrop for their narratives. Particularly *Anne+* aims to show LGBTQ diversity in its large cast of characters, nevertheless remaining firmly anchored with its young, white, highly-educated, middle-class main character. Even though Doris shifts from the 'safe' and established category of white lesbian to the more ambiguous (at least in *Anne+*) category of trans* man, their whiteness and financial stability is uncontested. *Queer Amsterdam* is set in a more 'alternative', politically conscious, less affluent environment. Contrasting racial difference is first signaled briefly by the presence of Sam's friend Robin, a post-op trans* man of color in episode two. Robin's physical and sexual

confidence compared to Sam's physical and sexual insecurity hints at a racial connotation, but since Robin does not return later on in the series, this issue is suspended. The pairing of Sam and Mira sets up the contrast between whiteness and blackness, without actually addressing this issue or even being conscious of it, it seems. Their coupling is certainly fascinating from a visual perspective: a diminutive, skinny white trans* masculine person versus a bigger bodied Black ciswoman. The matter of skin color and background is not mentioned, in favor of reaching the goal of a possible romantic love between them.

Ultimately, *Anne+* and *Queer Amsterdam* are apt examples of how Dutch LGBTQ identity politics is expressed in fictional narratives. Both display the Dutch 'act normal' motto, its insistence on the unproblematic nature of homosexuality and the, perhaps, naïve belief that with increased visibility comes social acceptance. Doris in *Anne+* follows the 'successful script', proposing that finding your authentic self will lead to self-acceptance, and, crucially, a normal life with a loving partner, as Doris unambiguously longs for. A similar desire for normalcy, instigated by the 'born in the wrong body' trope, is expressed in the development of Sam's character. Like Doris, Sam's overwhelming desire and his quest to become a man who is accepted and desired as a man by a cisgender woman, circumvents the challenging issues of transitioning and trans* identity. This is not to say that representations such as these are meaningless, far from it, but it does highlight that, rather than 'normal' representations, more complex and discerning representations of trans* characters are needed precisely to render actual trans* lives visible.

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Afterword—*Trans* Time* and the Internationalization of Trans Studies

Greta Olson

As I write this afterward, public discourse has been mulling over the December 2020 announcement by actor Elliot Page that he is trans and non-binary.[1] The actor requested that they now be called Elliot and that he be referred to with the pronouns he/him and they/them (Page 2020). Page, for those who do not know of him and his work, won an Oscar nomination for the role of the pregnant teenager in *Juno* (Reitman et al./Fox Searchlight Pictures 2007), and is a major character in the ongoing series, *The Umbrella Academy* (Blackman/Netflix 2019–present). Page was also celebrated for being an out and outspoken lesbian and one who had publicized their marriage to another woman in 2018.

In the context of the volume *Trans* Time: Projecting Transness in European (TV) Series*, Page's announcement and the considerable attention it has been given, strike me as important for several reasons. The announcement touches on critical debates around trans representation to which the volume centrally contributes. These debates concern the profound ambivalences of trans visibility; white Anglophone (and US American) privilege in trans representations and trans studies more widely, and the need for greater internationalization; and how more nuanced debates about trans lives and trans representations have been occurring during the past few years.

Let me speak to each of these issues in turn. The first concerns the pitfalls of trans hypervisibility, also in television series. Via public mass media and social media, many individuals become aware of identities that were unknown to them or only vaguely assumed before they were witnessed on screen. For instance, as has been repeatedly memed about the recent election of Black and Asian Kamala Harris as Vice President to the United States, we can only know what we can see. Visibility is an important part of

1 Following recent changes in preferred usage, I use 'trans' inclusively and without the asterisk in respect for those who do not have binary gender identities and also so as to not perpetuate forms of transmisogyny.

knowing about one's self and for achieving self-acceptance for those with non-normative identities.

Mass media—a problematic term due to the classist assumptions and derogatory connotations that surround the lexeme 'mass'—frequently provides forums for this kind of visibility. I include social media presentations and articulations in mass media as well as fictionalized texts. In the hybridic, increasingly niched, and prosumerist era of post-network television, representations of the knowable become widely visible through television series. This trend speaks for the importance of the series presenting trans characters dealt with in this volume, and also for the profound changes in how television texts are produced, transmitted, consumed, and commented on since the end of the network era. The discussion of 'internet-distributed television' in the Dutch context by Laura Copier in this volume addresses this point specifically.

As a case in point, consider the coming-out story of the Black dancer Damon, a character from *Pose* (Murphy et al./Netflix 2018–present). Like the author of this Afterword, Damon Richards grew up in a closeted and conservative small town in Pennsylvania. After being disowned by his family for his sexual orientation and his interest in dance and moving to New York where he becomes homeless and is soon robbed, Damon learns about how to live a queer life in the arts through the tutelage of his elders in the ballroom community, particularly his trans House Mother Blanca. Damon's story, in turn, provides a template for other queer and/or trans teens, living in places hostile to their emerging identities, who may look to the fictional series for a narrative about how to become free, just as they may look to Elliot Page for a model about how to announce that they are non-binary. The importance of television representations of trans stories extends beyond US American representations. For example, in this volume, Karine Espineira describes the importance of trans actor Jonas Ben Ahmed's portrayal of a trans character in French television and how the actor's Twitter presence has helped trans boys to explain their identities to their families.

Yet, as many of the essays in *Trans* Time* argue, heightened visibility does not by any means equate with political progressiveness or the actual acceptance and legal defense of trans persons. The incongruity between the hypervisibility of trans persons in television and the deficiency of actual trans rights and protections is a topic nearly all of the essays in this volume take up, proving what Anson Koch-Rein, Elahe Haschemi Yekani and Jasper J. Verlinden call the "paradoxical simultaneity of unprecedented trans

visibility in the arts and media and of ongoing transphobic violence, disproportionately affecting economically disadvantaged communities and communities of colour" (2020, n. pag.). As frequently noted, the new prevalence of trans representations, particularly in the United States has been met by a plethora of anti-trans legislation efforts and policies, especially during the Trump administration years. These efforts comprise so-called bathroom bills, necessitating that trans individuals use the bathroom of the gender to which they were assigned at birth, restrictions on health care to trans persons, and the ban on trans persons serving in the military. Further, the brutalization of trans persons appears to have increased rather than subsided, despite the new seemingly celebratory visibility of many aspects of trans life (Baggs 2020, n. pag.). As Tiq Milan succinctly states in an interview in the documentary *Disclosure: Trans Lives on Screen*: "The more we are seen, the more we are violated" (Feder et al./Netflix 2020, 00:01:30–00:01:38).

Accordingly, a saliently titled piece in BuzzFeed reads: "Trans Visibility Won't Save Us" (Green 2019). It contends that visibility and highlighting pronoun use, as in Page's announcement that he should be referred to as 'he' or 'they' or in introductions that involve statements of correct pronoun use, may, in fact, be privileges of only those who can afford to be openly and politically trans-affirmative.[2] I mean by that, trans people who are more often than not white, middle-class, and holders of permanent employment positions and higher educational degrees as well as their cis-gendered allies. This is to ignore the situation of those trans persons for whom trying to pass is a matter of survival, and for whom their transness is "the banality of buying some bread, of making photocopies, of getting your shoe fixed. It is not about challenging the binary sex/gender system […], it is not about starting the Gender Revolution" (Namaste 2005, 25). Vivian Namaste's point is that since transgender life is so often precarious and as such has been criminalized and rendered radically unsafe, the primary battles cannot concern identity issues that are based on concerns originating in Anglo-American queer theory (ibid., 26). Rather, one must address institutional issues such as draconian prostitution laws and the treatment of trans people in prison. For Namaste, there is little room for a trans utopianism in which every shade of non-binariness can be celebrated. Following up on Namaste's

2 I am avoiding the phrase 'preferred pronoun use', as it implies that using pronouns associated with a person's gender assignment at birth represents an option for them, which for many trans persons it is not. "A person's pronouns aren't preferred, they just are" (Van Groningen 2020, n. pag.).

discussion of banality, Alex V. Green differentiates between a politics of visibility and representation and an activism based on legal and institutional change:

> To talk about trans identity already imagines our mere existence as political, and promoting "visibility" as the key to our salvation has already failed to save so many of us. Rather than endorsing the bourgeois individualism epitomized in visibility discourse, we should be working toward a political vision and program of class and race solidarity grounded in collective action, strike, sabotage, protest, and mass mobilization. (2019, n. pag.)

In short, representation does not equate with political rights and political and social protections, although the two are often confused in public discourse. Visibility also entails exposure and potentially a greater vulnerability to attacks of all kinds. The volume *Trans* Time* speaks to the paradox of greater visibility coupled with a loss of protections and rights in these 'trans times', with essays describing the evolution of trans laws and protections alongside trans television representations in Italy, Portugal, Spain, Britain, France, and the Netherlands.

The specificity of trans representations in television demonstrates that histories of how minority groups become visible are medium and genre specific and are also particular to where they were produced and received. For instance, within the context of US American television, Jason Mittell traces the evolution of Black, non-white, and queer characters in a history that can be said to run parallel to the evolution of trans characters in television. Mittell first outlines the "default identity" of an American person in television as white, heterosexual, and implicitly cis (2010, 315). In a first stage of increasing visibility, minority characters are presented relatively seldomly and, when represented at all, then as reifications of existing stereotypes. Think of the character of Mammy in *Gone with the Wind* (Fleming et al./Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer 1939). In a further step, Black characters are presented in "assimilationist texts" (Mittell 2010, 320) in which their minority identity is ignored or whitewashed altogether, as in the still prevalent tropes of the Magic Negro or the Best Black Friend. Think of Bubba in *Forrest Gump* (Zemeckis et al./Paramount Pictures 1994) and the Morgan Freeman character in *The Shawshank Redemption* (Darabont et al./Columbia Pictures 1994). These characters are in fact Black. Yet they have no back-stories or complexity and no private lives themselves. Simply, they undeterredly support the large arc of the white protagonist's personal growth story and conveniently die or disappear before this white person's narrative comes to a

conclusion. Multiple iterations of narrow or clichéd Black characters serve either to strengthen existing prejudices or to further the pretense that racial discrimination does not exist. Only after these initial phases of representation do some Black characters come to have some of the roundness and messiness that has been afforded to white protagonists in television heretofore.

Mittell traces a similar, if more recent, history for queer characters in American television, moving from ugly stereotypes to sexless innocuousness in order to make characters palatable to a wider, potentially homophobic audience. Thus, the sexuality of the major queer character is effaced in *Will and Grace* (Kohan, Mutchnick et al./KoMut Entertainment 1998–2006) or in the initial run of *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (Collins, Williams et al./Bravo 2003–2007), in which gay men enable heterosexual dudes to achieve their erotic potential while seemingly having no sexual lives themselves. A history of trans characters in US American television might look similar. Early representations were monstrous or grotesque and corresponded with existing prejudices. One thinks of the laughable and ugly character of Androgynous Pat from the early nineties in *Saturday Night Live* (Michaels et al./NBC 1975–present). As representations of once invisible trans figures evolve, they develop from reiterating vilifying stereotypes into being flat supporting figures to white cis heterosexual protagonists, a point which the already mentioned documentary *Disclosure* (Feder et al. 2020) saliently demonstrates.

In the conference out of which this book emerged that took place in Giessen, Germany, in January 2020, I called the plethora of 'good' trans women characters in current American television the Saint Sophia phenomenon. Saint Sophia refers to the character of Sophia Burset in *Orange Is the New Black* (Kohan et al./Netflix 2013–2019), as well as to a series of too-good-to-be-true trans women characters who have come after her. Sophia is played by the immortal trans activist Laverne Cox, whose lovely image on the cover of *Time* Magazine in 2014 marked the supposed "transgender tipping point" for "America's next civil rights frontier" (Steinmetz 2014, n. pag.). Sophia Burset's backstory explains the extraordinary pain she felt while living as a cis man, in the hyper-masculine career as a firefighter. This caused her to commit credit card fraud to pay for her medical transition. Sophia's traditional family values and monosexism are demonstrated by her efforts to remain in a loving and committed relationship with her wife, Crystal, as she transitions and to parent her son, Michael, as best she can,

before and after she is imprisoned. The audience learns about Sophia's backstory in flashbacks.

As Sophia's time in prison progresses, the audience witnesses her efforts to combat transphobia and transmisogyny as well as sexual exploitation by a predatory prison guard. She acts as a teacher, explaining women's genitalia and clitoral sexual responses to her sister inmates, and her hair salon functions as forum for progressive politics—with a great discussion of which particular Best Black Friend hairstyle is needed for an inmate to be released by the parole board. Sophia is a political agitator. For me, Saint Sophia represents a faultless, intelligent, sexless—at least while she is in prison—, faithful and heroic character who suffers inordinately in order, I believe, to make a trans character palatable to the majoritarian audience watching *OItNB*. This is an audience that is arguably already more woke than others, since its members are choosing to watch a women-, Black- and queer-centered TV series in the first place. As discussed in a seminar on Trans* Television in 2017–2018, trans characters will only arrive in the mainstream when they, unlike Saint Sophia, are allowed to be shown as not always noble and altruistic in their actions.

The same could be said for other popular representations of trans women. I would number the character of Nomi Marks in *Sense8* (Wachowski et al./Netflix 2015–2018) and also, if to a lesser degree, the heroic Mother Blanca in *Pose*. While both trans women are presented as personally and physically attractive, miles apart from the hideous and laughable Androgynous Pat, they are nonetheless shown to be nearly saintly in their actions. For instance, Nomi, who is almost lobotomized for being trans, "is so flawless, so capable, that she is all light and no shade, always the victim or the heroine and never anything in between" (Levesley 2015, n. pag.). In the Introduction to this volume, Danae Gallo González refers to what I call the Saint Sophia phenomenon as a "trap of visibility", a trap that produces an overrepresentation of "consumable […] 'good trans* person'[s]", something that discussions of fictional television characters in this volume come back to again and again.

A second point about Page's announcement—I am avoiding the somewhat problematic and overused cliché of their having 'come out' as trans—is that the actor is a normatively attractive white Canadian, whose career has been made in US American cinema and television. This is not to belie Page's own pro-diversity filmmaking efforts in the documentary *There's Something in the Water* (Page et al./2 Weeks Notice 2019), or in their previous activism.

Rather, it is to say—and I am hardly the first to state this—that what we witness of publicized and visible trans identities is overwhelmingly white and Anglophone, materially well off, and most often US American sourced. This bespeaks the economics of mass media more widely, even as television becomes ever more diversified in how it is produced and transmitted, and even if we are aware of the localized adaptions and reception of vehicles produced in America.

This is a central point to which this volume speaks. *Trans* Time* asks about trans representations in television that are not Anglo-American. The contributions explore those OTHER characterizations of trans persons in Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, French (and also British) television series. As Gallo González points out, sources of knowledge are overwhelmingly Global Northern and so-called First World ones. This inflects people's general conceptualizations of trans narratives, representations, and identities. The contributors to *Trans* Time* comment both on the 'too pale and too male' majority of trans characters in European series as well as on how their presentations intersect with dominant US American ones. This includes the overrepresentation of sexually fetishized trans women, the predominance of transition narratives focusing on medical reassignment surgery, and the over use of the revelation trope. The representations discussed in these pages serve to question and disrupt American genealogies of trans representations. See, for instance, Luca Malici's 'hixstory' of Italian television, in which the increased frequency of trans representations, particularly positive ones, described in the other national contexts, is 'yet to come.'

A third point about Page's announcement is that it has been witnessed by a more nuanced discussion of trans identities and representations than was possible, I believe, even only a few years ago, including a greater awareness of transmasculinity. Page's description of himself as 'non-binary' has incited a more far-ranging discussion of trans biographies and identities than that which transpired when Caitlyn Jenner, for instance, announced that she was a woman in 2015. Then, the standard narrative of "I was born in the wrong body. I have always been a woman (the other gender), and—shoop da whoop—here is the seemingly magical perfect presentation of myself as the other gender, with long swinging hair and a gorgeous cover title on *Variety Fair* in a revealing swimsuit to demonstrate my successfully passing." Wrong body, dysphoria, and a re-essentialization of the gender binary, with the trans person's medical transition as a one-time event, their crossing the gender line, passing, and having their apotheosis in their having 'successful'

and quite narrowly defined straight PIV (penis in vagina) sex afterwards—these are frequently repeated trans biographical tropes. Particularly, the prurient public interest in sexual reassignment surgery has been criticized, for instance, by Laverne Cox, in her much-discussed refusal to engage with journalist Katie Couric's comment that "Your, your, your private parts are different now, aren't they?" (Cooper 2014, n. pag.). Thus, while Page's announcement has witnessed a larger interest in what it means to be non-binary and transmasculine, and a renewed discussion of the relative paucity of trans men in television series and elsewhere, it has also been accompanied by controversy.

These controversies mark discussions of trans experience, trans rights, trans representations, and trans narratives more widely. One, can Elliot Page continue playing the role of Vanya Hargreaves in *The Umbrella Academy*, a cisgender female lesbian? According to some commentators, this would defeat efforts to have queer, Black, and trans characters be played by actors and actresses who share these identities (see, amongst many such comments, @zx7miller 2020). Two, does Page's announcement that he is transmasculine and non-binary entail that he is no longer a socially prominent and importantly visible lesbian activist? Three, does Page's announcement mark a larger trend of more lesbians transitioning, leading to the loss of butch-identified women within lesbian communities (Howard 2020, n. pag.)? These questions point to controversies in LGBTQIAP politics, more widely, for instance, of whether lesbians and bisexual women continue to be invisibilized by richer and more visible men (and trans women), with the supposition that trans women carry a gender privilege with them in their original assignments as male that belies and detracts from other feminist issues. Or, does Page's announcement of his loving being "trans" and loving being "queer" (Page 2020) point to a move towards less normative and more fluid understandings of what it means to be transmasculine, lesbian, and queer? The greater fluidity of identities cues into less binaristic understandings of gender and sexuality, more generally.

Arguably, the way these tensions are presented medially functions to reproduce non-queer and binaristic forms of thinking about gender and sexuality for mainstream audiences.[3] Think of the endless commentary surrounding J.K. Rowling's transphobic tweets, which have been described as a "civil war between […] the cis and the transitioned" (Smith 2020, n. pag.),

3 I thank Laura Borchert for this insight.

as though people do in fact belong to two different planets. This is like a bad sequel to the 'Men are from Mars, and Women are from Venus' franchise about the supposedly unbreachable gap between the two genders that featured so strongly in the early nineties, only now the sequel features antagonistic cis and trans protagonists.

I want to hypothesize that the much discussed TRANS versus TERFs wars, that is, the allegedly enormous rift between a group of feminists (so-called trans-exclusionary radical feminists) and trans women is actually a product of media titillation and represents still another adaption of that age-old and ever replayed standard trope that feminism is dead, unsexy, mean, ugly, and deadly un-humorous. The politics of the workshop out of which this volume emerges—queer feminist and trans inclusive—certainly belie the supposed centrality of this controversy. Overwhelmingly, as I find, the story is a different one—that lesbian and queer women communities constitute large tents that generously welcome transmasculine persons as well as other empathetic, queer friendly individuals, whether on dating apps for queer women like Her or Zoé, or in public discourse and activism (Urquhart 2020).

What these controversies, like the contributions to this volume, demonstrate, is that trans is more than gender dysphoria, medical transitioning, passing, and fetishized representations of trans femininity. Trans represents a paradigm for reassigning identity that may have surpassed the queer one. For instance, in trans representations such as those dramatized in *Pose*, historical inequities in trans life, such as the derogation of trans people by gay men and the systemic violent and racist treatment of trans persons of color, are addressed and transformed in acts of "disidentification" (Anson, Haschemi Yekani and Verlinden 2020, n. pag.); these representations thus look forward to and also create the future. Here, fictional television provides an important kind of re-memoring what could not be represented in the documentary that *Pose* arguably disidentifies with, *Paris Is Burning* (Livingston et al./Off White Productions 1990). The series therefore constitutes a form of advocacy. Trans is then "a methodological tool to analyse media" as well as a form of knowing that upsets prevailing identity categories (Anson, Haschemi Yekani and Verlinden 2020, n. pag.).

This is a point that Teona Micevska takes up in these pages as well in her discussion of British series featuring trans characters, channeling Ruby Rich's insight that "trans [is] the new queer" in twenty-first century cinema—"a cinema of transgender and gender-queer identity formations and

representations" (Rich 2013, 271). Trans may be the new queer. Yet trans is also a 'banality', as Namaste argues, a fact of life for some, and an umbrella term for a great deal of non-gender-conforming persons, whose protections and rights are multiply reflected on and also often obviated in television representations. As *Trans* Time* repeatedly argues, analyses of trans representations can only go hand in hand with political advocacy for trans persons and trans rights and the achievement of protections for trans persons through institutional and legal reforms.

The films and television series I have referred to above attest to the dominance of US American representations, in general, as well as to my own disciplinary moorings. This volume's editor and its contributors and the television series they discuss, offer me and others the opportunity to look beyond these representations and to learn. The contributions gathered here query and also contest American representations as they look to the specifics and areas of overlap in Italian, French, Portuguese, British, Spanish, and Dutch television series, and their presentations of trans persons. These concern, for instance, the predominance of the tragic trans woman in Portuguese television series versus the Saint Sophias in American ones. (See the essay by Alice Azevedo in this volume.)

The discussions in these pages allow us to look outside of Anglo-American templates of trans theory and trans activism. In general, representations offer forums for discussing political issues and controversies, and they enact cultural political work in themselves. This is the current trajectory of trans television studies and trans studies, more widely, to look beyond the dominant and to address areas of difference in these truly ever more trans times.

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