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Title: Girl Cultures in Italy from Early Modern to Late Capitalism. Journal Editorial

Journal Issue: gender/sexuality/italy, 4 (2017)

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Publication date: September 2017

Publication info: gender/sexuality/italy, "Editorial"

Permalink: <http://gendersexualityitaly.com/girl-cultures-in-italy-from-early-modern-to-late-capitalism-journal-editorial>

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Abstract: The editorial includes the Editors' introductions to their respective areas: Paola Bonifazio and Nicoletta Marini-Maio discuss the Themed Section and the Invited Perspectives; Ellen Nerenberg presents the Open Contributions and introduces the new section, Continuing Discussions, which hosts informed voices on themes developed in previous issues of *g/s/i*.

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Girl Cultures in Italy from Early Modern to Late Capitalism

Journal Editorial

PAOLA BONIFAZIO, NICOLETTA MARINI-MAIO, ELLEN NERENBERG

Paola

When Rai Tre broadcasted *La Tv delle ragazze* [The TV of Girls] in 1988, I faithfully followed the show.¹ I was a “ragazza;” however, I could not identify with the characters on screen. The “ragazze” that acted, directed, and produced the show for two seasons not only did not belong to my age group but they were also not interested at all in girls as social and/or cultural subjects. Limiting the masculine presence to one man playing the traditionally feminine role of “annunciatrice” (also called “signorina buonasera”), these “ragazze” took over the public channel palimpsest for about an hour for the first time in television history. Teenagers like me were only indirectly involved in the program because we were implicated in the consumerist culture it satirized. Years later, when I finally reached the age group of the protagonists of “La TV delle ragazze,” I began to question their use of the term. “Le ragazze” were comedians whose ability to manage a TV program was meant to signify a gesture of empowerment in a male-dominated working environment and media system. But it was the TV of “girls,” not of “women,” for the ironic look at the Italian society that placed feminine subjects at the center of consumerist practices (as an active participant in their own exploitation) could only be expressed through the lightheartedness and, at the same time, rebelliousness of “girlish” comedians who were not (and refused to identify with) the women they impersonated in the show (see fig. 1). To some extent, the “girls” in this late 1980s TV show contrasted (consciously or not) with the “women” investigated and embraced by second-wave femin-



Fig. 1 A snapshot from *La Tv delle ragazze* (Youtube)

¹ *La TV delle ragazze*, Rai Tre, written by Valentina Amurri, Syusy Blady, Lella Costa, Serena Dandini, Linda Brunetta, directed by Marilena Fogliatti, 1988-89.

ism and its identity politics. But how different were these “girls” from those “women” in their motivations and objectives? Could one define “La TV delle ragazze” as *feminist*? What would change if another attribute, i.e. *postfeminist*, were to be used to describe the gender politics of this show?

I remember, in the very same years, my mother going out to meet her girlfriends and calling these gatherings “delle ragazze.” Most of the women with whom she met were the mothers of my own girlfriends. I don’t know whether my mother’s vision of these gatherings was informed by the program, even though I recollect that she was also a faithful viewer. My mother and her friends had lived through second-wave feminism, more or less affected by the movement but certainly aware of its impact and relevance. Why would they call themselves “girls”? What was there, in this term, that could better express their vision of themselves, as they were meeting without their husbands for an afternoon chat?

Nicoletta

I was an educated, single woman in her mid-twenties when *La Tv delle ragazze* aired. I felt intrigued and amused. For the first time in Italy, a group of only women ideated and produced a prime-time show. It was refreshing to see comedians embracing their female identity to ridicule the consumerist icons that dominated Italian television. I felt that the rebellious girls from the 1970s were finally taking the “room of their own” and the spotlight that they had been fighting for. Like Paola’s mother, I, too, used to call my girlfriends and female colleagues “girls,” not regardless but because of our common background and age. *La TV delle ragazze* sounded like “our” show (we were definitely part of their demographic), and quite often we organized rigorously feminine gatherings to watch it. It was fun and liberating to celebrate our “girlhood” by laughing at caricatures of subjects immersed in consumerist practices. The next days, and for weeks, we would repeat some of the comedians’ fake commercials and skits. We particularly enjoyed Serena Dandini’s intellectual language, which contrasted with that of the hyper-feminine figures impersonated by comedian Cinzia Leone. The interview of Santina Palermo (suggestive of buxom starlet Sabrina Salerno) became a mantra (see figure 2):

SERENA DANDINI: Lei si sente in qualche modo di rappresentare la ragazza-tipo di oggi? Mi capisce?

SANTINA PALERMO: Con le bombe o no?

SD: Sì, ma noi qui, alla *Tv delle ragazze* vogliamo un pochino approfondire, sottolineare il problema della condizione femminile, quindi cerchiamo di capire cosa si nasconde anche dietro al successo di una donna... mi segue?

SP: Il titolo della mia ultima canzone: ‘Urca che bombe!’

SD: Urca??

SP: Che bombe!²

² Serena Dandini: “Do you feel that you are representing today’s average girl? Do you understand me?” Santina Palermo: “With the bombs or not?” SD: “Yes, but here at *Tv delle ragazze*, we want to go a little bit more in depth, to highlight the problem of women’s condition, therefore we try to understand what is behind a woman’s success, too...are you following me?” SP: “The title of my last song: ‘Wow, what bombs!’” SD: “Wow...?” SP: “What bombs!” My translation. “Cinzia Leone e Serena Dandini in “La Tv delle ragazze,” *Rai Teche*, 9 July 2013. Web. Accessed 18 July 2017. <http://www.teche.rai.it/2013/07/cinzia-leone-e-serena-dandini-in-la-tv-delle-ragazze-1989/>



Fig. 2 Serena Dandini, on the left, talks to Santina Palermo (Cinzia Leone) at *La TV delle ragazze* (snapshot from the Rai Teche clip).

We also loved self-deprecating—yet intellectually provoking—lines such as:

SHOW-GIRL [to a group of female dancers]: Ragazze, ragazze, ma cosa stiamo facendo? Ma chi siamo? Ma perché continuiamo a traballare come degli atomi? Perché abbiamo questa personalità così fragile?³

But when the show ended, the lines soon lost their freshness. We started wondering why *La TV delle ragazze* had directed its satire mainly against hyper-feminine caricatures of girls. We reflected on the stream of girls that had taken center stage in other innovative television shows of those years: for example, the girls of “Cacao Meraviglioso” [Wonderão Cocoa] and the “Ragazze Coccodé” [Clucking Girls] of *Indietro tutta* [Full Speed Backward] in 1987.⁴ These girls mocked the hyper-sexualized ads and dancers of the shows broadcasted by the commercial television of the emerging Berlusconi-era.⁵ The *Ragazze Coccodé* wore chicken-like costumes and imitated the moves and sounds of chickens. The young brown *Cacao Meraviglioso* girls, dressed up and dancing like Brazilian carnival performers, sang a samba-paced song in a sort of Italianized Portuguese language to announce the fake sponsor of the show, *Cacao Meraviglioso*. Their performance was so convincing that a lot of people went shopping for the fake cocoa. The comedians of *La TV delle ragazze* had added a layer to this anti-capitalist mockery because they were critical adult impersonators. Perhaps this was the

³ Show girl: “Girls, girls, but what are we doing? But who are we? But why are we still shaking like atoms? Why do we have such a fragile personality?” My translation. Ibid., 53’ 12”.

⁴ *Indietro tutta*, directed by Renzo Arbore, was first aired on Italian public television channel Rai Due on December 4, 1987 and went on for 65 weeks. It was a continuation of the innovative shows *L’altra Domenica* (The Other Sunday, Rai Due, 1976-1979) and *Quelli della notte* (Those of the Night, Rai Due, 1985), both ideated and directed by Renzo Arbore. The three shows achieved legendary success (*Quelli della notte* peaked 51% share) and had a powerful impact on comic style, pace, and commercial breaks in Italian neo-television. See Giovanni Gozzini, *La mutazione individualista: Gli italiani e la televisione 1954-2001* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2011) Kindle ebook.

⁵ See the Brazilian-like *Cacao Meraviglioso* young women in the clip “Cacao Meraviglioso”, *Quelli di ... Arbore*, 24 June 2008. Web. Accessed July 18 2017. <http://www.rai.it/dl/RaiTV/programmi/media/ContentItem-4643eb74-abac-42ba-9b56-13d4a338039d.html>

reason why my girlfriends and I empathized so strongly with them. Like us, they were adult women who called themselves “girls” while criticizing the commodified girls of the society of the spectacle. We organized potluck dinners and watched the show pretending to sit in a 1970s self-awareness session [it. *seduta di autocoscienza*]. But it was unclear which feminist practice we were sharing. Looking at it retrospectively, I think we were caught in what Angela McRobbie calls “double entanglement” because we felt empowered as “girls” by making fun of other “girls” that we intellectually and politically disliked.⁶ In other words, we did not enjoy *La TV delle ragazze* for its feminist stance but, maybe, for its postfeminist suggestiveness.

Ten years later, when I moved to the United States, I was invited to a potluck dinner of the *ragazze italiane* of Philadelphia, my North American adoptive hometown. The dinner was a monthly habit and I enjoyed going. The “Italian girls,” whose age spanned from 30 to 70, had interesting stories to share. There was a lot to talk about, and very tasty meals.

Transnational single “girls”?

In her book *Neo-Feminist Cinema*, Hilary Radner traces back to the 1960s the history of the “single girl” as a set of practices defining a model of femininity, not necessarily linked to biological age.⁷ The rise of the “single girl” happened in the Anglo-Saxon world alongside the development of second-wave feminism and as a response to the same issues experienced by women at that time. Calling this “other” kind of parallel process towards female emancipation “neo-feminism,” Radner aims at reviewing what is today casually (and scholarly) addressed as post-feminism. Developing alongside second-wave feminism, and incorporating its catchphrases such as “empowerment” and “self-fulfillment,” neo-feminism is discursively entrenched in the ethics and rhetoric of neo-liberalism, grounded in consumerist culture and fostering individualism.⁸ “Girlhood” as a form of identification thus signifies a model of femininity that emphasizes the subject’s position of continual change and self-improvement, as well as her sexual availability, rewritten as a form of personal empowerment.⁹

From the American single girls that emerged in the 1960s as historical subjects, one can trace a genealogy of media representations that became prominent in the late 1990s with the success of the popular TV series *Sex and the City*.¹⁰ These “girls” could not be more different from the “ragazze” in the Rai Tre TV program. In fact, the feminine model of empowered shopper and businesswoman is very frequently at the center of the satiric sketches that fill the Italian show. This is not to say that Radner’s model does not provide any insights on the Italian case. Rather, scholarly readings of girlhood in contemporary Italian culture shed light on the constitutive congruity between the Italian and the Anglo-Saxon models of femininity.¹¹ But something happened in the transition from the late 1980s to the New Millennium in Italy, of which “girls” are the embodied sign of change, both in the sense of historical subjects and in that of media representations. A historical

⁶ See Angela McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism* (London: Sage, 2009), 12.

⁷ Hilary Radner, *Neo-Feminist Cinema: Girly Films, Chick Flicks and Consumer Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 117.

⁸ Radner, *Neo-Feminist Cinema*, 2.

⁹ On “successful girls” see Emma Renold and Jessica Ringrose, “Phallic Girls?: Girls’ Negotiation of Phallogocentric Power, in *Queer Masculinities. A Critical Reader in Education*, edited by John C. Landreau and Nelson M. Rodriguez (London, New York: Springer, 2012), 47-68.

¹⁰ *Sex and the City*, HBO, created by Darren Star, 1998-2004.

¹¹ Danielle Hipkins, “Figlie di Papà? Adolescent Girls Between the ‘Incest Motif’ and Female Friendship in Contemporary Italian Film Comedy,” *The Italianist*, 35:2 (2015): 1–25 and Hipkins, “The Showgirl Effect: Adolescent Girls and (Precarious) ‘Technologies of Sexiness’ in Contemporary Italian Cinema,” in *International Cinema and the Girl: Local Issues, Transnational Contexts*, ed. Fiona Handyside and Kate Taylor-Jones (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Paola Bonifazio, “Postfeminist (Dis)Entanglements: Transgression and Conformism in Contemporary Italian Teen Movies,” *California Italian Studies* 6:2 (2016).

change that must be understood in structural terms vis-à-vis both the Italian society and the Italian media system (particularly television) and whose symptoms are visible in the re-alignment of biological and cultural feminine subjectivities: from the ragazze-women of *La TV delle ragazze* to the teenagers of *Non è la Rai* (see fig. 3).¹² This shift also questions the figurative use of “girlhood” as a means for women to express themselves: in a position of continual change (even despite the passing of time, as the adult “girls” of our personal and family stories show); as desiring subjects, empowered by their liberated sexuality (as in *Non è la Rai*); and voicing anti-capitalist critiques of society (like the women in “*La TV delle ragazze*”), embodying the neo-liberal discourse of ethics and the self (as many female characters in contemporary Italian teen movies).



Fig. 3 A snapshot from *Non è la Rai* (Youtube).

Likewise, since the late 1980s, a plethora of studies and journalistic reports on female teenagers' practices has been released in the press, broadcast on television, and posted on the internet, including surveys on their sexual behaviors, habits of media consumption, and political engagement (or lack thereof). Contradictory discourses on female success, empowerment, and sexual liberation (frequently tied and dependent on each other) circulate on youth television programs, teen movies, girls magazines, and social media and often spur heated debates: girls have been both regarded as objects of old-style patriarchal tactics (sexual favors, hypersexualized media content) and targeted as subjects of immoral practices (slut shaming, *velinismo*) (Hipkins). Public discourses on girlhood have been swinging between cherishing girls' self-determination as the definitive accomplishment of feminism (which is therefore considered old-fashioned) and stirring up moral panic around their physical appearance and practices of recreational and reproductive sex. Beyond the heteronormative framework and the one-dimensional models of successful femininity, social and affective anxieties towards and in girls who do not fit these models trigger racism, sexism, and homophobia.¹³ The concentration on girls' developmental, potential, and moral vulnerability,

¹² *Non è la Rai*, Canale 5/Italia 1, directed by Gianni Boncompagni, 1991-1995.

¹³ See, among others, Rosalind Gill, “Sexism Reloaded, or, It’s Time to Get Angry Again,” *Feminist Media Studies*, 11, 1 (2011): 61-71, Danielle M. Stern, “It Takes a Classless, Heteronormative Utopian Village: *Gilmore Girls* and the Problem of Postfeminism,” *The Communication Review*, 15 (2012): 167-186, and Shauna Pomerantz, Rebecca Raby, and Andrea

however, risks overstating the challenges posed to female youth by gender politics and strategies advertising girls as positive “agents of change” (McRobbie), while at the same time promoting self-policing practices.

The current themed issue of g/s/i

This themed issue aims at contextualizing the Italian case in relation to the wider ongoing debate on girls and girlhood, demonstrated by scholarly work such as Angela McRobbie’s on UK female youth, academic journals such as *Girlhood Studies*, and publications such as the recent volume *International cinema and the girl: local issues, transnational contexts* (edited by Fiona Handyside and Kate Taylor-Jones).¹⁴ We also intended to broaden the contemporary focus and explore constructions of girlhood and representations and self-representations of young female subjects throughout the history of Italian culture, from the development of the idea of adolescence in modern times to date.

The articles we selected respond to our call in a variety of ways, showing multifaceted representations of “girls” in relationship with their historical, cultural, and social contexts. Sienna Hopkins’ essay, “Girlhood Constructed: Portrayals of Childhood in Italian Renaissance Biographies,” is an intricate study of images of girlhood emerging from a vast corpus of commemorative and spiritual biographies in pre-modern Italy. Going back to the classical models, from Plutarch to Boccaccio, Hopkins meticulously analyzes the biographies’ structural elements, emphasizing that only “brief glimpses of an individual life” are left in both types of narrative, which purposefully construct the Renaissance “girls” as exemplary transitional figures toward adult courtly or religious women. While Hopkins’s study fills a gap in the historiography of girlhood studies in Italy, which has privileged the modern and contemporary periods, Daniela Cavallaro’s research on the “*oratori femminili*” expands the field by looking at the lived experience of girls as historical subjects. By means of both archival documents and oral interviews, her essay “The *oratorio femminile*: Young women’s socialization and growth in post-war Italy” shows how Catholic youth centers provided girls and young women the time and space for “personal, spiritual, and social growth.” In addition to behavioral models that could influence their future careers and family lives, Cavallaro convincingly argues that the oratory experience was also “liberating” for girls who lived in the postwar historical context of the reconstruction, a time in Italian history that was characterized by both modernization and a return to social order, particularly with regard to gender roles and hierarchies.

Viola Ardeni’s article “Scrivere dalla parte delle bambine: infanzia e adolescenza femminile nella narrativa di Alice Ceresa” brings to our attention the literary works on young female subjects by the non-canonical female writer Alice Ceresa’s *La figlia prodiga* (The Prodigal Daughter, 1967) and *Bambine* (Little Girls, 1990). Young girls are the protagonists of both novels, which Viola examines from a feminist perspective, paralleling the author’s fictional texts with her unpublished personal letters. From this intimate and meta-literary angle, Ardeni is able to shed light on how Ceresa constructs the girls’ subjectivity by remodeling the traditionally masculine narratives on both formal and narrative levels. Ardeni argues that, in *La figlia prodiga*, the protagonist’s rebellious subjectivity is constructed through poetic experimentalism and a reversal of the biblical masculine parable; in *Bambine*, the focus is on the girls’ visual and artistic language, which symbolically depicts the repressive world of the family.

Stefanik, “Girls Run the World? Caught between Sexism and Postfeminism in School,” *Gender and Society*, 27, 2 (2013): 185-207.

¹⁴ See Angela McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change* (London: Sage, 2009).

Stephanie Hotz's "Rita Pavone's *Musicarelli*: Rethinking Genre and (Young) Women's Representation" focuses on the historical moment in which "youth" first emerged as a target audience and the subject of consumerist culture, and it examines Italian musicals produced in the 1960s, the so-called *musicarelli*. Hotz's research investigates representations and self-representations of young female musicians from the perspective of queer and film genre studies, in particular, the case of teenage pop star Rita Pavone. Hotz's essay demonstrates how Pavone's performances and personality in the *musicarelli* queered habituated models of femininity as well as conventional narratives of "woman's films," usually confined to the genre of melodrama. Through close-text analyses informed by theoretical and historical readings, Hotz shows that cross-dressing, impersonations, comic roles, and musical acts enabled Pavone to spread alternative (and potentially subversive) models of femininity to youth audiences in the years of the economic boom.

Finally, Elisa Cuter, in "*Non è la Rai*, Or: on the Becoming-Girl of Late Capitalism," reads the popular television program as "a paradigm of Berlusconismo." Cuter's essay demonstrates that the young girls dancing and singing on the stage of Mediaset are not only biological subjects entrenched in the political exploitation of young female bodies but also the embodiment of a symbolic category (that of girlhood) that is pivotal to the neoliberal strategy of which the show is a vehicle and that is dominant in the age of late capitalism. In this sense, Cuter's essay appropriately concludes our Themed Section not only chronologically, with a study on the contemporary, but also with an inquiry into the primary relevance of the category *and* biological subject of "the girl" to our society as a whole.

Invited Perspectives: Around the "girl": film, media, and girlhood studies in Italian culture

An extension more than an appendix to the Themed Section, the Invited Perspectives in this issue continue our conversation on girlhood cultures with short contributions from well-known scholars in the field (Danielle Hipkins and Romana Andò), and personal accounts of artists whose work has explored the lives of adolescents (Anne Riita Ciccone and Laura Samani). Hipkins's reflections on girlhood studies in Italy, titled "'Come fossi una bambola?' Girlhood Studies and Memory Studies," stems from her current research on the memory of girlhood playing, focused on *Barbie* dolls and based on interviews with women of different ages about their recollections. In her previous research, Hipkins examined at length the "girls" as a symbolic category of contemporary Italian culture, in a few seminal essays also mentioned in this Editorial. Currently, she agrees with scholars who claim that girlhood media studies are dominated by presentism and that new directions are needed in order to "unlock" the problematic relationship between present and past experiences of girlhood. In her short essay, Hipkins situates her project in connection with current research on the memory of girlhood, as well as other research that "talks directly to girls about their cultural consumption," providing important insights on the future of girlhood studies in and out of Italy.

Romana Andò's article "Girls and the media: girlhood studies agenda and prospects in Italy," provides readers with an overview on the status of girlhood studies in Italy, also suggesting (in agreement with Hipkins) that further attention should be placed on reception processes. Andò argues that a proper field of girlhood studies in Italian academia has not been developed yet, and that while teenagers have been excluded as an audience category in media studies or therein only considered in quantitative research, they historically have been subjects of investigation exclusively in the fields of psychology and sociology. Andò's own research, which she presents in the essay, not only generates a "new debate" on girlhood issues in the context of audience studies and cultural studies, taking into account current changes in the way in which media consumption affects identity-building processes. In addition, her work stimulates transnational perspectives on Italian teenage audiences, in particular, considering their extensive consumption of foreign (and especially

American) audiovisual cultural products, via multiple interfaces, including but not limited to television (for example, the Netflix series *13 Reasons Why*).

Finally, we invited contributions from two women filmmakers: Laura Samani and Anne Riita Ciccone. Laura Samani's fascinating short *La santa che dorme* (2016) is appropriate to this section because its loose narrative perfectly fits the topic of our themed issue: a moment in the lives (and death) of two adolescents. Moreover, the "realismo magico" (magic realism) of the film strikes us as a unique approach to speak about female friendship, in the Catholic social and cultural environment of a remote rural setting in northern Italy (in Friuli). Samani, who is from Trieste, wrote and directed *La santa che dorme* as her final project at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, and the short was then selected in the Cinefondation Program of the Festival de Cannes (2016). In her commentary to the making of the film, entitled "In un cerchio perfetto," Samani gives us compelling insights on the role played by her own memories of adolescence in the construction of the two young female characters and their story. Her account is not only helpful to us as viewers in situating the short vis-à-vis its representation of girlhood, but also precious in the access it gives us to the inner workings of the artist.

Anne Riita Ciccone's short *Victims* (2010) is a preparatory study for her feature *I'M*, which was selected in the "Special Screenings" lineup at the 2017 International Venice Film Festival 2017. In this section, we publish the short's trailer and a link to the entire film broadcast by Rai. In her commentary, "Le adolescenti che per caso ho raccontato nel mio Cinema," she offers an original perspective on girlhood, emphasizing that the young female protagonist of *Victims* (and *I'M*) is quite different from the teen girls commonly portrayed in media and film, as they are stereotypical constructs of Italian society and the Western world overall. For Ciccone, adolescence is a phase of diversity and transition, which goes beyond the conventional notions of emotional growth and an experience of the unknown. She argues that young female subjects who live on the edge of or beyond social norms are often the targets of violent reactions. It is violence, Ciccone argues, that characterizes adolescence as a fearful time and a transformational tension toward the future. The protagonist of *Victims* is one of such girls, targeted by her peers for her "gothic" mask and candid fantasies. Her fantastic perception of the world shows similarities with the "realismo magico" of *La santa che dorme*, although in the different context of a single-mother family in the urban environment.

Open Contributions

The *Open Contributions* section of this issue of *g/s/i* presents two important perspectives on Queer literary history and theory as well as Queer practices in Italy.

In "The Importance of Being Ernesto", Paolo Frascà plumbs the Queer potentials of Umberto Saba's single, and incomplete, novel, *Ernesto*. Through meticulous, deep readings, Frascà pursues a double line of historical inquiries, one more literary and historical, the other more critical and sociological. In the first, the essay shines a welcome light on Saba's relatively little-known novel, contextualizing it in the author's life, *oeuvre*, and in Italian literary history. In the second, Frascà examines *Ernesto* in a frame of Italian Queer theorists, chiefly Mario Mieli, and, in so doing, seeks to broaden the discourse of Queer theory, largely dominated by Anglophone theorists. The essay deftly balances and braids together these two large issues, and what results is a persuasive presentation not only of Saba and his contribution to Italian Queer literary history, but also the contributions that Mieli's work can make to the history not only of Queer Italian criticism but to the field of Queer theory more broadly and globally construed.

In "La gaia piazza. Le orme del movimento gay nella Parma degli anni Settanta," Antonella Grassi contributes to the mapping of Queer Italy, based on the unique case of the city of Parma. Looking back at lived experiences of "militanti, saggisti, drammaturghi e poeti" (activists, essayists, playwrights, and poets) in the gay movement of Parma in the 1970s, she brings together historiographical discourse, archival research, oral history, and Queer theory in the attempt to create a genealogy of Queer practices in Italy. She discusses the struggle of the Parma gay movement against capitalist oppression in the name of free sexuality and the

movement's subversive use of language, attitudes, and transvestitism as tools to redefine gender identities. Grassi maintains that the 1970s Parma experiment opened a space for the problematic "laboratorio di soggettività" (laboratory of subjectivities) that followed in the 1980s, arguing that it laid the foundations for the theory and practices that can be defined as consciously Queer.

Continuing Discussions

New with this issue of *g/s/i* is a section entitled "Continuing Discussions." This section will appear when called for and on an ad hoc basis. The articles contained herein are personal narratives and other forms of scholarly, descriptive, or creative contributions in dialogue with previous issues and themes that *g/s/i* has advanced, or of special interest for the editorial line of inquiry for *g/s/i*. Apart from oversight from the editors, these articles have not undergone the sort of peer review that is the practice of the other sections in the journal. In this issue we have three such essays.

The first of these perspectives is "How Italian Advertising Represents Women and Men. Towards a Methodology for the Semiotic Analysis of Stereotypes," by Giovanna Cosenza, Jennifer Colombari and Elisa Gasparri. This is the version in English of an Italian study (published in the international journal *Versus* in 2016) on a corpus of approximately 8000 ads by Nielsen Italia. It describes the semiotic methodology used to categorize the ads and defines the gender stereotypes that emerge as a result of the analysis. What makes this study cogent, besides the ample corpus examined and the heuristic methodology, is its rationale and practical goal. This research derived from the coordinated efforts of semiotic scholars, art directors, executives from associations for self-regulation and companies, and an activist and documentary author on gender stereotypes. Its ultimate objective is to provide institutions and associations with data and useful information that could lead to a healthier and more original commercial communication.

Nicoletta Mandolini's interview of Marilù Oliva titled "Una Femminista in Incognito Contro il Femminicidio" discusses femicide, a topic developed in [g/s/i 2, 2015](#) and [g/s/i 3, 2016](#). Femicide, or, the intentional killing of women precisely because they are women, anchors the interview of Oliva, which explores the way this issue thematically links Oliva's fictional and non-fictional writing. With the objective of re-narrativizing history so as to suggest alternative ways of thinking, acting, and being, literature, in tandem with other acts of cultural articulation, can contribute to social change by offering a disruptive "calligraphy" of fantasy and desire.

Finally, in "Fighting for Gender-fair Language at the National Institute of Astrophysics of Italy," Marina Orio offers a gripping personal narrative on the issue of gender and language in scientific academic institutions in Italy. Orio, who is a "ricercatrice astronoma" (astronomy researcher), went through a long and bitter confrontation with colleagues and administrators to affirm her right to be named as a woman researcher in her Italian institution. Her story is symptomatic of a larger issue (discussed in [g/s/i 3, 2016](#)) about the titles to use in the professional fields to avoid gender discrimination. This operation involves the grammatical structure of Italian, the norms created in different languages and countries to address the problem, and the cultural distance between academic institutions and fields (i.e. humanities and STEM). While in English gender-neutral designations have become most common, in Italian the masculine generic is still prevalent and the common language used to discuss this problem is still unclear. The historical evolution of the issue of gender-fair language in Italian cultural and academic institutions is inflected by the author's frequent travel and work residencies in other countries, providing a basis for comparison across different language groups.

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