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### Editor Bios

**Nicoletta Marini-Maio** is Professor of Italian and Film Studies and Chair of the Italian Department at Dickinson College. She is the recipient of the 2013-2014 Andrew W. Mellon Humanities Forum Fellowship at the University of Pennsylvania for her research on the representations of the Moro Affair in film and theater. Her research interests center on Italian political cinema, gender and sexuality in film and media, feminist and postfeminist theory, and auteur cinema. She is the author of *A Very Seductive Body Politic: Silvio Berlusconi in Cinema* (Milan: Mimesis, 2015) and co-editor and co-translator of *Body of State: A Nation Divided* (Fairleigh- Dickinson, 2011). She is currently working on the postfeminist transmedia project incarnated by Italian fashion influencer and digital entrepreneur Chiara Ferragni. With Ellen Nerenberg, she is co-author of *La Nazione Winx: Coltivare la futura consumista* (forthcoming, Rubbettino Editore, 2021) and, with Paola Bonifazio, she is completing a study on the transmedia and transnational representation of female teens' sexuality. She is co-founder and principal Editor of *g/s/i*.

**Paola Bonifazio** is Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of French and Italian at the University of Texas at Austin. In 2011-12, she was NEH/Andrew Mellon Rome Prize Fellow at the American Academy in Rome. Her research interests focus on film and media theory and history, cultural studies, gender studies, and feminist and postfeminist theories. Her first book *Schooling in Modernity: The Politics of Sponsored Films in Postwar Italy* (University of Toronto Press, 2014) explores short film productions sponsored by state and non-state agencies to promote modernization and industry, and to govern the Italian people's conduct. Her second book *The Photoromance: A Feminist Reading of Popular Culture* (MIT Press, 2020) examines the "convergence culture" of Italian media as photoromance magazines dispersed their content across multiple formats, narrative conventions, editorial and business strategies, and platforms.

**Ellen Nerenberg** is Hollis Professor of Romance Languages & Literatures at Wesleyan University. With *Prison Terms: Representing Confinement During and After Italian Fascism* (University of Toronto Press, 2001), winner of the Howard S. Marraro Prize from the Modern Language Association, she is also author of *Murder Made in Italy: Homicide, Media, and Contemporary Italian Culture* (Indiana University Press, 2012). Current essays have focused on nostalgia in the cinema of Paolo Sorrentino and on the [North American reception of the Andrea Camilleri's transmedial Montalbano project](#). At present, she is co-author, with Nicoletta Marini-Maio, of *La Nazione Winx: Coltivare la futura consumista* (forthcoming, Rubbettino Editore, 2020). She is co-founder of *g/s/i* and Editor of the *Open Contributions* and *Continuing Discussions* sections and an editor of the [Italian Studies Channel](#) on the New Books Network.

**Keywords:** queer, feminism, masculinities, motherhood, fotoromanzi, reproduction

**Abstract:** Nicoletta Marini-Maio, Paola Bonifazio and Ellen Nerenberg discuss the topic of the Themed Section. Paola Bonifazio presents the rationale of the Invited Perspectives. Ellen Nerenberg presents the Open Contributions and Continuing Discussions. Marini-Maio presents the new section Collaborations, which hosts discussions and descriptions of current scholarly collaborations.

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## Beside, Besides, and B-sides: Collaborations as Feminist and Decolonizing Practices

### Journal Editorial

NICOLETTA MARINI-MAIO, PAOLA BONIFAZIO, ELLEN NERENBERG

Going it alone. The prevailing research model, especially in the Humanities (the most common institutional location for many Italian Studies programs in North America, where *g/s/i* is lodged), has called for the lone scholar toiling in service to the monograph. This solitary scholar, as lampooned in caricature, curates their specialist subfield, has seldom engaged in public life (indeed fails to make their research “relevant” to those outside the academy), has been subject to publishing processes that result in the slow circulation of their work, and has cultivated relationships with specific (typically brick and mortar) sites (e.g., archives, collections, and so forth). Sciences, mathematics, and social sciences, on the other hand, have developed systems of attribution that recognize different investments of labor and commitment. In these fields, research is easily understood as collaborative, addressing global challenges, and having a measurable impact. STEM and social sciences colleagues prize open access journals, which favor broad, quick circulation, and accept and place importance on the metrics these journals use to evaluate circulation, citation, and impact. In other words, open access venues are generally accepted and not perceived as “non-standard,” even if, more often than not, they are market- and efficiency-driven.

For the most part, it appears that the Humanities, as a discipline, however multi-faceted and variegated, has relegated to the edges the sorts of collaborative research methodologies and pedagogies the social and natural sciences have long been developing. Nor does a rosier future, in which collaborative work might be embraced or endorsed, seem to appear on the horizon, since a particularly pernicious obstacle to developing greater collaborative habits of mind concerns career development within the academy: even though an emerging generation of scholars may perhaps wish to move the dial on collaborative research and their assessments, anxiety still percolates concerning how such collaborations may be “counted” in personnel reviews when assessment of the candidate’s portfolio focuses on equivalencies. For too long has one graduate student produced one doctoral dissertation which is subsequently developed into one monograph whose (single) authorship is unimpeachable. Mono-authored monographs mean simpler math, briefer committee meetings, and easier tabulation.

In *Touching Feeling*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick mapped the occasionally rough terrain of collaborations from another perspective. Eschewing a vertical configuration in favor of intellectual exchange encouraging greater collaboration, she describes what “co-labor” is like as one occupies a space “beside” another. As she wrote,

*Beside* comprises a wide range of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivaling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to everything Sedgwick describes about “besides”, we are drawn also to the “b-side”, or the “flip” side of the now defunct analogue artifact known as the 45 rpm. The 45 offers a useful metaphor for a strategy of pluralizing the creation of canon as well as restoring some agency to the artist. The “A” side of history gives you the hits. The “B” side gives you the not necessarily

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<sup>1</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 8.

commercializable, commodifiable artistic expression. This “b” side also carries us back to Teresa De Lauretis who, in *Technologies of Gender*, described something similar which she called the “space off”, outside the visual, where sound emerges to disrupt the hegemony of the visual image in a cinematic context.<sup>2</sup>

A review of theoretical perspectives of collaborative research reveals five, constitutive elements:

- constructivism,
- affect,
- performativity
- deconstructive, decolonizing potential, and
- feminism

Collaborative work constructs knowledges through connections across subjects (researchers, students, teachers, subjects/participants) and disciplinary fields (humanities, social sciences).

Research and artistic practices require affective investment, something present also as shared affect-ion for the research topic. Affective phenomena are implicated in close interactions, dialogue, and pleasure deriving from collaboration and can also engender an opposed set of feelings: rejection, repulsion, rebellion, resistance, polemic non-acceptance.

Collaborative research is performed and relies upon embodiment, gesture, action, and connection across varied media. Kathleen Fitzpatrick sees it as a necessary part of a new form of “‘generous thinking’ that emphasizes listening over speaking, community over individualism, collaboration over competition, and lingering with the ideas that are in front of us rather than continually pressing forward to where we want to go.” (Fitzpatrick, 2019, 13)

Collaborative research can deconstruct and decolonize the kinds of territorialization, as Deleuze would call it, of tendencies that assert findings, discovery, things revealed, uncovered results, things we recognize or realize that are already there.<sup>3</sup> Collaboration deterritorializes, stripping away familiarity, so that process can be more transparent.

Feminist practice, scholarly methodology, and activism intersect all of these categories. Collaboration enacts these fundamentally feminist perspectives and affects dialogic thought, intersubjectivity, and the centrality of the desiring subject. If allowed the space and platform, everyone can/should be able to speak.

For *g/s/i—gender/sexuality/italy* 7 (2020), the journal issued a call for essays studying collaborations as they intersect and cross research, pedagogical, and creative practices, gender and sexuality studies, and Italian Studies. Some areas specified by the call included:

- Horizontal and vertical intellectual and creative exchanges
- Decolonizing pedagogical and research practices
- Intersectional and interdisciplinary collaborations
- Collaborations across space
- Collaborations as continuum (continuing former collaborative efforts)
- Intra and extra-academic collaborations
- Inter-institutional collaborative models

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<sup>2</sup> De Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender*, 25.

<sup>3</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 139-45, 184-192

- Collaborative practices among affiliative groups (such as organizations, families, teams, etc.)

The happy outcome of this Call is the publication of new research and theoretical discussions, as the Invited Section of this issue of *g/s/i* remarkably testifies, that help constitute the archive of collaboration. Additionally, with this issue of the Journal, we inaugurate a new section titled *Collaborations*, in which we encourage submissions of collaborative projects. We hope that *g/s/i*'s new section will be a space for invitation and innovation. We hope it will carve out a space—that “beside” or “b-side” space we discussed in our Call—in which collaboration can be showcased, developed, and encouraged.

## Collaborations

NICOLETTA MARINI-MAIO

“We believe in collaboration.” This may not be a religious credo, but it is certainly a powerful statement of intent. It is how the inaugural essay of *Collaborations*, the new *g/s/i* section that we introduce with this issue of the Journal, begins. “‘Scrivere di Islam’: A Collaborative Project” by migration studies scholar Simone Brioni and writer Shirin Ramzanali Fazel is much more than an announcement and a presentation of their recently published collaborative book *Scrivere di Islam: Raccontare la diaspora* (Writing about Islam: Narrating a Diaspora). This essay is a testament to collaboration in that form of “generous thinking” theorized by Katheleen Fitzpatrick we mentioned above. In collaboration, Brioni’s and Ramzanali Fazel’s ideas, backgrounds (Italian and Somali) and fields (scholarly and creative) have cross-fertilized, enriching their professional and personal lives with the ethics of responsibility, empathy, and mutual respect. It is significant that their collaboration started as a friendship and has progressively grown into a set of antiracist, decolonial practices. As they clearly state, collaboration is uneasy, but necessary.

Sole Anatrone’s and Julia Heim’s “Working in the Shadows: Collaboration as Queer Practice” is a stimulating discussion on the two scholars’ collaborative project of translation of *Smagliature digitali: corpi, generi, tecnologie*, a book written by transnational, transfeminist groups. Anatrone’s and Heim’s translation collaboration is a queer practice that calls into question issues of authorship, ownership, and, overall, patriarchal norms that establish privileged and marginal positions. In their conversation, that also explores how collaboration has provided affective networks to contrast the isolating forces emerged during the 2020 pandemic, Anatrone and Heim affirm the power of collaboration as a set of practices expanding from the academic arena to their personal lives. Additionally, the unconventional format of their essay, which is presented as an in progress, operational, multimedia, and multilingual exchange, offers the readers the opportunity to perform a participatory reading.

The third essay published in this section documents an inter-institutional pedagogical collaboration conducted by Ellen Nerenberg and Serena Bassi with upper-level Italian students at Wesleyan University and the LGBTQ+ center Il Cassero in Bologna, Italy. The collaborative practice has informed all the project’s components: the structure of the course, titled “Coming Out/Coming of Age: Narratives of Becoming in Contemporary Italian Culture;” the selection of the course material; and the adoption of an experimental “co-laboratorio” (co-laboratory) format, in which students had the opportunity to conduct, under Bassi’s guidance, ethnographic interviews with volunteers of the Cassero willing to share their coming out stories. Aiming to expand the curricular canon of Italian Studies at Wesleyan and attempt to decolonize the student-instructor relationship, this pedagogical experiment models new transnational, transgenerational, and inter-institutional teaching experiments

rooted in queer and decolonizing pedagogies. A rich bibliographic apparatus and a practical appendix complement the essay.

*g/s/i* looks forward to further collaborations with colleagues from other journals, with editors, artists, and colleagues. We hope that with initiatives like the new section, and special issues, like, for example, the forthcoming Film Issue of *The Italianist*, we can advance collaborative research of many types.

## Themed Section

NICOLETTA MARINI-MAIO

The response to this issue's Call has been significant, albeit in some unanticipated ways. The essays in the *Themed Section* of the current issue constitute important documentation in the history of collaborations between women. These innovative studies detail collaborative practices and dialectical spaces created and cultivated by Italian women in literature, culture, and labor experiences. This important archive, at the same time, does not document collaborations in scholarly production. Put another way, while collaboration is the object of study, the essays are the fruit of the labor of individuals.

We take the disconnect between the object of the Call and method of the essays to be symptomatic of the problems we outline above. Further, it can be taken as evidence of the continued difficulties of collaboration, perhaps especially in 2020. Collaborations require time. The unprecedented challenges produced by the global pandemic, as we have all witnessed, had cascading effects with unpredictable, yet powerful, reach. Without exception, the time available to conduct research was eroded by newfound responsibilities in both the work and home spheres. These may not have been the ideal conditions in which to cultivate collaboration. Given the new and competing pressures of 2020, it is not surprising that familiar research methods have prevailed.

This issue's *Themed Section* includes three stimulating articles. Diana Garvin's "Riding the Stock Car to Sleep in the Stables: Migrant Agricultural Labor and Songs of Rebellion" takes a cultural studies approach to analyze the collective tactics that the *mondine* (rice workers) put in place during Fascism to survive and politicize their working conditions. Using archival research and "melodic evidence," Garvin engages in an original discussion of the dialectics between the material world experienced by the *mondine* and the songs that they created. Gavin originally argues that the development of class consciousness in these rural, working-class women was shaped and progressed during the actual travels to the rice paddies. The melodic exchanges among the *mondine* document their emotional and political transformation, from sadness to anger and resistance, and eventually hope in Socialist and Communism.

Loredana Di Martino's "Addressing Each Other's Eyes Directly: From Adriana Cavarero's 'Relating Narratives' to Elena Ferrante's Intersectional Ethics of Narrative Relations," investigates the "emancipatory potential of the B-side of female friendships" in Ferrante's Neapolitan novels. Di Martino argues that, through the powerful and complex kinship between Lila and Lenù, Ferrante revisits the Italian *femminismo della differenza* (sexual difference feminism), uncovering the systems of oppression and the still unresolved contradictions between intersubjectivity and autonomy in unprivileged contexts. Di Martino constructs an intersectional framework that allows her to connect Adriana Cavarero's paradigm of "relating narrative" with the decolonial theories of thinkers such as Audre Lorde and María Lugones.

In the last article of this section, "Rural Italy in Feminist Writing: Dialogism, Polyphony, and Heteroglossia in Armanda Guiducci's *La donna non è gente*," Viviana Pezzullo explores Guiducci's

autobiographical narratives from the lens of collaboration. She discusses the practice of *autocoscienza* (self-awareness), the “dialogic, polyphonic, and heteroglot relationship between Guiducci and the women narrators she interviews,” adopting a plural perspective in which she challenges individual authorship and language. Pezzullo’s study shows how Guiducci gives voice to the subaltern women in the rural South going beyond the (urban) second-wave feminist practices and interconnecting “fiction and historical data, cultural anthropology, sociology, and confessional literature.”

The “b-side” and the “beside” resonate, as outlined below, in the Invited Perspectives section of this issue.

## Invited Perspectives

PAOLA BONIFAZIO

Literature and the arts are great sources of inspiration when conceptualizing practices of collaboration in scholarship. How does the work of creative writers engaged in collective projects address questions of authorship? Do figurative artists challenge quantification in collaborative endeavors? What happens to individual thought and style when the creative output is co-authored? More broadly, do artists provide us with models that can be helpful not only to better understand creative works in themselves, but also to shape our own approaches to collaboration in the academic fields? In “Side by Side: Female Collaboration in Ferrante’s Fiction and Ferrante Studies,” Stiliana Milkova argues that what is represented in Elena Ferrante’s novels have engendered what has happened in academia and in the profession: female friendships and collaborations being not only a staple in the narratives but also features of projects in Ferrante Studies and an influence on a legacy of creative and authorial women. In Milkova’s view, Ferrante’s novels depict female characters as they relate to each other “side by side,” against established androcentric, vertical hierarchies (of authorship and [re]production). These dynamics find resonance in feminist approaches embraced by many scholars in Ferrante Studies and, in her words, they “are mirrored in the reality of readers, publishers, translators, and public intellectuals.”

Milkova’s article serves as a brilliant introduction to an additional three essays that explore, from different standpoints and in different areas, the bounding element of collaboration across the academic and the artistic realms. Practices of collaboration are self-reflexively discussed in “Where Myself Ends and Yourself Begins,” an article co-written by Veronica Mognato and Ana Treviño, two Austin-based artists who share personal experiences and professional interests, which they have embedded in their first collaborative project, *At Arms’ Length*. In their contribution, enriched by photographic images, Mognato and Treviño reflect on their minimalist performance and the ways in which it conveys their living experience of different, and yet so close, communities (Italy’s and Miami’s). In both, they argue, physical proximity is conducive of an inclusive environment. Currently working on another project together on body hair and feminine subjectivities, the two artists define their collaboration as an “infinite set of stairs where reciprocally one acts as a step for the other” and highlight the positive effects of dialogic practices of art-making. Moving from performance art to storytelling, in “Collective Writing Projects as Sustainable Ecologies of Collaboration,” Paolo Saporito discusses practices of co-authorship in two Italian writing collective, Wu Ming and Joana Karda, each with their own ethical, social, and political potential. According to Saporito, the collective practices of these writers ensure the sustainable management of diversity needed in order to counter contemporary forms of discrimination. At the same time, each collective uses very different creative strategies: Joana Karda’s method is to embrace the availability to yield (“rinunciare”) one’s views and welcoming others, while Wu Ming aims at achieving complex, inclusive solutions able to express the views of all the

members. In the essay, Saporito develops a scholarly reading of these innovative writing strategies, while experimenting himself with language. Framing his analysis, an episode in the life of an hypothetical reader, “the Consumerist,” whose purchase of a collectively written novel inadvertently short circuits the binaries that permeate their thought and conduct in a neoliberal society: subject/object; owner/owned; self/other. Finally, Damiano Garofalo and Dom Holdaway offer some insights into collaborative scholarship in Italy, referring in particular to the principal public funding scheme for research—the so-called “Progetti di rilevante interesse nazionale” (PRIN), organized and financed by the Ministry for Education, Universities and Research (MIUR). Their account is based on personal experiences (in particular, both of them participated as postdoctoral researchers in one such project, titled “The International Circulation of Italian Cinema,” together with scholars from different institutions in Italy). In addition to their reflections on the dynamics of collaborative research in Italy and its legal framework, Garofalo and Holdaway put forward some hypotheses on how gender balance in public-funded projects can be used to sketch the social composition of academic positions in the field.

Last but not least, “Invited Perspectives” is honored to host in this issue the autobiographical account of Francesca Rigotti, whose research in philosophy has been radically affected by feminist awareness. In “My Way to Philosophy,” Rigotti weaves the threads of her own story, from the “calling” towards philosophy to the birth of her form of thought, “impertinent thought,” embodied in the principle of gender contamination and daring to deal with everyday life philosophically. In her conclusions to this life account, Rigotti delves on the topic of female friendship, relevant to the theme of this issue, and questions the model purported by the two main characters in Ferrante’s Neapolitan novels, claiming that it interiorizes the masculine stand. Side by side, Milkova’s and Rigotti’s accounts demonstrate the breadth of responses elicited by the popular couple, Lina and Lenù, and circularly (yet, openly) conclude the section by allowing readers to further expand the debate on their own.

## Open Perspectives and Continuing Discussions

ELLEN NERENBERG

The Open Section of *g/s/i* provides space for submissions that are not linked to the stated theme of the current issue but which help enact the journal’s mission of presenting scholarship about gendered identities and the ways they intersect with and produce Italian politics, culture, and society. Like essays published in the Themed Section and Continuing Discussions, those featured in the Open Section have also undergone a double-blind review process. In “Per me il documentario è relazione”: The Eloquence of Found Footage and Garment Workers’ Rights in Costanza Quatrighio’s *Triangle*, Valeria Castelli takes as her subject Quatrighio’s award-winning 2014 documentary drawing into proximity the infamous Triangle Shirt Factory Fire from 1911 (New York City) and the deaths of four female textile workers in Barletta (Apulia) one hundred years later. Quatrighio’s use of found documentary footage to compare the two discrete events across time, space, and context, Castelli finds, “eloquently” invites viewers to critically position themselves vis-à-vis the disasters. Repurposing found footage creates a “montage of memory traces”, to cite Benjamin, and allows the filmmaker to retrieve, recycle, and recall while all the while establishing for herself and for viewers a critical, ethical, and self-reflexive distance from which to evaluate the historical events, their legacies, and their resonances.

This issue of *g/s/i* features two articles in Continuing Discussions that respond to the Themed section on current discourses of reproduction, fertility and parenthood in Italy from *g/s/i* 5 (2018). That issue documented conflicting discursive constructions of procreation, political and religious control, media articulations, family policies, and feminist and postfeminist configurations of femininity

in contemporary Italy. Continuing in the vein of inquiry into collaboration in which one works “beside” and “alongside” another, one might say that the essays in this issue “collaborate” with their predecessors. The editorial from *g/s/i* 5 problematized the articulations of “perfect motherhood” advanced by so many of the recent “mommairs,” observing how it fashions a heteronormative interpellation of largely white, economically privileged women.” Further, the “new” articulation of perfect motherhood excluded women of color, single, childless, or poor women, and queer people of all types. Both of this issue’s essays take up questions of adoption but with differing focus and critical stances. Ethiopian-Italian Carla Macoggi’s “semi-autobiographies”, *Kkeyma: Storia di una bimba meticcica* (2011) and *La nemesi della rossa* (2012), form the basis of Carla Cornette’s “Colonial Legacies in Family-Making and Family-Breaking: Carla Macoggi’s Memoirs as Semi-Autobiography,” which explores the continued colonial practices of *madamato* and foreclosed opportunities of decolonization. Cornette’s detailed analysis of Macoggi’s sequential memoirs contributes to the growing body of scholarship in Italian postcolonial theory but also to the field of Critical Adoption Stories. It is from this intersection that Cornette’s examination of mixed-race children at risk advances the line of inquiry from *g/s/i* 5. Adoption and surrogacy figure also in Luca Guizzardi’s essay “C’è una famiglia che vuole,” which also helps trouble the heteronormatization of reproduction. Guizzardi probes representations of how surrogate maternity in academic debates and, by way of ethnographic research, in the everyday lives of gay men in Italy. Drawing qualitatively from interviews of Italian gay men between 19 and 49, Guizzardi explores competing interpretations of surrogate pregnancy and adoption.

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