

The *lieu factice*: Performance, Identity, and Place in
French and Italian Queer Documentary since 2000

Thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

at the University of Leicester

by

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September 2013

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Abstract

This research is motivated by the increased output of Queer documentary film in France and Italy from 2000 onwards, an increase which is seen to form part of a wider committed cinema. The impetus comes from a need to recognise the contribution of this output in marking a shift away from the categorisation of representations within set frameworks and identities to the deployment of the intricacies of documentary performance in creating an alternative and more complex sense of place and identity. In considering this shift I develop the notion of the *lieu factice*, which I offer as an original way of approaching the complexities of both the process of documentary representation and the context in which this takes place in France and Italy where ‘difference’ is generally subsumed in universal principles. The *lieu factice* is a temporary site of agency and resistance which allows identity and place to be explored in different ways, reflecting the position of Queer lives in contexts where the universal predominates and the interplay between visibility and invisibility is a complex phenomenon. As I progress through each chapter, providing detailed analysis of the selected films, I appropriate a range of Queer theoretical concepts to support my notion, which draws on the work of Judith Butler, Michel Foucault, Leo Bersani and Nicholas de Villiers. The *lieu factice* is shaped by a range of representational and spatial dynamics in the foregrounding of ‘difference’ and is marked by shifts between local, national, and global spaces, both physical and imagined. The notion of ‘Queer documentary’ in France and Italy is seen to defy definition and centres on a notable challenge to the hegemony of the family as a heteronormative space within national narratives.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank, first and foremost, my research supervisors Dr Ann Miller and Dr Marina Spunta from the School of Modern Languages at the University of Leicester for their tremendous support during the preparation of my doctoral thesis. They have encouraged and supported me throughout my research, providing many hours of stimulating discussion.

I would also like to thank my family and friends for supporting me in everything I do, never questioning any endeavour upon which I embark. In particular, I would like to thank Peter Halliwell for his stimulating conversations and interpretations of my work from an impartial perspective.

At a personal level, my interest in documentary film started with a viewing of Albert and David Maysles *Grey Gardens* (1975), a film that I found very ‘disturbing’ on first viewing it in the 1980s as a teenager. It was then during my undergraduate degree at the University of Leicester, when exposed to the documentary style of Mathieu Kassovitz’s *La Haine* (1995), that this interest was re-ignited. This encouraged me to ask more and more questions about documentary filmmaking, and, while I feel that I now have more of the answers, clearly many more questions remain.

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Section I

Foundations—introducing the *lieu factice*

Chapter One—Contexts

The visibility that placement brings can make [queers] vulnerable to violence as well as facilitate [...] marginalisation and exclusion from the security and pleasures that placement typically brings members of dominant social groups. It is no surprise, then, that queers are frequently suspicious, fearful and unable to relate easily to the fixity and certainty inhering in most dominant ontologies of 'place'. Indeed, many queers find a certain amount of solace, safety and pleasure being in motion or nowhere at all. (Browne, Lim, and Brown, 2007, p.23)

This thesis explores performance, identity and place in a selection of Queer documentary films produced in France and Italy since the year 2000. It examines the performance of 'difference' by Queer¹ individuals within prevailing notions of 'place'. As the opening quote highlights, the tension resulting from 'placement' (i.e. occupying a particular place somewhere) can be threatening. This is particularly important in a consideration of Queer lives in France and Italy where 'difference' is frequently unacknowledged and assimilated into national discourses involving processes of universalisation (most notably in French republicanism). In the films I analyse, there is clear evidence of the problems that arise where non-normative sexualities meet hostility: the murder of François Chenu in a public park in *Au-delà de la haine* (2006); the face-to-face public confrontations of Gustav Hofer and Luca Ragazzi with far-right groups in *Improvvisamente l'inverno scorso* (2008); the precariousness of the Ecuadorian transgender migrant prostitutes living in Paris in *Les Travestis Pleurent Aussi* (2006). These films are a claim on the right to occupy space and to exert resistance to intolerance, reflecting attempts at altering

¹ In my use of the term 'Queer' I am referring to non-normative sexualities (such as gay and lesbian identities) as well as to 'those gestures or analytical models which dramatise incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire' (Jagose, 1996, p.1).

hegemonic discourse at the same time. The directors² and their work studied in this thesis offer a complex view of the negotiation of space and place in France and Italy and are seen to resist the fixity of ‘place’.

Queer Lives

While the term ‘Queer’ may not carry the same weight in France and Italy, and other parts of Europe, there is evidence to suggest that this is changing.³ Downing and Gillett (2011, p.5) assert that a Queer approach remains applicable to European contexts despite potentially overstated concerns about its lack of influence in fighting for the rights of marginal groups resulting from its rejection of ‘identity’. They assert that the collection of works in *Queer in Europe*—which considers the term ‘Queer’ in a range of different European countries—highlights a ‘story of discontinuities, of distinctions and of plurality’ instead of a direct linear progression of development similar to approaches adopted elsewhere, such as in the U.S. (ibid.).

Although acknowledged as reflecting the ‘antisocial turn’ of Queer theory in the U.S. (Downing and Gillett, 2011, p.4) the work of Judith/Jack Halberstam is helpful in

² Sebastiano D’Ayala Valva, Gustav Hofer and Luca Ragazzi, Peter Marcias, Olivier Meyrou, Philippe Vallois, Alberto Vendemmia.

³ Luca Malici explains that Italians tend to prefer identity categories such as gay and lesbian and that academic interest in Queer theory has only recently started to develop due to limited translations of works from elsewhere. He also explains that ‘Queer’ is not understood as a re-appropriated word used for combative purposes as it is in the UK and U.S. (Malici, 2011, pp.114-115). Other works have contended with similar concerns in the past: Heathcote et al (1998) — in *Gay Signatures – gay and lesbian theory, fiction and film in France, 1945-1995* — offer a Queer reading of contemporary gay and lesbian cultural production based on an analysis of the ‘intersecting play of relations’ between the respective French and North American contexts (i.e. between an Anglo-American Queer perspective and French *pudeur*), suggesting that this approach gives a sense of balance to the French debate concerning gay identities (at the same time overcoming the all too common problem of inappropriately analysing a culture different to one’s own from the position of an Anglo-American queer theoretical perspective); Denis M. Provencher’s *Queer French – Globalization, Language, and Sexual Citizenship in France* (2007) suggests that through an ‘American-style’ globalisation, a new French gay culture has been encouraged to queer up on both a national and global level; Gary P. Cestaro, editor of *Queer Italia* (2004) aims, through an analysis of a variety of texts from different periods, to collapse ‘fixed definitions of sexual identity’.

understanding what it means to talk of non–normative sexualities and Queer lives. While offering a more assertive approach through the appropriation of Queer clichés (ibid.), which are potentially less common in French and Italian contexts, Halberstam’s work remains very useful in illuminating the transgressive nature of Queer lives. In her work *In a Queer Time and Place* (2005), Halberstam asserts that ‘Queer time’ and ‘Queer space’ exist counter to the established ‘institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction’ and are driven by ‘location, movement, and identification’ (ibid., p.1). She states that: “‘Queer space’ refers to the place-making practices within postmodernism in which queer people engage and it describes the new understandings of space enabled by the production of queer counterpublics’ (ibid., p.6). In conjunction with this: “‘Queer time’ is a term for those specific models of temporality that emerge within postmodernism once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety and inheritance’ (ibid.). In very general terms, she then defines ‘queer’ as the ‘nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time’ (ibid.).

Halberstam’s ideas are a response to the problems arising out of a postmodern era, specifically to work previously done on ‘postmodern geography’ which has tended to exclude sexuality from its analysis, focusing less on localised issues relating to the personal and to the body for more global issues relating to class and politics (2005, p.6). However, Halberstam sees postmodernism as providing an opportunity to reconsider continually the ‘practice of culture production’ beyond the crisis of unstable meaning associated with postmodern cultural thought (ibid.). She identifies:

[...] the possibility that all kinds of people, especially in postmodernity, will and do opt to live outside of reproductive and familial time as well as on the edges of labor and production. By doing so, they also often live outside the logic of capital accumulation: here we could consider ravers, club kids, HIV-positive barebackers, rent boys, sex workers, homeless people, drug dealers, and the

unemployed. Perhaps such people could productively be called “queer subjects” in terms of the ways they live (deliberately, accidentally, or of necessity) during the hours when others sleep and in spaces (physical, metaphysical, and economic) that others have abandoned, and in terms of the ways they might work in the domains that other people assign to privacy and family. (ibid., p.10)

Halberstam focuses on the transgender body within this particular work and asks why ‘gender flexibility’ is increasingly valued within postmodern society (2005, p.19). She compares it to market exploitation within capitalism, which essentially establishes a firm base from where a ‘new global elite’ can discriminate against others while at the same time promoting ‘flexibility’ as an invaluable commodity. This ‘flexibility’ has allowed individuals, including those in the LGBTQ⁴ community, to adopt a guiding philosophy of ‘uniqueness as radical style’, which has resulted in a neo-liberal sexual politics that has sought to move away from the labelling and categorisation of gender and sexuality towards homonormativity (ibid.).⁵ Halberstam starts a dialogue in her work which aims to understand ‘gender variance in queer communities that move beyond claims of either uniqueness or unilateral oppression, and beyond the binary division of flexibility or rigidity’ (ibid., p.21). One of her main concerns is whether transgenderism—and associated issues of gender fluidity/fixity—is the triumphant result of decades of ‘gender activism’ or ‘the sign of the reincorporation of a radical subculture back in to the flexible economy of postmodern culture’ (ibid.). Either way, her work seeks to illuminate the role of transgenderism in *sustaining* an ongoing tension in relation to the fluidity and rigidity of gendered and sexual identities by focusing on its unpredictability and ambiguity (ibid.).

⁴ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer.

⁵ See Lisa Duggan’s *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism and the attack on democracy* (2003). This work deals with the breaking up of culture and identity from a politics centring on class and economics, which has deactivated any political potential surfacing from such a connection previously (Duggan, 2003, p. xxi).

Halberstam's focus on transgenderism in relation to cinema exemplifies the ongoing tension to which she refers, which is worth exploring briefly as it will help later in considering the issues of gender, sex and sexuality in relation to Queer documentary film in France and Italy. Halberstam highlights that narrative fictional cinematic representations of transgender individuals by those who are not transgender themselves usually fall into three categories—stabilization, rationalization and trivialization—which deny the representation of 'transgender lives in the glory of all their contradictions' (2005, p.56). She also suggests that there are three modes of representing the transgender individual/character: firstly, the spectator has to rewind the whole film—upon the revelation of a transgender character's previously successful 'passing'—in order to make sense of it all; secondly, the filmmaker uses formal techniques to allow the spectator to look *with* the transgender individual (through their transgender gaze) as opposed to looking *at* them; thirdly, the use of processes of 'ghosting' (i.e. the film's narrative is haunted by the transgender individual) and 'doubling' (i.e. two transgender individuals are played off against each other so that the issue of normativity does not become a comparative point of reference) (ibid., p.78). Halberstam also asserts that the shot/reverse shot of classical narrative cinema—which 'occupies a central position within cinematic grammar' and which promotes 'the compulsory heterosexuality of the romance genre' (2005, p.86)—can be temporarily dismantled through the adoption of a transgender gaze.⁶ While Halberstam is referring specifically to transgender representations here—offering a framework for analysis later—the features to which she refers draw attention to the

⁶ Halberstam's analysis of a particular shot/reverse shot in Kimberly Peirce's *Boys Don't Cry* (1999)—where Brandon Teena ends up looking at himself from two positions (i.e. from the point of view of having been forced to physically reveal he is a woman and also seeing himself still as a transgender man looking at himself from that compromised position, and vice versa)—describes the notion of the 'transgender gaze' as: 'constituted as a look divided within itself, a point of view that comes from two places (at least) at the same time, one clothed and one naked' (Halberstam, 2005, p.88).

control of cinematic space and afford insight into the issue of self-representation and how the self is represented by another. From the selection of films I explore later, a claim can be made to a more critical position in relation to these issues in French and Italian Queer documentary, allowing me also to suggest the *lieu factice* as a way of conceptualising the dynamics in operation. In the rest of this chapter, I consider the context of France and Italy further, suggesting the possibility of a ‘new queer documentary cinema’ before outlining the rest of the thesis.

Changing Face of French and Italian Queer Documentary?

There are a number of studies which draw attention to the contradictions that surface from French and Italian contexts concerning the performance of gender, sexuality and difference. Provencher demonstrates in *Queer French* how gays and lesbians in France have responded to globalised Anglo-American ‘articulations of homosexuality and sexual citizenship’ by developing their own narratives and language based on ‘unspecified “difference” related to a republican universalistic model that does not tout individualism’ (2007, pp.2, 53). Rees-Roberts considers in *French Queer Cinema*—amongst a whole range of Queer-related cinema and along a series of ‘faultlines’⁷—the Citébeur pornography company as ‘a visible space for a more complex representation of *beur*⁸ masculinity than is catered for in mainstream gay subculture’ (2008, p.19). Cestaro emphasises in *Queer Italia* how *World Gay Pride* in Rome in the year 2000 was an ‘important turning point in the history of the Italian gay rights movement that for the first

⁷ Nick Rees-Roberts uses Alan Sinfield’s concept of ‘faultlines’ in his analysis; these are ‘awkward’ issues that remain unresolved and which need tackling. Rees-Roberts asserts that, in relation to French Queer cinema, the following challenges exist: ‘post-integration ethnic identities, and their implications for same-sex, cross-race relations’, ‘the uneasy positioning of transgender within LGBT identity politics’, and ‘gay male sexualities, love and loss in the current HIV/AIDS conjuncture’ (Rees-Roberts, 2006, p.2).

⁸ ‘In France: a child of immigrant parents, born in France’. From the *Oxford Essential Dictionary of Foreign Terms in English* (LaFlaur, Speake, 1999, online version 2012).

time garnered serious national – indeed international – attention’ (2004, p.1). Mudu adds context to this by explaining that: ‘[t]he [Christian] jubilee marked the climax of a very long papacy devoted to the stout defence of strictly conservative stances in matters of family, sexuality, gender differences, the ordaining of women, etc.’ (2002, p.195). As a result of the staging of the pride event at a crucial point in the Catholic Church’s history, a series of ‘turf wars’ (my emphasis) ensued in society and the media; the outcome of the whole saga was the challenging of the homogeneity of Rome/Italy through the greater unity seen in the gay and lesbian community and the bringing to the fore of ongoing inequalities in Italian society (ibid., p.189). Duncan’s *Reading and Writing Italian Homosexuality* (2006) exemplifies a selection of gay male representations from a range of cultural sources, demonstrating its variable and contradictory nature, often based on geographical and gender determinants. He builds on and challenges the assumptions of those observing Italy, from outside, that male homosexuality, like heterosexuality, is clearly defined and dictated by a direct link between desire and ‘object choice’. Duncan explains that: ‘sexual identity [in Italy] is imbricated in complex economics of class, national difference, and cultural capital’ (Duncan, 2006, p.4). This includes, for example, assumptions (and fantasies) that men from the South of Italy partake in sex with other men, but are not gay; it is simply the unavailability of unmarried women with whom to have sex, their honour being maintained for marriage (ibid., p.4). Duncan shows in this work that ‘[m]odern or Northern versions of homosexuality [...] both long for and repress this sense of difference that might be termed racial as much as sexual for the object of desire is determined more by geography than gender’ (ibid., p.4). Also of note during the first decade of the millennium has been the attention paid to same-sex marriage and same-sex parenting, the latter of which Cristina Johnston highlights in her *French Minority Cinema* as contributing to a more visible gay and lesbian community ‘in dialogue’ with

the mainstream (2010, pp.33–34). All of these studies emphasise the importance of performance and ‘place’ in shaping gendered and sexual identities in France and Italy, particularly in the contexts of local, national and global imaginaries. Of particular note between France and Italy are the contradictions exhibited in the treatment of ‘difference’, an issue brought to the fore with greater mainstream visibility of gays and lesbians.

Although Pidduck reports on the ‘hypervisibility’ of Queer works across most of the Western world (2003, p.266), there has been no significant in-depth study from the point of view of documentary film in France and Italy. Referring positively to the ‘hypervisibility trend’ of Queer representations in the past two decades, Grandena perpetuates an often noted opinion in circulation within social and cultural spheres that ‘visibility’ is a positive and desired outcome for Queer lives (2009, p.75); as the opening quote to this thesis suggests, this is not always the case. In fact, Binnie states that there is unequal distribution in this ‘visibility’, which centres on issues of homonormativity (and which reflects back to Rees-Roberts’s use of Sinfield’s ‘faultlines’ in his study): ‘The increasing visibility and power of affluent white gay men has been accompanied by the marginalisation of the politics of both lesbian feminism and sex radicalism, and has highlighted the exclusions within queer communities on the basis of race, class, gender and disability’ (Binnie, 2007, p.34). The films I have selected for analysis attempt both to acknowledge the diversity of Queer lives in France and Italy—from the white male middle-class couple Gustav Hofer and Luca Ragazzi (who wish to get married) to the Ecuadorian transgender prostitute Mia/Angel—and to highlight how they interconnect in a number of different ways in spite of any socio-political differences between them.

In addition to specific socio-political issues of concern, the increased visibility and representation of Queer lives and voices in France and Italy since 2000 has also been stimulated by greater access to a generally affordable digital technology as well as the

ongoing support of film festivals in promoting LGBTQ voices both nationally and internationally. This output reflects, as Ezra and Rowden explain in *Transnational Cinema*, the greater accessibility of minority groups and individuals to a method of representation which can maximise on low-budget production and distribution and thus minimize financial risk (2006, p.6). This increase is amply detailed on the Italian *cinemagay* website (launched in 2002 by a group of volunteers), which, although it gives no absolute statistical figures, provides a resource of global trends and details on Queer cinema and its distribution and circulation. The *cinemaitaliano* website, however, gives a running total of ‘GLBT’⁹ documentary films produced between 2001 and 2013, which amounts to just over fifty films in Italy. However, I would suspect that this figure is higher as, for example, Alberto Vendemmia’s *La Persona de Leo N.* (2005) and Pietro Marcello’s *La Bocca del Lupo* (2009)—both invaluable examples of transsexual/transgender documentary—are not mentioned on this list. While in France there is no similarly well maintained resource with a focus on gay documentary cinema, there are a number of useful documentary websites (such as *film-documentaire*) and online ‘social magazines’ such as TÊTU, which report on social, political and cultural issues surrounding Queer lives, including the latest cinematic contributions and trends.

Of note in Italy in 2001 was the arrival of Ferzan Özpetek’s fictional film, *Le fate ignoranti*¹⁰ which Schinardi, in his reflections of the film as innovative and universal in its accommodation of difference, describes as a ‘film *manifesto*’ for an Italian gay community seeking more positive representations in the mainstream than had previously been offered as part of what was seen to be a slowly emerging visibility (2003, pp.90–

⁹ ‘Gay, Lesbiche, Bisessuale, Transgender’ / ‘Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender’.

¹⁰ A French-Italian co-production, *Le fate ignoranti* [*The Ignorant Fairies*] sees Antonia discovering that her dead husband, Massimo, had a male lover, Michele, who forms part of a wider circle of unconventional friends, described as an alternative ‘‘queer’ family’ (Rigoletto, 2010, p.204).

91). Schinardi's description of Özpetek is revealing: 'uno dei pochi autori interessato a sviluppare un discorso compiuto sull'omosessualità all'interno del panorama autoriale nazionale' (ibid.).¹¹ Produced in the same year as the *World Gay Pride* event in Rome (which also features in the film), Özpetek's *Le fate ignoranti*, while criticised by some for being too mainstream and insufficiently Queer (Prono, 2001; Smith, 2003, in Rigoletto, 2010, p.204), is considered to have facilitated greater openness in terms of being able to speak publicly of one's sexuality (Rigoletto, 2010, p.202). Other fictional films resulted from this change (ibid.); it is alongside this change which, I argue, a stronger LGBTQ documentary voice developed. This appeared to start in Italy at the beginning of the 2000s with *Roma A.D. 000* (2001)—Paolo Pisanelli's film on the *World Gay Pride* event in Rome—which built on the identity-based approaches common to Anglo-American countries in Claudio Cipelletti's *Tuttinpiazza* (1997) and *Nessuno Uguale* (1998).¹² Following this, a whole range of other productions ensued, some of which I discuss in this thesis. These developments demonstrate the tension between the mainstream and the peripheral and marginal, and contribute to a changing socio-political landscape in Italy and Europe. Suggestive of a New Queer [documentary] Cinema in the 2000s (referring to B. Ruby Rich's term coined in 1992 and to which I will return), this output, as shall be discussed, can also be considered as a response to the increasing intolerance to difference seen across Europe in the first decade of the new millennium (Duyvendak, 2011, p.1). In exerting the right to 'difference', these films can be seen as a response to the more mainstream positive representations of gays and lesbians as well as

¹¹ [one of the few directors interested in developing an accomplished discourse on homosexuality within the national authorial landscape.] My translation—unless otherwise acknowledged, please assume that all translations into English are mine.

¹² *Tuttinpiazza* (1997)—fourth, and final, part in a series covering aspects of the LGBT movement in Italy between 1994 and 1997 (cinemagay.it); *Nessuno Uguale* (1998)—produced by AGEDO (Associazione Genitori di Omosessuale / association for parents of homosexuals), this film allows adolescents, gay and straight, to speak of the issue of homosexuality. A later film, *Due Volte Genitori* (2008), again produced by AGEDO, adopts the parents position.

to concerns raised by Lisa Duggan over the de-politicised neoliberal ideals of the West which spout freedom yet inhibit any real unified response to inequalities (2003).

I consider this increased documentary output as a juncture in the development of Queer cinema in France and Italy. The period of interest for my thesis also marks, as Griffiths describes it in *Queer Cinema in Europe* (2008 p.15), ‘a pivotal moment of transformation’ in terms of considering identity and representation beyond the confines of a heteronormative framework, which reflects Johnston’s point (made above) about the increased process of dialogue between the gay and lesbian community and the mainstream. While the focus on mainstream representations is reflected in other scholarly work on France and Italy (see, for example, Rollet, 2006, Malici, 2011), other than Rees-Roberts’s *French Queer Cinema*, which looks at ‘auteur film, pornography and DIY digital video’ from the end of 1990, there has been little focus on Queer documentary filmmaking as a contribution to Queer cinema more widely. I feel that this dearth of analysis indicates the necessity for further research, particularly in light of the increased activity noted in the production and distribution of Queer and Queer-related films since 2000 alongside important socio-political discussions such as same-sex partnerships and same-sex parenting.

Despite the availability of a commercial and predominantly US imported gay cinema and television in France and Italy during the period covered by this thesis (*Gay.TV* and *Pink TV France*), the range of films that I analyse is not primarily driven by commercial interests. However, the films have had a degree of success at home and abroad, and demonstrate the strengthening of a Queer voice in France and Italy. As I progress through each chapter, I acknowledge, where relevant, how these films also form part of a wider corpus of work that includes less successful and less well-known works, but which nevertheless make a similar contribution. In doing this, I highlight the potential

challenge that Queer documentary presents to more mainstream productions representing LGBTQ individuals or issues.

There is evidence within the films I have chosen, detailed below in the ‘thesis plan’ section, of the unsettling of the hegemonic discourse surrounding gender, sex, sexuality, and desire, as well as a strong interrogation of modes of representation, including those purporting to represent the LGBTQ community in the mainstream. The films also occupy a critical position in relation to space and place, and consider a range of different issues affecting LGBTQ individuals and groups; for example, homophobia, HIV and AIDS, same-sex legal partnerships and notions of ‘family’, love and desire, and transgenderism. These films are seen to wander, diverge, and also to fail at achieving a fixed notion of place or identity; most notable in *Les Travestis Pleurent Aussi* and *Angel* through the ‘diasporic queer subject’ Angel/Mia. This dis-location is seen as a positive form of Queer placement here; as Knopp explains: “‘placelessness’ might be productively reconceptualised as an embodied and material practice, one that offers certain pleasures and other benefits (such as security) through its various perceived qualities (heterogeneity, temporariness, anonymity, cosmopolitanism), rather than just as a lack’ (2007, p.23). This position also links to Halberstam’s *The Queer Art of Failure* in that: ‘[a]s a practice, failure recognizes that alternatives are embedded already in the dominant and that power is never total or consistent; indeed failure can exploit the unpredictability of ideology and its indeterminate qualities’ (2011, p.88). I shall now consider the possibility of this recent output as contributing to a ‘new queer documentary cinema’ in light of B. Ruby Rich’s concept of New Queer Cinema.

‘New Queer Documentary Cinema’?

Angelone and Clò highlight that since 2000 Italy has witnessed a surge in interest in documentary filmmaking, which they describe as ‘one of the most innovative and creative artistic sites in Italy’, offering new perspectives on the country and its people, including spaces beyond its border (2011, p.83). They add that ‘[a]nother [...]trait that emerges from the work of Italian documentarians is the attention towards minor, marginal and marginalized subjectivities – immigrants, women, gays, lesbians, transgender persons and sub-proletarians, convicts and so on – that often do not find space in a mainstream cinema privileging an homogenized representation of the bourgeois nation’ (ibid.).¹³ O’Shaughnessy’s claims of the ‘rebirth of a committed cinema’ from 1995 onwards in France, which also highlights the ongoing importance of gender and cinema, points to a similar situation there (2007, pp.2–3). This points to the fact that Queer documentary in France and Italy, including my selected texts, fits into a wider body of ‘committed cinema’, which is also suggestive of a ‘new queer documentary cinema’ in that it is innovative, politically vocal, and independent.

The concept of New Queer Cinema has evolved and become more elaborate since its inception in 1992 when B. Ruby Rich referred to it as an innovative and independent form of gay and lesbian filmmaking which was emerging on the festival scene in the USA (Rich, 2013, p.16): ‘There, suddenly, was a flock of films that were doing something new, renegotiating subjectivities, annexing whole genres, revising histories in their own image’ (Rich, 2013, pp.16–17). Rich’s recently released book *New Queer Cinema* claims that the concept of New Queer Cinema originally ‘fossilized almost before it could be

¹³ Although not mentioned in the article, I suspect that Angelone and Clò’s reference to ‘transgender persons and sub-proletarians’ relates to the film *La Bocca del Lupo* (2009) by director Pietro Marcello, a film to which I make reference in section four of this thesis.

properly identified' (2013, p. xxi), which reflects her concerns about the commercialisation of New Queer Cinema. However, what I take from Rich's work is the idea of a cinema which is always in motion and continually renewing itself, 'a perpetual-motion machine stoked by helium and history' (ibid., p. xxviii). I claim that Rich's concept of New Queer Cinema in the context of France and Italy allows for greater flexibility in the interpretation of cinema outside a national framework.

There has been little consideration of the possibility of a New Queer Cinema in Italy, although Vincenzo Patanè (1998) claims that its origins can be found in the expressive forms of European cinema which is often more challenging than U.S. cinema. In relation to France, there has been a degree of tentativeness over whether New Queer Cinema has ever existed in the rising visibility of the largely restrained Queer fictional representations of French cinema in the 1990s (Marshall, 1998, p.262, Ince, 2002, p.90, Waldron, 2009, p.20). Reflecting the influence of French republican universality—and its own particular way of accommodating difference—this points to the limits of real Queer visibility. I would suggest that this reticence must also partly reflect the 'cultural exception' with which French commercial products, including cinema, have come to be defined (Marie, 2009, p.9), difficult to conceive in non-French terms such as in relation to New Queer Cinema.

The problem I perceive with Rich's concept is not the concept itself but rather its reception; it has been interpreted according to descriptions such as 'abject', 'unapologetic', 'assertive', 'non-normative' (Marshall, 1998, p.262, Waldron, 2009, p.20), descriptions which, while fitting to New Queer Cinema (although these are not the only descriptions), are difficult to apply in a context where such difference is denied. In the reservations noted in the literature concerning the possibility of a New Queer Cinema in France, this appears ultimately to draw attention to the obvious and visible forms of a

film's Queer aspects—such as the extent to which the issues covered and the people represented fulfil certain criteria—which thereby undermines the power of less obvious forms of Queer performance and subversion such as those pointing to wider socio-political issues of concern and/or more subtle movements and acts of agency. In fact, I would argue that it is the concept that should be open to interpretation and not specifically its characteristics (and how many of them are fulfilled) as Rich is clear in her recent book that French cinema has a role to play in her idea of New Queer Cinema, although she states that this connection is 'neither automatic nor obvious' (2013, p.214). Her sentiments on the French contribution are revealing:

For just as French cinema has sometimes been seen by Anglo-American audiences as “inadequately queer”—especially given its penchant for including heterosexual sex as a plot element in any queer story—so today does it offer routes to conceptualizing sexuality within and beyond moments of crisis and celebration. Its insistence on a sexually inclusive cinema seems a better match for a more fluid world of postmillennial, postidentificatory sexual styles. (2013, p.215)

This is emphatic in highlighting the two-way process involved in Rich's concept of New Queer Cinema outside of an Anglo-American dominant perspective, which allows for the particularities of French and Italian Queer documentary to be considered as important to its definition. The recent documentary output that I have identified can therefore be considered as New Queer Cinema and as contributing to the possibility of an 'ebb and flow, a migratory queer traffic' *between* the USA and Europe as suggested by O'Rourke in his preface to *Queer in Europe* which considers the various interpretations of the term 'queer' in a variety of European countries (2011, p.xv).¹⁴ Although Rich is not talking specifically about documentary film here—she considers New Queer Cinema in relation to the work of François Ozon and French republicanism—in referring to the documentary

¹⁴ In the European context the term 'Queer' is considered in more subtle ways (O'Rourke, 2011, p. xv).

film *Tarnation* (2003) she highlights the key aspects involved in ‘queering documentary style’ (2013, p.85). Rich explains how this film blends different approaches and trends, has its own biting style, represents queerness as ‘counterculture’ (essentially through filmmaker Caouette’s queer embodiment and self-representation), is inclusive, and works against dominant cultural forms of representation, including reality TV (ibid., pp.85–87). The two issues raised in these latter points (‘sexually inclusive’ and ‘counterculture’) and the quote above reflect the conflicting nature of New Queer Cinema, which connects with the associated complexities of the visibility and invisibility of non-normative sexualities in France and Italy where difference is denied. These features help define a ‘new queer documentary cinema’ in France and Italy, predominantly, I will argue, through exposing both the influence of the dominant modes of representation and the difficulties associated with representing non-normative sexualities.

Rich’s New Queer Cinema concept highlights a tension between mainstream and alternative cinema as it chronicled a shift from a period of prolific but short-lived commercial success of Queer-related films in the United States (in 1991–1992) to a more precarious situation ten years later when Queer cinema was at risk of losing its alternative edge as it succumbed to progressively selective commercial markers and the mainstreaming of Queer culture (2006, p.621). According to Rich, this situation called on the festival scene to provide an *alternative* forum, which she claimed, at the time, could be boosted by focusing on ‘underrepresented arenas’ such as:

[...] the transgender revolution represented not by mainstream characters bent on Oscar nominations but by increasingly accomplished works entirely framed and produced by trans sensibilities and talents; the rise of a brilliant “third queer” cinema outside the North American–Western European axis; and the fruition of digital storytelling realised by low budget tool boxes. (2006, p.621)

Arguably, Rich's 'underrepresented arenas' are seen to have shaped the documentary output in France and Italy. In 2008 there was the inauguration of *Divergenti*–Festival Internazionale di Cinema Trans, an annual event in Bologna organised through the *Movimento Identità Transessuale*.¹⁵ Two of the three films on which I focus in the final, transgender-related, section of this thesis— Alberto Vendemmia's *La Persona de Leo N.* (2005) and Sebastiano D'Ayala Valva's *Angel* (2009)—have featured at this festival and have been screened at a number of festivals worldwide in conjunction with D'Ayala Valva's other film, *Les Travestis Pleurent Aussi* (2009). Although often not always widely distributed, the increase in the number of such films is particularly interesting, which is one of the reasons why I include three of them in this thesis. These works are also seen to confirm the potentialities of John Philips's claim that:

The crossing of genders (not restricted to cross-dressing) will prove to be the most significant single cultural challenge in the first decades of the new millennium, largely because of the redefinition of the sexes and sexualities that necessarily accompanies it. Representations of transgender are already leading the way towards new conceptions of a self increasingly defined in terms of the images that popular culture reflects back on it. (2006, p.4)

In terms of "'third" queer cinema' (according to Rich's definition from above), it is worth, first of all, considering the meaning of 'third cinema' as well as 'accented cinema'. In building on the work of Gabriel's *Third Cinema in the Third World: The Aesthetics of Liberation* (1982), Naficy explains that 'Third Cinema' is a mobile form seen both in Third World settings and anywhere else, made 'by anyone, about any subject, and in a variety of styles and forms, as long as they are oppositional and liberationist' and

¹⁵ MIT [Transsexual Identity Movement]; this organisation has been fighting for the rights of transgender individuals for more than twenty years both in Italy and across Europe – see www.mit-italia.it for further details. In addition to its many activities, including the International Festival of Trans Cinema, MIT also has a Documentation Centre which seeks to archive documentary material on transsexuality/transgenderism; the centre deals with books, newspapers, posters, leaflets, photographs and film.

driven by a campaigning support of armed and class struggles (2006, p.123). This is somewhat different to the ‘engagé’ and less combative approach of Naficy’s ‘accented cinema’, which he deems to be a sub-type of ‘Third Cinema’ (2006, p.123). However, both are described as a ‘political cinema opposed to authoritarianism and oppression’, although ‘accented cinema’ is more concerned with the location of a specific emplaced individual (and not group, as would be the case in ‘Third Cinema’) who has been displaced from elsewhere (‘diasporic’, ‘exilic’) (Naficy, 2006, pp.123–124). In two of my selected texts, both by D’Ayala Valva, there is clear evidence of the ‘exilic’ and ‘diasporic’ in the Ecuadorian transgender prostitutes living in Paris; however, when Higson refers to ‘the nation as imagined community’,¹⁶ exhibiting a ‘tension between unity and disunity, between home and homelessness’ (2006, p.16), the various terms highlighted here do not adequately reflect the sense of ‘displacement’ that may be felt by those who have *not* been physically displaced from another country and yet feel marginalised. Rich’s application of the term ‘Queer’ to ‘Third Cinema’ draws attention to the political power of Queer documentary if seen as interconnecting with other socio-political concerns. The films that I have chosen to analyse raise other important issues beyond that of gender and sexual identity. Gustav Hofer and Luca Ragazzi’s film *Italy: love it or leave it?* (2011) is a particularly good example of this in the way it connects the ‘displacement’ of two middle class Italian men to other similarly displaced individuals, most notably the African immigrants workers in Rosarno.¹⁷

Moreover, with respect to what Rich has termed the realisation of ‘digital storytelling’ through ‘low budget tool boxes’, there is evidence to suggest that this too is

¹⁶ Higson formulates his own argument from Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1983).

¹⁷ I return to this point in chapter two when I appropriate an additional set of terms put forward by Elsaesser (2006); these terms are namely ‘double-occupancy’ and ‘hyphenation’, which prove useful in describing not only the socio-political position of those living in France and Italy but also those involved in the documentary viewing experience elsewhere.

having an impact upon French and Italian documentary cinema. Rees–Roberts considers as promising the politicised DIY approaches adopted by minority groups in France, which includes online and social networking activities (2008, p.149). The films of Philippe Vallois, whose work I consider in chapter five, is a particularly good example of this low budget approach, although all of the directors I have selected mention budgetary issues as an important factor in the production and distribution of their work alongside other online resources. Giampaolo Marzi, artistic and administrative director of the *Festival Internazionale di Cinema Gaylesbico e Queer Culture di Milano*, explains that these approaches to storytelling are the most visible trend in contemporary queer digital production (Marzi, 2005, in Barrett et al, 2005, p.601).

These developments also fit into Michael Chanan’s description of the ‘new documentary wave’ which has occurred over the past 10-15 years and which is characterised by the following points: the big screen; an increased variation in subject matters; an international feel; an individual/personal treatment of subject matter; a rejection of traditional documentary positions of authority; the insertion of the self into the film (in a whole host of ways); an independence that is both a reaction to, and incorporative of, mainstream commercialism (while maintaining an artistic feel that is distinctive of European cinema) (2007, pp.3-14). All of these features, to varying extents, are addressed in my selected texts and evidence the resistance inherent in Queer cinema to assimilationist, neoliberal and homonormative sexual identities, as well as their representation.

The issues discussed thus far in this chapter suggest the possibility of a ‘new queer documentary cinema’ in France and Italy, one which contributes to a shift in the dynamics of visibility and ‘place’ concerning the representation of Queer lives. I claim that a consideration as to whether or not this output contributes to a New Queer Cinema reflects

the ability of French and Italian cinema to compete outside its national borders. While this is beyond the remit of this thesis, what is important, from the point of view of documentary filmmaking in France and Italy, is to consider its position in relation to these more global dynamics, which includes taking into account an acknowledgement of its own Queer style in French and Italian contexts. In the rest of this section, I continue to work on this by developing a framework of analysis for the *lieu factice* that I propose. I aim to position the documentary films studied here within the framework of a New Queer Cinema but also within a wider notion of Queer cinema, which reflects a critical approach to the modes of representation and those represented therein.

Thesis Plan

In chapter two, I carry out a review of the literature on documentary and ‘place’. There, I outline documentary’s major shifts and expand upon what has, thus far, hinted at its increasingly unfixed relationship to ‘place’. Following on from this, in chapter three, I explore more specifically the issues of documentary performance and reflexivity as it is these that have largely come to define Queer documentary. However, more recent debates on this matter still focus on direct and obvious displays of performance (Bruzzi, 2006, Nichols, 2010), which I will argue reduces the notion of ‘place’ to ‘location’ and undermines the strong influence of more subtle forms of performance. The complexity of these issues is addressed as part of a wider debate within documentary but also in terms of developing a theoretical framework that allows for ‘documentary performance’ to be considered in less clear cut ways and in more mobile terms. I draw on a phenomenological approach which allows for the politicisation of more subtle movements and embodiment in the documentary encounter. I identify qualities of Queer performance and agency

which help in shaping my notion of the *lieu factice* and also in structuring the film analysis sections later. In chapter four, I build on this framework by locating the texts in relation to the ‘transnational’ and the ‘supra-territorial’, which allows French and Italian Queer documentary and those represented to be considered in terms of mobility/‘placelessness’ and its critical position in relation to local and global dynamics while also recognising the specific contribution of French and Italian cinematic histories to wider contexts. I then outline my *lieu factice* based on the theoretical framework which has been developed before commencing the film analysis in sections two to four.

In chapters five and six, in the section entitled ‘made up and making up’, I focus on the ‘constituted’ and ‘constituting’ qualities of Queer agency and performance. In considering these processes as a key feature of my proposed *lieu factice*, I analyse the work of two contrasting directors which provides an exposé of Queer lives and their representation within the context of the French Republic. The first film, Olivier Meyrou's *Au-delà de la haine* (2006), uses the long take to set up a notional film which works counter to hegemonic discourse in the main part of the film where François Chenu, victim of a fatal homophobic attack, is framed as the ideal in terms of identity and the accommodation of difference within a French universal framework; this latter point is shaped by a universalist antipathy towards difference as a determinant of identity, which the film resists at the same time, hence its Queerness. As a stark contrast to Meyrou's film, I analyse Philippe Vallois's *Tabous et Transgressions dans mes Films* (2007), a reflection on his life and work which can be described, like many of his other films—*Sexus Dei* (2007) and *Esprit es-tu là?* (2008) being representative examples—as Queer autofiction. Vallois is seen throughout his work to perform within the latest technologies, evidencing, in the process, a longstanding (largely unacknowledged) Queer voice in French cinema. As an openly gay but potentially marginalised director, Vallois offers a

complex insight into Queer lives and ways of representing them, one which is often bold, crude and unsettling in its focus on Queer sexual desire. Vallois's film *Tabous et Transgression* emphasises the more radical nature of documentary film and how this can be used to unsettle normative frames of reference.

In chapters seven and eight, in the section entitled 'relinquishing proprietary notions', I look at the work of three Italian directors which deals mainly with the contemporary issues of same-sex partnerships and same-sex parenting, but also wider socio-political issues of concern such as homophobia, inequality, and media representations. The films under analysis in this section are *Improvvisamente l'inverno scorso* (2008) and *Italy: love it or leave it* (2011), directed by Gustav Hofer and Luca Ragazzi, and *Ma La Spagna Non Era Cattolica?* (2006), directed by Peter Marcias. Through these films, I build on the *lieu factice* as a radical response indicative of the loss of place outlined in chapters five and six by focusing on its interrogative and place-making qualities in chapters seven and eight. This latter point is evidenced, firstly, in the shift that these films orchestrate towards the transnational through an emphasis on 'relationality' and the transversal relationships between Queer lives in different places and, secondly, in the interrogation of media representations through performances of self-reflexivity and 'queer opacity', a concept developed by Nicholas de Villiers (2012, p.6), which illuminates the potential manipulation of representational spaces as a Queer tactic. The overall aim of sections II and III is to explore how Queer lives are both performed and represented within the context of French republicanism and influence from the Vatican. What emerges is a lack of both place and articulated identity within the constituting factors of these two dominant discourses; however, it is this failing that continues to unsettle such fixed notions of place and identity.

In chapters nine and ten, in the section entitled ‘‘resistance’ and ‘innovation’’, I focus my attention on transgender documentary as this has made a significant contribution to the development of Queer documentary cinema in France and Italy, perhaps the clearest sign of a New Queer Cinema seen to reflect new and independent political voices in the two countries. In this section, I start by analysing Alberto Vendemmiaati’s *La Persona de Leo N.* (2005), following which I analyse Sebastiano D’Ayala Valva’s *Les Travestis Pleurent Aussi* (2006) and *Angel* (2009). Vendemmiaati’s film sees the transitioning male to female transsexual Nicole explore a variety of places and media (including the onstage production of Molière’s *M. de Pourceaugnac*) to express her transgender perspective. D’Ayala Valva’s *Les Travestis Pleurent Aussi* (2006) and *Angel* (2009) explore the lives of Ecuadorian migrant transgender prostitutes living and working in Paris, showing the negotiation of space and place in and across cities and nations from a range of transgender perspectives. In its focus on the transgender burly ex-boxer Angel/Mia, who joins the two films together, D’Ayala Valva’s work draws on the concept of ‘‘Third’’ Queer cinema’ and severely challenges gender binary notions. This particular section testifies to the significance of transgender documentary in the period of interest to this thesis and highlights the important challenge that this presents to fixed notions of gender performance and identity, and fixed and associated gendered spaces.

Chapter Two

Literature review: shifting notions of documentary ‘place’

Traditionally, the word documentary has suggested fullness and completion, knowledge and fact, explanations of the social world and its motivating mechanisms. More recently, though, documentary has come to suggest incompleteness and uncertainty, recollection and impression, images of personal worlds and their subjective construction. A shift of epistemological proportions has occurred. What counts as knowledge is not what it used to be. The coherent, controlling self that could make the world and others its objects of scrutiny is now fully one itself. (Nichols, 1994, p.1)

The politics of location, questions of magnitude, issues of embodiment all address the filmmaker as well as those filmed. These politics, questions, issues stress the local over the global, the specific over the general, the concrete over the abstract. (Nichols, 1994, p.6)

In this chapter, I review the literature surrounding documentary filmmaking. I marshal the information by focusing on the issue of ‘place’, setting the foundations for the consideration of a *lieu factice* in the chosen films. I organise this review into two sections. In the first section, I start by looking at the definition of ‘documentary’ before highlighting the main shifts in documentary’s development as a specific form. By taking into account issues of fact and fiction, representation and reality, truth and meaning, I will provide a current perspective on documentary filmmaking. This draws attention to the dynamics of the documentary encounter, allowing for an understanding of the various influences involved. In the second section, I home in on the discontinuity and incongruity of ‘documentary’ in wider spatial terms, emphasising how its dis-location reflects a more real sense of ‘place’ in contemporary society. As highlighted in the previous chapter, this links into the emplacement that comes from displacement, which reflects the potential of

a politics of both the individual and the particular to influence the universal, a key challenge to French and Italian contexts.

Key historical analyses of documentary filmmaking demonstrate the importance of 'place' by focusing on location, encounter, socio-political and historical influence upon the stories told, and responses to both improvements in cinematic technology and representation of the real. As I outline the major shifts in the history of documentary, it becomes increasingly apparent that 'place' should be considered as a variable and mutable notion. Developments in the theory and practice of documentary filmmaking point to 'a single place' from where documentary has sought to maintain a coherent, distinct, and sometimes counter, position in relation to other forms of filmmaking. However, any attempt to consider it as a place of 'documentary discourse', that is to say as an 'institutional framework', as Nichols says (2010, p.17), will become unravelled. This is particularly important to a potential notion of Queer documentary, which is defined not by fixity but instead by an ability to challenge normalising processes.

What is 'documentary'?

Historical reflections on what was then an emerging form highlight difficulties in defining 'documentary' in clear ways, an issue which persists today. Contemporary dictionary definitions share characteristics which centre on education, information-giving, simplicity, authenticity, reality and the absence of narrative plot, highlighting some of the very basic assumptions that have come to define documentary in pervasive and persistent ways.

Bill Nichols, for example, does not provide a firm definition in his *Introduction to Documentary* (2001), preferring to consider that 'the definition of "documentary" is

always relational or comparative’ and that ““Documentary” can no more easily be defined than “love” or “culture”” (2001, p.20). In the second edition of this work, Nichols succumbs to providing a more concise definition, one which firmly locates ‘documentary’ in relation to the real while drawing attention to the potential distortion that results from piecing sections of film together through processes of narrativization.¹⁸

As filmmaking in general became more sophisticated, both documentary and fiction film valorised the narrative sequencing of ‘actuality’,¹⁹ allowing for meaning to be more centred (Rosen, 1993, pp.73–74). Robert J. Flaherty in the 1920s, having become dissatisfied by the haphazard, travelogue nature of his expedition footage, introduced a narrative thread to his work; this paved the way for ‘documentary’ as an emerging cinematic form (Barnouw, 1993, pp.35–36, 43; Winston, 1995, p.8; Aufderheide, 2007, p.3).²⁰ Aufderheide highlights how Flaherty, Grierson (fellow realists) and Vertov were key to the development of early ‘documentary’, although their differences (of the formalist persuasion) introduced a tension between art and truth, and *realism* and *formalism* (Aufderheide, 2007, p.26). She explains how: ‘Proponents of formalism charged realists with illusionism, with tricking viewers into believing that they are watching something real; instead, these makers argued, let viewers notice and even celebrate the artist’s role in creating the work’ (Aufderheide, *ibid.*).

¹⁸ ‘Documentary film speaks about situations and events involving real people (social actors) who present themselves to us as themselves in stories that convey a plausible proposal about, or perspective on, the lives, situations, and events portrayed. The distinct point of view of the filmmaker shapes this story into a way of seeing the historical world directly rather than into a fictional allegory’ (Nichols, 2010, p.14).

¹⁹ Brian Winston addresses the term ‘actuality’ in his *Claiming the Real, the Griersonian documentary and its legitimations* (1995, pp.13–14) and *Claiming the Real II, Documentary: Grierson and Beyond* (2008, pp.16–17), highlighting that it adopts various different meanings from ‘factual film’ to ‘newsreel’ to ‘reality’. (From here onwards, I will refer to *Claiming the Real* and *Claiming the Real II*).

²⁰ Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* is well established within the documentary tradition, being remembered years later by many. It is easy to focus on its problems—its lack of authenticity, its reconstructive nature and the imposition of Western values—but it is frequently referred to and has a status that may seem to place it beyond criticism.

Aufderheide highlights that while pledging reality in their work, both realists and formalists made no attempt to illuminate the spectator as to their ‘artistic license’ and ability to deceive (2007, p.127), contributing to the realism that has come to dominate ‘the international language of commercial cinema, in both documentary and fiction’ (ibid., p.26). Whether developing as parallel competitors within cinema (sharing many of the same qualities) or in response to each other, the complex and intricate relationship between fiction and documentary resulted from these early processes, making definitions more difficult as a result. It is impossible to draw clear lines between fiction and documentary because, as Renov explains, ‘documentary shares the status of all discursive forms with regard to its tropic or figurative character and [...] employs many of the methods and devices of its fictional counterpart’ (Renov, 1993, p.3). He adds that the only difference between the two relates to the ‘historical status of the referent’:

For in a number of ways, fictional and nonfictional forms are enmeshed in one another—particularly regarding semiotics, narrativity, and questions of performance. At the level of the sign, it is the differing historical status of the referent that distinguishes documentary from its fictional counterpart not the formal relations among signifier, signified, and referent. Is the referent a piece of the world, drawn from the domain of lived experience, or, instead, do the people and objects placed before the camera yield to the demands of a creative vision? (1993, p.2)

Aufderheide (2007, pp.1–2) highlights the elusive nature of the term and its associations with fictional film by responding as follows to the question ‘what is documentary?’: ‘One easy and traditional answer is: not a movie’. By claiming that documentary can be viewed as something that is essentially ‘not a movie’ draws attention to the fiction–nonfiction divide, which she then unsettles by adding: ‘Or at least not a movie like *Star Wars* is a movie. Except when it *is* a theatrical movie [...]’ (ibid.). Aufderheide demonstrates with ease the blurring of boundaries between documentary and fiction film, drawing attention to claims of truth and entertainment value.

Nichols claims that ‘documentary’, while sharing some qualities with fictional filmmaking (i.e. ‘as a fiction like any other’), is actually a ‘fiction unlike any other’ (Nichols, 1992, pp.108-109). He states that ‘every film is a documentary’ and that even fiction film provides ‘evidence of the culture that produced it and reproduces the likeness of the people who perform within it’ (Nichols, 2001, p.1). He makes a distinction, however, between those documentaries that are concerned with ‘wish-fulfilment’ and those that are concerned with ‘social representation’, claiming that the former is synonymous with ‘fiction’ and the latter with ‘non-fiction films of social representation’ (Nichols, 2002, p.2). Documentaries of wish-fulfilment ‘make the stuff of the imagination concrete, visible and audible’ and are either positively or negatively received by the viewer (as indicators of reality) and then accepted or rejected in terms of their claims to truth (ibid.). This latter point draws attention again to the illusion of reality, which asserts coherence between the referent in the profilmic world and image as represented on screen, an illusion largely considered to have shaped the field of documentary filmmaking ever since the inception of ‘documentary’. However, in chapter six, when analyzing Philippe Vallois’s *Tabous et Transgressions dans Mes Films* (2007), I home in on Rancière’s more radical stance concerning documentary film in comparison to fiction film, which goes some way to highlight the power of all documentary film whether one documentary is potentially more fanciful or fictional than another. Key to my analysis later will be a focus on the creation of realities, more than whether a film is a reflection of the real, and the contribution that this makes to a challenge to the global and universal from the perspective of the local experience.

‘Documentary’: representation, reality and the real

On the etymological trail of the word ‘documentary’ in *Claiming the Real* (1995) and *Claiming the Real II* (2008), in which he bypasses latin based language roots and the notion of a ‘lesson’, leads Brian Winston to assert that the term ‘documentary’, whether used as an adjective or as a noun, is largely linked to that which is evidentiary (1995, p.11). This also allows him to challenge Grierson’s definition of documentary—the ‘creative treatment of actuality’—which was driven by a determination to evoke the real in his films in a non-mechanical and non-scientific way (ibid.). Winston argues that Grierson had essentially presented the field of documentary film with a problem by attempting to contemplate the real in a creative way, although the term was never fully explained by Grierson himself (Rotha, 1952, p.70, in Winston, 1995, p.11). He expands by claiming that:

[...] one does not have to be too much of a sceptic to spot the obvious contradiction in this formulation. The supposition that any ‘actuality’ is left after ‘creative treatment’ can now be seen as being at best naïve and at worst a mark of duplicity. (Winston, 1995, p.11)

According to Barsam, it is generally agreed that the defining of ‘documentary’ in the 1930s occurred as a result of the economic, social and political instability of the interwar period of recovery as well as the onset of the Second World War and a surge in mass media, propaganda, journalism, television, radio and Hollywood production (1992, p.112). This period created a tension between the *aesthetic* and the *political*, which the Griersonian method sought to resolve through a definition of ‘documentary’ that acknowledged creativity (ibid., p.113, p.255).

Winston challenges the work of Grierson and his followers—even Paul Rotha whose approach to ‘documentary’ had more socio-political conscience than Grierson

(Easen, BFI)—with ‘[running] away from social meaning’ with its aestheticization and depoliticization of subject matter (2008, pp.43, 48). For Winston this aestheticization introduced a problem into ‘documentary’, which assumed coherence between image and referent. However, Winston acknowledges in his follow-up book, *Creating the Real II* (2008, p.12), that his challenge to Grierson’s definition was in some ways justifiably criticised by others as he had:

[failed] to account for the camera’s ability to capture images of the world. However much such images might be selected and manipulated, this power of the photographic process does mean there is a residual relationship between the image and the imaged that leaves a measure of Grierson’s project intact. (2008, p.12)

However, he still maintains that Grierson’s definition ‘painted himself and the documentary into a contradictory corner’ (Winston, 2008, p.15). As Corner states in relation to the original attack:

Winston’s deconstruction of the Grierson holistic vision usefully problematises phrasings that have too often been allowed to carry a self-evident grandness, but the requirement is still to explore further the *different levels* at which documentarist practices relate to the ‘real’ and the different ways in which ‘creativity’ can operate, within various political and social conventions of representational propriety. (1996, p.18)

Winston valorises the realist documentary—which he sees as the mainstay of most documentary output worldwide—although he acknowledges tentatively that documentary is now possibly in a ‘‘post-Griersonian’ phase’ (Winston, 2008, p.10). The ‘Griersonians’, as he calls them—which include *cinema vérité* and direct cinema practitioners of the 1960/70s—‘were exactly in the business of having audiences equate images with reality and converting desperate real-life situations into promises of a better tomorrow’ (Winston, 2008, p.224). He attacks the realist claims made by Grierson, and those who followed in his footsteps, and calls for documentary film to illuminate its role

in representation: 'If documentary drops its pretension to a superior representation of actuality, explicit or implicit promises of simplistic, evidentiary 'referential integrity' will no longer need to be made because they would be beside the point' (Winston, 2008, p.290). Winston highlights the complexity of the current situation:

Agitprop and advocacy, animated documentary and CGI,²¹ satire, poetry, pictorialism, docusoaps, dramadocs and documusicals, excluded feminist, minority and other marginalised voices and first-person documentaries, mockumentaries and rockumentaries, 'reality' television, even perhaps 'conditional' documentaries about events yet to happen – all these are already here. The age of the post-Grierson documentary is upon us. (2008, p.290)

This reflects an ongoing vitality in the field of documentary filmmaking; in fact, the years 2002 to 2004 are described by *Sight and Sound* magazine as the 'golden years' of documentary filmmaking as it saw the production of seven of the ten most profitable documentary films ever produced (*Être et avoir* and *Supersize me* are examples cited) (Fraser, 2007, p.38).²² As highlighted in the previous chapter, Chanan states that such films reflected the arrival of a 'new documentary wave', which he claims surfaced from 1998 onwards and demonstrated a shift away from perceiving documentary as another form of fiction defined by an 'illusion of objectivity' (2007, pp.3–4), and which Winston fervently challenges. Chanan concludes discussion of this shift claiming that documentarists were no longer worried about accusations of 'false objectivity' in their work, frequently taking to inserting themselves into their own films (see, for example, the work of Michael Moore and Agnès Varda) and valorizing the truth of their own personal contributions which sought to be non-hierarchical, personal, and convincing (2007, pp.5–6). Chanan proceeds to elaborate the implications of such a shift towards the personal and the individual within documentary films:

²¹ Computer-generated imagery.

²² *Être et avoir* (N. Philibert, 2002); *Supersize me* (M. Spurlock, 2005).

It is a shift with complex aesthetic ramifications, since a film may speak in the first-person singular but imply a first person plural, and this has implications for the way the viewer is situated, as one of the 'us' who are pictured on the screen, or as the other from whom this 'we' wishes to differentiate itself. (2007, p.7)

This distinction also evidences the tension between 'representation' and 'reality', which has proved most persistent in challenging any final assertions made regarding theories and definitions of documentary. Nichols highlights that spectators demand more of a representation as a reflection of their reality than mere reproduction (which is assessed on faithfulness to the original), attaching more value on the ability of the documentarist to realize something that is fulfilling, understanding, perceptive, and of character and the right mood (Nichols, 2010, p.13).

There have been attempts, in the light mainly of postmodernist analyses, to try and come to terms with the possibility of never being able to capture reality, meaning or truth. Trinh T. Minh-ha exemplifies this position by stating that 'there is no such thing as documentary – whether the term designates a category of material, a genre, an approach, or a set of techniques' (1993, p.90). She highlights that truth is 'produced, induced and extended according to the regime in power' and therefore becomes something fixed and unwavering (ibid.). Minh-ha explains that truth and meaning, while often confused as being one and the same thing, actually provide only different meanings; she argues instead that the *space* between meaning and truth, which she calls the 'interval', is essential in allowing for variability in these meanings (ibid., p.92). The 'interval' is important to a concept of Queer documentary, which is seen to undo normalising processes (even if appearing to exist within them at times). While this 'interval' challenges any assertion to claims of truth made by any documentary, it also allows for a reality that is 'more fabulous, more maddening, [and] more strongly manipulative than fiction' (Minh-ha, 1993, p.98).

For Min-ha, the setting up of theory and practice in a certain domain (i.e. in this case documentary) works as a binary opposition, and, in so doing, is driven by a positivist perspective (i.e. by certainty and assurance) (1993, p.92). What this eventually does, according to Min-ha, is to limit ‘theory and practice to a process of totalization’ (ibid.), which, as this review demonstrates, can be problematic. She also states that ‘the link between the name and what is named is conventional, not phenomenal’ (ibid.), meaning that neither are based on a direct perceptual experience, but instead on that which has been agreed. Holmund and Fuch’s agree with Min-ha that ‘documentary’ is conventional—‘effects, of policy and history’—but assert that in ‘queering documentary’ there must be a challenge to the hegemony of the ‘representational regime’ that seeks to represent profilmic realities in very clear and coherent ways, which is just not possible within Queer documentary (1997, p.4). I take this as a key feature of the documentary films chosen for this study, which seek to undo the dominant modes of representation in France and Italy in unique ways.

Documentary’s shifting notion of ‘place’

As Min-ha’s position implies, the literature has frequently sought to shape ‘documentary’ into clear historical trajectories, with a tendency to pin down ‘place’ in very specific ways (particularly in terms of location, encounter, and source of interest). I briefly consider an example of this by reflecting on Erik Barnouw’s *Documentary: a history of the non-fiction film* (1993) before analysing more closely the work of Nichols and Bruzzi, which illuminates a tension between ‘place’ as ‘encounter’ and ‘place’ as a variable concept taking on a range of meanings. It emerges that the greater *introspection* of more recent documentary output—a term used by Nichols when describing *performative*

documentary (Nichols, 2010, p.211)—demands a more elaborate notion of ‘place’ beyond ‘location’ and the ‘real’ to include even fantastical notions.

Erik Barnouw’s work describes how each decade has presented filmmakers with different demands resulting in the definition and re-definition of ‘documentary’. He chronologically maps out twelve types of documentarist who aim to secure a place from where to voice a distinct perspective in relation to other forms of filmmaking (1993, p.297).²³ Barnouw’s overall approach hinges on ‘the various stances assumed by documentarists during their first century: explorer, reporter, painter, advocate, and so on’ (1993, p.297). While his use of the word ‘stance’ implies both ‘dispute’/ ‘dissension’ and a place or position from where one operates (*OED*, 1989, on-line edition), Barnouw claims that his ‘types’ are not exclusive to one period:

[...] a documentarist was almost always a combination of these [stances], although different historic moments brought different functions to the fore. As documentary entered its second century, all this remained true. (1993, p.297)

For example, the influence of Dziga Vertov, as a 1920s ‘reporter’, is identifiable elsewhere; he is linked to the observational filmmakers of the 1960s when *cinéma vérité* took its name from his *Kino-pravda* (film-truth): ‘It [*cinéma vérité*] indeed had echoes of Vertov, particularly of *The Man With the Movie Camera*, in that it was a compendium of experiments in the pursuit of truth’ (Barnouw, 1993, p.254).

Fredericksen suggests that Barnouw’s chronology could have the effect of ‘leading the reader to wonder if the moves are historical fact or primarily a narrative

²³ For example, Barnouw’s earliest two types, the documentarist-as-explorer and documentarist-as-reporter, developed respectively out of an interest in discovering those areas of the world which had previously been impenetrable (e.g. Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North*, 1922; *Moana*, 1926; *Man of Aran*, 1934) and out of the momentum exerted by Futurism in Italy and France with the publication of Marinetti’s Futurist Manifesto in *Le Figaro* in 1909 [the focus of which was speed, aggression, change, technology and a rejection of the past, and associated most emphatically by Barnouw with the work of Dziga Vertov who was most active in the 1920s and 30s] (*ibid.*, p.52).

device' (1975, p.58).²⁴ Barnouw's work reflects a tendency within the literature to make sense of 'documentary' in coherent ways, linking technological and philosophical developments to specific locations and time periods. While the domination of historicising processes should be challenged, certain styles and movements clearly remain historically located. This means that, while documentary practice from a current perspective needs to take into account the flexibility of documentary techniques and underpinning philosophical approaches as part of its history (however narrativised).

More recent documentary practice and theory certainly evidences this approach. This forms the basis of Bill Nichols's 'six documentary modes', although his work is not specifically a history like that of Barnouw. Nichols chronologically maps out documentary film into a series of modes of representation which reflect the various positions adopted by documentarists over the course of its history. However, he does not talk of an evolution as this would imply unity and linearity. These modes usually developed in response to technological developments and as a result of a sense of 'dissatisfaction' regarding representation of the real (Nichols, 2010, p.159). Nichols states that 'modes of representation are basic ways of organizing [documentary] texts in relation to certain recurrent features or convention' (Nichols, 1991, p.32).

Nichols refers back to the key period of the 1920s—when 'documentary finds its legs'—to classify its emerging features, which are display (i.e. exhibition, showing off), documentation (i.e. evidence-gathering), poetic experimentation (i.e. modernist avant-garde), narrative storytelling, and rhetorical oratory (i.e. speaking about the world around us in new ways) (2001, p.88). Nichols states that these features define 'documentary' by coming together at a specific moment in time rather than forming part of an evolutionary

²⁴ The first edition of Barnouw's book was published in 1974.

process of ‘documentary’ (ibid., p.99). He also focuses on the genre status of documentary in the formation of his documentary modes, saying that they provide a forum for ‘shared voices’ as opposed to individual voices of an *auteur* theory of cinema (ibid.). Nichols states that: ‘The order of presentation of these six modes corresponds roughly to the chronology of their introduction. It may therefore seem to provide a history of documentary film, but it does so imperfectly’ (ibid., p.100). I focus on his two most recent modes as these are the most applicable to the current debate and will simply observe at this stage that his earlier modes moved from the abstract (*poetic* mode) to the didactic (*expository* mode) then onto participation and observation (*participatory* and *observational* modes).²⁵

The *reflexive* and *performative* modes developed from the 1980s onwards; the former focusing mainly on representation and the latter on knowledge. The *reflexive* mode speaks ‘not only about the historical world but about problems and issues of representing it as well’ (Nichols, 2001, pp.125, 128). The engagement of this mode is principally with the audience member who is asked to consider the issue of representation too (ibid., pp.125–130). The *performative* mode is concerned with knowledge and its location within societal processes (most notably in relation to identity and politics), supporting that which is ‘embodied’ and ‘based on the specificities of personal

²⁵ The *poetic* mode of the 1920s developed alongside modernism and emphasised ambiguity, fragmentation of reality and ‘mood, tone and affect’ (Nichols, 2001, pp.102–105,138). Following this, the *expository* mode developed from the 1920s onwards and was based on ‘[assembled] fragments of the historical world into a more rhetorical or argumentative frame than an aesthetic or poetic one’ (Nichols, 2001, p.105, 138). The *expository* mode is concerned with giving information or mobilising support, and allows for generalisation if necessary (Nichols, 2001, pp.105–109). It is exemplified by John Grierson’s work, which is socially focused, analytical, rhetorical and mobilising, and nationally driven. The *observational* mode and *participatory* modes from the 1960s onwards coincided with advances in technology and the desire to access ‘reality’; the former was concerned with ‘observing lived experience spontaneously’ as opposed to the construction of a particular point of view as was the case with *poetic* and *expository* modes (Nichols, 2001, pp.109, 138) while the latter reflects the work of social scientists—such as anthropologists and ethnologists—and is interested in active engagement (as a social actor) with other subjects as opposed to unobtrusive observation. Nichols adds that: ‘[p]articipatory documentary can stress the actual, lived encounter between filmmaker and subject’ (2001, p.117). The distinction between the two is exemplified respectively by direct cinema and *cinéma vérité*.

experience' as opposed to that which is based on the abstract and general (Nichols, 2001, pp.130–131). The style of this mode is poetic (but remains familiar), subjective, personal and based on 'the actual and the imagined'; it deals with issues of race, identity, sexuality and gender, and encourages audience responsiveness (Nichols, 2001, pp.130–137).

Of particular relevance to the issue of 'place', are the qualities of 'time and space' that Nichols describes in relation to his documentary modes (Nichols, 2010, p.211). These qualities are described as 'discontinuous' in the *expository* and *poetic* modes, 'continuous' in the *observational* and *participatory* modes, and, finally, as contextual and variable in *reflexive* and *performative* modes (Nichols, 2010, p.211). Nichols's last two modes make clear the constructed nature of 'time and space' (ibid.), unsettling the dynamics of 'place' which a number of elements traverse in spatial and temporal terms.

Bruzzi claims that '[t]he fundamental problem with [Nichols's] survival-of-the-fittest 'family tree' is that it imposes a false chronological development onto what is essentially a theoretical paradigm' (2000, p.2). Bruzzi chooses instead to emphasise the documentary *encounter* (my italics) as a distinct place of performance *tout court*—i.e. one in which the spectator witnesses film participant and filmmaker performing documentary, increasingly in a more open way (2006, p.11, 197). While I understand her desire to undo the fixity of documentary's historical chronology, Nichols's 'theoretical paradigm' is indeed a response to that fixity and one which he openly accepts as a potential problem (2010, p.159). Also, while performance draws attention to the instability of the image and referent, Bruzzi's focus on the encounter limits the various notions of 'place' that are possible when describing documentary film and the location of the spectator as a complex addition to that encounter in a different place and time. Nichols's approach reflects the historical consciousness required of documentary theory, analysis, and practice, and demonstrates the mutable nature of 'documentary' as a

cinematic form, particularly from a more current perspective. Nichols and Bruzzi illuminate a tension in representation between the particular and the general, the local and the global, the concrete and the abstract.

It is also necessary to take into account that documentary is frequently described in terms of its ‘mobility’, which positions it spatially in relation to the issue of a fixed ‘place’; as highlighted thus far, it has an osmotic relationship with fictional film and has the ability to cross both borders and time periods. Nichols states in his *Introduction to Documentary* that ‘[...] documentary exhibits permeable borders and a chameleon-like appearance’ (2010, p.33) and Barnouw’s concluding reflections in *Documentary—a history of the non-fiction film* highlights how technological advances have helped in both a process of ‘cross-fertilization’ and a documentary movement at an international level:

Meanwhile they [documentarists] multiplied and were turning into a movement. Increasingly on the move, documentarists met each other at international film festivals, joined in co-productions, and exchanged ideas through film seminars, journals and a burgeoning film literature. Satellite, computer, and video speeded the cross-fertilization. Wanted or not, documentarists became an international presence. (1993, p.297)

In considering the technological developments that have allowed documentary filmmakers increased mobility and accessibility to explore various places and locations, compare, for example, the short, fixed-shot films by the Lumières who captured action ‘sur le vif’²⁶ (e.g. *L’Arrivée d’un Train en Gare*)²⁷ with Guy Maddin’s “docu-fantasia” *My Winnipeg* (2008) which contrasts a fixed location/place/habitat (shot in daylight where people/objects are seen to pass through space) to increasingly bizarre notions of ‘place’ expressed through memory (Barnouw, 1993, p.6; Ebiri, 2008). This contrast also exemplifies the difference between ‘location’ and ‘place’, Maeve Connolly explaining

²⁶ [on the run.]

²⁷ [*Arrival of a Train.*]

that ‘location tends to imply a certain straightforwardness and specificity, lacking the (usefully problematic) associations of place’ (2009, p.11). Connolly also adds that ‘place’ is often considered in relation to issues of authenticity, marginality, and mutability (ibid.). In addition to these useful distinctions, Connolly’s reference to the work on space by Claire Doherty, which highlights that—as a result of the alienating effect capitalism has had on ‘reality’—‘a sense of place may involve engendering a sense of *dislocation*’ is particularly useful (ibid.).

Taking into account David Hogarth’s analysis of global television documentary in *Realer Than Reel*, which highlights how ‘documentary’ has frequently been considered ‘a place-bound, commercially inert genre—a stubborn anomaly in a global market age’ (2006, p.9), it is easy to comprehend why, as some commentators maintain, ‘documentary’ has found it difficult to ‘travel’ elsewhere, particularly in the case of ‘public service’ documentaries (Hoskins et al, 1993; Havens, 2000; Kilborn, 1996; in ibid.). However, Hogarth explains that ‘it is important to remember—as many documentary studies do not—that the global and the local are not easily kept separate in today’s factual marketplace’ (ibid.). This ‘factual marketplace’ is of particular concern for a wider consideration of the concept of ‘place’ as highlighted above, suggesting instead the quantification of the production, distribution and reception of film usually as indicators of success and competition between individual nations. Bearing in mind Scholte’s concerns regarding ‘nation-state-territorial units’ resulting from a focus on the *inter-national* aspects of such relationships (2007, pp. 1474–1475), this can be seen to shape, reinforce, and negate the expectations of a particular ‘nation’. Described as based on key commercially driven ideas and practices, and as requiring little effort from a political and intellectual point of view (ibid.), nations and populations are organised and measured by equal criteria: ‘the vocabulary of internationality tends to ignore,

marginalise and silence other modes of organisation, governance and identity that exist and that are highly valued by, for example, indigenous peoples, regionalists and various kinds of cosmopolitans' (ibid.). This highlights that the efforts of those involved in the production of identity based and marginal documentary remain invaluable in terms of the perspectives that they offer to more stabilising narratives.

Roger Celestin's article 'Lost in Globalized Space? A Certain French Cinema Abroad' exemplifies this situation for us here (a situation which can also be applied to Italy); firstly, by highlighting and quantifying the increased difficulty of French cinema to compete at an international level, and, secondly, by considering how, in order to achieve commercial and international success, French cinema has had to offer a certain kind of 'Frenchness' and/or submit to a style of Hollywood Cinema in their films (Celestin, 2009, p.31). Celestin considers the position of French cinema in relation to the dominance of Hollywood, asking whether there is a 'third way' or 'another recipe' in ensuring a nation its distinctiveness and ability to '[export] a "certain idea" of its culture' without being seen to compromise (ibid., pp.45–46). He suggests that a possible way forward in being able to compete in such a way (internationally) is, firstly, by moving beyond the idea that the local in global contexts is necessarily restrictive, and, secondly, in anticipating a situation where 'the very nationality of films (including American films), whether their figures or narrative forms, becomes indeterminate, signalling the waning of a global paradigm dominated by American cinema' (ibid.,p.46). Celestin suggests that before this occurs there is likely to be a compromise on the part of national cinemas in attempting to compete within global commercial markets; this will sometimes involve giving others what they expect from a particular nation and/or the use of familiar cinematic/Hollywood formats (ibid.).

Celestin's work demonstrates the complexity of space–place dynamics both inside and outside the film text and also in terms of local–global connections. Reflecting on his position, it is worth asking whether documentary is not already 'indeterminate', particularly as, unlike Hollywood cinema or any other national cinema, it has not in itself developed along the inter-national lines of a 'cultural export' *per se*. While 'documentary' may have influenced certain national cinematic movements such as Neorealism, *cinéma vérité*, direct cinema, and the New Wave, in itself it is not exported as a cultural idea from one specific place or location. Nicolas Philibert's *Être et avoir* (2002) may be an example of where a certain 'Frenchness' resulted in its commercial success outside France, although it could equally have been due to the nostalgia associated with childhood and/or the rural idyll.²⁸

However, Thomas Elsaesser states that cinema's main opposition since 1990 is no longer the hegemonic dominance of Hollywood film but television instead, which has played a part in fragmenting the nation into individual consumers and not citizens (2006, p.651). He explains that:

It has created spaces for self-representation, even if only in the form of niche markets, and it has radically de-hierarchised the social pyramids of visual representation, while clearly neither dissolving stereotypes nor necessarily contributing to a more equitable multicultural society. It is the paradox of simultaneously dis-articulating the nation as a community of citizens, while re-articulating it as a collection of consumers (including consumers of 'ethnic identity') that, I would argue, has radicalised and compartmentalised European societies. (ibid.)

Elsaesser does not see this process as divisive, arguing instead that it allows for the exploration of alternative spaces beyond the citizenship model of 'private' and 'public',

²⁸ This film is set in a school in rural Auvergne where all the children are taught in one classroom by one teacher, George Lopez (Dawson, 2003).

‘interior’ and exterior’’ (2006, p.651). He describes this entire process as a ‘double-sided phenomenon’, referring to Kassovitz’s *La Haine* (1995) and Becker’s *Goodbye Lenin* (2003) to highlight the point that television is perceived as a site of misrepresentation yet also worthy of investment of the self; in relation to Kassovitz’s film *La Haine* (2005), he explains how ‘[t]elevision is despised by the film’s youthful heroes for its lies and distortions, and yet they go to extraordinary lengths in order to be featured on it’ (ibid.).

Commercial endeavours such as *Gay.TV Italy* and *Pink TV France*—launched respectively in 2002 and 2004 to promote mainstream media representations of appeal to gay lifestyles (predominantly via television programmes and with the support of major companies such as TF1 and Canal+)—can be seen as part of this process of ‘dis-articulation’ and ‘re-articulation’. Although their formats have altered since their initial inception—due to financial and/or consumer demands—they continue to reflect processes of ‘self-representation’, agency and the negotiation of place and space along commercial and identity based lines.²⁹ This also demonstrates the exertion of ‘difference’ in a very public way.

In addition, Elsaesser’s article ‘Double Occupancy—Space, Place and Identity in European Cinema of the 1990s’ tackles the over-determination placed on the nation by describing Europe as ‘*toujours occupé* (always occupied)’; by this, he means that ‘there is no European who is not already diasporic in relation to some marker of difference – be it ethnic, regional, religious, linguistic – and whose identity is not always already hyphenated or doubly occupied’ (2006, p.647). He explains that historically speaking Europe (as a set of nations) is quite a novel construction and that ‘many of them [nations]

²⁹ *Gay TV Italy* has become more of a web-based resource/community, which is now described as a ‘social magazine’; *Pink TV France* has experienced similar financial difficulties, requiring a reduction in its free transmission period to a slot between 10pm and midnight. For further details see: Dondoni (2002); *Le Monde* (2002); Gentleman (2004); James (2004); *Agence France Presse* (2007); *Marketing Oggi* (2013).

are the result of forcibly tethering together a patchwork quilt of tribes, clans, or culturally and linguistically distinct groupings' (ibid., p.648). He describes 'double occupancy' as an:

[...]intermediate term between cultural identity and cultural diversity, recalling that there is indeed a stake: politics and power, subjectivity and faith, recognition and rejection, that is conflict, contest, maybe even irreconcilable claims between particular beliefs and universal values, and between what is 'yours' and 'mine'. (ibid.)

Elsaesser proceeds to identify a number of characteristics of 'double occupancy', which are described as 'tragic, comic and utopian' (ibid.). In relation to 'tragic' and 'utopian' characteristics he is referring respectively to the insecurity and security/sharing of space; in terms of 'comic' characteristics, he is referring to the negation and incongruity of fixed identitarian categories through linguistic processes (ibid.). This 'double occupancy' returns us again to the issue of dislocation, which allows for a sense of alternative emplacement to be felt. It is also a useful term for when looking at France and Italy together where a sense of dislocation and contest may arise out of a 'double occupancy' or '[hyphenation]' associated with being a citizen/consumer within French republicanism or Vatican dominance.

In concluding this section then, I refer to Hogarth who provides a useful summary of the complex relationship between 'documentary' and 'place':

First, documentary is no longer a national cinematic form produced first and foremost by the nation-state and its cultural institutions. Second, documentary is no longer a public service genre dedicated to the representation of places and public issues for more or less captive audiences. And finally, documentary is no longer an epistemologically secure project, the truth and meaning of which depend upon special indexical ties to the world. Clearly documentary has changed, and at least some of these changes can be attributed to its position in a global marketplace. (2006, p.135)

This also returns us to Nichols's opening quotes, which set in motion the idea of 'documentary' as fluid and mutable when thought of in spatial terms. This is very much the standpoint from which I approach the texts later, accepting that 'place' can refer to any number of physical or metaphorical positions both within and without the film itself and across which people 'move' in different ways. It also allows for the process of 'queering documentary', as Holmund and Fuchs suggest, where 'representational regimes' in and outside of the film are challenged (1997, p.4).³⁰

In the next chapter I deal more specifically with the issues of 'performance' and 'identity' as these are key to an analysis of Queer documentary. I focus primarily on the debate between Bill Nichols and Stella Bruzzi who differ on the issue of documentary performance, most notably in terms of how they each respond to Judith Butler's gender performativity. A key feature of Queer documentary is the deconstruction of concordance between gender, sex, and sexuality, which can be seen most obviously in the transgender documentary films in chapters nine and ten; however, this feature also links into the notion of the 'family', which, as a recurrent theme in the chosen films in this thesis, is also defined ultimately by gender normative roles that require deconstruction from a Queer perspective. I do not specifically consider the representation of gender in this thesis, although it remains central to the debate on documentary performance and wider hegemonic discourse in general. I will argue in the next chapter that while it is useful to point out the deconstruction of meaning in documentary—thereby professing transparency in so doing (as it would appear Bruzzi suggests in her argument on documentary performance)—this potentially limits the elaboration of 'place' as discussed in this chapter, restricting it instead to the 'location' of the encounter. I will argue that such a stabilising process needs to be resisted as it threatens the potentially fantastical

³⁰ See above p.34.

and mutable nature of ‘documentary place’ and the articulation of Queer realities. The call to acknowledge spaces beyond a nationally determined framework—as discussed in chapter four primarily in relation to the work of Mark Betz (2009), Rosanna Maule (2008), and Alan O’Leary and Catherine O’Rawe (2011)—makes this debate central to an analysis of Queer documentary in France and Italy. In a market-driven world, this remains a debate worth resolving, not just for the benefit of this thesis but also for the wider documentary field.

Chapter Three

Documentary Performance, Performativity, and Reflexivity

In this chapter, the main aim is to tackle some of the complexities surrounding the use of the terms ‘performance’, ‘performativity’ and ‘reflexivity’ when dealing with documentary cinema. Nichols maintains that his ‘performative’ and ‘reflexive’ documentary modes best accommodate the notion of ‘gay documentary’ and continue to provide a space in which marginalised groups can speak about themselves (2001, pp.125, 131). He also refers to ‘gay film critic’ Tom Waugh who states that it is generally through the performative mode that gay and lesbian documentary has established itself (ibid., p.157).³¹ I argue for a wider notion of ‘performative documentary’ responsive to the multifaceted interpretation and use of the term ‘Queer’ as identified as characteristic of European contexts (Downing and Gillet, 2011). In turn, I contribute to the debate on this last point by dealing specifically with the complexities relating to documentary and performance.

I start by introducing Bill Nichols’s ‘performative’ documentary mode; this forms part of his wider genealogy of documentary modes and seeks *not* to make a specific link to Judith Butler’s work on gender performativity. I follow this by looking at the work of Stella Bruzzi who responds to Nichols’s work by arguing that *all* documentary is

³¹ It is also worth highlighting Chanan’s distinction between ‘central’ and peripheral’ media, ‘central media’ referring to mainstream media formats and ‘peripheral media’ to ‘first-person testimony’ (which is popular with feminist, gay and lesbian movements) (Chanan, 2007, pp.6–7). Chanan states that ‘the history of documentary’ has always been defined by its difference to mainstream media, although it relies on this tension to maintain the ‘critical spirit of documentary’ (ibid.). He explains that the ‘public sphere’ of dialogue ‘is not a single and unitary space of free and equal debate, but a network of parallel and overlapping zones, often of limited extension, and with unequal access to the mainstream forms of publication and broadcasting’ (Chanan, 2007, p.6).

inherently performative and does not follow any kind of historical pattern/evolution. In her thesis, Bruzzi also establishes a link between documentary performativity and Butler's gender performativity; I introduce the latter in the subsequent section alongside an overview of the much considered debate concerning the differences between 'performance' and 'performativity'. I then return to Bruzzi's work in order to highlight the complexities associated with making a link between Butler's gender performativity and documentary performance by unpicking her thesis, which proves useful in establishing a framework for analysis. I expand on Bruzzi's notion of 'performative documentary' by homing in on the performative action of movement as a Queer subversive tactic, in order, firstly, to redress the potential overemphasis in her thesis of the role of the documentarist controlling the documentary encounter, and, secondly, to illuminate the influence of individuals and their stories in shaping the structural dynamics of the film (which reflects issues of identity and notions of 'place').

Nichols's and Bruzzi's notion of 'performative documentary'

Nichols (2010, p.203) highlights that his use of the term 'performative' is not in line with JL Austin's 'performatives' in *How to Do Things With Words* where a speech act equates to a doing which thereby changes reality.³² For Nichols, 'performative documentaries do not do something in this sense'; instead, the 'performance' of performative documentary is about acting and the intangible (ibid.). Nichols's definition of 'performative documentary' has become more refined since its earlier introduction in *Blurred Boundaries* (1994, p.95) where he (less precisely) separates the reflexive elements of his performative documentary mode from the 'reflexive' documentary mode itself; this he

³² For example, 'I pronounce you man and wife' at a marriage ceremony. See footnote number 33 for further details.

outlines more distinctively in his later work as ‘the filmmaker’s engagement with us, speaking not only about the historical world but about the problems and issues of representing it as well’ (2001, p.125 and 2010, p.194). In eventually drawing this clearer distinction, Nichols highlights the key differences between his reflexive and performative modes.

For Nichols, the reflexive mode engages the spectator in the construction of film/meaning, stimulating a ‘heightened form of consciousness’ on either a formal or political level: ‘formal reflexivity’ draws the spectator’s attention to structural documentary film qualities; ‘political reflexivity’ draws the spectator’s attention to assumptions he or she may have about the historical world he or she inhabits (2010, pp.195, 198–199). The performative mode, similarly, addresses and challenges the spectator’s understanding and knowledge about the world, ‘[setting] out to demonstrate how embodied knowledge provides entry into an understanding of the more general processes at work in society’ (ibid., p.201). This mode is not driven by the need for historical fact—i.e. seeking to maintain a tight link between referent and image within the representation—but instead by the ‘subjective alignment’ of the spectator to the very personal and localised stories told, often through the use of fiction (ibid., p.204). Roscoe and Hight, in *Faking It—mock-documentary and the subversion of factuality*, highlight how Nichols’s performative mode is a pre-cursor to the ‘mock-documentary’ and challenges the ‘referential quality of documentary’ (2001, p.36).

Nichols claims that his two newest modes point to a shift away from the ‘realism’ of observational and participatory documentary modes to a more subjective, personal and localised form of documentary filmmaking shaped by identity politics and postmodernism (Nichols, 1994, pp.97, 105). It is, therefore, a popular format for those frequently seen as under- or misrepresented in society, allowing them to speak for

themselves, although Nichols explains that it is unusual for a film to be entirely shaped by performative features (Nichols, 2010, pp.201–203, 205). There appears to be an overlap, however, between Nichols's 'political reflexivity' (in his reflexive mode) and his separate performative mode in that both seek to challenge how the world and its inhabitants are perceived. This potentially confusing overlap can be explained by referring to a previous point made by Nichols in *Blurred Boundaries*:

Reflexive techniques, if employed, do not so much estrange us from the text's own procedures as draw our attention to the subjectivities and intensities that surround and bathe the scene as represented. Reflexiveness may draw our attention to the performative quality of film per se, heightening our awareness that it is the film which brings into being as if for the first time a world whose appearances and meanings we think we already know. (1994, p.96)

It would appear, then, that 'reflexivity' remains entwined within his performative mode—making the familiar seem strange to the spectator for the purpose of adding impact to the subjective perspectives represented—but in a way that is dissimilar to the overall aim of his reflexive mode, which seeks specifically to foreground the wider structures of documentary film in processes of representation.

When Bruzzi discusses her notion of 'performative documentary' in *New Documentary: a critical introduction* (2006), similarities can be seen with Nichols's performative mode in terms of how it acknowledges the use of fictional and stylistic elements to alienate the spectator in a way that enables him/her to look at the world differently; what she does not do is to make it a category in its own right as she feels this is too restrictive (Bruzzi, 2006, p.3). For Bruzzi, all documentary is performative (2006, p.11). The type of filmmaker that Bruzzi describes reflects the shift in positions as outlined by Chanon as characteristic of the recent 'new documentary wave'; this is from a position behind the camera to in front of it, a position from where the filmmaker

includes him/herself in contrast to the distant omniscient narrator who stays behind the camera (Chanon, 2007, pp.5–6).

Bruzzi claims that documentary filmmaking is based on a dialectical relationship between ‘aspiration’ and ‘potential’ in that ‘the text itself reveals the tensions between the documentary pursuit of the most authentic mode of factual representation and the impossibility of this aim’ (2006, pp.6-7). Her thesis builds on this by claiming that:

[...] documentaries are inevitably the result of the intrusion of the filmmaker onto the situation being filmed, that they are performative because they acknowledge the construction and artificiality of even the non-fiction film and propose, as the underpinning truth, the truth that emerges through the encounter between filmmakers and spectators. (ibid., p.11)

Unlike Nichols, Bruzzi seeks to establish a link between documentary and the work of Judith Butler and JL Austin on ‘performatives’, which she attempts to achieve by focusing on a selection of films that ‘function as utterances that simultaneously both describe and perform an action’ (ibid., p.186). Bruzzi claims that ‘documentary’ ‘[performs] the interaction between reality and its representation’ and is, like in fiction, ‘authored’, which further destabilises the notion that ‘documentary’ is transparent (ibid., p.197). In order to build further on Bruzzi’s thesis, I need first of all to introduce Judith Butler’s work on gender performativity. This will later allow me to critique Bruzzi’s argument. A critical reading of Butler will also prove particularly helpful to my theoretical framework as it assumes the instability of gender binaries within a range of hegemonic structures not limited solely to the issue of gender—a position from which I will start my chapter on transgender documentary.

Butler's Performativity

Translating Austin's work on speech act theory into her work on gender,³³ Butler considers that biological sex is always to a certain extent performative in that it is more than just a description and is assigned additional meaning; so, when "It's a girl/boy" is exclaimed in the reporting of a baby's sex, gender is assigned to it (Butler, 1997, p.49). She states that: 'gender proves to be performative – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed' (Butler, 2006, p.34). She explains further that 'expressions of gender' are the 'repeated stylization of the body' and do not have any predisposing centre: they are 'performative' acts which, through their repetition, give the appearance that there is something deeper behind them (i.e. a 'gender identity') (ibid., p.45). Butler argues that to support the idea of a predisposing centre (i.e. a 'gender identity') is to suggest that biological sex is the same as gender and that 'practices of desire' are, again, the same as biological sex and gender, which she claims then reinforces a 'compulsory heterosexuality' (ibid., p.24).

Butler's theory of gender identity places language at its centre, which is indicative of language's role as a discursive tool. More importantly, for Butler, this discursive tool

³³ Butler's theory on gender is built on JL Austin's initial distinction between speech acts that are considered either constative (i.e. descriptive) or performative (i.e. illuminated a simultaneous saying and doing) (Butler, 1997, pp.2–3). Therefore, a constative utterance—"it's a beautiful day", for example—could be distinguished from a performative utterance such as "I name" (as in the naming of a ship) and "I do" (in a marriage ceremony) (Austin, 1962, p.5). However, Austin then realised that some constative utterances could also be performative; for example, "the service is a bit slow here" said while in a restaurant could be taken as a description as well as a complaint and thus allows for the incorporation of what initially appears as a straightforward descriptive utterance into an utterance that has a potentially wider impact. This is an example of where Austin's 'locutionary' act (i.e. an utterance which at its most basic level has meaning) becomes an 'illocutionary' act in that an additional force is applied to the utterance (i.e. a complaint) (Austin, 1975, p.109). Austin's third grouping is the 'perlocutionary' act, which is the effect of having uttered something which can be seen as 'convincing, persuading, deterring, and, even, say, surprising or misleading' (ibid.). Butler's analysis of Austin's work highlights the temporal difference between an illocutionary and perlocutionary act, the former is simultaneous and the latter sequential (Butler, 1997, p.17).

does not acknowledge the individual—as-subject who has control over what he or she does as all cultural identity is the result of language and discourse and not the other way round; which is to say that cultural identities are not pre-cursors to discourse (ibid., p. 44). This is essentially the reason why she sees gender identity as performative and pernicious.

Butler's theory of gender performativity has moved, however, from the 'not primarily theatrical' (Butler, 1993, p.12) to somewhere 'between understanding performativity as linguistic and casting it as theatrical' (preface 1999, in Butler, 2006, p. xxvi). In *Bodies that matter*, Butler states:

Performativity is thus not a singular "act", for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like-status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition. Moreover, this act is not primarily theatrical; indeed its apparent theatricality is produced to the extent that its historicity remains dissimulated and, conversely its theatricality gains a certain inevitability given the impossibility of a full disclosure of its historicity. (1993, p.12)

In a later preface to *Gender Trouble*, Butler states that 'my theory sometimes waffles between understanding performativity as linguistic and casting it as theatrical. I have come to think that the two are invariably related, chiasmically so, and that a reconsideration of the speech act as an instance of power invariably draws attention to both its theatrical and linguistic dimensions' (preface 1999, in Butler, 2006, p. xxv). Butler's 'gender performativity' can appear ambiguous at times, which has led some to accept it as a voluntarist notion which allows an individual to construct a gendered identity actively (Bell et al, 1994, Lloyd, 1999, in Sullivan, 2003, pp.87–89). The problem with this idea is that it ignores Butler's overall point, which is that 'gender' is naturalized to such an extent that its 'performance', i.e. 'construction', is essentially ignored (Butler, 2006, p.34).

The many academic debates about performance and performativity have related respectively to: voluntarist–essentialist, theatrical–discursive, subjective/agency–subjugation divides (Sullivan, 2003, p.81). The knots of the debate concerning the notion of ‘performance’ and ‘performativity’ are unravelled by Sullivan who refers for help to Butler’s ‘Critically Queer’ article in which she considers ‘performance’ as a ‘bounded act’ and ‘performativity’ as the ‘reiteration of norms which precede, constrain and exceed the performer’ (1993b, in Sullivan, 2003, p.86). Sullivan tackles the complexity of Butler’s ‘bounded act’ by then referring to Lloyd’s article ‘Performativity, Parody, Politics’ (1999, p.202, in *ibid.*, p.90) wherein she highlights how ‘performance’ is ‘a process of re-signification and not signification *ab initio*’ (as in the case of gender performativity), although performance ‘is itself performative’ because it involves the recitation of those signifiers that (normally) exceed the performer (*ibid.*). The key point here, for Sullivan, is that the distinction between theatrical and discursive performance ‘turns out to be no distinction at all, or at least not an easily discernible one’ (2003, p.90).

Bruzzi’s notion of ‘performative documentary’ unpicked

Bruzzi’s thesis maintains a clear distinction between performative subject matter and performative documentary features, the latter of which focuses on the theatricality of documentary qua documentary. She exemplifies this distinction by referring to Jennie Livingston’s *Paris is Burning* (Bruzzi, 2006, p.188), a film produced in 1990 focusing on the New York City Ball Culture of the mid 1980s onwards. The film draws on issues of race and class in its focus on gay and transgender individuals from poor African–American and Latino backgrounds who partake in this Ball Culture from where the dance craze “voguing” came into being. Yet, in claiming this distinction between subject matter

and features of documentary film, Bruzzi presents the debate on ‘performative documentary’ with a contradiction, which ends up, firstly, suggesting that there is no distinction between them at all, and, secondly, restricting the performance of documentary to macro features. As a result, it is then difficult to acknowledge documentary as similar to performative gender when the latter usually goes unrecognised. I will now explore this further.

Bruzzi claims that *Paris is Burning* is not inherently performative, although it does observe ‘performative subject matter’ in action (ibid., p.188). Reflecting on the culture of the drag balls, Bruzzi explains that ‘the successful performance [at the Ball] is that which cannot be read [by the others in attendance]’ and asserts that because the viewer is aware of the transgender nature of the ball participants (who they essentially then ‘read’) those scenes in which they feature are less significant than those few sections where documentary film (in and of itself) is performative (ibid., p.189).

As already noted, Bruzzi focuses on documentaries that she claims work in line with Butler’s thoughts on performative gender in the way that ‘they function as utterances that simultaneously both describe and perform an action’ (ibid., p.186). Referring to Nicholas Barker’s BBC *Signs of the Times* series, Bruzzi asserts that while they appear to be observational in nature, they are in fact performative because:

Just as they are putting their houses on display so they are presenting themselves for assessment. These subjects are not caught unawares or merely talking about themselves in an unpremeditated fashion, rather they are conscious of their involvement in a performative event, one that is simultaneously a description and an enactment of their lives and lifestyles. (ibid, p.192)

The key to Bruzzi’s argument concerning ‘performative documentary’ is the simultaneity of ‘description’ and ‘enactment’ of documentary itself; however, it is difficult to see what differentiates this ‘performative event’ from that of the subjects in *Paris is Burning*,

although Bruzzi claims that Barker's work is 'scripted' and controlled and demonstrates more clearly the scene as a performance through the participants' (often subtle) acknowledgement of the camera (ibid., p.192). However, transsexual Venus Xtravaganza in *Paris is Burning* also acknowledges the various spaces that she occupies in the film as constituting a performance either by nodding to, or maximising, the exposure of the various cameras that observe her in motion; whether on the catwalk at the drag balls or out on the streets talking about her life and lifestyle, Venus Xtravaganza is frequently seen in performance mode. Bruzzi essentially wants to emphasise the theatricality and construction of documentary (i.e. 'documentary performance') without getting too wrapped up in 'gender performance' (as, clearly, not all documentaries are concerned with gender and sexuality). However, the potentially 'successful' performance, or rather 'passing', of Ball participants does not mean that they are unaware or do not demonstrate their role within the performance of documentary like those participating in Nicholas Barker's BBC *Signs of the Times* series. In some respects, these Ball participants are more acutely aware of their performing bodies within the frame of the camera's lens given the 'performance within a performance' nature of the film. If the performers of *Paris is Burning* have been 'read' as performing, surely the film is more than just the observation of performative subject matter? The key difference for Bruzzi is the performance of documentary qua documentary; for her, the participants of the drag balls are performing something quite different.

However, my concern with Bruzzi's defining of *all* documentary as 'performative'—and then claiming that some films are more performative than others—is that it dilutes the political influence of certain documentary films; her notion of the *performing documentarist* (my emphasis) as the one intruding on the scene and controlling it runs the risk of becoming what Loxley describes as a 'machinic [sic] model

of the performative' (2007, p.91), i.e. one based on 'procedure', 'predictability' and / or 'proper circumstances' (ibid.). This point can be explained further by looking at Scheibler's discussion on the 'constative' and the 'performative' in her chapter 'Constantly Performing the Documentary: The Seductive Promise of *Lightning Over Water*' (1993).³⁴ Using this film as a reference point, Scheibler explains that the 'performative' essentially challenges the referential, authentic and verifiable qualities of the 'constative' (i.e. the signifier) by 'performatively confronting [it] with its own assumptions of authority, authenticity, veracity, verifiability' (1993, p.140). Scheibler asserts, however, that this results in a 'potential hierarchy' within which the 'performative' dominates the 'constative', the outcome of which is that 'the performative [...] is displaced by its own constative performance which turns on and turns into the conventions which mark it as documentary' (ibid.).

With this in mind, Bruzzi's *performing documentarist* has the potential to turn itself into a convention more fitting both to Austin's 'constative' (as a description, to which little can be added) and to Hogarth's 'McDocumentaries' (Hogarth, 2006, p.1).³⁵ In her thesis, Bruzzi places greater emphasis on the performance of the documentarist in illuminating the construction of documentary, which potentially limits *both* the interplay between the 'constative' and the 'performative' to a macro level within a film and how 'the performative moment exposes the space between sign and referent' (Scheibler, 1993, p.149).

I agree with Nichols that the performance of documentary as a construction is, by and large, not the same as the gender performativity proposed by Butler, which usually

³⁴ This is a documentary film made in 1980 by Wim Wenders and Nicholas Ray. It is described as 'a study of the last months of film director Nicholas Ray's life, partly directed by himself, the last part being directed by Wenders after Ray's death' (BFI, 2012).

³⁵ Hogarth bases his use of the term 'McDocumentaries' on Albert Maysles' *The Defunct A Roll*, which is a reflection on the mass media and its inability to capture the more interesting snippets of reality.

goes unnoticed unless re-signified in some way. The ‘performative moment’—in breaking sign from referent—will be seen in this thesis as referring both to content and to structure, which are often seen to overlap (recall Nichols’s ‘reflexiveness’ as a performative feature, for example). Although more applicable to transgender documentary, I feel that Prosser’s input is helpful here in dealing with the complexities of Bruzzi’s thesis. Speaking primarily of autobiography and transsexuality, Prosser’s idea goes some way to support my argument that there is a more subtle, perhaps unidentifiable, overlap between performative documentary content and structure:

In their forms gender and genre mirror each other. The effect of the autobiographical act on the subject parallels that of looking into the mirror on the transsexual. Autobiography, like the transsexual’s first look in the mirror, breaks apart the subject into the self reflected upon and the self that reflects; autobiography, like transsexuality, instantiates (or reveals) a difference in the subject. (1998, p.102)

This is more in tune with the construction of realities evident in my chosen films than with the deconstruction of modes of representation (as relevant as this is too), which moves towards documentary parody. Although Bruzzi considers the film participant as important *within* the documentary encounter, she does so in terms of reinforcing that encounter as a reflexive performance, which, based on my discussion surrounding ‘place’ in the introduction of this thesis, could limit attention to ‘location’ (i.e. ‘here we are producing and controlling the limits of documentary’). I would argue, however, that the emphasis placed by Bruzzi on the distinction between content and structure remains useful outside a debate on documentary performance. In the close analysis of the chosen films it reflects an obvious attempt not to collapse the distinction between representation and reality to the extent that the films would be seen as totalising. It is also useful in focusing on the Queer aspects of the films in more subtle ways.

I now turn to focus on Queer performance and agency in order to maximise the extent to which documentary can be considered as subversive. I refer to Brickell (2005) and Noland (2009) whose work allows for a deeper understanding of both reflexive and mobile performances in this subversion.

Queer Documentary Performance and Agency

The term 'Queer' 'broadly speaking [...] describes those gestures or analytical models which dramatise incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire' (Jagose, 1996, p.3). While it refers to what is described as 'a range of critical practices and priorities' (Spargo, 1999, p.9), it can also be used as an umbrella term to refer to Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender identities. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, I use the term 'Queer' to refer to both of these interpretations.

Moe Meyer's 'Queer' offering in *The Politics and Poetics of Camp* draws the common distinction between a queer theoretical and identity-based approach, although emphasises its oppositional stance:

What I would offer as a definition of queer is one based on an alternative model of the constitution of subjectivity and social identity. The emergence of the queer label as an oppositional critique of gay and lesbian middle-class assimilationism is, perhaps, its strongest and most valid aspect. In the sense that the queer label emerges as a class critique, then what is opposed are bourgeois models of identity. What 'queer' signals is an ontological challenge that displaces bourgeois notions of the Self as unique, abiding, and continuous while instead substituting a concept of the Self as performative, improvisational, discontinuous, and processually constituted by repetitive and stylized acts. (1994, p.2)

The last point here is conceptually useful, although the adoption of an oppositional stance in a discussion of Queer performance and agency is not without its difficulties, which is

why I turn to Chris Brickell's article 'Masculinities, Performativity, and subversion: a Sociological Reappraisal' (2005). Brickell highlights that while subversion is neither easily articulated nor straightforwardly achieved, it is possible to make attempts at dealing with it in clear ways. He calls for a 'reworking [of] subversion away from [Butler's] parody and resignification toward a consideration of resources for subjectivity and challenges to prevailing social structures' (2005, p.24). 'Gender parody', as described by Butler, 'reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin' (Butler, 2006, p.188). Butler proceeds to explain that the ability of 'resignification and recontextualisation' to highlight the uncertainty of gender 'deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to naturalized or essentialist gender identities' (Butler, 2006, p.188). However, Brickell responds to what he considers the 'under theorized' attention to subversion afforded by Butler's gender performativity by concentrating, firstly, on the work of Erving Goffman on 'frames' and 'gender schedules', and, secondly, the issue of reflexivity (2005, p.25).

Brickell considers the public-private divide around which individual behaviour is shaped, drawing attention to Goffman's 'dramaturgical' slant which emphasises how an individual, concerned with the presentation of the self and the impression he or she gives of the self in a social interaction, 'practices impression management and the techniques required to accomplish a successful presentation – that is, a successful manipulation of others' definition of the situation' (2005, p.30). These public performances are influenced by 'frames', or rather 'principles', which allow for the interpretation and understanding of particular events in given circumstances (ibid.). The violation of the 'felicity conditions' that govern such events—or rather 'rules' regarding the interaction of the self with the other—could lead to an individual being excluded and/or ill-received within the given situation (ibid.).

Brickell goes on to explain that while ‘frames’ and ‘felicity conditions’ constrain agency—something which is never unmediated—the self, when considered as both constituted and constructed through processes of meaning and discourse, allows for a self-reflexivity which can result in a reconfiguration of the self through action (2005, p.37). He reinforces a reflexive model in his analysis as it refuses essentialist notions while at the same time affording a degree of agency. He also explains that processes of meaning and discourse are socially and symbolically available as a kind of ‘resource’/‘material’, the subversion of which leads to new and different understandings which ‘may seek to add and proliferate newly permissible ways of being gendered’ (ibid., pp.37–38). For Brickell, however, this process of reflexivity is not actively done by most, which means that gender remains unnoticed (ibid., p.31).

Brickell feels that Butler does not sufficiently expand on her notions of parody and resignification, claiming that ‘she paints a rather impressionistic picture, which lacks conceptual clarity’ (ibid., p.34). However, Brickell seeks to move beyond the ambiguity of Butler’s work while at the same time acknowledging its value:

Performances are always performed by some one(s), although those ones’ selves are reflexively constructed with reference to others and to the symbolic resources provided by the surrounding culture and social structures. The capacity for action does not depend on a self that is already fully existent, so our sense of ourselves as gendered in particular ways is both constituted and constituting simultaneously. In this way, we can reclaim the social action and interaction to the notion of gender performance without slipping back into essentialist assumptions about the performers. Meanwhile, we can draw on Butler’s writing as we investigate how particular constructions of gender are systematically taken as authentic and immutable and, subsequently, ontologically privileged on that basis. (2005, p.39)

In *Undoing Gender*, however, Butler does seek to go beyond ‘gender as a merely cultural question, or indulgence on the part of those who insist on exercising bourgeois freedom in excessive dimensions’, explaining that:

To say [...] that gender is performative is not simply to insist on a right to produce a pleasurable and subversive spectacle but to allegorize the spectacular and consequential ways in which reality is both reproduced and contested. This has consequences for how gender presentations are criminalized and pathologized, how subjects who cross gender risk internment and imprisonment, why violence against transgendered subjects is not recognized as violence, and why this violence is sometimes inflicted by the very states that should be offering such subjects protection from violence. (Butler, 2004, p.30)

This counters claims by Brickell that Butler’s work is only suited to cultural and literary analyses, its focus limited by its very own terms which struggle to deal with the issue of agency and subjectivity when much of what is claimed (by Butler) centres on there being ‘no doer behind the deed’ (2005, p.39). The key to Brickell’s argument is that in dealing with the performative self within the context of a performance there has to be an acknowledgment of how one is both ‘constituted’ and ‘constituting’ through reflexivity and action. As part of my developing framework, I would also include here the term ‘relational’ as this emphasises the connection one has with others.

The idea of being both ‘constituted’ and ‘constituting’ is a way of dealing with the similarities and differences between ‘reflexive’ and ‘performative’ documentary modes, allowing the two styles to overlap in some ways and to remain distinct in others. It also proves useful when working within the contexts of France and Italy where the experience of one’s identity and sense of place is potentially influenced, respectively, by French republican values and conservative Catholic traditions. Accepting that an individual works within, and counter to, essentialist notions surrounding gender, sex, and sexuality, it is clear that the body is also central to these processes of reflexivity and

potential subversion. The ‘constituted’ and ‘constituting’ body within the documentary encounter not only allows for the identification of Queer performance and agency in a theatrical sense but also in less obvious ways. Taking into account what I have said about Bruzzi’s *performing documentarist*, and reflecting on O’Shaughnessy’s ‘mute corporeality’³⁶ and Prosser’s ‘transsexual authorial subject’ (1999, p.9), the involvement of the body in shaping the documentary encounter at the level of, and between, content and structure can be identified in a number of ways. I will explore this further by turning to the work of Carrie Noland in *Agency and Embodiment: Performing Gestures/Producing Culture* (2009). This allows for the title *performing documentarist* to be applied to those who actually partake in the documentary encounter; their performances can be seen to occur in any number of ways, ranging from simple iterability to outright dramatic performance, but seeks to redress the imbalance of the ‘intruding’ documentarist in Bruzzi’s thesis and potential reduction of documentary performance to a macro level analysis. This is a particularly pertinent issue in contexts where ‘difference’ is dealt with through homogenizing processes, but also where Queer processes are likely to be more subtle.

In her work on ‘kinesthetic movement’, ‘kinesthetic experience’ and ‘gesture’, Noland focuses on ‘deviations’ and not just ‘oppositions’ because she feels that this allows for greater variation in the analyses of individuals’ behaviours. She uses the term ‘gesture(s)’ (i.e. her preferred term for ‘movement’) to refer to ‘learned techniques of the body’ and acknowledges that ‘agency’ is not autonomous. She defines ‘agency’ as ‘the

³⁶ In his focus on French (predominantly fiction) films from 1995 onwards, O’Shaughnessy talks of a corporeal dramaturgy that has responded to the lost class dramaturgy of the 1960s and 1970s through an *aesthetic of the fragment*: ‘a term meant to suggest not simply social fragmentation (although that is undeniably important), but rather a sea change in the cinematic face of socio-political struggle represented by the passage from a universalizing, discursively mediated vision to one marked by a newly raw and near mute corporeality’ (O’Shaughnessy, 2007, p.3).

power to alter those acquired behaviours and beliefs for purposes that may be reactive (resistant) or collaborative (innovative) in kind' (2009, p.9). Noland claims that this 'agency' follows on from 'embodiment', which she defines as 'the process whereby collective behaviours and beliefs, acquired through acculturation, are rendered individual and "lived" at the level of the body' (ibid.). She is interested in 'the ways culture is embodied and challenged through corporeal performance, that is, through kinetic acts as they contingently reiterate learned behaviours' (ibid., p.2). This corporeal performance is specifically concerned with a type of 'movement' beyond the body's mere iteration; instead, it is an embodiment which focuses on the *sensation* of movement in various innovative ways (ibid., p.9). Despite acknowledging the influence of hegemonic discourse in the construction of the individual Subject, Noland argues specifically for the adoption of a position outside the constructivist approach from where emphasis can be placed on the way in which the individual shapes discourse (Noland, 2009, pp.2–3). She also feels that there has been a lack of attention to the social and cultural framing of 'movement' in more recent scientific discourse, unlike in the work of previous philosophers of the phenomenological tradition (Noland, 2009, pp.5–6):

In this light, performativity, as a theory of how bodies achieve social recognition (and sensual materiality), should be understood as relevant to more than verbal phenomena. Reiterated corporeal performatives produce a wide range of qualitative interoceptive experiences (as well as gendered, classed, and raced bodies); and it is these experiences that are responsible for inspiring new gestural routines. (ibid.)

Noland describes the 'gesture' as based on a continuum from iteration to spectacle, i.e. from 'ordinary iteration of a habit to the most spectacular and self-conscious performance of a choreography' (2009, p.6). She adds that the 'gesture' may also be abstracted from its context, analysed in itself as a particular type of movement and various meanings

applied to it as a result. It also has an identifiable quality to its pace and range, working towards various goals in the process:

As Rudolf von Laban established in the 1920s, the performance of any gesture – involving the torso, limbs, facial features, or digits – possesses its own peculiar momentum, velocity, rhythm and scope. Gestures can be intentional or involuntary, crafted or spontaneous. They can be in the service of aesthetic, expressive, instrumentalist, or survivalist goals. But in all cases, gestures manifest a wide range of “effort qualities” (Laban’s terms) – tentative or firm, bound or flowing, lethargic or rushed – that affect their meaning. (ibid.)

Noland’s work on ‘gesture’ can be applied to the documentary encounter as the *sensation* of the moving body heightened by the whole experience of filming, being filmed, or, even, watching the film. In turn, this can highlight how identity and place are shaped through the encounter. This allows for the identification of performative content as contributing to the overall performance of documentary as it guides the film on a certain route covering certain places and spaces relevant to the performance of one’s identity and sense of place. This may occur alongside a documentary qua documentary performance, but with an emphasis also on the individual participant’s experience in the creation of his/her reality. Counteracting Bruzzi’s overemphasis of the documentary participant in contributing to a documentary qua documentary performance, this allows for a shift in focus towards what the participant and spectator might want to get out of the documentary experience, which may evidence and allow for mutable notions of place and identity more relevant to Queer lives.

It seems that the reincorporation of a more phenomenological approach to an analysis of lived experience through the documentary format has the potential to identify moments of subversion; therefore, a consideration of how and why a particular movement/gesture is performed in a shot will assist in identifying Queer performance and agency, and how this unsettles normative processes. A focus on the heightened sense of

‘movement’/‘gesture’ that comes through via the documentary encounter also has the potential to undo some of the ongoing ‘scientific’ approaches to documentary which still remain distant to the individual being filmed and claim omniscience in the process, often resulting in sweeping generalisations. This sensation of movement is clearly applicable to embodiment, which is tightly wrapped up in gender, sex, sexuality, and desire; therefore, I will home in where appropriate on particular movements within the chosen films, whether relating to camera movements, geographical movements, bodily gestures, or the physical use of objects. This also allows for movement from the local to the global and back again, in many ways creating affect through its indeterminacy (which proves to be a Queer tactic in itself).

Before moving onto the final chapter of this section, I re-cap briefly on the main issues covered so far and outline my position in relation to my thesis. I acknowledge the difference between identity-based and Queer-based approaches to gender and sexuality, and the use of the term ‘Queer’ to cover both. I have drawn on the work of Halberstam as a way of homing in on the discontinuity of Queer lives and their resistance to normalising processes relating to gender, sex, sexuality and desire, and their ‘representation’. I have also tackled the complexities of ‘performance’ and the ‘performative’ within documentary, the limitations of which call for the opening up of space beyond the conventions of naming and the performance of ‘documentary qua documentary’. Resolving these complexities for the purpose of this thesis, I have developed a framework of analysis which focuses on documentary performance as a site of self-reflection, action, and embodiment based on a spectrum between iterability and theatricality, both of which overlap to varying extents in the overall performance of documentary. In developing this, I have drawn on performance and agency, as identified through Brickell’s and Noland’s respective concepts of being ‘constituted’ and

‘constituting’, and the ‘reactive (resistant)’ and the ‘collaborative (innovative)’—and the associated ‘relational’ aspects of these—to work with the subtlety of the French and Italian contexts where the adoption of a Queer approach takes on different dynamics. I have also used Elsaesser’s ‘double occupancy’ and ‘hyphenation’ as a way of articulating not only the Queer lives represented but also the spectator’s involvement (in and outside the film) and the growing differences surfacing in Europe and its citizens (Elsaesser, 2006, p.648). In progressing towards the concept of the *lieu factice* (which I bring together at the end of the next chapter), I expand on the ‘relational’ in the following chapter, which is seen as a key feature of the Queer agency and performance discussed so far. I do this by considering the performance of ‘place’ in wider terms.

Chapter Four—Performing Place

The film texts that I analyse in the subsequent sections evidence the complex performances involved in the negotiation of space and place, a significant feature of which draws attention to the ‘relational’ at both local and global levels. The texts are mainly located in urban settings—Paris, Rome, and Venice being the most easily recognised—yet the liminal spaces occupied by those who are represented, and those representing them, divert attention away from the dominance of such identifiable urban backdrops. This reflects a shift towards ‘more fractured and mobile readings’ in European Cinema in contradistinction to binary spaces such as ‘centre and periphery, city and country, and public and private spaces’ (Everett and Goodbody, 2005, p.12). In my corpus of films, these fractured spatial dynamics implicate both protagonists and spectators in the constructed and fluid nature of representations of place and identity. The city continues to be perceived, however, as a place in which the sexually marginalised can feel secure in spite of the greater threat of violence and illness that this environment poses (Eribon, 1999, p.35; Wharton, 2008, p.108). Provencher argues that although the city is part of what Henning Bech considers to be the gay man’s ‘life space’—somewhere he can express his homosexuality most completely—what really matters is the greater access that various forms of media afford to the wider gay and lesbian community, including those who live in the non-urban setting (2007, p151). I claim that what is important is the notion of a ‘safe space’—borrowing Steve Wharton’s term (2008, p.108)—in which Queer sexualities can be performed and connections made with other people. The complexity of these dynamics in Queer documentary film in France and Italy

illuminates a complex relationship to the process of representation as well as an elaborate notion of ‘place’, which I explore further by developing the notion of the *lieu factice*.

Dynamics of space and place in Queer documentary

One issue identified in the literature is that when referring to ‘place’ it is impossible not to talk also of ‘space’. The former is described by de Certeau as consisting of fixed elements that co-occur, the latter as mobile elements that traverse the former in their own particular way (de Certeau, 1990, pp.172-173). De Certeau focuses on the ability of individuals to challenge power rather than reiterating the mechanisms that underpin it, the latter being epitomized through Foucault’s work on institutions and their control of society (1990, p.xxxix).³⁷ The distinction between ‘space’ and ‘place’ is reflected in other work on ‘place’ (Jones and Garde-Hansen, 2012, Johnston and Longhurst, 2010), with the key issue being that fixed notions of ‘place’ can be transformed and challenged through spatial actions and movements. This fits with de Certeau’s overall approach to ‘space’ and ‘place’ which claims that ‘space is a practiced place’ (*l’espace est un lieu pratiqué*) and where, using the examples of walkers and readers, he explains that the respective acts of walking and reading transform places or rather systems of signs (i.e. urban planning and the written text) into spaces (1984, p.117; 1990, p.173). These dynamics are at play within the ‘documentary encounter’ and demonstrate the complexity of considering performance, identity and place in relation to spatial actions and movements in documentary film. The representation of oneself (or others) and/or a particular socio-political issue, can therefore be considered as the space produced by the

³⁷ However, Martin *et al* (1988) discuss Foucault’s ‘technologies of the self’, work started towards the end of his life and which sought to redress the imbalance of his previous work.

practice of a particular place, namely documentary filmmaking (which is a place, or *lieu*, constituted by a system of recognisable signs).

In approaching ‘place’, I am convinced, as discussed in the last chapter, that there is a greater link between the content and structure of documentary than is suggested in the literature so far. My position assumes the ability of the individual who is represented in the respective film to shape and to create their own sense of ‘place’. More explicit in illuminating my position is the term ‘electronic elsewhere’ used by Berry *et al* in their reflections on mediated social space (2010, p. vii). They ‘[...] emphasize the idea that the media do not just represent—accurately or inaccurately—a place that is already there. Rather [...] places are conjured up, experienced, and in that sense produced through media’ and proceed to explain that: ‘Media help to reconfigure the taken-for-granted environmental boundaries between public and private, and global and local, to create electronic elsewheres’ (ibid). In adopting this approach, I seek to challenge the overemphasis placed on ‘representation’ as a one directional trajectory which assumes a mimetic approach to an exterior reality that does not give enough recognition to the power of the imaginary.

What is clear from the literature I have examined is that identity is linked to, and developed through, a sense of place which is defined in various ways and which potentially evolves over time taking into account both local and global dynamics. One interesting concept thrown up in this plurality of interpretation is the sense of place as a ‘stage on which life is lived out’ (Perkins and Thorns, 2012, p.13); this is applicable to the performance of the documentary encounter, and to de Certeau’s dynamics of ‘space’ and ‘place’ (and associated ‘tactics’ and ‘strategies’), which points to construction and artifice. I would like to make a distinction at this stage, however, between the space of documentary film and the space in which documentary filmmaking takes place. Mark

Shiel's distinction between 'space in film' and 'film in space' is particularly useful here, the former emphasising the mobility of film outside the film text itself (i.e. cinema as part of 'cultural practice', 'industry', and 'globalization') as distinct from space created within film (i.e. space relating to the 'shot', 'narrative', 'geographical settings', '[mapped] lived experiences') (2001, pp.5–6). In relation to my corpus, it is important to acknowledge these various spatial dynamics, particularly as there are local and global dynamics at play within the wider context of the films' production and distribution. This allows me to consider performance beyond a focus on the contemporariness of a documentary encounter as discussed in the last chapter.

Transnational Queer Spaces

My corpus of films explores space outside fixed local and national borders. I take this to be indicative of both the complex position occupied by Queer documentary in France and Italy and the innovative and dynamic relationship between the participants and makers of documentary productions. The films connect to the local, national and global, which allows for a Queer challenge to the fixity of 'place'. In order to articulate these dynamics later, I refer to key notions here for the purpose of locating my selected films at a more oblique angle to the nation so that a more balanced approach is sought in their interpretation. These key notions are the 'transnational' and the 'supra-territorial', which, as shall be discussed shortly, emphasise a difference between a focus on the nation and an interconnectedness with other people elsewhere (often through virtual spaces). Both are features of the films I study, which demonstrate an ability to work beyond the nation and to reflect the changing perspectives of Queer individuals and groups in France and Italy.

Grewal and Kaplan provide a summary of what it means to talk of the 'transnational' with the following key points as a guide: a description of migration; demise of the nation-state; diaspora; neo-colonialism; non-governmental organisations/movements (2001, pp.646–666). Ezra and Rowden state that: 'In its simplest guise, the transnational can be understood as the global forces that link people or institutions across nations' (2006, p.1). They claim that:

[it] comprises both globalisation – in cinematic terms, Hollywood's domination of world film markets – and the counter hegemonic responses of filmmakers from former colonial and Third World countries. The concept of transnationalism enables us to better understand the changing ways in which the contemporary world is being imagined by an increasing number of filmmakers across genres as a global system rather than as a collection of more or less autonomous nations. (2006, p.1)

Ezra and Rowden locate transnational cinema 'in the interstices between the local and the global', which 'troubles any commitment to fixed notions of a reigning culture' (ibid., p.4). It also focuses on the economic aspects of filmmaking, which 'includes financing, production, distribution and reception of cinema today' (ibid., p.1). Scholte's view that the term 'transnational' hinders a focus on 'non-statist' and 'non-national' connections between people and spaces (2007, p.1483), is not entirely held up by the position of self-reflexivity afforded by a 'transnational' position, which seems to have a dual function of undoing the nation while seeking out alternatives (which is a very Queer tactic). Ezra and Rowden explain the situation as follows:

As a marker of cosmopolitanism, the transnational at once transcends the national and presupposes it. For transnationalism, its nationalist other is neither an armoured enemy with whom it must engage in a grim battle to the death nor a verbose relic whose outdated postures can be scorned. From a transnational perspective, nationalism is instead a canny dialogical partner whose voice often seems to be growing stronger at the very moment that its substance is fading away. (2006, p.4)

As well as the ‘transplanetary’ and ‘supra-territorial’, the epitome of Scholte’s definition of ‘globalisation’ is space and social connections between people (2007, p.1478). She carefully avoids an emphasis on inter-relationships *between* countries/nations as she feels that this still has the nation as a kind of default setting from which to define itself (ibid., p.1483). Scholte also challenges the local/global binary and studiously avoids homogeneity when considering and exemplifying global approaches (2007, pp.1476–1477). Noting how the local, regional, national and global can interact in a variety of ways, Scholte points out how individuals can have international commonalities via attributes such as social class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation (ibid., pp.1494-1495). Scholte’s reservations about adopting a ‘transnational’ definition of globalisation, in that, again, it retains ‘the nation’ as its point of departure, should be kept in mind when considering its use analytically for this thesis. One way of accommodating the different perspectives, as suggested by Shih and Lionnet in *Minor Transnationalism*, is to acknowledge the potential to set the nation up in such a dominant/oppressive position that the minority position remains marginalised (2005, p.5). They suggest focusing on the “‘minor” perspective’ as ‘it is indispensable to a better understanding of the general logic of transcultural and transdisciplinary approaches, and it troubles the prevalent notions of transnationalism as a homogenizing force’ (ibid.).

The concern for a Queer analysis is the potential for globalisation to homogenize all aspects of culture, thereby reducing ‘difference’. While both France and Italy participate in the promulgation of a global Queer identity and culture, they each continue to show their own way of dealing with and representing non-normative sexualities (as highlighted in chapter one). I share the view by Adam, Duyvendak, and Krouwel that despite concerns over the potential for the universalising of gay identity ‘[c]ountry specific elements remain important’ (1999, in Jackson, 2009, p.358); however, this too

has the potential to restrict the interpretation of representation within strict frameworks centring on the nation.

Based on the discussion so far, the key is to avoid talking reductively of utopias uniting people and communities and/or the dominance of national discourses; however, it is possibly this tension that defines a notion of ‘new queer documentary cinema’ in France and Italy, namely between positions of inclusivity and ‘counterculture’ (recall the work of Rich above pp.16–17). Acknowledging the reflexive position of Queer documentary in relation to the nation attempts to redress imbalances in power, the focus centring on the ability of the individual documentary encounter to work within and without the nation in order to alter and to unsettle the dominant dynamics of ‘place’ that it [the nation] instils. One of the major themes to emerge from this thesis is the link between nation, family, and gender and sexuality, which, bound up in one way or another in each film, undo the dynamics of the nation as fixed and homogeneous.

In my analysis of the films, which I carry out on an individual basis in each chapter, I home in on the minority perspective (bearing in mind its mediated nature) and the role of documentary in manipulating space and creating new places. An awareness of the ‘supra-territorial’ is useful as it allows people to connect with each other in a way that permeates national and textual borders. The innovations that allow people to connect with each other, namely through social networking media and access to other online material, are an important aspect of many of the films under analysis in this thesis, the most notable being from directors Gustav Hofer and Luca Ragazzi (chapter seven). This contributes to the online innovation of a New Queer Cinema as outlined by Rich, which is made up of ‘fictional fantasies’, ‘political interventions’, and ‘historical restorations [like the ACT UP Oral History Project]’ (2013, p.267). In acknowledging the virtual place occupied by media representations and people accessing them at a ‘supra-territorial’ level in various

different ways, it is also important to consider the shared connection that France and Italy have with art cinema, which, as Patanè (1998) alludes, has the potential to influence New Queer Cinema. This counters the dominance of New Queer Cinema as an Anglo-American concept, reinforcing the contribution of France and Italy in the process.

Supra-territorial documentary connections

While the interpretation of cinematic representations solely in relation to the nation should be avoided, this does not mean that certain links cannot be made to, or between, countries. For example, during and after the Second World War, both France and Italy were slow in responding to a notion of documentary filmmaking as a socially-driven endeavour, choosing instead to focus more on art and culture than social issues (Rotha, 1966, p.268, Barsam, 1992, p.113). The greater interest that both countries showed in forging ahead with neorealism and then the New Wave (the latter being influenced by the former) further reinforces a shared aesthetic leaning (ibid.).³⁸

It has been suggested that the New Wave has ‘marked all French film production ever since’ (Neupert, 2009, p.29), and that Neorealism has led to ‘the use of ‘realism’ (in Italian film scholarship) as a value or prescriptive rather than descriptive term in the writing of Italian cinema history and in the discussion of individual films’ (O’Leary and O’Rawe, 2011, p.107). However, the most compelling link that comes out of associations between France and Italy is not the nation, as the New Wave and Neorealism have influenced more than French and Italian film, but rather the relationship of filmmakers

³⁸ Agnès Varda, one of three female New Wave directors identified in the total of 162 cited on a list by *Cahiers du cinéma* in 1962 (Neupert, 2009, p. xxi), is considered to have built on the work of the neorealist movement as she moved towards the New Wave, being described as a ‘transitional figure in bridging the gap between documentary and fiction film practice’ (Neupert, 2009, pp.89, 94). Varda’s work remains influential today on both a national and international scale.

(at the time and since) to processes of filmmaking, innovation, and economical modes of production and distribution. In addition, the debate as to whether documentary filmmaking can be described in genealogical terms or as a theoretical paradigm (Nichols, 2001, Bruzzi, 2006), highlights documentary's ability to be situated both in historical space at a specific moment in time (responding to certain historical and technical developments) and at an oblique angle to cinematic representations in general from where it questions its own limits and potentialities. Documentary filmmaking has always maintained a contemporary and theoretically modernist edge to its own practice, which challenges its ability to be historicised in any clear way, as previously discussed. To this extent it reflects a whole range of paradigms, including art cinema techniques, which appear as a more obvious feature in the contexts of French and Italian Queer documentary than in Queer cinema in the U.S. These features are identifiable in my chosen films, which evidence the innovativeness and independence of Rich's New Queer Cinema.

Moreover, I cannot help but consider whether the rise in documentary output over the past ten to twenty years—identified by Hogarth in his analysis of documentary and global television as contributing to a type of 'documania', with many of the films described as 'McDocumentaries' because of their presentational uniformity and widespread availability (2006, p.1)—has stimulated documentary into reflecting back on itself more than ever before as a form of art and producer of meaning (particularly as some of the documentary output has been of poor quality). This is also evidenced by the tension between modernism and postmodernism, art cinema and contemporary documentaries as self-referential, and film criticism and historicity. In addition to further dialectic complexity between realism and formalism and coherence and fragmentation, there are possibly, using Betz's words here, 'deeply structuring historical and political tensions' at play within contemporary French and Italian Queer documentary filmmaking

(Betz, 2009, p.30). Indeed, most of the films under discussion in this thesis demonstrate a self-referentiality which can be considered as incorporating a hint of art cinema. Techniques such as ellipsis, the long take, altered spatial and temporal features, action ‘sur le vif’, and the mixing of fact and fiction, are some of the key features identified.

I consider this connection to art cinema as relevant to the recent and current output of Queer documentary film in France and Italy. My argument is that, in some way, it contributes to a ‘supra-territorial’ position of self-reflexivity that unites people through a degree of indeterminacy resulting from the use of now well established documentary techniques. As shall be discussed below, this aesthetic connection detaches space from time, which means that aesthetic development (in space), at a specific moment (in time), is freed up. This allows the selected texts to reach the level of the ‘supra-territorial’ beyond the confines of the geographical space of the nation. It remains difficult not to connect certain styles and movements with particular countries; however, the articulation of the ‘supra-territorial’ allows for the acknowledgment of different spaces, places, performances and identities both outside of, and in relation to, the nation, including between people from different places who increasingly, and in varying ways, cross borders in what has become very much a virtual world (including with non-Queer individuals). This allows the artifice of documentary filmmaking to be more reflective of the plethora of spaces adopted in the documentary encounter between documentarist, participant and spectator. It also acknowledges the Queer beyond U.S.-centric perspectives where the term may not be commonly applied.³⁹

³⁹ It is also worth considering whether the rise in interest in French and Italian TV programmes in mainstream UK and U.S. programming schedules—such as *L’enrenage*, *Les Revenants*, *Montalbano*—mark a shift towards this ‘supra-territorial’ space, pointing to the potential for other forms of media to exist in the same position (facilitated through web download options too).

Mark Betz's *Beyond the Subtitle* deals with the totality of much academic film analysis and considers the historical and aesthetic development of art cinema in France and Italy from the 1950s onwards, exploring those areas of film study that have been sidelined by academics (namely the unsynchronised voice, the female flâneur and the omnibus, co-produced, film) (2009, p.30).⁴⁰ The key issue arising out of his study is that, in film studies, historical time and aesthetics are usually treated as corresponding with one another, the former dominating the latter. Betz explains how referring to the 'modern' or 'postmodern' usually suggests different periods in time and different aesthetic positions, the postmodern period following on from its modern predecessor (ibid., p.26). Then taking Susan Hayward's 'periodizing of French cinema'—wherein she claims that the French New Wave is postmodern—Betz claims that she 'privileges historical time over aesthetic transformations' (ibid., p.27). In considering this, Betz takes the aesthetic features of art cinema (in both modernist and postmodernist terms) and unfixes them from historical time. Betz is not denying historical-aesthetic progression, but rather challenges the domination of historicising processes, such as that carried out by Hayward. Throughout *Beyond the Subtitle*, Betz moves away from the auteur and the nation and carries out a series of 'remappings' of cinema (through the exploration of his 'traces') to allow for a combination of 'institutional' and 'geopolitical' reflections on film history and film studies (2009, pp.28-29). This demonstrates a shift in the production of meaning from the individual auteur to the participant in a collective (ibid., p.43), which also

⁴⁰ Betz also mentions other distinguishing features which link France and Italy in contrast to other European countries. He explains how Britain has always demonstrated closer links to the USA and that Spain and Germany were both late coming to adopt art house distribution and exhibition (Betz, 2009, p.29). Although, his strongest argument for the ongoing cinematic and cultural link between France and Italy relates to his analysis of the 'omnibus film' – 'or multidirector episode film' – which has seen the production (mainly as co-productions) of the second highest number of films between France and Italy from 1930 to 2007 (Betz, 2009, p.40).

reflects the ‘supra–territorial’ and the queering of wider spaces within a consideration of ‘new queer documentary cinema’ in France and Italy.

Similarly, while acknowledging the especially strong connection to the auteur in French, Italian, and Spanish cinema, Rosanna Maule’s *Beyond Auteurism* (2008) seeks to explore new authorial practices and ideas in these countries (particularly from the 1990s onwards). This is a period exemplified by a ‘radical departure from the authorial model that emerged during the 1950s and 1960s and was reinforced by government subsidies and import quotas during the 1980s’ (Maule, 2008, pp.16–17). Avoiding an auteurist approach—‘which entails textual, intertextual, and contextual analyses of a film director’s oeuvre and approach to film-making to point out underlying motifs and stylistic elements that justify her/his authorial status’ (Maule, 2008, p.15)—and preferring to focus on authorial practices and ideas (i.e. devoid of ‘authorial authority’), Maule explains that European cinema, in spite of European initiatives to promote it as a response to the domination from Hollywood cinema, has generally been ‘nationally over-determined’ (2006, p.16). Maule also identifies that: ‘[...] the cultural and cinematic traditions that for years informed the aesthetic and the reception of authorial cinema in these countries have been superseded by interests and various forms and styles of audio-visual expression, also drawing on new media technologies’ (2008, p.17). Her study locates the contemporary film author (more commonly referred to as the director) outside a framework based on the auteur and art house distribution, which points to ‘new directions in Western European author cinema, including the exploration of different film forms and genres, and a more cosmopolitan, not primarily western or European-centred, cultural horizon’ (Maule, 2008, p.18).

Betz and Maule draw attention to a number of issues that will be helpful in my thesis. Firstly, they highlight why a focus on France and Italy is appropriate in distinct

contrast to other geopolitical areas as a result of shared aspects of their cinematic history centring on the auteur and the nation (which are recognisable both at home and abroad). Secondly, and perhaps more importantly in terms of an analysis of Queer documentary cinema, the most outstanding aspect of their contributions is the state of flux that surrounds filmmaking practices and approaches more generally. Betz destabilises historical accounts of cinema in his work, offering a more open and flexible approach to analysis through his ‘traces’ (within reason given clear historical aesthetic developments such as modernism and postmodernism). Maule undoes the dominant auteuristic approach to defining national cinema by illuminating alternative globally positioned perspectives that sit at an oblique angle to the nation. In terms of my thesis, the issues identified here draw attention to the complexity of cinematic language, suggesting that it can function across nations as an aspect of transnational and ‘supra-territorial’ connections between people from different places as part of the *lieu factice* that I propose.

Lieu Factice

Bringing together all of the issues discussed in this section, I offer the term *lieu factice* as a way of conceptualising the intricacies of Queer documentary in France and Italy where exerting ‘difference’ can be seen as a more complex phenomenon. The term *lieu factice* is applied by Proust’s narrator to the Bois de Boulogne in *Du Côté de Chez Swann* and can be translated as an ‘artificial place’.⁴¹ This *lieu*, similar to the Bois, is considered here as a place of ‘creation’, which exists both within the documentarist (as a vision) and outside the documentarist (as performance). As Marcel reflects in the Bois on his first meeting with Odette, he draws attention to the fragility and importance of place,

⁴¹ Proust, M. (2012) *Du Côté de Chez Swann*. Paris: Éditions Gallimard, p.566.

construction, time, and memory. It is through this *lieu factice* that people temporarily pass in spatial terms in the documentary encounter, including as spectators with their own stories, and where disparate elements are brought together in a process of reconstruction. In the *lieu factice*, it is possible for control to pass from the documentarist to participant. This is similar to Odette, who, as Swann's handsome and commanding wife nods to her promiscuous past in the form of the society men in the surrounding carriages.

Crucially, the *lieu factice* draws attention to the creativity of the documentary encounter while acknowledging the spatial dynamics that generate an illusion of reality in the first instance. This illusion of reality has been of great concern to some documentary theorists, the issue of creativity having plagued debates concerning documentary representation and reality since its inception. Here, creativity will be seen as an essential feature of the *lieu factice*, reflecting Halberstam's 'practice of culture production' (2005, p6), and, similarly, de Certeau's 'space as a practiced place' (1990, p.173). The *lieu factice* is also an acknowledgement of the shared documentary and nonfiction film histories of France and Italy, which were seen in the post-war period of the 1950s and 1960s to develop in response to, and alongside, European art cinema, elevating it to a 'supra-territorial' space that not only connects various people through a cinematic language that defamiliarizes through self-referentiality but also by the representations shown therein.

The *lieu factice* that I propose is two-fold—it offers a place of reconfiguration and resistance (as agency) and reflects the contradictions and ambiguities of Queer lives and visibility in France and Italy. It acknowledges both the artifice of the mode of representation and artifice in the visibility and recognition of Queer lives as part of that representation. In illuminating this dislocation in my chosen films, the *lieu factice* can be considered as allowing those who enter into the documentary encounter (including the

spectator) to look in different ways, and, in so doing, to be re-positioned spatially. The transnational is a particular feature of this process as are memory and imagined spaces, which, in presenting a challenge to fixed notions of place, as well as associated links to a controlled time and space, acknowledge the wider application of processes of dislocation in feeling newly emplaced.

In her article ‘French Women Directors Negotiating Transnational Identities’, Portuges asserts that French women filmmakers challenge fixed cinematic and cultural representations by way of a range of filmmaking techniques which end up offering a ‘nomadic trajectory’ for the viewer who is taken away from and then back to recognisable cultural forms of representation (thereby unsettling those representations) (2009, pp.47–63).⁴² I am suggesting something similar here in the *lieu factice* of Queer documentary filmmaking.

The *lieu factice* will be offered as a conceptual term which seeks to point out the constructed nature and performance of dominant representations. It is seen in the selected films to challenge the role of the media—most notably television, radio and newspaper reports (but also ultimately ‘documentary’ itself)—in both representing the real and offering a coherent view of the world. This witnesses the queering of documentary in more mass-mediated forms and calls for a return to the fundamental qualities of cinema as an expressive medium. In the context of Queer documentary, this also seeks to unsettle the assumption of a normative correspondence between gender, sex, sexuality, and desire (and how this infiltrates other hegemonic discourses) and to connect spatially with others in similar situations of dislocation. The term also adds political clout to the placeless and mobile qualities of the Queer lives represented, which emerge as key features of the films

⁴² Marie (2009, p.13) refers to the ‘progressive feminization of the filmmaking profession’ in France, Agnès Varda being an example of this.

under discussion. These qualities will be perceived as positive within the *lieu factice* of the documentary encounter in that they instil a sense of dis-location and thereby Queer placement—including the setting out of alternative realities by those involved in the documentary encounter, most clearly the documentarist and documentary participant. In structuring the film analysis over the next three sections, based on the *lieu factice*, I organise the films according to key features of Queer performance and agency as discussed in this section—the ‘constituting’ and ‘constituted’, the ‘relational’, and the ‘resistant’ and ‘innovative’. These features are seen to overlap with each other and are not confined to any one film. In the next section, I start with the ‘constituting’ and ‘constituted’ features of Queer performance and agency by considering the work of Olivier Meyrou and Philippe Vallois. Their work contrasts well in that it draws attention to the radical nature of documentary cinema in both shaping and undoing hegemonic discourse. The *lieu factice* that I propose acknowledges that the performance and representation of Queer lives in France and Italy needs to be seen as both constituting and constituted at the same time, in terms of being both ‘made up’ and ‘making up’.

Section II— *Lieu Factice*: made up and making up

In this section, I analyse two films from France; Olivier Meyrou's *Au-delà de la haine* (2006) and Philippe Vallois's *Tabous et Transgressions dans mes Films* (2007). As Günther and Heathcote explain, in the introduction to the edition of *Modern and Contemporary France* on politics and sexuality in the French media, the films expose the 'double-edged' nature of equality within the French republican model which includes both the assimilation of 'difference' and the suppression of specific identities (2006, p.288). The reproduction of universality in this way, which is repeated throughout the range of cultural spheres in France, is actually seen to 'consolidate' a very Queer process in itself (ibid.). Rollet highlights that despite the increased visibility of gay themes in the media from 1995 onwards—referring to PACS⁴³ as a key feature in this process—televised fictional representations of gay and lesbian characters in the mainstream are still pigeonholed or positioned as 'une vision hétéronormée et hétérocentrée'⁴⁴ (2006, p.341). While the selection of films in this thesis are not mainstream productions, they offer, in the consideration of a 'new queer documentary cinema' in France and Italy, an interrogation of those modes of representation that frame dominant hegemonic discourse in this way, even if only by way of exposing the dominant discourse in operation. The two films in this section introduce this position, reflecting a number of other films in this thesis and elsewhere.

⁴³ Pacte Civil de Solidarité—civil union partnership, which, becoming law in France in November 1999, 'enables non-married couples, regardless of the gender of the partners to enter into a legally recognised partnership that offers a number of rights and responsibilities' (Johnston, 2010, p.33).

⁴⁴ [a heteronormative and heterocentric vision.]

While these two films are very different from each other—contrasting well in a consideration of the complexity involved in the representation of Queer lives and when approaching agency as both ‘constituting’ and ‘constituted’—they contain similarities in relation to the process of mourning. The films both examine the problematic exertion of difference within the context of republican France.

In particular, Meyrou’s *Au-delà de la haine*, in its intense focus on French republican universality, should be considered against a backdrop of a ‘second wave of nationalism’,⁴⁵ which Duyvendak (2011, p.1) states has swept discreetly across much of Western Europe since 2000; this development, seen as a response to the increasing diversity in the populations of countries in this area, has serious implications for the acknowledgment of ‘difference’, which, in Meyrou’s film, is downplayed in the mourning of the loss of a nation and an object representative of the values of that nation (François).⁴⁶ While in *Au-delà de la haine* the issue of ‘difference’ is seen as largely ‘constituted’ within a universally inclusive framework, it also evidences resistance against this model. As the first film under analysis, *Au-delà de la haine* exemplifies an

⁴⁵ The first wave of nationalism having occurred following the dissolution of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact in 1991, which resulted in a number of inter-state and intra-state wars. (Duyvendak, 2011, p.1)

⁴⁶ The fixity of the ‘nation’ and associated concepts of ‘family’ and ‘home’ appear also to be channelled in the French context by a desire of its film directors to look elsewhere for subject matter; see for example: Queer radical artist Hervé Joseph Lebrun’s *Kanbrik ou le proscrit d’Allah* (2007), which recounts the story of a young gay Moroccan who mourns his murdered lover; Louis Dupont’s *Être* (2006), which looks at the sensitive issue of homosexuality in Algeria; Gabriel Baur’s *Venus Boyz* (2002), which looks at the phenomenon of the Drag Kings in New York and London; Philip Brooks’s and Laurent Bocahut’s *Woubi Chéri* (1998), which is described as the first film of its kind to allow African homosexuals to have a voice of their own (potentially one of the first such global and transnational documentary films). This geographical mobility is not such a clear characteristic in the Italian context, although there are examples there of where the historical and social stability of ‘home’ as coherent within local and national imaginaries is challenged: see, for example, Gabriella Romano’s *L’altro ieri* (2002) and *Ricordare* (2004), which deal with the issues of lesbianism and homosexuality during the fascist era; Marcello Mencarini and Barbara Seghezzi’s *New Love Meetings* (2006), a contemporary version of Pasolini’s *Comizi d’Amore/Love Meetings* which was produced entirely on a mobile phone and lasting 93 minutes long (*The Guardian*; 14 June 2006)—many of the respondents apparently still considered homosexuality as a ‘sickness’ (IDFA, 2006).

important feature of other films within this thesis, which is that resistance, as Foucault claims, is often located *not* in opposition to power but also within it (1990, pp.95-96).

I draw attention to the dynamics of this resistance by focusing in *Au-delà de la haine* on the role of the ‘notional film’ (created through scenes of the park where François was murdered) in providing an alternative space to the dominant strands of the ‘main film’ which seek to uphold French republican values and fixed notions of the ‘family’ and ‘home’. I will argue that the space of the park exposes and unsettles these notions, notions which Duyvendak (2011, p.108) links to a ‘reflective nostalgia’ of the past and a realisation that the stability of such notions can no longer be assumed as given. I will also argue that *Au-delà de la haine* emphasises how the performances of those featuring within documentary film subsequently influence its structure. In evidencing a range of performances which contrast resolution and coherence, associated with the republican ideal of universality, with wider processes of self-reflexivity through the open space of the park, *Au-delà de la haine* highlights the gap between the particular and the universal, the individual and the social, the real and a reality.

In the second chapter of this section, I consider the ‘constituting’ qualities of agency by analysing Philippe Vallois’s *Tabous et Transgressions dans mes Films*. In this film, Vallois reflects on his life and work through the placing of his voice-over onto a montage of photographs and archive footage. In its use only of archive footage, the film evidences how ‘[m]odern memory is, above all, archival. It relies entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image’ (Nora, 1989, p.13). Challenged by the ongoing process of mourning and professional isolation at the time of making this film (‘a l’écart’, as he says),⁴⁷ for Vallois, as with all the films

⁴⁷ [isolated.]

in this thesis, the search for a sense of place and belonging remains extremely important however this may be constructed. With its unearthing of Vallois's memory, the film forms part of a mourning process for his partner Jean Decampe who died in 1992 as a result of complications associated with AIDS; it also reflects his need to locate himself spatially at a key stage in his life. I will assert that in this film Vallois re-creates a 'home movie' set-up, which, taking into account its frankness and often explicit content, undoes the stability of the notion of the 'family' through a queered 'affiliative look'. Working in and on such a powerful institution, Vallois offers an alternative. The recreation of his reality through the re-use of archive footage, allows Vallois to exemplify the radical nature of documentary, which I discuss with reference to Rancière. In 'constituting' his reality in this way I will argue that this film not only re-constructs another reality for Vallois, namely a reflection on his life and work, but also performs the inherent resistance of film. I will argue, in particular, that in re-creating a reality through his own archive, Vallois, borrowing from Pierre Nora here (1989), establishes his *lieux de mémoire*:

Lieux de mémoire are simple and ambiguous, natural and artificial, at once immediately available in concrete sensual experience and susceptible to the most abstract elaboration. In fact they are *lieux* in three senses of the word—material, symbolic and functional. (Nora, 1989, pp.18–19)

Through a consideration of these latter two points, Vallois demonstrates the radical and restorative functions of documentary, which, at the same time, illuminate the site of documentary as mourning for a lack of place. In their focus on processes of mourning, both films in this chapter introduce a key aspect of the *lieu factice* that I propose as way of understanding Queer documentary coming out of France and Italy. In dealing critically with the issue of representation, these two films seek not just to recount particular stories but also to consider the way in which they are represented. In my selection of Queer documentary film in this thesis, this focuses on qualities of the medium as a base from

which to consider one's place in the world, which also works on an ethics that targets the 'hyphenation' and 'duality' that results from an evolving Europe.

Chapter Five—*Au-delà de la haine* (2006)

This chapter homes in on Olivier Meyrou's use of the long take in *Au-delà de la haine* (2006), a socially and politically concerned film that focuses on the three-day trial and conviction of skinheads Mickaël, Fabien and Franck for the murder of François Chenu in a public park in Reims in 2002 when, having failed in 'doing an Arab', they 'did a gay' instead (Meyrou, 2006). *Au-delà de la haine* deals with issues of racism, homophobia, justice, extreme right-wing movements and disenfranchised youth. As an afterthought, Meyrou explains that the team commissioned to produce a film on homophobia were looking elsewhere in the world for material, 'everywhere but in France, it would seem', but then, on coming across the story of Chenu, he realised that it was a problem in France too (ibid.); while this highlights the transnational aspect of the issue, it also demonstrates the potential tunnel vision of France as the epitome of universality, a major consideration of this film. When asked about the political circumstances surrounding the murder of François Chenu, Meyrou explained that it was related to the economic crisis of the past 30 years in France which led to a surge in unemployment in the young, some of whom swayed towards the far right (Phillips, 2006). Meyrou adds that '[t]hose politically responsible for promoting these ideas, such as Le Pen and others like him, never appear at gay bashing and racist violence trials. They take no responsibility for what they create. It's always those on the bottom who are caught out' (ibid.). While highlighting the influence of the far right upon François's killers, *Au-delà de la haine* also reinforces individual responsibility in relation to 'la haine personnelle'/'personal hatred', which is evidenced mainly through the trajectories of François's parents, Marie-Cécile and Jean-Paul Chenu.

Au-delà de la haine has a predominantly non-interventional observational style which recalls both direct cinema and *cinéma vérité*. Meyrou's work fits into what Marie describes as a young, *auteur*, contemporary and technologically influenced French cinema which has developed over the past 30 years, including an increase in the popularity of documentary (Marie, 2009, pp.13, 18, 21). Meyrou's use of the long take, jump-cuts, action 'sur le vif', and montage, is evidence of this as is his relative success.⁴⁸ Similarities can be seen between *Au-delà de la haine* and clips of his blocked film *Célébration*,⁴⁹ which delves into the lives of Yves Saint Laurent and Pierre Bergé with equally controlled and unsettling long takes. Meyrou explains how he sought to create *Au-delà de la haine* into something 'classy' and almost 'Shakespearean', different to the 'trashy' media coverage surrounding François's murder (Meyrou, 2007).

The ideological shape of the film—and the absence of François and a reconstruction of events surrounding his death—creates a tension between what Nichols describes as an 'ethics' and a 'politics' of spatial representation, essentially between depictions of immediacy, and ideological patterns and relations:

A true ethics of spatial representation is also simultaneously a politics of spatial representation. The former gives greater emphasis to the immediate phenomenological encounter of viewer with filmmaker, the latter to ideological patterns and relations that tend to underpin or produce this encounter. (Nichols, 1991, p.102)

I will suggest in this chapter that in *Au-delà de la haine* there is a 'main film' and a 'notional film': the former is guided by processes of mourning for an object/ideal, which results in progression towards an identifiable resolution through a 'politics' of spatial

⁴⁸ *Au-delà de la haine* won the Teddy award 2006 at the Berlin Film Festival.

⁴⁹ *Célébration* was filmed between 1998 and 2001. Pierre Bergé still refuses to release this film, which was premiered at the Berlinale 2007. See a clip of this film on the following website:
<http://www.telerama.fr/cinema/dans-le-secret-d-yves-saint-laurent,53554.php#xtor=RSS-23>

representation; the latter centres on seven separate and unsettling long take shots of the park where the murder took place, which works against this political orthodoxy through an ‘ethics’ of spatial representation that firmly locates the spectator in relation to François. I start by looking at the ‘main film’, which is made up of public and private strands that overlap, before considering the resistance of the ‘notional’ film.

‘Main Film’—public and private strands

The ‘main film’ incorporates both ‘public’ and ‘private’ strands that seek resolution to the prior shocking factual events, achieved through an observational and expository documentary format based around a problem/solution structure centring on the dominant socio-political discourse of French republican universality. Meyrou explains that because Super 16 film is so expensive in terms of laboratory costs he had to be very controlled in the filmmaking process, which resulted in only seventeen hours of footage at the editing stage (Meyrou, 2007). This control comes through in the final film, which, although elliptical at times in terms of the montage of scenes, creates the atmosphere of dignity and nobility which Meyrou sought in representing this tragic story at a time when the family were still mourning their loss (ibid.). It also adds to the resolution sought in these strands, which reflects Meyrou’s desire to offer something different to the very emotive responses initially displayed in the media (Meyrou, 2007).

That the Chenu family were involved ‘at every stage of [the film’s] production, including the editing and final result’ (Phillips, 2006), suggests a potential overlap between performative content and features. It is clear that the film is shaped by the family’s ongoing processes of mourning. Referring to Freud’s notion of ‘mourning’ in *Mourning and Melancholia*, this points both ‘to the loss of a beloved person [François the object] or an abstraction taking the place of the person, such as fatherland, freedom,

an ideal and so on’ —in this case French republican values (Freud, 2005, p.203); François comes to represent both of these positions in the public and private strands of the film.

Meyrou explains in one interview that François is not seen in the film because it allows the story to remain universal, rather than one based on ‘that gay guy’ (Meyrou, 2007). In another interview, Meyrou adds that, in the week following his death, François was described in certain media as ‘gay body found in the water’, although this had subsequently come to focus on François the ‘icon—the good gay guy’ (Phillips, 2006). Meyrou explains that he ‘was amazed by the violence of these [earlier] articles and wanted [his] film to be different’ (ibid.). Despite his abstract presence in the film, François comes to preoccupy the spectator who seeks him out to no avail.

In thinking about how to represent François in the film, Meyrou asked himself ‘What is death?’, to which he responded ‘Death is absence’ (Phillips, 2006). For Meyrou, François’s face had to remain private and personal, hence its absence in any form in the film; an aspect that the Chenu family much appreciated once they had seen the film in its final form (Meyrou, 2007). François endured physical and verbal insults because of his sexuality, his face rendered unidentifiable as a result; this is something that his parents found particularly difficult to cope with, Marie-Cécile stating to the disguised witness to the attack: ‘François, c’était que le visage...c’est une question que...on aimerait bien comprendre, pourquoi le visage?’. Jean-Paul then asks: ‘C’est symbolique de quelque chose?’, following which Marie-Cécile exclaims: ‘Ils n’avaient pas dénudé que le visage, ils avaient écharné là, on sait pas pourquoi le visage?’.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ [For François it was just the face...it’s a question that we would like answered, why the face?], [Is it symbolic of something?], [They stripped him of his face, attacking only there, we just don’t know why the face?]. Subtitles and translations obtained from *Au-delà de la haine* (2006) unless otherwise stated—original author unidentifiable.

Therese Davis, in *Face on the Screen: Death, Recognition and Spectatorship* (2004), explains how contemporary media has commoditized the face to such an extent that even representations of the dead and dying have become ‘banal’ (2004, p.1). Reflecting on the concern of Buck-Morss’s and others that society has become ‘*immune* to the sight of death’, Davis’s work shows how ‘the shock of recognition produced in the dialectic of recognition and unrecognizability rehearses the experience of facing death: those unexpected moments when we are suddenly made aware of the full powers of death: finality, irreversibility, absolute otherness’ (ibid. p.2). François’s absence potentially forces the spectator into feeling these disparate emotions of ‘recognition and unrecognizability’ resulting from attempts to place François through some sort of physical materiality somewhere in the film; for example, through the anticipation of a photograph, home movie footage or something that his family and friends say about him (the spectator is never told that François will not be seen). Dosse and Glassman (2010, p.255) explain how for Deleuze and Guattari the face ‘is closely linked to a specific spatiotemporal moment in which it emerges and it cannot therefore claim to be universal’, associated too with duplicitous suggestions of a subjectivity that is ‘autonomous’ (2010, p.255). Dosse and Glassman also contrast Deleuze and Guattari with Levinas who sees the face as the absolute basis of ethics and humanity (ibid.). If we accept Dosse and Glassman’s view then, François’s lack of ‘faciality’ contributes to a universality, although there is undoubtedly still the desire to see what he looks like. Essentially, his representation in this way epitomises a tension between French universality and identity politics. There is an extension of the abstract notion of universality to the homosexual figure as opposed to the usual white middle-class heterosexual male, which is also reflected in François’s iconic status in the subsequent media reports. This overall process points to the more inclusive definition of French Republicanism, and, at the same time,

implicates the spectator in the experience of mourning and loss felt by the Chenu family. It is worth considering, however, whether François's visual presence in the film would have undermined Meyrou's original aim.

The 'public strand' of this 'main film' is bolstered by impressive representations of established public institutions and places, such as the *cour d'assises* and the prison. The professional opinions of lawyers, psychologists, media representatives and Le Procureur Général add to this as does Meyrou's careful use of striking music alongside images of legal and French republican symbols from low camera angles, which engage the spectator in the power of these well-established institutions, reinforcing the value of the accounts of events as perceived from the professionals' points of view. Le Procureur Général is the only person to be introduced formally with an intertitle following the trial's judgement, which sees Fabien and Mikhaël receiving a sentence of twenty years each, and Franck, 'le mineur', a sentence of fifteen years. This formal introduction emphasises the important role of high-profile individuals in maintaining the French republican value of universality and the rights of citizens (not individuals).

I would also include in this strand the memorial service scene in the park as it points to 'public mourning rituals' and the role of others in them (Leader, 2008, p.8), which, in this scene, brings together family, friends, lawyers, reporters, and, of course, Meyrou with his camera. Of significance in this scene is that in Jean-Paul's letter to François—which he reads aloud to memorial service attendees—he alludes to the divisive nature of 'le communautarisme' in terms of accommodating difference within the French republican model.⁵¹ The letter highlights the problems posed by individualism and fixed

⁵¹ The Republican model is frequently accused of maintaining a stance of inclusion and exclusion in relation to the issue of 'difference'. A major difficulty faced by minority groupings in France is the tension created between 'le communautarisme' and the Republican model; Montague explains that '[a]nti-communitarianists declare that communitarianists exemplify what is unacceptable and what is at stake if Republican principles are not defended' (2013, p.221). Referring to Tevanian (2008), Montague (ibid.)

political ideas, particularly those coming from more extreme movements (clearly), which, in addition to the overall universal slant of the ‘main film’, suggests that ‘le communautarisme’ is not necessarily seen as the ultimate answer given that it promotes a notion of identity based on belonging to a minority group rather than the Republic as a whole, although this is not openly declared by Jean-Paul. Referring to the French context, Béland highlights that ‘identity politics has called into question political universalism as well as the separation between the public and the private spheres’ (2003, p.66). The stability of the Chenu family unit, as a representation of political universality, is clearly challenged by this tension.

Feeding into the ‘public strand’ of the film, the ‘private strand’ progresses from disunity to unity within representations of the Chenu family unit in contrast to an ongoing disunity in the defendants and their families. The Chenu family disunity is identifiable through the initially separate trajectories of François’s parents Jean-Paul and Marie-Cécile. They emerge more cohesively at the end of the film, and appear to represent the nation of France as a family, reinforcing their civic and filial responsibilities through their letter of forgiveness and hope of salvation for the killers (which they read out together at the end).

At the beginning of *Au-delà de la haine*, François’s parents are seen separately; particularly unsettling is Marie-Cécile’s voice-over to a scene in which she is observed in contemplation (while fulfilling her role as hospital pastor) calmly declaring her potential to kill her son’s murderers; Jean-Paul’s introduction sees him in his role as a teacher, his voice-over declaring his own accountability for a society that has failed—this is while an intertitle displays the words ‘Ce récit commence 730 jours après le

proceeds to explain that the former are deemed ‘rational’ while the latter ‘irrational’, seen to promote what is described as ‘ethnic factionalism’ in English (Montague, 2013, p.221).

meutre' across one of the scenes of him supervising the schoolchildren who are playing in the snow.⁵² The spatio-temporal differences in both of these scenes highlights the disunity and feeling of displacement occurring just prior to the trial while still mourning François.

At the end of the film, the Chenu family are seen re-grouped and re-formed following the trial as they talk to reporters about the importance of republican values; at this stage, the Chenu family unit appears much stronger and less visually disperse. The death of François is seen to threaten family cohesion through the separate trajectories of his parents, which is symbolic of the threat that extreme right-wing groups have on the family of France as a nation too. Jean-Paul and Marie-Cécile are brought together in their final scene where they read out a letter to François's killers. Here, the white background is a prominent feature, pointing to faith, purity, and innocence. Compared with earlier scenes, the two are now united outside of the trial's arc and can hopefully move on from the individual trajectories they embarked upon and which saw an initial hatred on Marie-Cécile's part (reinforced by the red in her opening scene), and failure and sense of responsibility on Jean-Paul's part (reinforced by the filial connections represented through the schoolchildren in his scene).

A contrast can also be identified between the use of scenes with separately recorded voice-overs at the beginning of the film, for both Marie-Cécile and Jean-Paul, and the direct face-to-face voicing with the camera at the end of the film when they read out their letter in a temporally and spatially coherent scene. In distinct contrast to the beginning of the film, their voices are now in synchrony with their bodies as they address the killers who are now in jail, at the same time directly implicating the spectator in this. This is a powerful end to the film in that it asks the spectator to consider their

⁵² [This story commences 730 days after the murder.]

accountability within the events of the film. The spectator shifts from the adoption of Jean-Paul's position in the opening scene of the film—sitting beside him on the school bus taking in the road ahead, children heard singing a nursery rhyme in the background—now to being in front of him.⁵³

Within this progression the spectator moves from hearing of 'celui qui est en prison' (i.e. 'he who is in prison', Jeanette's Pierre or the deceased François) to being 'vous qui êtes en prison' ('you who are in prison'). The open-ended letter states that 'la haine' can never be tolerated and that fear of others is dangerous, the tone remaining optimistic in terms of hope in humanity, justice, dignity, learning and reflection. In one point of the letter, Marie-Cécile reads out:

[...] il vous appartient d'aller de l'avant pour ne pas rester toute votre vie prisonnier de cette idéologie de mort, la haine de l'autre différent de vous. La lecture et la réflexion peuvent vous aider à en libérer. La rencontre de l'autre sera plus facile si vous apprenez à connaître vous-mêmes avec des blessures, vos faux et vos qualités. À travers ces rencontres, apprenez à aimer les autres. Ils ne sont pas forcément vos ennemis.⁵⁴

The spectator is placed here in the prisoners' position as they are addressed directly by Marie-Cécile and Jean-Paul. This part of the letter asks the spectator to stand accountable for his/her actions, having been exposed to the various accounts in the film which incorporates them into the universality of the 'main film'. There is some hope that Mickaël, Fabien and Franck will change from such a disturbed view of the world: 'mais surtout nous avons entendu de votre part des mots indicants nous semblent-ils que

⁵³*Ne pleure pas Jeanette*: In this nursery rhyme, Jeanette's unhappiness is expected to be resolved by her being married off to a Baron or a Prince. However, she resists and only wants Pierre who is in prison. As a result of this, she too will be hanged. See <http://www.momes.net/comptines/personnages/ne-pleure-jeannette.html> for full text.

⁵⁴ [It is up to you to move forward so as not to spend the rest of your life prisoner to an ideology of death and hatred of others who are different from you. Reading and reflection can help you free yourself from it and meeting others will be much easier if you learn to know yourself with wounds, faults and qualities. Through these meetings learn to love others. They really are not your enemies.]

quelque chose bougeait en vous’,⁵⁵ which points to their potential humanity and ‘participation’ in French society one day.

As a comparison to the Chenu family unity, at the end of the trial, Franck’s father is seen from a high-angled camera position (above the court door looking down) descending a split staircase and going down the right branch of it; on the opposite side, François’s sister Isabelle and her sister are seen descending at the same time. This points to the split nature of the trial, the respective separateness and differences of each family, and the power of the law, citizenship and the republican model as controlling features. Following this scene, the Chenu family lawyer tells colleagues that two different worlds and sets of values had met in court; she also reiterates the importance of respect for humanity and the disastrous impact of not drawing a line of authority for children. With respect to Franck’s mother, she states: ‘Elle a pas eu un regard pour Franck qui était derrière’⁵⁶—a clear demonstration of a fractured family, his mother’s lack of gaze pointing to his inability to be fully integrated into social existence (taking a Lacanian perspective here).

The overriding rhetoric of these strands points to the abstract nature of individuals in French society—the issue of identity erased—and to a resolution through careful observation, practical change, forgiveness and the expectation of salvation on the killers’ part through justice. Although the documentary methods in use are technologically advanced in their mixing of voice and image, often over more than one scene, the observational mode seeks to observe, witness, remain unobtrusive and to consider a solution to a problem. The private strand does not reveal a great deal about François himself as a ‘gay man’, which reaffirms the way in which republican values are inclusive

⁵⁵ [We certainly heard from you words that seemed to indicate to us that something was changing in you.]

⁵⁶ [She didn’t even look at her own son.]

of difference in the film through his abstraction as an idealised victim more so than as a flesh-and-blood gay man; however, there is a sense that he comes through in the ‘contours and features’ of his family, most notably in a double profile-shot of François’s father and brother, which reveals a striking resemblance between the two.⁵⁷ The spectator also learns from François’s family that he would not hide his sexuality and that he was friendly, artistic, sensitive, and intolerant of intolerance (but not militant in his approach to this).

In contrast to this, the ‘notional film’, which is identifiable though a set of shots of the park, provides an open space against the ‘à huis-clos’⁵⁸ nature of these strands which centre on the court case and private trajectories of mourning and the performances that go with this. The ‘notional film’ is neither a space of banality nor solely a haunted place in the minds of mourners, as Meyrou suggests in relation to the longest of the park scenes (Phillips, 2006), but instead a space of Queer resistance working within and against the resolutions offered by the main film to the issues of universality and the assimilation of difference within a republican model and justice system. In this sense, the ‘notional film’ is a *lieu factice* in that it reflects the ambiguities of representing Queer lives in France. Meyrou’s long take shots of the park challenge the spectator’s normative expectations surrounding the viewing experience, particularly the one of eight minutes duration which provides an unnerving immediacy to François through the accompanying voice-overs that describe him and locate him there (although he remains a silent figure throughout). I will suggest that these long takes combine to form what McDougall

⁵⁷ Reflecting on *Mabo – Life of an Island Man* (a film about Eddie Mabo), Davis (2004, p.58) highlights that ‘[d]rawing on the portraiture tradition, the film’s interviews with family members, friends and political allies trace out the contours and features of Mabo’s personality. We learn that he was ‘family-orientated’, ‘generous’, ‘humorous’, ‘egotistical’ and ‘proud’ (2004, p.58). A similar situation is possible in *Au-delà de la haine* where no trace of François is available. Eddie Mabo fought against ‘[t]he fallacy of Terra Nullius, land belonging to no-one’ which was used ‘systematically, cynically and effectively to deprive the indigenous people of their own land [Torres Strait]’ (Kennedy, 2012)

⁵⁸ *Le Petit Robert* (2004, p. 1286) ‘À huis clos’—‘Sans que le public soit admis’ [In secret, without admittance of the public.]

describes as a ‘notional film’, one that acts as a [Queer] ‘antidote’ to the ‘main film’ that I outline here.

‘Notional Film’

The ‘notional film’ establishes qualities that offer a space of resistance to the resolution of the ‘main film’, whether the focus there is placed on documentary techniques/approaches or abstract notions of French universality in which all citizens have a place. MacDougall (1992, p.36) describes the ‘notional’ film as: ‘a kind of “shadow” film alongside the main film. This notional film – notional because it remains unmade – consists of long camera takes which quite clearly could never have been used in the main film’. Reflecting on one of his own documentary films, MacDougall (1992, p.37) describes this ‘notional film’ as an ‘antidote’ to the main film in that it constituted ‘an alternative film, a counter-film to the one we were making. They [i.e. the long takes] formed a necessary antidote, a way of holding on to qualities which are so often lost when a film is structured for its likely audiences’.

MacDougall is referring to the rushes here, the ‘excess’ (my emphasis), which is not the situation in which Meyrou found himself at the editing stage. As mentioned above, Meyrou only had seventeen hours of total film footage with which to work at the editing stage because of the financial costs associated with using Super16 film (Meyrou, 2007); therefore, I am adapting MacDougall’s idea and using it in a slightly different way, acknowledging the qualities of the long take that he proposes. This allows me to consider the potential significance of Meyrou’s use of the long take within the film, particularly the longest one of eight minutes. Meyrou maximises on his use of the long take in this scene and does not bow to the usual demands of commercial mainstream TV documentary/programming, which, according to MacDougall (1992, p.38), adopts short

takes and quick cuts to ensure that spectators do not get bored. Apart from interview and ‘talking head’ type documentaries, the average length of a shot is five seconds (ibid.).

MacDougall (1992, p.45) talks about the ‘prospects’ of the long take, suggesting that it points to: the potential for the introduction of marginalised cinematic forms into the mainstream; the combining of words and images in creative ways; the layering of sound and image on top of each other, ‘[making] us reinterpret what is nominally background and, on some occasions, [reconstituting] it as thematic foreground’; and the conscious use of the analytical strengths of the camera (‘requiring, on the film-maker’s part, an ability to impose a process of thought on the camera’s movements while filming unpredictable material’.) These ‘prospects’ are identifiable in the park scenes which become a focal point of interest for the spectator throughout the film, partly because they become increasingly darker and ‘uninhabited’ as the film progresses (making it a transgressive feature of the film), but also because they fail to provide real *visual* answers to prior events.

The 7 park scenes amount to 11 minutes 45 seconds in total, which equates to 13% of an 86 minute film. They vary in length from 8 seconds to 8 minutes and form part of a longer edited sequence as opposed to one long (and complete) sequence because the point-of-view shots are from different angles and suggest no visual continuity. Meyrou explains that the eight minute scene was filmed over several days (Phillips, 2006), although the darkening of the scenes does suggest temporal continuity. The scenes have common elements in them, namely the presence of a park bench and a street lamp, and, generally, there is very little action taking place. The first five scenes have separately recorded voice-overs mounted on them, which link into the events of what happened there. These voices proceed from parents speculating on the reasons why François may have been in the park to a narrative account by Isabelle of events surrounding her

brother's death and then a statement of remorse by Franck read out by his lawyer, Maroud. The remaining two scenes have no voice-overs, but do have striking music attached to them, which emphasises the importance of this place prior to the forthcoming sentencing. Meyrou explains that François is symbolised through the park, namely the 'place of his death [...] ' (Phillips, 2006). In addition, Meyrou describes the duration of the eight minute static shot as a 'monument' to him; this was the length of time that François endured with his attackers before dying, although Meyrou highlights that none of this is explained in the film (Phillips, 2006).

By placing the voices of key participants into the position of a voice-over Meyrou works a heteroglossia onto the 'notional' film; this was partly for financial reasons as it was less expensive to use separately recorded voices on top of these scenes than to create more scenes (Meyrou, 2007). This heteroglossia is evidenced principally through Isabelle's working-class voice, which points to the more inclusive Republicanism that forms part of Meyrou's project, placed well against the rhetorical insistence of the professionals. It is also evidenced when Jean-Paul and Marie-Cécile speculate as to why François was in the park, demonstrating a degree of naivety on their part as they do so, and when Maroud, as Franck's lawyer, mediates his (Franck's) voice by reading out a letter of remorse he has written. This is made more interesting by the fact that Maroud is of Maghrebi origin and of a very different social standing to him; although, clearly, the mediation of Franck's letter leads onto other questions about whose voice is really being heard here given the rehabilitative function of the justice system.

Francis explains the difference between Bakhtin's 'monoglossia' and 'heteroglossia' (2012, pp.3–4) by highlighting that the former seeks to establish unified and coherent visions of the world, the latter to offer more flexible, fluid and varied versions; however, she also draws attention to Bakhtin's view that all language is

‘heteroglossic’ despite often being presented as ‘monoglossic’: ‘Language in its very essence is heteroglossic and dialogic, saturated with reference to diverse ‘others’ (other subjects, the listener/reader, other texts/opinions, other language systems, etc.)’ (ibid., p.4). The heteroglossia in these scenes works within the ‘main film’ and supports my argument that Meyrou’s aim there is one of inclusivity; however, it serves also to demonstrate the complete absence of François’s voice.

The pivotal park scene frustrates the viewer’s desire for narrative closure, in spite of the explanatory intent of Isabelle’s voice-over. The fixed shot on screen is instantly recognisable as a park with a river or pond visible just to the left of a pathway with a barrier. As the light fades, there is the intermittent passing of joggers while Isabelle recounts events leading up to and surrounding the death of François; of particular difficulty for her was the process of having to identify his body, which she felt was an inappropriate task demanded of her as his sister. At the end of the scene Isabelle explains how she felt when informing her parents of his death, saying it was as if she had driven a knife through their hearts: ‘Le moment le plus dur de la journée finalement, j’ai poignardé mes parents en leur annonçant que leur fils aîné était mort’.⁵⁹ Following this, a lamp’s light comes on and a solitary figure on roller-blades goes in the opposite direction with his back to the spectator.

The position that is assigned to Isabelle’s separately recorded voice is troublesome on two counts. Firstly, her idiosyncratic working-class voice challenges the traditional male, white, authoritative, middle-class voice-over that Bruzzi suggests is generally associated with expository documentary film (2000, p.58). Secondly, Isabelle’s narrativisation of François’s last few days does not correspond with the visual aspects of

⁵⁹ [Finally, the hardest part of the day, I drove a knife into my parents’ hearts by telling them that their eldest son was dead.]

the long take, creating a verbal–visual disjunction. However, while the temporality that her narrative adds to this space seeks to protect François with the controlled release of information, the actual time afforded to this long take challenges spectators’ expectations of documentary film from within mainstream conventions and allows for a ‘*combinatoire* of spectatorial positions’, as described by Shohat and Stam (1994, p.350). This position is not ‘racially or culturally or even ideologically circumscribed’ as, according to Shohat and Stam, spectators too are heteroglossic, bringing their own varied identities to the viewing of a film (Shohat and Stam, 1994, p.350). The length of this shot gives the spectator time for an exploration of space beyond the profilmic scene because the link between voice and image is wide, necessitating, as Bruzzi explains, the search for secondary meaning (2000, p.57). This gives time for the exploration of alternatives to the dominant discourse of the ‘main film’.

A gay or ‘worldly-wise’ audience will interact with this scene differently to less knowing audiences, homing in on unexplored—and, therefore, potentially complicit—references by Isabelle to François’s partner and a well-known [possibly gay] bar in Reims, as well as the lack of exploration of this particular place as a gay cruising area, which is described in the press coverage of the trial as ‘un lieu de rencontres homosexuelles’ (Abiven, 2004; Brioux, 2004).⁶⁰ The fading light, the male joggers, the bushes, and secluded aspects of this scene reinforce this place as a ‘lieu de drague’.⁶¹ Isabelle’s reference to François’s partner points to the respectability of coupledness within universal republican values and is part of her defence against the possibility of cruising.

For bande dessinée artist, Fabrice Neaud, the ‘park’ features as a significant aspect of his *Journal* series and allows him to: ‘[condense] many of his personal and

⁶⁰ [meeting place for homosexuals.]

⁶¹ [gay cruising spot.]

artistic preoccupations, most particularly, his concerns about questions of place and space, public and private, and the like' (Johnson, 2008, p.29). Neaud is acutely aware, however, of the negative impact of 'gay legibility' on these dynamics, which he highlights can '[offend] the heterosexual republican subject's sense of the sacred nature and safety of the divide between public and private' (ibid., p.30). Gaissad, in his study on 'space-time dynamics of sexual activity' in the South of France, establishes a link between the various cruising sites he seeks to investigate and Foucault's 'heterotopias' and 'heterochronies', which demonstrates the complexity and sophistication surrounding the use of specific locations for sexual activity, often involving certain rules (Gaissad, 2005, p.20). Gaissad adds that, among a range of activities, jogging is one of the more 'discreet' ways of accessing cruising areas and acknowledges that previous work in the field has tended to focus too much on the night time veil in '[sheltering] stigmatised groups' (ibid.). Night time sexual activity, however, remains an important factor, although generally gay cruising has generated more sophisticated analyses and understanding (ibid., p.22).

None of these issues are overtly addressed in *Au-delà de la haine*, which seeks to maintain intact the public-private divide important to the French republican model and François as an icon representing this. The film witnesses a range of performances—one of which includes a performance of documentary itself—that 'constitute' François in this iconic way, which is predominantly felt through the divide between the 'main film', of overlapping public and private strands, and the 'notional film', which centres on the park. However, the park becomes increasingly unsettling as the film progresses, particularly as there is no sign of François in this place; this queers the coherence offered in the 'main film' and the narratives that it presents. The park becomes an abject place even though Meyrou seeks to portray it as a 'monument' to François; the duality and contradiction of

this place and its dissection of a number of realities as a *lieu factice* implicates the spectator in the Queer resistance of the scene. The shot can be described as a ‘crystalline’ Deleuzian shot in that it is a fusion of an actual banal park and a virtual recollection of the past in the present through subjective experience (Deleuze, 1989, p.67), which highlights the interaction of different temporalities at once and points to an indiscernibility which adds to its resistance.

In conclusion then, the ‘prospects’ of the long take in this film, which involve the layering of sound and image in technically advanced ways, allow for movement between the background and foreground, which highlights the analytical strengths of the camera. Although François is represented as coherent through the dominant republican framework of the ‘main film’, the open space of the ‘notional film’ allows many more alternative interpretations of that space, from its banality as an everyday feature to a Queer heterotopia of men connecting with other men. This allows for a marginal element to exist within the ‘main film’ by assimilating a Queer identity into the dominant discourse. Günther and Heathcote highlight this as a particularly contradictory feature of representations of ‘queer’ sexualities in France, which they suggest only ‘replicates the monolithic paradigm of universalism’ (2006, p.287). Ultimately, however, the aim of the ‘notional film’ is to locate and position the spectator at the scene of an awful crime, from which there is no hope of fleeing. Through this positioning, the spectator experiences a tension between an ‘ethics’ and ‘politics’ of spatial representation, between the need for a feeling of immediacy over who François was—and what actually happened to him in the park—and representations of ideological patterns and relations in the shape of abstract and concrete discussions of French citizenship. Equally, the neutrality evinced through this process elevates the film to a level beyond definitions, rendering it mobile through a well-established cinematic language that connects individuals beyond set identity

characteristics which is a very Queer process politically. The resistance of the 'notional film' lies very much in its failure to deliver what might be expected of a 'crime scene investigation' as well as the deafening silence of François in this place. This unsettles normative debates presented in the 'main film' and makes François a 'concrete' feature of the viewing experience.

Chapter Six

Tabous et Transgressions dans Mes Films – un film (un peu narcissique) de Philippe Vallois (2007)

Since the inherent transgressive potential and the sanctions applied for trespassing taboos provide an insight into the socio-psychological condition of a society and culture, the interdependent overlapping discourses surrounding the concept of the taboo—such as transgression and repression, innovation and conservatism, punishment and pleasure, or sadism and masochism, to name but a few—can be understood as an arena of contestation in which a society negotiates not only its values and beliefs (from the Inquisition via post-Enlightenment secularization to sexual liberation) but also its borders and power structures. (Horlacher, 2010, p.13)

Who is Philippe Vallois?

While the various performances in Olivier Meyrou's *Au-delà de la haine* draw, largely, on the influence of the French Republic in the structuring of the film's various strands, in this chapter, in distinct contrast, I consider Philippe Vallois's *Tabous et Transgressions dans Mes Films* (2007),⁶² which offers a more particular (as opposed to universal) perspective. This short film adopts an autobiographical approach and evidences the intertwining of Vallois's life and work in a number of different ways. As Ivan Mitifiot states '[I]a vie et l'œuvre de Philippe Vallois sont indissociables et intimement mêlées' (2013, p5),⁶³ although, despite his prolific filmmaking over the past forty years, he claims that Vallois and his work go largely, and unjustifiably, unrecognised (ibid.). Mitifiot considers whether the reason for Vallois's lack of commercial success on both the big screen and television relates to his homosexuality and a frank and uninhibited approach to representing love between men (ibid.); a clear and very early explicit example can be

⁶² *Tabous et Transgressions* from now onwards.

⁶³ [The life and work of Vallois are indissociable and intimately entwined.]

seen in his uncut film *Johan—journal intime homosexuel d'un été 1975* (1976)⁶⁴ which features an extreme fetishist sex scene and shots of the erect penis (some of this previously banned material is shown in *Tabous et Transgressions*). However, Vallois did have notable success with his first fiction film shot entirely in colour in 1979, *Nous étions un seul homme*.⁶⁵ Released onto the big screen in 1980, it was awarded, as Vallois explains in *Tabous et Transgressions*, 'le prix du magazine OFF', the only magazine seen to broach the subject of homosexuality in the 1970s. While Vallois's films are easily available for purchase on the internet, and there is a recent autobiography *La Passion selon Vallois: 'le cinéaste qui aimait les hommes'* (2013),⁶⁶ little has been written about him or his work.

Of particular note in *Tabous et Transgressions* is that the entire film is made up of three types of archive material: personal photographs, home movie film footage and excerpts from his various films (which includes self-reflexive out-takes on the construction of those films). Described on the DVD cover as '35 minutes d'archives méconnues sur le parcours d'un cinéaste téméraire',⁶⁷ this archive material is accompanied by Vallois's voice-over which explains to the spectator what is taking place, tying all the pieces together in a chronological account from 1967–2006; interrupted only when the individual pieces run their own course in between what Vallois is saying. In mapping out his life and work, Vallois draws attention to a number of important shifts which are both cinematic and personal. His work is seen to evidence a range of styles, including the New Wave, documentary, docu-fiction, mockumentary and even 'téléréalité'; the latter is a word he uses to describe his film *Les Phalènes* (1975), which

⁶⁴ [*Johan—intimate journal of a homosexual, summer 1975.*] *Johan* from now onwards.

⁶⁵ A film starring Serge Avedikian (Guy) and Piotr Stanislas (Rolf), set in wartime Lot-et-Garonne, France, depicting love between a wounded German soldier (Rolf) and local farmer (Guy).

⁶⁶ [*The Passion according to Vallois: the filmmaker who loved men.*]

⁶⁷ [35 minutes of unknown archives on the story of a reckless filmmaker.]

he explains is in the style of today's television reality shows, with eight people playing themselves.

With respect to the New Wave, Vallois can be seen to be in sympathy with its techniques and stances by foregrounding his own style, remaining innovative and creative, and by being in tension with the mainstream while offering a critical stance (Neupert, 2009, pp.xvi–xviii). This reflects the incorporation of the 'textual traces' to which Betz refers (see above pp.78–80). Vallois also places great significance on the therapeutic benefits of filmmaking, his 'cinéthérapie' as he calls it. Refusing to resort to the help of a psychiatrist when he continues to struggle with the death of his long term partner, writer Jean Decampe, he exclaims the benefits of his new Hi8 video camera instead. With this camera, Vallois proceeds to create a film about a care home for the elderly, which both helps the residents to start talking again and him to overcome his depression.

Towards the end of *Tabous et Transgressions* there is a poignant moment when Vallois says in voice-over: 'Je suis dans une période de ma vie où je me sens seul sur le plan professionnel'.⁶⁸ A period, he tells the spectator, in which he produces *Sexus Dei* (2006), a film he describes as being concerned with 'le deuil sexuel' / 'sexual mourning'. I suggest that *Tabous et Transgressions*, which was produced a year later, appears also to form part of this process of mourning as he reflects on a number of other areas of his life. I also claim that the film evidences, as Cook explains when discussing the role of archivists and the issue of identity, 'a *process* of memory-making and identity formation'; in reassessing the past, stronger identities can surface in the present (2012, p.96).

⁶⁸ [I am in a period of my life when I feel alone on the professional front.]

In re-constructing his own memory and identity through his own archive, Vallois gives an invaluable insight into a contemporary Queer perspective. Recalling the work of Brickell (2005, p.39), this emphasises the ‘constituting’ aspects of agency; visible both in the original archive material, particularly when he interacts with the external world around him through his camera, and in the re-construction of that archive material into new narratives.

Embodiment and exclusion: Vallois’s assertion of difference

Two key aspects emerge on an assessment of Vallois’s work; one relating to the embodiment of his sexuality in his films—from which he certainly never shies away, hence the title he assigns himself: ‘le cinéaste qui aimait les hommes’ (Vallois, 2013)—and another to his ‘exclusion’ from a more popular French cinema, which links into, I would argue, the way he asserts his ‘difference’ and breaks down the public–private divide so important to French republican universality. His work is more visually and aesthetically challenging in contrast to more popular and mainstream ‘Queer’ directors in France such as Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau, and François Ozon; see respectively, for example, *Ma Vraie Vie à Rouen* (2002) and *Crustacés et Coquillages* (2005), and *Gouttes d’eau sur pierres brûlantes* (2000) and *8 femmes* (2002). While the work of these directors is defined as having ‘queer features’, it is considered to fit into Rich’s notion of a New Queer Cinema in some respects only—namely in relation to its confidence, the representation of non-normative sexualities, and an ‘unapologetic’ and radical approach born of the AIDS crisis (Waldron, 2009, pp.7–9). The assimilation seen frequently in the re-constitution of the heteronormative family framework or other collective unit at the end of these films is said to limit the extent to which a Queer analysis

can occur (ibid.). Also, as previously mentioned, one of the key pertinent issues to an assessment of the French context—when talking of either French Queer directors or subject matter—is that, unlike in Anglo-American contexts, ‘their status as “queer filmmakers” and accompanying penchant for depicting queer desire on screen are largely downplayed’ (Schilt, 2011, p.35). I believe that the work of Vallois does the opposite of this, drawing attention in the process to a key feature that distinguishes Queer documentary work coming out of France and Italy since 2000, which relates to the interrogation of representation itself; seen in Meyrou’s ‘notional film’ as an antidote to the structuring features of the ‘main film’, Vallois achieves this through his embodiment in his work.

In maintaining a creative tension within his work, Vallois reflects the responsiveness and innovativeness of New Queer Cinema, never settling into a fixed style or encouraging a particular viewing experience. *Tabous et Transgressions* chronicles innovation within cinema as Vallois moves from his Paillard 8mm film camera to his Hi8 camcorder and then onto his caméra numérique (digital camera), which sees him becoming more creative with each format in terms of dealing with issues of representation and reality and fact and fiction. In his film *Esprit es-tu là?*, produced in 1999 but re-released 2009 in DVD format (Mitifiot, 2013, p.9), Vallois is seen to use his new camera to re-connect ‘physically’ with his dead partner Jean (who sends him messages via the camera), thereby unsettling the illusion of reality (ibid.).

I would assert that Vallois’s *Johan* was, in fact, the first Queer film in France as it appeared five years before the more well-known *Race d’ep!: un siècle d’images de l’homosexualité* (1979);⁶⁹ although one of the latter’s producers, Lionel Soukaz, is

⁶⁹ *Race d’ep!* from now onwards.

described by Rees-Roberts (2008, p.130) as ‘the pioneer of French queer video’. *Johan* was key in Vallois’s increasing acceptance of his own homosexuality, which reflected changing attitudes occurring in France towards gender and sexual norms. Vallois’s work is similar to that of Lionel Soukaz in that it is experimental, playful, unsettling with its visual images, and involves a significant focus on the subjective experience and the importance of a close circle of friends (*Arte.tv*); however, neither director has received significant critical attention, although it is possible that more interest has been shown towards Soukaz’s work because of its associations with Guy Hocquenghem in *Race d’ep!*—the author of *Homosexual Desire* (1993) and a well-known queer theorist and activist.

I suggest that Vallois’s work can be described as ‘Queer DIY video’, a category that Rees-Roberts associates with the work of Lionel Soukaz in claiming a recent return to the ‘lowbrow politics of pleasure’ of the post-gay liberation period (2008, p.132). However, in his list of films that fulfils this category, Rees-Roberts presents a rather contradictory view of ‘Queer DIY video’ by locating it both within the ‘underground’ and the visible, liberationist and commercial; one need only recall Jean Genet’s *Un Chant d’Amour* (1950), an obvious example of an ‘underground’ film in the sense that it was made for the secret gay male middle-class pornography market of its time (Adnum, 2003), and even Vallois’s uncut *Johan* which was banned after being shown at the Cannes film festival because of its explicit content. I do agree with Rees-Roberts that such forms of ‘DIY video’ are ‘being used by marginal subcultures in France as active forms of cultural empowerment, used to set the agenda according to their own terms, rather than accepting invisibility in mainstream heterosexual culture, or passive visibility on the terms of institutionalised gay male subculture’ (Rees-Roberts 2008, p.145). In contrast to some of the more visible Queer artists on the French scene that form part of Rees-

Roberts's corpus—mentioned earlier in this section—he also denigrates as 'nebulous' the statement by Didier Roth-Bettoni that some of the less well-known Queer artists, such as Vincent Dieutre, Alain Guiraudie, Pierre Trividic and Patrick Mario Bernard, are partly defined by their 'radicalism and [...] unique strangeness, be it thematic and/or aesthetic' (Roth-Bettoni, 2007, in Rees-Roberts, 2008, p.129). I argue that this lack of clarity is a key feature used in the queering of documentary and representation, which is particularly notable in the work of Vallois.

The therapeutic use of archive: Vallois's lieu factice

In arguing for a *lieu factice*, I seek to shift the focus away from a taxonomy of Queer cinema (a very non-Queer process)—such as suggested by Rees-Roberts's list of different types in *French Queer Cinema* (2008)—by emphasising instead the relationship that is established between director, protagonist, and spectator, and the issue of representation. The work of Vallois reflects a key aspect of French and Italian Queer documentary cinema which involves a critique of cinematic processes, which includes the use of DIY techniques to make things look strange in their own way. There needs to be greater focus on processes of creation within each individual piece of work as opposed to whether a film is Queer or not, which appears to have over-determined academic responses to Queer cinema in France and Italy. In fact, as shall become clear, not all of the films under analysis in this thesis are by directors who specifically identify themselves as homosexual, which does not prevent their films from having a Queer sensibility. I argue that this only adds to the committed project of French and Italian documentary as Queer in itself.

Tabous et Transgressions illuminates the power of documentary, as a construction and a reflection of the real, to undo the authority and truth-telling capabilities of the media and other producers of hegemonic discourse. As the film is essentially an amalgamation of pieces of Vallois's own archive,⁷⁰ an archive from which he uses pieces interchangeably between his films, it also contributes, I feel, to the more recent emergence of what Cook defines as 'community archiving' (2012, p.113).⁷¹ This is described as 'one not yet a fully formed paradigm to be sure' (as it unsettles the authority of the established professional archivist) but one making progress towards a 'more holistic and vibrant "total archive"' (ibid.) which includes not only the activities of professional archivists in their official roles but also the various other professional and non-professional contributions achieved through the internet and other community organisations creating their own records of their experiences, often reflecting a whole range of activities (filmmaking, music, writing, photography, etc.) (ibid.).

The use of archive footage is an identifiable trend in a number of Queer documentary and docu-fiction films produced in France and Italy since 2000, from the biopic to the more political film looking back to the 1968 student protests and the sexual revolution of the 1960/1970s.⁷² It also features in Gustav Hofer's and Luca Ragazzi's *Italy: love it or leave it?*, where archive footage is used as a reminder of a bygone era when Italy was once powerful. This trend appears to reflect the 'placelessness' of Queer

⁷⁰ Swender and Kepley (2009, p.4) provide the following succinct definition of 'archive footage': "archive footage" is defined as any recovered actuality footage incorporated into a secondary text—a documentary film—that was not recorded for the specific purpose of being included in that film, whether or not that footage once happened to reside in a recognised film archive'.

⁷¹ The emphasis of this type of archiving is on the owner and originator of the material not the professional archivist who previously held a privileged position in terms of, firstly, dictating the notion and value of an archive, and, secondly, in sequestering the material in a safe and ordered place for preservation (Cook, 2012, p.114). The other previous types are defined as: 'juridical legacy', 'cultural memory', and 'societal engagement' archiving.

⁷² *Pasolini— un delitto italiano* (1995), dir. Marco Tullio Giordana; *Un Mondo d'Amore* (2001), dir. Aurelio Grimaldi; *Amants des hommes* (2004), dir. Isabelle Darmengeat; *Ma Saison Super 8* (2005), *La Révolution du Désir* (2006), dir. Alessandro Avellis; *Pasolini Prossimo Nostro* (2006), dir. Giuseppe Bertolucci; *Le Gai Tapant* (2011), dirs. Voto et Goa.

realities in France and Italy, which seek anchorage in some way through recourse to retrieved footage. The term ‘total archive’ is particularly promising in that it promotes the need to document these realities for reference in the future, a resource which Halberstam feels is much needed for ‘queer historians who want to interpret the lives we have lived from the few records we have left behind’(2005, p.46); although, as part of a ‘total archive’, this may well sit alongside plenty of poor quality material, which is where the professional archivist comes in to help organise it, says Cook (2012, p.114). It also affords these records a notion of ‘place’, both physical and virtual; this, I would argue, adds to my concept of the *lieu factice*, artificial to the extent that it acts as a resource for the self whatever one’s particular socio-cultural and political status or needs might be, allowing for the past to be re-written and new perspectives offered if appropriate.

Along with the other chosen directors, Vallois evidences a degree of self-care through filmmaking; this is also seen in Meyrou’s *Au-delà de la haine*, in the family’s response to their mourning, and can be seen again in the transgender films analysed later where each one of the individuals represented acknowledges change through the filmmaking process. Vallois is seen on a number of occasions in *Tabous et Transgressions* actively resorting to his camera as a way of allowing him to know and to explore himself better (his ‘cinéthérapie’). This desire to work on the self by Vallois is reflective of Foucault’s ‘technologies of the self’: ‘[...] which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality’ (Foucault, 1988, p18). Vallois’s *Tabous et Transgressions* exemplifies the potentiality of what the other films in this thesis seek to do, which is to create a self-reflexive performative space in which individual realities are explored and re-presented to the

extent that they are both curative to the self in terms of creating a sense of agency and challenging to the very nature of representation itself. The ‘duality’ and ‘hyphenation’ associated with processes of representation and misrepresentation was seen in *Au-delà de la haine*, but is a feature repeated throughout my chosen films, contributing to a particular quality of French and Italian Queer documentary.

The difference between *Au-delà de la haine* and *Tabous et Transgressions*, however, is that Vallois breaks down the public–private divide, which is set up at the beginning of the film. In terms of considering how Vallois breaks down this barrier in his work, it is worth looking at it from the point of view of ‘taboo’ and ‘transgression’, particularly as he feels it important enough to use these words as the film’s title. Not wishing to get wrapped up in the various definitions and theories surrounding these two terms or their associated ambiguity, I recall as a guide here two aspects of the opening quote, namely that ‘taboo’ should be approached as an ‘arena of contestation’ of various discourses and as the ‘[negotiation] not only of [society’s] values and beliefs [...] but also its borders and power structures’ (Horlacher, 2010, p.13). In addition, Horlacher highlights that when looking at ‘taboos’ it is important to acknowledge that they exist beyond ‘social phenomena’ and should include a consideration of both ‘aesthetic innovations’ and associated ‘limits of art’ (2010, p.16).

In the opening scene of *Tabous et Transgressions*, Vallois’s voice-over states as:

Qu’est-ce qu’on peut montrer? Qu’est-ce qu’on doit cacher en tant que cinéaste? Chacun a sa théorie, ses pudeurs, son éthique, ses interdits. Selon moi, un film comme tout œuvre d’art peut aider l’artiste à extraire la partie cachée de son monde intérieur, affirmer sa vraie nature, et non pas ce que la société attend de lui. Donc, pourquoi s’opposer au processus? Il ne peut être qu’utile au public.⁷³

⁷³ [What can we show? What must we hide in the role of filmmaker? We all have our own theory, modesty, ethic, inhibitions. According to me, a film like any piece of artwork can help the artist extract the hidden part of his inner world, to affirm his true nature, and to exceed what society expects of him. Therefore, why resist the process? It can only serve the public good.]

The ensuing visual scene on screen is of Vallois dressed as Napoleon on a rotating platform with a series of columns placed at a number of equidistant positions around the perimeter; he appears to be rubbing his nipple under his coat and is looking provocatively at the camera. In the background there are a series of mirrors. Taking into account what he says in the voice-over above, this scene blends the public and the private while also implicating the filmmaking process at the same time; his desiring look towards the camera in a scene reminiscent of Eadweard Muybridge's *The Horse in Motion* (1878) is suggestive of this. In this opening scene, Vallois places himself directly in the centre of filmmaking, which epitomises the majority of his œuvre. He is conscious of his ability to shape and to be shaped by socio-cultural discourse, including the mode of representation through which he seeks to explore this. In the dissolve that is achieved through a ripple effect between this opening scene and a personal photograph, and then home movie footage, the spectator is invited into the private world of his memory.

Vallois deals only with the basic ingredient of documentary in *Tabous et Transgressions*—namely ‘raw material’ or ‘actuality’—which he ties together in an autobiographical account of his life and work. By its subsequent involvement of the public (namely the spectator) in this process, *Tabous et Transgressions* can be described as following the ‘home movie’ format given the significant amount of personal material in the film and the accompanying voice-over that provides a continuous narrative thread for the spectator: ‘Home movies can be defined [...] as an ‘autobiographical’ filmic mode defined by the identity between author, characters and public, taking the family as the unit of that identity’ (Cuevas, 2013, p.19). Cuevas also highlights how the ‘home movie’ both exemplifies ‘the archive as the mediator for the impossible return to the places of origin’ and encourages the ‘affiliative look’ (2013, pp.19–20), which the spectator is invited to adopt as part of the ‘family’ (although it is expected that in order to partake in

this shared experience the spectator should not feel alienation as a result). While Vallois provides a chronological narrative to this film in its progression from 1967–2003, on the whole, the film evidences the many Queer features of his life and work, which defy such coherence. Before exploring further the power of the basic ingredient of documentary by considering Rancière’s perspective on documentary filmmaking, I consider next how this ‘affiliative look’ challenges the spectator’s point of view. I have decided to focus specifically on his representation of the ‘family’ in this film as it provides a contrast to *Au-delà de la haine* in the first chapter of this section.

The Queer Alternative

In sharing an ‘affiliative look’ with Vallois over the course of the film, the spectator witnesses a major shift from a middle-class heteronormative view of the notion of the ‘family’ to a Queer alternative. This shift is marked by a progression from home movie footage of scenes in Madagascar where a very happy seventeen year old Vallois is seen holidaying with his family, falling in love with a girl, and obtaining his first camera (a Paillard 8mm, which he hopes will allow him to explore the world in all its colour and contradiction) to a constructed scene from *Sexus Dei* in the final section of *Tabous et Transgressions* where Vallois is seen having sex with Ramo and Christophe in what turns out to be a rather comical scene (an outtake from *Sexus Dei*). Ramo is previously introduced by Vallois as being a Muslim who is a strong admirer of Christ and a lover of sex, Christophe as being a welcoming rural atheist who lives in a converted presbytery and who looks and acts like Christ. The flow of this final scene in Morocco is interrupted only once they notice that a pigeon is watching them from a window ledge, which is

followed by Vallois exclaiming in voice-over: 'La seule torture sera quand il faudra montrer le film à mes amis et à ma famille'.⁷⁴

Already, it is clear that Vallois offers a Queer alternative that crosses a number of boundaries. As Mitifiot (2013, p.10) explains, the premise of *Sexus Dei* builds on the need for Vincent, who is played by Vallois, finally to mourn the loss of Jacques (who represents Jean, his real life long term partner who died from AIDS). In achieving this, Vincent is seen returning to Beirut where a montage of scenes, some of which are super-imposed, show him meeting with a family of dislocated refugees on top of a ruined building during which a sexual act ensues between him and the two men, the woman and child having left the scene beforehand; this sequence suggests that the two men give Vincent a massage and that they watch him while he masturbates, which culminates in his supposed vision of Christ's face upon which he ejaculates (which is actually the face of Christophe his future love, who he is yet to meet).

Madeline, writer and narrator to the ensuing story, informs the spectator that Vincent associates his mourning with that of a nation recovering from its losses, seeking reconstruction, love, and happiness. As a result of this process, Vincent is seen to progress in his mourning for Jacques who is represented as 'le bel ange'⁷⁵ in the film (ibid.); in the original *Sexus Dei* the body of Vallois's former partner Jean is replaced by the figure of Jacques, because, as Vallois tells us in *Tabous et Transgressions*, he finds representing him is just too difficult. *Sexus Dei* mixes fact with fiction by including personal aspects of Vallois's life into another fictional narrative (Christophe is Vallois's partner in real life), which is set up in an interplay in the film's narratives between the processes of writing and filmmaking. In one strand of the film, Madeline, Christophe's girlfriend (and

⁷⁴ [The only torture will be when I have to show the film to family and friends.]

⁷⁵ [beautiful angel.]

then ex-girlfriend once he meets Vincent), controls what occurs in the various chapters of the film which she writes contemporaneously as the film progresses under her control, re-writing the heartache that results from Christophe having left her for Vincent. In defying clarity and absolute surety, Vallois creates an alternative Queer space in *Sexus Dei* which is somewhat different to *Au-delà de la haine* where the family is seen to reunite over the course of the film, although the difficulty of representing mourning and loss are comparable.

Vallois is conscious of the ability of his work to impact upon traditional notions of the 'family', which is evidenced in his considerations of the potential reactions of his own family to his work. However, this does not stop him from challenging such established frameworks: one of his earlier films, entitled *La main de ma sœur* (1970), allows a young Vallois to conquer his inhibitions about his sexuality through a young student who plays the role of seducer to his sister's boyfriend, which, although played by fictional characters, allows Vallois to go one step further in exploring his sexuality within familiar territory; in *Johan*, a film in which a substitute Johan is sought to replace the real Johan, Vallois's partner who is incarcerated, his own mother plays herself and somebody else plays Vallois. As mentioned earlier, parts of this film were censored because of its very explicit nature, which explains why he hopes that his father never sees it and potentially why he has a substitute playing his role, although he states that 'quant 'à ma mère j'en fais ma complice et je lui fais jouer son propre personnage',⁷⁶ which suggests a queering of normative relationship roles. Vallois undoes the notion of the 'family' from its coherence at the beginning of *Tabous et Transgressions* by offering a complete

⁷⁶ [As for my mother, I made her an accomplice and got her to play her own role.]

alternative at the end, although he acknowledges the ongoing influence of his family at various stages of the film.

Over the course of *Tabous et Transgressions* Vallois is seen to create and to embody a sense of place through his films, and, in line with the trajectory from fixity to fluidity in his notion of the ‘family’, evidences an increasing confidence in his filmmaking skills and sexual identity. In relation to the latter, he is seen to move from the tentativeness of *La main de ma sœur* (behind the camera) to a burgeoning homosexual lifestyle in *Johan* (evidenced in its focus on gay cruising areas, gay bars, the activities of the pissoirs/vespasiennes of Paris and the freedom associated with cinema and his New Wave friends) to a complex Queer reality seen both in and outside his films in *Sexus Dei*.

I have focused on Vallois’s reflections on the transgressive nature of *Sexus Dei* as this draws attention to the role of cinema in re-creating the realities that form part of the concept of the *lieu factice* that I propose. In addition to the complexity of the various narrative threads in *Sexus Dei*, briefly outlined above, Vallois is seen to re-create a whole new reality through the montage of previously developed material: multiple images of refugee men from the Middle East sought for *On dansait sous les bombes* (1996), a film which sees Vallois and photographer–reporter friend Christine Spengler doing a report on Beirut in 1994, are re-used in *Sexus Dei* to form Vincent’s (Vallois’s) sexual fantasy while masturbating. Some of the same footage from this sequence is then used again in *Tabous et Transgressions* as part of a reflection as to whether it is acceptable to associate the misery of Beirut with such sexually erotic feelings, Vallois concluding that: ‘Alain Resnais l’avait fait en douceur avec *Hiroshima mon amour*, ma méthode est plus radicale mais terriblement exaltante, un apothéose de sentiments d’amour de mon prochain’.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ [Alain Resnais did it discreetly in *Hiroshima mon amour*, my method is more radical but terribly exhilarating, a culmination of my love for my fellow man.]

The Beirut scenes are used to create new narratives, inscribed differently from their initial purpose for *On dansais sous les bombes*; the original material used as Vincent's fantasy and mourning in one film and as a point of reflection on his work in another. While the images may retain historical and iconic specificity, losing the associations that surfaced in the original text from their juxtaposition with other images and applied specificity such as voice-over narration and music, for example, they acquire completely new meanings in their re-contextualisation, naturalized to the extent that they are used to exert a new truth (Swender and Kepley, 2009, pp4–5).

By referring to *Hiroshima mon amour*, a film in which there is great emphasis on place, memory, identity, forgetting, and infidelity (Mohsen, 1998; Anderst, 2011), Vallois makes a link between his work and the associated difficulties of his own memory and its representation. However, unlike Riva in *Hiroshima mon amour*, Vallois's direct vision of the scenes in Beirut are not doubted as he is physically seen there. Also, his film *Nous étions un seul homme*, in its comedy-drama style and positive depiction of love between wounded German soldier Rolf and local French farmer Guy (the latter of whom kills the former and then himself in becoming one against the German authorities), seems to undo Riva's shame of having her hair shaved because of her love affair with a German soldier as a youth. Both of these examples point to his love for his fellow man; however, the mutability of his archive footage in *Tabous et Transgressions*, and the changing perception inspired by its re-inscription, and his ability to undo dominant historical narratives—surrounding collaboration, for example—points to the transgressive crossing and undoing of established national borders in his approach. Adopting Pierre Nora's term here, this points to *Tabous et Transgressions* as Vallois's own *lieux de mémoire*.

In manipulating his own archive material in a way that queers the mourning process through the figure of Christ, there is an unsettling of the nation's control of

narratives; this appears to be an anti-homophobia statement as Vallois explains as voice-over that part of the motivation for doing *Sexus Dei* was to allow him to reconcile his homosexuality with the Catholic religion of his childhood.

The nation and other dominant discourses are also implicated in this by way of Vallois's disassociation with France for a ruined and dislocated nation where he feels more able to deal with his suffering in sharing it with others; Vallois's difficulties in representing his loss can be seen, firstly, as an attack on the French government's slow response to the AIDS crisis in the 1980s, by offering a very personal account of the fallout that he has experienced as a result, and, secondly, as the search for a sense of place within the fragmentation of his archive material. This highlights the complexity of representing Queer realities through cinematic spaces, a particularly pertinent issue for Vallois who has dealt with the difficulties surrounding AIDS and the mourning of his partner. Through recourse to his own archive, Vallois exemplifies the power of documentary at a very essential level to unsettle normative processes surrounding 'social phenomena' and the 'limits of art', a process in which the spectator, as a member of the 'family' watching the film, is expected to take part and to negotiate at a number of complex levels. This is where Rancière proves useful in understanding this better.

Baumbach explains how Rancière considers documentary to have the ability to maximise the 'aesthetic regime of art' (2010, p.60)—defined as the amalgamation of two opposing art concepts, namely a source located easily in the external world, usually considered as everyday and ordinary, and the gestural and creative feature of the artistic act itself—such that it generates an 'arena of contestation' (ibid.)⁷⁸ around issues of the real and its representation. According to Rancière, documentary is also a fiction, although

⁷⁸ Baumbach's term here.

it does not stand in opposition to fiction by claiming to be more real: ‘instead of treating the real as an effect to be produced, [it] treats it as a fact to be understood’ (Rancière, 2006, p.158). In doing this, the illusion of reality associated with fiction is reduced to the bare essentials of fragmented pieces of image which can then be reconstituted into various other stories (ibid.). Therefore, documentary sets off from ‘a more radical starting point’ in its ability to control meaning through processes of construction or deconstruction involving a whole array of different signs (Baumbach, 2011, p.67). Vallois makes this explicit by creating a film from his own archive footage, a process which witnesses the footage’s re-inscription and mutability in different ways. This also highlights the instability of representation and asks for a less complete and final view of the world. As Baumbach (2010, p.67) also explains:

[t]he question concerning the politics of documentary should not be about its explanatory power, its efficacy as a delivery machine for facts and information but rather the forms of community that are implied by the regimes of identification through which art, facts and politics are perceived and reorganized. The aesthetic regime of art, according to Rancière, is also a new regime of historicity in which the future is defined by restaging the past.

It is evident that what Vallois’s work offers to an understanding of the French context, and to my thesis, is the way in which it draws attention to the ‘aesthetic regime of art’ and resultant ‘arena of contestation’ surrounding documentary and representation of the real (within which ‘taboo’ is also implicated). This helps build on the idea of the *lieu factice* as an artificial place in which various discourses can be seen to interact and to dispute various hegemonic notions surrounding gender and sexuality and its representation, thereby contributing to the construction of different futures. Through his Queer embodiment of the camera, Vallois pushes the limits of what is representable and

challenges how this should take place; particularly notable through a consideration of *Tabous et Transgressions* as following the ‘home movie’ format.

In analysing and juxtaposing *Tabous et Transgressions* and *Au-delà de la haine*, I have highlighted the difference between the ‘constituting’ and ‘constituted’ features of agency, both of which are played out to varying extents and in different ways in each film. In ‘constituting’ his own reality, as others have also done in resorting to a ‘journal intime’ in their work, such as Lionel Soukaz, Hervé Guibert, and Rémi Lange (Mitifiot, 2013, p.5), Vallois breaks down the public–private divide in potentially unacceptable ways, which may indicate the reason for his ‘exclusion’ as highlighted by Mitifiot when considering his lack of commercial success (2013, p.5). Meyrou’s film also achieves an ‘arena of contestation’ through the ‘notional film’ that I proposed earlier; however, in distinct contrast to Vallois, who is seen actively to break down these borders in his work by exerting his differences, *Au-delà de la haine* is seen largely to maintain the public–private divide. Of particular note between *Tabous et Transgressions* and *Au-delà de la haine* are the associated processes of mourning; they each seek to deal with issues of memory and remembrance through their own *lieux de mémoire* and accompanying tensions between the particular and the universal and associated respective differences between social historical narratives and more personal individual memories, driven by the subjective experience, psychology, and processes of embodiment (Nora, 1989, pp.9, 12, 15).

Alongside the other films in this thesis, Vallois exemplifies what helps define Queer documentary in France and Italy, namely a critique of the creative means of representation alongside other social, political, and cultural issues of concern. Building

on the idea of the *lieux de mémoire* as an artificial and mutable site (Nora, 1989, p.18), what I am suggesting that is evident in the output of Queer documentary in France and Italy is a *lieu factice* which focuses on the issues of creativity and representation from a more subjective point of view; the tensions surrounding these issues are manifold and not specific to memory and immortalisation, although the recent work of Vallois and Meyrou as discussed here evidences strong leanings towards these processes.

Both Meyrou and Vallois offer a significant contribution to a Queer voice in France and outside. Their work reflects a committed documentary cinema emerging out of France and Italy since 2000, which I argue seeks to challenge its own mode of representation as much as to represent the complexity of Queer lives. The innovative and DIY techniques of Meyrou and Vallois point to the ‘electronic elsewhere’⁷⁹ of their creative pieces, which is seen to influence the performances of the final films at both the micro and macro level of their structure (overlapping most significantly in *Au-delà de la haine*). Their work allows for a consideration of the practical approaches necessary to a representation of the self and others in two contexts where interpretations of ‘Queer’ and the display of one’s difference can be perceived as an impossible task. In advancing this argument, I turn in the next section to two films that deal with the issue of same-sex partnerships and parenting. I focus on the importance of the relational, the transnational and ‘queer opacity’ as tactics that help elaborate the notion of the *lieu factice* as artificial and mutable.

⁷⁹ Recalling the work of Berry *et al* (2010, p vii) on p.70.

Section III—*Lieu Factice*: ‘relinquishing proprietary notions’

Homophobia does not result from the presence or absence of gay marriage, or from any other single status or characteristic, and therefore it cannot be eliminated by altering it. It is remarkably protean and like a weed can pop up anywhere. It is rhizomatic in character, a term that has been used in a positive sense to refer to new forms of identity and politics that are not fixed and tethered to place and rigid hegemonic structures but can also apply just as easily to less desirable developments. Responses to homophobia need to be just as varied and rhizomatic in their turn and not limited to a single issue, such as the right for gays to marry. (Graham, 2004, p.30)

In the previous section I considered the *lieu factice* as a response to ‘placelessness’ and associated mourning. In this section, I expand upon the interrogative and place-making qualities of the *lieu factice* by analysing Peter Marcias’s *Ma La Spagna Non Era Cattolica?* (2007) and Gustav Hofer and Luca Ragazzi’s *Improvvisamente l’inverno scorso* (2008) and *Italy: love it or leave it?* (2011). The first two films in this list focus primarily on same-sex partnerships and parenting, key matters up for discussion in most European countries in the 2000s. While these two films, by implication, present a challenge to heteronormative notions of gender and sexuality, the last film adopts a wider Queer voice which connects with other disenfranchised and placeless individuals in Italy and elsewhere.

Graham’s article ‘Gay Marriage: Whither Sex? Some Thoughts From Europe’ (2004, p.28) highlights the gap between a largely progressive European Union (EU) level response to increasing diversity across Europe, including the rights of LGBT individuals, and the tighter and more controlled borders and traditions of its individual state members

which are at times less receptive to change. Concerned that homophobia remains a significant problem in spite of an increase in LGBT rights at policy level, Graham argues that ‘queer sexuality’ needs to be kept a relevant point of discussion so that the issue of ‘gay marriage’ is perceived neither as the ultimate step in attaining equal rights nor as a potential mask to the problem of homophobia (ibid., pp.29–30). In talking of ‘queer sexuality’, Graham is referring to the social and cultural makeup of sex and sexuality, including its limits (if there are any), its associated impact and emotiveness (including issues of inequality) and connection to other issues such as age, race and gender (ibid.). The films under analysis in this section bring some of these discourses together, most notably, I will argue, through the shifting of the debate beyond the borders of Italy by way of a range of transnational and ‘rhizomatic’ performances.⁸⁰ The films also interrogate the dominant modes of representation that perpetuate marriage as founded on concordance between gender, sex, and sexuality, which remains ‘gendered to the core’ according to Graham (ibid., p.27).

In emphasising the sense of ‘duality’ and ‘hyphenation’ in the lives represented in French and Italian Queer documentary—resulting largely again from the public–private divide—I focus in this section on ‘relationality’ (which I exemplify through the work of Kaja Silverman),⁸¹ the ‘transnational’, and ‘queer opacity’. The positioning of the *lieu factice* in the local as well as the global and transnational reflects the emergence of a more critical voice to the representation of non-normative sexual identities within Italy. It also considers the documentary encounter as a site of agency and resistance, as an ‘arena of contestation’ in which the everyday and the creative are brought together (as

⁸⁰ This term is borrowed from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987, p.263) where ‘movement occurs not only, or not primarily, by filiative productions but also by transversal communications between heterogeneous populations’.

⁸¹ This can be described as the connection between one individual and another or an object that promotes spatial awareness.

key features). I concentrate on the films' ability, firstly, to challenge fixed ontological categories, particularly those centring on the nation, and gender and sexuality, and, secondly, to interrogate modes of representation, which includes a self-reflexive element in the process. In the context of France and Italy where difference in relation to non-normative sexualities is frequently 'glossed over', as exemplified in Meyrou's *Au-delà de la haine* (2006) in chapter five, it is also important to consider how documentary can be used to deal with the intricacy of such complex dynamics in the public domain. In relation to this, the role of de Villiers's 'queer opacity' proves to be especially productive as it acknowledges the resistance of the particular within the universal and allows 'invisibility' to demonstrate its own queering effect. It proves tactical in exposing those who dominate public opinion through the media, a key feature of the films under analysis in this section.

I start by analysing Gustav Hofer and Luca Ragazzi's *Improvvisamente l'inverno scorso* (2008) and *Italy: love it or leave it?* (2011). As evidence of the widening of a Queer political voice in Italy, these two films are seen to negotiate the national and the transnational, and, at times, most clearly in the interview setting, to use the tactic of 'queer opacity' (this tactic is also demonstrated in the interaction between Martina and Hernandez in *Ma La Spagna Non Era Cattolica?*, the latter of whom is a metonym for the media). Following this, I analyse Peter Marcias's *Ma La Spagna Non Era Cattolica?* (2007), which adds to the strength of voice in Hofer and Ragazzi's work by drawing particular attention again to the 'transnational' and to the dynamics of the 'ontic' and the 'ontological' which challenge dominant hegemonic discourse focused on the nation and appropriately gendered spaces governing the notion of the 'family'. Although I discuss these two dynamics in greater detail later, it is worth mentioning at this stage that the 'ontic' and the 'ontological' are based on a respective overlap between politics as an

organised system and the political as based on individual differences of being (Gressgård, 2011, p.33–35). When they are played out together—considered here in relation to documentary film—they act as a force for unsettling the fixity of place, which is maintained as mutable and irretrievable in the relationship between them; this is particularly useful for an analysis of Queer documentary tactics and is central to my argument on the *lieu factice*. These dynamics are not specific to any one film in this thesis, instead they can be seen to work in various different ways in each film, but are particularly useful in conceptualising the complexities of *Ma La Spagna Non Era Cattolica?*

Chapter Seven

Improvvisamente l'inverno scorso (2008), *Italy: Love it or leave it?* (2011)

The work of journalists and filmmakers Gustav Hofer and Luca Ragazzi⁸² has made a significant contribution to an emerging Queer voice in Italian documentary filmmaking since the year 2000; this is seen in its success in reaching a wide audience through the festival scene, commercial distribution, internet download options and personal blogs/WebPages. Their films allow a Queer subversive narrative to infiltrate and unsettle hegemonic discourse surrounding issues of heteronormativity, representation, and national economics. The first of their two works, *Improvvisamente l'inverno scorso*,⁸³ centres on the public, personal and private responses to Prime Minister Romano Prodi's proposed *DiCo* law of 2007.⁸⁴ Their more recent film, *Italy: Love it or leave it?*,⁸⁵ witnesses Gustav and Luca deliberating over whether to remain in Italy or to move to Berlin, the latter option seen as potentially preferable to the difficulties of life in Italy with its high living costs, economic instability, lack of prospects and job opportunities and little support for human rights. Luca is convinced that they should stay and Gustav

⁸² In this chapter, I use 'Gustav and Luca' for close readings of the text and 'Hofer and Ragazzi' for macro level analysis of their work, although both are closely entwined.

⁸³ *Improvvisamente* from now onwards. For further details see: <http://www.suddenlylastwinter.com/improvvisamente/index.html>.

⁸⁴ '*DiCo*' is an acronym for 'Diritti e doveri delle persone stabilmente Conviventi'; this law was proposed in 2007 and sought to protect 'due persone maggiorenni, anche dello stesso sesso, unite da reciproci vincoli affettivi, che convivono e si prestano assistenza e solidarietà materiale e morale, non legate da vincoli di matrimonio, parentela in linea retta, adozione, affiliazione, tutela, curate o amministrazione di sostegno, sono titolari dei diritti e delle facoltà stabiliti dalla presente legge' [two people over the age of 18, even if of the same sex, who are joined in a relationship of reciprocal affection and who live together and share material and moral support, not joined by marriage, direct kinship, adoption, affiliation, any other protective or agreed support, shall have the rights and powers of this law] (for further information about the specific nature of this law see: <http://www.repubblica.it/2007/01/sezioni/politica/coppie-di-fatto2/ddl-coppie-di-fatto/ddl-coppie-di-fatto.html>).

⁸⁵ *Italy* from now onwards. For further details see: <http://www.italyloveitorleave.it/>.

that they should go; however, both agree to spend six months exploring Italy in an old Fiat 500 in order to decide what they should do. In her article '*Improvvisamente l'inverno scorso/Suddenly, Last Winter: Queer Sex in Public*', Clarissa Clò states that the film goes beyond the demand of equal rights for a minority group: 'It is about the present state of the nation and its 'vision' for the future' (2011, p.257). It is this which links Hofer and Ragazzi's two films, exposing the holes in Italy's current vision concerning, amongst a number of other issues, gender and sexual norms (founded on the 'universal' concept of the family).

As their first film responds to the issue of *DiCo*, it sits well alongside Peter Marcias's *Ma La Spagna Non Era Cattolica?* which I discuss in the next chapter. Together with the work of Italian filmmaker Alessandro Avellis (who lives and works in Paris where he is a keen observer of LGBTQ issues in both France and Italy) they contribute to a body of committed work concerning the issue of same-sex partnerships, a key concern of many Western countries in the 2000s. Avellis's undistributed film *Le Regole del Vaticano* (2007) deals with the issue of *DiCo* and includes, along with the films mentioned thus far, the 'figureheads' Don Franco Barbero, who was dismissed from his position as a priest in the Catholic church in 2003 for his open-minded views, José Zapatero, Spain's (now former) progressive left wing Prime Minister who features most significantly in *Ma La Spagna Non Era Cattolica?*, and, former *Deputato Parlamentare* (MP) Franco Grillini, who was also President of *Arcigay* (Italian LGBT Association). Overall, these films suggest the strengthening of a Queer documentary voice in and across both Italy and France.

In tackling their two films here, I draw attention to how Hofer and Ragazzi work within a transnational space from where they are able to re-position themselves and the

spectator at an alternative angle to Italy as a nation. In relation to the issue of ‘display’, Clò proposes:

Hofer and Ragazzi are always consciously on display, their bodies the markers of sameness and difference simultaneously, exposing the assumption and tyranny of heterosexuality in a profoundly heteronormative and homophobic system, as well as, from a cinematic perspective, the presumed neutrality and univocal truth of documentary. (2011, p.257)

I build on this crucial observation in order to account more fully for Hofer and Ragazzi’s active performance and its role in unsettling both fixed and dichotomous notions of identity and place. I consider how their use of performance works in a more subversive way than is suggested in Clò’s article which largely focuses on the binary oppositions of visibility-invisibility, inclusion-exclusion, and the private/public divide (as important as these are to the two films).

I identify the queerness of their work while acknowledging what Clò considers as ‘the [potential] limitations to an approach to citizenship through rights-based claims that imply the assimilation of a monogamous gay couple to the state apparatus to the detriment of other non-normative sexual arrangements and identities’ (ibid., p.257). In their second film, *Italy*, Hofer and Ragazzi are seen increasingly to go beyond the issue of sexual identity and to connect with others who experience dislocation in relation to a number of broader socio-political issues. Drawing here on Moe Meyer’s *The Politics and Poetics of Camp*, the men’s altered focus is seen to allow ‘the queer label’ to widen its attention in exposing the inequalities perpetuated by those in power (Meyer, 2004, p.3) and to evidence the Queer tactics of their filmmaking.

I claim a shift to the transnational in their work by using Leo Bersani’s concept of ‘relationality’ as explicated by Kaja Silverman (2010, pp.410–413), which highlights the tension between a centred and dispersed perspective. Silverman explains this

‘relationality’ further by referring to Bersani and Dutoit’s analysis of a Caravaggio painting⁸⁶ as a balance of centripetal and centrifugal aspects which, as she elaborates, forces the onlooker to connect with others through processes of ‘seduction’ and ‘mortality’, defined as ‘perceptual enablers’ that respectively draw on one’s desire to know more about the world and with a sense of urgency (ibid., p.413). Reflecting upon Bersani’s *Is the Rectum a Grave? And Other Essays*, I also acknowledge how this ‘relationality’ links both to the ‘human’ and ‘nonhuman’ (i.e. objects) in a shared aesthetics driven by a political and ethical endeavour (Bersani, 2009, p.x). I will argue that Hofer and Ragazzi’s two films unite those involved in the documentary encounter in the realisation, as Dean states in relation to his analysis of Bersani’s work, that ‘the continuity of being entails, among other things, relinquishing proprietary notions about what belongs where and to whom’ (2010, p.392).

Although potentially counterintuitive to their demands for equality concerning same-sex partnerships in *Improvvisamente*, I will assert that Hofer and Ragazzi’s ceaseless performances over the course of the two films question their status as a couple because of the resulting emphasis that is placed on constative documentary performances. This proves to be strangely Queer as it unsettles the very representation of their relationship and not just documentary as a construction. In dealing then with the issue of their propensity to perform in front of the camera, I also claim that their power lies partly in their ‘queer opacity’, a term suggested by de Villiers’s (2012, p.3). Reflecting upon Foucault’s ‘The Subject and Power’, de Villiers responds to the tension that exists between recognition and secrecy over one’s sexuality (ibid.). In considering the process of ‘coming out’ as potentially homophobic in that it is ‘hegemonic’ in its desire to know

⁸⁶ *Saint John the Baptist with a Ram*; this painting is housed in the Hall of St. Petronilla, Musei Capitolini, Rome, and can be seen on the following website <http://en.museicapitolini.org/>.

and to categorise individuals, he offers the concept of ‘queer opacity’ as ‘an alternative queer strategy or tactic that is not linked to an interpretation of hidden depths, concealed meanings, or a neat opposition between silence and speech’ (ibid., p.6). The queerness of this ‘opacity’ plays on the desire of not wanting to reveal all while at the same time resisting accusations of being silent or invisible over one’s sexuality, and, therefore, potentially homophobic as a result (ibid., p.3).

I approach Hofer and Ragazzi’s work in two stages. Firstly, I consider how they disrupt normative spaces by increasingly focusing on the transnational across their two films, which allows them to connect transversally with others located elsewhere and to unsettle fixed notions of place and identity. In setting up a transnational space in and across *Improvvisamente* and *Italy*, I highlight how they challenge the spectator’s viewing experience by blurring the boundaries between the public and the private, and representation and reality. Secondly, I consider how Hofer and Ragazzi break down this public–private divide (similarly to Vallois) in a subtle but very tactical way. In doing this, I focus on a number of Queer performances in *Improvvisamente* which challenge the stability of social, cultural and politically mediated discourses centring on appropriately gendered and sexual spaces governed by time and reproduction. I will claim that this queering of space is achieved most significantly through the ‘child within’ alongside a process of ‘queer opacity’ which sees both Hofer and Ragazzi working in and on the complex dynamics of the interview set-up.

Disrupting Normative Space: queering the national and the transnational

In relation to *Improvvisamente*, Rome is described by Clò not just as a ‘back drop’ to Luca and Gustav’s life but also as ‘co-protagonist’ in their political struggle (Clò, 2011,

p.258). Clò considers those represented in the film as a ‘microcosm’, which establishes Rome as a metonym for the ‘entire Italian nation’ (ibid.). Taking an aspect of Ezra and Rowden’s perspective on the relationship between the transnational and the national, I would suggest instead that in both films Rome/Italy is best described as ‘a canny dialogical partner’ (2006, p.4) as this is more reflective and emphatic of the power differentials inherent in space–place dynamics, which can be manipulated and negotiated in an attempt to gain ground and control. Given that Rome is where the Vatican and the government are located, there is the potential for it to be seen as a hostile place because of its role in administering hegemonic discourses.⁸⁷ Through ‘dialogue’, and not just expository information, Hofer and Ragazzi provide an alternative narrative on Italy. However, this is not a univocal response on their part; in fact, their own ‘[samenesses] and [differences]’ contribute to the dialogical relationship they have with Rome/Italy in their work.

The hostility witnessed and experienced by Gustav and Luca in public spaces in *Improvvisamente* and *Italy* highlights the displacement and dislocation that Rome and Italy have come to represent in both political and social terms for them; although, through this, they seek emplacement by way of a dialectical process of considering place and identity at a number of different levels. This is achieved through a transnational perspective, which is introduced in *Improvvisamente* and expanded upon in *Italy* where they are ‘forced’ to leave Rome in response to their landlord’s decision not to extend the rental agreement on their apartment, an important place for them in *Improvvisamente*. At the beginning of *Italy*, having received ‘quella maledetta lettera dal padrone di casa’,⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Mudu (2002, p. 189) claims that the ‘historical centre [of Rome] is now completely vacated of its one-time heterogeneous population’ due to the control of urban space by the economically powerful. The term ‘co-protagonist’ does not fully reflect this position, appearing to imply a representativeness of, and equality in, the control and appropriation of space.

⁸⁸ [that damned letter from the property owner.] In this chapter, subtitles and translations relating to *Improvvisamente* are by Mark Weir, Natasha Senjanovic, and Lorenzo Lupano.

Gustav and Luca declare a truce with each other and agree to spend no more than the next six months deciding whether Italy is really where they want to stay or if they should instead go to Berlin. They become increasingly mobile and placeless figures over the course of the two films, seen to move outwards from Rome (Luca's home and birthplace) before returning once again.

Luca's reticence and lack of enthusiasm for Gustav's project on the proposed *DiCo* law in *Improvvisamente* reflects the difficulty of negotiating gender, sexuality and desire in public places in Italy. In responding to the polemic surrounding the proposed legislation, Gustav is clearly more active than Luca who requires coercion to take part in the documentary endeavour. While Gustav closely follows the progress of *DiCo*—monitoring media reports and persistently pitching up at the Italian Senate to watch the Law Commission in action—Luca remains more peripheral to this process. Encouraged to get involved, Luca agrees on a role which frequently places him behind the camera as 'il protagonista involontario' / 'unwilling protagonist' (Hofer and Ragazzi, 2009, p.15), which is more apparent in those situations and public places in *Improvvisamente* where he anticipates confrontation. Through the camera's frame, and not through the fixed optic of Rome as home, Luca is allowed to see familiar spaces differently and to experience the dislocation that Gustav experiences naturally as an outsider. In Luca's favourite place in Rome, a particular section of Isola Tiberina (where he wants his ashes to be scattered when he dies), he feels out of sorts having just been perceived as 'contro natura' by a member of the *Militia Christi* organisation (a very traditional Catholic political movement): 'non sapevo di esserlo. Mi sentivo così naturalmente...naturale'.⁸⁹ Luca is possibly performing the role of the 'faux naïf' to highlight the conservative points,

⁸⁹ [against nature.], [I didn't think I was against nature. I used to think myself naturally...natural.]

although this is a key moment in his realisation that familiar environments are not what they always seem, even if expressed in a cynical and nonchalant way.

For Gustav, the situation is different as he comes from Alto-Adige where he grew up with a German speaking mother. In *Italy* the spectator is informed by Luca—who is now more involved and confident than before as he takes on the role of narrator—that Gustav’s South Tyrolean accent frequently identifies him as foreign in Italy. Gustav represents dislocation in *Improvvisamente*, appearing to have a contrasting attitude towards the city and its various spaces than Luca. In *Italy*, Luca refers to how Gustav has made him understand his country better, which includes doing Karaoke at a Berlusconi convention where he is seen singing ‘Meno male che Silvio c’è!’.⁹⁰ In both films, Gustav takes on a more factual and objective stance, highlighting particular facts about Italy and claiming his right to exist in certain places, whereas Luca is more tentative, fanciful and romantic. This draws attention to the overlap between local (personal) and national (abstract) features, both appearing to complement each other in their own way in terms of a transnational focus.

Aside from Gustav describing Luca as an unwilling protagonist, the differences between them are visually represented in both films: in *Improvvisamente* in the Pigneto apartment scene they are each seen looking out of different windows from their apartment; in *Italy* they are frequently and obviously positioned in completely opposite directions as they try to reach a decision as to whether to stay or to leave Italy. Acknowledging their differences in relation to *Improvvisamente*, Gustav and Luca refer to their editor, Desideria, as ‘il nostro occhio esterno, in grado di giudicare, obiettivamente e non emotivamente, quanto è accaduto’ (Hofer and Ragazzi, 2009,

⁹⁰ [At least Silvio’s here!]

p.14).⁹¹ Their ‘external eye’ suggests that Hofer and Ragazzi adopt a critical position in relation to their work while also acknowledging honourably the potential for it to reflect more centred meanings as a result of their own different subjectivities. However, there is irony in the need for another individual to mediate between the two of them and the issue at hand particularly given the conspicuousness of many of their clearly mediated performances. This illuminates a Queer tactical approach on their part in the desire to disrupt normative processes surrounding the viewing experience.

Hofer and Ragazzi do not simply represent transnational spaces, however, but resolutely queer them. This is introduced in the very opening shot of *Improvvisamente*, which sees them sitting on a bench on Palatine Hill, setting their camera to take a picture of themselves. While this scene firmly locates them in Rome and shows how they ‘[reclaim] the right to be publicly visible and demonstrate their love like any other pair in the city’ (Clò, 2011, p.258), there are more revealing aspects of this shot relevant to the queer transnational aspect of their work and its ability to move outwards from this place. The Palatine hill is a telling choice of location given that it is described as follows in *The Seven Hills of Rome: a geological tour of the Eternal City* : ‘The Palatine Hill is evident from all sides, its prominent tablelike form covered with ruins and trees. One of Rome’s top attractions, the Palatine is believed to be the first of Rome’s seven hills to be inhabited—and perhaps the original nucleus from which the great city evolved’ (Heiken, 2005, p.37). There is a centring and dispersion of perspective in this opening shot through the symbolic nature of this place (and what grew out of it) and the interaction that Gustav and Luca have with the camera lens which they try to focus. They cast their work as political and personal as well as creative and reflexive, establishing a point from where their story will evolve as a ‘representation’ across a variety of different spaces. The two

⁹¹ [our external eye capable of judging what happened objectively and not emotively.]

are observed in the process of trying to get the shot right (seen coming to the camera to check it out), which draws attention both to the construction of the scene and everything that follows, and the spectator's involvement within this.

Most telling in this scene in terms of its Queer position, is the location overlooking Circus Maximus where the first World Pride rally took place in 2000. This event was organised by *InterPride*, an organisation which seeks: 'to promote Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Pride on an international level; to increase networking and communication among Pride Organizations; to encourage diverse communities to hold and attend Pride events and to act as a source of education' (*InterPride*). This major gathering 'jousted' with the Catholic Church's Jubilee, a situation which was described as 'inopportune' by the then Prime Minister Giuliano Amato (Stanley, 2000). The confrontation also saw the withdrawal of previously promised financial support for the Pride event by Mayor Francesco Rutelli and, as highlighted in the introduction to this thesis, an increased visibility of lesbian and gay rights in Italy in a new and more publically unified way (ibid.). The link between this place and a symbolic international event suggests, using Higbee and Lim's term, a 'critical transnationalism' on Hofer and Ragazzi's part, which positions them and their work between the local, national, and global (2010, p.9).

There is also something striking in the colours of Gustav's jumper in this scene: the boldness of the green, black, and yellow curved vertical strips against the predominantly white colour of the jumper evokes for the spectator the African National Congress party, which, despite increasing questions over its integrity, had for its centennial celebration 2012 the logo 'Unity in Diversity' (ANC). Luca's totally red shirt could be seen as a reference to Garibaldi's *Camicie Rosse* (Red Shirts) while contributing to the identification of the Italian tricolour amongst the various colours on display—

however, this is unsettled by the strong, bold colours of the ANC party and what it claims to represent. The contrasting ‘flags’ do not establish a direct link between these two countries—that is clear—but they do represent instead the interest of Hofer and Ragazzi in focusing on the national and the transnational and the location of both themselves and their work outside set national narratives, outside of the camera that they are trying to focus in the opening scene.

The table-like form of the hill contributes to the motif of the ‘table’ which features strongly across both films and at which a place is reserved for the spectator. The ‘table’ is seen temporarily to allow Gustav and Luca a secure and reliable place from where to navigate the complexity of their project and the society and culture in which it is located. The ‘table’ sees them brought together at various stages in their trajectory. They are seen at the kitchen table discussing the latest tabloid reactions to *DiCo*, disagreeing over Gustav’s plans to interview priests from the *Militia Christi* organisation (Luca adamant that he cannot step inside a church and/or put the faithful under the spotlight: ‘Farò altre cose, ma non con i preti, i vescovi, i fedeli’),⁹² declaring their truce at the beginning of *Italy*, and talking about various other plans usually relating to their attendance at planned public meetings. The table is also seen outside the ‘privacy’ of their apartment and involves, for example, the (separate) interviewing of contrasting Deputati (MPs)—pro-*DiCo* Barbara Pollastrini (Minister for Rights and Equal Opportunities), anti-*DiCo* Rosy Bindi (Minister for the Family)—as well as other activities such as planning the next stage of their movement up and down Italy and savouring a cup of good Italian coffee. Gustav and Luca bring their ‘orientation device’ (Ahmed, 2006, p.3) with them in *Italy*, although this expands to include the tables of others or temporary tables such as the physical map where they film a miniature car (similar to their own car) advancing here

⁹² [I will do other things, but not with priests, bishops, and the faithful.]

and there, coffee-shop tables, concrete walls and structures exposed to the elements functioning as tables while they speak to each other or to other individuals. Brought to the fore in this way, the ‘table’ appears as an ‘orientation device’ for Gustav and Luca in that it is a base from which they consider their place in the world (ibid.). In contrast to other complex associations generated by their work, namely intertextual references, the ‘table’ is a basic universal symbol that brings people together (particularly at mealtimes in Italy) in a process of ‘relationality’ and their location to others in the world. The motif can be extended to one final table even if it now does not hold as much nostalgia as it once did given the digital age in which we live; this is the ‘table de montage’, which highlights their role in creating their reality through the construction of their films. It also draws attention to the construction and deconstruction of public and private spaces, particularly as their own lives are so imbricated in their own work.

As a result of their professional backgrounds as journalists—Luca specialising in Cinema and Gustav in Art—it is clear that together they aim not only to connect with the audience but also to link with a connected audience, which is apparent from their assumption that spectators would recognise the Truffaut connection in the bedroom scene of *Improvvisamente*. In this scene, the two are seen sitting up reading their books and discussing *DiCo* and the protection it would afford them as a couple. This is all done in a very self-reflexive and performative style, Luca responding to Gustav’s rather informative and didactic approach by asking him to have a normal conversation in front of the camera. Instead of picking up the intended reference here to a similar scene in Truffaut’s *Domicile Conjugal / Bed and Board* (1970), Clò reveals how, in an interview with Gustav and Luca, they observed that Italians perceived this scene as a reference to the lowbrow sitcom *Casa Vianello*, which Clò considers as an indicator of the ‘low cinematic pulse of the country’ influenced by Berlusconi’s media monopoly (Clò, 2009,

in Clò, 2011, p.258). It is perhaps understandable why French audiences interpreted this scene as intended (ibid.), although it is worth being cautious about the representativeness of Hofer and Ragazzi's reflections in relation to both countries. Ezra and Rowden (2006, p.3) state that: 'transnational cinema imagines its audiences as consisting of viewers who have expectations and types of cinematic literacy that go beyond the desire for and mindlessly appreciative consumption of national narratives that audiences can identify as their "own."' Drawing on the work of Higbee and Lim (2010, p.12), I suggest that Hofer and Ragazzi's reflections acknowledge an aspect of a transnational approach to cinema which accepts a range of interpretations of their work across different localities and to varying degrees of understanding (2010, p.12). As Rancière points out in *Le Spectateur Émancipé* it is impossible to anticipate what an intended message might have on the spectator (2008, pp.58–60). Hofer and Ragazzi's use of comedy, irony, and performance in their films feels incompatible with their pedantic reflection on the different responses to this particular scene. If one accepts that Hofer and Ragazzi are suggesting that *Improvvisamente* can be considered as a high art object in line with Truffaut's film, then this is clearly queered as a result of their reflections on its misinterpretation in Italy. In fact, their bittersweet approach is more fitting to an episode of *Casa Vianello* in which Sandra and Raimondo argue and misunderstand each other than to *Domicile Conjugal* in which Antoine Doinel and 'Madame Doinel' settle into a boring middle-class life with mandatory offspring and the search for release through adultery (interestingly, they divorce in the final film of Truffaut's series, *Love on the Run*) (Monaco, 2003, p.69). More telling, I argue, is their queering of normative spaces of representation.

Hofer and Ragazzi's approach to comedy and irony reflects Elsaesser's 'double occupancy', the comic aspects of which draw attention to the incongruity of fixed identity categories (2006, p. 648); this comes through in their largely performative approach

which queers dominant modes of representation despite suggestions that the subtleties of their work are inaccessible to some. This tactic fits with their desire to give *Improvvisamente* (and *Italy*) a comedic slant: ‘vogliamo che sia come le commedie all’italiana, dolci e amare allo stesso tempo’ (Hofer and Ragazzi, 2009, p.14).⁹³ Taking into consideration some of the key features of this genre—for example, as an observation of the nation at a time of change (and man’s position and place in that changing world) and as comedic and dramatic, and with no U.S.-style ‘happy ending’ (Bini, 2011, p.109)—this is a fitting reflection of both films. More notable from the last two points regarding the reception of their work, however, is Hofer and Ragazzi’s reflection on the position of their work in relation to the mainstream in their intertextual considerations. I argue that this position seeks to queer popular culture and an established Italian cinematic tradition from the inside by exposing the instability of the dynamics that continue to define the ‘coherent’ relationship between spectator, text, and the historical world. Within their various performances, Hofer and Ragazzi home in on another key feature of *commedia all’italiana*, namely the inadequate male character who inhibits the shared investment required by all in a capitalist society (ibid., p.115); however, I argue that they reverse this process in the way that they highlight the inadequacies of those who are perceived to shape such dominant discourse within the dynamics of an ever changing world, such as the Pope, the politician, and the neo-Nazi fascist. This queers a traditional mainstream Italian genre and contributes to the wider challenge that their work presents outside national frameworks, shifting the focus away from coherence through capitalist lines (epitomised through Berlusconi’s media monopoly) to more open and mutable perspectives.

⁹³ [we want it to be like *commedia all’italiana*, bitter and sweet at the same time.]

Despite their ‘misgivings’ over their intended references in *Improvvisamente*, Hofer and Ragazzi clearly seek to connect with the audience in a way that allows them to become more spatially aware; this is represented most succinctly in the scene when the area in which they live, the Pigneto district, is introduced by the female narrator while both Gustav and Luca are seen simultaneously hanging out of different windows in their apartment waving at the camera from a reasonably distant high-angled position on their part. They are possibly waving to the Indian fruit vendor who has just been introduced to the spectator and whose position it would seem the spectator now occupies. This suggests, firstly, that Luca and Gustav are acknowledging the spectator’s presence alongside the fruit vendor, confirmed by the subsequent shot of a solitary apple in the fridge from which they must create something for lunch, and, secondly, that this is a construction in which the spectator is definitely implicated. The fact of the fruit vendor’s ethnicity draws attention to the changing dynamics of Rome’s and Italy’s population and widens Hofer and Ragazzi’s connection to the transnational, which has particular relevance given the success of this film outside Italy. This changing perspective is confirmed in *Italy* where they are seen to widen their perspective further.

Forced into ‘homelessness’ by their landlord in *Italy*, and with no clear route in mind, Gustav and Luca navigate the peninsula in a range of coloured vintage Fiat 500 cars made between 1957–1972. Aside from one brief scene where they are in a bedroom trying to sleep—Luca having ‘woken up from a nightmare’ (clearly performing again)—and reference to a stay in a hotel and an awkward encounter with a hotel receptionist when they ask for ‘il matrimoniale’⁹⁴ (i.e. rather than two singles), there is no evidence of a firm place in which they live during this film. They move on from the specific issue of *DiCo* that dominates *Improvvisamente* and explore the wider space of Italy and its

⁹⁴ [a double bed.]

‘belleza’ and ‘bruttezza’, a transition which evidences the widening of a Queer approach in their work. The restricted nature of place and identity in *Improvvisamente*—epitomised by the fixed camera shot inside the Senate which draws attention to its dull and staid environment and the farcical movement of officials in and out of various rooms as they discuss, seemingly interminably, the proposals surrounding *DiCo* (the perceived ridiculousness of the situation reinforced by a rather lyrical non-diegetic melody)—is replaced in *Italy* with a greater sense of mobility and freedom, including the consideration of the perspectives of others who they meet en route.

Gustav and Luca adopt another frame in *Italy*, this time from the position of their car seats as they drive to various places, which allows them to look at Italy from a different perspective. They are protected by the frame of the car and its familiar and reassuring shape, which can be considered a safe and reliable place from which to experience ‘placelessness’ and mobility (even if only temporarily). The double framing that occurs by way of the camera and the windscreen that witnesses various discussions between Gustav and Luca seems to reflect Elsaesser’s concepts of ‘hyphenation’ and ‘double occupancy’ (2006, p.647–648), which points both to their dislocation and to ours. Hofer and Ragazzi appropriate the conventions of the road movie in *Italy*, which, according to Cohan and Hark, afford the space in which historical crises and tensions can be faced (1997, p.2). There is also a potential link here to Pasolini’s *Comizi d’amore* (1964), which Restivo describes in his ‘The Nation, The Body and The Autostrada’ not as a journey shaped by the road but by ‘rhetoric’ instead; this ‘allows Pasolini to interrogate the very map of Italy, exposing cross-sections that remain hidden from the dominant discourse’ (1997, p.242).

This ‘hyphenation’ and ‘double occupancy’ is replicated when Gustav and Luca visit the Little Italy theme park in Rimini; here they take a trip on a gondola along the

‘Grand Canal’ and look at the various tourist sites of Italy in miniature. It also occurs when journeying on a scenic route through Tuscany, the beautiful vista described ‘da cartoline’⁹⁵ and of greater interest to the British and the Americans. Both of these scenes point to their ability to stand outside Italy and to look at it differently. This also occurs when they bring the gift of a Bialetti moka pot to George Clooney at his luxurious house near Lake Como (wanting to meet with him to find out why Italy is so appealing to international stars); having been unsuccessful in getting past his Filipino *colf*⁹⁶ (George is apparently away in Hollywood), they leave the moka pot on the intercom to await his return. This performance is complex, pointing to Gustav and Luca’s ability to occupy a critical position in relation to their country at a number of levels; it links the stylish international image of the Bialetti moka pot to an economic crisis by way of the sacked Bialetti workers who they meet in Omegna (the production having been moved to Romania) and to the economic migrant serving the international stars. This scene performs the ‘bellezza’ and ‘bruttezza’ that pervades *Italy* and the decision that they need to make. In transcending the national by focusing on Italy from an outside perspective, Luca and Gustav perform a very similar move to Andrea Hernandez, the Spanish journalist in *Ma La Spagna Non Era Cattolica?* which I discuss in the second part of this section.

As they further widen their focus to the transnational, their Queer approach is also seen to become more engaged with a number of displaced individuals. The most notably transient group are the African immigrants who pick citrus fruit in Rosarno for a pittance (25 euro/day);⁹⁷ they live in very poor conditions with no immediate access to water or other facilities and are helped by a local organisation—one of its members, Giuseppe

⁹⁵ [picture postcard.]

⁹⁶ [domestic help.]

⁹⁷ For further information see: www.africalabria.org.

Pugliese is completely shocked that this situation occurs so closely to his own home, in what he describes as ‘modern Italy’. I would also include Maria Epifania here whose employment at the Fiat plant is no longer envisioned through the protective embrace of the mother (as it once was) but through the potential threat of ‘cassa integrazione’.⁹⁸ Just after the protagonists say goodbye to Maria, the camera focuses on an advert on the back of a bus which states ‘Bello poter scegliere’;⁹⁹ this is a bold statement on Hofer and Ragazzi’s part as it reflects back on their ability to choose, although it goes some way to acknowledge their understanding of the socio-political issues that separate them from others.

Over the course of Hofer and Ragazzi’s two films there is a working outwards from the symbolic place of the Palatine Hill to other spaces in Rome and beyond (across Italy and abroad). From the outset, they centre but also disperse the spectator’s perspective, which undoes fixed and stable notions regarding performance, identity and place. There is a realisation through a process of ‘relationality’ that ‘the continuity of being entails, among other things, relinquishing proprietary notions about what belongs where and to whom’ (Dean, 2010, p.392). In their second film they physically leave Rome and ultimately return to it, which recalls the nucleus from which their first film began. The final scene of *Italy* suggests that Gustav and Luca are now living in an apartment just opposite the monument to Vittorio Emanuele II, which is framed by a window. Built in honour of the King’s efforts in unifying Italy, it reflects Gustav and Luca’s ability to frame Italy in a way that makes some sort of sense to them now, despite all of its superficiality and contradictions. As writer Andrea Camilleri tells them in one interview in *Italy*, reflecting on their question ‘Italy: Love or leave it?: ‘andandosene via lo spazio

⁹⁸ [layoffs.]

⁹⁹ [It’s nice to be able to choose.]

che noi lasciamo viene inevitabilmente coperto, occupato proprio da quello da cui noi stiamo scappando'.¹⁰⁰ There is a realisation that resistance comes from placing oneself firmly within the place occupied by power, which is epitomised by the framing of the Vittorio Emanuele II monument.

Queering space in *Improvvisamente*

Dominant hegemonic discourse surrounding notions of appropriately gendered and sexual spaces continue to impact upon the private space that Gustav and Luca occupy; this is epitomised through a powerful scene in *Improvvisamente* when, while watching television, the spectator's view of them is completely blocked by a multiple replication of the Pope declaring his anti-*DiCo* position and in *Italy* when Gustav and Luca are seen folding sheets from the washing line with Berlusconi's voice-over declaring that gay unions in Italy will never be seen as equal to the traditional family unit and that gays and single people should never be allowed to adopt children. The real power of their work, as demonstrated in the first section of this chapter, is in representing the difficulties of shaping a coherent and rounded identity in relation to place and identity in an open way in Italy. In performing this fragmentation, which includes a 'queer opacity', they are performing their reality, which turns out to be far more complex than the demand for equal rights, linking into a number of other Queer narratives of displacement on the way.

In her essay on *Improvvisamente*, Clò takes Rome and those occupying Rome to represent the 'entire Italian nation':

The capital becomes the symbol of where Italians congregate for special events to exercise their freedom of speech as citizens. Public places like piazzas, buildings and monuments come to occupy a central role particularly in light of

¹⁰⁰ [by going away, the space that we leave behind inevitably becomes covered, occupied by that from which we are fleeing.]

the oppositional subjects and subjectivities portrayed in the documentary, a powerful central theme that forces a rethinking of who inhabits, or is allowed to occupy, these spaces. (2011, p.258)

The ‘freedom of speech’ to which Clò refers is demonstrated in the following events which feature in the film: *Comunione e Liberazione* (25th Anniversary),¹⁰¹ *Family Day* (Anti-DiCo event), *Trifoglio* (Pro-Family Day march, extreme right-wing group), *Militia Christi* (Anti-abortion commemoration event in ‘onore ai bambini abortiti, ora e sempre’),¹⁰² *Coraggio Laico*¹⁰³ and *Gay Pride*. The first four events are seen to defend a very traditional and exclusive viewpoint concerning the ‘family’, offering a negative view of the DiCo proposals (at times quite aggressively in Hofer and Ragazzi’s portrayal of them); the latter two events, specifically from Gustav and Luca’s point of view, are seen instead to offer an alternative and more inclusive notion of the ‘family’ and represent the claiming of space as described by Clò (the *Coraggio Laico* was organised in direct response to the *Family Day* event). The metaphor also somehow implies ‘representativeness’, which is clearly not the case in *Improvvisamente* where there is an overemphasis on the ‘toxic’ and dominant heteronormative discourse within which the ‘family’ is constructed in Italian society. Clò’s metaphor, therefore, potentially leaves hegemonic discourse intact as the inclusiveness to which Gustav and Luca aspire is founded on a rights-based claim that in many ways reflects a normative heterosexual union.

In exploring Hofer and Ragazzi’s strategies in *Improvvisamente*, a Queer narrative emerges which infiltrates the dominant discourse they seek to unsettle. Bearing

¹⁰¹ Founded in Italy in 1954, *Comunione e Liberazione* is both a national and international movement. It works out of 80 different nations with the philosophy of Christianity as a community and thus liberation. See www.clonline.org for further details.

¹⁰² [in honour of aborted babies, now and always.]

¹⁰³ Translated here as Lay Courage, it was an anti-*Family Day* event.

in mind the clear and unashamed display of documentary performance in the film, which is also evident in *Italy*, and the overemphasis that Gustav and Luca place on traditional as opposed to voices more representative of the spectrum of views, it is important to consider what this says about their approach to representation and reality in their work. As Shih and Lionnet highlight: '[c]ritiquing the centre, when it stands as an end in itself, seems only to enhance it; the centre remains the focus and main object of study. The deconstructive dyad centre/margin thus appears to privilege marginality only to end up containing it' (2005, p.3). In applying this to *Improvvisamente*, this would suggest that Hofer and Ragazzi's focused challenge on the dominance of the exclusive traditional family unit, and, by implication, Italy as a nation based on this ideal union, maintains the ongoing binary between those who are visibly powerful and included—and who will continue to be present once the *Gay Pride* and *Coraggio Laico* events are over—and those who are marginalised and excluded from this picture. Hofer and Ragazzi's approach can be explored a little further by considering the dynamics of power as explained by Foucault in *Power/Knowledge*:

[...] there are no relations of power without resistances; the latter are all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised; resistance to power does not have to come from elsewhere to be real, nor is it inexorably frustrated through being the compatriot of power. It exists all the more by being in the same place as power; hence, like power, resistance is multiple and can be integrated into global strategies. (1980, p.142)

Provocative in *Improvvisamente* is the resistance shown by Hofer and Ragazzi in centring themselves within the powerful discourse that they seek to change. In doing this, their resistance elucidates its own particular Queer reality which proves effective in altering the dynamics of those power relations involved. Hofer and Ragazzi's resistance works on the normative and vociferously ardent voices which permeate locally and/or nationally

driven notions of the family and associated gender and sexual roles. They have an eye for the strangeness of situations, which they use to their advantage in unsettling the authority with which the ‘family’—and associated gendered and sexual roles—is established in fixed ways. For example, in one shot at the *Family Day* event they focus the lens on a woman who is filmed inconspicuously dancing to a song as if hypnotised by the music. They also speak with a number of attendees who defend the traditional family unit in ill-informed ways: ‘Supponiamo che sulla terra gli etero diventino omosessuali. L’umanità in pochi decenni si estinguerebbe. È un’ipotesi accettabile? No, neppure per gli omosessuali. Non sono nati da omosessuali, ma da eterosessuali’.¹⁰⁴ Luca mocks the voice on the megaphone which exclaims: ‘Non ho mai visto una piazza così bella, così piena di bambini! Non c’è mai stata una piazza così bella!’.¹⁰⁵ In contrast to what Luca describes as a hostile place, they move onto the more welcoming *Coraggio Laico* event in Piazza Navona where they focus on an elderly gentleman circulating in the crowd who is heard exclaiming on a megaphone that the Pope and politicians are morons: ‘Il papa senza di me ...è cretino!’, ‘Perché non sa come nasce la pace!’, ‘Anche i ministri senza di me sono dei cretini!’.¹⁰⁶

From Gustav and Luca’s point of view, the conservative voices represented in *Improvvisamente* are seen as equally ‘different’ to the non-normative sexualities and alternative ways of being which they have come to represent publically in Italy. In exposing the heteronormative, heterosexist and sometimes ethnocentric modes of being as represented by the more conservative and far-right voices (which occurs in both films),

¹⁰⁴ [Let’s suppose all straights on the earth became homosexual. In a few decades the world would be finished. Is this an acceptable hypothesis? No, not even for homosexuals. They were not born of homosexuals but rather heterosexuals.]

¹⁰⁵ [I’ve never seen such a beautiful piazza, so full of children. There has never been such a beautiful piazza!]

¹⁰⁶ [The Pope without me...is a moron!], [Does he not know how to create peace!], [Even politicians without me are morons!]

other than providing a counter argument to the (now scrapped) *DiCo* law, it is worth considering why Gustav and Luca persistently target the most obvious resisters to such divergences if not to highlight their strangeness in the world too.

Clò refers to the ‘coming out’ technique used by Hofer and Ragazzi and their ‘reversing of the confessional mode’ as important in this:

They ask questions about people’s perception of *DiCo*, then disclose their own investment in the legislation; they confess their long term committed relationship in front of astounded interviewees, and use their coming out as a weapon, a sort of cinematic guerrilla tactic to underscore the refusal to be silenced and rendered invisible. (Clò, 2011, p.257)

I am not convinced that their ‘coming out’ can best be described as a ‘cinematic guerrilla tactic’ as the resultant ‘visibility’ to which Clò refers remains quite limited outside the safety of the private space of their apartment and the mutually supportive *Gay Pride* and *Coraggio Laico* events. The confessionals take place only on two occasions, both of which are initiated by Gustav who is the more confrontational of the two. The first occasion occurs in and around the Vatican on *Comunione e Liberazione* day; the second occasion at a far-right *Trifoglio* event in support of the *Family Day* event on 12 May 2007, an event promoted and supported by the Vatican in response to the proposed *DiCo* law. The interviewees, who are stopped mid-track, appear not to take their confessions seriously, which suggests that Hofer and Ragazzi’s tactics play more on comedy and surprise than ‘warfare’. The ‘reversing of the confessional mode’ and/or the sudden realisation that (as a passerby) one is involved in a documentary performance draws attention to the dynamics of the documentary encounter and its genuineness, not necessarily to Gustav and Luca as a gay couple. The interviewees’ sense of reality and place is clearly challenged by the spontaneity of the situation, which potentially results in a sense of disbelief, wonder and threat by being drawn into the camera’s focus only

then to be dispersed by it. In one of the scenes, a female interviewee at the *Comunione e Liberazione* day event exclaims to Gustav ‘sei pure bello!’ having just asked him whether he was ‘un uomo vero’ worthy of creating a family.¹⁰⁷ While Gustav and Luca do not represent aggressive Queer political figures—appearing quite ‘normal’, ‘respectable’ and, at a superficial level, quite attractive (as the female interviewee indicates)—their power to seduce and to provoke through a persistent recourse to performance unsettles modes of representation and their status as ontologically sound, particularly for the interviewee who succumbs to their ‘charms’ and the spectator who is in on their ‘game’. Their ‘coming out’ in these scenes serves not as a ‘guerrilla tactic’ but rather allows for them to be categorised in negative ways by those they meet, particularly in the scene where the female interviewee refuses to believe him. I would assert that ‘coming out’ is not their greatest strategy; rather, their power lies, firstly, in the use of a child-like approach to ‘serious’ discourse, and, secondly, in their overall ‘opacity’, which inhibits their categorisation in negative ways while allowing them to expose others in the process.

In their exposé, both Luca and Gustav resort to tactics involving self-indulgent humour, childlike mischievousness, deceit, and an overemphasis on performance. While these tactics could be seen as negative features they are a potential response to the way in which the Italian government has treated its citizens. Halberstam’s *Gaga Feminism: sex, gender, and the end of normal* draws attention to the potentiality of the child—in its ability to wander from one issue to another (often emphasising what is ‘unimportant’ as ‘important’) and to unsettle narratives of time—in allowing adults to perceive the world differently, thereby challenging the ‘profoundly limited and conservative models of the family and childrearing’ (2012, p.xxiii). For Hofer and Ragazzi, as already highlighted in the first part of this chapter, this sees the crossover between the public and the private

¹⁰⁷ [you’re good-looking as well!], [a real man.]

in their performances. As the narrator explains early in *Improvvisamente*, ‘per rilassarsi coltivano il bambino che è in loro’.¹⁰⁸ Luca introduces this aspect of their behaviour during the home movies section of the film on ‘il giorno del bagnetto’.¹⁰⁹ In this particular scene, Luca is observed sitting cross-legged on the floor washing his collection of cartoon character figurines, which are used later in the film to explain the features of the *DiCo* proposals. In the reconstructed scene, the figurines are seen to move, and, at times, to speak about the *DiCo* proposals and how they would be applied if successful. Minnie Mouse and Mickey Mouse (plus offspring) are placed together in one scene in contrast to more alternative combinations. Of note in relation to these are the scenes involving Tintin; in one scene he is positioned next to Speedy Gonzales, in another he is seen next to one of the seven dwarfs, Dopey. The first reconstruction refers to same-sex male couples under the *DiCo* proposals; the second reconstruction presents a specific dilemma surrounding the issue of next of kin as applied to the hospital/healthcare setting. In one of the two latter scenes Dopey is allowed entrance to the very ill Tintin by the universal faceless figure of the Lego healthcare professional; in the other he is not. Through the appropriation of the universal and well-known figure of Tintin—described by Dunnett (2009, pp. 585–586) as ‘iconic’, a ‘European everyman’ about whom little is known at a personal level—Hofer and Ragazzi draw attention in these scenes to the artificial nature of social and cultural constructs surrounding the notion of the ‘family’ and its potential configurations. This sees the queering of gender and sexual normativity through the personalising of the universal figure of Tintin whose movement from Warner Bros. Speedy Gonzales to Walt Disney’s Dopey also draws attention to the challenge presented by those who are frequently marginalised in society because of their differences. There

¹⁰⁸ [in order to relax they work on the child in themselves.]

¹⁰⁹ [baby bath time.]

is also a more individual note here for Gustav and Luca, which illuminates a crossover between the personal and the political in their work; this can be exemplified in the following descriptions of Tintin: ‘A reporter by trade, but also an adventurer and detective, Tintin is very well travelled’; ‘Himself a pacifist and politically neutral (although he never hesitates to protect the weak [...]), Tintin has been to countries led by all types of ideological and political systems [...]’; ‘there must be a journey if Tintin is to have an adventure; for Tintin, home is dull, bland, uninteresting’ (Lominé, 2003, pp.59–60). At the beginning of *Improvvisamente*, Gustav and Luca tell the spectator of their respective jobs as journalists and show him/her previous travel footage of themselves located in a variety of destinations abroad. These scenes demonstrate how the political is closely linked to the personal and how this can be used to unsettle public discourse.

They perform as much within the home environment as they do outside in public spaces, perhaps more so given the privacy of this place; here, the spectator learns that Luca has an idolatrous nature, loving Edith Piaf and Sofia Loren, and that Gustav has a puppet, which he uses to mimic a staid old politician at one point. At times, the living room in their apartment in *Improvvisamente* is turned into ‘una pista da ballo’ for Gustav and his neighbour.¹¹⁰ In positioning themselves in relation to other family members, they focus mainly on their relationship to their nieces and nephews; in one scene they sing along with them (#Mi scappa la pipì!) and in another Luca ‘chastises’ a nephew who is seen with an inflatable pink elephant and a pump in hand: he says ‘voglio mettere questa pompa nel culo dell’elefante’ to which Luca responds ‘Non dire queste cose volgari, poi all’estero ci censurano’.¹¹¹ They offer their own approach to rearing children, and, in

¹¹⁰ [a dance floor.]

¹¹¹ [#Oops I’ve wet myself!], [I want to stick this pump in the elephant’s ass.], [don’t say such vulgar things, otherwise they’ll censor us abroad.]

attempting to show ‘authority’ to their nieces and nephews, they acknowledge the ability of the child to unsettle normative discourse even within the construction of their film. Their own return to childhood proves an effective way of responding to established discourse in relation to gender and sexuality, in many ways mocking this discourse.

The use of childlike qualities as resistance pervades other more public scenes in *Improvvisamente* and functions in a way that seeks to point out the holes in heterosexuality and heteronormative notions of gender and sexuality (most of which are sought in locations that are likely to reinforce this model of being). Of note here is when they ask two nuns seen linking arms in front of St Peter’s Basilica their opinion on *DiCo*: ‘Sorelle, possiamo farvi una domanda? Lei cosa pensa dei *DiCo*?’. Looking totally confused and concerned by the question—in such a location—they respond by saying it is something which cannot be considered: ‘È una cosa che non si può pensare’.¹¹² As they wander off, the men laugh behind their back, Luca saying: ‘Erano chiaramente una coppia di fatto’.¹¹³ At times they appear in candid camera mode asking what appear to be quite ridiculous questions in the given situation, which reflects the irony of their work; for example, at the *Comunione e Liberazione* anniversary they ask Sisters from the *Missionarie del Preziosissimo Sangue / Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood* whether gay couples should have rights and whether it is wrong for two men to love each other, to which one Sister replies (reciting a common riposte) ‘è contro natura’.¹¹⁴ However, they are not always so brave in verbally challenging normative gender and sexual associations, which reflects the dominance of the discourse in which they are positioned

¹¹² [Sisters, can we ask you a question? What do you think of *DiCo*?], [It is unthinkable.]

¹¹³ [They were clearly a couple.]

¹¹⁴ [it is against nature.]

but also the very important tactic of ‘opacity’. There are two situations which best exemplify this.

When Gustav poses questions to Roberto Lastel, leader of *Militia Christi*, he does not challenge him, but rather listens and encourages him to reveal his very conservative point of view; in fact, after the interview (which takes place on Tiber Island in the middle of Rome), Luca accuses him of having flirted with Lastel: ‘Ma eri fin troppo troppo amichevole, sorrisi, bigliettini. Forse ti inviterà per una pizza domani. Annuivi con la testa. Certo: deviati, malati [...] E io: ehi! Che buffo, che tipo che sei! Si è tolto gli occhiali e con uno sguardo magnetico ti ha fatto innamorare’.¹¹⁵ Luca does, however, ask one provocative question during the interview: ‘Ci sono coppie lesbiche che hanno un figlio. È giusto che abbiano una tutela giuridica? Soprattutto i bambini?’.¹¹⁶ This does not challenge Lastel, but rather allows him more space in which to invest his bigoted opinions, which can be summarised simply as ‘homosexuality is deviant’. Luca queers the encounter in his subsequent response by essentially sexualising Gustav’s interaction with him. One of the most powerful aspects of this sequence, however, is a shot which sees the attendees at the event holding a candle and pointing a finger to God in honour of the aborted babies while a wreath is thrown into the Tiber also in their honour. The angle of the shot from behind the group—made up largely of men—makes the gesture appear as if it were a Nazi salute. This illuminates the incoherent nature of this group (who claim to protect the rights of children) and emphasises the ability of Hofer and Ragazzi to undermine dominant discourse in more subtle manipulations of the camera (which, again, brings out the cunning child in them).

¹¹⁵ [But you were far too friendly, smiling, exchanging business cards. Perhaps he’ll ask you out for a pizza tomorrow. You were nodding in agreement. Yes, deviant, sick... And me, hey! How funny, you’re a terrible sort. He took off his glasses and with that magnetic gaze he made you fall in love with him.]

¹¹⁶ [Should lesbian couples and their children not have legal protection, particularly the children?]

Similarly, in an interview with Paola Binetti, Senatrice della Margherita/Senator of the Margherita Party, just prior to the *Family Day* event on 12 May 2007, Gustav and Luca make no attempt to reveal their personal interest in the *DiCo* proposals and/or to challenge her;¹¹⁷ instead, they focus on the banality of what she has to say by including the beginning of the interview when Gustav is seen trying to get the shot right. This allows Binetti time to get carried away in small talk with Luca. As Gustav comes back and forth to the camera, Binetti starts a conversation with Luca by asking him whether he has always been right-handed, apparently having observed him do something momentarily with his left hand: ‘Lei è sempre stato destrimano?’, she asks.¹¹⁸ Once the camera is set and the interview starts, Binetti continues with the same story (which could be a well-practiced one). She suggests that she may be ambidextrous, explaining that she does not have a clear orientation either way; however, she explains that in using her right hand to do the sign of the cross she is able to orientate herself (which reflects her orientation to the right regarding the family in traditional terms). Using an interminable and not entirely accurate sporting metaphor (where rules might differ depending on the sport) Binetti eventually arrives at her model of the family where the internal rules remain unchanged: ‘Maschio e femmina Dio lo creò’, she says.¹¹⁹ While accepting homosexuals as people, she cannot condone what they do by supporting *DiCo* because the internal rules of the family cannot be changed. Binetti’s explicit acknowledgment that official recognition of difference will not change anything is unsettling and not founded on any real sense of stable and rational discourse. Accepting that football teams can only be made up of men—as she claims we all claim—and that tennis is played as either singles or doubles only, affords no alternative. For Binetti, whether covered by a law or not, real alternatives

¹¹⁷ Democrazia è Libertà – La Margherita, centre/centre-left, Democratic Christian party.

¹¹⁸ [Have you always been right-handed?]

¹¹⁹ [God made them male and female.]

to the heterosexual union do not exist, only rules which permeate all aspects of gendered and sexual life which remain immutable. Binetti accepts the homosexual but not homosexuality as a visibly sanctioned practice; a change to this would threaten the traditional family unit as it stands, which includes Italy as a nation based on a 'coherent' set up of fixed gender and sexual roles.

In not revealing their invested interest in these interviews and refusing to 'come out' to the interviewees, Hofer and Ragazzi resist categorisation and totalisation; through this, the spectator witnesses the 'queer opacity' to which Binetti is exposed. A tactic that Hofer and Ragazzi use in most of their interview scenes in *Improvvisamente*, de Villiers's 'queer opacity' seeks to '[mark] the weak points in the system' and to 'create [...] a queer public persona that manages to resist confessional discourse' (2012, p.163), which is what these two particular scenes evidence even in our collusion with the directors.

Their 'queer opacity' is bolstered by the reflexive features in their work: the respective camera shots of Gustav and Luca in *Improvvisamente* looking into a circular double-sided mirror face-on to the camera while on the reverse side of it to them (which is face-on to the camera) a photographic image of themselves is reflected from somewhere else in the room, which draws attention to their role as journalists (Luca is seen in his reflected image reading a newspaper and Gustav sitting behind a desk); their revelation to the spectator at the beginning of *Improvvisamente* of their previous roles as a 'gay couple' in both an anti-sexual discrimination publicity campaign and a fictional film; their reflection in the wing mirror of one of the Fiat 500 that they use in *Italy*; the focus on other forms of media representation in both films; resorting to karaoke at the end of *Improvvisamente* with 'Follow You Tonight' by Anna Ternheim (the lyrics of Ternheim's song—'lying lips' and 'little white lies'—and reference to deceit and breaking promises, draws attention to the truth-telling capabilities of film and

representations therein, its placement at the end of the *Improvvisamente* a kind of ‘warning’).¹²⁰ These examples reinforce, firstly, Hofer and Ragazzi’s propensity towards performance and a desire not to be placed into fixed categories despite their rights-based claims in *Improvvisamente*, and, secondly, Hofer and Ragazzi’s role in manipulating and creating representations to reflect their own reality, but also their affinity to performance as a way of describing that reality. This reflexivity increases in intensity in *Italy* in their focus on the media where Gustav and Luca are seen to consider their place in Italy in relation to what feels like an anthology of the most current issues being represented in the media; the servile representation of women, Berlusconi’s ‘bunga bunga’¹²¹ parties and manipulation/control of the media, the level of youth unemployment at 29%, the misuse of government funds, etc. The continued emphasis placed on performance in *Italy* becomes troublesome in its overuse; whereas in *Improvvisamente* it is easy to get wrapped up in the reactive nature of their fight for equality—without questioning their relationship to performance too much—in *Italy* the ongoing tactic of performance increasingly highlights what is being represented. In exposing ‘representation’, whether in their own work or that of others, they question the value of truth-telling capabilities. However, in questioning others, they too are questioned, as is the representation of their coupledness. This proves to be a particularly useful Queer tactic which unsettles the whole viewing experience.

¹²⁰ For full lyrics see: <http://www.annaternheim.com/lyrics-anna-ternheim-%e2%80%93demo-ep/ill-follow-you-tonight-demo/>.

¹²¹ The term ‘bunga bunga’ surfaced in October 2010 when a young lady, Karima El Mahroug, claimed that she had attended ‘bunga bunga’ parties at Silvio Berlusconi’s home. Aside from the political fallout resulting from this revelation, the significance of this term was sought and many suggestions offered (e.g. ‘harems’, a nickname for Sabina Began (a German actress), etc.). However applied, it is now a well-used term in Italy (Wescott, 2011).

There is an increasing confidence in the bodily movements of both Gustav and Luca as *Improvvisamente* progresses; in the *Gay Pride* scenes, which occur later in the film, both are seen demonstrating confident participation as they and their camera take in the ensuing events. There is a striking rotation of the camera here which implies openness and control of public space; this technique also occurs in *Les Travestis Pleurent Aussi / Transvestites Cry Too* (which I discuss in a later chapter) where similar rotations suggest the gaining and control of space through *Gay Pride* events. Although Gustav and Luca show affection in public at the beginning of *Improvvisamente* on Palatine Hill overlooking Circus Maximus, and at various points thereafter, it is only at a gay bar close to the Coliseum around the *Gay Pride* event that they are seen to kiss in an open and rather provocative way to the camera. In this scene, they mock the authorities by kissing each other in their honour; there is one each for Paola Binetti, the Pope, and Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco (who claimed that legalising *DiCo* would lead to the legalisation of incest and paedophilia).¹²² This is more symbolic and challenging than any other such scene—of which there are few—as it forms a montage in response to the arrest of two gay Turks who kissed each other at the Coliseum (a significant site in the *World Gay Pride* event in 2000). The behaviour of these two men was described as ‘obscene’ by the carabinieri for which Turkey sought forgiveness from the Italian authorities on their behalf. The first scene in this sequence works on a double entendre arising out of one of the headlines that Gustav reads aloud to Luca: ‘I carabinieri: facevano atti osceni’ / ‘The police: they were doing obscene acts’. Luca picks up on the potential for Gustav’s words to be misinterpreted, therefore clarifying it by making a distinction between ‘I carabinieri ...due punti...facevano atti osceni’ and ‘I carabinieri facevano atti osceni’ (i.e. as

¹²² See following article for details: <http://www.repubblica.it/2007/03/sezioni/politica/coppie-di-fatto-7/parla-bagnasco/parla-bagnasco.html>.

intended by the headline or as ‘The carabinieri were doing obscene acts’). This scene brings together key points in their Queer project, which are namely the transnational, political reflexivity, and an element of comedy, which not only disrupt normative spaces but also queer them. The power of Hofer and Ragazzi’s work is in its recognition of the difficulties of non-normative sexualities gaining ground in a system which favours the negotiation of space along normative gender and sexual lines.

Chapter Eight

Ma La Spagna Non Era Cattolica? (2007)

Set in Rome, *Ma La Spagna Non Era Cattolica?*¹²³ is a ‘docu-fiction’ film which recounts the intertwining stories of a lesbian couple (Irma and Martina) and a Spanish TV network reporter (Andrea Miguel Hernandez) who is producing a film on the Italian response to the range of Zapatero reforms in Spain. What starts as an otherwise straightforward endeavour on Hernandez’s part becomes more complex following his chance meeting with Irma and his ex-girlfriend Martina while out with his film crew. An intricate story ensues between the three protagonists during which it is suggested that Hernandez remains unaware that as a result of his previous relationship with Martina he is the biological father to Ilenia who is now six years old. Their story occurs alongside the debate on same-sex partnerships, creating another strand to the film.

Prime Minister José Zapatero’s Socialist government implemented a number of radical policies between 2004 and 2008 relating to the relaxing of divorce laws, ‘gay marriage’, gender equality (including transgender recognition before surgical intervention), compensation for victims of the Spanish Civil War, and removal of troops from Iraq (Field, 2010, p.393). Representative of both political and social change, Zapatero enabled the Socialist party to look at itself and to change into what was described as the New Left—which, unlike Tony Blair’s New Labour reforms of the same period, were socially driven (Encarnación, 2010, p.413). It is suggested that Zapatero’s efforts offered Spain a ‘second transition’ towards democracy, similar to the one of the

¹²³ *Ma La Spagna* from now onwards.

1970s (i.e. post-Franco) only this time ‘from a simple democracy to a more complicated, sophisticated one’ (Field, 2010, p.393). Although the possibility of a ‘second transition’ is considered debatable by some, the figure of Zapatero and his government are representative of major change and progress in Spanish politics (Field, 2010, p.393). Marcias’s use of the Zapatero figure—alongside the question ‘ma la Spagna non era cattolica?’—makes his work socially and politically noteworthy, offering new and challenging perspectives to the Italian public and systems that it challenges in this film.

Given recent mass demonstrations in France against the legalisation of both gay marriage and adoption (authorised on 23rd April 2013), *Ma la Spagna* reflects a key moment in European history and highlights its ongoing relevance in view of what continue to be very contentious issues. *The Economist* article ‘Rainbow warriors’ considers why these protests occurred in a country claimed to be liberal; it suggests that the response was cultivated by two factors—the involvement of a well-known humourist and political activist, Frigide Barjot, who became an anti-same-sex marriage figurehead for protesters, and the opportunism of the right-wing to undermine François Hollande’s left-wing government. Despite the furore and reflecting on the Spanish response rate of 2% of marriages now being same-sex, *The Economist* predicts a poor uptake of ‘gay marriage’ in France (and, by implication, the rest of Europe) (*The Economist*, 27 April 2013).

However accurate the prediction for the future of same-sex unions turn out to be, indeed whether or not the figure of 2% could be used to undermine the whole agenda of ‘gay marriage’ across Europe—same-sex partnerships continue to pose a threat to hegemonic discourse surrounding notions of the ‘family’ and associated gender normative roles (evidenced in French demands to protect the rights of children to have a mother and a father).

Ma La Spagna was released a year before Hofer and Ragazzi's *Improvvisamente l'inverno scorso* and positions the debate on same-sex partnerships in Italy initially in response to the French Pacte Civil de Solidarité (*PACS*); this was before proceeding with 'una via Italiana' / 'an Italian way', as declared by Rosy Bindi, the then Minister for the Family who called for an alternative to the French legal framework concerning same-sex unions (which turned out to be the *DiCo* proposal). Despite many interviewees in the film claiming to support some form of same-sex civil partnership (somewhat different to *Improvvisamente*), most then demonstrate concerns over same-sex parenting, which appears to present the greatest challenge to a more balanced debate. Irma and Martina each respond differently to the possibility of greater visible recognition within wider media representations in the film, not dissimilarly to Gustav and Luca in *Improvvisamente* in that one is more reactive than the other. The interplay between visibility and invisibility creates a notable tension in the film, which centres on Martina's agonising decision over whether to reveal to Hernandez that Ilenia is in fact his daughter.

Ma La Spagna unsettles hegemonic discourse surrounding the traditional family unit and associated gender and sexual normativity, which it achieves through both its focus on a lesbian couple and its challenge to dominant producers of socio-cultural and political discourse in Italy, namely the media and the Vatican. Complementing *Improvvisamente* in terms of its contribution to an emerging Queer voice in the 2000s in Italy, *Ma La Spagna* is an invaluable document for a reflection upon performance, identity, and place. Like *Improvvisamente*, while it plays on notions of being inside and outside, included and excluded, and implicates the spectator in these often unstable distinctions, it also evidences a 'queer opacity', as shall be highlighted.

The film is structured around three interlocking threads: the observation of Hernandez's film being produced, the interaction between Hernandez's camera and the

public interviewees who discuss the Zapatero reforms, and the personal story of Irma and Martina as parents to the child Ilenia. Key to this latter thread is that Hernandez has heard nothing previously about Ilenia who he fathered over six years earlier and about whom he will (apparently) continue to know nothing based on Martina's decision not to include him in their lives.

Hernandez is introduced early in the film, which sees him arriving in Rome from Turin. He reveals to his awaiting film production team—whom he meets outside the Coliseum—that he has been living in Italy for the past thirteen years, having moved there from Spain because of his father's work as a banker. Hernandez also explains that he works for a local Spanish TV network and is in Rome to investigate what he considers to be the under-explored issue of how the Italians feel about the Zapatero reforms in Spain. This gives the film a feeling of contemporariness as the spectator's camera frame observes this interaction in progress, which is soon followed by a sequence in which Hernandez and his team are seen interviewing two very forward thinking elderly gentlemen just outside the Coliseum. Hernandez's introduction also locates the film beyond the local, given his role, aim, and provenance.

It would appear that two different cameras are in operation throughout the film; one which observes both the film production team in action and Irma and Martina's personal story, and another which deals directly with the public responses in various locations around the city (but predominantly in or around the Vatican). The perspective of this latter camera occupies a low-angled and possibly hidden position as the interviewees never look directly into the camera's frame. Irma and Martina 'bump' into the film production team while out walking together one evening, and it is from here that an additional story develops between Hernandez and Martina as they go over old ground together (the production team left aside in this thread of the film). In doing this, *Ma La*

Spagna sets public discourse up in contrast to deeper and more personal stories, clearly evidencing the blurring of boundaries on a number of different levels between the particular and the universal, the local, national and transnational, and the real and the fictional.

I will explore how *Ma La Spagna* alters the dynamics of representational space such that the spectator is forced to occupy a critical position in relation to the issues discussed in the film. I will then highlight how Marcias encourages a consideration of the particular in the universal through *both* a rhetorical question to frame the film's narrative, and reflexive and performative filmmaking techniques. In relation to the second part of this latter point, I will focus specifically on the 'apartment scene' as this is where Irma and Martina come centre-stage in the film and when they argue over whether Hernandez should know about Ilenia. I argue that this film tactically widens the debate beyond the local to the transnational through the figure of Zapatero and introduces once again the potential of 'queer opacity' as a useful strategy in contexts where difference is rendered invisible.¹²⁴ Furthermore, I argue that the film exemplifies the 'ontic' ('politics') and the 'ontological' ('the political') and how its performance, as a *lieu factice*, unsettles fixed notions of place and identity in an ongoing tussle between dominant discourse and private lives.

Setting up critical transnational spaces

The opening scenes of *Ma la Spagna* outline the current media responses to the debate on same-sex partnerships and position the film at a transnational level. This is achieved

¹²⁴ A term which seeks to resist *both* 'subjection (*assujettissement*)' and totalization, processes which de Villiers describes as homophobic in themselves (de Villiers, 2012, p.3).

by the camera's navigation of various shots of headlines from a range of newspapers and magazines splayed out and overlapping one another, some of which focus specifically on challenging Zapatero: 'Pacs, favorevoli due italiani su tre', 'Zapatero è donna', 'Il Papa: "No alle coppie gay" e Zapatero non va alla messa', 'Il Gay Pride sfilà a Torino. Calderoni: malati', 'L'invasion delle regine parata per i diritti dei gay'.¹²⁵ These headlines are interspersed with various personal opinions from the public who are filmed in front of the Vatican, some of whom demonstrate support for Zapatero and his politics while others are either totally against him or dismayed by him: 'Zapatero, non lo digerisco', says one gentleman.¹²⁶

The scattered headlines evidence the trivialisation of the public debate via the media; for example, 'Zapatero è donna' refers to an interview with deputy Prime Minister Maria Teresa Fernández de la Vega (Perelli, 2005) and 'Zapatero non va alla messa' refers to a visit by the Pope to Madrid in 2006 during which it was decided officially that neither Zapatero nor his deputy would attend mass with the Pope. While many did find this decision exasperating, others saw it as the epitome of his secular vision for Spain (BBC news channel 2006; UAAR, 2006); either way, this headline does not point to a thoughtless decision made by Zapatero. I claim that in the camera's reflection on the cynical and misleading headline shots, Marcias is exposing the media's attempts to centre meaning within heteronormative frameworks through the emasculation of Zapatero and by claiming that his political vision is linked to his secular status (therefore a non-member of the traditional family unit). However, in the headlines' desire to unsettle the link between sign and referent in this way, Marcias not only acknowledges his reflexive

¹²⁵ [Pacs: 2 Italians out of 3 in favour], [Zapatero is a woman], [The Pope: "no to gay couples" and Zapatero doesn't go to mass], [Gay Pride Parade in Turin, Calderoni says: sick people], [Invasion of the Queens. Parade for Gay Rights.]

¹²⁶ [I can't stomach Zapatero.] Subtitles and translations in this chapter obtained from *Ma la Spagna* (2007) unless otherwise stated—original author not identifiable.

position in relation to other modes of representation but also points out the inherent queering processes of these representations. The montage of headlines at the beginning of the film is seen later to reflect the interviewees' responses in Hernandez's film, which clearly demonstrates the role of the media (represented through the headlines) in shaping public discourse. However, a key difference to Marcias's approach is the acknowledgement of this instability at a transnational level, which establishes *Ma La Spagna* as a Queer project.

Of particular note in this opening section of the film, is the position afforded to the voices of two people who are heard using microphones at a demonstration. These voices overlay the peaceful Vatican scene at dusk—where just a few people are seen milling about, bells chiming—and the intermittent splayed newspaper and magazine articles, symbolically drowning out the power of this place with demands for the *PACS* bill and recognition of same-sex partnerships. The displacement established between voice and image here reflects Chion's 'audiovisual dissonance' (Chion, 1990, p.36); this draws attention to Marcias's ability to acknowledge creatively the distance between the well-established place of the Vatican and the demands being voiced, which thereby sets one discourse up against another as clear examples of 'counterpoint' (ibid.). It also exemplifies the exclusion of minority voices from the dominant discourse propagated by the media and the Vatican.

Ma La Spagna implicates the spectator in these spatial dynamics by using reflexive documentary techniques to shift his/her perspective from the passive to the active. The two opening interview scenes, which are completely distinct from the later public interview scenes, show this explicitly. The 'film within a film' is seen initially being made from the outside, the framing of which then merges into the frame of Hernandez's camera/film; this draws attention both to the greater transparency of the

filmmaking process and to an intimacy through what is a close-up (possibly hidden) camera, crossing from one scene as the observation of a construction/representation to the occupation of the lens in a more intimate way from Hernandez's (and ultimately Marcias's) perspective.

When Hernandez starts filming his film, Marcias's camera rotates around the ensuing scene. This occurs in both of the first two major interview scenes in which Hernandez is observed interviewing, firstly, the two elderly and very eloquent gentlemen outside the Coliseum, and, secondly, the Italian gay rights activist and politician Franco Grillini in a more formal setting. These two scenes compare well-informed, sympathetic and pro-gay right positions on the debate which is circulating in the media, setting a yardstick against which the various socio-cultural responses declared thereafter are evaluated. It is following these physical rotations that Marcias's camera blends into Hernandez's camera, which focuses directly thereafter on those being interviewed. The direct point of view shot of the two initial interviewees then adopts the perspective of the other (more numerous) face-to-face public interviews as part of the 'film within the film'. This allows Marcias to emphasise his performance in the film, entering into it through Hernandez as his 'avatar'.

The spectator goes from a position located outside the filming process to a position within it, from where he/she occupies both Marcias's official perspective as director of *Ma la Spagna* and Hernandez's nominal perspective as director within the film. This shift draws attention to the interchangeability of observing explicit documentary performance in action and participating in that discourse production at a socio-cultural level, which asks the spectator to consider his or her role within that. This shift in these two notable scenes performs the difference between being 'constituted' by discourse and 'constituting' discourse through the occupation of a reflexive position.

There is only one further shot of the production team in the film when Hernandez bumps into Irma and Martina. The ‘spontaneous’ nature of this encounter sets in motion a new strand which adds a more personal and potentially unsettling focus to Hernandez’s public debate, a debate in which he becomes personally involved. When Hernandez and Martina arrange to meet again, the spectator learns that Hernandez has a wife and a three and a half year old daughter named Maria; his heteronormative framework is now queered as a result of this encounter.

The ‘watchful eye’ of the spectator’s camera frame remains throughout the film, which only reinforces further the performative nature of those scenes in which Hernandez appears as ‘director’. Hernandez reveals Marcias’s presence at one point in the film when he momentarily (although perhaps accidentally) looks directly at the camera before him; this is when he and Martina catch up after so many years since their relationship ended. In this scene, Hernandez talks mainly about the production of his current film (of which the spectator is, of course, aware) and Martina talks about her life with Irma and her daughter, Ilenia. Film screenwriter Michael Porru (2010) states that when faced with the reality that he and Martina have had a child together, Hernandez ‘flees’; the fact that Martina never actually tells him that he is the father underscores the power of implication and influence to convey meaning.

The striking aspect of this part of the film is that if the spectator occupies either of the two filmmakers’ positions (real and/or nominal), why is it that Hernandez makes no effort to acknowledge his part in Ilenia’s life? If Hernandez acknowledges the position of the spectator by looking into their frame then he knows that he has had a child by Martina. Through his performance, he refuses to acknowledge their existence within official discourse and enforces their invisibility within the capacity of his film; what could in fact be described as prime material for his TV report. In many respects, Hernandez is

a metonym for the ‘media’ in *Ma la Spagna*, someone against which Irma and Martina are forced to consider their place in the world.

In his position as an impartial observer as TV reporter, it would appear that Hernandez is able to manage the potential challenge of non-normative sexualities to heteronormativity; however, this becomes more difficult once the story is personal. To agree with Porru that Hernandez ends up knowing about Ilenia, is to admit that he is all-knowing in this particular scene and is ultimately in control of the entire film (a position that the spectator occupies too). If this is the case, then the spectator too is expected to occupy a complex spatial position in relation to the film and the issues raised, the result of which is the breakdown of stable representative spaces.

Similarly to Hofer and Ragazzi’s *Improvvisamente l’inverno scorso* (2008), Marcias projects a personal story within the more impersonal arena of media production/representation, although he uses fictional characters to do this. In the process, Marcias draws attention to the actual construction of film, thereby scrutinising the ‘objective discourse’ that it also generates. Marcias adds to this by claiming that every documentarist invests something of himself/herself in their work; when asked about any autobiographical aspects in *Ma la Spagna*, Marcias responds: ‘Certo! In ogni mio film ci sono degli spunti autobiografici! Se non racconto qualcosa che conosco non riesco del tutto a buttarmi nell’impresa di fare un film’ (Marcias, 2007).¹²⁷ Marcias and Porru explain why they chose to do the film in a certain way:

Se avessimo intervistato alcune coppie di omosessuali per parlare dei diritti che chiedono al Governo, e li avessimo filmati nella loro vita quotidiana, avremmo ottenuto l’ennesimo programma televisivo di denuncia. Nel peggiore dei casi, vista la smania di apparire di questi ultimi tempi, ne sarebbe uscito un reality e il tema, pur essendo trattato dai diretti interessati, sarebbe stato paradossalmente

¹²⁷ [Of course! In all my films there are autobiographical bits. If I don’t include something of myself I don’t succeed in totally throwing myself into the task of making a film.]

falsato. Mi premeva, invece, raccontare profondamente il disagio nelle unioni omosessuali a causa dell'assenza di diritti che le regolano, così da marcare la distanza che c'è tra l'Italia ufficiale e quella reale.¹²⁸ (Porru, 2010, p.13)

Porru goes on to explain how he and Marcias define the film as 'docu-fiction', which they consider as the use of fiction to intensify documentary (ibid.). While the fictional story adds to the film's overall interest, its function is more complex than this suggests. When considered as part of the performance of the 'film within a film' (i.e. the performance of 'documentary'), the fictional story points towards 'mock-documentary' in '[constructing] a particular relationship with the discourse of factuality' (Roscoe and Hight, 2001, p.6). In the above quote, Porru clearly expresses his dissatisfaction with certain forms of media representation, namely reality television, and suggests that there are more effective ways of representing non-normative sexualities, which he achieves in this film, I feel, by interrogating the relationship between documentary representations and the historical world.

The challenge presented by *Ma La Spagna* to heteronormative hegemony is wrapped up in 'representation' itself, which sees the spectator brought further into both the construction and performance of the representation through fictional and non-fictional techniques. In drawing a distinction between 'representation' and the real, Marcias demonstrates what can be described as the difference between 'politics' and 'the political', or (respectively) the 'ontic' and the 'ontological' (Gressgård, 2011, p.33). 'Politics' refers to the conventional application of politics as commonly known whereas

¹²⁸ [If we had interviewed a few homosexual couples to speak about the rights they are asking of the government, we would have obtained the umpteenth damning television programme. In the worst case scenario—considering the latest desire to be 'seen'—a reality type TV programme could have been the result. Although the theme may have dealt directly with those interested in the issues, it would have been paradoxically false. I wanted instead to take it much deeper and to tell of the difficulties in homosexual unions resulting from the lack of rights to protect them, thereby marking a distance between official Italy and the real Italy.]

‘the political’ refers to categorised ‘ontological difference’, although the two overlap in more ways than is often thought (ibid., p.33). Reflecting on Oliver Marchart’s *Post-Foundational Political Thought* (2007), Gressgård expands on how the ‘ontic’ and the ‘ontological’ overlap:

The irreducible gap – the radical difference, the antagonism – between the ontological and the ontic is based on a political decision that unites the two sides in a never-ending play. On account of this, the interplay between the ontological and the ontic that points to the absent ground of society is of a non-natural, non-universal and contingent nature. (Gressgård, 2011, p.35)

Gressgård adds that this points to a range of grounds for society and not a final one in particular (ibid.). The ‘absent ground’ inherent in the relationship between the ‘ontic’ and the ‘ontological’—and its ‘contingent nature’—reflects the tension created in *Ma La Spagna* which comes through by way of the more overt public and political debate taking place in the various media and the private stories of Irma, Martina and Hernandez. This latter aspect points to the role of documentary filmmaking as a ‘contingent’ force within the various interconnecting relationships in the encounter, from where new places can be created and old ones challenged. Gressgård (2011, p.39) tackles the contradictions that surface between the particular and the universal within ‘politics’ by building on the work of Judith Butler and suggesting a ‘politics of performative contradiction’; this locates the ‘political’ (particular) at the level of ‘politics’ (universal) such that there is an overlap between the two which illuminates the problems of structural frameworks governing society and the hybridity of existing both inside and outside the structure (ibid.). This ‘politics of performative contradiction’, which reflects Elsaesser’s ‘hyphenation’ and ‘double occupation’, features in both *Improvvisamente* and *Ma La Spagna*, drawing attention to the failings of hegemonic discourse in accommodating difference. Building on this ‘politics of performative contradiction’, I now turn to the use of the rhetorical

question in the film and to the private world of Irma and Martina, and consider how these contribute to the creation of new places and identities.

Rhetorical questions, Public and Private Spaces

Marcias places his question ‘ma la Spagna non era cattolica?’ right in the centre of power governing hegemonic notions of the ‘family’ by using Piazza San Pietro in front of St Peter’s Basilica as a kind of ‘table’ at which people are encouraged to discuss Zapatero and his reforms (and, by extension, the implications that these reforms may have for Italy); here I recall Sara Ahmed’s use of the ‘table’ as an ‘orientation device’, an object (if brought forward from the background) from where one can think (Ahmed, 2006, p.4). This fits with Marcias’s desire to get people talking about the various issues: ‘Il cittadino ha bisogno di parlare, e invece parlano per noi, senza il nostro permesso, personaggi come Rosy Bindi, la Binetti, Mastella, Andreotti e Buttiglione’ (Marcias, 2007).¹²⁹ Working within, and on, this important site is a Queer political tactic, which seeks, in some way, to challenge its stability in controlling public opinion both in and outside Italy.

The question posed in the film’s title has added significance because of its rhetorical nature, having the ability to elicit a range of responses. Depending upon how it is emphasised, the question ‘ma la Spagna non era cattolica?’ could be interpreted in a number of ways; but, as an example, it is similar to saying: ‘But look at Spain—once considered the most catholic of countries has changed so much...we can do it too!’ / ‘But I thought Spain was a Catholic country?’. As potential interpretations, this points to the ability of Marcias’s question (or, rather, statement) to stimulate debate between the pro-

¹²⁹ [Citizens have the need to speak and politicians such as Rosy Bindi, Binetti, Mastella, Andreotti, and Buttiglione speak for us without our permission.]

reformer and conservative responder, demonstrating the ability of language to generate a polemic in the first instance. Marcias performs this in his own way by claiming the use of a rhetorical question, seeking in his film to shift the focus from the particular to the universal and back again between more insular declarations and more open and potentially progressive declarations.

The interviewees range from the ‘ordinary’ to the more ‘official’, the latter of whom are either from the political/legal field—indicated by their suits, government buildings in the background, and their way of speaking and reference to proceedings concerning legislation—or the religious orders (two priests and one nun form part of the group of interviewees). A key issue here is that most of those interviewed are neither named nor introduced formally, which allows for the blending of different opinions in a universal message found mostly to be of a conservative nature, even if to varying extents. Visitors from Spain and France are also included in this group, which further adds to this universality. None of the public interviewees make any reference to their own personal stories, which keeps the debate at the ‘table’ very much centred on public discourse. The only people officially named in the film are Franco Grillini, Andrea Miguel Hernandez, Irma, Martina, Ilenia, and the Pope, which, in itself, draws attention to the potential tension resulting from just these individuals alone.

The ‘question’ is simple, which helps in opening up the debate on same-sex partnerships and same-sex parenting. In addition to the reflexive and performative features of the film (discussed above), the question re-positions the debate in Italy to an alternative perspective beyond the nation itself through the figure of Zapatero. As Hernandez proceeds to gather material from the general public (i.e. for the ‘film within a film’), he is never heard in the process of asking any questions; this highlights that this section of the film is the work of Marcias and not Hernandez, as to include Marcias in

person would further unsettle the already complex and intertwining threads of the film. As the camera flips from one interviewee to another—each seen talking about the Zapatero reforms, or various developments in Italy regarding same-sex legal partnerships—the source who has stimulated the response in the first place is never seen or heard speaking, aside from the two opening scenes discussed above in which Hernandez is heard actively speaking to his interviewees. The careful editing of the public interviewees' responses, however, means that a question is never heard being asked. Recalling the blending of different camera positions discussed earlier, it is implied that the role of questioning lies with Hernandez; however, I would suspect that there was an editing out of Marcias's questions as their dispersed and wide-ranging nature did not reflect the centring of meaning that resulted from the public debate in his film. Marcias sought initially to focus on the full range of Zapatero reforms but discovered that only certain issues predominated, the ones relating to same-sex partnerships and same-sex parenting (Marcias, 2007).

This centring of discourse by and through the public, which turns out largely to have a conservative slant on it, illuminates the threat posed by Irma and Martina to gender and sexual norms, particularly in their role as a 'coppia di fatto'¹³⁰ of a child whose father is 'producing' the film. They pose a threat to Hernandez both as a metonym for public discourse and as a representation of the traditional family unit, which sees an unsettling of the ontological status of gender, sex, sexuality and desire, and notions of the family as shaped within national imaginaries. The 'family', as a heteronormative construction along gender and sexual reproductive lines, appears, however, to be kept intact by the dominant discourse that surfaces out of the interviews as even those in favour of 'gay marriage' remain reticent about the issue of adoption. However, while essentially closed,

¹³⁰ [de facto couple.]

the rhetorical question reflects the ability of documentary to generate more open debates and to centre meaning at a specific moment in time.

As the film progresses, it becomes apparent that Irma's and Martina's sense of place and identity is overshadowed by a peripheral, but omnipresent, shot to their vision. Similarly to the 'notional' film that is created in *Au-delà de la haine* (2006) through the park, the recurrent panoramic shot of the Vatican—seen from afar at various stages of the film—draws attention to the official spaces from which they are excluded as a lesbian couple. These repeated static shots act as a kind of 'notional' film, but more as a determined place of resistance to the 'liberalisation' of society than as a place of marginalisation and resistance represented by the park in Meyrou's film. The position from which this point of view shot is taken remains unclear until later in the film when it is revealed that it is in fact the perspective obtained from the balcony in Irma's and Martina's apartment—the place they occupy safely together, but which is clearly overlooked by this dominant historical site and the discourse it generates. Their apartment becomes their own 'safe place', recalling Wharton's term here (2008, p.108), albeit transient in comparison to the fixity and dominance of the Vatican. Here, they have their own 'table', both physical and metaphorical, from where they consider what is occurring around them. Despite the domination and power of this vista—and the unsettling discourse in the film that surrounds it and Irma and Martina's life together—their apartment is a place of resistance for them, as I shall discuss shortly.

In their encounter with Hernandez—both personally and in his professional capacity as a representative of public discourse in his role as a local TV reporter in Spain—Irma and Martina struggle in terms of how to identify with him. This relates specifically as to whether he should be allowed entry into their lives by telling him about Ilenia as, one way or another, it will involve a compromise on their part. They will either

maintain their invisibility and lack of recognition by not telling him or expose themselves and their closest to the risks of visibility by telling him. Porru explains that Irma and Martina are in a relationship whereby the non-biological parent (Irma) is closer to the child than the biological father, although their set-up is not yet legally recognised (2010, pp.13–14). Therefore, their exclusion from Hernandez’s film is symbolic of this lack of official recognition, which points to the difficult position they occupy in relation to media representations and visibility. In choosing neither to include prime material in his film by focusing on this ‘lesbian household’ nor to acknowledge that Ilenia is his daughter, Hernandez highlights his ability to constitute realities in his official capacity as a TV reporter (his discounting of their existence a very significant gesture on his part).

This inclusion and exclusion, visibility and invisibility, is clearly demonstrated in the scene where Martina is confronted by Irma for not having told Hernandez about Ilenia when they met earlier that day for a catch up after so many years. In this scene, in their apartment, they have a very heated argument; Irma repeatedly says to Martina ‘perché non gliel’hai detto?’ to which Martina responds emphatically on a number of occasions by saying ‘non ora’ and ‘non oggi’.¹³¹ This scene also witnesses an ‘altercation’ between the two in that they each lock the other inside and outside the apartment—Irma leaves the apartment with the keys in her hand, which Martina hastily requests back before locking Martina out once she has them in her hand. This points to the division between public and private spaces, Irma seeking greater visibility and recognition and Martina seeking greater privacy. Although they resolve the argument, Irma sympathising more with Martina’s difficult position as mother to Ilenia, their performances here reflect the dislocation felt in their non-normative set up. Porru (2014, p.14) describes Irma as a very strong character in asserting that Hernandez needs to know about Ilenia, although

¹³¹ [why have you not told him?], [not now], [not today.]

highlights how a more extreme section of the gay community considered her as driven by an internalised homophobia that felt, as part of lesbian couple, they needed to involve the distant biological father representative of the heterosexual framework. Irma's and Martina's different responses reflect Halberstam's concern that 'reactive politics are weak politics' (2012, p.104), which is particularly important considering Irma's and Martina's framing within what is a public debate on 'gay marriage' and 'gay parenting' in the film. Halberstam expands:

Gay marriage has become a central issue partly because right-wing Christian groups mount such a furious opposition to it. In other words, 'we' have made it into a big issue because 'they' have made it into a big issue—the politics around gay marriage, then, in part is reactive rather than proactive. Reactive politics are weak and defensive, are defined by the opposition, and tend to retreat into justifications instead of moving forward through provocations. (Halberstam, 2012, p.104)

Martina exclaims that to tell Hernandez would be like '[buttando] una bomba nella sua vita'.¹³² She attempts instead to remain in control, and, while she is not seen as 'reactive' in relation to the public debate represented in the film, acknowledges her ability—as 'una madre non tradizionale'¹³³—to distort the gender and sexual binaries that define the national imaginary concerning the traditional family unit in Italy. Martina is also all-knowing in her stance in the apartment scene, which allows her to retain her 'safe place' of resistance for the moment; for her, it is not as simple as setting their family unit alongside the traditional unit. At this stage of the film, Martina has already worked a resistance into the heteronormative framework not by denying her existence to Hernandez but instead by challenging the stability of his heteronormative framework by allowing him to suspect that he is possibly implicated in a non-normative set up. Martina's location

¹³² [throwing a bomb into his life.]

¹³³ [a non-traditional mother.]

outside the public debate as a non-reactive figure in comparison to Irma works on a tactic of ‘queer opacity’ (as used by Hofer and Ragazzi; see above previous chapter) which allows her to resist subjection to any fixed categorisation as ‘a non-traditional mother’; this tactic is evidenced when Martina and Hernandez meet—she reveals enough to him which allows her to remain in charge of the situation, refusing categorisation along any fixed lines.

The private space of their apartment gives a different angle to the ensuing public debate and to the dominant modes of representation which seek to denote their lives. Porru (2010, p.14) explains that the actors playing Irma and Martina were asked to improvise for the apartment scene, which he felt added to its documentary feel. During the argument, the spectator sees a number of images stuck on the wall in the bedroom and hallway that serve to reinforce this scene as fictional and performative, although Porru (ibid.) highlights how many spectators at post-screening discussions of the film asked whether this scene was real or not (some feeling the scene was, in some ways, more real than the interviewee scenes). The images on the walls point to a variety of lifestyles that are possible through a range of different constructions. The shot of Marilyn Monroe represents the heteronormative coherence of gender, sexuality, and desire, as does the shot of Rhett Butler and Scarlett O’Hara who are seen embracing each other in a scene from the film *Gone with the Wind* (1939). Marlene Dietrich points instead to gender bending¹³⁴ and Giulietta Masina’s clown image from *La Strada* (1954) can be seen to point, firstly, to the marginal and upside down world that this scene potentially represents,¹³⁵ and, secondly, to the figure of Ilenia who may be taken away from this

¹³⁴ I refer to Dietrich in greater detail in chapter nine when I look at *La Persona de Leo N.*

¹³⁵ ‘Federico Fellini, in many of his films, relies on the image of the clown or clown-like representations to juxtapose the carnivalesque and reality. As described by Bakhtin the carnival is not simply a festival, it allows repressed voices to speak. There is a momentary disruption of the established social structure, a privileging of the marginal’ (Kumar, 1993, p.383).

world as Gelsomina was taken away from her mother in *La Strada*—Martina has a fear that if Hernandez discovers that Ilenia is his daughter, he will seek to adopt her and threaten the world that they have created. The cartoon image of *The Lady and the Tramp* (1955) points not only to the presence of a child in the apartment but also to the alternative and expanded notions of Queer lives that cross not only gender and sexual boundaries but also other boundaries such as class, ethnicity and race (issues that I discussed when looking at Hofer and Ragazzi's work, which becomes progressively queerer in this respect). The insightfulness, openness and flexibility of what their apartment space represents, focuses on the role of documentary film as a mode of representation in the creation of a reality that is potentially more real and reflective of an individual's existence than traditionally coherent documentary modes, and the constructed nature of ways of living and being.

The apartment scene contrasts well with the end of the film when Hernandez is seen on his own in contemplation in Piazza San Pietro, wandering around and at one point taking a photograph for some tourists just prior to his return to Turin. This reflective moment, in this immense place, emphasises the pressure he feels following the destabilisation of his heteronormative framework by Martina and Irma who are excluded from this 'table' of Catholic power and the arms of the pillars that frame Piazza San Pietro and embrace the Holy See. Images of this place in both the opening and closing scenes of the film point to the circular and perpetual dominance of the Catholic Church in controlling space and time from its very fixed place, restricting alternative ways of being and demonstrating the influence of the Vatican in shaping media representations and public discourse.

Ma La Spagna, like *Improvvisamente* and *Italy*, unsettles fixed ontological categories by shifting the focus to more disperse and relational perspectives,

incorporating within this a range of techniques that both blur the boundaries between fact and fiction and highlight the gap between representation and the real. The three films discussed in this section are seen to interrogate their own representational capabilities and perform the overlap between ‘politics’ and ‘the political’, namely between actual political events and the range of possible realities. This reflects Rancière’s *la politique* (politics), a state of dissensus in which the marginalised struggle to appropriate the right to speak against their assigned place by the order of *la police* (police):

This ‘natural’ logic, a distribution of the invisible and visible, of speech and noise, pins bodies to ‘their’ places and allocates the private and the public to distinct ‘parts’ – this is the order of the police. Politics can therefore be defined by way of contrast as the activity that breaks with the order of the police by inventing new subjects. Politics invents new forms of collective enunciation; it re-frames the given by inventing new ways of making sense of the sensible, new configurations between the visible and the invisible, and between the audible and the inaudible, new distributions of space and time – in short, new bodily capacities. (Rancière, 2010, p.139)

As Corcoran explains: ‘[dissensus] is not an institutional overturning. It is an activity that cuts across forms of cultural and identity belonging and hierarchies between discourses and genres, working to introduce new subjects and heterogeneous objects into the field of perception’ (Corcoran, 2010, p.2). In doing this, the film draws attention to the overlap between the particular and the universal and the reflexive and performative documentary techniques used to unsettle both. Whether fictional or not, Irma and Martina, and Gustav and Luca, illuminate a reality defined by ‘duality’ and ‘hyphenation’ and not one simply defined by invisibility in contrast to dominant discourse; this position contributes to the ‘queer opacity’ of their emplacement which acknowledges and resists the processes of subjection and totalization potentially epitomised in the figure of Hernandez as metonymic of media power and representation. Acknowledging these features as part of a *lieu factice*, reflecting modes of representation and the lives represented, allows those

marginalised to conceptualise their own position in the world and ability to effect change in one way or another.

In the next section, I focus on the ‘collaborative’ and ‘resistant’ features of the emerging Queer voice in France and Italy by analysing three transgender documentary films. Drawing on Rancière’s *dissensus*, I argue that these films contribute to a more heterogeneous (Queer) view of gender and sexuality in France and Italy, which is working its way into cultural discourse by way of a more insightful approach to gender and its complexities. As mentioned in the opening quote of this section, homophobia and identity formation can be considered ‘rhizomatic’; the contribution of the transgender films emerging from France and Italy highlights the tremendous importance of gender in LGBTQ politics of identity—of which same-sex partnerships and parenting, as discussed in this section, is also a part—and challenges previous stereotypical transgender representations as epitomised in Édouard Molinaro’s 1978 film, *Il Viziutto / La Cage aux Folles*.

Section IV

Lieu Factice—‘resistance’ and ‘innovation’

In this section, I explore three transgender documentary films, two from France and one from Italy. The films reflect the increased activity in the representation of transgenderism since 2000 in these two countries, which recalls Phillips’s prediction mentioned in my introduction that: ‘[t]he crossing of genders’ will be ‘the most significant single cultural challenge of the new millennium’ (Phillips, 2006, p.4). This also corresponds with recent reflections by Rich that: ‘[b]y the twenty-first century it was clear: trans was the new queer’ and that young Queer ‘newcomers’ on scene were ‘crossing the boundaries into a redefined outlaw territory, an embodiment of the regendered self’ (Rich, 2013, p.271). Expanding on this, Rich explains that ‘New Trans Cinema’ ‘stakes out new territory’ and challenges both mainstream representations of transgenderism and homonormativity (ibid., pp.271–272). Both France and Italy are taking part in this development given the increased output of both Queer and transgender films since 2000,¹³⁶ all of which contribute in some way towards the unsettling of normative gender and sexual roles, and the films in this section can clearly be seen to make a strong claim on this process. I would suggest that the relative success at an international level of the films chosen for this section counters concerns about New Queer Cinema being mostly driven by the Anglo-American market.

¹³⁶ Largely successful on the festival scene, the transgender voices and perspectives surfacing from these films keep in motion the tension surrounding the issue of representation by offering a range of different approaches which defy processes of normative rationalisation. There have also been notable mainstream fictional films concerning the issue of transgenderism/transsexuality—for example, *ChouChou* (2002; France), *Mater Natura* (2005; Italy), *Gloss: cambiare si può* (2008; Italy).

The fact of France and Italy's contribution to this increased activity has also helped counter concerns expressed by Halberstam in *A Queer Time and Place* (2005, p.56) regarding the stabilization, rationalization and trivialization of transgenderism within narrative fictional cinema and by Rees-Roberts in *French Queer Cinema* regarding the 'limited potential for transgender visibility within the generic frameworks of narrative cinema' (Rees-Roberts, 2008, p.74). Of particular note also is the increase in the number of Queer film festivals in Italy within the past decade—see, for example, Florence Queer Festival (inaugurated 2003), Sicilian Queer filmfest, Divergenti and Gender DocuFilm Fest (all three inaugurated 2010).¹³⁷ The last two festivals on this list deal specifically with issues of gender/transgenderism, the final of which is one of very few with a focus on documentary.

The emphasis placed on 'crossing' by Phillips and Rich (above) draws attention to a key distinction that allows an explanation of the term 'transgender', the term I predominantly use in this section. In doing this, I acknowledge its difference and overlap with the term 'transsexual'; however, it is necessary to highlight briefly some of the differences and similarities between the two as it contributes to the strength and complexity of the transgender queer voices in France and Italy. Both terms are clearly delineated in Roen's article "'Either/Or" and "Both/Neither": Discursive Tensions in Transgender Politics':

[...] transgenderism may be understood as referring to a political positioning that draws from the postmodern notions of fluidity (for both bodies and genders). Transsexuality may be understood, in more modernist terms, as a (psychologically defined) state of being that assumes the pre-existence of two sexes which one may transition. (Roen, 2002, p.501–502)

¹³⁷ <http://www.florencequeerfestival.it/?p=1>; <http://www.siciliaqueerfilmfest.it/2013/en/>; <http://www.mit-italia.it/divergenti/>; <http://www.genderdocufilmfest.org/>

Reflecting on Bornstein's *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us* (1994), Roen highlights that an all-encompassing interpretation of the term 'transgender' such as that offered by Bornstein—which essentially includes anyone who contravenes 'gender codes'—does not adequately acknowledge the political nature of being transgendered and the desire to be recognised as 'crossing' genders (ibid., p.508). It also fails to examine the tension between 'passing' and 'crossing'.¹³⁸ This elicits further comparative associations between the terms 'transsexual' and 'transgender'; namely respective differences between 'passing' and 'being read', apolitical and political, eclecticism and narrowness, 'oppression' and 'transgression', and invisibility and visibility (Roen, 2002). Roen's claims that such interpretation is never this clear-cut is the basis upon which she seeks to challenge Bornstein's 'insufficiently careful critique of passing'—Bornstein considers those who 'pass' as 'non-supporters' of the 'gender revolution' (Roen, 2002, p.508; Bornstein, 1994, p.134).

In her research, Roen subsequently found that 'passing' involves a combination of both the 'Either/Or' of transsexuality (e.g. 'man' / 'woman') and the 'Both/Neither' of transgenderism (lack of clarity/confusion over gender), which results in a combination of fluidity and fixity (Roen, 2002, p.521). My use of the term 'transgender' acknowledges this complexity and allows for the potentialities of New Queer Cinema as a 'sexually inclusive cinema' in a 'more fluid queer world of postmillennial, postidentificatory sexual styles' (Rich, 2103, p.215). However, it seeks primarily to evince the political voice of this transgenderism.

¹³⁸ Bornstein (1994, p.74) refers to 'gender defenders' and 'gender transgressors'; in those who reassign their gender, whether through surgical or non-surgical intervention, the former would be considered as 'passing' (invisible) and the latter as 'crossing' (visible).

I start with Alberto Vendemmiati's *La Persona de Leo N.* (2005) (which introduces the main themes to which I refer in the subsequent analysis of the remaining films) before proceeding to Sebastiano D'Ayala Valva's *Les Travestis Pleurent Aussi* (2006) and *Angel* (2009). Although not intentional, the shift here between Italy and France evidences a greater move towards the transnational and global as Mia/Angel who features in D'Ayala Valva's work is considered a 'queer diasporic subject' in my analysis; this reinforces an observation I made earlier that French directors have had a tendency to look elsewhere for their material (*Woubi Chéri*, *Être*, and *Venus Boyz*, for example), perhaps not considering certain issues to be possible or of concern in a universal republican model.

As I progress through each film, it becomes clear that a number of recurrent themes emerge. These are not exhaustive by any means but go some way towards grasping the complexity of the transgender realities recounted in France and Italy and the challenge they present to gender normative frames of reference. Issues identified in previous chapters centring on modes of representation and processes of identification and negotiations of the local and the transnational feature in these transgender films too; however, the themes developed here build on the *lieu factice* as a place of collaboration and resistance, which involves both the alteration of normative frames of reference and processes of validating the self. In turn, this strengthens the overall voice of Queer documentary in France and Italy.

The first theme relates to the issue of 'agency', which, recalling the work of Noland from chapter three, is defined as 'reactive (resistant)' and 'collaborative (innovative)' (Noland, 2009, p.9). I adopt a positive stance on the issue of performance and agency as this reflects my claim to both a 'new queer documentary cinema' in France and Italy (since 2000) and the *lieu factice* as a place of creation. This counters more

negative positions on performance and agency such as those associated by Lois McNay with the work of Butler, which, despite a number of reworkings, remains limited in its focus on the individual and his/her psycho-social dimensions (1999, pp.187, 189). McNay describes how performance and agency, when considered as ‘creative or innovative action’, allow for both a greater connection to others and a sense of detachment ‘from [the] original conditions of enactment’ (ibid., p.189).

Although not included for detailed analysis in this thesis, the most illuminating collaborative piece of transgender documentary identified on the Italian scene is that which was organised by *Fondazione San Marcellino*¹³⁹—a group of Jesuits in Genoa—who asked director Pietro Marcello to produce a film on the area in which they live and of the people to which they offer their services (Marcello, 2010, p.19). *La Bocca del Lupo* (2009), which recounts the story of Genoa and ex-convict Vincenzo Motta and transsexual Mary Monaco, sees a widening of focus outwards as a result of the Jesuits initial brief—not specifically focusing on transgenderism but also homelessness, immigration, and economic and social precariousness, this film points to a particularly powerful Queer voice in Italy (more so as it was arranged by a Catholic religious order). While Marcello was surprised by the interest shown in *La Bocca del Lupo* from LGBTQ film festivals (Boille, 2010, pp.64–65), the film reinforces McNay’s claims above concerning the collective impact of creative action and evidences a widening of focus within LGBTQ circles on the importance of gender and other socio-political issues in addition to sexuality and identity. Moreover, as the directors of the chosen films in this section are not recounting their own personal stories of transgenderism, but are instead

¹³⁹ For further details on their work see: <http://www.sanmarcellino.it/>.

motivated by representing others, this makes these collaborations extremely significant as a result.¹⁴⁰

The theme of framing and reframing is also highlighted as significant in the films; through the multiple representations of frames, this transgender motif is seen predominantly in the use of the photograph and the mirror. This motif is evident in all of the films under analysis, pointing to the perspective of those represented as one of construction and deconstruction in relation to the fixity of the frame within which gender is expected to be explored and to be represented along normative lines. Prosser (1998, p.100) explains that ‘looking into the mirror is [...] a figure for the autobiographical act’, which, in terms of the transgender autobiography, she claims sees the interconnection between narrative structure (as a ‘second skin’ for the transgender individual) and embodiment, (ibid, p.101). Although Prosser refers specifically to the written text here, I will argue that this occurs in documentary film too—this, again, evidences the overlap between documentary performative content and documentary structure, which points towards the construction of a new reality and not necessarily the construction of documentary qua documentary. In the varying transgender perspectives adopted across the three films in this section is the desire to represent transgender identities outside fixed gender and sexual categories, or at least to evidence the complexity of these identities while remaining inside categories on a day to day basis (when identified by others as ‘Either/or’).

¹⁴⁰ See Appendix A for a personal reflection by director Gabriella Romano on her collaboration with Lucy (a survivor of the concentration camps and transsexual who defies all stereotyping) for the film *Essere Lucy* (2011). Romano discusses the complexities of representing Lucy’s life. Romano’s difficulties, which included concerns over funding, are also highlighted; of note is the accusation from a potential funder for her project that they could not commit as Lucy was a ‘collaborator’ (upon deserting the Italian army and when captured by the Germans he, as he was Luciano at the time, fought with the Germans so as to survive). A different collaboration to the one discussed above.

In relation to the motif of the ‘frame’, a third theme emerges which relates to the issue of ‘transgender self-authorisation’ (using Halberstam’s notion here; 2005, p.52). In working with the transgendered individuals, there is the metamorphosis of performative content as embodiment into performative features (as performance) which evidences their involvement in the construction of the documentary. For example, Nicole in *La Persona de Leo N.* performs her gender identity through the ideological leanings of three different city spaces and reproduces her ‘transgender gaze’ through a clever montage of scenes between a theatre performance of a Molière play and her gender reassignment surgery. Mia/Angel’s increasingly confident performances across *Les Travestis Pleurent Aussi* and *Angel* witness her body becoming more entwined with the camera and her ability to see and move more freely in her transgender body—through both the construction of the documentary film and a house in Ecuador (to which she expects to return one day), Mia/Angel is able to position herself in relation to space and place (even if this ultimately disappoints her). A final theme links in to this latter theme and relates to the mobility of the transgender lives represented, which, again, is seen to affect the structural performance features of the films through the pace and movement of the camera. The lives recounted point both to the living outside of fixed notions of place and to movement within space, which is epitomised most clearly through the Ecuadorian transgender prostitutes in *Les Travestis* and *Angel*.

Although I outline four themes in this section, I tackle each film separately so as to illuminate the varying role of documentary in allowing the transgender individual to create a sense of reality and place. This allows for the emergence of a stronger transgender voice in all its complexity, which seeks not to fall into the trap of generalisations but rather to consider the way in which it ‘stakes out new territory’ (recalling Rich here) and challenges processes of representation (Rich, 2013, pp.271–272).

Chapter Nine—*La Persona de Leo N.* (2005)

*La Persona de Leo N.*¹⁴¹ focuses on forty year old Nicole de Leo's experience of transgenderism in Italy. Nicole's male to female (MtF) 'trapasso'¹⁴² (transition) is partly government funded, although she also supports herself through shop work in Venice and street prostitution in what appear to be the industrial streets of Mestre, an area close to central Venice where she lives for the most part of the film. The film is constructed around a series of flashbacks of her life filmed over a four year period which surface during a train journey from Venice to Bologna and while settling into her room at the Malpighi Hospital in Bologna on the day before her major gender reassignment surgery. These flashbacks stop after her surgery when she departs from Venice on a gondola accompanied by both her framed Marlene Dietrich poster and new partner, the hyper masculine Andrea. It is a visually impressive departure at night time and one during which Nicole bids farewell to a previous life, and, while the spectator is simply not told of the whereabouts of her new life, the move away from Venice on the unstable surface of water to an unnamed place points to the continued instability of the transgender experience within contemporary Italian society.

The major city spaces of Venice and Bologna (representative of the masquerade and a liberal identitarian approach respectively) are essential to Nicole's 'trapasso' as is the more peripheral and traditionally conservative space of Genoa where it is implied, through the camera's focus on a motorway sign upon her return 'home', that her family

¹⁴¹ *La Persona* from now onwards.

¹⁴² From the verb 'trapassare' [to penetrate, to pierce, to die, to move across from one point to another] '[il] trapasso' can refer to '[il] passaggio' [passage, transit], '[il] varco, [il] valico, [il] guado' [passage/opening/gap], '[la] morte', '[il] decesso' [death] (*Lo Zingarelli*, 2007; *Oxford Italian dictionary*, 2003).

is located. And although the traditional family unit might be considered a place from which she is excluded it is to her family that Nicole must go for 'approval' six months following her gender reassignment surgery, which forms the final stage of the film.

The relationship between the filmmaker Vendemmiati and Nicole was important in the creation of this film, which resulted in a quality that Vendemmiati (2006) describes as specifically transgender:

If documentary is a genre then I believe I have created a transgender documentary which is located somewhere between documentary and fiction. This is in terms of how I sought to tell the story from a perspective within the encounter itself, through the flashback structure and also perhaps through its style. In fact through all the choices I made. I would also add to this the choice to film over a period of four years on my own. It would have been impossible or different to have had a team of people involved; Nicole and I would have been different as would the encounter.¹⁴³ (Vendemmiati, 2006)

For Vendemmiati then, the transgender documentary is located somewhere between fact and fiction and tells a story from a perspective internal to the encounter itself. This latter point reflects the collaboration required in dealing with a complex topic. Similarly to the other films in this section, this is taken extremely seriously by Vendemmiati who worked with Nicole for a long period of time. The intensity of this interest marks out the difference between a process of *representing* and the more complex endeavour of *creating* a sense of identity and place.

La Persona evidences both reflexive and performative techniques, referring to itself as a construction and drawing on fictional elements in the recounting of Nicole's journey through the medico-legal and psychological preparation for gender reassignment surgery.¹⁴⁴ The striking montage achieved through a series of cross-cutting scenes

¹⁴³ For further details see: <http://www.lapersonadeleon.net/notediregia.htm>.

¹⁴⁴ 'Since 1982, Italian transsexuals can have a sex change operation that is subsidised according to Section 164 of the law. Those eligible are also assisted in changing their sexual identity on paper. The condition is

between the onstage theatrical performance of Molière's *M. de Pourceaugnac* in Venice (in which Nicole plays a number of different roles) and the gender reassignment surgery in Bologna, illuminates the tension between a 'material' approach to transgenderism, where 'anatomical sex is represented socially by a gender role, and subjectively as a gender identity' (Stryker, 2006, p.9), and the constructed and unstable nature of gender categories. These cross-cutting scenes pit the official against the personal and deconstruct the stable nature of gender categories in the process. They also demonstrate Nicole's transgender gaze, which reflects her ability to see herself from two different positions at once—something which she must overcome through this final stage of her 'trapasso'.

These tensions also link into Nicole's lack of place, which is evidenced through her mobility within space. This sees her moving in varying directions and within various locations, which, I consider, forms part of what is described by Brown et al, when referring to the work of Knopp (2004) on 'queer movements and placelessness', as 'an on-going quest for belonging and identity, which offers the opportunity to continually experiment with alternative modes of being and to engage in active processes of reinvention' (2007, p.12). The result of this is the 'incompleteness of a queer identity', which is described as a 'continual process of becoming that challenges essential or predetermined bodies, identities or spaces' (ibid.). Nicole's relationship to her family contributes to her 'incompleteness', which additionally problematizes associated notions of belonging, citizenship and participation as a subject within society.

In exploring this film, I start by looking at its use of photography. I focus on the introduction in the early part of the film of photographs of Nicole as Nicola¹⁴⁵ (pre-

that they subject themselves to a complicated, lengthy and psychologically gruelling procedure' (IDFA, 2005).

¹⁴⁵ Nicola is a boy's name in Italy, not to be confused with its frequent use elsewhere as a girl's name.

transition) and on the role of a large framed photograph of Marlene Dietrich which accompanies Nicole at various points in the film. These photographs reflect a frequent theme in the chosen films for this section, which relates to the issue of framing. Forced to inhabit fixed gender identities, the frame appears symbolic as a point of departure for processes of reflexivity and the re-presentation of an alternative transgender perspective. I will then focus on the city spaces of Venice and Bologna, which respectively draw on the masquerade/mask and identity politics in shaping this perspective. This section is epitomised through the key cross-cutting sequence of the first night performance of Molière's *M. de Pourceaugnac* and the surgically performed penectomy/vaginoplasty. In contrast to both of these city spaces, I conclude by looking at Nicole's relationship to her family. The notion of the 'family' is important in Nicole's evolving gender identity, be it the *Capon* club in Bologna, the community theatre group in Venice or her own family in Genoa.¹⁴⁶ However, the space of the traditional family unit in the film challenges Nicole's completeness, contributing to a transgender perspective wherein alternative forms of 'family' need to be sought out.

Framings

At the beginning of *La Persona* there is a zooming in of the camera onto a full-screen black and white photograph of a young Nicola at school in his uniform. This is followed by a picturesque scene of Venice on a sunny day, which is immediately followed by another zooming in shot of a different black and white photograph of Nicola as an adult. This is repeated one more time with a further shot of Venice—Nicole seen in the process

¹⁴⁶ A capon is a castrated cockerel, and the phrase 'Welcome to the Capon Club' (said in English) is used by Nicole's friend and collaborator the larger than life trans campaigner Marcello di Folco, one of the members of the *MIT/Transsexual Identity Movement* (based in Bologna), in her address to Nicole as she wakes from the effects of anaesthesia following her surgery.

of boarding a commuter boat—and a final photograph of Nicola as an adult with a moustache. Once the three photographs have been shown, Nicole is seen boarding a train in Venice now inhabiting a very different gender to that displayed in the photographs. At various stages of the film thereafter, Nicole is seen instead with a large poster of Marlene Dietrich who is iconic of gender fluidity.

During the initial stages of the train journey, Nicole speaks to her mother on her mobile phone to tell her that she is going to Bologna to have her surgery the following day. At the end of the conversation Nicole exclaims as voice-over ‘non credevo che fosse così difficile, credevo che bastasse una decisione, la decisione c’è stata’¹⁴⁷ (here she is referring to the need to prove one’s identity by fulfilling certain medical, legal and psychological criteria to be considered as a ‘woman’). This is then followed by an intertitle — ‘Tre Anni Prima’¹⁴⁸—which precedes the first flashback scene where Nicole is seen sitting shaven headed underneath a framed Marlene Dietrich poster in her Venice apartment while speaking to her mother on the telephone saying: ‘Io non voglio essere accettata, voglio vivere la mia vita in questo modo perché se ci sono e in questa forma, è così’, ‘un giorno mi dovrai vedere, mamma’, ‘ma come se mi vuoi vedere morta!’, ‘va bene, ciao’.¹⁴⁹ The conversation ends and Nicole laughs, following which she declares solemnly in voice-over: ‘Nicole, il mio nome è Nicole’.¹⁵⁰

Nicole acknowledges her ability to be framed within language and seeks to be re-framed in her protestations. It is clear from the outset that Nicole’s mother is a central

¹⁴⁷ [I didn’t think it would be so difficult, I thought it involved one decision only, the decision has been made.] Subtitles and translations obtained from *La Persona de Leo N.* (2005) unless otherwise stated—original author unidentifiable.

¹⁴⁸ [Three years earlier.]

¹⁴⁹ [I don’t want to be accepted, I want to live my life this way because if I am here in this way, that’s how it is], [one day you’ll just have to see me mother],[but what do you mean you want to see me dead], [OK then, bye].

¹⁵⁰ [Nicole, my name is Nicole.]

feature of her ‘trapasso’, although there is defiance in Nicole’s seemingly jovial response: ‘un giorno mi dovrai vedere, mamma’, ‘ma come se mi vuoi vedere morta!’. The clear performative statement—‘Nicole, il mio nome è Nicole’—adds strength to her response and challenges the term ‘la persona’ in the film’s title (a term apparently written on Nicole’s official medical file, which maps out her progression and experiences). The term ‘persona’ comes from ‘maschera’ and is used to define a ‘human being, as in an individual’, ‘human being, as in a member of society’, ‘body and human figure’, and ‘someone entitled to rights and responsibilities’¹⁵¹ (from *Lo Zingarelli*, 2007, p.1358). The etymological link between ‘maschera’ and ‘persona’ points to both the ‘figurative’ and the ‘material’, which, in relation to Nicole’s transgenderism, sees her pitted against officialdom and its demands that in order to undergo gender reassignment surgery there must first be proof of gender discordance and attempts to resolve this. Behind this approach lies the following belief:

Transgender people who problematize the assumed correlation of a particular biological sex with a particular social gender are often considered to make false representations of an underlying material truth, through the wilful distortion of surface appearance. Their gender presentation is seen as a lie rather than as an expression of a deep, essential truth; they are ‘bad’ by definition. (Stryker, 2006, p.9)

The only decision Nicole thought she had to make was whether she wanted to go ahead with the surgery, not realising that she would have to go to such lengths to prove her sex–gender discord. Italy is represented in the film by Nicole’s mother whose desire that Nicole ‘dies’, whether metaphorically or literally speaking, only reinforces the need for gender, sex and sexuality to be in accord with each other. Of further interest here is that

¹⁵¹ Translated by me from the original text: ‘essere umano in quanto tale individuo’, ‘essere umano in quanto membro della società’, ‘corpo e figura umana’, ‘titolare di diritti e doveri’ (*Lo Zingarelli*, 2007, p.1358).

‘personaggio’ [character] is defined as a ‘persona mascherata’ in *Lo Zingarelli* (2007, p.1358), which is quite apt considering, firstly, Nicole’s role as an actor in the Molière play (and as a member of the traditional family unit, as shall be discussed later), and, secondly, the superficiality of the official processes when it comes to understanding transgenderism and difference.

The still portrait photographs of Nicola used in the introductory section of the film appear to reflect Nicole’s memory. Their brief introduction does not suggest sex–gender discordance, although Nicola’s soft lines and posture (even with a moustache) introduce the potential for a ‘retrospective reading’ by the spectator. Having been forced to display a coherent gender based on the sex with which she was born, Nicole mounts a response and moves away from the constraints that these images represent for her.

In *La Chambre Claire*, Barthes describes a photograph as an unrepeatable, unique and totally contingent moment, which is (on the whole) fixed by its referents; death like in a world which proceeds on its path, ‘[b]ref, le référent adhère’¹⁵² (Barthes, 1980, pp.14–20). Barthes also argues that to pose for a portrait photograph results in the intersection of ‘[q]uatre imaginaires’¹⁵³—one which is for both the self and others, and one which is both for the photographer and his/her creation (Barthes, 1980, p.29). The result of this is that one sees oneself as ‘ni un sujet ni un objet, mais plutôt un sujet qui se sent devenir objet’,¹⁵⁴ which highlights the inauthenticity and imitation involved in the process of photography (ibid., p.30). As Jacques Rancière explains in *The Future of the Image*, Barthes seeks to highlight the alterity of the image in that ‘[h]e wants to establish a direct relationship between the indexical nature of the photographic image and the

¹⁵² ‘In short, the referent adheres’ (Barthes, 1993, p.6; translation by Richard Howard).

¹⁵³ ‘Four image-repertoires’ (Barthes, 1993, p.13; translation by Richard Howard).

¹⁵⁴ ‘neither subject nor object but rather a subject who feels he is becoming an object’ (Barthes, 1993, p.14; translation by Richard Howard).

material way it affects us' (Rancière, 2007, p.10). Rancière does not see any difference between Barthes's *studium* and *punctum*¹⁵⁵—respectively between the decoded and affective features of a photograph—and explains that 'both play on the same inter-convertibility between two potentialities of the image: the image as raw, material presence and the image as discourse encoding a history' (Rancière, 2007, p.11). The photograph as a construction is both framed and encoded; however, the fixity associated with this framing can be recoded and re-framed, which, as noted already, Nicole does through the appropriation of the Dietrich image and the challenge she presents to language discourse and set categories of gender and sexual identities.

While the ensuing contemporary scenes of Nicole navigating her way through Venice to the train station add context to the photographs, and vice versa, the metaphorical and literal move away from the static photographic image (and its fixity/death) suggests the control of time and the creation of an alternative Queer space beyond direct relationships between signifier and referent represented by the photographs. It also points to re-birth and Nicole's desire to create a new identity for herself, appearing to move away symbolically from this process of fixity (subjection) towards a more complex and reflective mode of expression (subjectivity). Nicole is seen here almost to emerge from these photographic stills into another mode of self-representation, one which allows her to express her transgenderism more clearly.

Barthes's distinction between the photograph and moving image further supports this idea (Barthes, 1980, p.90; 1993, p.57). He refers to a 'champ aveugle' / 'blind field' when considering responses to cinematic and photographic images; he explains that the

¹⁵⁵ The *punctum* is a 'detail' which cannot be coded in any way (unlike the *studium* which are coded cultural objects) and which has the ability to 'prick' the person looking on. It cannot be named clearly and concisely (Barthes, 1980, pp.43–45; Barthes, 1993, pp.74–79).

moving image, unlike the photograph, is more likely to double the spectator's partial vision of an image because those who are visualised within the frame are seen to continue living (ibid.). Barthes explains that by referring to the 'image immobile'¹⁵⁶ of the photograph he is not suggesting that those within the frame do not move, rather he claims that they do not emerge easily with the resultant effect of causing *punctum* in the person looking on (ibid.). In exploring her transgenderism more fully through a variety of media, including the Molière play which is discussed later, Nicole refuses to be pinned down in any clear way and seeks instead to remain mobile as she navigates space in her own way.

Streitberger and Van Gelder (2010, p.48) highlight that the use of photographic images within film adopt a special quality of their own which smudges the distinction between photography and film from both technical and spectatorial points of view, particularly in a digital age of advanced technology. These hybrid images, which raise the question as to whether they are an actual photograph blown up for the screen or a still filmic shot, are difficult to define and usually end up being addressed in rather vague and narrowly focused ways (ibid., p.50). Streitberger and Van Gelder (ibid., p.51) prefer to use the term 'photo-filmic image' to describe these shots:

Photo-filmic images are not images where photography and film are both present in their own right, mutually reflecting one another, but rather 'multi-mediating pictures' (Van Gelder and Westgeest 2009) in the sense that the shift involved from the one medium to another is not a complete one. They layer, if not amalgamate, structures of existing media (photography and film) in order to provide new images of and on the world. (Streitberger and Van Gelder, 2010, p.51)

This layering is evidenced in *La Persona* through the multi-media quality of Nicole's self-representation, which is set up through photography, cinema and theatre. This allows

¹⁵⁶ 'motionless image' (Barthes, 1993, p.57; translation by Richard Howard).

Nicole to explore her own transgender identity and to involve the spectator in the process, reflecting the complexities surrounding gender identities and their definition and construction.

Nicole adds to this by setting herself up in contrast to Marlene Dietrich, which introduces a complex factor to Nicole's self-representation in the film. Haverty Rugg's 'Picturing Oneself as Another' (2011) assists in understanding the place of Dietrich's framed photograph within the film and in Nicole's life. The scholar considers a photographic image of Truffaut alongside his avatar, Jean-Pierre Leaud, who plays the character Antoine Doinel (Truffaut's alter-ego) in the 'adventures of Antoine Doinel' series.¹⁵⁷ In exploring the problem of representing one's self and one's memories as the 'cinematic autobiographer', she states that this photographic image of the two: 'serves as an emblem of cinematic self-representation, the self and its other' (Haverty Rugg, 2011, pp.73, 75). Similarly, by comparing the 'real' Woody Allen and Kenneth Branagh as Woody Allen in *Celebrity*, she claims that they both represent 'Woody Allen' and that 'Woody Allen is not a person, precisely, but a mask, a role, a guise' (ibid. p.74). This duality highlights the complexities associated with representing one's self cinematically and the need that one has of the other in a kind of 'fiction that aims to convey the collaborative nature of selfhood' (ibid.).

The relationship that Nicole has with the Dietrich image is similar to the idealised self-image that Poiccard has with Humphrey Bogart in *À bout de souffle*. Nicole uses the image of Dietrich within the documentary encounter to set up her self-representation as defined by it but also different from it, which, in the process, highlights the complexities of this self-representation, seeking not necessarily to reinforce the accord between

¹⁵⁷ *Les 400 Coups* (1959), *Antoine et Colette*, *Baisers Volés* (1968), *Domicile Conjugal* (1970), *L'Amour en Fuite* (1979).

gender, sex and sexuality, but rather to illuminate its potential discord. Dietrich is well known for having contributed to gender bending in Weimar Germany where the ‘gender invert’, ‘same sex desire’ and ‘cross dressing’ were features of a queer cinema at the time (Kuzniar, 2000, p.30, 33).

Nicole does not discard the photographic image altogether but responds instead to the restrictive nature of the ‘Tout-Image’¹⁵⁸—described by Barthes (1980, p.31) as ‘la Mort en personne’¹⁵⁹—by appropriating the ‘offending article’ in the form of the large framed portrait-photograph of Dietrich, which she brings forward with her from the past as a sort of symbolic gesture. The movement of Dietrich’s image is a Queer performative act on Nicole’s part, which reflects the constructed and reflexive nature of her gender identity and the alterity she experiences through Dietrich. The photographic image of Dietrich points to (de)construction and the rejection of fixed notions of ‘male’ and ‘female’, suggesting a more mobile notion of identity and place. Dietrich epitomises cinematic and performative reinvention, as well as sexual and gender bending, which adds to the reflexive nature of this film as a construction in itself. By re-illuminating, through Dietrich, the potential significance of the photographic image, Nicole simultaneously and crudely emphasises (as its opposite) the generalised banality of the photographic image that has come to dominate contemporary society, which largely reflects how: ‘nous vivons selon un imaginaire généralisé’ (Barthes, 1980, p.182).¹⁶⁰ Barthes states that this universalised viewpoint: ‘déréalise complètement le monde humain des conflits et des désirs, sous couvert de l’illustrer’ (ibid.).¹⁶¹ Nicole performs a reversal of this process by emphasising, in a Queer way, the falseness and inauthenticity

¹⁵⁸ ‘Total-Image’ (Barthes, 1993, p.14; translation by Richard Howard).

¹⁵⁹ ‘Death in person’ (Barthes, 1993, p.14; translation by Richard Howard).

¹⁶⁰ [we live according to a generalised collection of images.]

¹⁶¹ [it renders unreal a human world of conflicts and desires through its very own illustration.]

of the image upon which her own construction and self-representation is potentially based, opening up the base upon which her own construction, away from the fixity of the opening scenes of this film, is established. Building on this, I look more closely in the next section at how Nicole uses a variety of urban spaces to explore this inauthenticity further by emphasising the construction and deconstruction of her gender identity. Nicole achieves 'selfhood' through the image of Dietrich but also collaboratively in her interaction with Vendemmiaiti whose physical presence is seen only once in the film in the Dietrich image as it is placed into the gondola as Nicole leaves her apartment in Venice. This collaboration is a major feature of the films in this section, demonstrating the difficulties of transgender individuals in obtaining a platform for themselves from which to speak.

Transverse City Spaces

In the various flashbacks that structure the film, it is clear that Venice and Bologna allow Nicole to explore her transgenderism beyond essentialist notions of gender (as represented by the photographs that introduce the film). Bologna points to a communitarian and identitarian approach through Nicole's recourse to *Movimento Identità Transessuali (MIT)*¹⁶² and other transgender individuals who help her in her 'trapasso'—the most notable being the well-known MtF transgender rights activist Marcella di Folco who featured in the films of Fellini and Rossellini in the 1970s. Bologna also has a strong history of communist and left-wing activity (including student and popular culture movements), is the national headquarters for *Arcigay* and is described by Però as 'the traditional showcase city of the Italian Left' (Però, 2005, p.832). Her life

¹⁶² [Transsexual Identity Movement.]

in Venice has a much lonelier feel to it, although she does take part in the theatre group there; however, the mask is a strong feature of this section of the film—in the shop where she works, at ‘il ballo mascherato’ / ‘the masked ball’, in her role as an actor in the Molière play and as a prostitute on the streets of Mestre—and points to a tension between the mask’s function as either ‘reserve’ or ‘concealment’, and, respectively, ‘distance’ or ‘deception’ (Johnson, 2011, p.112). Nicole wants to be perceived as a woman, hence her attempts at ‘reserve’ and ‘distance’; however, the film also exposes that which lies behind the mask of this superficiality and distance. The variety of masks available to Nicole allow her to go further in exploring her own transgenderism, in which I would include the documentary as another kind of mask.

Venice is where Nicole speaks of the difficulties of talking about herself: ‘Parlare di me significa parlare di tanta vergogna, o di cose che si sono trasformate in vergogna’.¹⁶³ The shame to which Nicole refers must relate in part to her mother’s reasoning behind her transgenderism, which comes out during the telephone conversation (mentioned above) that they have together in the early part of the film. Nicole explains how she had a relationship with a married father-of-two at the age of eleven or twelve when she was becoming aware of a differentiating ‘istinto’¹⁶⁴ in relation to her gender identity. She was happy in this relationship and was not unsettled by anything she did with him, although he was arrested as a result. The positive associations that are made by Nicole between childhood, sexuality and intimate child–adult relationships are challenging, her marginalisation associated with the threat she poses to family cohesion and associated gender normative frames of reference.

¹⁶³ [to speak about myself means to speak of a lot of shame, or of things that have been transformed into shame.]

¹⁶⁴ [instinct.]

Venice is also where Nicole starts to think about finding love so that she can feel like a real ‘*donna, donna, donna!*’. In exclaiming this desire to be a real woman, while behaving in an extremely feminine way as part of her ‘*trappasso*’, Nicole is performing gender, and, in the process, draws attention to the ‘radical contingency in the relation between sex and gender in the face of cultural configurations of causal unities that are regularly assumed to be natural and necessary’ (Butler, 2006, p.187). In highlighting ‘dissonance’ between sex, gender and then the performance of gender, Nicole is unsettling gender normative frameworks. There are notable scenes in which Nicole emphasises this within the performance of the documentary encounter; showing her breasts, either subtly or explicitly, and preparing herself in ways that allow her physical appearance to match her gender identity: shaving her head, applying makeup, and facial cleansing, getting dressed, undergoing electrolysis and collecting hormone medication from the pharmacist. There is a particular scene in which Nicole is in her apartment and she removes a box of men’s shoes from a shelf saying ‘*questo cesso deve andare via, le butto, non le voglio più vedere*’, ‘*che cretina sono!*’.¹⁶⁵ She tosses the men’s shoes aside and puts on a pair of stilettos and says ‘*sono bellissime*’.¹⁶⁶ While Nicole wants clearly to be seen as a woman, the performance inherent within the documentary encounter here (and elsewhere) emphasises her ability to construct her own identity. This ends up Queering the referent (e.g. men’s and women’s shoes), which is shown to be disposable and interchangeable on a whim.

However, in preparation for ‘*il ballo mascherato*’ there is a sense of incompleteness and disappointment for Nicole in ‘*il travestimento*’ as once she is ready for the ball and a friend is checking her over, Nicole says ‘*Forse un altro body era*

¹⁶⁵ [this shit needs to go, I’m chucking them away, I don’t want them anymore], [how stupid am I?]

¹⁶⁶ [they’re beautiful.]

meglio....', to which her friend responds, 'Stai benissimo, non ci pensare più'.¹⁶⁷ While clearly referring to a piece of lingerie, Nicole's disappointment with the identified piece of clothing and ability to fit into it comfortably, points to the complexities of occupying a transgender body in ways that are often defined by the ability of others to read one as transgender or not. The deep conversation in English that occurs later between Nicole and two American friends, concerning the duality of the masculine and the feminine soul, highlights that the transgender gaze is far more complex than the superficiality of surface features such as clothing and ability to 'pass'.

There are two clear ways in which Nicole capitalises on the documentary encounter in exploring her transgender embodiment within the urban spaces of Venice and Bologna: she makes herself an object of desire and optimises on her 'womanliness' and the masquerade. This challenges set perceptions of gender, sex and sexuality and repositions the spectator in the process. There is a particular scene in which a topless Nicole lies down on a pebbled beach at one of the Venetian lidos and maximises on both the camera's exposure and her ability to disturb gender normative frameworks of the viewing experience. She confidently presents herself both as a woman and a potential object of desire, which could be said to reproduce patriarchal perceptions of the female figure and gender normative/connotative articulations of that figure (Mulvey, 2006).

Mulvey refers to Freud's analysis of the female figure as representative of the fear and threat of castration, and, although she applies it to narrative cinema in her essay, it is applicable too to the hybridity of this film and the scene in which Nicole sunbathes topless. Nicole's almost naked body is pleasurable to look at and therefore proves destabilising to the potential scopophilic fulfilment of this scene, particularly as the

¹⁶⁷ [the masked Ball], [transvestism], [Perhaps another body would have helped....], [You look great, don't worry about it.]

spectator may suspect that she still has a penis. This may result in either her '[demystification]', through 'devaluation and punishment', or her '[fetishisation]' (Mulvey, 2006, p.348); however, both have the potential to unsettle fixed notions of gender, desire and sexuality, particularly through the process of 'fetishisation' which may open the spectator to greater fluidity regarding gender and sexuality.

Mary Ann Doane's 'Film and the Masquerade – theorizing the female spectator' (1997) is also useful in considering the performative qualities of such scenes and their viewing. Doane asserts that in terms of scopic fulfilment, the female spectator has a different relationship to the viewing experience. In her essay she challenges the contradiction that exists between the iconic representation of women and the inability of women to influence and/or control those systems of representation:

Spectatorial desire, in contemporary film theory, is generally delineated as either voyeurism or fetishism, as precisely a pleasure in seeing what is prohibited in relation to the female body. The image orchestrates a gaze, a limit, and its pleasurable transgression. The woman's beauty, her very desirability, becomes a function of certain practices of imaging – framing, lighting, camera movement, angle. She is thus, as Laura Mulvey has pointed out, more closely associated with the surface of the image than its illusory depths, its constructed three-dimensional space which the man is destined to inhabit and hence control. (Doane, 1997, p.179)

Doane expounds Mulvey's position, which she goes on to critique in her own formulation of the 'masquerade'. Doane explains that the dominant spectator position is that of the male perspective, which is supported by the acculturated female perspective which has the ability to move between different forms of identification (i.e. 'trans-sex identification'); in identifying with a female character she is 'passive' or 'masochistic', in identifying with the dominant male position she is supporting the "masculinization" of spectatorship' (either way, the dominant male spectator position is maintained):

The idea seems to be this: it is understandable that women would want to be men, for everyone wants to be elsewhere than in the feminine position. What is not understandable within the given terms is why a woman might flaunt her femininity, produce herself as an excess of femininity, in other words, foreground the masquerade. (Doane, 1997, p.184)

The ‘masquerade’, therefore, destabilises the spectator’s understanding of the world and is considered ‘a type of representation which carries a threat, disarticulating male systems of viewing’ (ibid., p.186):

The transvestite adopts the sexuality of the other – the woman becomes a man in order to attain the necessary distance from the image. Masquerade, on the other hand, involves a realignment of femininity, the recovery, or more accurately, simulation of the missing gap or distance. To masquerade is to manufacture a lack in the form of a certain distance between oneself and one’s image. (ibid., p.185)

By simulating this gap/lack through ‘womanliness’—thereby creating a distance from one’s own image—there is essentially a refusal of patriarchal domination in the positioning of femininity in imagistic terms (ibid.). Through the embodiment of the female position (sometimes flaunting it for the camera), Nicole can be seen to simulate the lack which defines the female position. By not assuming an identity behind which she can hide passively, but rather standing back from this process and seeing it for what it is, she challenges the viewing experience and the coherence that may be demanded of it. In doing this, she occupies a Queer space outside (trans)normative associations of gender, sexuality and desire. Yet rather than seeing her various performances as being able to ‘read’ her (thereby potentially controlling her image), the documentary encounter gives her control in orchestrating *what* the spectator sees and *how* they see it, challenging any attempts that they may make in stabilising or rationalising her transgender self-representation. The masquerade and ‘womanliness’ prove to be useful performative tools

in the depiction of Nicole's transgender gaze and identity, and the destabilisation of the viewing experience of a classical narrative cinema.

Venice is not somewhere that Nicole plans to stay; on a trip to Bologna to see her friends at *MIT*, she admits that she will leave Venice because of the bureaucracy that has surrounded her 'trapasso'—she is referring here to the 'sentenza'¹⁶⁸ which declares legally whether or not she can undergo gender reassignment surgery. This official approval is supported by a medical report which demonstrates a medico-psychological approach to transgenderism: 'la diagnosi differenziale esclude la presenza di patologia mentale', 'ricorda il legame strettissimo con la madre...fino all'età di 8 anni, il desiderio di ammalarsi per avere cura di lei', 'viene spesso scambiato per una ragazza'.¹⁶⁹ These statements call for the stability of gender binaries and a rational approach to unhealthy pathologies and diversions from these categories. The ultimate expectation of the gender reassignment process, from the official point of view, is that Nicole will hide behind her mask; of course, it is not as simple as this, which she comes to realise for the spectator over the course of the film.

The final approval allowing Nicole to proceed with her surgery is comparable to the acceptance and rejection that she experiences in Venice and which highlights the problems associated with greater visibility of Queer lives in the city (Halberstam, 2005, p.26). Nicole's 'acceptability' is set within terms set by another. For example, Nicole is conscious that her appeal to men, whether for payment or not, centres on a contradiction declared by a transgender friend that: 'le trans si ritrovano di giorno a essere disprezzate ed emarginate, però la notte pagate'.¹⁷⁰ In another scene Nicole is seen responding

¹⁶⁸ [verdict.]

¹⁶⁹ [differential diagnosis excludes the presence of psychological pathology. He remembers a very close relationship with his mother...up until the age of 8, the desire to make himself ill in order to get his mother's attention was evident], [often mistaken for being a girl.]

¹⁷⁰ [Trans people find that they are condemned and excluded during the day, but then paid at night time.]

assertively to a verbal insult from a French teenage girl whom she passes while walking through Venice's narrow streets: 'Qu'est-ce que t'as vu?'¹⁷¹—this insult reflects the gender normative frames by which others are measured. Acknowledging that the distinction between constative and performative utterances has largely collapsed with Austin's evolving speech act theory, Eribon explains that the assignment of place through 'I injure' / 'the insult', which is essentially a performative utterance, 'determines a viewpoint on the world, a particular outlook' (2004, p17). In both of these scenes, Nicole, like other documentary participants in the films used in this thesis, refuses to be assigned this position, seeking to offer an alternative view to the rationalisation and stabilisation of the transgender individual according to normative frameworks.

Transgender gaze and performance

The montage of scenes between Molière's *M. de Pourceaugnac* and the gender reassignment surgery epitomise the final stage of Nicole's 'trapasso' in the most visceral way, drawing attention to Nicole's transgender gaze and performance in the process. These two different realities pit the 'material' against the 'figurative', as introduced earlier, and allow Nicole to represent her transgender perspective. Nicole's entrance into the theatre company reinforces her role as an actress and performer within the film itself, unsettling the 'authenticity' of many of her performances in front of the camera. It starts when the director calls Nicole on the phone: 'Parlo con la signorina Nicole de Leo? Vuoi tornare a fare l'attrice? Una donna, poi un uomo, poi una donna che si traveste da uomo,

¹⁷¹ [What are you looking at?]

da soldato che importuna un uomo travestito da donna' (laughs), 'cinque anni di analisi tutti insieme!'.¹⁷²

The cross-cutting scenes involving the two performances, namely the execution of the penectomy/vaginoplasty and the Molière play, blend the different activities of these two places in a number of ways, from the team dynamics involved in the two groups before their respective performances to the positioning of a light in the operating room (which mimics the lighting of a theatrical performance) and the adoption of various roles required of the different activities in each setting. In relation to this last point, Nicole changes from the role of Lucetta to the role of Apothecary and then back to Lucetta. In the process, and as a result of clever montage, she 'witnesses' her own penectomy from the position of her onstage medical role as Apothecary and declares her delight at her new vagina as Lucetta, wife to M. de Pourceaugnac. There are also two reflexive aspects to Nicole's performance here that are very illuminating; firstly, when in the role of Lucetta she removes her makeup and states to the mirror 'una maschera'/'a mask', and, secondly, when she is subsequently seen from behind looking out of a window onto the street and a sign 'Cinema Teatro' is visible in the distance. This latter point, in particular, reiterates Vendemmia's presence in the performance of this documentary. These particular scenes emphasise the construction and deconstruction of gender and sexual identities by focusing on the performance of gender reassignment surgery and the comedy and farce associated with gender bending. The oscillation that occurs between what are two very different performances is performative in itself as are the frenetic changes that

¹⁷² [Am I speaking to Nicole de Leo? Do you want to be an actress again? First a woman, then a man, then a woman who disguises herself as man, then as a soldier who pesters a man dressed as a woman], [Five years of analysis all at once!]

draw attention to movement, pace, and sentiment; this is reinforced by the reflexivity of the ‘Cinema-Teatro’ sign to which Vendemmiati, Nicole, and the viewer look.

The sequence reflects the theatre director’s comical précis of Nicole’s role in the initial telephone conversation, which very quickly unsettles the stability of gender and sexual representations by highlighting the ephemerality of roles and associated identities, and the issue of representation. What comes through strongly in the selected montage of scenes are the affective and subjective feelings associated with the transgender experience, particularly the final stage of Nicole’s ‘trapasso’, when she exclaims her shock and delight at the vision of her vagina, now as ‘la moglie’/‘the wife’. Nicole’s transgender gaze is identified from the clothed position of a variety of gender roles in the theatre production and ultimately in her role as co-producer with Vendemmiati as she looks on as the surgery takes place. The dividedness of her perspective—as clothed and unclothed, private and public, veiled and unveiled— occupies no fixed narrative and is fragmented, existing outside gender normative frameworks in a queer time and space of a variety of media (theatre and cinema) and roles and places. The narrative of *M. de Pourceaugnac* is broken down to facilitate this, creating a new performance through the manipulation of a variety of documentary techniques to represent Nicole’s transgender reality. In breaking down these narratives, new realities are created.

For Nicole, the role of Lucetta is potentially not enough as, being the ‘bigamous wife’ of Monsieur de Pourceaugnac, she is described as fake with her funny pseudo-Occitan speech (Kenny, 2011). Nicole wants instead to be a ‘real woman’, not a fake one anymore; however, her transgender gaze allows her to challenge the stabilising narratives that assimilate transgenderism into something palatable and rational by providing something quite different in these scenes which mocks our reliance on official discourse surrounding gender and identity. Livingston’s 1979 article ‘Comic Treatment: Molière

and the Farce of Medicine' adds to this in its exploration of Molière's treatment of medicine and medical practitioners, highlighting how his doctors are pretentious overrated impostors who share a common history of the sideshow with the clown; yet (unlike the clown) 'would have the gullible *badaud* mistake their theatre for the truth' (Livingston, 1979, p.677).¹⁷³ Molière considered comedy, music and ballet more therapeutic than the activities of the medical profession (ibid., p.677), which, in relation to this cross-cutting section of *La Persona*, seems to challenge the ability of those performing the surgery to understand the real nature of the transgender experience. The authority of the medical profession is challenged in these scenes through the Apothecary, a position occupied by Nicole who has succumbed to the medicalization of transgenderism in 'material' terms. The transparency of the surgical procedure adds nothing to an understanding of transgenderism on its own; whereas, conversely, the manipulation of film footage in ways that are subjective and affective can say much more. There is a desire to purge medicine (and the other professions of law and psychology) of its control in the categorisation of gender according to binaries that are measurable in the form of certain gender concordant characteristics.

Homeward Bound?

Nicole's return home is marked by an intertitle declaring that it is now six months following her surgery. She is seen in her car on the way to her mother's house in Genoa (or we are led to believe that it is located in Genoa), heard describing in voice-over how she feels about meeting her again. Nicole is more anxious than normal as she is now living as a transsexual woman and her family have never seen her this way before. The

¹⁷³ Badaud/aude – 'Personne qui s'attarde à regarder le spectacle de la rue' (*Le Petit Robert*, 2007, p.207). [onlooker.]

final section of the film is small and marked by difficulties in communication between Nicole and her family, identifiable in a series of muffled voice-over recordings that are spread out over the entire car journey home, but which are, in fact, taken from her actual entrance into the family home. By way of the voice-over recordings, Nicole is heard being accused of selfishness in what she has done, seen crying as she drives along. This montage raises the following question: in which direction is she going? Is she returning from having seen her family (and reflecting on what she has experienced) or is she going to see them? There is a confused queer temporality in this scene, which points to Nicole's ongoing existence outside heteronormative space and time.

Upon her arrival at her mother's house, which starts off with a high-angled camera shot outside the family home, the spectator sees Nicole climb a set of outside steps to meet her mother. Once inside the house she is met with hostility and trivialisation from family members whose voices are heard saying: 'per noi è una cosa strana vederti per la prima volta, capisci?', 'Noi siamo rimasti sempre gli stessi'.¹⁷⁴ In relation to his role as uncle Nico, the performance is expected to continue: 'I bambini si aspettano di trovare zio Nico. Una cosa è che tu ti vesti in jeans e maglietta, hai i capelli lunghi... Per i bambini stai girando un film in un ruolo femminile, e quindi ti devi immedesimare nella parte. I bambini non sono preparati'.¹⁷⁵ Unlike the theatre director who acknowledges the complexity of the transgender performance when she contacts Nicole for the first time, her existence now is denied vociferously and aggressively by members of her family who expect her to pretend that she is performing in the gender to which she has recently and officially been assigned. Of note is Nicole's position within the frame of the kitchen

¹⁷⁴ [For us it's a strange thing to see you for the first time, do you understand?], [We've not changed].

¹⁷⁵ [The children are expecting uncle Nico. It's one thing to wear jeans and a T-shirt and have long hair...For the children you are making a film and are playing a female role, so you'd better get with the part. The children aren't prepared for this.]

window—back to the camera—as she faces this abuse; she has temporarily returned to a place of fixity and rationality as in the photographs discussed earlier. There is some hope on Nicole’s part, however, that the younger members of the family will accept gender variance as a possible aspect of life; however, this is challenged through the expected continuation of normative gender references for uncle Nico who is only temporarily stepping outside of the framework to act as a woman on his return to the family home. The differing reactions from her family demonstrate the ongoing difficulties of the transgender individual in existing within normative concepts of the family, no matter how well he/she attempts to pass as the opposite sex.

It is not until the following day that the camera is allowed entry to the house, which reinforces the privacy of the family space in Italy. In never getting to know Nicole’s mother’s name, she is maintained as an abstract figure seen to represent Italy. Her mother’s reaction is one which stabilises Nicole’s transgender narrative into a gender normative framework, tentatively accepting her back into the family home as if a long lost daughter who never existed within the family. For her mother, ‘Nicola fa trapasso’;¹⁷⁶ her acceptance of Nicole is as if she is a long lost daughter being welcomed back into the family—as though never part of it in the first place. This is evidenced when Nicole is informed by her mother that she is now 76 years old, to which Nicole responds that she knows this. Nicole’s mother is unable to understand the complexities of the transgender experience; this is dealt with by rationalising it in a way that reinforces the stability of gender binaries. However, she starts to address Nicole in the feminine form during her return home, which is a significant development from the apparent difficulties highlighted by Nicole at the beginning of the film.

¹⁷⁶ [Nicola dies.]

The final scene of *La Persona* shows Nicole explaining to her mother at the kitchen table that she is playing the card game ‘patience’ incorrectly. Her mother states that she needs to see all the cards as she cannot remember them all, which is clearly not how this game is played. Nicole explains that certain cards need to be face-up and others face-down, the additional general discussion centring on the fact that for her mother nothing has changed (which clearly it has). The very final shot is of Nicole holding the old pack of cards getting ready to shuffle them again, which suggests that if she does so she may get a better deal. Nicole appears reluctant to do this and does not in fact deal again. This appears to be a final performative act within the film and highlights her acceptance of herself, her long desire to be accepted by her mother now somewhat misplaced. It also reinforces her ongoing existence outside the private space of the family and the ongoing threat that she presents to it, with some doubt over any secure future for herself within that family having finally returned home.

Ultimately, Nicole is offered no fixed place from which to exist as a transgender individual. She is always in the process of moving and any connection with the private space of the home is seen as transient; however, it is precisely the performance of this ‘placelessness’—the performance of her desire to belong and to have an identity—that functions as a ‘continual process of becoming that challenges essential or predetermined bodies, identities or spaces’ (Knopp, 2004, in Brown et al, 2007, p.12). This is achieved most notably through the use of various urban spaces which are explored in such a way that the control of gender by the Italian State is challenged, which her mother comes to represent symbolically as head of the traditional family unit. The ‘unsatisfactory’ end of *La Persona* also challenges the spectator’s desire to experience a neatly finished film and reflects both the incompleteness of Nicole’s queer identity and the definition of this film as a ‘transgender documentary’.

Chapter Ten

Les Travestis Pleurent Aussi (2006) and *Angel* (2009)

The transgender Ecuadorian prostitutes in D'Ayala Valva's *Les Travestis Pleurent Aussi*¹⁷⁷ and *Angel* are seen to occupy a complex position in relation to performance, identity, and place, interconnecting with other French and Italian transgender documentaries but this time from a more transnational and diasporic perspective. Mia/Angel's and Romina's stories provide the dominant narrative threads, which are jointly influenced by economic, cultural and gender factors. Their use of space in Paris in *Les Travestis* is dictated by the need for economic survival, yet the documentary encounter also allows for the emergence of a political voice. In *Angel*, D'Ayala Valva focuses on Mia/Angel who returns to her home country Ecuador to see her family after more than four years in Paris. I have chosen to focus my attention on Mia/Angel because, firstly, she unites the two films (remaining the ongoing interest of D'Ayala Valva), and, secondly, because she is the one who most notably appropriates a genderqueer position.¹⁷⁸

Throughout both films, there is evidence of a self-reflexive *cinéma vérité* style, with D'Ayala Valva heard frequently asking questions of the prostitutes as he follows them with his camera. The various performances witness the intensification of Mia's

¹⁷⁷ *Les Travestis* from now on.

¹⁷⁸ I will use the names Mia and Angel interchangeably throughout the text; the former is her transgender name (which I use mostly when referring to her in *Les Travestis*), and the latter is her birth name (which I use mostly when referring to her in *Angel* where she is also variably known as 'La Mujerón'/ 'La Grande Femme'/ 'The Big Woman'). I will also alternate between the pronouns he/she, him/her where necessary. This reflects her 'genderqueer' position which is defined as: 'designating a person who does not subscribe to conventional gender distinctions, but identifies with neither, both, or a combination of male and female genders' (*OED*, 2013 online edition).

political voice over the course of the two films as she moves away from the Bois de Boulogne where she works (called locally 'Le Bois') and negotiates other spaces in Paris and Ecuador as a transgendered individual. These performances also suggest her role as co-documentarist, a position which appears more obvious in *Angel* where she frequently guides the camera during her trajectory. There is also an increasing connection between Mia and the camera as she progresses on her journey such that the spectator experiences both her transgender gaze and an increasing disconnection between Mia and her family. This disconnection is also felt by the spectator in the need for translation, French subtitling in films where Spanish is the dominant language spoken. Through these various performances, Mia evidences her power and agency which are, again, reactive and collaborative. The increased political reflexivity of *Angel* is indicative of this, which allows for the spectator's retrospective evaluation of Mia's political consciousness in *Les Travestis* and the instability she poses to the representation of gender and sexuality.

Mia's attempts at dealing with the fragmentation of her gender and migrant status across the two films are tightly wrapped up in her body and the relationship she has with her family, most interestingly in relation to her mother who represents the home nation like Nicole's mother in *La Persona de Leo N.*. Both mothers point to their 'daughter's' need for a sense of place and home. However, there is an eventual realisation by Mia that her gender and sexual divergence are incompatible with the normative frames of reference within which she attempts to locate a place for herself in the house in Tena, Ecuador (where she had intended to return one day). Taking Wesling's definition of the 'diasporic queer subject', Mia is 'called upon to bear witness to the political, material, familial, and intellectual transformations of globalization' (Wesling, 2008, p.31).¹⁷⁹ In

¹⁷⁹ Wesling is critical of those studies that end up privileging the connection between the queer subject and the diasporic as a site of transgression; she feels that this results in the queer subject and globalisation becoming one and the same thing, which, she feels, reiterates established power differentials to the denial

her role within the films, I consider Mia as a ‘diasporic queer subject’ in the way she unsettles fixed notions of gender, sex and sexuality, and associated features of family and nation. In doing this, the spectator witnesses her progression from a position where she is being looked *at* to a position where she is being looked *with*, which implicates the spectator in her transgender gaze and reflects both her increasing agency and alignment to the camera; this is before finally leaving aside the documentary encounter and moving on, now able to locate herself more clearly in the world. I start by considering how *Les Travestis* foregrounds Mia’s queerness in direct contrast to Romina, and in so doing how the film draws attention to Mia as a particularly Queer political subject. I then consider how the films evidence an evolving agency on Mia’s part by focusing on her transgender gaze and use of documentary performance to allow place and identity to be both challenged and developed in new ways.

Fragmented nation

In *Les Travestis*, Mia and Romina live with a number of other prostitutes in a very unpleasant and exploitative hotel near Place de Clichy which is paid for through their work in ‘Le Bois’.¹⁸⁰ The transient crossroads of the Place de Clichy area—where four different arrondissements meet—and the economic exclusion of the prostitutes to an area in Paris which is not ‘Paris proper’ (i.e. ‘Le Bois’) points to their liminality in relation to

of difference. In focusing, for example, on mobility, Wesling argues that such approaches ignore the potential ‘groundedness’ and resistance of more local dynamics (Wesling, 2008, p.33–34).

¹⁸⁰ There is an intertextual link between *Les Travestis* and Gad Elmaleh’s fictional film *ChouChou* (2002) which centres specifically on the issue of space and place. Some of the shooting for *ChouChou* took place in and around the Passage Lathuille where Mia/Angel and Romina live in *Les Travestis* (although this thoroughfare is not actually mentioned). Passage Lathuille is also where the club Apocalypse is located in *ChouChou*, a cabaret club for transvestites. Although *ChouChou* is described as being concerned with ‘quelques grands sujets: l’immigration, la difficulté de vivre sa différence ...et l’amour’ / ‘a number of major issues, immigration, the difficulties of living out one’s differences ...and love’ (2002, Fechner Productions), *Les Travestis* offers something different in terms of political impact.

identity and place. D'Ayala Valva infiltrates the prostitutes' milieu by way of a photographer friend, Giulio Sarchiola, who is working on his own photographic project with them. The film opens with examples of Sarchiola's work, which introduces a reflexivity that becomes a feature of both films; a range of photographs (including a notable one with D'Ayala Valva holding a hand-held camera) show the prostitutes in their hotel rooms. In each of the featured photographs a mirror is also present, which is a subtle reminder of the prostitutes' active involvement in the construction of the representations shown and their self-perceptions as transgendered (a major aspect of their performances). In relation to this last point, it is important to mention here that Mia is very tall, of African origin, and very powerfully built, and that she used to be a well-known boxer in Ecuador prior to her move to Paris. She is clearly not on hormone therapy as she has a very large musculature as well as breast implants, which she exhibits quite matter-of-factly to Giulio Sarchiola's camera for one of the opening shots to the film.

The prostitutes' active involvement, participation, and reflection in *Les Travestis* is highlighted most significantly in the party scene in the confined space of Mia's hotel room where Mia, Romina and friends look at themselves on the video which is being played on a television screen in the background. Of note in relation to this *mise-en-abyme* is that D'Ayala Valva initially records one of the prostitutes linking a camcorder to a television screen in order to show what has been recorded. This suggests that some of the footage in the film may have been filmed by the prostitutes themselves. Also of note is the pausing of the final shot by one of the other prostitutes which sees Mia looking out from the television screen, framed by the bathroom doorway, having just attempted to apply makeup in the mêlée of activity that precedes the edited opening scene of the entire film where she is seen applying makeup in the bathroom. This points not only to a formal reflexivity within these particular scenes, but also to the control of cinematic space by the

prostitutes in relation to the whole film given that the bathroom scenes link the beginning and end.

There is also a political slant to the use of these two interlinking bathroom scenes, which suggests a general undercurrent of desperateness to the prostitutes' lives; sentiments verbalised by Mia in the first (night-time) scene are reused at the end of the film as a voice-over in an almost identical (day-time) scene, which also functions as a *mise en abyme* as mentioned above when played on the television screen during the party scene (although there are no guarantees of what Mia says in this TV scene as the spectator cannot hear her). In the earlier scene Mia is seen applying makeup within the frame of the bathroom mirror, her voice from a previous interview scene leading into the diegesis of the current scene; she explains how her family are her main priority, and, even if she does end up catching a deadly disease as a result of what she does for a living, such is life: 'life is a game of roulette' and 'we don't always win'. The *mise en scène* here is almost identical to her final scene of *Les Travestis* where she is seen briefly instructing D'Ayala Valva how to use the doorbell before allowing him access to her bathroom so that he can watch her in the ongoing process of ablution that surrounds her work as a prostitute, which essentially returns the whole film back to the beginning. On a formal level, as mentioned, the link between these two bathroom scenes points to film as a construction of meaning. On a political level, it can be interpreted as the cyclical, unchanging, trapped, and hopeless nature of the prostitutes' existence as *sans papiers* (particularly as Mia talks of these preparations for work as a daily occurrence).

The viewing of life as a 'game of roulette' suggests risk taking on Mia's part and points to her position outside normative frames of reference regarding gender, sexuality and reproduction. She continues to occupy an open-ended position in her final scene, whereas in Romina's final scene *she* is observed showing her new breasts to the camera

while declaring that she has a very happy ‘husband’. While Romina is now complete in her body, it would seem that Mia’s performance in front of the mirror points to the inassimilable nature of her existence at this stage. Also, Mia works solely to provide money for her mother and family unlike Romina who does not provide for her family at all.

In one of the interview scenes, Mia talks openly, and in a matter of fact way, about her life as a prostitute in Paris. She explains some of the difficulties she encountered having just arrived in Paris, specifically the hierarchy that went with working her particular patch in ‘Le Bois’ and trying to meet the cost of her hotel room. She also refers to her unwitting pimp—her mother who knows nothing of just how far she has ‘fallen’—and her sole ambition of being able to support her family financially. The complexity of Mia’s situation is linked to a filial dependency with her mother and family and (referring to Butler’s *Undoing Gender* here) her ‘unintelligible’ nature (Butler, 2004, p.30); however, her place in front of the mirror while reflecting upon her situation highlights her ability to occupy a critical position in relation to those social norms that govern whether or not she is deemed intelligible.¹⁸¹ Therefore, Mia’s ‘unintelligible’ position reinforces her occupation of a Queer space, which she uses to unsettle the ability of others to ‘recognize’ her in any complete and coherent way.

I would assert the possibility of a link here between Mia and the ‘Mirror Stage’ of the developing Lacanian Subject. Her ‘fatalistic’ interaction with the bathroom mirror is suggestive of a failed ‘Mirror Stage’, a stage in which differentiation from the mother

¹⁸¹ Butler, in *Undoing Gender*, relates ‘recognition’ to ‘intelligibility’, ‘humanness’ and a concern with ‘what it is to live, breathe, attempt to love neither as fully negated nor as fully acknowledged as being’ (Butler, 2004, p.58). She explains that ‘[t]o find that one is fundamentally unintelligible (indeed, that the laws of culture and of language find one to be an impossibility) is to find that one has not yet achieved access to the human. It is to find oneself speaking only and always as if one were human, but with the sense that one is not. It is to find that one’s language is hollow, and that no recognition is forthcoming because the norms by which recognition takes place are not in one’s favour’ (Butler, 2004, p.218).

usually takes place and from which the subject is then able to create an identity and wholeness for him or herself (Bailly, 2009, p.37). Drawing on Bailly's work on Lacan, Mia is like 'the child [who] does not make the mental leap from the fantasy of the fragmented body to that of the wholeness of its self' (ibid., p.39); although, according to Lacan, this 'wholeness' of the Subject is a mechanism whereby the individual 'thinks itself the source of everything, but is in reality the product of successive images, of language and its signifiers. The signifiers are not produced by the Subject, they are what constitutes it' (ibid., pp.39–40). What I think this suggests for Mia's interaction with the mirror, is the Queer fragmentation and incompleteness of her embodied performances which she continues to articulate for herself and others throughout the film, potentially never arriving at a 'wholeness'.

Interestingly, Romina is only ever seen once looking into a mirror; this is while brushing her teeth and having just previously spoken about being desirable. This reiterates the different agency that she demonstrates throughout the film, which, unlike Mia, suggests a lack of impulse to be reactive and resistant through gender discordant behaviours. Mia illuminates her capacity to 'constitute' signifiers through her fragmentation and various performances (as shall be discussed), whereas Romina is 'constituted' by them. Mia, it would seem, actively connects herself to the filming process in a way that is different to Romina who appears to bask in the camera's attention, like her heroine Marilyn Monroe who adorns the walls of her apartment and of whom she has a statuette.

Mia also identifies herself as 'different' from other transgendered individuals: 'I am different from the other transvestites. Very different. What I am, I keep to myself. When I show it, I do so in order to live'. Of added significance, is that Mia sees herself as a 'person'—'a person like anybody else', 'I am neither man nor woman', 'I am a

person’—which is all explained while she carefully applies makeup in front of a mirror before going out to work in a highly stylised image of what constitutes being a ‘woman’ and a ‘prostitute’. Mia does this in the first person singular, thus reinforcing her genderqueer position in this scene. In contrast, Romina’s use of the term ‘third sex’ to define her gender suggests its regulation and categorisation. This does not upset gender binaries, particularly as she declares her gender through the use of an indefinite pronoun (which reinforces the idea of universality and lack of difference). Butler states that ‘[...] a restrictive discourse on gender that insists on the binary of man and woman as the exclusive way to understand the gender field performs a *regulatory* operation of power that naturalizes the hegemonic instance and forecloses the thinkability of its disruption’ (Butler, 2004, p.43). It is not that Romina offers no disruption to gender binaries—as she clearly follows a Queer existence in talking of the magic that a transgender individual contributes to the sexual encounter: ‘It is magical to see a woman with the sex of a man or a man with the sex of a woman’—however, she seeks to remain within normative frames of existence, governed by the safety and protection of a ‘family’ (i.e. her pimp / ‘husband’ and dog / ‘baby’). Her various performances indicate a desire to be read as a ‘woman’ and to exist within gender normative frameworks regarding appropriately gendered behaviours, which is somewhat different to Mia’s relationship to her gender and notion of the ‘family’ which defies categorisation altogether.

Although Romina refers little to her family, other than to explain that they wish she would do something else other than prostitution (such as using her flair for languages and hairdressing, or even perhaps returning to her previous medical studies), she is acutely aware of her ability to disrupt normative frameworks and tries to avoid this by performing within them. Mia, on the other hand, does not appear concerned by such pressures and occupies a Queer position instead. This point can be further developed by

the fact that her 'husband' is not the usual sort: 'In addition, I need to maintain a 'husband'. And this husband is my mother. My lover is my mother. My boyfriend is my mother. My mother knew nothing about what I was doing. She knew who I was but not how far I had fallen'. (This reference to a husband, a lover, and a boyfriend, is too similar to Romina's description for it not to be suspected that D'Ayala Valva had something to do with stimulating their responses). In her descriptions of her relationship with her mother, Mia completely destabilizes those gendered binaries (husband-wife, parent-child, mother-son) on which patriarchal societies are supposed to depend. The relationship appears as a complex Oedipal parent-child binary where not only gender but also generational roles are queered (mother as husband, boyfriend and lover). In the process, Mia unsettles the stability of the nation and the various discourse it perpetuates.

Mia's Queer Embodiment

There is a corporeality in Mia's connection with the camera (and vice versa) which allows for the emergence of an embodied and political performance through her claim to occupy space in various ways, which is seen to reposition the spectator in relation to discourse surrounding gender and its representation. Mia is intermittently seen in both films, for example, handling her breasts in a very masculine and insensitive way or comparing them for size and womanliness with other women. At times, she also plays with her nipples, which (dis)orientates the dominant male spectator position away from and towards her body in a Queer and unsettling way, achieved through the bodily co-presence of what are potentially attractive female breasts and a hyper-masculine body structure which she seeks not to fit into any fixed category.

Mia challenges popular ideas of what it is to be transgendered; she is perhaps ‘Übertrans’, queering the transnormative through her body. It would appear that Mia’s transgender story is in some ways ‘transcending’ in that it goes beyond gender itself, seeking to deconstruct it altogether (Ekins and King, 2006, p.36).¹⁸² Mia uses her body in congruent and incongruent ways; for example, she wears neutral clothing during the day, such as a tracksuit top, jeans, and a vest, and highly stylised ‘feminine’ attire at night when she goes to work (the latter of which challenges any spectatorial viewing experience in consideration of her huge muscular form).

Mia’s politically charged embodiment in *Les Travestis* is seen in the irate exchange she has with the male hotel receptionist over the ability to meet the demands for payment (which are extortionate) and her subsequent reflection back in her room. This encounter shows political consciousness on Mia’s part and can be linked to the dynamics of the negotiation for paid sex in ‘Le Bois’; in both situations, Mia seeks to redress issues of abuse and power in certain ways. While Mia is heard verbally attacking the male hotel receptionist, the camera simultaneously focuses on a French Tricolour which is located above the Place de Clichy Metro station and just to the left of the Monument au maréchal de Moncey. Although her words remain inaudible here, the montage of scenes performs an attack on France. As Mia continues to shout at the receptionist, a fellow prostitute is seen leaving the hotel and getting into a taxi to go off to work, which points to the hotel’s exploitation of the prostitutes’ insecure immigrant status. There is then another image of the French Tricolour before Mia is seen in her hotel room describing the labile situation that she occupies in France. She says: ‘Putting my hand up men’s arses and for them to

¹⁸² Ekins and King (2006), in *The Transgender Phenomenon*, identify four modes of transgendering – ‘migrating’ (i.e. permanent change of gender), ‘oscillating’ (moving between genders), ‘negating’ (removing gendered body parts for the purpose of negating gender, becoming ungendered), and ‘transcending’.

do the same to me, for what? To pay for the hotel because I have absolutely no money whatsoever. We send no money to our families. There is no decent work or accommodation. We are illegal immigrants'. This montage equates the dominant place of France/Paris with that of the hotel, which ultimately forces her into a life of prostitution as there are no other opportunities available; therefore, Mia is seen here vociferously challenging this dominance through a performance which is enhanced by D'Ayala Valva's use of documentary space and montage.

Despite Mia's challenge here, her work in 'Le Bois' also forms part of her 'ambition',¹⁸³ which suggests a degree of fantasy surrounding her night-time work. Mia also occupies a niche within the 'Le Bois' market and fulfils a certain need for interested punters.¹⁸⁴ While, according to Butler, embodiment always refers to a norm, it [embodiment] can work against imposed ideals of what a body should look like: 'Fantasy is what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise; it establishes the possible in excess of the real; it points elsewhere, and when it is embodied, it brings the elsewhere home' (Butler, 2004, p.29). 'Le Bois' is a *lieu factice* which offers Mia the ability to perform her gender and sexuality in the most open way possible in Paris as a forced migrant, in spite of its associated threats. 'Le Bois' and the documentary encounter both allow Mia to imagine herself otherwise and to challenge norms concerning gender and sexual roles.

¹⁸³ Mia says in this shot: 'Ambition is ambition. Mine is to have a house, a car, some money, not a Swiss account or anything else like that. What counts is my family'.

¹⁸⁴ Although, the abolitionists—who have sought in France to view prostitution in a paternalistic way by wanting to save prostitutes from their terrible existences—would not acknowledge this position, unlike those seeking a more liberal approach: 'In direct opposition to the dominant state-sanctioned abolitionism, prostitutes' rights advocates, community health associations and some feminists called for the removal of the stigma attached to prostitution and for the recognition of the rights of sex workers. They argued that the state's blinkered commitment to abolitionism ignored the difficulties, dangers and the denial of rights faced by prostitutes in their daily lives and that their existence and needs must be recognised, that they must be seen as subjects and agents, not victims' (Allwood and Wadia, 2009, p.110).

While it can equally be suggested that Mia is subjected, her body commodified for the sole purpose of economic survival, I would argue instead that the way in which she presents herself as a prostitute in ‘Le Bois’ points to a performance that ‘[manipulates]...cultural ideals of sexualized femininity to attract and maintain custom and make financial gain’ (Sanders, 2005, p.143). The effort that Mia puts into preparing herself for work, including the smoking of cigars as a sort of weapon to protect her from the evil that awaits her, fits strongly into the idea of a theatrical performance.¹⁸⁵ In fact, Mia goes one step further in the manipulation of these cultural ideals by integrating them into what appears to be regulated work, which is confined to a certain section of ‘Le Bois’ and which follows set rules (Mia explains these rules to a new recruit in the café scene). She eroticizes gender binary features through the way she transforms herself into this night-time figure, playing on those qualities that are both male and female, active and passive, top and bottom (i.e. dominant versus dominated sexual positions), naked and clothed. Mia creates her own rules in ‘Le Bois’, and, as a result, undermines dominant hegemony concerning appropriately gendered and sexual spaces, albeit at a micro level in the two films.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ ‘Freud, a life-long cigar smoker, is quoted as having said: “Cigars have served me for precisely fifty years as a protection and a weapon in the combat of life. I owe to the cigar a great intensification of my capacity to work and a facilitation of my self-control”’ (Elkin, 1996, in Linn, 2002, p.1158).

¹⁸⁶ However, within this localised oppositional stance, there is also a transnational aspect which demonstrates the mobility of this film. D’Ayala Valva recounts how there was such interest in his film at one showing in Cuba—at the Festival del Nuevo Cine Latino Americano in 2007—that it had to be shown twice to appease the crowds (Amey and Fayet, 2008, p.15). As D’Ayala Valva says ‘Cela témoigne de la volonté des Cubains d’en savoir plus sur la diversité sexuelle’ / ‘This is evidence that the Cubans want to know more about sexual diversity’ (ibid.) Of note, was the presence at this festival of sexologist Mariela Castro—the daughter of Raul Castro—who was interested in doing some important work on changing laws concerning the LGBT community in her country (ibid).

Queer dynamics of space and place

The sense of agency demonstrated by Mia and Romina also reflects a difference in terms of the relationship they have to their body and the physical space in and around Place de Clichy. This results in two different navigations of the city. While Mia is seen predominantly to move between Place de Clichy and 'Le Bois', Romina is generally seen in relation to the home and domesticity (having sought out her own small apartment) and talks mainly of her life with her 'husband' (a Portuguese man) and her 'baby' (a dog to whom she shows devotion). Romina is more of a static figure, and, although she also works in 'Le Bois', like Mia, she is neither seen there nor observed in the process of preparing herself to go there. Her trip to Caen—to generate more money for her breast implant surgery and to get away from Tony (one of her boyfriends)—further secures her place in France, giving her gender stability through her capacity as a more convincing woman. Mia, on the other hand, connects to spaces beyond the Place de Clichy area and 'Le Bois', most notably through her movement to the Place de la Bastille for the *Gay Pride* march and ultimately back to Ecuador (when she returns there in *Angel*).

On the whole, however, both Mia and Romina navigate visually limited geographical spaces in *Les Travestis*; this reinforces their status as economic exiles in France. The feeling of a visually constricted space in *Les Travestis* might also reflect the introduction of Nicolas Sarkozy's law on 18th March 2003 concerning 'racolage passif', brought in around the start of D'Ayala Valva's filming. This law (which has since been revoked) sought to reduce the visibility of prostitution in France and to prosecute even those who showed 'une attitude même passive' / 'non-active, passive behaviours' towards the solicitation of sex (Amey and Fayet, 2008, INA, 2003). During an interview on *Les Travestis*, D'Ayala Valva (2008, pp.14–15) described this law as 'stupid' and explained that his ability to gain the confidence of the prostitutes was made more difficult

as a result. This law may also have affected the self-assurance with which the prostitutes moved about the city and the extent to which they would publicly explore their gender and sexuality for fear of being arrested.

The way in which Mia claims the Place de Clichy area for both herself and fellow transgender prostitutes—as if it were occupied only by transsexuals—is powerful: ‘On the whole avenue, from Porte de Clichy to Place de Clichy, there’s nothing but transvestites; they live in the hotels on the corner. On the whole street, there’s nothing but transvestites. They go to work by taxi or are brought back by taxi’. The key issue here is that Mia appropriates the area for herself and other transgender prostitutes, which is significant in the manipulation of space-place dynamics as described by de Certeau. The occupation of a ‘lieu’ means that time has been conquered (albeit temporarily in this case), which allows for reflection upon one’s location in relation to others and the potential future that lies ahead (de Certeau, 1984, pp.57-63); the hotel and the documentary encounter allow for a similar control of time and space in their own way.

In one scene, in ‘Le Bois’, Mia claims that the space she occupies in Paris is very much dictated by the hotel and ‘Le Bois’, which, on a map of the Paris Metro system, are directly connected by line number 2, there being eight stops between Place de Clichy and Porte Dauphine Metro stations. Although Mia goes to work in a taxi, the direct physical connection between these two stations on the Metro map highlights their restricted navigation of the city. The line between Place de Clichy and ‘Le Bois’ is extended to Place de La Bastille in a very political way by Mia, which is significant for her emerging Queer agency (discussed below). Paul A. Silverstein, in his *The Lines on the Pavement, The Racialization and Spatialisation of Violence in Postcolonial (Sub)Urban France*, refers to the ideological cartographic demarcations (both physical and symbolic) between the banlieue and other areas of Paris that have occurred as a result of laws to control

violence and crime within the Parisian metro/railway network system. He says: '[p]ublic transportation both delineates racialized compartments and violates them, enables mobility and delimits the possible avenues through which such mobility can occur. As such, public transportation, along with corporate institutions like supermarkets, serves as a locus of contestation and, consequently, violence' (2008, p.188).

Most of the prostitutes from the Place de Clichy area go to and from work in taxis, which may relate to their inability to access safely the more overt forms of public transport such as the metro, particularly when dressed to go out to work; therefore, the accessing of the metro by Mia to go to the *Gay Pride* march is symbolic in expressing her movement beyond the confined line that joins her hotel to 'Le Bois' and the constraints imposed upon her both economically and politically by the system more generally. This idea of ideological boundaries constructing the city of Paris can also be identified in the scene where Mia is ascertaining what happened during the preceding night's police roundup of prostitutes from the hotel (including her sister Issy who has come to stay with her illegally and also to work as a prostitute). While Mia talks through an open window from the little side street which fronts onto the hotel, a Galeries Lafayette van is seen passing in the background. This contributes to other more mainstream images of Paris that come through in both films in busy street images, place names (Place de Clichy, Place de la Bastille, Bois de Boulogne), iconic tourist attractions (the Moulin Rouge at the beginning of *Angel*, the photographic images of the Tour Eiffel back home in Ecuador, the Tour Eiffel key ring on Mia/Angel's bag in *Les Travestis*), and modes of transport (the Metro and the Gare St Lazare train station). All of these other images and associations with Paris reinforce the marginalised existence—economic, political, and geographic—of these Ecuadorian prostitutes and serve to reinforce the benchmark against which Mia and Romina create their world.

Mia's emerging 'transgender gaze'

D'Ayala Valva's camera tracks Mia's movement beyond the boundaries of domesticity, the Place de Clichy area, and 'Le Bois', functioning as a catalyst to her performance and agency. Mia 'ventures' to Place de La Bastille for *Gay Pride* where she grabs the attention of attendees who look at her and take photographs of her intriguing body. Mia's confidence is boosted by the experience: 'What success!' (Sebastiano), 'I told you, I'm a success. I always steal the limelight' (Mia). Whether part of the voice-over or diegesis, Mia's repeated use of 'yo' beyond the private space of her apartment at this public event points to her re-subjection, which allows her to emerge temporarily from geographical confinement. This assigns her a temporary place within France, although in a queer way through the contradistinctions that her body, as the transgendered migrant sex worker that we know, juxtaposes in this iconic place.

La Place de La Bastille clearly evokes notions of resistance and demonstration and Mia appears to maximise on the freedom that this and the huge crowd afford her, if only temporarily as a *sans papiers*. Mia is seen as a solitary figure within the crowd because of her physical difference and dominance, although she remains confident and antagonistic at the same time (particularly in the way she looks at others looking back at her). She emerges out of the contextual constraints of Paris, which thereby makes her a very Queer figure in the generally white middle-class *Gay Pride* entourage that surround her. Her presence as a central figure within the LGBT crowd points to a re-injection of the genderqueer issue back into LGBT community matters, away from issues of sexuality (which is barely touched on in either film, other than Mia describing herself as 'gay').

Mia's Queer body at the *Gay Pride* march—the way in which she confidently connects and moves with it—corresponds to Bakhtin's notion of the 'grotesque body',

which is described by Russo in her *Female Grotesques – carnival and theory* as the ‘open, protruding, extended, secreting body, the body of becoming, process, and change. The grotesque body is opposed to the classical body, which is monumental, static, closed and sleek, corresponding to the aspirations of bourgeois individualism: the grotesque body is connected to the rest of the world’ (Russo, 1997, p.323). Mia embodies both of these oppositions in her performance here; her musculature corresponds to the ‘classical body’ and her large breast implants to the distortion of that body (it is worth recalling here the photographs of Angel(ito) the boxer in *Angel* who is seen as ‘monumental’, ‘individual’, ‘static’). Illuminating the affective and perceptive sentiments that surface from a viewing of the grotesque, Remshardt, in *Staging the Savage God: the grotesque in performance*, claims that ‘every performance is a kind of grotesque, every grotesque is a kind of performance’ and that these two aesthetic and literary notions—‘performance’ and ‘grotesque’—present a respective contradiction between the ‘self-articulating’ and the ‘beyond articulation’, between ‘an act that speaks for itself’ and the ‘unspeakable’ (2004, pp.2–10).¹⁸⁷ The documentary encounter, therefore, allows Mia to articulate herself in a theatrical way, yet there remains something out of reach in her performing body that both attracts and repels the spectator. D’Ayala Valva and Sarchiola allow Mia to connect with the rest of the world and to express her transgenderism in a very challenging way, albeit briefly and temporarily at this stage. In the process, D’Ayala Valva seeks to shift the focus away from looking *at* Mia to looking *with* her and to illuminate how this culminates in an emphasis on Mia’s very own transgender gaze.

Although Mia is positioned within the camera’s frame for the spectator’s scrutiny—with the spectator looking *at* her—she challenges this by embodying a divided

¹⁸⁷ In tackling ‘performance’ and the ‘grotesque’, Remshardt refers to William Butler Yeats’s reflections on Alfred Jarry’s *King Ubu* (2004, pp.1–2). Yeats describes him as the ‘Savage God’ having seen him in a performance in 1896 at the Théâtre de l’Œuvre in Paris (ibid.).

transgender gaze which capitalises on her ability to look at herself as both male and female at any one time without upholding one gender binary position (thereby allowing the spectator to look *with* her). Mia is unreadable when it comes to considering her gender, which recalls Halberstam's 'transgender gaze' as 'a look divided within itself, a point that comes from two places (at least) at the same time, one clothed and one naked' (Halberstam, 2005, p.86). In dealing with Mia's 'transgender gaze' here, I draw attention to the way in which the camera emphasises her physical viewpoint.

Mia's gaze *tout court* can be exemplified by taking a closer look at those scenes in and around the Place de la Bastille section of *Les Travestis* when the Pride march takes place. The sequence marks a shift from the *looking at* of observational documentary to the *looking with* of performative documentary. The scenes that make up this sequence play on a reciprocity between Mia and the camera which acknowledges processes of both looking and being looked at, Mia being seen both to *look* and to *be looked at* in a very obvious way. It starts when Mia is seen getting onto the metro train at Place de Clichy. The close proximity and movement of the passengers who are boarding the train make it easy for the camera to pick up the astonished face of an intrigued male onlooker, whose position is then adopted by the camera (and spectator) immediately thereafter (as it continues to focus directly on Mia). From a reasonably close proximity, Mia is seen staring directly back at the camera as if into the eyes of the intrigued male onlooker who has just been filmed. She then momentarily looks down at her breasts and back at the onlooker (i.e. the spectator) in a slightly provocative way. Here she is seen to perform for the camera, tantalizingly acknowledging the confusion that her body presents to the onlooker (i.e. the spectator) through her eyes which point initially to her erotic breasts and then back to the incongruence that they present when seen combined with her

muscular body. She sees what the spectator sees, which is a confusion of how to categorise her.

When she arrives at the Bastille area of Paris, this visual interrogation starts to shift (although the crowd clearly remain interested in looking at her). One shot has the camera positioned just next to the back of Mia's head as if emphasising D'Ayala Valva's aim to see this primarily from her point of view instead of the spectator's which dominated the earlier train ride. From this new position, Mia focuses on the Banana Café boys who are seen on top of a float from her low-angle position in the crowd. Further forward, the back of Sarchiola's head is seen taking a photograph of the boys too (emphasising that this is temporarily not about Mia herself, but rather what she sees). The two boys—who are seen dancing together—eventually acknowledge the camera and look back at it and at Mia, pointing as they do so. Interestingly, the logo of Banana Café is a neon light shaped figure of Josephine Baker who represents exoticism, titillation, and being looked *at*. Here, that position is reversed as it is Mia who is seen initially to do all the looking, the boys' bodies dancing and writhing for her pleasure (which is interrupted only once they acknowledge they are being looked at). This reciprocity of looking emphasises Mia's ability to interrogate her environment through her body, which draws attention to itself and to processes of looking through the camera. It is through this focus on her body, and the process of looking, that Mia is seen to introduce her own gaze on her environment. The link between the ability to look and the ability to captivate the spectator's look through her body, draws attention to her transgender gaze—her ability to look at herself as divided. It is this that draws the spectator's attention in the first place.

It is at this point that a series of three physical rotations starts between Sarchiola and D'Ayala Valva in the process of carrying out their respective work. In the first scene, Mia's back is to D'Ayala Valva's camera as she proceeds through the march enjoying

herself, while, on the other side, Sarchiola is seen photographing Mia face-on to both her and D'Ayala Valva. These positions alternate until the Place de la Bastille scene, where they both adopt the same position of other observers amongst the crowd looking at Mia while Mia performs for them (although they acknowledge each other momentarily one last time). This acknowledgement appears not only to be reflexive but also to be part of a structured performance; photographer and cameraman having guided Mia from Place de Clichy to Place de la Bastille (protecting her en route and drawing the crowd to her in the process through their interest in her), until she is able to take her very own spot without them directly around her.

Mia is seen at this point standing in view of a Place de la Bastille street sign surrounded by a large crowd of people looking *at* her, either filming or photographing her. Mia suddenly adopts a feminine pose for the camera while asking an old lady who emerges from the crowd if she wants to be picked up in her huge muscular arms (to which the lady agrees, all in a rather amicable and jovial way). Clearly seen among the people are D'Ayala Valva and Sarchiola whose camera lens also forms part of the crowd; however, the difference is that D'Ayala Valva's viewpoint early in the sequence is seen to move from the position of observation—alongside fellow camera holders—to that of adopting Mia's observation of them. This is identifiable in a distinct rotation from one position to the other, which emphasises not only the reciprocity of subject and camera performances but also the movement from looking *at* of observational documentary to looking *with* of performative documentary. It also emphasises that this film is partially owned by Mia, particularly as she now stands independently outside both D'Ayala Valva and Sarchiola.

There is also something more complex going on here, which, referring to Butler again, centres on issues of recognisability and viability as a transgendered individual

(2004, p.28). Mia's performance must link into her fantasy given that she feels she has been a success in stealing the limelight. Butler explains that:

Fantasy is not the opposite of reality; it is what reality forecloses, and, as a result, it defines the limits of reality, constituting it as its constitutive outside. The critical promise of fantasy, when and where it exists, is to challenge the contingent limits of what will and will not be called reality. Fantasy is what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise; it establishes the possible in excess of the real; it points elsewhere, and when it is embodied, it brings the elsewhere home. (2004, pp.28-29)

The way in which Mia embodies her gender allows those who meet her to imagine something different. Perhaps more importantly, it allows Mia, as a transgendered individual, to 'enter the political field':

They [drag, butch, femme, transgender, transsexual persons] make us not only question what is real, and what "must" be, but they also show us how the norms that govern contemporary notions of reality can be questioned and how new modes of reality can be instituted. These practices of instituting new modes of reality take place in part through the scene of embodiment, where the body is not understood as a static and accomplished fact, but as an aging process, a mode of becoming that, in becoming otherwise, exceeds the norm, reworks the norm, and makes us see how realities to which we thought we were confined are not written in stone. (Butler, 2004, p.29)

The camera rotations to which I refer above are symbolic of this process, which are as much about an embodied feel coming from D'Ayala Valva and Sarchiola (behind their cameras) as from Mia. These shifts in focus point not only to the process of looking *with* Mia, but also the impetus for that shift, i.e. the transgender gaze, which D'Ayala Valva and Sarchiola obtain through their closer proximity to Mia.

Angel—Mia's evolving agency

It is mainly through the acquisition of a *carte de séjour* (residence permit), after four years in Paris, that Mia is able to explore her subjectivity further. With this, Mia gains greater confidence in the ability to move about with the camera, which sees her returning home to Ecuador in *Angel*. In the opening scene of the film a formal reflexivity is introduced which sets up the greater reflection that marks Mia's performance in the rest of the film. In this scene, Mia and her sister Issy are seen standing in the foreground of a long camera shot position of the Moulin Rouge, D'Ayala Valva having asked 'Shall we start?'. Mia explains to the camera that she just wants to show a little bit of the area in which she lives and to point out the Travelex worldwide money agency from where she sends money back home to her family. Interestingly, at this point, a van passes in the background and has 'Construction, matériaux de' / 'Materials of construction' written on its side. This 'construction van', if you like, is a serendipitous reminder of the construction of the city, the construction of the film, and the construction of the (Queer) self in a constituting rather than constituted way, Mia's sideways look as it passes is a possible indication that she knew it would add to the idea of their project as a performance and construction in itself.

As the scene progresses, it soon becomes clear that a message is being recorded for family back home in Ecuador, with well-wishes from Issy but not from Mia who flatly refuses to send kisses or anything like that because they are never reciprocated (however, she does this in a confident and coquettish way). In a very authoritative tone, she then exclaims to D'Ayala Valva "Coupez!", "Coupez!" / "Cut!", "Cut!" which points both to the performance inherent within this scene, and to the rebalancing of power within their relationship. When Mia (or, more familiarly, Angelito as she is known back home) arrives at her mother's house in 'El Suburbio', Guayaquil, she hands out presents for the children

and her family. She also circulates images of herself back in France, which she appears to use as way of explaining her bodily re-constructions, namely her breast implants and high cheekbones. Mia also shows her family the video clip from the *Moulin Rouge*, which is welcomed by Issy's children (particularly Francisco) who can connect with her in some way while she continues to remain in France. This clip connects Ecuador to France, and vice versa, and illustrates, on a political level, the financial aspect of this transnational link, particularly as it is during the *Moulin Rouge* scene where Mia points out the money agency. The dire economics of this situation recalls the final intertitle of *Les Travestis*: 'Les personnages de ce film ont fui la crise économique et l'homophobie dans leur pays. Aujourd'hui l'argent envoyé par les immigrants équatoriens à leurs familles est la première ressource économique du pays après le pétrole'.¹⁸⁸

Issy's message to her children in the *Moulin Rouge* scene is also reciprocated by Francisco at the very end of *Angel* during which he says in a video clip that she sits watching: 'I send an "hello" to France. I send a kiss to my mother. I love her a lot. I would like her to come back when it's my birthday and to stay all day before going back to work' ('do you remember your mother?', D'Ayala Valva asks) 'Yes, she is beautiful, very beautiful, I love her loads...'. These formal reflexive qualities reiterate the construction of the film itself, but also highlight the role of documentary film in connecting people from different places. The transnational connection here points to a political reflexivity that raises questions over how and why people fall into forced economic migration, Francisco's innocent request that Issy return to work appearing rather disturbing and unsettling for the spectator.

¹⁸⁸ 'The characters in this film have fled the economic crisis and homophobia of their countries. Today, money sent by Ecuadorian prostitutes to their families is the first economic resource after petrol'.

Angel's increasing reflexivity is reflected in the camera's focus on a television advert for the film *The Full Monty*, which appears on a television screen in her mother's house: 'Let's reveal all! Six men who have nothing to lose are going to use all their 'attributes' to earn a living their way', 'in the most revealing of comedies, *The Full Monty*'. As Halberstam suggests, this film challenges and reconfigures the traditional male gaze when one of the strippers, Gaz, secretly watches a woman urinate while standing at a urinal and when the troupe finally strip for the women who now occupy the auditorium seats, the economic power reconfigured since the closing of the steel works (Halberstam, 2005, pp.139–140). This dismantling of the traditional male gaze is something that Mia/Angel does throughout *Les Travestis* and *Angel*, particularly in the way she adopts a transgender gaze and moves confidently with her body. However, *The Full Monty* is a different type of film to *Angel*, clearly being a more utopian spectacle; Mia's utopia is one in which gender binaries are abolished, which is a somewhat more difficult task.

Angel's movements in and around the variety of rural and urban areas that she visits appear more confident, fluid and mobile in comparison to Paris (although she does hear verbal insults en route). There is a scene in which she passes some schoolchildren while out walking her dog dressed as a woman when she informs the spectators (indirectly while talking to a family member/friend who is accompanying her): 'They were saying dreadful things, those kids'. There are also a number of threatening wolf whistles that follow her; however, Angel has no difficulty in challenging the children who have insulted her and does so quite forcefully: 'Please children, keep your stupid ideas to yourselves when you are in my presence. I do not sleep with the criminals or whores who gave you life, do me a favour and learn some respect'. There is a feeling here that Mia/Angel gets a degree of protection from D'Ayala Valva's presence, which,

similarly to the Pride march scenes, allows her to explore her own environment and to draw attention from the those around her. This allows them to address her, this time with verbal insults and not the camera's gaze and undivided attention. It is clear that Angel's behaviour challenges those everyday spaces that she traverses in *Angel*, her gender ambiguity appearing incompatible with it; however, having regained her fluency, she can recognise and so respond to these insults.

Mia is also frequently seen and referred to as Angelito, the boxer, throughout the film, which is reinforced by old photographs and recollections of him as very masculine and feared. At the boxing club where she used to train, she is seen donning a pair of gloves to train on one of the punch bags while wearing a halter neck top. Just prior to this scene, the trainer says to the group of novice boxers during an exercise session (with Angel next to him): 'My aim is to unsettle you, yours is not to fall into my trap. I want to see if you're awake', 'Up! Down!'. This fighting talk is applicable to Angel's transgender gaze and the dominant male spectatorship position, Angel seeking to shock and to destabilise the opponent's (or rather viewer's) normative frames of reference and the opponent's (or rather viewer's) position seeking to support and sustain them. Mia's subsequent boxing of the (phallic shaped) punch bag appears symbolic as a result of this encounter, pointing to a victory on her part in terms of moving on from her previous embodiment as a very masculine man in a space deemed fit for that, namely the boxing ring.

In *Angel*, the spectator learns from Alexis Ponce (co-founder of the first Trans-rights movement in Ecuador, 'Coccinelli' / 'Ladybirds'), that 'El Mujerón' / 'La Grande Femme' / 'The Big Woman' (i.e. Mia) was a central figure in facilitating the Transgender Movement in Ecuador, being both feared and respected by the police because of her background as a boxer. With this information, there is the potential retrospective

evaluation of Mia's political consciousness in *Les Travestis*, seen both to highlight her capacity as a very promising Queer figure but also one that was severely contained in view of her status as a *sans papiers*.

Angel's challenge to both public and private spaces in Ecuador is clearly linked to the dominance of the Church. D'Ayala Valva cross cuts separate interview scenes of Alexis Ponce and Christian Landeta Centeno talking about article 3 of the Constitution and static images of a variety of churches in Ecuador and scenes of intense worship.¹⁸⁹ These two men claim that this constitutional right of non-discrimination based on sexual orientation is not applied in Ecuador. It would appear that D'Ayala Valva is making a statement about Evangelical Churches in particular given the Churches represented in these intercutting scenes.¹⁹⁰ The Catholic Church in Ecuador has seen a greater challenge from Protestantism since the 1960s and 1970s, particularly from the Evangelical Church—one study claiming that it has been divisive in certain indigenous communities and supportive of repressive governments (Cleary and Steigenga, 2004, pp.12–13). D'Ayala Valva emphasises the repressive and forceful influence exerted by religious thought by cross cutting scenes of religious fervour with those who seek to challenge this; in so doing, he creates a sort of 'battlefield' montage between the two. There is also a particularly powerful contrast between Reverend Alfredo Garcia who claims that 'man must not change into a woman or a woman into a man' (knowing of many people who had gone to France to earn money in a number of illicit ways) and Alexis Ponce who concludes this section by exclaiming that 'it is easier to oppose a policeman who throws you into a river than a man who holds a bible in his hand' and that what needs to be

¹⁸⁹ Christian Landeta Centeno is from the Foundation of Friends for Life—*Famivida*.

¹⁹⁰ 'Iglesia Evangelica La Santidad de Dios', 'La Iglesia de Jesucristo de Los Santos de Los Ultimos Dìos', 'Iglesia Evangelica 'Gilgal' Metodista Libre', 'Iglesia Cristiana Evangélica Muros de Salvacion Puertas de Alabanza'.

challenged is everyday speech and the mind-set of prejudice that is reproduced within the family.

However, Mia continues to attach an ongoing value to the ties that she has with her family who live in 'El Suburbio', an economically deprived area rooted in Evangelical Protestantism. It is alongside this commitment to her family that Mia has sought to re-construct herself in both a physical and metaphorical way through the construction of the film and her retirement house in Tena; however, during her stay in Ecuador, she slowly realises that neither her family—and the familiar spaces that they occupy and that she thought she knew so well—nor the documentary encounter provide her any safe place for the future. In positioning herself more critically through the documentary process, Mia recognises that her family have drained her both financially and emotionally. As the camera tracks Angel's movement in and around 'El Suburbio', and her progress thereafter to Tena, it sees her becoming increasingly distant from her family and Ecuador.

Mia's journey in Ecuador takes her from 'El Suburbio' to Guayaquil and then onto Quito and then the village of Carondelet, in the Province of Esmeraldas (where her father lives, separated from her mother) to Tena where her house is being constructed. As she progresses further away from 'El Suburbio', she appears less likely to return and while there is a feeling of rejection she is able to realise that she has a degree of power in terms of choice. There is a rather poignant moment when Angel returns to meet her father, whose failing eyes mean that he cannot see her (despite her having funded treatment to prevent them from getting worse). During their conversation, despite Angel bringing her father out of his house into the light, he still cannot see her; instead, her father is more concerned about what Angel might have brought for him, which riles Angel: 'Instead of saying "finally my son here you are with me", what do you want me to bring you?'. Mia/Angel further challenges her father by claiming that he has given land to Patrice and

Andre (his sons from his second marriage) but absolutely nothing to her. This encounter is significant on two counts; firstly, Angel is rendered invisible by it; secondly, the normative cyclical nature of the traditional family unit is not channelled through Angel by her father (even though her father apparently knows nothing of her life in Paris and from where his current income is coming).

Before the final stage of her journey—the point at which she expects to see her constructed home—she is seen waiting at a bus station. There are cockroaches everywhere and Angel is shaking them off her jacket. At the same time a very notable sign is visible above a shop in the background, which says ‘Brava’. It is a scene symbolic with the suggestion that Angel is getting rid of her past, and those who have drained her financially, and is doing the right thing by moving on. When Angel arrives at the partially constructed house, her nephew—who is called ‘El Gordo’ / ‘The Fatty’—asks whether his mother has come with her. Angel responds with ‘I came alone, very alone’ and subsequently reflects upon the state of the house with ‘I expected better, I expected a lot better’. This is a significant stage of the film in that any previous fears that Mia had about whether to stay in Ecuador are answered by the uninhabitable nature of this place and the draining of resources that ‘El Gordo’ represents. There is also an acknowledgement by Angel in this scene that she no longer needs the help of D’Ayala Valva by declaring that she has come alone, his work is now done. Or, equally, it could be that she has come alone as the ‘documentarist’ of this film, her body now well in tune with the documentary process. There is a final realisation that she must now do this on her own, given that she has a greater understanding of her place in the world.

As a ‘diasporic queer subject’ Mia poses a significant challenge to the nation and its reproduction along heteronormative filial lines. Her invisibility within these normative frames—as an economic source for Ecuador and a commodity for the French sex trade—

is exposed through the alignment of the camera with her perspective in a very embodied way. The films' chronicling of her geographical mobility is a particularly notable performance in itself, the camera seen not only to guide and to protect her, but also to destabilise and to realign those who follow and survey her, whether from the point of view of the spectator or those within her historical world. This allows Mia to reflect upon her dislocation, a process through which she achieves a sense of emplacement. The national, global, and transnational predominate in these two films, interconnecting with a number of other films in this thesis as already discussed and adding to a committed and engaged French and Italian Queer cinema.

The most striking aspect of the films in this section is the extent to which the transgender narratives are performed and embodied through the documentary encounter. Recalling Prosser's work in the introduction to this section, this demonstrates how 'gender and genre' can be seen to reflect each other through the [transsexual's] act of looking at the self while reflecting upon that self projected, the difference between 'the subject of enunciation and the enunciated subject' (1998, p.102). In adopting this position in the chosen films in this section, the transgender individual is seen to occupy a more critical position in relation to the mode of representation as well as the issue of gender. Compared to the stabilisation and rationalisation of the transgender narrative, this results in a range of different performances which reflect the specific quality to which Vendemmiati refers in his description of his film as 'transgender'. The differences noted between the three films evidence the widening of perspective from the dominance of medical discourse on transsexuality to the more complex transgender gaze, suggesting the commitment of documentary filmmakers in France and Italy to engage with transgenderism at a very thoughtful level. The critical position occupied, and the complexity of the lives lived by

those represented in these films, fits into the *lieu factice* that I propose, which is seen to interconnect with others in similar positions of dis-location as performed through the documentary encounter where the mode of representation is scrutinised as much as what is represented.

Conclusion

This work has investigated performance, identity, and place in Queer documentary cinema in France and Italy from 2000 onwards, a period when these two countries saw an increase in output of documentary films relating to issues of non-normative genders and sexualities. My interest lay in the intricacies of the documentary treatment of these issues in contexts with a shared cinematic history and a complex approach to the accommodation of ‘difference’. In spite of the greater visibility of lesbians and gay men in mainstream media and fictional cinematic representations in France and Italy (more generally from the 1990s onwards)—much of which has been shown to be limited in terms of its ability to unsettle normative processes regarding gender and sexuality (Rollet, 2006, p.341; Malici, 2011, pp.125–126)—my research has sought to consider the role of documentary in this visibility as well as part of a wider and more committed cinema, including New Queer Cinema. My focus on documentary reflects the greater accessibility to advanced media technology during the period of interest, which has allowed for greater self-representation and the potentialities of documentary as a more radical starting point in comparison to fiction (Rancière 2006, p. 158).

Drawing on Günther and Heathcote’s reference to the ‘monolithic paradigm of universalism’ and the ‘double-edged’ nature of equality in France (2006, p.288), and Mudu’s reference to the ‘repressive tolerance’ of Italy where ‘difference’ is accepted only in private spaces (2002, p.195), the thesis focuses on the idea of the *lieu factice* as a way of conceptualising the negotiation of non-normative sexual and gendered identities in contexts where a universal approach to ‘difference’ predominates. The focus of the *lieu*

factice is on ‘creation’, the documentary seen as a site of agency which reflects the contradictions and ambiguities of Queer lives and visibility in France and Italy.

I believe that the increased output in Queer documentary in these two countries since 2000 reflects a heightened awareness of the ongoing intolerance towards ‘difference’ across Europe (Duyvendak, 2011, p.1). For example, Meyrou’s realisation that homophobia was as much of a problem in France as it was elsewhere (at the time of researching his film, which would eventually become *Au-delà de la haine*) and Marcias’s acknowledgement of the lack of recognition of the non-biological parent in a non-traditional family set-up in *Ma La Spagna* (Meyrou, 2006; Porru, 2010, pp.13–14), are suggestive of a realisation by filmmakers that ‘difference’ is not always easily accommodated in the context of France and Italy. While the collaboration and resistance evidenced within the films studied here can be seen as reactive to this intolerance, particularly notable in the transgender documentary films in the final section, any connection to an increase in documentary filmmaking warrants further research. What is clear is that Queer documentary cinema in France and Italy, considered in my *lieu factice* as a site of resistance to homogenisation in universal terms, is a worthwhile area of study as it recognises the heterogeneity of voice beyond the potentially limited dynamics of mainstream LGBTQ representations.

In considering the possibility of a ‘new queer documentary cinema’ in France and Italy since 2000—in light of Rich’s New Queer Cinema concept (a concept which, in the past, has predominantly been applied to the Anglo-American setting)—the films that I have studied evidence a documentary cinema that is innovative, creative, committed, ethical, and political. Furthermore, most of the directors have been seen to optimise distribution by utilizing some of the features identified by Rich such as the internet and other methods for promoting their work like the festival scene (2013, p.267). This vitality

is particularly obvious in Italy with the inauguration of the following film festivals in recent years: Sicilian Queer filmfest, Divergenti and Gender DocuFilm Fest. This development, already seen as significant for the Italian context regarding the representation of transgenderism at a more serious level, will require further observation in terms of output and impact.

In the selection of film texts that I have analysed, the issues raised within them are seen as having the ability to connect with others elsewhere—not specifically in themselves but also through the supra-territorial ‘indeterminacy’ of a documentary film language which has developed in part through a shared cinematic history in France and Italy and which allows people to connect by way of a recognisable and expressive form. This has also afforded the queering of documentary, allowing for a challenge to the hegemonic structures that seek to represent reality as coherent (Holmund and Fuchs, 1997, pp.3–5). I have illustrated that the first point is possible by drawing attention to the physical and shared connections established between people both inside and outside the films. In relation to the second point, I believe that the level of sophistication in the selected films has the ability to influence Anglo-American contexts in what O’Rourke describes as an ‘ebb and flow, a migratory queer traffic’ between the U.S. and Europe (2011, p.xv). This also reflects Patanè’s claim that the origins of New Queer Cinema can be found in the expressive forms of European cinema (1998).

I have shown how the transversal and ‘rhizomatic’ nature of the chosen films repositions both the spectator and the documentary participant more critically and relationally; this is a particularly notable feature in the transnational aspects of the work of Hofer and Ragazzi, Marcias and D’Ayala Valva, and demonstrates the potential for Queer documentary cinema in France and Italy to compete beyond national borders in line with the dynamics of Rich’s New Queer Cinema. It is also clear from my analyses

that the film texts are seen both to reflect upon and to challenge modes of ‘representation’—a significant theme, I argue, in the treatment of Queer visibility in France and Italy. The interrogation of ‘representation’ is seen in the following key aspects of the texts: the ‘notional film’ in *Au-delà de la haine*; the radical use and re-use of archive material in *Tabous et Transgressions* and Vallois’s other work; the interplay of the ‘ontic’ and the ‘ontological’ in *Improvvisamente* and *Ma La Spagna* in the mixing of fact and fiction, and issues of representation and reality: and the transgender narratives created through the embodiment of the camera in *La Persona de Leo N.* and *Les Travestis* and *Angel*. The films that I have analysed reflect the more critical position of documentary film in relation to the mainstream, which I consider is a response to the important observation by Elsaesser that the greatest threat to European cinema is not from Hollywood but from television instead (2006, p.651). The work of Meyrou, Hofer and Ragazzi, and Marcias, in particular, demonstrates how ‘representation’ should be considered in more critical terms, including a serious reflection upon how one is represented by the dominant hegemonic perspective and modes of representation that seek to shape it.

In developing the concept of the *lieu factice*, one of the major issues that this thesis had to resolve in allowing the documentary films to be seen in more mobile terms was to respond to the tension between the performance of ‘documentary qua documentary’ and performative documentary content, which I have argued have the potential to overlap. This latter point is seen as particularly effective in dealing with transgender narratives where the stories recounted are very much embodied through the documentary encounter; forming part of the ‘self-authorisation’ that occurs in the transgender individual’s realignment of sex and gender by way of continuously looking into the mirror (Prosser, 1998, p.101), the transgender documentaries studied in this thesis

can be seen as following a similar process. Whilst the New Documentary Wave seen from 1998 onwards brought with it an associated freeing up of documentary almost to the point where it could do whatever it pleased in representing reality (Chanan, 2007, pp.3–14), the concern that I have with the *performing documentarist* is that it may encourage a formulaic constative documentary performance, which would somehow inhibit the wider interpretation of a film's role in representing minority voices (in an already media-saturated environment). I argue that this is a crucial consideration in contexts where 'difference' is restricted by the universal.

In the assignment of 'place' according to universal processes—like Eribon identifies in his consideration of the assignment of a subordinate place to the gay man through 'I injure' / 'the insult' (2004, p.17)—the *performing documentarist*, in the utterance of his or her work predominantly as a performance of 'documentary qua documentary', could restrict the elaboration of a notion of 'performative documentary'. In its emphasis on the constative documentary performance, as highlighted by Scheibler (1993, p.140), this could limit the interpretation of the documentary encounter to the performance of documentary itself, as a construction. In the performance of documentary, a place is potentially assigned; in *Au-delà de la haine*, for example, this is seen in its evidencing of the republican model and the dissolving of 'difference' through the iconic figure of François as a symbol of French republican universality. However, the defining feature of this film, the long take, is seen to expose and to interrogate this system of representation, which is identifiable through my Queer reading. All the films that I have analysed in this thesis demonstrate the ability to queer dominant processes of representation and to create alternative Queer realities which refuse the assignment of place as represented through either the universal or the dominant. This is a key finding of my analyses.

In building up a framework for the analysis of Queer documentary in France and Italy, I brought together a number of key Queer concepts in dealing with the issues of visibility and invisibility associated with exerting one's 'difference' in these two countries. In an attempt to redress the imbalance between 'representation' and 'creation' in French and Italian cinema analysis, I argue that it is vital to approach Queer documentary in these two countries with 'agency' in mind. The issue of 'representation' is a particular concern of O'Leary and O'Rawe (amongst others) who have sought in their 'manifesto' to move beyond cinema as a direct reflection of the nation (2011, pp.107, 121). I argue that this concern (within the context of documentary) can be addressed by focusing on subtle performative movements that occur alongside the more obvious structural features of a film, which thereby encourages a shift away from an overemphasis on 'representational' features to a consideration of the 'creation' of the film and what this might say about performance as a result. This approach allows for a variety of voices to be identified, which are clearly evidenced in my analyses of the films. I argue that the wide ranging nature of these voices in France and Italy defines them as 'Queer', and, therefore, as a contributor to Rich's New Queer Cinema through its 'inclusive' and 'fluid' nature (2013, p215). However, I have found that a specific quality of French and Italian Queer documentary cinema relates to the challenge it seeks to present to dominant modes of representation. Crucially, this also includes self-reflexive performances which seek not only to illuminate the role of documentary in the construction of meaning but also to reflect the ambiguous and contradictory position of Queer lives as an artificial performance within the contexts of France and Italy and its universal approach to 'difference'.

In view of this latter point, I consider de Villiers's 'queer opacity' particularly useful when approaching the interaction between the Queer individual subject and those

who have come to maintain normative hegemonic discourse (2012, p.6). Although most notable when considered in relation to interactions with the media, this was also identifiable in relation to other representatives of dominant discourse; for example, those from the religious orders, and health and legal professionals involved in gender transitioning procedures. In applying ‘queer opacity’ to the French and Italian documentaries studied here, a greater understanding is achieved of the complexity of interactions between the marginalised and the mainstream in these settings and the overlap between lives as lived privately and publicly. While this highlights the difficulties of openly expressing sexuality in public settings, it critically exposes the irony of the situation through the documentary format, which is a significant contribution of the films I have analysed. In Hofer and Ragazzi’s case, this was seen to be used with a degree of comic effect. In Meyrou’s film, while François is never seen visually, his ‘opacity’ through the park scenes exposes the dominant republican ideology of universalism in which he is a part; honoured at this year’s *IDAHO*¹⁹¹ event in Reims, and previously evoked in the reclamation of a street by *SOS Homophobie*¹⁹² (*FranceTvInfo*), François represents the irony of the French republican system—in particular, the visibility and invisibility, and ‘double occupancy’ and ‘hyphenation’ of its minorities.

By introducing the idea of the *lieu factice* as an ‘electronic elsewhere’, as a place that is ‘conjured up’ (Berry *et al*, 2010, p. vii), rather than as the ‘representation’ of a particular place, I have sought to draw attention to the more individual and marginal perspective. I argue that the films that I have studied demonstrate the more radical nature of documentary by drawing attention to the scene as a construction allowing for

¹⁹¹ *International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia*, which took place 17th May 2013.

¹⁹² ‘Association Nationale de Lutte Contre la Lesbophobie, la Gayphobie, la Biphobie et la Transphobie’ / [National Association in the Fight Against Lesbophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia]; for further information see: <http://www.sos-homophobie.org/>.

alternative realities. While this emphasises the self-referential qualities of documentary, seen in Marcias's film to reflect in part a mock-documentary, it does not deflect from the more personal stories that come through; in fact, these constructions have been seen in this thesis to reflect the particularities of the identities recounted. Vallois's concept of 'cinétherapie' reflects this position too as does Nicole's narrative of transition through the montage scenes. Under these circumstances, the documentary encounter can be considered as both a 'safe space' (Wharton, 2008, p.108), in which the self is explored and re-created in a variety of ways, and as a site where the distance between 'representation' and 'represented' can be played out, as in Prosser's prioritising of the texts of the transsexual 'authorial subject' over those of the 'medicodiscursive' formation (1998, p.9). This has been seen to be particularly productive in post-identity terms and also to a possible notion of 'new queer documentary cinema' in relation to France and Italy. It also reflects my concept of the *lieu factice* as a way of approaching documentary as a representation of the self or others.

In considering the *lieu factice* as reflecting the mode of representation and the context of those lives represented, I have identified specific themes as significant in the films. It is clear that the 'family' is a particularly strong theme, one which is seen to be shaped within hegemonic discourse surrounding the nation and associated gender normative frameworks. The transgender film section is testimony to the ongoing need to consider gender as a key issue in relation to the matter of sexuality, which, in the past, have been separated from each other through processes of 'homonormativity' and a Queer politics perceived as neutral to gender (Duggan, 2003, pp.64–65; Jagose, 1996, p.116). These films draw attention to the importance of gender to the wider LGBTQ community as it has been seen as a factor in homophobic attacks and the basis of anti-same-sex parenting and partnership discourses.

Another theme to emerge from the selected films is the placeless qualities of the Queer lives featured. This is displayed in different ways in each film; from François as an abstract figure iconic of French republican universality in *Au-delà de la haine* to Vallois's use of archive footage in the continuous re-creation of a sense of 'place' in *Tabous et Transgressions*, and from the self-induced homelessness of Hofer and Ragazzi in *Italy* to the 'diasporic queer subject' of Mia/Angel in *Les Travestis* and *Angel*, the ability to feel emplaced comes through by way of a sense of being dislocated. The idea of the *lieu factice* helps to articulate and to realise this particular position in the context of documentary filmmaking. Of particular note is the use of archive footage; seen not only in the work of Vallois, and Hofer and Ragazzi, but also, amongst others, the work of Avellis and Marcello, this reflects the desire both to retain more radical positions in relation to cinema and to create a sense of place as a *lieux de mémoire*, seen in the context of the films studied here as mutable and artificial and concerned with playing out the tensions between a politics and the political.

Through the *lieu factice* I have drawn attention to the importance of performance, identity, and place within the documentary encounter. In highlighting its artifice in both physical and rhetorical terms it offers benefits as a conceptual framework to the consideration of French and Italian Queer documentary cinema, and perhaps even more fictional cinematic representations too. The various features of performance and agency associated with the *lieu factice* that I propose are not isolated to any one film, they are seen instead to overlap with each other; yet the concept allows documentary cinema in France and Italy to define itself on its own Queer terms taking into account socio-political and cultural issues. It emphasises the importance of focusing on the individual film and the 'creation' involved in that film, which, taking into consideration the influential cinematic histories of these two countries, is able to offer something different to the wider

concept of Queer cinema—this amounts to a more critical position in relation to cinematic representation.

Appendix A

ALCUNE CONSIDERAZIONI SUL MIO DOCUMENTARIO SU LUCY

La rappresentazione del transgenderismo in Italia risente di una forte stereotipizzazione: la transessuale MtoF (gli FtoM sono stati praticamente invisibili fino a tempi recentissimi) è stata spesso rappresentata come prostituta, con caratteristiche molto insistite ed esagerate, oppure è stata ridicolizzata, presentata come persona volgare, ignorante, dai tratti somatici volutamente grotteschi, caricaturali. Questo vale anche per la rappresentazione dell'omosessualità maschile in Italia. Penso a film come *Il Vizierto*, per esempio. Penso a molti sketch televisivi dagli Anni Sessanta in poi. Sono pochissime le transessuali che hanno parlato di sé e della propria vita in prima persona (Giò Stajano, la Romanina), ancora meno le transessuali che non si prostituiscono a cui viene data la possibilità di apparire e parlare.

Il documentario su Lucy va contro ogni tipo di stereotipo sulla transessualità e non solo: intanto il fatto che la protagonista sia anziana è molto inusuale perché la rappresentazione della transessualità MtoF in Italia è spesso collegata alla prostituzione e perciò ad un'età non avanzata, alla bellezza, la perfezione del corpo, ecc. In secondo luogo la storia di Lucy è caratterizzata da una forte drammaticità e quindi in qualche modo tradisce le aspettative di chi è abituato a un racconto incentrato sul sesso, sugli eccessi, tradizionalmente associato alle "trans": Lucy è una reduce dei campi di concentramento, ha combattuto in guerra, è stata rifiutata dalla famiglia, ha avuto un padre violento, ecc.... Infine, Lucy è anche una figura di "anti-eroe" perché è un disertore e quando è stato catturato (uso il maschile perché all'epoca era Luciano) non ha voluto tornare nell'esercito italiano, ma ha preferito entrare a servizio per le forze armate tedesche per paura di ritorsioni: anche questo va completamente contro la figura tradizionale di quanti hanno raccontato le loro avventure di guerra, la loro esperienza di quel periodo. La memoria orale e scritta di chi è sopravvissuto alla Seconda Guerra Mondiale segue un'impostazione ben diversa in Italia! Anche quindi in questo senso la storia di Lucy è davvero unica: ha confessato senza reticenze e senza problemi la diserzione e il passaggio all'esercito nemico, due veri tabù nella narrazione della guerra.

Un personaggio con un percorso così singolare mi ha subito messo in una situazione narrativa molto particolare: in effetti non c'è niente e nessuno a cui si può riportare Lucy, la sua vicenda, la sua rappresentazione. Lucy è inoltre controcorrente in molti altri aspetti: è contraria all'intervento chirurgico di riassegnazione di genere, che ha fatto molto tardi (altra anomalia), intorno ai 60 anni, e di cui si è molto pentita. Non ha mai voluto cambiare il nome di battesimo sui documenti, altro punto ritenuto fondamentale dalla maggioranza dei/delle transessuali, italiani e non. Si è prostituita per necessità, ma ha

anche svolto la professione di tappezziere, di cui è fiera e per la quale ottiene oggi la pensione. E che è una professione tradizionalmente maschile. Ha deciso di raccontare pubblicamente la sua storia non nel dopo-guerra, come hanno fatto quasi tutti i reduci della deportazione nazista, ma molto tempo dopo. Ed è una delle pochissime transessuali della sua generazione che ha accettato di parlare della sua vita.

Quindi è un personaggio veramente a sé, avulso da tutti e tutto. Nel rappresentarla sapevo già che il solo parlare di lei andava contro ogni stereotipo passato e presente. Non ho dovuto insistere su nessun dettaglio visivo per sottolineare la straordinaria originalità del personaggio e delle sue scelte di vita. La decisione di intervistarla in situazioni di domesticità o comunque molto di routine, tipo la passeggiata ai giardini, l'aperitivo in piazza, lei che lava i piatti, ecc... è voluta perché sottolinea il fatto che, sotto l'apparente vita "normale", si nasconde un personaggio realmente straordinario, sotto l'apparenza del documentario-ritratto tradizionale c'è una storia davvero fuori dalle righe.

Per quanto riguarda il mio rapporto con Lucy: inizialmente pensavo che sarebbe stato meglio farla intervistare da una transessuale e avevo coinvolto una trans MtoF molto impegnata politicamente, che vive a Bologna e che aveva all'epoca circa 50 anni. Ci sono stati alcuni incontri tra loro, sia in mia presenza che in mia assenza, per vedere se il rapporto di collaborazione poteva funzionare e io inizialmente ero convinta che ci fosse maggiore affinità tra loro due e che quindi ci sarebbe stata un'intervista più intima, meno fromale. Ma Lucy ha dichiarato di non volersi far intervistare da questa persona e ha insistito che la intervistassi io. Penso che, come mi è anche successo per le interviste con gli anziani gay che parlano di fascismo, la generazione di Lucy si senta giudicata da chi, nella propria comunità, è più giovane. Credo che il fatto che io fossi più "distante" dal transgenderismo abbia favorito la sua volontà di raccontarsi con sincerità, mentre la trans più giovane e attivista ha decisamente intimorito Lucy. Troppi sono stati gli elementi di disaccordo tra loro sul transgenderismo, mentre io, essendo esterna al dibattito, ho ascoltato ogni sua dichiarazione senza ribattere, senza giudicare. Sono convinta che, nell'intervistare una persona, sia spesso vantaggioso essere un po' all'oscuro di quanto verrà detto: si ascolta con più attenzione, chi racconta ha maggiore voglia di spiegare, di farsi capire da chi non sa e si sente libero dai vincoli della propria comunità di appartenenza, cioè può parlare a ruota libera, commentare, fare dichiarazioni senza doversi censurare in alcun modo, non dover usare parole d'ordine. Perciò l'intervistatore secondo me deve avere una affinità con l'intervistato, ovviamente, cioè deve essere in qualche modo vicino e al corrente delle problematiche che lo riguardano, ma deve anche avere un certo margine di distanza. Il rapporto di Lucy con la comunità trans bolognese è stato sempre piuttosto critico da parte sua e per questo motivo non ha voluto confidarsi con un rappresentante di questa comunità.

La difficoltà è stata principalmente trovare i finanziamenti per il film: molti hanno sollevato dei dubbi sull'autenticità della storia di Lucy perché è riemersa con enorme ritardo. Perché – chiedevano o sottintendevano – ha deciso di parlare solo ora? Il sospetto

era che Lucy inventasse tutto per crearsi un personaggio “eroico”. C'è stato molto scetticismo. Secondo me questo è un aspetto molto interessante: abbinare eroismo e transessualità è sembrato a molti impossibile. Anche se poi, come ho accennato, la storia di Lucy unisce eroismo e vigliaccheria, cambi di opinione, contraddizioni. Lucy non è un eroe classico tipo film di Hollywood. Ma il suo coraggio, la tragicità della sua esperienza di vita erano già considerate “troppo” tanto da sembrare a molti inverosimili, inventate. Come se da una transessuale ci si potesse soltanto aspettare un espediente per attirare su di sé l'attenzione, una bugia dettata dalla vanità.

Sono molte le istituzioni e le associazioni da me interpellate che non hanno sostenuto il progetto o che lo hanno sostenuto “tiepidamente”, cioè con un piccolo contributo pro-forma e io credo che uno dei motivi principali di questa astensione sia stata proprio la transessualità della protagonista. Ma non si è trattato solo di transfobia classica, del non volersi associare a questioni glbtq, ma proprio di un pregiudizio ancora più profondo che non riesce a concepire la Storia raccontata da una trans, che mette in dubbio ogni sua dichiarazione che travalichi la sfera dello strettamente personale. Ho avuto la percezione che molti pensassero che, se una transessuale pronunciava la parola “Dachau”, questa fosse una profanazione. In tutta onestà, se un sopravvissuto dei campi di concentramento non glbt dichiarasse oggi di voler raccontare la sua esperienza, credo che ci sarebbe un altro tipo di risposta.

Sono stata molto sincera con Lucy e le ho spiegato per filo e per segno tutte le difficoltà che ho incontrato nella fase di pre-produzione, compresa quella di trovare finanziamenti: penso che questo sia stato uno dei motori propulsivi del progetto. Cioè Lucy, a cui nessuno aveva mai chiesto niente circa il suo passato, si è molto indispettita e intestardita quando ha visto che quello che voleva raccontare non veniva creduto, non era preso sul serio. Lì la mia e la sua caparbia si sono cementate una volta per tutte e lei ha deciso che non si sarebbe più tirata indietro. Cioè: è così che ha deciso che questo era un film che si doveva fare a tutti i costi. E il lavoro è stato molto faticoso perché abbiamo viaggiato in condizioni abbastanza improvvise, i giorni di Dachau, Torino e Fossano sono stati freddissimi, tornare in certi luoghi è stato doloroso, abbiamo girato per un periodo molto lungo, facendo e ri-facendo, il calendario delle riprese, per una persona di più di 80 anni, è stato pesante.

Contemporaneamente, anche per me è scattato un meccanismo molto simile a quello di Lucy: di fronte all'incredulità delle istituzioni e dell'associazionismo, di fronte a chi si dimostrava ostile al progetto perché trattava, secondo loro, di una “collaborazionista” e quindi era *politically incorrect*, di fronte allo scetticismo generale nei miei confronti, cioè di film-maker impegnata sul fronte della storia orale glbtq da più di 20 anni, mi sono indispettita e impuntata in modo simile a Lucy e ho voluto portare a termine questo progetto nonostante la evidente mancanza di fondi e mezzi adeguati (il documentario è stato dichiarato concluso anche se non è stato possibile effettuare il sound-mix finale per mancanza di fondi). Si è trattato di una dimostrazione da parte mia che non soltanto questa storia era – è – importante, ma che io sono in grado di valutarne l'importanza. Quindi

questo film è stato un po' anche un modo per asserire la mia professionalità, che veniva messa in discussione continuamente.

La storia di Lucy ha molti punti di contatto con la mia biografia, non solo questo (siamo entrambe piemontesi d'origine, ma viviamo altrove, entrambe abbiamo due fratelli alquanto “distanti”, entrambe abbiamo vissuto sulla nostra pelle esperienze come il bullismo o la discriminazione di genere sul lavoro, ecc..), ma questo è stato il punto focale di convergenza: di fronte ad un mondo che largamente ci screditava/scredita e non ci prendeva/prende sul serio come pensavamo/pensiamo di meritare, l'unica risposta per noi possibile è stata/è: continuare, oscurare tutto quello che ci sta intorno e andare sempre e soltanto avanti. In questo aspetto del nostro carattere ci siamo ritrovate in completa sintonia ed è per questo che il progetto è andato avanti in completa sintonia.

Roma, 7 agosto 2013 (email correspondence from Gabriella Romano to Oliver Brett)

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