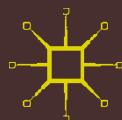


A silhouette of a person wearing a hooded jacket, standing with their back to the camera. The background is a solid, vibrant red. The person's shadow is cast on the ground in front of them.

QUEER APOCALYPSES

Elements of Antisocial Theory

Lorenzo Bernini



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To Tommaso, again and again
To Michele (again and again)
To Francesca

Physicists say that holes are not the absence of particles but particles traveling faster than the speed of light. Flying anuses, speeding vaginas, there is no castration.

[Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari]

Homosexuality exists and does not exist, at one and the same time: indeed, its very mode of existence questions again and again the certainty of existence.

[Guy Hocquenghem]

Sex is not a fatality: it's a possibility for creative life.

[Michel Foucault]

THE SELF-PORTRAIT OF A QUEER RESEARCHER IN ROMEO AND JULIET'S CITY: PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

VERONA, ITALY, SOUTHERN EUROPE

Careful! The book you are holding in your hands “incorrectly attributes the significance of political theory, or better yet, of real and true philosophical reflection to homosexual liberation movements, and thus gives rise to quite a few suspicions of manneristic intellectualism.” Or, at least, one of the members of the board that evaluated my publications at the *Abilitazione Scientifica Nazionale* [National Scientific Qualification] held in Italy in 2014 has claimed this to be the case. Another board member considered an article of mine (Bernini 2011c) written in Portuguese that spoke of the transgender experience as a subversion of heterosexual binary logic to be “of little relevance.” I was competing in the “political philosophy” discipline, and, all things considered, it went pretty well: while I continue to make a researcher’s salary—which, while small, I cannot complain about given the economic crisis—I obtained the title “associate professor,” and in the next six years I will be able to participate in competitions held by Italian Universities for the purposes of filing positions to which this title corresponds. Many of my colleagues will not have this same opportunity. Even though the Political Philosophy Commission has not appreciated the type of research that I direct, it has deemed me qualified for the role to which I aspire; in other philosophical, sociological and literary fields, instead, the majority of researchers that work on sexuality have not obtained their qualification because of the “little disciplinary relevance” ascribed to their work. This reality has outraged many, but has surprised no one. The reasons for this are indeed evident: The Ministry of Education, Universities and Research

does not consider feminist studies, gender studies, and queer theories to be discrete disciplinary sectors, and the scientific communities within existing disciplines find it difficult to recognize the dignity of academic research in these areas. The two opinions I have laid out above may serve as examples: in Italy the critique of compulsory heterosexuality and sexual binarism is considered “of little relevance” even in a discipline like Political Philosophy.¹ And the choice to thematize the sexual position of the subject of research and the ways that queer theories are indebted to the matured reflections within LGBTQIA movements, give rise to “suspicions of manneristic intellectualism.” More precisely, if I may hazard an interpretation of what this euphemistic and pompous expression hides and simultaneously reveals, this choice is met with resistance because it assumes the import of both a methodological, and a political stance, and thus elicits diffidence in those who consider themselves the keepers of the presumed neutrality of university knowledge. In Italy, those who work within gender studies or queer theories, whether they want to be or not, are militant intellectuals who challenge academic conventions and disrupt the heterosexist common beliefs active in the university and in the country. Thus these scholars occupy a liminal position: their referential community is that of activists more so than academics, and their readers and interlocutors belong more to LGBTQIA movements than to the universities. So, since movements and activists offer neither salaries nor scholarships, the destiny of these scholars is marked by a choice between a hardened but noble amateurism at home and legitimized research that receives more peaceful professional affirmation abroad.

My story, however, has been different. If I had to situate the evaluations of the Commission for the National Scientific Qualification within the frame of my academic career, I must admit—with a certain coquetry—that I went looking for them. When I was a philosophy student at the State University in Milan in the nineties, when I pursued my doctorate in political studies at the State University of Turin in the early aughts, and when I was a temporary researcher in various Italian universities, I did not take a single course on feminism, gender studies, or queer theories, because there weren’t any, and I did not meet a single teacher who was willing to tutor me in any of these subjects. No one encouraged me to pursue this path, many, in fact, tried to dissuade me. Even my doctoral research on Michel Foucault’s critique of political modernity was considered “not very educational” and I was forced to extend its scope to include Jürgen Habermas’ attempt to refound political modernity. Not very adept at foreign languages and too lazy to pursue my fortune abroad, or perhaps

too stubborn to admit defeat in the place I called home, for a long while I cultivated my interests outside the university, while simultaneously working on the more traditional themes that were forced on me by the institutional curriculum. An academic position for what I felt a pressing need to study seemed an impossibility. Then the impossible happened: in 2008 I was given an open-ended research position (a position which has since been eliminated because of the university reform put into effect due to the economic crisis) at the State University of Verona, and I was chosen precisely because of those publications which, until that moment, I had had to keep hidden during official academic occasions. The president of the evaluating committee, Adriana Cavarero—a feminist philosopher who, during her youth, had struggled to obtain academic acknowledgment in Italy even when her name was already known abroad—had evidently decided to take advantage of the hiring opportunity to promote gender studies and queer theories. It was extremely fortuitous, it would have been very difficult for me to get hired by a different committee, and I found myself in the right place at the right time. But it was also a sign of the times: it is undeniable that compared to when I was a student, a doctoral student, and a research fellow, something in Italy is definitely changing. In the span of just a few years: publishing imprints dedicated to LGBT studies² and to lesbian feminist and queer theories³ have popped up; a gender studies magazine⁴ was started; and summer schools and conferences dedicated to research on sexuality have been organized—often, but not always, because of initiatives by activist students within feminist and LGBTQIA movements. Still no women’s studies or gender studies departments exist, but interdisciplinary research centers focusing on sexuality are surfacing, one of which, PoliTeSse—Politics and Theories of Sexuality—was founded by me through the State University of Verona in 2012.⁵ A new sensitivity is spreading in Italian universities, and I am proud to contribute. And as a result, both inside and outside of academia, new forms of resistance are springing up in response: the results of the National Scientific Qualifications are just one example.

The city of Verona, in this sense, is paradigmatic. In 2010, when I taught a course on the challenge that queer theories present to the heterosexist conception of the human which serves as the foundation of the classic philosophy of modernity (ch. 5–6, *infra*), letters written by worried mothers appeared in “L’Arena,” the local newspaper. Furthermore, a representative of Christus Rex, a traditionalist Catholic association, wanted to express his grievances to the head of my department. The protests,

however, proved unsuccessful, and the members of *Christus Rex*, after disseminating a public statement in which they accused me of teaching “*frocismo militante*” [“*militant faggottism*”], had to content themselves with a “reparative mass.” The episode might make you smile if it wasn’t indicative of a commonly felt sentiment in the city; a city in which the *Lega Nord* [The Northern League]⁶ governs, and reactionary Catholicism tied to neofascist movements has managed for quite some time to influence institutional choices. In February 1994, when the European Parliament promulgated the first resolution that recommended that member states provide equal juridical treatment for homosexual citizens, it caused great turmoil among the Veronese right wing, and in July 1995 the Verona city council, the only one in Italy, approved a motion to vote down its implementation. Twenty years have passed since then and not only has that motion never been rejected, but in August 2014 the city council voted a new order of the day that—with the intention of defending “natural families formed by the union between a man and a woman” from the “unprecedented cultural aggression that would want to equate those natural families with the unions of people of the same sex through the recognition of their right to adoption and to the ‘production’ of children by means of a surrogate”—asks the mayor and the council to “gather the concerns of parents and teachers in regards to plans for affectivity and sexuality instruction, as well as performances and educational materials that seem to conflict with their moral and religious principles.” Three months later, the Veneto region approved the “celebration of the natural family,” which would take place every year in all schools on the day preceding Christmas break. In March 2014,⁷ for that matter, the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research prevented the distribution of educational pamphlets about sexual difference that the National Anti-Racial Discrimination Office (UNAR), in compliance with a new recommendation of the committee of ministers of the European Council, was about to widely disseminate to teachers all over Italy. A few days earlier, the president of the Italian Episcopal Conference (CEI), Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco spoke out against turning public schools into “reeducation and indoctrination camps.” And a few days later, during his meeting with the International Catholic Child Bureau, Pope Francis declared that “children have a right to grow up in a family with a father and a mother,” and that parents have the right to give their children a religious education. To point to the dangerous ideology that Catholic parents have the right and duty to take a stand against, Bagnasco used an interesting expression now

common among vaticanists, an expression that Pope Francis' entourage would use during the extraordinary Synod on the Family a few months later: "teoria del gender" ["theory of gender"].⁸

The phrase was coined in the mid nineties, and has since received significant editorial support (Galeotti 2010; Montfort 2011; Anatrella 2012; Peeters 2013). Joseph Aloisius Ratzinger also used it when he was still pope during the pre-Christmas talks to the Roman Curia in December 2008, and again during the pre-Christmas talks to the Roman Curia in December 2012, in an effort to hinder the planning of the French law on gay marriage that would get passed in April 2013. The rhetorical force of this expression lies in its singular form, which tendentiously reduces two vast fields of knowledge into one incoherent entity: the theory of gender is, in fact, none other than a caricature of gender studies and queer theories. Tony Anatrella—a priest, psychoanalyst, and author of, among other texts, the entries "Homosexuality and homophobia" and "Juridical recognition of homosexual unions" in the *Lexicon* of the Pontifical Council for the Family (2003)—presents it as an anti-Christian ideology that took the place of Marxism after the fall of the Berlin wall, but unlike Marxism, it has reached a hegemonic position both in the UN and the European Union. In his opinion the theory of gender: denies the essential value that sexual difference assumes in the couple, in the family, and in the children's upbringing; it supports women's empowerment, the exclusion of men from procreation, and the spread of homosexuality; it inspires laws aimed at disrupting the natural order; and it views as unjust the fact that only women can give birth and men cannot breastfeed. Thus, for this prelate, it is about "a vision that is not linked to reality, which sets the stage for unsettling questions for the future" (Anatrella 2012: 36–38, translation Julia Heim). Ever since those who hold the highest positions within the Vatican, beginning with Pope Benedict XVI, have become mouthpieces for this stance, the alarm has sounded and has proliferated all of Catholic public opinion and European political culture: in the last two years communities of believers and oratories have mobilized against the theory of gender; all over Europe, but especially in France and Italy, groups have protested against the promotion of rights and the reduction of the discrimination against LGBTQAI people; even some Italian institutions like the municipality of Verona are against it—the municipality is no longer as isolated as it was in 1994—and the Veneto region voted in favor of resolutions that defend the "natural family."

In Verona, on September 21, 2013, the Famiglia Domani [Family Tomorrow] and Movimento Europeo Difesa della Vita [European

Movement for The Defense of Life] associations organized a conference that obtained the support of the district and the province in Verona, and, with a few variations, was replicated in other cities.⁹ Entitled *La teoria del gender: per l'uomo o contro l'uomo?* [*The Theory of Gender: For or Against Man?*], the symposium opened with greetings from Bishop Giuseppe Zenti and mayor Flavio Tolsi, and continued with speeches whose objective was to defend the right to label homosexuality a disease.¹⁰ Their arguments were based on an interesting reconstruction of the history of Western thought according to which “the theory of gender is a complex of theories that have their basis in a philosophy of rebellion of man against nature, and thus against God” (de Mattei 2014: 29, translation Julia Heim). This history began with humanism, continued with the Enlightenment, with positivism, and with evolutionism, and ultimately led to the nihilism of totalitarianism in the 1900s. For the presenters, only in the Middle Ages did men and women live in accordance with nature and with God, when Thomas Aquinas, in his *Summa Theologiae*, taught that in the end of times human beings would be brought back to life with body and soul, and their bodies would be whole: “Nails and hair will rise again, genitals will rise again, they will not be needed for reproduction, but only for the integrity of human nature” (de Mattei 2014: 33, translation Julia Heim). In other words, it was meaningful to the speakers that they mention that we will rise up males and females as God created us (Genesis 1, 27), encouraging us to populate the world (Genesis 9, 1). No one said what will happen to intersex people on the day of Judgment, maybe they won't rise up at all, but one might intuit that it will truly be a rip-off for transsexual people who have undergone hormone therapy and plastic and reassignment surgeries. During the conference few words were uttered about the destiny of lesbians, while more attention was paid to gays who—it was said—mainly expose themselves to HIV by using their anuses in ways that do not “conform to its shape and function” (Atzori 2014: 58, translation Julia Heim), and thus in ways that are contrary to the nature intended by God.

MODERNIST HALLUCINATIONS AND ANTISOCIAL ANTIDOTES

In the face of this misogynist and heterosexist crusade, it would have been reasonable to expect a strong and unified position taken, if not by associations of university instructors,¹¹ at least by the feminist and LGBTQIA intelligentsia. Instead, in March 2014, Luisa Muraro, a prominent spokesperson for the “theory of difference”—a theory that boasts a

hegemonic position in Italian feminism—sent a letter to the newspaper “il manifesto” to express her opposition to projects of “educational reform inspired by the theory of gender.” And a month later, the gay journalist and historian Giovanni Dall’Orto published an article in “Pride,” the monthly about gay locales, entitled *Contro la teoria queer* [*Against Queer Theory*] which, paradoxically agrees on a number of occasions with the texts written by detractors of the theory of gender, especially in terms of the misinformation, of the conceptual confusion, and of the scarce consequentality within the arguments. The article accuses me, as well as Marco Pustianaz, Christian Lo Iacono, and Edizioni ETS¹² of having “obtusely” imported a set of incomprehensible theories from the United States to Italy, theories that would affirm that “talking about two ‘genders,’ male and female, is the product of a social construction caused by the ‘gender binary’ dictated by ‘heteronormativity’” and thus “there can be as many genders as you’d like” and “homosexuality does not exist” (Dall’Orto 2014: 30, translation Julia Heim).¹³ The spreading of gender studies and queer theories in Italian society has thus met with a lot of resistance not only in academia and conservative environments, but in administrations, educational institutions, and even within feminist and LGBTQIA movements. In this context, the ecclesiastic elite’s reduction of the fields of knowledge to the distorted and confused interpretation of Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity, risks becoming hegemonic. Perhaps the release of *Apocalissi queer: Elementi di teoria antisociale* [*Queer Apocalypses: Elements of Antisocial Theory*] in Italy in October 2013 may have helped clarify things a bit by showing how the complexity of the debate on the queer within the United States would have great difficulty being summed up in one “theory,” but that was certainly not my main motivation for writing the book. Instead of trying to “inform” interlocutors who have no intention of being informed, my intention was to confirm the prejudices of the detractors of gender studies and queer theories—professors, Catholics, feminists, gays—and show how justified their fears are. Even if the theory of gender, in the singular, does not exist, queer theories exist, and above all queer movements and subjects that mean to challenge male power and the heterosexist order, to give more power to women and sexual minorities, to multiply genders, and redefine kinship. They are theories, subjects, and movements that mock traditions and natural laws, and have no intention of asking forgiveness or looking for justifications for their abjection, nor any interest in the pity offered them by Pope Francis whom the Italian left seems to love so much. If it is true that God is love,

they couldn't give a fuck about being loved. The most astute answer to Italian Catholic integralism that I happened to hear was one given by a trans woman activist, Daniela Pompili, who is active in the Verona movements. When Daniela heard that, according to Thomas Aquinas, humans will come back at the end of times with their "real sex," she reacted with enthusiasm: "I can't wait: I'll finally have a vagina without having to get surgery!" What I have written certainly cannot compete with the expressiveness of this reaction, and yet in the (few) words that make it up, I recognize the spirit of the (excessive number of) words that comprise my book. Far from expressing the hope of being able to rise again to the truth of sex at the end of times, my friend Daniela's¹⁴ campy quip gets its strength from her certainty that she has already risen to the "truth" of *her* sex in this time. Queer subjects don't need the judgment of God's so-called Earthly representatives to approve their drives and their sexual desires, nor do they need this judgment in order for them to make use of their bodies, their vaginas, their clitorises, their penises, and their anuses any way they please. Condemned to the solitude of their singularity just like all human beings but in a different way than other human beings, they don't need to find redemption in a universal order (divine, natural, moral, cultural, civil, social, or political) that will confer meaning onto their existence. To the contrary, they can simply get enjoyment from their own senseless, irredeemable negativity, from the unsettling affect that their infamy has on any idea of universal order. As Daniela Pompili's comeback shows, if the apocalypse is the subversion of the present time and the advent of another world in this world, queer subjects—independent of the opinion of Thomas Aquinas, and the upholders of the tradition who want to cure LGBTQIA subjects and lead them back to a healthy heterosexuality, and of the preachers of "the right sort of progress" in which women will be women and gays will be gays in the most appropriate way—have no need for an apocalypse, because for them, the apocalypse, or rather apocalypses, plural, have been happening for a long time. And they keep happening, every moment, even in Italy.

It will become evident while reading that this book does not peacefully cohere to an antisocial position developed in the United States (Bersani 1996, 2010; Edelman 2004)—an "obtuse" import, to say it like Dall'Orto, of theses that were developed in a context that varies greatly from the Italian one. It is true that the book partially recounts the queer debate on antisociality in the United States, which is still not well known in non-Anglophone Europe where queer theories are often confused with

gender studies and integrated into feminism within Butler's thought. But, just as a theory of gender doesn't exist, one singular antisocial theory to which one must adhere doesn't exist either. And what I have attempted to do is retrace the presence of antisocial theoretical elements within a debate that is not born, in my opinion, in the United States universities in the nineties, but (at least) in the European gay liberation movements of the seventies. I hope that my perhaps overly-detailed reconstruction of the crusade against the concept of gender has served to clarify why today, whatever the commissioners of the National Scientific Qualification think, it is not a pose in Italy to acknowledge the debt that queer theories owe to queer movements, and that contemporary queer thought in the United States owes to the European gay, lesbian, and feminist thought that preceded it. Left more or less on their own in their protests against homotransbiphobic conferences¹⁵ and the vigils of the Sentinelle in piedi [Standing Sentinels],¹⁶ Italian LGBTQIA movements cannot let their disappointments or delusions stop them from critical engagement. The panic that was created around their claims places them before an obvious fact: despite all the efforts toward mending the public's image of homosexuality from the stigma of disease and death, and spreading a respectable image of lesbians and gays, despite the pressures from parties on the left and on the right to obtain social recognition for their couples, in the public debate homosexuality is still considered an unnatural practice that deserves AIDS as its divine punishment, as if it had never freed itself from an ancient social stigma. All of this deserves a reflection that is not merely a verification of failure, but one that makes sense of this failure and uses it to reconsider its political agenda. In this situation my effort has been to trace the presence of elements of antisocial queer theory before queer theories, within the reflections developed in the gay liberation movements of France (Hocquenghem 2000) and Italy (Mieli 1994, 2002) in the seventies, and reposition them within those uncomfortable interstices that occur in the Italian public sphere when LGBTQIA movements are able to get a foothold in academia, or simply when young LGBTQIA activists enroll in universities. I have done nothing more, and nothing less. The Ministry of Education Universities and Research may be able to prevent the distribution of the UNAR's antidiscrimination pamphlets to teachers, but it cannot limit the research freedom of its instructors: from the position I hold in the university—I hope because of merit, but surely because of luck—I have at least satisfied my urge, once more, to spread a bit of bad education (Edelman, publication forthcoming). After all, am I or am

I not a “professor of militant faggottism?” If this book does not represent a simple accession to the antisocial position, it is first and foremost because it is directed ideally, if not “at society,” at a potential, discontinuous, ephemeral queer community—a “tribe” without civilization, but not devoid of history (ch. 3, *infra*)—that emerges in the backlight of society, or better yet, in its negative.

As for possible accusations that this work contributes to a cultural imperialist operation, they should be directed elsewhere. I do not at all believe that reconstructing a debate on the queer that was carried out in the United States is equivalent to directing one’s gaze “forward” toward a future that we must help to develop even in the old Europe—even in Southern and Eastern Europe. To the contrary, as I have already mentioned, for me queer apocalypses represent a collapse of times in which the past rises up in the present. In the global world in which numerous temporalities coexist and space has lost its stability, my suggestion is to look around and look backward, in order to understand here and now where we are (where we have always been?). Throughout my book I reproach Leo Bersani for having constructed an ontology of homosexuality that begins with identificatory models from the 1800s, and Lee Edelman for putting too much trust in a structuralist psychoanalysis that freezes the sexual in an unalterable symbolic order that “precedes” every culture (ch. 1, 2, 3, *infra*). When confronted with such strong hypotheses I prefer to follow the tradition of philosophical skepticism of which Michel Foucault (1976) was just one of the great spokespeople: I believe it is worthwhile for LGBTQIA movements and subjects to continue to doubt every alleged truth about sex, not only when it comes from Vatican leaders but also when it comes from queer theories from the US, and to always remain in tune to what, in actuality, calls into question consolidated ways of thinking and feeling. Thus, I do not believe that everything remains immobile on the chessboard of sexuality, that the passing of time and the action of human beings leave no trace, or that the surface of the symbolic order is not scratched by the intense activity of the imaginary. For more than twenty years, it seems to me, however, Italian LGBTQIA communities and the intellectual environments close to them suffer the effects of a kind of delusion that transfigures lesbians and gays into champions of an egalitarian and liberal modernity in which love defeats power, and affectivity neutralizes the disturbing force of sexuality. Marzio Barbagli and Asher Colombo’s *Omosessuali moderni* [*Modern Homosexuals*], published in 2001 and revised in 2007 is considered, to this day, one of the most

extensive and detailed researches on the homosexual condition in Italy. The thesis put forth, with the participation and enthusiasm of the two sociologists, is that since the seventies, even in Italy, the redefinition of identity has been achieved through a process that, in the United States and in Northern Europe, has definitively transformed the “inverts” or “pederasts” of the past into the gays and lesbians of the present.

Unlike homosexuals of the past, modern homosexuals no longer make love to heterosexuals or to people of the opposite sex, but only to other homosexuals. They don't present themselves as effeminate men or masculine women. They no longer define their behavior and those of others as passive and active. They no longer have social and sexual relationships that are asymmetrical, relationships of superiority or inferiority, of domination and submission, but relationships of reciprocity and equality (Barbagli and Colombo 2007: 15, translation Julia Heim).

The arrival of “modernity” from the northern part of the world into Italy would thus have cancelled the identification models of “Mediterranean sexuality,” in which what is decisive is not the gender of the subject and the sex of the object of desire, but the role that sexual practices occupy, in particular activity or passivity during penetration. Already in the eighties and nineties, a widespread “orientalist” prejudice (Said 1978; Puar 2007) shared by Italian scholars, among whom the very same Dall’Orto mentioned above (1990),¹⁷ led to the belief that such identification models were still present, if residually, only in North African and South American countries, and in the “less industrialized” areas (Dall’Orto 1990: 796) of Italy, Spain, and the Balkans. Since the aughts, many including Barbagli and Colombo seem to be worried about freeing Italy from this backward image, as if gays and lesbians, in order to be worthy of juridical recognition for their couples, have to give up parts of themselves that are considered—according to the criteria of liberal respectability—“politically incorrect.” One does not have to be a sociologist to notice that in reality the interpretive rules of so-called “Mediterranean sexuality” still deeply permeate the experience of lesbian and gay communities, their relationships in meeting and cruising spots, their interactions in chat-rooms, not just in Italy, but throughout the globalized world. Antisocial queer theories, with their critique of liberal subjectivity, indeed seem to constitute a valid antidote to the modernist hallucinations afflicting sexual minorities. If queer studies can contribute to the reflections of Italian LGBTQIA

movements, whether or not they continue to be qualified using the English word “queer,” in my opinion, it will not be because of their utopian content, nor because they allow for new hope for a better future to be imported from the United States, but because, in referring to the past, they allow for a critical and disenchanted understanding of the present, an understanding of, for instance, the aggressive return of a religious conservatism within the public discourse that reminds sexual minorities of the negativity they still represent. And because they allow us to realize that Italy does not need the United States to feel queer. I am not just thinking of Mario Mieli here, but also, just to give a few recent examples: of the testimonies about the world of the “femminielli,”¹⁸ the “travestite,”¹⁹ and the transsexual and transgender people that were collected by Porpora Marcasciano (2002, 2007, 2008), the president of the Movimento di Identità Transessuale [Transsexual Identity Movement] in Bologna; of the history of the fascist persecution of the “arrusi”²⁰ reconstructed by Gianfranco Goretti and Tommaso Giartosio (2006), members of the association of homosexual parents Famiglie Arcobaleno [The Rainbow Families]; and of the account about the lives of “froci”²¹ during the second postwar produced by Andrea Pini (2011), one of the founders of the Circolo di Cultura Omosessuale Mario Mieli [Society of Homosexual Culture Mario Mieli] in Rome. Even these studies, however, only partly produce antisocial effects, and only in a limited sense of the word. They show just how recent the desire for social integration—that today takes the shape of the liberal way of life—is for sexual minorities, and that in a very recent past their existence was carried out largely on the margins of society, where they expressed their own particularity through experimentation with different ways of life that were certainly not easy. But at the same time they contribute to the construction of something that resembles a collective history in which we can recognize a community.

To step away from activism and return to academia—the antisocialist purists will once more have to forgive me—it is downright hard for me not to be tempted to give some projections about the future (ch. 3, *infra*): the reason I founded the Research Center PoliTeSse at the University of Verona is that I would like to help make the position of those who practice studies of sexuality in Italy more comfortable, and to form a scientific and activist community that can support young researchers who would like to undertake this kind of research. Nevertheless, I must say a few words to illustrate the paradoxical advantages that the current situation, despite everything, affords those who would like to do theory. The absence

of disciplinary sectors dedicated exclusively to research on sexuality, of established traditions and of “authorities” to whom entrust oneself do limit career possibilities, but at the same time these lacks “force” a criticalness and make great amount of freedom “necessary.” Devoid of defined borders and acknowledged canons, feminist studies, gender studies, and queer theories cannot help but carry out an interesting disturbing action that ends up unsettling even their own boundaries. This kind of dedication in Italy means experimenting with innovative hybridizations, making the borders between disciplines more porous, practicing forms of parasitism, contagion, and scientific bastardization that provoke resistance in university corporations, but offer interesting occasions for thought. In terms of this book, for example, the lack of an established tradition of Cultural Studies in Italy has made it easier to give a critique of a certain psychoanalytic convention present within this line of research in the United States, and to attempt to lead queer theories back to that European continental philosophy (namely, non-Anglo-Saxon) from which they originally arose (Foucault 1976). The recourse to the tradition of conceptual history solidified in Europe (Brunner, Conze, Koselleck 1972–1997; Richter 1995) has allowed for an investigation of the origin of liberal thought in the contractualist tradition of the 1600s, and for an insertion of elements of anti-social theory within the classic philosophy of modernity. Thomas Hobbes’ individuals (ch. 5, *infra*) vs. Bruce LaBruce’s gay zombies (ch. 4, *infra*): an unlikely conflict. Yet it seems to me that this has a lot to do with my experience within the Italian University. Doesn’t the political neutrality of the research subject defended by the Political Philosophy Commission at the National Scientific qualification correspond to the sexual neutrality of the individual that Hobbes places in the state of nature as the foundation of political modernity (ch. 6, *infra*)? Isn’t it an attempt to reestablish, in secularized form, that peaceful totality to which the Catholic detractors of the theory of gender aspire? And the negative force of the sex drive that antisocial theories insist on instead continually avoids?

Studies on sexuality in Italy today face at least two risks: a hardly-specialized eclecticism, and an excessive ease of interpretations. Aware of having run both these risks, I assume every responsibility.

Lorenzo Bernini
Verona
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NOTES

1. Probably the fact that the article in question was published in Portuguese in a Brazilian magazine, and not in English in an American magazine was also a factor in its being considered “of little relevance.”
2. Like the *LGBT* series: *Studi di identità di genere e orientamento sessuale* [*Studies of gender identity and sexual orientation*] run by Francesco Bilotta for Mimesis Edizioni.
3. *Áltera* for example. *Collana di intercultura di genere* [*Series of Interculturality of Gender*] run by Liana Borghi and Marco Pustianaz for Edizioni ETS, where in 2013 the first edition of this book was published, and also, *áltera. Politiche e teorie della sessualità* [*Áltera. Politics and Theories of Sexuality*] that I run within the same publishing house along with Olivia Guaraldo and Massimo Prearo. Other series deal with feminist and LGBTQIA questions along with other themes, like *Difforme* [*Different*], run by Flavia Monceri again through Edizioni ETS, and *liminalia*, run by Cirus Rinaldi for edizioni Kaplan.
4. “AG About Gender—Rivista internazionale di studi di genere” [International magazine on gender studies].
5. See the center’s website: www.politesse.it, and the page dedicated to it on the University of Verona site: <http://www.dfpp.univr.it/?bibliocr&id=200&tipobc=6>.
6. The political party founded in 1989, which has its origin in the fusion between the Liga veneta and the Lega lombarda, two previous groups that fought for the autonomy of the regions of northern Italy, which are richer than the southern ones. Today it gets votes from all over the national territory, including the south, and is mainly characterized by its hostility toward “irregular” immigrants and homogenitoriality. Its latest slogan is “Prima gli italiani” [“Italians first”].
7. Thus, under the bipartisan government whose prime minister is the Secretary of the Democratic Party Matteo Renzi.
8. In the *Relatio post disceptationem* pronounced by General Speaker Cardinal Péter Erdő, during the opening of the discussion, he read, in fact, that “unions between people of the same sex cannot be compared to marriage between a man and a woman” and that “it is not even acceptable that they want to exert pressure on the behavior of the pastors or that international entities influence the financial aid for the introduction of legislation inspired by the ideology of gender.”
9. On January 17, 2015 an analogous conference was held in Milan as well, backed by the Lombard region, whose president, Roberto Maroni, is also a member of Lega Nord. The logo of the Expo also appeared on invitations to the universal exposition of 2015 that would be held in Milan a few months later.

10. Two days earlier a controversial plan for a law was approved in the House against discrimination and homotransphobic propaganda, it never became an actual law because still to this day it has never been put on the discussion calendar of the Senate. The speakers of the Verona conference were: Roberto de Mattei, Mauro Palmaro, Luca Galantini, professors in the History of the Church, the Philosophy of Rights, and the History of modern rights at the European University of Rome, respectively; Dina Nerozzi, a professor of Psycho-Neuro-Endocrinology at the University Tor Vergata of Rome; Chiara Atzori, an infectologist at the Luigi Sacco Hospital of Milan, Matteo D'Amico, a teacher of Philosophy and History in Ancona. See the acts: Family Tomorrow, European Movement in Defense of Life 2014; and my comment in Bernini 2014.
11. On the occasion of the suspension of the distribution of the UNAR anti-discrimination pamphlets to teachers, only the Società Italiana delle Storiche [The Italian Society of Historians] expressed disappointment to the Minister of Education, University and Research Stefania Giannini, in a letter that is accessible at the site http://www.immaginiamicheravenna.it/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/LetteraSIS_genere.pdf (last accessed January 20, 2015).
12. The publishing house that published the first edition of this book (see note 3, *supra*). Stuningly, in the short list of authors given by Dall'Orto there are no women.
13. For Dall'Orto "the fundamental thesis of the queer is that homosexuality does not exist."
14. I met Daniela in May 2008, during the seminar *Elementi di critica Trans* [*Elements of Trans Critique*], which I discuss in the "overture" *Singing Beneath the Moon*, *infra*.
15. For example in Verona, after the conference on September 21, 2013, on November 9, 2013 a counter-conference organized by LGBTQIA associations was organized that was ironically entitled *Contro natura? Lesbiche, gay, bisessuali, asessuali, trans*, intersex/dsd si interrogano sul loro posto nel creato*. [*Against Nature? Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Asexuals, Trans*, Intersex/DSD Question Their Place in Creation*].
16. The *Sentinelle in piedi* movement has brought a method of protest to Italy from the analogous French movement *Les Veilleurs debout*. The protesters occupy a square, standing approximately two meters from one another, all turned in the same direction, and for one hour they silently read texts inspired by Catholicism. Since September 2013, following the House's approval of the plan for the law against homotransphobia (note 11, *supra*) events of this kind have happened in many Italian cities, among which are Arezzo, Bologna, Ivrea, Lecce, Milan, Naples, Reggio Emilia, Rome, Turin, Treviso, Varese, and Verona. Each time the Standing Sentinels are

protested against by LGBTQIA associations, which are at times joined by student movements and squatters.

17. "The Mediterranean paradigm may be defined as an attempt to interpret and harmonize exclusive homosexual conduct employing the same conceptual framework as that in use for heterosexuality. Its most salient characteristic is the sharp dichotomy between the one who is considered the 'homosexual' in the strict sense, that is the one who plays the insertee role, as against the one who plays the inserter role (the 'active')" (Dall'Orto 1990: 796). According to Dall'Orto, Mediterranean sexuality is characteristic of patriarchal societies in which, because of women's segregation, the sexual exuberance of men before marriage finds its release in passive men who assume an identity that is in some way feminine, even when those people are not transgender. For Dall'Orto, this model is not compatible with the modern gay movement whose members would not have any doubt about belonging to the masculine gender. In Chap. 2, I, however, will maintain that "from the seventies through today, though psychology insists on considering gender identity (male and female) and sexual orientation (heterosexual and homosexual) as two completely distinct components of a person's personality, the term 'gay' has come to mean not only a preference in one's object of desire, but a precise social identity, perhaps a real and true gender."
18. The term "femminiello" in Neapolitan dialect is the masculine form of the diminutive "femminiella," which means "little female," and is used to point to a specific social identity that is rooted in Neapolitan culture. There has been evidence since early modernity of this identity (Valerio and Zito 2010, 2013), and some elderly femminielli are still alive. Given its precise role at the margins of society, only in an imperfect way could the femminiello be defined as a transgender man or woman, or a passive effeminate homosexual.
19. "Travestita" in Italian is the female form of "travestito" ["transvestite"]. The nickname was used ironically in gay circles in the seventies to indicate the transvestitism of effeminate gays which did not necessarily correspond to what today we would call a transgender identity.
20. In Sicilian dialect "arruso" is an epithet used to speak disparagingly about passive homosexual men.
21. "Frocio" is the disparaging word used in the Roman dialect to speak about a homosexual man: Pini uses it to point to the experience of homosexual men in Italy before the arrival of the concept of the gay identity.

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SINGING BENEATH THE MOON (OVERTURE)

There is a painting by Klee entitled Angelus Novus. It shows an angel as if he was about to depart from something he is staring at. His eyes are wide open, his mouth gaping and his wings stretched out. This is what the angel of history must look like. He has turned his face to the past. Where a chain of events appears before us, he sees one single catastrophe that is continuously piling rubble upon rubble and hurling it in front of his feet. He would rather like to stay, awaken the dead and join together what has been broken apart. But a storm is blowing from the direction of paradise; it has got caught in his wings, and it is so strong that the angel can no longer close them. The storm drives him irresistibly into the future to which he turns his back while the pile of debris in front of him is growing up to the sky. This storm is what we call progress.

(Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the History of Philosophy*)

1. Castiglione degli Ubertyni (Arezzo), May 2008. The sunny countryside, the smells of spring, an agrotourism, about thirty people. For three days they talk about sex and politics; with seriousness, but also with irony, they narrate life-stories, they share their own senses of themselves with each other. They laugh frequently, and every so often someone gets emotional. Every night there is a big party. The small community celebrates its rites in the clear moonlight: singing oldies until far into the night, imitating the divas of old. Three days, two nights: a brief period of time for an event that will leave its mark. About forty years since Sylvia Rivera¹ launched that famous bottle—or stiletto?—that sparked to the Stonewall riots, the body of Italian associations dedicated to her has given rise to an original experience: the first Italian seminar on transsexuality and transgenderism