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Trans Television Culture Queer Politics, Gender Fluidity, and Quality TV

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RESUMEN:

Durante décadas, las personas trans han sido escasamente representadas en la cultura popular estadounidense. Y cuando han sido representadas en la pequeña pantalla, no han recibido un trato equitativo. No obstante, en los últimos años se han materializado diversos cambios y las personas trans han ocupado, hasta cierto punto, un papel más relevante en la cultura popular. Barneys (New York) o el galardonado diseñador de joyas Alexis Bittar han empleado, por ejemplo, modelos transgénero. En febrero de 2014, Janet Mock, ex-editora de la revista *People*, ya relataba su transición en sus memorias, llegando a colarse en la lista de best sellers del *New York Times*; programas de entretenimiento como *Dancing with the Stars* acogían en sus concursos a personalidades trans como Chaz Bono. Al igual que tanto gays como lesbianas gozan de cierta atención mediática desde la década de 1990, las personas transexuales están ganando cada vez más visibilidad en el medio televisivo, algunos tan populares como Alex Newell en el papel de Wade "Unique" Adams en *Glee* (Fox) o Laverne Cox como Sophia Burset en *Orange Is the New Black* (Netflix), convirtiéndose esta última interpretación en la primera nominación transgénero a un Emmy. En los últimos dos años, diversos programas de televisión han incrementado la presencia trans después de que Cox se convirtiera en una estrella mediática y después de que Amazon Studios apostara por un personaje transgénero en *Transparent* (2014).

En este artículo, por tanto, analizaremos cómo la política queer y la identidad se negocian en recientes series de televisión, examinando la posible resistencia queer a través del trans-feminismo, es decir, las perspectivas transgénero sobre el feminismo o las perspectivas feministas sobre las cuestiones transgénero. Argumentaremos que series de televisión actuales como *Orange is the New Black* y *Transparent*, que cuentan con personajes queer y transgénero, pueden leerse no sólo como instrumentos del capitalismo global de consumo, sino también como espacios comunes para el feminismo, lo queer y el activismo trans. Los personajes representados en estos programas no sólo ayudan a aumentar los límites de la tolerancia y aceptación en el cine y la televisión, sino que también contribuyen a enriquecer la cultura televisiva y su ideología, de modo en que su contenido refleja la ideología de su tiempo. Basándonos en las críticas queer y trans, veremos cómo estos programas de televisión y su ideología en torno al género, especialmente a través de programas de televisión de calidad, constituyen importantes intervenciones políticas en el ámbito de lo sexual.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Orange is the new black*, *Transparent*, trans, queer, televisión, sexualidad, género

ABSTRACT:

For decades, trans people have hardly been represented in American popular culture. And when they were depicted on screen, they were grossly misrepresented. But recent years have brought about changes and trans people have, to a certain degree, assumed center stage in popular culture. The luxury retailer Barneys New York and the award-winning jewelry designer Alexis Bittar have, for instance, showed transgender models; in February 2014, a memoir by Janet Mock, who was a former editor at *People* magazine and who focuses on her transition from male to female in her book, made the *New York Times* best-seller list; and *Dancing with the Stars* featured contestant Chaz Bono. Just as gay and lesbian characters have moved into the spotlight since the 1990s, transgender characters are increasingly gaining more visibility on TV, from Alex Newell as Wade "Unique" Adams on Fox's *Glee* to Laverne Cox as Sophia Burset on Netflix's *Orange Is the New Black*, for which she made history as the first openly transgender Emmy acting awards nominee. In the past two years then, TV shows have shown an increasing presence of trans people after Cox became a breakout star and after Amazon Studios has placed a transgender character center stage with the 2014 premiere of *Transparent*.

In this paper, I will analyze how queer politics and identity are negotiated in recent TV series, looking into the possibilities for resistant queer performances via the politics of trans feminism, that is transgender perspectives on feminism, or feminist perspectives on transgender issues. I will argue that recent TV series like *Orange Is the New Black* and *Transparent*, which feature queer and transgender characters, can be seen not only as instruments for global consumer capitalism but also forums for feminism, queer, and trans activism. The characters depicted in these shows not only help push the boundaries of acceptance in film and television, but also contribute to the cultural politics of television, the way in which the content of these shows themselves engage with the politics of their time. Relying on Queer Theory as well as Trans Theory, I will read these recent TV shows for their queer and trans politics, showing that popular culture, especially recent Quality TV shows, constitute important political interventions into sexual politics.

KEYWORDS: *Orange is the new black*, *Transparent*, trans, queer, television, sexual politics, gender

1. INTRODUCTION: FROM THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION TO A POLITICS OF NORMS

For decades, trans people have hardly been represented in American popular culture. And when they were depicted on screen, they were grossly misrepresented. To be on the screen is also to have been subjected, already also to the process of screening. While the term “screening” typically denotes the practical processes of showing and viewing, it likewise refers to the systems of selection that inform the production and reception of these texts. In many ways, trans people have had a similar fate as other queer people – they either were marginalized and not screened or misrepresented. Accordingly, many debates over media depictions of trans people and issues have focused on how such portrayals have marginalized and silenced trans people.

Recent years have, however, brought about changes, and trans people have, to a certain degree, assumed center stage in popular culture. Apart from filmic representations, transgender characters are also increasingly gaining more visibility on TV. These representations range from Alex Newell as Wade “Unique” Adams on Fox’s *Glee* to a series of trans characters in TV shows like *The L Word* and *Ugly Betty* to Laverne Cox as Sophia Burset on Netflix’s *Orange Is the New Black*, for which she made history as the first openly transgender Emmy acting awards nominee. And in the past two years, TV shows have shown an increasing presence of trans people after Cox became a breakout star, and after Amazon Studios has placed a transgender character center stage with the 2014 premiere of *Transparent*.

In this paper, I will analyze how queer politics and identity are negotiated in recent TV series, looking into the possibilities for resistant queer performances via the politics of trans feminism, that is transgender perspectives on feminism, or feminist perspectives on transgender issues.¹ Looking at recent TV series like *Orange Is the New Black* and, in particular, *Transparent*, which feature queer and transgender characters, I want to argue that these TV series can be seen not only as instruments for global consumer capitalism but also forums for feminism,

queer, and trans activism. The characters depicted in *Transparent*, for instance, not only help push the boundaries of acceptance in film and television, but also contribute to the cultural politics of television, the way in which the content of these shows themselves engage with the politics of their time.

When talking about the cultural politics of TV, some comments on media representations of trans people and the queer potential of TV are necessary. When discussing media representation of various groups, especially those we consider marginalized, stereotypes are often a primary concern. Hence most analyses of media representations focus on number of appearances of marginalized characters and stereotypical representations. At the heart of the politics of representation is “the clash of progressive and regressive social agendas, and particularly the effort to negotiate a space for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered (GLBT) individuals and communities within the mainstream media” (Keller, and Stratyner, 2006: 1). However, a discussion of whether or not a character is represented in a positive or a negative way very often does not go far enough and does not yield sufficient insight into the complexity of the cultural politics of media representation. TV, as Samuel Chambers argues, is a “constitutive element of culture” (Chambers, 2006: 84) that “like any other cultural artefact, participates in the constitution of our reality” (Chambers, 2006: 85). The question then really arises as to how we approach the representation of transgender people in recent TV shows. It is important, I believe, to find a way to move beyond the politics of representation, shifting the discussion of identity politics to questions related to what Samuel A. Chambers calls the “politics of norm” (Chambers, 2006: 81). Thus, rather than investigate whether recent TV series manage to represent trans people adequately or not—they do not, one could easily claim and that would stop the discussion before it can really begin—I want to examine whether the trans feminist politics of *Transparent* is used to subvert gendered norms. In other words, I attempt to mine this TV show for its possibilities of non-normative sexual politics, analyzing the ways in which *Transparent* actually manages to

queer television. As Kellner and Stratyner argue, “GLBT narratives are only aired on television after significant compromises and concessions have been made—concessions intended to coddle a still reticent public, to render queer sexualities safe, invisible, or agreeable” (Kellner, and Stratyner, 2006: 4). Still, as I want to claim, shows do have the potential to queer the mainstream and engage in sexual politics because of the multiple ways in which they can participate in the reproduction or deconstruction of norms. And it is precisely this deconstruction of norms that constitutes the queer politics of TV.

Norms, to be clear, are different from rules or a legal regulation, as Judith Butler has made clear. As she explains: “A norm operates within social practices as the implicit standard of *normalization*” (Butler, 2004: 41, italics in the original). A norm works implicitly or explicitly, demanding and expecting calls for normalcy. In *The Trouble With Normal*, Michael Warner has added that Butler explains “the possibilities of queerness, subversion, and resistance as enduring despite the force of norms” (142). As norms have no transcendent standing but only persist “to the extent that [they are] acted out in social practice” (Butler, 2004: 48), TV has a tremendous influence in the daily reproduction and implementation of “the normal.” TV shows like *Orange is the New Black* and *Transparent*, which feature trans characters, thus participate in the social discourses on sex, gender, sexuality, contributing to their codifications and normalization in the forms of heteronormativity and cisnormativity. The assumption that heterosexuality is the norm, in fact, produces heteronormativity and the idea that people are cisgender, that is that every person’s self-identity conforms with the gender that corresponds to their biological sex, produces cisnormativity.² As a queering of identities usually entails the possibility of operating against the normal, a foregrounding of and an engagement with queer identities in TV series can have the effect of troubling the normal.

Jenji Kohan’s *Orange is the New Black*, which is streamed on Netflix, is primarily remarkable because it features Laverne

Cox, a black transgender woman, in a major role. The way I see it, *Orange Is the New Black* is therefore tremendously important for its politics of representation, as it gives visibilities to a series of queer characters and provides a stage for a transgender character. It is, however, not really successful in offering a queer deconstruction of norms. In fact, most critics hold that this show offers character portrayals that perpetuate stereotypes and dominant ideologies (cf. Chavez, 2015: 1). On the other hand, Jill Soloway’s *Transparent* aims at a transfeminist politics that tries to deconstruct norms. Despite the fact that the main trans character is played by a cisman in this show, a fact that has, of course, not escaped criticism, *Transparent* shows an awareness of queer politics. Soloway has countered the criticism of featuring a cisman in the lead position and made sure to create an inclusive space for trans and queer people by hiring trans people on the productions set in Season 2. The show also self-reflexively and self-consciously undertakes Gender Studies 101 lessons and therefore shows sensitivity for trans issues. Since *Transparent*, the way I see it, also exhibits greater transfeminist potential than *Orange is the New Black* and presents itself as a trans affirmative show, I will now focus on this TV series.

2. A JEWISH TRANSFEMINIST POLITICS OF REMEMBERING

Transparent presents an L.A. Jewish family, the Pfeffermans, whose patriarch, an emeritus Professor of psychology called Mort (Jeffrey Tambor) transitions from male to female, Mort to Maura, Poppa to “Moppa.” Maura’s emergence constitutes the central narrative arc, which is interrupted by a series of other story lines. The stories of the three grown up children Sarah (Amy Landecker), Josh (Jay Duplass), and Ali (Gaby Hoffman), who are self-obsessed, spoilt, and uninhibited, serve as, to quote Villarejo, “reactive foils to Maura’s trans becoming, while ex-wife Shelly (Judith Light) delightfully hums over the action as an exercise- and diet-obsessed chorus of one, a kvetch who lives in a seaside, light-filled condominium” (Villarejo, 2016: n. pag.). *Transparent* also explores the fluid sexualities of the two sisters, Sarah and Ali. The main narrative, then, is not only about transgender issues

and identity politics, but focuses on issues of non-normative sexuality, changing identities, and intersections of different categories of identities, be they sexual, religious or class-related. In terms of the politics of representation of transgender people, the show, especially Season 1, has disappointed many viewers. As one review criticizes:

With ten 30 minute episodes (billed as 'a five hour movie') to entice viewers, the show promises to be everything liberals want and more: A nice, safe, user-friendly version of trans life, viewed through a cis lens. Creator Jil Soloway is cis, and so is Tambor — and he was cast, allegedly, because the show needed a big name to anchor it, or, at least, so claim the producers, who took care to cast trans actors in other trans (and non-trans) roles as though that excuses them. Notably, one of Soloway's mothers is transgender, reminding us yet again that the children and family members of trans people can tell our stories, but we cannot. (Smith, 2014: n.pag.)

Apart from the portrayal of a trans female character at the center of this show, Season One also featured a trans man's story, and it is especially the depiction of this trans man that has elicited criticism. In episodes six and seven, trans man and comedian Ian Harvie appears on screen. Ali, who is taking Gender Studies classes at university, meets a trans man named Dale, and soon the storyline focuses on his lack of a cisgender penis. "Im a man with a vag," Dale says. ("The Wilderness," 1:6). His character, as a reviewers says, "rapidly becomes a fetish that reflects some of the most negative stereotypes about trans men" (Keegan, 2014: n.pag). The culminating point takes place in a bathroom scene in which Dale tries to have sex with Ali with a prosthetic penis but accidentally drops it on the floor. This incident may appear funny for mainstream viewers, but it is extremely transphobic, constituting a shaming scene. Soloway, however, has tried to react to these severe criticisms by turning the next season into a more transaffirmative show. Season 2, as I want to show, then engages in a feminist politics that is not only informed by trans politics but that attempts to destabilize norms.

Transfeminism is linked with poststructural feminism, queer theory and intersectionality. Emi Koyama's "Transfeminist Manifesto" explains that transfeminism "holds that nobody shall be coerced into or out of personal decisions regarding her or his gender identity or expression in order to be a 'real' woman or a 'real' man" (Koyama, 2003: 246). And it is this sexual transfeminist politics, which is at the center of attention, especially in Season 2. In fact, one could say, that the show feeds on a queer theory and transfeminism syllabus, incorporating debates around transgender issues in society. While Ali enrolls in Gender Studies classes at college, Maura finds herself growing into her performance of femininity. Apart from this awareness of gender/queer theory, the show engages with transfeminist politics on multiple levels.

As a quality TV show, it engages with a series of controversial themes and deeper social problems that transcend the immediate milieu of this particular family.³ "The subject matter of quality TV tends toward the controversial," Robert Thompson has famously claimed in his list of defining characteristics of quality TV (Thompson, 1996: 15), and this show clearly follows this principle in exhibiting a liberal frame of mind that involves a complex multi-layered narrative that explores contemporary anxieties.⁴ The show is about larger personal as well as societal issues that give the show a universal quality: transformations, transitions, and the potential for renewal in general, the importance of family and religion, haunting secrets of the past, and the traumatic history of the Holocaust. *Transparent* is about Jewishness and the various intersections of religious identities and sexualities. Foremost, this show deals with trauma and pain, showing that a traumatic past lingers on into the present as it is passed down by generations. *Transparent* highlights that Jewishness and queerness are structurally related categories of difference, and this show is revolutionary in that it engages the politics of alterity by opening up the debate to the question whether intergenerational memory, or postmemory, also includes transgender memory.⁵

In Season 2, Episode 4 ("Cherry Blossoms"), Ali and her friend Syd (Carrie Brownstein), for instance, spend

the evening in the library, researching topics for Ali's grad school essay. Ali reads about "inherited trauma" in DNA or "epigenetics," that is the idea that trauma can be passed down genetically, and she asks Syd whether she believes that trauma is actually inheritable. Ali mentions an experiment in which rabbits that were exposed to electric shock while smelling cherry blossoms would pass on that memory so that future generations of those rabbits were afraid of cherry blossoms. Clearly, this episode, just like the entire season, is part of Soloway's project to "inscribe queer history onto American Jewish historical memory" (Breger, 2016: n. pag.).⁶

There is a story that evokes queer, Jewish history that runs in a parallel way to the main story line and keeps interrupting it. The Berlin narrative is mostly parallel to Ali's story and is about her grandmother Rose, Maura's mother, who was a member of a vibrant transgender scene in Berlin in the 1930s before the Nazis stopped it. The second season's intriguing and intense flashbacks to Weimar Germany also focus on Rose's transgender sister Gittel, born Gershon, opening up a supplementary genealogical narrative. Conspicuously, these Berlin flashbacks feature Hari Nef, a transgender "it girl" whom Soloway met through her sister Faith, who knew Nef from an arts camp and whom Soloway hired for this role.⁷ As the season progresses and as elements of the contemporary queer scene in California are increasingly juxtaposed with imagined memory, "viewers learn that the flashbacks lead to Maura's ancestors in Weimar Germany, Jewish and queer alike, who ultimately flee Nazi persecution and end up in Los Angeles" (Villarejo, 2016: n. pag.). Soloway's transfeminist politics of remembering mainly rely on the Berlin flashbacks to commemorate Ali's "queer Jewish ancestors by feeling her way into their trauma" (Breger, 2016: n. pag.).

From a queer perspective, Ali, it turns out, is the most interesting character. One of the central assumptions of *Transparent* is that "Maura's transition—and the suppressed family secrets it unearthed—has pushed all three Pfefferman siblings to poke at their identities and question the ways they have understood themselves" (Breger, 2016: n. pag.). And the question as to what Ali wants and how she wants

to live is one the main questions the show tries to answer. During the show's first season, Ali is presented as the most "messed-up" of the three Pfefferman siblings. She is presented as lazy but as intelligent, and it soon becomes clear that she is searching for meaning. She is portrayed as a notoriously unfaithful person who has a hard time making commitments to anyone or anything. A gender-fluid person, she is first shown as heterosexual but then transitions into a self-conscious lesbian when she meets Syd. In fact, one of the first plots about her focus on her attempts to have a threesome with her personal fitness trainer and his roommate. Portrayed as a "Lena Dunham-lite millennial cliché scrambling for money and meaning" (Breger, 2016: n. pag.), Ali then draws her best friend Syd, who had secretly been in love with her since middle school, into an affair. Turning into a "budding academic who is genuinely passionately about her studies even as she's mired in an ill-advised relationship with her graduate adviser, gender-studies star Leslie Mackinaw (Cherry Jones)" (Breger, 2016: n. pag.), Ali starts to draw the audience into debates on feminism and its troubled relationship with queer issues and transgender concerns.

This problematic history is highlighted in the episode which deals with the lesbian Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, a festival which is famous for having triggered debates about trans inclusion in all-female spaces. The separate narrative arcs come together in this scene. They "become stitched together in ambient connectedness, yielding a feeling for history that coincides with a feeling for present politics that basically is Soloway's acute sense of queer politics" (Villarejo, 2016: n. pag.). Michfest, as it became known, became famous for lesbian separatism, and the festival constituted an important space of criticism for its trans-exclusionary radical feminism (the so-called TERFs) when they insisted that only womyn-born-womyn could attend this festival.⁸ In episode 9 "Man on the Land," Sarah and Ali want to participate in Michfest, and they take Maura with them. On their way to "Idlewild Wimmin's Music Festival," the TV-fictional festival, the Pfefferman women join in the Indigo Girl anthem "Closer to Fine," singing "their solidarity and proclaiming the continuities between

the womyn-born sisters and their ‘Moppa,’ whose womynhood is thus cemented in advance of its contestation at Idlewild” (Villarejo, 2016: n. pag.). Unaware of the sexual politics of Idlewild, Maura is met with criticism. She is ultimately driven away from this space when the women with whom she talks begin to chant “man on the land,” because they spot a person assigned male at birth. The conversation that follows reminds of the transmisogyny that exists in many feminist circles. *Transparent* offers severe criticism of this transphobia and follows the credo of Koyama’s “Transfeminist Manifesto,” following the idea of the Indigo girls, who, in real life, threatened not to perform at Michfest anymore because of its transmisogyny. Famously, the Indigo Girls had stated: “We feel that if someone identifies as a womyn, they are a womyn and should be welcomed into our community with open arms. We will only be stronger for it.”⁹ The invocation of the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival is important in this show as it “provides an opportunity for Soloway to elaborate gendered and queer continuity across generations and simultaneously to derive a political position appropriate to *Transparent’s* hope for the future and for future seasons” (Villarejo, 2016: n. pag.).

3. FEELING BACKWARD

If one were to categorize *Transparent*, the label New Queer Quality TV series would come to mind. In their *Queer Cinema: The Film Reader*, Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin have identified three criteria for identifying cultural products as queer: Auteurs, Forms, and Reception. *Transparent* meets all three of them: it has been produced by queer people and it has a large queer audience: Soloway, known as a writer and producer of HBO’s *Six Feet Under*, has a personal connection to the show because her father came out as a trans woman. She herself “went butch” during the production of the show.¹⁰ And she started to date Eileen Myles, a lesbian punk poet, the Poet Muse of *Transparent*, as the *New York Times* proclaimed her.¹¹ Leslie, a character played by the out actress Cherry Jones, is based on Myles, and Myles’s poetry is recited by various characters across multiple episodes.

In terms of form, *Transparent* clearly displays a queer aesthetics, that is it follows certain styles and modes that

are associated with queer art. Camp, for instance, is considered a queer aesthetic because of its traditional use in many queer cultural products, and the show is certainly campy in many respects. One only has to think of Maura’s dresses, for instance. Camp constitutes an attempt to expose—through parodic theatricality—society’s highly constructed fictions of identity. As an aesthetic sensibility, camp is not measured by standards of beauty, but by “the extent of its artifice and stylization” (Eco, 2007: 408). It thus has the important function to draw the attention to the constructedness and fluidity of gender and sexual categories, contributing to the queerness of this show.

Clearly, the visual pleasure of this show also revels in queerness, triggering a queer economy of the gaze. As Villarejo has stated: “By crafting a female gaze through which Maura is seen—understood, apprehended, recognized—Soloway grants Maura a nurturing space of trans emergence, protected from the violence of hetero- and cis-normative visuality and power” (Villarejo, 2016: n. pag.). Season 2, for instance, opens with a wedding and everyone fully embodies their characters so that the audience believes we are watching a documentary. Soloway, we could say, makes auteur TV on the model of indie cinema. Apart from the home video quality that this scene evokes (there is a stationary camera which stands on a tripod), this scene also involves a lesson about gender identity when the photo shoot is broken up after the viewer’s gaze is aligned with the diegetic camera and the photographer misgenders Maura, calling her “Sir” (“Kina Hora,” 2:1). From this misrecognition of Maura’s gender identity, as Villarejo has it, “Maura’s deep well of privilege starts to run dry. In subsequent episodes, viewers watch her previously protected character become pockmarked both by the harm she has done to others and by her own complex vulnerability” (Villarejo, 2016: n. pag.).

Queer aesthetics typically rely on distinctive visual vocabularies—symbols and images that other queer people will recognize. 1930s Berlin is portrayed in an assemblage of images and sounds. Slowly the Berlin images and the audiovisual landscape of Los Angeles come together in dialectical Benjaminian fashion, creating a queer space that is characterized by

fragmentation and dislocation. Longing for a queer space, the characters give voice to their stories, which are incoherent and fragmented narratives of dislocation, non-belonging, and queer sexuality. The characters' queer appropriations of space and time entail a blasting apart of the narrative of progress of the city of L.A., constituting a reassembling of the fragments of collective history into dialectical images that encapsulate the diverse stories of deterritorialization. The backward look in *Transparent* is important. In *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, Heather Love claims that in order to move on, queers have to look backward and consider how the troubling history of the queer past continues to affect the present. Such a backward look also offers a crucial resistance to the politics of futurity and pride that demands queers to abandon difficult pasts in the name of progress. As Cael Keegan sees it: "Opening at the foot of the Hollywood sign in Griffith Park, Los Angeles, *Transparent* evokes the analog and the artifactual as backward modes for queer return. Like the Jim Croce record pined over in the first episode, time in *Transparent* is horizontal, circular, and layered" (Keegan, 2015: 138). This TV show suggests that moving forward together requires turning back in order to confront the shame, guilt and humiliation of the past. The presentation of contemporary queer spaces is therefore contrasted with the series' flashbacks to Weimar Germany and the Pfefferman family's genealogy.

4. CONCLUSION

In a recent review of the show, Eric Thurm has commented on the depiction of Jewishness in *Transparent*. He quotes Judith Butler, who has called the show "enormously entertaining," but "much better on Jewish life than it is on trans life" (qtd. in Thurm, 2016: n. pag.). "She's right," he adds: "From its bar mitzvah-infused opening titles to the its [sic] most important non-Pfefferman character, a literal rabbi, *Transparent* is one of the most Jewish shows on television" (Thurm, 2016: n. pag.). As a show that does not only focus on Maura's transition but also on the complicated lives of the Pfefferman family, *Transparent* tells a rich story about family and personal change, the legacy of the past and the transitions into new futures. The show, as

I have tried to show, is remarkable for its queer and trans politics, and it shows that popular culture, especially recent Quality TV shows, constitute important political interventions into sexual politics.

This TV series is getting more courageous as it progresses into Seasons 3. Between Season 1 and Season 2, "the cultural landscape has changed tremendously as the trans movement has grown and increased public awareness" (Shoukri, 2015: n. pag.). Famously, the TV personality Caitlyn Jenner revealed her identity as a trans woman in April 2015, publicly announcing her name change in a July 2015 *Vanity Fair* cover story. Jenner, who had appeared on the reality TV series *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, became an icon of the trans movement when from 2015 to 2016, she starred in the reality TV series *I Am Cait*, which focused on her transition. "We felt like once Caitlyn came out that America kind of had its 'Trans 101 Education,'" Soloway states in an interview, and "we were really getting the opportunity in Season 2 to go deeper into the stories of these people and to really let people know about a whole bunch of ways to be trans" (qtd. in Shoukri, 2015: n. pag.). Jenner guest stars in Season 3 of *Transparent* and the show has already been renewed for a fourth season. It will be interesting to see in what new direction this TV show will go.

NOTES

¹ My definition of the term queer relies on David Halperin's view that queer "is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence. 'Queer' then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative" (Halperin, 1995: 62). If we regard "queerness" as a position and not as a non-identity, then the vagueness inherent in the term "queer" turns out to be its biggest strength. As Lee Edelman has it, the indeterminacy, transformability, and elasticity of the concept of queer suggests an understanding of queerness as a continuum or "a zone of possibilities" (Edelman, 1994: 114).

² Coined in 1999, the term “cisgender” refers to the opposite of transgender.

³ Sarah Cardwell defines Quality TV by “high production values, weighty themes and careful characterisation and performances” (Cardwell, 2007: 26).

⁴ In the first detailed critical discussion of quality television, Jane Feuer, Paul Kerr, and Tise Vahimagi have stated that “the quality audience,” is “permitted to enjoy a form of television which is seen as more literate, more stylistically complex, and more psychologically ‘deep’ than ordinary TV fare” (Feuer et al., 1984: 56).

⁵ Marianne Hirsch has coined the term “postmemory,” which “characterizes the experience of those who grew up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the precious generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated” (Hirsch, 1997: 22). Hirsch developed this notion in relation to children of Holocaust survivors, but “it may usefully describe other second generation memories of cultural or collective traumatic events and experiences” (Hirsch, 1997: 22).

⁶ In an interview with Devon Ivie, Hari Nef comments on the idea of inherited trauma in the following way: “Our generation is always walking around with this feeling of, “I’m in trouble, I did something wrong, I’m being chased, I’m going to get in trouble, what did I do wrong? I’m late, I’m going to get caught.” Like, you’re going through security at an airport. For trans people traveling, it’s totally traumatizing, but even for cis people, things take on this incredibly anxious and nerve-racking feeling of being in trouble. So for us it was, oh, maybe it’s our epigenetic memory, or it’s our trauma we inherited on our DNA, this feeling of being chased and being in trouble. And actually, what I think it’s about, and what this season is about, is this kind of Jewish thing, but it probably extrapolates to other audiences — if you’re having pleasure, you’re going to be in trouble. You’re not allowed to have pleasure, especially female pleasure. Female desire and female pleasure would somehow incur the wrath of God or punishment” (Ivie, 2015: n.pag.).

⁷ As Michael Schulman has written in the *New Yorker*: “Nef’s burgeoning career has imposed contradictory demands on her: she is supposed to embody a rarefied brand of stylish cool, but, because she is a de-facto mouthpiece, she calls out her industry for valuing “trans aesthetics” over trans lives. At twenty-three, she is fluent in both Tumblr slang and academic buzzwords, name-checking Foucault with a Valley Girl drawl. At one point, discussing a phase in her life when she went by nonbinary pronouns, she used the gender theorist Judith Butler’s name as a verb. (“I was, like, ‘O.K., I can Judith Butler my way in and out of this.’”) She displays some of the well-documented traits of the millennial generation: a hyperawareness of racial privilege, an overreliance on the word “literally,” and a prowess with social media” (Schulman, 2016: n.pag.).

⁸ Trans-exclusionary radical feminism (TERF) refers to a subgroup of radical feminists who are characterized by transphobia and transmisogyny. For more information, see: <http://theterfs.com>

⁹ See: <http://planettransgender.com/indigo-girls-letter-to-our-community-in-regards-to-michigan-womyns-music-festival/>

¹⁰ For more details, see: <http://www.advocate.com/love-and-sex/2016/10/27/love-story-jill-soloway-and-eileen-myles>

¹¹ See: <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/17/fashion/eileen-myles-jill-soloway-girlfriend-transparent.html>

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