HOPE AND HEALING IN THE GUTTER:
THE GRAPHIC NARRATIVE AS A SOURCE OF AGENCY, IDENTITY, VOICE, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE FOR THE LGBTQIA+ COMMUNITY IN FASCIST AND CONTEMPORARY ITALY

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Advisor: Dr. Sloane Drayson-Knigge

Frank Sedita III

Drew University

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ABSTRACT

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The narrative serves as a universal element that unites individuals across time and space such as when considering a series of events that have unfolded outside of the setting in which they are being interpreted. Despite this unifying outcome, social, political, and economic factors at times impede upon the power of the narrative to serve as a source of liberation by attempting to marginalize, and in some instances silence, various experiences and how they are recounted. An awareness of this form of oppression necessitates a close examination and engagement with narratives that have been ignored, as well as the alternative mediums that have been deemed inferior to the traditional literary canon to which many subscribe. An oppressive silence has persisted in regard to narratives that capture the tumultuous experiences of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual (LGBTQIA+) community. The transformative nature of one particular medium, that of the graphic narrative, overcomes this oppression by effectively capturing the plight of homosexual men both in a historical and contemporary sense. The power of the graphic narrative to provide voice to this marginalized population is evidenced in the complementary works *In Italia sono tutti maschi* by Luca de Santis and Sara Colaone, as well as *La generazione* by Flavia Biondi. These narratives afford one the

opportunity to engage with text and image in a manner that ultimately allows them to draw vital parallels between various dichotomies. By considering the unique narratives of each work's protagonist, one is afforded the opportunity to contemplate their plight beyond solely lines of gender identity and/or sexuality. Instead, regardless of their identity, one may relate to some degree with the protagonists of these works to ultimately recognize a larger struggle for human rights. Through these works, one may reclaim what is often lost when individuals are marginalized and persecuted as a result of their presumed differences. In this sense, the graphic narrative assumes an empowering role that addresses the unique challenges facing homosexual males; highlighting the universality of this medium to reflect upon past, present, and future realities.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the many educators and students that have inspired and encouraged me throughout my educational journey. I am forever grateful for the countless lessons that they have taught me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FIGURE LIST

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to Dr. Sloane Drayson-Knigge and Dr. Emanuele Occhipinti for their unwavering support, patience, and guidance throughout the dissertation process. For over a decade, you both have assumed an integral role in my development as a student and educator. You both have inspired me to pursue lifelong learning and truly exemplify the educator that I strive to be. I am forever grateful for your mentorship and dedication to your students.

I would also like to offer my sincere gratitude to the authors and publishers of the two graphic narratives featured in this dissertation for affording me the opportunity to cite images from their respective works: Luca de Santis and Sara Colaone, authors of *In Italia sono tutti maschi* as published by Oblomov Edizioni, as well as Flavia Biondi, author of *La generazione* as published by BAO Publishing.

INTRODUCTION

Whether one considers a child excitedly recounting the details of their first day at school or an older adult reflecting upon the most precious moments of their life, everyone has a story to tell. Throughout the course of their life cycle, every individual simultaneously partakes in and creates narratives. The vast nature of the narrative allows this aspect of life to transcend historical periods, geographic locations, and language to connect all facets of the human experience. In this sense, the narrative serves as a universal element that can unite individuals across time and space such as when considering a series of events that have unfolded outside of the setting in which they are being interpreted. Despite this unifying outcome, social, political, and economic factors at times impede upon the power of the narrative to serve as a source of liberation by attempting to marginalize, and in some instances silence, various experiences and how they are recounted. An awareness of this form of oppression necessitates a close examination and engagement with narratives that have been ignored, as well as the alternative mediums that have been deemed inferior to the traditional literary canon to which many subscribe. The symbiotic relationship that exists between time and space to deliver a transcendent experience within one medium, that of the graphic narrative, rationalizes the pursuit of this imperative endeavor.

My Personal Journey and Purpose for this Work

As a lifelong learner, my own engagement with the graphic narrative has come to affirm my belief that this medium serves as an effective one for capturing moments of extremity, as well as for providing agency and voice to often overlooked narratives. I first encountered the graphic narrative during the Summer of 2015. At the time I had no previous

experience with this medium and was intrigued that a publication that appeared to be a "comic" was included on the assigned reading list for a graduate course. However, my preconceived notions surrounding this publication, Alissa Torres' 2008 work *American Widow*, were challenged. I realized that the interplay between text and image within this work was not to be simply "read," but instead actively engaged with by the audience. My continued exploration of the graphic narrative both through formal coursework, as well as my own informal inquiry yielded a similar experience. My active engagement with dozens of graphic narratives that grappled with an array of topics ranging from the seemingly mundane to the most extreme of circumstances developed my deep appreciation of this medium for effectively affronting past and present social injustices, as well as for providing audiences with a renewed lens from which to view and grapple with such issues. My curiosity regarding the graphic narrative prompted me to research publications utilizing this medium in a second language for which I am passionate; Italian. My preliminary search introduced me to Luca de Santis and Sara Colaone's 2008 graphic narrative *In Italia sono tutti maschi*. Similar to the graphic narratives that I had engaged with prior, this particular work made me aware of a historical topic to which I had not previously come across in my studies; the plight of gay men in Fascist Italy. Through subsequent research around this historical topic, I came to recognize that the contents of this graphic narrative, despite seeming unimaginable, were anything but fictitious. My introduction to a previously unknown historical topic and medium served as an inspiration to expand upon the existing scholarship that exists in both of these areas. Further, my continued search for graphic narratives originally published in Italian led me to Flavia Biondi's 2015 publication *La generazione*. My engagement with this work allowed me to further recognize the expansive

nature of this medium to capture both historical and contemporary realities pertaining to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual (LGBTQIA+) experience. Through this dissertation, my overarching objectives are to elucidate the power of the graphic narrative to promote awareness for and affront a largely unknown historical reality pertaining to the struggles of the LGBTQIA+ community, as well as the injustices that persist for this demographic in contemporary society.

My purpose for pursuing this work has been driven by two inquiries that have prompted much contemplation throughout the course of my professional and personal pursuits. The first of these inquiries pertains to the unfathomable atrocities that unfold in the world. I have found that a strictly historical approach to considering such instances is not sufficient in fully capturing the experience of those inflicted by the profound pain and suffering of dehumanization. Although a historical perspective provides one with the facts surrounding such instances, this approach alone is insufficient in capturing the human experience. Upon visiting the Risiera di San Sabba concentration camp during a study abroad trip to Trieste, Italy in June 2007, I recall being struck by the overwhelming degree of sadness and fear evoked by this experience. The historical narratives provided context in regard to the confinement and murder of those sent to this concentration camp. However, these facts still left me with a sense of emptiness and bewilderment. This experience, similar to when learning for the first time regarding other atrocities throughout history, left me asking “How could this happen?” and “How could the human spirit be thrust into and grapple with such experiences?” My formal and informal study of art forms including literature and film, as well as narratives surrounding the Shoah and other genocides helped to address these areas of dissonance. A consideration of the

narratives delivered through these art forms did not merely provide me with additional facts and figures surrounding such atrocities, but instead provided a glimpse into the perseverance of the human spirit amid the most unthinkable experiences. I developed a better methodology for navigating circumstances in which the mundane was transformed into a reality of profound pain and suffering that words alone could not capture. Among the mediums that most effectively provided the insight that I sought was that of the graphic narrative. This medium's utilization of text and image provided deep insight into the human experience amid these moments of profound extremity. My engagement with the graphic narrative generated new meaning in regard to the Shoah and other genocides by affording me the opportunity to contemplate such atrocities from different perspectives as conveyed through the interplay of text and image.

Another inquiry that brought me to this project was my surprise and discontent with the fact that certain narratives, as well as mediums have been silenced in dominant discourse. The exclusion of narratives of sociohistorically marginalized and disenfranchised populations continues to serve as a pervasive source of social control. When learning of various narratives for the first time in my undergraduate and graduate studies such as that of the plight of the LGBTQIA+ community, I pondered why I had not previously been exposed to such discourse. The primary and secondary resources that I encountered in regard to the confinement of homosexual males in Fascist Italy only confirmed my suspicion that such narratives have been intentionally omitted from the collective memory of a nation and the international community. Therefore, I recognized this project as an opportunity to exemplify how sociohistorically silenced narratives may and must be amplified.

These two areas of inquiry pertaining to atrocities and silenced narratives served as the motivation for this project. Throughout this work, my primary objective is to highlight narratives pertaining to the LGBTQIA+ community in historical and contemporary contexts, as well as the power of the graphic narrative as a transformative medium. The transformative nature of the graphic narrative as a medium is perhaps best exemplified by the blank space that exists between the panels referred to as the gutter. This seemingly insignificant blank space in fact serves as a vital source of inspiration. The seemingly simplistic space of the gutter is in fact a calm space that allows the audience to process the noise of life as conveyed in the text and images of a graphic narrative. The emptiness of this space invites the reader to contemplate their own life experiences within the context of the narrative to ultimately generate new meaning. Through my active engagement with this quiet space, I have been able to find healing and agency in regard to circumstances that simply may not be captured by words alone. Further, through my engagement, I have come to experience the power of the narrative and culture to rekindle the human spirit by providing a renewed sense of hope and inspiration for the future. By featuring two graphic narratives centered around the LGBTQIA+ experience, my intention is to illuminate the power of the graphic narrative as a vital source of social justice and healing for all who engage with this medium.

Historical and Contemporary Context

Despite the specificity of the periods and cultures that are considered in a particular work, the employment of universal elements allows graphic narratives to deliver a message that transcends time and space; rendering them an integral medium within modern literary studies. This is particularly evident when exploring graphic narratives surrounding the

LGBTQIA+ experience. This dissertation will consider the effectiveness of this medium in regard to illuminating the extremities that affronted gay men in Fascist Italy between the years of 1922 and 1943 during a historical period referred to as *Il Ventennio fascista*. Although according to historians Peter Davies and Derek Lynch "there is no *single* interpretation of fascism," this time frame will be adapted by this dissertation to consider the reality of homosexual men in Fascist Italy (Davies and Lynch 1). Lorenzo Benadusi, Associate Professor of Contemporary History and European Cultural History at the Roma Tre University, underscores how the aspirations of Benito Mussolini and the Fascist party to "…bring about an anthropological revolution" that was "…rooted in severe repression of any behavior that did not conform to norms established by higher authority" commenced by 1923 (Benadusi 173). The consequences of this objective were reflected by the pervasive actions undertaken by the Fascists against men that did not follow the ascribed social norms of masculinity as they were subjected to both formal and informal sanctions by the State. Further, as "…an important model" for other Fascist nations, the enduring impact of Fascism in Italy must be considered beyond the scope of the 1930s (Mosse, "Introduction" 14). This reality persists within a postmodern society plagued by political instability and pervasive inequalities.

The Graphic Narrative as a Medium for Capturing Social Realities

Regardless of which sociohistorically marginalized group one wishes to consider, numerous factors pervade aspects of personal and collective identity. As a result, the seemingly "mundane" experiences of those who affront social obstacles become "extraordinary," and in some instances "extreme," in nature. A moment of extremity thrusts one from the familiar comforts of daily life into a reality that is beyond their established

schema. These instances of extremity often challenge an individual's agency as they are shaped by pervasive social realities that permeate multiple facets of daily life. Additionally, experiences may be perceived as "extreme" by an individual as their identity becomes disconnected with their quotidian environment. While such social realities that deprive one of agency and result in a profound sense of alienation from wider society are often "beyond words," the graphic narrative effectively captures such experiences. In her publication *Why Comics?: From Underground to Everywhere*, Hillary Chute affirms this unique quality of the graphic narrative to grapple with the unimaginable and unspoken by noting

> comics is a form of visual presence, a succession of frames, that is stippled with absence, in the frame-gutter sequence. We can say that its very grammar, then, evokes the unsaid, or inexpressible. Comics highlights the relation between words and images-and therefore addresses itself to the nature of the difficulty of representing extreme situations and experience. (Chute 34)

In this sense, the graphic narrative goes beyond reporting an issue, instead empowering the audience by engaging one in a dialectical process where they vicariously "live" an otherwise unfathomable experience; serving as a powerful tool of social awareness, acceptance, and change. Additionally, this medium facilitates a careful exploration of inequality by grappling with diverse contexts across historical periods, as well as cultures. The impactful nature of the graphic narrative to capture such experiences is evident when considering the LGBTQIA+ experience in both Italy, as well as the United States in both a past and present context.

The Power of the Graphic Narrative as a Medium and Source of Agency

The topic of this dissertation is significant for several reasons. Firstly, as a versatile medium, the graphic narrative assumes an integral role in the field of literary studies. A thorough discussion of the trends associated with the graphic narrative will underscore how this often overlooked and delegitimized medium in fact serves as an imperative body of work that not only engages the audience in the process of "reading," but rather a participatory endeavor that integrates numerous aspects of the human experience. Further, this analysis will demonstrate how the graphic narrative is not merely a genre, but rather "…an expressive medium that artists use to tell stories, and those stories can be anything" (Gill 4). This sentiment is also underscored by Chute when she affirms, "comics…is a medium in its own right-not a lowbrow genre of either art or literature, as it is sometimes understood-and it can be about anything" (Chute 2). Additionally, the term "graphic narrative" rather than that of "graphic novel" will be utilized to identify this medium, as the former term is "…inclusive of both fiction and nonfiction" (Chute 19). The juxtaposition of this medium to the extremities of gay men in Fascist Italy will allow this dissertation to provide voice to a sociohistorically silenced narrative. This dissertation will not simply recount a past experience, but rather provide an effective framework for actively engaging with narratives pertaining to extremity. In this sense, this project will allow the narrative of gay men in Fascist Italy to transcend time and space, as the power of the narrative as a source of voice and agency will be extended to grapple with the present-day challenges that affront the LGBTQIA+ community. That is, the elements of time and space allow one to contextualize a narrative in regard to a historical period and geographical location, while simultaneously tracing the evolution of a particular experience. The consideration of two graphic narratives addressing homosexuality in Italy in both a past

and present context will connect the LGBTQIA+ experience between two distinct time periods. A focus on the impact of "place" and "space" on the social reality of gay men will ultimately demonstrate how narratives allow one to overcome seemingly deterministic circumstances as they not only recount, but engage with, their own experience.

The Unifying and Empowering Attributes of Graphic Narratives

The versatile nature of the graphic narrative to address a diverse repertoire of historical and contemporary realities, renders this medium as particularly effective in capturing the extremities of the LGBTQIA+ experience. A careful consideration of the intersection between the dichotomies of past and present, as well as individual and collective within graphic narratives grappling with this theme affirms the power of this medium to not only narrate past and present circumstances, but to also influence future discourse. Further, the graphic narrative creates a space to explore the transient and tumultuous state that often characterizes the quotidian reality of those in the LGBTQIA+ community. These attributes are evident upon a close analysis of Luca de Santis and Sara Colaone's graphic narrative *In Italia sono tutti maschi* and Flavia Biondi's publication *La generazione*, both of which manipulate time and space to deliver a message that transcends specific periods and cultures.

A Methodology for Engaging with Graphic Narratives

Several methodologies will be utilized throughout the course of this project. Firstly, Scott McCloud's work *Understanding Comics: [the Invisible Art]* will provide a framework for engaging with the graphic narratives under consideration. Further, the theoretical underpinnings of the works of several scholars in the area of narrative studies will provide a framework for exploring narratives as sources of agency. A historical

analysis will be employed to both locate the featured primary texts within a past and present context, as well as the evolution of the graphic narrative in the discipline of literary studies.

As several primary and secondary sources at the core of this project are originally published in Italian, translation will serve a vital function. When citing a key term, sentence or passage published in Italian, the text will remain in the original language and will be surrounded by quotation marks. The initial language of publication will be maintained in the citation to ensure that the meaning or significance of the concept is not lost through translation. As English is the language in which this dissertation is written, all terminology and concepts cited in Italian will be accompanied by a translation, as well as a thorough explanation in English. The translation will be distinguished from the original quotation through the use of parenthesis and double quotation marks, as well as a notation regarding the source of the translation. In the cases that the author of this dissertation has provided the translation, the notation "my trans." will appear. Additionally, key concepts written in Italian that do not directly translate into English will be italicized to distinguish their significance in the original language. This additional clarification in English will ensure that the dissertation reaches targeted audiences.

Through a careful consideration of the graphic narrative as an effective medium in regard to the extremities that affronted gay men in Fascist Italy, this dissertation will assume an interdisciplinary approach. The disciplines of literary, historical, and global studies will comprise the methodological approach of this project. A sociohistorical examination of the experience of gay men in Fascist Italy will be explored in tandem with a literary analysis of a contemporary graphic narrative that grapples with this same topic. A historical methodology will be employed to consider *Il Ventennio fascista* in relation to

the quotidian reality of gay men during this interval of time. This historical analysis will provide a vital context for considering the contemporary graphic narratives under consideration in this project. The subsequent literary analysis of these graphic narratives will be guided by several frameworks focused on the writing of homosexuality in Italian literature, as well as critical theories pertaining to the graphic narrative. By adopting a sociohistorical and literary approach, this dissertation will demonstrate that the graphic narrative serves not only as a lens for, but as a participatory experience for understanding the plight of gay men living in Fascist Italy. In this sense, this dissertation will illuminate a past experience through active engagement with a contemporary medium. The impactful nature of the graphic narrative in regard to conveying a past extremity will ultimately be extended to consider the importance of the medium in providing voice and agency to the LGBTQIA+ community in the present.

Bridging Historical and Contemporary Graphic Narratives: An Overview

The first chapter will provide an overview of existing scholarship in the area of narrative studies. The works of several leading figures in the field will be considered to define and legitimize the graphic narrative as an effective medium for addressing social issues in both a historical and contemporary context. The featured scholarship will include Scott McCloud's theories as discussed in *Understanding Comics: [the Invisible Art]*, as well as the articles found within two anthologies: *Critical Approaches to Comics: Theories and Methods* edited by Matthew J. Smith and Randy Duncan and *From Comic Strips to Graphic Novels: Contributions to the Theory and History of Graphic Narrative* edited by Daniel Stein and Jan-Noël Thon. Additionally, the principle arguments of these scholars will be considered in tandem to develop a framework for meaningful engagement with the

graphic narratives at the center of this dissertation. This chapter will commence with an exploration of the cultural antecedents of the graphic narrative particularly in regard to capturing the LGBTQIA+ experience. The scholarship of Scott McCloud and his contemporaries will specifically define aspects the graphic narrative that will ultimately be applied in the analysis of selected publications within the subsequent chapters. In particular, the concept of the gutter will be introduced and explored as a source of agency for authors and audiences alike. Further, a dialogue will be facilitated between the theories of McCloud and his contemporaries, as well as leading figures in the field of narrative studies. This analysis will ultimately illuminate the importance of narratives in relation to both the preservation of identity, as well as the promotion of social awareness and acceptance.

The second chapter will provide context for the historical period in which one of the two graphic narratives under consideration unfolds. Specifically, this chapter will discuss how the construction of an aesthetic around the "New Man" by Benito Mussolini and the Fascist party both figuratively and literally placed gay men living in Italy during this time period beyond the confines of society. The ultimate displacement and confinement of gay men to the Tremiti Islands resulted in an extremity defined by contestations relating to national and personal identity as these individuals were thrust into a liminal reality. The historical context provided in this chapter will not only underscore the economic, political, and social persecution that affronted gay men, but will also illuminate how a contemporary graphic narrative provides voice to a traditionally silenced and relatively unknown narrative. In this sense, one will acquire a better understanding regarding how the elements of the contemporary graphic narrative both revisit a past

extremity, while simultaneously promoting awareness regarding social injustices that persist within the LGBTQIA+ community. Ultimately, one will come to recognize the graphic narrative as a vital bridge between past and present extremities through the ensuing discussion of two graphic narratives; Luca de Santis and Sara Colaone's graphic narrative *In Italia sono tutti maschi* and Flavia Biondi's publication *La generazione*.

The third chapter will provide an analysis of Luca de Santis and Sara Colaone's graphic narrative *In Italia sono tutti maschi*. de Santis and Colaone's graphic narrative employs text and image to convey the plight that affronted gay men in Fascist Italy, while drawing parallels to the hardships that persist for the LGBTQIA+ community in the present day. Through the employment of theories pertaining to narratives, this discussion will demonstrate how de Santis and Colaone employ the graphic narrative as an effective medium for acquiring agency by engaging the senses of their audience through text and image. In doing so, de Santis and Colaone capitalize upon the middle ground, or gutter, between text and image to ultimately reclaim an aesthetic that the Fascist party sought to silence and eradicate through the creation of the "New Man." The connection between the plight of gay men living in Fascist Italy, as well as those living in Italy in the present day will be explored through an analysis of the numerous flashbacks that appear throughout the work. By exploring the dialogue that occurs between the past and present experience of gay men, one will observe how the graphic narrative transcends time to address past and present injustices.

The fourth chapter will feature a discussion regarding the effectiveness of the graphic narrative to grapple with the ongoing struggles of the LGBTQIA+ community in the present day through an analysis of a second work, Flavia Biondi's *La generazione*.

Biondi's publication features the complexities that affront Matteo, a young Italian male that returns home to his small Tuscan hometown following an emotional breakup with his partner in Milan. Upon returning to his small hometown, Matteo discovers himself "Dissolto. In un limbo fra ieri e domani" as he must affront challenges that he encounters in relation to homosexuality, intergenerational differences, as well as regional variations between rural and cosmopolitan life ("Stuck in limbo between yesterday and tomorrow"; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 5). In this sense, Biondi's work grapples with issues pertaining to identity, regionality, as well as time through both text and image. This graphic narrative will be considered during the latter portion of this dissertation in order to establish a clear link between the past and present realities that impact the quotidian experience of gay men in Italy.

CHAPTER ONE

Narratives and Homosexuality:

Graphic Narratives as a Source of Agency and Identity for the LGBTQIA+ Community

Defining the Graphic Narrative as an Inclusive Medium

In a postmodern society defined by an unprecedented degree of globalization, varied literary genres, mediums, and topics have come to diversify, as well as challenge what was once considered the more traditional literary canon. Among the mediums that have come to lead this transition is that of the graphic narrative, a descendent of visual artforms that date back to antiquity. Daniel Stein and Jan-Noël Thon have chosen to refer to the literary medium as the "'graphic narrative…[as this term] is much more inclusive" and "…is more capable of encompassing different forms, formats, genres, and storytelling traditions across cultures and from around the world" (Stein and Thon 5). The inclusivity of this medium "…can make major contributions to our understandings of culture, media and society," as graphic narratives help one to orient and examine their own identity in relation to local, regional, and global contexts across periods of time (Hague 19). The vast nature of the graphic narrative has led scholars such as Henry Jenkins to "…embrace an approach that is radically undisciplined, taking its tools and vocabulary where it can find them, expansive in its borders to allow the broadest range of objects of study, inclusive in who it allows to participate and in the sites where critical conversations occur" (Jenkins 6). By adopting an inclusive framework, those who engage with graphic narratives are not merely interpretive "readers" as defined in a more traditional sense, but instead active participants in a process of seeking, and hopefully acquiring, a better understanding of the

world in which they live. Further, the versatility of this medium to grapple with essentially any topic and time period attests to what Scott McCloud refers to as their "limitless potential" (McCloud 201). Although the deliberate use of the terms "graphic narrative" and "medium" facilitate an inclusive approach, Gabriele Rippl and Lukas Etter argue that this "labeling…is somewhat problematic because [graphic narratives] actually involve two basic media which they combine, word and image, and these two media or representational semiotic codes are not present independently, but interact in very complex ways on the page in order to tell a story" (Rippl and Etter 194). In this sense, Rippl and Etter illuminate the importance of considering graphic narratives beyond a single medium. Those interpreting this medium may achieve a more inclusive and heightened level of engagement by employing two approaches in tandem (Rippl and Etter 194). Firstly, a "semiotic approach" allows one to consider graphic narratives as "...representational codes based on two media, words and pictures." Secondly, "cultural, material, and technical approaches" allow one to consider "…word and picture…[as] based on the medium of the printed book" (Rippl and Etter 194). The incorporation of both approaches allows one to observe what McCloud refers to as both the "visible" and "invisible" aspects of this medium (McCloud 205). This comprehensive framework is particularly imperative when engaging with works of this medium, as they often illuminate sociohistorically marginalized and silenced narratives that often fall well beyond the confines of ones established schema.

In her respective work, *Ethics in the Gutter: Empathy and Historical Fiction in Comics*, Kate Polak echoes the observation of her contemporaries that engagement with graphic narratives necessitates both "…the traditional literacy of reading and visual literacy" and "are…their own language" (Polak 13). However, Polak extends her

consideration of this medium to illuminate how graphic narratives effectively affront marginalized and silenced narratives. Polak asserts that these works "…create a *different* ethical universe for readers," as "ethics and empathy are rooted in processes of remembering, simulating, and narrating" (Polak 15 and 17). By partaking in this "*different* ethical universe," there is "…the possibility of reincorporating victims' voices," as well as an "… [exposure of] the fault lines between what we [the audience] think we know about violence and what we fail to understand about complicated circumstances of atrocity in the real world" (Polak 15 and 36). Therefore, both the creation and engagement with these works is mutually beneficial for authors, illustrators, and audiences alike. While providing victims with a venue in which to (re)affront atrocities, this medium does not merely "tell a story," but instead illuminates and transforms. This transformational attribute of the graphic narrative is particularly imperative when considering often silenced narratives, such as those of the LGBTQIA+ community both in past and present contexts. The marginalization of this demographic renders the graphic narrative not only an appropriate medium, but one of great importance.

The Cultural Antecedents of the Graphic Narrative in Capturing the LGBTQIA+ Experience

The graphic narrative has effectively captured the transformation of "mundane" experiences into the realms of the "extraordinary" and the "extreme," by featuring narratives of inequality that profoundly alter the LGBTQIA+ experience. In fact, as discussed in Chapter fourteen of their reference, *Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered Literature: A Genre Guide*, Ellen Bosman and John Bradford underscore how the obstacles that have impeded the development of this medium in relation to

LGBTQIA+ themes largely mirror the struggle found in the individual experiences of the featured works. According to Bosman and Bradford, despite emerging in the 1950s, sequential art "…did not receive much encouragement from the underground comics of the 1960s and 1970s" (Bosman and Bradford 288). Unlike other themes, those pertaining to the LGBTQIA+ community were particularly complex. Firstly, similar to essentially all forms of sequential art, the literary community was hesitant to accept a medium that upon initial review resembled stigmatized comics; preventing the medium's acknowledgement as a legitimate literary form (Bosman and Bradford 288). Additionally, unlike other themes in sequential art, the taboo nature of LGBTQIA+ community during this period, further hindered the development and acceptance of works grappling with such themes (Bosman and Bradford 288). However, since the development of additional sources including newspapers, news and literary magazines, and most recently, the proliferation of the internet, graphic narratives addressing the needs of the LGBTQIA+ community have become increasingly prevalent and accepted as legitimate discourse (Bosman and Bradford 288). Despite this wider acceptance, Bosman and Bradford affirm that a "battle" still persists in regard to "...[having] comics in [a] library," especially those dealing with LGBTQIA+ themes (Bosman and Bradford 288). These themes include issues pertaining to identity in relation to perceptions of the self, as well as ascribed social norms.

Among the pertinent themes that the graphic narrative effectively addresses within the context of the LGBTQIA+ experience are the complexities surrounding the body as a site of contention. In their article, Aidan Diamond and Lauranne Poharec distinguish the "unmarked body" from that of the "Other" defined as "…a body marked by disability and deformity: race and religion; sexuality and gender identity; physical and mental illnesses;

injuries, age, and prosthetics, and many alternative categories of differences" (Diamond and Poharec 403). The visible nature of the characteristics listed by Diamond and Poharec sustain the four categories that compose what Rosemarie Garland-Thomson refers to as the "'extraordinary' Othered body" which include: the "…supernatural," the "outcast," the "medicalized Other," and the "post-human" (Diamond and Poharec 403). The category of the "outcast" particularly pervades the LGBTQIA+ experience by

> Rendering the body an extension of the State, and [continuing] to require, the preservation of the heterosexual reproductive family unit. Efforts to control women's reproductive rights and to stamp out and queer sexualities and/or non-confirming gender identities are tied to this exercise as a state of power. Those who would today identify as LGBTQIA+ have been, in the last two centuries, imprisoned…socially punished…and executed…or institutionalized as mentally ill. (Diamond and Poharec 405)

In this sense, the labeling of those who identify as LGBTQIA+ has had tragic implications in both a past and present context. The fact that the label of the "outcast" relies heavily on visible markers permeates mediums that are visual in nature including that of comics. Consequentially, the comic has to some degree created and perpetuated detrimental portrayals of certain demographics. The fact that "…comics studies has tended to focus on one aspect of representational embodiment…race, gender, sexuality or disability" has prevented a holistic analysis of what Diamond and Poharec refer to as the "graphic body" (Diamond and Poharec 407). To overcome this limited perspective, Diamond and Poharec seek to "…expand the boundaries of the graphic body through the intersecting lenses of disability theory, gender and queer theory, post-humanism, and monster theory" (Diamond

and Poharec 411). This latter approach provides an interdisciplinary framework for better understanding the experience of a specific population and/or individual. Further, by "…[initiating] a dialogue between the body of the normate and the body of the Other," Diamond and Poharec's framework allows one to engage with a narrative as they identify and explore various extremities that transform the body into a contested site (Diamond and Poharec 411). Additionally, by exploring the intersectionality between various factors within the context of the human body, one is able to observe how the "…sociohistorically mediated-narrative self-understanding also influences [an individual's] bodily traits" (Brandon 80). This comprehensive approach is critical when exploring the multifaceted medium of the graphic narrative where numerous interactions unfold to illuminate the extremities that define the human experience.

The vital role of sequential art in bridging gaps between several dichotomies in relation to time, space, as well as personal and collective identities renders this cultural "battle" necessary. The unifying nature of the graphic narrative in bridging such elements is underscored by the theories of several scholars including Paul Ricouer, Derek Duncan, Risa Sodi, and Scott McCloud, all of which collectively uphold the importance of curating publications that grapple with LGBTQIA+ themes in a comprehensive media collection.

Defining and Exploring the Queer Narrative

In order to effectively consider the narrative form as an effective vehicle for exploring the LGBTQIA+ experience, one must first identify and define the "queer narrative." Similar to her contemporaries including Derek Duncan, Susan Lanser acknowledges that an "incongruous capaciousness of 'queer' extends to the study of narrative" (Lanser 924). In response to this observation, Lanser embraces the academic

definitions "…of the verb 'to queer'-[as] to transgress normative sexualities, to dismantle sexual fixities, and to dismantle all fixities…" (Lanser 924). Collectively, each of the three meanings of this verb prompt those inside and outside of the LGBTQIA+ community "to inquire" in regard to the social reality of this demographic (Lanser 925). Specifically, the manner in which Lanser adopts this verb allows for a critical analysis of the narrative that ultimately reveals how "…the binary of gender…figures in the writerly and readerly engagement with narrative voice" (Lanser 925-925). As a result, those who engage with a narrative are able to recognize the "mimetic investments" of the "narrative *person* ('who speaks?');" a factor that is present whether the narrator assumes a "homodiegetic ('first person')" or "heterodiegetic ('third person')" perspective (Lanser 925-926). By partaking in this process, one is able to recognize how their own biases, in addition to those of the narrator, influence their engagement with the narrative. Lanser develops the academic definition of the verb "to queer" to develop a "narratological framework" that places the "queer voice" at the core (Lanser 926). According to Lanser this framework is guided by three definitions of the "queer voice:" "(1) a voice belonging to a textual speaker who can be identified as a queer subject by virtue of sex, gender, or sexuality; (2) a voice that is textually ambiguous or subverts the conventions of sex, gender, or sexuality; and (3) a voice that confounds the rules for voice itself and this baffles our categorical assumptions about narrators and narrative" (Lanser 926). A consideration of the varying definitions of "voice" within the queer narrative underscores the complex and at times ambiguous experience that both narrators and readers must navigate. However, this ambiguity engages both parties in a dialectic process rooted in active inquiry as they explore aspects of the LGBTQIA+ experience. As affirmed by Lanser, the process of "queering narrative voice"

has the potential to "…emphasize the freedom of the verbal text to imagine a world beyond gender that resist conventional categories and conventional hierarchies of masculinity and femininity" (Lanser 933). Therefore, the queer narrative has the potential to benefit wider society by deconstructing binary social norms that silence the LGBTQIA+ community.

Paul Ricouer's Narrative Theory of "Selfhood" and "Sameness"

One dichotomy the graphic narrative addresses is that between collective and personal identity. In his respective work *Oneself as Another*, Paul Ricouer affirms that while "…personal identity…can be articulated only in the temporal dimension of human existence," there in fact exists a "…framework of narrative theory that [demonstrates a] …concrete dialectic of selfhood and sameness-and not simply the nominal distinction between the two terms..." (Ricouer 114). Instead, Ricouer identifies a "…middle ground between the descriptive viewpoint…and the prescriptive viewpoint" where a "triad" unfolds as narratives "…describe, narrate, and prescribe" (Ricouer 114). A careful analysis of the intersection, rather than the sole distinction, between "sameness" and "selfhood" serves as a vital space in which one may extract relevant meaning from a particular literary work. Further, this "middle ground" often allows one to contemplate a past narrative within a present context, while still providing the author with the opportunity to express the intricacies of their individual firsthand account. The resulting "…intervention of narrative identity…[which serves as a] mediator between pole of character, where the *idem* and *ipse* tend to coincide, and the pole of self-maintenance, where selfhood frees itself from sameness" (Ricouer 119). Therefore, "narrative identity" serves as a site of liberation, as one acquires a better understanding of the individual "selfhood" in relation to collective structures that pervasively seek to promote "sameness." This framework not only allows

an audience to acquire a holistic perspective into the individual experience, however also empowers one to assume a pragmatic role in addressing issues that threaten the quotidian human experience. When considering narratives, such as those pertaining to a sociohistrocially suppressed demographic (i.e. homosexual men) such an analysis is essential in acquiring a genuine understanding of the challenges facing this population. Additionally, the unique elements of this medium in particular, produce a sense of universality that delivers a message that allows a particular work to maintain relevancy beyond a specific period, as well as cross-culturally.

Derek Duncan's Cross-Cultural Message Regarding Identity and Literature

Another area in which the graphic narrative deconstructs traditional dichotomies to offer an objective glimpse into the individual LGBTQIA+ experience, is that between gender and sexuality. In his respective work, *Reading and Writing Italian Homosexuality: A Case of Possible Difference*, Derek Duncan addresses the silence that has surrounded homosexuality in Italian literary works; a theme that he notes has been present, but significantly marginalized and misinterpreted in common discourse. As discussed by Duncan, a close examination of how "…homosexuality has been articulated in twentieth-century narrative as an element of male subjectivity…[allows one to identify] the incoherencies that come to light once masculine identity is tested by the dual prisms of gender and sexuality" (Duncan 10-11). Duncan argues that for many authors of these works "…homosexuality is masked by gender or style or geographical difference [illustrating] how confused embodiment and sexuality become" (Duncan 7). Additionally, Duncan argues that one may acquire a better understanding of the more latent themes within these works by examining "homosexuality…[as] a position from which the production of

knowledge becomes possible, intimating in effect the creation of the queer subject…" (Duncan 8). This framework is predicated upon two essential perspectives, which include a consideration of the body as a "site" where conformity and contestations are both literally and figuratively embodied, as well as the peculiar "markers of cultural difference" that profoundly vary the manner in which homosexuality is represented cross-culturally (Duncan 12-13, 160). To substantiate the former point, Duncan discusses Teresa de Lauretis' notion of *autorappresentazione* ("self-representation"), the process by which the "'…[cultural] representation [of gender] becomes self-representation, when it is assumed by the subject as a component of identity'" (Duncan 11). In this sense, engaging with these narratives is not a static exercise in which information from the past is merely interpreted, but instead a dialectical process that invites readers to actively engage with the text and generate new meaning. As underscored by Duncan, such an approach has the potential to challenge "incoherencies" in narratives that both counteract the "conflation" of historical events associated with a particular period (i.e. homosexuality and Fascism), as well as provide a "voice" to a sociohistorically marginalized group (i.e. homosexual men) (Duncan 10-11, 13). While Duncan offers a critical perspective from which to analyze the complexities pertaining specifically to homosexuality in Fascist Italy, one is able to extend his framework to illuminate how the public and private domains intertwine to shape "narrative identity" in a more general sense. This extension of Duncan's findings in relation to identifying commonalities and distinctions between gender and sexuality, simultaneously allow one to better understand the rapport that exists between "sameness" and "selfhood;" acquiring a more accurate understanding of LGBTQIA+ narratives.

The Imperative to Narrate as Affirmed by Risa Sodi

Through a careful analysis of latent binary social norms that have pervaded the LGBTQIA+ experience, graphic narratives illuminate extremities that have sociohistorically been overlooked and/or marginalized by society. Through her analysis of writing pertaining to the Shoah in Italy in her work *Narrative and Imperative: The First Fifty Years of Italian Holocaust Writing (1944-1994)*, Risa Sodi highlights the vital role of narration in regard to less frequently considered historical moments. According to Sodi, certain aspects of the Italian narrative "…[lie] in a state of abeyance…" in a nation that "…has yet to reconcile itself to its World War II past" (Sodi 1). The complexities that surround narratives from the Fascist period in Italy necessitate "…a catalyst [to bring them] to the public's attention;" bridging the schism that persists between past and present realities in the nation (Sodi 1). Although Sodi's emphasis on the "'testimonial imperative'…or the drive that propelled Holocaust survivors to present their witness and that induced non-survivor authors to contemplate the Holocaust" pertains to the Shoah in Italy, this "imperative to narrate and recount" may be extended to reflect upon other extremities from the period (Sodi 2, 230). In this sense, Sodi provides a framework for not only considering the Shoah in Italy, but also the plight of other persecuted populations. This framework, which incorporates several taxonomies that "…[categorize]…works in terms of theme and structure," as well as "memory and…point of view of the author (author/survivor)," is transferable in nature and may extended to narratives that capture the dire circumstances that affronted homosexual males living within Fascist Italy (Sodi 6). One taxonomy cited by Sodi is that of Sidra Dekoven Ezrahi. Sodi delineates the four classifications that compose Ezrahi's taxonomy which include: "documentary literature," "concentrationary realism," the "survival novel," and the "myth" (Sodi 3-4). Whereas

narratives denoted by the classifications of "documentary literature" and "concentrationary realism" are aligned with facts, the latter two categories rely more on individual memory and tend to incorporate fictive elements (Sodi 3-4). Ezrahi's taxonomy affords one the opportunity to explore the "…'intermediate state' between testimony and imaginative literature," as well as fact and fiction within a single narrative (Sodi 3, 6). As both the collective and individual narratives of gay men living in Fascist Italy are shaped by objective historical facts and subjective memories, an exploration of the intersectionality between these two elements is paramount.

A second taxonomy noted by Sodi that is of particular interest when considering the LGBTQIA+ experience is Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's classification of "minor literatures" (Sodi 7). Deleuze and Guattari define "minor literature" as partaking "…in a minor practice…of a major language" (Sodi 7). While Sodi considers this framework within the context of Italian writings featuring the less commonly explored area of the Shoah, relatively unfamiliar narratives related to the adversity of homosexual men in Fascist Italy too may be designated as "minor." Therefore, a consideration of the experiences of gay men in Fascist Italy connects a "minor" historical topic to a "major" language (i.e. Italian) and period (i.e. Fascist Italy). Regardless of which system of classification one wishes to consider, Sodi affirms the multifaceted nature and importance of the narrative in regard to moments of extremity in a nation where memory is both complex and at times divisive.

Graphic Narratives: An Intricate Relationship Between Text and Image

The complexities surrounding narrative forms as underscored by Duncan, Ricouer, Sodi and others is only exacerbated in the case of the graphic narrative as one must navigate

not one, but two, forms simultaneously; text and image. According to Thon, one may commence this seemingly daunting undertaking by simply determining "'who's telling the tale'" (Thon 67). In consideration of the different types of narrators, Thon outlines additional questions one must ask when engaging with this medium "…is the narrator located within the first-order storyworld or 'outside' if it? [and]…does the graphic narrative provide any information about the specific situation in which a given narrator narrates that can be attributed to a source different from the narrative?" (Thon 73). From these inquiries, one may ascertain if a narrator is "heterodiegetic/extradiegetic…
not part of the story they narrate" or if they are "homodiegetic/intradiegetic…part of the story" (Thon 72). Further, Thon affirms that readers of graphic narratives must look beyond the physically represented text and image, by adopting "the idea that texts should be treated not merely as communication, but as 'communicated communication,' not merely as representation, but as represented representation" (Thon 68). In this sense, readers must reflect upon the identity and context of not only the narrator, but also themselves to fully comprehend and engage with the latent aspects of a particular work. McCloud reminds one of the introspective and extrospective approaches that are required when engaging with a graphic narrative when he asserts that this medium "…[commands] viewer involvement and identification" and functions as "…a vacuum into which our identity and awareness are pulled" (McCloud 36, 204). The various techniques employed within these publications through text and image profoundly impact this experience for each reader.

One technical element of the graphic narrative that facilitates this outcome is that of focalization or "…the relation between the ocular position that the image postulates, the visual field in the image, and the character's speech, thoughts, and presumed knowledge"

(Mikkonen 106). Polak further affirms that "focalization offers a powerful distinction between how a panel is *framed* (i.e., what point of view it depicts) and how it is *positioned* (i.e., through which character's memory the scene is filtered or, alternatively, how the reader is connected to the characters in the scene)" (Polak 27). Additionally, Polak asserts that the "…various levels of focalization…imply different roles and different affective statements for the reader" (Polak 27). For example, whereas with "zero focalization, the reader perceives…in the third person omniscient…[with] internal focalization [they develop] the narrative through a character or sets of characters whose perceptions frame the action. In the case of external focalization, the [reader]…[views] elements of the narrative at greater or lesser proximity to self" (Polak 27). The technique of focalization essentially allows readers to establish their own cognitive and spatial location in relation to elements within a narrative, as well as to incorporate elements of their own identity. When considering narratives of extremity, one must carefully consider "…the distance between the assumed audience's experiences and those of the victim's shown in the representation of the atrocity…" (Polak 9). This resulting metacognitive process ultimately affords readers the opportunity to connect with victims that have experienced extraordinary or extreme circumstances, as well as to construct tangential narratives for affronting adversity in their own lives. The profound variation of these individually constructed narratives both by the author and readers further serves as a source of contention between text and image.

Several scholars in the field discuss the complex relationship that exists between text and image as is evidenced both when one creates and engages with a graphic narrative. This complexity largely results from how visuals and text are simultaneously received and

then processed by the reader. McCloud takes note of the unique relationship between text and image when he affirms that whereas "pictures are received information" with a "…message [that] is instantaneous," the written text that accompanies them "…is perceived information [as] it takes time and specialized knowledge to decode the abstract symbols of language" (McCloud 49). Rippl and Etter concur with McCloud by noting "…decoding/reading are based on the different perception modes of both sign systems, on reading sequentially and looking on the panel and the graphic narrative page as a whole" (Rippl and Etter 197). In some instances, the juxtaposition of text to image results in a situation in which "…what is said is often betrayed by what is shown" (Polak 19). In order to overcome this challenge, one must consider how the interpretation of both images and words simultaneously impacts the ultimate meaning that is derived from these works. Further, one must recognize that the interpretation of text and image does not occur in isolation, but is instead profoundly influenced by a multitude of realities that define the lives of both a work's author, as well as those of the readers. Polak underscores how one may better grapple with the "the tension [that exists] between word and image" by considering how "both representation and description occur from a particular point of view, and points of view is embedded in a network of values, desires, and beliefs that shape the way we receive both words and images" (Polak 6). Therefore, by contemplating the larger context in which a graphic narrative exists, both when created and interpreted, one may recognize how the same contention that exists between text and image similarly functions as a unifying element. Silke Horstkotte emphasizes how a holistic analysis of this medium often reveals this "dynamic interaction between the visual and verbal…" (Horstkotte 43). This unifying outlook is necessary to fully understanding how numerous elements of the

individual and collective human experience converge within the graphic narrative to produce an increased degree of social awareness. Even when there is "…a lack of clarity… [the engaging nature of the graphic narrative elicits] greater participation by the reader and a sense of involvement" (McCloud 133). Further, as affirmed by Polak, by "…negotiating representations of extremity," audiences partake in an "emotional engagement" rooted in ethics and empathy (Polak 2, 7, 17). In a world often defined by divisiveness, this medium offers hope and inspiration.

Why the Graphic Narrative?: How Graphic Narratives Effectively Capture the "Mundane," the "Extraordinary," and the "Extreme"

Although numerous literary styles have grappled with the LGBTQIA+ experience, the graphic narrative has emerged as a particularly effective medium for capturing the all but mundane reality affronting this demographic. The effectiveness of this medium in successfully illuminating the individual experiences of homosexual men is twofold. Firstly, this medium manipulates time in a manner that engages present day audiences by inviting them to experience a series of events in a fluid manner with few time constraints. Secondly, these works create a space that allows one to vicariously experience the events of a particular narrativr, as well as to ultimately derive individual meaning. Collectively, these aspects of the graphic narrative highlight how "…place and space play a central part in the ways that large-scale and abstract social categories such as 'nation,' 'class,' and 'race' impact on lived experience and reproduce through it" (Hopkins and Dixon 174). Therefore, by considering place, space, and time through this medium, one is able to observe the degree of social control present within a particular narrative in relation to nationality, regionality, social class, gender, and race. Through the manipulation of time and space, the

graphic narrative has emerged as a "…fresh [approach] to the communication of individual experience" (The Chicago School of Media Theory 3). This medium fosters a dialectical process as the audience is not merely required to interpret a text regarding a series of events, but instead to engage in a "visual literacy" of "…constructing [and] manipulating" the information that is encountered (Duke 1). According to Ricouer, the participatory nature of narratives highlights the "…correlation *between* action and character in a narrative…[that] results [in] a dialectic *internal* to the character which is the exact corollary of the dialectic of concordance and discordance developed by the emplotment of action" (Ricouer 147). By exploring the symbiotic relationship between "action" and a "character," Ricouer affirms that the resulting "concordant-discordant synthesis" within narratives "…contributes to the necessity…of the history of a life, to which it is equated to the identity of character" (Ricouer 147). Therefore, by actively participating in a narrative one has the opportunity to (re)claim a particular narrative on their own terms; (re)establishing their own sense of agency. Further, this participatory experience with narratives illuminates the emergence of a "…moral problem… [in regard to] the recognition of [an] essential dissymmetry between the one who *acts* and the one who *undergoes*, culminating in the violence of the powerful agent" (Ricouer 145). In this sense, active engagement with the graphic narrative affords one the opportunity to identify the authentic elements of individual identity, even when suppressed and/or artificially manipulated as a means of survival amid extraordinary realities. Therefore, by fostering active engagement this medium provides an authentic voice for the LGBTQIA+ community.

In regard to time, the graphic narrative creates a unique experience that distinguishes the medium. Specifically, these works "…convey both the linear and

narrative formation of time" and allow the audience to have an almost omnipresent experience, as they are "…capable of experiencing past, present, and future simultaneously" (The Chicago School of Media Theory 3-4). In facilitating this fluidity of time, this medium overcomes what Ricouer refers to as "…the question of *permanence in time*… [that causes] the confrontation between [the] two versions of identity [sameness and selfhood]" (Ricouer 116). When grappling with a series of sensitive events in LGBTQIA+ narratives, one is able to acquire a better understanding of how banal experiences rapidly escalate to the domains of the "extraordinary" and "extreme," as those who identify in this manner must navigate structures promoting a status quo sense of "sameness," while still preserving their individual sense of "selfhood."

The Relationship Between Time and Space in the Graphic Narrative

The symbiotic relationship between time and space within the graphic narrative warrants further discussion. A consideration of time and space reveals the complexities that surround both concepts within the context of this medium. Karin Kukkonen defines time as "notoriously difficult to pin down: sometimes a repetition of the same image in two panels indicates length, sometimes an elongated panel does, sometimes depending on the time it takes to read the text in a speech bubble or to take all the detail in a crowded panel" (Kukkonen 54). In regard to space in the graphic narrative, Kukkonen notes that "space in comics unfolds on two levels, that of the storyspace represented in the panels and that of the arrangement of panels on the face of the page. Both…gain shape for readers through the action potentials of characters and the compositional lines in…the page layout" (Kukkonen 54). A consideration of Kukkonen's discussion of time and space reveals the parallels that exist between these two essential elements. Specifically, both time and space

are manipulated through the individual panels and/or overall panel layout. This manipulation transports the audience in a subtle, yet powerful, manner as they seek to orient themselves in relation to this medium. In his respective work, McCloud similarly explores this intricate relationship, as is evidenced when he notes "…as readers, we're left with only a vague sense that as our eyes are moving through space, they're also moving through time-- we just don't know by how much" (McCloud 100). This observation also underscores that when one is engaging with these works, they are in fact moving through time without necessarily noticing. Additionally, the vagueness of this movement through space and time invites the reader to establish these elements by synthesizing the words and images, as well as their own perspectives. McCloud not only discusses the relationship that exists between time and space, but in fact declares "In learning to read comics we all learned to perceive time spatially for in the world of comics, time and space are one in the same" (McCloud 100). Similar to the rapport that exists between text and image, space and time must be considered simultaneously and not as separate elements within the graphic narrative. The intertwined nature of time and space reflects how these two elements are not only influenced by the actual content of this medium, but also by the larger social and global context in which the work exists. As underscored by Ian Hague, these publications "…are not simply static objects… [but instead] change and are changed over time, modifying the space they occupy as they are being read" (Hague 19). Therefore, in order to fully engage with this medium, one must be aware of the historical and contemporary context in which the work exists. Further, readers must reflect upon their own social realities as they too will impact how they come to ultimately engage with the work.

Although time and space provide structure and transition, “Comic panels fracture both [elements], offering a jagged, staccato rhythm of unconnected moments” (McCloud 67). This characteristic of the medium necessitates a careful consideration of two other critical elements that provide cohesiveness; the gutter and closure.

Finding Closure in the Gutter

The graphic narrative also illuminates the LGBTQIA+ experience by creating a unique space for reflection. As underscored by Ricouer and Duncan, an accurate analysis of narratives requires one to identify the intersection between various dichotomies including “sameness” and “selfhood,” as well as sexuality and gender. Additionally, the often fragmented nature of panels and page layout that compose a graphic narrative necessitates additional elements to ensure seamless transitions and critical reflection. The medium achieves these objectives through the creation of a unique space that McCloud refers to as the “gutter,” which “…despite its unceremonious title…plays host to much of the magic and mystery that are at the heart of every comic” and creates a state of “…limbo…[in which] the human imagination takes two separate images and transforms them into a single idea” (McCloud 66). In her respective work, Polak emphasizes the importance of this element, by affirming “…the gutter is the space between the panels that has been variously theorized as a pause, as a place in which the reader imaginatively connects two separate panels, and as a space in which the reader is actively involved in constructing the text” (Polak 19). Polak’s definition of the gutter illuminates how this space serves both a pragmatic and metacognitive function. Firstly, the gutter allows for a much needed place of reprieve for readers as they engage with panels filled with text and images. The lack of a gutter would make an already difficult interpretive task much more

challenging, if not impossible. Secondly, the gutter engages one in an "imaginative collaboration" that "…represents the shift from one point of view to another, signaling transition in the ethical relationship between reader and character and reader and implied author" (Polak 1, 20). In this sense, the gutter helps to bridge the "…distance between the experience and the representation" (Polak 20). By strengthening the connection between readers and the text, the gutter drives engagement and facilitates another vital outcome of the medium, closure.

Another aspect of the graphic narrative that distinguishes this medium from others when grappling with moments of extremity, is that of closure. Defined by Rippl and Etter as "…the readers' ability and constant activity to bridge the gutters that divide the single static pictures, [that] helps to create narrativity;" closure assumes a vital role in the medium (Rippl and Etter 191). By partaking in "closure," the audience engages in what McCloud describes as the "…phenomenon of observing the parts but perceiving the whole" (McCloud 63). Further, McCloud affirms that "in recognizing and relating to other people…[humans] depend heavily on our learned ability of closure" and that "in an incomplete world, we must depend on closure for survival" (McCloud 63). The imperative need for closure is echoed by Polak when she states "…closure…has an ethical dimension; who you are and who you are prompted to identify with, how you make sense of your imagination in relation to what is depicted…are…a few areas in which comics create a different ethical universe for the reader" (Polak 15). Polak extends McCloud's definition of closure by considering this element to function as a "…space that…allows the reader to invest in rapport with the content in the panels," as well as to partake in an "…imaginative reconciliation of different iconic content in the panel and often different points of view"

(Polak 13). In this sense, closure invites one to partake in metacognitive processes as they draw vital parallels between the graphic events in which they have actively engaged and their own experiences. The resulting reflection is essential in identifying the "extraordinary" and the "extreme" among the seemingly "mundane" occurrences in life.

Engaging the Senses: Embodiment and Transformation through the Graphic Narrative

In addition to the gutter and closure, the multisensory nature of graphic narratives also assumes an integral role in rendering this medium highly engaging and, in some instances, a source of liberation. McCloud considers senses in relation to these works when he notes "All of us perceive the world as a whole through the experience of our senses. Yet our senses can only reveal a world that is fragmented and incomplete" (McCloud 62). Further, McCloud affirms that "All the things in life can be separated into two realms, the realm of concept and the realm of senses" (McCloud 3). The highly visual nature of graphic narratives, coupled with the medium's sites for reflection and the conceptual process of closure via the gutter, provide readers with a venue to explore and connect the senses. In doing so, these publications serve as a source of physical and mental survival by "…[uniting] the senses" (McCloud 123). McCloud notes that even in instances in which "none of our senses are required at all [i.e. between panels] …all of [the senses] are still engaged" (McCloud 89). Therefore, the senses are essentially engaged at all times as one navigates a graphic narrative. Although McCloud places an importance on the senses within these publications, Hague further develops this attribute of the medium. In his work, *Comics and the Senses: A Multisensory Approach to Comics and Graphic Novels*, Ian Hague "…[challenges] the idea that comics are a purely visual medium, arguing that they

are in fact possessed of a wide variety of properties that address themselves to readers; senses of hearing, touch, smell and in some instances taste...” (Hague 19). Further, Hague argues that graphic narratives “…stimulate our actual senses… [rather than solely stimulating] sensation through processes such as synesthesia” (Hague 51). Hague considers these works to transcend text and image as they engage readers in an authentically sensual experience. As the instances of extremity that this medium affronts often seek to strip one of their individuality and aesthetics, the multisensory nature of the medium restores these very same elements. This transformative element provides a renewed sense of agency to both an author and illustrator, as well as the wider audience.

The presence of the different senses within a graphic narrative work collectively to facilitate a larger embodiment among readers. According to Kukkonen, “embodiment grounds time and space in terms of our perception, experience, and exploration of them” (Kukkonen 54). As both time and space assume an integral role in the medium, readers are engaged in what Kukkonen refers to as an “embodied simulation;” something that is prompted by the textual and visual representations found throughout the medium (Kukkonen 58). For example, as discussed by McCloud, the “…universality of cartoon imagery” often allows one to see themselves and others within the actual narrative (McCloud 31). In fact, McCloud asserts that these publications actually “…command viewer involvement and identification” (McCloud 204). The resulting “*performance*,” not necessarily by the characters of the narrative, but by the audience, prompts readers to “…not interact…through their eyes alone; [as] their whole bodies are involved…” (Hague 25). This embodiment essentially transforms the audience from mere “readers” into “active participants,” as they vicariously partake in an experience.

The graphic narrative both transforms and is transformed by the audience. As discussed by both Polak and McCloud, the reader "invests" themselves in the medium (Polak 13; McCloud 28). McCloud illuminates how "…identities and awareness are invested in many inanimate objects every day… [allowing them to] trigger numerous transformations in the way others see us and in the way we see ourselves (McCloud 38). As these works are replete with such objects, this medium presents numerous opportunities for transformations. How an individual views themselves in relation to the work could potentially alter the manner in which they see themselves within a social context in the real world. Additionally, Kukkonen underscores how they "'transport' readers in three different ways: they evoke a readers' embodied simulations of being in a storyworld; (2) they make them experience the emotional involvements of characters; (3) they guide them across the face of the page. On each of these levels, time, space, and causality enforce each other through bodies on the page" (Kukkonen 55). As individuals engage with a graphic narrative, their perceptions, experiences, and realities intertwine with those found within the medium. The fact that readers may "…mask themselves in a character and safely enter a sensually stimulating world," entices them to take such a risk and be vulnerable (McCloud 43). The resulting transformation is essential to fostering a deeper level of engagement and understanding in relation to the extremity under consideration within a work.

Putting Theory into Action: The Graphic Narrative as a Vehicle for Exploring the Plight of Gay Men in Past and Present Contexts

Overall, the graphic narrative is a powerful conduit for considering the mundane, extraordinary, and extreme circumstances both in historical and contemporary contexts.

The engaging and transformative nature of the medium allows the audience to not merely interpret a text or image, but instead to actively participate in a metacognitively stimulating experience, as well as construct new meaning of relevance to their own lives and social realities. In this sense, the reader of a graphic narrative acquires agency as they "make meaning" and "in the end, what [they] get is what [they] give" through the process (Polak 28; McCloud 137). Further, the reflective and transformative nature of the medium is particularly imperative when affronting narratives of extremity. The publications allow society to overcome the pervasive and "convenient cultural amnesia" that often silences "…groups whose memories are left out of a broader cultural narrative" (Polak 30). As illuminated by Polak, this is made possible by the ability of the graphic narrative to create a "…relative distance from…sites of violence [that] frees them up to reintegrate forgotten or marginalized atrocities that exist outside our normal network of cultural memory and association, to make visible the source of traumas still dealt with in many communities today" (Polak 30). Therefore, by creating a venue rooted in engagement and reflection, they offer a unique opportunity for readers to comprehend and affront social injustices both in the past and present. As a sociohistorically marginalized demographic, the graphic narrative assumes a powerful role in capturing the injustices that have negatively impacted the lives of those in LGBTQIA+ community. The fact that various LGBTQIA+ narratives from the past, such as the plight of gay men in Fascist Italy, remain largely unknown is a symptom of the marginalization that pervades essentially all facets of the LGBTQIA+ experience. A careful consideration of two publications grappling with this topic, Luca de Santis and Sara Colaone's *In Italia sono tutti maschi* and Flavia Biondi's *La generazione*,

will demonstrate the power of the medium to provide voice and agency to those who have long been marginalized and persecuted.

CHAPTER TWO

Exploring the Bodily Narrative:

Aesthetics and Homosexuality in Fascist Italy

In Search of an "Enemy:" Locating Homosexual Males within Fascist Italy's Aesthetic Narrative

One element that is characteristic of many periods defined by profound extremity is the emergence of numerous narratives that capture the reality of both the collective and individual amid previously unfathomable quotidian realities. These moments of extremity are often defined by extraordinary hardships that challenge all facets of the human spirit, as well as the ultimate (re)shaping of an individual's identity as they seek survival. Although such narratives highlight the challenges that have affronted various populations, they too reveal instances in which agency is attained in the most unlikely of circumstances. The multifaceted and versatile nature of the graphic narrative renders this medium particularly effective in grappling with such moments. In her respective work *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy*, Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi considers the importance of narratives in relation to Fascist Italy. According to Falasca-Zamponi, "as intersubjective discourse that [take] place within social space and historical time… [narratives establish] mutual understanding with members of the collectivity…" and serve as "a crucial means for social recognition… [as they] provide us with ways to organize reality and construct meanings" (Falasca-Zamponi 2-3). Further, Falasca-Zamponi, similar to Ricouer, asserts that narratives assume a transformative role in shaping collective memory as "…the power of narrative and the narrative of power form an explosive combination" (Falasca-Zamponi 3). In this sense, narratives transcend time,

space, as well as place to shape both collective and individual identity. Although narratives assume an integral role for all individuals, they prove particularly impactful in the lives of sociohistorically persecuted populations. The power of the narrative is particularly evident when considering seemingly unfathomable moments of extremity, such as daily life under a pervasive totalitarian regime. A careful analysis of homosexual men living in Italy from 1922 through 1943 under the rule of Benito Mussolini and the Fascist party during the period of *Il Ventennio fascista*, underscores the profound impact of narratives for an often overlooked and "silenced" population. The experience of homosexual men under Fascist rule reflects how a set of aesthetics was established and manipulated as a means of exerting political, economic, as well as social control in both the public and private spheres. The pervasion of a Fascist aesthetic into essentially all facets of daily life became manifested not only through societal perceptions towards homosexual males, but also in how these men ultimately came to identify themselves amid a hostile and unhospitable environment. In this sense, the impact of the Fascist aesthetic on homosexual males became evident throughout the narratives that emerged during the Fascist period in Italy.

A careful consideration of the defining attributes of the aesthetic created and enforced by Benito Mussolini and the Fascist party illuminates the sense of displacement and disembodiment experienced by homosexual men. By assuming the role of the "manly artist-politician" and "God-like artist-creator," Mussolini perceived "…the 'masses' as a passive material…to carve" as a means of "transforming" Italy (Falasca-Zamponi 8, 12). As Italy seemingly transformed, so too did the very definition of aesthetics as "nature was displaced by human-made… [and manipulated] for cognitive functions" (Falasca-Zamponi 11). Although on the surface Mussolini's aspirations to "transform" Italy through aesthetics

would lead one to assume that new artifacts were "created," the opposite was in fact true. As affirmed by Falasca-Zamponi, rather than creating aesthetic elements, Mussolini and the Fascist party pursued a "destructive path" motivated by achieving "sensory alienation," "disembodiment," and an "anesthetic" quality that "…assaulted the body and denied the senses" (Falasca-Zamponi 13, 192). In his respective article, George Mosse extends Falasca-Zamponi's argument by adding that "[although the] Fascist aesthetic invented nothing new or even experimental…fascist politics did present something new, a so-called political party based upon a civic religion which encompassed all aspects of life" (Mosse 249). The convergence of a new political model with preexisting aesthetic elements proved to be an effective vehicle for Mussolini in his quest to create an Italian identity built upon a single standard. This approach emphasized the collective masses over the individual being and resulted in prejudicial perceptions and discriminatory responses towards anyone who did not meet the criteria of the nationally established aesthetic schema. According to Mosse, the Fascist aesthetic sought a strictly binary approach that made a "…clear distinction between friend and foe" and actively sought an "…enemy against which to define itself; the outsiders, designated as such, often denigrated and vilified" (Mosse 249). Consequentially, when compared to the national aesthetic individuals were either labeled as "…the so-called beautiful or the supposedly deformed body…[in] character and mind" (Mosse 249). Those who received the latter designation antagonized Fascist ideology; necessitating urgent intervention by the authoritarian state.

In his publication *The Enemy of the New Man: Homosexuality in Fascist Italy*, Lorenzo Benadusi similarly affirms that the Fascists created a "…dichotomized view of reality and increased the head-on opposition between *amico* (friend) and *nemico* (enemy),

between *tipi* (types) and *controtipi* (counter types)" (Benadusi, "The Enemy" 25). The "enemies" that Mussolini and his party sought to serve an imperative function in the national Fascist aesthetic were identified along two seemingly "easily" recognizable "classifications;" race and gender. As highlighted by Rhiannon Welch, both of these categories became focal points within a nation marred by "…post-Unification political anxieties about the (re)production and fragmentation of the Italian nation-state: the so-called southern question; mass emigration to the Americas; and early colonialism in the Horn of Africa and Libya" (Welch 4). By directing the nation's attention to issues of reproduction of the Italian "race," the citizens emerged as what Welch refers to as "vital subjects," subjected to the omnipresent role of the Fascist regime in both the public and private spheres of daily life (Welch 4). In regard to gender, the Fascist aesthetic provided Italians with "…value-laden perceptions of…differences [that in turn allowed them to] exert a significant bearing on the ways in which representations of sexed and gendered bodies [were] viewed" (Polezzi and Ross 17). The social anxiety and perceived threat of gender and sexual changes during the interwar years ultimately prompted a "terrorizing backlash" from movements such as the Roman Catholic Church, Fascists, and Nazis that aligned sex reform with eugenics (Herzog 410-411). The profound sentiment of "emasculation" that defeat and loss during World War I engendered, further exacerbated the severity of sexual politics under the Fascist and Nazi regimes that ascended to power in the years that followed. Therefore, the actions against gay men by the Fascist regime which included surveillance, imprisonment, and deportation to penal colonies as "*confinati comuni*" ("common criminal detainees") and "*confinati politici*" ("political detainees") reflected "…older origins, and…had a far broader political base than fascism per se"

(Herzog 412; Benadusi, "The Enemy" 119). In a nation defined by "…elements of continuity and discontinuity between ideological models (and the social practices they strove to inform)," a preoccupation with gender and race emerged as a logical means of resolving "the friction between bourgeois mentality and totalitarian aspirations to achieve a real anthropological revolution" (Polezzi and Ross 16; Benadusi, "Private" 195). The resulting aesthetic was contradictory in nature, as "…the display of exotic love affairs was encouraged as a sign of Italian virility…while…inter-racial sexual relations were condemned by racial eugenics" (Ponzanesi 85). Despite this disconnect, the visual nature of these two categories rendered them convenient when identifying the "Other" within the context of a national aesthetic that emphasized homogeneity. As a result, individuals who did not meet the nationally established norms and values in regard to idealized gender roles were deemed "enemies" of the Fascist state and subjected to the harsh daily reality that accompanied this detrimental label.

The preoccupation of Mussolini and the Fascist regime in regard to identifying an enemy to perpetuate a national aesthetic that emphasized hypermasculinity, placed homosexual men living in Italy during this period at the center of the regime's persecution. Further, as underscored by Benadusi, the fact that "Fascism did not punish homosexuals but rather men who had feminine ways," only expanded the pervasive nature of the regime in a manner that rendered all men potential "enemies" of the state (Benadusi, "Private" 186). Both heterosexual and homosexual men alike who did not meet the established standard of masculinity could be subjected to punitive actions as sanctioned by the State. In turn, the fear of attaining the status of an "outsider," especially when such a label was accompanied by dire consequences, served as an incentive for "masculine" men to not only

view women as inferior due to perceived gender differences, but also other men. Although the concept of the "New Man" was a socially constructed ideal comprised of false and unrealistic attributes as defined by the Fascist regime, the consequences for men who did not strive towards attainment of this standard carried real consequences. In this sense, the concept of the "New Man" allowed the State to exercise a high degree of social control and fostered violent behavior among and towards men in Fascist Italy. The resulting discordance between an artificial construct of the mythical "New Man" and the reality of homosexual males resulted in an aesthetic that pervaded all facets of this population's quotidian experience and (dis)placed these individuals both symbolically and literally beyond the confines of society and perhaps even more tragically, their own self-identity.

Fascist Italy's "Creation" of a "New" Masculine Aesthetic: The "*Amico*" of the State

One manner in which Mussolini and the Fascist party sought to acquire complete social control was by clearly defining the masculine aesthetic that the regime sought to attain at the national level. The primary objective of the Fascists was to establish a "…link between 'body and nation'" (Benadusi, "The Enemy" 11). As a result, the male body emerged as both a contested site and symbol for the Fascist regime to "…[convey] to the masses the values and virtues needed to increase their domestic cohesion" (Benadusi, "The Enemy" 12). In an effort to establish an explicit rapport between the individual body of the private sphere and nationalistic aspirations in the public sphere, the Fascists transformed not only the manner in which society viewed populations deemed as "inferior," but also how individuals within these "categories" perceived themselves in relation to the national discourse. The Fascists infiltrated the perceptions of both the national collective and individual citizens through the manifestation of various labels based on the mythical

aesthetic. This outcome was particularly evident with homosexual men, as the Fascist regime juxtaposed stereotypes pertaining to this demographic to a mythical aesthetic of the "New Man." The contrast between the aesthetic of the "New Man" constructed upon the tenets of virility, warfare, and comradery, as well as preexisting prejudices against homosexual men led this specific population to emerge as a malleable piece to be manipulated in the larger aesthetic mosaic of Fascist Italy. Specifically, by enforcing the concept of the "New Man" the State created a formal apparatus for persecuting a stigmatized population, homosexual men. Whereas heterosexual men who exemplified the amicable attributes of the "New Man" were celebrated by the State, homosexual men were persecuted for not meeting the ascribed social norm. In this sense, heterosexual men who embodied the national aesthetic of the "New Man" were considered "friends" that belonged to the State, while homosexual men were labeled as "enemies" that needed to be isolated from society. These actions were undertaken with the desired outcome to "change" homosexual men and eradicate all aspects of both individual and collective identity within this disenfranchised community. The formal creation of a "friend" and "enemy" binary through the social construct of the "New Man" empowered the State to undertake these pervasive actions under the guise of protecting the wellbeing of the nation amid turbulent social, political, and economic circumstances.

(Re)constructing Masculine Identity Physically and Spiritually: Fascist Italy's "New Man"

The aesthetic of the "New Man" reflected the Fascist party's attempt to grapple with Italy's tumultuous historic past in order to establish a strong nation-state that could achieve dominance on an international level. As underscored by Benadusi, the concept of

the "New Man" was not based on an imagery that Mussolini or the Fascists invented, but rather proved to be "…an exaggerated version of the sum of the various features of the pre-Fascist man: the idealized virile man was a mythical image that captivated society because it was founded on real elements; it was a feasible aspiration, a future model already based in the present" (Benadusi, "The Enemy" 9). Therefore, Mussolini and the Fascists examined various epochs in Italian history to ultimately select and denounce aesthetic elements from the past that best aligned to the regime's needs. Regardless of the time periods from which they came, the concepts that comprised the "New Man" were closely linked to industrialization and militarization (Benadusi, "The Enemy" 18-19). Although the "New Man" celebrated "Ancient Rome's 'heroic morality,'" this concept had a much more contentious relationship with aspects of modernity (Benadusi, "The Enemy" 17). In his respective discussion of Fascist notions of masculinity, Sandro Bellasai argues that the Fascist concept of masculinity was deeply rooted in "…ruralism, anti-urbanism, anti-intellectualism, antibourgeois, antifeminism-and [promoted] misogyny and pronatalism" (Bellasai 315). Therefore, although the "New Man" embraced some aspects of modernity that complemented an ancient ideal, others were attacked as threats to the unified nation. The concept of the "New Man" reflected a similar contestation between the Fascist regime and the Roman Catholic Church. Whereas both the Fascist party and the Roman Catholic Church, "…further sought to circumscribe gender roles…within the private sphere of the home," the two institutions diverged in regard to the latter's focus on "humanitarian pacifism" (Polezzi and Ross 16; Benadusi, "The Enemy" 81). The Roman Catholic Church continued to encourage morality in regard to matters of sexuality, addressing sex in terms of monogamy and procreation. In contrast to the Roman Catholic Church, the Fascist

party's "New Man" "…emphasized a more unrestrained and transgressive masculinity, allowing for satisfaction of sexual needs implicit in a healthy and explosive virility…" (Benadusi, "The Enemy" 81). Although the Fascists sought to utilize the aesthetic of the "New Man" to promote uniformity through the transcendence of time, the outcomes of this effort were quite divisive. The very nature of the title "New Man" alone implied that "…the 'old man' had to be reformed by changing his habits, customs, and actors;" dichotomizing Italian men based on degrees of masculinity (Benadusi, "Private" 190). Further, the aesthetic of the "New Man" reinforced a degree of "…indifference to pain or threat of harm… as the standard…" and ultimately made Italians "…indifferent not only to others but to oneself-indifferent to one's rational, self-protective prefrontal cortex…" (Acheson-Brown 2). Therefore, although rooted in the image of power and energy, the "New Man" essentially stripped citizens of their individuality and established a clear enemy that needed to be addressed.

Virility as a Source of Social Control Amid Moral Panic

Among the attributes that defined the "New Man" was that of virility. In a nation where preoccupations in regard to race, gender, and reproduction persisted, virility emerged as a possible solution to a seemingly urgent social problem. Although virility pertains to the individual body, the emphasis of the "New Man" aesthetic at the national level established a symbiotic relationship between the individual body and nation. Therefore, the pursuit of "…virility…the perfect balance of a strong, vigorous body and an energetic strong-willed soul" became an initiative all Italians could participate in to better themselves and the nation (Benadusi, "The Enemy" 15). As defined by Benadusi "The exaltation of virility originated from within those movements that referred most to the

strength of the nation, Italianism, activism, and youthfulness and aimed to increase demographic growth, physical vigor, and social renewal through instruction on hygiene and public health" (Benadusi, "The Enemy" 14). Therefore, similar to the other attributes of the "New Man," the Fascists did not create a new aesthetic, but rather borrowed from preexisting movements. Additionally, the Fascists exploited a contemporary anxiety in relation to reproduction in order to propagate the aesthetic. The resulting "male stereotype" further stratified citizens through gender role expectations (Benadusi, "The Enemy" 14). The reinforcement of these roles targeted men who did not meet the Fascist definition of exhibiting virility; a reality that proved highly problematic and dangerous for homosexual males.

The Body as a Site of Warfare

As the "New Man" and virility were intertwined with the national climate, warfare emerged as a bridging element between the nation and individual. During a time of colonization and war, the Fascist ideal of virility became synonymous with the image of the "warrior-like" Italian male who possessed the "…ability to fight for the homeland…[serving as a symbol] of virtue, health, vigor, and national regeneration" (Benadusi, "The Enemy" 14). Additionally, the focus on combat promoted an "aggressive" stereotype of men within the aesthetic of the "New Man" (Benadusi, "The Enemy" 19). In this sense, Italian men were ascribed the bifurcated identity of a "citizen-soldier," making little to no distinction between the two roles (Benadusi, "Private" 174). Therefore, a man who did not meet the necessary prerequisites of the "New Man" to serve as an effective soldier was similarly classified as inadequate to be a citizen. This classification of the ideal male citizen based on the perceived ability to fight was further compounded by how the

"homosocial models" of *cameratismo* ("camaraderie") and *squadrismo* ("action squads") reinforced the message that "adherence to the lifestyle and ideology of Fascism were the necessary requirements for belonging to the Fascist community" (my trans.; Polezzi and Ross 16; Benadusi, "The Enemy" 273). The "sense of belonging" espoused by these aesthetic qualities only further distinguished between the "ideal male" and the "Others." Ironically, *cameratismo* and *squadrismo* often generated a homoerotic aesthetic; something that was overlooked by the Fascists (Benadusi, "The Enemy" 273). As gay men were not perceived as belonging since they did not meet the ideals of the "New Man," they were further excluded from serving their nation as a soldier.

Regardless of which aspect of the "New Man" one wishes to consider, the aesthetics of this mythical construct collectively defined the "ideal" male that was of value to the Fascist state. Additionally, each element eliminated the acceptance of variation in regard to masculinity and made "confusion about gender…a serious threat to the goal of orienting people…" (Benadusi, "The Enemy" 14). The attributes that defined the "New Man" created a framework that the Fascist party would ultimately utilize to formally label and attack individuals who did not meet the nationally defined aesthetic. As a result, just as men who exhibited the qualities of the "New Man" were deemed "friends" of the Fascist state and celebrated, gay men were labeled as "enemies" and subjected to severe consequences that assaulted their individual identity.

Fascist Italy's Assault on the Internal "Being" through Dis-em-bodiment and Displacement: The *Nemico* of the State

Similar to the manner in which the Fascist party utilized the aesthetic of the "New Man" to identify and celebrate men who met the criteria that comprised the ideal form of

masculinity, the regime also established a "counter-aesthetic" to address men who did not meet the prescribed standard. Whereas the aesthetic of the "New Man" commenced in the public sphere at the national level, the propagation of this imagery ultimately permeated the private sphere to impact the self-identity of Italian men who did not align with this myth. This crisis of identity was particularly evident for gay men living in Fascist Italy. Although gay men were marginalized in pre-Fascist Italy, the aesthetic of the "New Man" made them a direct target of the Fascist state through the reinforcement of pervasive labels, stereotypes, as well as codified surveillance and prosecution. As a result, gay men were subjected to "spatial exile," as they found themselves exiled from their region, nation, and self (Drayson-Knigge, "Home"). The degree of disembodiment and displacement that resulted from this "exile," resulted in a complex and radical transformation for gay men at a physical and psychological level (Drayson-Knigge, "Women's"). A careful consideration of the actions that gay men took to affront a previously unfathomable reality illuminates the emergence of a disconnect between the way one subjectively engages with and experiences moments of extremities and the more objective realities of these same circumstances. In his publication, John Champagne reiterates the artificial role that all men had to assume as a survival mechanism under the oppressive Fascist regime "…this new male subject 'performed' his gender in such a way as to render masculinity a spectacle that, on the one hand, provided visible evidence of his strength of body and will and, on the other, threatened to turn him into an object of erotic contemplation for both women and other men" (Champagne 10). In this sense, both heterosexual and homosexual men had to "act" or "perform" to some extent to meet the demands of the public sphere while denying aspects of their identity that did not correspond to the aesthetic of the "New Man." As the

"…sociohistorically mediated-narrative self-understanding also influences [an individual's] bodily traits," both the aesthetic of the "New Man" and the body of the gay male became deeply intertwined and impacted self-identity (Brandon 80). In this sense, the male body shaped the narrative equally as much as the narrative shaped the individual body. The resulting deprivation of the self in the case of gay men in Fascist Italy necessitates an "analysis…[that strives] to peel away the layers of identity inscribed onto the [male] body and evaluate the qualities with which these facets of identity are invested, by whom and from which perceptive(s)…" (Polezzi and Ross 17). A careful examination of the labels and confinement of gay men in Fascist Italy facilitates a deeper understanding of the issues pertaining to individual identity that unfolded amid the aesthetic of the "New Man."

Dis-em-bodiment: Labeling the Homosexual Male in Fascist Italy

In a society constructed upon a polarizing and combative ideology, labels served an integral role in identifying gay men as the "Other." One of the earliest and most common labels associated with gay men was that of "*pederasta*" ("pederasts") who were "…portrayed as perverse individuals, corrupted, with unstable personalities, fickle, liars, lethargic, poor workers, lacking in morals, seriousness, and decency, with no sense of shame. They had tendencies to commit immoral acts and acts that damaged racial integrity, with feminine behaviors, voice and displaying 'womanly attitudes.'" (my trans.; Benadusi, "Private" 180). This definition of the *pederasta* is significant for several reasons. Firstly, the characteristics associated with the *pederasta* labeled homosexual men in a manner that rendered them as a perceived threat to society. The negative connotation associated with this label cultivated fear and anxiety in spaces throughout Italy. This impact was reflected

by the unique titles assigned to gay men in different regions. For example, in Sicily the term "*arruso*" was utilized to label homosexual men (Benadusi, "The Enemy" xxi). Secondly, this particular label affirmed that the *pederasta* was not only a threat to individual communities, but to the entire nation as the characteristics exhibited by such individuals countered the initiatives of the Fascists and had the potential to burden the entire nation-state.

As division was at the core of Fascist ideology, further distinctions were made through the categorization of gay males, as men subjected to labels were further classified as either "*passivo*" ("passive") or "*attivo*" ("active"). Whereas an "active" man possessed qualities associated with virility, the "inactive" man was deemed to lack such qualities (Benadusi, "The Enemy" 20-21). In their respective study, Gianfranco Goretti and Tommaso Giartosio discovered that among the men arrested for "*pederastia*" ("pederasty"), the vast majority were classified as "*sessualmente passivi*" ("sexually passive") (my trans.; Goretti and Giartosio 88). Those who exhibited "sexually passive" behaviors were believed to be "*ammalati*" ("ill") and a "*contagio*" ("contagion"); creating a label "…che permette di mescolare il piano medico con quello morale" ("…that mixed the medical level with the moral one"; my trans.; Goretti and Giartosio 88). In addition to subjecting "passive" gay men to a pervasive label, the distinction made between "passive" and "active" men aligned with the distinction made for heterosexual men and women; preventing a "proper subculture" from forming for this population (Benadusi, "The Enemy" 134). These labels and stereotypes detached gay men from identifying with both a national culture, as well as any particular subculture. As a result, homosexual men living

in Fascist Italy were alienated not only from wider society, but also others experiencing the same extremity.

Constructing and Perpetuating a Myth in Fascist Italy through Social Class and Labor

Among the many complexities that constantly (re)shape collective and individual identity are myths. Although myths have assumed an impactful role throughout the course of history, the power of this element is particularly evident when considering totalitarian and authoritarian regimes. A careful consideration of Mussolini and the Fascist party reveals how the regime engaged in a deliberate process of constructing and sustaining myths in an effort to (re)shape the experience of Italian citizens at both the national and individual level. Similar to their counterparts in Nazi Germany, the Fascist party not only sustained a particular mythology, but altered the propagated discourse to accommodate a series of changes that unfolded nationally and internationally. Additionally, the Fascist party capitalized upon the symbiotic relationship that often exists between myths and culture to exercise political, economic, and social control on essentially all facets of the quotidian experience of Italians. As affirmed by Ruth Ben-Ghiat, the Fascist myth in relation to the economy was predicated upon "the notion of 'spirituality'…[which] functioned as a container for qualities such as individuality, heroism, and creativity that were perceived as threatened by the 'materialistic' ethos of communist and capitalist societies" (Ben-Ghiat, "Italian" 293). As a result, the Fascists introduced a mythical "…'third way' distinct from liberalism and Marxism," centered upon "…community and comradeship without crushing personal initiative and will" (Ben-Ghiat, "Italian" 293). This model led Italian intellectuals, as well as citizens supporting nationalistic and cultural

movements, such as *romanità* ("Romanitas") and *Strapaese*, alike to ultimately accept Fascism as a means of attaining "…a 'national' version of modernity that would permit the retention of spirituality and specificity" while reconciling social variations (my trans.; Ben-Ghiat, "Italian" 296-298). Therefore, by "…[believing] in fascism as a system that would create a modern mass society…while preserving individual and national identity," the Italians consumed a myth that capitalized upon the uncertainty of the period in which they lived and appeared to provide "…a blueprint for a new type of civilization" (Ben-Ghiat, "Italian" 298-299). Further, this myth masked the complete suppression of individuality that Mussolini and the Fascist party sought to achieve through pervasive policies that placed the nation before the individual.

Similar to Ben-Ghiat, Falasca-Zamponi, illuminates the motivation and attributes of the "third way." Falasca-Zamponi affirms that, fearing the threat of "individualism" symbolized by the bourgeoise, Mussolini and the Fascists employed "aesthetic politics…via a complex strategy of mimetism, displacement, and incorporation," as well as through the "spiritualization of the economy" (Falasca-Zamponi 120, 135). At the core of this approach was to make "…individual desires…public…political," as "…fascism exploded and reformulated [the] division [between private/public] in multiple combinations that tended to neutralize and reinvent both terms" (Falasca-Zamponi 146-147). Jorge Dagnino similarly underscores how various attributes of Fascism, such as the pursuit of "true liberty" through authority, stood in sharp contrast to bourgeois ideals of individualism, autonomy, liberalism, and socialism. Dagnino argues that Fascists were successful in their endeavor to assert a high degree of authority by "…[linking] biological, political, and spiritual values" to achieve their mutual objectives of dismissing previous

societal values as "passive" and weak (Dagnino, "The Myth" 146). The policies and actions of Mussolini and the Fascist party reveal the struggle to transform the "private" into the "public" as a means of achieving nationalistic objectives. Further, the ongoing effort to converge the public and private spheres of society was not unique to Fascist Italy, as Nazi Germany similarly pursued this initiative as a source of control. To some extent the careful creation and merchandising of myths pertaining to the public and private domains permeated aspects of daily life in both Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy to emphasize the masses over individuality. This exerted control through consumerism was evidenced within both regimes by the attention devoted to monitoring and influencing matters pertaining to the most individualistic of sites, the human body. In regard to the latter Italian case, the construction, perpetuation, and evolution of a myth to achieve desired political, economic, and social control was evident in regard to labor and consumerism.

The construction and perpetuation of a myth by the Fascists was closely aligned with two critical elements that impact an individual's identity; social class and occupation. In addition to defining and enforcing "normative" roles within the domestic sphere, the Fascist regime sought similar control in regard to labor within the public sector. When men partook in labor pursuits that fell beyond the confines of the Fascist ideal, the regime resorted to pervasive actions in an attempt to (re)establish the established myth. One common trend that emerged when gay men were tried and sentenced was how "Morality and social standing were closely related; many sentences differed…depending on the social position and level of respectability of the accused" (Benadusi, "The Enemy" 187). As a result, men of lower classes were significantly more at risk to be accused and tried for engaging in homosexual behaviors. In their study, Goretti and Giartosio similarly found

that "la scelta dei mestieri" ("choice of work") correlated with who was labeled as an "*arrusu*," a local word for a homosexual male in Catania, Sicily (my trans.; Goretti and Giartosio 87). For example, the researchers found that many of the accused were "…tra i sarti, i camerieri, i calzolai, o i barbieri" ("…tailors, waiters, cobblers, and barbers"; my trans.; Goretti and Giartosio 87). A consideration of the occupations of these men reveals that they were targeted not necessarily for their sexuality, but for partaking in occupations that were associated with "*connotazioni femminili*" ("feminine connotations") (my trans.; Goretti and Giartosio 87). In addition to perceived physical and behavioral characteristics, the Fascists capitalized upon class and occupational variations to serve as visible markers that distinguished certain men from the national myth of the "New Man." Therefore, the same meaningful labor that allowed men to contribute to the economic health of the Fascist nation and to showcase the contributions of the working class, similarly could render them enemies of the state. By closely aligning class structure and labor with gender norms, the Fascist regime merged the private and public spheres of daily life; further consolidating power and social control.

Displacement: Placing Gay Men Beyond the Social and Geographical Confines of Fascist Italy

In addition to the disembodiment experienced by gay men in relation to self-identity, the escalation of the prejudices reinforced by the image of the "New Man" to discriminatory acts led to the literal displacement of gay men living in Fascist Italy. Dating back to the pre-Fascist period, Italy long grappled with how to formally address homosexuals within the law. This was particularly evident during the development of the Codice Rocco in the early 1930s. The Codice Rocco, which incorporated Fascist ideology,

succeeded the Zanardelli Code (Benadusi, "The Enemy" 96). Although one proposed article (n. 528) of the legislation sought to criminalize homosexuality, this measure was ultimately not included in the final draft (Ponzanesi 85). One significant incentive behind not formally criminalizing homosexuality in the Codice Rocco was the fear of making this issue appear "widespread… [something that] was not true for homosexuality, a practice that was practically nonexistent among Italian Fascist males" (Benadusi, "The Enemy" 103). Therefore, the concern with maintaining the aesthetic of the "New Man" in large part deterred the criminalization of homosexuality and "social repression [of gay men] remained indirect, given that specific laws would have created a category which was deemed nonexistent" (Ponzanesi 85). The Fascists sought to control homosexuality without a formal law within the Codice Rocco that went into effect on 1 July 1931, instead choosing to rely on the "…demonization [of homosexuality], while virility was exalted and protected through repressive measures of control" (Benadusi, "The Enemy" 105, 110). Therefore, the "New Man" aesthetic, not the law, policed and persecuted gay men. This aesthetic defined and enforced a "standard of virility" and functioned as an "'apparatus of normalization'" for those who did not comply with social expectations (Benadusi, "The Enemy" 185-186). These particular measures were evident through the regular surveillance of gay men, the issuing of *diffide* ("notices") and *ammonizioni* ("warnings"), as well as social isolation through imprisonment and commitment to asylums (my trans.; Bendausi 181, 183). The desire of the Fascist regime to exert further social control escalated beyond admonishments as gay men were physically sequestered from society.

The persecution of gay men included the practice of *confino* ("confinement") that replaced the previous practice of *domicilio coatto* ("forced residence") on 6 November

1926 (my trans.; Bendausi et al. 115). As affirmed by Benadusi, "*confino*…carried out a double function: preventative and repressive" (Benadusi, "The Enemy" 118-119). The practice of *confino comune* ("common confinement") was utilized to address homosexuality as a means of "…[removing] those considered undoubtedly guilty from society, even if there was insufficient proof to charge them" (my trans.; Benadusi, "The Enemy" 119). As a result of the development and ultimate passage of *Le leggi razziali fasciste* ("The Fascist Racial Laws") in November 1938, homosexuality was in fact criminalized (my trans.; Ponzanesi 85). This shift in the law was largely motivated by concerns pertaining to Italy's slow population growth; a measure of great importance when considering a nation's power and vitality (Ponzanesi 85). As a result, homosexuals subjected to confinement after this period received a revised label of "*confino politico*" ("political confinement") between 1936 to 1939 (my trans.; Benadusi, "Private" 178). Although the label placed on gay men in confinement changed following the passing of the new laws, Benadusi argues that regardless of the title ascribed to them "…those who were confined for homosexuality were always considered common confinees" and were subjected to the same harsh punishment for being gay (Benadusi, "Private" 178). Therefore, the persecution of gay men proved to be a consistent practice since the rise of Fascism in Italy.

The forced confinement of gay men escalated when the Fascist regime sought to confine this population to the Tremiti Islands. Beginning in 1935, "pederasts" were sent to stay on San Domino, an island that was "…almost completely uninhabited, lacking a sewage system and water, without any work opportunities and in constant lack of food supplies…" (Benadusi, "The Enemy" 132-133). Additionally, gay men were specifically

sent to San Domino in order to separate them from other *confinati politici* ("political detainees") confined to the main island of San Nicola (my trans.; Benadusi, "The Enemy" 132). Many of the men were confined to San Domino following roundups, particularly of those who were labeled as "passive pederasts" that partook in prostitution and openly exhibited "feminine" characteristics (Benadusi, "The Enemy" 133). In many instances the sentences were initiated by circumstantial rumors, which were "confirmed" through a degrading medical examination often involving a screening for venereal diseases and a rectal analysis to "confirm his [specific] pederasty" (Benadusi, "The Enemy" 134). Those captured were also subjected to a degrading series of questions: "Sei pederasta? Attivo o passivo? Da quanto tempo? Con quante persone sei stato? Dove? Quando? Con chi? Lo facevi per lucro? E chi sono i tuoi…colleghi?" ("Are you a pederast? Active or passive? For how long? With how many people have you been? Where? When? With whom? And who are your…colleagues?"; my trans.; Goretti and Giartosio 102). In addition to their highly intrusive nature, these inquiries further reflected the dehumanizing nature of the roundups that sought to capture and punish the "Other." The largest of these roundups occurred in the Sicilian town of Catania in 1939 when forty-six men were confined to the Tremiti Islands (Benadusi, "Private" 178). The subjugation of men to the roundups, interrogations, and harsh conditions of confinement on the Tremiti Islands resulted in a profound sense of displacement of homosexual males both from the Italian mainland, as well as the self.

This forced removal continued to have implications in the decades that followed. For example, when the confinement of gay men was commuted to two years of monitoring on 28 May 1940, many expressed trepidations regarding their return home (Goretti and

Giartosio 201). According to the interviews conducted by Goretti and Giartosio, while these men were happy to be liberated and to see their families, many expressed "…il dispiacere di lasciare un luogo comunque protetto, sospeso-con la prospettiva di tornare in una realtà…più dura di prima dell'arresto" ("…the displeasure to leave a place in any case protected and suspended-with the prospective of returning to a reality…more difficult than before the arrest"; my trans.; Goretti and Giartosio 202). These preoccupations regarding a return to daily life following confinement were not unfounded as gay men continued to be subjected to constant surveillance and struggled to reintegrate into society (Benadusi, "The Enemy" 143). Often these men were unable to find jobs and shunned from religious life (Benadusi, "The Enemy" 143). A return to "normal" life was not possible for the former detainees as society continued to perceive them as "…circus performers…[who] attracted attention and amused people" (Benadusi, "The Enemy" 143). Therefore, the profound sense of displacement experienced by the men confined to the Tremiti Islands continued long after their return "home."

Establishing a Transient Space and Identity for Homosexual Men

The uncertain daily reality that affronted homosexual men as a result of the Fascist aesthetic of the "New Man" transformed them into transient beings. In this sense, gay men found themselves living in what Victor Turner refers to in his work *The Forest of Symbols*, a "…period of margin or 'liminality' as an interstructural situation" as they were involuntarily thrust into a "…transition between [more stable] states" (V. Turner 93). As illuminated by Turner, this "betwixt-and-between" liminal period often results in "the subject of passage ritual…[becoming] structurally, if not physically 'invisible'" and therefore what he refers to as a "…structurally indefinable 'transitional-being' or 'liminal

persona…defined by name and by a set of symbols" (E. Turner 36; V. Turner 95). In the case of gay men, a distinct set of symbols associated with the Fascist aesthetic of the "New Man," as well as the adversary of this ideal form resulted in gay men living in an ambiguous state somewhere between that of an Italian "citizen" and a foreign "alien" that needed to be formally policed and sanctioned.

The immense degree of uncertainty that defined the daily experience of gay men living in Fascist Italy ultimately permeated all facets of identity both on the individual and societal level. Gay men living in Fascist Italy ultimately were perceived by society as "…non…(più) uomini" ("no longer men anymore"; my trans.; Goretti and Giartosio 90). This status of the "Other" stripped gay men of the biological and social identity, leaving them in a transitory state both in regard to how they were perceived by society, as well as how they viewed themselves within a transformed social context. Through his consideration of "liminality," Nic Beech explores the "…interplay between an individual's 'self-identity' (their own notion of who they are) and their 'social-identity' (the notion of that person in external discourses, institutions and culture)" (Beech 285). According to Beech, the contention between these two aspects of identity within the "liminal" state has various implications that include "…instabilities in the social context, the ongoing ambiguity and multiplicity of meanings, the lack of resolution (or aggregation) and the substitutability of the liminar" (Beech 288). An analysis of this transitory state not only reveals how one is perceived by wider society, but also how realities within these constructs reshape the most fundamental aspects of identity at the individual level as the "self" is transformed by conflicting elements. Two "practices" associated with liminality, "reflection" and "recognition," are particularly relevant when considering the interaction

between individuals that identify as LGBTQIA+ and larger social structures (Beech 289). The process of "reflection…[causes] the liminar [to consider] the views of others and [question] the self," while that of "recognition…[causes] the liminar [to react] to an identity that is projected on to them" (Beech 290). Whereas "reflection" is an entirely internal phenomenon, "recognition" is manifested through the external actions of the individual. In Fascist Italy, social norms guided how gay men ultimately responded to the dissonance that emerged between their own self-identity and heteronormative constructs.

Despite the degree of agency that was deprived from gay men living in Fascist Italy, Edith Turner underscores an important element that challenges this seemingly deterministic circumstance. According to Turner, despite the degree of uncertainty that defines the liminal experience, her husband observed a spirit of "'communitas,' the comradeship and fellowship of people in the midst of liminal ritual" (E. Turner 36). Therefore, despite the social control that was exerted on gay men, the same state of uncertainty that denied them of basic rights, also served as a source of agency amid the most unlikely of circumstances. In several regards, the Fascist regime's persecution of gay men unified this population around an extremity. Referred to by the *carabinieri* ("officers") as a "community of 'sisters,'" both platonic and romantic relationships flourished on the island of San Domino (my trans.; Benadusi, "The Enemy" 141). In fact, the subculture that emerged among the gay men that inhabited the island is underscored by the title of a 1987 interview between historian Giovanni Dall'Orto and a gay man, "Giuseppe B.," "Ci furono femmenelli [*sic*] che piangevano quando venimmo via dalle Tremiti" ("There were '*femminielli*' that cried when we came away from the Tremiti"; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 167). The term "*femminielli*" is derived from Southern Italy and refers to a third

gender classification that does not conform with "female" or "male." In this instance, "Giuseppe B." utilizes the term "*femminielli*" as one of endearment to identify both himself and other gay men. The specific use of this term by "Giuseppe B." is significant, as this language further attests to the unique identity that was established on the Tremiti Islands. The camaraderie that formed during isolation had an inverse impact than what the Fascist regime had intended and underscored how liminal spaces have the potential to unite the human experience.

Despite the efforts of the Fascist regime to establish and sustain the myth of the "New Man," the "…gap between myth and reality" was ultimately exposed and unraveled during World War II (Benadusi, "The Enemy" 296). Benadusi largely attributes the demise of the "New Man" to "…the bourgeois canon of respectability [that] was a barrier against the public invasion of the private…[as] the idea of privacy and discretion clashed with the pretext of having complete control over peoples' lives" (Benadusi, "Private" 192). The numerous contradictions behind the Fascist aesthetic exposed the regime's unsustainable façade and failed to extinguish the individuality and identity among gay men. In this sense, even amid an unfathomable extremity, the human spirit was to some extent preserved.

Navigating a Liminal Space through Active Engagement: Sensory Dialogue and Fictive Authenticity

A careful analysis of two distinct, yet interrelated, phenomena including the reconstruction of identity through engagement in a sensory dialogue, as well as the adoption of a fictive authenticity, has the potential to facilitate a holistic perspective for considering survival within the liminal space. Engagement in both a sensory dialogue and fictive authenticity alters the manner in which one initially identifies and subsequentially

interacts with the social realities that define their environment even when doing so warrants a deviation from their previous sense of self. Graphic narratives that grapple with homosexuality in Italy both within a historical and contemporary context illuminate how these elements allow one to (re)attain a sense of agency even amid moments of extremity.

One survival mechanism that helped gay men to adapt and persevere in an environment defined by devastation, irrationality, and unpredictability was the continuous reconstruction of their own identity. These continuous reconstructions profoundly complicated the narratives that emerged following this extremity, as survivors sought a degree of stasis after experiencing continuous displacement in regard to place, time, and space (Drayson-Knigge, "Women's"). This interaction with a memory may be achieved through sensory dialogue, a process by which one actively participates with a narrative to affront moments that are "beyond words or text" (Drayson-Knigge, "Women's"). The graphic narrative invites one to partake in a sensory dialogue that captures an extremity in an oral and tactile manner (Drayson-Knigge, "Women's"). In doing so, graphic narratives affronting the plight of gay men deliver a universal message that prompts one to identify the intersections between their own narratives, as they are invited to contemplate how individuals are constructed in ways that are both similar and diverse (Drayson-Knigge, "Women's"). By affronting the complex and painful memories associated with gay men in Fascist and contemporary Italy, graphic narratives reconstruct identity in a manner that provides closure both for the authors and audience, as well as continued inquiry. Additionally, when contemplating a historical period in which a Fascist regime sought to exert social control through a denial of the senses, sensory dialogue restores the same aesthetic quality that was once deprived.

In addition to providing gay men that have experienced an extremity with the opportunity to reconstruct their identity, as well as to acquire agency, active engagement in the narrative has facilitated another survival strategy for this population; fictive authenticity. Defined as the ability to appear authentic despite entirely acting in a particular moment of extremity as a means of survival, fictive authenticity entails a complex transformation at a physical and psychological level (Drayson-Knigge, "Women's"). This particular survival mechanism has been captured in graphic narratives that provide an authentic glimpse into the hardships that affronted gay men in Fascist Italy, as well as in the present day. In this sense, the adoption of a particular role did not end with the downfall of Fascist Italy, however continues to (re)shape the survivor's reality decades later as gay men exert a particular "front" or "act" to cope with trauma. Further, consideration of the dichotomy that exists between the "fictive" and the "authentic" allows one to identify the often overlooked parallels between these seemingly contrasting elements. Through a careful analysis of the psychological and social underpinnings that comprise the role that victims assume through the process of fictive authenticity, one has the potential to acquire a more in-depth and authentic glimpse into individual and collective narratives surrounding an extremity.

The processes of fictive authenticity and sensory dialogue both reveal how the human experience is not merely impacted by outside deterministic structures, but rather the active engagement of those at the center of the narrative. Although often involuntary, this interaction is profoundly shaped by individuals though their "negotiation" with the circumstances that affront them. In the case of gay men living within both historical and contemporary contexts "…subjectivities are negotiated through precarious forms of

compromise…" and render "…the human body…a *politicum*; a battlefield on which a series of contradictions [may] express themselves publicly…" (Benadusi, "The Enemy" 5, 27). Through this continuous "negotiation," gay men simultaneously surrender, (re)claim, and (re)shape aspects of their identity within relation to a narrative.

The chapters that follow will consider sensory dialogue and fictive authenticity in relation to two graphic narratives that grapple with extremities surrounding homosexuality in Italy both within a historical and contemporary context. These graphic narratives include Luca de Santis and Sara Colaone's publication *In Italia sono tutti maschi* and Flavia Biondi's *La generazione*. A careful analysis of the symbiotic relationship that exists between the concepts of a sensory dialogue and fictive authenticity, as manifested within these graphic narratives, reveals areas of agency and autonomy amid extremity. The consideration of these concepts in tandem allows one to identify and engage with the multifaceted attributes that define moments of extremity for gay men. Additionally, engagement with these works affords one the opportunity to identify how the medium of the graphic narrative reclaims agency for this sociohistorically marginalized population.

CHAPTER THREE

Liberating Suppressed Identities through Text and Images:

An Analysis of Luca de Santis and Sara Colaone's *In Italia sono tutti maschi*

The Graphic Narrative as a Source of Agency in Fascist and Contemporary Italy

The multifaceted and dynamic nature of the graphic narrative makes this medium particularly effective in regard to affronting the most challenging of circumstances. Specifically, by capitalizing upon the symbiotic relationship that exists between text and image, the graphic narrative transforms readers into active participants. In doing so, the graphic narrative invites readers to closely consider not only the contents of a particular work, but instead to examine the narrative well beyond the surface. This deep level of engagement guides readers towards identifying the latent realities that define the human spirit. Among the most impactful attributes of the graphic narrative is the medium's ability to foster a strong sense of empathy between readers and the reality of the individual(s) featured in the work. In this sense, the graphic narrative does not merely retell a series of events within a particular setting, but instead has ethical implications that transcend a particular time period, place or space.

The ethical implications of the graphic narrative are exemplified in the publication *In Italia sono tutti maschi* by Luca de Santis and Sara Colaone. In this work, de Santis and Colaone utilize text and image to shed light on the sociohistorically silenced narrative of gay men confined to the island of San Domino. According to Tommaso Giartosio and Gianfranco Goretti the confinement of gay men in Fascist Italy began as early as 1928 and became more pronounced with the introduction of *Le leggi razziali fasciste* ("The Fascist Racial Laws") in 1938 (my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 165). While the brutality of the

Fascist regime against Italians was recognized and denounced in the collective memory of the nation, this was not the case for homosexual men sent to San Domino. In fact, as underscored by Giartosio and Goretti, the persecution of gay men by the Fascists was not studied until the 1980s (de Santis and Colaone 165). This delayed response for the atrocities committed against one subpopulation, homosexual men, in comparison to others reflects a social stigma that exists beyond a particular time period and persists in the present day.

De Santis and Colaone's graphic narrative assumes an ethical disposition by featuring a narrative that has been excluded in dominant discourse. In doing so, de Santis and Colaone illuminate how social, political, and economic circumstances seek to (re)shape identity both in historical and contemporary contexts. Additionally, the ethical implications of this work are evidenced by how de Santis and Colaone explore the notion that one ultimately sees themselves in the manner in which they are perceived by society. In a postmodern society in which social injustices persist against the LGBTQIA+ community, *Italia sono tutti maschi* grapples with prejudices and discriminatory acts surrounding sexuality. By featuring a sociohistorically marginalized population, de Santis and Colaone allow those who identify as LGBTQIA+ to see themselves in a mainstream publication, while simultaneously fostering inclusivity and acceptance among those who do not identify as a member of this community.

Transcending Time and Space: Examining the Past to Affront Present Injustices

One manner in which *In Italia sono tutti maschi* effectively chronicles the LGBTQIA+ experience to shed light upon both the individual and collective experiences of homosexual men is by bridging historical and contemporary realities. Additionally, this approach provides commentary for future social change. In their graphic narrative, de

Santis and Colaone make this objective explicit in the epilogue which features three resources that contextualize their work. These resources include a historical overview from scholars Tommaso Giartosio and Gianfranco Goretti titled "Una storia da raccontare" ("A Story to Remember"), as well as an interview facilitated by historian Giovanni Dall'Orto in 1987 with a survivor of the confinement named Giuseppe B. titled "Ci furono femmenelli [*sic*] che piangevano quando venimmo via dalle Tremiti" ("There were 'femminielli' that cried when we left the Tremiti") (my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 165-170). The term *femminielli*, as featured in this title, was prevalent in Southern Italy to identify gay men who did not adhere to traditional gender norms and expectations. Additionally, the 2019 publication of this graphic narrative that commemorates the ten-year anniversary of this work features an addendum titled "Dieci anni di *In Italia sono tutti maschi*: Un diario di viaggio" ("Ten Years of *In Italia sono tutti maschi*: A Travel Diary") (my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 171-175). This addendum, dated 20 February 2019, features five colorful pages that chronicle the reception that de Santis and Colaone received around the world for their work; particularly in light of the ongoing struggle of the LGBTQIA+ community to secure social justice.

De Santis and Colaone's *In Italia sono tutti maschi* offers unique insight into the plight of homosexual males confined to the island of San Domino in the Tremiti Islands by the Fascists for "*pederastia passiva*" ("passive pederasty"). The epilogue of this graphic narrative by Giartosio and Goretti emphasizes the overarching goal of this "*racconto-cornice*" ("story setting") to not merely recount a past narrative, but instead to draw parallels between the "*silenzio*" ("silence") that has sociohistorically affronted gay men

and present day social realities (de Santis and Colaone 165-166). Additionally, the epilogue of this work discusses a "*doppio problema*" ("double problem") that often surrounds narratives pertaining to this topic. Giartosio and Goretti affirm that this contention is rooted in the ongoing debate between the past and present, as well as objective history comprised of "*documentazione*" ("research") and "*storia vera*" ("true story") and the more subjective testimony of a "*storia romanzata*" ("romanticized story") (my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 166). For example, Giarotsio and Goretti argue that while society was less accepting in the 1930s, gay men were more defined and confident in regard to their personal identity when compared to the present day (de Santis and Colaone 166). An exploration of these dichotomies reveals the complexities that surround the experience of gay men; past and present. Further, this epilogue orients the audience in a graphic narrative that wavers between the past and present. De Santis and Colaone develop a dialogue between two young directors, Nico and Rocco, who are working on a documentary surrounding the experience of gay men confined to the Tremiti Islands and Antonio Angelicola (Ninella), a seventy-five-year-old man who endured this experience. In this sense, this graphic narrative both literally and figuratively serves as a "living" documentary. Through both a written and visual narrative, de Santis and Colaone underscore the rather pervasive and confounding experience of Antonio and the other "*confinati*" ("detainees") that he encounters on the island. In highlighting their respective stories, this graphic narrative ultimately illuminates the profound physical, mental, and spiritual displacement that these men experience both in regard to their self and larger social identities.

In addition to providing historical context surrounding *In Italia sono tutti maschi*, Giartosio and Goretti underscore the effectiveness of the graphic novel in capturing this particular narrative. Giartosio and Goretti affirm that

> È una vera fortuna che un pezzo così importante della storia gay-e della storia italiana-sia stato raccontato in una forma come la graphic novel, così vicina alla sensibilità contemporanea, così capace di guadagnarsi lettori sempre nuovi. E ci ha fatto piacere vedere che, considerate le necessarie semplificazioni e drammatizzazioni che il genere impone, si tratti di una narrazione fondamentale rispettosa della verità storica, al punto da citare alla lettera, talvolta, la documentazione esistente. (It is truly fortunate that such an important piece of gay history - and of Italian history - has been told in a form such as the graphic novel, so close to contemporary sensibility, so capable of gaining ever new readers. And we were pleased to see that, given the necessary simplifications and dramatizations that the genre imposes, it is a fundamental narrative that respects historical truth, to the point of sometimes quoting to the letter the existing documentation.; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 166)

In this sense, Goretti and Giartosio attest to how the graphic narrative amplifies silenced voices by presenting historical realities in a unique and engaging manner. The graphic narrative bridges the past and the present by intertwining historical testimony with a contemporary form of narration.

Another component of the epilogue, an interview between historian Giovanni Dall'Orto and a survivor of the confinement named Giuseppe B., further substantiates the ethical obligation for recounting the inhumane experiences of homosexual males in Fascist

Italy. This interview underscores that the atrocities experienced by homosexual males did not end upon their release from confinement at San Domino. As attested by Giuseppe B. "E quando ritorniamo a casa, dopo due anni di ammonizione, abbiamo chiesto tutti la riabilitazione allo Stato. Nessuno è riuscito ad ottenerla." ("And when we returned home, after two years of admonition, we asked the State for rehabilitation. No one has been able to get it."; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 170). The failure of the Italian government to make amends with gay males decades after their confinement reflects how sexual orientation excluded them from the justice provided to other victims of Fascism. The exclusion of the persecution of gay males under Fascism from the national narrative implies that their story is less significant than others and not worthy of healing; further marginalizing an already persecuted population.

The final portion of the epilogue, a series of color pages added to the 2019 edition of *In Italia sono tutti maschi*, chronicles the reception of this work a decade following initial publication. The authors note that "A dieci anni dalla prima uscita italiana di *In Italia sono tutti maschi*, io [Luca] e Sara ci siamo ritrovati spesso a essere i portavoce di questa storia sconosciuta e a restituire voce a quegli omosessuali che all'isola di San Domino furono esiliati dalle loro vite, dalle loro famiglie" ("Ten years after the first Italian release of *In Italia sono tutti maschi*, Sara and I [Luca] have often found ourselves the spokespersons of this unknown story and to restore voice to those homosexuals who were exiled from their lives, from their families on the island of San Domino"; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 175). De Santis and Colaone illuminate the larger purpose that their graphic narrative serves by educating readers across the world regarding the plight of gay males in Fascist Italy. While de Santis and Colaone have encountered a lack of awareness

in regard to this atrocity on an international level, they encounter similar ignorance at the national and even local level. De Santis and Colaone share this surprising experience when they recount that during their first trip to San Domino "È subito chiaro che l'isola vuole raccontare solo una parte di sé" ("It is immediately clear that the island wants to tell only a part of itself"; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 173). The lack of awareness and acceptance encountered by de Santis and Colaone regarding the experience of gay males in Fascist Italy further underscores the ethical implications of their work for a marginalized population.

By juxtaposing historical and contemporary facts pertaining to the narrative of homosexual men, *In Italia sono tutti maschi* commences on a premise that seeks to shape a better future for this oppressed population. In assuming this approach, this work is also successful in delivering a narrative that decreases the disparity between "sameness" and "selfhood," as the audience acquires comprehensive insight into how oppression and resistance thrust experiences of the "mundane" into the more shocking realms of the "extraordinary" and "extreme." A careful analysis of *In Italia sono tutti maschi* illuminates how this graphic narrative is in fact a source of agency, social justice, and activism for both those featured in the publication, as well as a wider audience.

Narrative Voices in *In Italia sono tutti maschi*

One aspect of de Santis and Colaone's *In Italia sono tutti maschi* that is particularly impactful is how narrative voice is employed. De Santis and Colaone employ several techniques as various voices and narratives converge throughout the course of their work. The featured narrative voices deliver insight into the queer narrative within both a past and present context. Readers traverse time as they are invited to deconstruct the pervasive

binary thinking enforced by oppressive regimes similar to the Fascists under Benito Mussolini's reign.

Among the techniques utilized by de Santis and Colaone is a wavering between "homodiegetic ('first person')" and "heterodiegetic ('third person')" perspectives. Several panels of the graphic narrative feature Antonio providing testimony in a homodiegetic manner. As they film their documentary, Nico and Rocco assume a heterodiegetic approach as they recount the experiences shared with them by Antonio Angelicola (Ninella). Whereas the homodiegetic perspective invites the audience to directly engage with Antonio, the heterodiegetic perspective filters his historical testimony through the contemporary lenses of Nico and Rocco. Both perspectives contain factual and fictional elements; between which one may identify the "truth" regarding a particular experience. The incorporation of both first and third person voices fosters the intersectionality between "sameness" and "selfhood," as readers engage with both the micro-level perspective of Antonio, as well as the macro-level societal perspective represented by Nico and Rocco. Collectively, this multifaceted approach to delivering a narrative leads one to acquire different perspectives on the same topic, while simultaneously making connections to their own social reality. The audience is provided with the opportunity to locate their own identity within and beyond the confines of the narrative.

The intertwining of narrative voices is well captured during conversations that transpire between Rocco, Nico, and Antonio. Perplexed and frustrated by the ambition of Rocco to document the atrocities that he affronted during confinement at San Domino, Antonio lashes out "…Voi credete che questa è una favoletta, ma guardate che è la mia vita! Mica sono barzellette, raccontini…la storia mica è fatta di questo. È fatta di dolore!"

("…You think this is a fairy tale, but look, it's my life! They are not jokes, short stories... history is not made of this. It is made of pain!"; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 123). A reminder by Antonio to Rocco that he was his age, twenty-six, at the time of his confinement immediately brings a renewed sense of empathy to the young director. From this moment forward, Rocco is forced to introspectively examine his own motives and experiences that have led him to pursue this documentary. As Rocco looks inward, his own narrative becomes intertwined with that of Antonio; profoundly shifting his work from passively reporting to actively engaging with the past.

The tension between Antonio and Rocco is reconciled when the motivation behind the documentary is revealed. The revelation is initiated when Antonio inquires to Nico "Però non ho capito perché volete fa' 'sta intervista" ("But I don't understand why you want to do this interview"; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 102). Nico responds that his colleague, Rocco, was inspired by an incident that occurred with one of his teachers who identified as gay: "Credo che c'entri un vecchio professore di Rocco" ("I think an old teacher of Rocco's has something to do with it"; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 102). During a subsequent conversation with Rocco, Antonio asks Rocco "Me la vuoi raccontare 'sta storia del tuo professore?" ("Do you want to tell me this story about your teacher?"; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 144). Despite some initial hesitation, Rocco proceeds to share the story with Antonio

> Quando ero alle medie, abitavo vicino a Viterbo. Io non studiavo molto…ma la storia sì, la storia mi è sempre piaciuta, e avevo un professore per cui impazzivo. I miei genitori lavoravano e io rimanevo solo fino a sera, qualche volta andavo dal professore e lì studiavo…poi l'ultimo anno, prima degli esami, lo hanno

> sostituito…io ho pensato che fosse perché si era ammalato, e sono andato a casa sua. Lui era lì…però, non mi ha aperto. Io l'ho visto che era lì, alla finestra. (When I was in middle school, I lived near Viterbo. I didn't study much…but history yes, I have always liked history, and I had a teacher I was crazy for. My parents worked and I was left alone until the evening, sometimes I went to the teacher and I studied there...then in the last year, before exams, they replaced him...I thought it was because he was ill, and I went to his home. He was there… however, he did not open for me. I saw that he was there, at the window.; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 145)

When Antonio asks why the teacher did not answer the door, Nico responds that his mother "Mi ha raccontato che qualche genitore si era lamentato che lui era…be', che era…[femminiello]…E lui per non far scoppiare scandali si trasferì" ("She told me some parents had complained that he was…well, that he was…[femminiello]…And he was moved to avoid scandals"; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 145). This injustice made Rocco determined to take action through his documentary.

By incorporating multiple narrative voices, de Santis and Colaone bridge the past and present. The candid conversations between Rocco and Antonio draw vital parallels between their own life experiences as a past narrative is brought to life in the present. These connections foster a sense of universality, as audience members themselves develop a deep level of empathy and relatability with the shared narratives; allowing the graphic narrative to transcend time and place.

Framing A Narrative through Focalization

Another technique that de Santis and Colaone employ to deliver their graphic narrative is that of focalization. The utilization of focalization throughout *In Italia sono tutti maschi* allows readers to establish their own identity both cognitively and spatially in relation to the narrative. Further, focalization affords readers the opportunity to incorporate elements of their own identity as they engage with the narrative. Built upon the premise that Rocco and Nico are filming a documentary, de Santis and Colaone draw upon this cinematographic technique to both deliver the plot, as well as engage the audience with the narrative. While filming, the videographer Nico literally focuses the camera on Antonio's face. This image appears six times over the course of the graphic narrative and varies from being displayed on one or two full pages.

The first time that this image appears, Rocco and Nico have just arrived in Salerno to begin filming their documentary featuring Antonio. The focused image of Antonio's stoic face is positioned between two sections of text and is framed as a video camera shot, as indicated by the word "play" in the lower left-hand corner. The text above the picture affirms Antonio's identity: "Mi chiamo Angelicola Antonio e ho 75 anni. Ho sempre abitato a Salerno, da quando ero piccolo, con mia madre e mio fratello." ("My name is Angelicola Antonio and I am 75 years old. I have always lived in Salerno, since I was little, with my mother and my brother."; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 5) (see fig. 2). The text below the image continues to provide personal information regarding Antonio's identity: "A otto anni lavoravo già nella sartoria di mia madre, poi lei è andata in pensione e io ho preso il suo posto. Non sono mai andato via da Salerno, conosco tutti e tutti mi conoscono. Mi chiamo Ninella." ("At the age of eight I was already working in my mother's tailor shop, then she retired and I took her place. I have never left Salerno, I know everyone and

everyone knows me. My name is Ninella."; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 5) (see fig. 2). The page that immediately follows features the same image with one slight variation, the word "pause" appears in the left-hand corner (de Santis and Colaone 6) (see fig. 3). These staunch images serve a dual function. On the surface when appearing earlier in the graphic narrative, these images pragmatically introduce the audience to Antonio. However, on a deeper level these same images do not merely introduce aspects of Antonio's identity, but instead affirm what defines him as a human being. As the narrative unfolds, the images and text found on these two early pages serve as steadfast reminders of who Antonio is, even when challenged by outside factors that seek to reshape his identity. Notably, these particular images zoom in more than some of the ones to follow; providing more proximity between Antonio and the audience. The "play" and "pause" text provide readers with the opportunity to reflect upon this imperative information and become acquainted with the narrative's complex protagonist.

The second time that the focused image of Antonio's face appears follows his recollection of being captured by the Fascists. Similar to the previous one, the focused image of Antonio's face appears between two sections of text. This text captures the rise of Fascism and the impact on Antonio's life "Quando rifecero il nostro codice penale, il 'codice Rocco,' ci misero pure un articolo contro quelli come noi, i femminielli…Che i nazisti portavano nei campi assieme agli ebrei. Allor Mussolini disse: 'Noi non abbiamo bisogno di questa legge. In Italia sono tutti maschi.' Alla fine toccava alle prefetture decidere di mandarci al confino, ma come 'Politici.'" ("When they remade our penal code, the 'Codice Rocco,' they even included an article against those like us, the femminielli...Who the Nazis brought to the camps together with the Jews. Then Mussolini

said: ‘We don't need this law. In Italy they are all masculine.’ In the end it was up to the prefectures to decide to send us into confinement, but as ‘Politici.’”; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 29). Whereas the first focused image of Antonio is surrounded by text that defines his identity, the second of this same image portrays how Fascist laws sought to redefine him as a person. Several elements that comprise Antonio’s quotidian experience including origin, age, occupation, and family are replaced by bureaucratic structures beyond his control. The inclusion of the words “play” and “pause” on the two images once again present a moment for the audience to reflect upon this profound shift in the narrative, as well as to empathize with Antonio’s plight.

The third and fourth time that there is a full-page focus on Antonio’s face, specific emotion is added to capture his reaction when recalling life following confinement. The third time that this technique is used, Antonio has a more pleasant expression on his face. This facial expression corresponds to the text that surrounds the image: “C’erano femminielli che piangevano quel giorno…piangevano perché andavano via…piangevano perché tornavano a casa…Chi lo sa? Io pensavo di Mimì e mio fratello mi aspettava…” (“There were femminielli who cried that day…they cried because they were leaving…they cried because they were coming home…Who knows? I was thinking of Mimì and my brother was waiting for me...”; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 141). Although Antonio reflects upon the trauma of confinement in this particular scene, he recalls the bittersweet memories of his friend Mimì and the sense of community that was fostered among the men during their confinement at San Domino. Further, Antonio is heartened by how thinking of his family awaiting his return brought him through the hardest of times. While this scene brings some comforting sentiments, the closeups that follow underscore how these

relationships could not overcome the hardships that followed upon Antonio's return to society after confinement. The next two close ups portray Antonio in a pensive and melancholy state. The accompanying text similarly captures these sentiments: "Degli altri non ho più sentito nessuno, dopo la guerra è stato difficile mantenere le amicizie. E poi un po' si voleva dimenticare. Ma mica si dimentica o si vive sereni…Ci si convive con questa pena. Solo quattro anni dopo, Mimì rispose alle mie lettere e mi diceva di andava subito a Catania dove stava…E di fare presto…Che non c'era mica tanto tempo." ("Of the others I have not heard from anyone, after the war it was difficult to maintain friendships. And then one kind of wanted to forget. But you do not forget or live peacefully… I know you live with this pain. Only four years later, Mimì answered my letters and told me to go immediately to Catania where he was staying… And to hurry… There was not much time left."; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 150-151). Antonio acknowledges the ongoing trauma, as well as sense of loss that endured following confinement. The focused imagery allows readers to empathize with Antonio's fragile state as painful memories are conjured during his recollection of events.

The fifth series of images and text that focus on Antonio's face are identical to those that initially appeared at the onset of the graphic narrative. The two images are followed by a full-page colored sketch portraying Antonio's face just beyond the frame of the video camera. Several individuals recounted in the narrative appear to his left in a linear manner. The repetition of the initial series of text and images at the end of the graphic narrative affirms the triumph of Antonio over the seemingly deterministic structures that attempted to deconstruct his identity. Further, the repetition of the same series of focused images and

text at the start and end of the graphic narrative provides a sense of closure for the audience, as they grapple with Antonio's trauma and suffering.

The Symbiotic Relationship Between Text and Image

Among the most unique attributes of the graphic narrative is the medium's simultaneous incorporation of text and image. These two elements are developed in tandem to deliver an engaging experience for readers in both a literary and visual manner. Whereas pictures immediately grasp the attention of the eye, the accompanying text engages one in metacognitive processes as they decode and interpret text in relation to the images. In their work, *In Italia sono tutti maschi*, de Santis and Colaone employ both forms in unison to deliver a tumultuous, yet coherent, experience for their audience. The symbiotic relationship between text and image in de Santis and Colaone's graphic narrative is particularly evident upon close examination of several scenes of the work.

Both text and image capture the complexities surronding Antonio's relationships with the other inmates. Upon being greeted by two fellow captives, Paternò Sabino e Paternò Francesco, Antonio is portrayed as fearful and bewildered. As he is bombarded with information from unfamiliar prisoners, the speech bubble that appears over Antonio's head contains a simple question mark (de Santis and Colaone 35). This simple question mark guides readers to focus on Antonio's reactions in response to the written information that appears in the speech bubbles coming from the other characters. A full panel that appears later in the graphic narrative portrays the barrack at night. The barrack is surrounded by speech bubbles capturing the many thoughts on the minds of the prisoners: "È vero che Mimì sta male? Dicono che è polmonite. Ma Romeo solo questo è riuscito a cucinare oggi? Ninella, tu non fiatare, ancora venti lire hai da restituirmi! Sabino, ancora?!"

("Is it true that Mimì is sick? They say she has pneumonia. But Romeo this is all you managed to cook today? Ninella, do not say a word, you still have twenty lire to pay me back! Sabina, again?!"; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 110). The divergent thoughts surrounding the barrack at night provide the audience with insight into the questions and concerns that plague the minds of the prisoners. Whereas the simple question mark that appeared over Antonio upon his arrival guided the audience to focus on the images, the large desolate image of the barrack guides readers to focus on the text. In both instances, the images and text work in conjunction to guide the attention and contemplation of the reader in relation to the developing events.

Another aspect of de Santis and Colaone's work that underscores the relationship between text and image is the inclusion of written letters. As highlighted by Giartosio and Goretti "Avevamo ancora negli occhi i ritratti dei loro originali, le fotgrafie inserite nelle cartelle personali che le questure avevano costituito dei confinati" ("We still had in our eyes the portraits of their originals, the photographs inserted in the personal folders that the police headquarters had established of the confined"; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 166). The inclusion of elements of these primary resources by de Santis and Colaone, such as written correspondences, are integral in capturing the emotional and physical hardships experienced by the prisoners. One of the written correspondences featured in the narrative is a love letter composed by one of Antonio's fellow prisoners, Attilio, to his partner Franco. The images that accompany excerpts from the letter portray Atttilio's capture and loneliness at San Domino. Attilio shares the contents of this intimate letter with Antonio: "O' visto che la notte che mi hanno portato via, sei passato in bicicletta sotto la mia finestra, e quello è il ricordo che mi fa compagnia in questo luogo alla fine del mondo. Ti che

piangevi in silenzio, sotto la mia finestra." ("I saw that the night that they took me away, you passed by my window on bicycle, and that is the memory that keeps me company in this place at the end of the world. That you cried in silence, under my window." my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 66). This excerpt attests to how a simple memory helps Attilio to endure the daily hardships of confinement apart from his loved one.

The incorporation of letter writing appears later in the graphic narrative when a series of panels portrays the different prisoners writing to the Interior Minister regarding the disparate conditions of daily life in confinement. The collage of written testimony captures the lack of basic necessities including adequate food, clothing, and medical care. One prisoner warns: "Questa è la situazione che mi trovo. Senza un miglioramento la fine è certa." ("This is the situation I am in. Without improvement the end is certain." my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 106). In this instance, de Santis and Colaone utilize text and image to emphasize the physical hardships that jeopardize the very survival of the prisoners. By incorporating multiple voices on the same panel, the audience comes to understand not only the collective despair, but solidarity, among the prisoners.

Another manner in which de Santis and Colaone capitalize on the relationship between text and image is through the inclusion of Fascist symbols and text from Benito Mussolini's *La dichiarazione di guerra* ("Declaration of War"). After becoming frustrated with Rocco and Nico when pressed to remember aspects of his experience in confinement, Antonio lashes out

> Voi non capite che a fare come voi finisce che la gente non sa neppure che c'è stato un esilio degli omosessuali in Italia! Ma perché ricordarle? Queste son cose che hanno causato dolore. E poi le persone dimenticano tutto…avete visto che sta

> succedendo di questi tempi? Scusate, ma se uno conosce le ingiustizie che ci sono state…se uno sa che la storia ha già giudicato…Voi non sapete di cosa parlate! Dopo quarant'anni uno non ha più voglia di raccontare. Cosa volete…ci sono stati scandali, processi, dolori…le famiglie hanno avuto un disonore grandissimo! (You do not understand that by doing like you, people do not even know that there has been an exile of homosexuals in Italy! But why remember them? These are things that have caused pain. And then people forget everything about it…have you seen what is happening these days? Sorry, but if one knows the injustices that have taken place…if one knows that history has already judged…You do not know what you are talking about! After forty years one no longer wants to tell. What do you want ... there have been scandals, trials, pain ... the families have had a great dishonor!; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 76)

In expressing his frustration, Antonio questions the reason for remembering the trauma that he and others have experienced. Further, Antonio makes a direct reference to how many of the same injustices that he experienced persist into the present day; further leading him to question recounting what happened. De Santis and Coloane present this text in a striking manner by breaking Antonio's remarks down into six abrupt panels on a single page. Further, the Fascist symbol of the perched golden eagle grasping a fasces appears in each panel. This recognizable Fascist symbol is the only image that appears repeatedly on this page. The juxtaposition of the Fascist symbol to Antonio's remarks alludes to the pervasive impact of Fascism on the lives of Antonio and the other men. This panel leads one to question for a moment if recounting this painful narrative is in fact an appropriate undertaking.

In addition to Fascist symbols, de Santis and Colaone directly incorporate primary text from Benito Mussolini's *La dichiarazione di guerra* ("Declaration of War") delivered on 10 June 1940. Direct excerpts from Mussolini's speech appear over a three-page spread as the soldiers and prisoners on San Domino listen to a radio broadcast (de Santis and Colaone 135-137). Ironically, the official declaration of war ended the confinement of the prisoners as the island was repurposed for the war. The juxtaposition of text from Mussolini's speech and the scenes from San Domino portray how gay men were viewed as outside the confines of society and inferior by the Fascist regime. The images and text that follow capture the uncertainty that affronted the prisoners as they were again subject to displacement and injustice even when permitted to leave the island.

Transcending Time, Space and Place

Among the most unique and impactful aspects of de Santis and Colaone's graphic narrative is the wavering between past and present. Through the use of flashbacks, de Santis and Colaone bring the reader back and forth between the Fascist period to the present day. Similarly, de Santis and Colaone traverse space as they bring the audience on a journey from San Domino to Salerno. In this sense, de Santis and Colaone's work overcomes all boundaries of time, space, and place to deliver a historical narrative with present day implications.

The ability of the graphic narrative to traverse time and space is evidenced in the opening pages of *In Italia sono tutti maschi*. Set in Salerno in July 1938, Antonio has a candid conversation with his concerned brother, Michele, who warns him that he must be careful with his behavior in response to the political police. Antonio, secure in his identity, responds to Michele "Non posso mica smettere di essere quello che sono per paura di quelli

là! Qui tutti hanno paura-tu, mammà…" ("I cannot stop being who I am for fear of those over there! Everyone here is scared-you, mammà…"; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 11). Soon following this conversation, the narrative flashes forward to Salerno in February 1987, as Nico and Rocco travel there to interview Antonio for their documentary. This flashforward sets the precedence for the remainder of the narrative that will go back and forth between both time periods. Early in the work, the reader comes to the realization that the plot will not unfold in a linear fashion; as past memories influence present realities and vice versa.

The repetition of images and panels helps to orient the reader in regard to time and space. This strategy is particularly evident with a repeated image of the island of San Domino. A full single page image in gold, white, and black colors portrays the prisoners as they row towards San Domino following their capture and sentencing (de Santis and Colaone 31) (see fig. 4). A second black and white closeup of San Domino comprises two pages of the graphic narrative (de Santis and Colaone 60-61). Finally, a double-page black and white spread portrays San Domino from afar (de Santis and Colaone 104-105) (see fig. 5). These images serve as a bridge between the present and past, as they are each preceded by an emotional exchange between Antonio, Rocco, and Nico. The images are also succeeded by scenes of Antonio's confinement on San Domino. In these instances, the island is portrayed as desolate and lacking all signs of life. Later in the graphic narrative, a single page aerial view of San Domino is portrayed (de Santis and Colaone 120). Unlike the other image, this overview of the island is in yellow and white, as well as contains signs of life and text. The image portrays Antonio as he engages in a fight to seek revenge against someone who has physically assaulted his friend Mimì. The image is also accompanied by

text: “E se ci mancasse la speranza? Allora la morte sarà in tutte le cose.” (“What if we run out of hope? Then death will be in all things.”; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 120). This particular depiction associates San Domino with a loss of hope and death. Despite this grave outlook, the scene that follows portrays Antonio, Nico, and Rocco embarking on a boat to visit the island; affirming that life has continued despite the past trauma.

Similar to time and space, place assumes a vital role in de Santis and Colaone’s graphic narrative. The importance of place in this work is evident in how regionality is closely connected to the identity of the characters. From the onset of the work, Antonio equates his hometown of Salerno as a core element of his identity: “Ho sempre abitato a Salerno, da quando ero piccolo con mia madre e mio fratello” (“I have always lived in Salerno, since I was little with my mother and brother”; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 5) (see fig. 2). Antonio’s reference to Salerno emerges throughout the course of the narrative, particularly in moments when aspects of his identity are challenged by extraneous circumstances. Antonio is not alone in equating a specific place with his identity, as is evidenced in his initial encounter with the other prisoners on San Domino. The other prisoners introduce themselves by noting their places of origin which include the regions of Sicily and Puglia, as well as the city of Catania (de Santis and Colaone 34). Similar to Antonio, the other prisoners remain steadfast in preserving this critical aspect of their identity despite their forced displacement to the foreign island of San Domino. Despite their close ties to specific places, the prisoners must work together to form a new identity and sense of community in an entirely unhospitable location. When a fellow prisoner, Attilio fantasizes to Antonio regarding a visit to Paris, Antonio simply replies: “A Parigi? No, no voglio stare solo a Salerno.” (To Paris? No, I want to stay only in

Salerno."; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 63). As Rocco and Nico travel with Antonio to the Tremiti Islands to film their documentary, Antonio remains reluctant to return to this painful place. Early in the trip, Antonio expresses his reluctance: "Le Tremiti, Le Tremiti…Mica c'è tutta sta fretta di tornare" ("The Tremiti, And Tremiti… There is no rush at all to return"; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 45). Despite the painful memories, Antonio perseveres with the trip to San Domino. Even after arriving on the island, Antonio continues to experience emotional pain by merely being present in this place. Antonio expresses both anger and sadness as he returns to San Domino. Antonio shares with Nico "Io me ne volevo tornare a Salerno e invece sto ancora qua…mica mi sono offeso se sto ancora qua" ("I wanted to go back to Salerno and instead I am still here..., I am offended if I am still here"; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 101). Prior to one flashback, Antonio is portrayed crying as he repeats "Sono quarant'anni che non ci torno a San Domino" ("I have not returned to San Domino in forty years"; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 103). The pleasant and safe memories that Antonio has of Salerno are in staunch contrast to those of despair and danger that characterized his time at San Domino. By providing this contrast through text and image, de Santis and Colaone underscore the importance of place in shaping memory.

Finding Closure in the Gutter

An attribute of the graphic narrative that contributes to the impactful nature of *In Italia sono tutti maschi* is the space between the panels referred to as the gutter. Throughout their work, de Santis and Colaone utilize the gutter in both a pragmatic and abstract manner. On a pragmatic level, the gutter separates the panels and permits the narrative to be delivered in a coherent manner. On a more abstract level, the gutter engages readers in a

deep metacognitive process as this space permits them to pause and reflect upon the narrative. Both aspects of the gutter allow readers to make meaning and draw connections between their own realities and the graphic narrative.

While the gutter assumes an important role in graphic narratives, the importance of this element is particularly evident in *In Italia sono tutti maschi*. By framing their narrative on the premise of two young men filming a documentary, a unique opportunity is created to utilize the gutter. Specifically, the inclusion of six full page panels focused on the face of Antonio effectively serves as a gutter. As Antonio's face is the only image that appears on these pages, the reader is forced to focus on his facial expressions and the text that accompanies some of the images. Framed within the lens of a video camera, the words "pause" and "play" literally direct the reader when to stop, as well as to continue with their interpretation of the narrative. Further, the proximity of these images to tumultuous events provides a needed moment of reprise for the reader. In this sense, the space surrounding these images of Antonio's face exemplifies the function of the gutter as a pragmatic separation of panels, as well as a space for metacognitive processes to unfold.

One of the more impactful and striking uses of the gutter in de Santis and Colaone's work is when a black gutter is used to separate the panels. An all-black gutter is used for the first time to guide readers through the scene in which Antonio is captured in August 1938. Believing that he is meeting someone in the woods, Antonio encounters Fascists who ambush and capture him (de Santis and Colaone 17-21). The black gutters that surround the images guide readers through a fast-paced sequence of events. As the events that unfold are unexpected at that particular moment, they initially cause confusion for the audience as a peaceful encounter rapidly becomes violent. The gutter provides the reader with the time

needed to comprehend what is in fact transpiring. Further, the use of an all-black gutter instead of the typical page color one that separates the majority of panels, indicates how Antonio is being thrust from his mundane life into a moment of extremity.

A second time that an all-black gutter is utilized is to separate the panels of a scene featuring Antonio and his friend Mimì as they are in a prison cell. As he battles an illness, Mimì asks "Qual è la differenza tra questo e la morte…? Questo che viviamo più triste della morte è. La mia vita è lontana da qui e il mio futuro non è mai stato così lontano." ("What is the difference between this and death…? This that we live is sadder than death. My life is far from here and my future has never been so far away."; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 112). In this series of panels, the black gutter permits the reader to empathize with Mimì during this moment of despair. Similar to the earlier scene that is surrounded by a black gutter, one is able to utilize this space between the panels to contemplate the inhumane circumstances and loss of hope that plague Mimì and Antonio.

De Santis and Colaone provide some sense of closure to their audience during the latter portion of the graphic narrative. After sharing the injustices that his teacher faced for being gay, a mutual understanding is established between Antonio and Rocco (de Santis and Colaone 146). A series of three panels follows featuring Anontio comforting Rocco before nightfall (de Santis and Colaone 146). From this point forward in the narrative, Antonio allows himself to be more vulnerable and open in sharing his past experiences. In another scene situated at the end of the narrative, Antonio recounts the details of his final visit to Mimì. The panels portray Antonio comforting his dying friend and placing letters that he received from the other inmates over the years in a coat pocket. Mimi's final words to Antonio underscore that although his life is over, the trauma of confinement endures:

"Siamo ancora su quel molo, ad aspettare le barche. Aspettiamo ancora che le barche ci portino a casa…" ("We are still on that pier, waiting for the boats. We are still waiting for the boats to take us home..."; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 155). Despite the pain that still afflicts Mimì at the time of his death, Antonio finds strength in the memory of his dear friend to share the details of his experience with Rocco and Nico. Following these two scenes, the reader acquires a sense of closure as they, similar to Antonio, come to recognize that justice may be found in the sharing if this narrative.

Liminality: Displacement and Dis-em-bodiment

Through this graphic narrative, readers come to recognize the liminal state in which gay men live both in a historical and contemporary context. Whereas the gay men featured in de Santis and Colaone's work are in fact Italian citizens, they are transformed into liminal beings. Both through the displacement of gay men on the island of San Domino, as well as their disembodiment through the Fascist ideal of the "New Man," gay men are both literally and figuratively estranged from society.

The deportation of gay men to a desolate San Domino placed them beyond the confines of society as they were removed from their home cities and regions. de Santis and Colaone portray the abrupt and shocking nature of this displacement in the scenes leading up to Antonio's ultimate capture in the woods. Concerned for Antonio's wellbeing, Michele warns his brother to exercise caution due to the growing presence of the political police (de Santis and Colaone 9). Despite this foreshadowing of events that are to occur, the scene in which Antonio is beaten and captured by the political police is nonetheless shocking. This scene is upsetting to readers not only for portraying violence, but also in how Antonio is unjustly removed from his life and family in Salerno. Once deported to San

Domino, Antonio expresses ongoing confusion and frustration. These sentiments are captured by the simple question that Antonio asks a prison guard with whom he develops a rapport, Brigadie': "Qui tutti mi dicono che non capisco! E allora spiegatemelo voi…perché davvero io non ci arrivo…perché sto qua?" ("Everyone here tells me I do not understand! So you explain it to me…because I really do not get it…why am I here?"; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 155). This perplexity and anger derive from the basic physical and emotional necessities that are denied to the prisoners. With an allowance of only five Lire and meager wages working as a tailor, Antonio is able to purchase a few simple necessities (de Santis and Colaone 48). As prices of goods rise, this allowance becomes increasingly inadequate, leading a prisoner, Francesco to exclaim: "Un carcere questo è, non un esilio!" ("This is a prison, not an exile!"; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 82). Antonio and the other prisoners express how they miss their families and friends back at home. In particular, Antonio misses his brother Michele whom he describes his relationship with as being "Come l'acqua a un pesce" ("Like water to a fish"; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 69). For Antonio, his brother's coat that he brought with him becomes one of his most prized possessions, not only for the warmth that the garment provides, but also the connection to home (de Santis and Colaone 108). Similar to Antonio, Mimì is saddened and concerned by his separation from family. Mimì expresses this sentiment when he asks Antonio: "Che mi succederà ora, Ninè? Che succederà alla mia famiglia?" ("What will happen now, Ninè? What will happen to my family?"; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 72). Mimì's concern regarding the future for himself and his family is not unfounded. After being sent home following Mussolini's *La dichiarazione di guerra* ("Declaration of War"), Antonio expresses "Si torna, Sì, ma dove? Si torna a quella che fu la mia casa, ma mi fu

tolta. Si torna a quella che fu la mia famiglia, ma fu squarciata dal dolore. L'esilio di mio paese, è l'esilio anche dagli sguardi, dai malanimi, dai livori. Si torna che tutto è cambiato. Si torna che niente è come prima. Oggi il mio regno è quella terra di nessuno, dove casa è una parola che non so più pronunciare." ("Return, Yes, but where? Return to what was my home, but it was taken from me. Return to what was my family, but it was torn apart by pain. The exile of my country is also the exile from looks, from malice, from hatred. I know that everything has changed. Return to nothing as it was before. Today my kingdom is that no-man's land, where home is a word I can no longer pronounce."; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 139-140). Antonio's sentiment reveals the hardships that will affront the men upon their return home. Further, Antonio's remarks capture how a return home will dissolve the insular community of San Domino that ironically shielded the prisoners from the injustices that affronted them prior to their confinement. The release of the men from San Domino does not serve as a source of liberation, but instead ongoing uncertainty and persecution for both themselves, as well as their family. As illuminated by Antonio's testimony, this liminal state continued to pervade the lives of the men throughout the decades that followed their release from San Domino.

In addition to the sense of displacement that confinement causes for Antonio and the other prisoners, perhaps even more profound is how the experience leads to their own disembodiment. The disembodiment of Antonio and the other men is a result of the Fascist state's objective to perpetuate the myth of the "New Man" by invading both the private and public spheres of daily life. Immediately following his capture, Antonio is disembodied as one of the core aspects of his identity is changed; his given name. Rather than referring to Antonio by his name, a label is ascribed to him by his Fascist captors: "…Dediti alla

pederastia passiva, con grave pregiudizio per la moralità pubblica e l'integrità della stirpe" ("…Indulged in passive pederasty, with serious prejudice to public morality and the integrity of the race"; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 22). The label of "pederastia passiva" replaces Antonio's public identity as a law-abiding citizen to that of a criminal subject to formal sanctions. Early in the narrative Antonio receives another name from the other prisoners of San Domino, "Ninella." While a term of endearment, this name replaces Antonio's given name throughout his confinement. The nickname of "Ninella" affirms how Antonio's private identity too his changed, as he navigates numerous hardships and forms new relationships.

De Santis and Colaone more explicitly illuminate the degree of disembodiment that Antonio and the other men have experienced through their portrayal of the male body. The first illustration that demonstrates this is a full-page yellow outline of Antonio's body against an entirely black backdrop. Antonio's body is surrounded by three text boxes that provide the "findings" of his medical examination by the Fascist officers, as well as his sentence (de Santis and Colaone 24). This image underscores how Antonio's body is evaluated based upon the socially constructed criteria of what constitutes the "New Man." As a gay male, Antonio does not "meet" these criteria and loses all agency to the Fascist state. De Santis and Colaone portray the bodies of Rocco and an older Antonio later in the graphic narrative. Their bodies appear as Antonio struggles to share his story with Rocco and emphasizes "Guarda che era una vergogna avere un figlio così! E tu vuoi rivangare tutto questo?" ("Look, it was a shame to have a son like this! And you want to dig up all this?"; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 77). The manner in which the bodies of Antonio and Rocco are depicted highlights how both men must be vulnerable if they wish to truly

understand each other's pain. From this vulnerability, both Antonio and Rocco find the strength to share their narratives; reacquiring a sense of agency that was previously lost.

Engaging the Senses to Reacquire Agency

In addition to shedding light on an overlooked atrocity, de Santis and Colaone's graphic narrative actively engages the senses of the audience. In doing so, this work provides a sense of agency by restoring the same aesthetic qualities that the Fascist regime sought to suppress and eliminate. The multisensory nature of de Santis and Colaone's work allows the reader to enter the minds and bodies of the characters as they are transformed into active participants. One sense that is engaged is that of sound. When running from the Fascist police in the woods, the sound of "frush" is written several times on two pages (de Santis and Colaone 18 and 20). The inclusion of this sound not only allows the reader to comprehend that Antonio is running from his captors, but also running to maintain his freedom. Following a suspenseful sequence of panels, the sound "Alt!" replaces "Frush," as Antonio is ordered to "Fermo dove sei!" and "Non muoverti!" ("Stop where you are! Do not move!"; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 20). This change in sound indicates Antonio's capture and the end of his autonomy to the Fascists. After disembarking a row boat on San Domino, the sound "cri" is written several times (de Santis and Colaone 33). The sound continues as Antonio and the other prisoners are being led to their place of confinement by the soldiers. The only text that appears in this sequence of images, one senses the solitude of the island. Despite the grim tone set by the sound "cri," music and singing are heard by Antonio when joining the other prisoners for dinner later that evening. This joyous scene filled with positive sounds underscores that even among the darkest of experiences, the human spirit may find joy (de Santis and Colaone 37). At this point in the

narrative, the reader comes to recognize that Antonio and the other men form a community that maintains some agency in the most unlikely of places. The strength of this community offers a sense of hope as Antonio and the other men must affront Fascism. By creating a multisensory experience, de Santis and Colaone invite readers to identify elements of darkness and light within the context of a narrative.

Fictive Authenticity: Transforming the Self

Often when affronted with extreme situations, one must quickly adapt to ensure their own survival. In their work, de Santis and Colaone explore one survival mechanism that helped gay men to survive the extremities of life in confinement; the reconstruction of their own identity. Antonio and the other men engage in a fictive authenticity as they undergo a complex physical and psychological transformation. This transformation results in a disconnect between the personal morals and ethics of the men and the actions in which they must partake to navigate an extreme reality. At the onset of the work, Antonio remains true to his identity by affirming to his brother Michele: “Non posso mica smettere di essere quello che sono per paura…” (“I cannot stop being who I am out of fear…”; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 11). Although Antonio remains steadfast in who he is as a gay man, aspects of his life as a peaceful citizen change during his confinement. This transformation of Antonio’s physical and mental state is captured when he remarks “Siamo disperati…e quando si è disperati ci si può prendere il lusso di essere quello che si vuole, pure cattivi” (“We are desperate…and when we are desperate we can take the luxury of being whatever we want, even bad”; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 55). A series of panels capturing Antonio attacking the men who physically hurt his friend Mimì illustrates how he must engage in violence for survival. In a scene that follows, Antonio shares with Brigadie’:

"Una volta non sapevo quanto buio poteva riempirmi il cuore" ("Once I did not know how darkness could fill my heart"; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 129). By reflecting upon the "darkness" that now fills his heart, Antonio recognizes how confinement has transformed who he is as a person. Ironically, the same darkness that plagues his spirit protects Antonio against the physical and emotional perils that he must affront.

In Italia sono tutti maschi: A Bridge Between the Past and the Present

Overall, de Santis and Colaone's *In Italia sono tutti maschi* demonstrates the power of the graphic narrative to intermingle past memories and present circumstances to derive new meaning. The interplay between text and image is particularly effective in transporting the reader between two periods of time, Fascist and contemporary Italy, while simultaneously affording them the opportunity to locate the narrative within the context of their own lives. By wavering between two distinct, yet interrelated, time periods de Santis and Colaone capitalize upon the graphic narrative as an effective vehicle for traversing time, place, and space. In this sense, the audience is not merely informed regarding a series of static historical events, but instead considers them within the context of contemporary society in a dynamic manner. This application is facilitated via multiple avenues that unfold both within and beyond the confines of the graphic narrative. Firstly, Nico and Rocco's documentary captures the unfiltered testimony of Antonio's primary account of life as a gay man seeking to survive in Fascist Italy. Secondly, Antonio's contemporary interaction with Nico and Rocco adds depth to his experience by connecting the atrocities that the protagonist affronted with persisting injustices in that moment. Further, the secondary perspective of Nico and Rocco reawakens and adds insight to Antonio's past memory. Whereas Antonio's historical memory, as well as his contemporary encounter with Nico

and Rocco transpire within the confines of the publication, the active engagement of the audience with this narrative generates meaning within the setting in which they themselves are present. Both the individual life experiences of the reader, coupled with the wider social realities that define their environment interact with the featured narrative. As a result, as evidenced through the respective journeys of Antonio, Rocco, and Nico, a personal and societal transformation occurs. This outcome is particularly impactful when considering the injustices that affront sociohistorically disenfranchised populations such as the LGBTQIA+ community. In this sense, the past, present, and future are united through this graphic narrative in a manner that fosters voice, agency, and social change. These transformational attributes are characteristic of other graphic narratives that grapple with adversity affronting the LGTBQIA+ community in both the past and present, such as Flavia Biondi's publication *La generazione*.

CHAPTER FOUR

Illuminating Contemporary Social Issues through Text and Images: An Analysis of Flavia Biondi's *La generazione*

The Graphic Narrative as a Source of Agency in Contemporary Italy

Regardless of which time period one wishes to consider, the experiences that comprise an individual's identity transcend time, space, and place. The transcendence of these experiences necessitates a unique approach when recounting and engaging with narratives pertaining to identity. This consideration especially must be adopted when considering the narratives of sociohistorically disenfranchised and silenced populations such as those of the LGBTQIA+ population. The consideration of both individual and collective narratives surrounding a particular population serves a pragmatic purpose by reminding contemporary society of past moments of hardship, perseverance, and triumph. In addition to educating society, narratives provide an empowering opportunity by affording those that underwent a particular extremity the opportunity to negotiate and create meaning from their individual experience. The reclamation of narratives on an individual and collective level is imperative, particularly in a postmodern society in which those in positions of privilege and power regularly seek to rewrite and silence narratives. The LGBTQIA+ community, similar to others, continues to be adversely impacted by these oppressive structures of social control.

Among the numerous mediums that effectively affront structures of social control through the (re)telling of experiences is that of the graphic narrative. The consideration of Luca de Santis and Sara Colaone's publication, *In Italia sono tutti maschi*, illuminates how this medium has the ability to engage an audience with a past narrative in a present context.

The use of flashbacks featuring testimony and moments of hardship provide some degree of closure for the work's protagonist, Antonio, while commencing an inquiry among readers into a relatively unknown extremity. In a manner similar to how de Santis and Colaone's graphic narrative utilizes flashbacks to waver between the past and present, Flavia Biondi's work *La generazione* focuses on the past developments of the protagonist Matteo's family to establish present and future circumstances. Biondi specifically draws parallels between a past narrative within the family unit and the contemporary challenges experienced by Matteo. This approach not only chronicles Matteo's individual journey as he comes to accept aspects of his identity as a homosexual male, but also provides closure to a past familial hardship. Further, similar to de Santis and Colaone, Biondi considers personal issues pertaining to a protagonist's LGBTQIA+ identity within the context of larger social realities. Throughout the course of the graphic narrative, Matteo draws parallels between his tumultuous relationship with his father, Danilo, with that of his Aunt Cosima and his grandmother, Nan Tonia, who became estranged several decades prior. Although separated by nearly two decades, the plight of Nan Tonia and Aunt Cosima's relationship provides intergenerational support and guidance to Matteo. Matteo's reflection on this conflict is particularly powerful in reconciling his relationship with his father. Throughout the course of *La generazione*, Biondi also explores the intersection between life and death by setting the personal and familial acceptance of Matteo's identity amid the death of his grandmother and birth of his cousin Sara's child, Elisa. The literal and figurative rebirth of Matteo's identity mirrors the evolution of death and new life within his family. In this sense, Biondi's work transcends generations to transcend time, space, and place. As the audience joins Matteo in his traversal through multiple generations, they

(re)acquire a sense of agency along with the protagonist. The framing of Matteo's struggles and triumphs in the context of a family unit assumes a universal approach, as most individuals have experienced similar circumstances in their own lives. By seeing themselves in Matteo and his family, the audience relates with the narrative on a personal level. The relatable and intimate nature of Biondi's graphic narrative provides the reader with an empowering experience as they actively engage with intertwining narratives. Biondi's choice of the graphic narrative as the vehicle for chronicling Matteo's journey makes this experience possible as the reader does not merely interpret the details of his experience, but instead actively engages with the plot and derives meaning for their own lives.

Ethics: Providing Voice to a Silenced Narrative

Similar to de Santis and Colaone's work, Biondi's *La generazione* fulfills an ethical function by shedding light upon a silenced narrative surrounding LGBTQIA+ identity. The ethical role of this work is evident throughout the course of the narrative as the protagonist, Matteo, makes multiple references to the "silence" that has surrounded his identity as a homosexual male, as well as the individual and social implications that this has had on his daily life.

Upon returning to his small hometown of Pontecesello at the beginning of the narrative, Matteo notes his reluctance: "Non posso tornare a casa da mio padre. Non dopo quello che è successo. Non dopo tre anni di silenzio." ("I can't go back to my Father's. Not after what happened. Not after three years of silence."; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 7). Matteo's direct reference to the "silence" surrounding his homosexuality within his family has resulted in a profound sense of estrangement on several levels. Firstly, the silence

surrounding Matteo's homosexuality has led to his physical displacement from his hometown. Fearful of the adversity that he would affront in his small town as an openly gay man, Matteo spends three years in Milan. Although Matteo finds some degree of acceptance in Milan, this physical separation prevents him from grappling with his identity in relation to the place and with the individuals with whom he has deeply rooted relationships. Secondly, the silence surrounding Matteo's identity leads to a degree of estrangement from his own identity. Although initial reference is made to the silence in relation to his homosexuality within his family, the reader comes to realize that there is an internal silence within Matteo as he too has not come to fully embrace and accept his own identity. Although the external challenges that Matteo must navigate within his family unit are significant, the internal conflict that unfolds throughout the narrative is in fact more complex and profound in nature. As Biondi's graphic narrative provides numerous opportunities for reflection, the audience vicariously partakes in Matteo's journey of self-discovery.

During the latter portion of the graphic narrative, Matteo reflects on the importance of silence in healing his relationship with both himself and others. Matteo comes to the realization that "[suo] padre da solo e io lontano a pensare che vivesse meglio senza di me" ("[his] father was alone and I [Matteo] was gone [*sic*], thinking he felt better off without me"; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 119). Instead, Matteo's father sought the return of his son and the opportunity to reconcile with him. Matteo assumes responsibility for the fact that "È la mia generazione che dimentica il crepitio incessante dei silenzi. Quelli di mio padre non mi sono mai fermato ad ascoltarli fino a oggi." ("It's my generation that forgets the necessary space of silences. I never stopped to listen to my father's, until today.";

Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 119). Matteo acknowledges that he instead escaped from his challenges at home. Matteo's ongoing reflection upon returning to Pontecesello allows him to affirm that "È la mia generazione che dimentica il crepitio incessante dei silenzi" ("It's my generation that forgets the necessary space of silences"; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 119). Further, Matteo reveals that his father "…mi ha insegnato che non c'è bisogno di parlare, di spiegare" ("…showed me that talking and explaining isn't always necessary"; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 120). Biondi's selection of the graphic narrative, a medium comprised of places for reflection, is particularly impactful in delivering this message. As readers navigate the panels and gutters that separate them, they literally partake in moments of silence and reflection in tandem with the work's protagonist. The audience, similar to Matteo, comes to appreciate the role of silence in life. The universality of Matteo's experience, as well as that of his relatives allows the audience to make a meaningful connection with this imperative message regarding how silence, often perceived as a source of oppression, in fact may be repurposed as an element of empowerment. In this sense, Biondi's publication has ethical implications by not merely recounting a narrative, but instead creating a reflective space in which agency and voice are reacquired.

Narrative Voices in *La generazione*

Similar to de Santis and Colaone, Biondi capitalizes upon narrative voice throughout *La generazione* to deliver a powerful message with relevance to the audience. Biondi assumes a homodiegetic approach as the narrative is told from the perspective of the graphic narrative's protagonist, Matteo. The framing of this graphic narrative in a homodiegetic manner invites the audience to engage directly with Matteo in the first-person without any interpretation from outside sources. In this sense, Matteo's first-person

testimony facilitates an exploration of the intersectionality between "sameness" and "selfhood" as the protagonist locates himself in relation to the private domain of his family unit, as well as the public domain of their town/city/region. By traversing between past family and personal memories and his present social reality, Matteo derives new meaning in relation to his identity as a homosexual male. Although these memories are delivered exclusively from Matteo's perspective, Biondi's graphic narrative features several scenes in which Matteo dialogues with others regarding them. These intimate conversations, although recounted from a homodiegetic perspective, serve as moments in which other characters challenge and reshape Matteo's prior conclusions in which his homosexuality is perceived as mutually exclusive from other aspects that comprise his identity. This influence ultimately leads to Matteo's acceptance of the notion that his homosexual identity may coexist with the love that he has for his family and hometown. Reflections that take place with his cousin Sara and acquaintance Francesco are particularly impactful in serving as spaces in which Matteo's initially limited heterodiegetic perspective is reshaped.

As the plot of *La generazione* unfolds, the "silence" expressed by Matteo at the onset of the graphic narrative is quickly broken. Although one is led to believe that a return to Pontecesello may further silence Matteo's narrative, the inverse is true. One conversation featured in Biondi's graphic narrative that serves as a vital outlet for Matteo is that which occurs with his pregnant cousin, Sara. Upon returning to Pontecesello, Matteo has an intimate conversation with Sara regarding previously unrevealed aspects of his experiences as a homosexual male. Matteo begins the conversation by sharing with Sara that he has returned to their hometown due to a failed relationship with a girl in Milan. When met with a skeptical reaction from Sara, Matteo bravely asks "Pensi che sia una

bugia?" ("What? Think I'm lying?"; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 25). Sara responds, "in parte" ("partly") and openly asks "Era un ragazzo, vero?" ("It was a boy, right?"; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 25). Although previously secretive regarding his homosexuality, Matteo responds in the affirmative by asking "Si vede così tanto?" ("Is it that obvious?"; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 26). This moment of the conversation is pivotal in the graphic narrative as this is the first instance in which Matteo openly acknowledges an aspect of his identity to someone else. Matteo proceeds to share the details of his failed relationship with his ex-boyfriend in Milan, Massimo. Sara responds in an accepting manner, suggesting "Ehi, ci facciamo compagnia. Anche io sono stata lasciata." ("Hey, we should stick together. I've been dumped too."; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 28). Sara shares that her ex-boyfriend left her as well due to her pregnancy. Sara reassures Matteo that "…ognuno ha il suo cruccio" ("…we all have our troubles") and affirms "Guardo al domani…" ("I'm looking ahead"; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 28-29). Sara's empathetic response underscores to Matteo that he is not alone, as well as the fact that his homosexuality and breakup alone are not solely responsible for his isolation. Matteo begins to contemplate the fact that he may instead be the causation for his internal struggle. Sara's focus on the birth of her daughter, Elisa, allows Matteo to begin to consider his own future in relation to his family life as a homosexual male.

Similar to the conversation that transpires with Sara, Matteo's dialogue with his grandmother's nurse, Francesco, further breaks the silence surrounding his homosexuality. Whereas the prior conversation with Sara interrupts Matteo's silence on a family level, his revelation to Francesco initiates his openness in the public domain. Just prior to this conversation, Matteo foreshadows the importance that this seemingly mundane exchange

between he and Francesco will have in his life as he shares “Mi sentii sveglio per la prima volta quando ero tornato” (“I felt awake for the first time since my return”; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 51). Matteo expresses a similar sentiment when engaging in conversations with his cousin, Sara. While having a simple cup of coffee with Francesco sitting outdoors in the scene that follows, Matteo shares his narrative: “Non riuscii a sopportare tanta calma e tanto silenzio. Li rovinai vomitando su Francesco tutta la mia storia.” (“I couldn’t stand such quiet and silence. I just had to spoil the atmosphere and tell Francesco my life story.”; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 53). After not responding for some time, Matteo is met by Francesco’s accepting and caring response. Francesco questions Matteo’s reluctance to return home: “Non capisco perché trovi così il tuo rientro. Lo dici come se vivere qui fosse una condanna.” (“I don’t understand why you feel so terrible about your return. You talk as though living here’s some sort of punishment.”; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 54). Francesco further goes on to highlight the internal struggle that Matteo has overlooked: “Per me, scusa il diretto, sei solo scappato da un problema. Invece di affrontarlo è stato più facile per te prendere e andartene, chiudere tutti i contatti.” (“Forgive me for being blunt, but I think all you did was run away from a problem. Leaving, cutting all ties, was a lot easier than facing things head on.”; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 54). This exchange between Francesco and Matteo serves as an inflection point as Matteo’s silence is interrupted. Whereas Matteo attributed his silence to fear of societal rejection, Francesco’s accepting response forces the protagonist to realize that his vow of silence is not exclusively a result of external factors, but of his own internal struggle. Matteo’s conversation with Francesco leads to a deep internal reflection. While walking around a rural portion of his hometown, Matteo reflects upon how his life in Milan, in comparison

to that in Pontecesello, did not resolve his internal conflict. Matteo reflects upon how "Sentivo [Matteo] un senso di rivalsa verso il mondo. Non ero solo, non ero l'unico finocchio al mondo. Fuori c'era un intero universo da scoprire." ("I [Matteo] felt a sense of payback towards the world. I wasn't alone, I wasn't the only gay in the village there was an entire universe to discover."; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 56). Although life in Milan and his relationship while living there with a man named Massimo did provide Matteo with a sense of community, he comes to the realization that this move was more of a physical escape than a true resolution. In fact, the open conversation that Matteo has with Francesco reveals to him that he in fact could have found genuine acceptance in the most unlikely of places. Even when not speaking, Matteo finds his time in Pontecesello with Francesco to be a source of healing. Matteo expresses this sentiment of consolation while simply picking mushrooms with Francesco in the woods: "Siamo stati ziti quasi tutto il tempo. E io smesso di pensare a te [Massimo] e al domani. Sto lentamente tornando a respirare." ("We said nothing almost the entire time. And I stopped thinking about you [Massimo] and about tomorrow. I'm slowly starting to breathe again."; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 61) (see fig. 9). Although life in Pontecesello led to Matteo's initial silence surrounding his homosexuality out of fear of rejection, this same place ultimately provides Matteo with a reacquired sense of voice and agency.

Whereas the conversations with Sara and Francesco permit Matteo to alter his homodiegetic perspective in a contemporaneous context, the recollection of a past series of events within his family is equally as impactful. During his conversation with Sara, Matteo also learns the details of a falling out that occurred three decades prior between Aunt Cosima and Nan Tonia. Sara shares how her mother was involved in a romantic

relationship with a married man and became pregnant with her. When Aunt Cosima decided not to terminate the pregnancy in accordance with the wishes of Sara's father and instead left Pontecesello and gave birth, Nan Tonia stopped speaking with her. As Matteo stands on the balcony hearing this past narrative from Sara, he looks out at the night sky and contemplates: "Pensai a quanto amore si potesse provare per un figlio. Pensai a mio padre, distante solo qualche curva. Per la prima volta, dopo tanto tempo, mi domandai cosa stesse facendo." ("I thought of the love you can feel for a child, I thought of my father, only a few blocks away. For the first time in ages, I wondered what he might be doing."; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 39). Matteo's immediate connection to this past family conflict initiates a self-reflection for addressing the present circumstances with his own father, Danilo. Matteo draws a direct parallel between his failed relationship in Milan and that of his Aunt Cosima with Sara's father as he questions "Ma eravamo realmente innamorati di quelle persone? Oppure speravamo soltanto che ci salvassero dalla nostra solitudine?" ("Were we really in love with those people? Or were we just hoping they'd save us from our loneliness?"; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 57). Matteo arrives at the realization that everything he needs to feel loved and accepted is not somewhere else, but in his very hometown. Later in the graphic narrative, Matteo further reflects upon how the estrangement between Nan Tonia and Aunt Cosima is reconciled. A series of six panels highlights Aunt Cosima and Nan Tonia lightheartedly sharing a ride on a motorbike. After experiencing a bumpy ride together, the two break their three decades of silence. These panels are followed by an entirely blank panel containing only text from Matteo: "La sapevi questa storia, papa? Non finiamo anche noi così. Non so se avrò il coraggio di chiamarti io per primo…ma spero che prima o poi, anche chiedendocelo a gesti, ce lo faremo anche noi

un giro su quel motorino." ("Did you know about this, Dad? Let's not end up this way. I don't know if I'll have the guts to call you first…I just hope that, sooner or later, however we get there, we'll also take a ride on that same motorbike."; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 63). This blank panel literally and figuratively creates a space for Matteo to contemplate how he may resolve matters with his father as a past narrative provides them with future hope. Matteo's ongoing contemplation of this past family conflict, coupled with his contemporaneous conversations with Sara and Francesco transform his homodiegetic perspective as outside narratives mold his future.

The Role of Focalization in *La generazione*

Another technique that Biondi capitalizes upon in *La generazione* is that of focalization. Similar to de Santis and Colaone in their work *In Italia sono tutti maschi*, Biondi utilizes the technique of focalization to invite readers to establish their own identity both cognitively and spatially in relation to the narrative. The use of focalization in this publication affords readers the opportunity to incorporate elements of their own identity as they engage with the narrative and create new meaning. Further, through a focus on one of the most private social institutions, that of the family, Biondi's work delivers a universal message to which readers may relate and that they may apply to their own lives. The moments in which focalization is utilized in *La generazione* fosters a strong sense of intimacy and connection for the audience.

One manner in which Biondi utilizes focalization is through the incorporation of family photographs. Following an intimate conversation with his cousin Sara in which he reveals his homosexuality, a series of panels appears featuring photographs of Matteo's family over the course of several decades. The first of these photographs features a family

photograph of Matteo's father and three aunts when they were children alongside his grandparents. The family photograph is accompanied by two text boxes capturing Matteo's reflection: "Ci fu un pensiero che non mi fece abbandonare la veglia, quella note. Il constatare che per vent'anni ero cresciuto in una famiglia di cui avevo volutamente ignorato la storia." ("A nagging thought prevented me from sleeping that night. The realization that for twenty year I had been living in a family whose story I had willingly ignored."; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 40). The image that immediately follows in the next panel zooms closer into the faces of Matteo's five relatives as Matteo further contemplates

> Il racconto di quelle anziane matrone cui ero troppo indifferente per interessarmene. Arrabbiato perché loro non avevano sostenuto le mie battaglie. Quando io per primo avevo ignorato le loro. Battaglie di anni passata che avevano dato forma alla loro vita. A quella di mio padre e quindi alla mia. Mi sentii in colpa per tutte le nuove generazioni…che dal passato pretendono senza mai dare. (…the story of those old matrons that I was too unrealistic to learn. Angry at them because they hadn't supported me through my battles. When I had been ignoring theirs first. Battles of years gone by which had shaped their lives. Shaped my father's life and therefore my own. I felt guilty for all the new generations…that do nothing but expect from the past, without ever giving.; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 40-41)

Matteo's thoughts capture his realization that he has not only been attempting to escape and silence aspects of his own present-day narrative as a gay male, but also those from his family's past. By focusing on this family photograph, Matteo realizes that he must reconcile not only his present circumstances, but also those of the past as well. By

empathizing with the generational struggles that have occurred between his relatives, Matteo derives inspiration regarding how to heal the relationship with his father.

Another manner in which Biondi utilizes focalization to foster a strong connection between Matteo and the audience is through a series of panels as imagined by Matteo that follow the death and funeral of Nan Tonia. These panels portray Matteo's thoughts through text and image during a family tragedy. The first group of images portrays Nan Tonia walking with her four children Antonia, Bruna, Cosima, and Danilo. These images are accompanied by written text capturing Matteo's thoughts: "C'era questa immagine che non riuscivo ad allontanare. Vedevo mio padre e le sue sorelle camminare in fila dietro alla macchina. Camminare insieme alla madre per l'ultima volta. E non potevo fare a meno figurarmeli bambini, mentre alla stessa maniera seguivano la mamma per le vie del paese. Riuscivo a sentire quanto nonna Tonia avesse amati e quattro." ("There was this image I just couldn't shake. I saw my father and his sisters walking in a line behind the hearse. Walking with their mother for the last time. And I could picture them as children walking along the streets, right behind their mum. I could feel just how much Nan Tonia loved the four of them."; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 126-127). Similar to the family photographs, this imagery connects the past to the present as Matteo ponders the thought of his relatives during a happier and more mundane moment in life. The two full page panels of a household wall containing family photos focused on the framed faces of Matteo's family members over the course of multiple generations further delivers this same message, while fostering a stronger sense of empathy between the reader and Matteo. Biondi's incorporation of family photos over the course of two large panels is particularly effective by not merely highlighting the evolution of Matteo's family, but instead by providing a

place in which the reader sees themselves. Although recognizable as Matteo's relatives, the generalized nature of the individuals portrayed in the photographs provides a degree of universality as the reader sees themselves and their own family members among them. The text contained on these two full panels further guides the reader through their contemplation of these images in relation to time: "Zia C con la sua bambina. Mio padre e mia madre, il mio primo giorno di scuola. Zia A e Gigi che si tolgono il riso dai capelli ridendo, freschi di nozze. Zia B col suo muso imbronciato da adolescente." ("Auntie C. with her little girl. My mum and dad, my first day of school. Auntie A. and Gigi, just married, shaking rice off their hair, laughing. Auntie B. as a grumpy teenager."; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 128-129) (see figs. 12 and 13). This chronology of events leads to Matteo's final reflection regarding life: "Siamo tutti qui, fra queste foto, fra queste mura, in questa casa, in un'infinita costellazione nata da tutti noi. Papà. Ho visto la vita. Come un albero che sale dalla terra, ho visto le prime foglie, le radici, i frutti. Ho visto quella mela pesante, tanto matura da spezzare il ramo." ("We're all here, in these photographs, on these walls, in this house, an endless constellation made of all of us. Dad, I've seen life. Like a tree growing from the ground. I've seen the first leaves, the roots, the fruits. I saw that heavy apple, so ripe it broke off the branch."; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 129). Although referring to his own family, the reader situates themselves and their families among the images portrayed on the walls of the house. Further, by containing only framed images of family members spread over two full panels, the reader comes to reflect upon their individual and familial identity in relation to time. The audience, like Matteo, organically arrives at the notion that the family is eternal in nature as even in moments of hardship generational change and memories endure.

In addition to utilizing focalization to generate reflection in relation to family identity, Biondi also employs this technique to draw the audience to Matteo's own internal struggle. The use of this technique is particularly impactful in a series of panels that span two pages featuring a closeup of Matteo's face as he scrolls through memories from his relationship with his ex-boyfriend in Milan, Massimo. The deliberate omission of text bubbles by Biondi leads the reader to focus exclusively on Matteo's face of sadness and despair. By the end of this series of panels Matteo calls Massimo to simply share "Ehi…mi manchi [Massimo]" ("Hey…I miss you [Massimo]"; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 100-101). In addition to helping the reader to understand the despair that affronts Matteo, the focus on the face and perseveration on a failed relationship reveals how the past is negatively influencing him in the present. Whereas focalization captures Matteo's despair, Biondi uses this same technique to offer hope and healing. Biondi employs focalization for this purpose in a later panel portraying Aunt Cosima adoring her new granddaughter, Elisa. The closeup of Aunt Cosima's face visually conveys the peace and closure that she has found in life through this birth. Additionally, the two textboxes that surround this image on two sides underscore how Matteo too finds solace from this intimate moment: "[Matteo]…chissà se Zia C rivedeva la se stessa di vent'anni prima. Chiedendosi forse se anche Sara avrebbe dovuto proteggere la sua bambina dalle parole del mondo." ("I [Matteo] wonder if Auntie C. saw herself twenty years ago…wondering whether perhaps Sara, too, would have to protect her little girl from the world's evil eye."; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 135) (see fig. 14). The focus on Aunt Cosima's face in this panel serves in direct contrast to the one featuring Matteo's face earlier in the graphic narrative. Through

this image Biondi successfully denotes that rather than fixating on the past, Matteo will look forward into the future that awaits him and his family.

Discovering the Self through Text and Image

Throughout the course of *La generazione*, Biondi explores the symbiotic relationship between text and image to deliver a powerful message of self-discovery. One notable aspect of Biondi's work in which text and image work in tandem is through the incorporation of nature and mundane elements within Matteo's hometown of Pontecesello. The placement of text in relation to mundane occurrences is evident in a full-page vertical panel featuring a train traveling down the tracks. A chain of text is positioned just above the train: "Non ricordo [Matteo] molto del viaggio. Quando il treno ha lasciato Milano dietro di sé, mi sono sentito annullato. Dissolto. In un limbo fra ieri e domani, Rammento che era uscito un po' di sole dopo la pioggia della mattina. Il verde della campagna baciata dalla luce mi riempiva gli occhi. Faceva maledettamente male." ("I [Matteo] don't remember much about the trip. When the train left Milan, I felt empty. Stuck in limbo between yesterday and tomorrow. I remember that the sun was shining, after the morning rain. My eyes were blind from the sun-kissed countries green. It was actually painful."; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 5) (see fig. 8). The juxtaposition of text and image in this initial panel explicitly makes reference to Matteo's internal conflict. The text and image contained on this panel denote both a physical and temporal transition for Matteo. The connection of Pontecesello to Matteo's past and Milan to his present further distinguishes these two places. In this sense, the interplay between text and image in this panel creates a liminal space that allows one to transition with Matteo into the narrative.

Throughout the course of the graphic narrative, Biondi employs text and image in a manner that thrusts readers into the evolving reality that affronts Matteo. After inadvertently overhearing Matteo on a teleconference with his friend Simone in which he is discussing his relationship with Massimo, the response of Matteo's Aunt Bruna changes the trajectory of the narrative. A series of abrupt panels employ text and image to involve the audience in a rapidly unfolding series of events. Matteo's three aunts and father Danilo, whom is called to pick up Matteo, are portrayed knocking on the locked door of his bedroom citing homophobic perspectives. Bruna repeatedly proclaims, "È contro natura quello che fai, Matteo!" ("What you do is not natural, Matteo!") and "Matteo, non va bene quello che fai!" ("Matteo what you do is not right!"; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 73-74). When confronted by his three enraged sisters, Danilo simply replies "Non mi interessa." ("It doesn't matter!"; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 74). Although Matteo is portrayed hearing Danilo's response from behind a closed door, he does not recognize this initial degree of acceptance from his father amid the response of his three aunts. After opening the door and seeing his father face-to-face, Matteo coldly says "Babbo…grazie di essere passato. Ma ora vai a casa, per favore." ("Thanks for dropping by, Dad. Just go home now, please."; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 77). A large panel portrays a defeated Danilo simply replying "Va bene" ("Ok") to his son and leaving (Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 78). Matteo soon realizes that he has made a mistake by sending his father away. From this moment forward, Matteo begins to revisit his relationship with his father as he realizes that he may in fact have been avoiding one of the few individuals in his life that truly accepts and loves him. In this sense, the panel in which Matteo encounters his father not only ends an abrupt chain of events, but instead begins an internal dialogue in which Matteo reflects

upon his relationship with his father. Although the use of text and image in these instances guides the audience through tumultuous moments, Biondi also employs these same elements in tandem to deliver a sense of peace and closure.

As the events of the narrative transpire, Biondi continues to create meaning by capitalizing upon the symbiotic relationship between text and image during pivotal moments in the work. One element in particular that Biondi utilizes to engage readers through these two elements is that of nature. The exploration of text and image through nature is evident in a series of panels featuring an intimate conversation between Matteo and Sara amid the night sky. As they converse on the balcony, Sara shares the details of the challenges experienced by her mother, Aunt Cosima, when she became pregnant with her. While looking up at the night sky, Matteo immediately draws parallels between the past strife that occurred between his aunt and grandmother and that between him and his father in the present: "Ne parlai con Sara, quella notte. Mi disse che non era colpa mia…Mi raccontò di cose che io avevo solo vagamente intuito dalle mezze parole di mio padre." ("I talked about it with Sara, that night. She said it wasn't my fault…She told me things I had only vaguely guessed from my father's veiled words."; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 38). Matteo's reflection upon this conflict leads him to contemplate a different future with his own father: "Me la immaginai camminare in strada con Sara bambina per mano. Mentre sorrideva come sempre. Mentre la proteggeva dalle parole del mondo. Pensai a quanto amore si potesse provare per un figlio. Pensai a mio padre, distante solo qualche curva. Per la prima volta dopo tanto tempo, mi domandai cosa stesse facendo." ("I pictured her [Aunt Cosima] walking down the street, holding Sara by the hand. Smiling, as always. Protecting her from the world's evil eye. I thought of the love you can feel for a child. I thought of

my father, only a few blocks away. For the first time in ages, I wondered what he might be doing."; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 39). Biondi's specific focus on a clear evening sky with the moon and stars provides the audience with a sense of stillness to fully contemplate alongside Matteo. Similar to the evening sky that serves as a transition between each day, this scene denotes the beginning of Matteo's own journey into the future. The simplicity of the evening sky, coupled with the relatable experience of looking up at the moon and stars on a given evening fosters a degree of universality to which readers may relate and derive their own meaning.

Another instance in which Biondi draws upon elements in nature to deliver a powerful message is through the scenes in the countryside of Pontecesello. While walking alone in the countryside of his hometown, Matteo deeply connects with his emotions

> Tre anni fa mi sono innamorato di Massimo. Ricordo che rileggevo senza sosta i suoi messaggi di soppiatto, sotto al banco. Dopo aver passato anni a invidiare gli amori dei miei compagni, finalmente anche io ero corrisposto. […] Lo sognavo, lo sognavo ogni notte. Volevo raggiungerlo. Era il mio primo amore. Ero convinto che bastasse salire sul suo calesse dorato per sfuggire a tutti i tormenti della mia adolescenza. Chissà se, trent'anni fa, Zia C [Aunt Cosima] faceva i miei stessi sogni. (Three years ago, I fell in love with Massimo. I remember I used to read his messages in secret so many times. After envying my friends' relationships for years, at last my love was reciprocated. […] I dreamt. I dreamt about him every night. He was my first love. I was convinced that he was better than anyone who lived here. I thought all I had to do was step into his golden chariot to escape from

> all my teenage troubles. Who knows if, thirty years ago, Auntie C. [Aunt Cosima] was dreaming the same dreams.; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 56-57)

While alone in nature, Matteo identifies and assumes a degree of responsibility for his own loneliness. Matteo realizes that leaving Pontecesello for Milan did not reconcile his internal conflict regarding his homosexuality. Although Matteo previously blamed the external factors associated with his family and life in Pontecesello with his isolation, he comes to realize that these circumstances are a result of his internal mindset. Biondi's placement of this self-reflection amid nature, similar to the earlier evening scene, provides a serene setting in which the audience's full attention may be directed to Matteo's thought process. As Biondi focuses a panel on the moon and stars during Matteo's evening conversation with Sara, she employs a similar technique in this daytime scene. Biondi focuses Matteo's reflective questions in textbox located within a tree: "Ma eravamo realmente innamorati di quelle persone? Oppure speravamo soltanto che ci salvassero dalla nostra solitudine?" ("Were we really in love with those people? Or were we just hoping they'd save us from our loneliness?"; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 57). Matteo's small silhouette under the large tree captures the gravity of the protagonist's thoughts, while pragmatically providing the reader with the space to process them. Additionally, this scene serves as another inflection point as Matteo shifts the blame for his loneliness from external factors, to those within.

As the graphic narrative unfolds, Matteo continues to derive a sense of peace and self-discovery from nature. This tranquility is evident in a series of six smaller panels that comprise one page featuring Matteo and Francesco picking mushrooms in the woods on a Saturday afternoon. Matteo shares the benefits of appreciating simple objects and the

silence found in nature: “Ho imparato che la gioia delle piccole cose non si concede a noi di sua iniziativa. Bisogna avere la forza di cercarla. Alle volte è necessario stringere i denti e strozzarsi il cuore per gustarsi un pezzo di vita.” (“I learned that happiness in the smaller things doesn’t come for free. One must have the strength to look for it. Sometimes one must grit one’s teeth and choke one’s heart to enjoy a slice of life.”; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 61) (see fig. 9). Through the simplicity of nature, Matteo comes to realize that all he needs to grow may be found in his hometown.

Navigating Time, Place and Space in *La generazione*

Similar to her contemporaries de Santis and Colaone, Biondi utilizes the medium of the graphic narrative to transport the reader in relation to time, place, and space. The integral role of time in Biondi’s work is evident from the very title of the work, *La generazione* (*Generations*) as even prior to engaging with the plot, one is aware that they will be engaging with not just one, but instead multiple, narratives across several generations. The juxtaposition of two contrasting places of importance in the protagonist’s life, the small hometown of Pontecesello and the cosmopolitan city of Milan, also makes the audience aware that they will not only be traversing periods of time, but also the geographical places in which they occur. Further, through a focus on seemingly mundane daily occurrences that unfold in the present, Biondi manipulates time, place, and space to deliver the overarching message of the graphic narrative in regard to generational growth and change. By exploring time, space, and place Biondi delivers a message that is both relatable and timeless in nature.

The importance of time in *La generazione* is underscored by Biondi through text and image in several instances. A direct reference to time in relation to the narrative is

evident in a series of three smaller consecutive panels that portray Matteo staring outside of a window in the home of his aunt. Although the setting is the same, Matteo's clothing changes in each photograph, indicating the passing of time. In a more direct manner, each of these three images is accompanied by a simple text box with the notation "Domani" ("Tomorrow") (Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 20). Two small images of crossed out dates on a calendar in the month of March appear on the page that follows (Biondi 21). On a pragmatic level, these two series of images indicate the passing of time for Matteo in Pontecesello. This sequence also captures the sense of stagnation and aimlessness that Matteo feels in his own life as he faces multiple uncertainties. Although stuck in the present moment in these particular panels, as Matteo confides in those around him, the movement of time shifts to the future. This renewed perspective is evident when Matteo is portrayed feeling the stomach of his pregnant cousin Sara and declaring "Si muove [la bambina]…il domani è tutto suo" ("She's [the baby's] moving…tomorrow's all about her"; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 29). Although subtle, this scene plays a transformative role by transitioning the narrative to focus on the future. As Matteo begins to look forward, he develops a renewed appreciation for the present as well. While looking out at the trees that adorn the landscape of his hometown, Matteo expresses his newfound gratitude for the present moment: "Questi alberi che salgono fra i frutti delle sementi. Mi rammentano il gusto di apprezzare il sapore di questi giorni. Inesorabilmente veloci come il peso di un sorriso. Mi sussurrano che è ora di seminare. Per poi raccogliere, in un giorno sereno lontano da oggi." ("These trees growing from the fruits of their seeds…They remind me of how lovely it is to appreciate the taste of today. As it goes as fast as the weight of a smile. They whisper that it's time to sow. Only to reap on a happy day, a long way away.";

Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 88-89). By devoting his attention to the slow yet steady growth of trees, Matteo derives peace and happiness from this often overlooked phenomenon in nature. Matteo realizes that he must focus on the present in order to make sense of his past, as well as forge the path for the future.

The use of time, place, and space by Biondi is also evident in a scene in which Matteo and his family are portrayed watching television. In this particular series of panels, Matteo bonds with his grandmother, aunts, and cousin while watching a television program together. Although seemingly mundane, a more profound transformation occurs as the familial conflict regarding Matteo's homosexuality is pacified by a daily experience. As Matteo and his female relatives remark on the attractiveness of men, a level of acceptance is observed among initially intolerant relatives. By delivering this acceptance through a mundane scene, Biondi creates a relatable moment in which the audience may fully empathize; allowing this moment to serve for readers not as a window into another family but an introspective mirror in which to consider aspects of their own identity in relation to their own family.

Another moment in the graphic narrative in which Biondi transitions the audience through time, space, and place occurs as Nan Tonia is dying. In the weeks leading up to his grandmother's death, Matteo reflects upon the importance of the mundane routines amid a hardship

> Furono settimane difficili. La nonna peggiorava. Facevamo avanti e indietro dall'ospedale. Era stranamente confortante essere di aiuto in quei momenti. Portare vestiti puliti. Cambiare l'acqua, comprare da mangiare per chi restava sveglio. Nella sofferenza i piccoli impegni portano sollievo. Sembra di poter fare qualcosa.

> Ricordo distintamente di aver tagliato le unghie delle mani di mia nonna. Come se fosse qualcosa che potesse fare la differenza. Carezzavo le sue mani lo ricordo ancora. Nessuno voleva parlare molto. Ci aiutavamo tutti. (Those were tough weeks. Nan was getting worse. We were back and forth from the hospital. Being able to help at those moments was strangely comforting. Bringing clean clothes. Changing the water; buying food for the people keeping vigil. In times of distress, small tasks keep you sane. You feel you're doing something. I distinctly remember cutting my Nan's nails. As if that could make some kind of difference. I stroked her hands, I still remember. Nobody said much. We were just there for each other.; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 118)

During this moment of transition from life to death, simple tasks allow Matteo to ground himself. Further, the relatability of these daily tasks invites the reader to once again see themselves within the narrative; essentially removing any barriers that exist between the publication and the interpretation that is occurring in the outside world among the audience.

Following the death of Nan Tonia, Matteo continues to traverse time, space, and place to make sense of his present reality. Biondi capitalizes upon this triad as Matteo looks at his father and three aunts during the funeral. Matteo reflects upon how "C'era questa immagine che non riuscivo ad allontanare" ("There was this image I just couldn't shake"; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 126). This "image" is of his father and three aunts walking behind the hearse transporting his grandmother's coffin. As they walk, Matteo's mind wanders to a past moment of the four children following their mother: "E non potevo fare a meno figurarmeli bambini, mentre alla stessa maniera seguivano la mamma per le vie del paese. Riuscivo a sentire quanto nonna Tonia avesse amati e quattro." ("…I could picture

them as children, walking along the streets, right behind their mum. I could feel just how much Nan Tonia loved the four of them."; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 127). This flashback to Nan Tonia walking down the street with her four beloved children connects the solemn present reality of death with a fond memory from the past. By traveling back in time and place, Matteo discovers comfort and closure despite the death of a loved one. From this traversal of time Matteo derives the strength and acceptance to fully address his own challenges as he assumes a renewed sense of responsibility as a member of the next generation. Therefore, this powerful scene does not serve as an endpoint, but instead provides an eternal aspect by allowing the narrative to endure into the future for both the protagonist and the audience alike.

The Importance of Regionality in *La generazione*

In addition to time and space, place plays an integral role in Biondi's graphic narrative. The importance of place in this work is evidenced through the manner in which Biondi interweaves regional identity in the narrative. By highlighting a series of subtle, yet significant, aspects of regional identity in relation to Matteo and his family, Biondi illuminates the importance of this factor on (re)shaping past memories, as well as present and future perspectives. In several instances in which regional elements are incorporated, Biondi engages the reader's senses to fully immerse them in the narrative. This multisensory approach actively engages the reader as they vicariously partake in Matteo's experience and develop a strong sense of empathy for the protagonist. Further, Biondi's wavering between not only the past and present, but also the two geographical locations of Pontecesello and Milan, highlights the importance of regionality in shaping the human experience.

By focusing on simple elements found in Matteo's hometown, Biondi illuminates how a mundane setting has the potential to be transformative. One element within the narrative that immediately conjures warm feelings is that of regional cuisine. In two scenes, Matteo's aunts offer regional delicacies: a slice of Mantovana, a Tuscan specialty cake from the Prato area, Mantovana and Rosticciana, a Tuscan dish made of grilled pork meat. Although on the surface the offering of these two foods seems insignificant, this act plays a critical role. Firstly, the offering of Mantovana and Rosticciana by Matteo's aunts underscores how they seek to leverage the comforts of home to connect with their distant and melancholy nephew. The offering of food as a source of comfort presents an opportunity for the reader to connect with Matteo and his family as they too most likely have had a similar experience in their life. Secondly, Biondi's intentional decision to highlight two regional foods distinguishes Pontecesello from Milan. The reader comes to recognize that elements found only in Matteo's hometown of Pontecesello, not the unfamiliar metropolis of Milan, will ultimately serve as a source of refuge for Matteo. These local foods remind Matteo of his connection to Pontecesello despite his previous attempt to escape this place in his life. Through these subtle reminders, Matteo begins to (re)discover aspects of his identity in a place that he had previously considered to be unaccepting and intolerant. The particular significance of food in Italian culture allows Biondi to capitalize upon this product to deliver a narrative that grapples with identity.

Another aspect of regional life that Biondi explores is that of social interactions that are often common among residents in smaller locales. Upon returning to the small town of Pontecesello from Milan, Matteo expresses a high degree of concern regarding town gossip. Matteo is particularly fearful of how the residents will respond to him and his family

if they discover that he is gay. Biondi captures Matteo's fear early in the graphic narrative in a scene in which Matteo brings Nan Tonia out of the house. As Matteo pushes Nan Tonia's wheelchair while walking around the town, multiple residents notice him and inquire into why he has returned. As Matteo accompanies his grandmother, he ponders: "Per la prima volta fuori, dopo tre settimane. […] Cosa potrei dire se incontrassi un compagno del liceo? Che sono in visita? Di passaggio. Che ripartirò presto. Molto presto. […] Non passerà molto prima che pure mio padre lo venga a sapere." ("Out for the first time after three weeks. […] What could I say if I met an old schoolmate? That I'm visiting? Just passing through. That I'm leaving soon. Very soon. […] Very soon, everyone will know I'm back. People here have nothing better to do. It won't be long before Dad finds out too."; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 46-47). Matteo also is annoyed when he overhears Nan Tonia telling others that he has returned from studying in Milan (Biondi 48). Matteo's sentiment underscores the dissonance that he is experiencing. Although Matteo does not wish for aspects of his identity and reason for returning to Pontecesello to be revealed, he is uncomfortable when lies are told to facilitate this outcome. In this sense, Biondi utilizes Matteo's daily interactions with local townspeople to underscore the conflicting emotions within the protagonist, as well as the ultimate triumph of his desire to live an authentic lifestyle.

Through the juxtaposition of two contrasting settings, rural Pontecesello and cosmopolitan Milan, Biondi further illuminates the power of regional elements found exclusively in Pontecesello to reset Matteo's trajectory in life. Biondi highlights Matteo's strong connection to land both through text and image. The beauty of the countryside is captured in a series of panels in which Francesco and Matteo are taking a drive. These

panels feature the trees, mountains, and other simple objects typically found in the countryside. In addition to recognizing the beauty of Matteo's homeland through the featured images, the accompanying text delivers a similar sentiment as Matteo shares

> Francesco si inoltrò per una stradina sterrata che non avevo mai percorse. Una di quelle vie confluenti nella Francigena…Mi ero dimenticato di quanto fosse bella la mia campagna. Dal mio ritorno avevo avuto la costante impressione di essere un turista nella mia vecchia vita. Adesso, invece, vedevo qualcosa di nuovo, assieme a una persona nuova. Fui felice di avere un nuovo ricordo. Finalmente la mia vita aveva fatto un piccolo passo avanti. (Francesco took a dirt road I didn't know. One of those roads merging into Francigena…I'd forgotten just how beautiful our countryside was. Since my return, I'd has a constant feeling of being a tourist of my old life. Now, I was seeing something new, with someone new. I was happy I made a new memory. My life made a step forward at last.; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 52)

Through his connection to the countryside, Matteo rediscovers elements of his past to direct his present and future. This epiphany serves a profound role in redirecting Matteo to locate himself as a gay male in a place that he genuinely loves, as well as the place in which he too is loved. While overlooking the countryside Matteo proudly proclaims the place he once tried to escape as "La mia terra" ("My land"); affirming his embracement of this place (Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 88). The positive feelings that are generated within Matteo while admiring the countryside stand in staunch contrast to those he shares regarding Milan where he had resided for three years prior. This contrast is evident through Matteo's testimony of his experience in Milan

> Non ero solo, non ero l'unico finocchio al mondo. Fuori c'era un intero universo da scoprire. Massimo mi insegnò che non dovevo provare nessuna vergogna. Mi aiutò a leggere, a capire, a conoscere. Mi raccontava dei suoi amici, di Milano, di tante città dove si può camminare tenendosi la mano senza che nessuno si sloghi il collo per guardare. Lo sognavo, lo sognavo ogni notte. Era il mio primo amore. (I wasn't alone, I wasn't the only gay in the village. There was an entire universe to discover out there. Massimo taught me not to feel any shame. He taught me to open my eyes and ears, to understand, to know. He'd tell me about his friends, about Milan, about many other cities where you can walk hand-in-hand without people breaking their necks to stare. I dreamt. I dreamt about him every night. He was my first love.; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 56)

Although Matteo did in fact find a partner in Milan, when the relationship dissolved, he found himself even more isolated and alone than he had ever been while residing in Pontecesello. Whereas the failed relationship with Massimo resulted in his loneliness in Milan, Matteo's lifelong familial relationships and newly formed rapport with Francesco in Pontecesello lead him to feel loved. Even after briefly returning to Milan and reconnecting with Massimo later in the graphic narrative, Matteo quickly returns to Pontecesello when notified of Nan Tonia's rapidly declining health. Biondi notes Matteo's second transition from Milan to Pontecesello with a full page of six images portraying scenes in Milan. These images are accompanied by a single speech bubble containing text from his conversation with Sara as she informs Matteo of his grandmother's deteriorating condition "Hai fatto bene a chiamarmi, Sara" ("You did the right thing calling me, Sara"; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 106). Matteo's immediate return to Pontecesello to be with

his grandmother and family further underscores that his heart is not in Milan with Massimo, but in fact with his family in his hometown.

By weaving elements of regional identity through the graphic narrative, Biondi creates a setting in which the audience may easily connect. As they interpret the text and images in tandem, the reader comes to contemplate the role that specific places have had on (re)shaping their own life. The reader also is reminded how, despite their travels, only one place may be considered their original home. This powerful message allows the reader to not only navigate Matteo's narrative, but also their own.

Reflecting in the Gutter to Find Closure

One hallmark of the graphic narrative that Biondi effectively utilizes in *La generazione* is that of the gutter. Throughout the course of the graphic narrative, Biondi incorporates panels that have limited text and/or images. In some instances, Biondi includes entirely empty panels and spaces. The voids in text and image are deliberately placed in the graphic narrative to afford the reader the opportunity to not only interpret, but also connect with, the complex intergenerational narratives presented to them. The seemingly blank spaces provide a space for the reader to engage in a series of metacognitive processes as they derive and contribute meaning to the featured narrative. The impactful nature of the gutter in Biondi's work is particularly evident during integral moments that grapple with the life cycle including (re)birth, growing older, and death. Specifically, the gutter invites the audience to partake in deep reflection in the scenes surrounding Nan Tonia's death and the birth of Elisa.

In addition to capturing the silence and sorrow surrounding Nan Tonia's death, Biondi selects large still panels to deliver closure to the audience. A large panel features

Aunt Cosima lying in bed comforting Nan Tonia in her final moments. A speech bubble coming from Aunt Cosima makes reference to the memory that Matteo recalls earlier in the narrative of his aunt and grandmother on a motorbike: “Lo senti il vento fra i capelli? Lo senti, mamma? Lo sento…è bello. Mi sarebbe sempre piaciuto imparare a guidare…allora, guida forte, vai dritto. Ci aspettano tutti.” (“Can you feel the wind in your hair? Can you feel it, mom? I can…it’s nice. I would have loved to learn how to ride…Then keep going straight on. They’re all waiting for us.”; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 122-123). A large panel portraying Aunt Cosima and Nan Tonia on a motorbike in the countryside contains a speech bubble “Stiamo per arrivare” (“Almost there”; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 123). These scenes are important for not only capturing the death of Nan Tonia, but for delivering a sense of closure to a past narrative; the decadelong conflict that persisted between the two characters. Aunt Cosima’s reference to this moment underscores how the love between mother and daughter triumphs any hardship. The gutter continues to play a prominent role in the following pages focused on Nan Tonia’s funeral. The image of Nan Tonia’s loved ones walking behind a hearse carrying her coffin appears at the bottom of two almost fully white pages. A vertical list of text appears above this image

> Zia B. dice che siamo tutti mele. Che le famiglie sono come un albero carico di frutta. E che quando siamo maturi, succede che ci stacchiamo e andiamo via. Non ricordo [Matteo] degli altri miei noni. Quando se ne sono andati ero troppo piccolo. Ma quando nonna Tonia ha lasciato il ramo c’ero. Io c’ero, quel giorno. Ho ringraziato tutti gli errori che ho commesso e tutte le mie scelte vigliacche. Se non fosse stato per loro oggi non avrei questa consapevolezza. Oggi non sarei qui. Oggi non mi sentirei così parte di voi. Di noi. Invece cammino per questa strada, con le

> mani che conservano ancora il calore di tutte le spalle che ho abbracciato. Ed è questa la via giusta. Ci sono e basta, non importa come ci sono arrivato. (Auntie B. says we're all apples. And families are like trees heavy with fruit. When we're ripe, we just fall off and leave. I [Matteo] can't remember my other grandparents. I was too young when they died. But when my Nan Tonia left the tree, I was there. I was there that day. I thanked all of mistakes and my cowardly choices. If it hadn't been for them, I wouldn't understand. I wouldn't be here today. I wouldn't feel such a great part of you. Part of us. So now, as I follow my path, my hands are still warm from all the shoulders I hugged. This is the right way, I'm here and it's enough, and it doesn't matter how I got here.; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 124-125) (see figs. 10 and 11)

Matteo's reflection captures how he has come to terms with his past and fully accepts the circuitous path that he has taken in life. Although saddened by the death of his grandmother, Matteo recognizes that his own journey must continue. This includes reconciling his relationship with Danilo, as well as accepting aspects of his own identity that he has long been oppressing. The copious amount of white space found on these panels facilitates the reader's contemplation of Matteo's deep conclusion and subsequent connection to their own life.

In the scenes following the death of Nan Tonia, Biondi transitions the narrative to provide closure not only through a moment of death, but of birth as well. The seemingly mundane object of a suitcase facilitates this significant transition in the narrative. A mostly blank open panel appears before the death of Nan Tonia. This panel features only a suitcase with Matteo's reflection regarding his rekindled relationship with Massimo: "L'impegno è

il collante migliore. Se avrò fiducia abbastanza per allungare entrambe le braccia…c'è la possibilità che io riesca a tenere unite assieme tutte le nostre mani." ("Commitment is the best glue. If I muster enough confidence to stretch both arms…Chances are I will be able to keep all of our hands together."; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 113). Although on the surface that luggage appears to indicate Matteo's return to Pontecesello, after receiving news of Nan Tonia's imminent death, the blank space that surrounds this object leads the reader to engage in deeper contemplation. The prominence of the suitcase, coupled with the accompanying text draws attention to the fact that this particular object represents the proverbial "baggage" that Matteo has been carrying around. The symbolism behind this seemingly mundane suitcase becomes more pronounced in the scene following the birth of Sara's baby, Elisa. Whereas the suitcase appears alone in a large empty panel preceding the death of Nan Tonia, this object later reappears in a series of smaller busy panels. These panels alternate between scenes portraying Matteo and his relatives caring for Elisa and the protagonist packing his suitcase. The text within these panels rationalizes this deliberate incorporation of the suitcase

> Si dice che le generazioni si alternino, che vadano e tornino come le stagioni o la marea. Ma io preferisco immaginarci come un lungo racconto che non finisce mai. Piccola Elisa, tu sei qui e neppure lo sai quanto sei importante. Sei la storia nuova, il vento fresco, la gioia di tutti. Crescerai giorno dopo giorno e ci vedrai tutti invecchiare e maturare al sole dell'estate. Metterai le tue piccole dita nelle rughe dei nostri visi. Esplorerai i segni del tempo. Quando sarai grande io sarò il tuo zio strambo che figli non ha avuto, ma che ha sempre qualcosa per te. Come questo racconto che dura da cento anni e ci avvolge tutti. Ti racconterò del giorno che ho

> imparato che non esistono fallimenti assoluti nella vita. Che gli errori fanno parte della nostra valigia assieme alla gioia e ai ricordi. Che siamo resistenti alle intemperie se conserviamo la memoria. Ti insegnerò che quando una mela troppo matura cade dal ramo, l'albero continua a vivere. (They said that generations interchange, they come and go like seasons and the tides. I'd rather think of us as one long never-ending story. Little Elisa, you're here now and you don't even know how important you are. You're the new story, our fresh air, everyone's joy. You'll grow day after day, and you'll see us all get old and mature in the summer sun. You'll place your tiny fingers in our wrinkles. You'll explore the signs of the time. When you grow older, I'll be your crazy uncle with no children, but with something for you always. Like this hundred-year-old story, involving us all. I'll tell you about the day I learned there's no such thing as a total failure. Mistakes make up our baggage, just like joy and memories. We can withstand all kinds of storms if we preserve our memories. I'll teach you that when an apple is too ripe and falls from the branch, the tree lives on.; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 136-137)

This transitional moment in the narrative transforms the death of Matteo's grandmother from a coda to the start of a new beginning for his family and himself. Matteo no longer considers deceased loved ones to be pieces of fruit that "…succede che ci stacchiamo e andiamo via" ("…just fall off and leave"), but rather as a part of a "l'albero [che] continua a vivere" ("… the tree [that] lives on"; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 124 and 137) (see figs. 10 and 11). Biondi illuminates how enduring memories provide an eternal element to all relatives, as their legacy lives on throughout the generations. The birth of Elisa soon after Nan Tonia's death underscores that these memories will continue to manifest and

evolve through her being. A two-page panel of family photographs of Matteo's relatives on a wall further affirms this moment of closure for Matteo in regard to the death of his grandmother and birth of his cousin: "Siamo tutti qui, fra queste foto, fra queste mura, in questa casa, in un'infinita costellazione nata da tutti noi. Papà. Ho visto la vita. Come un albero che sale dalla terra, ho visto le prime foglie, le radici, i frutti. Ho visto quella mela pesante, tanto matura da spezzare il ramo." ("We're all here, in these photographs, on these walls, in this house, an endless constellation of all of us. Dad, I've seen life. Like a tree growing from the ground, I've seen the first leaves, the roots, the fruits. I saw the heavy apple, so ripe it broke the branch."; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 128-129) (see figs. 12 and 13). Biondi's placement of Matteo's thoughts amid the family photographs provides a space for the reader to receive and transfer this message to their own lives. By once again featuring the relatable image of family photographs on a home wall, Biondi creates an intimate scene in which the reader not only sees the continuity of life in Matteo's family, but their own.

Biondi creates a sense of intimacy in another culminating scene portraying the family with the newborn Elisa. Similar to the large panel featuring the funeral scene, Biondi uses the gutter in a large panel featuring Matteo and his family surrounding Elisa while in her baby stroller. Simple text appears above the family adoring Elisa: "Ma stavolta ci saremo noi, zia. Tutti noi." ("We'll be there, this time, Auntie. All of us."; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 135) (see fig. 14). The white space surrounding this image allows the reader to reflect on how as Elisa's uncle, Matteo assumes responsibility for ensuring that his own mistakes and those of previous generations do not reoccur. Unlike Aunt Cosima and himself, Matteo affirms that he will always be present to support Elisa.

In addition to providing closure through a focus on the life cycle, Biondi also does so in regard to the ongoing conflict between Matteo and Danilo. The graphic narrative concludes with a full-page panel featuring Matteo and Danilo in front of his father's home. Danilo is portrayed welcoming Matteo by opening the front door. Matteo stands ready to enter the home with his suitcase. Two simple text boxes appear at the top of this full-page panel: "Perché noi siamo la forza che sale dalla terra. Noi siamo tutte le generazioni." ("For our strength rises up from the ground. We are all the generations."; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 138) (see fig. 15). Both through text and image, the audience acquires a sense of closure as Matteo and Danilo have seemingly reconciled their differences. Further, unlike in earlier scenes, Matteo appears to have obtained a renewed sense of strength and stasis in his life in the same place that he once attempted to escape from, home.

Liminality: Displacement and Dis-em-bodiment

Two reoccurring themes that guide Biondi's graphic narrative are those of displacement and disembodiment. Biondi's use of the graphic narrative as the medium for conveying these themes is particularly impactful. Firstly, the incorporation of text and image invites one to connect with Matteo's personal journey in an intimate manner. Secondly, although the narrative is presented in seemingly fragmented panels, when considered in a holistic manner, they reveal a cohesive lens into Matteo's journey. Biondi's utilization of elements unique to the graphic narrative, such as that of the gutter, is particularly effective in providing spaces throughout the work for interpretation and reflection. Further, this space allows the ongoing themes of displacement and disembodiment to be transformed as Matteo actively engages in a process of self-discovery and acquires a renewed sense of agency by the conclusion of the work.

One theme that evolves in Biondi's graphic narrative is that of displacement. After arriving at his family's house, this sense of displacement persists. This continued struggle is evident as Matteo's aunts and grandmother argue over where Matteo may reside during his time in Pontecesello. Whereas Matteo's Aunt Bruna expresses concerns regarding him staying in an already crowded household, Nan Tonia expresses "Non siamo troppi. Siamo una famiglia." ("There's never too many. We're family."; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 14). While lying on the couch that same evening, Matteo expresses his feelings of displacement and loneliness not only from others, but also himself: "…non so neppure se ho detto a tutti della mia partenza. Ma la mia partenza per dove, poi? Non posso credere di essere tornato qui. Senza soldi. Senza lavoro. Senza amore. Tutti mi vedranno come un fallito. Che umiliazione. Un presuntuoso campagnolo che ha vissuto da topino di città. Ed è tornato senza niente. Ma ieri ero a Milano. Ieri avevo un futuro. Domani sarò qui." ("I don't even know if I told everyone I was leaving. Leaving for where really? I can't believe I'm back here. With no money. No job. No relationship. They will all think I'm such a failure. So humiliating. A pretentious country bumpkin who's been living as a city mouse. And came back with nothing. Yesterday I was in Milan. Yesterday I had a future. Tomorrow…I shall be here."; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 16-17). The placement of the textboxes capturing Matteo's thoughts among images of him looking at photographs of his friends in Milan on his cellphone, as well as his unpacked luggage further underscores the degree of despair and confusion. The darkness of the night sky that ends this series of panels alludes to the dark void that Matteo feels in regard to his future. Matteo's thoughts at this particular point in the narrative reveal how he must move on from the past in order to make sense of his present condition. Whereas Matteo initially considers his "future" to

still be in Milan, as the narrative unfolds, he comes to realize that his destiny may in fact be in his hometown with his family. This revelation is made later in the narrative as Matteo is videoconferencing with his friend from Milan, Simone. Matteo surprisingly shares with Simone: "A dirti la verità…al momento io…non so se voglio tornare. […] …io devo risolvere delle cose qua. Parlare con mio padre del fatto che sono gay. Voglio trovare il coraggio per litigare con lui. Parlarci un giorno e poi un altro…senza scappare più. Finché un giorno non capirà che può essere orgoglioso di me." ("To tell you the truth, I actually don't know if I want to come back. […] I must fix things here, talk to my dad about being gay. I need to find the courage to fight with him. Talk one day, and then the next…no more running away. Until he'll realize that one day he will be proud of me."; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 66-67). The displacement that initially characterizes Matteo's return to Pontecesello is replaced with a sense of stability. Matteo realizes that Milan, and not his hometown, was a site of exile for himself. Matteo's hometown provides an environment in which he may resolve matters pertaining to his identity as a gay male.

In addition to displacement, Biondi explores the theme of disembodiment. After arriving in Pontecesello, Matteo lacks a sense of direction and purpose in his life. This aimlessness is perhaps most evident in how Matteo initially hides his identity as a gay male to his family. Rather than having honest conversations with his loved ones, Matteo inflicts silence and the suppression of his identity onto himself. As a result, Matteo becomes disassociated with aspects of his identity. Only through conversations with his cousin Sara and newfound friend Francesco in which he shares aspects of his identity does he begin to feel like he is living again. Matteo's proclamation that sharing his identity with others is allowing him to "…lentamente tornando a respirare" ("…slowly [start] to breathe again")

reflects how his return to Pontecesello and interactions with his family are reviving his physical and spiritual being (Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 61) (see fig. 9). Matteo makes reference to his renewed sense of agency and control of his life later in the narrative after speaking with his ex-partner Massimo

> Sai perché sono tornato qui, Massimo? Certo, perché anche tu mi mancava…ma anche perché volevo dimostrare a me stesso di essere in grado di avere il controllo della mia vita. Tre anni fa ho dato la colpa della mia fuga a mio padre, tre mesi fa ho incolpato te del mio rientro. Ma in verità erano scelte mie. Credevo di non avere scelta e invece ce l'avevo. In entrambi i casi potevo scegliere di restare e lottare. Invece ho scelto la fuga. (Do you know why I came back, Massimo? I missed you, of course. But I also wanted to prove to myself that I could get back control of my life. Three years ago, I blamed my dad for my running off. Three months ago, I blamed you for my return home. They were, however, entirely my choices. I thought I had no choice but, actually, I did. In both circumstances, I could have chosen to stay and fight. I chose to run off instead.; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 110-111)

By returning home and striving to resolve issues with his father, Matteo acquires a sense of control over his life that was unattainable in Milan. Although Matteo once considered Milan and his relationship with Massimo to be sources of liberation, they instead allowed him to avoid issues pertaining to his identity rather than resolving them. Matteo also takes full accountability for his past and future actions; allowing him to assume full control of his path towards acceptance and happiness in life.

Engaging the Senses to Reacquire Agency

Through the medium of the graphic narrative, Biondi engages the senses of the reader. In doing so, Biondi's work has an aesthetic quality that elicits the active participation of the audience. One sense that is engaged in addition to the visual is that of sound. The important role of sound in the narrative is evident in the panels surrounding the moment in which Matteo's family discovers that he is gay. As Matteo talks to his friend Matteo via the computer, he hears his aunts arguing in the kitchen as the coffee pot on the stove makes a "ffuuuuu!!" sound (Biondi 64). Shortly after, Bruna overhears Matteo discussing with his friend Simone how he must tell his father that he is gay. A small panel that follows features Bruna dialing a phone with the sound "bip bip" followed by "Danilo? Sono Bruna, tua sorella…Tuo figlio è tornato da Milano. È qui. Vienilo a prendere." ("Danilo? This is your sister Bruna…Your son is back from Milan. Come and get him."; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 69). The arrival of Matteo's father Danilo in the panels that follow is noted by the ringing of the doorbell ("dlin dlon"), a knock on Matteo's bedroom door ("toc toc"), and attempts to turn the locked doorhandle ("clac") (Biondi 70-71). The placement of these sounds during a pivotal turning point in the narrative allows them to transform mundane household occurrences into extraordinary elements in the narrative. Collectively, these sounds indicate the moment in which Matteo reacquires voice and agency in regard to his identity. Further, these often overlooked daily sounds strengthen the connection between the reader and the narrative as they relate to their presence in their own homes. By capitalizing on sound, Biondi further engages the audience and illuminates how aesthetic qualities have the potential to serve a transformative purpose.

Fictive Authenticity: (Re)discovering and Transforming the Self

Similar to other graphic narratives that grapple with the extremities of life, Biondi's work explores the survival mechanism of fictive authenticity. Prior to Matteo's full acceptance of his identity as a gay male, he experiences an ongoing reconstruction of his identity. The complex psychological transformation that Matteo undergoes addresses the disconnect that he identifies between the external interactions in which he partakes with those closest to him and his internal identity as a gay male. Although engaging in a fictive authenticity permits Matteo to avoid direct confrontation with a family that he fears may be unaccepting of his homosexuality, the protagonist comes to realize that his engagement in conflict is in fact necessary to resolve the dissonance in his life. Matteo comes to realize that he will only find true happiness in life by remaining true to his values and living as his authentic self.

Matteo's engagement in a fictive authenticity to avoid confrontation with his family members and others is evident upon his return to Pontecesello. While catching up with his cousin, Matteo dishonestly shares the reason for his return home: "Io non sono andato a Milano per l'università…ma non posso dirlo alle zie. […] [Mio padre] si è inventato questa balla dello studio, quindi penso che non voglia che ne parli. Mi sono trasferito perché mi sono innamorato di una ragazza di Milano. Ma ora è finita." ("I didn't go to Milan to study…but I can't tell anyone else this. […] [My father] made up that lie about my studies, so I don't think he wants us to talk about it. I moved because I fell in love with a girl from Milan. But it's over now."; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 25). Sara responds to Matteo by simply saying "uhm…" (Biondi 25). Matteo responds to Sara's skepticism by asking "Pensi che sia una bugia? […] E quale parte sarebbe una bugia?" ("What? Think I'm lying? […] What would I be lying about?"; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 25). Sara replies by

simply asking “Era un ragazzo, vero?” (“It was a boy, right?”; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 25). Matteo creates an opportunity to be vulnerable by questioning Sara’s disbelief. Sara’s blunt response asking if Matteo was in love with another man while in Milan further facilitates this opportunity for authenticity. At this point in the narrative, Matteo begins to deconstruct his fictive authenticity of being heterosexual.

In addition to deconstructing the fictive authenticity that he engages in to preserve his familial relationships, Matteo partakes in a similar deconstruction of this false identity in relation to his romantic relationships. Matteo’s engagement in fictive authenticity is made evident in his candid conversation with his friend Simone when he shares: “Massimo ha troncato con me accusandomi di essere una zecca che succhiava dalla sua vita. Mi ha offeso ma aveva ragione. In tre anni mi sono limitato a fare il suo mantenuto, lamentandomi che lavorasse troppo solo perché mi annoiavo.” (“Massimo dumped me saying I was a parasite sitting around and mooching off of him all the time. It was upsetting but he was right. For three years I played the kept man, complaining he was working too hard because I was bored.”; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 66). Although Matteo once saw his relationship with Massimo as a source of love and liberation, his time in Pontecesello leads him to the realization that his relationship was not sincere and in fact prevented him from living his best life. In an effort to validate this conclusion, Matteo leaves Pontecesello for Milan one final time in an attempt to “…di rispondere a una domanda” (“…to answer a question”; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 103). After returning to Milan to see Massimo, Matteo substantiates the inauthenticity of the relationship that he once shared with Massimo. Matteo shares this sentiment by noting “[Voglio] sentirmi dire che sono importante. Sentirmi illudere del suo amore.” (“I need to feel important to someone. I want

to fool myself about his [Massimo's] love."; Roncalli Di Montorio; Biondi 104). This visit affords Matteo the opportunity to obtain closure for his relationship with Massimo in Milan as he comes to realize the life that they once shared together was not genuine. Matteo confirms that his family and deep connections to his home are at the core of his identity including as a gay male. This affirmation permits Matteo to reject the fictive authenticity that once allowed him to escape the fear of intolerance and rejection from his closest family and friends to live an authentic life predicated on love and acceptance.

Discovering the Self and Reacquiring A Sense of Agency

Overall, Biondi's *La generazione* provides a unique perspective into the LGBTQIA+ experience in contemporary society. Biondi capitalizes upon the unique attributes of the graphic narrative to not merely recount a storyline, but to actively engage the audience with and through the protagonist, Matteo, via a journey of self-discovery and acceptance. Similar to her contemporaries de Santis and Colaonne in their work *In Italia sono tutti maschi*, Biondi intertwines narratives that transcend time, place, and space. Specifically, *La generazione* oscillates between Matteo's life in his hometown of Pontecesello and the three years that he spent in Milan following an argument with his father, Danilo. Biondi's use of flashbacks similarly transports the audience between Matteo's present day conflict with his father and that which had occurred decades prior between his Aunt Cosima and Nan Tonia. The death of Nan Tonia and birth of Elisa provide a sense of continuity as one comes to recognize that when one aspect of a narrative ends another commences. These elements work harmoniously to generate new meaning and a sense of closure. Through the focus on the family, Biondi creates a narrative to which the audience may relate and derive personal meaning. The universality of Matteo's plight,

particularly in relation to his family, invites the reader to reflect upon how their identity is a sum of the memories, experiences, relationships, and values that collectively create one's sense of self. Further, by featuring a narrative focused on the struggle for acceptance of a character that identifies as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community, Biondi provides voice and agency to an often silenced and marginalized narrative. The degree of acceptance acquired by Matteo over the course of the narrative provides a renewed sense of hope. In this sense, Biondi's graphic narrative provides a unique opportunity for the audience to introspectively engage with and embrace elements of their own identity, while providing agency and voice for the LGBTQIA+ community. In doing so, Biondi's *La generazione* is transformational both to the individual reader, as well as wider society.

Although Biondi's graphic narrative focuses on the challenges of an individual within the family unit, this narrative illuminates the pervasive nature of larger social structures on individual identity. By situating this narrative within a contemporary setting, Biondi's work reminds the audience how social injustice continues to negatively impact the LGBTQIA+ community. The initial lack of acceptance of several of Matteo's relatives in regard to his sexuality, as well as his struggle to fully integrate with the LGBTQIA+ community while residing in Milan, reveals how socially constructed ideals have the potential to not only isolate an individual from society, but also the self. If not interrupted, as society labels one as the "Other" on the basis of a perceived "difference," this same perception has the potential to become internalized by an individual. By exploring the impact of personal and private spheres of society on individual identity, Biondi reminds readers that they must remain cognizant of how social institutions at times seek to enforce conformity. However, by remaining true to oneself, individuality may overcome the

pervasive nature of seemingly deterministic social structures. The relatability of Biondi's narrative reminds one that by looking inward, they may reacquire agency and preserve their sense of self. The universal message of Biondi's *La generazione* serves not only as a source of inspiration for those in the LGBTQIA+ community, but for anyone who has ever felt stifled by society. In this sense, Biondi's publication both delivers a contemporary narrative and serves a didactic purpose by illuminating how to live an authentic life.

Discovering Hope and Healing in The Gutter: A Dialogue Between *In Italia sono tutti maschi* and *La generazione*

Although de Santis and Colaone's *In Italia sono tutti maschi* and Biondi's *La generazione* contain numerous differences in regard to content and aesthetics, the universal nature of the graphic narrative as a medium facilitates a meaningful dialogue between these two works. The same stylistic elements, technique, and content that are perceived to distinguish these narratives on the surface in fact unite them in a multitude of ways. In a holistic sense, both publications effectively capitalize upon the most powerful elements of the graphic narrative to not merely retell, but instead to actively engage the audience in an experience in which agency and healing are acquired. As words alone are insufficient to fully capture the plight of each work's protagonist in relation to internal and external conflicts, both graphic narratives employ text and image in tandem to capture elements of the human experience that are both literally and figuratively beyond words. A careful consideration of style, technique, and audience within these graphic narratives illuminates how the unique attributes of these publications both distinguish them, while simultaneously fostering an interconnection.

A careful consideration of the aesthetic qualities of *In Italia sono tutti maschi* and *La generazione* underscores the complementary rapport that exists between these graphic narratives. Among the most significant attributes that unites these works is that of time. Both works incorporate memories from the past to grapple with contemporary challenges. Whereas Antonio's memories surrounding his confinement to San Domino are captured through the lens of a documentary, Matteo's experiences are recounted through both his conversations with his cousin Sara, as well as his own internal dialogue. In both instances, memory serves an integral role in leading both Antonio and Matteo to make sense of tumultuous and unfathomable realities from both the recent and historical past. In the instance of Antonio, the historical memories that are featured in the narrative are derived directly from his own experience. The historical memories considered by Matteo pertain to familial conflict experienced by his relatives. As a result, Antonio has a closer proximity to the historical memories that are featured in de Santis and Colaone's graphic narrative when compared to those of Matteo in Biondi's publication. Matteo's contemplation of his experience in Milan is derived from the recent past. This difference in time between past and present narratives as featured in these works results in one sensing a stronger degree of persisting pain and suffering in Antonio's case when considered in relation to that of Matteo. Despite this difference, Antonio and Matteo engage with memories from the past to provide clarity to their present realities. In doing so, both protagonists acquire agency in regard to their narratives. The incorporation of the gutter provides a physical and metacognitive space for the audience to bridge the past memories of both Antonio and Matteo to derive meaning in the present.

Another area in which parallels and differences are observed between these graphic narratives is in relation to space, as well as place. Both *In Italia sono tutti maschi* and *La generazione* are focused on the hardships of displacement. Antonio's removal from society through the codified hatred of the Fascist party literally places him on the confines of society. Antonio's confinement from his hometown of Salerno to the untenable living conditions of the island of San Domino forcefully displaces him from the comforts and stasis of his home. Similar to Antonio, Matteo must contemplate life in contrasting locations, the cosmopolitan city of Milan and his hometown of Pontecesello. However, unlike Antonio Matteo's transversal between these two locations is primarily driven by his own volition. The hateful laws of the Fascist party persist even following Antonio's release from confinement to San Domino and destroy all notions of the home that he once knew. However, unlike Antonio, Matteo ultimately finds peace and comfort in his hometown of Pontecesello. The events of *La generazione* primarily unfold in a local setting, whereas those of *In Italia sono tutti maschi* occur in a strange location. The sense of coming home in Biondi's work provokes a profound sentiment of familiarity for readers, as they too may have experienced similar moments in their own lives. Whereas the events of *La generazione* prompt readers to contemplate the familiar, that of *In Italia sono tutti maschi* thrusts them into considering life in an entirely unfamiliar and unhospitable environment. Further, the pervasive nature of a larger political entity on all facets of daily life in Antonio's hometown of Salerno even following his confinement to San Domino, prevents his pain and suffering from ending by the conclusion of the narrative. Although Antonio reacquires agency by recounting his hurtful past, the narrative ends in a more ominous and unresolved manner when compared to *La*

generazione. This staunch difference allows one to recognize de Santis and Colaone's work as that of a graphic narrative that seeks to highlight an often overlooked historical moment through a contemporary lens, whereas Biondi's work exclusively features familiar moments within the entity of the family both in a past and present context. In this sense, de Santis and Colaone grapple with larger political, economic, and social stratification from a historical perspective through the medium of the graphic narrative. Biondi utilizes this same medium to feature a local narrative to which many may relate within their own quotidian experience.

In addition to physical displacement, both *In Italia sono tutti maschi* and *La generazione* address the internal displacement and loss of self that emerges as a result of seemingly deterministic social structures. In the instance of Antonio, the protagonist must come to recognize himself after he is labeled as a criminal following the establishment of a series of Fascist laws that promoted unwavering conformity to ascribed social norms aligned with the mythical construct of the "New Man." Although not directly impacted by the hateful actions of a political apparatus, the fear of being rejected for identifying as a gay male leads Matteo to live in a state of limbo before discovering acceptance in the same place that he once abandoned. Both Antonio and Matteo experience a profound degree of internal strife as they must come to (re)define aspects of their identity in light of social structures that negatively impact the daily experience of the LGBTQIA+ community. Fortunately, by reclaiming their own narratives as gay men, both Antonio and Matteo are able to partake in a process of internal healing. Much of this healing unfolds in the gutter as the reader pauses and reflects between the rapidly unfolding

panels. Similarly, from this reclamation of their identity, the reader attains a sense of overall closure within the gutter of both graphic narratives.

Despite their perceived differences, *In Italia sono tutti maschi* and *La generazione* complement each other not only in regard to aspects of their aesthetic qualities, but also through the universal message that they provide regarding the plight of the LGBTQIA+ community. A juxtaposition of these two graphic narratives creates a timeline that illuminates the adversity of gay men in Italy both in a historical and contemporary sense. The fact that aspects of the plight that Antonio experiences in the 1930s as a gay man persist in the present day for Matteo, attests to the continuous struggle for human rights as experienced by those who identify as LGBTQIA+. This unifying element affords these narratives the opportunity to reach a similar audience that seeks to not only understand, but to address, past and present social injustices in the hope of attaining a more equitable future. By selecting the graphic narrative as the medium to deliver this message, de Santis, Colaone, and Biondi have created works that employ text and image in a manner that transcend time, place, and space to deliver a universal message of acceptance and healing. In a postmodern society challenged by social injustices, works such as *In Italia sono tutti maschi* and *La generazione* are essential discourse.

The intentional pairing of de Santis and Colaone's *In Italia sono tutti maschi* and Flavia Biondi's *La generazione* serves both practical and metacognitive purposes. On a pragmatic level, the authors of both works effectively employ the medium of the graphic narrative to deliver deep insight into the LGBTQIA+ experience within the same nation, Italy. The original language of publication, Italian, further unites these two works in relation to language and culture. On a deeper level, the coupling of these works transports

readers along a mnemonic journey as they engage with the LGBTQIA+ experience across time periods, places, and spaces. The universality of the medium invites readers to both make sense of two complex narratives, while simultaneously deriving meaning that is applicable to the development of their own identity.

CONCLUSION

The Graphic Narrative as a Portal into the "Autonomous Sphere of Culture"

Overall, the transformative nature of graphic narratives in addressing various social issues is particularly evident when one examines the power of this medium in capturing the plight of homosexual men both in a historical and contemporary sense. The graphic narrative provides agency to the sociohistorically marginalized demographic of homosexual men, as is evidenced in the complementary works *In Italia sono tutti maschi* by Luca de Santis and Sara Colaone, as well as *La generazione* by Flavia Biondi. These narratives afford one the opportunity to engage with text and image in a manner that ultimately allows them to draw vital parallels between various dichotomies. First, by considering the unique narratives of each work's protagonist, one is able to contemplate their plight beyond solely lines of gender identity and/or sexuality. Instead, regardless of their identity, one is able to relate to some degree with Antonio and Matteo to ultimately recognize a larger struggle for human rights. Additionally, these narratives bridge the gap between "sameness" and "selfhood," by illuminating how circumstances of extremity ultimately have the potential to create sites of resistance and liberation. In assuming this approach, these graphic narratives achieve what the sociologist Jeffrey Goldfarb refers to as the "autonomous sphere of culture" in which "culture has an importance independent of the developments of capitalism and the modern state and the logic of their administration," and "presents critical alternatives to the dominant value system" (Goldfarb 428). Regardless of the larger social realities that seek to (re)shape their own identity, one is able to observe through these works how they still have opportunities to preserve their own sense of "selfhood." Further, through these works, one is able to reclaim what is often lost

when individuals are marginalized and persecuted as a result of their presumed differences. In this sense, the graphic narrative assumes an empowering role that addresses the unique challenges facing homosexual males; highlighting the universality of this medium to reflect upon past, present, and future realities.

In Italia sono tutti maschi and *La generazione*: A Powerful Pairing

The powerful impact of pairing de Santis and Colaone's *In Italia sono tutti maschi* and Flavia Biondi's *La generazione* transcends their shared medium, original language of publication, setting, and focus on the LGBTQIA+ experience. Instead, the pairing of these two works illuminates the power of the gutter to serve as a transformative space in which one not only interprets the message conveyed through text and image, but also situates their own narrative in relation to the one that is featured. In both graphic narratives, the authors employ the medium of the graphic narrative to challenge readers to consider the presence of oppression in their own lives. The juxtaposition of these two works highlights the pervasive impact of oppression in the lives of two seemingly different protagonists; an older Antonio who survives confinement under Fascist rule and a younger Matteo who seeks acceptance from his family and friends. In both narratives, Antonio and Matteo simply seek to live their lives in peace when they are subject to pervasive societal norms and expectations that disrupt all facets of their quotidian reality. A consideration of these works in tandem underscores the marginalization of members of the LGBTQIA+ community across time periods and locations. In doing so, readers come to recognize that oppression follows one everywhere in regard to both time and place. However, as demonstrated within both graphic narratives, the gutter serves as a site in which internal and external conflict may be contemplated and addressed. Within this

space, one may acquire a sense of agency as they (re)claim and (re)create their own narrative despite the influence of pervasive social structures. Through this transformative process, oppression is affronted and a path to healing is forged. Engagement with graphic narratives, such as the two featured in this dissertation, inspire a sense of hope for a more accepting and just society.

Connecting the Past and Present

In their graphic narrative *In Italia sono tutti maschi*, de Santis and Colaone capitalize upon the most powerful elements of this medium to deliver a powerful narrative. By actively engaging their audience in a series of metacognitive processes, de Santis and Colaone's work does not merely recount a past extremity, but affords readers the opportunity to construct meaning as they draw vital parallels between a past extremity and their own lives. In doing so, this graphic narrative transcends time, space, and place to illuminate past and present injustices experienced by the LGBTQIA+ community. The five-page addendum found in the epilogue of the 2019 edition of this publication, places the release and international reception of this work within the context of developments in the LGBTQIA+ community. De Santis and Colaone recognize that their graphic narrative "Inizia un effetto domino virtuoso" by generating conversation regarding past and present injustices ("Initiated a virtuous domino effect"; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 172). Despite the impact of their work, de Santis and Colaone assert that acts of violence and discriminatory legislation witnessed in the 2010s indicate that social change is still needed for the LGBTQIA+ community. The inclusion of a Primo Levi quote at the end of the epilogue effectively captures this call to action from the authors: "Primo Levi diceva che l'unico riscatto per il sopravvissuto è diventare testimone" ("Primo Levi said that the only

redemption for the survivor is to become a witness"; my trans.; de Santis and Colaone 175). *In Italia sono tutti maschi* serves as a starting point for ongoing dialogue and action; allowing this publication to provide hope in a postmodern society plagued by social injustices. This work also sets a precedence for future research and publications focused on these imperative issues.

Discovering the Future Self and Reacquiring a Sense of Agency

Biondi's *La generazione* provides a unique perspective into the LGBTQIA+ experience in contemporary society. Biondi capitalizes upon the unique attributes of the graphic narrative to not merely recount a storyline, but to actively engage the audience with and through the protagonist, Matteo, via a journey of self-discovery and acceptance. Similar to her contemporaries de Santis and Colaonne in their work *In Italia sono tutti maschi*, Biondi intertwines narratives that transcend time, place, and space. Specifically, *La generazione* oscillates between Matteo's life in his hometown of Pontecesello and the three years that he spent in Milan following an argument with his father, Danilo. Biondi's use of flashbacks similarly transports the audience between Matteo's present day conflict with his father and that which had occurred decades prior between his Aunt Cosima and Nan Tonia. The death of Nan Tonia and birth of Elisa provide a sense of continuity as one comes to recognize that when one aspect of a narrative ends another commences. These elements work harmoniously to generate new meaning and a sense of closure. Through an intimate focus on the family, Biondi creates a narrative to which the audience may relate and derive personal meaning. The universality of Matteo's plight, particularly in relation to his family, invites the reader to reflect upon how their identity is a sum of the memories, experiences, relationships, and values that collectively create one's sense of self. Further,

by featuring a narrative focused on the struggle for acceptance of a character that identifies as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community, Biondi provides voice and agency to an often silenced and marginalized narrative. The degree of acceptance acquired by Matteo over the course of the narrative provides a renewed sense of hope. In this sense, Biondi's graphic narrative creates a unique opportunity for the audience to introspectively engage with and embrace elements of their own identity, while providing agency and voice for the LGBTQIA+ community. In doing so, Biondi's *La generazione* is transformational both to the individual reader, as well as wider society.

Bridging Experiences through the Graphic Narrative

Despite initially presenting as a series of fragmented text and images, the parts of the graphic narrative work in unison to deliver a coherent message. One feature of the graphic narrative that fosters the unifying nature of this medium is that of the gutter. Although on the surface the gutter appears to serve a pragmatic purpose of separating the panels within a graphic narrative, this space serves a much deeper metacognitive function for the reader. Through the facilitation of reflective processes, the gutter connects time, place, and space within a narrative to not only deliver a plot, but to actively engage the reader in a transformative experience. From this experience, one may derive meaning to apply within the context of their own daily life. In this sense, "…important events take place not just within the panels but often between them" in the gutter (Magliano et al. 569). As evidenced in a study by Joseph P. Magliano et al., "comprehending narratives crucially involves generating bridging inferences that fill the gaps between explicitly described events…" (Magliano et al. 569). These connections are facilitated through "…both linguistic and perceptual working memory systems [that] support the construction of

bridging inferences" (Magliano et al. 517). In addition to unifying the panels within a particular work, the gutter similarly connects experiences well beyond the confines of a particular publication. A consideration of *In Italia sono tutti maschi* and *La generazione* illuminates how, despite their unique attributes, numerous parallels are evident when these two narratives are juxtaposed and considered in a comprehensive manner.

Both *In Italia sono tutti maschi* and *La generazione* feature narratives that engage the audience in a journey that traverses the past, present, and future. Unlike other literary forms, this traversal of time does not occur in a linear fashion, but instead in a manner that wavers between time periods. The incorporation of flashbacks throughout both works is particularly effective as the memories of the protagonists, Antonio and Matteo, impact their present and future realities. The gutter assumes a critical role in allowing the audience time and space to interpret, as well as reflect upon the respective journeys of both protagonists. The sense of timelessness delivered by both publications prompts reflections that continue beyond the featured narratives. Therefore, while actual visual and physical spaces appear in each work, there is also a larger gutter in which the reader engages that exists between the confines of a graphic narrative. This larger gutter assumes an integral role for readers such as when they engage with two graphic narratives that feature overlapping themes. A consideration of *In Italia sono tutti maschi* and *La generazione* in the space that exists between these two graphic narratives allows one to identify the symbiotic relationship that exists between these works. Further, the space between these two publications facilitates an opportunity for the reader to situate them in relation to the time, space, and place in which they are being interpreted. These variables allow one to derive new meaning and experiences each time that they engage with these graphic narratives. In the instance of

these graphic narratives, the challenges of the LGBTQIA+ community in the past and present allow them to be transformative, as well as to have future implications both for individual readers and wider society.

Italy's Ongoing Struggle with Homosexuality

As evidenced by *In Italia sono tutti maschi* and *La generazione,* the graphic narrative assumes an imperative role in contemporary society. The nature of the graphic narrative, coupled with the challenging topics that are considered allow this medium to affront social injustices including those that persist in the LGBTQIA+ community. The ongoing injustices experienced by the LGBTQIA+ community render the graphic narrative an imperative medium in contemporary society.

Although seemingly unrelated, the adversity experienced by Matteo is in fact a manifestation of deeply rooted hate from the past, such as the aesthetic of the "New Man." Through the (re)creation of a masculine aesthetic, Benito Mussolini and the Fascist party defined a mythical ideal while simultaneously reinforcing a binary ideology to meet the political, economic, and social needs of the regime. The hyper masculinized aesthetic of the "New Man" not only defined the ideal masculine form that was to be revered, but also delineated the characteristics of a counterimage that was to be monitored and attacked. As the defining attributes of the "New Man" were rooted in traditional gender roles, homosexual men served as a seemingly visible inversion to this aesthetic. As a result, the persecution of gay men became an integral component towards attaining the "New Man" by demonstrating the consequences of noncompliance with the nationally established Fascist aesthetic. The sense of silence that resulted for gay men has continued into the present day. Lorenzo Benadusi captures this persisting marginalization by noting

"homosexuality is still considered something strange and abnormal in Italy, something to be ignored or exploited…" (Benadusi, "The Enemy" 4). Sandra Ponzanesi echoes a similar sentiment regarding the silence surrounding homosexuality in present day Italy when she affirms "…homosexuality has a curious form of visibility since it is neither acknowledged openly nor denied officially" (Ponzanesi 90). Finally, Daniel Acheson-Brown argues that a glorification of the same elements that formed the Fascist aesthetic persist in the present, resulting in "…false memories…demanding idealized gender role behavior from males who cannot live up to the impossible standards…" (Acheson-Brown 4). Therefore, a careful analysis and understanding of the narratives that capture the plight that affronted gay men in Fascist Italy underscores the "imperative to narrate" (Sodi 230). Through the power of the narrative one has the potential to give voice to not only gay men who were silenced in a past context, but also to those who comprise present and future generations.

Moving Forward Towards Social Justice and Acceptance

An active engagement with *In Italia sono tutti maschi* and *La generazione* exemplifies the transformative nature of the graphic narrative that allows this medium to serve as a catalyst for social change. By featuring two protagonists that identify as gay, both works underscore the daily hardships that affront those within the LGBTQIA+ community. Further, by centering their respective narratives around both mundane and extreme situations, de Santis, Colaone, and Biondi illuminate that there is in fact nothing ordinary regarding the factors that shape an individual's identity. Instead, these variables assume an extraordinary role in transforming the human spirit. Among the most transformative of these elements is that of memory. Although often considered to be comprised of past and static occurrences that an individual simply recalls, an individual's

memory is in fact a dynamic space that allows one to reshape and reclaim their narrative. The unique attributes of the graphic narrative largely mirror those of one's memory, allowing this medium to enliven and engage memory in literary form. The liberating aspects of memory, and by extension the graphic narrative, are particularly empowering for those who belong to sociohistorically disenfranchised populations, such as members of the LGBTQIA+ community. In this sense, the graphic narrative serves not as a mere comic book, but rather an impetus for social justice and change.

Collectively, the chapters of this dissertation cohesively bridge past and present extremities, while substantiating the graphic narrative as an effective and legitimate medium in regard to addressing social injustices that affront the LGBTQIA+ community. This body of work affirms the power of this medium to reclaim, create, and celebrate all narratives; thus providing participants with an increased sense of agency and one of the most fundamental human rights, the right to be heard.

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APPENDIX

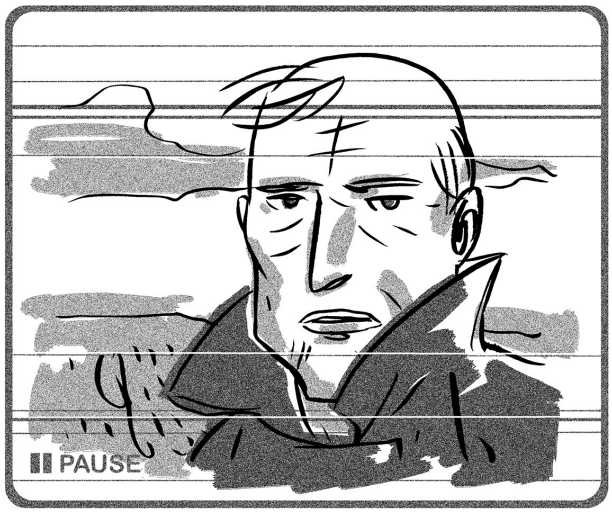
I.) Text & Images from *In Italia sono tutti maschi* by Luca de Santis & Sara Colaone

Figure 1. Cover page (single cover page) from Luca de Santis and Sara Colaone. *In Italia sono tutti maschi*. Oblomov Edizioni, 2019, Cover Page.

***In Italia sono tutti maschi*, 2019 © Sara Colaone, Luca de Santis, Oblomov Edizioni.**

Figure 2. Play of Antonio being recorded (single black and white panel) from Luca de Santis and Sara Colaone. *In Italia sono tutti maschi*. Oblomov Edizioni, 2019, 5.

Figure 3. Pause of Antonio being recorded (single black and white panel) from Luca de Santis and Sara Colaone. *In Italia sono tutti maschi*. Oblomov Edizioni, 2019, 6.

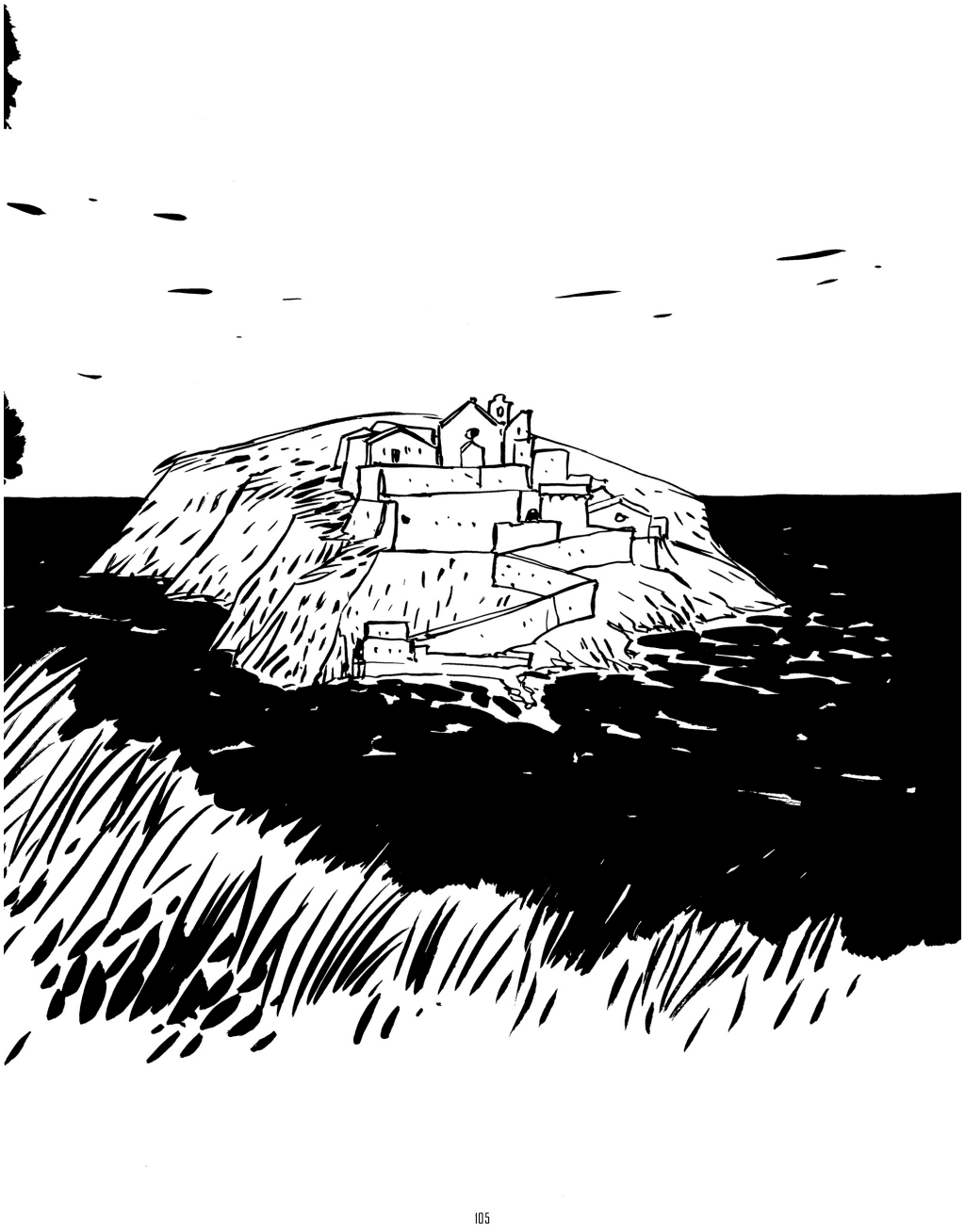


6

Figure 4. Prisoners rowing to confinement on San Domino (single color panel) from Luca de Santis and Sara Colaone. *In Italia sono tutti maschi*. Oblomov Edizioni, 2019, 31.

***In Italia sono tutti maschi*, 2019 © Sara Colaone, Luca de Santis, Oblomov Edizioni.**

Figure 5. Desolate San Domino (single black and white panel) from Luca de Santis and Sara Colaone. *In Italia sono tutti maschi*. Oblomov Edizioni, 2019, 105.



II.) Text & Images from *La generazione* by Flavia Biondi

Figure 6. Cover page (single cover page) from Flavia Biondi. *La generazione*. BAO Publishing, 2015, Cover Page.

***La generazione*, 2015 © Flavia Biondi, BAO Publishing.**

Figure 7. Copyright page (single text page) from Flavia Biondi. *La generazione*. BAO Publishing, 2015, Copyright Page.

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Flavia Biondi

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Officine Bolzoni con Cosimo Torsoli

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Michele Foschini

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Figure 8. Introductory train scene (single black and white panel) from Flavia Biondi. *La generazione*. BAO Publishing, 2015, 5.

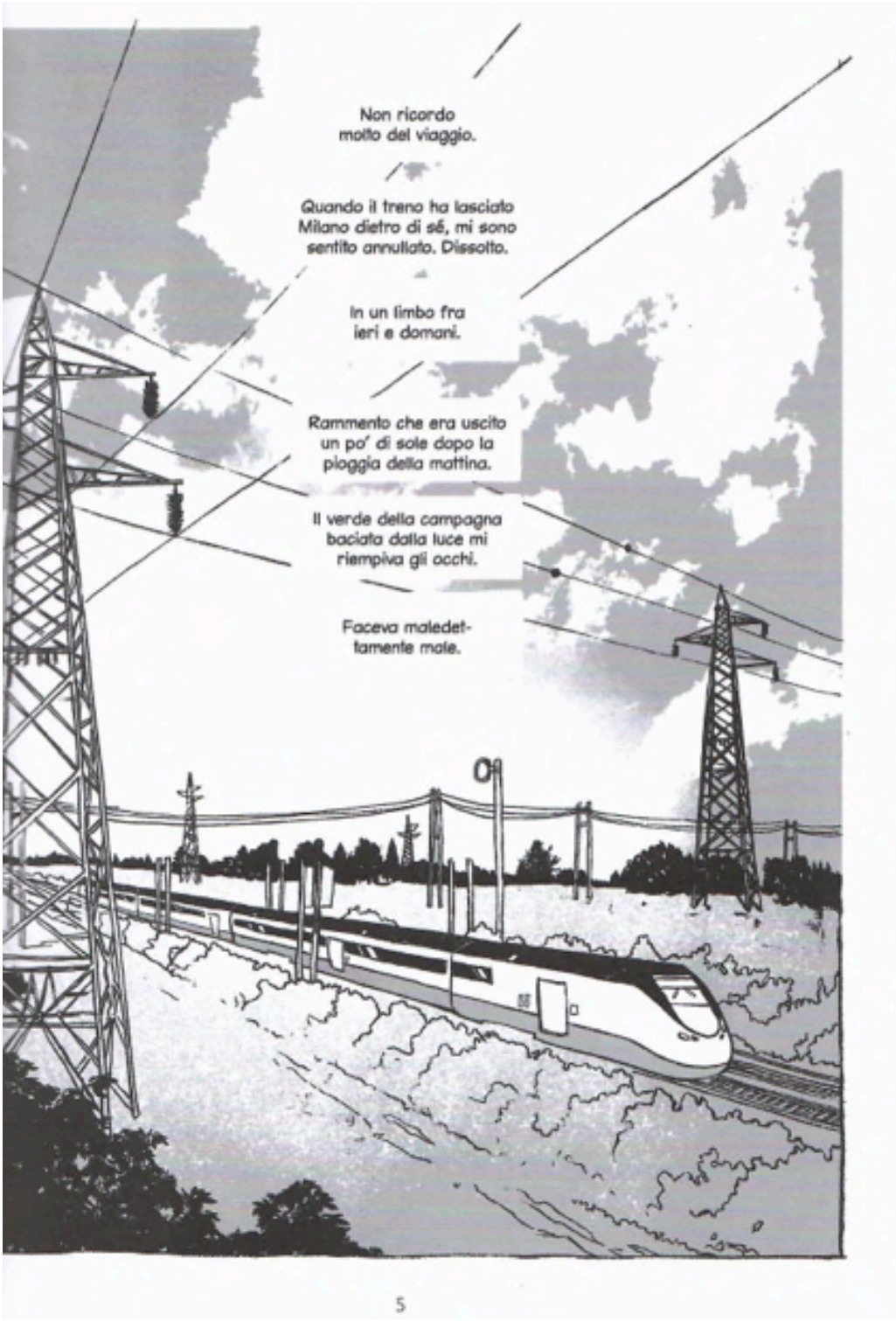

Figure 9. Matteo finding peace in nature with Francesco (single black and white panel) from Flavia Biondi. *La generazione*. BAO Publishing, 2015, 61.

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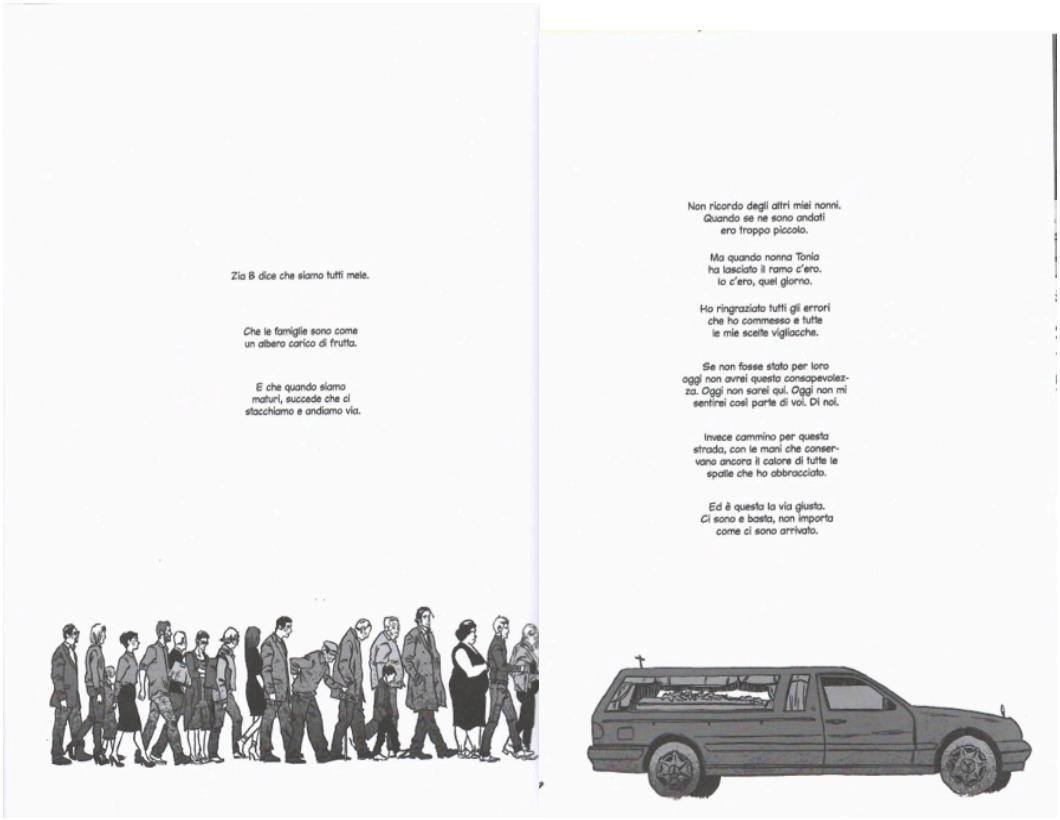
Figures 10 and 11. Nan's funeral procession (double black and white panels) from Flavia Biondi. *La generazione*. BAO Publishing, 2015, 124-125.



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Figures 12 and 13. Family photographs (double black and white panels) from Flavia Biondi. *La generazione*. BAO Publishing, 2015, 128-129.

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Figure 14. Family with Elisa (single black and white panel) from Flavia Biondi. *La generazione*. BAO Publishing, 2015, 135.

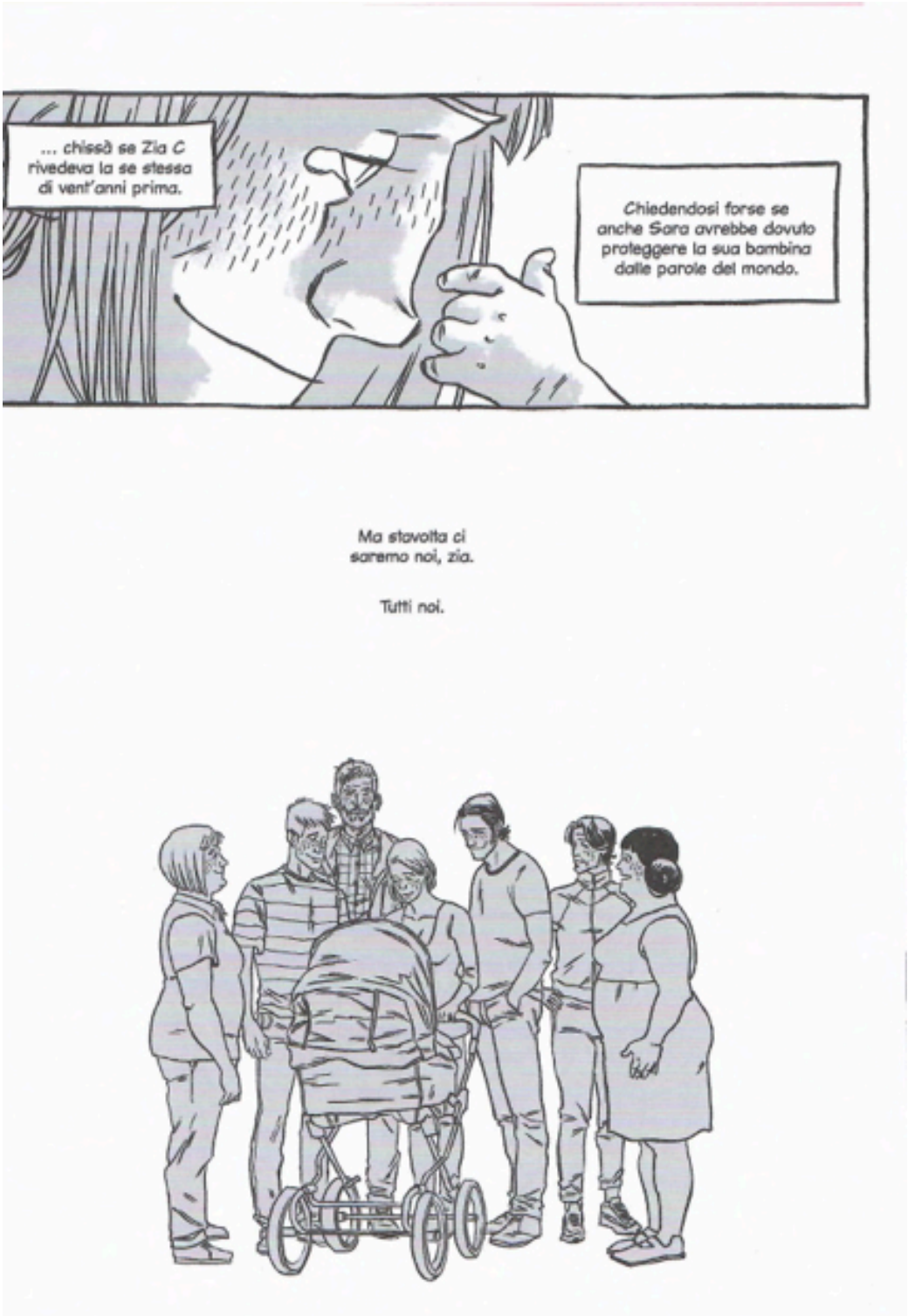

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Figure 15. Final scene featuring Matteo and Danilo (single black and white panel) from Flavia Biondi. *La generazione*. BAO Publishing, 2015, 138.

***La generazione*, 2015 © Flavia Biondi, BAO Publishing.**

VITA

Full name: Frank Sedita III

Place and date of birth: Summit, New Jersey/ May 10, 1988

Parents Name: Carol & Frank Sedita

Educational Institutions:

School	Place	Degree	Date
Secondary:	Watchung Hills Regional High School	High School Diploma	June 2006
Collegiate:	Drew University	B.A.	May 2010
Graduate:	Drew University	M.A.T.	May 2011
	Seton Hall University	Certificate	July 2014
	Drew University	D.Litt.	January 2024