

Queering the Greek Television “Comedy”: Popular Texts, Dissident Readings

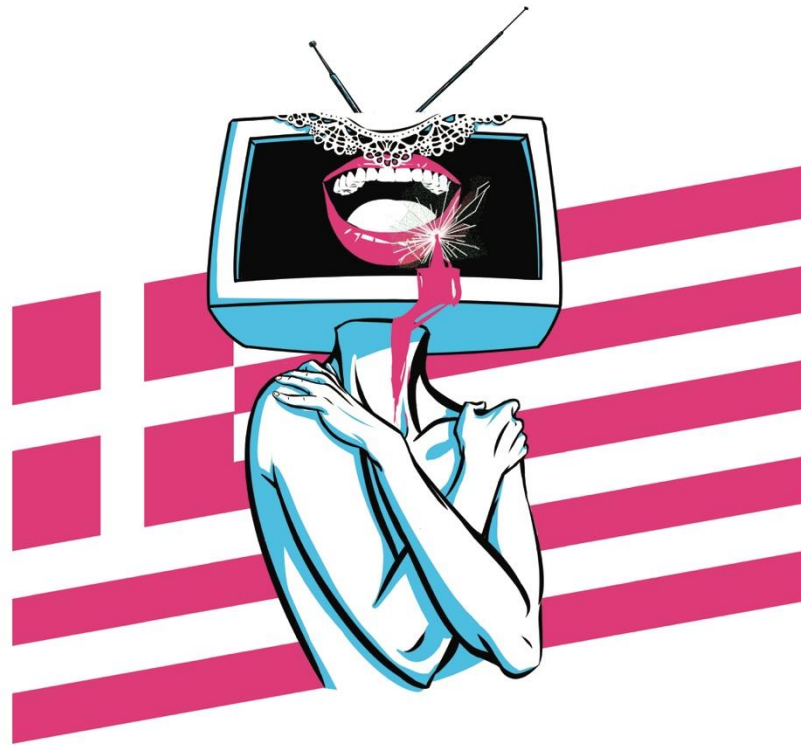


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“If you want to examine comedy you destroy its sense of humor (which may be a bad thing), but if you want to examine gender you destroy its certainties (which, I propose is a good thing).”
Rosie White

Abstract

This dissertation examines Greek television fiction and attempts to proffer queer readings of a wide range of texts that were made and broadcast in the 1990s and 2000s. These texts, despite their differences, fall under the general rubric of “comedy” and enjoy phenomenal popularity ever since their inaugural appearance on the small screen. There has been growing academic interest in the examination of the relatively underexplored sub-field of Greek television fiction, and this dissertation contributes to this project, using *Οι Απαράδεκτοι* [*The Unbearables*] (MEGA, 1991-1993), *Στο Παρά 5* [*In the Nick of Time*] (MEGA, 2005-2007), *Το Καφέ της Χαράς* [*Hara's Café*] (ANT1, 2003-2006), and *Ντόλτσε Βίτα* [*Dolce Vita*] (MEGA, 1995-1997) as its main case studies.

The case studies selected in this dissertation integrate gender, (a)sexuality, family, domesticity, body, and/or age in their narratives as a vehicle to create humor, yet in ways which have divided and continue to divide how audiences understand and interpret them. Today, more than ever before, the reception of these texts has generated mixed criticism from everyday people and critics, many of whom approach them either through nostalgic or polemic lenses.

Considering the impact of the *Greek crisis* on Greek television channels, as well as the implications of television's global paradigm shift for media consumers, the study aims to assess how the (omni)presence of ‘older’ Greek television comedies—in the form of reruns but also on the Internet, and the Greek public sphere—give these texts the opportunity to be examined through the prism of feminist and queer methodological frameworks. Employing close-reading approaches, and adopting the dual role of television fan and researcher, I search for gaps, cracks, and fissures in the comedies' narratives and conventions in order to suggest ways in which popular, heavily consumed texts can reveal new colors and materials that remained unnoticed, or intentionally suppressed. How has Greek television impacted the

ways in which issues of gender identity and (homo)sexuality circulate onscreen? How have critical discourse and audiences responded to television comedies? Are there characters, themes, and particular scenes in television comedies that have escaped the notice of journalists and television fans? Is it possible to read television of the past differently? Finally, to what extent does an examination of a text's genre facilitate such 'different' readings? In an attempt to answer these questions, I employ a queer angle, which is primarily based on Alan Sinfield's dissident readings, yet enriched with a set of feminist, poststructuralist, phenomenological, and queer theories.

Far from viewing Greek television of the yesteryear as an always already idealized and/or decisively heteronormative time and space, this dissertation, follows the recent cultural turn in television comedy and shows how Greek television can at different times—and through different readings—proffer unexplored bits of knowledge thus revealing its cloaked, yet deeply-embedded queerness. This project making use of a dissident angle and a queer methodological framework which has yet to be incorporated in the study of Greek television demonstrates the vitality to detach queerness from white, gay, Western men and engage in more personal, and intimate ways of approaching popular culture, thus opening up the space for unforeseen and surprising knowledge gaps that 'traditional' research methods may not be able to fill.

Keywords: Greece; sexuality; television; television fiction; comedy; queer; fandom; embodiment; phenomenology; visibility; dissidence; digital; media; popular culture; Sinfield, Foucault.

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Paradoxically enough, a Doctor of Philosophy (DPhil) is a team sport, and I know that I would not have finished this dissertation without the support of a number of individuals who helped me emotionally and practically in this nice-but-not-easy journey. These include my closest friends from the Department of Medieval and Modern Languages: Vera, Emmanouela, and Jessica; the Takis Sinopoulos Poetry Crew: Silvana, Maro, Panagiota, and Vangelis; as well as my wonderful men from *10%*. I am internally grateful to LGBTQ activist, writer, and health counselor, Leo Kalovirnas. You brought hope when it seemed there was none.

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PROLOGUE

The history of Greek broadcasting has yet to be written. [Although] there exist some historical reports from individuals who were absent from the events [they narrate], those who were present [at the same events] ascertain serious imprecisions and omissions. Writing this story, these stories, I believe I avoided [historical] imprecisions, but not the omissions. My well-informed professional archive, comprised of forms and notes, papers and photographs protected me from the imprecisions and helped me document this history... History is being written with proofs. So that is the case here. I mainly deposit documents and take care of their solid assembly... If it is certain that somewhere in my narrative, you can see an ‘I’, please forgive me and let this ‘I’ be seen with the eyes of the justifier. Let this work be shown as a contribution to the very feeble Greek radio-television literature, and as an easy-to-read testimony of the era in which we established the work of our present colleagues. And, a dedication: To the co-founders of Greek television, to those who hoped that it could have served as a useful means of developing culture.¹

-George Karter, *Greek radio and television: History and histories*

¹ “Η ιστορία της ελληνικής ραδιοτηλεόρασης δεν γράφτηκε ακόμα. Και σε κάποιες ιστορικές αναφορές από απόντες στα γεγονότα, αυτοί που ήσαν παρόντες διαπιστώνουν σοβαρές ανακρίβειες και παραλείψεις. Γράφοντας τούτη την ιστορία, τούτες τις ιστορίες, πιστεύω πως απέφυγα τις ανακρίβειες, όχι όμως τις παραλείψεις. Το αρκετά ενημερωμένο αρχείο του επαγγελματικού μου χρόνου, με έντυπα και σημειώσεις, με έγγραφα και φωτογραφίες, με προστάτευσε από τα ανακριβή και με βοήθησε στην τεκμηρίωση αυτής της ιστορίας [...] Η ιστορία γράφεται με ντοκουμέντα. Έτσι κι αυτή εδώ. Ντοκουμέντα κυρίως καταθέτω και επιμελούμαι τη στέρεη συναρμογή τους. Αν είναι βέβαιο ότι κάπου στην αφήγησή μου διακρίνεται ένα «εγώ» περισσότερο, παρακαλώ να συγχωρηθεί και να ιδωθεί με τα μάτια του δικαιοκριτή. Ας είναι τούτο το πόνημα να καταδειχτεί ως μια προσφορά στη βιβλιογραφία της ελληνικής ραδιοτηλεόρασης, την τόσο ισχνή, και ως μια ευανάγνωστη μαρτυρία της εποχής που θεμελιώσαμε το χώρο-δουλειά των σημερινών συναδέλφων μας. Και η αφιέρωση: Στους συνθεμελιωτές της ελληνικής τηλεόρασης, σε εκείνους που ελπίζανε ότι θα μπορούσε να γίνει ένα εύτονο μέσον ανάπτυξης του πολιτισμού.”

With these words, George Karter begins his book, whose publication back in early 00s is premised on the notion that the history of media in Greece “has yet to be written” (Karter, 2004, p. 9).² Cautioning against those who have attempted to approach television without having actual knowledge of the field, Karter sells himself as a connoisseur and appears to have every right to do so. Even a cursory examination of his biography in the back cover of the book reveals that the author has indeed led a long and successful career in public television channels such as ERT1 and ERT2, as well as in the Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation. His access to top managerial positions, mentioned over several pages, is therefore implied to provide him with the right credentials to tell a ‘real’ Hi-story.

Karter, however, is not only interested in touting the active role he has played in shaping the Greek media landscape; he also wants to make clear that he has concrete evidence. His first-hand experience, supplemented with visual and written records collected throughout his professional life, are seen as the final touches that can contribute to a holistic and most importantly, ‘objective’ account of Greek radio and television. Still, his preoccupation with the validity of his archive is more than blatant. While the self-proclaimed ‘registrar of television’ tries to convince us that the purpose of this collection of essays is only to deposit facts, he eventually falls into the trap he warns against. Unavoidably, he is compelled to admit that the ‘I-eye’ of the teller is, in fact, visible in a certain number of instances throughout his work; yet, he is quick to justify himself on the grounds that these personal interventions are made with good intentions.

² “...δε γράφτηκε ακόμα.”

Towards the end of the prologue, however, Karter no longer tries to hide behind words; what seemed to be a pseudo-humble position of an ‘objective historian’ turns more and more into an elitist position from someone who has the power to determine the rights, but mainly, the wrongdoings of Greek media. The book dedication clearly expresses the author’s disappointment about the inability of Greek television to serve its intended goal, while the rest of the book reads as a caustic attack on the medium on all fronts, with a particular emphasis on entertainment fiction, those “populist and naïve programs” whose viewing cannot cultivate new and meaningful ideas in viewers’ minds (Karter, 2004, p. 83).³

Unlike Karter, I consciously choose to start this thesis with some deeply personal, intimate, and treasured stories from my engagement with Greek television and its so-called ‘light-entertainment’ content. The general idea of this dissertation was conceived in 2012, in Bath, United Kingdom while I was studying European politics at the university, and attending a module entitled *The Politics of Otherness*. During that semester, my then-professor delivered a series of lectures on the nexus between popular culture and world politics, which somehow woke me up to the ways in which mass media can inform our understandings of power, ideology, and difference.⁴ Yet, my interests date back way earlier, while I was growing up as an only child in a central neighborhood of Athens, Greece.

I was raised in a familial environment where there was no distinction between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture. My father, a tax collector, was an educated man who used to

³ “λαϊκίστικα και αφελή προγράμματα.”

⁴ In my master’s thesis, I focused on the comedy shows *οι Απαράδεκτοι* [*The Unbearables*] (MEGA, 1991-1993) and *Υπέροχα Πλάσματα* [*Wonderful Creatures*] (ALPHA, 2007-2008) and applied aspects of queer theory in order to investigate how popular media texts depict homosexual characters and to what extent—if any—they negotiate heteronormativity in their representation of male homosexuality. A few years later, a part of my thesis was presented at the 2014 Graduate Research Colloquium in Modern Greek Studies (12 June 2014), University of Birmingham, United Kingdom, with the title “Between Victimhood and (Queer) Resistance: Representations of Male Homosexuality in *Οι Απαράδεκτοι/The Unbearables*.”

read newspapers and listen to the radio every morning before work. My mother was a housewife, who took care of our apartment and spent her limited free time during the day reading magazines and books. In the evenings though, when my parents and I were back at home, we always liked to indulge in television.

Back in the 90s, there was only one television set in our apartment, and it was placed in the living room. As a result, this part of the house often constituted a site of struggle over who would eventually get the remote control. Seen from a distance, I can now recognize how the micro-politics of television in my household—as enacted through my parents’ different selections of TV programming—reproduced stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity. My dad, on the one hand, was always interested in the news and the weather forecast. On the other hand, my mother loved watching game shows and Colombian telenovelas. Each one of them had clearly distinct tastes, but both my parents, in addition to I, myself, converged on Greek television comedies, which were shown during prime time.

The usual routine before watching our favorite shows was like this: I used to come home from the *frontistirio* (foreign language institute) and do my homework for school, while my mother would prepare the next day’s meal. Around 8:30 p.m., my father would return from the *kafeneio* (traditional café mainly populated by men), and all of us would have dinner and then sit on the sofa to watch comedies such as *To Δις Εξαμαρτείν* [*Doing the Same Sin Twice*] (MEGA, 1993-1996), *Ντόλτσε Βίτα* [*Dolce Vita*] (MEGA, 1995-1997), *Ο Κακός Βεζύρης* [*The Evil Vizier*] (MEGA, 1997-1998), and *Και οι Παντρεμένοι Έχουν Ψυχή* [*Even Married [Guys] Have Soul*] (ANT1, 1997-2000). My memory of these evenings still remains alive. I truly enjoyed spending quality time with my family and sharing moments of laughter and bonding.

Most of all, however, I liked being able to get a glimpse of those fictional characters whose lives were a lot more exciting than mine.

During my childhood and early teenage years, I was not the most sociable person on earth; I remember that other boys my age used to hang out in groups, play sports, and even enter into their first relationships. Even if I had a strong desire to socialize with some of them, I did not know how. In contrast to the rest of the boys at my school who were obsessed with football, I could not even kick a ball, and I was also beginning to admit to myself that I was not particularly interested in girls. The languages we spoke were therefore different.

In the face of this realization, I somehow solidified the belief that something was wrong with me; being gay was probably not okay, so I decided to keep my sexual identity ‘locked’ inside the closet. At the age of twelve, I started to distance myself from my small circle of friends—which primarily consisted of girls—and instead, turned my attention to school work and foreign-language learning. During these years, television comedies not only kept me company when I was lonely and confused, but they also served as a soothing escape from reality.

Having spent countless hours in front of the television screen, I became acquainted with a great number of characters that held a strange fascination for me: First, I discovered Sasa from *Dolce Vita*, and then Korina from *Εγκλήματα [Crimes]* (ANT1, 1998-2000). Lila from *Singles* (MEGA, 2004-2005, 2006-2008) came last, but all of them made an important contribution to my early teenage life. These women were sexy, funny, and provocative, but most importantly, they were brave enough to express themselves without caring about other people’s reactions and comments. From the vantage point of today, these women exemplified what it means to be different in a world where everyone is boringly normal. Back then, however, I was

simply mesmerized by the way they looked, the eccentric clothes they wore, and the sassy responses they gave to those characters who were trying to get in their way.

There were of course a number of male characters who had also sparked my interest. While I admired adventurous and uncontrollable women, my favorite male characters were the ones who were not ‘proper’ at all times. For example, men like Kostas Karras from *Πάτερ Ημών [Our Father]* (ANT1, 1994-1996) and Captain Epameinondas Kakalos from *Της Ελλάδος τα Παιδιά [Greece’s Children]* (ANT1, 1993-1995) featured traits that made me laugh without being able to understand why. I can now say that there was something goofy in these characters’ physique and actions, which made them look contradictory and ambivalent. The male figures I knew from my circle of family and relatives were consistently serious and manly or at least, that is the image they were trying to show when in public. Kostas and Epameinondas, though, engaged in a constant oscillation between seriousness and frivolity. As a result, these fictional characters were—in my eyes—men who forgot to grow up, or in other words, children trapped in adult bodies.

In the summer of 2001, I went on holiday to Crete and stayed at my grandmother’s house. There, I met a guy slightly older than me, with whom I shared the same passion for popular culture, and we became friends immediately. The days when my grandmother was outside the house, Manolis and I were chilling inside watching films and television shows.⁵ One day, as we were channel zapping, we chanced upon *Οι Απαράδεκτοι [The Unbearables]* (MEGA, 1991-1993), a rare rerun of a popular television show that was initially broadcast in 1991. We were not surprised to come across an ‘old’ comedy, because Greek television had been notoriously known for recycling its output in the summer months. With not many

⁵ All names and identifying details have been modified to protect the privacy of individuals.

choices available, we gave *The Unbearables* a try, and it was definitely worth it. Unexpectedly enough, this comedy introduced Manolis and myself to a queer television character for the very first time.⁶ And although it was uncomfortable to confess each other (and mostly ourselves) the reason of our excitement about the show, it was obvious that we both liked it a lot.

During the remaining summer, we made the unwritten pact to meet every afternoon and soak up like a sponge what the queer man and the rest of *The Unbearables* had to offer. One particular afternoon, however, turned out to be anything but typical. My grandmother left the house, but that time, she went to a neighboring village to visit her sister who was sick and alone. Manolis came over as usual, but he looked oddly tense; he was standing in front of a wall like a grounded pupil, and when I asked him if there was anything he wanted to talk about, he reassured me that everything was fine. After walking back and forth in the living room several times, Manolis finally perched on the sofa next to me with a nervous smile. Then he put his arm around my shoulder clumsily and kept his eyes fixed on the screen.

Of all the possible scenarios I had ever fantasized, this one without doubt was the least expected. Although I was attracted to Manolis, I had not thought of expressing my desire in any way, so this was the perfect moment to make a move. Having consumed dozens of rom-coms and love films, I leaned my head on his arm, a body-language sign that gave him the green light to proceed to the next stage. Indeed, Manolis received the message and turned my head with his hands to kiss me. As far as I remember, it was a beautiful and intense kiss, yet it did not last long.

⁶ Yanis (Yanis Bezos) is the first homosexual character to appear in the genre of Greek television comedy. For an exploration of male queerness as well as notions of masculinity, femininity, effeminacy, and domesticity, see chapter 2.

The clanging of the entrance door, followed by the sound of slow footsteps signified the sudden return of my grandmother and the end of our short-lived romance. Manolis and I tried to act naturally to avoid any suspicion, but my grandmother was busy with other matters. When she approached us, the television screen was still broadcasting *The Unbearables*. At that moment, the scene in question involved the queer man, Yanis who was wearing a flamboyant robe and walking gracefully inside his apartment while trying to teach his female neighbor, Dimitra how to act femininely. Reflecting on this, I would say that the funny and surreal element of that scene was the very fact that a man could act more womanly than a woman, without even making the slightest effort. For my grandmother, however, there was nothing funny in a scene like this. “I wish I knew what you find interesting in this rubbish,” she stated, without waiting for an actual response.⁷ Then she turned her back to us continuing to wonder, “how can they display such men [ironically] on this stupid box” and headed towards the kitchen.⁸ I cannot be sure whether it was the kiss, my grandmother’s words, or a combination of the two that scared Manolis, but that was the last time I saw him. Even though I was not happy with this abrupt change in events, I carried on watching *The Unbearables* without Manolis’ company, and receiving my grandmother’s judgmental facial expressions whenever she caught me red-handed.

It was early September when I came back to Athens, and *The Unbearables* was still showing on TV. It had not crossed my mind, however, that my grandmother would contact my parents and tell them to prohibit me from watching the show. My mother was quite soft on the issue and willing to compromise, but my dad had a

⁷ “Μακάρι να ήξερα τί βρίσκετε ενδιαφέρον σε αυτά τα σκουπίδια.”

⁸ “Πώς γίνεται να δείχνουν τέτοιους άντρες [ειρωνικά] σε αυτό το χαζοκούτι.”

different point. After watching a couple of episodes himself, he reached the verdict that the show promoted lifestyles that were dangerous for young viewers. Focusing on the queer character of the show, he emphasized that people like Yanis, who lead a lonely and unnatural life, serve as negative examples that could turn his son and other boys into *dindinides* (sissies).⁹ Immediately, *The Unbearables* was off-limits to me.

My father's decision to forbid me from watching my favorite show, with the ultimate aim to prevent me from becoming someone I should not be(come), was certainly frustrating. At the same time, though, the way he interpreted Yanis and *The Unbearables* revealed to me early on that there is rarely unanimity, or consensus, on how media texts are understood. This revelation was hard to grasp, but at the same time, it was liberating. Because, while others saw Yanis in exclusively negative and victimizing terms, my experience from 'knowing' the same character was completely different; in his face, I could sense a man who opened up a world of different language, perceptions, and aesthetics, and whose life was way less isolated than my dad could see.

The case of *The Unbearables* was the catalyst that helped me recognize the co-existence of plural knowledge stemming from a television text with my interest in tracing hidden messages and alternative scenarios in television shows. Like an undercover detective, I was eager to search for material that may have not been visible at first sight. Even when the television episodes were coming to an end until the following week, I continued to play several scenes of the shows in my head in a quest for new findings and evidence gaps. I enjoyed pondering over the after-lives

⁹ To the best of my knowledge, *dindinis* is a word used in the island of Crete. *Dindinis* or *Didis*, started as a shortened version of the name *Konstantinos*. Initially the term referred to the male subject who paid particular attention to his physical appearance, yet it gradually acquired a negative connotation functioning as a pejorative term to address homosexuals, see <http://www.slang.gr/lemma/2661-ntintis>.

that these characters may have had when the cameras ceased to shoot. I was also wondering about the characters' motives behind their actions: How would some of these characters have acted in specific occasions, had they not been 'given life' at nine o'clock, a television time zone populated by families and kids? By playing the dual role of spy and spectator, I used to take a peculiar pleasure in 'intervening' into the television texts, thus enriching and expanding the existent stories in ways that better suited my personal tastes. My imagination ripped the scripts at their seams; those individuals who were oppressed and marginalized were given a second chance, while the 'bad guys' were reshaped in a fashion that could eventually expose their fragile and weak status.

At the age of 14, with the money I had saved in my piggy bank, I bought a second-hand video recorder (VCR) and started recording some of my favorite programs. Slowly but steadily, my love for television comedies acquired different dimensions. Repetition is the mother of knowledge, they say, and indeed, my frequent encounters with the television shows of my preference reconfigured my relationship with the texts and their characters. Aside from learning all lines and dialogues by heart, I even started to pay close attention to details, decoding silences, pauses, and glances that casual viewing did not allow.

Years later, the advent of YouTube restored old comedy shows to their former glory by making them available to anyone with a computer and access to the Internet. As a result, I sold my VCR and started watching my favorite shows online. Since the platform allowed interaction between Internet users, I came in contact with other television fans who also watched the series and posted their comments under the videos. It was then that I realized I was not alone in this search for different knowledge from within television. In fact, it was a true revelation to see that other

people also read comedy texts beyond the lines and provided fresh and unpredictable perspectives on mainstream stories and characters.

Today, when I tell people I am a doctoral candidate who studies queer potentialities in Greek television comedies, I generally receive enthusiastic smiles; after providing some vital clarifications about the use of the word *queer* in my dissertation, many people ask me whether particular characters who have shown up in television shows are queer, while others share with me their thoughts about how much queerer they find shows of the past in comparison to more contemporary productions. These varied responses demonstrate the polyvalent ‘nature’ of media texts and the renovated interest of young generations towards the politics of gender and sexuality in popular culture. Furthermore, they remind me that these experimentations and interpretations that I used to make when I was a child (and still do) were not only products of a person’s untamable imagination, but also readings that were real and legitimate and continue to be. So every time my memory goes back on that autumn day when my father banned me from watching *The Unbearables*, a cheeky smile spreads across my face. Because, outside of *The Unbearables*, there was a plethora of popular, family-oriented television comedies that harbored bits of perverse and unorthodox knowledge under their amusing funny humor and innocent façade. These texts had been shouting out loud all these years inside our living room making an incredibly intense noise. Yet, it is funny—and sad, if you think about it—that my parents and many others could not hear any of these sound frequencies.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This dissertation examines Greek television comedies and attempts to proffer queer readings of a wide range of texts that were made and broadcast in the 90s and 00s. These texts, despite their differences, fall under the general rubric of “comedy” and enjoy phenomenal popularity ever since their inaugural appearance on the small screen.¹⁰ There has been growing academic interest in the re-examination of the recent Greek national past,¹¹ and this dissertation contributes to this project, using *Οι Απαράδεκτοι* [*The Unbearables*] (MEGA, 1991-1993), *Στο Παρά 5* [*In the Nick of Time*] (MEGA, 2005-2007), *Το Καφέ της Χαράς* [*Hara’s Café*] (ANT1, 2003-2006), and *Ντόλτσε Βίτα* [*Dolce Vita*] (MEGA, 1995-1997) as its main case studies. These texts integrate gender, (a)sexuality, family, domesticity, body, and/or age in their narratives as a vehicle to create humor, yet in ways which have divided and continue to divide how audiences understand and interpret them. Even today, the reception of these texts has generated mixed criticism from everyday people and critics, many of whom consider the aforementioned comedies as conservative, homophobic, misogynist, or nothing but funny. I search for gaps, cracks, and fissures in the comedies’ narratives in order to trace different access points into the texts in question and give some of the female and male characters who are embedded in the stories possibilities to be viewed in resistant, agentic, and/or fresh ways.

¹⁰ The use of the term *text* showcases my familiarization and immersion within a British cultural studies background, which perceives texts of all kinds—regardless of whether they are literary, filmic, or televisual—as cultural evidence that can provide valuable knowledge about the historical and social contexts in which they were (re)produced.

¹¹ This is evident in the plethora of special issues, collected volumes, and monographs that have been published recently in Greece and beyond. These scholarly works—some of which are discussed in this introduction and conclusion—use the so called *Greek crisis period* as a starting point and a justification for understanding how the past of the nation has been passed on contemporary generations, as well as ways to reassess particular aspects of Greek history. See for example, Doxiadis & Placas (2018), Floros & Chatziantoniou (2017), Karyotis & Gerodimos, (2015), Papanikolaou & Kolocotroni (2018), Tziouvas (2017), and Willert & Katsan (2019).

In this dissertation, I adopt a cultural studies model for the analysis of Greek television fiction. Broadly speaking, cultural studies has emerged as a set of approaches committed to the study of culture and society. Being a fundamentally transdisciplinary enterprise, cultural studies rejects the divide between high and low cultural texts (Williams, 1974) and insists that culture “must be investigated within the social relations and systems through which culture is produced and consumed” (Kellner, 2002, p. 37). Thus, cultural studies researchers seek to understand not only how institutions like television produce cultural knowledge, but also how texts circulate and how audiences decode and make sense of these texts (Hall, 1980).

Here, I engage in close readings of popular comedy texts that made their first appearance during previous decades. Additionally, I probe the meanings that can be activated when examining these texts from the vantage point of today and through a dissident perspective. Given television’s position as both an expression of (national) culture and an entertainment provider, the following research questions arise: How has Greek television impacted the ways in which issues of gender identity and (homo)sexuality circulate onscreen? How have critical discourse and audiences responded to these television productions? Are there characters, themes, and particular scenes in television comedies that have escaped the notice of journalists and television fans? Is it possible to read television comedies of the past differently? Finally, to what extent does an examination of a text’s genre facilitate such ‘different’ readings?

The first two set of questions engage with what Annette Hill (2018) calls ‘push-pull’ dynamics. These research questions follow a long media scholarship tradition exposing “the complicated power relations in the transactions between media industries and audiences” (p. 4). The present dissertation examines how the medium

of television has shaped and “pushed” specific images and themes onscreen and how audiences themselves have engaged with these products and ‘pulled’ different kinds of content and critiques out of them. I examine this two-way line of communication through a study of the historical context during which television channels in Greece launched these television products as well as media discourses within contexts of production and reception (Schröder, 2007).

The remaining questions center around the potentially unacknowledged contributions of a popular text to cultural knowledge and the meanings particular audiences may excavate from them. Stuart Hall (2005) has famously argued that popular culture constitutes a site whose texts “are polymorphous, polysemous and open to negotiation” (p. 228). Television comedies, being popular cultural texts, not only allow audiences to escape into a carefully crafted narrative for the pleasure of it, but they also serve as “public pedagogy and a form of cultural politics” (Giroux, 2000, p. 341). Suzanna Danuta Walters scrutinizes the audience’s ability to relate to texts. Turning her attention to viewers, Walters (2001) underlines how the act of reading “between the lines, and-if need be-to ‘rewrite’ scripts, characters and [media] moments” (p. 132) can be a resistant practice with destabilizing effects in the way that viewers can understand mainstream media. Hall’s and Walters’ contentions on the dialectic relationship between a text and its readers informs this study’s attempt to challenge a narrow understanding of Greek television fiction of the past. My assumption is that despite its common characterization as a conservative and predictable form, Greek television (situation) comedy contains textual structures and signals that yield to queer readings and open up space for unanticipated knowledge to emerge. Furthermore, I argue that the particular queer reading which I employ may also be used to disturb other texts that are also accommodating of textual queerness.

This dissertation, therefore, contributes new knowledge in three ways. First, it aspires to contribute to a reassessment of television comedy. In line with current research conducted in the Anglophone and Greek academia on the queer politics of television comedy and situation comedy, this dissertation explores some of the comedy's codes and conventions. Additionally, it demonstrates that heteronormativity and queerness may co-exist within a text. Second, by applying a dissident perspective through which particular television texts are read and examined, this dissertation makes an original contribution to queer theory, establishing a conceptual and methodological framework that researchers could implement in the study and diversification of meanings that may emerge from other cultural texts. These could include, for example, theatrical comedies and comedy films.

Third, one of the most important contributions of this thesis is the close attention it pays to a vital chapter of Greek audiovisual history. Through its unapologetic and meticulous reading of popular television shows, the thesis advances a particular method of studying television texts that weaves together comedies' characters, actions, and emotions with academic concepts and theories. Thus, the thesis challenges simplistic analyses of isolated episodes and/or thumbs up/thumbs down approaches. By resituating the role and significance of popular television in Greek society and academia, it will hopefully serve as a useful addition to the sub-field of television fiction theory and as the first extensive academic study on the queer politics and potentialities of Greek television comedy.¹²

In what follows, I will explore the evolution and reception of popular Greek television fiction in the space of Greece and beyond. After explaining different ways

¹² For another angle on the queer politics of Greek television, see Konstantinos Kyriakos' *Ελληνική Τηλεόραση και Ομοερωτισμός: Οι Σειρές Μυθοπλασίας* [*Greek Television and Homoeroticism: Fictional Television Series*] (1975-2019) (Athens: Aigokeros, 2019).

of reading popular culture queerly, I will draw on recent scholarship on queer(ing) comedy and employ a dissident angle to investigate the queer potential of Greek television comedy.

Introduction to (Greek) TV Fiction

In the context of the United Kingdom and United States, the study of television comedy has charted a complicated yet certainly progressive course. From “the poor cousin to more ‘legitimate’ objects of analysis such as realist drama and quality television” (White, 2018, p. 19), television comedy and particularly, television situation comedy, has succeeded in commanding significant academic attention from a variety of disciplines. The systematic engagement with the field across decades has been translated into an exponentially rich body of individual and collective works that have explored a number of analytic sites such as the ideology, aesthetics, form, identity, representation, and performance in popular comedy shows (e.g., Dalton & Linder, 2016; Grote, 1983; Mills, 2009; Morreale, 2003; Tueth, 2005).¹³

Nevertheless, the same cannot be said about the academic study of Greek television fiction. As media scholar Vasilis Vamvakas observes, Greek television constitutes a persistently introverted medium whose production and consumption does not ‘travel’ outside the country.¹⁴ This introversion, however, becomes noticeable even within national borders and is reflected in the way that local academia prioritizes

¹³ I would be remiss to argue that other (sub)genres of comedy have not been studied. Two interesting books that touch upon numerous sub-genres of comedy (largely television) and provide a grammar for discussing a number of US comedies are David Marc’s *Comic Visions: Television Comedy and American Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992) and Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik’s *Popular Film and Television* (New York: Routledge, 1990). Still though, the large body of work on television comedy continues to lay particular emphasis on the sitcom format.

¹⁴ There are, undoubtedly, exceptions to this general rule. Journalist Aphroditi Grammeli, in her article “Ελληνικές σειρές στο εξωτερικό [Greek series abroad]” (2012) provides a list of Greek television series such as *Τα Μυστικά της Εδέμ [Eden’s Secrets]* (MEGA, 2008-2011), *Κλεμμένα Όνειρα [Stolen Dreams]* (MEGA, 2011-2015), and *Το Νησί [The Island]* (MEGA, 2010-2011) that have been sold to foreign television channels and enjoyed international success.

the examination of specific aspects of Greek television (Vamvakas, 2018a). A similar opinion is expressed in Georgia Aitaki's review article "The academic study of Greek television," which captures dominant directions and trends in the study and critique of Greek television, shedding light on a field that remains predominantly scattered (Aitaki, 2018b).

Over the last two decades, scholarship on Greek television has primarily adopted autobiographic (Karter, 2004), historical (Paschalidis, 2005; Valoukos, 2008), and sociological approaches (Dampasis, 2002; Leventakos, 2004; Papathanasopoulos, 2005). Within this literature, special focus has been given to 'the big picture' of Greek television, addressing the evolution of the medium (Vovou, 2010), its role in the public life of the nation (Konstantopoulou, 2012), as well as its impact on viewers across different time periods and cultural moments (Doulkeri, 1999; Madianou, 2005; Papathanasopoulos, 2000). This is not to say of course that Greek academia's engagement with television fiction has been completely non-existent; in fact, Kirkos Doxiadis' *Ιδεολογία και Τηλεόραση [Ideology and Television]* (1993) and Joanna Frangou's *Soap Opera Reception in Greece* (2002) demonstrate some early and remarkable experimentations with specific television formats and case studies.¹⁵ However, it is evident that Greek television fiction has only lately begun to become a legitimate and 'sexy' object of academic inquiry (Adamou, 2013; Aitaki, 2018a, 2019a; Kaklamanidou, 2017; Paschalidis, 2013; Vovou, 2009).

The question that therefore arises is why the study of commercially oriented television and entertainment programming has been placed at the periphery of Greek

¹⁵ Kirkos Doksiadis' monograph employs discourse analysis in an attempt to compare and contrast the ways in which Stratis Mirivilis' novel *Η δασκάλα με τα χρυσά μάτια [The teacher with the golden eyes]* (1933) was adapted into television (ERT, 1979). Joanna Frangou's unpublished doctoral dissertation focuses on Nikos Foskolos' soap operas and investigates the ways in which Greek audiences responded to these texts.

television studies until recently. New scholarship on media culture has attributed this rather significant delay to accessibility issues with regards to audiovisual material (Aitaki, 2018b), but this is only part of the story. Aside from actual difficulties associated with acquiring permission to study secured data from television regulators, ideological barriers, traced by Aitaki, are “posed by voices which doubted Greek television’s cultural value” (2018b, p. 249). Indeed, Grigoris Paschalidis’ chapter “*To χαμένο παράδειγμα της ελληνικής τηλεόρασης [The Lost Paradigm of Greek Television]*,” suggests a tripartite periodization of Greek television history,¹⁶ only to uncover that the evaluation of the medium as a low- and bad-quality object had circulated within academic circles, long before its advent in the country.¹⁷ While

¹⁶ Here, I will attempt to summarize the tripartite periodization of Greek television history as suggested by Grigoris Paschalidis and show how other media scholars have provided additional insight into this discussion. Between 1952-1968, the country made several abortive attempts to introduce the medium. During this period, the dominant discourses surrounding the medium and its potential role in Greek society follow a trajectory similar to the one carved in the United States and other European countries. While a number of Greek voices adhere to the optimistic paradigms developed by international scholars (see Cassirer, 1960; Cazeneuve & Oulif, 1963; Crozier, 1966) and envision television and its entertainment programs as a pedagogical platform able to cultivate critical skills for young viewers, others approach the medium with skepticism and hostility (see Evelpidis, 1960; Ligizos, 1963; Ploritis, 1966). The second phase (1968-1989) witnesses the continuation of the same divisive discourse, but this time, much of the discussion produced therein is less abstract and more focused around the operation of television under a governmental monopoly. During the seven-year dictatorial regime of Modern Greece, the television model that is employed invests primarily on entertainment programs, which make their appearance soon after the development of state television (Koukoutsaki-Monnier, 2003). The newly established medium and the entertainment choices that it provides are welcomed by the overriding majority of Greek households (see Iosifidis & Katsirea, 2014; Paschalidis, 2018), but critics are split again into different camps. Towards the end of the 70s, a number of Greek academics begin to explore television more systematically and enact a first and promising dialogue with the international scholarship on television studies (Paschalidis, 2018, pp. 22-23). Still, ‘ideology’ continues to serve as the key interpretative matrix that dominates academic conversations; the main criticisms that therefore circulate in this period either characterize fictional programs as sloppy and ‘poor’, or liken the medium to a propaganda tool (Koukoutsaki-Monnier, 2003) and an “allegory of modernization” with the potential to harm family life, traditional values, and society as a whole (Paschalidis, 2018, p. 20). The third and more recent phase of television history is marked by the liberation of Greek television and diversification of its audiovisual landscape. During the period between 1990 and 2016, private television channels gain ground in Nielsen ratings, while the public-service broadcaster experiences an unprecedented challenge. Much like television viewers who move to private television en masse, academics turn their back to public channels, which, from this point on, remain immune to criticism, and even become labeled as ‘quality television’. For a detailed analysis of the history of Greek television, see Paschalidis (2018). For further explorations of the diachronic evolution of television programs and productions in Greek television, see Koukoutsaki-Monnier (2010).

¹⁷ While there is not enough space in this chapter to fully elaborate the history and reception of television in Greece, it is vital to note that the discourse of the ‘bad’ and ‘dangerous’ object does not concern Greek television exclusively. For an exploration of the depreciative attitude of a number of

recognizing the sporadic efforts of a number of academics to shift the prevalent discourse of emancipatory television in Greece and foster a dialogue with international media scholars, Paschalidis concludes that the decade of the 1990s marks the gradual consolidation of an ideological paradigm that appears to echo aspects of Theodor Adorno's ravaging critique of popular culture.¹⁸ This prolonged clinging to outdated theoretical frameworks therefore rendered Greek scholarship isolated from the rest of the academic world. He writes:

In the field of media, as well as in other branches of social sciences which were slow to develop, Greece did not constitute a[n intellectual] space that established genuine conceptual frameworks, but [a space that] imported [such frameworks]. As a result, the absence of adequate and important translations [of Anglophone studies in Greece], particularly in relation to the big turn that took place in international television studies ever since the early 80s onwards, deprived local academia of vital intellectual tools and stimuli about television, contributing to phenomena of anachronism and generally [speaking], asynchrony with international developments in the area of television theory and research. (Paschalidis, 2018, p. 36)¹⁹

American, French, and British academics towards the medium of television, see Bourdon (2018), Brundson (2008) and Gronbeck (1988).

¹⁸ Theodor Adorno's critique of popular culture focused on the conception of mass culture and television as aesthetically and morally bad art. In his article "How to Look at Television," Adorno argues that "The repetitiveness, the selfsameness, and the ubiquity of modern mass culture tend to make for automatized reactions and to weaken the forces of individual resistance" (1954, p. 216). See also Fiske (1989a, 1989b) who served as Adorno's most prominent critic and proponent of the audience-based paradigm, as well as Gauntlett (2002).

¹⁹ "Στον τομέα μελέτης των μαζικών μέσων, όπως εξάλλου και σε άλλους τομείς των κοινωνικών επιστημών που καθυστέρησαν να αναπτυχθούν, η Ελλάδα δεν αποτέλεσε τόπο παραγωγής πρωτότυπου θεωρητικού λόγου, αλλά εισαγωγής του. Η απουσία, συνεπώς, επαρκών και σημαντικών σχετικών μεταφράσεων, ειδικά σε σχέση με τη μεγάλη στροφή που σημειώθηκε στις διεθνείς τηλεοπτικές σπουδές από τις αρχές της δεκαετίας του 1980 και μετά, στερησε κρίσιμα διανοητικά εργαλεία και ερεθίσματα από την εγχώρια επιστημονική συζήτηση για την τηλεόραση, συντελώντας καθοριστικά στα φαινόμενα αναχρονισμού και, γενικότερα, ασγχρονισμού της με τις διεθνείς εξελίξεις στον τομέα της τηλεοπτικής θεωρίας και έρευνας."

This point—despite its overall pessimism—provides a more rounded explanation and justification for local academia’s ‘reluctance’ to examine certain aspects of Greek television. In other words, if we follow Paschalidis’ train of argument, it is possible to speculate that the sub-field of television fiction, aside from an ‘unserious’ object of analysis, may have also constituted a challenge—a challenge that involved familiarization with the then developments in the field of television in the Anglophone world, which at the time remained beyond the reach of Greek scholars.

Unlike academics, however, Greek journalists have traditionally shown a steady predilection to fill the lacuna between television and television criticism. Ever since the establishment of the medium in the country, and particularly after the privatization of television in Greece in 1989 (e.g., Maniou, 2017), a number of journalists turned into television critics, writing reviews about television series and serials in various newspapers and television magazines, such as *Τηλεθεατής [Viewer]*, *TV Zapping*, and *7 Μέρες TV [7 Days TV]*.²⁰ With a certain degree of variation, these reviews were typically published before the premiere of a series, with daily or weekly columns quipping notable storylines in a given show (e.g., McNutt, 2016).

That the television critics of the 90s and early 00s spilled ink to write about the then contemporary comedies and situation comedies is not surprising. Besides, as Angeliki Koukoutsaki-Monnier reminds us, situation comedies had traditionally been

²⁰ The term *television series* is generally used to refer to television products that comprise stand-alone episodes, whereas a *television serial* consists of episodes that are arranged in serial and chronological order. For a more expansive analysis of the difference between the two terms, see Koukoutsaki-Monnier (2010, pp. 418-419). In this dissertation, I consciously avoid these two terms because television fiction, and particularly comedies, are way more complicated and may include both stand-alone and serial episodes. It is for this reason that I mainly use the terms *comedies*, *comedy texts*, and/or *shows*.

the most “popular [genre] among different types of audiences” in the country (2010, p. 444).²¹ What is surprising, though, is that a substantial number of these shows, which were produced during previous decades, have continued to attract the attention of old as well as new generations of journalists and critics.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that today, and more than ever before, an ever-growing number of individuals raise their voices and go as far as to directly interrogate television or express their admiration about particular television shows through different technological devices and social networks. Numerous international scholars locate these shifting temporalities of television criticism in recent decades, and ascribe the phenomenon to what Graeme Turner has labelled as ‘the demotic turn’ in contemporary media (2010). As Lynn Spigel explains, the transition from oligopoly control to ‘blogopolies’ has removed the paid television critic with their institutionalized tastes and agendas from their position of authority, allowing the quest of vast and free knowledge from a wide variety of Internet sources (2009).

Unavoidably, Greek television could not have remained intact in a global paradigm that makes “each medium touch and be touched by neighbors and rivals” (Thorburn & Jenkins, 2004, p. 11; see also Booth, 2012). However, I will demonstrate that the proliferation of criticism about ‘old’ comedies in Greece is not an exclusive result or direct after-effect of the increased convergence of production and consumption. In other words, while new generations of journalists, together with television fans, bloggers, and aficionados talk freely about the comedies of the past at the current moment and thus bring them to the surface, at the same time, the texts themselves—thanks to the classic status they enjoy in the country—exert their own agenda and somehow impose their presence in the Greek public sphere.

²¹ “[...] ιδιαίτερα προσφιλείς σε όλες τις κατηγορίες κοινού.”

Among the various shows that belong to what I call *popular* Greek television fiction are the four case studies that I have selected to examine in this dissertation. Comedies like *The Unbearables*, *In the Nick of Time*, *Hara's Café*, and *Dolce Vita* were hailed as instant successes riveting millions of viewers from almost the moment their first episode aired on television (Hulot, 2017; Kokouvas, 2016). Their unprecedented appeal, possibly due—among other factors—to the presence of a number of actors who were already known to Greek audiences from their participation in public television, cinema, or theatre, did not allow the comedies to fade from the public eye. After the completion of their initial airing, many of these shows, such as *The Unbearables* and *In the Nick of Time* were released on DVD and made available at various *periptera* (kiosks) throughout the country, giving Greek audiences unlimited access to their favorite shows. At the same time, private Greek television channels that owned the copyrights rebroadcasted many of these comedies to fill spaces in their programming and gain profits, thus turning them into both strategic and economic assets (e.g., Kassaveti, 2017). As Derek Kompare has famously argued, “Repetition is [actually] the primary structuring factor of commercial television” (2005, p. xi). Television repeats in Greece are by no means an exception. However, the (omni)presence of reruns on MEGA and other private television channels, both during and in the aftermath of the financial crisis does constitute a particularly peculiar and rare phenomenon, which raises a number of questions about Greek television’s (ab)use of its own history and spurs different reactions among professional journalists, television fans and ‘ordinary’ critics (Chairetis, 2018).²²

²² Here, I refer to the *Greek crisis* and the ways it impacted television channels like MEGA, the first private television broadcaster that aired in Greece and perhaps, the most prolific one in the area of television fiction. It stopped operating in 2018, after continuous efforts by its employees. In the last two years before its official closure, MEGA had not secured permission to broadcast legally, and its programming consisted exclusively of television reruns. At the forefront, comedies were rebroadcast all day and night, and interestingly enough, they achieved very high viewership, despite their age.

Indeed, the last 10 years or so have evinced not only a proliferation of television criticism about some of these popular comedies, but also the production of fully-fledged articles and argumentative opinion papers that circulate online and adopt opposing ideological camps vis-à-vis the representational politics and value that these shows have on today's television screens.

On the one hand, a great number of these television reviews tend to embrace the cultural legacy that these television comedies have left behind, praising the humor, characters, and pop culture atmosphere they exude at the present moment, while bespeaking at the same time of a certain disregard for contemporary productions (Georgiakiodis, 2009; Kyriakopoulos, 2017; Makavelou, 2016).²³ Yorgos Kokouvas, for instance, in his article “Σίριαλ των 90s: Οι αγαπημένες ελληνικές κωμωδίες [Serials of the 90s: The Most Favorite Greek Comedies],” takes the entire decade of the 90s as the period when television comedy in Greece reached its climax in terms of quality. He writes:

The first decade of Greek private television had been the [most] golden era of Greek [television] fiction. The best ‘pens’ of screenwriting were set on fire and celebrities such as [Apostolos] Rigas, [Dimitris] Apostolou, [Mihalis] Reppas, [Thanasis] Papathanasiou, [Lefteris] Papapetrou, [Dimitra] Papadopoulou, [Haris] Romas, [Vasilis] Nemeas made sure to fill the television programming with series full of fun and humor, that we still enjoy

²³ I also find Konstantinos Antonatos' article very interesting and relevant here. With the clickbait title “Τί έχουν τα έρμα και ψοφάνε; [What's up with those poor things and they kick the bucket?]" (2017), Antonatos discusses the ‘odd’ television behavior of Greek audiences in the years of austerity. More specifically, the journalist seeks an explanation for why Greek viewers ‘skip’ contemporary television comedies, and instead, turn to MEGA and other television channels whose broadcast comedies has been consumed several times over the course of the years. While his article intends to play around with this idea, rather than provide a ‘serious’ argument, Antonatos, much like Kokouvas, finally reaches a conclusion that idealizes the scripts and ‘high quality’ of past productions, while he easily dismisses the new ones as uninspiring and dull.

[to watch]. Maybe because in the ‘gappy’ landscape of today’s television, the eras of innocence seem more entertaining and fill us with memories.

(Kokouvas, 2013)²⁴

In his academic article, “Is the End of Television Coming to an End?” Jérôme Bourdon argues that the metamorphosis of television into a past medium can “easily trigger nostalgia in a contemporary age, obsessed with memory and increasingly defined by a longing for an idealized past” (2018, p. 8). If Bourdon’s argument is transposed into the Greek television criticism of this period, then the appeal of old comedies for authors like Kokouvas may appear to lie in the affective responses and social dimensions that certain products of the past generate to individuals with the passage of time.

Apart from those who align themselves along this side of ‘smooth’ criticism, there are a number of journalists who take a polemic stance and concentrate on the potentially pernicious effects of old comedy shows on today’s screens. So while many of these comedies are popular and gain high ratings whenever they are rebroadcast, their content and relevancy in contemporary society have been called into question.

Well-known journalist Aris Alexandris, in his opinion paper, “Η ελληνική τηλεόραση σήμερα [Greek Television Today]” (2012), questions the fruitfulness of television reruns and wonders why popular television is so eager to turn to the past to tell stories—of dubious quality—that have already been told. Using the famous

²⁴ “Η πρώτη δεκαετία της ελληνικής ιδιωτικής τηλεόρασης υπήρξε και η πιο χρυσή εποχή της ελληνικής μυθοπλασίας. Οι πιο δυνατές «πένες» της σεναριογραφίας πήραν φωτιά και ονόματα όπως οι Ρήγας, Αποστόλου, Ρέππας, Παπαθανασίου, Παπαπέτρου, Παπαδοπούλου, Ρώμας, Νεμέας φρόντισαν να γεμίσουν το τηλεοπτικό πρόγραμμα με σειρές γεμάτες κέφι και χιούμορ που ακόμη και σήμερα απολαμβάνουμε. Ίσως γιατί στο «κενό» σκηνικό της σημερινής τηλεόρασης, οι εποχές της αθωότητας μοιάζουν πιο διασκεδαστικές και μας γεμίζουν αναμνήσεις.”

sitcom *To Πετιπέ* [*The Penthouse*] (MEGA, 1990-1992) as the main television product upon which he substantiates his argument, Alexandris states:

The ‘staleness’ would have acquired different dimensions of spirituality and completely different affective colors had it not been compulsorily combined with the viewing of terrible television series from the 90s [...] which have no reason to exist. The cultural demise that permeates Greek television since its inception is a direct accomplice in the crime of spiritual decline and the subsequent social stupefaction of a whole generation (or even more).

(Alexandris, 2012)²⁵

Towards a similar direction, Nikos Bovolos’ article, “Πόσο έχει επηρεαστεί η κοινωνία από τις Ελληνικές σειρές; [To What Extent Has Society Been Influenced by Greek Television Series]” (2015), reflects on some of the most iconic shows of the past and puts their themes and narratives in focus. In his discussion of famous male and female characters who have appeared in comedies such as *Και οι Παντρεμένοι Έχουν Ψυχή* [*Even Married [Guys] Have Soul*] (ANT1, 1997-2000) and *Εκείνες κι εγώ* [*Them [fem.] and I*] (ANT1, 1996-1998), Bovolos focuses on the construction of gender roles and describes how patriarchal ideology oppresses women and other non-hegemonic groups while, at the same time, male heterosexuality remains unharmed.

Although Kokouvas, Alexandris, and Bovolos work to understand and interpret television comedies in completely different ways, it seems to me they all

²⁵ “Η κλεισούρα θα αποκτούσε διαφορετικές διαστάσεις πνευματικότητας και εντελώς διαφορετικά συναισθηματικά χρώματα αν δεν συνδυαζόταν αναγκαστικά με τη θέαση άθλιων τηλεοπτικών σειρών από τα 90’s [...] χωρίς λόγο ύπαρξης. Η πολιτιστική κατάντια που διατρέχει την ελληνική τηλεόραση από καταβολής της ιστορίας της είναι άμεσος συνεργός στο έγκλημα της πνευματικής παρακμής και της συνεπαγόμενης κοινωνικής αποβλάκωσης μιας ολόκληρης γενιάς (ή και περισσότερων).”

approach the genre through a magnifying glass. For Kokouvas and other like-minded journalists, old Greek comedies are envisioned through a nostalgic prism that appears to embellish potential ‘imperfections’ and rub smooth sharp edges through a false patina of memory. For Alexandris and Bovolos, however, the same television products are perceived as unavoidably ‘claustrophobic’ and heteronormative, going as far as to argue that potential exposure to such images may have dire and direct effects on their viewers. Although I can find some slight glimpses of ‘truth’ in both ideological positions, I believe that we must explore television texts—as well as any other cultural text—critically and not only nostalgically. At the same time, I argue that comedies defy single and monolithic representations and are more complex than Bovolos and Alexandris advocate here. The following subsection proffers a brief overview of queer reading practices as popularized in the context of media and television studies. Later, it advances the main influences and rationale behind the queer reading practice proposed in the four comedy texts under examination. Finally, I reflect on examining television in ways that extend beyond the area of gender and sexuality.

Queering the Popular

In her monograph entitled *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*, Sullivan (2003) states:

[...] there is no single way to queer popular culture. Rather, the queering of popular cultural has taken multifarious forms, has focused on different issues, and has drawn on a range of theoretical positions, often to contradictory or conflicting ends. (p. 189)

Nearly two decades have passed since Sullivan wrote the quotation above, and yet her words continue to have relevance in today's academic scholarship. Queering constitutes a non-unified 'method' that has impacted diverse areas of research. With its roots in Roland Barthes' and Michael Foucault's works,²⁶ queering stems from the shortened version of the phrase *queer reading* (Barker & Scheele, 2016).

Additionally, queering involves placing texts outside heteronormative borders and probing contradictions and ambiguities in their interpretation (Dhaenens, Bauwel, & Biltreyst, 2008, p. 335; see also Hayward, 2000; Spivak, 1999). Further, in its application in the area of television studies, queering can be about "making the object of media studies unfamiliar and hence expanding its field to include queer practices, discourses and objects" (Kroker & Kroker, 2013, p. 182). This can encompass, among others, processes of queering television itself as a medium (Davis & Needham, 2009; Joyrich, 2014), television's conventions (Sarkissian, 2014), particular texts (Chambers, 2009; Dhaenens, 2013), spaces of television consumption (Malici, 2014), viewing practices (Kooijman, 2009), and audiences (Bolton, 2013; Parsemain, 2019). As this project explores textual queerness, it is useful to proffer a snapshot of how queer theory and queer reading practices have impinged on the study of media texts in general and television fiction in particular.

This dissertation considers Vito Russo one of the pioneers to approach media from a queer perspective. In his encyclopedic review of representations of lesbians

²⁶ Roland Barthes' and Micheal Foucault's work have been influential in the development of queer theory and the formation of queer reading practices. Roland Barthes, in his famous essay "The Death of the Author" (1977) rejects the practice of including the intentions and 'biography' of an author in an interpretation of a text and proposes a disentanglement of the product of writing from its producer. In a quite different vein, Michael Foucault adopts the term *discourse* to contest the "author-function" (Compagno, 2012, p. 44). While acknowledging the importance of having a person next to the text in order to construct "a certain unity of writing" (1984, p. 111) when reading a text, Foucault is interested in the text itself and its position within a particular cultural and historical context, only within which it acquires meaning.

and gay men in Hollywood, Russo opened up *The Celluloid Closet* (1981), revealing homosexual images hinted at in otherwise heterosexual filmic texts. Grounded on the assumption that overt articulation of homosexuality amid censorship could not be permitted, Russo (1981) advanced the notion of ‘gay sensibility’ and used it as “a second sight that [would] translate silently what the world sees and what the actuality may be” (p. 92).

If Russo’s ‘gay sensibility’ constituted a silent response to symbolic annihilation and a strategy of survival, then camp, in its intensity and loudness emerged as a “fearsome weapon” (Medhurst, 1997, p. 275) and a sensibility “that delights in impertinence” (Mallan & McGillis, 2005, p. 3). Susan Sontag’s famous essay “Notes on Camp” introduced camp as an aesthetic strategy, aiming “to upset conservative beliefs, practices, and forms of representation” (1964, p. 4). Freta Johnson (1995) and Jack Halberstam (2001) demonstrate this by employing camp in works that challenged the ‘seriousness’ and ‘naturalness’ of heterosexuality in popular and mainstream films.

Another perspective to study audiovisual texts is Alexander Doty’s queer reading ‘model.’ Doty conceptualized queerness as a practice that did not exclusively concern gay and lesbian audiences. *Making Things Perfectly Queer* (1993) deals with queer moments that occur in acts of production or acts of reception—moments that, according to Sullivan’s (2003) reading of Doty, “destabilize heteronormativity and the meaning and identities it engenders, by bringing to light all that is disavowed by, and yet integral to, heteronormative logic” (p. 191). Doty’s analysis offers a renovated perspective in the study of mass communication and has influenced generations of scholars working on the queer politics of media. Following Doty, Arthurs (2004), Becker (2006), Chambers (2009), Davis and Needham (2009), and Lipton (2008)

have engaged in reading practices of television fiction, which reveal that the medium can and does challenge heteronormativity.

Concerning the area of genre, Doty's analysis of popular texts has been pivotal in establishing a new vocabulary for comedy. More precisely, some of the first studies on situation comedy were mainly concerned with the genre's conservative formula (Bryant, 1990; Hamamoto, 1989; Mintz, 1985). Devices like the laugh track and the three-camera setup as well as the kind of stories, narrative tropes, and stereotypical characters that sitcoms typically entail, led David Marc characterize the genre as "a representational art committed to harmony and consensus" (Marc, 1992, p. 118). However, for Doty and other scholars who followed the changes in the media landscape of the 1990s in the United States, television comedy could be understood as accommodating of "incredibly progressive" moments within its narrative structure (Hilton-Morrow & Battles, 2015, p. 213).

Recent scholarship has further challenged the conservative character of comedy by revisiting its basic formula and assumedly rigid grammar. For example, Tison Pugh's *The Queer Fantasies of the American Family Sitcom* (2018), as its title proclaims, brings family, sitcom, and queerness together. Moreover, it affirms that the sitcom's deeply heteronormative narrative frameworks "are [so] structurally incapable of suturing over their aporias and contradictions [...] that their surface normativity cannot withstand the steady erosion of their symptomatic queerness" (p. 2). It is under this rejuvenated perspective that the sitcom can be, as Susanne Reichl and Mark Stein (2005) contended, "cheeky, humorous and culturally ambiguous" (p. 14). At the same time, it also discloses, as John Hartley (2015) argued, "bizarre [...] family set-ups, no matter what their surface 'smileyness' suggested about 'family values'" (p. 97). In *Queering Gender* (2018), Rosie White makes a similar contention to Pugh and

Hartley, arguing that television comedy is capable of “upsetting heteronormativity as a compulsory practice and even gesturing toward other possibilities regarding gender identities and sexual desires” (p. 3). The vast possibilities that White (2018) envisions in comedy pronounces its potentiality to queer the ‘normality’ of any concept of gendered identity, thus making it clear that no comedy and no fictional character—irrespective of their gender, age, and sexual orientation—can ever be safe (p. 2).

This dissertation follows a slightly different approach from Pugh and White. Although I agree with the above writers in that the sitcom and comedy retain an ambivalent position towards heteronormativity, their works do not elucidate how queer fictional worlds are being written and read in the genre of (situation) comedy. Of course, I am not implying that Pugh and White alone fell into error in failing to elaborate on the model of queer reading they put into use. In fact, such omissions are common insofar as queer theories “are not literary theories in the strict sense, but only partly adequate, as a tool for literary analysis” (Kubowitz, 2012, p. 204).

My analysis in this dissertation partly complies with Hanna Kubowitz’s assertion that it is possible to create a model of queer reading that may serve as a basis for better understanding the forms of knowledge that can be extracted from a text.

According to Kubowitz (2012):

Having a model of queer reading and writing strategies at hand will help us answer questions such as: What does the reader who comes up with a queer reading of a text do differently from the reader who comes up with a non-queer reading of a text? How can both readers be “right” in their contradictory interpretations (i.e. “right” in the sense of being able to offer plausible

readings)? In which aspects do their reading strategies differ? And what could be potential reasons for why they apply different reading strategies? (p. 204)

Far from answering all the questions that Kubowitz poses and placing the openness of queer theory into a box, the model of reading I propose here seeks to map out textual patterns and narrative tropes endemic in comedy texts that “can speak in several languages” (Kamm & Neumann, 2016, p. 8). This means that I understand ambivalence as an intrinsic characteristic of the genre that may activate different responses to different viewers.

In other words, if according to Glyn Davis and Gary Needham (2009) television “has been configured as a domestic medium, and as such, closely associated with the home, the family, the quotidian” (p. 6), then the Greek television comedy genre may have the potential to harbor themes and patterns unorthodox and nonconformist to the institutional logic from which they were broadcast. Although earlier attempts to theorize television fiction in Greece focused primarily on the comedy’s engagement with “family issues, relationships between the protagonists, mishaps and daily problems” (Koukoutsaki-Monnier, 2010, p. 431), I shift my attention to new publications that have slowly begun to establish a grammar for television fiction that points to this unorthodoxy. For instance, in focusing on MEGA channel, Christina Adamou (2020) argues that comedies produced in the early years of privatization of the Greek television channels have been particularly daring and have incorporated “homosexual men, women in erotic triangles, or women in love with younger men, love at the age of fifty, professional women or women trapped in

dead-end relations” (p. 159).²⁷ Adamou’s opinion matches Kyriakos’. While Kyriakos (2019) agrees on the circulation of heterosexual characters whose over-the-top and eccentric performances incited queer pleasures to the viewers, he locates queerness as something mainly transposed onto straight male and female bodies and attributes such strategies to “censorial and prohibitive mechanisms imposed by the administration team of television stations” (p. 29).²⁸

Thus, although such emerging readings discuss patterns and themes of the genre and expose how comedy may deconstruct heteronormative rules, it remains a genre that scholars ought to examine in its specificity. My point is that television is a medium characterized by particular institutional logics, production incentives, and creative freedoms. Thus, the questions of how the television of a country may construct its content onscreen and to what end, depend on a variety of factors. Current literature in the United States and Australia, for example, has shown that subscription-based networks are innovative and radical in terms of content (Himberg, 2017; Parsemain 2019). By contrast, television industries like the one in Greece, which is governed by a mixed economic model of government and advertising funds and controlled by the National Radio-Television Consulate, is more likely to rely on ratings and less likely to show unabashed images of queerness (Myrtou, Poulakidakos & Nakou, 2016, p. 115; Kyriakos, 2019, p. 29). At the same time, it is these potential restrictions in terms of televisual permissibility which, as I argue, have possibly turned creators to infuse their comedies with textual signals that readers may trace and read through a queer perspective.

²⁷ “Ομοφυλόφιλοι άντρες, γυναίκες σε ερωτικά τρίγωνα ή ερωτευμένες με μικρότερους άνδρες, έρωτες στα πενήντα, γυναίκες καριέρας ή γυναίκες εγκλωβισμένες σε αδιέξοδες σχέσεις [...]”

²⁸ “[...] εξαιτίας των λογοκριτικών ή των απαγορευτικών μηχανισμών που επιβάλλουν οι διοικήσεις των τηλεοπτικών σταθμών.”

In this dissertation, I look at four patterns or tropes that I have identified in television (situation) comedies. The first pattern—queer codes, symbols, stereotypes, and allusions to queer culture— may entail camp characters, use of gay slang or references to queer persons and signals. The second trope – that of queer ambiguity – is related to a character’s oscillation between queerness and straightness, double entendres, puns, and innuendos. The remaining two tropes – that of the homosocial continuum extended and the heteronormative matrix suspended – are related to intimacies that oscillate between homosociality and homoeroticism and/or ways of living that reverse marginality and disrupt heteronormative institutions.

According to Kamm and Neuman, “comedies often portray alternative, marginal, and eccentric patterns of behavior thus offering unprecedented ways of depicting and experiencing the world” (2016, p. 3). As Hillary Dannenberg further supports in her article “Marketing the British Situation Comedy” (2004), comedies feature characters “who manage to transgress social norms and move beyond the conventions of their specific class, gender, ethnicity, or occupation” (p. 172). The conventions I wish to explore in this dissertation are those that may contain the representation of the male and female characters’ ‘maneuvering’ inside the texts, often placing heterosexual men in positions of authority, while the rest of the bodies are cast as naive, entrapped, and/or in need of surveillance. The unprecedented ways of depicting and experiencing the world that Kamm and Neuman describe above presuppose narratives and stories that may allow the male and female characters to change themselves and/or the fictional world they inhabit. Yet, the degree of transformation, ambivalence and ambiguity that these narratives may entail can vary significantly depending on the “comedy” in question. As a rule, according to Jason Hellerman, “the comedy genre covers any work in film and television whose general

purpose is to create humor and intentional laughs for the audience” (2019). While this definition may hold true, genre theory as well as the study and categorization of genres is knotty and open to different interpretations. In his monumental book, *The Television Genre* (2015), Glen Creeber openly interrogates generic purity in relation to television programs and argues that more than any other media genre, “Television genres and programming formats are notoriously hybridized” (2015, p. 9; see also, Allen, 1989; Feuer, 1992). If we take this argument under consideration, then the analysis of “comedy”—through the implementation of flexible theoretical tools—can not only produce a rejuvenation in the way we study genres, it can also provide a different set of answers and meanings to the texts under examination.

The four television texts I focus on in this dissertation are labeled as “comedies.” However, my quotation marks in the word “comedy” in the title, as well as in different parts of this dissertation, indicate that “comedy” can be divided into subgenres and even meld into other genres. The case of *The Unbearables* for instance, which was produced in 1991, constitutes a typical model of television situation comedy (sitcom), or in other words, a domesticom, because it depicts a specific set of characters and takes place primarily inside the house. *Dolce Vita*, which made it to the airwaves four years after *The Unbearables*, contains many features from both domestic and workplace comedies, yet influences from the old Greek cinema and Yanis Dalianidis’ famous 1960s musicals are not absent. As years go by, however, television comedies become more and more blurred, thus confirming the impact of particular temporalities in the evolution and intensification of genre hybridity within texts (see, Allen 1989; Mittel, 2004); so in the case of *Hara’s Café*, which was produced in 2003, the funny storylines are accompanied with brave doses of drama that propel the diegesis and the actions of the main characters. Moving one step

further, Yorgos Kapoutzidis' *In the Nick of Time* constitutes a genuine example of a hybrid text since it brings together comedy with melodrama, adventure, and mystery. As I have hopefully showed so far, the comedic elements of these “comedy” texts are on no account uniform. Thus, far from one genre, comedy throughout this project is only a category used to avoid analytical arbitrariness. This means that while some texts, particularly the ones produced during the 1990s, are treated as relatively ‘pure’ genres, other texts in this dissertation are better analyzed through the exploration of a mixing of genres or a focus on other genres outside comedy (*In the Nick of Time*). Nevertheless, the common strand that I find in all texts under examination—which may in fact operate as another way of classifying these texts—is the presence of the family—in the broadest possible sense of the term. As Gary Needham notes in his foundational television study “Scheduling Normativity” (2009), “the family is the cultural expression of television’s representational logic played out in most television genres and formats” (p. 146). Here, families of different shapes, sizes, and structures populate the comedies; indeed, monoparental families, extended family networks, couples without children, and groups of friends that operate as families make their appearance in a variety of houses and landscapes. The presence of a variety of families in the texts and the total eclipse of the nuclear family, which has traditionally served as the cornerstone of Greek society and the ideal type of family arrangement, tells something meaningful about the comedies and their creators’ intentions. Comedies and “sitcoms”, according to Trine S. Willert and Gerasimus Katsan, constitute Greece’s most “characteristic disseminator of popular culture and can be seen as society’s mirror” (2019, p. 3). Although I have elaborated on the influential, popular, and even classic status that many comedies of previous decades enjoy in the country, I believe that comedies do not provide clear images of a given society. It is

for this reason that I envision these texts as small windows—and not mirrors—that open and close, thus allowing the periodic articulation of resistant, rebellious and unexpected voices to emerge. The characters who show up from these windows shout to express their disobedience to patriarchal norms, but they may also make their voices sound fragile and weak, in an attempt to unmask the frailty of this system that obligates them to act in gendered and absolute ways. The television texts under examination display a number of characters who face and resist the rules and regulations imposed upon them in different ways. These regulations may derive from official and unofficial institutions and may include the privileging of marriage and procreation, a display of patriotic and hegemonic masculinity, a compulsory investment in appropriate expressions of femininity and womanhood, and the unequal occupation of spaces. The texts under examination present a number of representations of women as widows, divorcées, tomboys, and housewives. There are also a number of men who are represented as homosexuals, asexuals, womanizers, conservative patriots, and breadwinners. Some of these characters, as I will try to show, may reveal their willingness to distance themselves from conventional culture and travel into different ‘worlds’ such as the village (*Hara’s Café*), the exterior of the house (*The Unbearables*), and the city (*In the Nick of Time*), by revealing a soft heteroflexible self (*The Unbearables*), by denying to conform to appropriate and societally expected enactments of femininity (*In the Nick of Time*), by creating gay–straight alliances (*The Unbearables*), and friendship networks (*Dolce Vita; In the Nick of Time*), and by speaking in nonsensical languages and leading otherworldly ways of living in this world (*Hara’s Café*).

Queer Theory and Intersectionality Theory

This dissertation rereads popular television shows and its characters, zooming in on areas relating to gender and sexuality. This means that I explore the following topics: femininities and masculinities; gender dynamics and roles; and sexualities. Equally significant, however, is the imperative of this work to recognize the existence of aspects of identity beyond gender. Studying television fiction reveals that characters are not only gendered and sexed but characterized by other markers such as age, race, nationality, disability, and class. Robert Kolker tellingly argues that main characters in situation comedies are equipped with dominant characteristics, often stereotypical, which in turn define their dramatic composition, actions, and interactions with surrounding characters (2009, p. 192). Thus, a television researcher ought to be familiar with a given fictional character ‘inhabiting’ a television comedy and able to acknowledge “what kind of questions you can legitimately pose of it, what kind of knowledge you can reasonably expect it to yield” (Dyer, 1979, p. 1). This means that, depending on the dimensions of identity to which comedy texts themselves give prominence, it is possible for a researcher to choose conceptual frameworks that they consider most relevant and efficient.

Arguably, queer and intersectionality theory have emerged as valuable theoretical frameworks, impacting decisions for research design and methodology in television fiction (Haggins, 2018; Meyer, 2010; Spieldenner & Glenn, 2014). Both theories have forwarded “conceptual frameworks and empirical analyses wrestling with the nature of identity categories organizations of power... and social location” (Chan, Steen, Howard & Arshad, 2019, p. 61). Furthermore, for scholars like Ava Laure Parsemain, queer is considered intersectional because it traverses overlapping identities and intersecting forms of oppression (2019, p. 2). Nevertheless, both queer

and intersectionality theory have different approaches and interests, due to their distinct legacies and theoretical underpinnings (Lugg & Murphy, 2014). Queer theory emerged as a paradigm of research devoted to experiences of gender identity and sexuality and as a framework rejecting identity categories (Johnston, 2018). By contrast, intersectionality theory concentrates on inequities and connections between social identities, advancing an agenda towards understanding those identities and environments that produce power, whilst seeking points to bring about social change (Collins & Bilge, 2016).

In this dissertation, I use a queer and feminist intersectional approach in one particular comedy text that consistently raises multiple identity dimensions and makes them a recurrent theme of the script. More precisely, there is a body politics in the way that Christina in *Dolce Vita* is constructed as an object rather than a subject in her own story. Christina's body is not only gendered in the sense that she is coded female and rich, but motherhood and widowhood also act as "border agents by making visible the cultural boundaries that are not just disciplining, but sexing and essentializing female bodies in a male-coded environment" (Åhäll, 2015, p. 57). Thus, far from being a mere tool for representing multiple dimensions, in chapters like *Dolce Vita*, intersectionality theory attempts to move away from the stock of knowledge already available about Greek television fiction and serves as "a call for increasingly detailed accounting of the structural forces that coordinate patterns of injustice as entrenched and persistent ones" (Duong, 2012, p. 372). According to David Halperin (2003, p. 343):

If queer theory is going to have the sort of future worth cherishing, we will have to find ways of renewing its radical potential-and by that I mean not devising some new and more avant-garde theoretical formulation of it, but

quite concretely, reinventing its capacity to startle, to surprise, to help up think what has not yet been thought.

Like Halperin (2003), I contend that intersectionality is something that motivates one to (re)think and problematize the kinds of characters and themes that have been incorporated into the Greek visual culture, as well as those characters and identities that have remained underexplored or completely disavowed. Combining queer and intersectionality theory thus responds to the promise to surprise and startle, not through a sole focus on gender and sexuality but through a dissection of overdetermined identities that often seem to pass as natural and authentic (Carastathis, 2016).

(Re)Doing Masculinities and Femininities in an Era of Narrow Politics

Although I trace instances in the texts where female and male characters destabilize the heteronormative matrix by enacting unusual masculinities and femininities that diverge from the norm, I recognize that these texts are produced during a particular period in modern Greek history marked by specific national, financial, and cultural events and values (e.g., Lyberaki, 2016; Papadogiannis, 2017; Papanikolaou, 2018a).

Indeed, after a long period of financial stagnation, Greece strove to recover and ‘catch up’ with the rest of Europe in the early 1990s (Bryant, Garganas, & Tavlas, 2001). With the ultimate aim to gain access to the common monetary union, the Greek State made a series of institutional changes that reshaped its treatment of gender, among other areas. More specifically, the reformation of the anachronistic family law, which placed the man in the position of the head and leader of the household, ceased

to exist in 1983 (Kantsa, 2014, pp. 820-821). The same year, the parochial tradition of dowry was abolished, and both spouses began to claim equal participation in the property acquired during marriage, as well as the same responsibilities to family needs and children's upbringing (Psarra & Repoussi, 2017). These institutional changes, coupled with Greek feminist and LGBT activists' contributions in these debates, encouraged a vital discussion and problematization of the dimension of gender and sexuality in society, yet they did not—and could not possibly—effect a sea of change overnight.²⁹ In what appears to be an uneven gender and sexual liberalization, it is no surprise that the television texts produced in the 1990s and even 2000s continued to raise much of the same debates that pre-existed in society, however in rather open and equivocal ways. So, in the comedy texts' themes, the culture of marriage, domesticity and procreation, patriarchal family structures, and faith in the Greek orthodox church and in the nation may coexist with xenomania and consumerism, as well as deviant and libidinous behavior. By analogy, the texts portray a wide range of male and female characters and even include homosexuals. Under no occasion, however, can these characters and texts be conceived of as ardently feminist or unabashedly queer.

Some cultural theorists give justice to a number of Greek media texts of the yesteryear and argue that it is possible to identify important feminist and queer glimpses in them, if we study these texts from the vantage point of today (Chairetis, 2017; Fessas & Kosma, 2017; Kaklamanidou, 2017).³⁰ Others, however, find severe

²⁹ I use the term *LGBT* and omit the *Q* (for *queer* or *questioning*) because in the 1990s, this term was not particularly known or used in Greece.

³⁰ In her article "Introduction to the Greek sitcom" (2017), Betty Kaklamanidou suggests that within the traditional gendered genre of the sitcom, instances of gender equality and empowerment are often available. Using *Οι Τρεις Χάριτες* [*The Three Graces*] as a case study, Kaklamanidou identifies a wide array of female representations that defy gender roles and social conventions, carving out independent and emancipatory pathways for women. Nikitas Fessas and Yvonne Kosma (2017) employ a feminist psychoanalytic theoretical framework in order to revisit and revise two Greek noir films which were produced in different chronological periods, but can still be viewed as potentially subversive with

gaps and weaknesses in the ways that Greek feminist and queer subjects used to and continue to circulate both onscreen and off (Faubion, 1993; Kyriakos, 2001, 2017). Dimitris Papanikolaou for instance, conceptualizes the 1980s and 1990s as a time period “characterized by the lack of public visibility for queer cultures, the lack of proper debate around issues of gender and sexuality, and the relative absence of a visible archive of non-normative sexual expressions in the Greek public sphere” (2018b, p. 169).³¹ LGBTQ activist Irene Petropoulou covers a shorter chronological period starting from the 1990s until 2004 and similarly contends that Greek society, as well as television,³² “remains coldly indifferent towards issues of gender rights and equalities” (2019).³³ This point has already been made by journalists like Bovolos and Alexandris who express preoccupations about the circulation of past representations on today’s screens, implying that the images produced at that time are inherently incompatible and discordant with present-day ideas and television. Yet, it is to this latter area of discussion (and not so much to the nostalgic rhetoric in Kokouvas’ and Antonatos’ articles) that I want to contribute in this dissertation, taking under serious consideration the spatiotemporal context from which we (ought to) watch, consume, examine, and speak about cultural products of different times and kinds.

In their editorial article “New Queer Greece: Performance, politics and identity in crisis” (2018), Dimitris Papanikolaou and Vasiliki Kolocotroni use the Greek crisis as a defining moment in Greek history that “brought to the fore debates [.

regards to the way they represent gender and sexuality. In a similar way, yet focusing on a particular case study, I argue that Yorgos Katakouzinou’s film *Angelos [Angel]* replays and rejects heteronormative values, thus creating a cinematic space where its characters (both leading and supporting) assume different roles and reflect broad and diverse desires, sexualities, and domestic–public arrangements vis-à-vis heteronormativity.

³¹ Although I adopt a different conceptual framework from the one that Papanikolaou employs in relation to the study of the queer past of Greece during the 1980s and 1990s, I agree that in the 2000s, queer expression became more visible and active.

³² In her article, Petropoulou implies that while representations of homosexuality are available on television, they are limited and sterilized (2019).

³³ “[...] στέκεται παγερά αδιάφορη σε θέματα δικαιωματικής ισότητας.”

. .] that had been considered either as resolved or of peripheral importance in the past” (pp. 147–148). In his personal article in the same special issue Papanikolaou explains how the “crisisapes” have appeared pivotal in energizing legislative changes on sex and gender identity, as well as increased visibility of feminist and queer collectivities in Athens and beyond. At the same time, though, he makes the tentative argument that all this bottom-up “mobilization is happening alongside, or rather together with [. . .] a strengthening of a very specific and dominant discourse that precisely undermines the possibility of gender/queer political presence as too identitarian, too narrow, too enclosed in its own agenda” (2018b, p. 170). There is plenty of truth in what Papanikolaou says here, but perhaps we could reverse the argument and support that the strengthening of these “too identitarian and too narrow discourses” do not only stem from dominant groups in society, but also from members of feminist and LGBTQ movements whose ‘public interventions’ and critiques may at times work against their very own interests. In order to make my point clear and relevant to the topic of my dissertation, I turn to the relatively recent launching of a television comedy, whose airing—and theme—coincided with the heated debate and subsequent signing of the human rights bill, which allowed civil partnership agreements between same-sex couples in Greece.

The news about the upcoming appearance of a middle-aged queer couple on the television comedy *Μη Με Σκας* [*Don't you Grate on me*] (ALPHA, 2015), with Yanis Bezos' comeback in a queer role, was met with great excitement by Greek audiences. However, what followed the comedy's premiere—which was meant to be one of the three episodes airing—was a barrage of negative responses from LGBTQ journalists, fans, and TV columnists, all of whom lamented and condemned the assumedly outdated and persistently harmful depictions of queerness on television

(Melas, 2015; Palioura, 2015). Aside from differences with regards to their time of production, the public shaming of *Don't you Grate on me* (that resulted to the series' cancellation) does not differ much from the criticism that older comedies such as *The Penthouse* (Alexandris, 2012), *Even Married [Guys] Have Soul* (Bovolos, 2015), and many others have received from a number of contemporary critics (e.g., Antonopoulos, 2004; Grammeli, 2009). In fact, this line of thought, typically accompanied with “an oft-sounded note of nagging insistence or disappointment” (Villarejo 2014, p. 3) reveals our re-entrée into what David Greven understands as “a period of adamant insistence on positive and of accurate representations” (2017, p. 6). As a result of this highly politicized and neo-conservative climate that dominates contemporary discussions about media, the texts of the past that appear on our small screens occupy an almost impossible space, because their values and themes land clumsily in a different temporal context with new terms and conditions of permissibility. I consider that judging older television shows based on current ideological systems and values to blame them as problematic is pretty unfair venture, yet this might be even more the case in the genre of comedy, whose codes and conventions are prone to change. Drawing on relevant works from the field of comedy and humor studies (e.g., Critchley, 2002; Mulkay, 1988; Pickering, 2001), Kamm and Neumann write:

Different frames of perception induce members of different cultures to interpret events, situations, and contexts extremely differently. In plain terms, what may be funny for some may be offensive for others. Not least because stereotypes and comic meanings are frequently imbued with associations and values that may reach well back into the past, the ethical line and social acceptance of jokes has to be negotiated over and over again. (2016, p. 13)

Indeed, some of the texts I analyze here diverge significantly from what we consider ‘politically correct’ representations and raise a number of red flags in the ways they integrate gender and sexuality in their scripts. For instance, a text such as *The Unbearables* brings to the fore an effeminate gay character whose stereotypical portrayal reinstates a long genealogy of mis-represented. Additionally, it portrays under-represented homosexualities, which were available in Greek cinema of the 60s and Greek theatre (Kyriakos, 2019). The female protagonist of *Hara’s Café* is a character whose feminine actions—despite the absence of a husband authority figure in her life—are criticized by others inside her community. At the same time, male characters in the same television comedy are often represented as holding significantly superior positions, with females often restricted to the roles of the obedient mother and housewife. I remain cognizant of these discourses surrounding masculinities and femininities in these shows, but I also take into account the institutional logics of the medium from which they emerge, the time they were produced, and—once again—the genre to which they belong. Dennis Tredy’s research on 1970s American television is particularly useful here, because far from dismissing the American audio-visual heritage as politically incorrect, Tredy excavates a degree of social critique underneath this in-your-face narrative impertinence. He explains:

When looking back at the popular American situation comedies of the 1970’s, one notices a vast network of programs aimed at framing social discourse and at helping America come to term with its own, changing image. This was done through a restaging of the political and social ills of the generation as comedic teleplays, thereby using laughter as a vehicle towards social awareness and

unwitting change or personal growth, and by recycling popular (and unpopular) clichés and stereotypes (the bigot, the racist, the bleeding-heart liberal, the closed-minded conservative, the touchy feminist, etc.) so as to undermine them while appearing to reinforce them. (2013, p. 9)

Much like Tredy, I suggest that not all comedy texts of the 1990s and 2000s should be judged so seriously, because feminist and queer ideas might reside in them, in non-explicit ways. The texts under examination in this dissertation are characterized by an ebb and flow pattern: feminist and queer politics are present, but in insidious ways, palpable mainly when we seek them. With this in mind, I believe that while we must be critical of misogyny (*Hara's Café*), macho nationalism/patriotism (*Hara's Café*), homophobia (*The Unbearables*), and discrimination on the grounds of age (*Dolce Vita*), we also need to contemplate that these texts may allow for competing, conflicting, and contradictory femininities and masculinities at play.

These inconsistencies in the ways female and male characters are represented onscreen are conspicuous in several of the texts under examination. For example, a text such as *The Unbearables* does indeed depict a homosexual man in enclosed spaces. Nevertheless, his stay inside the house does not render him a victim, *a priori*. Indeed, in many instances, he can collaborate with female characters and challenge the patriarchal system and the institution of the family from within by conspiring, lies, and masquerades. Within this seemingly oppressive landscape, a gap is therefore created that allows homosexual and heterosexual female characters to devise a number of strategies and plots that can destabilize patriarchy and the domestic space they inhabit. Differentiated patriarchies are at work in many of these families and to

borrow Tsaliki's formulation, "high-status positionalities" can be attained in the most hopeless spaces (2000, p. 221). Thus, rather than regarding these television comedies as burdens of the past, which are doomed to heteropatriarchy and/or superficial humor, I posit that a bottom-up approach attentive to minor details and moments in the texts may reveal the co-circulation of feminist and queer dynamics.

Time and the concept of performing womanhood and manhood are key to this dissertation. Time, seen through a poststructuralist lens, is understood as a system that bridges and mixes the past with the present in non-linear ways. Since these television comedies are products of the past and bearers of the historical universe during in which they were made and seen, the rebroadcast and rereading of the very same television products at different times demonstrate the opportunities that television comedies afford queer scholars interested in interrogating established frameworks of knowledge production. According to Gary Needham:

In television time is bent, the progression of time is reversed and resisted, new temporal moments are re-opened and re-examined; time, like history, is not laid to rest—indeed, perhaps these temporal expressions of television are somehow queer in their refusal to abide by the linear and teleological. More than any other medium or screen-based form, I would argue that it is television that can fully embrace the capacity to engage with the concept of queer temporality, quite simply because television's ontology is temporal. (2009, p. 153)

Time therefore emerges as an important tool to trouble the logics of television and the television products' seemingly-sealed histories. Yet, this is not another academic bluster; older comedies, when lifted out of their spatio-temporal contexts,

may allow the possibility to expand the understanding of how these texts may have initially been perceived and broaden how they may presently be read in the light of their resemblance to more contemporary productions (Chairetis, 2018). In simple words, the (omni)presence of older Greek classic television comedies, both in the form of television reruns but also on the Internet, and the Greek public sphere gives these texts the opportunity to be viewed, compared with other national and international popular culture texts, and examined through the prism of feminist and queer methodological frameworks.

The underlying rationale behind this dissertation is that *popular* Greek television fiction constitutes an archive that is more easily accessible than ever before in the history of Greek media, that is among the most-discussed ones in journalistic and cybernetic circles, and that is simultaneous, the least-studied within academia. Far from diagnosing this condition as “disheartening” though, Aitaki suggests the implementation of “interesting, relevant and appropriate approaches” so that Greek television research “escapes a niche status and emerges as conceptually equipped and confident to provide answers to both small and large questions” (2018a, p. 23). Like Aitaki, I find many reasons to be optimistic about the empowering potential that the (in)visibility of Greek television fiction offers, especially in the field of gender studies and queer theory.

The marriage of queer theory and television in the international bibliography, despite the differences and potential incompatibilities between the two partners, is a relatively long and productive one (Chairetis, 2018; Chambers, 2009; Poole, 2017; Pugh, 2018; White, 2018).³⁴ Although the use of queer theory in Greek television

³⁴ For a meticulous analysis of the relationship between queer theory and television studies, see Ahn, Himberg and Young (2014).

studies introduces uncharted waters, if these waters are navigated critically, the creative spirit that both television comedy and queer theory share can incite new and interesting directions in the study of Greek television and popular culture. Therefore, throughout this work, I seek to excavate the queer potential of comedy and suggest ways in which popular, heavily consumed texts can reveal new colors and materials that remained unnoticed, or intentionally suppressed.

In his book, *Faultlines*, Alan Sinfield discusses problems with ideology and power in literary texts and notes the following:

Conservative criticism has generally deployed three ways of making literature politically agreeable: selecting the canon to feature suitable texts, interpreting these texts strenuously so that awkward aspects are explained away, and insinuating political implications as alleged formal properties. As a consequence of the long-term practice of these three strategies, the received literary canon and discourses of criticism are, of course, resistant to progressive readings. (Sinfield, 1992, p. 22)

While cognizant of the dominant interpretative strategies and beliefs surrounding particular texts of English literature, Sinfield envisions literary texts as open to different ‘translations’ in diverse times and spaces, and argues that “all stories comprise within themselves the ghosts of alternative stories they are trying to repress” (1992, p. 21). The acknowledgment of spectral stories squeezed by the capacious presence of normative ones serves as an invitation to “engineer a radical shift in perspective” with the ultimate aim to locate and excavate “the potential of [those] other forces” inside texts (1992, p. 17). Sinfield’s angle, in other words, suggests a reworking of “the authoritative text so that it is forced to yield, against the grain,

explicitly oppositional kinds of understanding” (1992, p. 22). Borrowing Sinfield’s angle, I use a similar methodology to discover new means of access into the texts and “create vandalism” with the ultimate aim to revitalize some of the ways we have come to consume and understand Greek television (1992, p. 24).

Since Sinfield’s theorization has the ability to both deconstruct dominant understandings of canonical texts and at the same time reconstruct hidden knowledge, it can be seen as uniquely connected with queer theory. For anyone familiar with gender and sexuality studies, the term queer is particularly notable—and even appealing—for the different meanings it has acquired in different social and historical moments. From a term used to mean *strange*, *odd*, or *awkward*, queer was an insult targeting homosexuals. From late 1980s onwards, however, queer followed a new sociolinguistic trajectory, starting to operate as an alternative identification which was re-used by the LGBTQ community for activist and political purposes. At the moment, queer can be understood as a verb, a noun, an adjective, “a collection of intellectual engagements with the relations between sex, gender, and sexual desire” (Spargo, 2000, p. 9), and an anarchical school of thoughts reacting against normalized hierarchies, conventional ways of living, and stable categories. Borrowing Athena Athanasiou’s inclusive and particularly interesting definition, queer can “[emerge] as a performative gesture of decentring, dis-orienting and re-orienting bodies and worlds, locations, categories, identities, affiliations, affectivities, desires, and imaginaries” (Athanasiou, Kolocotroni & Papanikolaou, 2018, p. 275).

Following Athanasiou’s definition, I wish to engage with four television texts and consider how these older comedies can expose new unexplored dimensions of meaning, which, in the spirit of Javier Esteban Muñoz’s analysis, may “enact a future vision” (2009, p. 4). If so, however, the future vision of these texts shall be enacted

through different utilizations of the term queer. For instance, some of the case studies will use queer as an adjective to address homosexual but also heteroflexible characters who have appeared in the sitcom genre (*The Unbearables*). In other cases, I employ the term to accentuate and blur the boundaries between allegedly ‘normal’ and ‘different’ characters in specific settings (*Hara’s Café*). In most cases, though, and as the title of this dissertation proclaims, queer is first and foremost used as a gerund. This choice is by no means coincidental; it reveals the term’s ultra-dynamic component, but mainly, the active involvement of a subject-researcher behind the queer-making processes attempted upon texts.

Dissident Readings

This dissertation investigates how popular comedy texts of the past can open up new meanings and possibilities for its characters to be viewed in unexplored and underexplored ways. In this search for hidden knowledge, I turn to Sinfield’s work on dissidence. Faithful to the spirit of Raymond Williams (1963) and Stuart Hall’s (1980) materialist writings, Sinfield forms a theory of subcultural reading that, in its accommodation of “both extreme conformist pressures and startling dissident refusals” can function as “a persuasive cultural critique” (1994, p. viii). He writes:

the literary is not a property of texts, but a way of reading. The text appears literary when it is read with literary criteria in view. Once it is admitted that different reading positions will produce different readings, easy claims for canonicity, the universal and essential properties of literature, and the authority of the academy, become unsustainable, indeed embarrassing. Meanwhile, queer reading offers, for its constituency and some fellow

travelers, the kind of relevance that once was claimed for literature generally. Refusing the dominance of the normative reader sidesteps standard, mystifying, questions about relevance, quality, and access: subcultural significance becomes the criterion. (1994, p. xiv)

I redeploy Sinfield's model in order to investigate the extent to which mainstream and popular texts afford opportunities for dissident understandings. If Sinfield is right that "no story can contain all the possibilities it brings into play" (1992, p. 51), then it is important to revisit stories, from wherever they come, even from the medium of television, whose dominant heteronormative power is often considered uncontested (see Saavedra, 2009; Suter & Strasser, 2012).

The dissident potential that Sinfield identifies in texts "derives [. . .] from conflict and contradiction that the social order inevitably produces within itself, even as it attempts to sustain itself" (1992, p. 41). So, if dissidence implies:

refusal of an aspect of the dominant, without prejudging an outcome [. . .] it posits a field necessarily open to continuing contest, in which at some conjunctures the dominant will lose ground while at others the subordinate will scarcely maintain its position. (1992, p. 49)

By applying this model to Greek television comedy, characters who find themselves in hierarchically dominant roles may lose ground and move towards weakening positions. In a similar way, those characters who are considered as agentless or powerless have the potentiality to change the rules of the game or achieve relatively minor victories.

Although Sinfield's dissident angle serves as the main conceptual framework and the umbrella term permeating this dissertation, I use a flexible theoretical toolkit that can show how dissidence/queerness can take various forms and emerge out of various theories. Using feminist, poststructuralist, and queer theories in combination highlights that there is no one-size-fits-all way to apply queer theory when reading texts. This multiple and elastic implementation of queer theory also explicates that the dissident/queer readings offered in this dissertation do not constitute the only 'legitimate' or 'correct' interpretations of the texts. Rather it presents examples of a theoretical exercise with a strong impact on the way that the history of Greek popular culture can be unwritten and rewritten.³⁵

Much like Sinfield, Michel Foucault's work points to the interrelation between power/knowledge and transgression, famously arguing that "where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (1990, p. 95–96). Although Foucault's conceptual framework has often been criticized as a theory of entrapment (e.g., Pickett, 1996), Sinfield finds important commonalities between his work and Foucault's, explaining that these resistances Foucault refers to "are not only a reaction or rebound, forming with respect to the basic domination, an underside that is in the end always passive, doomed to perpetual defeat" (Foucault, 1990, p. 96 quoted by Sinfield, 1992, p. 48). My redeployment of Sinfield's feminist queer methodology, like Foucault's, argues that representations of characters in television comedies do not only portray them as agentless, oppressed, and victimized under the control of

³⁵ There are many theoretical pathways to turn to the past, and the one employed here has its critics. Heather Love, for instance, engages in a "backward future" (2007, p. 147) that remains germane to the negative effects of the past and thus, rejects affirmative historiographic approaches. See also Papanikolaou (2018b) and Ruti (2017). Later, I briefly explain and justify why I align myself with those theorists who adopt the 'sweet queer-after' approach.

dominant agents. While different institutions may train the actions of particular bodies or characters, the very processes that marginalize and police them are the ones that give them a voice and the ability to exert their varying degrees of dissidence or resistance.

Along with Sinfield and Foucault's theorization of disciplinary power and reverse discourse, I also turn to political theorist James Scott's notion of the *hidden transcripts* and *weapons of the weak* as tools of dissidence or resistance. Scott's monographs have concentrated on peasant studies and class struggles. His work delineating resistance patterns employed by powerless or subordinate groups has been used by a number of queer and feminist scholars. For example, Martha Ackelsberg employs Scott's model to investigate the ways in which LGBTQ activism may expand and enrich the range and content of US life (2017, p. 190). In a similar way, Laura L. Miller's article "Not Just Weapons of the Weak" redeploys Scott's theorization to explain how army men engage in covert gender harassment to show their disagreement with women's participation in the military forces (1997, p. 32). Focusing on evasion, false compliance, masquerade, and sabotage, I rework Scott's theorization, showing that his work can be fruitful in analyzing television texts and characters who, metaphorically speaking, are understood as subordinate and weak (*The Unbearables*).

Other scholars such as Elizabeth Freeman (2010) and Jack Halberstam (2005, 2011) have established different yet relatable frameworks for a queer politics of time. Using heteronormativity as a starting point and inspiration, Freeman explains how chrononormativity "[may] shape flesh into legible, acceptable embodiment" (2010, p. 4). In a similar way, Halberstam points to the pains and sacrifices required to inhabit a kind of *straight time*, which is focused around reproduction, marriage and procreation.

However, both Freeman and Halberstam identify temporalities that defy conventional clocks and allow *bad timing* and *queer failures* to emerge. Following Freeman's and Halberstam's theorizing, I pay attention to the moments in texts where a number of characters—both leading and supporting ones—create new relations with time, forget norms, and allow themselves not to come up to others' expectations, for a change.

Much like with time, the way subjects position themselves in the world may be revealing about their relationship with space. Sarah Ahmed's work lying at the intersection of queer theory, body studies, and geography argues that, "[i]f orientation is a matter of how we reside in space, then sexual orientation might also be a matter of residence, of how we inhabit spaces, and who or what we inhabit spaces with" (2006, p. 1). The *straight line*, which is a predefined line that always already exists before us, presupposes the attainment of certain points along a life's course. In this safe path, however, moments of *disorientation* are possible; I take Ahmed's concept of *(dis)orientation* as a means to investigate the extent to which certain "comedy" characters may risk "departure from the straight and narrow line" in the hope for new futures and different ways of being in the world (Ahmed, 2006, p. 21).

Another key text of this dissertation with a clearly queer approach is *Gender Trouble* (1988, 1990) by Judith Butler. Butler understands gender as a "stylized repetition of acts" (1988, p. 519). Since subjectivity is contingent on a politics of the performative, gender turns out to be a repetition of behaviors and acts which have no substance and fixity. Yet, potential failure to perform gender in consistent, repetitive, and appropriate ways opens up space for feminist and queer appropriation. Since "popular television comedy is built upon and exposes normative accounts of gender" (White, 2018, p. 3), it is a valuable terrain where the absolute certainties and hegemonic constructions of gender are dissolved giving way to peculiar, odd, and

unruly characters who may question social norms and “bring the house down” (Rowe, 1995, p. 8). I use Butler’s theory of gender performativity in implicit ways here in order to show the ways in which female and male characters engage in unstable and ambivalent ways of ‘doing’ womanhood, and manhood.

The aforementioned theoretical tools are meant to illustrate the different shades that dissidence can take and the effects of these readings on the texts’ locked stories. To investigate the representations of female and male characters in the comedy texts under examination, the method of close reading analysis is chosen as an interpretative method that employs a queer cultural studies approach into account. Close textual analysis of the texts, combined with intertextual knowledge acquired from contemporary productions and public discussions about the comedies (e-articles, reviews, interviews) allows the exploration of these texts’ stories in new ways. I argue that the discourses of gender and sexuality expressed through the texts can acquire different meanings when discussed within today’s politicized context. I therefore endorse a reworking of these texts and believe that these comedies can potentially articulate “another way of being in both the world and time, a desire that resists mandates to accept that which is not enough” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 96). This is because, aside from an intellectual exercise, I believe that as long as homophobia, transphobia, misogyny, racism and gender inequality continue to exist and affect important segments of the population, such approaches are useful and needed (see also Pullen, 2018).

The dissident angle I wish to employ in this dissertation presents many similarities with Sinfield’s, whose focus on historical aspects that have been locked in specific interpretations or silenced in other narratives of history appears particularly useful. Yet, while Sinfield’s work examines English literary texts, I employ this angle

to study television. I argue that despite the rather unusual research field upon which I use this approach, dissident modes of reading television can advance interesting understandings and even effect cultural change. According to Sinfield, “the dominant and the subordinate are structurally linked” (1992, p. 42), so the use of this dissident angle on television can, in fact, show that “television texts are always both complicit to and critical of established ideologies” (Dhaenens, 2014, p. 15). I believe that using the angle in this way and context, it is possible to excavate how ‘old’ characters can do masculinities and femininities that break the norms and include instances of coalition and collaboration; disobedience to societal rules, and flexible enactments of gender identity that place them in new zones of knowledge and emancipation. Yet, unlike Sinfield, who always finds queerness or dissidence inherently present within the text, but hidden and contained, I locate dissidence primarily in the act of reading. In short, while I argue that “comedy” texts can potentially invite and even plead for dissidence, it is the individual reading that primarily makes a text dissident or queer (e.g., Pullen, 2018).

Of paramount importance, at this point, is the positionality from which I speak, read, and write about popular culture and television. As Brett Farmer argues in his book *Spectacular Passions*, “[t]o write critically and productively, one must be able to generalize, to identify patterns and typicalities, and to construct heuristic models with which to read and make sense of these things” (2000, p. 9). In this dissertation, I try to apply Farmer’s words, but at the same time, I am conscious of the potential challenges that critical and productive writing can pose. Apart from being a doctoral candidate writing about queer theory and television fiction, I am also a passionate television fan. This means that in the process of writing this project, my (at least) dual identity markers intersect, overlap, and collide.

Integrating personal tastes into media research has become increasingly common and even celebrated over the last decades (e.g., Doty, 2000; Chambers, 2009; Hanmer, 2014). Speaking from the position of aca-fan, or in other words, scholar-fan in certain academic contexts outside the Anglophone world, however, can potentially trigger different, and in fact, negative reactions (e.g., Jenkins, 2006). In the United States and the United Kingdom, it is no longer necessary to defend the status of fan-scholars against charges of inaccurate and biased research. By contrast, television researchers in Greece need to learn from scholarship produced in other parts of the world about (auto)biographical-ethnographic methods and the role of positionality in research (Aitaki & Chairetis, 2019, p. 7). While I have been given numerous opportunities to present my work in Greece and receive constructive feedback, I have sometimes received passive-aggressive or ironic comments from scholars who found my work to be “wishful or willful misreadings, or ‘reading too much into things’ readings” (Doty, 1993, p. 16).

In this dissertation, I proudly come out as a queer scholar and a television fan who enjoys watching and writing about Greek television fiction. Borrowing Dhaenens’ definition of fan, I see myself as a subject who “expresses an enthusiast, active, and productive engagement with a specific text. . . [someone who] claims a relationship with a text, and participates in the reproduction and redistribution of the text’s meaning, as well as the critiquing and the rewriting of it” (Dhaenens, 2011, p. 21). Through mingling my academic and fan identities, it is my intention to explore the study of Greek television comedies from angles that the academic or fan identity alone would not have been able to cover. For Matt Hills (2002), however, the appropriation of the fan identity from within the academic realm may at times lead to the creation of a two-speed subject who first and foremost projects the image of the

academic and secondarily that of the fan. As he cautions, “The scholar-fan must still conform to the regulative ideal of the rational academic subject, being careful not to present too much of their enthusiasm while tailoring their accounts of fan interest and investment to the norms of ‘confessional’ (but not overly confessional) academic writing” (Hills, 2002, p. xxvii). This dissertation has much to gain from this critique because it forcefully uncovers its main weakness. Although some of my previous work has responded to Hills’ call for autoethnographic research methods in implicit (Chairetis, 2018) and explicit (Chairetis, 2019) ways, this dissertation does not bring theory and experience together in its entirety. The prologue, current introduction as well as, the conclusion (and perhaps the case study of Yorgos Kapoutzidis’ *In the Nick of Time*) proffer academic theories coupled with pieces of knowledge from my childhood and nascent queerness, my relationship with television, or inside information about some of the television shows that I most enjoyed watching and continue to watch. The academic and personal, distant and at times informal language identified through these pages illustrate the voices of the academic and fan, which are used in interchangeable and equal ways. In the remaining chapters, however, the voice of the fan becomes conspicuously silent, succumbing to the institutional mechanisms of academic writing, which often favors careful, neutral language over a simple and passionate one. My fan voice, however, despite its feeble sound, is always there, defining the selection of case studies, providing behind-the-scenes information about the shows, and organizing those moments and dialogues that are valuable for exploring dissidence in/through the texts. My personal experiences, attachments, likes, and dislikes are not removed from the study. The same applies to the gathering, analyzing, and reporting of data which is unavoidably influenced by my personal values and beliefs. My intention here is not to relay ‘correct’ and ‘objective’ findings

that will overshadow the reviews and criticisms about the series that have been made so far. Instead, through this venture, it is my hope to be able to show different ways of studying Greek television and media and contribute to a more responsible and transparent research methodology (e.g., Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

Research Material, Parameters, and Limitations

Before going any further, it is important to detail the research material upon which this dissertation rests. In an attempt to capture the readings and discursive frameworks that surround the Greek popular television comedies under examination, I have turned to e-review journalism and e-articles.³⁶ By carrying out Internet searches and using the titles of the television comedies/case studies as keywords, I collected a considerable number of opinion pieces, articles, and television reviews, which constitute an essential part of my research material and a meaningful “web of interactive relations between the [television] texts and their contexts” (Koivunen, 2003, p. 27). As Christine Geraghty has argued, television scholars have long rejected reviews and press commentary on television, reducing them into a “matter of humour and condescension” (2003, p. 31). These personal forms of commentary, however, have recently served as important sites for reception studies in film and television (e.g., Kaklamanidou & Tally, 2014; Psaras, 2016; Staiger, 2000). The material I have therefore used in this dissertation consists of an exciting blend of reviews written by professional writers and occasional television viewers, fans, and critical communities who wish to express their point of view about specific television programs. Far from treating these reviews as mere ‘readings’ (see Koivunen, 2003), this dissertation

³⁶ A concurrent analysis of how journalists and television critics interacted with the television comedy texts during the time of their initial broadcasting would have allowed for the diachronic ‘life’ of television fiction to emerge. However, difficulties in accessing print material from popular television magazines of the 90s and early 00s limited my investigation to a body of criticism available online.

provides the writers' names whenever this information is available.³⁷ This approach wishes to shed light on the diverse voices that have played an active role in the media discussion, and thus highlight their significant contribution to the establishment of what we now begin to recognize as primary bibliographical sources for the study of Greek television fiction.

Given the chronological distance of these shows from the present moment, many of these reviews—some of which are mentioned in the introduction—highlight what Bridget Kies and Thomas West III have described as “the folly of nostos (return home) and alia (longing)” (2017, p. 162). Although this material would have benefitted from an exploration of the ways nostalgia troubles media and the way people understand the past they have lived and consumed (e.g., Boym, 2001; Stevens, 2005), such a venture would have required a different set of theoretical tools from memory studies and psychology and will thus remain outside the scope of this project.

The second significant category of research material comprises e-articles and videos featuring interviews with some of the creators and actors who were involved in the making of these comedy texts. Nevertheless, when considering the possibility to incorporate information about the author of a text in a queer-making project as the one here, questions about meaning, truth, and power arise. In other words, can a dissertation that claims to queer television texts and unearth dissident meanings from them include the viewpoints of its creator? And if so, how can such an addition not ‘pollute’ the queer reading itself? As argued earlier in this chapter, Barthes’ and Foucault’s theoretical thinking have been pivotal in queer studies. According to Melissa E. Sanchez, their work has enabled “a queer critique of identity by

³⁷ In some of the main chapters of this dissertation, I offer reviews written by television fans who own their own blogs and write about their favorite television series on a steady basis. Although most of the writers reveal their real names, some of them wish to retain anonymity and thus sign their texts with a nickname (see chapter 2 and chapter 5).

questioning the ideals of agency, subjectivity and authenticity on which normative view of selfhood, desire and sexuality rest” (2019, p. 29).

Within the context of this dissertation though, I posit that the death or the deposition of the ‘author’ behind a television text requires a certain degree of refashioning. For Richard Dyer, it is of utmost importance to know “who specifically made a [text]...[because] the authors’ material social position in relation to discourse, the access to discourse they have on account of who they are” matters (1990, p. 185). Furthermore, Jason Jacobs’ work on television drama rejects ideas of the death of the author “for what it always was an attempt to demote human artistic agency.” Instead, he suggests an examination of those agents, each one of whom “lend their skills and distinct manner of creative shaping to a larger, agreed sensibility” (2014, p. 322; see also Kalinina, 2016). In a similar way, I consider television a medium in which intentionality can be highly productive and even compatible with critical viewing and reading of an author’s text. For Parsemain, who has studied the ways in which audiences interact with television, there is an important distinction between critical viewing and critical involvement when it comes to engaging with television series. As she writes (2016, p. 75):

Critical viewing is a form of intellectual distance that involves distrust and often mockery of the programme... This type of critical response may open up possibilities in terms of learning about the programme. But because they distrust the text/teacher, critical viewers are unlikely to learn from it and with it. Critical involvement, on the other hand, is a form of intellectual proximity or connection with the text, which combines critical, literate analysis and trust.

Rather than ‘killing’ the author and keeping a distance from a text, which can be detrimental in the process of meaning-making, Parsemaine advocates in favor of critical involvement as a way of reading that can proffer a more complete idea of a text. Guided by Parsemaine’s thinking, it appears that the dissident angle I employ in this dissertation constitutes a form of critical involvement, insofar as I focus on the texts and the discourses produced by both creators and other viewers like myself. By being attentive to “how [these texts] are being articulated and rearticulated, structured and restructured, during [their] circulation and relation to [their] sociopolitical context” (Papanikolaou, 2012, p. 320), I can extract and identify valuable knowledge. Thus, I can produce heterogeneous and highly unpredictably effects to the meanings and content of these comedies.

As a third source, I draw on a handful of academic articles and chapters that investigate and comment upon some of the comedy texts under examination. Georgia Aitaki has arguably provided the most prolific and systematic engagement with the field of Greek television fiction, and her article on *The Unbearables* (2015) constitutes a useful starting point for the exploration of the interplays of ideology in the sitcom. *Hara’s Café* is also examined in terms of gender representation and included in a collective volume under the title “Gender and sexuality in Greek TV comedy series” (Valsamidou, 2014). Although the aforementioned works follow conceptual and methodological pathways that differ from the one that this dissertation attempts to initiate, their role is important as they demonstrate the highly interdisciplinary field of television that welcomes a plethora of methods and approaches, but most importantly, the plurality of interpretations available in texts. Along with the scholarly work conducted in Greece/by Greek researchers, this dissertation has been grounded on critical essays and academic scholarship produced

mainly in the UK and the United States. This means that the study of the Greek television comedies has been primarily based on genre theory (Creeber, 2015; Mittel, 2004), comedy studies (Mundy & White, 2012; Savorelli, 2010; Wagg 1998), reception studies on cinema and television (Doty, 1993, 2000) and research that lies at the intersection of comedy and queer theory (Chambers, 2009; Pugh, 2018; White, 2018).

Finally, the last portion of my research material consists of the Greek television comedy texts, and the ways I read and interpreted them. Adopting the dual role of television fan and researcher, I chose favorite texts of the 90s and 00s that I have consumed several times ever since their initial broadcast, and critically explored them at the present moment with the hope of offering new perspectives and unfamiliar knowledge on familiar texts.

The four chosen texts are examples of TV shows from private broadcasters, MEGA and ANT1. Both networks were established in 1989 and expressed early on their interest in producing entertainment and ‘light-theme’ fiction (Iosifidis, 2008). Since the primary goal of TV stations is to attract audiences and maximize profits (Aitaki, 2018a; Vamvakas, 2019), such shows played a strategic role in the channels’ programming schedules and overall economic success. Angeliki Koukoutsaki-Monnier explains:

From the beginning of the 1990s the production of comedy series has flourished. Private television channels introduced the American term ‘sitcom’ into the Greek television context in order to characterize lowbudget productions (3 million to 4 million drachmas per episode for the period 1991–2, 6 million to 8 million for 1996–7) of comedy content, shot indoors with

three or four cameras and a regular cast. Unlike most American and European sitcoms, Greek comedies do not use ‘canned’ (prerecorded) laughter and they are always intended for a weekly broadcast, usually just after the 8.15 p.m. or 8.30 p.m. news, covering the 9 p.m. to 10 p.m. time-slot. onsisting of 13 or 14 episodes lasting 20 to 26 minutes, they usually extend over several TV seasons. (2003, p. 721)

As families represent an important demographic for marketers and advertisers, ANT1 and MEGA strived to build the image of being ‘serious’ television channels by producing comedies that would attract the unwavering interest of the desired target audience (Adamou, 2020). At the same time, however, both channels also attempted to approach younger audiences and made decisions that, in hindsight, appear daring and even risqué. While the history of ANT1 has not been sufficiently theorized, Joanna Frangou’s article provides a valuable entry point into the previously unknown history of MEGA (2019). Writing from the role of TV practitioner and researcher, Frangou sheds light on MEGA’s ‘inclusive policy’ and willingness to welcome new writers and ideas that could potentially show “a promise, an expectation, the hope that they may be the bearers of the next MEGA hit” (2019, p. 140).

The common link between the four television shows under examination is that they all became ‘big hits’ earning very high Nielsen ratings at the time they were produced (Krigkou, 2018; Ligerou, 2018; Thanou, 2018). Furthermore, while these comedies were broadcast during the so-called family viewing hour, they presented significant product differentiations from similar programs broadcast by competing state channels and other private channels. For instance, Dimitra Papadopoulou’s *The*

Unbearables made use of the familiar conventions of the sitcom yet integrated a homosexual character as one of the main protagonists of the show, despite the initial doubts expressed by the executives of MEGA. Similarly, it is interesting that Alexandros Rigas and Lefteris Papapetrou were given the green light to produce *Dolce Vita* in the middle of the 1990s — a comedy focusing on a love triangle between an older woman and the young partner of her daughter. Finally, the film-like qualities of Yorgos Kapoutzidis' *In the Nick of Time* together with the 'rural' romance of Anna Hatzisofia and Haris Romas' *Hara's Café* constitute two expensive and risky shows both in terms of actual production costs (Arhontaki, 2019; Michas, 2019) and aesthetic and screenwriting choices. Based on the above, it is evident that the aforementioned TV comedies can be seen as texts designed to accommodate novelty by allowing a certain degree of transgression, yet without alienating their core demographic.

In terms of methodology, I accessed the television comedies via YouTube or the official WebTV of MEGA and ANT1 and watched the comedy texts in question, pausing and rewinding whenever necessary. The study was guided by a textual oriented analysis of the television texts in question. The selection of scenes and dialogues was made based on the intention to create a diverse yet comprehensible overview of scenes and dialogues that would allow dissident/queer readings to emerge. In general terms, I explored the pilot episodes of each comedy show on the grounds that the first episode of a television comedy establishes a style and dramaturgy that is maintained throughout the show's cycle (Hunter & Breen, 2018). I analyzed the pilots together with the episodes that I considered important for my analysis in regards to dramaturgy, narrative, tropes, and themes. In particular, the study of characters —both primary and/or secondary — is nodal in all comedies in

question. For this reason, I give special attention to the analysis of the characters' positioning within the comedy narrative, their display of actions and emotions, as well as their relationship and interaction with other characters (Krijnen & Tan, 2009; Fourie, 2001). For Jonathan Gray and Amanda D. Lotz (2012), "...every sound, image, character, plot point, or choice [can be] worthy of analysis and potentially requiring of explanation" (p. 31). Thus, while the conventions of the comedy and situation comedy provide specific routes to take in the process of reading and analyzing texts, my readings do not follow a specific pathway. This means that the reading I employ here allows me to explore characters and emerging themes. Additionally, it allows me to explore particular scenes from episodes through recourse to body politics and intersectional theory (*Dolce Vita*), the cinematic notion of the gaze (Oliver, 2017), and panoptical theories of surveillance (Foucault, 1995). These dialogues and lines that served useful for the analysis were transcribed verbatim and translated in English, while the originals (in Greek) were placed at the bottom of the respective pages. In a similar logic, the Greek reviews and academic works that are quoted in the body of this dissertation—including the introduction—were translated and placed inside the main text, while their original version was added in the form of footnotes. The appendix, featuring information about the television comedies such as episode titles, duration, and links, aims to facilitate access to this material and prompt further research.

Chapter Overview

Each of the following chapters makes an attempt to regard Greek television comedy queerly by pointing out to the countless ways in which television characters' assumingly concrete identities are questioned, and to the potential of traditionally

obedient and disenfranchized subjects to articulate varying degrees of dissidence and challenge heteropatriarchal norms.

Chapter 2 uses Dimitra Papadopoulou's show as a case study and continues the discussion initiated in the introductory chapter by considering the diachronically popular evaluations of situation comedy as a conservative and heteronormative genre. *The Unbearables* (MEGA, 1991-1993), telling the story of four friends—a heterosexual couple and two male friends—who live in an Athenian apartment building, has received mixed feedback from contemporary critics and journalists who disagree as to whether the queer man of the show constitutes a positive or negative representation of homosexuality. This chapter suggests a move away from the queer visibility debate to a more holistic reading of the sitcom and its characters in an attempt to identify its underlying feminist and queer politics. Focusing on *The Unbearables'* use of stereotypes and male homosociality, I argue that the text's rich visual and narrative elements provide the impetus for a creative intervention, one that allows the viewer to examine *The Unbearables* as a story that harbors a second couple (beyond the heterosexual one), which emerges out of the two men's cohabitation under the same roof. Although such a reading may appear to reify gendered categories and homonormative logics, in fact, it brings to the forefront a cultural unease with femininity and effeminacy, to make a case of the patriarchal ideology of the 90s in Greece. Chapter 2 finally continues the discussion about gender and the division between the public and private spheres, concentrating on the queer man and his heterosexual girlfriend. While the exclusively domesticated and powerless areas that the two characters inhabit begin as a symbolic space of 'castration' and a source of nagging humor, it eventually turns into a strategic space from which the supposedly disenfranchized subjects contest patriarchy. This reading of *The Unbearables*

stretches queer notions of canonicity and conveys the message that if ‘men’ are understood as the heads of the house, then ‘women’ —in the broadest sense of the term—are the necks and may turn the heads whichever way they please.

Chapter 3 examines another group of friends, which, unlike *The Unbearables*, does not actively participate in the marriage-and-couple paradigm. Yorgos Kapoutzidis’ *In the Nick of Time* (MEGA, 2005-2007) invites viewers to the lives of five highly heterogeneous individuals who meet by chance and unite to solve a political scandal. My discussion of auteur theory and genre theory provides the opportunity to explore Yorgos Kapoutzidis’ creative vision and even reassess how *In the Nick of Time* can be understood when re-read in combination with the showrunner’s preceding and subsequent television shows. Building on this initial discussion of showrunnership and genre theory, I then use Sarah Ahmed’s notion of queer disorientation as well as the concept of female masculinity to read Angela as an ‘out of line’ figure in spaces where she does not fit. The character’s incompatibility with the appropriate norms dictated by sociocultural rules provides space for reading Angela as a closeted lesbian and identity itself as performative, dissonant with gender expectations, but strategically employed for accomplishing collective goals. While the previous chapter engaged in a reading that ‘outed’ its male characters to expose the hidden queerness of the sitcom, this chapter suggests that a kind of anadiplosis to the closet (instead of a blatant affirmation of queer sexuality) provides more queer-fertile ground to explore the ambiguities, complexities, and openings available within *In the Nick of Time*’s unconventional family.

With the fourth chapter, my focus pivots to the countryside and explores the village’s institutions’ collective and concerted efforts to build obedience through reproductive futurism, appropriate enactments of masculinity and femininity, and

morality at all societal levels. Anna Hatzisofia and Haris Romas' comedy-drama *Hara's Café* (ANT1, 2003-2006) raises the question of time in/of the countryside and has been characterized by television critics, fan bloggers, and a few academics as a text that promulgates misogyny, nationalism, and even fascism. I argue that viewing *Hara's Café* as a firmly realist show misses the point of irony and satire that the text itself fiercely attempts to display. Building on the comedy's use of ambiguity and camp humor, I draw on Sarah Dyne's work (2017) and redeploy Foucault and Freeman's theoretical insights to consider *Hara's Café* as a text that constructs and deconstructs nationalist, familial, and gender discourses through a constant movement between submission and resistance to chrononormative rules. Although the village of Kolokotronitsi fantasizes the possibility of being an imagined community that produces gendered and nationalized docile bodies, the text itself makes clear that deviance is always already there, putting the fantasy of the imagined community under severe crisis, long before the advent of foreign and 'immoral' agents in the village. My theorization of in-text narratives and dialogues, along with the main actors' extra-diegetic ideological baggage, argues that the series challenges the power of the institutions in the village, allowing villagers—both adults and children—to deviate from the norm whenever local institutions are unable to take actions. Furthermore, a focus on the village fool makes clear that beyond the main characters, who sway between docility and deviance, there are secondary figures whose odd and nomadic subjectivity marks a permanent flight from prescribed chrono-norms and conventions.

The last chapter of this dissertation goes back to the urban landscape and examines a television text that has attracted limited critical attention. The story of a conservative middle-aged widow and mother who engages in an erotic intimacy with

her daughter's partner has garnered positive feedback, which is mainly reduced to the acknowledgement that Rigas and Papapetrou's *Dolce Vita* is a funny text that broke many glass ceilings back in the 90s. In an attempt to unpack this line of criticism, I view *Dolce Vita* as a text that can potentially curb heteronormative logics. Although *Dolce Vita* interrogates the demands made of middle-aged women, subjecting them to severe surveillance through the figure of Christina, it also represents resistance to those demands, showing that women who may have passed the cult of youth can still drive themselves—through eccentric alliances and friendship networks—into a realm that gestures beyond rigid rules of gender and sexuality. Through an intersectional reading of the discourses, both oppressive and normative, by which Christina's multiple and conflicting identities are understood, I wish to explore how the interrelationship of Christina's widowhood with other social categories bring to light the personal, intimate, and affective experiences of living as a middle-aged woman, mother, and desiring subject in an oppressive social environment.

The systematic efforts to employ a wide range of queer theories and dissident readings hopefully loom large in the conclusion of this dissertation, as it begins with the examination of the first queer character to appear on Greek television, winds through a variety of men and women who collaborate and 'do' gender in ways that destabilize the heterosexual matrix, and ends with a whole community whose unsuccessful attempts to be obedient betray the utopic fantasy of the countryside and give away the inescapable human desire for non-normative, knowledge-making practices, which, in turn, sabotage national, familial, and mononormative discourses. Although a number of scholars continue to characterize queer theory as an outdated theoretical model (Penney, 2014) that steadily moves towards the academic mainstream (Taylor, 2009, p. 199; see also McLaughlin, 2006), I contend that it still

remains important within the Greek context and especially within the underexplored sub-field of television fiction. Furthermore, the use of queer theoretical lenses, through ways that step beyond the exclusive examination of non-heteronormative characters and dissident sexualities, demonstrates the vitality and usefulness of this prism to detach queerness from white, gay, Western men and investigate a wider range of bodies, practices, and desires across different times and spaces.

The conclusion provides a closing assessment of how these texts and characters help us to think about the queer potential of television comedy, which made its initial emergence to our television screen back in the 90s and 00s and continues to appear in the form of reruns; about how heteropatriarchy is often taken for granted; and about how re-reading these texts at the present moment can open up different avenues to make sense of and interpret characters, scenes, and themes of the yesteryear. This examination points to the queer potential of Greek television comedy, but it also serves as a starting point for further scholarship to revalorize other television comedy texts, genres, and formats. This chapter therefore comes to an end highlighting other potential areas of research on Greek television, hoping to expand the field towards new and unforeseen territories.

CHAPTER TWO

Contesting Patriarchy Through the *The Unbearables*' Living Room

On October 28, 2018, nearly 22.5% of Greek television viewers aged between 18 and 54 turned on their televisions to watch one of Greece's largest, and perhaps most favorite, private television channels 'die' (Pipinis, 2018). Facing closure since 2016, yet operating without a license, MEGA channel drew its last breath at 2:08 a.m., while Vlasis (Vlasis Bonatsos) was breaking up with Renia (Renia Louizidou) in *Οι Απαράδεκτοι [The Unbearables]* (Dimokidis, 2018).

For a cultural product last transmitted in 2010,³⁸ this television viewership figure was remarkable but certainly not unforeseen. Dimitra Papadopoulou's situation comedy (or sitcom), first airing on September 18, 1991, and running over two consecutive years, became an immediate hit, garnering millions of television viewers. Today, nearly three decades since its initial transmission, the sitcom continues to be a fan favorite for older and younger generations of YouTube users who enjoy watching the lives of four friends who live in an Athenian block of flats in the Likavitos area: Dimitra (Dimitra Papadopoulou) and Spiros (Spiros Papadopoulos), who are married and live in the same apartment, as well as Vlasis (Vlasis Bonatsos) and Yanis (Yanis Bezos), who are friends and cohabit in an apartment opposite their friends'. *The Unbearables*' success was, at least, partly due to the fact that the show was produced in a cultural moment when television fiction was still in its infancy, and private channels had barely started to mushroom. Yet, beneath its emergence during a critical moment in Greek television history, *The Unbearables* has mainly been recorded in collective memory as the first television fiction to feature a queer man as part of the

³⁸ The sitcom's last rerun took place back in 2010. On October 2018, MEGA Channel said goodbye to television viewers, providing an episode of *The Unbearables* in an attempt to reveal the indelible mark that Dimitra Papadopoulou's series has left on the television channel and Greek television fiction as a whole (Grammeli, 2018).

main cast of characters.³⁹ The appreciation of *The Unbearables* as a landmark television text that is both amusing and queer-themed has grown over the years to such an extent that journalists and fans alike are still interested in discovering behind-the-scenes facts about the show and responses from the actors involved in the making of the sitcom.

In an interview taken by Leonidas Stravakos (2018), Spiros Papadopoulos, the actor who performed the role of Dimitra's husband, admitted that *The Unbearables* was largely based on a comedy-sketch radio show written by Dimitra Papadopoulou.⁴⁰ The radio show, centered around the weekly quarrels of a troublemaking couple, was welcomed by television executive producers who approached Dimitra Papadopoulou and asked her to enrich and adapt the script for television.⁴¹ While Papadopoulou did not face any particular challenge when deciding to incorporate a queer character in the

³⁹ There are two things I would like to point out: First of all, I am aware that the word *queer* for assessing Yanis and other characters of the past is arbitrary, since the word was not known in Greece during the late 80s and 90s. Drawing on Ben Aslinger, though, I posit that “this is a strategic essentialism necessary for political organizing—a unifying thread that helps hold lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) together” (2013, pp. 59-60). Secondly, unlike *The Unbearables*, *η Κάθοδος [The Descent]* (ERT, 1983) is the first television series to actually feature queer characters. The drama series, which debuted on January 4th 1983, depicted the relationship between an elderly gay man and drug dealer with his noticeably younger male partner. The series was met with persistent hostility, and ecclesiastic representatives asked producers to cancel the program. In response to the Church of Greece's reaction, producers rescheduled the series from primetime to an after-midnight slot, but ERT finally cut it short on its eighth episode (Abatzis, 2017). During the same year, Spiros Bibilas played in another dramatic series entitled *Τα Σκληρά Καρδιά [The Tough Guys]* (ERT, 1983). In the series, Bibilas played the role of an autistic child who was raped by his inmates and guards at a juvenile detention center (Paridis, 2011). On September 27th, a few months after the completion of *The Descent*, ERT launched the family-orientated series *Ουράνιο Τόξο [Rainbow]* (1983), which also included queer characters and themes.

⁴⁰ The comedy sketch show, entitled *Κυριακή, Μήτηρ Πάσης Κακίας [Sunday, the Root of All Evil]* was capturing the lives of a couple that was working hard to make ends meet. Yet, on Sundays, when both partners had time to relax and spend time together, they always ended up arguing for trivial reasons (Stravakos, 2018).

⁴¹ In her chapter “Gracie, Martha, Eve and Lucy: Queering Femininity in Early American Comedy” (2018), Rosie White examines a number of radio shows that turned into television sitcoms, and crafts a compelling argument which constructs early American sitcoms as a queer place and time. As she observes, “Early sitcom [...] offers an interstitial moment between the theatrical spaces of vaudeville and the incorporated technologies of radio and television. As television sitcom became established during the 1950s it inherited traditions from vaudeville and variety shows that worked to queer gender, class and ethnicity on the small screen” (2018, p. 26-27). This is a valuable argument and a good opportunity to touse with the queer potentialities of *The Unbearables* and perhaps, other Greek radio-to-TV adaptations. Nevertheless, this discussion shall remain outside the scope of this chapter.

cast of *The Unbearables*, the real problem was to convince private television channels about her decision. ANT1 was the first television station to read the script and turn it down, while MEGA gave *The Unbearables* the green light, yet not without reservations. Going back to those days, Dimitra Papadopoulou recalls (Dimitropoulos, 2016):

They were afraid of the gay character at the beginning. Very. But we all insisted strongly. Yanis, who played the role, did not accept any compromise. Their idea [from the television channel] was to say that he was a ‘man’ in some episodes and that it was all a game just for fun. But we did not want that. And they respected us.⁴²

Not surprisingly, the appearance of a queer man in the early 1990s during primetime was not without controversy. Since Yanis did not constitute an overly supported or bigoted representation, Dimitra Papadopoulou’s sitcom left room for much debate in determining *The Unbearables*’ stance vis-à-vis queer representations. Even today, the sitcom’s aftereffects continue to be felt in varying degrees of intensity, since contemporary television fans and journalists still find themselves drawing battle lines when assessing the case of Yanis. While on the one hand, a number of critics consider Yanis to be a positive depiction of homosexuality, and an equal member amongst his friends (Mavroidis, 2008; Tsabas, 2017), on the other hand, there are voices that speak about the privileging of heteronormative scripts, and stereotypical treatment of non-heterosexual television characters (Antonopoulos,

⁴² “Φοβήθηκαν τον γκέι χαρακτήρα στην αρχή. Πάρα πολύ. Αλλά επιμείναμε σθεναρά όλοι. Ο Γιάννης που έπαιζε το ρόλο αρνήθηκε οποιονδήποτε συμβιβασμό. Η ιδέα τους ήταν να πούμε σε κάποια επεισόδια ότι ήταν “άντρας” και ότι όλα αυτά ήταν ένα παιχνίδι. Αλλά δε γουστάραμε. Και μας σεβάστηκαν.”

2004; Hulot, 2017). This lack of consensus regarding the representational politics of queerness in *The Unbearables* reveals two things. First, that the majority of the criticism produced nationally, but also internationally, about television programs provides a shrunken vision of what queerness is and how queer subjects should be represented. Due to this somewhat inflexible prism, both researchers and critics are unable to grasp the breadth, diversity, and revolutionary potential of queer representations in the visual sphere.

Since *The Unbearables* has been circulating in public discussions for decades, but has yet to be studied systematically through the lens of gender and sexuality,⁴³ here I wish to draw attention to the following: that *The Unbearables*, by addressing popular tropes and narrative structures of conventional family sitcoms, creates a space to challenge and eventually contest ideological norms from within. Via close reading approaches, I will demonstrate how particular viewers may see *The Unbearables*' use of stereotypes and male homosociality as tools that encourage dissident readings to emerge. Much like many situation comedies of the past, *The Unbearables* depicts a fairly static microcosm (Kaklamanidou, 2017): it is mainly shot in the interior of two apartments and concentrates on the lives of characters whose repertoire of movements is rather specific and repetitive. Through this focus, a fixed idea of home and a sense of imprisonment permeates the sitcom (Hill, 2016). This is evident insofar as all main characters appear to remain—to a greater or lesser extent—geographically and symbolically 'trapped' within circumstances in which they are located. This invites the audience to revisit the possible meanings that can be decoded from the spatial

⁴³ Georgia Aitaki has provided an in-depth analysis of *The Unbearables* examining Papadopoulou's sitcom through the concept of geopolitical imaginations (2015). Despina Chronaki's chapter "Mainstreaming the Transgressive: Greek Audiences' Readings of Drag Culture Through the Consumption of RuPaul's Drag Race" (2017) also makes a brief reference to the queer character of Papadopoulou's show.

configurations and emotional connections developed inside the building and between the main protagonists. As such, the audience may envision *The Unbearables* as a text that deals with more than the incorporation of a male homosexual in the main cast of a show.

This chapter will first provide a brief history of representations of queer men in television, mainly focusing on their reception by media and cultural scholars. In the course of this, the emphasis will be placed on recent attempts to analyze the character of Yanis, as ventured by contemporary critics and fans of the show. By examining the circumstances of the sitcom's making, the representational techniques that the program adopts, and the various critical reactions that it has generated, this chapter will finally attempt to expand the ways in which Papadopoulou's text can be understood, divulging different answers to the ever-new questions that *The Unbearables* continues to elicit.

Before (and After) Yanis: Queerness in (Greek) Television

The question of how queers have been represented on television has received immense academic attention in the Anglophone literature. Initially portrayed as individuals who only appeared to be ridiculed or cast as abnormal and perverse (Capsuto, 2000; Sarkissian, 2014), lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender characters have appeared on television with greater regularity since the 1990s. This visibility, however, does not necessarily translate into the inclusion of alternative lifestyles and sexual orientations (Peters, 2011; Sender, 2007). Not all LGBTQ+ people enjoy equal opportunities for representation (Davis & Needham, 2009; Dhoest, 2015), and variables, such as class, race, and age, often escape the analytical prism of directors and screenwriters (Goltz, 2010; Shugart, 2003). Furthermore, the characters who

appear in comedies often subscribe to representations that are associated with gender inversion. For instance, scholars have observed that gay characters have long been tied to the stereotype of the sissy and thus portrayed as either asexual or grafted into normative spaces (Parsemain, 2019; Saavedra, 2009). Thus, although queer characters may have become selling points in the 1990s, American television before the 2000s could largely be understood as a market operating at the service of heterosexual viewers (Becker, 2009; Parsemain, 2019).

Within the Greek context, a good starting point for the study of queer representations in Greek television is Konstantinos Kyriakos's (2019) recent monograph, *Greek Television and Homoeroticism*. In over 200 pages, Kyriakos explored the images of homosexuality that Greek public and private television created and exhibited at different times and on different television channels. In the early years of the creation of the medium, homosexuality was presented as a personal matter and, thus, as a secret. This means that television tended to avoid open articulations of queerness and made use of codes and symbols to raise topics around (homo)sexuality. The first discreet yet clear homosexual images can be detected in theatrical and literary adaptations that made it onto television during the 1970s. Shows, such as *Το Θέατρο της Δευτέρας* [*Monday Theater*] (ERT, 1976–1992), sporadically portrayed homosexual characters as dramatic and problematic figures who experienced ridicule from their social circle and feelings of guilt and self-hate for their deviant sexuality (Kyriakos, 2019, p. 30).

In parallel to the establishment of private television in Greece, the 1990s witnessed a timid yet remarkable increase in the number of homosexual characters on the small screen. Indeed, during this period, comedies, such as *Δέκα Μικροί Μήτσοι* [*Ten Little Jimmies*] (MEGA, 1992-2003) and *Δύο Ξένοι* [*Two Strangers*] (MEGA,

1997–1999), featured homosexual men as recurrent characters. Yet, the conventions of the medium in which these characters appeared did not allow them to express and/or consummate sexual desire in direct ways. As a result, innuendos, double-entendres, and misunderstandings were employed to “hide and tell” homosexuality. Yet, Kyriakos (2019) not only noticed tropes that comedies sometimes incorporate to address the issue of queer representation but also described how narrative forms have been used to discuss homosexuality in comedy in two main ways. First, it has been discussed as a form of sexuality that is feared by and appalling to heterosexuals. Thus, comedies of this kind depict gay characters as persons to be inspected, looked at, and finally accepted in the name of the magnanimity that characterizes the heterosexual characters (Kyriakos, 2019, p. 137). Second, it has been discussed as a form of sexuality and behavior that becomes obvious through gestures and a certain dress code. Kyriakos (2019, p. 138) offered the following description:

As a whole, the televisual presence of homosexuals remains captive to imposed conventions of [the] television genre; as a result, the dramaturgical conditions under which homosexual “types” make their appearance on television do not surprise us: either [they are] directly defined by the specific professions they exercise as art lovers and directors, [or] the [homosexual] characters are expressed with over-the-top vanity, foppery and emotional instability.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ “Έν συνόλω η τηλεοπτική παρουσία των ομοφυλόφιλων μένει δέσμια στις επιβεβλημένες αρχές του τηλεοπτικού είδους, έτσι και οι δραματουργικές συνθήκες υπό τις οποίες εμφανίζονται οι ομοφυλόφιλοι τύποι στην τηλεόραση δεν μας αιφνιδιάζουν: είτε είναι άμεσα συναρτώμενες από τα συγκεκριμένα επαγγέλματα υπηρεσιών που ασκούν (κομμωτής, καμαριέρης, μόδιστρος, αισθητικός) είτε ως φιλότεχνοι και σκηνοθέτες, οι χαρακτήρες εκφράζονται με υπερτονισμένη ματαιοδοξία, φιλαρέσκεια και συναισθηματική αστάθεια.”

Yanis' profession, as well as his concern about clothes and style, seem to reiterate and embody the popular image of those non-heterosexual characters who circulated in the Greek visual sphere before him. Yet, Yanis is one of the most popular leading queer characters in the genre of the sitcom and is, as a matter of fact, the only one amongst a group of heterosexuals.⁴⁵ Yanis is surrounded by friends who know about his sexuality, but he is not always outside the queer closet.⁴⁶ Throughout the two seasons of the show, the character does not reveal much information about his personal life and in several episodes he even hides his queerness from people who do not belong to his intimate human network, such as the landlord, Mr. Vasilis (Vasilis Chalakatevakis), and his aunt, Virginia (Aliko Alexandraki), who is his main living relative and a substantial source of financial support. Furthermore, unlike Dimitra, Spiros, and Vlasis, who are married or sexually active in the main, Yanis' personal life is not an integral part of the plot. In fact, it is only in one episode during the second season that Yanis confesses a relationship with a sailor (episode 34), which was nonetheless platonic and short-lived.⁴⁷

The focus that Papadopoulou gave to the queer character, and the way in which Yanis Bezos enacted the role, has therefore received a variety of responses, which range from being mildly positive to overly negative. *Vice's* Antonis Konstantaras explains, "although we talk about very conservative times, he [Yanis]

⁴⁵ In episode 39 ("*Ο έρωτας γεννήθηκε για δύο/Love was Made for Two*"), a queer friend of Yanis, named Apostolis, makes a cameo. Apostolis here is presented as an outspoken camp figure who lives his life unabashedly, and his appearance serves as a means to highlight the different lifestyles that Apostolis and Yanis lead. *The Unbearables*, MEGA Channel, season 2, episode 39. Retrieved August 23 2018 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JKIGI3SxEzY&t=365s>

⁴⁶ I am aware that this argument has been contested by a number of queer scholars who claim that the actual 'problem' with the closet is the fact that it constitutes a space that individuals cannot fully inhabit or fully vacate. See for instance, Adams (2011) and Chambers (2009).

⁴⁷ In episode 34 ("*Λος απαδεκτάος/Los Aparadektaos*"), the group of friends embarks on a trip to Lisbon. While sightseeing in the capital of Portugal, Yanis bumps into Vangelis, a sailor with whom he had an affair 14 years ago. Yanis explains that his relationship with this man was never consummated because Vangelis liked women. *The Unbearables*, MEGA Channel, season 2, episode 34. Retrieved August 23 2018 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FOIQHzcqzk4>

did not present himself as a caricature” (2018).⁴⁸ In an attempt to identify the motives behind why *The Unbearables*’ queer character has been crafted as such, Melina Papageorgiou argues, “We are at a time when homosexuality is to a large extent condemned from the society. Therefore, it may not be coincidental that Yanis’ love life is hardly ever mentioned in the series” (2016).⁴⁹ Other journalists, however, have been harshly critical of Papadopoulou’s televisual text, addressing the stereotypical and unequal depiction of the queer character compared to the rest of the characters in the show. Thodoris Antonopoulos (2004) for instance, in his provocative article “Όταν η τηλεόραση (δεν) συνάντησε τους γκέι [When Television (Never) Met Gays],” suggested that the spaces—both comedies and dramas—in which gays move are ruled by heteronormativity, and despite efforts to the contrary, queer men are presented as “a painless weirdness in ‘modern’ series,”⁵⁰ including the case of *The Unbearables* on the list. Of particular interest in this discussion is also Antonis Theodorakopoulos’ contribution, in his monograph *Αμφί και Απελευθέρωση [Ambi and Liberation]*; Theodorakopoulos finishes his book with an epilogue that attempts to examine continuities and discontinuities in the Greek culture across time (2005). Focusing on the topic of (a)sexuality, the author looks at the unexpected cohabitation of the two male characters in *The Unbearables* to discuss how the presence of a permanent female partner (Renia Louizidou) next to the queer guy’s flatmate confirms Vlasis’ heterosexual status and, by extension, precludes any possible suspicion of homosexuality or homosexual relationship with the queer guy. As he explains:

⁴⁸ “Παρότι μιλάμε για εξαιρετικά συντηρητικές εποχές, δεν παρουσιάστηκε σαν καρικατούρα.”

⁴⁹ “Βρισκόμαστε σε μία περίοδο που η ομοφυλοφιλία ήταν σε μεγάλο βαθμό καταδικαστέα από την κοινωνία. Ίσως γι’ αυτό να μην είναι και τυχαίο πως η ερωτική ζωή του Γιάννη δεν αναφέρεται πολύ στη σειρά.”

⁵⁰ “Ανώδυνη γραφικότητα σε «μοντέρνα» σίριαλ.”

The game is clear: the screenwriter uses—once again—the homosexual man as the salt and pepper in the dull and meaningless relationship of two heterosexual couples in order to make the series interesting, counting on the hazardous curiosity of TV viewers. (2005, p. 283)⁵¹

The main argument that Antonopoulos and Theodorakopoulos make is that queer characters on Greek television are few in number, stereotypical, and not diverse enough to reflect their viewers. Such a line of thought reveals the longstanding struggle of the LGBTQ community both in Greece and beyond for quantitative improvement and continual signs of progress in queer representations. Despite the good intentions behind such efforts though, it is vital to question the extent to which these collective demands are feasible, and if queerness can ever be deemed unanimously positive and progressive. For Hwee S. Lim, “as minority groups contest a history of negative, stereotypical representation of their identities and cultures, it is precisely this history that becomes a burden against which their self-representation must be defined” (2006, p. 46). As a result, even though opportunities for self-representation of sexual minorities may arise or have already arisen, these are not necessarily recognized by everyone.

Silvia Grassi offers an incisive critique of visibility politics when she asserts that queer people in the media “are not a homogeneous group with a unified identity, and precisely because of this diversity, what could constitute a positive or verisimilar image for some can be negative or unrealistic for others” (2016, p. 146). This means

⁵¹ “Το παιχνίδι γίνεται καθαρό: η σεναριογράφος χρησιμοποιεί—γι’ άλλη μια φορά—τον ομοφυλόφιλο σαν αλατοπίπερο στην πληκτική και ανούσια σχέση των δύο ετεροφυλόφιλων ζευγαριών για να δώσει ενδιαφέρον στο σήριαλ, ποντάροντας βέβαια πάντα στη νοσηρή-και όχι μόνο- περιέργεια του τηλεοπτικού κοινού.”

that far from viewing television as an educator with an obligation towards diversity and social change, it is useful to examine how the available queer figures are constructed through television, taking into account the time and medium from which they emerged. That is, diverging from the essentialism of such positivist approaches, and adopting a close reading analysis of the text's dialogues and scenes, it is possible, and perhaps rewarding, not only to imagine "how television portrays queers but mainly, to envision time queerly" (Needham, 2009, p. 157).

Following the approach that Michele Aaron has famously called as the "sweet queer after" (2009),⁵² and borrowing from Vanessa Campagna's (2014) and Kylo Patrick Hart's (2013) works, I will attempt to reclaim Papadopoulou's text in an attempt to highlight new potential avenues for reading the queer character, the rest of the protagonists, and the situation comedy as a whole. My main interest is to examine the interrelationship between subjects and spaces, explicating the ways in which the group of *The Unbearables* occupies space inside and outside the *polikatikia* (apartment building) and the cultural significance that this repertoire of moves implies. In this way, it is my hope to show that the overarching patriarchal structure upon which the sitcom is being built is not as stable as it may seem.

In the pages that follow, I will focus on the cohabitation between Yanis and Vlasis, and discuss those dialogues, scenes, and moments that may expose potential tensions in the two men's relationship. Against Theodorakopoulos' point of view, I argue that the series places a markedly queer and a straight guy under the same roof, not only as an opportunity to highlight Yanis' deviance, but as the impetus for a

⁵² In her chapter, "Towards queer television theory: bigger pictures sans the sweet queer-after," Michele Aaron (2009) uses film theory and psychoanalytic theory to make sense of the spectatorial pleasures that television viewers, much like film viewers, may gain.

creative intervention, one that may allow some of us to imagine Yanis and Vlasis as a duo whose relationship may exceed the boundaries of a mere friendship.

More Than Just Friends: Searching for the Subtext

Zachary Snider argues that the genre of sitcom typically exploits:

opposition, misunderstanding, misinterpretation, and incompatible character differences [which] are based on gender expectations and misperceptions.

Thus, in order to defy such gender expectations and roles, a sitcom must first employ them; only then they can be challenged and hopefully changed. (2016, p. 12)

In an attempt to test the applicability of Snider's argument in the Greek televisual context, I posit that while Papadopoulou's text places a queer man and his straight male friend within the same apartment and thus highlights from the start the pragmatic difficulties that obstruct the two male characters from being envisioned differently, it is the very incompatibility and allegedly different sexual orientations of the individuals that allow and incite the queer subtext of Yanis and Vlasis' relationship to emerge.

From the start, Yanis is portrayed as a character uninvolved in love matters. Vlasis though, is the exact opposite. The explicit incorporation of a permanent girlfriend; rumors of ex-women like Nafsika (episode 1); and information about other girls dating Vlasis, but whom are never seen onscreen; constitute common techniques,

which can be found in a variety of media texts, to eliminate any queer potentiality between male characters.⁵³

Nevertheless, queerness in *The Unbearables* is manifested in many ways; from the very first episodes of the show, Yanis' intense stares towards Vlasis pass unnoticed both by Vlasis and the rest of the characters. Yet, what may begin as a flat-sharing between two men soon breeds an interpretation of a they-might-be-more-than-just-friends relationship. The traces of a potentially queer relationship between Yanis and Vlasis are identified early in the show when several supporting characters, not particularly familiar with Yanis and Vlasis, assume that they are a couple. Take for instance Renia's reaction when she visits Vlasis at his apartment (episode 9, "άμα θες να φύγεις φύγε / *If You Want to Go, Just Go*"). Without knowing that the man she dates cohabitates with another man, Renia's encounter with Yanis makes her suspicious about Vlasis' sexual orientation and leads her ask her boyfriend if he is a *kriptoomofilofilos* (closeted gay). Shortly after that, and while Renia becomes assured of Vlasis and Yanis' non-sexual relationship, it becomes evident that Yanis feels some sort of jealousy for Renia, whom he sees as his competitor and enemy. Specifically, unlike the rest of the main characters who appreciate Renia's innocent view of the world, Yanis does not grow fond of her and takes advantage of every opportunity to mock her. It is during his discussion with Vlasis that Yanis criticizes Renia's strong rustic accent and her style, and when she is present, the queer man

⁵³ The list is long, but here I will briefly refer to some iconic examples from American cinema. Jerry Schatzberg's *Scarecrow* (1973) is a road movie whose main plot centers around the relationship between two men who travel from California, aiming to start a business in Pittsburgh. While Lion (Al Pacino) expresses his attraction to his friend in different scenes throughout the film, Max (Gene Hackman) appears to be intimidated by Lion's calls, and instead, pursues women to reassert his heterosexuality. *Thunderbolt and Lightfoot* (1974), directed by Michael Cimino, is another film where the queer potential between men is apparent and, at the same time, overshadowed by the presence of female prostitutes and a general ambiance of machismo and violence. Last but not least, more recent filmic texts that have been examined in terms of their homoerotic subtext is Mike Newell's fantasy film *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2005), particularly with regards to Harry and Ron's bond, as well as Renny Harlin's *The Covenant* (2006).

calls her *astropeliki* (bright spark) to accentuate her supposedly low intelligence (episode 7, “ασφάλεια ζωής / *Life Insurance*”). The series also brings to the fore several scenes where Vlasis is about to leave the house; in these scenes where Vlasis gets dressed and prepares himself before going out on dates, Yanis stands right next to him and bombards him with questions about the places he will visit and the persons he will meet.

While the analysis so far has shown how the queer man may have expressed his interest towards his flatmate, it is also important to draw attention to the figure of Vlasis, whose enactments of masculinity upset fixed notions of identity and subjecthood. At first glance, Vlasis reveals a visual image, which encompasses many characteristics of the ideal masculinity. While Spiros, Dimitra’s husband, may make a ‘traditional’ and more ‘authentic’ presentation of masculinity than Vlasis, Vlasis embodies a laddish and cool version of manhood promoted in magazines and advertisements of the 90s, which dictate a return to unrestricted basic pleasures like flesh, fun, and lazing. As noted earlier, Vlasis is consistently presented as an attractive, financially independent man who enjoys the appreciation of his friends and peers and the admiration of women. Portrayed as a person who enjoys his life, viewers see him going out, engaging in manly activities with Spiros and other presumably heterosexual men, and becoming acquainted with different women in bars and nightclubs. Although *The Unbearables* repeatedly reminds the viewers and the rest of the characters of Renia, who plays the role of Vlasis’ permanent girlfriend, and thus enjoys a recurrent presence in many episodes, there is a marked propensity towards emotional unavailability that the character appears unprepared to commit and abandon his masculine and freewheeling way of living. Thus, comparing the male character with chronologically subsequent representations of masculinity in American

television, Vlasis seems to share common personality traits with Charlie Harper (Charlie Sheen) from *Two and a Half Men* (CBS, 2003–2015). Much like Charlie, who is a frivolous womanizer, Vlasis exudes unbridled masculinity at the service of its uxorious desires. As a result, Vlasis is incapable and perhaps unwilling to make any relationship last, except for the one he sustains with his queer flatmate and the rest of his close friends.

At the same time though, there are many representational signs that betray a distancing of the character from a strong hegemonic script and a move to queer pathways. For example, his sexual promiscuity, sense of independence, and commitment phobia, characteristics decoded as masculine and virile, can be called into question. Despite the fact that Vlasis frequently kisses Renia, and addresses his sexual commentary to almost every woman, including his best friend's wife, Dimitra (episode 36, "*ο τέλειος άνδρας /The Perfect Man*"), at the same time, he exhibits mannerisms and behaviors that can be identified as not-so-masculine; Vlasis' eccentric shirts printed in floral designs, cute gestures, and easiness to kiss and play around with the rest of the men of the show enable Vlasis to explore a 'feminine' aspect of his personality. The clothes, verbal utterances, and mannerisms, if combined with Vlasis Bonatsos' eccentric and loud appearances in his public life, bring outside knowledge inside the screen text and gradually sabotage the construction of a unified masculine self.

Furthermore, unlike the mature, self-assured masculinism of most Greek television male characters, Vlasis also exhibits behavior most suited to teenagers; despite his claim to the opposite, he is in a constant struggle to find balance in his life, and he appears incompetent to deal with the everyday practicalities of life. As a result, the façade of an attractive, professional, and heterosexual man soon changes and the

viewers may discover an individual who frequently finds himself in trouble and appears impotent to find solutions to his self-incurred problems. Furthermore, no matter how much Vlasis tries to persuade himself and others that he wants to abandon the apartment he shares with Yanis and live on his own, the sitcom makes clear that such a life-changing decision is not about to be made anytime soon. Despite his repetitive claim for freedom and independence, Vlasis does not seem to want that badly enough to leave the house and start a new committed life with Renia or any other girl he knows. This is evident not only in Vlasis' interactions with Renia but also with his flatmate. When Yanis, for instance, pretends to have abandoned the house in Likavitos and moved to Egypt, Vlasis is in a really bad mood and does not want to go out or engage in sexual intercourse with Renia (episode 9, “*άμα θες να φύγεις φύγε / If You Want to Go Just Go*”) until his male flatmate comes back. In this way, the show teases out the centrality that each character's presence has in each other's lives, despite the fact that they argue often.⁵⁴ A case in point is the following scene in which Vlasis and Yanis quarrel about a trivial house matter (Figure 1.1). In this segment, Vlasis gets ready to go out and vainly tries to find his helmet; when Yanis tells him that he washed the helmet and that it is still wet and not for use, Vlasis goes mad.

Vlasis: Stop nagging you, spinster [female]!

Yanis: Me, a spinster? Although I wash, and cook for you, puddings, rigatoni al 4 formaggi, stuffed vegetables, I have made everything for you.

⁵⁴ Vlasis pretends and sends Vlasis a letter in which he writes the following: “Έχω γνωρίσει τον Ιμπραήμ, τον Ισμαήλ και τον Μουσταφά, τρεις αράπηδες, κι έχουμε γίνει φίλοι. Η δική μας φιλία όμως ήταν πάνω απ’ όλες [I have met Ibrahim, Ismail and Mustafa, three niggers and we have become friends. Yet, our friendship was above everything.]” *The Unbearables*, MEGA Channel, season 1, episode 9, 10:35-10:56. Retrieved August 23 2018 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0L2Up463LDQ&t=178s>

Vlasis: Where is my helmet?

Yanis: I washed it.

Vlasis: Who told you to wash it? Why?

Yanis: It stank; I could not leave it in that condition.

Vlasis: (ironically) I should feel lucky you did not iron it then!

Yanis: You have the audacity to mock me, haven't you?

Vlasis: We need to talk.

Yanis: Sure, let's have a serious talk.

Vlasis: I am tired of you.

Yanis: I wish you are tired of me so that you leave, but where will you find a bigger sucker! I'm not a housemate, I am a cleaning lady.

Vlasis: Well, bring me a luggage. I am going to pack my stuff and go.

Yanis: Ha! to go (repeating Vlasis' words) ...Are you really?⁵⁵

⁵⁵Vlasis: Σταμάτα τη γκρίνια γεροντοκόρη!

Yanis: Εγώ γεροντοκόρη? Που σου πλένω σου μαγειρεύω, και τι δε σου έχω φτιάξει; Πουτίγκα, ριγκατόνι τέσσερα τυριά, γεμιστά, όλα αυτά στα έχω κάνει

Vlasis: Που είναι το κράνος μου;

Yanis: Το έπλυνα.

Vlasis: Ποιος σου είπε να το πλύνεις; Γιατί το έπλυνες;

Yanis: Ήταν μες στη βρώμα, δεν μπορούσα να το βλέπω.

Vlasis: Σε λίγο θα το σιδερώσεις κιόλας.

Yanis: Έχεις το θράσος να ειρωνεύεσαι;

Vlasis: Θες να μιλήσουμε σοβαρά;

Yanis: Φυσικά να μιλήσουμε σοβαρά.

Vlasis: Με κούρασες!

Yanis: Μακάρι να σε κούρασα να έφευγες αλλά που θα βρεις μεγαλύτερο κορόιδο. Εγώ δεν είμαι συγκάτοικος, εγώ είμαι πλύστρα.

Vlasis: Λοιπόν, φέρε μια βαλίτσα να μαζέψω τα πράγματά μου να σηκωθώ να φύγω.

Yanis: Χα, να φύγεις. Θα φύγεις? (έκπληκτος).

The Unbearables, MEGA Channel, season 1, episode 9, 02:43-03:11. Retrieved August 23 2018 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0L2Up463LDQ&t=178s>



Picture 1.1

Figure 1.1 Vlasis is upset with Yanis because he interferes in his life

In this comic scene, the two men's irreconcilable differences are placed in the foreground; Yanis' consistent efforts to intervene in his pal's life and help him are in contrast with Vlasis' desire to be exempt from any form of control; therefore, it results in short scenes of dispute and fighting. What is also accentuated, however, in this dialogue, is the use of gendered and sexist language. Vlasis employs feminizing vocabulary when referring to his flatmate, and Yanis in turn accepts these characterizations and even adopts similar words to define himself. In *Bodies that Matter*, Judith Butler explains that a subject qualifies as intelligible through "the forcible citation of a norm, one whose complex historicity is indissociable from relations of discipline, regulation, punishment" (1993, p. 34). Towards the same direction, Didier Eribon reminds us that "to be a subject and to be subordinated to a

system of constraints are one and the same” and that “this is even more the case for those subjects assigned to an inferiorized place by the social and sexual order” (2004, p. 5). In *The Unbearables*, the queer man is frequently presented as a figure that appears to become included within social identification by citing and doing the norm in response to interpellations undertaken by other characters.

Such feminization processes, understood as reifying stereotypical conventions and not transgressing them has led contemporary viewers to criticize *The Unbearables*’ treatment of male queerness. In M. Hulot’s article devoted to Greek television fiction, a *LIFO* reader posted a response that, interestingly enough, received very positive feedback from many other Internet users (Hulot, 2017):

I remember genuinely unbearable scenes in the serial, as behaviors directed against Yanis because he was homosexual. Deeply homophobic ones. Today, this ‘character’ would have spurred vehement reaction and rightfully so.⁵⁶

This comment implies *The Unbearables*’ queer man’s correspondence to older visual paradigms and, at the same time, highlights how our understandings and criteria over what is a proper or harmful representation alter over the course of the years. For the *LIFO* reader and many other Internet users who ‘liked’ his comment, Papadopoulou’s text appears to be infested with the haunting presence of effeminacy, a behavior and condition which renders queerness intelligible and victimizing, simultaneously. Although this is an understandable concern, in the part that follows, I suggest that the sitcom is intentionally playing the gender card in order to

⁵⁶ “Θυμάμαι απαράδεκτες πραγματικά σκηνές στο σίριαλ, ως συμπεριφορές απέναντι στον Γιάννη, επειδή ήταν γκέι. Ακρως ομοφοβικές. Σήμερα αυτός ο "χαρακτήρας" θα ξεσήκωνε θύελλα αντιδράσεων και σωστά.”

problematize patriarchy as a system that affects not only queers, but also a wider range of bodies inside the text.

Contesting Patriarchy through the Living Room

Aside from citing the norm of subjecthood by means of using and even responding to feminine pronouns, Yanis' queerness is also made aware through the embracement of a set of outwardly feminine signifiers. For instance, when Yanis introduces himself in the pilot, he wears a red-colored kimono, walks around gracefully with a limp wrist, and accentuates effeminacy in every possible way. According to Richard Dyer (1999), the use of such stereotypes can be restricting, but somehow unavoidable. As he explains, "the role of stereotypes is to make visible the invisible, so that there is no danger of it creeping up on us unawares" (p. 212). Thus, stereotypes are used "to make fast, firm, and separate what is in reality fluid and much closer to the norm than the dominant value system cares to admit" (Dyer, 1999, p. 212). In *The Unbearables*, the employment of gay cultural codes to sketch Yanis appears to be somehow justified and even necessary, because the queer character does not discuss his sexual orientation openly up until the last episodes of the sitcom. Yet, as I argue here, even a brief look at Papadopoulou's text reveals that, contrary to the popular insistence on the queer man's stereotypical (and negative) representation, all main characters of the sitcom allude to a fixed and oversimplified image of a particular type of person. Thus, if Yanis stands for the queer figure who 'does' gayness through acts and not words, then Vlasis depicts the care-free man of the 90s. Similarly, Dimitra, living in the next-door apartment, represents the role of the conventional Greek housewife, while her husband, Spiros, visualizes the typical

Greek husband and a left-wing ideologist whose actual life choices contradict his theoretical positions.

Of course, a reasonable question that stems out of this discussion is whether all stereotypes are equally powerful and harmful. Among the scholars who have studied power imbalances in representations, bell hooks' (1992) research argues that stereotypes serve as an act of consumption and a form of violence mainly perpetrated by dominant groups against minorities. Even if that may be true in some cases, *The Unbearables* challenges the simplicity of reading the queer man as a perpetual victim of patriarchy, or, at the very least, the only one to endure the burden of heteronormative conventions of television. Evident as it may be, Yanis' circulation inside Papadopoulou's sitcom is, to a great extent, limited to a very specific definition of queer identity. Nevertheless, the critical reception of *The Unbearables* has not managed to capture Papadopoulou's greater narrative arcs and intentions to critique patriarchy, sexism, but also gendered relations from within the very space of the house. Spatial dynamics are of utmost importance to look at, because it is here that *The Unbearables'* most spectacular moments of dissidence take place. By shifting the attention from the question of whether Yanis is a 'good' or 'bad' representation and example for the LGBTQ community of Greece, I wish to focus instead on the role of the apartment, as I am interested in exposing the ways in which characters' different access to space can reveal the existence of heteropatriarchal structures and, at the same time, possibilities for contesting them.

Space, spatiality, and private-public binaries have traditionally worked to determine and restrict the zones that subjects can occupy. They demarcate, for instance, which spaces are appropriate for women and men, and when each category of bodies can make use of them and how (Spain, 1993). Such limitations are at work

in *The Unbearables*' block of buildings. In an invited lecture Dimitris Papanikolaou (2011) delivered at the University of Western Thessaly, he conceptualized “buildings as a topic of deep and conflictual crisis”⁵⁷ in that “the experience of the house leaves its mark on our bodies and identities and, correspondingly, the body leaves its mark on the space”.⁵⁸ The way by which spaces are intertwined with bodies, though, has been a favourite anthropological topic in Greek social sciences ever since the 1980s. Peter Loizos and Evthymios Papataxiarchis' (1991) classic ethnographic work explicates the prevalence of a domestic model of gender in Greece. This model encapsulates the values of marriage, and informs the roles and responsibilities which are assigned to the individuals forming the couple. Having established the role of the household as a vital regulator of marriage, Loizos and Papataxiarchis write:

The house and the children are the imperative concerns around which married women organize their lives. Men's attachment is more flexible and indirect, since their destiny is more ambiguous and overshadowed by extrahousehold concerns. However, the role of household head (*nikokiris*) is often a vital condition of assuming an active profile in public life. (1991, p. 6)

The Unbearables provides comprehensive accounts of the gendered activities and roles assigned to women and men, and thus confirms Loizos and Papataxiarchis' domestic model of gender to a great extent. Take the first scene of the pilot for instance, which has Dimitra placed in the kitchen, while Spiros tries to get dressed in order to go to work. For Spiros, finding his clothes is not an easy task. He wanders

⁵⁷ “Κτίσματα ως θέμα βαθιάς και συγκρουσιακής κρίσης.”

⁵⁸ “Η εμπειρία του σπιτιού μας αφήνει το στίγμα της πάνω στο σώμα και την ταυτότητά μας όσο και το αντίθετο, το σώμα αφήνει το στίγμα του στο χώρο.”

inside the room furiously, asking help from his wife. Dimitra, knowing the exact positioning of everything inside the apartment, gives him directions from a distance, while preparing breakfast.⁵⁹ According to Antonio Savorelli (2010), space management in sitcoms is of pivotal importance, because “the space that characters occupy define their relationships with other characters, as well as their own-self image and identity” (p. 95). Indeed, this scene illustrates different knowledge zones for the husband and the wife, and thus different ways partners occupy domesticity. Spiros, who is defined as a professional and a person with significant presence in the public sphere, does not invest much in familiarizing himself with the house. For Dimitra, however, the house appears to be the one and only domain she knows well. In several episodes, the female character yearns for education, so that she might get a job and get out of the house, but these aspirations are never satisfied.

However, the value system that controls the plot does not only place men and women in distinct zones. Indeed, the two male characters who live in the next-door apartment also present distinct attachments to private space, which, in fact, replicate the exact house logistics that Dimitra and Spiros appropriate. Vlasis, who is depicted as a career man who works at the same advertising company with Spiros, relates to the apartment in ways which are partial and transient. Yanis, however, maintains a steady presence in the domestic sphere; even if he is a fashion designer, the queer character is rarely witnessed to practice his profession and, instead, spends his entire time inside the apartment, taking full responsibility of the household chores. Under this light, *The Unbearables* ensures the construction of Spiros and Vlasis as subjects whose actual duties start by the time they escape the rigid confines of the apartment

⁵⁹ *The Unbearables*, MEGA Channel, season 1, episode 1, 1:55-04:13. Retrieved March 28 2019 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rq6zO5aRNT8&t=158s>

block. Based on the long-held assumption that the public sphere is defined as masculine and the domestic as a feminized space, the two male characters become the household heads—borrowing Loizos and Papataxiarchis’ terms— and, thus, beneficiaries of a broad and flexible spectrum of positionalities both inside and outside the house. The comparison of these two households highlights that, if the strategy of the situation comedy is to equate Spiros and Vlasis, then part of the same strategy is to make Dimitra and Yanis look equal. In other words, if *The Unbearables* presents Spiros and Vlasis as the ‘men’ of the two apartments, it simultaneously links female heterosexuality with male queerness, positioning Dimitra and Yanis as feminine/effeminate housewives, and, consequently, outsider figures vis-à-vis patriarchy.

Throughout the show, Papadopoulou’s text makes concerted efforts to cast Spiros and Vlasis as tourists who visit the domestic space, without engaging seriously with household activities, on the tacit assumption that the roles they are expected to perform are outside the house and of higher value. Dimitra and Yanis, though, who live in and define themselves through the house, are envisioned as bodies with negligible connection to the public realm and ultimately without much power. Echoing ideas similar to the ones Stavros Tsiolis’ film *Ας περιμένουν οι γυναίκες* [*Let the women wait*] (1998) raises, *The Unbearables* gives the impression that men can invade spaces at their will, while ‘women’ stay at home and master the household, while expecting their ‘husbands’ to arrive.

Indeed, for Dimitra and Yanis, occupying the domestic space and care for the ‘men’ of their lives is an end in itself. Many times in the show, Dimitra informs viewers about her willingness to make herself a good housewife and attract her husband’s attention (although in the end she does not). In a similar way, Yanis has

often channeled his energy into making Vlasis' life easier. Nonetheless, both characters do not receive any recognition from them; most of the times, they are being scolded for having overdone or omitted specific housework they were supposed to, thus exposing their unequal power dynamics and conspicuously weaker voices in the household.

Despite their connection with the life in the apartment, though, access to domesticity is not always granted to Dimitra and Yanis, particularly when subjects outside the close network of the building make their appearance. In episode 5 (o doctor/the doctor) for instance, Vlasis accedes to Renia's demands and invites her father at home. Yanis learns from Dimitra that a guest will arrive and takes for granted that he will be in the house to meet him. Unlike the rest of the characters, who have the opportunity to dine with Renia's father, Yanis is not allowed to be present on the grounds because "the father-in-law is a bit conservative."⁶⁰ In a similar logic, when Spiros invites his boss home, hoping to make a good impression to him and get a promotion, he does his best to make Dimitra leave the apartment, because he is afraid that his wife will embarrass him with her vulgar manners and naïve behavior (episode 11, "*Είμ' εγώ γυναίκα φίνα ντερμεντέρισα/I Am a Delicate Woman*"). These forms of symbolic castration are meant to be humorous and play with the characters' reactions to these prohibitions. Yet, by emphasizing Yanis and Dimitra's statuses as eccentric and inferior, these comic instances also serve—to a certain extent—as a means to renew and justify the barriers between the dominant and the weak members of the households.

⁶⁰ "Ο πεθερός είναι λίγο συντηρητικός." *The Unbearables*, MEGA Channel, season 1, episode 5, 18:51-18:59. Retrieved March 23 2019 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lf7enmGx6S8>

So far, the reading of *The Unbearables* has uncovered a number of scenes which demonstrate how the power of patriarchy is imposed upon the straight woman and the queer man of the show. However, I argue that this seemingly irreversible spatial confinement can be interrupted and even challenged. As I discussed earlier, recent scholarship on situation comedies has rejected the narrative of a monolithic patriarchal system hovering over television characters (Pugh, 2018; White, 2018). For example, in her excellent chapter “Challenging and Negotiating the Myths,” Lisa Tsaliki (2000) examines situation comedies across different countries, and pinpoints different forms of patriarchy and gender specificities circulating across national televisions. While identifying unequal gender contracts for women and men in Greek media representations, Tsaliki draws from Nikos Kyriazis (1995) and stresses that Greek televised women like Dimitra from *The Unbearables* may at times “occupy a high-status position even by staying at home” (p. 221). This ascertainment reveals what Simon Duncan (1995) has called *differentiated patriarchies*, that is to say different levels and types of gender equality, as well as varying degrees of flexibility and resistance women enact. Since this chapter—and Papadopoulou herself—has understood womanhood not only as a biologically determined identity, but primarily as a matter of being read and treated as such, Tsaliki’s argument can be used to assess the ways in which both Dimitra and Yanis may temporarily resist patriarchal norms and achieve higher statuses.

Before going further, however, it is important to briefly explore the social and cultural context during which the two characters appear onscreen. *The Unbearables* raises feminist and LGBT concerns in a time period when the very concepts of gender and sexuality remain largely unaddressed in Greek society. By means of making a

retroactive assessment of Greece's sociocultural landscape, Papanikolaou (2018a, p. 131) argues:

Greece in the late 1980s and 1990s is a country whose public sphere enters a deeply conservative, devastated, essentially depressed period—and this can be seen in the change of the [ideological] ambiance in relation to the issues that the movements of the 1970s had posed. The movements of the transitional period, including AKOE and some of the most radical movements of women, are neither silenced nor defeated in the 1980s and 1990s. They become de-narrativized. In other words, they are condemned to aphasia.⁶¹

The aphasia that Papanikolaou observes is partly noticeable in Papadopoulou's text, which does not signify a tsunami of feminist or queer rebellion. Dimitra may at times advance glimpses of a feminist agenda, but this knowledge about feminism is 'hollow' and comes only as a media phenomenon whenever she watches and parrots current affairs around the world on television. Similarly, Yanis having no actual insight about the lives of gays and lesbians in Greece and beyond is not in the position to demand his rights and claim a voice of his own. The lack of resources, combined with the spatial imprisonment inside the building, renders Dimitra and Yanis unable to make significant changes in their lives. Thus, when Vlasis and Yanis leave the apartment block, the two characters stay alone in their apartments and have none to

⁶¹ “Η Ελλάδα προς το τέλος της δεκαετίας του '80 και στη δεκαετία του '90 είναι μια χώρα της οποίας η δημόσια σφαίρα μπαίνει σε μια βαθειά συντηρητική, απονευρωμένη, ουσιαστικά κατεσταλμένη, περίοδο της – κι αυτό φαίνεται και στην αλλαγή ατμόσφαιρας σε σχέση με όσα ζητήματα έθεταν τα κινήματα της δεκαετίας του '70. Τα κινήματα της μεταπολιτευτικής περιόδου, μαζί και το ΑΚΟΕ ή πολλές από τις πιο ριζοσπαστικές κινήσεις γυναικών, δεν φιμώνονται, ούτε ηττώνται, κατά τη δεκαετία του '80 και του '90. Αποαφηγηματοποιούνται. Καταδικάζονται, δηλαδή, κι αυτά, σε αφασία.”

talk to and express their concerns. It is due to the ‘imprisonment’ inside the domestic sphere through which Dimitra and Yanis come together and form an alliance. Indeed, by placing the queer man and the straight woman together, the show gives the characters the opportunity to contest the terms of their imprisonment while their ‘husbands’ are absent. In this sense, *The Unbearables* illustrates the collaboration and revenge of what I call here ‘the union of the weaks’.

The presence of the straight girl and the queer guy bears a long history in visual media, and is even associated with a feminist-queer agenda. Scholars such as Sarah Maddison (2015) and Christopher Pullen (2016) have suggested the connectivity between feminism and queer identity politics as a means of collectively challenging patriarchal oppression. Pullen’s (2016) *Straight Girls and Queer Guys* has actually attempted to deconstruct the patriarchal visual culture in the media, exploring how the traditionally humiliating fag-hag duet may be seen in a new light. As he explains:

[T]he imagined union between the straight girl and the queer guy suggests a form of alliance, which might stimulate some kind of revolution or drive to equality. At the same time, as both the queer guy and the straight girl are respectively and independently male and heterosexual, they are indexical to the dominant powerbases. Hence, their union is a complex identification resource, which relies not on stability and fixity, but rather on shared difference and also shared access to power. (p. 5)

In *The Unbearables*, the reading of Dimitra and Yanis as a fag-hag couple may engineer an important shift in the way we understand Papadopoulou’s narrative,

thus deconstructing those criticisms which place the queer man in exclusively weakening and inferiorized positions. Since the situation comedy proffers depictions of friendship developed between the straight woman and the gay man vis-à-vis heteromasculine authority, the heterosexual (Dimitra-Spiros) and queer couple (Yanis-Vlasis) exits the frame for a while, laying emphasis on the fag-hag duet's actions towards negotiating the terms of their seclusion inside the house. Indeed, there are several scenes throughout the show where the straight girl and the queer guy's alliance creates a discursive space inside which both of them are able to act as equals and support each other. Whenever Yanis argues with Vlasis, for instance, the queer character visits Dimitra's apartment to express his complaints and seek consolation. Similarly, Yanis stands by Dimitra's side every time she needs his help. In episode 17 ("*Πληρωμένη εκδίκηση/Paid Revenge*"), Dimitra suspects that Spiros is cheating on her, and becomes obsessed to make her relationship last. The show presents marriage stability as a goal to be achieved. As Dimitra perceives herself as being somehow inadequate, she considers any means by which she can make Spiros want her again. Yanis, being her only friend, is ready to help her rekindle the romance in the long-term relationship with her husband.

Yanis: Don't speak, yes don't speak, just kiss me. Take me in your hands and make me yours [feminine]. Also, you can say another one which I like a lot. Roughneck, tonight is your night, roughneck, tonight make me [feminine] whatever you want.⁶²

⁶² Yanis: μη μιλήσεις, ναι λοιπόν μη μιλήσεις, μόνο φίλα με. Πάρε με στα χέρια σου και κάνε με δική σου. Επίσης μπορείς να πεις και ένα άλλο που μου αρέσει πάρα πολύ. Αλήτη απόψε είναι η βραδιά σου, αλήτη απόψε κάνε με ό,τι θες. *The Unbearables*, MEGA Channel, season 1, episode 1, 20:55-21:06. Retrieved August 23 2018 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rq6zO5aRNT8&t=128s>

While delivering a performance, so that Dimitra learns how to seduce Spiros, the show plays with and interrogates how the queer character engages in such confident sexual enactments, while never being seen openly to engage in sexual or romantic relationships. However, what is significant here is the level of comfort that Yanis feels in the absence of Vlasis and Spiros, which in turn allows him to imitate female roles in front of his girlfriend, and present himself as a woman. Rather than showing tensions, this notion of blending and playing with identities renders the straight girl-and-queer-guy-alliance a space to experiment with different roles and ways of being. After performing the role of sex savvy in the pilot, Yanis moves on to different ones.

With the ultimate aim to help his girlfriend improve her image, Yanis is also seen acting as a fitness instructor, and shows Dimitra how to cook and do workout. While demonstrating different exercises, Yanis holds Dimitra's legs up in the air and touches her hips (Figure 1.2). In examining visual representations of queerness, Angela Smith (2015) explains:

Gay men, due to their homosexuality can touch women with impunity in inappropriate ways and inappropriate contexts...[and] the access and license portrayed in these representations is tantamount to a degree of sexual entitlement that is, notably, no longer readily available to heterosexual men. (p. 53)

Indeed, Yanis' privilege on Dimitra's body points to the non-sexual and therefore non-threatening nature of the touch, but also to the degree of familiarity that the involved subjects share. This familiarity is relative not only to the way the two

subjects physically approach each other, but also to how they interact and collaborate towards achieving their small yet important resistances from within the living room. I search how *The Unbearables*' concentration on Dimitra and Yanis' duet fosters opportunities to resist confinement and act dissidently.



Picture 1.2

Figure 1.2 Yanis holds Dimitra's legs up in the air and touches her hips.

In *Weapons of the Weak*, political scientist and anthropologist James Scott (1985) writes that, when examining historic events, it is possible to lose sight of small acts of rebellion which, despite their relatively disproportionate impact, still exist and temporarily contest domination. Thus, instead of relying on the macro-level analysis of events, Scott finds small gaps and everyday resistances that subordinate groups of individuals can exploit to destabilize oppression. Scott never raised issues of feminism and queer politics in his work; nevertheless, a number of scholars, such as Ackelsberg (2017) and Miller (1997), used his theorizing by to study gender

inequality and discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. As Ackelsberg and Miller, I believe that this theoretical schema, reminiscent of Foucault's and Sinfield's work, can also be of benefit to the study of Greek television fiction. Scott acknowledges that weak groups of people cannot contest *public transcripts* in direct ways; it is for this reason that he defines resistance as a subtle form of contestation. For Scott (1992), "rumour, gossip, disguises, linguistic tricks, metaphors, euphemisms, folktales, ritual gestures, and anonymity" (p. 137) are considered effective methods of contesting domination, because they permit "a veiled discourse of dignity and self-assertion within the public transcript [...] in which ideological resistance is disguised, muted, and veiled for safety's sake" (p. 137). Thus, since these methods do not require much time and energy, the symbolically weak subjects of *The Unbearables* can make use of them without need of being exposed to the household-heads of the sitcom. Dimitra and Yanis are weak in a number of ways: Much of *The Unbearables*' imagery symbolizes the will of 'men' to push their own agendas. One episode of *The Unbearables* entitled "*I Am, You Are...Thanasis*," which forms the forty-sixth episode of season two, mostly focuses on Vlasis and Spiros' intention to make the straight girl and the queer guy stay out of their way. The central premise is that both men have been tired of having Dimitra and Yanis nagging about everything, and consider strategies to keep them busy inside the house, so that they pursue their 'manly businesses' undisturbed. Spiros suggests that Dimitra and Yanis start English lessons at home. Indeed, in this episode, as well as in many others, Vlasis and Spiros dictate rules in the house, which Dimitra and Yanis follow.

From the space of the living room, however, Dimitra and Yanis reverse the rules of the game, and make the house a space of empowerment and a base to launch dissidence. The straight girl and the queer guy in *The Unbearables* take up many roles

and use a number of “languages” in Scott’s terms, which help them curb the abuse of power and do what they want.

In episode 10 (“*Móδα 91 / Fashion 91*”) Yanis organizes a fashion défilé, and the female model that is supposed to arrive cancels the trip to Greece for health reasons. Without second thought, Yanis asks from Dimitra to be the model. Dimitra hesitates at the beginning, because she knows that Spiros would not allow her to take part in the show, but in the end she decides not to ask for his permission. Wearing a wig and pretending to be Deborah, Dimitra appears in the show and, interestingly enough, impresses Spiros, who does not understand that the person he admires is in fact his wife. Dimitra/Deborah uses the disguise as a means to gain back her power and appropriate the apartment in new ways. As a result, when Spiros invites her at home, assuming that Dimitra is not present, Spiros’ wife endorses an empowering identity. Unlike the inferior script she used to perform, in this scene Dimitra/Deborah turns into a dynamic woman, and a subject who dominates the game of seduction. She is assertive and mysterious, and even asks from Spiros to get in the kitchen and cook for her, thus carving out a space to explore other iterations of womanhood that go beyond the imperative of passivity and domesticity.

As the sitcom progresses, the fag-hag duet is given many other opportunities to perform playful and impromptu enactments that push the discursive boundaries of femininity and effeminacy into unexpected territories. If anything, however, these enactments are malleable and fluid, respecting the conventions of the sitcom. The situation comedy constitutes an amnesia-prone genre, where characters do not remember much of what they did in previous episodes, and scenes, interactions, and relationships between characters are not linear, but in a frequent process of

modification. Investing on this forgetful convention, the straight girl and the queer guy enact an array of performances which are humorous and highly contradictory.

While in many cases Dimitra is jealous of Spiros and depends on him, in other cases she completely forgets his existence and makes her own choices with the help of her friend. For example, in episode 44 Spiros admits to Dimitra that he had sex with another woman (Eleni Filini) and the shock of the news makes his wife devastated. After two episodes, though, Dimitra makes no reference to Spiros' infidelity, as if it never happened, and her only goal is to meet the new tenant of the building who is known to be handsome and rough in sex (episode 46, "*I Am You Are... Thanasis*"). In a similar way, although Yanis is often curious to learn about Vlasis' affairs with the women he goes out, in other occasions he appears completely disengaged with his flatmate's life and meets men with his girlfriend, without letting Spiros and Vlasis know. By paying particular emphasis to Yanis and Dimitra's shifting positionalities outside, but mainly inside the house, *The Unbearables* allows for a thick narrative that permits small, but significant acts of dissidence to be energized against domestic regulations. Furthermore, the ability of the sitcom to synthesize Yanis and Dimitra's inconsistent performances and contradictory scripts in a natural way opens up a means to envision gender, femininity, and effeminacy in the domestic sphere otherwise.

This is far more evident in the final episode. Following a circular schema, *The Unbearables* provides familiar images which, once again, place the four characters in different spheres: While Vlasis and Spiros are somewhere outside the usual familial space of the apartment, Dimitra and Yanis remain 'imprisoned' inside the house. Through projecting their future, Yanis and Dimitra move 30 years ahead and see themselves in the same building, visibly older, yet in relatively similar conditions. Vlasis is still in a relationship with Renia and has a child out of wedlock, yet

continues to live with Yanis. Spiros is still obsessed with the Polytechnic events, steadily angry at Dimitra's naiveté and even witnessed to flirt with other women. As far as Yanis and Dimitra are concerned, they are steadily dissatisfied with Vlasis' and Spiros' behavior, and unhappy with the way their lives have turned out to be. Through this leap into the future, Dimitra understands that her marriage with Spiros is not viable and opts for finding younger men who will be able to give her life meaning. Similarly, when Yanis gets a glimpse of his life in the future, he stops his daydreaming, and both characters come back to reality, ready for life-changing decisions. The closing scene features all characters inside Dimitra and Spiros' open-plan kitchen living room, the space from which everything started in the pilot. Spiros and Vlasis enter the apartment and stay in relative proximity to one another, while Dimitra and Yanis stand with their luggage right next to them, ready for their new and separate adventures outside the building.

Unlike conventional sitcoms, which would possibly cast the dissolution of a marriage or relationship as a sad and mournful event, Vlasis and Spiros, much like Yanis and Dimitra seem to be eager to make new beginnings. By not explaining the why's and how's behind these life-changing choices, the four characters stand in front of the camera together, one next to the other singing *To Τελευταίο Ποτηράκι* [*The last drink*], a song about romantic separation and relationship ruptures. If, according to David Grote's (1983) argument, "the principal fundamental situation of the situation comedy is that things do not change" (p. 12), the staging of the characters in the center of the frame, their cheerful disposition, as well as the proximity of their bodies make their decisions to break up as a plausible probability (Figure 1.3), suggesting that, despite all odds, things might change.



Picture 1.3

Figure 1.3 The characters stand in front of the camera singing The last drink.

Learning from the Present to Inform the Past

On the occasion of celebrating 25 years since the broadcast of *The Unbearables*, the television show *Ti Néa [What's New]* (2015) invited the protagonists of the sitcom on a MEGA channel studio to talk about the sitcom and reveal fun facts that may have remained unknown to the general public. As Dimitra Papadopoulou revealed, the show's content, despite the praise and positive feedback it accumulated, generated anxiety to a substantial number of Greek viewers who had difficulties with some of the topics raised by the series and went as far as to send complaint forms and press charges against the television station. Presumably, the queer character and his portrayal may have been one of the causes of such anxiety.

Nearly a decade after the transmission of the last episode of *The Unbearables*, the Greek National Council for Radio and Television (NCRTV) fined MEGA Channel 100,000 euros for having aired a kiss between two morphologically male characters in Christophoros Papakaliatis' popular drama series *Κλείσε τα Μάτια* [*Close Your Eyes*] (MEGA, 2003–2004). Although Greece's Supreme Administrative Court annulled this decision in December 2006, ruling that NCRTV's fine was unconstitutional (Rizos, 2014), the public reactions around the homosexual kiss, as well as the institutional decision to bowdlerize scenes that do not fit the heteronormative canon, tell something meaningful about the politics of queer permissibility when it comes to visual representations of non-heteronormative content onscreen. Under this perspective, if the reading of Yanis as a desexualized and single queer man was met with wariness and phobia by some Greek viewers who went as far as to protest, it would be interesting to see how the same viewers would have reacted had they considered the possibility of Yanis and Vlasis being more than just friends. Even though some may insist that Yanis and Vlasis are nothing but two persons of different sexual orientation who happen to share the same flat, this chapter has aligned itself with recent Internet-based interventions made by fans of *The Unbearables* that attempted to reclaim the text's heteropatriarchal structure and infiltrate it with new meanings (see Figure 1.4). By playing the devil's advocate, the chapter has posed these simple-to-ask but hard-to-answer questions: What makes the two men spend their lives under the same roof during these two seasons when they could live in different apartments and lead the kind of life each of whom claims to desire? Furthermore, given that *The Unbearables* constructs Yanis as an effeminized/effeminate subject confined within the sphere of the domestic, much like

Dimitra, then why would it not be possible for Yanis to be in a relationship with Vlas, just like Dimitra was with Spiros?

Apparently, a reading of *The Unbearables* under this dissident lens gives answers to questions which otherwise remain entirely hidden behind the narrative's seemingly totalitarian patriarchal content. At the same time, the schematic staging and positioning of the two men in highly discernible roles, which draws from existing narratives from conventional heterosexual sitcoms, exposes the performative and gendered character of their kinship relations and facilitates the queer decoding of their relationship. Besides, it is important to remember that both characters made their appearance on Greek television in a sitcom that was aired during primetime and was explicitly prohibited from showing anything more than a libidinous woman-hunter and an effeminate queer (Adamou, 2020, p. 158). Similarly, the inferiorized and weakening conditions within which Yanis and Dimitra appear to be restricted occlude any possibility to envision the queer man and his heterosexual girlfriend as an enabling duet, able to transform domestic seclusion into a potential place of empowerment. This chapter has addressed one of the first television sitcoms airing in Greece as a text that can harbor queer readings, contest the sitcom's patriarchal structure, and reveal—paraphrasing from a famous Greek quote—that while 'men' may be the heads of the household, 'women' can turn the head whichever way they please, even from within the space of the living room.

The next chapter, following similarly dissident reading strategies, considers a more recent television production, defined mainly as a comedy, whose characters' (hetero)sexuality remains largely in the closet. Can one of the main female characters' presumptive heterosexuality be challenged, and to what extent can Yorgos

Kapoutzidis' "comedy" also be felt as a fairy tale and a journey from disorientation to orientation?



Picture 1.4

Figure 1.4 Internet-based interventions made by fans of The Unbearables.

CHAPTER THREE

Making *In the Nick of Time* Perfectly Dissident

The year 2019 marks the twelfth anniversary of the Yorgos Kapoutzidis' broadcast of the very last episode of *Στο Παρά 5 [In the Nick of Time]* (MEGA, 2005-2007). Chronicling the adventures of five highly heterogeneous characters, *In the Nick of Time* 'hooked' millions of viewers since its initial airing, going so far as to gain ratings that only the annual Eurovision song contest and UEFA Champions leagues finals could possibly reach (Savvidis, 2015). A year after the end of the show, *In the Nick of Time* cemented its status as one of the ten most popular television series of all time (including *The Unbearables* on the same list) produced by MEGA channel (Thanou, 2018), and became one of the few television shows to have received such triumphantly positive reviews from television critics and famous personalities. Politician Liana Kanelli, for example, who usually abstains from discussing popular culture, agreed to play a guest role in the show, and even give an interview, where she offered a personal account of her relationship with *In the Nick of Time*: "I have been a fan of the series two years [now], and the show was suggested to my by Yorgos Hourmouziadis, Professor at the University of Thessaloniki, and member of the parliament in Greece ... I enjoyed [*In the Nick of Time*], it mentally relaxed me ... it managed to blend virtual reality with reality"⁶³ Admittedly, *In the Nick of Time* constituted a rare television phenomenon that injected enthusiasm to a wide variety of Greek viewers, and continues to do so, even after the closure of MEGA. Recently, Kapoutzidis was asked to comment on the unstinting appeal of the program and the famous scriptwriter replied with gratitude:

⁶³ "Είμαι φαν της σειράς δύο χρόνια και τη σειρά μου τη σύστησε ο καθηγητής στο Πανεπιστήμιο της Θεσσαλονίκης και βουλευτής, Γιώργος Χουρμουζιάδης [...] Το χάρηκα, με ξεκούρασε ψυχικά... κατάφερε να δέσει το virtual reality με το reality."

I am glad to see children on the street, [children] who were unborn back then [when *In the Nick of Time* was made and first seen], and watch the series today with the same joy and craziness that children in 2005-2007 used to... Already a new generation grows up with this serial [...] until it becomes like the Greek [old] films we grew up with. (Kouphoyiannakis, 2017) ⁶⁴

This undiminished popularity of *In the Nick of Time* has been extensively vetted by a near-record number of journalists, who are still interested in writing about Dalia (Smaragda Karidi), Zouboulia (Elissavet Konstantinidou), Angela (Angeliki Labri), Argyris (Argyris Angelou), and Spiros (Yorgos Kapoutzidis) as well as their unexpected mishaps toward solving the mystery behind Greece's Prime Minister's peculiar assassination. Nikos Drivas (2019) explains the reason behind this fan frenzy:

One of the main advantages of the series, to which its huge success is possibly due, is that it achieves to weave comedic situations and funny lines into the main web of the storyline, whose power is [further] enhanced by the comicality of the main heroes. ⁶⁵

Asteropi Lazaridou (2008) also concentrates on the comedic aspect of *In the Nick of Time*, explaining that the show offered viewers some of “the most fanciful punchlines ever written in a series.”⁶⁶ At the same time, however, she does not hesitate to

⁶⁴ “Χαίρομαι που βλέπω στον δρόμο παιδιά, που τότε ήταν αγέννητα, να παρακολουθούν σήμερα τη σειρά, με την ίδια χαρά και τρέλα που είχαν τα παιδιά τότε, το 2005-2007...[Η]δη μεγαλώνει κι άλλη γενιά με αυτό το σίριαλ, ...μέχρι να γίνει σαν τις ελληνικές ταινίες που μεγαλώσαμε.”

⁶⁵ “Ένα από βασικά πλεονεκτήματα της σειράς, στο οποίο πιθανότητα οφείλεται και η μεγάλη επιτυχία της, είναι το ότι κατορθώνει να εμπλέξει στον κύριο ιστό της υπόθεσης κωμικές καταστάσεις και αστείες ατάκες, η δύναμη των οποίων ενισχύεται από την κωμικότητα των ίδιων των ηρώων.”

⁶⁶ “...μερικές από τις πιο ευφάνταστες ατάκες που γράφτηκαν ποτέ για σίριαλ.”

denounce the show's melodramatic and metaphysical finale that provided closure she did not anticipate.

Nonetheless, for some fans, *In the Nick of Time* may not be a pure comedy about friendship, or a television product containing elements of melodrama only in its finale. In other words, while some viewers may have been shocked at the sudden loss of certain secondary characters, and even disappointed with the bittersweet ending of the show, others may have been moved by the very first episode, and related to *In the Nick of Time* in an unprecedentedly familiar way; a way that allows them to sense what it means to inhabit unwelcoming environments and navigate awry spaces that hardly feel like home. This chapter, continuing to deploy Sinfield's theorization, is an attempt "to test or challenge, revoke or destroy the intellectual foundation which makes [*In the Nick of Time*] the formidable thing it has become" (Sinfield, 1994, p. 24). Through the implementation of Sinfield's dissident angle, I argue that it is possible to read Kapoutzidis' tremendously successful television show, as a text which under the veil of comedy, masks the not-so-funny story of "not facing" other bodies, objects and typical life choices "the right way" (Ahmed, 2010, p. 126). A reading of this kind, which gives prominence to and simultaneously looks beyond the comical storylines upon which *In the Nick of Time*'s critical reception has been exclusively based, opens the door to examine the relationships between the main protagonists, upset some characters' orientations within the domains of gender and sexuality, and even wrestle with the dialectic of (homo)sexuality in cultural creation and production.

As Alexander Doty (1993, p. 43) reminded us in relation to cinema, a critical approach that considers auteurism and queer cultural reception practices is likely to enrich a spectator's queer pleasure. In other words, the interpretation of a creator's

work with reference to specific extra-textual information from their life and overall oeuvre may significantly add to the analysis of a text and lead that analysis into unknown directions. This chapter is animated by questions surrounding authorial voice, creative vision, and how a heavily consumed yet complex text may allow new readings to emerge. One of the novelties in Kapoutzidis' work, I argue, is how he inaugurates distinct television texts whose generic affluence reconfigures familial themes within alternative paradigms. Starting with a brief introduction to auteur theory in television studies, I explore Kapoutzidis' television auteurship and offer a general context in which to place my reading of *In the Nick of Time*. More specifically, I suggest that an examination of Kapoutzidis' showrunnership and most successful works illustrates how hybrid texts, such as *In the Nick of Time*, can illuminate different forms of families and harbor queer characters whose presence may have remained largely unexplored.

Auteur Theory in Television Studies

The field of television studies—particularly the strands of this field exploring television fiction—re-imagined auteur theory relatively recently, interrogating its strict association with cinema. The idea of authorship, which has been central within film studies ever since the 1950s (Caughie, 1981; Sarris, 1971), has been linked with the person who, according to François Truffaut (1976, p. 230), “brings something genuinely personal to his subject instead of just producing a tasteful, accurate but lifeless rendering of the original material.” Thus, the auteur, being responsible for the overall creative authority of a given product, proffers their own recognizable themes and visual cues, which, in turn, reflect their unique artistic vision and agenda.

Yet, while film studies have a long tradition of recognizing and even celebrating the individual and creative expression of a single person, there has been considerable debate over how and to what extent auteur theory could be implemented in the study of television fiction. This debate, which has primarily taken place within the US context, points to the collaborative workflow that characterizes big television industries and the involvement of more than one person in the making of an entertainment show (Thompson, 2003). Against this backdrop, and despite the conceptualization of television as the medium of the producer (Newcomb & Alley, 1983), recent scholarship has dissected the divisions of labor in the television context and even attempted to understand how individuals other than the director may have left their unique imprint on particular television works. As such, concepts, such as auteur (Corrigan, 1994), television auteur (Molloy, 2010), and auteuse (Nelson, 2014) have been used to discuss and examine the controlling perspective of a show's screenwriter.

Although the concepts of the auteur has entered strongly into emerging discussions of US television, the study of authorship in Greek television has been scarce. Taking the 1990s as a benchmark of the expansion of television entertainment programs, Angeliki Koukoutsaki-Monnier (2003, p. 730) considered the presence of teledirectors in the production of comedies, as well as their limited decision-making role within “a strongly concentrated sector, dependent on its broadcasters’ short-term commercial interests.” Likewise, Betty Kaklamanidou’s (2017, p. 143) work on MEGA’s early years of operation reveals private television channels’ “inexperience in long-term planning and/or television management.” Through her interview with famous screenwriter Michalis Reppas, Kaklamanidou (2017) revealed the changing and, at times, seemingly erratic directives that screenwriters and television directors

had to follow in order to conform to private channels' shifting commercial and strategic needs.

Georgia Aitaki's (2018e) "Authorship potentialities in Greek television fiction" dealt with the question of the auteur from a different perspective, especially in terms of Manousos Manousakis's social dramas. Aitaki (2018, p. 129) mapped out a comprehensive list of individuals—including Manousakis—whose overall artistic oeuvre and/or involvement in more than one role within the television industry rendered them the creative forces behind a television production. Within this list, Yorgos Kapoutzidis also emerged as "one of the most promising screenwriters, [and] as the creator of some of the most recent big hits of Greek television, [whose] writing is distinguished by a situational sense of humour and acute social commentary" (Aitaki, 2018, p. 135). Indeed, Kapoutzidis' creative stream, dispersed into the roles of creator and screenwriter, as well as actor, has provided him with access to diverse areas of the production side of the television spectrum. According to Robert Del Valle (2008, p. 403), a showrunner can be defined as "the writer/executive producer who created the series and who oversees the writing staff. He/she is also ultimately responsible for delivering the completed episodes to the studio and network within the required creative, budgetary, and scheduling parameters."

Since Kapoutzidis serves as the person "who has the overall responsibility for [his] shows" (Redvall, 2013, p. 125), his involvement is of crucial importance. Thus, attention to Kapoutzidis' showrunnership reveals at least two broad ways in which his work has distinct qualities. The first is the presence of stylistic and aesthetic markers that differentiate Kapoutzidis' work from other productions made and seen in Greek television. According to Christina Adamou's (2020, p. 249) analysis, Kapoutzidis' television works are relatively "expensive productions and comprised of permanent

sets for indoor scenes and exterior shootings.”⁶⁷ Such features bring shows, such as *In the Nick of Time*, closer to the medium of the cinema than that of television. The second way in which Kapoutzidis’ television products are read as unique is the presence of a common vision permeating his oeuvre. Kapoutzidis has been able to depict families in complex ways. This, in turn, has led to a more nuanced definition of family and how it can be understood well beyond blood ties. The next section combines biographical information about the creator with an exploration of the kinds of families that Kapoutzidis has presented in his shows to make a case for the creatively dissident readings that Kapoutzidis’ families encourage.

Kapoutzidis’ Queer Families

Yorgos Kapoutzidis was born in Serres, Greece in 1972. At the age of 18, he moved to Thessaloniki to study law and later to Athens to study acting. One of his first collaborations outside of television was with famous drag performer and showman, Takis Zacharatos. In 2000, Kapoutzidis appeared as a guest star in MEGA’s series, *Απαγορευμένη αγάπη [Forbidden Love]* (1998-2006), and, in 2002, he wrote the script for *Κάμερα Καφέ [Camera Café]* (MEGA, 2002-2003). In the years that followed, Kapoutzidis remained loyal to the MEGA channel, making guest appearances on a number of popular comedies and writing scripts that would eventually become highly successful television shows.

Kapoutzidis’ most popular works belong to the wide generic classification of comedy and exhibit a distinctive style of comedy that concentrates on a broad concept of family. This is evident in *Σαββατογεννημένες [Born [fem.] Lucky]* (MEGA, 2003-

⁶⁷ “[...] ακριβή παραγωγή για τα ελληνικά δεδομένα, με πολλούς σταθερούς χώρους και πολλά εξωτερικά γυρίσματα.”

2004), which follows the fate of Savvas Katsikis (Sakis Boulas), an affluent rentier who has a serious car accident only a short time before receiving a large amount of money from gambling. Exploring notions of fate, the series uses Savvas's accident and subsequent memory loss as an opportunity for his three ex-wives to re-appear in Savvas's life in order to claim his money for themselves. The series charts the selfish motives that drive each female character, the differences between the women, as well as the demise of an otherwise macho and abusive man who ends up becoming impotent and dependent on his ex-partners' support. It is in the merging of an uncommon ensemble of characters made up of ex-wives that a non-normative friends-as-family network can be traced.

The blurred boundaries between friendship and family are again explored in *Εθνική Ελλάδος [Team of Greece]* (MEGA, 2015). This show depicts the gradual union of four women: Niki (Smaragda Karidi), Froso (Konstantina Mihail), Phoebe (Katerina Papoutsaki), and Stalo (Mariella Savidou), whose different financial, social, and racial statuses do not prevent them from approaching each other and becoming members of the first curling team of Greece. Acting as a counterweight to the difficulties of everyday life, the complex and meaningful friendship network created in the female-only group of *Team of Greece* translates into a form of family able to proffer care when the main characters' biological families are unable to do so.

Kapoutzidis' commitment towards advancing a feminist agenda comes to the fore again in *In The Nick of Time*. Unlike his aforementioned works, *In the Nick of Time* is the only one to integrate male characters in the main cast. However, *In the Nick of Time* does not only focus on mixed-gender protagonists. While MEGA characterized *In the Nick of Time* as a production belonging to the comedy genre, Adamou (2020) viewed the show as falling under the rubric of quality television, and

Papanikolaou (2007b) considered it a hybrid whose “modern, pop aesthetic can balance everything, can reconcile [everything] can neutralize the differences that define reality.”⁶⁸ When viewing *In the Nick of Time*, it follows on the heels of a number of buddy-themed series like *Friends* (NBC, 1994-2004) and *The Unbearables* (MEGA, 1991-1993), as well as action spy films such as *Mission: Impossible* (1996), and even family adventure comedies like *Scooby-Doo* (2002). Yet, inclusive of Papanikolaou’s reading of *In the Nick of Time* as a pop fairy-tale, I contend that his argument would be even more accurate if analyzed slightly further; it may well be Kapoutzidis’ familiarization with pop culture that makes *In the Nick of Time* an imaginary other-worldly space that can miraculously vanquish the ‘villains’ and restore peace in the microcosm of the main heroes. Yet, unlike typical fairytales that bring about such happy-endings through the defeat of the narrative’s ‘villains’ and the placing of the ‘good’ boys and girls into gender-appropriate roles and predestined life choices (Bellas, 2017; Zipes, 2000), Kapoutzidis’ text never loses sight of reality and instead of neutralizing everything, exercises cultural criticism against outdated gender tropes and canonical ways of living. Drivas (2019) makes a relevant argument, pointing to the ways in which the show’s reliance on alternative forms of kinship and family overtakes “the commonly intense sexism and naiveté [embedded] in Greek television series.”⁶⁹

Kapoutzidis, who has increasingly presented himself as a vehement advocate of social equality and human rights, gave light to a particular segment of his past, sharing traumatic memories of bullying and harassment that he had experienced when

⁶⁸ “σύγχρονη, ποπ αισθητική μπορεί να εξισορροπήσει τα πάντα, να συμφιλιώσει [τα πάντα], να εξουδετερώσει τις διαφορές που ορίζουν την πραγματικότητά.”

⁶⁹ “τον συνήθως έντονο σεξισμό και αφέλεια των ελληνικών τηλεοπτικών σειρών.”

he was younger. Referencing his experience with *In the Nick of Time*'s main cast, he illustrates the connection between personal and professional life (Faysbook, 2015):

[When we were working on *In the Nick of Time*,] we were not five co-workers. For me, we were a family. And that is what I was writing. That is what I was feeling when I was writing, and this is what the series is all about. I want people to know that we truly were a family.⁷⁰

Through Kapoutzidis' own perspective, new insights can be revealed about *In the Nick of Time*. While Kapoutzidis never openly expressed his sexuality, he never actually hid such issues from his work. Instead, Kapoutzidis' concentration on diverse femininities and masculinities, as well as unconventional families, can be conceptualized as a strong and scathing critique of heteronormative rules and conventions.

Furthermore, the showrunner's attraction to stories about misfits might be easily related to his own status as an ex-outsider in a heterosexual world. According to Doty (1993, p. 44), "we enter cultural history at various times and under differing circumstances, and this affects how we make sense of the personalities and products within a culture." With Doty's and Kapoutzidis' words in mind, I focus my analysis on *In the Nick of Time*'s main characters and interpret Angela's story as a tale of transformation and a journey from disorientation to (re)orientation, similar to the one that the showrunner and some of us may have lived on our way from the closet to the world. Through this reading, it is possible to envision how an extremely successful and fan-favorite show, which has been watched by children and adults of all ages, can

⁷⁰ "Δεν ήμασταν πέντε συνάδελφοι. Για μένα ήμασταν μία οικογένεια. Και αυτό έγγραφα. Αυτό αισθανόμουν όταν έγγραφα και αυτό είναι η ίδια η σειρά. Θέλω να ξέρει και ο κόσμος ότι πραγματικά ήμασταν οικογένεια."

make use of stereotypes and funny innuendos in an attempt to support the enactment of dissident gender expressions inside the symbolic space of family. In order to understand the non-hegemonic gender logistics that Kapoutzidis brings to the fore, a brief exploration of the main characters that form *In the Nick of Time*'s group of friends is required. According to Jewkes and Morrell (2012), hegemonic masculinity⁷¹ can be described as:

[A] set of values, established by men in power that functions to include and exclude, and to organize society in gender unequal ways. It combines several features: a hierarchy of masculinities, differential access among men to power (over women and other men), and the interplay between men's identity, men's ideals, interactions, power, and patriarchy. (p. 40)

Contrary to this definition, men in *In the Nick of Time* 'do' gender in ways that are anything but hegemonic. Argyris and Spiros' masculinities are circumscribed by their under-construction status; Spiros, on the one hand, is still an undergraduate studying accountancy and financially dependent on his grandmother, Sofia (Irene Koumanarianou). Argyris, on the other hand, works as a journalist and television presenter at his father's local and not particularly popular television channel. As young men who are not successful or self-reliant, Spiros and Argyris do not tick all the boxes required to claim manhood (let alone hegemonic masculinity). Furthermore, their passion for comics and geeky stuff, as well as their lack of interest in sex or

⁷¹ The concept of *hegemonic masculinity* has been coined by sociologist Rawyaen Connel (1987). Since then, the term has been used in a variety of disciplines and particularly within the fields of gender, sexuality, and masculinity to study those behaviors, practices, and performances among men that reproduce gender inequality, implicating men's domination over women and other supposedly subordinate men. For a critique of the concept of hegemonic masculinity, see Demetriou (2001) and Moller (2007).

romantic relationships with women enhances their placement in a developmental stage somewhere between adolescence and adulthood.

Unlike the two male characters who present many commonalities in the ways they perform their gender, *In the Nick of Time*'s female characters work to proffer a set of distinct femininities at play. While Dalia, the world's richest person, adopts a version of naïve femininity, Zouboulia's heterosexual femininity combines assertiveness and autonomy, which appear to have resulted from her early loss of her husband and her increased responsibilities as a mother and the head of a house in the Greek countryside. Angela, however, is seen as the exact opposite of Argyris and Spiros; she emerges as a tomboy and the epitome of what Jack Halberstam has defined as *female masculinity* (1998). In his intention to deconstruct the well-held and long-circulating notion that masculinity is a cultural overlay ascribed to a given sex or body, Halberstam introduces "a model of female masculinity that remarks on its multiple forms but also calls for new and self-conscious affirmations of different gender taxonomies" (1998, p. 9). Pursuing Halberstam's conceptualization of femininity, the character of Angela appears to know which gender enactments are societally acceptable, yet she consciously ignores such taxonomies and prefers to make up her own. The viewer is thus invited to meet a figure who is pretty but distant, aggressive, and unfriendly as she starts to speak and occupy spaces.

Under this light, one tempting reading of *In the Nick of Time* would allow us to examine how some of the main characters' masculinities and femininities diverge from the norm and thus how they queer Kapoutzidis' text. This would be in line with the relatively recent developments in the area of queer methodologies and media studies, where texts and characters are not necessarily seen as having been produced with the intention to contain queer messages, but are often seen as queer because they

have been (or could be) reclaimed as such by fans and avid followers of popular culture. Drawing on de Certeau (1984), Henry Jenkins has rightfully argued in *Textual Poachers*, that “[b]ecause popular narratives often fail to satisfy, fans must struggle with [texts], to try to articulate to themselves and others unrealized possibilities within the original works” (Jenkins, 1992, p. 24). The fans’ power to intervene in a text and make it their own has been tested by a large number of media theorists. For instance, academics such as Beirne (2004), Hanmer (2014), and Projansky and Van de Berg (2000) have ‘mined’ (and sometimes projected) secret couplings, unspoken desires, and homoerotic subtext in shows such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (THE WB, 1997-2003), *Xena the warrior princess* (MCA, 1995-2001), and *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* (ABC, 1996-2003). Such readings, contingent on ‘coded signs’, ensure the circulation of characters that can be translated as lesbians, without them ever coming out openly as such (Weiss, 1992). Barbara Creed, in the same direction, unpacks some of the most typical sets of mannerisms and gestures used for decoding ‘lesbianism’, and explains how masculine-looking and masculine-behaving figures have been—among other tropes—hitched to lesbianism and coupled with non-normative and transgressive identity expressions (1995).

While admitting the important role that such psychoanalytic approaches have offered in the destabilization of media’s heteronormative representational politics, Lindner (2012) remains skeptical about the relevance of a framework that is exclusively focused around what White (1999) calls the “lesbian visual economy” (as cited in Lindner, 2012, p. 282). Lindner (2012) does not discard the usefulness of the vision per se; yet, she suggests that “appropriative possibilities, particularly in relation to films that are so centrally about bodily performance and physicality, and are more (use)fully understood in embodied terms and through a consideration not only of their

lesbian “visual economy” but their lesbian ‘sensibility’” (p. 284). From a similar perspective, Barker’s *The Tactile Eye* (2009) proffers a methodological framework of analysis that minimizes the perceived distance between the viewer and the filmic text, thus allowing the former’s body to react, interact and participate in the ‘body’ of the text in “fleshly, muscular, visceral” ways (p. 13). Through such a close and intimate relationship between the viewer and the text, the rigid labels of subject and object become decrystallized giving way to what Barker (2009) understands as “a full-bodied opening into and suffusion of one with the other that goes beyond surface, middle, and depth” (p. 146).”

Drawing on both Lindner and Barker’s embodied approaches in analyzing filmic texts, my intention in the rest of the chapter is to deploy a similar methodological framework in the examination of *In the Nick of Time*’s text. Although this mode of reading texts beyond the vision has been mainly put in use in film studies, I contend that it is applicable to television texts too. Further, as I have hopefully established already, Kapoutzidis’ show may not be a film, yet it is surely not a typical (Greek) television show either. Thus, a phenomenological, affective, and visceral approach of consuming *In the Nick of Time* allows for the discovery of beyond-vision-pleasures that the show can potentially incite.

Notably important to this chapter’s analysis of *In the Nick of Time* from an embodied perspective is Ahmed’s (2006) concept of *(dis)orientation*. Ahmed’s phenomenological account of queer embodiments raises the topic of sexual orientation through the following set of questions and hypotheses:

What does it mean for sexuality to be lived as orientated? What difference does it make “what” or “who” we are orientated toward in the very direction

of our desire? If orientation is a matter of how we reside in space, then sexual orientation might also be a matter of residence; of how we inhabit spaces as well as “who” or “what” we inhabit spaces with (p. 1).

Congruent with Ahmed’s theorizing, the aim of this chapter is to go beyond Angela’s ‘tomboy’ appearance and explore the ways that *In the Nick of Time*’s female protagonist’s body orients itself in relation to other bodies, objects, and spaces. Through this investigation, I show how a popular television text like *In the Nick of Time* may be felt, sensed, and conceived of as a social fairytale and as a journey of self-transformation through which all characters, but mainly Angela, may “find [her] way in a world that acquires new shapes, depending on which way [she] turn[s]” (Ahmed, 2006, p.1).

Beyond Vision: ‘Feeling’ (for) Angela

From the pilot, Kapoutzidis, through the voice of a female narrator (Zeta Makripoulia), introduces the viewers to Angela in terms that accentuate and sensationalize the queer ways she inhabits space:

Angela left home at the age of fourteen. Good thing for her mother who could not control her untamable and aggressive character. At the beginning, Angela tried to make the big time and get into show-biz. But it was her brusque character that did not let her settle down in any job for more than a week.⁷²

⁷² “Η Αγγέλα έφυγε από το σπίτι της στα 14. Ευτυχώς για τη μητέρα της που δεν μπορούσε να κοντρολάρει τον ατίθασο και επιθετικό της χαρακτήρα. Στην αρχή η Αγγέλα προσπάθησε να πιάσει την καλή, να μπει στη σόου μπιζ. Αλλά ήταν αυτός ο απότομος χαρακτήρας της Αγγέλας που δεν την άφησε να στεριώσει σε καμία δουλειά πάνω από βδομάδα.”
In the Nick of Time, MEGA Channel, season 1, episode 1, 13:05-15:56. Retrieved August 23 2018 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uCmKDM5eJjo>

Angela is instantly presented as an individual who encounters several problems in the environments she dwells. The first taste that viewers get of Angela is when they see her taking part in a beauty pageant and the ‘gender discordance’ is made explicit right away because Angela’s body and behavior do not go hand in hand. On hearing of the crowning of another female contestant, Angela acts aggressively and leaves the main stage angry.⁷³ We then witness her finding a job at a play-store and later at a night-club, but wherever she goes, she is “out of place” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 12).

Although spaces like home and place of origin typically constitute orientation devices, Angela does not experience her family house and the city of Ioannina as ‘home’, and it is for this reason that she leaves from her place of birth when she is still a teenager. For Ahmed, such flights from home constitute “a form of migration and can be understood as a process of disorientation and reorientation” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 9). Disorientation presupposes orientation in the first place; Angela however, is steadily depicted as a body with no “anchoring signs” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 1) and no safe hallmarks that would allow her to create a safe space to which she could resort. As a result, this sense of disorientation is likely to have been experienced long before and throughout her move to the capital. In the rest of the pilot, viewers follow Angela and observe her unsuccessful attempts to “create new lines”; yet again, she cannot

⁷³ *In the Nick of Time*, MEGA Channel, season 1, episode 1, 13:26-13:59. Retrieved August 23 2018 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uCmKDM5eJjo> On an intertextual reading, the scene is reminiscent of Vasiliki Mastoropoulou’s actual reaction in the 1997 beauty contest, hosted by ANT1 channel. When the female contestant realized she would not be crowned, she took her heels off and left the main stage leaving everyone in shock. See <https://www.gossip-tv.gr/g-specials/back-to-the-future/video/362099/eleni-thymithikan-ta-kallisteia-otan-diagonizomeni-petaxe-ta-papoytsia-tis>

hold any job, and when she is asked to attend an acting interview at a hotel, she gets lost and visits another one.

Angela's lack of orientation—both literally and figuratively—becomes the incentive for new encounters and unforeseen life directions. When Angela understands her being in the wrong place, she takes the elevator to leave the hotel. Yet, the stoppage of the elevator cab finds Angela sharing the same space with five complete strangers. While Zouboulia, Dalia, Spiros, Argyris, and the Prime Minister react differently to this unexpected occurrence and try to find a way out, Angela stands out from the rest of the entrapped bodies. Leaning against the wall of the elevator, the female character calmly takes her cellphone out of her bag and starts playing a game, acting as if nothing happened. The lack of action by the part of Angela is marked by a series of moments in which Zouboulia attempts to understand if the red-haired woman is a foreigner or simply insensitive. Angela, though, is not particularly affected by Zouboulia's rude comments and returns to her cellphone; the female character's unwillingness to synchronize herself with rest of the bodies inside the elevator reveals a subject that has not learned to “go with the flow” and that appears to be comfortable in spaces that others consider confined and claustrophobic. It is only when Evangelos Stavrianidis dies in front of them (Figure 3.1), that the rest

of the characters, including Angela, begin to leave aside the lines that directed their lives up until that time, and “acquire new directions” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 12).



Picture 3.1

Figure 3.1 The five characters are the only witnesses of the poisoning of Evangelos Stavrianidis.⁷⁴

During the first half of season one, Angela, Dalia, Zouboulia, Spiros, and Argyris are cast as bodies that struggle to inhabit real and symbolic spaces that are not meant for them. According to Ahmed (2006), “for bodies to arrive in spaces where they are not already at home, where they are not ‘in place’ involves hard work; indeed, it involves painstaking labour for bodies to inhabit spaces that do not extend

⁷⁴ *In the Nick of Time*, MEGA Channel, season 1, episode 1, 44:30-49:30. Retrieved August 23 2018 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uCmKDM5eJjo>

their shape” (p. 62). *In the Nick of Time* provides exactly this iconography of bodies that occupy spaces that do not belong to them and vice versa. The group of five is seen spying the Prime minister’s secretary to extract information that will help them find their orientation and solve the mystery (episode 2); yet, the more they try, the more entangled and confused they turn out being. With no prior familiarization with this new line that opens up before them, the newly formed team of *In the Nick of Time* is not sure how and whether they are adept at undertaking such a risky mission; some characters are more determined than others, but all of them express reticence at times and even consider the possibility of returning back to their comfort zone because the “proximity” of new objects is imagined “as a threat” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 2).

Despite all the characters pushing their personal limits, and this being a fundamental part of their transformative journey, hard work has mainly been made by the character of Angela. Interestingly enough, the female protagonist is the only one whose traces are being found early on by *In the Nick of Time*’s ‘forces of evil’. Through the eyes of the paid assassins, we see Angela walking down the streets without knowing that she is being followed. Once she notices a car behind her and the eyes of the two men fixed upon her body, Angela walks faster and runs to get lost from sight (Figure 3.2). Viewers see the female character walking up the roof of a building, with a big kitbag on her arm filled with top-secret information; Angela is sweating but does not stop moving. The camera’s movement, as well as Angela’s maneuvers to interrupt surveillance and save herself, activate our “kinaesthetic memory” because “[o]ur bodies’ muscular empathy with the [text’s] body emerges partly from experience” (Barker, 2009, p. 75). As a result, the female protagonist’s attempts to run, escape and keep something hidden from strangers might remind some of us the similar movements that our bodies have possibly made while living in the

closet and in fear—both interiorized and pragmatic—of being discovered as not facing the ‘right’ way.



Picture 3.2

*Figure 3.2 Angela is running to disrupt surveillance.*⁷⁵

While Angela eventually succeeds in getting off, she does not dare go back to her newly rented house because Stavrianidis’ assassins might know where she lives. The rest of the characters provide Angela with cover in both metaphorical and literal terms; Argyris for instance, suggests Angela come and stay at his place and she accepts his invitation, yet not whole-heartedly. Furthermore, Dalia lends Angela some of her clothes, but she does not feel comfortable wearing them. At the first level of analysis, the gown-ish and haute couture clothes that Angela is given to wear serve as a source of humor accentuating Dalia’s living in a queer time and place. A

⁷⁵ *In the Nick of Time*, MEGA Channel, season 1, episode 3, 34:49-44:40. Retrieved August 23 2019 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G8jD04s2LQI>

phenomenological reading of this sequence reveals that such clothes operate as a sign of confirmation that feminine “tools” and accessories do not sit well on Angela’s body. Furthermore, as much as spaces and bodies relate and inform one another, the same occurs when it comes to bodies interacting with certain objects. As Ahmed (2006) aptly argues:

Objects, as well as spaces, are made for some kinds of bodies more than others. Objects are made to size as well as made to order: while they come in a range of sizes, the sizes also presume certain kinds of bodies as having “sizes” that will “match.” [...] The failure of something to work is a matter of a *failed orientation*: a tool is used by a body for which it was not intended, or a body uses a tool that does not extend its capacity for action. (p. 51)

In their research about the meaning and politics of beauty in lesbian women’s lives, Cogan and Erickson (2012) quote a research participant who points to the highly gendered and heteronormative fashion rules that make a number of lesbians ‘suffocate’ under a system that favors mainstream beauty and limited behavioral ideals for women. Angela is being asphyxiated by stereotypically feminine clothes, yet this sense of asphyxia also extends to the management of the public sphere, which often appears to be highly sexualized and heteropatriarchal.

Indeed, while Kapoutzidis constructs the main group of *In the Nick of Time* as a safe space that invests in gender equality, the public sphere is understood as male-dominated. Throughout most of the first season, Angela's body remains "out of line", wary, and unwilling to adjust to the flow of bodies that surround her. Her deviation from those markers that Ahmed (2006) defines as "lifelines" (p. 17) is further underlined by Kapoutzidis' screenwriting decision to place Angela out in the public and at the constant proximity of strangers. Feminist and queer geographers have pointed out that while the public space is a topos where all bodies are equally on display, the different behaviors, looking relations, and 'liberties' given to women and men are certainly uneven (Bell & Valentine, 1995; Oswin, 2008; Probyn, 1995).



Picture 3.3

Figure 3.3 Displaying a deadpan calmness, Angela pepper sprays a potential mugger.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ *In the Nick of Time*, MEGA Channel, season 1, episode 1, 15:36-16:02. Retrieved August 23 2019 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uCmKDM5eJjo>

By working in the semi-public spaces of cafeterias and bars, which according to Freeman (2002) favor “unconsummated erotics” (p. xv; see also Abatzi, 2009), Angela comes in contact with several male bodies that express their interest in her, but this desire to face each other in sexual ways is not mutual. And although Angela is not interested in giving in to men’s calls, her body, often mistaken as vulnerable and fragile, gives men the erroneous impression that they are ‘allowed’ to approach her without much to lose. In a number of scenes, male clients make an order from Angela and take this time as an opportunity to talk to her in ways that supersede the relationship that a client and an employee would typically entail. To the men’s surprise, Angela is not reluctant to express her displeasure for them and even becomes verbally aggressive and hostile. In these episodes where heterosexual men hit on the female character, Angela responds in ways that give away a certain rawness and close the door on the potentiality of a romantic possibility with them. The purpose of such scenes’ visual and narrative elements are twofold; firstly, they illustrate how Angela’s actions veer from the gender-appropriate enactments that someone would expect from a physically feminine and seemingly petite woman (Figure 3.3). Secondly, they make some of us recall those awkward moments when our body betrayed us by sending messages-against our will to subjects we may have not wished to face.

Angela’s difficulties, though, are also evinced when it comes to communicating with *In the Nick of Time*’s main group. In the rally toward finding the culprits behind Stavrianidis’ death, the female character is often ‘lost in translation’ and her sense of disorientation is foregrounded and satirized by the rest of the group and mainly by Zouboulia. In Episode 6, after having escaped from Stavrianidis’ assassins, Angela along with the rest of the group continue their mission toward collecting evidence. This time, the five characters arrive at an organized camp to trace

a man who could possibly provide them with information about the prime minister's murder. While Angela is lying by the beach on her own, Spiros, Zouboulia, and Argyris brainstorm ideas for approaching the unknown man. As they discuss, the question of who is going to talk to him remains open.

Spiros: So, I thought that in order to approach him, we have to make Angela hit on him.

Zouboulia: That's what you thought? (ironically, then turning her head to address Argyris) So tell me, is it available in other fruits? (asking about the sunscreen).

Spiros: Excuse me, that is not what we are talking about!

Zouboulia: Are you completely insane? Are we going to send her [emphasis] to hit on a man?

Spiros: She looks fine.

Zouboulia: From the outside. [Because] inside, she is [like] Priest Tsakalos.

Spiros: Yes, but she's got the looks, though. Imagine if it were the other way round. Priest Tsakalos outside and Vougiouklaki on the inside!

Zouboulia: She is like Antonia's son from the Zaproudis family. What to blame the poor thing for...born this way.

Fotis: Yet, we have nothing to lose trying (Fotis shouts "Angela!" and she comes closer).

So listen, what we thought in order to approach him. You will go and hit on him.

Angela: [You mean] in cold blood?

Fotis: Yes, how does that sound to you? Would you be able to do it?

Angela: Perfect, of course I can. I will go and hit him for good. I will throw him two punches and two kicks until he speaks and the end.

Zouboulia: There you go (ironically). That is how the girl understands ‘hit on someone’.⁷⁷

The aforementioned dialogue plays with the double entendre of the phrase *tin pefto* (which is defined as either ‘hit on someone’ or ‘attack someone’) and allows viewers to understand that Angela does and sees “everything wrong,” and this is what constructs her as orienting herself in different directions from most people. Yet, particular attention should also be drawn to what is implied sideways. When Zouboulia compares Angela with a known quantity from her village concluding “what to blame the poor thing for ... born this way,” *In the Nick of Time* introduces essentialism as a framework for comprehending differences. “Born this way,” in the wake of Lady Gaga’s hugely influential song, has become the LGBTQ community’s lever to gain legal rights and invokes, according to Kristen Schilt, “that sexual orientation is innate, essential part of a person that cannot be changed or acted upon by others” (2015, p. 1). Thus, Zouboulia’s supposedly innocent comment can be read as highly ambiguous and even revealing of Angela’s sexual dissidence.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Σπύρος: Για να τον προσεγγίσουμε, θα βάλουμε την Αγγέλα να του την πέσει
Ζουμπουλία: και για πες, το έχει και με άλλα φρούτα; (αναφερόμενη στο αντηλιακό του Φώτη)
Σπύρος: συγγνώμη αυτό είναι το θέμα μας;
Ζουμπουλία: ζουρλάθηκες τελείως; θα στείλουμε αυτήν να την πέσει σε άντρα;
Σπύρος: μια χαρά κοπέλα είναι
Ζουμπουλία: απ’ έξω. Από μέσα είναι ο Παπα-Τσάκαλος
Σπύρος: εντάξει την εμφάνιση την έχει όμως. φαντάσου να ήταν το αντίθετο. Από έξω παπατσάκαλος και από μέσα βουγιουκλάκη!
Ζουμπουλία: σαν το γιο της Αντωνίας του Ζαπρούδη και αυτό. Τί φταίει κι αυτό, έτσι γεννήθηκε!
[ενδιαφέρουσα αναφορά στο γεννιέσαι-γίνεσαι, κοιτάω και Sabrina, θα με βοηθήσει]
Φώτης: πάντως δε χάνουμε τίποτα να δοκιμάσουμε. (Ο Φώτης φωνάζει την Αγγέλα κι αυτή πλησιάζει)
Λοιπόν άκου να δεις τί σκεφτήκαμε για να τον προσεγγίσουμε. Θα πας εσύ και θα του την πέσεις
Αγγέλα: στη ψύχρα;
Φώτης: ναι, πώς σου φαίνεται, θα μπορέσεις να το κάνεις;
Αγγέλα: τέλεια, πώς δε μπορώ, θα παω και θα του την πέσω κανονικά. Θα τον πλακώσω κανονικά, θα του δώσω δυο μπουνιδια και δυο κλωτσιδια
Ζουμπουλία: ορίστε, έτσι αντιλαμβάνεται η κοπέλα το να του την πέσεις.
In the Nick of Time, MEGA Channel, season 1, Episode 6, 08:20-09:20. Retrieved August 20 2019 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6-4plORugZo&t=1s>

⁷⁸ Related to Zouboulia’s ironic comment about Angela’s sexual orientation is another comment that targets the latter’s gender enactments. In Episode 4, the five are gathered at Angela’s house, which is dirty and messy. Zouboulia criticizes Angela for not cleaning the house, but Angela replies sharply that

Angela makes efforts to draw new lines, and this is evident from the middle of the first season onwards. Slowly but steadily, Angela's orientation toward the rest of the group begins to change. There are a number of instances when the camera shows Angela's attempts to come closer to her new (and only) friends and show how committed she is to their shared cause. This allows some viewers to empathize with the female body's attempts to create links and face other subjects for the first time. Angela's explosive personality is never completely lost; as Ahmed explains, "lines become the external trace of an interior world, as signs of who we are on the flesh that folds and unfolds before others" (2006, p. 18). This means that Angela cannot transform into a different person overnight, but her stiffness and detachment from the rest of the characters slowly fade, thus letting the latter see different aspects of herself. This is illustrated vividly and comically in Episode 20. After the death of one of Stavrianidis' assassins in a car accident, the police discover a number of photographs inside the car that incriminate the group of five. As a result, Zouboulia, Angela, Dalia, Spiros, and Argyris find themselves at the police station trying to identify the corpse and explain their relationship with the deceased man. While the group is unsure of how to deal with the police officer, Angela takes the lead, warning them not to react no matter what they see. Indeed, the female character goes away from the group and, crying, steps toward the police officer. The young man tries to calm her down, but Angela's seemingly fragile but provocative body is already wrapped around him. The police officer tries to keep his composure and carry out the interrogation as expected. Yet, Angela lingers her body over the policeman making him feel highly uncomfortable. The sensual movement of Angela's body and its proximity to the body of the policeman invites a

"I'll get a woman." That's when Zouboulia gets back to her yelling, "Why, what are you, a man?" *In the Nick of Time*, MEGA Channel, season 1, Episode 4, 19:28-19:36. Retrieved August 20 2019 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_dbuflksenw

haptic looking, leaving the police officer stunned and the rest of *In the Nick of Time*'s group surprised (Fig. 3.3). As film theorist Laura Mulvey has famously argued:

Traditionally, the woman displayed has functioned on two levels: as [an] erotic subject for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium, with a shifting tension between the looks on either side of the screen. (1975, p. 13)



Picture 3.3

*Figure 3.3 Angela bends pretending she is picking over her jacket.*⁷⁹

Unlike Mulvey's useful but somehow totalizing theorization, *In the Nick of Time* elicits and simultaneously subverts patriarchy, rendering the female erotic subject as having control over the male viewer. In this way, Angela reverses the rules of the

⁷⁹ *In the Nick of Time*, MEGA Channel, season 1, Episode 20, 34:10-36:27. Retrieved August 20 2019 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CBMhgHJ-X4>

game and shows how the looked-at subject can become an object that can retain its agency. Most importantly, however, through this process of becoming someone different from who she usually is, Angela engages in a form of “aesthetic activism” (Rader, 2011, p. 5). The female character’s femme enactment reinforces the argument that femininity is an adaptive performance and, drawing on Judith Butler (1990, p. 175), reveals “the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency.” At the same time though, this all-together feminization of Angela, which looks artificial and highly theatrical, may call to mind images from the past when some of us practiced similar performances to avoid suspicion and ‘pass’ as facing the right way. Perhaps most tellingly, when the group of five leave the police station and ask Angela how she did what she did to the police officer, she replies uneasily yet proudly, “because I do not do this [kind of stuff] it does not mean that I do not know them. When I was young, I did [such things].”⁸⁰ This answer, reverberating with Ahmed’s theorizing evinces that “‘what is behind’ refers to what is in the past or what happened ‘before’” (2006, p. 38). Somehow, in this statement, Angela constructs femininity as “an area of past journeys,” which is familiar to her, but she is unwilling to traverse it again (Ahmed, 2006, p. 38).

Of course, an important element that allows the dissident reading of Angela to emerge is also the way the rest of the characters explore questions of gender and sexuality. As Papanikolaou (2007b) writes: “the eroticism, sexuality and otherness are undermined and neutralized, but always impose themselves through innuendos, either as jokes, or as aesthetic and as an acceptable reality off-screen.”⁸¹ I suggest that paying attention to these innuendos enhances the queering of Angela but also the social

⁸⁰ “τα ξέρω, μη κοιτάς ότι δεν τα κάνω, όταν ήμουν πιτσιρικά τα έκανα.”

⁸¹ “Ο ερωτισμός, η σεξουαλικότητα και η διαφορετικότητα υπονομεύονται και εξουδετερώνονται, πλην όμως επιβάλλονται είτε ως υπονοούμενα, είτε ως αστεία, είτε ως αισθητική και ως αποδεκτή πραγματικότητα εκτός της οθόνης.”

dimension of Kapoutzidis' fairy tale. Aside from Zouboulia's earlier comments that can be understood as a hint regarding Angela's sexuality, Theopoula's (Efi Papatheodorou) query about the meaning of the word lesbian, and Angela's angry response to the old woman's lack of knowledge brings the topic of non-normative sexuality to the fore, comically revealing Kapoutzidis' willingness to explore such topics and even pose ideological critiques in indirect ways.⁸² Take, for instance, Zouboulia's innocent stroll on the island of Mikonos and the playing of Alkistis Protopsalti's *Τράβα σκανδάλη* [*Pull the Trigger*] song every time a gay couple is witnessed holding hands. A scene like this creates a difference in knowledge, with the viewer knowing more than the fictional character (who believes she has visited the island of Tinos) but at the same time, it makes a direct reference to Christophoros Papakaliatis' drama series *Κλείσε τα μάτια* [*Close Your Eyes*] (MEGA, 2003–2004) and a critique of the National Audiovisual Council's decision to fine a television channel for showing a kiss exchanged between two men during prime time.⁸³

As we have established, the feminist queer agenda of *In the Nick of Time* bleeds through into the text sideways, yet conspicuously enough to sense Angela's transformative journey as well as the rest of the group's efforts to naturalize difference through jokes and playful remarks. Although there is a variety of instances, the functioning of the group of friends as a safe space for their female member is best demonstrated through a scene that, at first sight, might appear to serve exclusively comedic purposes. Episode 23 is premised on the notion that Angela is accused of a crime she did not commit, and it is for this reason that she remains domesticated inside Fotis' house for days. Unexpectedly enough, however, a policeman (Thomas Paliouras)

⁸² *In the Nick of Time* (2005–2007), Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tviVvzcyXqg>

⁸³ *In the Nick of Time*, MEGA Channel, season 2, episode 2, 15:48-16:40. Retrieved September 17 2019 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CtH5YoK3yG4>

arrives at Fotis' apartment for a search, causing Angela to hide behind the sofa. When the policeman shows Fotis a picture of Angela and asks if he knows her, Fotis pretends to be gay and assures the policeman that no woman has ever entered his house. When the policeman forcefully walks past the door and sees Zouboulia and Dalia, Fotis is quick to justify his former lie and explains that Zouboulia and Dalia are lesbians, thus implying that they do not count as women. Dalia starts role-playing immediately and acts as Zouboulia's female partner; Zouboulia, however, cannot possibly be in character and faints.

Facing this far-fetched story, the policeman finds it difficult to believe the four characters, and his suspicion becomes even more legitimate when he spots a tiny pink tank top and a pair of flashy trousers lying on the sofa. Judging from the fact that none of the persons present in the house could possibly fit in these clothes, he asks them to whom they belong, betting that these items could belong to Angela. At this point, though, Spiros enters the house through the open door and Argyris tries to explain the situation to him in clumsy ways. While the policeman looks at them with distrust and decides to take them to Fotis' father's television channel to see whether his father could confirm the validity of this weird story, Spiros takes things in hand. Grabbing the clothes from the policeman's hand, he takes his own clothes off and wears Angela's clothes, protesting about the policeman's invasion into and disturbance of their private space (Fig. 3.4).

In the end, the four characters do not escape the verification process at Fotis' father's television channel. What is important here, though, is that, in a scene that some viewers might decode as merely funny, others can gain different pleasures. More specifically, some of us might relate to Angela's hiding practices and understand the sense of agony she might have felt while trying to remain out of sight. Furthermore, the

rest of the characters' masquerades and queer enactments to protect someone who might seem to be the 'real' queer moves some of us and incites us to ponder over the experience of finding a place that can finally be safe and feel like home.



Picture 3.4

Figure 3.4 Argyris and Spiros pretend they are a gay couple. Dalia also tells the police officer that she dates Zouboulia. Angela remains hidden behind the sofa.⁸⁴

In the Nick of Time, under this light, cannot be understood as a comedy meant just for laughs. Stepping beyond the funny storylines and the mystery that constitutes the main web of the plot, Kapoutzidis' text can be read beyond vision, inviting our

⁸⁴ *In the Nick of Time*, MEGA Channel, season 1, episode 23, 17:10-23:28. Retrieved September 17 2019 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8sOxJ5x7ng>

senses and body to follow a woman's transformative journey from disorientation to orientation. This journey, familiar as it is to many queers who have lived the experience of the closet energizes our memory and eventually demonstrates that, funnily enough, a story that some viewers find only entertaining can move others, both literally and metaphorically, in completely different directions.

The Open Future of *In the Nick of Time's* Family

Anne Harris, in her influential article, "Back Seat Girls: Where Do Dykes Sit with Queer Theory" takes the metaphor of a 'road trip' as a starting point to reassess where lesbians lie in relation to gays and queer theory. Sitting in the back of a car while her two gay friends and fellow academics are seated in front, Harris (2000) argues:

Back in the back seat of the car, I was caught up in questioning our own histories, and my positionality and voice as a "back seat girl" [...] The front seat can be a limiting and confining space to inhabit, as centers always also are. My colleagues were not even aware of my discomfort, or my deliberations. My back seat role, then, cannot be easily dismissed as the men erasing or placing me. Becoming accustomed to the space and the pleasure of the back seat was becoming clear as we passed through the dusty brown landscapes. The enticing possibility of getting lost, in contrast to be found, named and made visible, offered up a transgressive positionality from which I had the freedom (not available in the front seat) to view the historicity of "I" from a variety of perspectives. (p. 2)

Drawing on Harris, it is a reasonable assumption to take Angela to be a back-seat girl whose sexuality remains silent but felt through her embodied presence in the ‘body’ of Kapoutzidis’ text. This chapter teased out the pleasures that can be gained by queering presumably sealed television genres and ostensibly heterosexual female characters. The practice of reading texts and characters against the grain flirts with dominant structures, and can at times re-inscribe, according to Sinfield, “that which it proposes to critique” (Sinfield, 1992, p. 47).

Instead of relying on dominant structures, though, *In the Nick of Time* manages to say the unsayable and nullify such conventions in backstairs and cryptic ways. Under this perspective, if Angela is a silent back-seat girl, then so is Dalia, Zouboulia, Argyris, and Spiros. Reading *In the Nick of Time* through Harris’ metaphor, it is, therefore, possible to start envisioning and relating to a group of misfits who have never seen themselves in the position of the ‘driver’, but who have come to appreciate the joys that back-seats can provide. Whereas the front seat comes with a set of responsibilities that would require them to mainly look straight ahead and follow specific pathways, the back-seats that *In the Nick of Time*’s family occupies allow them to orient themselves toward different directions, try many seats within the gender and sexuality domain, and choose the positionality from which they wish to enjoy the ride.

In this journey, experienced from the back of the car, the ensemble of five strangers succeed in getting to know each other in meaningful ways. As such, they make it clear that a family that is related by experience, location, collective desire, and sexual orientation can substitute any family related by blood. When biological families collapse and fall out of the frame, Kapoutzidis’ message, consistent throughout his three popular television shows, is that people may find shelter and heal

the wounds of the past from within those networks they deliberately choose to create. A reading of Kapoutzidis' text under this perspective offers more than just laughs; in fact, the text's genre hybridity invites the unearthing of diverse life trajectories and endings for the group of five.

In a fairy-tale fashion, the 'villains' are punished, and justice prevails in the Greek capital. While good things typically happen to 'good' people, *In the Nick of Time* ends placing its 'good' characters facing new and unexpectedly positive and/or negative lines. Spiros' present, for instance, is marked by the sudden loss of his beloved grandmother and a new reality that he has to face on his own. Argyris, on the other hand, is given a job on a Greek island and takes this opportunity to make a new beginning away from his monoparental family. Zouboulia and Angela, despite the initial tensions in their relationships, understand how much they care about each other and decide to live together; while Dalia is married to her financial assistant, Alexis and has children with him.

Although marriage in television fiction usually serves as the narrative closure and expected destination for all protagonists, *In the Nick of Time* presents coupling and reproduction as one of the many options available in the life of an adult. The new trajectories that the five individuals have made is likely to split the group of five apart, yet this change is not seen as something negative. The last episode of the show attests to this in a vivid and joyful way. In the final scene of the show, all of the characters

meet at the beach and show their love and interest for each other through words and body language (Figure 3.5).



Picture 3.5

Figure 3.5 The group of five are playing at the beach like little children.

The group of five, although seemingly the same, have become mature and have changed in the way they face the world. Their lines are about to take them toward separate roads this time, yet despite the changes that life has in store, nothing is lost. No matter how long or far the five characters stay from one another, the impression that the last scene of *In the Nick of Time* gives is hopeful and promising. Angela, Dalia, Zouboulia, Spiros, and Argyris get into the sea and play with the water. They might not be children anymore, but this minor detail does not disallow them from acting foolishly. Life continues, promising new possibilities and the group

of *In the Nick of Time* collectively enacts an “actually existing queer world” under the sun (Muñoz, 2009, p. 49).

CHAPTER FOUR

Time (and) Difference in *Hara's Café*

The opening scene from the pilot episode of *To Καφέ της Χαράς [Hara's Café]* begins with a close-up view of the rotating Earth and sepia-toned shots of the Athenian urban landscape. Images of the subway, cars, avenues, and shopping malls glide over one another in fast-forward motion while a male narrator provides additional context.

Twenty-first century, culture has reached a stalemate. In the streets, particularly, nothing moves. Stress and neuroses have reached their peak. Hysteria, fear, violence. . . Violence and via Veneto. The orgy of consumption has reached its highest point. So have the debts in credit cards. The craze for show-off, self-promotion and glamour constitutes the biggest disease of the era. The pith of the matter is that nothing matters. There are only people who destroy destroying their habitat. . . [There are] people who have lost their destination. All of them? Well, not really.⁸⁵

Right after the narrator's playful remark, the camera abruptly leaves the city behind to move to the fields. With no filters now, and colours set back to normal, the voice-over starts again, while folk music is playing in the background setting the tone for what is about to follow: "There is also a village, lost somewhere in the mountains,

⁸⁵ "Εικοστός-πρώτος αιώνας, ο πολιτισμός έχει φτάσει στο απροχώρητο. Ειδικά στους δρόμους δεν προχωράει τίποτα. Το στρες και οι νευρώσεις έχουν χτυπήσει κόκκινο. Υστερία, φοβία, βία. Βία αλλά και via Veneto. Το καταναλωτικό όργιο έχει φτάσει στο ζενίθ. Τα χρέη των πιστωτικών καρτών επίσης. Η μανία για επίδειξη, αυτοπροβολή και γκλαμουριά είναι η μεγάλη νόσος της εποχής. Μία είναι η ουσία, δεν υπάρχει πια ουσία. Υπάρχουν μόνο άνθρωποι που καταστρέφονται καταστρέφοντας το περιβάλλον γύρω τους. Άνθρωποι που έχουν χάσει τον προορισμό τους. Όλοι; Όχι και όλοι!" *Hara's Café*, ANT1 Channel, season 1, episode 1, 1:34–2:27. Retrieved May 20 2018 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ThUtbBKm8mI>

which follows its distinct, turtle-like rhythms; a tiny earthly paradise where absolute peace prevails,”⁸⁶ the narrator tries to persuade us. Yet, as a group of people fight in the middle of a central square and right in front of our eyes, his credibility is being seriously compromised. Kanela (Fotini Demiri) and Lefteris Pouloupoulos (Vasilikis Chalakatevakis) on the one hand, and Haido (Christina Tsafou) with Tasos Polimeneas (Kostas Flokatoulas) on the other hand, dispute over the ownership of a fig tree. The rest of the villagers surround them, a few take sides, and others just look. The priest attempts to appease the spirits, but in the end, the mayor’s advent marks a temporary suspension of hostilities between the two opposing sides.

From the start, Anna Hatzisofia and Haris Romas’ comedy-drama lavishly provides representational signs and a language which suffice to imply that what we are about to watch should not be taken literally. Furthermore, the presence of an extraordinary number of characters, as well as a broad array of themes that arise from people’s interactions give room for extensive interpretive analysis and critique: the everyday relationships between individuals and families, the different life rhythms in the village and the city, and the division between tradition and modernity are arguably some of the main topics to which the show immediately calls attention. Here, however, I will argue that only by digging a bit deeper, it is possible to discuss and examine time—broadly speaking—as the main link which brings the aforementioned topics together. Although a substantial number of television series has raised the promise and perils of living outside the city,⁸⁷ *Hara’s Café* is one of the first shows on

⁸⁶ “Υπάρχει και ένα χωριό, χαμένο κάπου ανάμεσα σε βουνά και λόγκους που πηγαίνει με τους δικούς του ρυθμούς της χελώνας. Ένας μικρός επίγειος παράδεισος όπου επικρατεί η απόλυτη γαλήνη.” *Hara’s Café*, ANT1 Channel, season 1, episode 1, 2:30–2:46. Retrieved May 20 2018 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ThUtbBKm8ml>

⁸⁷ Mainly the 1990s but also the 2000s were bountiful times for Greek television. During this period, a bulk of television productions abandon the Athenian studios to capture life outside the city, including *Απών* [*Absent*] (MEGA, 1995–1996) *Αγγιγμα Ψυχής* [*Touch of the soul*] (ANT1, 1998–1999), *Βίος ανθόσπαρτος* [*Life Strewn With Flowers*] (MEGA, 1998–1999), *Το σημάδι του έρωτα* [*The Mark of*

Greek television to explore so thoroughly and systematically how time norms, circulating in the space of the countryside, operate towards producing the creation of properly gendered and nationalized/patriotic subjects at the service and maintenance of the village community's exceptionalism. This chapter will read *Hara's Café* as a text that, built on opposites, permits and disallows such gender and nationalistic/patriotic narratives in relation to time and space. To expose the utopic fantasy of an innocent, pure, and timeless countryside that the text itself vehemently strives to advance and satirize, I employ an approach that combines feminist and queer theory with spatiotemporal analytics. Through this analysis, it is also my intention to proffer a different reading for a text which has been viewed by television fans and scholars alike as conservative, misogynist, or representing a milieu beset by unassailable heteropatriarchal and nationalistic discourses.

Borrowing heavily from the screenplay of Lasse Hallström's film *Chocolat* (2000),⁸⁸ *Hara's Café*, the fifth television show written by Anna Hatzisofia and Haris Romas,⁸⁹ takes us to a fictional village in Arcadia, Peloponnese which remains fixated to traditional norms and values. Periandros Popotas (Haris Romas) is a man of letters who has spent a great deal of his time in the United Kingdom completing his master's degree in folk studies and who has returned to Greece in order to serve as the mayor of Kolokotronitsi. His obsessive commitment towards tradition and his pathological hatred for anything 'modern' turn Kolokotronitsi into a place resistant to evolution

Passion] (MEGA, 1999–2000), *Περι ανέμων και υδάτων* [*Of Cabbages and Kings*] (MEGA, 2000–2003) and *Μη μου λες αντίο* [*Don't Say Goodbye*] (ANT1, 2004–2005).

⁸⁸ In the British-American film, a woman (Juliette Binoche) and her daughter open a chocolate shop in a small French village that disturbs the rigid morality of the local community. The film is an adaptation of Joanne Harris' homonym novel (1999).

⁸⁹ This is a full chronological list of the comedy shows whose scripts have been co-written by Anna Hatzisofia and Haris Romas: *Οι Μεν και οι Δεν* [*These and Those*] (ANT1, 1993–1996), *Ο Κακός Βεζύρης* [*The Evil Vizier*] (MEGA, 1997–1998), *Κωνσταντίνου και Ελένης* [*Konstantinos and Eleni's House*] (ANT1, 1998–2000), *Αίφτινγκ* [*Lifting*] (ANT1, 2000–2002), *Hara's Cafe* (ANT1, 2003–2006) and *Δεληγιάννειον Παρθενοναγωγείον* [*Deligiannis' Virgin School*] (ANT1, 2007–2008).

and change. The triggering event, which upsets Popotas' and the inhabitants' habitual routines, is the emergence of Hara Haska (Renia Louizidou) who inherits her aunt's property and decides to abandon the city and start a business and a new life in the village. Nevertheless, her plans to run a lounge-café bar in Kolokotronitsi are often doomed to failure. The show revolves around Popotas' efforts to discourage Hara and her daughter and make them leave Kolokotronitsi, while Hara does not give up. She takes it upon herself to make the whole village forget their anachronistic habits and endorse her liberal and *protevousianikous* (urban) ways of living.

Evidently, *Hara's Café* does not deviate significantly from the grammar of popular Greek comedies and romcoms; much like in *Δύο Ξένοι* [*Two Strangers*] (MEGA, 1997–1999), *Κωνσταντίνου και Ελένης* [*Konstantinos and Eleni's House*] (ANT1, 1998–2000), and *Είσαι το Ταίρι μου* [*You Are My Soulmate*] (MEGA, 2001–2002), Hatzisofia and Romas' television text focuses on the collision of two otherwise incompatible heterosexual characters whose love project is far from ideal, as they both come from separate worlds and adopt different ideological standpoints over issues of gender, family, and politics. Yet, while these series' romances mainly take place inside the city, *Hara's Café* makes use of the same conventional romance narrative whilst relocating it in the underexplored context of the countryside. According to Hatzisofia, both Romas and she received discouraging comments from colleagues and fellow actors when sharing their intention to make a show about life outside the capital. As Hatzisofia admits in an interview that she gave in *To Μωβ* [*The Purple*] (2015) many years after the end of the show:

Everyone back then was telling us that we are crazy, that we will fail, and that none is interested about the countryside. You see, during that time it was all

about lifestyle and high culture. But since the comedy scriptwriter’s work is to see beyond the surface, even though the critique appears to be superficial; because in comedy, nothing should be at the forefront, we had seen that things cannot continue this way and that we needed a subversion.⁹⁰

Despite all odds, the first episode of *Hara’s Café* which aired on 3 September 2003 made great sensation and reached top ratings. Yet, the popularity of the series proved to be anything but haphazard; going into its third and final season in 2006, *Hara’s Café* remained not only one of the most successful and highly rated programs of the year but turned out to be one of the most popular series in the history of Greek television fiction (Krigkou, 2018). Even today, 13 years after the series’ finale, *Hara’s Café* is being broadcast as a rerun from the same private channel twice a day during the week, continuing to attract a great number of Greek television viewers.

The dynamic following of the series, however, was also accompanied by criticism from media outlets, Internet blogs, and scholarly publications that sought to explain the television product’s enduring success, as well as its main ‘failures’. In an attempt to examine *Hara’s Café*’s popularity, Konstantina Kalabordani (2017) goes beyond the funny lines and amusing themes to trace the nostalgic and affective version of countryside that the show presents to its viewers. As she writes, “we might have been ‘Europeanized’, but it [*Hara’s Café*] reminded us that there are villages [in Greece] that do not keep pace with the lifestyle of the big cities, and stay back in time” (2017).⁹¹ Lina Valsamidou has provided the first—and currently the only—

⁹⁰ “Όλοι τότε μας λέγανε ότι είμαστε τρελοί, θα αποτύχουμε και κανείς δεν ενδιαφέρεται να δει επαρχία. Βλέπετε, ήταν η εποχή του lifestyle και του χαΐ. Επειδή η δουλειά του κωμωδιογράφου όμως είναι να βλέπει κάτω από την επιφάνεια, έστω κι αν φαίνεται ότι είναι επιδερμική η κριτική, γιατί στην κωμωδία τίποτε δεν πρέπει να είναι πρώτο πλάνο, είχαμε δει ότι το πράγμα δεν πάει άλλο και χρειαζόμασταν μια ανατροπή.”

⁹¹ “μπορεί να έχουμε «εξευρωπαϊστεί», αλλά μας θύμιζε [το Καφέ της Χαράς] πως υπάρχουν χωριά που δεν συμβαδίζουν με τον τρόπο ζωής των μεγαλουπόλεων κι έχουν μείνει πίσω στο χρόνο.”

academic writing on *Hara's Café*. In her book chapter, “Φύλο και Σεξουαλικότητα στην Ελληνική τηλεοπτική κωμική σειρά: Μελέτη περίπτωσης [Gender and Sexuality in Greek Television Comedy Series: A Case Study],” Valsamidou illustrates the differential ways through which the show treats its characters depending on their gender and concludes that:

female sexuality is mainly represented in stereotypical and fairly predictable ways, continuing and reifying the man/woman schema, continuing and reifying the basic ingredients of patriarchal ideology (2014, p. 108–109).⁹²

Advancing in a similar direction, Nikos Daskalopoulos' fan blog (2014) problematizes the impact and diffusion of popular culture onto various aspects of society to criticize the comedy series' oscillation between conservatism and liberalism, and thus unfolds the repercussions of living and watching “the fascist Kolokotronitsi village” (as the blogger calls it). Daskalopoulos (2014) explains:

Hara's Café is a series that clearly (unintentionally) advances fascist ideologies. and I write ‘unintentionally’ because, according to my own assessment and analysis, it seems that the creators of the series wished to do exactly the opposite, in other words, to propagate left-wing positions using the role of progressive Hara, the mayor's communist assistant and the village's priest's anarcho-communist son, Aris as vehicles for their purposes. But [in the end] the series did not succeed so. . . The series is riddled with racist, fascist (and Nazi)

⁹² “η γυναικεία σεξουαλικότητα αναπαρίσταται εν πολλοίς με τρόπο στερεοτυπικό και αναμενόμενο, συνεχίζοντας και αναπαράγοντας το διπολικό/αντιθετικό σχήμα/ζεύγος άνδρας-γυναίκα, συνεχίζοντας και αναπαράγοντας τα βασικά συστατικά στοιχεία της πατριαρχικής ιδεολογίας.”

and misogynist references.⁹³

Valsamidou's and Daskalopoulos' critiques offer interesting insights into the study of television fiction, a field which is still in its infancy and in need of theoretical and empirical fortification. Nevertheless, these analyses remain strictly germane to what Ellis Hanson has defined as "moralistic politics of representation" (1999, p. 5). A danger with such a mode of reading texts is predestined to an understanding of television as a categorically realist medium and its viewers as "cultural dopes" (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 68) who uncritically and passively consume ready-made fantasies and meanings without being able to make their own. However, media and communication studies have long pointed to the polyvalent 'nature' of television texts which allows different meaning-making processes by viewers (e.g., Fiske, 1989a, 1989b; Hall, 1980). This is even more so in "comedies" where, as has been shown, humor is far from a stable terrain. As Wendy-Hilton Morrow and Kathleen Battles explain, "because media texts need to be enjoyed by a fairly broad audience base to be considered successful, the jokes need to be ambiguous enough that people from a range of backgrounds can find humour in them" (2015, p. 198).

Because of this creative ambiguity, television viewers will likely respond to comedy texts in different ways. That is to say that while some viewers may find a joke as insulting and harmful, the same joke can potentially be perceived as questioning patriarchal norms through irony, theatricality, excess, and what Susan Sontag famously calls "elevation of style over meaning" (Sontag, 1964). I do not

⁹³ "Το 'Καφέ της Χαράς' είναι μια σειρά που καθαρά (άθελά της) προπαγανδίζει υπέρ του φασισμού. Και γράφω άθελα γιατί από την δική μου εκτίμηση και ανάλυση, προκύπτει ότι πιθανότατα οι δημιουργοί της σειράς ήθελαν να κάνουν το ακριβώς αντίθετο, να προπαγανδίσουν αριστερές θέσεις χρησιμοποιώντας ως όχημα τον ρόλο της προοδευτικής πρωτεγουσιάνας Χαράς, του κομμουνιστή γραμματικού του Δημάρχου, αλλά και του αναρχοκομμουνιστή γιού του ιερέα του χωριού, τον Άρη. . . Βρίθει ρατσιστικών, φασιστικών (και ναζιστικών) και μισογυνιστικών αναφορών η σειρά."

argue that *Hara's Café* is an outrightly feminist text or that it offers representations of nationhood and manhood in an uncomplicated way. Rather, while many characters within the text promulgate heteropatriarchy, misogyny, and nationalistic discourses, the same characters support the exact opposite of what they directly state. In addition, aside from those characters whose intentions are not straightforward, I contend that by stepping beyond the main protagonists, it is possible to find dissidence/queerness in subjects who reside on the edges of the fictional village and the television text.

At this point, an important clarification needs to be made about the use of the term queer in this chapter. While queer was employed before to uncover flexible gender enactments and lesbian tendencies in *The Unbearables* (MEGA, 1991–1993) and *In the Nick of Time* (MEGA, 2005–2007), this chapter follows a distinct pathway. *Hara's Café* is mainly decoded as a series comprised of heterosexual characters,⁹⁴ and this chapter does not mean to trouble their heterosexual status. Instead, I wish to revisit the television text and scrutinize the dialectic between heterosexuality and the canon. On the basis that queerness is typically used to examine non-heterosexual characters and sexual rebellions, “heterosexual culture,” according to Linda Schlossberg “continually passes itself off as being merely natural, the undisputed and unmarked norm” (2001, p. 5). In *Rereading Heterosexuality* (2012), Rachel Carroll, while acknowledging the pervasively normative impact of heterosexuality on non-heterosexual identities, is interested in investigating those heterosexual heroes, particularly female characters, that deviate from familial, marital and reproductive norms. Following Carroll’s logic yet concentrating on both female and male characters, my aim here is to study and dissect the ways in which heterosexual

⁹⁴ The topic of homosexuality emerges during the second season and continues until the series finale. Asteris Negrepointis (Christos Mantakas) is a supporting character who arrives at Kolokotronitsi in order to meet his ex-wife, Hara, and his daughter in order to come out as a gay man and attempt to reconcile with his family.

characters may mark a departure from the perceived norm. In other words, I wish to explore the extent to which heterosexual characters may act awkwardly, behave differently from the way they usually tend to, thus destabilizing family values, as well as ‘proper’ ways of doing gender and heterosexuality in specific times and assumedly conservative spaces. Such concerns and struggles against the normal, the proper, and the dominant, which are often abundant in the genre of comedy shall be analyzed within the village of Kolokotronitsi.

Docility and Deviance in the (Isolated) Village of Kolokotronitsi

From the very beginning, *Hara's Café* illustrates the unequal distribution of power within the village of Kolokotronitsi. By the time the Mayor (Haris Romas) makes his appearance in the central square along with his son, Manolakis (Paris Skartsolias) and his housemaid, Tasia (Maria Kanellopoulou), the Polimeneas and Pouloupoulos families cease to fight, and the village starts applauding, as a sign of respect for their leader. In turn, Periandros Popotas, conscious of the institutional power and admiration he enjoys from his fellow villagers, walks confidently among them and ascends the podium to address his audience. As he speaks, we are informed that Kolokotronitsi has played a fundamental role in the Greek War of Independence, serving as a base from which Theodoros Kolokotronis launched his victorious attack against Mahmud Dramali Pasha. Yet, the exceptionalism of Kolokotronitsi does not lie exclusively in its modern history; the cultural significance of the village dates back to ancient times when, according to the research that Popotas himself conducted, Kolokotronitsi operated as the historic municipality of Menippos. Expressing overt pride about the new findings that position Kolokotronitsi as a unique geographical and cultural space within the national but also international map, Popotas continues his speech along these lines:

It is my ambition that this village becomes a bright example for the whole world. A village-model of morality and virtue. Order and virtue, order and virtue! Enough with pseudo-evolution. In the name of liberation, they push our children to debauchery and corruption but I myself, Periandros Popotas, I swear in front of [the statue of] Menippos that I will not allow this to happen. We suck now the pacifier of progress. They say that we want to move forward. Evolution is ahead, we make steps ahead. And I tell them that a few steps further ahead and you will fall off the cliff. Here in Kolokotronitsi, we do not want steps ahead, we will make steps back. Let's go back. Back brothers, if the rest want to be pioneers, we want to be at the backside. And I promise you that I will not salve my conscience if I do not take you 100 years back. Let's go back, let's go back.⁹⁵

The general message that Popotas sends to his people, together with the repetition of anachronistic mantras construct Kolokotronitsi as a cultural, geographical and historical area that demands to remain isolated from the rest of the world in a decade when actual but also metaphorical borders have come loose or at least, flexible. As Jane Chance notes in her analysis of ideology in *Lord of The Rings*,

⁹⁵ “Φιλοδοξία μου είναι να γίνει το χωριό μας φωτεινό παράδειγμα για όλο τον κόσμο. Ένα χωριό πρότυπο ήθους και αρετής. Τάξις και ηθική, τάξις και ηθική. Μας έχει φάει η ψευτοεξέλιξη. Εν ονόματι της απελευθέρωσης σπρώχνουν τα παιδιά μας στην ακολασία και τη διαφθορά αλλά αυτό εγώ, ο Περίανδρος Πόποτας, το ορκίζομαι ενώπιον του Μενιπέος, θα το εμποδίσω. Βρήκαμε τώρα και πιπιλάμε την καραμέλα της προόδου. Θέλουμε να πάμε λέει μπροστά. Μπροστά είναι η εξέλιξη, κάνουμε βήματα μπροστά. Κι εγώ τους λέω λίγα βήματα ακόμα μπροστά και θα πέσετε στο γκρεμό. Εμείς εδώ λοιπόν στο Κολοκοτρωνίτσι δε θέλουμε βήματα μπροστά. Θα κάνουμε βήματα πίσω. Εμπρός πίσω. Πίσω αδέρφια, θέλουν οι άλλοι να είναι πρωτοπόροι; Εμείς θέλουμε να είμαστε οπισθοπόροι και σας υπόσχομαι ότι δε θα ησυχάσω αν δε σας γυρίσω 100 χρόνια πίσω. Εμπρός πίσω. Εμπρός πίσω.” *Hara's Café*, ANT1 Channel, season 1, episode 1, 10:21–11:23. Retrieved May 23 2018 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ThUtbBKm8mI>

“The political problems in the Shire grow out of its deceptively ‘safe’ isolation from the rest of Middle-earth. Its inhabitants distrust those who come from outside because they differ from them in ways they do not understand” (2001, p. 27). Although a comparison between Kolokotronitsi and the Shire might seem at best arbitrary, and at worst, a loss of focus, I argue that it is the very illusion of alienation that connects the two distant yet equally fictional villages together. For Popotas, much like for the leader of Hobbits, anything that resides outside the geographical domain of the village is met with distrust and phobia because it entails the risk to pollute the safe and stable community that they have long tried to build and keep clean from vices.

Benedict Anderson has coined the term *imagined community* to refer to those people who consider themselves as a nation (1983). Anthony Smith goes further, defining the nation as “a named and self-defined community whose members cultivate shared myths, memories, symbols, values and traditions, reside in and identify with a historic homeland, create and disseminate distinctive public culture, and observe shared customs and common laws” (Smith, 2008, p. 34). Kolokotronitsi does not see itself as part of the Greek nation; in fact, the Arcadian village claims superiority and differentiation from the rest of Greece which has turned out to be corrupted and decadent. Yet the patriotic, heroic, traditional past that unites the villagers of Kolokotronitsi and their intention to preserve their land intact respond to Anderson and Smith’s definitions and turn Kolokotronitsi into an autonomous and imagined nation within the nation of Greece. As Pablo D. Andersen and Alexander Wendt highlight, though, the nation can continue to be perceived as real and natural only through constant repetition in nationalist discourses and practices (Andersen & Wendt, 2015, p. 4). Indeed, the continuation of Kolokotronitsi as a distinct community and the last pillar of tradition requires the enforcement of norms and

behaviors that may ensure its endurance across time. Thus, one way to preserve *taksi kai ithiki* (order and virtue) as well as to address concerns of proximity with strange and unknown subjects and ideas potentially leading to corruption and modernization is through the thoughtful management of time and space in the village, with the ultimate aim to maintain docility and discipline. In the part that follows, Michel Foucault's work is helpful for investigating the institutions and strategies through which bodies become disciplined both in theory but also in the village of Kolokotronisi.

Foucault's term *biopower* refers to the dominant system of social control in modern Western society as he understood it. Rejecting previous models that envisioned power as totalizing, repressive, and imposed by a dominant group over another, Foucault described power as diffused within society, integrated into social relations, and ingrained within a network of practices, technologies, and institutions spanning over all the "micro-levels" of everyday life. In his work *Discipline and Punish* (1995), Foucault examines the ways in which discipline, a form of biopower, is acted upon individuals to produce docile bodies, that is to say, passive, subjugated, and productive bodies. He explains:

Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in economic terms of utility). In short, it dissociates power from the body; on the one hand, it turns it into an 'aptitude', a 'capacity', which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection. (Foucault, 1995, p. 138)

Since political order is ensured through the production of docile bodies, Foucault traces a number of institutional spaces such as prisons, schools, military establishments, and even villages, whose diverse forms of discipline work towards “controlling or correcting the operations of the body” (1995, p. 136). The concept of discipline as emerging so far from Foucault’s reading testifies to the ways in which *Hara’s Café* operates towards producing the types of nationalized and appropriate citizens that Kolokotronitsi requires to remain traditional and conservative. Although Hatzisofia and Romas’ text presents Popotas as the only institutional actor in the village, Foucault reminds us that “power comes from below” and “is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations” (Foucault, 1995, p. 94). In other words, Kolokotronitsi constitutes a space inside which different agents engage in the project of making normative and thus, ‘proper’ citizens. If this sum of institutions is effectively to sculpt bodies that are trained for their promised purpose, there ought to be discipline, surveillance, and a salient distribution of power.

To achieve continuous surveillance—or at the very least, the idea of continuous surveillance—village representatives disseminate discourses aiming to control sexuality and promote heteronormative ideals and values to the villagers, starting from when they are children. The fixation on the figure of the child, as Lee Edelman puts it, can be explained by the fact that it “remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention” (2004, p. 3). This means that the child nurtures “the hope of posterity” (2004, p. 12), so its survival and ‘proper’ upbringing is considered primordial for the evolution and continuity of a given nation. Thus, if Kolokotronitsi wishes to preserve the community it imagines itself to be, young Arcadians ought to be ‘shaped’ from an early age so that they become docile citizens. Many times throughout season one,

boys are told to be ‘proper’ and proud of their homeland, and girls are reminded to get dressed decently in order not to tempt boys. While boys and girls are allowed to interact and play with each other, relationships between children or teenagers are frowned upon. Furthermore, while boys are encouraged to study and gain knowledge in various professional fields, girls are not given the same support, with the underlying assumption that the positions they are expected to serve are that of the mother and housewife.

In a similar fashion, adults in Kolokotronitsi ought to comply with the village representatives’ discipline for contributing to the maintenance of the community’s stability, moral codes, and values. So couples in Kolokotronitsi are by definition heterosexual and obliged to respond to the exigencies of the social order by getting married, making children, and behaving according to the expectations of their respective gender roles.

These idea(l)s are implemented via a system of institutional surveillance that is dispersed across Kolokotronitsi. Indeed, Popotas employs a panoptic method of control that monitors even the tiniest details of everyday life of all people at all levels: Aglaia (Sofia Moutidou), the school teacher of the village, monitors students’ behaviors and enforces punishment and expulsion; Triantafillos Sergianopoulos (Stelios Goutis), the priest of the Greek Orthodox Church of Kolokotronitsi, regulates children and adults via religious sermons and acts of confessions; while women like Priest-Triantafillos’ wife ‘inspect’ the whole village via the social practice of gossiping. Such “a system of constraints and privations, obligations and prohibitions,” according to Foucault, works “to deprive the individual of a liberty that is regarded both as a right and as a property” (Foucault, 1995, p. 11). Yet, at the same time, the set of constraints and privations imposed upon the villagers of Kolokotronitsi also

illustrates that there are severe ‘loopholes’ and makes it clear that docility is unfair and relational. Jen Pylypa, reading Foucault, cautions that “knowledge is not neutral—conceptions of normality and deviance are manufactured so as to create the types of bodies that society needs” (1998, p. 26).

Admittedly, the disciplinary system that governs boys and girls presents significant differences that work at the expense of the latter. In a similar way, while men in Kolokotronitsi are expected to be productive and work in their family businesses, women ought to assume roles and tasks both inside but also outside the house. That is to say, in addition to their contribution to the labor market, women are exclusively held responsible for the raising of the children and all household activities. Yet, despite their increased responsibilities both inside and outside the house, women in Kolokotronitsi do not enjoy the same freedoms as their husbands. While Vangelis (Gerasimos Skiadaresis), Tasos, and the rest of the married men move freely between the domestic and the public sphere, occupying the male-segregated spaces of *kafenias* (cafeterias), Stavroula (Joyce Evidi), Haido, and other women of the community are only allowed to explore specific public spaces (e.g., church, local shops) during specific hours throughout the day. In this way, the policing of gender and sexuality in *Hara's Café* not only sheds light on the differential gendered norms reinforced throughout Kolokotronitsi through Foucault's theory of docility, but as I argue here, it also reveals the question of time within the theoretical framework of Elizabeth Freeman's concept of chrononormativity. In other words, *Hara's Café's* script not only exposes cultural anxieties about producing the right kind of docile children and adults, but also the question of how they can exert their citizenship and when.

“Everything in its time”: Unpacking Chrono-Norms

Foucault connects the application of disciplinary power towards producing docile bodies to the deliberate control and use of time, saying, “[T]emporal dispersal is brought together to produce a profit, thus mastering a duration that would otherwise elude one’s grasp. Power is articulated directly onto time; it assures its control and guarantees its use” (1995, p. 158). Taking this link between docility and spatiotemporality into account, *Hara’s Café* is understood as a text that constructs and simultaneously deconstructs expectations of the heteropatriarchal system in Kolokotronitsi. If Foucault’s theorizing on the regimentation of time within imperialist institutions conceptualizes discipline and control of behavior at a micro-level, then Elizabeth Freeman and Judith Halberstam’s insights raise the topic of time and its heteronormative expectations in specific spaces and, mainly, the countryside.

In *Time Binds* (2010), Freeman defines chrononormativity as “a mode of implantation, a technique by which institutional forces...such as schedules, calendars, and time zones...come to seem like somatic facts” (2010, p. 3). These time zones are summarized by Pamela Aronson into what she labels as “five objective life events” and include “completing education [and becoming an adult], entering the labor force, becoming financially independent, getting married, and becoming a parent” (2008, p. 56). Yet, whenever these life events are disrupted, not completed as expected, or never even ventured, queer temporalities arise. Freeman continues, explaining that “temporal politics of deconstruction” suggest the potentiality “to arrive at a different modality for living historically, or putting the past into meaningful and transformative relation with the present” (2010, p. xvi). These different modalities can be achieved through instances of “asynchrony, anachronism, anastrophe, belatedness, compression, delay, ellipsis, flashback, hysteron-proteron, pause, prolepsis, repetition,

reversal, surprise (Freeman, 2010, p. xxii)”; in fact, some of the above can easily be traced within *Hara’s Café’s* text. Going back to the pilot, while Popotas speaks from the podium and reminds the villagers about the ways they ought to behave both in the public and private sphere, the sight of a little girl wearing a mini-skirt gets his immediate attention. Popotas criticizes Garoufalia for “this shameful and scandalous spectacle,” but the little girl does not understand the reason why she is being scolded and asks innocently, “Why mister Mayor, what’s wrong about it?” The mother of the daughter standing right behind her is quick to justify it, saying, “but it is just a kid,” implying that the girl is young enough to not have to get dressed in the same conservative clothes as the rest of the women. The mayor however, considers this to be a feeble excuse and contends that “The evil starts from young ages and then it becomes more and more uncontrollable,” raising the age factor as an important parameter that everyone needs to take into account, including minors.⁹⁶

Similarly, teenagers like Matoula (Hara Ismirou) and Billy (Dimitris Tsoukalas), but also old women like Tasia, are strictly forbidden to spend time in ways not appropriate for their age. That is to say, young boys and girls are not allowed to visit the neighboring village after high school on the pretext of their not being adults yet, and thus are unready to handle temptations responsibly. Tasia on the other hand, is considered too old to even consider the possibility of having a relationship with a man. Although the aforementioned characters do not always succeed in acting on the prompting of their desire, their minor deviations should not be underestimated. Yet, the driving force that sets the action in Anna Hatzisofia and

⁹⁶ Popotas: αυτό το αναίσχυντο, σκανδαλώδες θέαμα

Garoufalia: Γιατί κύριε Δήμαρχε, τί έχει;

Garoufalia’s mother: Μα είναι παιδάκι

Popotas: Από τις μικρές ηλικίες ξεκινάει το κακό και αντρειεύει και θεριεύει

Hara’s Café, ANT1 Channel, season 1, episode 1, 06:37-06:55. Retrieved June 1 2018 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ThUtbBKm8mI>

Haris Romas' comedy-drama and actually surprises—in Freeman's words—

Kolokotronitsi, is Hara and her daughter's escape from the city to the countryside.

At the beginning of episode 2, *Hara's Café* cuts to a static shot showing the female protagonist's car suddenly stop in the middle of a dirt road. Unable to fix the car on her own, Hara waits with her daughter (Efi Rasia) for someone to come and help them. Indeed, a car moving towards the two female characters' direction pulls over right in front of them. Periandros Popotas, the driver of the car and the mayor of Kolokotronitsi, is imagined as a *Deus ex Machina* who can possibly take them for a ride to the village and call someone to haul away the damaged vehicle. Yet, Hara's provocative appearance repels the mayor immediately. As if that were not enough, the news that the strange woman is unmarried and she had her daughter out of wedlock drives Popotas crazy and makes him abandon them in the middle of the street. On his way back to Kolokotronitsi, the mayor declares a state of emergency and explicitly prohibits his villagers from giving Hara and her daughter "earth and water."⁹⁷ When the two female characters manage to arrive at Kolokotronitsi on foot, the villagers already know how to respond. Hara visits all local stores in the area, but none are eager to question the mayor's will and act deviantly. The village fool, however, is the only character who provides assistance to the strangers and thus acts in discordance with the mayor's wishes. This otherwise petty dissonance of discipline and regimen appears to affect the cohesion in the relationship among the villagers, undermine the institutional authority of the mayor, and contribute to the village's slow but gradual resistance to chrononormative lawful order. As this chapter will attempt to show, however, the conversion of Kolokotronitsi and its abstinence from rules demonstrates

⁹⁷ "Γη και ύδωρ." *Hara's Café*, ANT1 Channel, season 1, episode 2, 06:00-07:41. Retrieved June 1 2018 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EAa6dNuCMYw>

that aside from Hara's deviant bodily presence, there was a noticeable tendency towards queer temporalities in the village long before her arrival.

While Anna Hatzisofia and Haris Romas construct or at least appear to construct a conceptual representation of a rural space characterized by anachronistic mentality and village nationalism, rurality has always had a complicated relationship with time. According to Judith Halberstam (2005):

While gender roles may be somewhat more flexible in urban settings, this also means that people become more astute in urban contexts at reading gender. In the context of a small town where there are strict codes of normativity, there is also a greater potential for subverting the codes surreptitiously...the rural context allows for a different array of acts, practices, performances, and identifications (p. 44).

That is, even though *Hara's Café* wishes to preserve a strict living environment for its citizens through its institutions, the power of the involved agents does not remain stable at all times and in fact, evinces other temporalities at play. This temporal alterity manifests in *Hara's Café* in the way the religious discourse circulates to ensure the maintenance of chrononormativity throughout the village. Priest-Triantafilos, the one-and-only ecclesiastic representative of Kolokotronitsi, conjures a visual image, which encompasses many characteristics of the good-tempered and venerable old man of the countryside. Portrayed as a person who enjoys the respect of the village, viewers see him out in the public, interacting with people and even enforcing spiritual laws whenever someone has fallen or strayed from the right path. At the same time though, and as the series progresses, there are many

representational signs that point to a distancing of the character from a robust chrononormative script. While Priest-Triantafilos tells the villagers to adopt a decent and moral lifestyle, encouraging them to sustain their docility through self-discipline and self-surveillance, he is the first to break the rules that he himself imposes. Despite the ease with which he asks people to do prayers and penances in order to be forgiven for their sins, Priest-Triantafillos is in a constant struggle to keep himself away from temptations; he consumes way too much alcohol, he seldom completes his church service in the fashion and timeframe he is supposed to, and despite his claims to the opposite, his public appearance eventually sabotages the construction of a religious man who can instill moral knowledge in the villagers' heads.

A similar point can be made about Kolokotronitsi's educational institution. Queer theorists have long pointed out that schools have an idiosyncratic relationship to larger hegemonic structures by existing as an important component of society whilst running separately from it, both in and outside of imperial measurements of time (e.g., Dyne, 2017; Halberstam, 2005). In the case of *Hara's Café's* school however, one could go as far as to argue that the head of the school, Aglaia, resides in an already-queer temporality, as a result of her non-normative heterosexual status. Among the writers who have discussed the various types of women in the genre of comedy, Carroll has particularly studied the link between the single woman and the school environment. As she explains:

A school is the time-honoured professional location of the spinster, whose reputation as a 'surplus woman' from the nineteenth century onwards is offset by employment in the task of social reproduction through ancillary attachment to other people's families (Carroll, 2012, p. 45).

Lorraine Porter, looking at the portrayal of the grotesque in visual culture, posits that “the female grotesque [embodied in the figure of the spinster] is well past her prime, and youth is a prerequisite for female desirability. She’s also coded as unattractive, often in the extreme, but, more importantly for the purposes of comedy... she is sexually frustrated with a libido in inverse proportion to her declining sexual appeal (1998, p. 84).” Following Carroll’s and Porter’s research, parallels may be drawn when examining the teacher of Kolokotronitsi. Aglaia appears throughout the show’s two seasons as an eccentric figure whose oddness stems from her involuntary singleness and inability to engage in a relationship with Popotas. Every time she approaches the mayor and he rejects her, Aglaia enters the classroom lost and frustrated. Despite her attempts to keep her composure and enact the role of the teacher properly, these efforts appear to be futile in the face of comedy’s queerness. Aglaia is unable to draw a line between personal and professional life and in most scenes shot inside the school, she is witnessed to stop the class, yell, and punish students for no actual reason, and even ask them to evacuate the class earlier than the expected time, thus upsetting the chrononormative rules of school, and questioning the extent to which she can be an actual role model for children. The aforementioned temporal shifts and inefficiencies in the village representatives to enforce power in systematic ways ultimately reveal the failure of religious and educational institutions to serve their intended purposes in Kolokotronitsi and, at the same time, demonstrate how they actually contribute to the queering of the village’s anthropogeography.

When the Cat's Away, the Mice Will Play: Negotiating Norms and Spaces

In *The History of sexuality*, Foucault argues that “power is tolerable only on condition that it masks a substantial part of itself [...] Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms” (1990, p. 86). For Pylypa, one way of doing this is by creating desire (1998, p. 27). The discourses of order and virtue, as well as the constant policing and ‘punishment’ of those bodies who do not behave in compliance with societal rules, do not provide any pleasure at all in Kolokotronitsi. On the contrary, power is seen as a limitation that contains the villagers’ very own desires and suppresses their ability to act agentfully. Thus, within a social context where agents are failed because rigor and discipline are eclipsed from sight, citizens appear more and more prone to demonstrate a special affinity for less strict social scripts.

Stavroula (Joyce Evidi) and Vangelis Fatseas (Gerasimos Skiadaresis) are one of the many married couples in the village, and their relationship is a central tenet of the script, which is marked by the lack of a child. Given the centripetal role of motherhood to the normative gendered identity of adult women in Kolokotronitsi, to not give birth to a child and satisfy familial and national ideals is in some way to forfeit the identity of woman and Arcadian villager. Thus, Stavroula, by stepping—unwillingly—outside the chrononormative norm, is marked as an unproductive person. Her unproductivity therefore becomes the justification and excuse for her husband Fatseas to seek female company outside the spatiotemporal capsule of the marital home, despite the fact that infidelity is theoretically condemned.

Yet, this is not the only way that *Hara's Café* deviates from docility and compliance to heteronormative rules. Stavroula's husband, exuding a rustic version of the Greek lover, is persistently seen to engage in sexual intercourse with women of different nationalities, ages, and body sizes. Matoula, a high-school girl who dreams

big and uses her body as a way to gain economic profits and escape from Kolokotronitsi is one of the women who has a secret affair with Fatseas. Seen as the female equivalent of Fatseas, Matoula throughout the show's three seasons flirts with Dionisis, the Priest-Triantafillos' son, while she also tries to seduce Gogo's husband. Interweaving the different love stories into the very center of the show, *Hara's Café* slowly unravels the fantasy of the imagined community and turns Kolokotronitsi into a space that is haunted by desire, since all families are somehow involved in non-normative practices and behaviors. Yet, although the failure of the imagined community becomes more and more apparent, the panopticon continues to induce the people into a state of conscious visibility that scares them to act immorally inside the village. It is for this reason that all the illegal couples turn to the forest for the consummation of their 'immoral' practices. Since Trelantonis' hut is located in the middle of the forest, it frequently becomes a space that is occupied by many characters. In several episodes, viewers watch various people—temporarily reclaiming Trelantonis' private property for perverse purposes; take for instance, Stavroula and Fatseas (episode 16), Billy and Gogo (episode 29), Dionisis and Matoula (episode 12), Matoula and Aris (episode 19), and Manolakis and Valia (episode 23). In the essay, "Of Other Spaces," Foucault and Jay Miskowiec explain that "heterotopias" are "privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis: adolescenets, menstruating women, pregnant women, the elderly" (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986, p. 24). Under this light, Trelantonis' hut, placed outside the village and away from the public eye, serves as a crisis heterotopia, that is to say, a cut-off place and a safe shelter that harbors individuals who wish to configure alternative actions and behaviours.

The same space is also used by Lefteris Pouloupoulos and Haido Polimenea in episode 85. Although the Polimeneas and Pouloupoulos families are notorious for having a hostile relationship, the final episodes of the third season bring about surprises in *Hara's Café's* narrative. Both Lefteris and Haido are fed up with their spouses' judgmental comments and lack of interest. On a random occasion, Lefteris and Haido meet in the streets and start confessing the problems they face with their partners. Slowly but steadily, the two characters appear to approach each other and understand that they share more commonalities than they could possibly imagine; Lefteris likes Haido's *pahoulokompsa* (curvy) body, and Haido is perhaps the only character in the entire village who begins to like Lefteris' bad singing. After several rendezvous out in the open, both characters decide to move one step further and meet at Trelantonis' hut. For the first time, Lefteris and Haido appear to be alone in a private space; they flirt each other and act like children who experience romance for the first time. The body language between Haido and Lefteris demonstrates that vividly as well, in the innocent way they approach each other in bed in order to kiss (fig. 4.1). The burden of chrononormativity and mononormativity,⁹⁸ however, is so deeply engraved on their minds that they eventually hesitate to come closer despite their desire for each other's body:

Haido: Oh, I can't.

Lefteris: It is not right.

Haido: I can't, my Lefteris. Even though I like you a lot as a man.

Lefteris: And as an artist, right?

⁹⁸ Much like other systems of oppression, mononormativity is comprised of a set of practices and institutions that privilege or endorse monosexual and monogamous relationships as fundamental and 'natural' within society. For an introduction to non-polyamories and a critique of mononormativity, see Klesse (2007).

Haido: That as well. And although it is the first time after so many years that my heart flutters because of joy, and not because of the resent remarks that Tasos makes. Still, I love this grumpy, stingy [man].

Lefteris: Me too. Even though I fancy you as a little Easter bread, as a goose filled with chestnuts.

Haido: Oh stop it, you are increasing my appetite.

Lefteris: I was also craving for this moment as much as I crave to release my first C.D., but I love Kanella.

Haido: We should not go any further, Lefteris; it is not right to sacrifice so many years of marriage for an hour of lust.

Lefteris: I cannot [have sex] for an hour anyways.

Haido: (dissapointingly) Well, if it is only for three minutes of lust, then what's the use of cheating?⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Haido: Αχ, δεν μπορώ

Lefteris: Δεν είναι σωστό

Haido: Δεν μπορώ Λευτέρη μου. Παρότι μου αρέσεις πολύ σαν άντρας.

Lefteris: και σαν καλλιτέχνης!

Haido: και ιδίως αυτό, και παρότι για πρώτη φορά μετά από τόσα χρόνια φτερουγάει η καρδιά μου από χαρά, και όχι από τις πίκρες που με κερνάει ο Τάσος. παρόλαυτα, τον αγαπάω τον στριμμένο τον τσιφούτη.

Lefteris: κι εγώ, ενώ σε ορέγομαι σα πασχαλινό τσουρεκάκι, σα χήνα γεμιστή με κάστανα.

Haido: Αχ σταμάτα, μου ανοίγεις την όρεξη.

Lefteris: κι ενώ λαχταρούσα αυτή τη στιγμή όπως λαχταράω τη στιγμή που θα βγάλω το πρώτο μου cd, κι εγώ την αγαπώ την Κανέλλα.

Haido: δεν πρέπει να προχωρήσουμε Λευτέρη. δεν είναι σωστό να θυσιάσουμε τόσα χρόνια γάμου για μια ώρα ηδονής

Lefteris: 1 ώρα δεν μπορώ έτσι κι αλλιώς

Haido: ε αν είναι για τρία λεπτά ηδονής, τζάμπα κέρατο.

Hara's Café, ANT1 Channel, season 3, episode 85, 01:47-02:47. Retrieved June 2 2018 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lkzx_r8QhUY&t=212s



Picture 4.1

Figure 4.1 Haido and Lefteris are sharing an intimate moment at Crazy-Antonis' hut.

The intimate moment between Haido and Lefteris is lost forever and the two characters decide to leave Trelantonis' house in order to get back to their families and normal lives. However, in an attempt to lighten the tone of the scene, the camera zooms out to reveal a banana peel on the floor, foreshadowing for the viewer what is about to happen. Before Lefteris manages to alert the female character, Haido slips on the banana skin and falls in bed, carrying away Lefteris. At that point, the dilapidated door of Trelantonis' hut opens, and Kanella and Tasos see their partners in bed together thinking they are cuckolds. Later, we see Haido and Lefteris trying to persuade the entire village that they did not engage in sexual intercourse. Although Kanella and Tasos believe their spouses' words, they still want to give them a lesson, so they follow their example and visit Trelantonis' house, pretending they are a couple. Through this specific storyline in which the couples employ the typical language of infidelities and jealousy, *Hara's Café* offers glimpses of dissidence that eventually fade away.

Despite the promising way with which the story of the Polimeneas and Pouloupoulos started in this episode, the narrative eventually returned to a conservative

formula, which is pretty common for the genre and the medium that accommodates it. Yet, even these assumedly conservative episodes of *Hara's Café* offer characters the possibility to negotiate chrononorms and step outside the canon. This means that although the acts of dissidence enacted by the characters vary in intensity, and some of them are completely contained, they still illustrate the potentiality of characters to act unconventionally as long as rigor and discipline are absent. In the part that follows, however, I will turn my attention slightly outside the village and trace characters that act weirdly at all times and open up possibilities for more complex representations of gender and (hetero)sexuality.

Beyond Time and Space: The Case of Trelantonis/Crazy-Antonis

In this part, I continue to deploy the feminist queer prism in my analysis of *Hara's Café* in an attempt to trace the potential articulation of dissident politics in Hatzisofia and Romas' show. As Alan Sinfield writes, one of the multiple aims of the dissident angle is to “bring minor characters into the foreground [. . .] while suppressing the principals” (1992, p. 24). I make use of this method to search for characters who might not have received adequate attention from both the screenwriters and the viewers. By moving these ‘ghosts’ from the margins to the center of my study, it is my hope to show how supporting and assumedly unimportant figures like Trelantonis may reveal knowledge and information that may have passed unnoticed.

Trelantonis, as his name proclaims, is the village fool who, unlike the rest of the characters of the show, lives in the forest but makes daily appearances in Kolokotronitsi village. When we do not see him offering his services to help his fellow villagers, the show spends a substantial number of scenes following him as he walks on the streets, the fields, and the meadows. In a small community where

everyone knows each other, Trelantonis is one of the most well-known and easily discernible figures of the community. Yet, the villagers of Kolokotronitsi do not seem to know him well and are not even interested in doing so. The show's style is crucial in conveying Trelantonis' estrangement from his fellow villagers as they seem to accept his oddness but not as much as to invite him in their homes and make him an integral part of their small society. Indeed, while the show provides a number of familial moments from within the various houses of Kolokotronitsi, where all family members have lunch and spend time together, Trelantonis is nourished whenever people give him food and eats it alone while walking. He wears rags, lives in a tiny little hut that has only the essentials to lay his body, and he does not mind that other people occasionally use this otherwise private space without his permission. In other words, he has no interest in material goods and is not willing to comply with the selfish and individualistic ways of life and behavior that many of his fellow villagers tend to follow. Thus, despite his acquaintance with the entire population in the village, Trelantonis constitutes a rare species because he epitomizes [no]madness.

Rosi Braidotti, inspired by communities of people without fixed habitation, writes about nomadism as a theoretical option and a "kind of critical consciousness that resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behaviour" (1994, p. 5). Braidotti explains that "nomadic subjects are capable of freeing the activity of thinking from the hold of phallogocentric dogmatism, returning thought to its freedom, its liveliness, its beauty" (1994, p. 8). For such individuals, "language is not only and not even the instrument of communication, but a site of symbolic exchange that links us together in a tenuous and yet workable web of mediated misunderstandings that we call civilization" (1994, p. 14). It is for this reason that the nomad may also be a polyglot who practices "an aesthetic style based on compassion for the incongruities

[and] repetitions” (1994, p. 15). In Kolokotronitsi village, Trelantonis remains thoroughly and persistently unclear when read through contemporary categories of rationality and temporality. Even though he would be able to approach the villagers and give them an opportunity to get to know him better and vice versa, Trelantonis chooses to communicate only with a few of them—mainly women—while he also claims that his actual company are the mountains, animals and bugs (episode 58). In addition, despite the fact that he can understand and even speak the language that others use, he selects different and impromptu ways of communication: speaking through rhymes, singing improvised melodies, and using peculiar and non-existent words such as *bourdoun bourdoun*, Trelantonis defies the Greek language (as well as the language of common sense) and opts for one which sounds childish, yet rhythmic and, always unconventional. As a result, people cannot take him seriously or relate to him in profound ways.

Trelantonis, however, is not entirely alone throughout the show. Besides, as Braidotti reminds us, nomads may “not form identifications,” but “nomadic politics is a matter of bonding, of coalitions, of interconnections” (1994, p. 35). Indeed, when the female protagonist, Hara, and her daughter arrive at the village for the first time, Trelantonis is the only character who is willing to provide them with assistance without waiting for anything in return. While the entire village complies with the Mayor’s rules and imposes trade embargo on Hara to make her leave, Trelantonis does fair and impartial justice; he ignores Popotas’ commands and finds ways to trick his fellow villagers and supply Hara and Valia with food (episode 3).¹⁰⁰ From this

¹⁰⁰ Bearing in mind that the Polimeneas and Pouloupoulos families hate each other, Trelantonis visits Polimeneas and Pouloupoulos families and in each time he enters their stores, he creates a song that praises the opposing camp-family’s virtue. In this way, he makes both families furious which in turn start tossing him bread and food to get him out of their stores. In thus ways, Trelantonis manages to get enough food for Hara and Valia, without raising any suspicion. *Hara’s Café*, season 1, episode 1, 8:30–9:27. Retrieved June 5 2018 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b10JrzOUEKg>

point on, he actively participates in Hara's house and occasionally serves as a valuable member of a family of choice. However, it becomes apparent from the start that Trelantonis' involvement in this family making does not mean to substitute the father surrogate, nor does it reproduce customary family structures. In fact, the show's unconventional placing of two adults of different sexes, instead of reifying the traditional nuclear family model, mocks the least possibility of coupling, since Hara does not see him as a man (nor does Trelantonis himself). Attention should be drawn to episode 14, for instance, where Valia senses that her mother must have been interested in someone from the village and asks for answers from her. After a short argument in the kitchen at the presence of Stavroula and Trelantonis, Valia runs out of the house, and Trelantonis follows her to calm her down. Lost in her thoughts, Valia sits on a log and enumerates the single men in the village to solve the mystery of her mother's love affair. After eliminating the possible candidates one by one, she ends up with Trelantonis being the best possible partner for her mother:

Valia: There is only one who is good in this village.

Trelantonis: Who?

Valia: You.

Trelantonis: My little girl! [he hugs and kisses her on the forehead]

Valia: Do you want to become my dad, Trelantonis?

Trelantonis [thinking for a second]: This is not possible.

Valia: Why?

Trelantonis: Because I am your little brother!¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Valia: Μόνο ένας αξίζει σε αυτό το χωριό.
Trelantonis: Ποιός;

By feeling, acting, and seeing himself as a child, Trelantonis contributes to the gender trouble in *Hara's Café*. According to Katherine Bond Stockton, the child is a queer figure, exemplifying a “sideways” path which defies linear time logics (2009). That is to say figures like Trelantonis who constitute children in grown-up bodies provide a disturbing account of time, linearity, and heteronormativity in many and diverse ways.

Among the literary and media scholars who have explicated the association between madness and transgression, Melinda Williams posits that the figure of the village idiot, “unafraid to be different. . . is sensitive to innuendo and dares to challenge the views and behavior of the town’s majority” (2000, p. 274). *Hara's Café* makes use of this trope and gradually teases out how Trelantonis’ crazy and child-like behavior upsets the village and creates small but at times, important opportunities for dissident politics. Moving in and out of spaces and having access to the entire village of Kolokotronitsi and beyond, Trelantonis observes everything without speaking much. He listens to his fellow villagers fighting about the ownership of the fig tree (episode 1); he listens to the Mayor imposing absurd laws for the management of the village and its people (episode 44); he listens to the priest Triantafilos talk about correct ways of being a proper Christian (episode 14); he listens to the school teacher, Aglaia who is supposed to develop and nurture essential lifelong values in her students (episode 10).

Valia: Εσύ.

Trelantonis: Κοριτσάκι μου (την αγκαλιάζει και τη φιλά στο μέτωπο).

Valia: Θες να γίνεις μπαμπάς μου Τρελαντόνη;

Trelantonis (έκπληκτος για λίγο): Αυτό δε γίνεται.

Valia: Γιατί;

Trelantonis: Αφού είμαι ο μικρός σου αδερφός!

Hara's Café, season 1, episode 14, 36:40–37:00. Retrieved 27 September 2018 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JE6ljSGYSdQ>

Although he does not participate and is not even given opportunity to express his view, Trelantonis' rhymes come out of nowhere without asking for permission; they are highly political and express meaningful ideas through simple and seemingly superficial words. When for instance, Penelope Markatos (Kerasia Samara) comes back to Kolokotronitsi to restore her relationship with her ex-husband, Periandros and her child, Trelantonis does not share the same joy with them about the potential remarriage of the two partners and claims that "people get married but rarely walk together. They don't respect their vows and dream on their own" (episode 34).¹⁰² Drawing on Donna Haraway, Braidotti notes that "new and even alien bodies," in acting differently from the crowd, "are easy targets of assimilation from the cannibalistic machine" (Haraway, 1984, quoted by Braidotti, 1994, p. 33), and the case of *Hara's Café* speaks precisely to Trelantonis' constant and dangerous flights away from docility as well as to the impact that such flights have on deviant bodies like his own. Periandros' enemy relationship with Hara constitutes the central narrative of the first show, and this hostility becomes even more intense towards the last episodes of the first season, when Hara becomes the first woman to run for the elections in order to become the Mayor of Kolokotronitsi (episode 27). In this episode, storylines create political polarization and gender segregation, with the women of the village to temporarily take the side of Hara and men to align themselves with Periandros. One day before the elections, the Mayor delivers his speech at Fatseas' traditional cafeteria and all men, except Trelantonis, gather to express their support to Periandros. When they realize though, that Trelantonis is absent, Periandros makes the men search for him and bring him to the cafeteria. Indeed,

¹⁰² "Οι άνθρωποι παντρεύονται μα σπάνια συμπορεύονται, τους όρκους τους δεν σέβονται και μόνοι ονειρεύονται." *Hara's Café*, season 2, episode 35, 21:51–22:00. Retrieved June 10 2018 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AcI-zi0RDHk>

Trelantonis arrives at the café after other men's pressures, and Periandros does his best to secure votes from all men, including Trelantonis. Periandros' attempts to convince Trelantonis work to confirm that difference may be tolerated as long as it is harmless for the status quo, but unacceptable whenever it becomes a potential power to destabilize it:

Periandros: Listen Trelantonis. You are the only man in the village who does not want to vote for me. That is obviously because you are crazy. So I am thinking to take you to a good psychiatrist in Tripoli in order to avoid losing your vote. I mean that our Trelantonis will get well and we will no longer call him Trelantonis, just Antonis.

Priest: What do you mean, Periandros?

Trelantonis: No, I do not want to. I was born Trelantonis and that is how I want to die. I shall never take off the crazy cloak.

Periandros: My poor thing, why don't you want to become normal like us?

Rodo: And in the end you may find a beautiful gal like me to get married (throughout the season Rodo is presented as the embodiment of ugliness)

Trelantonis: Noooooo (running).¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Porotas: άκουσε Τρελαντώνη. Είσαι ο μόνος άντρας στο χωριό που δε θέλει να με ψηφίσει, προφανώς επειδή είσαι τρελός. Σκέφτομαι λοιπόν να σε πάω σε ένα καλό ψυχιατρείο στη Τρίπολη να γίνεις καλά για να μη χάσουμε αυτή την ψήφο.

Priest: Τι εννοείς Περίανδρε;

Porotas: Εννοώ ότι ο Τρελαντώνης μας θα γίνει καλά και δεν θα τον λέμε Τρελαντώνη, θα τον λέμε σκέτο Αντώνη.

Trelantonis: Όχι δεν θέλω, εγώ Τρελαντώνης γεννήθηκα Τρελαντώνης θε να πεθάνω. Και τον μανδύα του τρελού ποτέ μου δεν το βγάλω

Porotas: γιατί καημένε μου, γιατί δε θες να γίνεις κανονικός άνθρωπος σαν κι εμένα? Στρέφεται γύρω του για να του δείξεις τους άλλους, «σαν τον θόδωρο» (ο τρελαντώνης μορφάζει με σιχαμάρα, δείχνει την άρνησή του), σαν τον Λευτέρη, σαν τον Τάσο, σαν τον παπα? Σαν κι εμένα τέλος πάντων.

Rodo: και στο τέλος να βρεις μια όμορφη κοπελούδα σαν κι εμένα να την παντρευτείς

Trelantonis: όχιιιι (κι έφυγε τρέχοντας).

Hara's Café, ANT1 Channel, season 2, episode 27, 09:20–10:10. Retrieved June 11 2018 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X2idKeN6NE4>

Popotas turns around and points towards other men inside the café in an attempt to convince Trelantonis, that if he accepts the treatment, he may become normal as the rest of the villagers. Yet every time Popotas shows another man's face such as Theodoros, Lefteris, Tasos, or the alcoholic priest, Trelantonis cannot help but grin and starts running away (fig.4.2).



Picture 4.2

Figure 4.2 The Mayor attempts to convince Crazy-Antonis to become 'normal' like the rest of the villagers and Crazy-Antonis grins.

In effect, *Hara's Café's* deployment of scenes as the one mentioned above serves to highlight the incongruity of characters meaning to be serious about situations which are ironic and funny. More than a source of amusement, Hatzisofia and Romas' comedy echoes Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik (1990), confirming that

comedy may serve as a potential site or critiquing dominant ideologies. Indeed, as is already evident, the character of Trelantonis departs from expected, normative, and predestined trajectories; his courage to express emotions, reactions and feelings render him a character that resides in different times and spaces, unwilling to settle in one location. Therefore, Trelantonis' escape from the cafeteria confirms Braidotti in that "nomads can run faster and endure longer trips than most: thus, they cannot be assimilated easily" (1994, p. 33). The character's dash for unknown spaces somewhere in the village renders him an agentful subject who, despite or because of his madness, wishes to stay consistent in a way of life that is anything but consistent, docile, and stable. So, while other villagers, including Periandros, find Trelantonis' craziness as a flaw in need of correction, he does not see this aspect of his subjectivity the same way. As Tony E. Adams has argued (2011), an insult is effective only when the suggestion is horrible to both the subject and the object of the insult. In fact, Trelantonis accepts the derogatory term *crazy*. In fact, his refusal to abandon his deviancy and harmonize himself with the rest of the people directs him less towards irrationality and madness and more toward a different and critical way of thinking.

That Trelantonis might, in fact, be the wisest member of a community of allegedly sane people is not something new. It is the combination of nomadism, craziness, and polyglossy, however, that when brought together, poses a challenge to the abstract norms that define binaries such as rational and crazy, same and different, and docile and deviant. By rejecting the norms imposed upon him, Trelantonis bears the burden of the village fool and the consequences of being the one who stands out and lives at the periphery of the community. Ironically, however, by being crazy and rebellious but also being democratic and standing next to women, Trelantonis is the

sanest of them all and is most importantly the feeble voice that betrays and questions the entire village's normality and adherence to societal rules.

(Re)defining *Εμπρός πίσω*= Back-and-forth or Let's Go Back Backwards?

Hara's Café, analyzed through a dissident angle, has demonstrated how ostensibly conservative and morally correct people may flirt with non-normative gender scripts, yet the manner and the degree to which they engage in inappropriate gender enactments and practices vary. Although many of the aforementioned acts of noncompliance enacted by the villagers were eventually suppressed, thus revealing cultural concerns that continue to govern rural areas and small communities, they still expose the permeability of the power system that controls their actions and behaviors.

Aside from the villagers, Popotas' status as a vindicator of nationalism and patriotism is undermined by the numerous moments of "derailment" from hegemonically masculine, patriotic, and leadership enactments present throughout the show. In many occasions, Popotas contradicts himself when he insists that everyone in the village look up to their place of origin and act as admirable continuators of Arcadian men and women, even though he is the one who often disregards the rules he himself imposes. Take, for instance, episode 28, which is illustrative of whether or not the show is truly consistent in its nationalistic and patriotic discourses. In this episode, Popotas is witnessed at the village's main square delivering his last campaign speech ahead of Kolokotronitsi's mayoral election. Although frustrated because Hara has taken most of female villagers by her side, Popotas tries to convince his people that he deserves to be, as usual, the head of Kolokotronitsi. By means of mudslinging his opponent and employing a patriotic language, Popotas reminds his people that his main aim is to keep the village away from bad modernisms that might pollute it with

‘foreign’ ideas. Meanwhile, Hara and Valia watch Popotas’ speech live on television and are afraid that Popotas might persuade the villagers and turn them again against her. As Valia tries to cheer her mother up, Stavroula arrives and tells Hara that her husband, Fatseas, is burning big quantities of marijuana out in the fields to avoid being caught by police officers. This allows Hara to understand what is about to happen soon and enjoy the public ridicule of the mayor from the comfort of her sofa.



Picture 4.3

Figure 4.3 The entire village starts dancing Sakis Rouvas’ anthem ‘Shake it’.

In the face of comedy’s queerness, the hallucinogenic gases resulting from the burning of weed spread through the entire village, and their side effects become instantly noticeable. Exposed to second-hand marijuana smoke, Popotas abruptly stops his serious and patriotic speech and begins to mumble and laugh. Much like Popotas, the crowd that is gathered around the main square is also under the influence

of marijuana and is unable to understand what their mayor tells them. While the image of an entire village being ‘high’ creates a rupture in the way the community wishes to fantasize itself, it also creates a common state of blissed-out relaxation that allows everyone to ‘loosen up a little’ and engage in un-Kolokotronitsi-like practices, such as singing and dancing foreign-language songs (fig. 4.3).

The scene featuring Popotas executing an impeccable choreography of Sakis Rouvas’ Eurovision song *Shake It* with the rest of the villagers is perhaps the most articulate example of camp in *Hara’s Café*, for it is through this openness and embracing of international and queer pop culture elements that patriotic and narrative discourses upon which Kolokotronitsi had rested for centuries are seriously shaken. Music scholar Ivan Raykoff contends that the Eurovision Song Contest “plays with notions of the nation-state in ways that call into question conventionally heteronormative and particular [...] experiences of national identity and patriotic feeling” (2019, p. 1). The performative revival of Sakis Rouvas’ Eurovision performance, enacted by a range of bodies who go wild and take their clothes off, renders Kolotronitsi a space where *taksi and ithiki* appears as a relic that is hardly ever put into effect. It is through the communal access to alternate masculinities and femininities that *Hara’s Café* is thus able to illustrate the potentiality of an allegedly exceptional village to cross queer, national, and gender identities and, most importantly, reveal that the fish stinks from the head.

The next day, Popotas witnesses the historical and glorious village of his ancestors as well as himself change and worries that “the ‘face’ of our village is being perverted.” Humiliated, he tries to save what can be saved, repeating the famous mantras *taksis kai ithiki* (order and virtue), *Kolokotronitsiotes and Kolokotronitsiotises*, and *ebros pisw* (let’s go back) again and again. This last stock

phrase, however, when uttered during Popotas' speech in the pilot, puzzles Priest-Triantafilos, urging him to ask the mayor "*ebros (forward) or pisw (backward)?*". For Popotas, "*ebros pisw*" is employed as a nostalgic evocation of desire for a particular period in time when life was plain, pure, and innocent. Therefore, the phrase describes the willingness of the subject to orient itself into a pre-industrial, pre-modern era, assumedly stripped of social vices and temptations (fig. 4.4). As I will argue here, however, "*ebros pisw*" also responds to one of the core tenets of queer theory and allows us to read Popotas' words as exuding fluidity, instability, and a lack of center.



Picture 4.4

Figure 4.4 Popotas repeats the famous mantra ebros pisw (let's go back).

Hara's Café reveals how different characters do different masculinities and femininities, which sometimes destabilize the norms and other times, reify them. Indeed, towards the end of the second season and the beginning of the third and final, the show makes back-and-forth movements, placing the characters into different positionalities or in those places we had initially found them. Gogo for example, breaks up, on good terms, with Billy and assumes the upbringing of their child. At the same time, she begins her own business as well as a female community, thus obtaining an emancipated and independent positioning away from the control of her family and her ex-husband's parents. While the life of the Polimeneas and Pouloupoulos families go back to normal with slight changes, Fatseas and Stavroula reunite, but this time the female character is different outside (she dyed her hair blue), but also inside, since she finally managed to become pregnant, and offer the proper dose of happy-ending that the comedy-drama requires. As far as the youngsters are concerned, Matoula moves abroad with the village's local doctor, Emilios, to volunteer with *Doctors Without Borders*, and somehow turn over a new leaf in her life. Much like Matoula and Emilios, the teacher, Eleonora—who appeared during the third season (and replaced Aglaia)—and her conspicuously younger boyfriend (and student), Dionisis, leave Kolokotronitsi and move to London in order to leave their lives freely. These mobility plans away from the countryside are imagined as a gateway that will offer 'failed' and 'deviant' bodies the possibility to reinvent themselves in the vast, anonymous city landscape, and start a life trajectory that could perhaps not be attained in Kolokotronitsi. Unsurprisingly enough, however, the characters who enact the most ground-breaking changes are the leading ones.

For anyone familiar with Haris Romas' acting roles, such miraculous transformations are not novel. In *Stars*, Richard Dyer (1979) explains that fictional

characters can never be understood in isolation because they are imbued with the actor's star image as well as their performances in other roles. More specifically, Dyer states that the star's name and his appearance already signify that condensation of attitudes and values which is the star's image" (1979, p. 126). Thus, following Dyer's thought as well as the *ebros pīsō* mantra that Popotas repeats throughout the show, it is possible to go back and forth and explore the extent to which Haris Romas' extratextual baggage has been incorporated in *Hara's Café*. Although the famous scriptwriter and actor has played diverse roles that range from sneaky (*The Evil Vezir*, MEGA, 1997–1998) and asexual (*These and Those*, ANT1, 1991–1993) to highly sexual (*Lifting*, ANT1, 2000–2002) characters, his most popular and recent performances evoke adherence to traditional values and expose a type of masculinity in crisis. Just like in *Konstantinos and Elenis' House* and *Diligianeio Parthenohogio*, Popotas/Haris Romas in *Hara's Café* embodies a soft form of masculinity that prioritizes logic over emotion. Yet, in all cases, this innocent man-of-letters performance becomes easy prey for women-predators who interfere in his life and change him, yet only temporarily.

Up until the middle of the second season, Popotas is a character marked by class, both in terms of financial autonomy as well as discipline and education. He is a mature, independent, and self-reliant individual whose only purpose in life is to raise his son properly and serve as a role model for his offspring and the whole community of Kolokotronitsi. Although his high status in the social hierarchy of the village renders him an ideal husband and thus, an erotic target, to plenty of women who are interested in him, Periandros eliminates any possibility to invest in coupledness and appears to live beyond the flesh. In a number of scenes, comments made by women like Marika (Rania Ioannidou), the priest's wife, and other villagers echo concerns

about male sexuality, but also operate as disciplinary mechanisms that police singleness in an attempt to make Periandros re-enter into the heteronormative route he had so long averted after his divorce with Manolakis' mother.¹⁰⁴ Yet, it is not until the advent of rebellious Hara that Periandros begins to reassess his life's priorities. From season two, Popotas attempts to overcome his crush on Hara; the emotions that the presence of this strange and unconventional woman makes Popotas feel are wide and range from anger and frustration to jealousy, love, and admiration. The mayor confesses his preoccupations to the priest and his housemaid, Tasia, hoping they will help him go back to the single and celibate course. However, as the episodes progress, the show adheres to the typical romcom formula and makes the two characters' irreconcilable differences into reconcilable and peaceful facts. In episode 81, Popotas and Hara put their egos aside and attempt to make mutual compromises. The construction of a stiff celibate man gives way to an individual who goes all the way to Athens in order to surprise Hara (episode 79) and sings in hip hop clothes to persuade her that he can truly change (episode 80). In a similar fashion, the representation of the self-made and emancipated woman that Hara has displayed over the three seasons is gradually replaced by the image of a docile housewife who releases her unruliness in order to share her life with a man who tries to modernize himself, though not always successfully (episode 80).

In the penultimate episode of season three, the question over Hara and Periandros' couple logistics is brought to the table after a minor argument they have about whether Hara should continue to work at the café she created all by herself. Periandros says that Hara's persistence to keep the café open now that she is married

¹⁰⁴ In episode 1, Marika asks Popotas, "When will you make a family again so that the kid has a mother?" and Popotas responds, "We do not want any other woman apart from Tasia."

disappoints him because he thinks his wife does not try hard enough to build a healthy relationship. When Periandros exits the house, Valia is still standing next to her mother speechless, and Hara takes the lead to break the ice:

Hara: He is doing everything for me. And I do everything for him. At least, that is what I think.

Valia: No mother, you don't only think [it is that way]. [In fact] you do everything for him. You are the one who lost herself for him.

Hara: How much you have grown!

Valia: And if you are happy with all this change, then it's fine. As long as I know that you are happy.

Hara: I am not happy.¹⁰⁵

It is ironic that Hara, whose name means happiness, is no longer happy after her marriage with Periandros. What is more ironic, however, is that a little girl, and in this case, Hara's daughter, appears to be more mature and rational than her very own mother. According to Tison Pugh, "the ideological construction of the child [in fictional programmes] overwrites children's individuality, amalgamating them into an undifferentiated collective in need of nurture and protection" (2018, pp. 13-14). The case of Valia, however, illustrates that children and teenagers might not need support and care, and instead, can be the ones who help adults think wisely and take action.

¹⁰⁵ Hara: Κάνει τα πάντα για μένα. Κι εγω κανω τα πάντα για αυτόν. Έτσι νομίζω τουλάχιστον. Valia: Όχι μαμα, εσύ δεν το νομίζεις. Εσύ κάνεις τα πάντα γι' αυτόν. Εσύ έχασες τον εαυτό σου για αυτόν. Καταλαβαίνω ότι τον αγαπάς, αλλά σε αυτή την αγάπη χάθηκες, έγινες μια άλλη.

Hara: Πόσο μεγάλωσες!

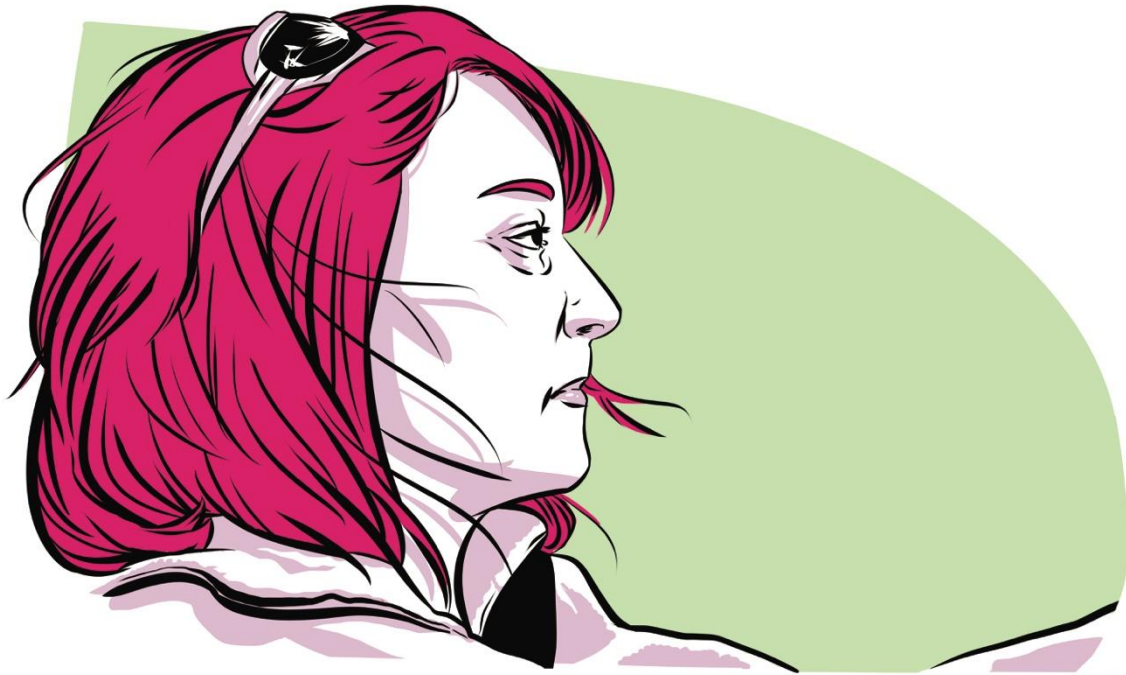
Valia: Κι αν με όλη αυτή την αλλαγή είσαι ευχαριστημένη, πάει στο καλό, αρκεί να ξέρω ότι είσαι χαρούμενη

Hara: Δεν είμαι χαρούμενη. Quote from the series *Hara's Café*, ANTI Channel, Season 3, episode 87, 32:13-32:57 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uBm7_LfEzHw, Accessed June 17 2018.

In this fashion, *Hara's Café* follows a narrative device not particularly common for its genre. While a number of popular dramedies and romcoms follow the meet-lose-get formula and conclude with a happy ending for the central couple (see Kaklamanidou, 2011), Haris Romas and Anna Hatzisofia's show comes to an end with a rather sad final episode, which finds the two protagonists taking separate roads. The lesson that the viewer learns from this final episode is clear when Popotas says, "whoever said that opposites attract is a big liar," with Hara responding that "opposites attract but attraction is way different from settling down with someone."¹⁰⁶

Despite its overall pessimism, the final episode may be seen as a feminist reparation, which gives the female protagonist the possibility to reclaim her power from those instruments that exerted control over her body and thus, determine her own fate. Much like Matoula and Pinelopi, who left the countryside, Hara and her daughter are the last two women to move to the capital after their multiple efforts to integrate in the village. Just like in the pilot episode, the series' finale finds Hara and her daughter in the streets, yet this time the car moves toward the opposite direction. While the mayor runs behind Hara and shouts her name to make her stay, the female character speeds up the car; a series of close-ups in the foreground show Hara's crying face, as the air blows her hair and the radio plays Dimitris Basis' song "γεια σου λοιπόν/Goodbye Then," signifying the end of a big love romance and a conventional femininity that Hara tried to enact unsuccessfully and unwillingly (fig. 4.5).

¹⁰⁶ **Periandros:** όποιος κερατάς είπε ότι τα ετερόνυμα έλκονται, είναι πολύ μεγάλος ψεύτης
Hara: Τα ετερόνυμα έλκονται, άλλα άλλο έλξη και άλλο κάνω σπίτι.



Picture 4.5

Figure 4.5 Hara leaves the countryside behind and moves to an unknown direction.

The car vanishes and Periandros ends up with his knees on the ground, uttering “I can’t live without you.”¹⁰⁷ The next scene finds the male protagonist sitting on the balcony of his house with his head bowed down desperately. His son Manolakis, sharing the same melancholia for having lost his own partner, Valia, approaches his father and gives him a hug. While the same song continues to play, Popotas looks directly at his son and murmurs, “They will come back my son, they will.”¹⁰⁸ Basis’ song refers to emotional closures; Popotas’ words, however, do not provide the viewers with the closure they might have expected. Instead, both

¹⁰⁷ “Δεν μπορώ να ζήσω χωρίς εσένα.” *Hara’s Café*, ANTI Channel, season 3, episode 88, 43:00-43:05. Retrieved July 1 2018 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yWxGm0KT3vM>

¹⁰⁸ “θα ξανάρθουν αγόρι μου, θα ξανάρθουν.” *Hara’s Café*, ANTI Channel, season 3, episode 88, 44:57-45:06. Retrieved July 3 2018 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yWxGm0KT3vM>

Periandros Popotas and Haris Romas wink their eyes to the viewer, leaving *Hara's Café's* finale suspended. As Glyn Davis and Garry Needham explain in *Queer TV* (2009:5):

the cancelled television series [and the ones that are] left hanging without resolution could be seen as one of the queerest aspects of television programming and experience. The sense of conclusion and satisfaction delivered by the closed text—which arguably serves to valorise conservative and patriarchal ideologies—is not provided, replaced instead by a formless open-ended yearning, a realm of possibilities without barricades.

Indeed, the series' open-ended finale, concomitant with the text's general ambiguity, enhances *Hara's Café's* queer potentialities and opens up different ways to approach the text. Furthermore, recent rumors that whisper about the very possible continuation of Anna Hatzisofia and Haris Romas' text from the *ANTI* channel in 2020 can be seen as another sign of *Hara's Café's* fluid politics. It is unknown if, when exactly, or how the comedy-drama will eventually make it to our television screens. Yet, what becomes more and more apparent is that the *ebros pisw* politics that Periandros Popotas has put to the fore since 2003 may not be so much a linear turn to the past, as he advocated, but a back-and-forth movement, and thus a stance vis-à-vis nationalism, patriotism, and gender that remains decisively unstable and always in motion.

CHAPTER FIVE

Queering Motherhood, Widowhood, and Friendship in *Dolce Vita*

Middle-aged and older women tend to find themselves on the periphery of television programming as wives, widows, mothers, and grandmothers, filling secondary roles in television series (Fiske, 1988; White, 2018). In the social context of an ageing Western population, where women traditionally tend to live longer than men, and a media landscape which continues to celebrate youthfulness (Bagavos, 2013; Vamvakas, 2018c; Woolf, 2013), portrayals of ageing women are particularly topical. To rectify historical and sociocultural injustices against these social groups, this chapter will examine the representation of middle-aged women in the Greek television comedy, *Dolce Vita*.

Set in a luxurious house somewhere in the posh Athenian neighborhood of Paleo Psihiko, *Dolce Vita* tells the story of three women who inhabit the same accommodation. Complying with the grammar of previous television series, which emerged with the privatization of the Greek television, Alexandros Rigas and Lefteris Papapetrou's screenplay brings together women of different ages, professional statuses, and belief systems in order to problematize the changing social and cultural role of women in the 1990s and expose the feminist views each of whom expresses in an assumedly postfeminist era.

The main protagonist of the comedy, Christina (Anna Panagiotopoulou), is a middle-aged woman and mother. After the loss of her older and not particularly loving husband, Periklis (Athinodoros Prousalis), Christina takes over his position and role, and becomes the chief director of a tomato sauce factory, and the single parent of her daughter, Dorita (Katerina Ziogou). Christina spends most of her time at work or with her close female friend, Sasa (Katiana Balanika). However, when she

returns home, she lives with her religious and judgmental mother-in-law Olga (Maria Foka) and Aspasia (Maria Kavogianni), a big-mouthed spinster who serves as a domestic worker and Olga's caregiver. Christina's monotonous and highly repetitive lifestyle, however, abruptly changes after a business trip to Italy, where she meets her daughter and a young man named Antonis (Thanasis Efthimiadis). Thanks to Antonis, she starts to speak a language of love, passion, and 'immorality'.

Taking to the airwaves on October 5th, 1995, *Dolce Vita* achieved phenomenally high ratings from the broadcast of its first episode and became MEGA channel's most successful comedy show for the seasons 1995-1997 (Savvidis, 2015). The television critic Konstantinos Karasarlis (2018) attributes *Dolce Vita*'s ongoing success to "the modern, clever humor, and witty dialogues"¹⁰⁹ written by Rigas and Papapetrou.¹¹⁰ Similarly, Dimitris Kapetanopoulos (2017) characterizes *Dolce Vita* as a television production that is "way ahead of its time."¹¹¹ While Kapetanopoulos does not specify why he considers *Dolce Vita* innovative, the comedy's innovation possibly lies in its use of spaces. Unlike previous "comedies," like *The Unbearables* (see chapter 1), which largely constructs home as the main space where action takes place,¹¹² the cast of *Dolce Vita* gets out of the house often and works in white-collar jobs, thus combining pre-feminist and feminist depictions of womanhood. In addition

¹⁰⁹ "Σύγχρονο, έξυπνο χιούμορ και καλογραμμένους διαλόγους."

¹¹⁰ In 1995-1996 Alexandros Rigas and Lefteris Papapetrou wrote the script for the comedy show *Πάτερ Ημών [Our Father]* (ANT1, 1994-1996). *Dolce Vita* was their second and ultimate collaborative project; ever since, Lefteris Papapetrou chose a solitary path and wrote the script for the comedy series *Εγκλήματα [Crimes]* (ANT1, 1998-2000), *Είσαι το ταίρι μου [You are my Soulmate]* (MEGA, 2001-2002), *Κάτω Παρτάλι [Southern Partali]* (MEGA, 2014-2015), and *Στο καλό γλυκιά μου συμπεθέρα [Goodbye my sweet co-mother-in-law]* (ANT1, 2016-2017).

¹¹¹ "Μπροστά από την εποχή του."

¹¹² The list is long but here I provide just a few examples of those comedy shows that preceded *Dolce Vita* and were shot inside the 'house': *Οι Μεν και οι Δεν! [These and Those]* (ANT1, 1993-1996), *Οι Απαράδεκτοι [The Unbearables]* (Mega, 1991-1993), *Οι Τρεις Χάριτες [The Three Graces]* (Mega, 1990-1992) and, *Οι Αυθαίρετοι [The Arbitraries]* (Mega, 1989-1991).

to the rather expanded use of spaces, the broad and complex family networks in the comedy are worth mentioning.

Television fiction in Greece that aired during the 90s was quick to capture the sociocultural tensions and historic transformations within the family structure that occurred at the time (e.g., Georgoulas, Kassimati, Papaioannou, & Prantalos, 2000; Presvelou, Riga, Yotsa, & Geka, 2012). Comedies and situation comedies broadcast by private television channels set the home as a key space of the family. Yet, the house may vary on a number of factors such as morphology, family structure and even number of residents. Deviating significantly from the ‘sacred’ configuration of the nuclear family, television series address various types of families, such as single parents (*Τα επτά κακά της μοίρας μου* [*My seven misfortunes*], MEGA 1991-1994; *Πάτερ Ημών* [*Our Father*], ANT1 1994-1996), extended families (*Το Πετιπέ* [*The Penthouse*], MEGA 1990-1992) and same-sex parenting (*Με δυο μαμάδες* [*With two mummies*], MEGA 1999-2000), which mark either a progression to new forms of family or a retreat to older family structures. In the aforementioned series, men and women enter the labor market, occupy public spaces, and engage in a range of outdoor activities. Yet at the end of the day, all family members return home. Despite its diversity and polymorphy, the home becomes the default destination, where social interaction, power relations, and complex exchanges of a variety of social signals occur.

The focus that Rigas and Papapetrou intended for *Dolce Vita*, which was exploring family conflicts that develop between its members, links the series with a number of popular “comedies”, starring women, and particularly, Yiannis Dalianidis’ *The Penthouse*. Just as Christina in *Dolce Vita* shares the same house with two female residents, *The Penthouse*’s main cast consists of a middle-aged woman, Katerina

Sofianou (Katerina Gioulaki), who lives in the same flat with her elderly mother, Sofia (Koula Agianiotou), and her niece, Eirini (Joyce Evidi). In both series, middle-aged women are presented as empowered and emancipated individuals with an important role in the professional arena, while the elderly are cast as young-old and eager to push their own agenda inside and outside the house in clever and insidious ways. Despite similarities in themes and women's presence on the small screen, the differences between the series cannot be overlooked. Except for blatant class imbalances, Dalianidis' static aesthetic allows protagonists to run their course until the next episode, where all characters eliminate their 'life-meter' and start their day anew, thus revealing situation comedy's 'forgetful' and cyclical format. The ongoing long-form narrative structure of comedy, on the other hand, provides screenwriters the possibility to develop deeper plots and more complex characters, and create variations in episodes, which in turn maximizes suspension into the unfolding action (Mittel, 2006). In the case of Rigas and Papapetrou's show, characters constitute indeed complex individuals who comprise a diverse range of ages, power dynamics and desires. Through a dynamic interweaving of characters' relations and personal agendas, rivalries, eccentric alliances, and temporary cease-fires are common phenomena and the main loci where humor in *Dolce Vita* stems from.

In her book, *In a Queer Time and Place*, Judith Halberstam (2005, p. 10) includes "ravers, club kids, HIV-positive barebackers, rent boys, sex workers, homeless people, drug dealers, and the unemployed" in a list of individuals who live in eccentric ways and outside of heteronormative markers. In this chapter, I will enlarge this list, counting the widow in *Dolce Vita* as another subject that can potentially curb heteronormative logics. As I will attempt to show, although *Dolce Vita* interrogates the demands made of middle-aged women, subjecting them to severe

surveillance, the show also represents defiance of those demands, showing that women who may have passed the cult of youth can still drive themselves, through eccentric alliances and friendship networks, into a realm that gestures beyond confining rules of gender and sexuality. Through a close reading of the oppressive and normative discourses by which Christina's multiple and conflicting identities are understood, I wish to study how the interrelationship of Christina's widowhood with other social categories bring to light the personal, intimate, and affective experiences of living as a middle-aged woman, mother and desiring subject in a 'tyrannical' social environment. By exposing the processes through which the main female character inhabits a set of different and at times clashing roles, *Dolce Vita* provides room for apprehending identity as temporary, fluid and the house as a space prone towards queer territories. Through this analysis, it is finally my hope to explain that what Karasarlis and Dimakopoulos find clever and progressive in *Dolce Vita* is the very element of dissidence which, more than in any other text discussed so far, lies at the very center of the show.

Self / Socially-Imposed Enactments of Widowhood

The first scene of the pilot introduces us to Sofi (Galini Tseva), Christina's secretary and Loukas (Pavlos Orkopoulos), an accountant at the tomato sauce factory. Both characters talk about Christina while they wait for her at her office. Through Sofi's propensity for verbal gossip and Loukas' commitment to his beloved boss, the viewers acquire a sense of Christina's character and marital status before seeing her.¹¹³ Later in the same episode, Sasa meets her friend Christina at her work to say

¹¹³ Through Loukas and Sofi's dialogue, Christina is portrayed as a workaholic whose entire life focuses around the tomato sauce factory that she inherited from her late husband.

goodbye before the latter goes to Italy to see her daughter. When Loukas exits the office to leave Christina and Sasa alone, Sasa addresses Christina with curiosity:

Sasa: Haven't you ever had sex?

Christina: Sasa, Loukas and I are more like brother and sister, alright?

Sasa: Then have sex [with him] in a brotherly-kind-of-way.

Christina: That's what's always on your mind!

Sasa: Pooh! I definitely wouldn't think of tomato sauces and ketchups though. In front of my condo, a two-floor house is being built. I will tell you one thing, you have to see the painter.

Christina: Why, what has he got?

Sasa: The most important, 24 years of life. Think of him having [sex with] you on the scaffold.

Christina: (irritated) Don't you feel ashamed at all!

Sasa: (cheekily): You silly! You have Loukas walking between your legs...well, literally speaking, he is not.

Christina: Is this how it works? You with the 24-year-old guy and me with Loukas, the matured meat?

Sasa: Darling, if you don't find the milk lamb, settle down with the matured meat.

Christina: Yet you never let yourself unfed, right?

Sasa: (cheekily) Never. Sit down there to take the trophy of the loyal widow. Three o'clock, the construction workers finish work, I have to go.

Christina: Goodbye, I wish you all the best.

Sasa: Kisses to Dorita, make sure you have some fun.

Christina (ironically): Don't worry, I will be hopping from one cabaret to another.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Sasa: Δεν τό'χετε κάνει ποτέ;

In this dialogue, the differences between Sasa and Christina's characters become apparent. On the one hand, Sasa is portrayed as a confident woman with an active desire for men that is not suppressed. On the other hand, Christina is presented as a lonely widow who can navigate herself in the professional domain. Yet she is uncomfortable enough to consider a different life scenario for herself after the death of her husband. Being a widow is therefore implied as an identity that requires the adoption of specific moral codes and behaviors. This discussion implies the markedly distinct expectations that different bodies must meet on the basis of the unwritten laws that govern gender within the private and the public sphere.

Authors of influential studies (Tapinc, 1992; Loizos & Papataxiarchis, 1991) argue that while the marital status for men is dichotomized socially as married or single, women are split into different groups, each of which holds different value and entails specific social enactments, thus supporting Michael Herzfeld's argument that "women are not controllers of their own discourse" (1991, p. 79). In her groundbreaking essay, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980), Adrienne Rich asks why "such violent structures should be found necessary to enforce

Christina: Σάσα, με τον Λουκά είμαστε σαν αδέρφια, εντάξει;

Sasa: Ε, κάντε το αδελφικά.

Christina: Όλο εκεί έχεις το μυαλό σου όμως!

Sasa: Όχι, μωρέ θα κάθομαι να σκέφτομαι τους πελτέδες και τα κετσάπ. Απέναντι από το σπίτι μου χτίζεται ένα δίπατο. Ένα σου λέω μόνο, πρέπει να δεις τον ασπριτζή.

Christina: Γιατί, τι έχει;

Sasa: Το κυριότερο, 24 χρόνια ζωής. Σκέψου να σου το κάνει αυτός απάνω στη σκαλωσιά.

Christina: Ε μα δε ντρέπεσαι λιγάκι πια!

Sasa: Α μωρή χαζή, έχεις τον Λουκά ανάμεσα στα πόδια σου... ή μάλλον δεν τον έχεις.

Christina: Α έτσι το έχουμε, εσύ με τον εικοσιτεσσάρη, εγώ με τον Λουκά τον σιτεμένο.

Sasa: Αγάπη μου, άμα δε βρίσκεις το αρνάκι του γάλακτος, βολεύεσαι με το σιτεμένο.

Christina: Πάντως νηστική δε μένεις.

Sasa (**checkily**): Ποτέ! Κάτσε εσύ να πάρεις το βραβείο της πιστής χήρας. Τρεις η ώρα σχολάει η οικοδομή, πρέπει να φύγω.

Christina: Στο καλό, καλό βόλι σου εύχομαι.

Sasa: Φιλάκια στη Ντορίτα και κοίτα να το ρίζεις λίγο έξω.

Christina: Μην ανησυχείς, από καμπαρέ σε καμπαρέ θα είμαι.

Dolce Vita, MEGA Channel, season 1, episode 1, 02:47-03:40, Retrieved August 5 2018 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CVZ1iP8Px0&t=349s>

women's total emotional, erotic loyalty and subservience to men" to expose the centrality of heterosexuality, not only as a sexual relation, but more importantly, as a system with unequal distribution of power (Rich, 1980, p. 652). Following Rich's line of thought, I will further argue that the same violent patriarchal structures that exclude women from particular areas of life, continue to haunt them even in the absence of men.

During the last decades, women, coupled with feminist's commitment towards deconstructing natural and instinctual assumptions about women and their bodies, have succeeded in redefining their presence, resulting in noticeable attempts towards confronting heteropatriarchy in both the private and the public sphere. Yet, as pertinently explained in Lana Rakow's chapter "Feminist Approaches to Popular Culture" (2006), "Women still have a particular relationship to popular culture that is different from men's" (p. 202). In other words, the centrality of marriage, motherhood, and womanhood to the normative gendered identity of women still places them in identities and roles, which are already, in effect, before them. In *Dolce Vita*, Christina's performances of 'loyal' widowhood do not take place in a vacuum but are enacted as a result of the normative violence experienced inside and outside the house. In the pilot, as soon as Christina returns home, the comedy illustrates how the rest of the house residents monitor her moves. When the female protagonist leaves her luggage unattended to check to see if the chauffeur who will take her to the port has arrived, Olga and Aspasia approach each other and seize the opportunity to gossip Christina's clothing (Fig. 5.1).

Olga: What did she take with her?

Aspasia: I will tell you one thing. Three bras: in beige, white and black color.

Olga: At least she took the black one!

Aspasia: And a coat, which is pink though. Well, not pink. Red as fire!

Olga (disapprovingly): Alas, what a tootsie!¹¹⁵



Picture 5.1

Figure 5.1 While Christina is away, Aspasia and Olga gossip about Christina's open luggage.

For Olga and Aspasia, the various aspects of appearance, which constitute what is translated as 'feminine', are subject to strict rules. According to Hannah McCann, "Feminine styles of the body are often not merely understood as the effect of an oppressive gender system, but rather are seen to perpetuate and maintain this system" (2018, p.1). Nina Lykke points to special clothing expected from widows and

¹¹⁵ Olga: Τι πήρε μαζί της;

Aspasia: Ένα μόνο θα σας πω. Τρία σουτιέν: μπεζ, άσπρο και μαύρο.

Olga: Πάλι καλά που πήρε μαύρο!

Aspasia: Κι ένα σακάκι όμως ροζ. Δηλαδή τί ροζ! Κόκκινο της φωτιάς!

Olga (disapprovingly): Αλίμονο, η μπεμπέκα!

Dolce Vita, MEGA Channel, season 1, episode 1, 05:37-05:48. Retrieved August 5 2018 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CVZ1iP8Px0&t=349s>

its ambiguous functionality within society. On the one hand, the widow's weeds send a clear message to the public and elicit respect for her state of mourning (Lykke, 2015).¹¹⁶ On the other hand, the weeds, seen as a rather oppressive and inflexible social tradition, do not easily allow widows to deviate from these bodily expectations of the gender regime for a given time. Words like *bebeka* (tootsie) and disapproving remarks that are expressed by Olga and Aspasia to address the main protagonist carry with them histories and politics of meaning and demonstrate that the female heterosexual identity is susceptible to discipline because the subject in question ought to enact particular identities.

Women's oppression and the strategies to empower women is part of the post-modernist political project, which places women at the center of discourse. In her study *Talking Back*, bell hooks (1989) describes the process of 'finding a voice' as a metaphor for self-transformation, which is particularly important for groups of women whose public voices have been feeble or fully eclipsed. According to hooks, "Coming to voice is an act of resistance. Speaking becomes both a way to engage in active self-transformation and a rite of passage where one moves from being object to being subject. [Because] Only as subjects can we speak" (1989, p. 12). The question of how subjects may react to the norms that are placed upon them and whether their ability to articulate a voice constitutes a real act of resistance is part of a larger debate about feminism and identity politics. In her ground-breaking article, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity, and Violence against Women of Color," Crenshaw (1991) argues, "The problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, but rather the opposite-that it frequently conflates or ignores

¹¹⁶ The word weed comes from an Old English word for garment and refers to the black clothes worn by a widow in mourning, see <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/widow%27s+weeds>

intragroup differences” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1242). Drawing on black feminism, Crenshaw (1989) recognized the limitations of the single-axis paradigm of identity in research and political activism and, at the same time, developed the concept of intersectionality to stress how different axes of subordination crosscut each other. Building on Crenshaw’s theory, Collins (1990) introduced the idea of the matrix of domination, claiming that multiple oppressed identity statuses produce distinctive social realities and interlocking systems of oppression, depending on the individual’s social positioning in the matrix.

In *Dolce Vita*, Christina, belonging to the upper class, is consistently presented as an autonomous and self-sufficient individual, who claims voice through her social status and financial power. Age bias though, crosscuts gender, defining the repertoire of moves available to middle-aged, widowed women like Christina, therefore to wear bright colors and assumedly provocative clothes is in some way to fail to perform widowhood and womanhood in gender and age-appropriate ways. However, proper widowhood is not only policed in terms of clothing but also in terms of one’s behaviors and practices in the public sphere. For instance, in Episode 11, Christina is once again subjected to criticism for neglecting her ‘obligations’ towards her late husband:

Olga: Where are you heading to?

Christina: Some of us will gather at a little tavern.

Olga: Nice, nice. Will there be other widows?

Christina: What do you want to say?

Olga: Nothing, I was [just] thinking that you haven’t been to the cemetery with your daughter and your son-in-law, not even once!

Christina: To do what at the cemetery?

Olga: Aspasia, are you listening to what she says?

Aspasia: Don't get me involved!

Olga: How can this hero be forgotten so fast?

Christina: Since when are 10 years a short period of time?

Aspasia: Alas for those who pass away!

Christina: You say that you don't want to get involved but you don't lose the chance to utter your bitter word.

Aspasia: Well, I am not mute after all!

Christina: Unfortunately [you are not].

Olga: The soil that covers him is still damp.

Christina: It makes sense, since you go and water it every now and then as if it is a parterre.¹¹⁷

Through this scene, Olga and, to a lesser extent, Aspasia, are presented as preservers of traditional customs and practices. Not only do they criticize Christina for not respecting death rituals and her deceased husband's grave, but they also become suspicious of her unprecedented activities outside the house. Christina's ironic responses to Olga and Aspasia render her a character with a voice who can

¹¹⁷ Olga: Για που με το καλό;

Christina: Θα μαζευτούμε μια παρεούλα να πάμε σε μια ταβερνίτσα.

Olga: Ωραία, ωραία. Θα είναι και άλλες χήρες;

Christina: Πού θες να καταλήξεις;

Olga: Όχι λέω, στο νεκροταφείο δεν πήγες μια φορά με την κόρη σου και τον γαμπρό σου.

Christina: Τί να κάνουμε καλέ στο νεκροταφείο;

Olga: Την ακούς Ασπασία;

Aspasia: Μη με ανακατεύετε εμένα!

Olga: Τόσο γρήγορα ξεχάστηκε αυτός ο ήρωας;

Christina: Γρήγορα είναι δέκα χρόνια;

Aspasia: Αλί σε αυτόν που πάει!

Christina: Εσύ δεν ανακατεύεσαι, την κουβεντούλα σου την πετάς όμως!

Aspasia: Ε δεν είμαι και μουγκή!

Christina: Δυστυχώς!

Olga: Νοπό είναι ακόμα το χόμα που τον σκεπάζει.

Christina: Αφού πας και τον ποτίζεις κάθε τρεις και λίγο, λες και είναι παρτέρι πια!

Dolce Vita, MEGA Channel, season 1, episode 11, 08:44-09:48, Retrieved August 10 2018 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VRtLu1s8rDQ&t=573s>

express her opposition to other's demands. Yet, instead of challenging established norms, irony in *Dolce Vita* serves as a temporary escape from surveillance and as Sabrina Abrams would argue, "a means of channeling anger and thereby reinforcing the social hierarchy" (Abrams, 2017, p. 5).¹¹⁸ This irony is particularly evident in Aspasia and Olga's answers, which remain unaltered despite Christina's ironic comments.

After the female protagonist leaves the house, Aspasia tells Olga with contempt, "Everyone thought of her as the very model of a widow."¹¹⁹ Thus, Aspasia condemns Christina for expressing multiple self-identities across different spatiotemporal contexts. Similarly, Olga Markatos envisions widowhood as a fixed identity, which is associated with vulnerability, unhappiness, and loss (see Moss & Moss, 2014). As a result, Christina's nighttime social outings do not bode well for her.

As Olga Markatos continues, if Christina keeps going to "taverns today, bouzoukia tomorrow, in a week the newspapers will write about us."¹²⁰ In her scathing response, which revealing her ideological background, Olga posits that women who have lost their partners and visit taverns, bouzoukia¹²¹, and other male-dominated spaces of dubious reputation break the 'widowhood contract'. These actions also embarrass the broader family circle to which they belong (see Caraveli,

¹¹⁸ For an exploration of the concept of irony and its ambiguous functioning in cultural texts, see Hutcheon (1994).

¹¹⁹ "Κι όλοι την είχαν για υπόδειγμα χήρας." *Dolce Vita*, MEGA Channel, season 1, episode 11, 09:31-09:33. Retrieved August 10 2018 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VRtLu1s8rDQ&t=573s>

¹²⁰ "Σήμερα ταβέρνα, αύριο μπουζούκια, σε μια βδομάδα θα μας γράφουν οι εφημερίδες." *Dolce Vita*, MEGA Channel, season 1, episode 11, 09:35-09:40. Retrieved 10 August 2018 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VRtLu1s8rDQ&t=573s>

¹²¹ Bouzouki is a popular musical instrument that was brought in Greece in the 1900s by Greek immigrants from Turkey, and quickly became the central instrument to the rebetiko genre and its music branches. Bouzoukia are a metonymical symbol for the night-clubs which play this type of music. For a discussion about the history of bouzouki(a) in the Greek culture during the 1980s onwards as well as the active involvement of women in the production of *kefi* (high spirits), see Kirtsoglou (2003, pp.13-14), and Papanikolaou (2007a, pp. 63-67).

1986). To prevent that embarrassment from happening, the tyrannical mother-in-law and spinster's hyperbolic reactions, serve as an incentive for the development of the plot and the means to symbolically control Christina. The matriarch in *Dolce Vita* enforces widowhood as a position that requires absolute compliance to the performance of 'decent and proper woman' femininity. Nevertheless, although irony alone does not suffice to necessarily resist these norms, Christina's unmarried status may turn her into a character, who can potentially disturb the seemingly stable family logics of the house.

Rosie White, in examining British comedies featuring middle-aged and old women, comments, "Women who free themselves from the policing mechanisms of marriage and maternity, are prone to become unruly in their later years" (2018, p. 167).

As Lykke aptly explains, the widow defined as "a woman without a (live) husband, constitutes a character and a figure that is always already queer" (2015, p. 87). While in patriarchal societies and narratives, to live without a man may be stigmatizing for the widow, in more alternative imageries, the absence of a man may transform a woman with agency and an empowering figure, who may defy the heterosexual construction of gender from within society. *Dolce Vita* oscillates between these two opposite sides. Widowhood constructs Christina as a body, which endures the burden of patriarchal culture despite the loss of her husband, and the complete lack of male characters in her intimate familial circle. However, at the same time, widowhood is seen as fluid and revocable in time. Widowhood is an identity, which is defined by what has already happened and open to new and unexpected possibilities. The gradual removal of Christina from a space of oppression and proper widowhood is envisioned as an ability to inscribe her own destiny. The widow in the

sections that follow is metamorphosed from a woman whose desires are different from those acceptable within normative gendered identity into a woman who attempts to lay claim to her wants and thus, unsettle both family structures and comedy's queerness.

Towards Becoming a Merry Widow and a Sinful Mother

Dolce Vita's exposure of the mechanisms of violence and oppression that (re)produce patriarchal power is an essential aspect of how Christina navigates her presence inside and outside the house. Christina is not immune to the two conflicting voices that surround her. It is evident from the script discussed that Olga and Aspasia force her through their words and actions to be a proper and decent widow, while Sasa's behavior and practices expose her friend to different scenarios and ways of living in the present. Vacillating over whether to follow her family's demands or her friend's advice, Christina needs to make her own decisions. After her dialogue with Sasa at the office, which in a way plants the seeds in her mind to seek self-awakening, Christina's business trip to Italy turns into a journey of self-awakening. When she comes back from Italy, Sasa spots something odd in Christina's behavior, and Christina guiltily admits to her friend that she had sex with a young man in Perugia.

In examining attitudes of elderly individuals regarding sexuality, Walter Bouman and others argue that ageist erotophobia is so pervasive that "many older people see themselves as too old for sex" (Bouman, Arcelus, & Benbow, 2005, p. 153). As Allison Moore and Paul Reynolds, confirm, "Sex continues to be the preserve of young able-bodied adults"; as a result, those individuals who deviate significantly from these strict parameters of age "are positioned as asexual or post-sexual and sexuality is seen as irrelevant to them" (Moore & Reynolds, 2016, p. 92).

Indeed, Christina's narration to Sasa reveals the sense of embarrassment she experiences for having engaged in sexual intercourse with a man, and mainly with someone “who could have been my son.”¹²² Christina finds difficulty in justifying her seemingly immoral action, which appears to be in stark contrast with the life narrative she has internalized.

Sasa tries to calm her down, yet Christina considers her affair with the young stranger as a one-off misdemeanor that decisively belongs to the past in an otherwise decent life trajectory. Yet, rather than allowing the protagonist to go back to her normal and predictable life, comedy is more likely to make the impossible possible and trigger unexpected encounters in familial places.

Towards the end of the pilot, when Christina's daughter is about to come back home for vacation, Christina waits for her in the living room while practicing her Italian. The door opens, and Christina expects to see her daughter along with her new boyfriend, who is assumedly Italian. Yet, when Dorita enters the house and the man shows up, both Christina and the audience understand that Dorita's boyfriend is the man who Christina had slept with in Perugia.

As in other comedies, *Dolce Vita* borrows heavily from the enduring tradition of the Anglophone visual culture,¹²³ capitalizing upon boulevard dramas' fondness for

¹²² “Που θα μπορούσε να είναι γιος μου.” *Dolce Vita*, MEGA Channel, season 1, episode 1, 21:32-21:35. Retrieved August 15 2018 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CVZ1iP8Px0&t=525s>

¹²³ There is indeed a considerable number of films, which explore how the advent of a man may unsettle the already complex relationship between mothers and daughters in many permutations. In dramas, such as Gabrielle Beaumont's *Secrets of a Mother and Daughter* (1983), this pattern displayed how a widowed mother, Ava Pryce (Katharine Ross) and daughter Sausa Decker (Linda Hamilton) clash over the same man. In comedies like Marino Girolami's *At Last, at last* (1975), the moral and social problems inherent in such situations give way to comic twists and illustrate how the male protagonist's (Renzo Montagnani) affair with his wife's mother (Edwige Fenech) becomes a means to regain his virility and eventually, protect his marriage. Other European productions include Roger Michell's *Mother* (2003) and Gabriel Aghion's *Belle Maman* (1999) where Antoine (Vincent Lindon) falls in love on his wedding day with his mother-in-law, Lea (Catherine Deneuve).

complicated relationships between mothers and daughters,¹²⁴ and melodrama's typical formula of the noble heroine threatened by a shadow of the past.

The theme of the 'guilty secret', endemic in numerous classic Hollywood and Greek melodramas, has indeed been transposed onto comedies like *Dolce Vita*. Daniel Lieberfeld and Judith Sanders' work on comedy and identity in films illustrates how 'passing' serves as a strategy that enables an individual to perform a false identity in order to navigate a hostile social environment and achieve a goal (1998). The humor in *Dolce Vita* stems largely from this discrepancy between Christina's falsely 'moral' identity and her real one. Yet aside from the secret relationship between Christina and Antonis, and their intimate social circle's attempts to keep the couple's relationship in the dark, the comedic effect in *Dolce Vita* also derives from the generational differences in Christina's household and the ways they play out in the family sphere.

As White aptly explains, in comedies in which the age and ageing is addressed, "The conflict between the home as an institution and the desires of its residents appears to be inevitable" (2018, p. 178). Such an approach, considering the dialectical tensions between bodies and spaces, envisions the institution of home and heterosexuality as a combat zone in which bodies are policed and constrained, while at the same time they attempt to resist. Under this light, in exploiting the chronicle of an illegal relationship through the sensationalist plot of the fallen woman, as well as the intergenerational conflicts inside the house, comedies like *Dolce Vita* pose a set of questions regarding family and motherhood as two distinct yet interrelated institutions.

¹²⁴ For a discussion of representations of mothers and daughters in popular films and television shows, see Rowe (2010).

Raine Dozier has identified how dominant sociological discourses construct family as the main unit responsible for raising and socializing children, passing on norms, and ordering gendered relationships (2014, p. 132). Tied to these functions of the family is the historical differentiation of the roles of men and women and the contribution of motherhood to the prosperity of the family. Karin Sardadvar and Katharina Miko argue, “Social constructions of motherhood are closely connected to constructions of biological particularities of women, such as the constructions of a maternal instinct, of a unique bond between mothers and their children, and of natural motherly love” (2014, p.145). In a similar vein, E. Ann Kaplan, in her famous *Motherhood and Representation* (1991), explains how the institution of motherhood has historically been depended upon unquestioned acceptance of the paradigms of maternal sacrifice. However, this paradigm is brutally sabotaged in *Dolce Vita* when Christina violates conventional morality and has sex with her daughter’s partner. Individuals like Christina, who perform motherhood in unusual ways are undoubtedly subject to pathologizing gazes and discriminating comments. These verbal and nonverbal ways of communication speak not only to the protagonist’s flight from societal conventions but also her inadequacy to fulfil her expected role as a mother.

However, recent works adopting a queer perspective have envisioned alternative drafts of motherhood. For instance, Melanie Gibson, in a collective volume entitled *Queering Motherhood in Narrative, Theory, and the Everyday*, expands and liberates the range of ‘duties and obligations’ afforded to women:

Motherhood is such a closely monitored and prevalent identity, such a fundamental component of social ideology, that there is ample territory for “queering” ...Queering is understood to extend beyond individual identity and

toward a reconsideration of how relationships, communities, genders, and sexualities might proceed otherwise. Queering motherhood can therefore start where any of the central gendered, sexual, relational, political, and/or symbolic components of “expected” motherhood are challenged. (Gibson, 2014, p. 6)

It is evident that Christina's widowhood is further complicated by her deviant motherhood. By engaging in sexual intercourse—although unknowingly—with the partner of her daughter, not only does she transgress the widow contract, but she also commits herself to the ultimate motherly sin.¹²⁵ Motherhood is therefore seen as opening a range of responses and behaviors that may have been considered disturbingly unusual and unacceptable. At the same time, this version of motherhood resonates with Judith Halberstam’s queer art of failure. As she elaborates in her monograph:

Failure allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behavior and manage human development with the goal of delivering us from unruly childhoods to orderly and predictable adulthoods. Failure preserves some of the wondrous anarchy of childhood and disturbs the supposedly clean boundaries between adults and children, winners and losers. And while failure certainly comes accompanied by a host of negative affects, such as disappointment, disillusionment, and despair, it also provides the opportunity

¹²⁵ The initial title of the show, borrowed from Yorgos Viziinos’ titular short story (1883), was *To αμάρτημα της μητρός μου/My mother’s sin* (Mad, 2016). Although the title was eventually replaced for *Dolce Vita*, Alexandros Rigas used the title *To αμάρτημα της μητρός μου/My mother’s sin* for another romcom which aired on ANT1 during the season 2012-2013.

to use these negative affects to poke holes in the toxic positivity of contemporary life (Halberstam, 2011, p. 3).

To be a mother who engages in a sexual relationship with your daughter's partner is unacceptable, but why not grasp that opportunity? Christina subscribes to a process of self-loathing her failed and fallen identity. Therefore, she wants desperately to erase her sinful past in Perugia with Antonis. Christina acts as if she does not recognize Antonis. Should she pretend she is not the woman Antonis met in Perugia, she would not have to confront her own guilt in having sex with a young man and disclose her sinful deeds to her daughter. Yet Antonis does not play along Christina's supposedly indifferent behavior and takes pleasure in making Christina feel uncomfortable. While the female protagonist continues to avoid Antonis, he meets her in the laundry room and seizes the opportunity to untangle the nature of their relationship. Christina is forced to confess that she remembers Antonis, yet concludes, "What is done cannot be undone, it is a mistake, but it happened. Now, you are my daughter's boyfriend and I am your girlfriend's mother" (episode 2).¹²⁶

Despite Christina's initial willingness to end her affair with Antonis, the man takes the initiative to kiss her. Christina surrenders to his passionate kiss. This hot kiss in the uncool space of the laundry room as well as the couple's unequal power dynamics evoke the "distinct gender cultures within which men and woman have been raised" (Grindon 2011, p. 4). On the one hand, Antonis is depicted as a man whose motives are driven by the irrationality and spontaneity of his youth. On the other

¹²⁶ "Ο, τι έγινε έγινε, λάθος αλλά έγινε. Τώρα είσαι ο φίλος της κόρης μου κι εγώ είμαι η μητέρα της φίλης σου."

Dolce Vita, MEGA Channel, season 1, episode 2, 24:33-24:40, Retrieved August 20 2018 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3j-L6EAs1-U>

hand, Christina, portrayed as a mature woman who prioritizes logic over emotions but eventually, gives in to her passions. Therefore, *Dolce Vita*, offering the pleasures of seeing Christina made visible and temporarily rebellious, paves the way for middle-aged women to use the space of comedy in ways which may suspend the oppressive force of patriarchy imposed upon their bodies (see Heilbrun, 1979, p. 72).

Rigas and Papapetrou's script records the secret encounters of Christina and Antonis in meticulous detail, illustrating the difficulties in keeping a love affair secret while living under the same roof with other residents. The urge of Christina and Antonis to spend intimate moments together, which is viewed as a natural part and step of their courtship ritual, is not always satisfied. In fact, their attempts towards finding a temporary haven for themselves are often doomed to failure because of Christina's fear and hesitation. During the initial episodes of the season, Christina is not able to act freely inside the house and afraid of other characters' reactions in case they discover the truth about her relationship with Antonis.

In episode 1, while sleeping in bed, Christina has a nightmare about her relationship with Antonis becoming the country's top story on television, and she wakes up paralyzed. Whenever Christina attempts to liberate herself from her prearranged fate as a proper widow, she fantasizes the possibility of Olga Markatos knowing everything about her passing identity and calling her slut. Christina's nightmares and fantasies betray the sense of fear and surveillance that she is subjected to by her mother-in-law, the housekeeper, and other members of her social circle. Creating a space ruled by a panopticon gaze, Christina does not know when she is being watched, yet she is always afraid of living her life carefree. A case in point is a scene in episode 20, during which the couple goes out for dinner at an elegant restaurant. Although Christina was asked to a romantic dinner by Antonis, she is very

tense because she is certain that something bad will happen. Indeed, the appearance of an old friend of Christina's catches the couple off guard. While the image of a mother-in-law with her son-in-law does not suggest anything sexual, the level of discomfort between the two characters is so palpable that it leads them into lies, excuses, and hiding to alleviate suspicion (Figure 5.2).



Picture 5.2

Figure 5.2 Christina's old friend sits at their table without notice. Christina and Antonis look at each other uncomfortably.

The interference of supporting characters in the main characters' lives and the trouble they cause in their romance are essential parts from which humor in romantic comedies stems. When Christina finds free time from her busy schedule at the factory, she suggests to Antonis that they spend some time together in a hotel (episode 5). Christina visits the hotel with Antonis and gives the receptionist Olga Markatos' identity card in order to hide her own identity in both a literal and metaphorical sense. After the couple takes the elevator that leads them to their room, a male receptionist

and a female cleaner are surprised with the considerable age difference between Christina and Antonis. As soon as the couple exits the hotel, the female cleaner visits their room and finds a cat wearing a collar of her owner's name and address on it. When the cleaner's scheduled shift comes to an end, she carries the cat and visits Christina's house to return the cat to the owner. When the door opens, and the female cleaner realizes that the woman who visited the hotel is having a sexual affair with her daughter's partner, she cannot manage her feelings of anger and disgust (Figure 5.3). The dialogue between the female cleaner and Christina contains many humorous elements but mainly provides its own critique of contemporary culture's obsession with regimenting particular enactments of the identity and sexuality of mothers:

Christina: So, I will give you a cheque, and you can fill in the amount of money on your own.

Cleaner: With your son-in-law, you slut!

Christina: I will give you my ethnocard. Limitless shopping!

Cleaner: As if there are no men!

Christina: What about 500 dollars' foreign currency on top of that?

Cleaner: Don't you have any sense of decency?

Christina: You want cash right, you want cash.

Cleaner: I want nothing. I just want to leave, not to see you [again].

Christina: Git then! And leave the preachments for elsewhere!

Cleaner: Fire will come under you!¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Christina: Θα σου δώσω μια επιταγή, το ποσό θα το συμπληρώσεις μόνη σου.

Cleaner: Με το γαμπρό σου μωρή;

Christina: Θα σου δώσω την εθνοκάρτα μου, απεριόριστο όριο αγορών.

Cleaner: Χάθηκαν οι άντρες;

Christina: 500 δολάρια συνάλλαγμα επιπέον;

Cleaner: Τσίπα δεν έχεις πάνω σου;



Picture 5.3

Figure 5.3 The hotel cleaner inside the house in Paleo Psihiko, shouting at Christina.

The accusations against Christina are attributed to the female cleaner's inability to accept the shameful and indecent couple configuration embedded in Christina's household, both in terms of the age differences that characterize her illegal relationship with a young man and foremost, in terms of the transgressive coupledness with the already taken partner of her daughter. The cleaner's words acquire greater significance when we consider her profession. The cleaner named Vaso works at a dodgy hotel situated near Athinon-Lamias Avenue, which is mainly occupied by

Christina: Θεες και μετρητά ε; Θεες και μετρητά!

Cleaner: Τίποτα δε θέλω, να φύγω θέλω και να μη σας βλέπω

Christina: Ξεκουμπίσου και άσε τα κηρύγματα για αλλού

Cleaner: Φωτιά θα πέσει να σας κάψει!

Dolce Vita, MEGA Channel, season 1, episode 5, 24:03-24:23, Retrieved August 27 2018 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a6t55OzVj9E>

illegal couples for ‘perverse’ purposes. She is therefore constructed as a knowing individual who is familiar with transgressive practices. Under this light, her state of shock, as well as her repulsion by Christina’s deeds demonstrate the truly transgressive and liminal nature of Christina’s identity. Through insults, the cleaner exemplifies how Christina’s practices inherently disturb her identities of mother and widow and place the latter within the realm of the abject (e.g., Kristeva, 1982). The pervasive sway of Christina’s upper class evincing itself through bribery and manipulation illustrates that only those individuals who have the economic power can afford the potential privilege of covering-up a ‘filthy kind of business’. Gender and age intersect with class, dividing poor people as decent and moral, and rich ones as immoral and corrupt. In addition, the diffusion of Christina’s immoral relationship out in the public sphere signifies a threshold from one stage of identity to another. As a merry widow and a sinful mother, Christina experiences difficulties in reconciling her multiple and contradictory identities, fluctuating ambivalently between desire on the one hand, and obligation on the other.

The condemnation of the widow as a woman whose femininity and motherhood have deviated from the norm is not easily defensible. This is evident not only from the accusations stemming from the cleaner but also when Christina internalizes the shame and explains to Sasa her guilt for not being a proper mother to her daughter. Christina’s gendered performances and her desire for inappropriate gendered subjects render her a liminal figure.¹²⁸ Throughout many scenes, Christina expresses to Sasa her preoccupations for keeping a relationship with Antonis. Antonis

¹²⁸ I learned the concept from Victor Turner who describes liminality as the quality of ambiguity that a subject might experience during the middle stage of a rite passage. In this in-between stage/space, the subject has departed from the pre-ritual status but has yet to reach the status s/he will gain when completing the rite. For an introduction to the concept of liminality, see van Gennep (1960), and Turner (1967).

defies fears, wishes to live his life dangerously, and stubbornly tries to make his relationship with Christina known to everyone. However, such a revelation would weigh heavier on Christina than Antonis. Nevertheless, the disciplinary mechanisms of surveillance and its accompanying feelings of self-oppression are contested or at least negotiated. For Foucault, each subjugated subject still has the capacity to step beyond power threads and discover a “narrow zone” in which transgression can occur (1977, p. 33). In the section that follows, I wish to examine this narrow zone that emerges when Christina along with her intimate female friend, Sasa, collaborate to attack the oppressive power of Christina’s social circle. The disobedience to this surveillance is of great significance because it exemplifies that wherever there is power, there is resistance, and as a result, there are routes that diverge from the established social path.

Queer(ing) Friendship

While the romantic and forbidden love between Christina and Antonis serves as the driving force in comedies like *Dolce Vita*, it is impossible to ignore the relationships that develop between women. The series, which consists primarily of female characters, proffers a platform for a number of emerging actors and a generation of older female actors who had already spent many years playing in theatre before moving to the small screen. Additionally, Greek private television gave vital space for actors to participate in a plethora of television series, which began to air during the late 80s and early 90s. Olga (Maria Foka) ran a long and successful course in the Greek film industry, while Anna Panagiotopoulou, playing Christina, came to the show after a very successful participation in the book-to-television adaptation of *Μαντάμ Σουσού* [*Madame Sousou*] (EPT, 1986-1987) and the sitcom *Οι Τρεις*

Χάριτες[*The Three Graces*] (MEGA, 1990-1992), which had already made her popular among the Greek public. Katiana Balanika, who played Sasa, has had an important career as a dancer and actor in theatrical performances alongside Yorgos Marinou. Katerina Ziogou (Christina's daughter) and the housekeeper (Maria Kavogianni) had just finished their studies and made their debut appearances on the small screen through this show. The different ideological standpoints that the aforementioned characters adopt sets the tone for Rigas and Papapetrou's comedy. Yet the premise of *Dolce Vita* is that Christina and Sasa share a long-lasting friendship. Although the two of them live in different houses, each character constitutes a vital source of emotional and practical support for one another. Moreover, Christina and Sasa have no marital obligations, the former being a widow, and the latter as a divorced woman.

The vitality and impact of this friendship on the audience are supported by the fact that the characters of Christina and Sasa, on the occasion of the 20 year-anniversary of Mega Channel, was voted as the second-best unbeatable duet in Greek television fiction (Savvidis, 2015). The success in this duet may be partly explained through the women's relationship outside the show. More specifically, when asked in an interview, Anna Panagiotopoulou explained that she had truly enjoyed sharing scenes with Katiana in *Dolce Vita*. She added that they had been good friends ever since they both studied acting at college (tvxs, 2018). As Margaret Tally tells us within her analysis of HBO's *Girls*' main actors' interaction on and off-camera, "The real friendship and the on-screen friendship are mutually reinforcing and add a layer of depth to the portrayal of fictional bonds" (2014, p. 30). Applying the argument of Tally within *Dolce Vita*, then the sense of closeness that has been developed in real

life between Anna Panagiotopoulou and Katiana Balanika is likely to have enhanced the sense of intimacy that Christina and Sasa present in their roles.

More generally, Rigas and Papapetrou attempted to develop intimacy between the two characters by placing them in situations that are intended to reinforce the critical and exclusive nature of their bond. While in several episodes, female friends of Sasa and Christina make their appearance and interact with them, these female friends never manage to become close friends with Sasa and Christina and part of their distinctive duet. This prioritizing of same-sex friendship between women, drawing on Alexander Doty, may “allow for, and even encourage, readings of the characters as ““really” [queer] for viewers” (1993, p. 43).

The dynamics of their friendship, as identified by a *Dolce Vita* fan, is evident if one notices how much support Sasa provides to her friend “whenever fate throws mishaps in Christina’s life” (The Daily Owl, 2018).¹²⁹ Other fans have also commented on how *Dolce Vita* makes use of techniques and forms borrowed from cinema in to illustrate the solidarity network that characterizes their friendship. For example, Savvidis (2015) observes that “one of the most notable techniques of the comedy is that Christina and Sasa engage in and visualize fictional journeys into the past and future through their wild fantasy.”¹³⁰ Christina’s imprisonment at the hands of patriarchal/matriarchal authorities often depicts the protagonist trapped in normative discourses. However, Christina, along with her female friend’s help, can discover the narrow zone of resistance, and this zone is the liminal landscape of fantasy. Fantasy, as a product of imaginative activity, is inextricably linked to one’s personal and private realities. Considering the relationship between fantasy and time,

¹²⁹ “...συμπαράσταση στη φίλη της τη Χριστίνα, σχετικά με όποια κατραπακιά της επιφύλασσε η μοίρα.”

¹³⁰ “Μια από τις πιο χαρακτηριστικές φόρμες της σειράς ήταν όταν Χριστίνα και Σάσα έκαναν σενάρια για το παρελθόν ή το μέλλον και τα οπτικοποιούσαν με την αγαλίνωτη φαντασία τους.”

Sigmund Freud notes that fantasies “fit themselves into the subject's shifting impressions of life, change with every change in [their] situation, and receive from every fresh active impression what might be called a ‘date-mark’” (1989, p. 439). Although for Freud, fantasy is associated with lived experience, the former has the potential to deviate from the norm and escape life’s domination.

When Christina escapes to the world of fantasy, music, clothes, and lighting change dramatically. The same house scenes, which evoked claustrophobia and oppression in reality, are transformed into enabling spaces, where the female protagonist is able to act freely. Although the setting remains unaltered, Christina enters the same space differently. Her confident and independent movement within the zone of fantasy is a clearly reactionary move - she pursues a pathway with agency that surpasses the rules imposed on her within the conventional culture. Rigas and Papapetrou's screenplay gives Christina the possibility to traverse familiar spaces in unfamiliar ways, thus contributing to a paradigm shift, in which the heroine is released from the persistent surveillance and monitoring represented by Olga Markatos, Aspasia, and other characters. These fantastical journeys reshape the spatial and human geography of the house and turn it from a space of discipline to a topos that condones deviant behaviors and excessive reactions. Under this perspective, the fantasy becomes a lens through which the widow is capable of confronting and striving against the dominant order.

For instance, in episode 64, the two female friends think of how Christina could possibly reveal to her family and social circle her relationship with Antonis. When Christina navigates herself into the world of fantasy, she enters the house in

Paleo Psihiko with audacity and presents Antonis as her official life partner.¹³¹ The members of her family and her employees, who are gathered at the house, condemn Christina and accuse Antonis of having influenced a proper widow to engage in immoral practices. Yet, Christina does not pay attention to their reactions. Comically, the realism of the scene is suspended when the music starts to play, and Christina stops addressing the rest of the people in the house who look at her shocked; the lights go down, and the female character begins to dance with Antonis while singing Tzeni Vanou's anthem *Δεν έχουν το δικαίωμα* [*They don't have the right*] (Figure 5.4).



Picture 5.4

Figure 5.4 The lights go down and the couple starts dancing to Tzeni Vanou's music song, Δεν έχουν το δικαίωμα [They don't have the right].

¹³¹ *Dolce Vita*, MEGA Channel, season 3, episode 64, 13:45-15:51. Retrieved August 23 2018 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AuliVZ_pANg&t=4s

In his influential work, Javier Esteban Muñoz writes that when a subject experiences a tyrannical and heterocentric timeline, “queer world-making... hinges on the possibility to map a world where one is allowed to cast pictures of utopia and to include such pictures in any map of the social” (2009, p. 40). The comedy here exposes a world of fantasy of this nature, in which Christina can bend the dominant social order and articulate a voice that has been long silenced. She controls her destiny and makes the rest of her ‘enemies’ follow her lead and dance with each other, turning them into pawns on her own chess board. Entrance into a fantasy of disobedience thus signifies a radical affective openness to unforeseen scenarios. The theme of rebellious flight marks not only an expression of discontent with the strict social roles that Christina is forced to follow; it also grants her the possibility to exercise autonomy, self-reliance, and resistance to those social demands. Through this fantastical enactment of transgression, Christina can adopt an alternative and complex feminine, middle-aged, and motherly identity. While Aspasia calls them sinners and the rest of the people in the house threaten to kill them, Christina does not seem to feel afraid or insulted. Instead, she uses the insults to her advantage as a means of resisting the conventional and obedient femininity that she performed in the past.

In her doctoral thesis on women's humor in contemporary American television, Melinda Lewis writes that the genre of comedy has historically been preoccupied with queerness. She observes, “Transgressions of social codes by women threaten social and personal life but are corrected by the re-assertion of ordained gender relationships and identities, although in the process conventional ideas of good and bad are put to sustained questioning” (2014, p. 213). While adopting the outsider identity of the sinner and the sinful mother, Christina interrogates the limits of hegemonic femininity that she was obliged to internalize and perform in her daily life.

Yet following Lewis' words, these trips to fantasy do not last permanently and Christina ought to face the oppressive and restraining environment she inhabits when she returned to her real world. The restoration of power and agency to the matriarch of the house undermines the potential for Christina's agency to emerge as a significant force in reality. Yet the act of performing impossibility in the face of the pragmatic according to Muñoz and Lewis, is not an ending point because some inchoate glimpses of another world permeate reality. More specifically, the pairing of Christina with Sasa in the real, everyday life of *Dolce Vita's* fiction encourages friendship to emerge as a force, which can potentially upset the house in Paleo Psihiko and at the same time, transform Christina in unpredictable and comic ways.

In her monograph, *The Unruly Women*, Kathleen Rowe, examining a rich cultural archive of female characters in literary and visual history, has identified a type of 'unruly woman', which is defined as "a topos of female outrageousness and transgression" (1995, p.75). Building on Natalie Zemon Davis' notion 'of the woman on top' (2008), Rowe (2010) claims that the unruly woman, often equated with sexual inversion, upsets the social and political order of heterosexuality. Focusing on comic performances as diverse as those of Mae West, Katherine Hepburn, Marilyn Monroe, and Cher, Rowe combines her theorizing with Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the *carnivalesque* (1984) to redefine women's roles and their potential to question cultural norms and "bring down the house" (Rowe, 1995, p. 8). Since sexually explicit humor has traditionally been decoded as male humor, women's appropriation of and relation to provocative jokes, unpredictable actions, and unruly behaviors, objectify men and problematize gender and power relations in transgressive ways (Porter, 1998).

In a cultural era devoted to icons of morality, passive reception of messages and inactive participation in the world,¹³² Katiana Balanika in the role of Sasa constitutes a certainly pleasant surprise in the Greek television landscape, succeeding in creating an unruly space of her own. Unlike previous characters, such as Dimitra from *The Unbearables*, Sasa is consistently uncontrollable. Her single status, as well as her financial independence, allow her to navigate private and public spaces in her own terms. Read in light of her resemblance to more recent national and international productions, Sasa is the epitome of *Dolce Vita*'s queered heterofemininity. Much like Korina (Maria Kavogianni) from *Crimes* (ANT1, 1998-2000), Lila (Sunny Hatzigiorgi) from *Singles* (MEGA 2004-2005, 2006-2008) and, perhaps as a common influence, Samantha Jones from *Sex & the City* (HBO, 1998-2004), Sasa lives her life to the fullest, expresses her insatiable desire for men, and gives no interest in society's rules, thus defining herself as one of the first drag queens of Greek television.¹³³ However, when placed next to conservative Christina, Sasa acts as a mentor who helps her friend set herself free from her domestic prison and start experiencing her life in new and flexible ways.

In episode 9, for example, Christina and Sasa talk at the living room in Paleo Psihiko when Dorita enters the house and brings a set of photographs. The photographs are taken from a private investigator that was spying on Antonis and contain visual documentation that would prove Antonis' secret affair and would possibly incriminate Christina. While Dorita goes upstairs to ask from Olga and Aspasia to join them in the living room, Sasa hides herself behind the home bar and chews the photographs to protect her friend from humiliation and exposure. The

¹³² For a discussion of women's relation to laughter, see Gray (1994) and Hay (2000).

¹³³ It comes as no surprise that even today, Sasa's lines circulate on the cyberspace in the form of memes and are used amongst queer circles and cultures of connoisseurs for fun and social interaction.

power of this image is further echoed in subsequent episodes, in which the female duet offers a network inside which the characters feel safe to enact playful roles and confide in one another.

In episode 21, Christina invites Antonis at home. Nonetheless, they are not aware that a burglar (Christos Hatzipanagiotis) has snuck in the house and seen them engaging in sexual intercourse through the closet. In the morning, when the couple finds the burglar asleep on the floor, they threaten that they will call the police. The burglar does not believe their words and threatens back that he will reveal their secret relationship to Christina's family. When Sasa arrives, Christina pretends that Sasa is her sister and Antonis' wife. Sasa, instead of playing the desperate housewife whose husband has been unfaithful to her, reacts calmly, consoles Antonis and Christina for having sex, and simply asks from them not to repeat what they did. Facing this scene, the burglar is at a loss for words and leaves the house with his hands empty. This shared moment transitions into laughter as they dissolve into hysteria over the fake kinship relations they played in front of the unknown man.

Female friendship in *Dolce Vita* thus far translates into compassion, caring, and solidarity. However, in this space of emotional and practical support, the idea of betrayal, jealousy, and irritation are inevitable. *Dolce Vita* explores this possibility at the end of the first season. Just as the comedy attempts to depict the sense of solidarity that Christina and Sasa share, Rigas and Papapetrou are no less hesitant to depict generous doses of negative feelings that such a close female friendship might entail. In episode 16, Christina spends her time at the hospital taking care of her mother-in-law. Sasa, knowing that Antonis is at Christina's house alone, visits him dressed in highly provocative and revealing clothes. While the extent to which Antonis and Sasa eventually engage in sexual intercourse is unknown, this episode

invites audiences glimpse into the complex trajectories that long-term friendships may undergo at certain times.

Similarly, episode 25 features a scene that exposes Sasa's feelings of jealousy when she learns about Christina's recent success in love. When Christina tells Sasa that another friend of her daughter hit on her, Sasa's reaction is comic and intense. She states, "Not only will I not shut up, I will scream so that all [people in the] meadow hears me. They can't show a student from abroad to you! Have you got the honey or what? What drives me nuts is that deep inside, you truly enjoy it."¹³⁴

Later, when Antonis enters Christina's office, Christina tries to change the subject to avoid telling him what happened with Guissepe. Antonis jokingly tells Christina and Sasa that Giuseppe is a lover of antiquity and innocently asks them if he has already been to Acropolis. Sasa responds, "In a way he did", a hitting below the belt to mock Christina's age. In this way, she reveals, "One may talk the talk but another walks the walk."¹³⁵

While many of the attacks are intended to create a comic effect, the subtext lies in the realization that Sasa and Christina's relationship has progressively become unequal and somewhat unfair. While Sasa has been steadily portrayed as a successful cougar, her friend's recent accomplishments with men disturbs Sasa's unique 'domination' over the opposite sex and triggers her inferiority feelings and emotions of envy. Consequently, while Christina and Sasa's relationship may deviate enormously from other female duets that celebrate highly romanticized and unrealistic

¹³⁴ "Όχι μόνο δε θα σκάσω, θα φωνάξω να με ακούσει όλος ο κάμπος. Μη σου δείξουνε εσένα φοιτητή απ' το εξωτερικό! Ήθελα νά' ξερα μέλι έχεις; Αυτό που με τρελαίνει περισσότερο είναι ότι κατά βάθος το φχαριστιέσαι!" *Dolce Vita*, MEGA Channel, season 1, episode 25, 04:20-04:49. Retrieved August 21 2018 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GZ4gVMHvK-c>

¹³⁵ "Άλλες έχουν το όνομα και άλλες έχουν τη χάρη." *Dolce Vita*, MEGA Channel, season 1, episode 25, 06:18-06:21. Retrieved August 15 2018 from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GZ4gVMHvK-c>

scenarios, *Dolce Vita* testifies the complex and ambiguous nature of same sex friendship.

Aside from the female duo's ambiguous relationships, other house residents demonstrate a special affinity for less strict social scripts. Much like Christina and Sasa, Antonis and Dorita's relationship has its fluctuations. Throughout the first season, both characters appear to be more and more different and mismatched. Dorita is an environmentalist, with strong ecological consciousness and frequent activist presence in different parts of Greece while, Antonis is boring and inactive, preferring to stay at home in the hope of spending some time alone with Christina. In episode 14, Antonis' mother, Fotini Kaloudi (Eleni Gerasimidou), arrives in Athens and visits the house of Olga Markatos to precipitate her son's engagement with Dorita. Christina is frustrated with Antonis because she thinks that it was his idea to make his relationship with Dorita official. Realizing Fotini is not particularly pleased with Dorita's rebellious character and radical ideas, Sasa makes sure to destroy Dorita's image in the eyes of her future mother-in-law, hoping to convince the latter to reconsider the engagement. When Fotini is home alone, Sasa visits her and makes up stories that depict Dorita as sexually promiscuous, perverse, and insatiable. The disclosure of such immoral practices shocks conservative Fotini and, on the New Year's day, when everyone has gathered in the house of Paleo Psihiko and brought presents for the soon-to-be-engaged couple, she posits, "The engagement will not happen because something ain't right here."¹³⁶

Just as Fotini asserts her opposition to the wedding, Antonis agrees with his mother and suggests to Dorita that they take a break. In most comedies of the Greek

¹³⁶ "Εδώ πέρα κάτι μου μυρίζει άσχημα...αυτός ο αρραβώνας δε θα γίνει απόψε." *Dolce Vita*, MEGA Channel, season 1, episode 14, 22:02-22:16. Retrieved August 23 2018 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_pd0LyEGpkY&t=697s

cinema, such a situation would result in intense arguments and fierce accusations from the bride's family circle. While Olga Markatos takes Antonis and his mother's indecisiveness as an insult to their family and protests, Christina is happy that Antonis is now available and Dorita appears unexpectedly relieved with this change of events. In this case, both Antonis and Dorita's objection disturbs the hegemony of heterosexual romance. Despite the different reasons driving each character towards this decision, they both resist cultural doctrines ruled by heteronormativity and picture, as Heather Love has described in another context, "the conjugal couple rip[ping] the social fabric apart at the seams" (2007, p. 126).

At the same time, the reconfiguration of Antonis and Dorita's relationship, leads to a spiral of hidden secrets and desires which start to seep into the house uncontrollably from different directions. After his breakup with Dorita, Antonis has no excuse to remain in the house in Paleo Psihiko and prepares his luggage to move to his friend's house in Pagrati. After his departure, Christina and Aspasia sit on the sofa calm but conspicuously preoccupied (episode 19). Dorita is in a bad mood when she joins them and asks if Antonis called. The negative answer she receives encourages Dorita and the rest of the female characters to start criticizing Antonis. After reeling off a long list of negative characteristics, Aspasia argues sighing, "He [Antonis] came and upset our lives for good."¹³⁷ Christina follows, saying, "He turned our lives upside down" in an attempt to convince Dorita, but most importantly, themselves, that their lives are better without him.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ "Ήρθε και μας αναστάτωσε για τα καλά."

¹³⁸ "τα πάνω κάτω έφερε."

Dorita, however, breaks into tears saying, “We will end up alone, four women dressed in black.”¹³⁹ The comedy here derives from the very lack of men and heterosexual couplings. In other words, as Porter would explain, “The comic potential is derived from the essential instability of the all-female environment and the nightmare scenarios associated with the exclusion of masculine logic, reason and authority” (1998, p. 70). This sequence sets the tone of the series: in the female-dominated space of the house in Paleo Psihiko, nothing is what it seems. Despite claims to the contrary, in many episodes, Christina, Dorita, and Aspasia do not lose the chance to secretly meet Antonis and spend intimate moments with him. Take for instance episode 20, during which all women visit Manolis’ house and bring an item that they stole from Antonis’ luggage to find a reason to see him. Every time the bell rings, Antonis needs to hide Christina, Dorita, and Aspasia in different rooms inside Manolis’ house to avoid unexpected encounters. This style of comedy borrows from theatre to establish the tone of farce in its reference to situations that are highly exaggerated, extravagant, and improbable (see Grote, 1983). This brings to light comedy’s affiliation to queer scripts and imaginings.

The second season begins in a way that is not standard for 1990s comedies. Instead of showing the familiar familial house in Paleo Psihiko, Rigas and Papapetrou place two women in a stereotypical setting, bombarded with *semedakia* (doilies) and plastic flowers. Following a meta-theatrical structure, Lela (Anna Kouri) is seated in a typical Greek living-room and impatiently asks from Fani (Joyce Evidi) to come over because *Dolce Vita* is about to air. Fani sits at the sofa hurriedly, yet to Lela’s

¹³⁹ “Θα μείνουμε στο σπίτι μόνες μας. Τέσσερις γυναίκες μοναχές ντυμένες στα μαύρα.” *Dolce Vita*, MEGA Channel, season 1, episode 19, 11:50-12:31. Retrieved August 25 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tQhhRmRNQpE>

surprise, she wonders how “they continue to air this non-sense for another year.”¹⁴⁰ Lela tries to pretend that she is equally annoyed with the content of the series. Both characters raise the age factor and their chief complaint is that cultural images of a middle-aged woman ‘stealing’ her daughter’s partner and deceiving the whole family are unrealistic, though pervasive and dangerous for “our children, tomorrow’s academic citizens.”¹⁴¹ Lela and Fani cannot understand the reason behind Mega Channel’s decision to give the green light to such a ‘bad’ television product. However, they both appear to know everything about the series and be eager to start watching the second season with curiosity.

By making viewers (through Lela and Fani) assume an active role and express their viewpoints, Rigas and Papapetrou break a contract and force the audience to engage in questions they did not necessarily expect. Therefore, the scene serves not only as a response to the assumedly low value of television, which was pertinent in discussions during the 90s, but also a surface irony and critique against Greek society’s proneness to consume ‘unserious’ cultural products through the keyhole.

After having established a false sense of superiority over Christina, Sasa and the rest of the sinful characters of *Dolce Vita*, Lela and Fani—as Greek viewers may also have done—comfortably allow themselves to watch the series without guilt. Through their narrative, viewers learn that Sasa has returned from a promiscuous trip to Ibiza while Antonis serves his military duties. While *Dolce Vita* has queered ageing and heteronormative scripts on many occasions during the first season, the second season reinstates reproductive futurism in its initial episodes. Christina decides to confront her daughter and confess her relationship with Antonis. The two women go

¹⁴⁰ “Συνεχίζουν αυτή την αηδία δεύτερη χρονιά.” *Dolce Vita*, MEGA Channel, season 2, episode 39, 00:09-00:11. Retrieved August 28 2018 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jG4RSIiS1x0>

¹⁴¹ “Τα παιδιά μας, οι αυριανοί ακαδημαϊκοί πολίτες.” *Dolce Vita*, MEGA Channel, season 2, episode 39, 00:29-00:33. Retrieved August 28 2018 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jG4RSIiS1x0>

to a restaurant to talk, yet before Christina comes out, Dorita reveals that she is pregnant (episode 43). The pregnancy news entangles main characters' relations once again, as Antonis may be the father of Dorita's child. The dialogue between Christina and Sasa after Christina's night out with Dorita at the restaurant satirizes family logics and characters' secret motives (episode 44).

Christina: What a bad girl, always trying to go against social stereotypes. Marriage first, child second? No way! The rebel will do it the other way round.

Sasa: Look who's talking!

Christina: What do you mean by that?

Sasa: Come on now, Christina. If you cared about social stereotypes, you should have been a proper widow with your grey skirt suit, pearl necklace and every Easter you should go on excursions to Tunisia.

Christina: Am I not a proper widow?

Sasa: Yeah right, it is only the pearl necklace that you don't have!

Christina: Anyways, my story is different.

Sasa: My darling, why don't you tell the truth? What is the thing that burns you?

Christina: My Sasa, don't you see my pain? Think if Dorita is pregnant to Antonis' child

Sasa: Well ask her directly, whose child is this, Dorita?¹⁴²

¹⁴² Christina: Κατάλαβες το παλιοκόριτσο! Εκεί, να πάει κόντρα στα κοινωνικά στερεότυπα. Τι πρώτα γάμος και μετά παιδί; όχι, αυτή επαναστάτρια, το κάνει ανάποδα.

Sasa: Κοίτα ποιός μιλάει!

Christina: Τι θες να πεις;

Sasa: Έλα μωρέ Χριστίνα τώρα! Αν σε ένοιαζαν τα κοινωνικά στερεότυπα έπρεπε να ήσουν μια καθώς πρέπει χήρα με γκρι ταγεράκι, κολιέ με πέρλες και κάθε Πάσχα να πηγαίνεις εκδρομές στην Τυνησία.

Christina: Δεν είμαι εγώ καθώς πρέπει χήρα;

Sasa: Ναι, μόνο το κολιέ με πέρλες σου λείπει!

Christina: Τέλος πάντων, άλλο εγώ.

Sasa: Αγάπη μου γιατί δε λες αλήθεια; τι πραγματικά σε καίει;

Christina: Σάσα μου, δεν καταλαβαίνεις το δράμα μου; σκέψου η Ντορίτα να είναι έγκυος το παιδί του Αντόνη.

Sasa: Ερώτα την ευθέως, τίνος είναι ρε Ντορίτα το παιδί;

The imminent birth of the baby might appear to disturb family structures and place Christina back into place as a grandmotherly, maternal figure. At the same time, it highlights her lack of ‘natural’ motherly skills. When Christina finds out that her daughter is pregnant, she turns to her friend complaining, “My Sasa, messages come from everywhere. Everyone’s treating me as a grandma and I do not know how to act!”.¹⁴³

In a climate that embraces traditional norms of gender and sexuality, Olga plans to introduce a young girl to Antonis, while trying to persuade Christina to come closer to a man of her age, Stefanos, in order to ensure coupledness. Stefanos confesses his love to Christina, but this love is not reciprocal. The female protagonist wishes to become a proper grandmother as a compensation for the rest of her identities, which have not been performed appropriately. In one scene, Christina breaks up with Antonis and meets another grandmother to learn how to knit and sing songs for the baby. If anything, this scene underlines her imposed and thus unnatural performances of grand-motherhood.

Christina’s attempts towards turning herself from a merry widow and evil mother to a proper grandmother are suspended when previously unknown truths about her marriage are brought to light. Sasa tries to protect her friend by not telling her about Periklis’ immoral practices out of wedlock, but once Aspasia reveals Christina’s dead husband’s infidelities, the protagonist remains dismayed at the collapse of her assumedly ‘sealed’ past.

Dolce Vita, MEGA Channel, season 2, episode 44, 04:07-04:29. Retrieved August 28 2018 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dgg9dLVFKeo>

¹⁴³ “Σάσα μου, τα μηνύματα μου έρχονται από παντού. Όλοι με αντιμετωπίζουν σα γιαγιά κι εγώ δε ξέρω πως να φερθώ.” *Dolce Vita*, MEGA Channel, season 2, episode 50, 08:28-08:34. Retrieved August 28 2018 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJufsv07JyE>

What this revelation denotes is the range of possibilities afforded to men in patriarchal societies, disrupting the seemingly hegemonic ideality of the heterosexual coupledness. The cracks and fissures in the seemingly perfect household is part of the show's comedy and proffers an interesting reflection upon Dimitris Papanikolaou's recent work on the Greek family. Papanikolaou fleshes out dominant accounts surrounding the Greek family and gives light to various bodies that live under the shadow of the Greek saint family. Envisioning the family as a short-circuit and a problem, he remarks, "The challenge that emerges in many...[Greek cultural] texts is a challenge which lies on the fact that the family gazes at the familial and the national past/present, with a focus on the present/presence of a body that feels, reacts and desires, no matter how unattainable it may be, to say 'I escaped again'" (2018a, p. 87).¹⁴⁴

This escape becomes palpable towards the end of *Dolce Vita*'s second and ultimate season. In episode 63 the house is empty, and Christina invites Antonis to spend the night together. Christina thinks that the rest of her family went to Menalo for skiing and forgot her birthday. While her family's plan is to surprise Christina and throw her a secret birthday party, it is Christina who eventually surprises her family members. As Antonis holds Christina in his hands and goes down the stairs assuming that no one else is in the house, the lights go on and Christina's family and employees become witness to Antonis and Christina's illegal affair.

The secret of Christina's relationship with Antonis is brought into the open, yet not to everyone. According to Laura Kipnis, "Falling in love commits us to merging. Meaning that unmerging...is ego-shattering and generally traumatic. The

¹⁴⁴ "Η πρόκληση που αναδύεται στα περισσότερα...κείμενα είναι μια πρόκληση που έγκειται στο ότι [η οικογένεια] κοιτάζει το οικογενειακό και το εθνικό παρελθόν/παρόν, με έμφαση στο τώρα ενός σώματος που συναισθάνεται, που ενίσταται, και που θέλει, όσο κι αν αυτό δεν του είν' αρκετό, να πει ξέφυγα πάλι."

fear and pain of losing love is so crushing that most of us will do anything to prevent it, especially when it is not our choice” (2003, p. 57). Here, the painful experience of unmerging occurs as a result of Christina’s affair with her daughter’s partner, yet *Dolce Vita* ensures the concealment of this information from Dorita. Lee Edelman’s (2004) argument about western culture’s attempts towards sustaining the sanctity of the child is pertinent here because it depicts Dorita as an adult yet still a child that ought to be protected and temporarily saved from her mother’s sins. Although Christina is envisioned as a fallen woman who deserves public humiliation for her deeds, all characters bring out a uniform protectiveness of Christina’s secret and allow her to reveal the secret to her daughter at her own pace.

In the end, serving the grammar of comedy, the truth is revealed from the person responsible for the troubled mother-daughter relationship. Antonis, in alignment with the construction of the frivolous character he has exhibited throughout the two seasons, tells Dorita about his relationship with Christina. Dorita, although initially shocked, comprehends the situation and unexpectedly admits that she was never really in love with Antonis. Her calm reaction is consistent with the cool character she has revealed throughout the series. She talks to her mother and, although she gives her the permission to continue her relationship with Antonis, Christina and Antonis are far from experiencing a happily-ever-after.

The queering of heteronormativity extends to the long-heralded finale of the comedy. While Antonis breaks up with the young girl that Olga Markatos had introduced to him, Christina stubbornly insists to marry Dorita’s godfather, Angelos. The final sequence at the church is bittersweet. Angelos is waiting for the bride at the church, surrounded by the main cast of the series. Christina arrives, and when she joins Angelos, ready to enter the church and legalize their union, Antonis calls

Christina by his motorcycle. Christina hesitates, but when receiving her daughter's nod—a sign of her approval to follow her own desires—she abandons Angelos without second notice and runs towards her lover. Borrowing from mainstream national runaway bride films such as *H νύφη τό' σκασε* [*The bride ran away*] (1962), the escape of the bride from her soon-to-be-defined roles signifies the break of an unwritten heteronormative contract and an escape towards unexpected territories. The puzzled reactions of the guests and the feelings of uneasiness that they feel demonstrate the highly impactful currency that such transgressions have on other individuals. At this point, it is also crucial to concentrate on Christina's mother-in-law and caretaker, who, despite their adherence to heteronormative scripts, they finally lose their power and thus deserve particular mentioning.

Among the writers (e.g., Lavin, 2005; Rosivach, 1998) who have discussed the various 'types' of women in the genre of comedy, Loraine Porter (1998) suggests that figures like the mother-in-law have repeatedly been depicted as an interfering critic in British comedy. As she explains:

[The mother-in-law] is often a lone surviving matriarch, having outlived her spouse to become, in a male-defined comic universe, a frustrated old battle-axe. As an older woman, whose domestic and sexual functions of childrearing and servicing male desire have long since ended, she has a lowly status in patriarchy. (Porter, 1998, p. 85)

Following Porter's research, parallels may be drawn when examining the characters of Olga and Aspasia. Olga, on the one hand, appears throughout the series as a dominating figure whose power originates primarily from her high

socioeconomic background and old age, both of which constitute markers of respect. Aspasia's low socioeconomic status on the other hand, combined with her spinster identity, render her a figure with no marital or reproductive obligations. Due to the absence of husband, partner, and children, both Olga and Aspasia are reduced to interfering in other people's lives. While they insist in defining other people's trajectories, these efforts appear to be futile in the face of comedy's queerness. In the end, despite their attempts to push their own agendas, Olga and Aspasia become tragicomic figures whose power cannot be considered as a serious threat to other people's plans. Dorita is pregnant outside wedlock and finally marries a hippy guy (Christophoros Papakaliatis), while Christina abandons the socially imposed script of the proper mother and widow by deciding to live her life with Antonis. Through a complete upsetting of family values and symbols, these narratives encourage and expose the face of families which in the end may be miles away from 'normality'.

Happy Ending?

The wedding scene in the church gives the impression that Christina and Antonis will finally live their lives together and in sin. To *Dolce Vita*'s fans' astonishment, Rigas and Papapetrou have other plans for their main characters. Towards the end of the final episode, a new character makes his appearance. Dorita and Haris' son, presented as a primary student, is witnessed sitting at his desk and finishing a school assignment. By writing an essay about his family, the young man also writes the story of *Dolce Vita* and the comedy's finale. Through his narrative, he informs viewers about his parents' divorce due to irreconcilable differences, the closing down of the tomato sauce factory, and Aspasia's longed-for relationship with a postman. Last but not least, the young man does not forget to discuss Christina's life

after her escape to the unknown with Antonis. As he explains, Christina lived a happy life with Antonis for many years but one day, she came back home and settled down with her mother-in-law and her daughter in the familiar familial space of Paleo Psihiko.

Just as the pairing of a young man with a middle-aged woman may have come as a shock to the audience, this final return of Christina back to the house was met with suspicion and disappointment from its viewers. Among the fans of the series that disagree with the series' ending, Petros Eleftheriadis' comment merits particular attention:

I find one fault in the series. Its finale. Under no occasion can you expect such a turn-off. Suddenly, the scriptwriters decided to see the thing realistically, and they are like, they cannot stay together [Christina and Antonis], a couple with significant age differences and so many other things to keep them apart, so the relationship has a date of expiry. Alright, we know, but you (addressing the scriptwriters) sold me a fairy tale for two seasons, you completely ignored realism, and above all, you convinced me that this couple loves each other genuinely. So after what they have been through, suddenly you come, and you take back all that...after all the hardship they spent to be together! Unsuitable finale. Completely! (Eleftheriadis, 2010)¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ “Ένα μόνο σφάλμα βρίσκω σε αυτή τη σειρά. Το φινάλε της. Τέτοιο ξενέρωμα, ειλικρινά, δεν το περιμένεις. Ξαφνικά οι σεναριογράφοι αποφάσισαν να το δουν το θέμα ρεαλιστικά και σου λέει, δεν γίνεται να μείνουν για πάντα μαζί, ένα ζευγάρι με τέτοια διαφορά ηλικίας και με τόσα άλλα να τους χωρίζουν, οπότε αυτή η σχέση έχει ημερομηνία λήξης. Ωραία, το ξέρουμε, αλλά εσείς (σεναριογράφοι) μου πουλήσατε για δύο χρόνια ένα παραμύθι, αγνοήσατε παντελώς τον ρεαλισμό και πάνω που με πείσατε ότι αυτό το ζευγάρι αγαπιέται πραγματικά μετά από του λιναριού τα πάθη που πέρασε, ξαφνικά έρχεστε και μου το αναιρείτε όλο αυτό; Τώρα θυμηθήκατε τον ρεαλισμό; Μετά από τόσες και τόσες δυσκολίες που πέρασαν για να είναι μαζί! Άστοχο φινάλε τελείως.”

Eleftheriadis' statement reveals how media in general and television products in particular may shape fans' attachment, behavior, and expectations. Yet, navigating heteronormative trajectories, which focus on marriage and long-term romances, restricts or eliminates other avenues of inhabiting the here and now. As Cynthia Port explains, "The attempt to achieve duration and chase meaning into the future denies the potential for the identification of other modes of being in the present" (2012, p. 4).

To the television series fans' disappointment, Christina comes back home alone. While this return may be envisioned as a return to the dark times of conservatism and moral policing, Christina is no longer the same person she was during the first season. By ending her relationship with Antonis for reasons that remain unknown, Christina enters the familiar familial institution of home and heterosexuality in new ways. Just as her relationship with the partner of her daughter opened new possibilities to be a mother and a desiring woman, the final refusal of cultural legitimation and happily-ever-after with Antonis forebodes her entry into a territory open to new possibilities.

Indeed, Dorita's son, towards the end of the scene, explains that his grandmother is on a trip to Italy and the very last scene shows Christina stuck in Perugia again due to a strike initiated by deckhands. With her broken Italian, the female protagonist finds herself inside a motel and tries to understand the reason why the ship to Greece does not execute its sailing route. While talking on the phone in Greek, a young man (Marios Athanasiou) from Greece who studies in Italy and sits next to her introduces himself (Figure 5.5). The young man approaches Christina and invites her for a drink in the lounge of the motel. Christina is hesitant because she remembers that she has lived a very similar story several years ago. Before following the unknown young man, she is quick to ask him if he knows any woman named

Dorita to avoid new troubles and make sure she will never again commit the same ‘motherly sin’. *Dolce Vita*'s final episode proffers a satisfying lack of resolution to a sophisticated and highly entertaining comedy of ageing, gender, and sexuality. Christina's encounter with the young man, much like her encounter with Antonis and other men during the series' two seasons defies normative conventions regarding ageing, and places Christina in playful ways (back) into the discursive domain of sexuality and desirability. It is a mystery how Christina and the young man's affair will end after that drink. Yet it is this lack of certain conclusions that eventually confirms the title of Rigas and Papapetrou's comedy: that life can be sweet (when you act dissidently at times).



Picture 5.5

Figure 5.5 The young man wants to have a drink with Christina, but she is initially hesitant.

CONCLUSION

In the winter of 2017, politician Yerasimos Yakoumatos was invited to an interview that would go viral for all the wrong reasons. The initial discussion had been running smoothly and the politician was covering topics contingent with the Greek sociopolitical landscape. Yet, a question about the relatively recent legalization of same-sex marriage and Yakoumatos' answer that he has no actual problem with *aderfes* (faggots) and their sexual choices sufficed to incite severe and immediate upheaval. Shortly after the end of the radio show, politicians from different parties condemned Yakoumatos' statements, while *New Democracy*—the liberal-conservative party of Greece to which Yakoumatos belonged—was quick to differentiate their ideological position from the politician and asked him to apologize.

Indeed, on January 17th, 2017, Yakoumatos showed up at Sasa Stamati's television chat show to rectify the misunderstandings in his previous remarks and justify himself; this time, the man reassured Greek voters that he is not homophobic, and the proof of the matter is that he also has friends who are homosexuals. Pleading to his status as a doctor, Yakoumatos offered a didactic speech to inform viewers about the two available categories of homosexuals. There are those individuals who are born this way and are not to be blamed for, and there are those who are out there and suggest—through their provocative behaviors—that being homosexual is a big privilege. Since Yakoumatos' answer did not sound like an actual apology, the host who led the interview expressed her confusion, and the ex-minister made an ultimate attempt to make his point even clearer, "If you watch television, for example, which 'enters' our house, in 90% percent of cases you have successful homosexual examples

[sic]. When the child sees that [homosexuality] is rising and rising, s/he [the child] gets hooked. It is a contagious disease” (2017).¹⁴⁶

The idea that the child, the family, and the nation are under threat from homosexuals is neither a new nor an exclusively Greek preoccupation. The politician’s words, however, generate a different set of questions about the politics of Greek television and its relation to non-heteronormative material. According to Yakoumatos, television appears to be an institution which is bombarded with images of homosexuality, but it is a mystery where exactly he traces this particular content. If that is the case, and there are as many homosexual figures and portrayals as the ones Yakoumatos claims to see, then why do LGBTQ journalists and activists in Greece complain about the limited and biased depictions of homosexuality onscreen, ever since its inception?

While no quantitative research has been conducted so far to assess the actual percentage of LGBTQ representations which have made it on our television screen, Yakoumatos’ words appear to be an overstatement at the very least. Yet, what if Yakoumatos is trying to prove something else altogether? What if he sees something that others may not have noticed? Would it be possible to suggest that Yakoumatos does not refer to homosexuals per se, but to a whole range of mediated aesthetics, discourses, and bits of knowledge that deviate from the norm and have the potential to contaminate the Greek nation, starting from the figure of the child? In other words, could Yakoumatos’ ostensibly homophobic slur, initially mobilized for deeply conservative ends, be read as an incisive recognition of the cloaked, yet deeply-embedded queerness of Greek television? This acknowledgment is at the center of this

¹⁴⁶ “Αμα δεις τηλεόραση για παράδειγμα, η οποία μπαίνει στο σπίτι μέσα, όλα τα παραδείγματα, είναι 90% τα πετυχημένα ομοφυλόφιλα. Όταν το παιδί βλέπει ότι ανεβαίνει, ανεβαίνει, κολλάει. Είναι κολλητική αρρώστια.” *Oh lala*, SKAI Channel, season 2, 01:18-01:40. Retrieved 25 September 2018 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YXTuj8hK_Os&t=3s Accessed 23 March 2019.

dissertation, which has examined the ways in which Greek television fiction has offered specific types of knowledge, and yet at the same time, how it can at different times—and through different readings—enrich this assumedly partial and limited stock with extra insight.

I have explored these tensions in the Greek television “comedy” of the 1990s and 2000s, whose focus on the ‘family’ —in the broadest possible sense of the term—renders gender roles, sexual behavior, domesticity, and national values a recurring theme of interest. Breaking rules, taking risks, and acting perversely, however, brings unanticipated effects, which become crucial for its role as “comedy.” *The Unbearables*, *In the Nick of Time*, *Hara’s Café*, and *Dolce Vita* I analyzed in the previous chapters belong to the category ‘popular Greek television fiction’ and have, over the years, attracted immense popularity by both television viewers, fans, and television critics. While the critical reception of the texts analyzed in the previous pages may have moved toward a specific direction, the arguments made throughout this dissertation attempt to provide different angles, which have hopefully allowed underexplored or perhaps, unexplored understandings of recent Greek television fiction’s content.

Dissidence and queerness, seen as identical twins, serve as the driving force behind this project; comedy’s ambiguity, polysemy, and cheekiness accommodate the themes and contents that may disturb normalcy and normativity. As a consequence, a plethora of dissident characters, practices, and configurations may make their appearance on the comedy genre. Dissidence, therefore, translates into female networks, alliances between queer male and heterosexual female subjects, as well as intimate relations amongst mixed groups of friends. It may also entail solitary paths and individual female’s efforts toward contesting or negotiating traditionally

oppressive and conservative landscapes, such as the private house and the countryside. The ways characters perform dissident enactments is a fundamental cause of comedy's queerness. Yet, although I posit that the "comedy" genre offers, and in fact, begs for multiple and alternative interpretations, dissidence takes place primarily in the act of reading.

Reading television dissidently constitutes a means to trace the politically queer and feminist potential that is hidden or waits to be excavated from media texts and its representations. Therefore, dissidence—understood as an integral ingredient inside the text, and an optic sensor to decode television messages—opens up fantasies while at the same time broadening the scope and limits of the texts' meanings.

Although the genre of comedy has often come to be seen as fraudulently revolutionary and prone to rigid poles of gender and sexual behavior (despite its diegetic ups and downs) there are significant gaps and temporary loopholes that merit particular attention in this narrative. Often, television shows illustrate monogamous relationships, display love narratives celebrating reproductive futurism, use plots dichotomizing men and women, and show heterosexuals and non-heterosexuals in unequal subject positions. Nevertheless, the queer dynamics at play in comedies can also give room for deconstructing ostensibly dominant characters and reframing assumedly disenfranchised ones into emancipatory and dissident positions. These ambiguities are often visible even in the traditionally conservative genre of the sitcom. Looking at American situation comedy, Pugh writes, that "America has seen itself, and its changing sense of sexuality on the television screen, with queer representations, both absent and depicted, both skewed and truthful, both exaggerated and recognizable, both metaphoric and realistic" (2018, p. 196). More specifically, he observes that "[t]he paradox of sex, queerness, and family sitcoms, as with much of

American culture, is that innocence coexists with experience, even when the nation's children sit watching, glued to the screen, with adults laughing right there beside them" (Pugh, 2018, p. 196).

Greek television comedies, much like the American productions that Pugh describes above, play with this ambiguity and encourage viewers to interpret and relate with media images in new ways. This is, even more, the case at a time of prolonged media transition on a global scale, and at a cultural moment during which Greek television material of the yesteryear appears again and again in the form of reruns (Chairetis, 2018). Through the afterlife they seem to be enjoying, the texts of the past converse with old and newer generations of viewers as well as other television products, both national and international, that made their appearance after the millennium, and thus expand their horizon of expectations. So, although the queer man from *The Unbearables* may have been decoded as asexual, single, and different from the rest of the male characters in the show, in the first presentations of this series, the same character, in the light of his resemblance to more contemporary representations of queerness circulating in Greece and beyond, can, at least now, and within specific fan circles, be read differently. In a similar logic, if we look at Vlasis (both the comedy character and the star persona of Vlasis Bonatsos) and re-examine his seemingly unquestioned heterosexuality and attraction to women, it may be possible to recognize a heteroflexible subject who, much like other popular television characters, plays around with identities and flirts with non-hegemonic gender scripts.

Furthermore, while texts like *The Unbearables* contain humorous moments and scenes of patriarchal domination, they eventually contest them many times throughout the episodes, thus generating surprising scripts and narratives, which are anything but monolithic and linear. In this dissertation, I explored those potentially

queer texts making use of a flexible definition of the term queer. While queer researchers have established a tradition of studying sexual dissidence and non-heteronormative subjects in the main, here I chose texts that may reveal different micro-histories of knowledge that depart from the norm and include ambiguous finales as in *The Unbearables* and *Dolce Vita* and open-ended scripts such as *Hara's Café*. Furthermore, in many of the texts under analysis, characters present an alternative, eccentric, odd, or ambivalent relation to societal norms and conventions. Some of these characters are widows, queers, spinsters, asexual, infertile, celibate, or fools, and their voices often contest heteronormative order and dominant ways of living.

I have identified glimpses of feminist and queer politics expressed in these comedies, yet I understand the varied and at times narrow articulations of feminism and queerness at play. For instance, while *Hara's Café's* main protagonist (along with her daughter) leave patriarchal oppression behind and opt for new and unknown futures through the open end of the series and their flight to the city, *Dolce Vita's* female character follows a narrative pattern prone to different interpretations. While Christina resists the normalizing forces exerted upon her as an aging female and widow, the last scene of the comedy in Perugia is marked by a new encounter with a handsome young man, similar to Antonis. Although the ease with which Christina breaks free from ageist stereotypes signifies a new field of gender and sexual emancipation for her, the female character asks the young man several questions to ensure that he is not anyhow related to her daughter, Dorita. As a result, her sexual transgression may be stigmatized from an internalized fear to not fail again as a mother.

Similarly, while Dimitra and Yanis in *The Unbearables* contest rules through secret and playful alliances, the very fact that these resistances take place from inside the house does not upset the very foundations of patriarchy. Instead of envisioning these acts as problematic and sabotaging the queer potential of the texts, it is useful to explore the ways in which narratives of widowhood, domestic womanhood, and male queerness are both enabling and restraining simultaneously. These small gaps and petty victories within the texts offer us unforeseen ways to examine the circulation of feminist, postfeminist, and queer discourses in television material of previous decades, and allows us the opportunity to review how these narratives depicting men and women who resided during a different spatiotemporal context are understood and read in the present. As Vasilis Vamvakas (2018b) notes, “[i]n Greek media studies, the model of interpretation that dominated the field roughly considered the way in which the (assumedly passive) public reacted to television programs (whose messages were also considered to be one-dimensional)” (p. 21).¹⁴⁷ Using the dual role of a doctoral student and television fan, I responded to Vamvakas’ call and illustrated how television fans with multiple overlapping identities (e.g., fan and cultural studies graduate) may react to, and engage with television fiction and its content.

The texts under discussion shed light on narratives that are not visible at first sight and at times even defy the intention of their creators. I claim that texts that have been known as funny, yet frivolous and simplistic can become sites for re-appropriation in the name of queer experience and disclose different meanings and concerns. In the case of *In the Nick of Time*, some of its main heroes and heroines perform roles and behaviors that upset both their gender and the genre of comedy.

¹⁴⁷ “Στον χώρο έρευνας των μέσων επικοινωνίας στην Ελλάδα, το μοντέλο ερμηνείας που κυριάρχησε θεώρησε σχετικά δεδομένα (και μάλλον παθητικό) τον τρόπο με τον οποίο αντιδρά το κοινό στα τηλεοπτικά προγράμματα (των οποίων τα μηνύματα εκλήφθηκαν ως μονοδιάστατα).”

The text in question represents characters who abstain from social codes of proper femininity and hegemonic masculinity, which entails active sexual life as a prerequisite in young individuals' universe and styling, presenting, and performing the body in ways deemed attractive and appropriate by dominant norms. These visual moments of gender-bending, combined with a queer (phenomenological) approach, evince that comedy can transcend its genre conventions and eventually serve as a queer space for harboring ostensibly heterosexual characters who live inside the queer closet.

If the television comedies under analysis are considered 'bearers' of the universe during which they were made and seen, these new readings of old texts work to potentially disturb their temporal order and 'fixed' histories. Locating and generating dissidence in comedy texts has demanded interdisciplinary research that concentrated on the fields of cultural, film and television theory, feminist, queer and anthropological studies, as well as comedy studies. The areas as mentioned above and their interconnectedness are useful in assessing the dynamics between media and heteronormative norms, as well as theorizing how these norms may be curbed or circumvented.

In the process of queering the Greek television comedy texts in question, I have employed a multiplicity of queer approaches and theoretical models of analysis in an attempt to challenge ultimate, authoritative meanings (e.g., Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2013). As White (2018) has succinctly argued, the vast body of work on television and gender studies tends to concentrate on femininity because "gender is still understood as referring primarily to the subordinate 'other'" (p. 19). Here, I have instituted a poststructuralist methodology that does not necessarily associate femininity with cis-female bodies; instead, it examines the ways in which a diverse

number of characters engage in ‘doing’ womanhood and manhood, and how these gender enactments have the potential to trouble the heteronormative matrix. I posit that this theoretical model illuminates how women and men have been represented onscreen, stretching the area of femininities and masculinities studies into new terrains of empowerment.

My methodology relies heavily on Foucault’s theory of power/knowledge and transgression. These concepts permeate many of my case studies and demonstrate that women, queer men, and even young children are not exclusively oppressed by institutional mechanisms of heteropatriarchy, but rather, they are agents with varying degrees of power and ability to resist. Following the example of scholars such as E. Ann Kaplan (1992) and Christopher Pullen (2007), I have used Foucault’s model of power because it can vividly portray those mechanisms that marginalize characters who deviate from the white-middle-class-heterosexual-man archetype. Utilizing Foucault’s theory within television fiction allows for an unfolding of how gender and sexuality are regimented and how heteronormativity imposes strict rules on allegedly deviant or inferior bodies.

I have made this clear through the unequal power dynamics that develop inside the urban house (*The Unbearables*), the politics of the panopticon village in the countryside (*Hara’s Café*), and the policing of womanhood through discourses of motherhood and female ageing (*Dolce Vita*). At the same time, I have explored the narrow margins of transgression, or in James Scott’s terms, the *weapons of the weak*. I have argued that the same fictional characters who endure the burden of heteropatriarchy are able to enact gestures of disobedience as they resist the official and unofficial channels of power that govern their lives. In other words, those characters whose bodies are surveilled and policed by regulatory forces can make use

of the available tools they have to express their voice and articulate resistance. I have argued that from within these marginal spaces, the male and female characters who are cast as outsiders can protest, and these forms of protest may serve as feminist and queer attacks to patriarchal ideology.

Judith Butler's notion of performativity is also sporadically employed to explain how gender identity is formed through the stylized repetition of acts. I have made use of Butler's theory to examine how fictional characters perform their gender identities onscreen. According to White (2018), "Television comedy is one arena in which the 'persistent' failure of coherent heteronormative identities is exposed and played upon, presenting viewers with a range of gender and sexual identities which are visibly tenuous and always already unstable" (p. 6). The instability of these identities, attained through excessive performances, transparent role-playing, and extravagant reactions make gender roles look forced and camp, while heterosexuality turns more and more into a comedy. Such instances are more obvious in some of the texts under examination than others, and I have argued that it is in the allegedly conservative comedy texts that the precarity of gender identities becomes noticeably exposed.

Although the theoretical concepts of power, transgression, and performativity have hopefully broadened the discussion around the queer politics of Greek television comedies, dissidence is the driving force and the main theoretical umbrella of this project. Drawing from Alan Sinfield (1992) who popularized dissident readings and the queer reading strategies that emerged throughout the rise of queer theory (see Chambers, 2009; Dhaenens, 2011; Doty, 1993; Farmer, 2000; Lipton, 2008), I have employed an analogous theoretical model that traces material within a politicized framework by paying attention to television histories which may have been silenced

or discarded as canonical and unworthy. The emphasis on comedy dialogues and aesthetics has highlighted real tensions between characters and pathways for seemingly disenfranchised and weak heroes to escape patriarchal oppression, docility, and surveillance. Through eccentric performances, incomprehensible language codes, singing songs, and dancing passionate dances, the male and female characters of these texts express resistance and the possibility to lead their life differently. By employing a dissident/queer lens to include minor and peripheral characters, as well as scenes which may have passed as mundane to many viewers, it is my hope to have provided an innovative theoretical and empirical framework that may be of value to media and television studies. The theoretical and empirical framework expands the potential locations of queerness and, methodologically speaking, advocates in favor of a meticulous, analytic, and close engagement with the television material for research purposes (see also Aitaki, 2018a, p. 31).

Although much television scholarship in the Anglophone world centers around television products that are still ‘hot’ and running (e.g., Aslinger, 2013; Smith, 2007), I chose texts that have kept circulating among fans and sometimes as TV reruns and had first appeared on television in the 90s and 00s. In this way, it is possible to make sense of narratives on a grander scale and in fact, assess what these popular texts did “and not just what they did not (or did not do as well as we hoped they would at the time)” (Aslinger, 2013, p. 62).

While the study of television fiction in Greece is very limited, a few works have explored particular case studies analyzing television fiction as deeply patriarchal and as divisive and unfair toward women and minority status groups (Valsamidou, 2014). Here, I have advanced a different conceptual and methodological framework; by closely re-reading in the entirety of those texts that previous critics and researchers

have assessed as one-dimensional, oppressive, and totalizing, I invest on minor details and seek moments of dissidence that break down the omnipresent specter of heteronormativity and show diverse ways that characters inhabit television texts. This approach, which is attentive to details, gaps, cracks, and narrative ruptures, has enabled me to identify power, domination, and oppression, but also has allowed me to identify agency, empowerment, transformation, and resistance in the texts, thus proffering a rather different understanding to a televisual archive which has yet to be evaluated under this prism.

Opening up the Field of Greek Television Fiction

In December 2016, an international conference entitled *50 years of Greek Television* was held in Thessaloniki, Greece. Both well-established and early career scholars participated to discuss the past, present, and future of the academic study of Greek television. The conference was the first of its kind and delivered a wide array of arguments in favor of a fresh and unapologetic—yet rigorous—approach to the study of the popular medium, as well as its content, production conditions, technological transformations, historical and socio-political parameters, and impact on Greek society.

My presentation in that conference problematized the extent to which Greek television fiction upsets or reifies mononormativity as the ubiquitous norm of intimate relationships through the case study of *Singles* (MEGA, 2004–2005, 2006–2008). Although I decided not to incorporate this work in the current dissertation, the conference was an excellent opportunity to come in contact with other researchers who were producing their individual and diverse projects on Greek television. Since then, an official Facebook group has been created under the coordination of Dr.

Aitaki, and a series of workshops have taken place at the Laboratory of Cultural and Visual Studies of the Department of Journalism and Mass Media Communication in Thessaloniki, Greece. New critical networks have therefore been created that allow a new set of questions about the lack of academic engagement with the ‘unserious’ area of television fiction, especially in light of the closure of the MEGA channel, and the unknown fate of its rich cultural archive. Responding to the call to start experimenting more systematically with television and its content, the collective volume *50 Years of Greek Television* (2018) is the newborn baby that came out of this pivotal conference. Working toward filling a significant academic gap and contributing to the fortification of a sub-field of television studies which still remains at its infancy, *Filmicon: The Journal of Greek Film Studies* is currently preparing a special issue on Greek television fiction, while *The Journal of Greek Media & Culture* is also promoting a call on a similar topic under the title ‘Greek screen industries: Perspectives, Methodologies and Practices’.

The available scholarly work on television fiction in Greece at the moment has mainly adopted close-reading approaches (Aitaki, 2019a, 2019b, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c; Kaklamanidou, 2017; Kosetzi, 2012), and this dissertation is no exception to this rule. As my intention has been to analyze a selective number of television products, a promising research avenue would be to explore other paradigmatic and perhaps more blatantly queer television comedies that made their appearance on the Greek small screen, particularly during the resurgence of identity politics from 2010 onward.

The methodology I employed throughout this dissertation may serve as a starting point for further research and expansion in the field. This methodology serves two interrelated purposes; it reveals the queer potential of television “comedy” texts,

and at the same time, sheds light on the meaning-making processes that take place through the interaction between texts and viewers (Livingstone, 1998). Therefore, a range of Greek television genres such as television melodramas (Goldberg, 2016) and soap operas (Dhaenens, 2012) can be explored through these lenses and perhaps allow for points of dissidence and resistance to emerge. Other research directions include finding ways to expand the limits of queerness and investigate a gamut of non-hegemonic representations on television and their (dis)connectivity vis à vis the norm. If the power of heteronormativity applies to LGBTQ characters and women who appear onscreen, it is vital to problematize the terms of the representation in Greek television with regard to fatness (Kyrölä, 2014), disability (Ellis, 2018), ethnicity (Bradley, 2013) and race (Gurr, 2015) as well as the potential gaps that arise from these representations.

Furthermore, to advance the study of television, it is essential to experiment with different methodological frameworks. In the audiovisual landscape changes, audiences ‘travel’ across televisions. Scholars from a range of disciplines make use of diverse tools to register and interpret the consequences of these developments. For Elke Weissmann, television studies “openly subscribes to a multi-disciplinary approach that recognizes the industry, the texts and the consumption in equal measure” (2014).¹⁴⁸ The tripartite to which Weissmann refers, however, is not always in balance, or at the very least, it is not in all the sub-disciplines of television studies (Freeman, 2016, p. 33). More specifically, researchers have explored the queer

¹⁴⁸ In fact, social and cultural changes occurring at an international level, such as the impact of Netflix (Jenner, 2018) and other subscription-based channels on television entertainment, as well as the multiplicity of ways audiences interact with television products lead scholars across the world to adopt approaches that extend beyond the aforementioned triptych. This means that current studies include perspectives that extend, for instance, to legal issues (Paxson, 2018), technological implications (Turner, 2019), and ethical aspects of media usage (Davisson & Booth, 2016; Ess, 2013).

politics and potentialities of television fiction in great depth, and a number of media scholars have employed empirical approaches that bring together texts, producers and/or audiences (see for instance Day & Jean, 2017; Dhaenens 2011; Hill, 2018; Lacalle, 2015). By contrast, it seems that a great body of academic work on queer(ng) television fiction still prioritizes text-centric approaches and researchers' analysis of the texts over real audiences and research subjects (Chambers, 2009; Dhaenens, 2012, 2013; Doty, 1993; Hart, 2013; Parsemain, 2019; Saavedra, 2009). Cognizant of the fact that my reading of these texts is fan-based, scholarly informed but personal, and thus non-generalizable, further research could possibly implement multi-method approaches that could combine the study of television texts as clusters with the study of research subjects and their narratives. Such attempts would shorten the perceived distance between textual representation and reception in Greek television fiction and show us how actual audiences see television portrayals and themes, but also ways they understand and relate to these texts. In addition, far more work can be done in the field from the production side of the spectrum by exploring the complex network of institutional routines, production practices, and creative incentives that function collaboratively—or antagonistically—for the shaping of television content (Aitaki, 2018d; Koukoutsaki-Monnier, 2003; Tsourvakas, 2004)

Other research directions could include understanding ways to incorporate fandom in the dialogue about Greek television fiction and look at how fans explore and react to media representations and images. Recent developments in media accessibility are providing new pathways for individuals whose dynamic and enthusiastic relationship with the texts allows them to reproduce and reclaim the text's initial meaning, as well as critique and even rewrite it. Although such fan-based interventions in media texts have received significant academic attention in the UK

and the USA (Dhaenens, Bauwel, & Biltreyst, 2008; Jenkins, 1992), these studies in Greece are required to understand if and to what extent members of fan groups with overlapping identities respond to media images and articulate their voice through media outlets and slash fiction.

In this dissertation, acting both as a television fan and a cultural theorist, I first and foremost attempted to show how a subject with multiple identities dissidently reads a number of popular television comedies that first appeared in the 90s and 00s and continue to ‘travel’ in the Greek public sphere until today. The examination and systematic engagement with this dynamic and ever-growing archive of Greek television fiction continue to significantly upset simplistic, cliché, and hasty assessments and evaluations about the medium and its content. As Alan Sinfield (1992) argues, “all stories comprise within themselves the ghosts of the alternative stories they are trying to repress” (p. 21). Concluding with this argument, let this dissertation be an invitation for other scholars to touse with the patchy field of television fiction and trouble stories of our televised past that may still wait to be (re)visited and creatively vandalized.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1: *The Unbearables* (1991-1993) *The Unbearables* (1991-1992), Season 1

| Episode Name | Duration | Link |
|--|----------|---|
| 1 Give a bit of hmm to me | 25:51 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LaKzJN479sI&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=1 |
| 2 Ride with a stolen car | 24:54 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pjxI3dMh6Qg&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=2 |
| 3 The eviction | 28:27 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yzzEIhLhz48&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=3 |
| 4 Happy birthday | 25:37 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uVqqMUfJWXM&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=4 |
| 5 The Doctor | 25:06 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fTtoIoU1E-T0&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=5 |
| 6 The bald assassin | 22:59 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1YAEJNvb8C4&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=6 |
| 7 Life insurance | 20:06 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-YJFc16y76c&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=7 |
| 8 Poetry Night | 21:36 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rW67jEEs458&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=8 |
| 9 If you want to leave, [then] leave | 19:31 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ymLDsI-UQ9I&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=9 |
| 10 Fashion '91 | 23:56 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rbYgZZDAVw0&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=10 |
| 11 I am a delicate woman..straight-talking | 21:09 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1fowAX0Owl0&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=11 |
| 12 French culture | 23:25 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJNHC1nnKvM&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=12 |
| 13 Help...caretaker | 22:24 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ETy53-dFg4&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=13 |
| 14 The lover is coming | 20:15 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5KbNOXvauJQ&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=14 |
| 15 Merry Christmas | 24:14 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CybWfrnfGEg&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=15 |
| 16 Real revenge | 19:22 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gczqsCFI2to&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=16 |
| 17 Destroy them all | 21:23 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QDfZtpEIUds&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=17 |
| 18 Tritsis, Tritsis...oh my! | 23:12 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YsWj--QuVfw&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=18 |
| 19 The aunt is coming...stop | 22:49 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GNDZ5HozI3Q&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=19 |
| 20 Eurovision 92 | 24:15 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VZxbHM4ZEWU&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=20 |

| | | |
|---------------------------------------|-------|---|
| 21 Freak out | 22:29 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U_0k_KXKYk0&list=PL75E4158319DE00B&index=21 |
| 22 Beauty pageant 92 | 27:40 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPNicwrwxVo&list=PL75E4158319DE00B&index=22 |
| 23 I invest...you invest...he invests | 25:23 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cGiRf0HWtxI&list=PL75E4158319DE00B&index=23 |
| 24 May we be healthy | 22:28 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nE8apYv8y30&list=PL75E4158319DE00B&index=24 |
| 25 Surveillance in the first degree | 27:04 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bw451BtJgJY&list=PL75E4158319DE00B&index=25 |
| 26 Return to nature | 27:21 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QI60-i2nXVg&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=26 |
| 27 Viva la nation | 24:15 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9JXJyKP-9Qk&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=27 |
| 28 Live divorce | 24:46 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jt7o2vpfEoU&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=28 |
| 29 Fellow ecologists | 22:21 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ne8Fq86qEaY&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=29 |
| 30 Actor means light | 21:24 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mh4cTZOsj2w&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=30 |
| 31 Working girl | 20:58 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uHAuSDJUEGM&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=31 |
| 32 Young man wants young woman | 21:37 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-DIXnMczdaA&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=32 |
| 33 Video-clips | 20:46 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vflaUp4hPho&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=33 |
| 34 Los Unbearablados | 24:06 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TUOmBry8Zzc&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=34 |
| 35 Children, children of Greece | 28:05 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=07g6UZajQ5E&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=35 |

The Unbearables (1992-1993), Season 2

| Episode Name | Duration | Link |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|---|
| 1 The perfect man | 19:16 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nEi2Udjc0lQ&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=36 |
| 2 The L.E.G.G.I.N.G. | 23:55 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wM-SAGicH0s&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=37 |
| 3 Sex, porn and videocassetes | 20:02 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fqzi0xa2aTg&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=38 |
| 4 Love was made for two | 22:50 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uVbOAhS4O9A&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=39 |
| 5 Yet it happened | 22:08 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VVmhXiBd6MY&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=40 |
| 6 Revue | 24:33 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HIRU4N06QzQ&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=41 |
| 7 I will beat Paraskevas | 26:04 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WgMGFgGwH9s&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=42 |
| 8 The psychiatrist | 21:38 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EIOUa5vPUx0&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=43 |
| 9 Who [is] Helen | 21:35 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OToSjpe_zM&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=44 |
| 10 My story my sin | 22:06 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f5UWvk83-LY&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=45 |
| 11 I am, you are...Thanasis | 22:27 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jtW1oHhnlOk&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=46 |
| 12 To be or not to be? | 21:00 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JVPlzaaHQcQ&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=47 |
| 13 Until we meet again | 25:16 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tXrXGPp4SsM&list=PL775E4158319DE00B&index=48 |

Appendix 2: *In the Nick of Time* (2005-2006)

In the Nick of Time (2005-2006), Season 1

| Episodes | Duration | Link |
|-----------------|-----------------|---|
| Episode 1 | 50:20 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uCmKDM5eJjo |
| Episode 2 | 44:53 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gJUGh6Y9AJM |
| Episode 3 | 44:47 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G8jD04s2LQI |
| Episode 4 | 43:06 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ka_zlx24Oo4 |
| Episode 5 | 44:18 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5fz37l7Z7X0 |
| Episode 6 | 44:40 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6-4plORugZo |
| Episode 7 | 45:31 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q7cII-I5mNA |
| Episode 8 | 44:26 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GTpVIOpXE0Q |
| Episode 9 | 45:50 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZCDZ3-9Mw |
| Episode 10 | 43:47 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BCJmcnyc7_c |
| Episode 11 | 46:44 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K62Pit91RIU |
| Episode 12 | 46:11 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PYbnz0V17vo |
| Episode 13 | 44:12 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FQZ-fvxS-xs |
| Episode 14 | 43:48 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IN31V8it8WY |
| Episode 15 | 44:49 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1jXr1wEuuZg |
| Episode 16 | 45:12 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=42kkgdErCEs |
| Episode 17 | 43:41 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ec-7yxemvCI |
| Episode 18 | 44:35 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NnxBOvZip8w |
| Episode 19 | 43:02 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XmLNJVVGZ9qo |
| Episode 20 | 44:01 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C3ljYs-pr6M |
| Episode 21 | 42:10 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=waqAF3VOIIM |
| Episode 22 | 45:21 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YmAjdAlQuQ8 |
| Episode 23 | 46:01 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tI5B_IC3dfI |
| Episode 24 | 43:29 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CXzRPZow9i8 |
| Episode 25 | 42:07 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xoqndXplMsg |
| Episode 26 | 44:01 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TCsK2dHepDA |

In the Nick of Time (2006-2007), Season 2

| Episodes | Duration | Link |
|-----------------|-----------------|---|
| Episode 1 | 48:33 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AuK5xRHh4EE |
| Episode 2 | 43:19 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CtH5YoK3yG4 |
| Episode 3 | 45:18 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYPxVGcmWoM |
| Episode 4 | 43:39 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LEzlOPXuV5U |
| Episode 5 | 42:01 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vh5wWQxTJKM |
| Episode 6 | 47:52 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DF1ICJUbaRE |
| Episode 7 | 46:21 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oiuOaxjCVRs |
| Episode 8 | 50:56 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8eF5NCgr_w |
| Episode 9 | 48:15 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d24Gxre1woI |
| Episode 10 | 57:49 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=16GbB2zdTs0 |
| Episode 11 | 44:52 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c2olyKdvKT0 |
| Episode 12 | 45:32 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-faqIooZ-XY |
| Episode 13 | 43:49 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uXFQkhQ-JrM |
| Episode 14 | 42:25 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rwvSAWSG-hQ |
| Episode 15 | 44:57 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=29KRu3siEF8 |
| Episode 16 | 46:39 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3L50Np7sgxs |
| Episode 17 | 43:52 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SVDMPHpDCJIQ |
| Episode 18 | 43:23 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jqGKGajgY-c |
| Episode 19 | 47:27 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4IHMFstsFcA |
| Episode 20 | 44:28 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FNwKtykBJp8 |
| Episode 21 | 47:39 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPKyKVEgGN8 |
| Episode 22 | 43:13 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jhkCE0JkJUA |
| Episode 23 | 1:09:47 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NJ1xysfMZW0 |

Appendix 3: *Hara's Café* (2003-2006)
Hara's Café (2003-2004), Season 1

| Episodes | Duration | Link |
|-----------------|-----------------|---|
| Episode 1 | 44:45 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/291457/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-1 |
| Episode 2 | 42:44 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/291458/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-2 |
| Episode 3 | 44:34 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/291459/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-3 |
| Episode 4 | 43:11 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/291460/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-4 |
| Episode 5 | 43:20 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/291461/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-5 |
| Episode 6 | 44:29 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/291462/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-6 |
| Episode 7 | 45:43 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/291545/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-7 |
| Episode 8 | 45:22 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/291546/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-8 |
| Episode 9 | 43:46 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/291547/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-9 |
| Episode 10 | 43:42 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/291548/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-10 |
| Episode 11 | 44:28 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/293588/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-11 |
| Episode 12 | 49:05 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/293589/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-12 |
| Episode 13 | 51:08 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/293590/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-13 |
| Episode 14 | 46:06 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/293591/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-14 |
| Episode 15 | 49:45 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/293592/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-15 |
| Episode 16 | 43:04 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/293593/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-16 |
| Episode 17 | 48:14 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/293594/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-17 |
| Episode 18 | 48:50 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/293595/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-18 |
| Episode 19 | 46:04 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/293596/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-19 |
| Episode 20 | 44:38 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/293597/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-20 |
| Episode 21 | 43:50 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/298025/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-21 |
| Episode 22 | 43:49 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/298028/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-22 |
| Episode 23 | 44:34 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/298041/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-23 |
| Episode 24 | 47:59 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/298054/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-24 |
| Episode 25 | 50:04 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/298063/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-25 |
| Episode 26 | 47:57 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/298070/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-26 |
| Episode 27 | 50:47 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/298079/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-27 |
| Episode 28 | 48:56 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/298086/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-28 |
| Episode 29 | 45:08 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/298095/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-29 |
| Episode 30 | 42:23 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/298104/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-30 |

Hara's Café (2004-2005), Season 2

| Episodes | Duration | Link |
|-----------------|-----------------|---|
| Episode 31 | 47:08 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/330804/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-3 |
| Episode 32 | 44:22 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/330805/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-3 |
| Episode 33 | 43:53 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/330806/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-3 |
| Episode 34 | 49:28 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/330807/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-3 |
| Episode 35 | 41:29 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/330808/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-3 |
| Episode 36 | 46:56 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/332595/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-3 |
| Episode 37 | 44:25 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/332630/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-3 |
| Episode 38 | 44:19 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/332637/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-3 |
| Episode 39 | 43:25 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/332848/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-3 |
| Episode 40 | 48:24 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/332849/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-4 |
| Episode 41 | 45:58 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/332904/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-4 |
| Episode 42 | 47:14 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/333233/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-4 |
| Episode 43 | 49:17 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/333234/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-4 |
| Episode 44 | 49:12 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/333235/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-4 |
| Episode 45 | 47:20 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/333236/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-4 |
| Episode 46 | 48:33 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/333237/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-4 |
| Episode 47 | 46:05 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/333238/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-4 |
| Episode 48 | 44:44 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/333239/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-4 |
| Episode 49 | 44:27 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/333240/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-4 |
| Episode 50 | 44:33 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/333241/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-5 |
| Episode 51 | 46:49 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/333935/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-5 |
| Episode 52 | 47:48 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/333936/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-5 |
| Episode 53 | 45:33 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/333937/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-5 |
| Episode 54 | 47:33 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/333938/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-5 |
| Episode 55 | 46:05 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/333939/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-5 |
| Episode 56 | 50:30 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/333940/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-5 |
| Episode 57 | 47:09 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/333941/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-5 |
| Episode 58 | 49:50 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/333942/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-5 |
| Episode 59 | 43:32 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/333943/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-5 |
| Episode 60 | 47:50 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/333944/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-6 |

Hara's Café (2005-2006), Season 3

| Episodes | Duration | Link |
|-----------------|-----------------|---|
| Episode 61 | 50:13 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/334103/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-6 |
| Episode 62 | 48:43 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/334104/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-6 |
| Episode 63 | 44:04 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/334105/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-6 |
| Episode 64 | 46:09 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/334105/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-6 |
| Episode 65 | 47:20 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/334544/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-6 |
| Episode 66 | 48:19 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/334545/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-6 |
| Episode 67 | 47:55 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/334546/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-6 |
| Episode 68 | 46:01 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/334547/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-6 |
| Episode 69 | 44:59 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/334553/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-6 |
| Episode 70 | 44:09 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/334554/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-7 |
| Episode 71 | 48:36 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/335163/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-7 |
| Episode 72 | 44:23 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/335164/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-7 |
| Episode 73 | 43:48 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/335165/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-7 |
| Episode 74 | 44:46 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/335166/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-7 |
| Episode 75 | 44:52 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/335167/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-7 |
| Episode 76 | 44:23 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/335593/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-7 |
| Episode 77 | 48:58 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/335594/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-7 |
| Episode 78 | 47:53 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/335595/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-7 |
| Episode 79 | 49:19 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/336151/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-7 |
| Episode 80 | 47:46 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/336152/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-8 |
| Episode 81 | 49:00 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/336153/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-8 |
| Episode 82 | 49:08 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/336154/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-8 |
| Episode 83 | 49:51 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/336155/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-8 |
| Episode 84 | 47:43 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/336156/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-8 |
| Episode 85 | 46:43 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/336157/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-8 |
| Episode 86 | 44:45 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/337261/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-8 |
| Episode 87 | 51:22 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/337262/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-8 |
| Episode 88 | 46:11 | https://www.antenna.gr/watch/337263/to-kafe-tis-xaras-epeis-8 |

Appendix 4: *Dolce Vita* (1995-1997)
Dolce Vita (1995-1996), Season 1

| Episodes | Duration | Link |
|-----------------|-----------------|---|
| Episode 1 | 25:47 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YjBiFawBJow&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezI8QScI0OIS&index=2&t=0s |
| Episode 2 | 24:07 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K9_o2CArF3M&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezI8QScI0OIS&index=2 |
| Episode 3 | 26:17 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sxdo1t_e0bE&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezI8QScI0OIS&index=3 |
| Episode 4 | 29:49 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C1Pz12VcZKw&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezI8QScI0OIS&index=4 |
| Episode 5 | 25:46 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xtINh_V3_Ek&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezI8QScI0OIS&index=5 |
| Episode 6 | 25:08 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zyb1W0ohooc&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezI8QScI0OIS&index=6 |
| Episode 7 | 19:04 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p6pxTAUqcgg&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezI8QScI0OIS&index=7 |
| Episode 8 | 22:35 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TTOh4oCOJQI&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezI8QScI0OIS&index=8 |
| Episode 9 | 22:28 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EhyqAj2WrHo&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezI8QScI0OIS&index=9 |
| Episode 10 | 27:33 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uGREL69jUfU&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezI8QScI0OIS&index=10 |
| Episode 11 | 23:54 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-g8zX2eA54&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezI8QScI0OIS&index=11 |
| Episode 12 | 26:30 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mjExhxLobR8&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezI8QScI0OIS&index=12 |
| Episode 13 | 43:46 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ch_X2moo6M&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezI8QScI0OIS&index=13 |
| Episode 14 | 25:28 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZzXqyLyMPqI&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezI8QScI0OIS&index=14 |
| Episode 15 | 25:41 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4-DwVyAbkOo&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezI8QScI0OIS&index=15 |
| Episode 16 | 23:02 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DVL3ElqwcEU&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezI8QScI0OIS&index=16 |
| Episode 17 | 22:08 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jgZfKj7GkY0&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezI8QScI0OIS&index=17 |
| Episode 18 | 26:11 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yCCXPzGoc7w&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezI8QScI0OIS&index=18 |
| Episode 19 | 24:13 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wJh0eH1nG78&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezI8QScI0OIS&index=19 |
| Episode 20 | 28:53 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eKOGAKLk9Sw&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezI8QScI0OIS&index=20 |
| Episode 21 | 32:03 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EyJHhf3BRpk&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezI8QScI0OIS&index=21 |
| Episode 22 | 28:50 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Re1alqgeXO4&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezI8QScI0OIS&index=22 |

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| Episode 23 | 26:23 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R9GIMw6m_Vw&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTVDezIEP8QScI0OIS&index=23 |
| Episode 24 | 28:15 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBeViOEeiS8&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTVDezIEP8QScI0OIS&index=24 |
| Episode 25 | 25:49 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b2gi0zxirGo&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTVDezIEP8QScI0OIS&index=25 |
| Episode 26 | 26:52 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jGO9JC4XI_0&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTVDezIEP8QScI0OIS&index=26 |
| Episode 27 | 28:54 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9cpOELvWcGc&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTVDezIEP8QScI0OIS&index=27 |
| Episode 28 | 29:00 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NmV7zpLihM&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTVDezIEP8QScI0OIS&index=28 |
| Episode 29 | 30:52 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOTJAx_PfJY&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTVDezIEP8QScI0OIS&index=29 |
| Episode 30 | 26:44 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OxqepRxJm-M&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTVDezIEP8QScI0OIS&index=30 |
| Episode 31 | 29:05 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aDC5UEkjjz8k&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTVDezIEP8QScI0OIS&index=31 |
| Episode 32 | 30:23 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9fDjvXHKG-g&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTVDezIEP8QScI0OIS&index=32 |
| Episode 33 | 31:18 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lMYBB0wCzQ8&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTVDezIEP8QScI0OIS&index=33 |
| Episode 34 | 30:30 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=imlj_fpbhHg&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTVDezIEP8QScI0OIS&index=34 |
| Episode 35 | 33:29 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iSSvKR3wIp4&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTVDezIEP8QScI0OIS&index=35 |
| Episode 36 | 30:07 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=62f1Q7yWzeU&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTVDezIEP8QScI0OIS&index=36 |
| Episode 37 | 29:52 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mvugN6I7Dho&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTVDezIEP8QScI0OIS&index=37 |
| Episode 38 | 29:01 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vQPMq5VedRQ&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTVDezIEP8QScI0OIS&index=38 |

Dolce Vita (1996-1997), Season 2

| Episodes | Duration | Link |
|-----------------|-----------------|---|
| Episode 1 | 32:41 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OSirGB7l4Es&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezIEP8QSci0OIS&index=39 |
| Episode 2 | 29:36 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0TkRNwJxvkQ&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezIEP8QSci0OIS&index=40 |
| Episode 3 | 23:02 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wU6ChrIDGMo&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezIEP8QSci0OIS&index=41 |
| Episode 4 | 31:59 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m9MHdbTiq54&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezIEP8QSci0OIS&index=42 |
| Episode 5 | 29:58 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_AbL3oVpTAI&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezIEP8QSci0OIS&index=43 |
| Episode 6 | 29:45 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uziZD9Tr2ME&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezIEP8QSci0OIS&index=44 |
| Episode 7 | 28:54 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I59vIe3Jdv4&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezIEP8QSci0OIS&index=45 |
| Episode 8 | 25:41 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=10wVKScy_aM&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezIEP8QSci0OIS&index=46 |
| Episode 9 | 31:30 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x-B_S-zX-Uk&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezIEP8QSci0OIS&index=47 |
| Episode 10 | 29:33 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LOVm3Nz3yvA&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezIEP8QSci0OIS&index=48 |
| Episode 11 | 33:17 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YMgHUBq6LBE&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezIEP8QSci0OIS&index=49 |
| Episode 12 | 33:00 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nPF25x8nxNQ&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezIEP8QSci0OIS&index=50 |
| Episode 13 | 28:57 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V6Z-Ggf2eMM&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezIEP8QSci0OIS&index=51 |
| Episode 14 | 32:53 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F_bQG76G6tg&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezIEP8QSci0OIS&index=52 |
| Episode 15 | 32:30 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XuYB-djv5uo&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezIEP8QSci0OIS&index=53 |
| Episode 16 | 32:28 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UMVagK2fSxI&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezIEP8QSci0OIS&index=54 |
| Episode 17 | 32:13 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PkhQhhwiJrc&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezIEP8QSci0OIS&index=55 |
| Episode 18 | 33:16 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fz6fuUc7chA&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezIEP8QSci0OIS&index=56 |
| Episode 19 | 33:19 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ou1ukng60r0&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezIEP8QSci0OIS&index=57 |
| Episode 20 | 32:50 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kz5pHfry9Uk&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezIEP8QSci0OIS&index=58 |
| Episode 21 | 28:38 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mpw5vI-zm5w&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezIEP8QSci0OIS&index=59 |
| Episode 22 | 36:15 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VEu_JtWbSnk&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezIEP8QSci0OIS&index=60 |
| Episode 23 | 30:46 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MW7q4o7rSAU&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTvDezIEP8QSci0OIS&index=61 |

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| Episode 24 | 25:05 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YW9sNPYvqX8&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTVDezIEP8QScI0OIS&index=62 |
| Episode 25 | 30:21 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tvTCMDIgv8I&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTVDezIEP8QScI0OIS&index=63 |
| Episode 26 | 30:16 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKgAuc5HCWM&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTVDezIEP8QScI0OIS&index=64 |
| Episode 27 | 32:42 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gf4SFI4sjC4&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTVDezIEP8QScI0OIS&index=65 |
| Episode 28 | 32:41 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ii6PjYFuw2c&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTVDezIEP8QScI0OIS&index=66 |
| Episode 29 | 34:13 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cpmp-InpBrk&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTVDezIEP8QScI0OIS&index=67 |
| Episode 30 | 28:36 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WVuPLsjcH_o&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTVDezIEP8QScI0OIS&index=68 |
| Episode 31 | 36:40 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=06k4HcZvAnE&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTVDezIEP8QScI0OIS&index=69 |
| Episode 32 | 34:59 | https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zsQjYlsFgNA&list=PL8Pra97AUsbuj_5QTVDezIEP8QScI0OIS&index=70 |