

Charlotte Ross, University of Birmingham

c.e.ross@bham.ac.uk

Queering spaces in Turin¹

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Abstract

This article engages with scholarship on the sexualisation and queering of public spaces, drawing on ethnographic research carried out in LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer) communities in Turin in 2006, the year in which the city hosted ‘Pride Nazionale’. In the Italian context, problematically heteronormative forms of sexuality are ever-present in the media, while sexual minorities face a hostile climate in which their rights are not yet fully recognised. I argue that this climate has been mitigated by activist initiatives, and forms of inhabiting and occupying space, from everyday socialising, to participation in specific cultural activities, to large-scale demonstrations, which all contribute to ‘queerings’ of space. The article further suggests that the queering of space enables community building, increases the visibility and status of minority populations, and is a vital means to achieving greater livability. However, this queering is often temporary, amounting only to a ‘tactic’ rather than a ‘strategy’, to use de Certeau’s terminology.

Introduction

This article contributes to ongoing discussions of how LGBTQ subjects inhabit, occupy and resignify public and private spaces in Italy.² I begin by providing a general sketch

of discourses on sexuality in Italy, and introducing key theoretical concepts. I then devote the rest of the article to my case study: queer(ing) spaces in Turin.

Social spaces are never neutral, but are always codified: ‘space is not an innocent backdrop to position, it is itself filled with politics and ideology’, teeming with discourses that govern the ways in which individuals inhabit and perceive it.³ This non-neutrality is particularly evident when we consider sexuality in relation to spatial locations. As documented by sexologists, philosophers and cultural critics,⁴ the regulation of sexuality in both public and private spaces has historically aroused a great deal of anxiety, much of which has resulted in the imposition of heteronormative understandings of what constitute ‘acceptable’ and ‘healthy’ expressions of sexuality. In Italy, as has been widely noted, attitudes towards sexuality remain heavily influenced by two main, powerful discursive contexts : on the one hand, the Italian media is saturated by hyperbolic depictions of a problematically heteronormative, permanently available, and increasingly voiceless and younger female sexual subject;⁵ on the other hand, the Vatican’s position on sexuality continues to privilege the heteronormative family and condemn sexual minorities (Wanrooij 2004 : 173-91 ; Barbagli et al. 2010 : 292). Moreover, research has shown that homophobia persists even amongst the younger generations, with potentially fatal consequences: of those interviewed in a 1998 study, 48% had suffered from physical violence at the hands of their schoolmates due to their sexual orientation, and 14% of all those interviewed has attempted suicide.⁶ Political discourses continue to compound this situation. Silvio Berlusconi has uttered many offensive and homophobic statements, and has failed to react to more extreme homophobic pronouncements by figures of authority : for example he did not take issue when in 2007, Giancarlo Gentilini, vice-mayor of Treviso, spoke openly about the need to perform ‘pulizia etnica’ on gay men (Anon. 2007), implicitly sanctioning this view.⁷

Critical debates suggest that this kind of normative discursive context has an almost tangible impact on spaces and the ways in which we are able to inhabit them. Drawing on Judith Butler's theories of gender identity and sexuality as 'performative' (1990), Bell and Valentine argue that social spaces are '*produced* as (ambiently) heterosexual, heterosexist and heteronormative' (1995 : 18, original emphasis), which certainly seems to be the case in contemporary Italy. Butler's 'heterosexual matrix' (1990: 42) is a discursive set of norms—in the Foucaultian sense—circulating in and through socio-cultural spaces, that impact in concrete ways on our bodies, what we do with them, with whom, and where. It is nevertheless possible to destabilise this heterosexist codification of space, Bell and Valentine propose, through the presence of 'queer' bodies or cultural forms—phenomena that in their non-adherence to heterosexual norms first of all reveal the matrix of assumptions at work in apparently 'neutral' spaces, and second, disrupt the presumed stability of such assumptions. For example, they argue that 'the heterosexing of space is [...] destabilised by the mere presence of invisibilised sexualities' (1995 : 18). Such destabilization has arguably been strengthened by the significant shift in recent decades in the way that LGBTQ individuals present their sexualities in public. Referring to the US, Andrew Sullivan notes that 'the old public-private distinction [...] in which homosexuals committed sexual acts in private and concealed this from public view' has been replaced: 'a new public-private distinction emerges: homosexuals claim publicly that they are gay' (1996 : 129-30). In Italy, we might think of the fashion designers Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana's openness about their sexuality (Duncan 2006: 1).

In this article, a case study on the northern city of Turin, I examine the ways in which LGBTQ individuals and groups in this particular context have worked to destabilise spaces perceived as heteronormative by publicly insisting on the recognition and validation of their presence within them.⁸ This disruption can be understood as a process of 'queering' space, of

freeing up multiple (non-normative) modalities of use and existence which it may enable or host. As Judith Halberstam argues, this process impacts not only on engagements with the spaces themselves but specifically on those who use them: 'queer space' derives from 'new understandings of space enabled by the production of queer counterpublics' (2005 : 6). Notions of public and private space are highly relevant to the discussion that follows, but given Halberstam's point—reflecting that made by Bell and Valentine—that spaces are queered, at least in part, by the *people* within them, any dichotomous understanding of private/public is itself unfurled. Just as understandings of the distinction between homo/heterosexuality as neat or straightforward have been deconstructed, largely by debates around bisexuality and queer identities, so too the private/public split hovers uncertainly as the boundaries between these spaces are complicated by a variety of factors.⁹ As people move from one 'type' of space to another, in addition to deplacing their physical, sexed, selves, they carry with them their sexual identities and experiences, as well as the multitudinous other elements of identity that co-exist alongside these specific aspects of personhood. Thus the 'transportable' spaces of the body are also relevant here.

My analysis of the 'queering' of space in Turin, is based on on a set of interviews I carried out with a group of LGBTQ activists in March and June 2006.¹⁰ The perspectives reported here are therefore not representative of the LGBTQ population as a whole, but only of a select number of individuals ; however, these individuals are all engaged in social, cultural and political activities around LGBTQ experiences, rights and identities—activities which enable and often deliberately effect queerings of space. There were several reasons why I chose to conduct this research in Turin at this particular moment. First, while being a city with a monarchist heritage, characterised by a reputation for understatement (Culicchia 2005 : 87), Turin has also been home to the activist group the 'Fronte Universale Omosessuale Rivoluzionario Italiano' (FUORI), founded in 1971, and the longest running

annual celebration of LGBTQ culture in Italy, the Festival of Gay and Lesbian Cinema, ‘Da Sodoma a Hollywood’, first held in 1985.¹¹ In addition, in 2006 Turin hosted ‘Pride Nazionale’, an annual, roaming event established in 1994, to ensure greater visibility and attendance at Pride events, especially in cities where LGBTQ visibility is lacking, and to create cohesion among LGBTQ communities in different cities. During 2006 in Turin, the committee organised a series of events designed to celebrate pride in LGBTQ identities, to raise the profile of LGBTQ contributions to socio-cultural practices, and to campaign for improved rights for LGBTQ individuals, most specifically through the proposed PACS legislation (the ‘Patto Civile di Solidarietà’, a formal recognition of same-sex partnerships).¹²

In what follows, I briefly discuss the views of LGBTQ individuals living in Turin on the LGBTQ (and non-) spaces available to them in this urban setting, and explore the ways in which both the committee and LGBTQ individuals sought to ‘queer’ public spaces through Pride events. I argue that the events of Pride Nazionale and the modalities of inhabiting a range of city spaces enacted by the LGBTQ population did indeed effect a queering of a range of spaces, often in a temporary but symbolically significant way, increasing visibility and enabling, for some, a burgeoning sense of community. While recognising that the notion of an ‘LGBTQ community’ is potentially problematic, as noted by queer scholars as well as by the individuals I interviewed, since it may imply or lead to forms of self-ghettoisation, or to the invisibilising of certain populations gathered under this hold-all umbrella, for example, I suggest that the ‘real’ and ‘imagined’ LGBTQ communities that are enabled by and may inhabit queer spaces nevertheless play a vital role in the struggle for LGBTQ rights and sexual freedoms.¹³ Although arguably these communities should remain open and evolving rather than calcifying into a rigid social group, they can work powerfully to destabilise normative codifications of spaces and of the bodies that move within them.¹⁴ However, if the dominant discursive regime heteronormative, such destabilizations, while important, may, to use Michel

de Certeau's terminology, be limited to 'tactics', rather than constituting a more substantial 'strategy' of subversion. De Certeau argues that 'strategies are able to produce, tabulate, and impose these spaces, when those operations take place, whereas tactics can only use, manipulate, and divert these spaces' (1984: 30). It is my hypothesis that the LGBTQ population in Italy does not yet have the ability to strategise, but only to deploy tactics in certain determined spaces, and at certain determined times. This is borne out by tragic reminders that the consequences of public declarations of LGBTQ identities may differ drastically and potentially fatally depending on how, by whom and in what context they are undertaken.¹⁵

LGBTQ Spaces in Turin

Turin is a city, an urban space characterized by critics as a 'world of strangers', in which people relate to one another as surfaces, and engage in a sexuality characterized and enabled by anonymity, consumption, rapidity, motion, restlessness (Bech 2002: 31). Urban spaces have also historically exerted significant 'pull' factors for non-heterosexual individuals, influencing patterns of rural to urban migration and enabling the affirmation of both a queer and a metropolitan identity: 'coming out and developing a gay identity has commonly gone hand in hand with becoming a sophisticated urban dweller at ease with urban life' (Binnie, 2000: 172).¹⁶ This was borne out by interviewees. For Maura, originally from Puglia, the relative anonymity of Turin as a northern Italian city has been a relief: in Bari, she comments, 'la gente fa troppo gli affari tuoi. Bisogna nascondere tutto', especially homosexuality.¹⁷ Similarly, Franco, from a village of 300 people in rural Sicily, spoke of the homophobic (and other) surveillance in operation in his village, explaining that it was impossible to be 'different' there in any way, 'perchè in quel posto lì non c'era mai spazio'. Here we see examples of the heterosexual matrix of normative discourse penetrating from the public into

the private realm, colonising spaces of possible difference, and potentially impacting not only on one's presentation of self but also ultimately on self-perception via internalised homophobia. Franco and Maura might have found a relative respite from prying eyes in Turin, due to its recent history as a left-leaning 'laboratorio', a city that produced FUORI, amongst other initiatives,¹⁸ yet, as another interviewee commented, despite being 'generalmente intesa come città gay', for many who have lived there all their lives it remains 'provincial', lacking the LGBTQ appeal of Milan, for example.

Sociological studies of LGBTQ experiences in Italy attest that this population increases with the degree of urbanisation. As a result, it is estimated that Turin, along with the other twelve urban centres that constitute the country's metropolitan areas (Milan, Venice, Genoa, Bologna, Florence, Rome, Naples, Bari, Palermo, Catania, Cagliari), boasts approximately double the LGBT population of a town of 10-50,000 inhabitants.¹⁹ Moreover, scholars argue that 'Torino si colloca, dopo Milano e Roma, come la città italiana con una più ampia offerta di locali omosessuali con funzioni sociali e ricreative' (Saraceno et al.; 2003 : 159). Since surveys of the LGBTQ population rely heavily on individuals' willingness to discuss their sexuality, it is unclear whether the urban context 'facilitates' the decision to declare oneself as LGBTQ, or whether the higher population of LGBTQ individuals within cities is the result of internal migration, as in the case of Franco and Maura. What remains uncontested is the lack of designated LGBTQ spaces in rural areas, and the consequent pull of the city on those outside its bounds, whose local areas do not provide spaces in which to fully embody their LGBTQ identities. The constant threat of physical or verbal abuse, or of exclusion, is a daily reality for many LGBTQ individuals, to the extent that 'al fine di evitare le sanzioni, si sforzano a comportarsi secondo aspettative etero-normative' (Ruspini 2005 : 13). Andrea Benedino, who collaborates with the organisation 'Ivrea la gaya', explained that 'a Torino vengono da tutta la provincia per i locali; le associazioni gay e lesbiche Torinesi

sono in realtà un punto di riferimento per tutto il Piemonte'.²⁰ These LGBTQ spaces—bars, nightclubs, cultural and community associations, Arci centres—are vital, he continued, because they are 'locali e luoghi di socializzazione dove le persone possano sentirsi se stessi liberamente senza subire discriminazioni [...dove] si sentono se stessi fino in fondo'.²¹

As regards LGBTQ spaces in the city, views expressed by those interviewed were inevitably varied due to the diversity of potential needs, desires and expectations encompassed by the constantly shifting constituency indicated by the acronym LGBTQ.²² Some are looking to meet people; others are seeking political solidarity; some want to be undisturbed by the homophobia of others, or to achieve personal and collective insights into identity: 'ci troviamo fra di noi per capirci meglio'. For those who are just in the process of coming out for the first time, the mere existence of supportive, 'safe' spaces can be crucial. Giulia, an active member of the lesbian group 'L' Altramartedì' which meets weekly at the Circolo Maurice explained :

una donna mi ha mandato un messaggio dicendo che le faceva stare meglio il fatto che ci fosse l' Altramartedì quando ci stavano le donne qui...il fatto che ci sia una struttura che ti sostiene e nella quale puoi incontrare delle persone è fondamentale.

Aside from this more 'protective' function of LGBTQ spaces, which may be extremely important to LGBTQ individual who feel isolated,²³ it is generally recognised that in Turin, as elsewhere, for a variety of socio-cultural and economic reasons, gay men and lesbians seek different social spaces for different ends; men are more likely to frequent 'public' spaces, such as nightclubs and bars, in which the main goal may be a sexual encounter, while women are more likely to develop networks of solidarity, often in private, domestic settings: 'è più solito tra donne di dire "stasera ci vediamo a cena"; sono rapporti fra amiche' (Giulia).²⁴ Consequently, lesbians in Turin have historically tended to be less interested in—and less

successful at—‘colonising’ public spaces than gay men. Whilst gay men make their mark in more concrete terms with established clubs and bars, ‘lesbian’ evenings (or more often in Italy ‘serate per sole donne’) are often itinerant, temporarily hosted by available spaces. Lesbians may thus ‘leave no trace of their sexualities on the landscape’ (Bell and Valentine 1995 : 6), even linguistically, potentially reducing their political visibility and power. This itinerance is certainly evident in Turin, as aside from a couple of designated ‘serate’ on Wednesday and Sunday evenings, ‘l’unica associazione dove c’è un gruppo lesbico visibile è Il Circolo Maurice’ (Paola), and even that only meets one evening per week, under a banner that does not include the word ‘lesbian’.²⁵ In light of this, several individuals I spoke to who identified as lesbian, as well as Benedino, argued that more designated spaces were needed. Others expressed different views, seeing LGBTQ spaces and especially the notion of a ‘gay village’, as in San Francisco or New York, for example, as self-ghettoisation.

Ghettos are problematic because they ‘set gay men [and women] apart from fellow citizens so that they run the risk of making their status as a scorned minority a permanent one’ (Sibalis 1999:11). Among those I interviewed, approaches to this issue varied significantly. Franco assumed a rather utilitarian, self-protective position, arguing that LGBTQ spaces can be the surest context in which to meet a new partner while avoiding potentially volatile confrontations with heterosexual/homophobic individuals:

Per me i locali gay inizialmente qualche anno fa potevo pensare a ghettizzazione ma ora funziona così; mi posso permettere di andare in tutti i locali che voglio, etero, gay, di tutto. Il locale gay mi serve poi, se voglio conoscere qualcuno e non voglio perdere del tempo. Quello è un posto gay e allora troverò delle persone gay, e se dico a qualcuno ‘ciao, mi chiamo Franco’, magari non gli viene di allontanarsi. Più che nascondersi è un’opportunità.

The unarticulated implications here are that while Franco is free to socialise wherever he chooses, he may engage in a partial or total masking of his gay identity in ‘neutral’ (heteronormative) spaces; this seems to derive from the possibility of rejection (and in extreme cases also of physical attack) when approaching an unknown individual in a non-LGBTQ (friendly) space. In contrast, several lesbians felt that ‘un locale non è un gran che. È il rapporto lo spazio dove riesci ad esprimerti meglio. Se vuoi stare in uno spazio lesbico te lo crei anche’ (Valeria). Lesbian, and queer spaces, then, can be created spontaneously, by those physically inhabiting them in that moment, and relate to experiences as much as to concrete locations. Valeria’s comments resound with the critical perspectives cited above on the temporary queering of spaces tacitly understood as ‘heterosexual’, opening the way for a more fluid interaction of bodies, spaces and sexualities. However, it is arguably significantly more difficult to spontaneously create queer space where a community base is lacking, and where there are no or very few recognizable LGBTQ public spaces.

In terms of the development of community and activist networks, LGBTQ spaces can act as a vital stepping-stone in the process of claiming socio-political rights. Guy Hocquenghem has summarised the importance of a sense of ‘community’ in the French context:

We don’t have a gay community in France. That is, we have a gay movement—with several organizations working actively for political rights, as in all the Western countries—but people do not feel part of a *community*, nor do they live together in certain parts of the city, as they do...in New York City or in San Francisco, for example. And this is the most important difference and the most significant aspect of gay life in the US : not only having a ‘movement’ but having a sense of community—even if it takes the form of ‘ghettos’—because it is the basis for anything else’. (Cited in Sibalís 1999 : 31)

While this refers to the France of 1980, it seems to hold relevance for contemporary Italy. The Italian scholar Giovanni Dall’Orto gives short shrift to the proliferation of ‘communities’ in the US, for example, and notes that ‘in Italia invece ogni omosessuale è parte di un moto centrifugo e tende a fuggire da una comunità’ (Dall’Orto 2000 : 18). This perception is perhaps due to the Italian cultural valorisation of the (heteronormative) family, or nostalgic visions of the ‘paese’ as offering the ideal community, combined with a lack of LGBTQ visibility in Italy as a whole. One lesbian interviewee explained:

Non ho la minima sensazione che possa esistere la comunità [LGBTQ in Italia]. Per me la comunità è quando vado al paese di mio padre che è un paesino piccolo toscano dove hanno le chiavi di casa attaccate alla porta.

Possible consequences of a lack of a sense of community include isolation of individuals and a low socio-cultural and political profile. If a social group is not recognised, Dall’Orto continues, echoing arguments put forward by Butler, its members can’t fight for their rights.²⁶ For this purpose, the Arci space of the Circolo Maurice proved vital for the organisation of Pride 2006, as one lesbian interviewee explained : ‘perché altri spazi dove ci si incontra, si prende l’appertivo ce ne sono, però questo comunque è uno spazio associativo dove ci si costruisce assieme un progetto’.

The Circolo Maurice certainly held great importance to all those I spoke to, as both a social and community space, which fostered a sense of unity and personal affirmation. This was particularly the case for lesbian interviewees, who commented: ‘Che ci sia una realtà di accoglienza che crea comunità è fondamentale’ ; ‘Sento la differenza dopo aver frequentato il Circolo e di aver parlato del lesbismo’. However, those I spoke to were active, ‘out’ LGBTQ individuals who frequently spend time in the LGBTQ spaces of the city, and are therefore not representative of the city’s LGBTQ population as a whole, much of which, it was felt,

remains invisible. A lesbian interviewee commented : ‘Secondo me la gente se ne sta in casa in silenzio. Si fa la sua vita...siamo poco visibili nel senso che ci sono molti più lesbiche e gay [invisibili]’. If, as Hocquenghem argues, community ‘is the basis for anything else’, then it is from the establishment of LGBTQ spaces and through fostering a sense of unity that ‘anything else’ may be achieved, whether this is activist lobbying for improved rights and legal protection, or the possibility of spontaneously, and productively, queering space. Reflecting on Paris, Michael Sibalís (1999: 10) wrote that ‘today’s gay visibility is the culmination of a long process by which homosexuals not only created and expanded private gay space, but also struggled to secure a share of public space’. This might be seen as one step towards being able not only to deploy ‘tactics’ in occupying and resignifying space, but in being able to develop rich and lasting ‘strategies’ of inhabiting public spaces. As I argue in the next section, the Turin Pride organising committee aimed specifically to continue this struggle by occupying and queering public space in significant ways; moreover in so doing, they created a series of ‘queer counterpublics’ by impacting on the individuals who move in and through spaces, complicating understandings of the public/private and hetero/homosexual dichotomies.

Pride in Public

For Enzo Cucco, a longstanding LGBTQ activist in Turin and co-ordinator of the Pride committee, the city’s LGBTQ history reveals a significant cultural and political engagement, but prior to 2006 the city risked becoming a stagnant rather than a progressive space: ‘A Torino serviva una scossa, una scossa di ripresa su nuovi temi che il movimento omosessuale deve affrontare in questi anni’. Indeed, that had been no Pride parade since 1981. Seeking to effect a sea change in terms of visibility and cultural participation, the committee devised a year long schedule of events ranging from a commemoration of those who died in the

Holocaust to conferences discussing the rights of transsexuals, or the ‘Città amiche’²⁷ with which Turin is forging LGBTQ activist networks, asserting its status as an ‘LGBT metropolis’.²⁸ In Cucco’s view, the LGBTQ population in Turin lacks visibility and is therefore effectively muted and effaced from the cityscape:

C’è questa vasta area di persone e di cittadini che non sa di avere il vicino omosessuale, o la vicina lesbica, e non ha mai riflettuto sulle eventuali conseguenze che derivano dal fatto di vivere in un contesto dove non puoi dire di essere gay or lesbica.

Rather than relegating LGBTQ individuals to a form of ‘ghetto’, Cucco hoped to celebrate a range of LGBTQ cultural activities and reveal how ‘transversal’ this population is. The political campaigns focussed on ‘Uguali diritti per tutti’, including the rights of same-sex couples to have their relationships officially recognised through civil partnership legislation. The campaigns argued that rights should extend equally to all people, in both their public and private lives, a view echoing the position of the Piedmont Commissione Regionale per la realizzazione delle Pari Opportunità Uomo-donna, that equal rights means enjoying ‘uguali possibilità di affermazione’ whatever one’s sex, gender or sexual identity.²⁹

Franco Grillini, former president of Arcigay, the national association for gay rights,³⁰ has spoken of Pride marches as :

un cammino di luogo in luogo, per portare allo scoperto e rendere più numeroso e visibile il popolo di gay e lesbiche [...]. Con il Gay Pride, un cittadino gay costretto a nascondersi tutto l’anno ha la possibilità di ricostruirsi un’identità positiva. (Trappolin 2005 : 275)

Cucco’s aim went further, recognising that it is not sufficient to have just one day in which to identify publicly as LGBTQ, but it must be possible for people to realise their identity fully all

year round, ‘e dovunque, non solo in determinati spazi’. The programme of events strove specifically to ensure an LGBTQ presence in a variety of public space, in a process that Benedino referred to as ‘infiltrazione’ or ‘contaminazione’; a queering of (hetero)normative spaces. Aside from his association with ‘Ivrea la gaya’, Benedino was in 2006 also spokesperson for Gayleft, the LGBTQ group within the Democratici di Sinistra, and was a member of and spokesperson for the Turin Pride committee. He spoke of the need to open up ‘un’area di contaminazione tra i mondi eterosessuale e omosessuale’, another form of transversality, that would enable the LGBTQ population to merge into, infiltrate or become part of the dominant social realm in some way. The committee therefore ensured an evident LGBTQ presence at established Turinese events such as ‘Settembre musica’ and the ‘Fiera del libro’ (4-8 May).³¹ In Benedino’s vision, LGBTQ activity queers cultural spaces and events, inserting a new element alongside existing practices. This in turn forces a new awareness of diverse cultural, social and sexual identities, altering the original content and context of the event and encouraging reflection on the ‘queer counterpublics’ within the audience.

To further assert the presence of the LGBTQ population, the committee produced a map, purporting to be the first of its kind of Italy, showing LGBTQ and ‘friendly’ establishments such as bars, cultural centres, restaurants, saunas and bookshops. While this may be helpful to a visitor who doesn’t know Turin, reactions to the map amongst interviewees were quite mixed, some finding it surprising, since it lists as ‘friendly’ many establishments which interviewees did not recognise as being such, others accusing it of ‘ghettoizing’ an implied LGBTQ community. In broad terms we can understand the map as a text that seeks to assert, and perhaps legitimise the presence of LGBTQ Turin, its communities and its spaces. The map also queers official recordings of the cityscape, presenting an ‘alternative’ way of inhabiting this urban environment, supplementing existing documentation of the city’s principal socio-cultural attractions with the invisibilised itineraries of LGBTQ individuals. As

regards notions of community that transcend the local, the map may also appeal to a more itinerant LGBTQ population, notably LGBTQ tourists and visitors to the city, alerting them to and inviting them to connect with an LGBTQ presence in Turin, evoking the ‘imagined’ LGBTQ community. Whether it is a ‘true’ or ‘accurate’ representation of individual experience seems less important than the symbolic fact that this ‘underside of the map of domination’ is beginning to be made recognisable to mainstream society (Pile, cited in Halberstam 2005: 1).

Notions of queer space are also supremely relevant in relation to the actual parade, the moment of major visibility. Lesbian interviewees emphasised that ‘questa cosa di occupare lo spazio pubblico sicuramente è importante’. This occupation was described as a queer contamination as LGBTQ communities make themselves actively present in the public realm:

Il corteo è una parte significativa perchè comunque è il giorno quando entriamo noi nella vita degli altri mentre per le altre iniziative che organizziamo sono gli altri che devono venire; con il corteo entriamo decisamente nella collettività della vita.

Likewise, Benedino emphasised the importance of parading ‘nel salotto della città’: areas of central Turin are often referred to as the ‘salotto’, since much social life goes on in the streets, piazzas and under the porticos. Benedino’s reference to the Turinese ‘salotto’ takes on further significance when we consider the collapsing of private/domestic space into the public/external realm inferred by this moniker, especially in light of the Pride parade understood as public affirmation of the right to enjoy certain forms of intimate relationship.³² Notably, this ‘contamination’ of ‘other people’s lives’ is far from uni-directional; all those I interviewed expressed a strong desire that the Pride parade and all the Pride events should be openly accessible, as reflected in the comment that ‘il Pride a Torino non vuole essere esclusivo dell’omosessualità, ma comunque l’aggregazione del colore. Il mondo GLBT con

l'eterosessualità'. Not only were heterosexual families, for example, very much in evidence during the event (17 June, 2006), but an open invitation was extended to all present to join one of the post-parade parties on the Murazzi, the promenade along the Po River. The only condition to attending these parties was that in order to inhabit the (temporarily) queer space of the host venue, guests should leave their prejudices at the door (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1 (Photo : author's own)

The slogan, 'Lasciate ogni machismo o voi che entrate', evokes the well-known exhortation from Dante's *Inferno*, 'Lasciate ogni speranza o voi ch'entrate'.³³ It is a 'queering' of Dante's text which converts a lack of hope into possibilities for progressive social harmony; it evokes and challenges pejorative, stereotypical notions of gay clubs as hellish dens of iniquity full of tortured souls, while proposing a space that might liberate those who enter from the weight of prejudice ; it also 'queers' any normative notions of Dante's reading public through the evocation of the LGBTQ reading counterpublic of the *Commedia*, emphasising a shared cultural heritage among diverse social groups.

A further example of queering space is the conference held on 19 June 2006 in the Aula Magna del Rettorato of the Università degli studi di Torino, which included sustained

discussion of the rights of transsexuals. This august setting, decorated with images of Catholic iconography, became a space in which to discuss and celebrate transsexual activism in Italy, and in Piedmont in particular (see Fig. 2).



Fig. 2 (Photo : author's own)

Vladimir Luxuria, the openly transsexual Deputy for Rifondazione Comunista and one of the invited speakers, highlighted the fact that Turin University has granted transsexual students the right to two 'libretti', one inscribed with their birth identity and the other with their desired/lived identity, thus avoiding potential exposure to transphobic prejudice for transsexual students during oral examinations, for example.³⁴ Moments like this, and Valeria's spontaneous creation of lesbian space, make the map seem rather rigid and pedestrian. Yet the political significance of asserting a mappable community, and of claiming a share of public space, should not be underestimated, since these initiatives risk being swiftly, palimpsestically overlaid by dominant, heteronormative discourses.

Conclusions

The LGBTQ community in Italy has been described as 'la comunità omosessuale che non c'è' (Ramina 2000 : 45). There are many possible reasons why this may be felt to be the case,

ranging from the invisibility of LGBTQ people in public spaces and institutions, to the social taboos which discourage discussion of LGBTQ issues, to a desire not to reinforce problematic notions of LGBTQ individuals as ‘other’—as requiring and constituting a separate community from mainstream society. The notion of community, it should be remembered, means different things to different people. Some would rather not be categorised as part of a group, even if it is one that by its very nature celebrates diversity and non-conformity; others rely on a sense of collective identity and draw great strength and comfort from it. Importantly though, as Hocquenghem points out, asserting the existence of a community opens the way to achieving more substantial social recognition, rights and freedoms. Asserting one’s right to exist freely in public, as well as in private spaces, is a vital step if one is to be able to contribute to shaping and fully participating in the action which takes place in these spaces. Wide-ranging programmes of cultural events such as that organised for Torino Pride Nazionale 2006, demonstrate the ubiquitous character of LGBTQ individuals and argue for their inclusion in and recognition across society as a whole.

The LGBTQ population of Turin, and all those from outside the city who attended the events of Pride Nazionale, effected a queering of the city’s streets and institutions, of its residents and their imaginaries. The spaces that were queered were both material and immaterial, and the effects will have been both temporary and permanent. Vitally, the queering of space can be a way to assert a sense of community, without imposing a particular form of identity; this in turn may open up the way to more spontaneous queerings of space, and encourage an increased fluidity between received categories of gendered and sexual identity. A few years on from Pride Nazionale, some important developments have occurred : the vital space of the Circolo Maurice has been transformed, as the association now inhabits new, larger, more prominent and accessible premises.³⁵ However, since the overall context in Italy remains largely hostile, and the political campaigns of the early 2000s for Pacs and other

forms of civil partnership have failed to achieve the desired legislative changes, it seems that the LGBTQ population in Italy is still somewhat limited to developing ‘tactics’ rather than being able to enjoy the greater ability to make their mark on public spaces that results from the deployment of ‘strategies’. It is to be hoped that in the coming months and years this situation will change, but given current political turmoils this cannot be taken for granted. This article represents a limited analysis of the ways in which LGBTQ individuals may, can and do inhabit public spaces in Turin. It is certainly not claiming to paint a definitive picture, but rather is intended as point of departure for further, future research, that, I hope, will tackle the questions I have begun to engage with here in more depth.

Endnotes

¹¹ This essay developed from a paper given at the SIS conference on ‘Private and Public Spaces in Italian Culture’, April 2006. My research in Turin also led to another publication (Ross 2008).

² See, for example, the special issue of *Omosapiens* (vol. 2), on ‘Spazi e identità queer’ (Antosa 2007), in particular Helen Ibry’s ‘Percorsi di formazione dell’identità lesbica: un’etnografia’. A recent conference was held on this issue in Milan, ‘Lo spazio della differenza: <http://www.formazione.unimib.it/default.asp?idPagine=637>.

³ Keith Pile, cited in Bell and Valentine 1995: 18.

⁴ See the work of Michel Foucault and Jeffrey Weeks, for example.

⁵ See Zanardo, www.ilcorpodelledonne.net and 2010 for a discussion of the narrow and pernicious forms of female sexuality privileged on Italian mainstream television.

⁶ Research carried out in 1998 by Azione gay e lesbica, Florence. See Graziella Bertozzo’s comments in Anna Gonella, *Omosessuali e transessuali a Torino* (Turin: Citta di Torino, 2003), 59-63.

⁷ See Ross 2009 for a discussion of how Berlusconi was seen by the LGBT movement in Italy between 2001-06, and the strategies of resistance they adopted to government legislation on and discussion of sexualities and sexual minorities.

⁸ In this essay I use the acronym LGBTQ, since I find it productively inclusive, especially given my interest in the queering of space. Some of those I interviewed used the acronym LGBT or GLBT to describe themselves or activist/community groupings. The reclaimed term ‘queer’ is used in Italy despite its anglophone origins, but, as in other contexts, is regarded by some with ambivalence. For a discussion of the reception of the term and queer theory in Italy, see Pustianaz (ed.) 2010.

⁹ See Bell (1995), who refers to Jo Eadie’s (1992) analysis of Roland Barthes’ *S/Z* and the panic caused by anything that might transgress across the slash.

¹⁰ I interviewed several members of the Pride committee, as well as 12 LGBTQ individuals who volunteered to speak with me. Contact was made through the Circolo Maurice, an Arci centre established in 1985 whose premises are the focus of LGBTQ community life and activities in Turin. The names of the interviewees, where they are used, have been changed to protect anonymity. Members of the publicly visible Pride committee agreed to be mentioned by name. I’d like to thank everyone who so generously gave up their time to speak to me.

¹¹ For an account of the founding and activities of FUORI, and the development of gay rights activism in Italy see Cristallo 1996 and Rossi Barilli 1999.

¹² At the time of writing, the proposed PACS legislation, originally based on the French PACS, has not been passed. It has replaced by other proposed forms of civil union (e.g. DICO), none of which have been approved. For an account of the political struggles around this legislation in 2007, see the award-winning documentary *Improvvisamente l'inverno scorso* (Hofer and Ragazzi 2009):

<http://www.suddenlylastwinter.com/improvvisamente/>

¹³ The notion of 'imagined communities', developed by Benedict Anderson (1991) in relation to discourses of national identity, has been adapted by several scholars in their work on LGBTQ identities. See Weston 1998: 130; Ibry 2007: 57.

¹⁴ Similarly, in her work on lesbian spaces, Alison Eves argues that 'visibility can disrupt heteronormative hegemony' (2004 : 482).

¹⁵ To cite just one example, a young man of 22 took his own life in November 2007 because of homophobic discrimination. See <http://www.queerway.it/dblog/articolo.asp?articolo=691#>.

¹⁶ See also Aldrich 2004 for a discussion of 'Homosexuality and the City'.

¹⁷ Here it is worth noting that Bari hosted Pride Nazionale in 2003, and the openly gay politician Nichi Vendola was elected as President of the Region of Apulia in 2005. It remains to be seen whether his presence and public profile will have a lasting impact on attitudes to sexuality in the city and the region.

¹⁸ Interview with Enzo Cucco, co-ordinator of the Turin Pride Committee.

¹⁹ Barbagli and Colombo (2001): 189. They note that 'le differenze [between urban and rural LGBT populations] sono leggermente più marcate nel Mezzogiorno' (190).

²⁰ Personal interview.

²¹ Arci (Associazione Ricreativa e Culturale Italiana) is a left-leaning association promoting social and cultural activities as well as civic engagement. See www.arci.it

²² Due to the diversity of any LGBTQ population, it is impossible to discuss in depth the multitudinous ways in which space may be used. For clarity, and due to the prevalently lesbian/gay male identities of the interviewees and committee members I spoke with, I devote more attention to issues affecting these particular groups. Bisexual and transsexual populations are notably less visible and more marginalised than lesbians (See Firestein 1996; Namaste 2000). However, as discussed in due course, issues affecting transsexuals were highlighted during Pride events in Turin.

²³ For example, for a gay male perspective on isolation and the importance of welcoming LGBTQ spaces see Sandro's comments, Saraceno et al. 2003 : 153.

²⁴ See also Saraceno et al. 2003 :164. I certainly do not wish to suggest that lesbians are less sexually active than gay men, and would prefer to avoid blanket categories that are potentially reductive; however studies have shown that lesbians and gay men do tend to use spaces differently (see Rothenberg 1995, and on Italy, Barbagli and Colombo 2001 : 164-66).

²⁵ Barbagli and Colombo attribute this to two factors: first, Italian lesbian communities are often strongly rooted in the feminist (separatist) movement where the category of 'donna' is key; and second, a reluctance to use the term 'lesbico' (2001 : 165). Ambivalence towards the term 'lesbian' is also identified and discussed in the text *Cocktail d'amore* (2005), a study of the 'lesbian' population in Italy based on a survey conducted by the group Soggettività Lesbica in 2001.

²⁶ See Dall'Orto 2000 : 18; Butler 2005 : 31.

²⁷ The conference 'Fascismo e omosessualità : la persecuzioni degli omosessuali in Italia' was held at the Museo Diffuso della Resistenza, 26 January 2006; 'Città amiche, friendly cities, villes amies' was held at the Centro Congressi Regione Piemonte, 16 June 2006; 'Omossessualità/transessualità/transgenderismo. Quali azioni positive per le pari opportunità' was held in the Aula Magna del Rettorato of the Università degli studi di Torino, 19 June 2006.

²⁸ For Benedino, the lack of LGBTQ spaces in the city and invisibility of the LGBTQ population stem from the fact that 'Torino non è ancora una metropoli'; he saw the events of Pride 2006, and the city's successful hosting of the 2006 Winter Olympics as an opportunity to move more firmly towards achieving full metropolitan status.

²⁹ Comment by Maria Grazia Pellerino, during the 2002 conference 'Omossessuali e transessuali a Torino'; see Gonella 2002 : 15.

³⁰ See www.arcigay.it.

³¹ The London Gay Men's Chorus performed in 'Settembre musica', at the Auditorium Giovanni Agnelli Lingotto, 12 September, 2006; two recent publications were discussed in particular at the 'Fiera del libro', Giartosio and Goeretti's *La città e l'isola. Omossessuali al confino nell'Italia fascista* (2006) and Cecchi Paone's *A viso aperto. Dopo il coming out: lettere da un continente sommerso* (2006).

³² Giuseppe Culicchia's book *Torino è casa mia* plays on this understanding of Turin as an enlarged domestic space, even including a map showing the different 'rooms' of the city as he understands them. There is no

significant reference to the contemporary LGBTQ community, and the inevitably gendered and sexed forms of inhabiting he narrates have potentially exclusionary implications.

³³ *Inferno* canto 3, line 9.

³⁴ Vladimir Luxuria was an elected Deputy for Rifondazione Comunista from 2006-08. The right to a document indicating the desired, or even post-transition identity of a trans individual is not yet accorded by the Italian government, leaving many people extremely vulnerable and rendering it almost impossible for many to find work, for example. See Crisalide Azione Trans, 'Perchè noi trans al Pride?' prepared for Rome Pride, 16 June 2007: http://www.crisalide-azionetrans.it/romapride2007_volantini.html

³⁵ The new premises are at Via deio Stampatori, 10, and were inaugurated on 12/09/2010. See <http://www.mauriceglbt.org/drupal/>.

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