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School Spaces and Subjecthood in Netflix's *Baby*

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This article explores representations of subjecthood in Netflix's 2018 Italian teen drama *Baby* through a detailed investigation into the ways that the multiple spaces of an elite private high school in Rome's upper class Parioli neighborhood control and are controlled by the students who occupy them. The three-season series, a fictionalized version of a real-life Italian underage prostitution ring in Rome, explores all facets of the teenage lives of its characters, but it is through the space of the school, the hallways, the classrooms, the locker rooms, and the bathrooms, that we get to understand how social regulation works on and against those who depend on its structures. Using cultural geography and queer theory, this analysis explores how the representation of these students in these spaces ultimately reveals the inability of normative structures to understand or educate these students in a way that meets their needs.

> ‘You park your kids here and expect that when they return home, they’ll be polite and prepared for what awaits them in the world, but that’s not how it works’
>
> —Headmaster Fedeli

Netflix’s *Baby* loosely recounts the true story of two teenagers in a posh neighborhood of Rome who were caught up in an underage prostitution ring in 2014. This three-season fictionalized series depicts not only their entrance into and ultimate exit from sex work, but also all the other facets of their teenage lives: friends, crushes, gossip, family drama, and of course school. Through a detailed investigation into the ways that the multiple spaces of Collodi, their elite private high school in Rome’s upper class Parioli neighborhood, control and are controlled by the students who occupy them, this article reveals not only the cultural geographies at the root of subject formation, but perhaps more importantly, the limitations and contradictions of the very social structures that seek to shape these subjects. The students, in performing an agency that challenges the ability of these institutions to serve their purpose, ultimately question the purpose itself, or rather, the normative regulatory practices implied within the school’s purpose.

Our main characters throughout this journey, and the ones accused of underage prostitution, are Chiara Altieri (a student of relative privilege, and only child to a cheating father and a politician mother) and Ludovica Storti (the older of the two, Ludo comes from a single parent household, and her mother’s bad taste in men affects Ludo and her ability to attend Collodi). In the beginning of the series, Chiara is close friends with both Camilla (whose brother Niccolò she is initially secretly having sex with) and Fabio (the soon-to-be out of the closet son of the headmaster). Their lives are turned upside down by two events: the release of a sex tape involving Ludovica, and the arrival of Damiano Younes, the son of an Arab diplomat, weed seller, and resident ‘bad boy.’ Chiara and Camilla begin to grow apart as Chiara and Ludovica start spending time together. Damiano has a fling with Camilla but ends up with Chiara, and Fabio—bullied frequently by schoolmates, and in particular Brando (who later finally comes out himself)—ends up finding his voice and courage through his friendship with Damiano (for whom he also begins selling weed). While much of the action of the show occurs around the city and in the characters’ homes, one of the most prevalent spaces they occupy remains their school.

To look at how these characters fit or how they *mis*-fit within the structures of the school could arguably reveal a kind of moral panic around youth, because the drug dealers, gays, and underage sex workers that populate the school represent the future of Italian society. In many ways, this would be in keeping with the kind of pushback

the series first received.[1] But the representation of this elite private school and the portrayal of the (inter)actions of the characters within its walls reveal more than the future degradation of society as guided by these troubled youth; the degradation lies instead in any faith we may have in the figures and institutions that claim to educate them.

This paper shall consider the space of the school a kind of Foucaultian heterotopia, namely, a place 'designed into the very institution of society … in which the real emplacements, and all other real emplacements that can be found within the culture are, at the same time, represented, contested, and reversed, sorts of places that are outside all places, though they are actually localizable' (1998: 178). The heterotopic space of the school centers on the role of emplacements, namely, 'the relations of proximity between points or elements'; it is a no-place where the relations between objects, persons, and spaces both prove their existence and challenge their relationship to their own interrelation. The school is thus spatial and social; it is outside of social time but is also created to provide a necessary place for all that cannot exist within the social, the spatial, or the temporal. In this way, 'the heterotopias have the role of creating a space of illusion that denounces all real space, all real emplacements within which human life is partitioned off, as being even more illusory' (1998: 184). Put another way, this essay invites the reader to use Foucault's notion of heterotopia to put phenomenology in conversation with queer geography and queer theory more generally; it considers the structures of experience (phenomenology) as normative and/or antinormative loci that require a relationality of the subjectivities within them to have meaning and likewise impose meaning on those very same subjectivities. Thus, the paper considers the characters' interactions with and within Collodi high school to think through how adolescents (as subjectivities-of-becoming) resist and/or reify their imposed sociality. The journey of these students, their existence in the in-between of childhood and adulthood, their negotiation with language, power, and the symbolic, their efforts to perform 'belonging,' serve not as indicators of their own moral ineptitude but to question the very social structures against which their actions push, the school being the ultimate symbol of this socialization.

Written on The Body/Written on The Walls

To begin discussing how the space of the school shapes and reflects the positionality and agency of the students within its walls we must begin precisely there, in, or

[1] See, for example, the condemning statement put out by the National Center on Sexual Exploitation accusing the series of promoting sex trafficking, which can be found here: https://endsexualexploitation.org/articles/netflix-baby-trivializes-teenage-sexual-exploitation/.

rather, on its walls. These are structures that 'contain' the student body, they inform the actions, interactions, and routines. Following the theories of geographer Doreen Massey, Jubas and Lenters show us how: 'place, space, time, and identity become intertwined. In turn, places give rise to personal identities … and entire places develop identities' (2019: 79). The walls make structure and determine experience but the walls themselves also retain significance as surface-objects onto which messages are communicated. In her work *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed frames this relationship by arguing:

> Phenomenology reminds us that spaces are not exterior to bodies; instead, spaces are like a second skin that unfolds in the folds of the body. … Such spaces 'impress' on the body, involving the mark of unfamiliar impressions, which in turn reshapes the body surface. The social also has its skin, as a border that feels and that is shaped by the 'impressions' left by others (2006: 9).

So, to think of the impressions left on the walls is also to think of the way they impress on those who read them. We may say then that the skin of the social is precisely the skin of the student body, the corpus on whose surface the writing occurs. The word 'graffiti' itself comes from the Italian 'graffiare,' meaning to scratch, to scratch on the surface, to etch, to impress; this is a mark that breaks the surface, it impresses upon the boundaries or the flesh of the social body, and it does so in order to show us precisely where those boundaries are and thus all those that 'should' exist outside of it. In other words, the impressions left on these surfaces are the impression left on the school body, and in so far as they visibly (and physically) mark and ostracize those *others* they delineate them as existing outside the skin of the social.[2] It therefore should come as no surprise that three of these writings, more specifically the graffiti written on these walls, may be classified as hate speech.[3] The first occurs in the third episode of the first season when Brando goes into a classroom and graffitis 'shit arab' on Damiano's desk (#Friendzone 2018). The second hate graffiti, which will be addressed in depth later, exists in a stall in the boys' bathroom and reads 'Fedeli Faggot,' though the writing is later changed to 'Headmaster Fedeli Faggot' by Fabio Fedeli, the very person it was about in the first place (Emma 2018). The third instance of hate graffiti is written and later erased by Fabio, who, in an act of revenge against his bully/lover, writes in large

[2] The regulatory practice of marking those *others* whose difference has been deemed dangerous or unacceptable of course has a dark and longstanding tradition across cultures and genocides. Exhibited here are Islamophobic and homophobic markers of cultural acceptance within Italian society.

[3] For a more detailed breakdown of the kinds of graffiti and their socio-cultural interpretations and potentiality see Kaela Jubas and Kimberly Lenters' article 'Extemporaneous Lessons on Place, Space, and Identity: Graffiti as a Pedagogical Disruption' (see References for citation).

letters on the front of the school 'Brando Gay' (Truth or Dare 2019). The other instance of graffiti written about a third party occurs in the boys' locker room. Brando has written 'draw a line if you want to fuck Monica' (the Italian, it should be noted, is more clever with its rhyme scheme), which is accompanied by all the markings of boys who agree that they would like to have sex with Monica, the track coach (Emma 2018). We may include this in the hate-speech category insomuch as, like the other forms of hate speech mentioned above, its objectification of Monica reaffirms the patriarchal norm of women's subservience and positions Monica as a sex object to be consumed at the will/desire of those men-to-be in the boys' locker room. The writing of this graffiti in many ways confirms their roles as men in society, as they signal through socially acknowledged act of 'making their mark' their participation within broader society. Thus, their subjectivity, their existence as subjects within the walls, is confirmed by their visual participation in heterosexual desire to have sex with their track coach.

The last two significant instances of graffiti occur in the first two episodes of the third season, and this time they seem to serve quite a different purpose. In one of the stalls of the girls' bathroom, Chiara finds a note that she believes is for her. It reads, 'for E, don't contact Sofia' (Valentine's Day 2020). The message serves as a warning for Chiara (whose pseudonym is Emma) because Sofia has been detained by the police for underage prostitution. It is as direct as it is anonymous, but what also makes this graffiti exchange different from the others is that it serves to deliver a personal message in a secretive way. After the author of the note writes a follow-up, 'D was the one who talked,' referring to Damiano, Chiara, frustrated that her life is about to unravel and this anonymous tipster is exposing those dear to her as untrustworthy, replies, 'Who the fuck are you?' (April 26th, 1915 2020). This exchange shows us the power at the heart of all the graffiti writing in the show: anonymity and visibility/exposure. The fact that this unknown person knows the details of Chiara's private affairs lends a big brother feel to the events, the anonymity of the writing reminding us that it could be anyone, anywhere, while the fact that the graffiti is in the bathroom stall signals that there is no safe space. School remains a locus of social control, a heterotopic container where students must stay, and be surveilled until they are deemed sufficiently socialized. Scratching/etching at the walls is a physical act of resistance against those structures, and a mark of confirmation of who belongs and who does not. But the walls, and the eyes governing them, remain.

All Eyes On/In the Hallway

The most public and open space of all is the school hallway—the teenage town square, where dirty laundry is aired and public feelings whispered. This social corridor moves bodies as much as it moves information. Lingering happens in groups, in cliques,

standing around placing judgment. Rumors and whispers are visually exacerbated for viewers by the text messages that surround the characters as they walk by, adding more digital gossip to crowd the space. To walk the hall is to be seen, and most significantly to understand how you are seen by peers; it is thus the show's visual power map.

On the one hand, much is communicated in the hallway through silent gestures and exchanges of information. The subtle act of 'making eyes' between characters serves as an acknowledgment of affections for those whose love is secret, as is the case often with Monica the track coach and Niccolò (#Love 2018) and eventually with also Fabio and Brando (Ghosts 2019). The silent note pass is another way communication is conveyed secretly in such an open environment, as with Camilla and Chiara when the two are on the outs but Camilla writes asking for forgiveness (April 26th, 1915 2020).

On the other side of the hallway's spectrum, we have the gestures of posturing and peacocking, both loud and quite performative power plays. Some such actions are subtly communicated though their message punches hard, like when Brando—in a symbolic effort to counteract the rumors of his gayness—walks in slow motion toward his friend group holding Chiara's hand (Truth or Dare 2019). But the most frequent of these gestures are the slut shaming and gay bashing. Slut shaming in fact marks one of the opening scenes of the whole series; small cliques are standing around (Niccolò, Virginia, and his crew in one circle, and Fabio, Camilla, and Chiara in another) when, as Ludovica walks by, Virginia calls her 'cum bucket' (Superpowers 2018). The second episode continues the trend as Camilla, seeing Ludovica, says that she threw centuries of feminism away with the sex tape she made (Puppet 2018). Blaming the victim and slut shaming set the cultural climate of the school. The same thing soon happens when people find out Chiara is sleeping with Niccolò; as she is being called a slut by passersby, she notes that it, indeed, takes two to sleep together, and while Camilla eventually forgives and defends her, the public sentiment remains (Emma 2018).

The gay bashing is the more physical of the hallway abuses. The first episode occurs right near the entrance to the school, where a group of boys encircle Fabio and engage in a game of gay hot potato. Luckily Damiano sees the incident, comes down to break it up, and regardless of the consequences, threatens any of them to a fight if they continue to bully his friend (#justagame 2019). The second and more brutal of the gay bashings occurs in the third episode of season two when Fabio is dragged out into the hall by his peers who insist he is in the wrong bathroom. While the most horrific moments of this bullying occur in the bathroom—which we will address later—the public nature of the hallway heightens the severity of it. The final public homophobic moment is directed at Brando after 'Brando gay' appears on the school wall. The next morning, comments like 'I always knew you were a fag' accompany Brando as he walks down the school hallways (Truth or Dare 2019).

The acts of slut shaming and homophobic bullying (physical and verbal) are acts that socially police teenage bodies, and more specifically with whom and how they explore and engage in sexual acts. If the hallways serves as the public space (mirrored as we have seen by the digital hallways of social media engagement), it stands to reason that they also work in the service of maintaining the standards and regulations of normativity within the heteropatriarchal space of this institution of learning. Thus, the space serves as a kind of physical equivalent to the writing on the walls; the groups gathered reify the heteronormative models of power and expectation, while the secret acts reveal the restrictive nature of this social boundary.

The Locker Room: Dismantling Notions of Privacy

It is in the private or semi-private spaces that we may begin to see that the school does not merely reify the social power structures of the larger society and ostracize those that do not conform; here the agency of the students within its walls begins to show some fissures in the normative legacies the walls exist to sustain. In his queer text 'Epistemology of the locker room,' Broderick D. V. Chow remarks that 'the homosociality of the locker room is accompanied by misogyny and homophobia,' elaborating that, as 'homosocial desire is re-routed through heterosexuality, one might argue that misogynistic and homophobic male bonding in the locker room is an attempt to disavow the overt homoeroticism of the space' (2021: 79). We are witness quite often to displays of sexual bravado which confirm the hetero-maschilinist culture of these spaces, as is the case in the third episode of the first season when Niccolò enters the girls' locker room remarking 'such great memories' and confronts Chiara about her not responding to his texts. Then, caressing her face, he insists they are good together, a bold gesture symbolic of the (hetero)sexual culture (#Friendzone 2018). The other very public performance of normative masculinity comes after Brando has been out of school for several days. Upon his return, he tells Niccolò he is upset Nic didn't visit him. This touching display of vulnerability reveals itself too much in such a public setting, and Niccolò's response is to say that it does not matter because 'faggot Fedeli was there' in his stead, using homosexuality as a tool for leveraging social power (April 26th, 1915 2020). It is the normative posturing that remains most common in the space *when* the space is inhabited 'publicly.'

The moments when the locker room serves as a more private space allow the characters to engage in illicit behaviors, like when student Niccolò and track coach Monica smoke a joint together and make out next to the graffiti about her (#Love 2018). But often students use the intimacy of this space as a manipulative tool, knowing that others will use the space for divulgation. The two occasions when we see this strategy occur are in the second season. The first is when Virginia, knowing that Monica is

sleeping with her boyfriend, intentionally cries in the locker room so that Monica will find her there. When asked what is wrong, Virginia says that she knows Niccolò is cheating on her and that if he dumps her, she will kill herself (Ghosts 2019). The act clearly works because Monica swiftly ends things with Niccolò. The second occurs two episodes later when Chiara is being blackmailed into a relationship with Brando because he has a sex tape of her. Confiding in Camilla, she asks if Camilla can find out Brando's phone password so that she can erase the video. In this moment of confession, Camilla agrees only to out Chiara publicly later, an act that will result in a moment of public sex shame for Chiara. These two instances make evident the public nature of these private spaces, by revealing the privacy to be merely facade, or at the very least unsafe. Chow notes that 'the epistemology of the locker room might therefore be defined as the in-between space between public identity and private acts' (2021: 81), where the spatial delineation of those boundaries proves as socially constructed as it is meaningless. To understand the social frameworks/expectations of the space and to upend them by playing against these rules is to, for these students, claim an agency that challenges normative regulation.

The Bathroom as 'Third Space'

This kind of transgression of normative expectation is again present in the other homosocial space, the bathroom, which serves as perhaps the most vulnerable space on school premises. It is reserved for abject activities, for those most private and personal moments of self-care and need, but it remains a public space, one in which this vulnerability may be publicly regulated, much like the locker room. In this way it is a space of liminality, bordering the public and the private. Susan Fraiman, in analyzing what she terms 'bathroom realism,' remarks of the site:

> Near the bedroom but surpassing it in connotations of fleshiness, fluidity, and vulnerability, the bathroom is claimed by all three of these shows as the realest of real spaces. What is more tied to the rhythms of daily life, to the ordinary and even abject, to a bottom line of authenticity, than the bathroom? An interior within an interior, it is usually windowless—a room at the core (2022: 595).

The bathroom stall is precisely this interior within the interior to which Fraiman refers. This is the 'private' public space where students most often go to let out difficult feelings they do not wish to share with the rest of their cohort. It is here, in fact, that Niccolò goes when he is distraught after being rejected by Monica (Ghosts 2019), and it is here that Chiara runs to when, upset about Brando and the sex video, she needs a space to cry (Baby 2019). What is revealed here is what Richard Dyer calls

'the repressiveness of a life so focused on instrumentality and seriousness, so afraid of or unable to handle emotion and sensuality' (2001: 22). But while these spaces allow for moments of invisibility, they are not completely protected from public eyes or ears, as is the case in this last example when Ludo, hearing Chiara's cries, provides words of comfort and support through the stall door. If the door is the marker of the public/private divide, crossing the threshold is an invitation into spaces and moments of vulnerability. This crossing is intimate; it holds a certain potential, a queer potential that extends beyond the boundaries of acceptability and regulation. The best example of this occurs when, after Brando kisses Fabio a few days earlier but then insists that he is not gay, Fabio goes into the bathroom and opens a stall door to find Brando in there. Fabio crosses the stall threshold, and closing the door, the two make out (The Offer 2019).

There is another narrative trajectory worth exploring if we think through Fabio's relationship to the bathroom stall. Early in the first season, Fabio agrees to help Damiano sell weed in the school, and it is in this role that Fabio begins to get a sense of self-assuredness, emboldened by the ways that he learns to use this private space. While I have previously argued that the close ties between Fabio's coming out and his drug dealing and his rejection of homophobic language reaffirm the nefariousness of his gayness, seen through the lens of the space of the bathroom stall, we might conceive of this overlap, instead, as being related to agency and regulation.[4] Consider the moment I noted earlier, when Fabio is finished selling pot in the bathroom where he has noticed 'Fedeli Faggot' graffitied on the wall. He walks out to find his father, the headmaster, there policing him to flush the toilet. When Fabio returns to the stall, he changes the graffiti to say, 'Headmaster Fedeli Faggot,' taking control of the narrative inside the confines of the stall, when he could not control and wanted to resist the restrictive pressures of his father just over the stall's threshold. Within the space of the stall, Fabio may sell his drugs and empower himself while doing it, only later to use his newfound empowerment to cross over and kiss Brando. It is a haven that is safe for expressions of private grief and anger, and safe from the restrictive normative bounds just beyond the stall door. Phil Hubbard notes, '[q]uestions of geography are clearly vital if we are to understand the reproduction and mutation of heteronormality … there has been broad support in social and cultural geography for the idea that place has a material bearing on how we "do" our sexuality' (2008: 651). The doing is safe here.

[4] See Heim J in References for citation.

But while the bathroom stall provides sanction, the public/private communal sink area is a much more fraught space; here vulnerable secrets become fodder for empathetic consolation, leverage, gossip, or often something much worse. Let us consider the most horrific bathroom scene of the series: Niccolò and Brando's gay bashing of Fabio in season 2, episode 3 (content warning for the following description). This is a continuation of the scene we noted earlier in which Niccolò goes into the bathroom stall furious and upset that Monica has dumped him. Brando is in the bathroom splashing water on his face, and seeing his friend Nic in distress, bangs on the door to ask if he is alright. Fabio then comes into the bathroom unaware that Nic is in the stall and begins to ask Brando's forgiveness for the day before when their hangout was interrupted by a call from Fabio's boyfriend. Brando covers his mouth making a shushing gesture; Fabio does not take the hint, and in this moment, Nic comes out of the stall and sees the two boys very close together. Brando, embarrassed by their proximity, asks Fabio what the fuck he wants and shoves him away. Fabio, confused, says that Brando must be out of his mind, but Brando doubles down, and shoving him out the bathroom says that the fairies' bathroom is down the hall. At this point, transferring his sadness into rage, Niccolò takes over the abuse and pushes Fabio into the arms of his friends who pull Fabio into the girls' bathroom. Borrowing Camilla's lipstick as she stands there motionless, Niccolò grabs Fabio over at the mirror and smears lipstick over his lips. The mirror, in Foucault's heterotopia, 'makes this place I occupy at the moment I look at myself in the glass both utterly real, connected with the entire space surrounding it, and utterly unreal—since, to be perceived, it is obliged to go by way of that virtual point which is over there' (1998: 179). This allows for perception to detach from identity; it marks the devaluation of socially constituted frameworks of reality and, at the same time, points to a potential elsewhere in which perceptions of ourselves can reflect our own experience. But this kind of detached moment of engagement with the mirror, while theoretically empowering with the queer potentiality it suggests, is actually an aggressive act of gay bashing.

Though Fabio entered the space imagining a moment of private intimacy between himself and Brando, what he got was quite the opposite, namely, the bathroom as a space of normative policing and control. As Robbins and Helfenbein remind us, 'students already entangled in the assemblage of school take up the curriculum of gendered bathroom spaces and police each other's bodies' (2018: 269) The boys take advantage of the use of the space, specifically in the power implicit within the space's structures so that they may put their feeling somewhere it might be justifiable/justified. In other words, Brando was able to express his sexual desire for Fabio *inside* the bathroom stall, and Niccolò could be upset about his breakup *inside* the bathroom stall, but once the boys are outside that space their feelings are no longer permissible,

so they find more acceptable outlets for their emotions, namely, the performance of regulatory practices on their peers. This ensures their own social belonging because it deflects the otherness onto those for whom difference is visible and normatively policeable. What this reveals is that the actual needs and feelings of these students are not accepted, or not perceived as such, which signals a lack in or challenge to the norms that they themselves are enforcing.

Through this elaboration, we may begin to consider the bathroom as a 'third space' in which students negotiate various identities—those exhibited within the internal stall space in which it is permissible to express 'excess' feeling and action (excess being all that lies outside heteronormative expectation), and those of the communal sink area wherein grooming, and visibility in a homosocial environment facilitate the regulation of bodies and norms.[5] Here the simultaneity of space (space being necessarily social and multiple, as per feminist geographer Doreen Massey) creates a conflict that feels emblematic of the larger social/spatial contentions with which the students grapple. This negotiation is spelled out explicitly in the very first bathroom scene of the series and marks our first encounter with Chiara and Ludovica. Chiara enters the bathroom to forge her parents' signature on a permission slip, thus using the space to subvert protocol and act against the restrictive adult world. While practicing the forgery she hears crying; opening the stall door (an intrusive gesture), she finds Ludo sitting on the toilet crying. While we feel like we, along with Chiara, have entered this personal space during a vulnerable moment, Ludo flips the script and begins to laugh, asking Chiara (and us as well) 'what the fuck do you want?' as she slams the door (Superpowers 2018). When Chiara goes back to her forgery practice Ludo comes out of the stall and explains that she was practicing crying to get out of a math test, she then takes the permission slip from Chiara's hands and performs the forgery without hesitation. Here Ludo uses the private space of the bathroom stall to negotiate the difference between herself and her performance of self that she plans on bringing to the public space. The bathroom is thus a space of negotiation where the students work through their social selves. Their agency is displayed through this performative practice that reveals the vapidity behind the performance itself—an act devoid of the actual feelings prohibited within the public space, thus pointing to the limits of the imposed sociality the space serves to create.

[5] The concept of 'third space,' as per Homi Bhabha, lets us rethink a kind of homogenous unity of identity that may be preserved and translated in conversation with others, stressing the hybridity of bodies and cultures. See Bhabha H 1994 *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge. Within the context of the school, we have students negotiating the self that is outside the cultural boundary and the self that is formed by the societal inscriptions, and then the self that exists as the negotiation between the two precisely in the ambivalent often contentious middle space represented by the school bathroom. Bhabha notes, 'we should remember that it is the "inter"—the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space—that carries the burden of the meaning of culture' (1994: 38).

Heterochronic Spaces: The Roof & The Playground

The roof and the playground are two external spaces that exist as opposite ends of the same spectrum, the roof being full of potential, of performances of adultness and futurity, while the playground reaffirms the youth of the characters. Thus, we have two spaces that mark the positionality of the characters in time, or rather their existence out of time. When Foucault discusses heterotopia, he argues that it 'begins to function fully when men are in a kind of absolute break with their traditional time,' and while he separates these heterochronia within the heterotopic into two kinds—one which holds all time and accumulates, and the other which is linked, instead to the most fleeting and transitory iteration of time—I believe that the roof and the playground combined highlight Chiara and Ludovica's ambivalence about their own maturity and thus exist as both forms of heterochronia simultaneously (1998: 182).

The first instance of Ludovica and Chiara on the playground happens in the fourth episode of season one, when Ludo has been in contact with a dentist/client and Chiara is considering following up with someone who wants to take her on a date. The background sounds of children playing lend a spectrality of youth to the conversation and the characters, and the lingering of childhood is echoed by the attitude and gestures of Ludo, who stands up from the swing to imagine the girls' future full of beautiful dresses and champagne. We understand at this moment that Ludo and Chiara are in a kind of limbo, playing with adulthood as much as they are playing on the swings. Two episodes later, when they are on the playground once more, Ludo mentions that she saw the dentist again and confirms the feelings Chiara shared after having sex for pay the first time: 'you know it's all wrong … but at the same time it's all under control' (The Last Shot 2018). It is a sense of agency and freedom that thrills them: it is the power of being able to decide not only to do adult things but to manipulate the adults in the process. The ability to conform to adult performances of maturity but refuse the mentality exposes a failure in the normativities presented to them by society. The scene ends with a confirmation of this careless, carefree attitude as Chiara notes, 'I can't wait to get drunk tonight!'

We only see the roof four times in *Baby*'s three seasons, but in all three we have moments of emotional difficulty or disclosure. It is the first roof scene that clues us into the ambivalence guiding the narrative: namely intensity of feeling paired with a sense of insignificance. In this scene, Chiara takes Damiano up to the roof, they remark on the immateriality of everything from that height, Damiano shares feelings about his dead mother, and they flirt with one another (#Friendzone 2018). Here the roof is a secret space where things feel freer and look 'almost nice.' The perspective that the height provides also allows them to reveal things to one another, affirming that indeed identities are constructed in connection and through emplacement. It is here

that we may understand the representation of identity not as performative (Ludovica's practice cry in the bathroom stall confirmed the fallacy of performance), but rather as assemblaged. As Jasbir Puar argues, 'assemblages foreground no constants but rather "variation to variation" and hence the event-ness of identity' (2012: 58). What we see from the fleeting tensions presented to us through these roof scenes is that these youth identities are created and recreated by their relation to space, time, and one another.

It is here on the roof that Chiara finally admits to Camilla that she is not coming to America with her, a declaration that 'establishes' the decision for herself as well; through her visible declaration that she prefers to hang out with Ludovica and her verbal confirmation that she is giving up on study abroad, Chiara's position is solidified, but as we see, it is only done in relation to these other characters (#Love 2018). Similarly, on a separate roof occasion, Chiara's emotional state is expressed via an essay written and read to us by Damiano. He says:

> The space-time theory can apply to the real world because the past doesn't disappear, it lingers inside us, in our present. Time rewinds like a video that plays the same frames over and over again, an old scooter, a scraped knee, a simple gesture. The idea of going forward is an illusion just like Einstein said. Things change on the surface but deep down they remain the same. What if pain isn't an obstacle to overcome? Maybe it's just a road you walk on, a detail carved on that scooter's bumper that never leaves you. (The Last Shot 2018)

Not only do Damiano's words frame Chiara and thus imprint their meaning onto her experience, they also reiterate the dependence on others and on space and time for experience and, thus, for identity. In many ways, this puts into perspective the childlike behaviors and spaces that Chiara and Ludovica occupy when they play on the playground outside school. The levity of their approach to serious 'adult' matters is explained through the necessary existence of childhood experienced in conjunction and simultaneous to their more mature behaviors; it is not one or the other.

From Classroom to Courtroom

The classroom is depicted twenty-two times throughout the show's three seasons, but only a handful of them involve teaching, discipline, or assessment. Instead of an interpellative space of control and discipline, we often see the classroom as a moment for students to come together or mark their distance. In many ways, especially in the first season of the show, the classroom space counterbalances the space of the hallway, reaffirming allegiances in the face of public scrutiny. Take, for example, when Camilla finds out that Chiara has been sleeping with her brother and the other students are all

whispering about her. Camilla uses the classroom proximity to approach Chiara and remark that women are always villainized in these situations, and the two, as a gesture of peace, play tic-tac-toe (Emma 2018). Similarly, in the episode prior, Damiano is accused of having trashed the headmaster's office. The initial core group of Fabio, Chiara, and Camilla discuss the act together and work through their feelings. Camilla is immediately quick to judge Damiano saying that he deserves what he gets, while Fabio instead challenges the snap judgment arguing that they do not actually know if it was him. In this way, the classroom allows for intimacy and exchange. It serves as an emotive companion to the other para-pedagogical spaces occupied within the school, but one more public than the bathroom stall.[6]

The second season marks a shift in the uses of the classroom, a shift made clear in the first episode when a new teacher, Tommaso, who happens to be an almost-client of Ludovica's, enters the scene.[7] Indeed the one snippet of lecture that we see in the series comes from Tommaso, who gives a lesson on responsibility through the theories of Kierkegaard. He remarks:

> According to Kierkegaard, man finds himself in a condition of absolute freedom. Maybe you think that's a great position to be in. But no. Because he also says that from absolute freedom derives absolute responsibility of our choices (The Offer 2019)

From here, Tommaso goes on to attempt to instill a kind of social moralism both in Ludovica and in Brando. He confiscates Ludovica's cell phone when she uses it in class, he attempts to get stern with her and asks to speak with her mother, he implores her not to throw her life away because of a few shitty days, he attempts to get her to quit sex work, and he appears interested when Ludo and Chiara seem on the outs. Similarly with Brando, Tommaso tries to find out about the rage that he holds within and lectures him about the dangers involved in outing other students (when Brando says that he knows that a girl in the school is a sex worker). While Tommaso has no luck with Brando, he does seem to gain the favor of Ludovica, who begins to look at him as a kind of father figure. Ludo's belief in this care backfires, and Ludo is once more confronted with the shallowness and self-serving nature of Tommaso's interest when he makes a pass at her at his house. The trust in these figures of authority is quickly shattered and the classroom remains a space of disciplinarity inflicted by those purporting to 'teach.' So, when Tommaso confiscates Ludovica's phone, she must hand it over. When he exiles

[6] As Mark Readman notes, the para-pedagogical is 'all of those things that happen alongside education—bullying, sexual relationships, intoxication and so on.' (2016: 2).

[7] 'Almost-client' refers to the fact that upon seeing Ludovica, Tommaso Regioli refuses to continue their appointment because he senses that she is underage.

her from the class because she is disruptive, she leaves. And when Damiano sleeps through an assignment, the teacher warns, 'Younes, starting with a fail isn't a very good idea' (The Offer 2019). Here the classroom space marks the institution of learning as a disciplinary structure, and it is precisely as disciplinarians that these teachers hold any power at all in the lives of these young adults.[8]

By the third season, Ludovica (the only one seen in a classroom the entire season) has taken matters into her own hands. She is now convinced that she is deserving of a better life and goes through the motions of school only as a means to an end. Thus, the one time that we do see Ludovica in a classroom the extra-diegetic music plays 'Baby' by Bishop Briggs, and the lyrics 'my baby's got a fucked-up head, doesn't matter 'cuz he's so damn good in bed' play over the scene as Ludo is shown cheating on an exam (make a wish 2020). The pithy lyrics reaffirm the proforma nature of her educational performance, marking the illegitimacy of the institutional structures at its heart. As Ahmed remarks when speaking of institutions, 'Once a building has been built, once it has taken form, more or less, some more than others, will fit the requirements' (2019: 170). This form, and its implied boundaries, appear to reaffirm the disciplinary powers evidenced by the classroom dynamics we saw just earlier, but their use-value, just like the use-value of those punishments imparted in the classroom, are slowly called into question, as are, as we shall soon see, the larger societal structures of control.

In the final episode of the series, the courtroom takes the place of the school, with obvious mirroring techniques that emphasize to viewers that this institution of learning, meant to ready students for adulthood, is an institution of control governed by those whose questionable morals form the basis for the girls' illicit behaviors in the first place. As Rebecca Bauman reminds us, 'the program takes a nihilistic approach in its negative vision of the corrupt and hypocritical adult world for which the teens are preparing, even though the series' more optimistic conclusion suggests a path towards self-acceptance and self-determination for the female protagonists' (2022: 111). Indeed, in this final episode the only scene shot in the school is the one during which Ludovica takes her maturity exam.[9] Ludovica has chosen to discuss the socio-political movements of 1968, and she specifically brings up women's struggle for equal rights. When a male professor remarks that the women of back then would be disappointed to see how women act in this day and age, she retorts that they would be scandalized to see the way that men still treat women—a nod to both her position and

[8] This is not to suggest that Tommaso's abuse of power when he attempts to make out with Ludovica does not leave its scars, but rather that within the space of the school his role as moral educator is invalidated; thus he may only function as disciplinarian within the institutional frameworks of the education system.

[9] In Italy, the maturity exam is a necessary requirement for getting your high school diploma.

responsibility within the sex ring, and to the optimism of which Bauman speaks. The panel of professors is then mirrored almost exactly by the panel of judges overhearing their case, marking again a parallel between these two structures of power and their respective historically repressive chauvinist characteristics, but also the intelligence of these girls-now-women as they operate within them (100 Days 2020).

The Queerness of Consequence or The Consequence of Queerness

We have seen how the uses and representations of Collodi private school solidify it as a site of social regulation and formation; not only do students generally adhere to the educational and financial expectations, but they similarly repeat and thus reify many normative standards, as displayed by the gestures of bullying and graffiti that we witness in the hallways and written on the walls of the school. These gestures, however, also reveal the limits of social acceptability, boundaries that the students continually push up against as their lived experiences, feelings, and desires lie outside admissible societal practice. The quotation by Headmaster Fedeli that opens this article conveys much more than his discontent for the ways that parents treat the school: 'you park your kids here and expect that when they return home, they'll be polite and prepared for what awaits them in the world, but that's not how it works.' This reveals both the social expectation that schools serve as a formative space to educate and 'shape' those within it, but also the fact that the failure to do so is a failure of the structure to acknowledge those it seeks to shape. We have seen how space determines the identity of the school body and the bodies of which it is made by regulating the ways they are allowed to 'fit' within its walls. Ahmed remarks, 'in feelings of comfort bodies extend into spaces, and spaces extend into bodies. The sinking feeling involves a seamless space, or a space where you can't see the "stitches" between bodies' (2004: 148). But as we have seen, these characters often do not fit, and in this way, they create fissures, cracks in the facade of the social infrastructure. It is these fissures, created by these characters through their decisions and inabilities to conform, that mark a queerness within them. Their manipulation of the 'uses' of space, as they do with the locker room, their excess emotion that proves too much for anywhere but the bathroom stall, and their refusal to reject their childishness (as evidenced by the teddy bear tattoo the girls get in the last episode), speak to a need for a different standard, a different social model that may choose support above regulation, and care above discipline. Ahmed asks, 'What happens when bodies fail to "sink into" spaces, a failure that we can describe as a "queering" of space? When does this potential for "queering" get translated into a transformation of the scripts of compulsory heterosexuality?' (2004: 152). Perhaps we should let the students of Collodi decide.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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