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**Between accessibility and inclusion:
gender, sexuality, race and ableism in the audio
description of the Italian TV Series *Prisma***

Master's Thesis

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Abstract

This thesis project aims to illustrate the paradoxical relation between accessibility and inclusivity in audio description (AD) of the Italian TV series *Prisma* (2022). Audio description is a progressive tool to enhance accessibility to blind and visually impaired people to visual productions. However, the language used in audio description still reifies ideological norms on bodies and identities in relation to gender, sexuality, race and ableism. The theoretical frameworks of my thesis are grounded on a combination of feminist, disability, decolonial and queer studies and representation theories. I discuss Stuart Hall's representation theories, Donna Haraway's situated knowledges, the disabilities studies of Lennard J. Davis, the work of Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí on the visualization of the body in Western culture, Judith Butler's gender performativity theories, Georgina Kleege's work on blindness and the studies on sexuality and disability of Rosemarie Garland-Thomson. The findings of my research show that, the rule of objectivity that is mandatory in audio description's guidelines, is impossible to be pursued and contrasts with the situatedness of its language. The AD of *Prisma* are produced by the white Western ablest and male perspective that designed a concept of normal body that influences the relevance of the physical characteristics described and the linguistic choices of the audio describer. This assumption is proved for example by the absence of description of the physical characteristics that fits the norm or the excessive visibility of the body of 'the other'. Due to that, identity is still perceived as a bodily matter but only for certain categories of people. As a consequence, the innovative themes on gender identity and disability representation introduced in *Prisma* contrast with the actual language of AD. This situation is emphasized by the marginalization of AD from audio-visual productions that obscures the necessity to develop accessible tool that are also inclusive.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This project is about the analysis of the audio description (AD) of the Italian TV Series *Prisma* (2022). *Prisma* is one of the most popular Italian mainstream TV Series on the theme of gender identity and disability representation. While audio description is a progressive project to enhance accessibility to blind and visually impaired people to visual productions, the language of audio descriptions used in *Prisma* reifies ideological norms on bodies and identities that reinforces marginalization, exclusion and power hierarchies. In my thesis, I offer an analysis of the terms and sentences used to describe the physical characteristics, appearance and actions of the characters of *Prisma*. I illustrate the paradox between accessibility and inclusivity in AD of *Prisma* designed by the Western white ablest male perspective at work in the descriptions. Moreover, in my analysis I also explore the predominance of sight in Western culture and its role on identity's construction.

Nowadays, the debate on Italian language and inclusion is considered one of the most heated in Italy. There are many aspects of the Italian language that are addressed by publications, books, talks or festivals such as, for example, language and racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, gender binarism and more. Italian is a gendered language and there are only two grammatical genders: masculine and feminine and there is not a 'neutral' gender. Moreover, the neutral is usually given by the masculine gender. For example, the word 'avvocato' (lawyer) it is masculine and it is used for both women and men. Therefore, many writers, thinkers and activists are trying to overcome this bias and propose the use of the word 'avvocata', with the final -a that stands for the feminine, to address female lawyers. The proposal to introduce the feminine when referring to women workers and experts is facing many tensions in Italy as there are many people who do not recognise the importance of the feminine in language, especially within institutions. Another proposed approach to avoid gender binarism is the introduction of the 'schwa' in the Italian written language. The schwa (ə) is a reverse 'e' to be added to the word instead of the gendered ending. For example, in Italian when addressing a multitude of people the plural is always masculine. In the sentence 'buongiorno a tutti' (good morning everyone) the word 'tutti' is the plural of 'tutto' - that stands for the English 'everyone' (but also 'all'). In Italian can be used both for people and things and it has a masculine ending. With the introduction of the schwa the word 'tutti' will become 'tuttə' in order to include multiple genders. This proposal entered the debates on Italian language in transfeminist and LGBTQI+ communities a few years ago (Gheno 2020, 175-195). Vera

Gheno, an Italian sociolinguist and researcher, brought to light these discussions on the introduction of the schwa in Italian language in 2020 with the book *Femminili Singolari*. She is also one of the main expert voices on the topic¹. Along with the use of the schwa it was also suggested the use of the asterisk (*) in the same way as the schwa. The letter (or the asterisk) can be used mostly in written Italian because it is difficult to pronounce when speaking. Another issue that is addressed by the discussions on Italian language is the different approaches employed by journalists when describing men or women. For instance, if newspaper articles discuss women or women and men, most of them would identify the women by addressing their first name only. Instead, when men are discussed the articles highlight their name and surname. Addressing women only with their personal names, makes them unrecognisable and unknown, and as a result, it causes women to be often cut off from history. Moreover, the description of a successful woman is mostly combined with reference to motherhood, beauty or any other characteristic that is discursively and historically connected to femininity. In addition, the narration of femicide is made from a male perspective: many journals give more space to the man and describe the actions as the consequence of ‘too much love’ and as victims of their partners behaviours. Michela Murgia², an important Italian writer and thinker, wrote a book called *Stai Zitta* on this topic and gave other examples by analysing and questioning the relations between patriarchy, language, machismo and sexism in journalism, publications and discussions. Against this cultural and political background, the aim of my project is to introduce another perspective on the issue of Italian language, inclusion and accessibility.

My research is guided by the following questions: How does *Prisma* relate to the Italian political and cultural context? *Prisma* raises many question on the theme of LGBTQI+ rights in Italy. The situatedness of *Prisma* within an extreme right and conservative environment led to consider this representation a turning point in Italian mainstream productions as it portrays issues such as gender identity, coming out and disability on screen from a new perspective. Along with the necessity to renew the representations of certain bodies, it is also fundamental

¹ Vera Gheno is an Italian translator and sociolinguist. She is well known for her commitment on inclusivity issues and sexism in Italian language and she published many books and articles on the themes. She has also a podcast called *Amare parole* on Italian language and hosted by the Italian journal *Il post*. In the podcast, she explains the story and the meanings behind the words we use.

² Michela Murgia is an Italian writer and thinker who is known for her commitment against patriarchy, sexism and fascism in Italian politics and intellectual environments. She is a supporter of the ‘queer family’, a new idea of family that is not based upon blood relationships, fixed roles and institutional recognition but on mutual reliability and care. A queer family is made of two or more people because the couple is not anymore at the basis of this new ‘system’. The queer family is a broader understanding of what is meant to be a family that get over the patriarchal setting of the ‘traditional family’. More information can be found in Michela Murgia’s Instagram profile @michimurgia.

to address the accessibility of such audio-visual productions to people with sensory disabilities. There is not inclusivity without accessibility. Against this framework, why is AD important to enhance accessibility to blind and visually impaired people? Accessibility issues are usually at the margins of inclusivity politics. The promotion of inclusivity does not always include also the improvement of tools such as AD, which aim is to overcome the limits of audio-visual productions for the reference audience. Moreover, within Western culture, sight is considered the main sensory organ involved in research and linked to reason and objectivity. The vision is deeply involved in the determination of people's identities; thus, identity is still a bodily matter. Considering this, what is the relation between bodies, vision and norms in the audio description of *Prisma*? The intersection of these layers complicates the research of inclusivity and accessibility. Despite the innovations introduced by *Prisma* and the presence of AD to provide accessibility, the language of AD still displays stereotypes and ideologies on normalcy. How do gender, sexuality, disability and race emerge in AD of the Italian TV Series *Prisma*? Audio description and its language open new questions on linguistic issues. The descriptions focus only on the visual part of an audio-visual product and they enlighten the relation between bodies, vision and language. AD permits to reflect on how sight over-determines bodies and identities in Western culture and on the tensions between language and accessibility.

1.1 State of the art

In the field of audio description, the research and publications on the bias in its language are just a few. The following studies were helpful to start my reflection on AD and its language. I directly quoted only some of them in my thesis but I intend to mention here some titles that I read that were useful to start asking questions.

While doing research, I did not find any research in the Italian context on the discussion on the bias in the language of audio descriptions but just on the issue of objectivity (Perego 2017; Arma 2012; ADLAB 2012). In international context, there is some research in the UK, USA and Brazil on the analysis of the descriptions of identity in AD (Kleege 2016; Hutchinson 2020; Villela and Gallardo 2020; Bennet 2021; Oppegaard and Miguel 2022) and on objectivity (Taylor and Perego 2022; Snyder 2014). There is also some research on the language as a discursive practice (Piety, 2004). The following is an overview of the main themes and arguments of some of the aforementioned sources.

Elena Perego mentioned objectivity issues in her essay “L’Audio Descrizione Filmica per Ciechi e gli Ipovedenti” (Filmic audio description for blind and visually impaired people) by arguing that there are many issues around the freedom that audio describers can avail of in AD’s writing and how to regulate the selection of information to give to the target audience (Perego 2017, 27).

Saveria Arma in her essay “Why Can’t You Wear Black Shoes Like the Other Mothers?” Preliminary investigation on the Italian language of audio description” compares the Italian and English audio descriptions of the film *Chocolat* (Arma 2012, 38-39). She analyses how the history of the literary written language influences the syntactical and lexical choices in the ADs of the movie in both languages. She discovered that due to the structure of the Italian language and its written and spoken historical background, Italian AD tends more to use subjective choices, linguistic variety and interpretation to maintain the narrative mode. In contrast, English AD are more objective, simple and regular (Arma 2012, 50-51).

In September 2020 the report *Describing diversity. An exploration of human characteristics and appearance within the practice of theatre audio description* (Hutchinson, Thomson, Cook 2020) was published in the UK in collaboration with Vocal Eyes, Royal Holloway University of London and the Arts Council of England. The report explains in detail the audio description, the history and the main rules and key figures in UK theatres. Then, it analyses the language of the AD in theatre plays through the use of online surveys, in-depth interviews and workshops. In particular, the report analyses the terms used when describing race, gender, disability and age. The main findings are: colour-blindness³; the gendered and sexist dimension of words related to female characters and their bodies; the negative connotations of disability and age seen as outside the norm and an obstacle to overcome.

Georgina Kleege in the article “Audio Descriptions: Current standards. Future Innovations, Larger Implications” theorizes around the standard and inclusivity issues in AD through the analysis of the movie *The Session* (Kleege 2016, 1-2). Kleege is blind herself and this was important for my research because I had the perspective of a blind scholar on AD. Kleege argues that the research of objectivity comes from the assumption that sighted people can have an unmediated and autonomous experience of an audio-visual product that is the same

³ I found the term colour-blindness on the report but I found it critical. Despite the aim of the report to underline white supremacy, the term colour-blindness associates the idea of blindness as lack in something with a negative connotation. In the chapter 31 of the book “The Disabilities Studies Reader” curated by Lennard J. David, Georgina Kleege explains in the essay “Blindness and Visual Culture: An Eyewitness Account” how blindness is always associated with lack, inattention and prejudice by sighted people (Kleege 441-445, 2016).

for everyone. She continues by saying that this is not possible and the words selected to describe a scene can differ from describer to describer and they are influenced by personal perceptions and cultural backgrounds. Neutrality is an illusion. She also proposes to extend the use of AD for sighted people because they can enjoy a new possibility in the fruition of audio visual products (Kleege 2016, 14).

Philip J. Piety in the essay “The language system of Audio Description: An Investigation as a Discursive Process” analyses the language of audio description in comparison with the general written and spoken language. He also takes into consideration the cultural influences of the sighted world in the descriptions, the individual creation of meaning of the user of AD and the influences of the describer in linguistic choices. The investigation illustrates that the language of audio descriptions, despite it being part of the general language, is different from the spoken and written language. The language of AD makes use of a restrict part of the general vocabulary and the descriptions are mainly focused solely on what it is occurring on the screen. The essay also shows that AD can be considered a new product regarding the original one because it does not use all the visive information that are present on screen. Moreover, the meaning of AD is influenced by the individual re-elaboration of the user of AD, the choices of the describers and the historical and cultural understanding of symbols and codes that can change through the time (Piety 2004, 461-467).

My research fits the frame created by these publications and tries to fill the gap in the Italian researches on the bias in the language of AD.

1.2 Contents overview

Prisma is a 2022 Italian TV Series realised on Prime Video. The Series is a young adult TV Series and it is considered the first contemporary and mainstream Italian production on the theme of gender identity and disability representation. Directed by Ludovico Bessegato and Alice Urciolo, the show was shot in Latina, a city near Rome in Lazio region in east-central Italy. The TV Series unfolds in eight episodes over one season. The name *Prisma* in English is *prism* and each episode is named after each light spectrum’s colour: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and purple. The audio descriptions of *Prisma* have been generated by Artis Project, an Italian company that produces audio descriptions, translations and dub for the TV and the cinema.

In chapter two I explore in depth the relation between *Prisma* TV Series and the Italian cultural and political context. Why is *Prisma* considered innovative in Italy? What are the main themes of the serial? How does *Prisma* address the concept of identity? How do the characters challenge the norm in *Prisma*?

The story of *Prisma* focuses on Andrea and Marco, two twin brothers from Latina. The characters are teenagers and, even though they look like the same, they live different identities' struggles. In particular, Andrea is exploring his gender identity and, along with his personal struggles, he also experiences many tensions with the conservative cultural and familiar context where he lives in. Andrea's self-discovering journey is a new representation in the panorama of Italian TV Series as the aim of the character is not to determine himself as a man or a woman but to continue exploring the spectrum of his gender identity. As the name of *Prisma* suggests, as well as the prism decomposes the light into its spectrum, similarly Andrea (as well as the other characters) is exploring the spectrum of his identity. The concept of identity is central throughout the TV Series, and it is also highlighted by the city of Latina, the location of the TV series, which was founded during fascism. Indeed, Latina evokes the fascist period in Italy along with a specific idea of 'Italian identity' perpetrated by the dictatorial regime of Mussolini that is in contrast with the identities of the characters. *Prisma* introduces new perspectives not only on the theme of gender identity, but also on the themes of sexuality and disability. Another main character of *Prisma* is Carola, who wears a leg prosthesis. Carola blurs the boundaries between sexuality and disability that are challenged by her strong personality and desirability.

The language of audio description (AD) is a particular one. In the third chapter of my thesis, I illustrate in detail what is audio description and its writing process. Audio description is a multidisciplinary field, and its process of creation involves multiples different professionals. Moreover, the rules that govern the creation process of AD are not institutionalized in Italy and they slightly differ one to another. In addition, the audio description is not part of the creation process of the audio-visual product but it is external to the production. AD is added later, after the movie or TV Series is finished. Movies and TV Series creators are not directly involved in the AD process and how it may influence the experience of TV Series for the blind and visually impaired audience. Furthermore, the multiplicity of companies and associations that produce audio descriptions and the absence of a common regulation makes it difficult to control the process. As a consequence, there are many differences in the language chosen and in the descriptions approaches, facilitating the presence of bias and ideologies in AD. In this chapter, I also question the issue of objectivity, which is one of the main rules to be pursued in AD that shows how ableism hides differences among

people and their capacities. The presumption that only the sighted are capable of objective vision obscures the spectrum of visual possibilities that involve not only the visually impaired but all the people because we do not see all the same (Kleege 2006, 89-101).

The fourth chapter of the thesis is about the theoretical framework on which I grounded the analysis of the audio description of *Prisma* and the intersection of normalcy, vision, bodies, audio description and accessibility. How is AD railroaded by ideological norms on identity? How are these norms challenged and reified in the AD of *Prisma*? Who is the spectator addressed by the AD of *Prisma* and what is their role? Firstly, I explain how the meaning of audio description is created through representation theories. Stuart Hall explains that representation is the process of creation of meanings through language. Meanings are created within discourses that are culturally and historically situated. Discourses define how to speak about a topic and they are ruled by relations of power (Hall 2013, 29-30). The meaning of the story of *Prisma* and the visibility of the character through the audio description is produced within discursive practices that are shaped by the Italian historical and cultural context. Furthermore, Stuart Hall explains the process of representation of difference and stereotyping in representation theories. Difference is necessary to define 'the other' in relation to the subject because subjectivity is constructed also by the recognition of difference (Hall 2013, 12-14). Stereotyping is a process of exclusion that reduces and simplifies a person to few traits and fix differences (Hall 2013, 257). Audio description makes use of stereotypes and differences to address specific characters and make them visible to the target audience. Representation theories complicate the issue of objectivity that I previously mentioned because they remark the situatedness of the language of audio description. According to this, Donna Haraway explains that objective vision is an illusion as it is impossible to be detached from the object of knowledge. Knowledge is always situated and objectivity is embodied in the white Western male that imposed his vision among others to control bodies and define norms (Haraway 1988, 575). Lennard Davis explores the roots of the concepts of norm and normalcy that were raised at the end of 19th century with the birth of statistics and bell curve. Statistics defined the parameters of the 'normal body' and normalcy started to control people's lives. Bodies were divided into categories with common characteristics that became part of their identities. Everyone who did not fit the parameters was defined abnormal and excluded from society. These characteristics were identified through visual parameters such as skin or gender (Davis 2002, 101-103). In order to understand why bodies and identities are overdetermined by vision, I explored the relations between sight and Western culture. According to Oyèrónké Oyéwùmí, in Western culture the sight has been linked to detachment and objectivity. The Cartesian's split

between mind and body stands at the bottom of the belief that the mind was more important than the body. Knowledge was produced by the mind. The sight became the main tool involved in knowledge production because it did not need a direct contact with the object of knowledge. The minds that were in charge of producing knowledge were the male minds of the thinkers. Thus, all ‘the others’ became just their bodies such as black people or women (Oye`wùmí 2005, 4-5). As a consequence, these bodies were identified through their physical characteristics and these characteristics were used to determine peoples’ identities. Gender itself is a product of the vision. Judith Butler theorized the concept of ‘gender performativity’ that explains in what way gender is a performance made by the repetition of specific acts (Butler 1999, 45). These actions are visible and shaped the categories of man and woman and their relationships with society. Moreover, language itself is a product of the body and the words used allows the body to come into existence and be viewed (Butler 1988, 5). Audio description shows how bodies are visible and identifiable only through certain physical characteristics. The selection of visual details translated by the describer for the target audience reflect the connections between identities and physical appearance that inscribe people into specific categories. Against this background, the relations between bodies, blindness and sight are complicated. Blind and visually impaired people are considered unable to develop a critical thought because the lack of sight is perceived as lack of autonomous thinking. Georgina Kleege explains that there is a spectrum of visual possibilities and both the blind and the sighted are part of it. We do not see all the same and audio description is an example of a visual possibility that permits to see (Kleege 2006, 89-101). Moreover, it is ablest to argue that the sighted are able of objective vision because seeing is a product of re-elaboration of data by the brain that involves all of the body along with historical, cultural and subjective issues and beliefs (Kleege 2006, 89-101). Different bodies elaborate different information through the same process. Such relations between embodiment and audio description are addressed also by the character of Carola that contributes to the paradox between accessibility and inclusivity. The theories on disability, sexuality and representation of Rosemarie Garland-Thomson enlightened how Carola renews the narratives over disability while, at the same time, she personifies certain stereotypes on women’s representation (Garland-Thomson 2016, 365-372) that are evident in the audio description related to the character.

In the last chapter I explore in depth some of the terms and sentences that I selected from the AD of *Prisma* and that I reported in the list at the end of this introduction. How are gender, sexuality, disability and race depicted and create a specific imaginary around the characters? As explained before, audio description is the textual translation of the visual part of

an audio-visual product made for blind and visually impaired people. AD enlightens the role of the body and physical appearance in identity construction and perception because its function is to make the scenes ‘visible’ to the target audience. According to this, physical characteristics of the characters have to be translated. The selected details described reduce people’s identities to few recurrent physical characteristics that reinforce the idea that identity is designed solely by specific visual elements. Those characteristics, such as skin, gender or bodily shapes, become the filter that allows the characters to be ‘seen’ by the target audience. Why do we need that specific characteristics to make the characters visible?

My project wants to open a discussion on the language of audio description from a critical perspective. There are many other questions that can be asked and that you can keep in mind before starting the reading of this thesis. Why is audio description still at the margins of these discussions? Why is AD not included in the audio-visual production process? To what extent can audio description be helpful to rethink the way we address bodies and identities? Can we think about AD as a new visual possibility for all?

1.3 Subjectivity and positionality

In this section I would like to situate myself in the project by focusing on my own subjectivity as a researcher. Along with the academic interests of doing research in the field of audio description from the perspective of gender studies, I would like also to explain the personal reasons behind this choice. I want to make explicit “where I am” within the project and highlight the point of view from which I have done my research. Donna Haraway explains that objectivity is an illusion because the vision is always partial and knowledge is always situated (Haraway 1988, 583). She says:

“We need to learn in our bodies, endowed with primate color and stereoscopic vision, how to attach the objective to our theoretical and political scanners in order to name where we are and where we are not. ... objectivity turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment and definitely not about the false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibilities [...] Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see [...]. There is no immediate vision from the standpoints of the

subjugated. Identity, including self-identity, does not produce science; critical positioning does, that is, objectivity [...]. I am arguing for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating where partiality not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims. [...]" (Haraway 1988, 588-589)

According to Haraway, the body is always entangled with knowledge. Researchers' questions and discoveries are informed also by their personal experience, political beliefs and theoretical frames. These threads in combination with the body situate the vision within a specific, embodied point of view that reveals the partiality of the process of research. This assumption allows for it to be always traceable for what it is produced. Moreover, identity itself is not enough to be considered knowledge but the researcher needs to assume a critical position from which analysing themselves and making claims. Knowledge is produced as a result of the different perspectives at play that favour discussions and arguments. For example, as a photography graduate the first challenge that I faced when starting my thesis was the one of a sighted person who uses photography. I have never questioned the predominance of sight in Western culture before this project because I had always taken for granted my ability to see. I truly understand now Georgina Kleege's insight when she argued that "*if you can see you do not need to know why you can see*" (Kleege 1999, 111). As a consequence, I had to question my own ableism to be aware of my bias and to understand why audio description highlights the tensions between accessibility, language and embodiment. My aim is to open a dialogue that first started by questioning myself. The personal is political someone said. Moreover, the more I practiced with audio description, the more I was able to overcome the bias of my vision as a sighted person. I do not want to be moralistic or to explain 'what I learned from AD', neither I want to say that now I can see as I were not sighted because it is impossible. Instead, what I am arguing is that to write this thesis I came across a process of subjectification that put myself in the condition to feel the tensions between my submission to ideological norms and my mastery of them. As Allen says:

"The process of subjectification is characterized by simultaneous submission and mastery and is not possible without both. Explaining this principle, Butler writes: The more a practice is mastered, the more fully subjection is achieved. Submission and mastery take place simultaneously, and it is this paradoxical simultaneity that constitutes the ambivalence of subjection. Where one might expect submission to

consist of a yielding to an externally imposed dominant order, and to be marked by a loss of control and mastery, it is paradoxically marked by mastery itself ... the lived simultaneity of submission as mastery, and mastery as submission, is the condition of possibility of the subject itself (Butler, 1995: 45–46)” (Allen 2010,157)

Becoming a subject means to get through a process that involves practices and performances. The more I am submitted to a practice the more I am able to master it and control it. These processes are apparently in contrast because if I am submitted to a practice I can think that I am not able to defy the dominant ideologies that govern those practices. Despite that, I can overcome the limits imposed by these practices precisely because I am submitted to them as I know those practices from inside. For example, while working at this project I have always felt the tension between my own vision as the product of the ablest predominance of sight over the senses and the necessity to decentre my sightedness in favour to a broader concept of visual possibilities as suggested by AD. I questioned my identity of sighted person continuously. My process of subjectification was possible through these two poles: the predominance of sight and a broader understanding of the meaning of seeing. Audio description expands the spectrum of visual possibilities. As well as I was subjected to the dominant order represented by the predominance of sight in Western culture, in the same way I mastered my own submission to the sight broadening its meaning while working on the analysis of audio description. I experienced that is possible to deconstruct ableism through the mastery of new practices such as the use of audio description that leads into new forms of subjectification. New forms of subjectification come from the experience of new practices that in my case was the AD. Exploring the field of AD was possible by looking at the margins of main visual productions and media. AD is still a “segregated accommodation outside general public’s awareness” (Kleege 2016, 18) that is still not included in the original audio-visual productions; thus, movies and TV Series are first produced for the ablest public. Looking at the margin is a practice that I learned from bell hooks when she explained that from the margins is possible to better understand the issues of the centre because both margins and centre are part of the same whole. hooks says:

“Living as we did—on the edge—we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as on the margin. We understood both. This mode of seeing reminded us of the existence of a whole universe, a main body made up of

both margin and center. Our survival depended on an ongoing public awareness of the separation between margin and center and an ongoing private acknowledgment that we were a necessary, vital part of that whole.” (hooks 2015, 12-13)

The life at the margins permits to embody a different attitude towards reality. The perspective from the margins considers the complexity of the violence of certain phenomenon because the consequences of discriminations are concretely visible on the lives of who is marginalized.

Living at the edge raises awareness on the condition of discriminated groups of people and their needs as well on the work of power in the hands of who lives in the centre and that perpetrates such divisions. The whole universe is made by margins and centre; thus, it is important to be conscious about the hierarchies of power that oppress categories of people that are all fundamental to our survival. For example, audio description is a tool that is considered useful only for a specific group of people and stands at the margins of visual productions and intellectual discussions. The absence of AD from the main discussions traces the boundaries of the centre defined by dominant ideologies on bodies and identities based upon ablest standards that became the norm. As a result, AD is considered a second rank media as it is used by a determined group of people. This means that blind and visually impaired people are not part of the centre but are at the edge of society's interests. The discussions on inclusive language must take into consideration all the forms of languages. Looking at the margins helps to understand our stance when we fight our battles for human rights and what battles are prioritized than others.

1.4 Methodology

In this section I illustrate the methodology that I used to do my research. I watched *Prisma* for the first time at the end of 2022, about a few months before deciding my thesis' topic. As a consequence, when I watched the TV series with audio description for the first time, I was already aware of the story and the characters. Before starting the analysis, I watched it all two times with audio descriptions. I focused my attention on the vocabulary used to describe the scenes, the characters and the events when referring to gender, sexuality, disability and race. Then, I listened to the audio description of the single scenes or parts of episodes that reported the selected terms and sentences over and over in order to transcribe the descriptions and contextualize them in the TV Series. The list of the selected terms and sentences can be found

in the last part of this introduction. Listening repeatedly to the AD was helpful to get used to the voice of the describer, as at first it was difficult to focus solely on the voice and dialogues. Moreover, in order to experiment further with the audio description, I watched other TV Series TV series that were new to me; this time only using the audio description. It was an interesting experience that helped me to understand the way in which the audio description works together with the dialogues and how the mind recreates the visual part of the scenes through the hearing sense. While working on the list, I started reading the theoretical and technical texts that I selected for my research. Once I finished the list, I did a close, textual analysis of the texts by selecting the quotes and the main topics that I considered relevant for my research.

In regard to the theoretical frameworks of my thesis, the first two texts on which I focused were by Donna Haraway and Judith Butler; I used them to analyse the language of AD and its situatedness. I want to make explicit that the original idea of the thesis was just to analyse the language. While analysing it, I started to broaden the perspective and working also on the paradox between inclusivity and accessibility and on the predominance of vision in Western culture that I illustrated in the previous sections. As a consequence, researching and writing were two processes that happened at the same time. For example, the texts of Oye wùmí and Garland-Thomson were added in the middle of the writing process as I realised in that moment that they were relevant for my project. My approach permitted me to expand the research possibilities of my thesis. Haraway argues:

“Acknowledging the agency of the world in knowledge makes room for some unsettling possibilities including a sense of the world’s independent sense of humour”. (Haraway 1988, 593)

Haraway is arguing that the world is not just a resource to study but it has its own agency. Not all knowledge is under the control of the researcher; meanings and things are mutable through time and space. In addition, knowledge is always partial and filtered by the perspective of the researcher that interacts with the object of knowledge. This interaction confutes the idea that the world is a fixed entity and it promotes a less strict approach to knowledge that can bring to unexpected discoveries. In this sense, I was influenced by Haraway’s statement as I was trying to implement a flexible approach to my research and its discoveries.

In regard to the technical issues of AD, I deepened them by looking for the main Italian scholars and researchers on audio description and then selecting their main publications. I also looked at the Italian regulations on the topic and I read the handbook of few of the main Italian

producers of AD to inform myself of the current local situation. Alongside my country, I researched the situation in other European countries and overseas.

Another point I stress in my thesis is the cultural analysis of my case study. I analysed *Prisma* TV Series against the Italian cultural, historical and political context to understand the impact of this representation in my country. In particular, my analysis included an historical overview of the fascist roots of the city of Latina where *Prisma* was mostly shot. I also illustrated the current political situation led by the extreme right which is promoting conservatism and repression and that is threatening the protection of freedom of expression and human rights. Moreover, I have done research on the contemporary publications and discussions on the themes of inclusive language, blindness and audio description in Italy. The combination of these research threads helped me to contextualize and expand the main argument of my thesis in relation to accessibility politics.

1.5 List of terms and sentences that describe the physical characteristics and appearance of the characters in *Prisma* TV Series

In the following scheme, I grouped the main terms and sentences related to gender, sexuality, disability and race that I found in the audio descriptions of *Prisma*. I am aware that the use of the categories ‘female characters’ and ‘male characters’ still perpetrate the gender binaries, but the approach I propose is helpful to highlight the differences between their descriptions.

Episode 1 - Red

Female characters:

- “[Carola] *Al posto della gamba sinistra ha una protesi che le parte dal ginocchio*” (Carola has a prosthetic leg) (2:47)
- “*Dal gabinetto esce una trent’enne in tiro*” (A thirty years old woman well dressed up gets out the toilet) (3:50)
- “*Una barista bionda piacente*” (An attractive blonde bartender) (4:05)
- “[Carola] *sorride affabile*” (She has an affable smile) (5:05)
- “[Andrea] *Entra in camera della sua ragazza e la trova a letto con una brunetta*” (He get in his girlfriend’s room and he found her while having sex with a brunette) (14:14)

- “[Carola] In minigonna di jeans e stivaletti neri come la sua protesi” (She wears a short miniskirt and a pair of boots as black as her prosthesis) (18:27)
- “Selfie di un corpo femminile” (Feminine body’s selfies) (27:17)

Male characters:

- “Due sono gemelli [Andrea e Marco], biondicci e dai lineamenti delicati” (Two of them are twins with blonde hair and delicate facial features) (00:23)
- “Il terzo è in felpa con la lampo ed ha la pelle scura” (The third one wears a jumpsuit and his skin is dark) (00:34)
- “Il padre [di Andrea] quarant’enne” (Andrea’s father is forty year old) (11:35)
- “Il padre [di Andrea], capelli rasati e fisico massiccio” (Andrea’s father has shaved hair and massive body) (11:40)
- “Ilo, lunghi capelli stretti sulla testa in una cipolla” (Ilo has long hair gathered in a bun) (17:08)
- “E [Ilo] si scambia uno sguardo con l’amico [Daniele] che ha un tatuaggio dietro l’orecchio destro” (And he exchanges looks with his friend who has a tattoos behind the ear) (18:00)
- “[ad Andrea] Gli apre un ragazzo tatuato” (A tattooed boy opens the door) (25:02)
- “Su un tavolino caotico il ragazzo prepara una canna d’erba. Cerchietto al lobo e unghie smaltate di nero ha i capelli platino rasati sui lati” (A guy is making a joint on a messy table. He has an earring, he wears nail polish and he has light blonde hair shaved either sides of his head) (25:08)
- “[Andrea] Rimasto in mutande indossa il vestito da donna. Se lo aggiusta davanti allo specchio e si guarda incantato” (Andrea in underpants wears a women’s dress. He adjusts the dress in front of the mirror and he looks himself enchanted) (31:15)
- “[Andrea] Si sposta i folti capelli dietro le orecchie con i modi di una ragazza” (He moves his hairs behind the ears with the moves of a girl) (31:35)
- “[Andrea] Prende il cellulare, incrocia le gambe e si scatta una foto” (Andrea take his phone, crosses the legs and shot a picture of himself) (31:38)

Episode 2 - Orange

F:

- *“[Micole] si guarda intorno e nota una moretta che ascolta la musica con le cuffie. E’ Nina”* (She looks around and notice a brunette who is listening to music with a pair of headphones. The girl is Nina) (00:30)
- *“Seduta alla scrivania di un ufficio una ragazza mascolina [Raffa] con corti capelli neri”* (A tomboy with short black hair is sitting at the desk of her office) (00:43)
- *“Intrigata Carola, si mordicchina il labbro inferiore”* (Carola is intrigued and she picks her lip) (10:18)
- *“Carola Sorride maliziosa”* (Carola smiles mischievously) (15:13)
- *“[La sorella di Nina] Entra una ragazza sui venticinque anni truccata e con lunghi capelli castani”* (A twenty-five years old girl with brown hair and make-up gets in the room) (27:05)
- *“Ilo e la ragazza con la frangetta che gli siede accanto”* (Ilo is sitting besides a girl with fringe) (37:10)

M:

- *“[Andrea] La sua ombra proiettata sulla sabbia ricorda il profilo di ragazza seduta e con lunghi capelli che le ricadono sulla schiena”* (Andrea’s shadow projected on the sand reminds of the profile of a girl seated with long hair) (13:29)
- *“[Marco] Il suo corpo snello e sinuoso”* (His body is slim and sinuous) (23:00)

Episode 3 - Yellow

F:

- *“Due mani femminili le coprono [A Carola] gli occhi da dietro”* (Two female hands cover her eyes) (04:12)
- *“Carola si tocca i capelli raccolti in una crocchia”* (Carola touches her hair up in a bun) (04:54)

- *“Le tre amiche ammiccano con aria furba”* (Three friends are winking with a smart attitude) (05:00)
- *“[Nina] Si mordicchia il labbro e sorride soddisfatta”* (Nina picks her lip satisfied) (17:08)
- *“Carola sorride maliziosa e guarda Marco con aria implorante”* (Carola smiles mischievously and looks at Marco imploring) (19:06)
- *“Carola indossa un top aderente zebrato. Ha un velo di rossetto sulle labbra e i capelli raccolti in due trecce alla francese che le ricadono morbide sul seno”* (Carola wears a top zebra-striped top. She wears a light lipstick and her two braids are softly dropping on her breasts) (23:13)
- *“Carola, che sta assistendo alle riprese, si volta a guardarlo [a Marco] e sorride maliziosa”* (Carola, who is assisting to the shooting, looks at Marco and she smiles mischievously) (24:12)
- *“Carola si volta verso di lui e sorride intrigante”* (Carola looks at him smiling intriguing) (28:52)
- *“Entra una donna piacente sui cinquant’anni”* (An attractive woman of fifty years old gets in the room) (33:14)

M:

- *“La luce fredda dello schermo gli illumina il viso dai tratti delicati”* (The cold light of the screen enlightens his delicate facial features) (00:32)
- *“Un uomo sulla sessantina sta ultimando la piega a June”* (A sixty years old man is finishing to style June’s hair) (05:06)
- *“[Marco] Fisico asciutto e longilineo”* (Marco’s body is lean and slender) (20:11)
- *“Vittorio ha il torso nudo ricoperto di tatuaggi”* (Vittorio’s chest is covered in tattoos) (21:00)
- *“Ilo, indossa un gilet tecnico senza maglietta. Dei vistosi orecchini a cerchio argentati e una collana a più fili che gli cade sul torso nudo e tirato”* (Ilo wears a technical gilet without the t-shirt. He has silver hoops earrings and a multi-wire necklace that drop on his naked and contracted torso) (21:03)
- *“Marco ha la testa appoggiata al finestrino semi aperto e guarda fuori con aria sognante”* (Marco looks outside the window and he is dreamy) (30:15)

Episode 4 - Green:

F:

- *“Carola gli si avvicina e lo bacia sulle labbra. Gli posa una mano sulla nuca e lo bacia con più trasporto”* (Carola get closer and kisses him on the lips. She touches his head with the hand and kisses him with passion) (29:01)
- *“Carola gli posa una mano sul viso e lo bacia sensuale sulla bocca. Carola lo spinge sul letto”* (Carola touches his face and kisses him sensually) (30:53)

Episode 6 - Indigo:

- *“Andrea guarda attraverso il finestrino. Un gruppo di persone evidentemente appartenenti alla comunità LGBTQ+ sono riunite di fronte al locale”* (Andrea looks outside the car’s window. A group of people evidently part of the LGBTQI+ community stand outside the club) (30:33)

Chapter 2: Why *Prisma*?

From fascism to Giorgia Meloni: the meaning of *Prisma* in the Italian political and historical context

Prisma is set in Latina, a city near Rome. The city was founded in 1932 in the countryside of Rome during fascism, when Mussolini decided to renew the countryside of Italy to fulfil the aim of ruralism, one of the main projects and expressions of his ideology. *Prisma* narrates the story of Andrea and Marco (Mattia Carrano), two twins in their teens that are physically identical, but who have two different attitudes towards society, relationships and towards their own identity struggles. The twins grow up in a Catholic and conservative Italian family. Marco is shy and introvert, he has a crush on Carola, and he is a professional swimmer. Later in the series, flashbacks emphasise by what means Marco gets bullied by his swimming mates Daniele (Lorenzo Zurzolo) and his friends. As a result, he has a breakdown and gets injured when punching a glass window at home. The accident forces him to take a break from swimming and when the series begins he appears to be trying to get back in shape. In contrast, Andrea is extrovert and rebel. He gets caught dealing marijuana at school and he is suspended and rejected from the high school. He breaks up with his girlfriend because she betrays him with Nina (Caterina Forza). Andrea is the owner of a social profile called *nonesknowsmelike* where he posts pictures wearing female clothing and acting like a girl but never shows his face. One day, Daniele starts following the profile and the two start texting each other on a daily basis. Daniele believes to be speaking to a girl and suggests to meet in real life to get to know each other, but Andrea does not reveal his identity and always rejects such invitation. At this time, Andrea has not spoken to anyone about his identity struggles with the exception of Raffa, one of the volunteers of the *Gay Help Line* of the *Arcigay* group in Rome who Andrea often calls to speak about his situation and to understand what to do. It is the new year and Andrea has new classmates one of whom is Nina. Despite the past events with his ex-girlfriend, Nina and Andrea become friends and she will help him exploring his gender identity and sexuality and to find the courage to come out with his family and finally tell the truth to Daniele.

The choice of filming the series in Latina is not casual. This city is relatively young, only inaugurated in 1932 during the fascist period. The city is a *Città di Fondazione*, one of the cities born during Fascism on the drained areas of Agro Pontino, in the countryside of Rome

(Deschermeier 2014). The reclamation of these lands was one of the main aspects of Mussolini's ruralism project, one that stood at the basis of fascism. The aim of ruralism was to promote the countryside instead of urban cities and industrial development. Big cities were considered dangerous for the regime because of the presence of industries that can trigger working-class revolts and the development of communism (Deschermeier 2014). The architecture of these new cities reflected the ideologies of fascism; the architects were called to build the 'true Italian city' of Italians. For example, in the first minute of the fourth episode of *Prisma*, Daniele is at home with Carola and he is staring at the window contemplating the panorama. Carola lives in an apartment at the top of a tall building. Daniele while looking at the view, starts talking about the big 'M' that would be visible from there. The big 'M' that Daniele refers to is the *Palace M* or *Casa del fascio* that was one of the most prominent buildings of the city, which was built to celebrate fascism. The scene emphasises the relationship between the location, the Italian political context and the stories of the characters of the TV series (Musillo 2022). Latina was born with the name of *Littoria*. Originally, it was supposed to be an agricultural village. Later, it assumed the status of city and elevated as a symbol of fascism. The main characteristics of Latina and of the other cities of this kind were monumentalism and the hierarchic structure of the city. Monumentalism was employed to represent the power of the regime and auto-celebration. The hierarchic structure means that the layout of the city was organized on the web model where the square was the centre of the city life and institutions, while its size was suitable for the 'adunate fasciste' (fascist assembly) for Mussolini's speech. These cities were more important for their symbolic value as 'ideal cities' than for their effective serviceability (Deschermeier 2014). Latina is an example of that idea of Italian identity and Italianess that was pursued by Mussolini during Fascism. This city, the background of the events in *Prisma*, can be considered a character itself as it represents the conservative environment where Andrea and his friends experience their struggles and research of identity. The theme of identity is central in the series and the city of Latina is useful to help the spectator to contextualize the story to construct the characters. Difference matters because we constitute each other with our opposite (Hall 2013, 12-14). The differences between the strict environment where the characters grow up and live and their undetermined identities, changing and transformations co-constitute each other and allow for their differences to unfold. During fascism homosexual, transgender, black people, people with disabilities, psychiatric issues and any other characteristic that was considered abnormal were rejected by the regime. Although having improved considerably since the fascist regime, modern Italy is still somewhat fighting the battle of human rights. The recent election of extreme right's leader Giorgia Meloni

as Italy's Prime Minister marked a step back towards inclusivity. An example could be the following. Recently, the government has asked cities such as Milan and Rome to stop inscribing children of homosexual couples. Therefore, the government would not allow the children's parents to be recognised as such. (Il Post 2023). The decision was made following the idea of these children not recognised as biological as they were born through surrogacy practices in countries where surrogacy process is allowed, or they are the child of one of the partners. The government supports the 'traditional family'; that is the family formed of biological mother and father. Moreover, Lazio region rejected the sponsorship towards the Rome's Pride event that took place on June 2023 (Turano 2023). The decision was supported by *ProVita* organization, an extremist Italian antiabortion movement that supports the same idea of "natural family" (Guerra 2018). The reason behind the choice given by the president of Lazio region Francesco Rocca, is that people from LGBTQI+ communities promote "illegal behaviours" because they promote the legalization and regulation of surrogacy in Italy for homosexual couples (Turano 2023). A few weeks before Rocca's decision, the Prime Minister party Fratelli d'Italia proposed to extend the current law against surrogacy to Italian people who already had children abroad. The law would allow the State to pursue a criminal trial against such families for the use of surrogacy (Il Post 2023). Such actions and discriminations against LGBTQI+ community are common in Italy and this hate climate threatens the preservation of human rights. The ones stated above are only a few examples of the many difficulties queer communities experience in Italy nowadays. *Prisma* is set in contemporary times and the choice of setting this TV Series in the city of Latina is clearly a way of portraying both the current Italian political situation and of evoking the background of the country that shaped ideologies and prejudices. Moreover, the family of Andrea and Marco is catholic and one of their uncle is a priest. In the fourth episode of *Prisma* (16:45) the family and the uncle are sitting and talking around a table while having dinner when the mother asks why one of their male friends wears nail polish. The guys, to avoid discussions, simply responding that it is 'for fashion'. In the scene, the priest agrees and answers asserting that many of the male teenagers that he has met in church use nail polish for fashion (with negative meaning). The mother of the twins is visibly disappointed by the behaviour of their friend. At the same time, the father of the twins who is listening to the conversation, starts to be suspicious about this friend and he looks sceptical to his sons. This short scene shows the positions of the family on gender identity. They represent the tension between the Church and the issues of gender identity, homosexuality and transgenderism. In Italy, the Church is particularly influent on political choices and human rights. As a result, the lives of certain groups of people can be impacted. Apparently, although only with his speeches, Pope Francisco

appears to be more open to these issues, but concretely the dialogue between the Church (in particular the Church of Rome) and the LGBTQI+ community is still problematic. For example, the catechism still defines homosexuality a ‘guilt’ (in the past it was compared to rape) (Grieco 2023) and same sex couples do not have access to Christian marriage. Taking into consideration this background, *Prisma* is one of the contemporary Italian TV Series that tries to defy the idea of ‘normalcy’ that the Church and the government are pursuing. The new identities that Andrea (and other characters) represent are a glimmer of light in the Italian audio-visual representation as they challenge the discriminatory projects, prejudices and violence encouraged by the currently Italian political views, that are threatening the rights of marginalized groups.

According to that, the aim of *Prisma* TV serial was to “tell a story that was never told before in Italy”, as explained by the broadcaster of the series of Prime Video during the panel dedicated to *Prisma* at the Italian *Festival delle Serie TV*, one of the main Italian TV Series festival that take place at the *Triennale* museum in Milan in October⁴. The issue of inclusivity in movies and TV series has increased considerably in the last few years in Italy. In the introduction, I explained the issue of language and inclusion, but the same discussion on inclusivity is happening also in the audio-visual field. For example, since 2013 the foundation *Diversity Lab* has committed to promote diversity in the field of media and audio-visual productions through different activities, events and training programs. It soon became an important reference point in the analysis and recognition of the current situation on diversity and inclusion in the field of representation and media in Italy. Since 2016, every year they organize the *Diversity Media Awards* which is the most important ceremony in Italy awarding those who represent society and the people in an inclusive way and who allow people to feel represented⁵. In 2023, *Prisma* TV serial won the prize for *best Italian TV serial*. As well as *Prisma* it is also important to mention another Italian production that introduced new challenges in the representation of marginalized groups on streaming platforms. *SKAM Italia* is the Italian version of the Swedish *SKAM* and it is directed by Ludovico Bessegato, the same director of *Prisma*. The first season of *SKAM Italia* was produced in Italy in 2018. Today it counts five seasons, the last one produced in 2022. *SKAM Italia* tells the story of a group of middle-class teenage students and friends from Rome who attend the same high school. Each season focuses

⁴ The *Festival delle Serie TV* is one of the most important events on TV serials in Italy. It takes place every year on September at *Triennale* museum in Milan. The director and co-founder of the festival is Marina Pierri who is a television critic and an expert of female representations. Further information:

<https://ilfestivaldelleserietv.it/programma/>

⁵ Further information: <https://www.diversitylab.it/>

on one or two characters of the group and it addresses different kind of issues and personal struggles that teenagers tend to experience in their lifetime. The main themes of *SKAM Italia* are: relationships, love, friendship, heterosexuality, homosexuality, coming-out, religion, identity, physical appearance, physical prejudices, sexual abuse, drugs, sex and mental health. This series speaks about important notions that usually are never addressed in other Italian productions. Remarkable are the fourth and the fifth seasons of the series. The fourth season is about the relationship between sex and Islamic religion and the marginalization that the main character experiences when she deliberately decides to not have sexual intercourse before marriage due to her religious beliefs. The perspective taken by the series is not judgmental and the tensions between different cultures try to maintain an intersectional approach; something that I have found insightful in an Italian production. The last season is about Elia, one of the characters, who is affected by hypoplasia of penis. The theme is a complex one as it shows the impact of phallocentrism and machismo in young cisgender males and the construction of their identity, especially during teenage years. *SKAM Italia* and *Prisma* represent two significant stages in Italian TV Series production as they bring new perspectives and modernised views into the field of representation.

The story of *Prisma* is inspired by a combination of multiple stories of people that the TV Series crew met while doing research for the project. In particular, the person who inspired them the most was Giovanna Cristina Vivinetto, an Italian trans woman who has a twin just like the main characters of *Prisma*. Vivinetto is a poet and her book *Dolore Minimo* about her own transition, is the book that Andrea reads in the TV Series and helps him to deal with his identity and personal struggles. Giovanna Vivinetto is visible in *Prisma* in the episode 7. In the episode, Andrea and Nina go to Rome to meet her in a famous bookshop during the presentation of her aforementioned book⁶. The book of Vivinetto is the first Italian book of poems on gender transition. Vivinetto explains that writing is helpful to her for sharing her experience as a trans woman and to inform people about gender transition⁷. In Italy, transgender people experience different levels of discrimination. Vivinetto for example, told that she was fired once due to her transition⁸. The experience of Vivinetto is just one of many. I want to remind the story of Cloe

⁶ These information were realised during the last edition of the *Festival Delle Serie TV*. The cast of *Prisma* was interviewed by Marina Pierri, the director of the Festival, who asked them about the path of *Prisma* from the first ideas to the production. You will find the full interview at the following link: <https://ilfestivaldelleserietv.it/eventi/prisma/>

⁷ Giovanna Cristina Vivinetto speaks about her life during an interview at the festival *Chiasso Letteraria*. Full interview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3gnzFBDBY7w>

⁸ *ibidem*.

Bianco, Bianco, a teacher who was suspended and removed from teaching in 2015 because trans. Cloe Bianco was attacked also by the councillor for education Elena Donazzan from the Veneto region where Bianco lived and worked. At that time, Donazzan, who is part of Fratelli d'Italia party, received an e-mail from the father of a student of Bianco who explained that the presence of a trans teacher in the school was problematic. Donazzan decided to publish the whole letter on her Facebook profile by encouraging people to “*make their considerations*”. She then said to the journals that the case of Cloe Bianco was “*serious*” and that it would never happens again to have a trans woman teaching at a school. The discrimination that Cloe Bianco experienced and the impossibility to work led her to kill and burn herself in the truck where she used to live (Il Post 2023).

In addition, the gender transition path in Italy is long and complicated. There are many steps to accomplish that can take years. Moreover, not all the schools and universities guarantee the alias career for transgender students while waiting the reassignment of their documents with the new name and gender. The alias career is useful because the process of reassignment of documents is really slow in my country. Many times it occurs that trans people are called with their dead names in certain institutions or are obligated to explain why their physical appearance does not fit with their documents. These issues expose them to discrimination and violation of privacy (Shendi 2023). In 2020, the Italian parliamentarian Alessandro Zan proposed the *DDL ZAN* to modify two articles of the Italian penal code in order to broaden the *Mancino law* on the protection from discriminations by adding discriminations against sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and disability together with the existing ones against race, religion and ethnicity. The proposal was approved by the Camera but rejected by the Senate, effectively determining the ending of the procedure of approval for the law. The day when the DDL Zan was rejected, half of the people in the Italian Senate made by politicians from the extreme right, stood up in the chamber to acclaim with excitement for the result. As a consequence, in Italy we do not have a law against transphobia and homophobia that protects people against discrimination and violence (Il Post 2023). Audio-visual productions such as *Prisma* are important because they are produced within this environment that perpetrates ignorance, violence and hate against people from LGBTQI+ community and marginalized people in general.

Chapter 3: Audio description

I explained in the introduction that contemporary debates about Italian language and its bias and regarding the language of audio description is still marginal within these discussions, particularly in Italy and abroad. I decided to focus my research on AD in TV Series and movies because it is impossible to analyse the AD in all the sectors in which it is employed⁹. In this chapter, I will provide a detailed explanation of audio description and its unique language. This is a fundamental step to analyse the language of the audio descriptions in *Prisma* TV Series, which is the main case study of this thesis. There are a few questions that guide my arguments in this chapter. What is the process of creation of audio description? What are its main rules? What can be considered relevant to be translated by the audio describer into AD? What does it mean to be objective within audio description?

3.1 Audio description in Europe and Italy

Audio description is the textual translation of the visual part of an audio-visual product, a theatre piece or the collection of a museum. AD is created to enhance accessibility to visual products to blind and visually impaired people. AD is a multidisciplinary field and its creation requires the collaboration of different kind of professional figures. AD is defined by Joel Snyder “*the visual made verbal*” and “*seeing with the ear*” because is a kind of writing that is made with the aim to be listened (Snyder 2014, 9). The main difference between the language of audio descriptions and the written/spoken language is that AD describes solely what is actually occurring in the scene, nor after or before, with the exception of specific requirements of the audio-visual product or the story (Piety 2004, 463).

Audio descriptions are subjected to many rules and criteria. Within the European context, there are not mandatory common guidelines; thus, they differ from country to country. Moreover, sometimes it is possible to find different approaches to writing AD in the same country because AD production is not regulated by any official law, but the rules are dictated by the companies or associations that produce AD. Italy is one of the countries in which it is possible to find this phenomenon.

⁹ Audio description can be employed in museums, festivals, theatre, dance, social media and more. In general, the rules within them are similar but there can be some differences or different levels of development, usage and distribution.

In lights of this situation, in 2012 the European Union promoted the ADLAB project¹⁰ that provided for the first time a document with common European guidelines. The project was a three-year research over the AD rules in European countries and it was curated by six universities across Europe and others in the world. The University of Trieste in Italy was one of the six universities that collaborated to the project. The aim of the ADLAB was to improve accessibility to art and multimedia products to blind and visually impaired people across Europe. The final product was a manual translated into several languages across the EU that contains all information about AD. These guidelines are not mandatory for the European countries but they are considered an important document in the field of AD (Perego 2014, 9-11).

In Italy, the first AD on TV is dated back to the 1991, when the movie *Spartacus* by Stanley Kubrick was broadcasted on RAI, the Italian national public channel¹¹. Nowadays, the production of the audio descriptions is made by different institutions, associations and companies, each free to set their own rules which can differ one to another. Since 1992, a great contribution to the creation and development of AD in Italy has been made by *Senza Barriere Onlus*¹², a non-profit association born with the aim of facilitating access for blind and visually impaired people to visual products. They provided the AD for many Italian and foreign audio-visual products and they are considered a key figure in this kind of accessibility products. *Senza Barriere Onlus* was one of the contributors of the ADLAB project. Other realities worth to be mentioned are the company *Artis Project*, the app *MovieReading* developed within the association *CulturAbile*, *Forword* association, *Blindsight* project and *RAI Easy Web*. According to the latest report realised by the Italian Ministry of Health in March 2023, in Italy 1.9% of people aged 15 years old are affected by severe visual diseases. The percentage increases to 5% amongst people aged 65 and reaches the 8% in those aged 75. Moderate visual diseases affect 16.7% of Italian population¹³. The access to multimedia products is regulated by the *Legge Cinema 220* dated 2016 which states that Italian government must incentivise and promote the access to cinema and audio-visual to those with disability¹⁴.

¹⁰ Further information: <http://www.adlabproject.eu/home/>

¹¹ <https://audiomovie.it/da-ctt-a-audiomovie-la-storia-dei-film-audiodescritti/>

¹² Further information: <https://www.senzabarriere.org/>

¹³ <https://www.salute.gov.it/portale/prevenzioneIpovisioneCecita/dettaglioContenutiPrevenzioneIpovisioneCecita.jsp?lingua=italiano&id=2389&area=prevenzioneIpovisione&menu=vuoto>

¹⁴ <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2016/11/26/16G00233/sg>

3.2 The writing process of audio description in films and TV serials

The writing process of AD is made of multiple steps and strict rules that are impactful on the linguistic choices of the descriptions. When a visual detail is considered important it is called 'relevant'. Such relevance is shaped by cultural and historical codes that collide with the pursuing of objectivity that stands at the basis of the writing process of audio descriptions. The key figure who creates the audio descriptions is called audio describer. The process of creation of AD is formed by four main steps (Remael, Reviere, and Vercauteren 2012, 10-11). The first one is to watch the movie together with one or more blind or visually impaired people and to analyse the visual source. Then, the descriptions are written, read out aloud and timed in order to know if the script of the AD overlaps with the movie's sounds and the dialogues. Once that is completed, the movie is streamed including AD to visually impaired individuals and reviewed. When the script of the AD is definitive, the AD is officially read out loud and recorded (Remael, Reviere, and Vercauteren 2012,10-11). The last step is to combine the recording with the original movie and release the final product to the audience. According to Elena Perego¹⁵, writing audio descriptions means to interface with four main aspects that are shared between all the guidelines worldwide (Perego 2011, 22). The four aspects are: knowing what, when, how much and how to describe. She argues that there is always more to see than what is possible to say. The first important rule is that in order to know what to describe the audio describer needs to know which kind of visual details are important for the target audience and stand apart from its sighted dimension. In addition, the screen or the movie to be described must be well known by the audio describer. Indeed, the director's artistic choices for the language of the movie could be important to attribute and translate the accurate meaning of the audio-visual product. 'When describing' means that audio descriptions do not have to interfere with the original product, being careful not to disrupt sounds and dialogues and also paying attention to respect the silence and the breaks of the movie. For specific reasons connected to the understanding of the movie, sometimes is possible to anticipate the content of a scene or to describe it more detailed. 'How much' describing relates to the quantity of information that can be included in the audio descriptions because blind and visually impaired people do not need the description of every detail, but they can extract a good level of information just by listening

¹⁵ Elena Perego is one of the main Italian scholar who researches on audio description in Italy and abroad. She published many articles and books on the field of audio description such as the *Routledge Handbook on Audio descriptions* in collaboration with Christopher Taylor.

to the movie's sounds and the dialogues. 'How to describe' deals with objectivity, language and style. Within AD, being objective means to stay attached to the pure description of the scene, the actions and the characters Without any interpretation or giving away too much information (Perego 2011, 22). As I explained above, audio descriptions are subjected to many rules and their language is influenced by such guidelines (Remael, Reviere, and Vercauteren 2012, 52). In particular, the timing of each scene plays a huge role when selecting what vocabulary to use to describe each situation. Further language rules for audio descriptions are:

- the language must be in line with the target audience and the movie genre;
- the language must be clear and concrete;
- it is possible to use vivid adjective and adverbs that give the descriptions more details;
- metaphors and similitudes can be used as well as they can help recreating visual elements of the movie;
- the time of the verbs must always use a present tense
- the use of the third person is common because it suggests a possible omniscient narrator.

The relevance is one of chore elements of audio description. It is the action of translating into written form the most important details of a scene. These details are considered relevant when they fundamental to the understanding of a product, a story or an event. The relevance is influenced by many elements in particular the time available, the plot and the kind of audio-visual product (Perego 2014, 78). Usually, the actions of the characters, their personal characteristics, the time and the location of a scene, the movie genre and the movie language are considered relevant details that can be described in AD (Perego 2011, 25). Furthermore, relevance is influenced by cultural aspects. The understanding of a story is subjected to the interpretation of the codes that are shared amongst the reference cultural context (Remael, Reviere, and Vercauteren 2012, 13-14). The following example provides an idea of audio description. It is the description of the first scene of the first episode of the TV Series *Prisma*.

“È sera, gruppi di ragazzi affollano un'ampia piazza di Latina. Ragazzi bevono e conversano nei pressi di una fontana. Ai due lati giardinetti con alberi e palme. Appollaiati su un muretto in marmo che delimita la vasca della fontana, tre adolescenti. Due sono gemelli, biondicci e dai lineamenti delicati, simili come due

*gocce d'acqua. Il terzo è in felpa con la lampo e dalla pelle scura*¹⁶.” (Prisma, 2022, “Rosso”, Episode 1, min. 00:10 – 00:40)

In this short paragraph, crucial details thoroughly describe the scene to blind and visually impaired people. The location is well described: a big square of Latina, a fountain, gardens and palms, a marble wall where the characters are sitting. The description slowly zooms in the scene and the camera movements are embedded in the descriptions themselves. First, there is a big group of young people; then, the description zooms on a group of three teens who are drinking and conversing. The AD mentions that two of teens are twins who look alike. The actions such as drinking, talking or sitting help to create the vibes of a night at the end of summer in Latina. The physical characteristics such as twins, blond, gentle traits, ‘dark skin’ define the characters and introduce them for the first time to the audience.

3.3 The issue of objectivity

The relation between audio description and objectivity is critical. There are many discussions around how much freedom to give the describer for their own interpretation as the whole process is subjected to personal choices (Perego 2011, 27). Despite trying to define common, general guidelines, every movie play or scene can be described in multiple ways that all can be truthful and valid. Moreover, the understanding of a story is constructed not only by the author and the creators of the audio-visual product but also by the audience and the cultural background where the product is realised (Remael, Reviere, and Vercauteren 2012, 10-13). The physical characteristics that are selected to be described in audio description convey cultural meanings that create the character’s identity. As a consequence, the audience of a movie or a TV Series can identify themselves in the story. Just as it occurs that specific categories or marginalised groups do not feel represented, a similar situation could happen with audio descriptions. Thus, it is important not only the way people are represented, but if they are represented at all. In addition, there are many different kinds of visual impairments that together with age and the target of public require different vocabularies and details to be translated.

¹⁶ Trasl: It is evening, a big square in the city of Latina is crowded of young people. They are drinking and conversing near a fountain. On the sides of the square there are little gardens and palms. Three teenagers are sitting on the marble pit that delimits the pool of the fountain. Two of them are siblings, they are blonde and the traits of their faces are delicate. They look like two drops of water. The third one is wearing a sweater with a zip and his skin is black.

Moreover, according to Gili Hammer there are also different levels and ways of sighting. The neutrality of the sight is an assumption that needs to be challenged (Hammer 2019, 143-144). The possibility to describe the same scene in many different ways shows how many different perspectives there are when seeing. The audio describers must take into account the whole complexity of the movie, its reception and the limits of its own sighted dimension while deciding how to describe a movie. What I just explained shows that AD can be seen as a discursive practice that involves systems of representation. According to Stuart Hall, representation is defined as “*the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language*” (Hall 2013, 3). By describing what is happening in a scene of a TV serial or a movie, audio description allows the target audience to process and understand the meaning of an audio-visual product that would not be totally accessible without the AD. Blind and visually impaired people perceive the world differently from the sighted audience (Hammer 2019, 121-123). Despite that, they live in the same speech community. Their language is influenced by the sighted world as is the language of audio descriptions (Piety 2004, 454). In the example of AD of *Prisma* that I provided before it is possible to notice an element that is helpful to clarify the difficult to reach objectivity within audio description. The term ‘black-skin’ is used to describe the personal characteristic of a character that in the serial is one of Marco’s best friends. The whiteness of the other characters is taken for granted because it is never described and specified. This presumption is the result of white supremacy over blackness. The norm is to be white, and whiteness becomes invisible while blackness is marked as a colour (Griffin and Braidotti 2002, 234). In the next chapter I deepen the issue of objectivity and I illustrate the theoretical frameworks that guided my analysis of the AD of the TV Series *Prisma*.

Chapter 4: Theoretical frameworks

Audio description is an important project that promotes accessibility to visual productions to the blind and visually impaired people. Despite the aim to improve accessibility, the field of audio description reifies ideological norms on identities and bodies. What I said means that the research of objectivity that stands at the basis of the production of AD and the improvement of accessibility politics in Italy face tensions with the actual production of AD and its language and it proves the situatedness of the practice. Within this frame my questions are: How is audio description discursively constructed? In what way does AD relate to ideological norms on bodies and identities? How are these norms challenged or reified in the AD of *Prisma*?

4.1 Stuart Hall: meanings, discourses, differences and stereotypes

In the language of audio description, the physical characteristics and appearance of a character are important details to describe for the blind and visually impaired audience. These characteristics fit in the categories of gender, sexuality, disability, race etc. and they build and highlight people' identities. The details selected and the linguistic choices made to address these characteristics build the imaginary around a character and how specific groups of people are perceived and represented. But how are these categories created? How did they become meaningful within the reference cultural context? Audio descriptions are the textual translation of the visual part of a movie or a TV Series. There are different layers and players that intercourse in the process of signification: images, words, the audio describer, the spectator and the cultural context. The combination of these elements creates what is called representation. But what is really representation? How does it work? AD enables the targeted audience to access the visual part of the fictional world of a TV Series. When listening to AD, the audience understands them because the language that addresses the visual part of the TV serial is produced by shared codes that are in common within the reference cultural context. Stuart Hall argues that:

“Representation is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language. it is the link between concepts and language which enables us to refer to either the “real” world of the objects, people or events, or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events. [...] The meaning is

constructed by the system of representation. It is constructed and fixed by the code, which sets up the correlation between our conceptual system and our language system in such way that, every time we think of a tree, the code tells us to use the English word TREE. [...] One way of thinking about culture, then, is in the terms of these shared conceptual maps, shared language systems and the codes which govern the relationships of translation between them. [...] This translatability is not given by nature or fixed by the gods. It is the result of a set of social conventions. It is fixed socially, fixed in culture. [...] Meaning can never be fixed.” (Hall 2013, 2-3).

The meanings of these shared codes are constructed by systems of representation that make the images ‘visible’ to the spectators. For example, when audio descriptions say “*corpo femminile*” (female body) the spectator is able to recreate a specific idea of body because the general idea of what a female body looks like is shared among the reference cultural context. Femininity and masculinity are the product of social conventions that are not fixed; they can change and they are not only visually constructed. Language bonds together different experiences and allows translation and transmission of meanings and concepts. The question arises as to who defines what is femininity and what is masculinity. If the meanings of the language are never fixed, why is it possible to understand them? Who or what does define the codes? Michel Foucault introduced the concept of discourse to explain that the creation of meanings is not only produced by language but by practices as well. Language and practices are not two separate entities but they are part of the same whole. Audio descriptions make visible the bond between practices and language. The language of audio descriptions describes and produces the physical appearance of the characters through the selection of specific details that are relevant because discursively constructed. Stuart Hall explains the Foucauldian concept of discourse as follow:

“He studied not language but discourse as a system of representation. [...] By discourse, Foucault meant “a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment. Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. But since all social practices entail meaning and meaning shape and influence what we do – our conduct – all practices have a discursive aspect. [...] it attempts to overcome the traditional distinction between what one says

(language) and what one does (practice). Discourse, Foucault argues, constructs the topic. It defines and produces the objects of knowledge. It governs the way that topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others. [...] the same discourse, characteristic of the way of thinking or the state of knowledge at any one time (episteme) will appear across a range of texts, and as forms of conduct, at a number of different institutional sites within society.” (Hall 2013, 29-30)

In the AD of *Prisma*, female and male characters are described differently. Masculinity and femininity are socially constructed through a series of actions, representation, education, ways of speaking and so on. Within the audio description of *Prisma*, discursive practices define how to speak about a woman or a man, how to define the normalcy of whiteness through the visibility of blackness. Moreover, they do not only define how to speak about them but they allow to recognise these identities among others through the selection of details and physical characteristics that are specific for specific bodies. Furthermore, knowledge itself works through discursive practices that control the lives of people. Knowledge is always linked to power because knowledge is used to define what counts and what not, what it is normal and what stands outside, who can produce knowledge and who cannot. The truth is the product of such power relations. Hall argues:

“Truth isn’t outside power...truth is a thing of this world; it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it introduces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its “general politics” of truth; that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true, the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned...the statues of those who are charged with saying what count as true.” (Hall 2013, 34)

Within the field of audio description, the “*truth*” is the idea that sight people can be objective. The importance of the sight as considered predominant among other senses is itself a belief that was shaped by a certain idea of normalcy that is based on the able body. This assumption is the product of power relations that defined who can control the knowledge produced. Power relations stand at the basis of the process of othering, an important process that is central to the

creation of meaning and involves the practices of representation of difference and stereotyping. Stuart Hall argues:

“Difference matters because it is essential to meaning: without it meaning does not exist. [...] we know what black means, Saussure argues, not because there is some essence of “blackness” but because we can contrast it with its opposite, white. Meaning, he argued, is relational. It is the difference between white and black which signifies, which carry meanings. [...] We need difference because we can only construct meaning through a dialogue with the Other. [...] Culture depends on giving things meaning by assigning them to different positions within a classificatory system. The marking of difference is thus the basis of that symbolic order which we call culture. [...] The Other is fundamental to the constitution of the self, to us as subject, and to sexual identity.” (Hall 2013, 12-14)

The quote explains the main arguments that are involved in the representation of difference. In the audio descriptions of *Prisma* it is possible to understand how difference works in representation. Audio description creates the characters through details. I mentioned before that the details are not alike between the characters, but they depend on the character themselves. The visibility of a specific characteristic of a character not only describes the character but also shows that the others are different as they do not have such characteristic. For example, the character described with ‘dark skin’ can be a concrete example of the importance of difference as the visibility of his blackness defines the whiteness of the other characters. This remarked difference works as a classification as whiteness is not described. The necessity to make blackness visible classifies the other (in this case the black individual) and subordinates it to white people that appear to be superior and ‘the norm’. Stereotyping is another process that is involved in the creation of meaning and it is a set of representational practices. Hall on the topic says:

“Richard Dyer [...] argues that, stereotypes get hold of the few simple, vivid, easily grasped and widely recognized characteristics about a persona, reduce everything about the person to those traits, exaggerate and simplify them, and fix them without change or development to eternity. [...] Stereotyping reduces, essentializes, naturalizes and fixes difference. [...] Stereotyping deploys a strategy of splitting: it divides the normal and the acceptable from the abnormal and the unacceptable.

[...] Stereotyping is a practice of closure and exclusion. It symbolically fixes boundaries and excludes everything which does not belong. [...] Stereotyping tends to occur where there are gross inequalities of power. Power usually directed against the subordinate or excluded group.” (Hall 2013, 257)

Against this background I want to question: what is the relation between stereotyping and audio descriptions? The previous example of the use of the term ‘dark skin’ can therefore be considered a stereotyping process. I argue that this is true not because of the description itself, but in relation to the omission of descriptions of other colours of skins. In this case, the personality of that specific character is reduced to the colour of his skin that creates a specific imaginary around the character. The word ‘dark skin’ creates a boundary and underlines the relations of powers among whiteness and blackness. Gender itself is subjected to a process of stereotyping. The stylization and repetitions of certain actions frame gender into specific binaries (Butler 1999, 45). The creation of meaning is a complicated process that involves different players and layers of understanding. It is crucial to understand the way in which meanings are created through discursive practices in order to understand the relation between the words used in AD and the object (the scene) itself. Language shapes ideas and concepts. Audio descriptions shows the process behind the creation of meaning through language because the kind of language used to describe the characters explains the filters that are on when we look at people and their identities. Evidently in AD what is seen becomes what is said: the target audience has access to identities/bodies of the characters through dialogue and through audio descriptions too. The visibility of the characters is the product of discursive practices that are situated within specific cultural contexts. In the next section, Donna Haraway explains the situatedness of vision in relation to objectivity as one of the practices involved in the creation of meaning which influence the relevance of the details translated by the audio describer.

4.2 Donna Haraway and situated knowledges

Objectivity is a core element in the field of audio descriptions. The main rule that an audio describer has to follow is to describe solely what it is happening and not to interpret the contents. Although, it is possible to describe the same scene in many different ways that can be all valid. Moreover, as I have illustrated in the third chapter, the language of audio descriptions and the details that the audio describer decides to translate are the product of a process that involves a

specific approach to writing and it is influenced by different parameters such as time and clearness. These limits impact the choices of the audio describer. In addition, the words used to describe the personal characteristics and the appearance of the characters are not innocent. These words, such as in the example of ‘dark skin’ or the use of “*modi da ragazza*” (girl’s behaviours), convey specific meanings that are situated within the cultural reference context. It is clear, then, that the research of objectivity faces many tensions with the actual writing of AD in Italy. The language of audio description of *Prisma* reflects certain stereotypes and common assumptions on marginalized bodies and identities and it enlightens the situatedness of the writing process of AD.

Donna Haraway developed the concept of ‘situated knowledges’ that explains the idea that an objective vision is an illusion, and it is the product of a Western White Male (and ablest I would say) approach to science. Such approach divides people into two categories: them, who are able of objective vision and we who are not able to; we are ‘the other’. The eyes are considered capable of objective vision because they are detached from the object of knowledge. But the object itself is not just a screen on which attach meanings, but it has its own agency as it is defined by the cultural context in which it exists. Against this background, it is fair to wonder: how does the concept of situated knowledge relate to objectivity in audio description? What does it mean that it is the subject that defines the boundaries of the object described? First of all, Donna Haraway explains who are in the categories of ‘them’ and ‘we’:

“The imagined “they” constitute a kind of invisible conspiracy of masculinist scientists and philosophers replete with grants and laboratories. The imagined “we” are the embodied others, who are not allowed to not to have a body, a finite point of view, and so an inevitably disqualifying and polluting bias in any discussion of consequence outside our little circles [...]” (Haraway 1988, 575)

The assumption that vision is detached from the body and that is possible to maintain infinite points of view are the product of a masculinist conspiracy. Haraway calls this illusion “*God’s trick*” (Haraway 1988, 581). Objective knowledge creates a boundary between ‘them’, those who are capable of a disembodied vision, and ‘the other’, those who are seen as the only one with a body. The disembodied ‘them’ are able to produce knowledge without any influence and they do not carry any responsibility. ‘The other’ is subjected and controlled by the power exercised by ‘them’. The Western white and ablest gaze exercised by them is capable of objective vision and imposes his own perspective on knowledge production. Donna Haraway

argues that from a feminist perspective the only objective vision that it is possible is situated knowledges. She argues:

“Only partial perspective promises objective vision. All Western cultural narratives about objectivity are allegories of the ideologies governing the relations of what we call mind and body, distance and responsibility. Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see.” (Haraway 1988, 583)

The Western narrative on objectivity is at the basis of the process of writing audio descriptions too. The perspective of the audio describer is involved in the process of writing despite the aim of being distant and detached. The way the describer sees and describes is the product of a specific context. The feminist perspective proposed by Haraway shows the necessity to rethink such narratives on objectivity. This perspective can be applied to the field of audio description because situated knowledge allows to be critical and responsible of the social norms at work in the descriptions. I mean responsible because the ideology of objectivity hides the real responsibilities of who is describing as objectivity erases the differences among the gazes. Instead, partial perspective can be questionable for its limits because due to its partiality it will not have the presumption to speak for everyone.

In the previous chapter I made the example of the term ‘dark skin’ used in *Prisma* to describe the skin of a character. This example is useful to explain the situatedness of the language used in the audio description of this specific TV Series. What the example shows is that the normal character is white because whiteness is considered the normal condition of a body and it becomes invisible while blackness that is always remarked. The blackness of the characters is on view but we do not have any information about the skin of the other characters that I assume are white (because I am situated as well). White supremacy is an ideology that governs *“the relations of mind and body”* (Haraway 1988, 583) because the idea behind the AD of being objective hides the Western white ideology that marks black bodies as ‘the other’. Moreover, the link between the mind of ‘them’ and the body of ‘the other’ is also at work here. When Haraway says that the embodied are only ‘the others’, she is asserting that the only visible bodies are all those bodies that differs from the standard, from the norm. Whiteness is interiorized by the audio describer and the description. For instance, ‘dark skin’ made me capable to identify its presence. Difference is recognised as such only when in comparison to

something else. Here the describer is enforcing the normalcy of his body by remarking the existence and the differences of ‘the others’ bodies. As a consequence, there is no split between subject and object; object finds its limits in the subjectivity of the describer. Despite that ‘dark skin’ can be considered a physical characteristic of a character that can be described, by making the choice of describing one kind of skin only the describer underlines the Western ideologies on whiteness. The character who is defined as black does not exist as such, but because of the relation between the other characters. The sight is not detached from the body and it is influenced by norms and ideologies. The audio describing process shows the limit of sight and the presumption of Western culture that sighted people can be more objective than blind or visually impaired ones. Throughout history, visual technologies were considered the main tools involved in knowledge production and they were continuously improved and applied to different fields. The absence of sight was considered a lack of abilities and capacity. Donna Haraway says:

“The "eyes" made available in modern technological sciences shatter any idea of passive vision; these prosthetic devices show us that all eyes, including our own organic ones, are active perceptual systems, building on translations and specific ways of seeing, that is, ways of life. There is no unmediated photograph or passive camera obscura in scientific accounts of bodies and machines; there are only highly specific visual possibilities, each with a wonderfully detailed, active, partial way of organizing worlds.” (Haraway 1988, 581)

Donna Haraway speaks about “*visual possibilities*” and not about objectivity or the possibility to see “everything from nowhere” (Haraway 1988, 581). Audio description is an example of a visual possibility. AD shows that there are many different ways to describe a scene, thus, there are different possibilities to make it visible. Moreover, the same term ‘seeing’ and ‘vision’ can assume different meanings in that sense. Seeing and vision are not just related to the sight; blind and visually impaired people can be empowered by AD and be able to train their vision. I want to argue that vision can be understood in a broader sense than just in the ablest one and the lack of sight does not mean an incapability to see. I stated above, there are different ways of seeing and some of them do not involve the sight directly. The details that are considered relevant by the describer are a partial way of describing a scene of a TV Series or a movie that it is not objective but still useful for the target audience to have access to an audio-visual product. In addition, what is described by AD has its own agency. Donna Haraway explains as follows the

way in which written language generates meanings beyond the original intentions of the author (or the audio describer in this case). She writes:

“Like "poems," which are sites of literary production where language too is an actor independent of intentions and authors, bodies as objects of knowledge are material-semiotic generative nodes. Their boundaries materialize in social interaction. Boundaries are drawn by mapping practices; "objects" do not preexist as such. Objects are boundary projects.” (Haraway 1988, 595)

The language of audio description defines how to speak about characters and the boundaries of their identities. Returning back to the example of ‘dark skin’, the words assume their meaning in the social interaction between the audio describer, the target audience and the cultural context. The character does not exist as a black character until he is inserted in that specific representation and described in this way. In the third chapter of this thesis, I have shown how the use of “*corpo femminile*” (feminine body) can become a boundary set by the language in audio description as it takes for granted that the normal body is the male one. Instead, feminine bodies are always marked in many different ways as feminine. The physical characteristics that are considered important for the audience exist because, within the cultural context where the TV Series is produced, such characteristics map identities and bodies of people and make them recognisable. The sentence “*boundaries materialize in social interaction*” refers to the concept that a specific body has specific meanings because someone else define it in a specific way. Haraway continues by saying:

“Gender is a field of structured and structuring difference, in which the tones of extreme localization, of the intimately personal and individualized body, vibrate in the same field with global high-tension emissions.” (Haraway 1988, 588)

By applying this sentence to the field of audio description is possible to trace the limits and tensions between objectivity, audio descriptions and identities description. The subjectivity of the audio describer and their personal and individualized body play a role in the description; its own intimate relation with the body is influenced by the context in which they work. The cultural context, seen as ‘global’, generates a tension with the rule of objectivity because certain ideas on gender are the product of discursive practices that are produced within the cultural

context where the audience, the audio describer and the producer of the TV Series live and where certain stereotypes are reproduced.

All things considered, the white Western males and ablest bodies were considered superior to 'the others' and they became the norm. The normal bodies were also considered neutral and this is why they were linked to objectivity. This norm defined the destiny and social consequences of all 'the others' that were different from the standard and abnormal. In the next section I illustrate the research of Lennard J. Davis to provide the historical background behind the raise of concepts of normalcy and the neutrality of certain bodies.

4.3 Lennard J. Davis and the concept of normalcy

According to Lennard J. Davis, the word 'normal' showed up in the English vocabulary 150 years ago. Before the diffusion of the concept of 'normalcy' people did not have any idea of what was normal. Instead, words like 'ideal' were used by people, thus, there was a concept of 'ideal body', but no one had one. Simultaneously, the concept of 'norm' was born and 'normalcy' appeared as well that further developed with the development of statistics and bell curve. The bodies who were not comprehended under the parameters of the curve were considered abnormal (Davis 2002, 101). Davis argues that is not a causality that language and normalcy came together. The birth of the nation-state led to a common language spoken in the same country and the standardization and homogenization of language contributed to the creation of the categories of normal/abnormal that were extended to bodies and bodily practices (Davis 2002, 102). People with disability, such as blind and visually impaired people, were inscribed outside the bell curve and considered abnormal. Along with the word normal there are other words that can be considered critical: 'identity' and 'represent'. The word 'identity' stands for the individual existence and the similarities with 'the others'. In order to be similar to other people there must be standards to fit in. The word 'represent' was born during the birth of the modern-state as well as the word norm and they are linked. Representation raised with the necessity to identify an individual who represented a group of citizens in government. In order to represent a group of people it must be identified who can be part of that group and the following parameters. The concept of the 'norm' was useful to group specific individuals with the same characteristics. Davis states:

“The problem of how is it possible to be an individual equal to other individuals and the further problem of how to represent such individuals are solved through the concept of the norm and the bell curve. [...] there is an average, a normal citizen who can be described. These are the hypothetical people whose cumulative characteristics fall under the center of the curve. Thus, the concept of the norm permits the idea of individual variation while enforcing a homogeneous standard or average. Further, with the concept of a norm, representation is made possible.”
(Davis 2002, 103)

The concept of ‘norm’ plays a double role in representation of bodies and identities. On one hand, by recognizing the presence of common characteristics among the people of a group allows the community to be visible and represented in visual media and in representation in general. For example, the character of Carola who has a prosthetic leg represents disability and people with disability can recognise her struggles and wins and identify themselves with her. On the other hand, the identification of one or more characteristic is not enough to address the various experiences that disable individuals experience as disability is not a monolithic category. I further analyse, for example, the intersection of gender and disability and how they complicate the relation with sexuality.

In the AD of *Prisma* the representation of certain categories/bodies reinforces ideological norms on identities. What I want to argue is that despite the aim to make these audio-visual products accessible to blind and visually impaired people, the concept of norm is still at work and creates a hierarchy of bodies and identities. In that sense, audio description shows that the problem is not seeing or not seeing, but in representation and the idea of the ‘norm’. People are still reduced to few characteristics and inscribed in frames that enforce marginalization.

4.4 Oyèrónké Oyeẁùmí: the predominance of sight in Western cultures

The concept of ‘normalcy’ that divides people into groups for their physical characteristics enlightens the bodily dimension of identity that is overdetermined by sight. Within Western culture sight has been always considered predominant among other senses. The question arises as to how sight became so significant and why. Oyèrónké Oyeẁùmí addresses the issue by exploring the relationships between body, identity, biology and sight to explain why vision

determines identities in Western culture. In his text “Visualizing the body: Western theories and the African subjects” she argues:

“[...] Until recently, the history of Western societies has been presented as a documentation of rational thought in which ideas are framed as the agents of history. If bodies appear at all, they are articulated as the debased side of human nature. The preferred focus has been on the mind, lofty and high above the foibles of the flesh. Early in Western discourse, a binary opposition between body and mind emerged. The much-vaunted Cartesian dualism was only an affirmation of a tradition in which the body was seen as a trap from which any rational person had to escape. Ironically, even as the body remained at the center of both sociopolitical categories and discourse, many thinkers denied its existence for certain categories of people, most notably themselves. “Bodylessness” has been a precondition of rational thought. Women, primitives, Jews, Africans, the poor, and all those who qualified for the label “different” in varying historical epochs have been considered to be the embodied, dominated therefore by instinct and affect, reason being beyond them. They are the Other, and the other is a body.”

(Oye wùmí 2005, 5)

Within Western societies, the development of rational thought and the ideas produced were considered the reasons behind events and historical turning points. History keeps going thanks to the mind of thinkers. As a consequence, the mind was considered more valuable than the body that was viewed as a prison of the thought. The contraposition of mind and body was theorized for the first time by Cartesio, although this dualism is rooted since the early stages of Western cultures. Thinkers were elevated and considered the most impactful and knowledgeable people of Western societies; they usually referred to the themselves as ‘bodyless’ due to the importance of their minds. The body of the thinkers was the white, Western, male and ablest body thus it became neutral within Western discourses. The body started to be seen as a condition of all ‘the others’ that were not the thinkers such as women, black or poor people that were controlled by their instincts and physical necessities. The split between mind and body stands at the bottom of the predominance of sight in Western cultures. The mind governs the body and the mind produces knowledge. Sight, in that sense, is considered detached from the body because seeing does not involve any contact with ‘the other’. Consequently, sight was directly linked to the mind as the principal tool involved in

observation and reason that were the main requirements of rational thought. Previously, I explained that the body of the thinkers was the neutral, invisible one; but their invisibility was visible through the recognition of the bodies of ‘the others’ as their difference was recognised as such in comparison with a standard. These standards forged the ideal ‘Man’ that was created on the possession of specific physical characteristics. The body remained at the centre, as the quote says, but only certain categories of people came to existence as bodies and experienced the social effects of their differences. In the audio description of *Prisma* the standard body is noticeable in the presence of the description of certain physical characteristics and the absence of others. For instance, the ‘dark skin’ example discussed highlights the neutrality of whiteness that never emerges. ‘Dark skin’ is a visual detail that is considered relevant to be translated by the describer because it inscribes the body on screen into a specific cultural frame. The visibility of the skin is grounded in the history of rational thought that I illustrated before and sustained by sight. Oye wùmí explains the birth of the predominance of the sight as follow:

“In an interesting paper appropriately entitled “The Mind’s Eye,” feminist theorists Evelyn Fox Keller and Christine Grontkowski make the following observation: “We [Euro-Americans] speak of knowledge as illumination, knowing as seeing, truth as light. How is it, we might ask, that vision came to seem so apt a model for knowledge? And having accepted it as such, how has the metaphor colored our conceptions of knowledge?” These theorists go on to analyze the implications of the privileging of sight over other senses for the conception of reality and knowledge in the West. They examine the linkages between the privileging of vision and patriarchy, noting that the roots of Western thought in the visual have yielded a dominant male logic. Explicating Jonas’s observation that “to get the proper view, we take the proper distance,” they note the passive nature of sight, in that the subject of the gaze is passive. They link the distance that seeing entails to the concept of objectivity and the lack of engagement between the “I” and the subject—the Self and the Other. Indeed, the Other in the West is best described as another body—separate and distant.” (Oye wùmí 2005, 15)

Detachment is what allows the subject to maintain the proper view of the world and be objective. The example of audio description is suitable to understand how this ideology of sight predominance is still at work and its consequences. The research of objectivity that the audio describer has to follow relies on the idea that the sighted are capable of objective vision.

Objectivity means to be detached and it means to be able to produce knowledge. The fact that the describer's lack of engagement can be possible through the sight reifies the ablest assumption that there are minds who are able of autonomous thought and minds who are not; these are just bodies. Within this frame, I can argue that blind and visually impaired people are simply considered as bodies. What sounds paradoxical in my opinion is that the eyes are part of the body and sight is a bodily process. The lack of sight does not mean lack of autonomy, but simply a different way to signify the world. The body is at work both if you can see or you cannot. Instead, the gaze is a product of ideologies; the problem is not seeing but how to see. Audio descriptions perfectly show this issue as objectivity does not exist; what exists is the cultural context and social norms that shaped how to see; the details translated for blind and visually impaired people in this instance. The meaning that difference assumes and the way certain bodies became the norm and govern other bodies is the product of the gaze and not the biological matter. Oye wùmí argues:

“In the West, social identities are all interpreted through the “prism of heritability,” to borrow Duster’s phrase. Biological determinism is a filter through which all knowledge about society is run. As mentioned in the preface, I refer to this kind of thinking as body-reasoning; it is a biologic interpretation of the social world. The point, again, is that as long as social actors like managers, criminals, nurses, and the poor are presented as groups and not as individuals, and as long as such groupings are conceived to be genetically constituted, then there is no escape from biological determinism. [...] No difference is elaborated without bodies that are positioned hierarchically.” (Oye wùmí 2005, 9)

Biological determinism impacts on audio description too. The physical characteristics that are relevant for the audio describer to be translated find their roots in that characteristics that became determinant in defining people's identities. Why we do consider important the skin or gender or physical shape of a character in audio description? Why do characters become visible only through these characteristics? These details are minor when we describe a person but they become enough to inscribe such person within a frame. In the examples of ‘dark skin’, “*movimenti da ragazza*” (moving like a girl), “*fisico massiccio*” (massive body) or “*ragazza mascolina*” (mannish girl) the describer is not just describing the character but he is identifying it.

4.5 Judith Butler: language and gender performativity

Gender itself is overdetermined by vision. For example, in the audio description of *Prisma* gender is described as binary. The female characters are described through physical characteristics such as the hairstyle, hair colour and behaviours towards the male characters. The male characters are described for their bodily shape or tattoos on their skin. Moreover, when Andrea starts to explore his own gender identity his new behaviours are grouped under the umbrella term “*modi da ragazza*”. These examples show that the categories of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ are socially constructed. But what does it mean? How are gender categories constructed? What is the relationship between language, bodies and gender? In the book *Gender Trouble* Judith Butler used the concept of ‘gender performativity’ for the first time. She argues:

“Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being.” (Butler 1999, 45)

Judith Butler explains that gender is not natural but it is created by repeated acts that create a certain idea of gender. These acts are defined as performances; thus, gender is performative. She uses the term performance because she compares gender performativity to theatre performances (Butler 1988, 526). The script of a theatre show exists beyond the presence of the actor who performs it, but his presence is necessary to reproduce the performance. Just as it happens at the theatre, the acts that create gender survive the people who performs them but, at the same time, they need them to be actualized (Butler 1988, 526). She continues by stating that gender is also a public act: the difference between acting on a theatre and outside the stage is that in real life the consequences of gender performances lead to control and regulations. Being considered a woman or a man means to be treated differently within societies because men and women face different issues. The link between sex and gender is historical and cultural and not biological as having different sexes does not mean that there must be social differences between the sexes. Butler defines the body as an “*historical idea rather than a natural species*” (Butler 1988, 520). Within *Prisma* TV Series, the language used to describe the gender identity of Andrea shows the performativity of gender. His transformation is described through the sentence “*si muove con i modi di una ragazza*” (he moves like a girl) and it refers to that kind

of acts that are linked to femininity; but who defined what it femininity is? What is the meaning of “*modi di una ragazza*”?

In the example above, and others that I will further analyse, the use of this kind of descriptions that group women’s performances into a frame remarks the link that exists between bodies and language. The identity’s exploration of Andrea is explained by the sentence “*modi di una ragazza*” because it allows the blind audience to recognize the transformation of Andrea through his actions. Butler argues:

“Language sustains the body not by bringing it into being or feeding it in a literal way; rather, it is by being interpellated within the terms of language that a certain social existence of the body first becomes possible. [...] Thus, to be addressed is not merely to be recognized for what one already is, but to have the very term conferred by which the recognition of existence becomes possible. One comes to “exist” by virtue of this fundamental dependency on the address of the Other. One “exists” not only by virtue of being recognized, but, in a prior sense, by being recognizable.” (Butler 1997, 5)

What Butler is saying is that bodies exist despite the language but the social existence of bodies becomes possible at first through language. When bodies are interpellated it means that they are recognized. Being recognized underlines the importance of ‘the other’ in the process of affirming one’s social existence. By quoting Donna Haraway’s argument, I previously explained by what means the boundaries that define the object are created by social interactions. Butler is taking a step further: not only social interactions define how it is possible to speak about someone but there is a relationship of dependence between the actors who are involved in the process of defining one’s identity. Bodies need to be recognizable, and this is what gender performativity does. People acts in a specific way because in that sense they are recognisable, they are visible, they are called. For example, in *Prisma* Andrea acts differently because he wants to affirm his gender identity and he makes his own existence recognisable. The problem is that the actions of Andrea are not just described as they are but they are grouped and defined as woman’s actions. In order to overcome a binary vision of gender that inscribes man and women into specific ways of being and acting is important to develop a language that does not reinforce these categories. Moreover, the character of Andrea never states that he wants to be a woman, but that he is exploring and he wants to embrace a more flexible idea of gender. According to this thought, it would be more coherent to solely describe the actions themselves.

Why are they grouped under the words ‘behaving as a girl’? Why do they not extract the single actions from “gender” and just describe the character of Andrea. Without any judgment?

Butler writes:

“A political genealogy of gender ontologies, if it is successful, will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within the compulsory frames set by the various forces that police the social appearance of gender.” (Butler 1999, 45)

Within the AD of *Prisma*, it is not only important what people do and how their actions are translated but also what kind of actions a body does that are named and made visible for the audience. AD shows the impact of gender performativity on bodies. Taking apart the visual dimension of the TV Series, the actions of the body become the translation of their gender and identity. When Andrea wants to explain his struggles to the other characters, he names his actions and what he does to express his own gender identity. Wearing make-up, wearing women’s clothes or behaviours are all examples of the actions that Andrea does to make his identity visible to the others. In the AD of *Prisma* the acts of Andrea are always described because they are the main visible details of his transformation. Andrea, supposedly, is doing language because acting and naming these acts are part of the same process of identity’s exploration; and even when he is not performing he is still addressing his identity by speaking about his actions. The language that he uses to identify his identity has effects and consequences. Moreover, the language of AD underlines the impact of language on bodies because the character is recreated through the words in the target audience. Butler says:

“We do language. That may be the measure of our lives.” We do things with language, produce effects with language, and we do things to language, but language is also the thing that we do. Language is a name for our doing: both “what” we do (the name for the action that we characteristically perform) and that which we effect, the act and its consequences.” (Butler 1997, 8)

Audio description combines naming and doing actions. The characters in that sense are language because their actions are always described to allow the events to keep going. The characters also do language because, as in the example of Andrea, his gender identity is visible because he names his gender performances. The language of AD emphasises the speaking body

through body's actions. In addition, the audience uses the TV series' dialogues to create meanings. Within this frame, the whole experience of an audio-visual product is articulated and allowed by the spoken and written language. By arguing that we do language, Butler overcomes the split between mind and body because language, that is involved in knowledge production, is considered an ability of the mind. Language as an action remarks the performative attitude of language itself and how it is influenced and created by the body either. Moreover, between bodies and language there is a relation of dependence that permits the bodies to be recognized and recognizable. Language can be considered a bridge between the physical body and its inner dimension and expresses the embodied dimension of subjectivity in words. If language is embodied and if knowledge is produced through language (such as representation and meanings) then language is always situated within bodies. Consequently, there are not bodies that are able to be detached nor bodies who cannot such as the different embodied. The issue of objectivity is questionable again because the language as an act challenges the ablest idea of "a disembodied I and an embodied other" (Haraway 1988, 575) in favour of a broader spectrum of capacities and visual possibilities that differs from individual to individual and are also connected and dependant one to another.

4.6 Georgina Kleege, blindness and the spectrum of visual possibilities

I explained in the previous paragraph that language is embodied. As a consequence, the visual experience of the sighted is always influenced by cultural and historical factor, embodiment and it is situated. Objectivity is a product of ableism that obscures differences and capacities. From this perspective, different embodied are depicted as unable to understand autonomously visual productions such as *Prisma*. Georgina Kleege argues:

"The insistence on objective neutrality seems to come from an assessment that sighted viewers enjoy an autonomous, unmediated experience of visual media, which is more or less the same from viewer to viewer. Therefore, if the describer simply chooses the correct words, an image will be transmitted directly to the blind person's mind's eye where she can form an independent, aesthetic judgment about it. [...]" (Kleege 2016, 7)

Blind and visually impaired people recreate their world differently from the sighted, but their aesthetic experience can be the same as the sighted. The words chosen by the audio describer in the AD allow access to the images. Vision, in that sense, can assume different meanings that can be far away from the sight. Perception is created by the brain from external inputs that are re-elaborated and finally, allows to see. According to this feeling, there is not one way of seeing as the way the brain can interpret signals is different from person to person. Kleege says:

“The unimpaired human eye provides the brain with such a surfeit of visual information that only a certain amount consciously registers at any moment. In effect, your brain privileges certain aspects of the retina's images and disregards others. Each eye sends the brain a billion messages per second. Together the two eyes transmit twice as much information to the brain as the rest of the body combined. With all this information flooding in every second, the perceptual system seems designed to adapt readily to losses and distortions, whether because of eye damage or other circumstances. [...] Relative to the type and degree of our conditions, we learn to interpret the world through minimal visual information. We learn to combine these imperfect and incomplete images with our other sensory perceptions, plus what we know about the laws of nature, and call it the world. The idea that some people, through habit or even conscious effort, can use visual information and skills differently, seems to indict the averagely sighted as lazy, slack, perhaps even stupid. [...] Vision is a series of discrete activities, not a constant, seamless, pervasive ebb and flow of information.” (Kleege 1999, 107-114)

The vision is created through a process of re-elaboration of data produced by perceptual input. Some of these inputs are employed by the brain in the act of seeing and some of them are eliminated. The brain is conscious of only a part of this process and the visual information that it receives are combined with all the others from the body and the senses. Blind and visually impaired people elaborate information as well as the sighted. The only difference is in the range of inputs that their brain dismisses. Our perceptual systems adapted to the lack of information (visual or of different kind) but they learned to generate meanings from the world with less data and by combining them with our knowledge. Generally speaking, what we perceive about the world is always combined with the knowledge that we have of things. Having less perceptual inputs does not mean to understand less but to re-elaborate a different kind of information that

is always filtered by what we know. In the field of audio description, this statement challenges the issue of objectivity once again. The audio describer re-elaborates the relevant information of the movie or the TV Series, but the selection is never objective because such relevance is defined not only by perceptual inputs but through a combination of perception, knowledge and cultural influences. Despite that, Kleege explains that people with impaired eyes are often described as not bright even if the process of vision is not linear nor only visual for both sighted and blind or visually impaired. For example, the multiple ways to describe the same scene in a TV Series, as explained in the third chapter, shows that even the same scene can be read and translated differently. As well as there are various levels of blindness or visual impairments, she says, there is also a spectrum of variation in visual acuity and visual awareness and skills (Kleege 2016, 89-101). The experience of blind or visually impaired people of movies and TV serials is often perceived as less than the experience of the sighted audience. The idea that sight is the most important sense, led to the belief that lack of sight meant lack of judgment and awareness about visuality. Moreover, she argues that language in general is mostly designed on visuality and language is a shared code. Blind people grown up between the sighted and, thus, they learn from them about visuality. She says:

“I started from the premise that the average blind person knows more about what it means to be sighted than the average sighted person knows about what it means to be blind. The blind grow up, attend school, and lead adult lives among sighted people. The language we speak, the literature we read, the architecture we inhabit, were all designed by and for the sighted.” (Kleege 2006, 441)

This social dimension of language that is described by Kleege reminded me of the relationship of dependence between bodies that allows their recognition of Butler. Different embodied does not live in another world but we all inhabit the same. Any social existence is determined by a combination of factors and coexistence is one of them. The problematic belief is still in the concept of norm that divides people into categories that are included or excluded by society. The importance of audio description project is that it allows to improve the experience of audio-visual products to the blind audience and language as a shared code that allows to re-think how we perceive vision.

4.7 Rosemarie Garland – Thomson: sexuality, gender and disability

Audio description is a vital project that enhances accessibility to the different embodied. *Prisma* TV Series shows a new representation of a different able character that can be considered innovative within Italian TV Series panorama. Carola, one of the main characters of the series, has a prosthesis on her leg and she shares with her friends her life with the prosthesis. I will explore the character of Carola in depth in the next chapter. For now, I want to emphasise what allowed to discuss new representations of disability: Carola's sexual life. Within this framework, I tried to answer the question: what is the relationship between femininity, male-gaze and disability in the representation of Carola in *Prisma* TV Series?

Usually, disable characters are represented as victims, vulnerable, incomplete, dumb, ignorant, non-autonomous and more. Along with the idea that disable bodies are not able to develop their own independent thought, there is the belief that they are asexual and they do not have the same sexual needs of able bodies. In addition, the intersection between gender and disability complicate the relation with sexuality. Ableism perpetrate the belief that only normal bodies can be sexual. Disability threatens the common assumption of the female body as sexualized and eroticised because disability stands outside of what is considered 'beautiful' and the category of 'normal'. The character of Carola stands between these two assumptions. Garland-Thomson argues:

“Women and the disabled are portrayed as helpless, dependent, weak, vulnerable, and incapable bodies. [...] The twin ideologies of normalcy and beauty posit female and disabled bodies, particularly, as not only spectacles to be looked at, but as pliable bodies to be shaped infinitely so as to conform to a set of standards called “normal” and “beautiful”. [...] Cultural stereotypes imagine disabled women as asexual, unfit to reproduce, overly dependent, unattractive— as generally removed from the sphere of true womanhood and feminine beauty.” (Garland-Thomson 2016, 365)

In contrast to the way in which disabled women are usually portrayed, Carola is considered beautiful, attractive and desirable by others. Moreover, Carola is not only sexually active but she exercises her decisional power towards who wants to flirt and have sex with her. Carola is not a victim of the system but she has a strong personality. This new representation of the

disable woman through the character of Carola perfectly shows the way the intersection between bodies, sexuality and gender work. Disability is seen through a new lens as Carola is able to affirm her own sexual power. What I addressed here is how this representation of a female character stands in between reinforcing the sexualisation of female bodies and creating new possibilities for different embodied through sexual liberation and agency. Garland-Thomson in her essay quotes the story of Ellen Stohl, an actress who became quadriplegic after a car accident; she argues:

“After becoming disabled, Stohl (note) wrote to editor Hugh Hefner that she wanted to pose nude for Playboy because ‘sexuality is the hardest thing for disabled persons to hold onto’ (‘Meet Ellen Stohl,’ 68). For Stohl, it would seem that the performance of excessive feminine sexuality was necessary to counter the social interpretation that disability cancels out sexuality. This confirmation of normative heterosexuality was then for Stohl no Butlerian parody, but rather was the affirmation she needed as a disabled woman to be sexual at all.” (Garland-Thomson 2016, 372)

It is clear, then, that there is a tension between femininity and disability in Garland-Thomson’s words as the narratives that design women as objects of desire change perspective with disabled characters. What does not change, I argue, is the male-gaze. Carola renews the representation of disability because she can become an object of desire and she can exercise her sexual power towards men. This new narrative of Carola as sexually active is possible thanks to the presumption that the normal spectator is still the male. I recognise that Carola’s story brings innovative views towards the representation of women and disability in Italian TV Series. The character was designed under the suggestion of disable writers and scholars that helped the directors to revise the narrative over disability. Sofia Righetti, one of the consultants of the TV series, argued how vital it is to have such characters in movies and TV Series because people with disability are marginalized for many aspects; sexuality being one of them. The possibility for disabled people to be represented and to recognise themselves in such representation can create a new space in the common imaginary and challenge ableism. Thus, I recognise the importance of this practice as it is filled with positive outcomes. My critique is not of the character itself or what represents, but on the difficulty to challenge the male gaze which permeates narratives and stereotypes.

Chapter 5: Analysis of the AD of *Prisma*

In the third chapter I explained the process of creation of audio description and what affects the relevance and the words of the language of AD. In audio description, the appearance and physical characteristics of the characters are considered highly relevant details to describe. I questioned before the issue of objectivity in audio description and the impossibility to be truly distanced. In this chapter, I will analyse in depth the terms and sentences of the audio description of *Prisma* that shows the ideological norms at work in its language. My questions will be: what are the relationships between bodies, language and normalcy in the audio description of *Prisma*? Who is the main spectator that the AD is addressed to? How are gender, disability sexuality and race depicted in *Prisma*? How do they relate to accessibility politics? Despite the aim of *Prisma* to renew the narration over these themes, the audio descriptions of the TV Series still perpetrate stereotypes on bodies and identities. First of all, I focused on the differences among the descriptions of what are described as female and male bodies and their gendered dimension. Female bodies are mostly described for their likeness and hairstyles. Male bodies are visible through their bodily shapes or tattoos. Moreover, I considered the behaviours of the characters towards the opposite gender and how their gender influences the relevance of the actions that the describer translates for the target audience. In addition, male bodies are never presented as masculine despite the fact that female bodies are always framed as such. Concerning the race issue, in the audio description of *Prisma* whiteness is taken for granted despite that blackness is visible. The absence of description of white skins enlightens the white gaze on black bodies. The character of Carola in *Prisma* introduces new narratives on disability representation. In the audio description, the details related to this character make visible the tensions between sexuality, gender and disability. Carola has a prosthesis on her leg; she is desirable and has a strong personality. On one hand, the intersection of these threads shows the innovative representation in the field of disability. On the other, they remark the provocative attitude of women in relation to sexuality. Another feature on which I focused on is the creation of the category LGBTQI+ people that groups people from the community as they would be recognisable through physical characteristics.

5.1 “*Modi da ragazza*”

“[Andrea] Davanti a uno specchio seminascosto e dal vetro impolverato. Ha tolto i pantaloni. Finisce di spogliarsi sotto la luce avvolgente di una lampada a piantana. Si sfila una catenina da cui pende un ciondolo e una t-shirt con un volto stilizzato che indossa dal mattino. Rimasto in mutande indossa il vestito da donna. Se lo aggiusta davanti allo specchio e si guarda incantato. Si sposta i capelli con i folti capelli corti dietro le orecchie con i modi di una ragazza. Prende il cellulare, incrocia le gambe e si scatta una foto dall’alto tagliando fuori la testa. Con un sorriso timido e appagato guarda lo scatto e apre il profilo social “noneknowsmelike” che Vittorio gli ha mostrato al capanno sul mare.”¹⁷ (Prisma 2022, Episode 1, 30:00 - 32:00)

The struggles of Andrea with his gender identity are progressively revealed in different ways throughout the TV Series. *Prisma* navigates the present and past of Andrea to clarify that Andrea has always struggled with his gender identity. The social media profile where the pictures that he shoots wearing women’s dresses or his interests in make-up are combined with few scenes of his childhood, such as of him playing with his basketball jersey as a dress or while reading the child version of the book *The Metamorphosis* by Ovidio. These descriptions are always focused on the clothes he wears, his physical transformation or the ‘female actions’. All this information about Andrea’s gender identity is visual. Moreover, the descriptions provide a certain idea of femininity that turns around a specific way of taking care of the self. The portrayal of femininity that emerges from the description of Andrea explains the performativity of gender (Butler 1999, 45) through the acts that Andrea does to fulfil what he feels. Andrea is giving a new meaning to his body, he is trying to reframe his identity into a new one by performing in different way in comparison with the society’s expectations on man’s behaviours. Judith Butler says:

¹⁷ Trasl. [Andrea] Is in front of a half-hidden and dusty mirror. He took his pants off. He finishes to get undressed under the enveloping light of a floor lamp. He takes off a little necklace with a pendant and a t-shirt with a printed stylized face that he is wearing from morning. Once he remained in his underwear he wears the woman’s dress. He adjusts the dress and he looks at himself enchanted. He moves his hairs behind his ear moving like a girl. He picks up his phone, he crosses the legs and he shoots a picture from above without including his head. He smiles shyly and satisfied while looking at the picture and he opens his social profile “noneknowsmelike” that Vittorio showed to him at the shed near the sea.

“The body,” not as a ready surface awaiting signification, but as a set of boundaries, individual and social, politically signified and maintained. (Butler 1999, 46)

The audio description shows that when reading Andrea’s body, the audio describer frames it within certain boundaries. The transformation of Andrea is real because his performance is not what society expects from males. His actions assume meaning and are relevant because within the discourses created in *Prisma* these actions are the real effect of the inner struggles of the character. Moreover, when the describer says *“modi di una ragazza”* he is making visible the social and individual boundaries that define the new identity of Andrea. The description makes explicit who Andrea is and what he is not, how he has to behave and how he behaves. The visibility of such actions shows the hidden traits of his assigned at birth gender. Andrea is understood as trans character because he acts as the opposite gender. The marked difference between man and women is the product of discourses around femininity and masculinity framed into gender performances that are perpetrated by the AD in *Prisma*. The differences among the gender of the characters that come out in the descriptions are what allows to recognise the transformation of Andrea. Stuart Hall says that difference is essential to meaning because culture is set up on differences that permit the recognition of ‘the other’ (Hall 2013, 12-14). Andrea is himself and ‘the other’ at the same time. Moreover, common assumptions around femininity are grouped under the umbrella term *“modi di una ragazza”* that stands for a specific way of performing as a woman, shared and understood by the cultural context where the TV Series is received. The sentence takes for granted that all the women act the same and all people understand femininity in the same way. In addition, Andrea never states that he wants to totally embrace one gender or another but he feels more comfortable in behaving differently than males are taught to behave. At this stage of awareness, the gender identity of Andrea is not classifiable. We don’t know for sure if he wants to start a gender transition, if he is non-binary, if he is bisexual, homosexual or heterosexual, if he wants to take hormones or have surgeries. The textual translation of the behaviour of Andrea in AD still moves between the gender binaries and does not include the space in between. Andrea’s struggles are not about the choice between being a woman or a man but he simply performs in ways that he feels are suitable for him. The umbrella term *“modi di una ragazza”* interprets the meaning of his actions and perpetrate the bias. The sentence shows the situatedness (Haraway 1988, 583) of the describer within certain discourses (Hall 2013, 29) that are shared by the reference cultural context. Donna Haraway explains that *“translation it is always interpretative, critical and partial”* (Haraway 1988, 589).

Why does not the describer just describe the actions of the character without explaining that they are women's behaviours? Consequently, the descriptions reify the visual dimension of identity that I addressed in the fourth chapter. The body of Andrea is visually interpreted and his gender emerges visually. His body is not just a body but it is a social text that is read and translated. Andrea is what he does. Oyeẁùmí quotes Elizabeth Grosz and says:

“The body becomes a text, a system of signs to be deciphered, read, and read into. Social law is incarnated, “corporealized” [;] correlatively, bodies are textualized, read by others as expressive of a subject’s psychic interior. A storehouse of inscriptions and messages between [the body’s] external and internal boundaries . . . generates or constructs the body’s movements into “behavior,” which then [has] interpersonally and socially identifiable meanings and functions within a social system.” (Oyeẁùmí 2005, 4)

The social recognition of Andrea is at first addressed by the presence of the mirror. The mirror allows the character to recognise himself differently. The character is reading himself by setting new boundaries for his image. This form of spectacle occurs for the first time in secret, under the low light in the canteen of Andrea's family. Then, Andrea crosses his legs and he posts his picture on the social media that becomes the social system which recognises himself as a girl. Although he does not show his face when wearing a dress or having crossed legs, these details push the describer and the audience of the fictional social media to assume that he is a woman. The first recognition of the identity of Andrea is through his own image which transforms his body into a text that assumes new meanings.

5.2 Females and males

The descriptions of female and male characters focus on different details. The adjectives that describe women are always connected to their behaviours and likeness; their actions are sexualised and they are provocative. The only physical features that are described of these characters are the hairs and the hairstyle. The adjectives that describe male characters are related to their bodily shapes, the presence of tattoos on their skin or earrings. Despite the adjectives used towards women, men are not described through their behaviours or seductive power. For example, in the first episode a young girl meets Andrea in the toilet. The description says: “*da*

un gabinetto esce una trentenne in tiro” (A well dressed-up girl get out the toilet). Few moments later Andrea goes to the bar counter and he asks for a beer. The description says: *“una barista bionda piacente versa una birra in un bicchiere di plastica”* (an attractive blonde bartender pours the beer into a plastic glass). In the same episode, a friend of his father is described as *“uomo sulla quarantina”* (a man in his forties). In the third episode, a male character is described as *“uomo sulla sessantina”* (a man in his sixties) and after a while a female character is introduced as *“donna piacente sulla cinquantina”* (an attractive woman in his fifties). The descriptions reported show that male and female characters are introduced differently. Along with the age of the characters that is, according to the rules of AD, a relevant detail for the target audience, the females are described also for their likeness. This word ‘piacente’ (attractive) is never used in the descriptions of male characters. This is another example that situates the language of AD into specific discourses. Beauty is a feature that involves both women and men. What I asked myself while listening to the descriptions was: what meaning does the remarked ‘likeness’ of these characters add to the understanding of the target audience? Why is women’s appearance so important? What standards define the likeness of these characters?

These characters are not main characters but just extras. They are not further described in the TV Series; there would not be any other information about them in the episodes. In *Prisma*, they appear once and they have no lines. The describer is appreciating female characters and is judging them. Beauty is defined by specific visual standards that concerned visual traits, hairs, body shapes, measures and so on. The describer defines them as beauty because according to those standards they are presumed to be desirable for everyone despite that these standards are not explicit as their appearance is not reported. Moreover, in these example female bodies ‘are viewed’ instead of male bodies that are ‘on view’.

Another feature that differentiates the descriptions of males and females characters is the depiction of their bodies. The relevance of details concerning their bodies reflects the ideological norms on masculinity and femininity. For example, when the father of Andrea and Marco shows up for the first time he is described as *“capelli rasati e fisico massiccio”* (shaved head and massive body). The body of Marco while swimming is presented as *“fisico asciutto e longilineo”* (lean and sinuous body). Many times in the TV Series, Ilo and Vittorio are described as tattooed such as *“Vittorio ha il torso ricoperto di tatuaggi”* (Vittorio’s chest is covered in tattoos), *“ragazzo tatuato”* (tattooed boy), *“ha un tatuaggio dietro l’orecchio”* (he has a tattoos behind his ear) or for the usage of earrings and necklaces such as *“cerchietto al lobo”* (earring on the lobe) or *“Ilo ha orecchini a cerchio argentati e collana a più fili che cade*

sul torso nudo e tirato” (Ilo has silver earrings and a necklace with multiple chains that falls on the naked and muscular chest). Female characters, in contrast, are addressed for the colour of the hair that sometimes become their pronoun, such as “*a letto con una brunetta*” (having sex with a brunette) or “*moretta*” (morette). Other details of their bodily shapes are not given but many times they are described through their behaviours. For example, “*lo guarda intrigata*” (intriguing look) and “*sorride maliziosa*” (mischievous smile) that all refers to their attitude towards males. The portrayal of masculinity that emerges from the descriptions of male bodies relate to that idea of strength that is usually associated to men. Their bodies are on view, they are muscles and thin, sportive and reactive. Along with this idea of the health and sporty man, there is also the issue of tattoos and piercing. These two features are synonym of ‘coolness’ and fashion but they are also an expression of trap Italian culture (Marino and Tomatis 2019, 97). Ilo and Vittorio are rappers and in *Prisma* they publish their first single. Their bodies are the representation of a specific way of being in the world that it is framed into performative actions that are visually determined and identified. In contrast, female bodies are more or less absent in the descriptions in favour of their general beauty or the visibility of their behaviours. In these characters emerges an idea of femininity that is more relational than physical. The adjectives used in the description require the presence of someone because they are not related to their status but to how they look at the male others. Audio descriptions reveals the performativity of masculinity and femininity. The actors are playing a role; they are acting this way to fit into a specific idea of gender. The audio describer encapsulates the bodies of these characters into their gender not only by describing their tattoos or behaviours but also by deciding to describe these details because part of certain bodies. The describer does not depict the same details for male and female bodies. The interpretation of the describer is shaped by the social expectations that impose certain identities to certain bodies that do the same repeated actions. Butler says:

“It seems fair to say that certain kinds of acts are usually interpreted as expressive of a gender core or identity, and that these acts either conform to an expected gender identity or contest that expectation in some way. That expectation, in turn, is based upon the perception of sex, where sex is understood to be the discrete and factic datum of primary sexual characteristics. This implicit and popular theory of acts and gestures as expressive of gender suggests that gender itself is something prior to the various acts, postures, and gestures by which it is dramatized and known; indeed, gender appears to the popular imagination as a substantial core

which might well be understood as the spiritual or psychological correlate of biological sex.” (Butler 1988, 528)

Gender is historically and culturally linked to sex. Common beliefs argue that certain acts are the expression of a specific gender and that gender comes before sex. What Butler is saying is that popular thinking perceives gender as the inner expression of biological sex. In contrary, gender identity is constructed through the repetition of acts and practices that are not predetermined by the biological sex but performed by the body. The bond between sex and gender is a cultural product that created gendered expectation in relation to the biological characteristics of the body. Gender expectations play a big role in the audio descriptions. The describer filters the bodies and the performances of the characters through this sort of gendered-gaze that defines the relevance of the details selected. Along with the dialogues that can suggest the identities of the characters, the target audience has access to the visual parts of these bodies in different ways whether is in front of a male or a female. Gender ideologies influence the language of the audio descriptions. Moreover, language itself sets up the boundaries of the characters described and filters their appearance. I have now described underlines the situatedness (Haraway 1988, 583) of the describer into a specific cultural and historical context that shapes ideological ideas on gender and normalcy. In the audio description of *Prisma* the normal body is considered the male one. I argue that as female bodies are usually remarked as such; male bodies are never explicitly framed as male. For example, female bodies are described as “*corpo femminile*” (feminine body) or “*mani femminili*” (feminine hands) or “*ragazza mascolina*” (masculine girl). I did not find any description that defines a body as male but always if a body is female. Female bodies deviate from the “norm” and they are made visible. In particular, the expression “*ragazza mascolina*” (masculine girl) reify gender binaries and expectations towards certain bodies. The girl is defined as ‘masculine’ because her appearance is distant from the visual standard of femininity. Andrea, who is exploring his gender identity also by using and acting as ‘a girl’ is never addressed as ‘effeminate’ but only his actions are grouped as ‘female’. Women are “*The Other body*” (Oye`wùmí 2005, 5) that differs from the normal, from the standard and become visible.

5.3 A new representation

Gender identity is just one of the main themes of *Prisma*. Disability is another focus of the TV Series. The character of Carola introduces new narratives on the representation of different embodied in Italian audio-visual productions that challenge ableism and normativity. The presence of this character extends the purpose of the series to improve the representation of gender identity to a broader level that involves different embodiments too. Moreover, within my thesis embodiment is a central topic as the aim of audio description is to improve accessibility to visual productions to blind and visually impaired people. As a consequence, the presence of Carola creates a connection with the issue of accessibility in audio description because they both relate to inclusion. The identity of Carola emerges in the audio descriptions through the description of the prosthesis that she has and her life with it. The absence of the left leg is introduced the first time as follow: “*Carola ha una protesi al posto della gamba*” (Carola has a prosthesis instead of a leg). The AD usually reports also her life with the prosthesis such as in the second episode when she met Marco on the top of a skyscraper: “*Si siede su un gradino e si stacca la protesi dalla gamba. Si alza e continua a salire saltando su una gamba sola*” (She seats on a step and she removes the prosthesis. She stands up and continue walking jumping on one leg). Her attitude with her crushes is described with many adjectives that underlines her likeness and provocative attitude. For example: “*Carola sorride sensuale*” (Carola smiles sensually), “*Carola sorride intrigante*” (Carola smiles intriguing), “*Carola si volta a guardarlo e sorride maliziosa*” (Carola looks at him with a mischievous smile), “*Carola sorride sarcastica*” (Carola smiles sarcastic), “*Carola lo bacia sensuale*” (Carola kisses him sensually), “*Carola lo guarda provocante*” (Carola looks at him flirty). The character is sexually active and enterprising and makes the first move with boys. For example, in the fourth episode when she is at home with Marco; the describer says “*Carola gli si avvicina e lo bacia sulle labbra. Gli posa una mano sulla nuca e lo bacia con più trasporto*” (Carola gets closer to him and kisses him on his lips. She touches his head with the hand and she kisses him passionately) (31:15). In the same scene, the describer says: “*Carola prende una mano di Marco e se la porta delicatamente sul seno. Lui la lascia fare*” (Carola takes Marco’s hand and places it on her breast. Marco lets her free to do it) (31:20). From these examples emerge a character with a strong personality and desire. Carola is aware of her sexual appeal; she makes decisions and seduces her friends or the people she likes. The aim of the directors of *Prisma* was to give her self-determination, independence and audacity as these characteristics are

ground-breaking in the representation of the different embodied in Italian audio-visual productions. The audio description focuses more on her behaviours and characteristics than on her physical appearance. The only physical characteristic that is described is the prosthesis. Usually, disabled characters are portrayed as victims, vulnerable, asexual and childish. In particular, sex is the most problematic issue for them. Moreover, Carola is framed as woman and gender plays a big role in the sexual life of different embodied. Garland-Thomson argues that:

“Disability disrupts the unity of the classification woman and challenges the primacy of gender as monolithic category. [...] Privileges of normative femininity are often denied to disabled women”. (Garland-Thomson 2016, 371)

She continues by saying that cultural stereotypes depict disabled women as asexual, unattractive, dependant and *“removed from the sphere of true womanhood and feminine beauty”* (Garland-Thomson 2016, 371). In *Prisma*'s AD, Carola's character challenges these assumptions and renews narratives. Carola is emancipated, she is the character who makes decisions in relationships, she is mean, she is affable, she has fun and she makes jokes about who fell in love with her. Carola's behaviours express her will to live and be free. What I found insightful are the various contrasting perspectives between the intersection of gender and disability. The desirability of female characters in movies and TV Series can be read as objectification and sexualisation. Female characters provoke men, they tempt them, their bodies are always on view or looks at. In that sense, if Carola was not disabled her attitude would be described as influenced by male-gaze (Mulvey 1989, 19). Disability is disruptive and threatens common assumptions around femininity. Despite that, the way in which Carola is described defines her as the provocative, the mischievous and the intriguing one. Her disability is not seen as an obstacle in the achievement of her goals, sexual satisfaction or personal experiences. The narrative around disabilities is certainly changing but the narrative around femininity is still going on. The emancipation of Carola is possible through the same narrative that shaped a specific idea of women in movies and TV Series. The sexualisation and provocative attitude of Carola is seen as new when analysed from the perspective of disabilities studies although it remains the same when taking into consideration the sexual and erotic dimension of the character as a woman. The dimension of the body and the way in which she uses it is still at the centre of her way of being in the world. I am aware that sexual dimension is for sure an achievement for narratives and characters of this kind and their representation. Although, the

common narrative around women is still going on and the character still remains anchored to her own physical dimension.

5.4 LGBTQI+ community

In the episode 7 of the TV series Andrea and Nina are in Rome and they intend to attend the famous queer party *Muccassassina*. The audio descriptions depict the scene and they refer to the people who are queuing outside the entrance as: “*Gruppo di persone evidentemente appartenenti alla comunità LGBTQI+*” (group of people clearly part of the LGBTQI+ community). The sentence refers to a specific group of people who are considered part of the LGBTQI+ community because they are visually adherent to certain stereotypes connected to the community itself. The use of ‘evidentemente’ (clearly, evidently) says that there are visual differences between groups of people from LGBTQI+ community and people who are outside of it. The remarked visibility of such people who are not singularly described but just grouped, enforces a specific idea of normalcy. Normalcy, in that sense, is made invisible despite abnormal bodies are in some way always on view or recognisable. The issue is not the bodies who are different but how these differences are constructed. More than explaining what makes them different it must be understood how a certain idea of normalcy creates categories of inclusion and exclusion. Lennard J. Davis argues:

“There is probably no area of contemporary life in which some idea of a norm, mean, or average has not been calculated. To understand the disabled body, one must return to the concept of the norm, the normal body. So much of writing about disability has focused on the disabled person as the object of study, just as the study of race has focused on the person of color. But as with recent scholarship on race, which has turned its attention to whiteness and intersectionality, I would like to focus not so much on the construction of disability as on the construction of normalcy. I do this because the “problem” is not the person with disabilities; the problem is the way that normalcy is constructed to create the “problem” of the disabled person.” (Davis 2016, 2)

In a broader sense, the category of ‘LGBTQI+ people’ exists because the norm creates such categories. There is nothing problematic in being part of the community but is problematic that

such category is made visible in that way through that sentence. Once again, what is not described becomes invisible. Normalcy not only frames people into categories but hides its own frames. The parameters of normalcy are never explicit but always deduced from the description and the visibility of what normality is not. Moreover, the description of LGBTQI+ is paradoxical if in relation to the character of Andrea and his story. Here, besides the aim to make audio-visual product accessible, there is still a certain idea of normalcy at work on bodies and identities. The reduction of a characters or a multiplicity of them to just a few details is the translation into representation of the work of the norms. Richard Dyer says:

“This is the most important function of the stereotype: to maintain sharp boundary definitions. To define clearly where the pale ends and thus who is clearly within and who clearly beyond it. Stereotypes do not only, in concert with social types, map out the boundaries of acceptable and legitimate behaviour, they also insist on boundaries exactly at those points where in reality there are none. Nowhere is this clearer than with stereotypes dealing with social categories that are invisible and/or fluid. Such categories are invisible, because you cannot tell just from looking at a person that she or he belongs to the category in question.” (Dyer 2003, 17)

Stereotypes are the product of norms and norms define boundaries. The social categories that are addressed by stereotypes are constructed on a certain idea of normalcy; but this idea is never explicit but only addressed. People from LGBTQI+ community are not described; they are not defined because of wearing something different or behaving in specific way. Their category is monolithic but also invisible and fluid. These norms are understood only because they are shared among a specific culture. The absence of other kind of description is what makes visible such categories. As Dyer argued, these categories are invisible because we cannot tell just from looking at them if they are part of it. Despite that, they are constructed by a specific imaginary around a community that is shaped by the difference from the normal category.

6. Conclusion

My project explored in depth the audio description of the Italian TV serial *Prisma*.

Audio description (AD) stands at the margins of the audio-visual creation process as AD is created after the release of the movie or of the TV Series to the general public. The absence of this tool from the original production highlights that the idea of accessibility is not a priority for the audio-visual industry. Therefore, it is more difficult to raise awareness on the topic of accessibility when this is relegated at the margins of productions. People do not acknowledge the existence of such tools or how they work (Kleege 2016, 18). Despite the aim of AD to enhance accessibility, the language of this progressive tool reifies ideological norms on bodies and identities. Consequently, the relation between accessibility and inclusivity is a paradoxical one. On one side, AD enhances access to visual productions to blind and visually impaired people. Moreover, it improves their experience of different typologies of media and artistic representations. On the other side, AD perpetrates the dichotomy between a specific idea of normalcy grounded upon white, Western, male and ablest bodies. Blind and visually impaired people still remain outside of the paradigm of normal body that continues to exclude this group of people from the realm of the bodies that count.

In this project, I illustrated the complexity of creating accessible projects that can be really inclusive and respectful. What I now wonder is whether we can imagine something different. For instance, to what extent can we improve the language of AD? One possible solution could be to use the same approach to describe character's physical characteristics despite their gender, race or sexuality. The audio describer should make explicit the colour of the skin of every character, and not only the black ones. The descriptions of male and female bodies should focus on the same characteristics instead of differentiating them, as it happens in *Prisma*. Moreover, it could be helpful to avoid grouping actions under umbrella terms such as "*modi da ragazza*" instead, it would be a good practice to describe the actions in a more precise way. These suggestions are, indeed, beneficial; although I also recognise issues in my ideas. My approach would continue to use certain categories such as, for example, race. I wonder whether it is possible to overcome the use of such categories. Can we conceptualize a way to make the character visible through different physical characteristics? Why are such categories still so important? Audio descriptions enlightens that these categories are still important in Western societies. What if the audio describer decides to depict other characteristics such as, for

example, the colour of the eyes, the size of the nose or the height? The gaze is culturally shaped by these categories, and it affects how we perceive what we see.

If the process of seeing is also a cultural act, I can argue that maybe it is possible to reframe the vision into a new paradigm. We can learn to see differently by focusing on new details of the body. Through audio description we can explore a new way of describing the body; thus, new possibilities of seeing. While watching the movie with audio description I thought about podcasts or audio books. Who does define the boundaries between auxiliary technologies for different embodied and digital file audio such as podcasts and audio books for all? According to that, can we envision a way to employ audio description in the media for all? How would AD change if we broaden its use? My argument is that we can start to consider to move from the margin to the centre and rethink the use of certain technologies or products that are designed only for specific users. Audio description is inscribed within a precise frame and associated to blind and visually impaired people and their needs. Improving the language of AD is beneficial but it is also important to explore new practices in the field of audio description that could change the use of the tool and its meaning within Western culture. Meanings are the product of discourses that involve not only languages but also practices (Hall 2013, 29-30). While watching new movies and TV Series with AD, I discovered a new approach to visual production that I never took into consideration before. The combination of sounds, dialogues and descriptions can be developed more creatively and become a new media experience. A new employment of AD would not only improve its quality but overcome the able/disabled category generated by the segregation of such auxiliary technologies. It is important to develop a more inclusive representation through well-known audio-visual media such as cinema or photography. Although, it would be intriguing to find out what would happen if the process was inverted; and maybe develop new possibilities for all from less-known media that were created for excluded group of people. Moreover, research on language can benefit from AD as it suggests assuming a new point of view.

New perspectives open new questions and new questions lead to new discoveries and experiences.

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