

## An infinite spectrum of colours 2

### Teaching gender issues through *Prisma: The Video Essay*

**Arianna Vergari**

*is a Research Fellow at Link Campus University of Rome and a member of the PRIN 2020 project "The Atlas of Italian 'Giallo': Media History and Popular Culture (1954–2020)" and the PRIN 2022 PNRR project "WokeIt: Investigating Representation, Inclusivity, and Social Responsibility in Rai's Fiction Audiovisual Productions (2015–2022)." She also works as a filmmaker and visual education operator in schools.*

**M. Elena D'Amelio**

*is Associate Professor in the Department of Humanities at the University of San Marino. Her main research interests focus on Italian stardom and celebrity, gender and motherhood studies, transnational cinema and serial dramas, memory and media. She is the author of La Diva Madre (Meltemi 2024).*

**Valentina Re**

*(<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2267-819X>) is Professor of Film and Media Studies at Link Campus University. She is the PI of the research project "The Atlas of Italian 'Giallo': Media History and Popular Culture (1954-2020)" funded by the Italian Ministry of University and Research, and WP leader of the CERV project "GEMINI. Gender Equality through Media Investigation and New Training Insights".*

**Gianluigi Rossini**

*is Assistant Professor in Tenure Track in Film and Media Studies at Universitas Mercatorum. He worked as a post-doc researcher for the CERV project "GEMINI. Gender Equality through Media Investigation and New Training Insights" and for the PRIN-PNRR project "CineAb – Rediscovering and promoting the film and audiovisual heritage in the Abruzzo Region.*

## Abstract

This text outlines and contextualizes the methodological and stylistic choices underpinning the video essay *An Infinite Spectrum of Colours. Teaching Gender Issues Through Prisma*, whose theoretical implications are further developed in the homonymous essay included in this special issue. Focusing on the representation of coming out in the television series *Prisma* (Amazon Prime Video, 2022-2024), it discusses the montage strategies, aesthetic decisions, and intertextual references employed to construct a critical and pedagogical discourse on non-binary and fluid gender identities. By embracing the video essay as a form of *cinécriture*, the text reflects on its potential as a tool for research, teaching, and media education—capable of combining analytical rigor with emotional engagement.

**Keywords:** Italian serial dramas, coming out, gender identities, non-binarism, video essay



## Introduction: The Video Essay as Critical Inquiry?

The video essay form, conceived as “the possibility of using the camera as a pen, and of producing a fully personal *cinécriture*” (Rascaroli 2017: 4; 2017), offers a powerful medium for critical inquiry, particularly when engaging with complex audiovisual texts such as *Prisma* (Amazon Prime Video, 2022-2024). By blending analytical description with self-reflexive engagement, the video essay is espe-

cially well-suited to pedagogical contexts, where it functions not only as a mode of analysis but also as a tool for active learning and critical thinking.

This article, which serves as a guiding text for the video essay *An Infinite Spectrum of Colours: Teaching Gender Issues through Prisma*, discusses the montage strategies, aesthetic decisions, and intertextual references employed to construct a critical and pedagogical discourse on non-binary and fluid gender identities. The theoretical implications are further developed in the homonymous essay included in this special issue.

The editing structure used in the video essay aims to interrogate the theme of “coming out” by situating it within a pedagogical framework that integrates three interrelated analytical dimensions: first, an exploration of media literacy, achieved through intertextual comparisons with analogous scenes from other serialized dramas; second, a focus on narrative strategies, emphasizing how the series challenges and subverts stereotypical tropes; and third, an examination of gender discourses, with particular attention to the multiple and evolving meanings that the act of coming out assumes in the context of non-binary and fluid identities. In this way, the video essay not only analyses the representational strategies of *Prisma* but also reflects on its broader cultural and educational implications.

### **Aesthetic Strategies and Analytical Framing**

The video essay opens with an evocative condensation of what will emerge as one of the focal points of the analysis of the television series *Prisma*: the delicate moment of coming out. The montage of various coming-out sequences drawn from different television series is characterised by the removal of the original audio, replaced instead with a metallic sound. This stylistic choice serves to emphasize the emotional weight that this moment typically carries within narrative structures. By doing so, as in *Prisma*, the viewer is momentarily distanced from the scene, disrupting their voyeuristic impulse to penetrate another’s intimacy. Thus, the opening sequence of the video essay is intended to function not only as a compelling prologue but also as an anticipatory device that replicates, through a form of mise en abyme, the core of the entire analysis.

For the presentation of the series *Prisma*, in addition to the reassembly of selected sequences from the show, supplementary materials were incorporated, such as the Amazon Prime Video interface—evoking the aesthetics of desktop films—and a map of the city of Latina. These elements facilitated the integration of additional details about the series while also alluding to two fundamental aspects that warrant further investigation: the role of location and the impact of streaming platforms.

Before arriving at the analysis of the coming-out sequence in *Prisma*, which constitutes the central focus of the video essay, a deliberate “step back” was taken. This transition was visually underscored through a rapid countdown. The objective was not to provide a comprehensive historical reconstruction but rather to propose a broader analytical framework that considers both sociopolitical discourses on LGBTQ+ identities and the evolving cinematic and televisual portrayals of coming out. This rationale guided the selection of various materials: found footage from 1969 depicting the Stonewall riots as a symbolic moment, covers from the magazines *Come Out!* and *Fuori!*, and coming-out sequences from television series spanning different historical periods.

Following this brief flashback, the narrative returns to the coming out sequence. Andrea is in the car with his father and asks him to pull over. Given the visual and narrative intensity of this moment, the decision was made not to intervene, but rather to present the beginning of the sequence as it is originally shown to the audience. It is only upon reaching the key off-screen moment—at which point one may presume that Andrea shares his inner journey with his father—that the video essay re-engages, replicating this off-screen dynamic through a visual contraction of the frame. This narrowing introduces symbolic black borders, which serve as a visual metaphor for all that remains inaccessible to the viewer’s knowledge, including how any label might define a precise articulation of the protagonist’s gender identity.

A colour match transition then leads into the final section of the video essay, which is more theoretically oriented and engages with the visual representation of the academic concept of the “pedagogical triangle” (Jacobsen and Hansen 2024). This is realised through the visualisation of a triangle encompassing selected scenes from *Prisma*. The eventual expansion beyond the boundaries of this

triangle—culminating in an enlargement that allows the embrace scene to fill the entire screen—aims to underscore the intersection of academic research, television seriality, and the lived significance of embodied experiences.

The voice-over was produced using an artificial intelligence program. After an additional attempt to use a human voice, the final choice settled on the synthetic alternative, as it proved surprisingly capable of professionally modulating different tones, thereby contributing to both rhythm and emotional immersion. While the content remains rigorously grounded in scientific research, the “grain” (Barthes 1985)—the texture—of the artificial voice becomes an indispensable element of the video essay, preserving the crucial interplay between aesthetics and scholarship.

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